

STRAIGHT WIVES: A STUDY OF WOMEN ENGAGED OR MARRIED TO A MAN WHO
IS LATER IDENTIFIED AS BEING GAY

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DISSERTATION APPROVAL

This dissertation submitted by Marguerite Bonnet, has been read and approved by three faculty members of The American Academy of Clinical Sexologists.

The final copies have been examined by the Dissertation Committee, and the signatures which appear here verify the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the dissertation is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this doctoral dissertation to my four daughters and angels in disguise, who have had an absent mom for so many years, but have never held that against me. You all have loved and supported me unconditionally, and for that I am incredibly grateful. To my mother and grandmother who are the wind beneath my wings and two of my biggest cheerleaders. You are all my guardian angels, and through preparation of this dissertation, have kept me safe on the road through your continuous prayers. Despite driving throughout the east coast by myself from state to state, I never felt alone.

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ABSTRACT

This study is based on in-depth interviews of heterosexual women who had been or are currently engaged to and living with or married to a man who is later identified as being gay. The majority of the women interviewed for this study were married, and belonged to straight wives support groups regardless of marital status, hence the researcher will refer to participants as wives. This study focuses on obtaining insight into the nature of the spousal relationship, assessing present psychological implications, and determining the need for effective clinical support and intervention. It describes the wife's discovery, response, and effects the discovery responses have on the marital relationship.

This study serves as a starting point for further research only and is not meant to be definitive in its conclusions. Participants ($N= 24$) were recruited through word of mouth, posting flyers on university bulletin boards, announcements on Craigslist, LinkedIn, and mass emails to friends and colleagues. Participants were women from all parts of the United States, Canada, and Australia. Participants were of varied ages, races, ethnicities, and socio-economic statuses. The issue of confidentiality and protecting the identities of participants was of considerable concern, given the potential for recrimination. Due to the small sample size, results cannot be generalized to the entire population of women in relationships with a gay man.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A recent national probability study on sexual behavior in the U.S. reported that 4.2% of the men surveyed identified as gay and 2.6% as bisexual (Yarhouse et al., 2011). Studies have shown that many individuals who consider themselves gay have been or are married to a heterosexual partner (Auerback and Moser, 1987). The impact on a heterosexual wife after discovering her husband is gay can be traumatic, yet is generally overlooked. The lack of relevant research, literature and media publicity regarding the straight wife's perspective on her marriage to a closeted gay man, has created a deficiency in society's view of her emotional needs, level of victimization, and ego identity formation. These information deficiencies are the focus of this paper.

The notion that women have married men who later come out as gay is not a new one. Since the early 1900's there have been many prominent men who have been open about their homosexuality, also known as "coming out", after being married to a woman. Harrison Pierce reported in an article that Vincente Minnelli, Liza Minnelli's father, was married to several women including her mother Judy Garland before coming out as gay (Pierce, 2009). Actress Jackée Harry married actor Elgin Charles in 1996. Seven years and one child later, Elgin confessed his preference for men (Baines, 2013). While these examples of husbands coming out were recognized and exploited by the media, the women involved were prominent industry figures, whose lives were already frequented in the media. However, the exposure or coming out

process as we currently know it, has centered its focus primarily on the journey, hardship, and bravery of the husband, leaving the straight wife's story untold.

In 2004, during his tenure in office, former New Jersey Governor James Mc Greevey announced that he was gay. According to the New York Times, Mr McGreevey was married to his wife Dina Matos for eight years and had one child together (Mansnerus, August 2004). Pro basketball player Jason Collins was engaged to Carolyn Moos, whom he dated for eight years. After cancelling their wedding, he disclosed to the public that he was gay in a Sports Illustrated article (Collins, May 2013). The media exploded with stories of the heroism and bravery of both McGreevey and Collins. The media attention they were given lasted for months, and was centered on how the men were able to live with their lies, how they pulled through, and how they found the strength to eventually expose their truth. Neither McGreevey nor Collins had to seek out the media once their secrets were made public, as the media had a voracious appetite for exposing secrets and reporting on their journey. On the contrary, both significant others, Dina and Carolyn, who were both faithfully, financially, intimately, and lovingly invested in their relationships, were less noticed by the media sensation. Both women were acknowledged only after seeking out the media on their own in order to tell their sides of the story. Dina wrote a candidly revealing book titled *Silent Partner: A Memoir of My Marriage*. Carolyn shared her experience in an interview with Cosmopolitan Magazine (Pesta, July 2013).

The preceding examples involved prominent figures. Each example shows the lack of concern the public had for the heterosexual partner. Given the fact that these women were in relationships with public figures, they were fortunate enough to have the opportunity to tell their story. However, for people who live outside the spotlight, the wives of men who come out as gay are invisible; their truth remains unseen and untold. While the "ordinary" coming out husbands

may not be highlighted and sensationalized by the media, they still find emotional support and encouragement for their bravery from the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender) community. What society loses sight of is that the husbands' coming out process affects the entire family. The wives of these husbands may end up with emotional scars, which requires bravery and heroism in order for them to heal and eventually move forward with their lives.

