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What Do Men Really Want? (It's Not What You Think.)

This is Stay Happily Married #121, "What Do Men Really Want? (It's Not What You Think.)"

Welcome to Stay Happily Married, your source for weekly updates on the latest tips and advice to build a happy and healthy marriage.

Today's episode of Stay Happily Married is brought to you by the Rosen Law Firm. For more information, visit us at Rosen.com.

Ned Daze: I'm Ned Daze and I'm your host today. Welcome to the show. I'm here with Dr. Kristen Wynns. Kristen is no stranger to the show. She's been on several times before. We always love having her here.

Kristen is a psychologist with her own practice, Wynns Family Psychology in Cary, North Carolina. And she's been married for 11 years herself. She's got two kids as well, so that's always a good qualification when we're talking about being married.

Kristen, welcome back to the show.

Kristen Wynns: Thank you.

Ned Daze: Well, I'm so glad you could join us today. I think this is going to be an interesting topic, "What Do Men Really Want?" I guess there's probably a big disparity between kind of the general idea of what men want and then what they actually want. I'm guessing there are a lot of stereotypes out there that aren't exactly true.

Kristen Wynns: That's right. And I have to admit, this topic is a little intimidating to try to get into the male psyche as a female. But I hope after being married for 11 years and learning a lot from marriage, and from talking to my sisters who've been married about the same time, and

from working with couples, I'm hoping I've picked up a thing or two about what husbands want in marriages.

Ned Daze: Yeah. I can only speak for myself, but I don't know that the male psyche is all that complicated. But we'll see. We will see.

Kristen Wynns: Well, I do think that there is still a bit of a stereotype. If you ask the typical woman on the street, "What do husbands want?" I think in unison women -- or men, for that matter -- might say, "Oh, well, most husbands want more sex." But I think that somewhat simplifies things.

And even though most men would say that's an important part of their relationship, I think men are a bit more complicated psychologically than that and there are some other aspects of the relationship that really mean a lot to them.

Ned Daze: Well, when we're looking at this -- when we're looking at wives trying to make their husbands happy and there's this idea that all men are after are those kind of caveman -- like, food, sex, competition type thing --

Kristen Wynns: Right.

Ned Daze: -- where does that lead when that's kind of the only option you're looking at? If you think, oh, that's all he wants; I'll just cook and have more sex. Does that really solve the problem, or is that really what guys want is just more food and more sex?

Kristen Wynns: Right. And together, if possible, right? Well, right. So I think that sometimes if it's simplified like that then sometimes women might miss out on opportunities to really satisfy their husband in more fulfilling ways.

So again, those things are important. But a lot of times if females in general are kind of basing their behavior on thinking that men are pretty much just still back in the caveman days where they just want those simple needs fulfilled, then they might miss out on opportunities to really make their husbands happy, show them appreciation and really fulfill the relationship in a much more comprehensive kind of way.

Ned Daze: Okay. Yeah. And so does this cause any problems at all? I mean, I'm guessing nobody's going to complain about more food and more sex. But what are some of the things, just kind of very generally, that are kind of overlooked when we simplify this and say, "Oh, all men want these three things."

Kristen Wynns: Right. Well, interestingly, a big thing that I see with talking to husbands is -- or men in general on relationships -- is men really want to feel successful and men really have a need for their spouse - - for their wife -- to see them as successful.

So a lot of times really simple things that women can do to recognize something that their husbands are great at or to point out their husbands' strengths or what they admire about their husbands, drawing attention to those areas can really go a long way in satisfying that need that most husbands have of feeling like their wife sees them as successful and a winner.

So that's a need that I see frequently that men have that often times isn't recognized because women don't necessarily think about pointing that out to their husbands, especially the longer they've been married.

Ned Daze: Well, that makes sense. That makes a lot of sense to me and I'm wondering, do men always realize that themselves? Like, that's something -- I hear you say that and it makes sense, but I don't know that I would come up with that on my own; like, oh, I have this need to feel successful and appreciated. When you're helping couples, do you see that men aren't always quite sure what they want or need?

Kristen Wynns: That's a good point. I think sometimes it's almost the loss of having that that's sort of eating at them that might cause them to feel not quite satisfied or a little bit resentful or irritated in a relationship. But I do think that sometimes it's hard for men to articulate that, that that is a need for them.

