

**ERP 068: What Women Really Want... Really! With Dr. Kathryn Foster**

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**Jessica:** Hi, thank you for joining me in today's episode, What Women Really Want, with Doctor Kathryn Foster. In today's episode she's really just helping us recognize the differences in our brain structure and how that informs the way we think, feel and behave, and when we're talking about relationship - how we approach the relationship. I hope you'll find some golden nuggets, some wisdom points that will be useful for you in your relationship.

Kathryn Foster, PhD is a psychologist in private practice in Fort Worth, Texas, with a masters degree in marriage and family counseling and a PhD in Psychology. She has practiced psychotherapy for over 27 years. Kathryn is the author of several books and has written three non-fiction books that I think are really geared towards this topic of relationship. One is The Naked Truth About Men (And Romance), which she was a guest last year - I'm gonna tell you a little more about that episode where we talked about that book. The second book that she's written is What Women Want... Really, written for men, but meant to be read by couples. The third is When Your Relationship Changes: How To Find Strength When Going Through A Breakup.

Doctor Kathryn Foster, thank you for spending time with us today.

**Kathryn:** Hello, it's good to be back with you.

**Jessica:** Excellent. We were just chatting that this is my first second appearance for somebody being on the show, so it's really a great privilege to have you. As I mentioned in episode 32 of Empowered Relationship - I interviewed Dr. Kathryn Foster, and it was largely about the first book, The Naked Truth About Men, and she really just pointed out some of the very important biological, hormonal differences between men and women that I think it's so easy for us to perhaps overlook at times, when we're in relationship and we don't always know how it impacts our language, our emotions, our needs and desires in relationship, right Kathryn?

**Kathryn:** Yeah, you bet!

**Jessica:** And I think one of the bigger things that came out of that episode, I felt like a lot of clients really responded to is just normalizing that these are just some of the things we're working with.

**Kathryn:** Yes, we all have to learn to manage our brain structure in order to be in a romance.

**Jessica:** Yes, so just kind of helping people point out some of those key differences, how we see connection, what we're expecting. I think lastly we were saying women primarily seek intimacy in a relationship for the talking and sharing, and men primarily seek emotional closeness through sexual intimacy. Is that more of the biology/instinct?

**Kathryn:** Yes, and brain structure.

**Jessica:** And brain structure. Great. So for listeners who want to check out that previous episode, it's episode 32. You can find that on my website, which is [DrJessicaHiggins.com](http://DrJessicaHiggins.com). Just click on Podcast, scroll down to episode 32, The Naked Truth About Men And Women In Romance. People have really gotten a lot of value out of that episode.

Today we are going to be talking about What Women Want... Really! So this is the title of your second book, right?

**Kathryn:** Yes, this is exciting because I think it really gives the nuts and bolts of how to help a relationship.

**Jessica:** Tell us more.

**Kathryn:** Okay. Well, two thirds of divorces are initiated by women now, and I believe that's because women expect something from men that for men is a learned behavior. It's not that it's impossible to do, it's just not intuitive for guys. So even though "What Women Want... Really" is written for guys - because it's concise, it's bullet-pointed, it is a pocketbook guide - it is meant to be read by couples, and it's probably women that will be buying the book. It also includes discussion questions that make it easy for both to talk about what they need in a neutral way.

In my own practice, I love to see couples reading this out loud together a couple times a year just to stay on track.

**Jessica:** Yes, I think that that's a great strategy, to read it out loud together and really share the experience. It's kind of a little bit of a platform to engage in dialogue.

**Kathryn:** Yes, absolutely.

**Jessica:** Great. Okay, I think these differences between men and women are so important to have insight around. Tell me more about how come you wrote this book.

**Kathryn:** Let me go back to something fundamental. When I talk about women and I talk about men in this book, I am talking about something very specific, and I just want to say that upfront.

So let's talk about women first. When I say it, it refers to the greater population of females. Not everybody though, but those who are hardwired and strongly motivated by empathy. They attach to discern another's feelings.

Let me go to men now. Men refers to the greater population of males who are hardwired and strongly motivated to value and assemble systems. A system is anything from a pencil sharpener to world economics. It's anything that has some fixed rules and can be figured out. Men orient toward that. But the key here is that they detach to observe and figure out a system. Now, since most women don't detach, they can really misread what is going on with the guy.

Let's say they're going on a date, there's tremendous rapport, and then he doesn't text for five days. She probably thinks the relationship is over.

**Jessica:** [laughs] Right.

**Kathryn:** The guy isn't thinking that. He just has a normal way of being, because he's a systemizer. He goes in and out of detachment.