It is important to clarify the rationales for which certain terminology appears throughout the study. The phrase "straight wives" is being used instead of heterosexual wives, as a form of empowerment because that is how the participants self-identified. Based on the interviews for this research study, many of the men married or engaged to straight wives fit the description of being bisexual or MSM (men having sex with men). However, the term "gay" is being used because it is the most recognized umbrella terminology for men who engage in intimate, sexual relationships with other men.

This study strictly focuses on straight wives. It does not address straight husbands. Even though the emotional turmoil can be equally intense for a man when he discovers his wife is a lesbian (Buxton, 2006). It is customary for a man to pursue and ask a woman to marry him; therefore, when a gay man asks a straight woman to marry him without divulging his true sexual orientation, he is deciding on the course of their marital life, and many aspects of her future, without her full consent.

The study aims at lending a voice to straight wives and increasing public awareness for this population. In order to achieve this, straight wives must feel empowered to be transparent with their truth, and have a network of support that will encourage such transparency. Currently there are only a handful of pioneers, such as Bonnie Kaye, Amity Buxton, and Carol Grever, who focus on revealing and openly sharing the experiences of straight wives. Each of

these pioneers are clinical therapists and straight wives themselves. They have worked with other straight wives for years providing individual counseling, support groups, and advocacy, in addition to helping raise awareness to this population. They have produced radio shows, published books, and developed programs that are specific to straight spouses' issues. However, despite all their work and devotion to the straight wives cause, more research studies and publication are needed to bring this population to awareness.

The women of this study were consistent in verbalizing that their husbands' infidelity with a man was very different than if it were with another woman. There was a consensus among the women of this study, that when the extramarital affair occurs with a woman, it is easier to conceptualize possible solutions to saving the relationship. Conversely, when the infidelity is with a man, the women felt that the anatomical differences did not allow them room to compete. One of the participants phrased it this way "how do you compete with a dick?"

Given the number of women who may potentially become straight wives, our society has much work to do to properly train and equip professionals who are able to provide the emotional support needed by this population. An objective of the study is to provide information, which demonstrates the need for developing specialized therapeutic care for straight wives. Another objective is to provide a platform for introducing the traumas and hardships experienced by straight wives, and to increase public awareness of this population.

Purpose of the Study

This research study examines the lives of women from various demographic compositions, with the purpose of determining the psychological and social impact of being married to, having been married to, or having been in a long term relationship with a gay man.

Inquiries are made to better understand the couple's sexual functioning, the woman's sense of self, her coping skills, and if she felt emotionally supported after her discovery. Emphasis is placed on the fact that the women did not know that their husbands or long-term partners were gay, and felt they were deprived of critical decision-making information.

Statement of the Problem

There is a significant impact on ego identity formation of women engaged or married to men who are later identified as gay. Straight wives feel victimized by their former spouses. The emotional needs of this population are generally overlooked by society.

Problem Questions

- 1- Is there a significant impact on the ego identity formation of heterosexual women who find out that the man they have married or are engaged to is gay?
- 2- Do straight wives feel victimized by their spouses?
- 3- Is society overlooking the emotional needs of straight wives?

Limitations of the Study

This study is derived from the researcher's own quest for answers to a personal struggle, which limited the target population. The researcher experienced barriers in reviewing existing research articles due to lack of accessibility in public and university libraries, and online. The limited accessibility of existing research articles hindered the researcher's ability to present an extensive literature review, thus being able to substantiate the hypothesis with evidence-based research.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, and the trauma associated with it, the researcher had difficulty recruiting participants that were willing to share their experiences, instead, participants were self-selected and voluntarily contacted the researcher upon receiving information about the study. This limited the sample size. Due to the sample size, the findings of this study are tentative rather than definitive. Results are specific to the research population and cannot be generalized. Therefore, a conclusion cannot be drawn based on the findings of this study alone. The findings of this study do, however, further contribute to the existing research of this understudied population.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly research regarding women married to gay men is virtually nonexistent.

However there are some tangential studies that allude to the topic of this research. Although over fifty articles were found dating back to the 1960s, only a handful were topic specific (Auerback and Moser 1987; Buxton 2006; Buxton and Schwartz 2004; Grever 2001; Pearcey and Olson 2009). The aforementioned authors' works are reflected, to the extent of their relevancy, in this chapter.

Most of the studies pertaining to homosexual men marrying heterosexual women, were conducted through the homosexual men's perspectives. Thus the focus is on the gay spouses' journey. Additionally, searches were conducted utilizing numerous published books, internet resources, and newsletters by Bonnie Kaye, M.Ed., an internationally renowned specialist in straight/gay relationships. Related literature searches examined marital infidelity, trauma, ego identity and homophobia. Following are summaries of the topic specific literature.

