

Married With Benefits

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Episode 11: Does My Husband Secretly Want Me to Be a Bikini Model?

Featured Host: Shaunti Feldhahn
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Brian: Welcome to the FamilyLife Podcast Network. I'm Brian Goins host of Married With Benefits. We're passionate about discovering the real benefits of saying, "I do."

This season we are answering the questions that many wives are asking but just aren't sure who to turn to. I've got Shaunti Feldhahn who is a Harvard trained researcher and we've been throwing some tough questions her way all season long and this one is no exception. We're going to ask the question, do husbands secretly want their wives to look like bikini models? If you've ever felt the pressure to keep up with all those magazine covers, we've got some good news.

Shaunti: Are we—are we sure we want to tackle this, Brian?

Brian: I—well—I'm glad you're the one that's going to answer because I don't want to be anywhere *near* being on podium to answer this question. The question is: Do men—are men thinking it—they're just not saying it?

Shaunti: The good news is that—oh sure! A guy would enjoy if his wife looked like that...guys are visual creatures—but no, that's not what they *want*—that's not what they're *looking for*—that's not what they *wish* that they had.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: We—and this is something that we actually have studied pretty extensively in our surveys. It took some courage for me to ask the anonymous men on these big nationally representative surveys where they were being really honest.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: They were being really candid about their inner feelings. Sometimes it was a little hard to hear—there were things that were challenging—

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: —but when I asked this one—and I actually asked the guys, “Do you secretly wish your wife looked like she did the day that you married?” You know, that she could fit into the honeymoon bikini?

Brian: Sure.

Shaunti: Or do you just want her to make the effort to take care of herself for you as she is now—today?

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: It was 83 percent of men said, “No. I *know* that this is 20 years later—we have three kids. I enjoy her as she is! I do want to see that we’re both making the effort to take care of ourselves—

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: But I don’t secretly want the bikini model.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: *That* to me was so encouraging because frankly, that’s not what culture tells us.

Brian: Yes. No, it’s not—and that’s true across—whether you’re a believer in Christ or not, it seems like. You were showing me an article last night, just about—from this men’s magazine that I don’t even really want to mention the name—

Shaunti: No, I don’t either! [Laughter]

Brian: —because when you go there it’s got all kinds of stuff that that we *cannot* promote—and *would not* promote—yet, they were asking the same question.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: It was a woman author that was asking all these men the same thing—

Shaunti: 215 men—

Brian: 215 men—

Shaunti: —that responded. Yes.

Brian: —that responded—and *overwhelmingly* they agree with exactly what you’re saying—

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: —that they just want someone that they realize that “I’m satisfied with who you are.”

Shaunti: Yes. Not just satisfied—“I love it!”

Brian: Right! And I want more of it.

Shaunti: “I *love* who you are!” Yes, they did say that!

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: This is something, I think—for us as women—it is incredibly important to recognize that the false idea that he isn’t excited by *us* it’s what’s holding us back from some—honestly—some of the intimacy—physical intimacy that’s really important for him and for our marriage and for us. I think we might have said this on another podcast—but it’s one of the things that makes women like, go into the closet to change.

It’s one of the things that make us feel like “I’m not comfortable with myself because I’m assuming he’s not comfortable with me and how I look.”

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Yet the men are like, “No! I love this!” It’s a difficult culture out there—

Brian: It is!

Shaunti: I’m seeing all these images I wish I didn’t have in my head—I’m seeing all these billboards, there’s all—there are the bikini models—

Brian: Right!

Shaunti: —staring at me from every cover—and those—those stimulating that part of the brain—all that the stuff that the guys don’t want if he’s trying to honor his wife.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: I had one guy who said—I might have told you this before but, it cracked me up and made me sad at the same time—he’s like, “You know, I see the billboard up there—and I look away.”

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: “And I see the bikini on the cover of whatever—and I look away. I see the girl in the short shorts—and I look away. And I come home and my wife is changing—and she goes into the closet”—and I’m like—are you kidding me? [Laughter]

Brian: Come on!