Now, let me go to something else, Dr. Jessica, let's go back to women. Sophisticated MRIs are now showing us that by the age of 17 a girl's brain has transformed so that the processing of negative emotion, like "I'm afraid" or "I feel cheated" or whatever, moves up to the cerebral cortex, and this is where higher mental functioning like reflection and language and reasoning take place. So she can now explain what she feels and why she feels what she does; she can hook words up to feelings in a way that's much easier than what is going on with a guy, and she can reason through emotion. In fact, she uses dialogue as a way to explore what she feels and thinks. And I like to say this: she thinks her feelings, and she feels her thoughts. It's all together. So a guy in a romance has to realize that her very identity is associated with this profound brain change, and her identity is associated with her thought feelings, and she likes to talk about those.

Now guys, their processing of negative emotion doesn't move, it stays in a more primitive place in the brain, and so he is a little worried when somebody starts talking strongly about their feelings, that she is going to get reactive, or something.

**Jessica:** [laughs] Yeah.

**Kathryn:** ...but it's very different for her. She has had something happen to her that causes her to have integrated thought-feelings and she wants to explore those. If he doesn't do that with

her, then she doesn't feel known by him. If she doesn't feel known by him, she does not want to be sexual. So that's a heads up on that.

Let's go back to guys though. One other thing I want to say is that between the ages of 9 and 15 a boy's daily quotient of one cup of circulating testosterone per day now soars suddenly - get this - to two gallons! [laughter] I can't even picture it - in fact, I had to get out two gallons to just look at it for a minute, you know?

**Jessica:** Yes, no kidding!

**Kathryn:** Testosterone is a very powerful chemical, you know? And these two gallons that begin driving through his body livens his hypothalamus to grow over twice - in fact, over 2.5 times that of a girl's, and it pushes everything sexual to the front of his thinking. Now, that's tough when you're just in your adolescence. Girls have more time, you know? But here it is. So the important thing about that to understand though is today men are four times more likely than women to see sex and emotional closeness as the same thing. So this is why guys want to be sexual if they love a woman.

**Jessica:** Right, because you're saying from this very formative adolescent forming of the brain in which you're describing the hormonal impact, that there's some significant intensity there that you're describing just to articulate the point, and I'm assuming that that's got an imprint on functioning from there on out. Yes, I know that we develop and we mature, and some of that kind of integrates and we develop different parts of ourselves, and I think that impacts our brain. Because I don't know that every man in adulthood maybe has that same... Right? It's different?

**Kathryn:** Well it's funny, because in mid-life when hormones start going down and the testosterone goes down, guys' testosterone is still really a lot more than a woman has.

**Jessica:** Right. I'm not saying it goes away, but the intensity of what you're describing...

**Kathryn:** Yes, because we know that guys who are over sixty are much more interested in the friendship part of a relationship, but understand that testosterone has already shaped his brain, so he has certain ways of prioritizing things in a relationship, and the sexual piece is still important. I think a woman has to know that. She also has to know that for a guy sex has emotional meaning. I often say to guys, if you want more sex, talk about sex in emotional ways, so she can get it, you know?

**Jessica:** That's so key.

**Kathryn:** Say "I really feel warm when we touch, I feel so close to you when we have sex." You can't say "I'm horny!" That just doesn't work.

**Jessica:** Wow... So I think I added that piece of question just to give... Because I think people get it, and I'm saying that it can feel different in adulthood essentially; it may not feel like it does in adolescence, but the imprint of it or the structuring of it is the same.

**Kathryn:** Yes, right. The imprint is there, because it resulted in a brain change.

**Jessica:** Gotcha, gotcha! Okay, and I'm just still stuck on what you were saying a moment ago about just even in those initial stages... You could probably give several examples even in relationship or in marriage where a guy disconnects and the woman is feeling that, and she's interpreting it very differently.

**Kathryn:** Yes, and you know, what I'd like to say to women is that if you go out with a guy and you have this resonance and then he doesn't contact you for days, what might be going on in the guy's mind is this sense of how he can be successful again, because if a date worked and he knows that, then he's gotta figure out "How can I make the next date so great? Because I don't want this to peter out." So he may be thinking about that a lot, and that's a huge compliment to the woman. Now, women are different. They just think that - and I don't know if this is why you laughed, Jessica, but women just think "No, let's just get together and just talk, it will be fun!"