Amity Buxton (2006) discussed the impact of disclosure on a heterosexual partner. She found that the homosexual spouse gets all of the attention, while the heterosexual partner is overlooked. Her article reflected that the most unique and challenging issues faced by the heterosexual partner are sexuality, identity, integrity, and belief system. Buxton found that the heterosexual partners questioned the quality and power of their own sexuality, often blamed themselves for being sexually inadequate, and felt sexually rejected by their spouse or partner. She reported that the feeling of sexual inadequacy contributed to low self-esteem, lack of self-confidence, and a decrease sense of self-worth. According to Buxton, many straight wives

accommodated their spouses' needs, to the extent of losing who they were, essentially losing their identity. Buxton went on to say, "Some spouses plummet to an absence of any sense of self".

The straight wives of Buxton's study viewed their partners' deception not only as a betrayal, but also as an act that shattered their moral compass and caused them to question their own integrity. They wondered what was real or imagined in their marriage. They no longer trusted their partners' word or their own judgment.

In regards to belief system, Buxton found that spouses who were raised to believe that homosexual behavior is immoral, but also that marriage was a sacred covenant, experienced conflicting feelings between what they were taught and the fact that the man involved is their partner and the father of their children. Buxton found that African Americans had difficulties finding validation of their pain, because of the condemnation of homosexuality and the denial of closeted gay men in their congregations. In addition, for some, the disclosure destroyed their previously held assumptions about gender, marriage and the future. They felt stripped of the belief system that provided them a direction for living.

Buxton recommended that heterosexual spouses consider both peer support and skilled counseling to assist them with their healing process. The support and shared experiences from peers, is essential for straight wives to find ways to resolve their concerns, and increase their confidence and wisdom. Counseling assists straight wives to discern the issues that prevent them from progressing, and managing overwhelming emotions. Her suggestion to therapists is to get to know and understand more about the experience and perspective of the straight wife in order to effectively work with them.

Like Buxton, Auerback and Moser (1987) found that there was a lack of professional attention to the issue of women married to gay men. They reported that the professional literature focused almost exclusively on helping the gay spouse through the coming out process. The authors solicited the help of gay therapists and agencies to form support groups for the heterosexual partners of their clients. A total of fifty participants from the San Francisco Bay area, ranging from age twenty to age fifty years, were included in the Auerback and Moser study.

Based on the researchers' observation, the most prevalent group issues identified by the wives were: Anger, Hurt, Betrayal, Sexuality, and Need for peer support. It was noted that the wives were not upset about the infidelity; instead, they were angry, hurt, and felt betrayed by their husbands for violating their marital contract. The research showed that the wives viewed their marriage as a lie and invalid from its inception, since their husbands' interest must have always been homosexually directed.

The study reported that sixty percent of the women considered their marital sex life to be adequate in terms of quality and frequency until the disclosure. It was thereafter that intercourse was either curtailed or completely stopped. As a result, the women felt sexually rejected, undesirable, unfeminine, and lacked self-confidence.

According to Auerback and Moser (1987), despite the fact that some of the group participants were receiving individual psychotherapy, many still felt their unique needs were not being met. Participants reported that the peer support groups were more effective in meeting their needs. The group setting provided a forum where the wives could seek advice from each other, problem-solve, feel reassured that they are not alone, and feel validated.

A study conducted by Buxton and Schwartz (2004), focused on the experiences of over 8,000 straight spouses who “weathered the coming out storm” of their partners. While some of the participants in this study reported having suspicions of their spouses’ sexuality, most were unaware that their spouse was gay when they married. The article illustrated the views straight spouses have on the implications of gay marriage, and the extent of pain the coming out process has on the spouses, their children, and other family members.

The article revealed that the disclosure of the husbands or wives homosexuality typically causes shock, denial, and for some, relief to have an answer as to the spouses change in behavior, and lack of sexual intimacy in the marriage. It described the straight spouses as experiencing conflicting emotions such as, “anger and compassion, love and hate, sadness and relief, fear and hope” (Buxton and Schwartz 2004, p. 25). The conflicting emotions straight spouses experience follow a typical progression, otherwise known as the Kubler-Ross stages of grief, which eventually leads to acceptance. Once their present situation is accepted, straight spouses must be able to let go of their past in order to move towards healing. According to the authors, healing can be achieved through the support of clinical professionals, peers, friends and family.

This article differed from the others in such that the study highlighted the straight spouses’ views on same-sex marriage. It was found that the straight spouses, as a whole, condemn deception, and supported truth telling and personal integrity when it came to entering a heterosexual or same-gender marriage. While not all of the spouses supported same-sex marriage, many did support it for varied reasons. One reason same-sex marriage was supported was because the spouses thought it would prevent others from experiencing the pain and grief they did as a result of the legal and societal barriers against same-sex marriage. The authors also discussed a common theme as being the impact homophobia and heterosexism has on society.

Other reasons included the importance of truth, integrity, love, and societal acceptance of different sexual orientations. Apart from the differences this article discussed, the fundamental findings were similar to the aforementioned Buxton 2006 article.

Pearcey and Olson (2009), conducted a study, investigating the sexual activity of women married to a gay man. A total of ninety women from all regions of the United States were surveyed. Of the ninety women, ten knew of their husband's homosexuality before marriage. The survey included an inquiry regarding sexual activity in the marriage. Nearly half of the women surveyed omitted the question. However, the majority of those who did answer the question, indicated they remained sexually active with their spouse even after disclosure.