Shaunti: He wants to be able to enjoy *her* visually, but she’s hiding in the closet because that’s how we feel. We feel like you’re going to be—as guys—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: —that you’re going to be dissatisfied. On behalf of all men, can you tell the women what men actually think?

Brian: Wow! I feel—I feel all this pressure now—to speak for *all* men. [Laughter] I would agree with what—reading in this article—this men’s magazine—this one guy responded—because I’m a lot like this guy—he said, “In my 20’s I cared about looks.” I’ll be honest, sure, that was part of me—I mean, when we got married, if you were to ask me why do I love Jenn, I was excited about the way she looks.

Shaunti: And that is *completely* normal.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: It can go in wrong directions—

Brian: Sure!

Shaunti: —but that’s completely normal; yes.

Brian: Completely normal. He said, “I think physical attraction is an important element in relationships even in my 30’s, however, now I appreciate a girl who can effectively communicate more than her looks.” So it’s like—looks are important, but realize that doesn’t last anyway.

“Then, after giving birth to our three kids—I’ve got three kids—my wife doesn’t have a bikini body anymore, but I couldn’t care less. To me she’s hot as *bleep*” [Laughter] “I probably don’t have a ‘Dad’ bod anymore and yeah, I’m a little sensitive about it.” Because the truth of the matter is guys, you—the guys that feel like that want that bikini body for their wife?

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: They’re not having it. Like, they’re not going to look good in Speedos—let’s just be honest.

Shaunti: Yes. Let's just be honest. Yes; yes.

Brian: No one's going to put them on the cover of anything.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: I think for me, as a guy—it's more—I like my wife to want to take care of herself.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: I feel—at least she's trying; right? But for—and for me, Jenn's beautiful and I would rather focus on *her* than be dissatisfied because that's the thing—guys know that if I just keep looking elsewhere, all it's going to lead toward is dissatisfaction.

Shaunti: Absolutely! Absolutely!

Brian: It's not going to give you the results you want—and guys—for me—I don't like to be manipulated by anything.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: So, I *want* to enjoy my wife—and I think most men probably do. Most married men, I mean obviously—83 percent—are saying, “I just want to enjoy my wife.”

Shaunti: Well they—what they're saying is, “I *do* enjoy my wife.”

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Ladies, here's the thing, really, that I think we have to come to grips with—we are insecure about this because this is one of our underground areas of insecurity; right? The “am I beautiful” question. This is a big deal for women. We—subconsciously—that's under the surface. We automatically assume, “I'm not beautiful enough. That means, by definition in marriage, “I'm not beautiful enough for him.”

Brian: Huh.

Shaunti: We have to recognize—that's *our* hang-up, *not* his.

Brian: That's the “ah-ha” moment.

Shaunti: *Not* your husband's—that is *your* hang-up, not his. He *loves* feasting his eyes on you.

Brian: So, to start with that assumption—that my husband finds me beautiful—

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: I can hear some women skeptical right now, going, “If that were the case, why does my husband look at porn?”

Shaunti: Right. Yes.

Brian: “Why does my husband seem to take that second look?” There’s plenty of men that do.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: What do you say to that woman that’s going, “Yes, but not my husband, you don’t know him.”

Shaunti: We tackled this on another podcast.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Just to recap—the key point there is that, first of all, we have to recognize that men’s brains—whether or not they take inappropriate action as a result of this, is a whole second step, but the first step is today men’s brains *are* being stimulated in this way whether they want it to or not. The fact that his brain is tempted to look at other things—whether...obviously if he does, that’s a problem—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: —but the fact that he’s being tempted? That’s just having a male brain in a culture where everyday men are being confronted in public with images that their brain was *only* designed to see in private.

Brian: Huh.

Shaunti: The fact that that brain stimulation is happening says *literally* nothing about whether he loves you, finds you hot, beautiful, loves to look at you—all those things. He would far—most guys—are good guys who want to honor their wives. He would far rather look at you than those images—he just can’t avoid those images today.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: I’m sure you would agree with that.

Brian: Oh, yes.