**Jessica:** Right, let's build on the rapport.

**Kathryn:** Yes!

**Jessica:** But I was giggling because I think if the way you're talking, it's like a man... We'll go back and have a meeting of the minds, of like "Okay, let's debrief that", like you're talking about this kind of system... Like a strategy, what worked, what didn't work... [laughing]

**Kathryn:** [inaudible 00:13:58.18] this woman as though she's a system, and "How do I get this to work with her again?" So there's some pressure on guys, and there has to be some acknowledgment of that, but even in a marriage... Yes, people can be married for 25 years and the woman asks... You know, he can go on a hunting trip or a business trip and he doesn't even call, it seems weird. He's not affected by that. The relationship has not changed for him. He is still solidly there and committed, but she relies more on the moment-to-moment relational stuff: the dialogue, the checking-in. And women just need more of that.

**Jessica:** Yes. I mean, I'm pretty open with people about my experience, and it's taken a while for me to really experientially get that, especially when there's conflict. So if my husband is kind of doing the "I need to go into my cave" thing, to kind of identify... It's not as easily available for him to know how he's feeling, and it feels like disconnect sometimes, and I've had to learn... Because he's told me, and I get it over experience that he's very much with me, he's super committed, and there's no disconnect from him. For me it felt difficult at times, because of my languaging and my interpretation of that is like "You're going away!"

**Kathryn:** Right, yes. You know the studies regarding blood pressure, that if a guy enters into a conflict with a woman and she says "We need to talk" - those words... - then his blood pressure goes up, and it may go up so much that he can't even think, or he tries to escape, or he says funny things that don't make sense. [laughter] But she's fine. A woman is biologically suited for disagreements and conflicts, and kind of knows they're going to come, she kind of expects them. But her blood pressure goes up when he stops talking. I bet that this is something that happens to you when he says "I gotta go in my man cave and think." You just freeze.

**Jessica:** I used to... I don't anymore, but I used to, for sure.

**Kathryn:** A woman really has to picture, tough... I think it helps to picture the human brain. You have a left hemisphere and a right hemisphere, and between those two is a bridge. A woman's bridge is four times as thick compared to a guy's. That gives her this ease with language and with identifying feelings and talking about her feelings. It's so easy. She just zips around over the bridge. But you have to understand that a guy doesn't have that kind of bridge, he's built differently.

**Jessica:** Yes, so it's almost like you're asking women to have a different interpretation with that understanding, or a different narrative around it.

**Kathryn:** Yes, you have to expect something different, and not condemn somebody for what they can't help, or what is inherent to them. We have to embrace each other. There are differences, and we like those differences a lot.

**Jessica:** Yes.

**Kathryn:** But there's another side to it that we have to come to terms with. Now, women are complicated, so if a guy is going to commit to a woman, he has to be ready for the complication she brings him. I talked about the bridge between the left and right hemisphere - you see, that bridge gives her access to the 412 different feelings that have been identified. And she wants to talk about those. I know, most of us women don't realize we have 412 emotions to draw on, but there are that many. And as every guy knows, this makes a woman complicated. Plus, she feels more strongly and more often than men do. A guy has to be ready for all that. We all have to deal with the opposite sex, and it's not easy.

A woman loves a man who asks her about her feelings, and I've kind of explained why. But let's look at it this way - this is kind of for guys here. As a woman talks, her feelings rise. I compare this to the feelings a guy might have when he's having sex; the intensity gets stronger. If a guy interrupts a woman when she's talking in a feeling kind of way, it's like if during sex she jumps up and says "You know, I'm just gonna run downstairs and get a cup of tea."

**Jessica:** [laughs] Right.

**Kathryn:** Pretty dismissive, right?

**Jessica:** Mm-hm...

**Kathryn:** And a guy's feelings are more connected to his behaviors than they are to talking, so both men and women have to keep that in mind. You have the old story of a wife who comes into therapy - Dr. Jessica, you've probably had this very same thing happen... She's saying to him in the therapy session, "Do you love me? I don't know if you love me", and the husband says, "Of course, haven't I gone to work every day?" Now, his comment is not going to register with her on any deep level, because she's not going to associate those behaviors with love as much as she will words. She needs words. That's how she's built. It's just different brain structures.

A woman has tremendous capabilities of exploring the many feelings she feels, and a guy can become worn out and frustrated by her emotional marathon; he may want her to get to the behavior she wants from him, especially if she's complaining. I like to use the example of - a woman never knows when the guy will be home for dinner, but she cooks dinner and she waits; she puts it in the fridge, she puts it in the microwave, she doesn't know what to do. So her way of approaching that is often to start talking about how difficult it is for her, because the woman is empathy-driven. Her brain is set up that way, so she feels like if she just tells him how bad this is for her, a light will go off in his eyes and he will go "Oh, I get it, no problem." Because that's what another woman would do.