Inquiries about the women's feelings revealed they were angry, resentful, and had felt less attractive post disclosure. The study found no significant correlation between the women's religious affiliations and their belief about the morality of homosexual relationships. The authors concluded that learning about their husband's same-sex attraction was a traumatic experience for all respondents. A future qualitative study with more full-bodied stories, that capture the wives' experiences, was suggested. Although it is not a study, Carol Grever provided such full bodied stories in her book, which is discussed in the following paragraphs.

The book, *My Husband Is Gay: A Woman's Survival Guide*, by Carol Grever (2001), illustrated accounts of her personal experiences of being married to a man who later identifies as gay, and those of twenty five other women. Grever mentioned that the purpose for which she wrote the book was to demonstrate to straight wives that they are not alone (2001, p. 115). The book traced the straight wife's journey from the initial trauma experienced after the discovery her husband was gay, to transformation and wholeness.

Throughout the book Grever provides insight into an array of thought provoking topics, and highlights what she suggests as important factors, such as straight wives feeling they too were in the closet due to difficulties they encountered sharing their husbands' secret with others; the harsh reality they faced in knowing that their marriage was their husbands' "cover-up"; the potential health risks they faced being that their husbands slept with other gay men; and the varied emotional roller coasters they experienced. Unlike the articles, Grever's book illustrated stories of deep pain, illnesses, disorientation, and suicidal or self-destructive behaviors. She used the women's reported struggles and coping strategies, in order to create a practical self-help guide. Grever presented coping strategies that the spouses have used to resolve problems of sexual damage, the disruption of the family dynamic, and deception. She suggested that "full recovery is nearly impossible without outside help, professional counseling, broadening of viewpoint, and positive personal action" (Grever 2001, p. 116). In the book, Grever strongly encouraged straight wives to choose a counselor and begin counseling soon after discovery. She further encouraged straight wives to seek a competent counselor, with whom they can do a trial session to ensure their personalities are compatible. The book also includes professional resources, advice, and positive support for women married to gay men.

An analytical review of the aforementioned articles revealed the emotional aspects of what straight wives experience during and after disclosure. The articles also highlight the importance of addressing this population's unique needs through peer support and specialized therapy. While the articles reviewed do lay a foundational basis to support this study, additional research is necessary in order for clinicians and society to better comprehend the severity of what this population experiences.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

In chapter two, the literature review focused on the essential supporting structure that helped provide an understanding of the straight wives population and how the discovery of their spouse's homosexuality redefined them spiritually, physically, emotionally, socially, and psychologically. Here in chapter three, the rationale for selecting a case study research design methodology is presented. The major element of the design, and how these elements were applied, is explained.

Research Design

This is a qualitative research study using semi-structured interviewing. For consistency purposes, an interview guide was developed and utilized (Appendix A). The guide also served to ensure that each of the research questions were addressed. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to allow for the flexibility, depths and details in participant disclosures. This proved to be a valuable approach in securing information, which otherwise may not have been captured.

Selection of Participants

Announcement of the study were posted on the Craigslist advertising site and the social media site LinkedIn. Flyers were sent out via email, and posted on university message boards (Appendix B). Additionally, family, friends and colleagues were petitioned to inform people of the project.

Straight spouse advocate, Bonnie Kaye was contacted for the study and was receptive. Bonnie served as a gatekeeper; providing access to the respective population. More than half of the respondents were members of Bonnie's online support group for straight wives.

Participation in this research required that interviewees be heterosexual women, who are or had been married to, or in a committed relationship with a man who is later identified as gay. Researcher guaranteed anonymity of the participants by utilizing fictitious names throughout the interviews. Researcher offered follow-up support, via phone, to all participants.

As a result of the research advertisement and solicitation, thirty one women expressed interest in participating in the study. When respondents were informed of the face to face interview process, seven declined, due to concerns of spousal retaliation despite anonymity, leaving a total of twenty four participants. Despite stating their identity would not be revealed, some of the women who responded but did not participate, were only open to doing an anonymous mail-in or online survey.

Data Collection Procedures

The data for this research was obtained from the interviews of twenty four heterosexual women. The interviews were conducted face to face via Skype, an internet-based webcam, or in person. The researcher drove to different states along the East Coast and the South to conduct the in person interviews. The participants who were not in those geographical areas or lived outside of the United States, were interviewed via Skype. A copy of the American Academy of Clinical Sexology release form was used as a base, to create a release/consent form (Appendix C). This form was provided to each participant for review and signature, or as verbal consent. Upon consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

This chapter presents the information gathered from the qualitative research case study, and provided a record of the data and the data analysis. In this study, the researcher was the only collector of data. Data was gathered through recorded interviews, and the use of an interview guide as an instrument. The tape recordings of each interview were reviewed on a regular basis to extract qualitative data, and to ensure the accuracy of the information being reported.