Shaunti: It seems like guys tell me that—they just can’t *avoid*—

Brian: You walk out the door—you turn on your phone—you turn on the tv—I mean, it is going to be around—you can't escape it. It's not like 100 years ago when we were an agrarian society and a guy spent most of his time looking at the south end of a north end moving mule! [Laughter]

It doesn't matter, at the end of the day you walk back into your house and your wife is looking *great*—because you have *nothing* to compare her to.

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: But what I hear—

Shaunti: Now that's not helpful—for women who are like, “Okay, so I'm—better than the mule.” No.

Brian: But that's what you're saying though, in a sense that—what I hear you saying is that *even with the images*—

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: —even with the—what would seem like, “He's of course going to compare me!” —He's not.

Shaunti: He's not. He would much rather feast his eyes on you because he's yours and you're his. This is where he can enjoy that visual nature that God has given him in a God-honoring way and in a way that honors you—it's just that you, as a wife—I can hear every woman having a hard time even believing that what I'm saying could *possibly* be true—but again, it's because of *our* hang-ups, not his.

Let me tell you, when I have talked to women—you know, we do all these interviews, we do surveys—but we also do these focus groups.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: When I have brought together focus groups of women to talk about this or I've conducted interviews of women who have basically taken a deep breath and gone, “Okay, I will change—”

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: “—not in the closet—or have sex with the lights on—or something I'm *completely* thinking, ‘This is crazy!’” They have said the response is actually really affirming!

He's showing his delight in me as a wife—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: —and it kind of debunks all of those insecurities. Now unfortunately, are there going to be guys that are just—goof-balls and are just idiots—

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: —and make their wife feel fat and ugly?

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Yes, unfortunately that happens. Are there going to be men who take that look—you know, that glancing “look”—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: —at the woman walking by and make their wife feel *horrible*?
Yes, there will be men like that—but that really is the minority.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: In most cases, even these guys in this men's magazine...we can't even say the name of it because it's so—

Brian: I know!

Shaunti: —it's something—

Brian: Everyone's going to want it—like, wait—are you serious? [Laughter]

Shaunti: —they're going to try to—yes. Even these guys who—you'd think if *anyone* would be like, “Yeah babe! I want the bikini model!” You know?

Brian: Right?

Shaunti: No! These men—they love their wife!

Brian: Right. And over and over again—whether, again—it's interesting that it's across the board—because you would think, “Well, maybe for Christian married men.” No, it's—it's for any—

Shaunti: No. No. Absolutely.

Brian: Anybody that's in a relationship—

Shaunti: Absolutely.

Brian: —is going, “I want to focus on the woman that I am with.

Shaunti: Now, let me just move to a second point here. That's actually *really* important though—for us as women—and this is where we could get into trouble and I'm—

Brian: I *like* getting into trouble that's what the whole point of this podcast is.

Shaunti: Yes; right! [Laughter] Okay. So, everybody—e-mail Brian—not me; alright? [Laughter]

Let me just say the next piece of this though—sensitively. When we ask that survey question, we *are* talking about a woman who's willing to *try* to make *some* sort of effort to take care of herself. I think, for us as women, that's the next step that we have to confront—our husband isn't looking for that perfect bikini body—he's not—but you making the effort to take care of yourself, to *him*—because he's a visual creature—shows you care about him.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Those two things are inextricably linked in a man's mind. It was interesting—I was talking to Jenn—your wife—this morning about this—where I literally had to confront—when I had my two kids—and I had gained so much weight, and I hadn't really put any effort into trying to get back into shape.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: I thought it only affected me.

Brian: Hmm.

Shaunti: That's—honestly, that's what I thought—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: I thought it only affected me. I had no idea—because there was *no way* that Jeff could bring this up with me without feeling like an idiot guy.

Brian: Yes. There's no guy that wants to go, “Hey, honey—we got a good deal on a gym membership. What do you think?” [Laughter]

Shaunti: Yes. Exactly! Let me tell you—

Brian: That conversation *never* goes well.

Shaunti: It never goes well. And yet, I didn't realize—emotionally, it actually *was* impacting him because he—not because of a certain amount of weight, or a certain size—that's what our female brains go to. We think, "Oh, he wants me to get back down to being a size 3." Well, good luck! I never—that was when I was 12, you know? No. The reality is though, that I wasn't making any effort to take care of myself.