**Jessica:** That's so important...

**Kathryn:** It's not what happens though, because a guy is hearing the emotional talk going all over the board and he doesn't have a real grip for that in the first place, but he's searching-searching-searching for "What is it she wants me to do? If I just knew what she wanted me to do, then I could do it. Tell me what you want!" So if a woman would kind of journal or talk out what she feels and then get down to what she wants, and present the bottom line to him first, it would go so much better, there would be so much less frustration. If she would say "Honey, would you text me at 4 o'clock every day to tell me what time you'll be home for dinner?" He can go "Oh, yeah! I can do that!" And a lot of guys are really happy to do things, because the way they experience it, Jessica, is as a win, kind of an achievement. And men, because of testosterone, they're built that way. They want to be efficacious in the world, they want to be successful, so when they experience a win, it's physical; their testosterone immediately goes up. Then, because of the testosterone, their dopamine goes up, which makes you feel good. They feel so engaged in life, and happy.

**Jessica:** Absolutely, and I'm thinking on the converse, if they're getting the empathy description of "Here's my experience, can't you relate?", all they're hearing is how they did it wrong and what wasn't right, and it's essentially probably a lose.



**Kathryn:** It's a downer. Oh my gosh, it's a downer. Guys need to hear what the woman wants them to do. A lot of guys are so great about doing it if they just know what it is. Then later maybe the woman can say, "You know, it would really help me/I would really appreciate it - it has to be positive - if you would just let me talk about some of the feelings I've had. Because remember, I'm a woman and I have a lot of feelings." And they can both laugh, and he can sit down and just listen for a while. But then at least he gets what's going on.

**Jessica:** Right.

**Kathryn:** But a guy does have to understand that he must show that he cares enough to actually know her. And that isn't about knowing her body or her behaviors, it's about knowing her thought-feelings; that's where she feels like she's known. And a little advice for guys: when you are listening to a woman, you have to go into a relaxation mode, or probably your blood pressure is going to do something you don't want it to do. So release your jaw muscles, release your shoulders, slow your breathing down - because this is under our conscious control - and go into night-time breathing. Picture that your mind is a serene lake, with a smooth surface - that's your brain - and tell yourself "She just wants me to know what she feels. It's okay, I don't have to do anything. This is what women do."

**Jessica:** Right, "That's my job, just to listen."

**Kathryn:** Yes, and women are so grateful when they get to have self-expression. It makes a woman feel like she is a woman, it makes you feel good, and she becomes endeared to the man who listens.

**Jessica:** So what does that look like? I love the setup of what you're inviting men to do internally, but what is... Since this isn't natural, so what would that look like in practice? What would be a question they could ask, or something that they could say?

**Kathryn:** The book has some very practical tools in it. Let me just share... Women have special rules, that men don't have any way of knowing about. [laughter] And one rule is that if she asks you a question, the guy then is supposed to return the gesture and ask the same question of her. So she says, "How was your day at work?" He should answer, but then he should say, "So tell me about your day." Because she wants a back and forth flow. A lot of times a guy thinks that "Okay, here's a question before me. I have the job of answering the question. I'll get that finished and then that's it." No. She wants a dialogue. So if she says "Do you think Kevin really meant what he said when he was talking about spying on his wife?" The guy needs to say, "Well, I'd like to hear what you think." He doesn't always have to even answer, as long as he gets it back to her.

We know that in the world of private conversations, like in relationships - this isn't necessarily fit in the work world, but in private relationships women talk two to three times as much as



guys do. They need to talk, because of the way their brain is set up, so it's endearing if a guy makes space for that.

To answer your question more, guys need to learn to ask open-ended questions which give her the chance to share more deeply. A close-ended question is if the question can be answered with a yes or a no, or a couple of words. You want to ask a question that gives room to respond, and those questions often begin with what or how. They encourage mental and emotional exploration, which is kind of what women like.

A guy might say, "What did you decide to do?" or "How do you feel about it?" or "What were your impressions of him?" or "What do you think you should do?" or "What are you feeling about her?", that kind of thing.

If guys want more sex, ironically, they need to make their comments less sexual and more emotional, because this will help her be sexual.

**Jessica:** I like that.

**Kathryn:** In this way, the guy appeals more to a woman and you pique her interest, and she will feel that she is going deeper with you in terms of showing thought-feelings, and that opens her to being deeper with you sexually. A guy has to remember that sex - I'm not talking about the first nine months of a relationship, we can talk about that another time... You know, for a woman, sex is a symbolic expression of the emotional closeness that's already present.