Interview Transcripts

The following are five of the twenty interviews conducted. The case studies below were randomly selected out of the twenty four. The goal is to provide the reader an opportunity to share into the lives of the women who participated. All interviews were conducted directly with the women of this study. Interviews are transcribed as reported by the women. Pseudonyms are used for all persons mentioned by the interviewees during the interviews to protect participants' identities.

Straight Wife #1: Myrtle and her former husband Daniel

Myrtle: Before I forget Mark is Daniel's partner. He comes to all our family things. One of the grandsons is named after him. My girls think of him as their father too. They have three fathers and a mother. He is such a wonderful person. When Daniel was dying, I stayed there a couple of nights because Mark was so tired, and somebody needed to sit with Daniel. He said to

me that Daniel had always had difficulty coming to terms with being gay and that he always felt guilty. That's truly all I know other than when we were fifty, our birthdays are two days apart, and my present husband's birthday is the same as Daniel's just not the same year, but our girls gave us a surprise birthday party which Darryl my husband and Mark helped organize. At that time Daniel apologized to me for all the years of difficulty because the first years weren't easy after the divorce.

Writer: How long were you and Daniel married?

Myrtle: We weren't married that long. I graduated from college in May of 1968 and Daniel had one more semester to go. We were not in the same college, both in Illinois not that far apart. But you know it was the 1960s and most people got married the summer after they graduated from college. It wasn't like now when you deferred, just kind of what happened especially in the Midwest. We got married a week after I graduated from college, and he still had one more semester. I taught English in the high school at the place where he was in school, and had Joy in nine months. I was a good catholic girl. I'd been raised Catholic, no birth control or anything like that, and got pregnant immediately. He graduated and he taught English also.

It was right when Bev was born a year and three months later. Our girls are very close together. Actually after I had Joy, I thought well birth control is a good thing. I tried an IUD and still got pregnant. And I actually found out Daniel was gay while I was preparing for Joy's first birthday and I was pregnant with my second girl, I found a card. I was getting a suit of his ready to go to the cleaners, and took some stuff out of the pockets, and there was a card in there, a Valentine card from a guy. I still remember what that card looked like and the disbelief of it, you know, having two babies, one in the womb and one who was just going to have her first birthday.

Writer: So you found out by accident?

Myrtle: Yes. But Daniel never denied it or anything and was always solicitous to me. He did not want to separate, divorce or anything. He really wanted what he called a normal life. He wanted a family life, and I knew that Joy and the new baby coming meant everything to him. He was a good father, so I thought well maybe this will work. But we decided to move to a different city where our parents were in Springfield. And he was going to stop teaching, because that's not a good profession to be in if you're gay. He started a job in a local hospital and basically over the years worked his way up in the administration to where he was head of the financial office at the hospital by the time he left there. But if you're gay you can't deny that lifestyle or being that. Well I suppose you can deny the lifestyle but it can tear you apart. And of course I was kind of overwhelmed by it all, and quite frankly there is a lot that I just blocked out of my mind at that time. If you'd ask me, how often we had sex, I knew we had it those two times when I had my girls. There is proof positive there. And you know what, being catholic and to go through this. I was one of these teenagers who did well. I went to an all-girls catholic school. I was salutatorian in a college bound prep thing. I did well in college. I thought I did everything right. And I think that was one of the most difficult things for me to think that oops you screwed up here. But I loved Daniel. And of course that religion didn't help much at that point. We stayed together for about six months, but more and more he was out late night. He was working late or doing something, and I knew things weren't going well and would get worse. And so, we finally did have a discussion and he said that he felt like he needed to live that life. That it wasn't fair to me and it wasn't fair to him either.

So here I am with two babies. His parents were really angry with him, so angry with him. They just couldn't believe it and thought it was a fluke, something that he was just pretending.

They had four sons and no daughters, and the other three were straight and narrow kind. The older one was a fundamentalist minister and he just wouldn't even consider the notion that Daniel was gay. The one who is immediately younger than Daniel, he was a policeman. He had a hard time, a really hard time. The youngest one was in high school at the time and he just didn't have much to say anyway. At that age you're just trying to divorce yourself from the family, let alone your brother who might be gay. But his parents were really unhappy, and of course they were so delighted to have two granddaughters, were afraid of what was going to happen. My father never even acknowledged that's why we got divorced. I think it bothered him more that I was the first to divorce in the family, although he was never unkind to me. My Dad is kind of a hermit guy, he's not real social. He died two years ago. I have two brothers and a sister. He cared about all of us, but he never got into personal lives with you. That would turn him inside out. My mother was the opposite. She was very sad over the whole the thing, but supportive and everything you would want in a mother. So that was good.

Writer: So you guys were married for how long?

Myrtle: I think by the time we went through the whole divorce proceedings, we had been married probably three years. But not much of that time were we living together or probably kind of a roommate situation.

As far as the sexuality, I probably wasn't affected too much. I was so young. We both were. We were twenty one when we got married, and this is before we hit twenty five. Memories are faint as you get older and I don't remember so much. But I do remember thinking well he is gay, it really wasn't my fault, and that he just couldn't do this. So, I don't think I had any kind of guilt feelings around that. I don't remember that. But I was working. I had two baby girls. I

didn't have a whole lot of time to reflect on stuff. I really didn't have much of a social life.