And sometimes, once that's introduced -- it may be pointed out through therapy or through conversations between the couple -- sometimes if the wife starts to add those elements to the relationship it makes a huge difference. And then the husband can say, "Oh, yeah, I really love it when you do that. That means a lot. I really like it when you point out you're proud of me."

But a lot of times, you're right, it's not something the husband might be able to articulate right off the bat.

Ned Daze: Okay. And do you see this kind of coming up in your practice when you're helping couples out, where either the husband isn't feeling appreciated or the wife is really trying all these things that don't seem to be working? What does that kind of look like when either the husband is feeling unappreciated or maybe the wife is trying her hardest but doing the wrong things?

Kristen Wynns: Right. Well, it's interesting. A lot of times, by the time a couple comes to therapy then sex is the first thing that's affected when they're having marital problems. A lot of times that will filter into their sexual relationship. And a lot of times, by the time they come to therapy, that's already kind of off the table because they're so unhappy that no one's really feeling like connecting in that way.

So a lot of times, in a way that highlights these other areas that weren't going well that are critical to the relationship and that make the husband feel appreciated and needed. And of course, we could say a lot of these things we're going to discuss are also important to women, but a lot of times these issues are highlighted in therapy because they're kind of past the point where they know it's not as simple as sex. And they're having the feeling that there are these other issues going on but it's difficult for them to sometimes figure out on their own.

And that's where it's sometimes helpful in therapy to highlight, okay, well, these other elements of the relationship are critical to us feeling connected. And of course, once they feel more connected then sex comes back in the relationship again too as a nice bonus.

Ned Daze: Okay. That makes a lot of sense. Well, I want to get to -- you have I think six tips here for kind of how to make husbands and men feel more appreciated. And I think these are some really great advice and you're awfully kind to give us so much credit that we're after more than just a couple or three things here.

Kristen Wynns: That's right. Well, right. These are really kind of boiled down six things that men really want besides sex. So I think we can all agree that, of course, men like sex and that's an important part of the relationship, but these are six other things that men really want.

And I have to admit, I did a little research yesterday with my husband and asked him, "Okay. If we could boil this down besides sex, what do men really want?"

And he said, "Peace and quiet."

And I kind of laughed and said, "No, seriously."

And he said, "No, seriously. I think that's a really important thing that most men want." So that is on my list as one of the things. And I would put that in the category of down time/peace and quiet.

So I do think that most men have that need to chill out, to sit and relax. And a lot of times, speaking from experience, wives have our list of things to do and the honey-do list and the projects we want

our husbands to do, and a lot of times that can kind of wear down a husband if he's being ambushed with that type of thing 24/7.

So I do think that's one of the six things that men really want is just to have a little bit of down time and to have their wives appreciate that they're going to need to put up their feet every so often, play video games or watch TV or whatever they do to kind of chill out. So that is an important need that most men have.

Ned Daze: I would have to agree. I think that's a very important one. Yeah. Very good advice your husband gave. Very serious, I think.

Kristen Wynns: Have to give him a shout-out there.

Ned Daze: Yes. Exactly. We need our down time.

Kristen Wynns: So that's number one. Another one is just appreciation. We've kind of touched on that one already. But even though that might be something that we think of that women need, those words of affirmation and confidence, most men actually appreciate that too, especially if their wives are pointing out things that they are thankful for or compliments.

So if your husband has been -- started a new exercise routine or a new diet or he's finished a really tough project at work, a lot of times, just because we're all so busy and focused on getting through the day, then wives might not necessarily think to point that out. But that goes a long way.

Most men really like to hear that from their wives, for their spouse to say, "Hey, I'm really proud of you. You've stuck with this diet for two weeks. I know that was really hard on vacation." Or, "Hey, I know you must be tired after that project got finished. You really worked hard. I'm proud of you for how dedicated you are to your job." Those kinds of basic words of appreciation and compliments really make an impact on men and they especially like to hear those things from their wives.

Ned Daze: Yeah. Everybody likes to get compliments. And I'm imagining that kind of helps even just build kind of the friendship between spouses as well, right?

Kristen Wynns: Exactly. It has multiple benefits. Of course, the husband appreciates it, but even the wives giving those compliments -- does all kinds of warm and fuzzy things for her and for the friendship between the couple. You're exactly right.