**Jessica:** I love that.

**Kathryn:** Yes, so a guy has to participate in some talk.

**Jessica:** So what does that look like? I know you're giving the recipe, and just to give people an example.

**Kathryn:** Well, I hope I'm on the same page. I'm talking about a guy saying, "Honey, can we talk?"

**Jessica:** I see, I see. So it doesn't even matter, it's just... I loved what you were saying about just asking open-ended questions and helping her talk about her feelings, that really helps foster a lot of things. But when you brought up the sex part and you said talk about her feelings, it's essentially the same thing as what you're saying.

**Kathryn:** Yes, but let me say this too. A guy gets more sex if he will not make sexual comments, but will make more emotional comments. "I love you. I feel so happy to be with you", that kind of stuff.

**Jessica:** Gotcha.

**Kathryn:** Interestingly, on the sexual thing, which I do cover in the book... This is ironic to guys too, and that is that if a guy will begin touch that is non-sexual, she will move into feeling her sexuality faster than if he touches a sexual part of her body. A guy has to memorize that, because guys would usually be just fine [laughter] with you-know-what, right? But women are different. The bottom line with a woman is that you have to catch the emotional piece of her. You have to appeal to that first, through non-sexual affection, through talking, before she can light up and open that door.

**Jessica:** Yes, I'm sure it's counter-intuitive for guys.

**Kathryn:** It is, it is. This is what I mean about how we all have to manage our brains. Because our brains are very old - and I explain that in *The Naked Truth About Men (And Romance)* - and we are carrying those around in our heads now, and it tells a guy to just seek out sex, and it tells a woman to just complain about her feelings maybe, but we have to manage it. We have to learn about it and manage it.

**Jessica:** So great. I feel like we are just getting a sliver, and I feel the excitement between us both, because there's so much to say. So anything you want to say in our closing, any added points, and also how people can get in touch with you and purchase your book. I'll put the links on the show notes for sure. I want to give you a little space here.

**Kathryn:** Let me just close with a quote from D.H. Lawrence. He said:

"The greatest living experience for every man is his adventure into the woman. The man embraces in the woman all that is not himself, and from that one resultant, from that embrace, comes every new action."

There's a lot of truth in that, that men's testosterone is raised when they're with a woman, and that translates into success in every other area of life. So I think D.H. Lawrence hit on something there.

A good place to reach me is a new website I put up. It's [BooksByKathrynFosterPhD.com](http://BooksByKathrynFosterPhD.com). There's my five books there. I have another on the way, Jessica, it's called *Past Lives*, and I am so excited about it. I'll tell you more about that later in an e-mail.

**Jessica:** Wonderful. Well, thank you again for your wisdom, your knowledge, your insight and your heart. I feel your real purpose of just helping people navigate these differences and really come into a connection that allows... And this quote that you're closing with, just the enrichment and blossoming that some of us have touched in on, but don't even know that is possible. I think you're shining the light on that.

**Kathryn:** Yeah, good. Well, it was delightful to be with your, Jessica.

I hope you have enjoyed today's podcast episode, What Women Really Want, with Dr. Kathryn Foster. She's talking about a book she wrote, however she's also really talking to us as couples in relationship, and the differences we are negotiating; how we see things, how we interpret things, and how we relate to one another. And when we experience things so differently, it can feel a little conflictual, it can feel a little difficult at times. If I'm a woman - which I am - I might be inclined, like she is saying, to be more motivated in leading with empathy. Whereas my husband is more looking at things from a systems perspective, we are coming at things totally different. So we're going to miss each other, we're going to be miscommunicating, we're going to be misunderstanding each other's intentions, what we're wanting, and it can cause a bit of a rift at times. So this information can be incredibly informative, empowering and useful for you.

If you have any questions, or would like me to talk about a topic in an upcoming podcast, I would love to hear from you. I would love to hear your wondering, anything you're questioning about or maybe challenged with in your relationship. And again, this can be anonymous. You can e-mail me, let me know your question, let me know your topic, and I will be incorporating that in an upcoming podcast.

It's always a pleasure to hear from you. If you have any feedback or any question for me in general, I'd love to hear from you. You can reach me by e-mail, that's [jessica@drjessicahiggins.com](mailto:jessica@drjessicahiggins.com), or you can go to my website, which is [DrJessicaHiggins.com](http://DrJessicaHiggins.com). Find the show notes on the Podcast section - click Podcast at the top menu, find all the episode there listed, and you can click on whatever one you're interested in. Find the show notes, as well as the transcript.

Until next time, I hope you take great care and again, thank you for your listenership.

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