Although I had a number of friends around, I didn't care to date for a while cause I was so tired.

It was a juggle trying to find babysitters.

Writer: Did you ever feel angry?

Myrtle: Oh yes, I did feel angry because life was hard then. Daniel went more than a little wild at that time. I think he was trying to figure it out. He was out and he could live the life he wanted, but it was the early seventies and Midwestern central Illinois is highly republican and conservative, so you can't be too out there. But he didn't have to live a lie with his friends. He always took the girls on Saturdays and they usually end up at his parents for dinner before he brought them back at bedtime. Once in a while, probably not that first year, but maybe the second year once in a while someone would come with him and that was before Mark. Daniel was drinking pretty heavily. I'm so grateful and I'm sure he was too that this was the seventies before the AIDS epidemic, and if this hadn't been the case, things could have been a lot worst.

The things that I would get upset about, especially around the holidays, it was easier than a lot of divorced couples because both our parents and our families lived in Springfield, so we could easily arrange for the two families to have dinners at different times and the girls loved it cause they got to see everybody on the day. But it was hard for me because when they were little it didn't make so much difference as to what they were doing. But as they got older they only had fun with their father. This is typical of a lot of divorced parents. Daniel made a lot more money than I did, so there are disparities in there that were difficult. And it felt like I was the one who was always disciplining them. The older girl has a personality much like her father and she

wanted to go live with her dad as she got older. But he was always afraid they would find out he was gay. So it's all these kinds of things that sort of added up.

Two years after we got divorced, I dated this guy that lived behind me and had a little boy about the girls' age for about six months and had a sexual relationship with him that was very good. But then I realized, I really didn't like the guy that much. He was kind of arrogant. He bought me such practical things. He bought me a dishwasher for my birthday and I thought, I appreciated having a dishwasher but it's not a very romantic thing to have. So I broke that off. And then it was quite a few years before I dated again. I did have quite a big circle of female friends. I worked with mostly women at that time, and their husbands would always help with something. I had two brothers who were always there to help me, fix the furnace when it went out and stuff like that. I needed time to step back, get my girls through a certain time, and try to relax because I was going a mile a minute. I needed to keep myself calm.

Writer: Do you think you did that so you wouldn't focus too much on all that was going on?

Myrtle: I think probably so. I was trying to make a safe and quiet place for me. I certainly had all the support to do that, and still have fun, be with my friends, and stuff like that. So I don't think I resented the idea that I didn't have a boyfriend at that time. But as time goes on, you want to move on. During that time, I think the girls were about five and six, Daniel met Mark. Had Daniel not met Mark, he would have been dead long before that because he was drinking too much. He was in financial turmoil, spent too much; borrowed too much money. He just had a very self-destructive lifestyle. Mark is just an extremely caring person and he kind of put him back together again. He made a nice stable place where the girls could be there. It was better then, because Daniel was so much calmer. I knew I could call on Daniel if I had to go to work

and one of the girls was sick, that he could arrange something. We became better parents together at that point. Whereas before Daniel was still, it was clear the girls were extremely important to him, but he was kind of falling apart.

Writer: He was living the single life and you're at home with the babes. Did you resent that?

Myrtle: I did, I did. There was no doubt about that. I think my own personality is to kind of deny certain things, and then whenever you cannot not face it anymore then you figure out a way to assimilate it, make it better and go on. I don't like to dwell on things like that.

Writer: When you were going through all this, I know you said your Mom was supportive, but did you have friends and other people you wish were in your corner?

Myrtle: I had quite a few people who were there for me. I had met Daniel while we were both in the wedding party of friends. He had gone to high school with them, and I had gone to college with the wife. They were there in Springfield, and Anne was probably my best friend through all of that. She'd known Daniel in high school and kept up being friends with him, but still yet I knew she was there for me. My sisters in law were very supportive and helpful. My older brother was my older brother and he was just going to protect me against this evil person who had ruined my life. My younger brother had a more subtle approach about it. He's only a year younger, we're sort of like twins, with similar personalities, and we grew up on a farm, so that's who you played with. My older brother was seven years older. He didn't talk much about it. He'd stop by on his way home from work to see if I was okay, and see if I had any pie around. So I did have a good many people there for me. And there was one other person, particularly in the first years, who was a friend of Daniel's at school, he is a year younger. I always thought Andy had been gay too or maybe asexual. He didn't seem to have boyfriends or anything but he

was always around. He was extremely helpful. He would take the girls out to fly kites or to the zoo whenever he thought I needed a little break. He didn't talk much about the situation or what had happened, but just made sure I had everything I needed and help with the girls. He really liked the girls. And he has actually stayed a friend all these years.

Writer: Emotionally, what was it you felt you needed the most and did you get it from the people around you?