For a guy—in some weird way—maybe you can describe it better—but in some weird way, a man seeing that—it makes him feel cared for.

Brian: Yes. But I think there's something Biblical about that when you think about Paul—when he's writing to the church at Corinth—he says, "Your body is not your own."

Shaunti: Oh! Interesting; yes.

Brian: That there is—that maybe even that take of—we tend to use that in terms of you should have—

Shaunti: Physical intimacy; yes.

Brian: —you should make love to your spouse—but it could mean a lot more than that. It could be broader in the sense that, "I'm stewarding my body for my wife." "She's stewarding her body for her husband."

Shaunti: *That's* interesting. Yes.

Brian: And you apply it in that sense, it's like, "Well, why *wouldn't* I want to do that?"

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: I think what's hard for—maybe what's hard for ladies is that—you can get into that spiraling effect of, "Well, I'll never be like I used to be."

Shaunti: Again—that's *our* hang-up.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: Right? Not his.

Brian: So how do you—so talk to that woman that is feeling that way and maybe doesn't feel—maybe her husband *isn't*...helping her feel beautiful—he's not a communicator. She's like, "I would do this a lot more if I even got a *hint* from my husband because he's not *telling* me I'm beautiful."

Shaunti: Yes.

Brian: Or when I ask that question—“Do I look fat in these jeans?” and my husband doesn’t know what to say—it’s an unfair question, by the way, ladies.

Shaunti: Yes. Talk to them about this for just a second.

Brian: There’s no win—of course the answer is, “No, you don’t” but, if you come back and go, “Well, of course I do—are you looking at the same picture I’m looking at?” Then what do you say?

Shaunti: Brian, here’s a little bit of information for the men—

Brian: Yes! Help me out!

Shaunti: —because any men who are secretly listening to this—is that your wife isn’t—*usually*—isn’t asking a technical question of the “do these jeans make me look fat?”

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: She’s not like—it’s not the equivalent of does this orange go with that blue—she’s not asking a technical question. She is basically saying, “After 20 years of marriage and two kids, do I still rock your world?”

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: *That’s* basically—you answer that question—“You look amazing!”

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: This ties into this whole topic of taking care of yourself *and* recognizing that he loves you as you are and he’s excited to see you as you are.

Really, truly coming to grips with the fact that—yes, we have responsibility—I *love* the way you said that—about stewarding. They you’re stewarding your body for your spouse, to some degree—but you’re also being willing to celebrate it.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Yes. That you’re also recognizing that by withholding yourself in that way it’s not helping anybody—so both of those things go together.

Brian: Yes. So—just practically speaking—as we’re wrapping up—give the woman that’s out there right now feeling, “Okay, I’m willing to take a step of faith here and

maybe *believe* that my husband really does want me. I'm still struggling a little bit with insecurity—what do I do—what steps do I take?”

Shaunti: The first thing is—this is all part of the—one of the main things that we've found in all of our marriage research is that—if you want a happy marriage, you *need* to be able to believe the best of the other person's intentions towards you—and feelings towards you.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Because that's usually not wishful thinking, it's usually true. The guy who doesn't say, “You look so beautiful, honey.” That's something that a lot of men think but it's awkward to say—they don't think about saying it—it's what they *think*—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: —but they don't think about saying it. Believe that's what he feels about you! Right?

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Maybe he's sent signals that have made you feel...ugly and he has *no idea* that he sent that signal—he didn't intend to. Believe the best of how he feels about you—that's the first.

Brian: Right. Yes.

Shaunti: Then second, is actually—I do think—and this is again, we get ourselves in trouble—but be willing to *do* things to take care of yourself—for him. I had one guy who said—and I actually think I put the quote in *For Women Only*—where he said, “My wife is a size 3.” Right?

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: I'm like, “Okay, I hate her already.” [Laughter]

He said, “My wife *is* a size 3 but if she never goes to the gym—if she doesn't exercise—if she doesn't have *any* energy to go out and do things together she just kind of lies around the house all day and sort of doesn't do anything to take care of herself at all. She doesn't have any energy then to go out and do things together—it feels like she's not willing to do something she should *know* is important to me.”