Ned Daze: Well, let's see. Next one I have on the list is acceptance, which is realizing that you don't want to change your husband. Is that correct?

Kristen Wynns: That's right. And you hear that a lot -- or I hear that a lot -- that men complain because they feel like their wives knew what they were getting when the wife signed up for the marriage. And so why, as soon as it was official, did this wife start in on her agenda to sort of do a home improvement project and change the husband?

A lot of times wives will sort of accept things during the dating period because they assume, "Oh, well, I'm sure he'll grow out of that," or, "Once we're married it'll be different." And then once they're married, a lot of times wives have this agenda where they want their husband to dress differently or get in shape or be more involved at home. And a lot of times men get quite resentful, feeling like the wife just wants to fix him or change him.

So it's very important that women give that kind of feedback if they need to in a positive way to point out what the husband is doing well. And if you have suggestions or feedback, to state it that way.

"Have you thought about trying some of these shirts that are a little bit more professional?" Or, "Have you thought about maybe, once you've had your down time, to come in and play with the kids while I get dinner ready?" Instead of it just seeming like a, "You don't do this right. You don't do this right. Why don't you do this better?"

To really focus on the positive and use the straightforward communication and the good "I" statements that we all know kind of are cliché but are helpful to say, "I feel kind of overwhelmed when I'm making dinner and dealing with the kids after work. Could you help more?" That kind of phrasing is really important in communicating what the wife needs, instead of it just being sort of an ambush of, "You need to do this. You need to do that."

Ned Daze: Yeah. Though in your defense, I think a lot of us would probably wander to the office in ratty old tee-shirts if we didn't have somebody telling us that that wasn't appropriate. It kind of reminds me of the old joke, though. What is it? Men marry women hoping they'll never change and women marry men hoping to change them, or something along those lines.

Kristen Wynns: That's right.

Ned Daze: Yeah.

Kristen Wynns: That's one of those stereotypes that I think is based in reality, that a lot of times women are kind of bidding their time and once it's official and they've got that ring on their finger, they're like, "Okay. Good. Now, let's get to work on this improvement project here."

But you're right. The clothes area might be something that you guys actually do need our help with, right?

Ned Daze: I'll take all the help I can get in that arena. Yeah.

And the next one I have here is affection. What are we talking about with that?

Kristen Wynns: Well, interestingly, when I was doing my review with my husband, when I mentioned that one to him he said, "Oh, no. That's a girlie one." But once I explained it a little bit more, he agreed that that was a helpful component.

So a lot of times if you think about affection in terms of holding hands or hugs -- and, sure, that might be something that you would say women need more than men. But the fact is that men are human beings just like women, and we all have that built-in need for physical affection, for hugs and kisses and cuddles. And there's all that great research to show how that affects our health -- affects our mental health and our physical health. And men need that kind of thing too.

So simple things throughout the day. Instead of just passing at 80 miles an hour while the wife might be going to start dinner and put in another load of laundry and yell at the kids in the other room, that wives can slow down and just say, "Hey, how was your day?" Give your husband a hug or pat him on the back or give him a squeeze as you're going through the kitchen. Just little gestures of physical affection, as well as more romantic kind of things.

Even men appreciate romantic gestures like surprise sexy e-mails or texts during the day to kind of make it fun. Or to bring home a special treat that you know your husband likes. Certainly I think men appreciate those things and they're not just something that we can put in the female category and say, oh, no, men don't need any of that.

Ned Daze: We like all that. We just feel like we can't admit to it. That's the problem.

Kristen Wynns: Right. So now I'm giving all men permission that it's okay to admit that you like those things and that it's good for you and it's good for the relationship.

Ned Daze: All right. So we're in the clear. Excellent.

Kristen Wynns: That's right.

Ned Daze: Next one on the list is trust.

Kristen Wynns: That's right. And that one is one of those key foundations of any relationship that has to go both ways. But of course, when we're speaking about men in particular, it's very important that wives assume the best of their husbands. Assume that your husband is being loyal and faithful and is committed to the relationship. Assume that he's doing what he needs to do to contribute, that he's participating the way he should.

And of course, if you have questions about your husband's faithfulness or you're feeling insecure, instead of doing some of the sneaky things that sometimes women might do to go behind his back or try to check up on him, to just directly have a conversation with your husband about your feelings of insecurity.