Myrtle: Well, I'm not sure I would have been looking for that because I was independent and I didn't want to feel I needed someone else's help. I know that was the case. I've always felt that way. For example, my father is a first generation American. His parents came from Germany. German families especially in the Midwest believed that girls do not go to college. They get a nice secretarial job until they get married, and then they stayed home with the kids. So my father didn't put me through college, but I was determined that I was going to do that myself and I did that. I always felt like I can do anything. Women of the sixties, you know. I went to high school from 1960-1964, then college 1964-1968. That was kind of the big turning time for women. We still had one foot back in the fifties and one foot moving forward. Things had changed a lot, so I really felt like I could be quite independent. So I don't ever remember seeking someone out to talk about things. I'm sure I didn't do that. But in thinking for example there were four of us who loved needlework. We would meet once a month at one of our houses and bring projects that we were working on, sit around and talk in the evening for several hours. I'm sure we must have talked about things, that would have been that kind of support, but I don't remember specifically.

Writer: Whenever you felt resentful or angry about going through all this, do you have any recollection of what you did to get through that time?

Myrtle: I just pulled it together. Go to work.

Writer: How often would you say you had these moments?

Myrtle: If I had to think about it, I'd probably say maybe once a month or so. The times that I can remember just feeling miserable was when I was sick or something broke down in the house and I didn't have the money to pay for it. There was some trigger in addition to just kind of having a hard time of it. I actually wasn't physically real well. I had tonsillitis all the time. At age twenty nine I got my tonsils taken out and my health got a lot better. But before that I was sick a lot. Well like the financial stuff, I just focused on finding another job that would pay me more. I look for those kinds of environmental things that would relieve the stress.

Writer: Before Daniel became stable, was there ever a time when you guys did not talk at all?

Myrtle: No, he picked up the kids every Saturday. So we always talked then. And he sometimes called on Friday nights to say "I'll be there at this time" or whatever.

Writer: Sounds like you maintained a relationship, but would you say you were friends or did that happened later?

Myrtle: That happened after. Those first years were just hard and I don't remember being real friendly, but there wasn't any bad things going on. We did one strange thing being catholic. After the divorce, Daniel asked me if I wanted to go through an annulment because the Catholic Church doesn't recognize that gay men can marry, which kind of make me wonder what do they consider my children. It's kind of a weird thing. So we started the process because I was still

very Catholic and I thought I may want to get married again. So we went to these meetings with this priest. I remember going three times. It was all so uncomfortable. It was really even more uncomfortable for Daniel. I don't remember what they asked, but I remembered thinking this is grim. How long was this gonna go on? I said after the third time, I don't think we need to go through this. And the priest called me a couple of days after that cause I think Daniel had called him. Daniel was not Catholic. He was never raised Catholic. The priest called and he said a very strange thing to me. He said I know you feel uncomfortable with going through with this, but if you want to marry in the church again come to me. He said I have no doubt that this wasn't a valid marriage and I'll be happy to marry you again. I thought that's kind of strange. It was in the seventies and the church was still kind of strict about the rules. I kind of wondered later, or it may be something Daniel said to me, that the priest was gay. But who knows. It was kind of an odd thing.

Writer: So you never did get it annulled, may I ask you why?

Myrtle: I did not get it annulled so the girls wouldn't be considered born out of wedlock. I raised my girls in the Catholic Church until about the time I started dating Darryl my present husband was never raised Catholic, and he was divorced from his first wife. There was a lot of things going on in the church and over time the church was not that important to me anymore.

Writer: At that time were you ever upset with God?

Myrtle: I think so. It was sort of like "I did everything I was supposed to do, why are you doing this to me?" And then life goes on and on and then you realize there are very few things in life that are fair. So my idea of God has changed pretty dramatically since that time.

Writer: If you had to say something to a woman who is going through a similar experience, what would it be?

Myrtle: well, I would try to convince someone to be more open than I was. I know that I didn't help myself just trying to look like I was doing fine, everything was cool. There really wasn't any need to do that, and it just makes it harder for you. Although the girls were at preschool age and a lot of work as children are, they kept me far more positive about things. Their little happy faces, so joyful, that it's hard to regret something. And I don't regret that because it gave me them. Actually even beyond that, I think I had three different relationships with Daniel. The early romantic, the very quickly just awful, and then I think I told you we became very good friends. When Daniel got stable a few years into that, I started dating again. The girls were a little older. It helped them to see their father and I were friends. And I didn't resent him as I did before. I had a good job that I really loved. It's there that I actually met my husband. I also made a lot more friends. People who didn't know me back then. I never made it a secret that I had been married to someone who was gay. Many people did know that because Daniel was a pretty high up administrator in one of the teaching hospitals for the medical school. People often knew him too. It just became a different kind of relationship. Started feeling more like a sibling than a former mate.

Writer: At what point did the girls find out and how did they react?