His wife was this little—I actually happened to meet his wife, and she was *beautiful*, but it wasn't about some stereotypical size or weight or whatever—which is where our heads go. It's literally taking care of yourself—that's it!

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: So, to me that's the second thing—it to *really* be willing to take care of yourself. Then the third is—truly act on it.

Brian: Act on it.

Shaunti: It's *really* act on it—be brave! I literally—I had somebody I was just having this conversation with a woman...two-three days ago—where she said, “I heard you say that”—because we were talking about this in another context—about the fact that your husband wants to be able to feast his eyes on you.

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: She went—and this woman is beautiful but...she's a mom of multiple children and she went home and she asked her husband—she said, “It was an uncomfortable conversation for me to initiate” but she said, “Do you really want to see me?” He looked at her—and she told me later that he said, “Honey, you're *beautiful!!* Of *course* I want to see you!!”

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: She sees every flaw. She sees every bit of cellulite. [Laughter] She sees all the stretch marks from having all these kids—

Brian: Right.

Shaunti: She's been around a few years.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: Yet this husband was *completely* shocked that she would even ask this question—so she realized she had to actually act on that—she *had* to be willing to change when he was looking.

Brian: Yes.

Shaunti: —and have the lights on—and those things that—it gave him such delight. When I have talked to women who have tried that they have seen this *delight* in their husband come forward like...a childish delight of gleeful enjoyment of their wife. Most women *love* that—they *love* that feeling that they can give their husband that delight. They just didn't think that *they* would be able to do that.

Brian: I know! Give them the opportunity. So ladies, remember that—your husband wants to feast his eyes on you. He's not looking for that bikini body on the cover of the

swimsuit edition—he's looking for *you*—and that's where he ultimately wants to keep his enjoyment.

There's one more quote from a guy with one of these studies—he said, "It's not important having that beach-bikini body. There's so much I love and appreciate about her—the biggest she got when she was pregnant was about 180—and even then, I was still physically attracted to her. I wanted to *be* with her. We've been through a lot together and there's no one else I'd rather experience life's peaks and valleys with." That's really what I think a husband wants.

Shaunti: It just makes me want to cry—that that's how guys feel.

Brian: Yes. We want someone on the journey of life and obviously part of that is enjoying each other physically—and most guys really do want that. So, ladies—I think those are three great points: Believe the best about your husband—what would change if you *really* believed that your husband wanted to see you?

Secondly, do some things to take care of yourself—I know that doesn't feel good coming from a guy so—Shaunti said that, I'm just repeating that. [Laughter] And then act on it—act on that belief and see what happens. Imagine if you try those few things and it does a *huge* change in your marriage—wouldn't that be awesome? Because that's our goal is we want to see you become one, together as a spouse and as a family and connected with God.

I think about—there's probably a lot of ladies going, "Gosh, I wish my husband could hear stuff like this." Or "How could he hear about how to become more beautiful?" I think that's why Shaunti does marriage conferences and FamilyLife® does Weekend to Remember®s—is because it gives you that space to have these kind of conversations—because sometimes it's hard to have this conversation of—

"Does my husband know that I'm—does he think that I'm beautiful?" "How could he learn to even communicate that more?"

Getting yourself to a place where you can have those honest conversations is really important, so check out FamilyLife.com or you can go to Shaunti.com and you can find out where she's speaking or where we're having *Weekend to Remember* conferences and get away together to have this kind of space and this kind of opportunity.

By the way this podcast is listener supported and so we appreciate many gifts from people like yourself. If you're interested in donating today you can do that at familylife.com. Just click the word "donate."

I'd love to give a special thanks to our audio producer, CJ3 and our project coordinator Page Johnson for helping to pull this off. We couldn't do it without their help.

Well, next time on Married With Benefits we are going to ask a question that my wife sent in, "Why does my husband always want to fix my problems and not just listen to my conversation. I look forward to hearing Shaunti's answer on that. Until next time, we'll see you.

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