Or if you're really feeling like it's more than the two of you can handle, of course to go see a marriage counselor where you can really talk about your concerns and insecurities in a healthy, open environment instead of kind of assuming that he's doing something he shouldn't be or starting to let that wear down the relationship without you ever addressing it directly.

Ned Daze: Yeah. Absolutely. All right. So I've got the last one here, number six. I've got respect. Fill me in on that. What do you mean by respect?

Kristen Wynns: Yes. And I would say out of all of these six things that men really want -- again, I'm a woman, so I don't know, but it seems from my experience and from talking with husbands in therapy, and just from my own personal experience, it seems like this would actually be the most important out of those six things. I think that's a basic need that men really need in their relationships, and that's just to feel that their wife respects them as a husband, as a father, as a human being. Men need to know that their wives respect them.

And unfortunately, a lot of times when couples have been married for a while, wives might develop a sarcastic way of talking to their husbands or might roll their eyes when their husbands are saying something, or cut them off. And those things really do quite a lot of damage to the relationship and to the husband's commitment and satisfaction in the relationship.

So that type of thing is very important for women to show their husbands respect by believing in him; supporting him; communicating in a respectful way; when he's talking, to really listen; not cut him off, not do the sarcastic things or the dreaded eye roll when talking, but really be considerate. Show him that you appreciate his opinions and thoughts. Even if you disagree with him, you can say that in a way that's appropriate, not to condescend to him or belittle him.

I think out of all those six things that men really want, I think respect would be at the top of that list. If you don't have that in the relationship, you're never going to have a completely satisfactory and fulfilling relationship.

Ned Daze: I think that's a really good one. Yeah. The eye roll is deadly because everybody knows how fragile our egos are as men. That's a big one.

Kristen Wynns: That's right. And there is that good research by John Gottman where he has the four horsemen of the apocalypse, kind of the danger signs when you know a relationship is headed south. And one of those is that whole category of sarcasm and those nonverbal things, like eye rolling or turning your body away in the middle of a conversation, that those really have been shown to be quite detrimental to the relationship. And if you don't change those, it's going to be part of bigger problems for the relationship.

Ned Daze: Yeah. Absolutely. Well, Kristen, is there anything else on the six tips that we need to cover or anything else we need to talk about?

Kristen Wynns: No. I would just say that those six needs we could also say are important for women as well. But I hope from the way we've discussed these as being specific to men, that women can just be more aware that there's more to the picture, that men have come a long way in relationships. And that's a good thing. And that we can all benefit from focusing on these things in our relationships.

Ned Daze: All right. Great. Well, I want to just ask you a little bit real quick. I've got two websites here for you which are both really great. We've got WynnsFamilyPsychology.com, which has a lot of great information on it, all about your practice. And you've also got a blog up at KristenWynns.wordpress.com, right?

Kristen Wynns: That's right.

Ned Daze: And that's the Marriage and Parenting 101 blog, correct?

Kristen Wynns: That's right.

August 2, 2010 - What Do Men Really Want? (It's Not What You Think.)

Ned Daze: And what do you do on there? Fill me in a little bit about what you post up there.

Kristen Wynns: I try to go back and forth and post some blog articles on parenting and then also marriage. And a lot of times it's combined. So I try to just give really short articles that are chock-full of tips for how to improve your parenting with young kids, older kids, and also how to improve your marriage. So it's got a good mix of articles there but they're very easy to read. Five, 10 minutes and you've gotten some good tips, hopefully.

Ned Daze: All right. Great. Well, I'll be sure to put a link to both of those in the show notes. And Kristen, thank you again so much for joining us today on the show.

Kristen Wynns: Thank you.

Ned Daze: You can get in touch with Kristen, again, on her website at WynnsFamilyPsychology.com. There's a lot of great information on there. You can also give her a call at her office number; that's (919) 805-0182. Her office is in Cary, just moved just a little while ago, I do believe.

Thank you so much for joining us today. I hope you'll join us again next week. We love to hear all of the comments we get from you via e-mail and via phone call. We listen to every single one of them and we do our best to improve the show and put on the guests you want to hear and cover the topics you want us to talk about. So please feel free to give us a call. You can call us at (919) 256-3083 or e-mail us at comments@stayhappilymarried.com.

I'm Ned Daze. Until next time, stay happily married.

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