Myrtle: I think the girls knew far earlier than we realized. Daniel always felt like they didn't know. But kids are smart. They were growing up in the seventies when being gay was starting to be more known. Some kids were not very nice about it, but some kids were thoroughly accepting of it. They've talked a number of times about this and I have never heard

the girls say that none of their friends made fun of them or had any issues with their father being gay. I never had to make them feel okay about their father. He only lived about seven or eight blocks from us, and he could be over in five minutes if they needed something. By that time he was being a lot more supportive, if I couldn't be there right after school, he or Mark would be there or something like that. At that point, they really had three parents and four grandparents. They had a lot of support. The one thing, as the older girl got to be close to teen years, she developed a huge temper, hormones kicked in, and she had a difficult teen years. She wanted to live with her dad. I was just too strict. He did not want to because he knew they would realize that he and Mark slept together. They never spent the night there. I kept telling him they know; they love you. And I said to him, you know you make it really hard on yourself and you don't need to. I don't know if they ever talked about it but he finally gave it up. Soon after that, Darryl and I decided to get married. And at the same time Darryl got an offer to work for CDC. We actually decided to get married and move down here. That was kind of hard, although Daniel never argued against it. It was really hard for him. The girls at that point were eleven and twelve. Two years later Daniel and Mark moved down here because they missed the girls so much. The oldest continued to have difficult problems. She was never self-destructive, like Daniel was, but she always seemed so unhappy and angry. I know a huge part of that was hormones. But she did have a lot of trouble from the time she was about fifteen to seventeen. And I gotta say that having four parents for those two years was a real blessing. For Daniel and me, it was wonderful because those two had a firmer grip on things. Joy would listen to Darryl more than me. And Mark got her a good psychotherapist who did therapy with all of us and got us to calm down, so we can all get through it. We did a lot of family events together with Daniel and Mark. Darryl has a daughter who is a lesbian, and when she came out they were really able to help Darryl deal

with that. It still brings tears to my eyes, it was really sad when he got sick, pancreatic cancer, it takes people very quickly. It was actually diagnosed only a month before he died. We still all miss him. He died six years ago, just a few months before his second grandchild. People are surprised that we can be so all inclusive and it can work out like that. I suspect if we did not have children, we would go our separate ways and never cross paths again or maybe only casually. But because we had two children and we were both very involved parents. That kind of makes everybody work towards a better place, I think.

Straight Wife # 2: Ciara and her husband G

Writer: Tell me your story.

Ciara: I met him- I'll refer to him as G in 1966. I had just turned twenty years old. I was in nursing school at the time and was going to graduate in June of that year. I was kind of shy, came from a small town, raised Catholic, and fully committed to the notion that good Catholic girls were, well just that, good. I had occasional dates in high school, but never found anyone interesting enough to fall in love with. So in other words I was very inexperienced when it came to men. However looking back on it, I was certainly not unattractive. I was very slim, had many friends, and could certainly hold my own in social situations. It was my intention to eventually use my nursing diploma to travel and work in many different places. California was my first choice. But for some strange reason I was drawn like a moth to a flame to what would become my husband, albeit seven years later. He was cute looking, humorous, almost silly acting actually, and he appeared to be very attracted to me as well. He called me to go to a party or something, can't remember the date details, within a few days after we met. I was thrilled and jumped at the chance to go. Thus began an on again, off again courtship for lack of a better word,

for up to five years. He broke it off at least twice, saying “I’m not ready to get serious about anyone yet”. He was nearly seven years older than me and had been in a seminary for the priesthood for a couple years before he met me. In the meantime, he was seen about town with many different women dates, and had pretty well established himself among friends and acquaintances as a playboy. By this time of course I fancied myself to be hopelessly in love with him and had forsaken any good Catholic girl commitment within a couple years after dating him. I was crazy about him and had no previous sexual experience, so at the time I thought it was good. Even though looking back on it, he sometimes had trouble getting satisfaction or whatever. This first red flag completely escaped me.

Writer: Are you talking about trouble with sexual satisfaction as the red flag?

Ciara: Yes. But in all fairness to myself, homosexuality was rarely if ever discussed in those days, unless it was referred to in a cruel joke. Anyway in spite of his desire to stay away and my eventual acceptance of it, and a decision to just forget him and carry on with my life, he kept coming back and I took him back. And the rest is history. We even lived together for a year or so before marriage, and he so seemed like a straight guy. He is not a big guy, kind of smallish actually, and has always indicated a low self-esteem. Now I know the reason why.

Over the years after we got married, he had a tendency to choose men who were much younger than him for friends. They were usually immature and not very likeable to others who came in contact with them, especially me. And he would want to spend so much time with them. I worked full time at the local hospital. He was often unemployed, in between odd jobs here and there, and when he found a new playmate he had lots of time to indulge them perhaps. One friendship in particular was questioned by our kids and other family members. The guy was an

ex con who was ugly and sinister looking, tattooed, smoked heavily. G hates smoking and so forth. He tried to spend every waking moment with him, much to my dismay and disapproval. That relationship ended abruptly one day and he never did offer a reasonable explanation as to why. When I discovered G's ugly secret, I questioned his relationship with that guy and he denied it, but I know he was lying.

We went to Cuba for the first time in the year 2000. I did not care for it as a place to holiday. It was okay for a one time visit, but that was enough for me. While we were there G developed what seemed to be an ardent attachment to an eighteen year old black Cuban boy who lived near the resort. It was odd to say the least. My mother and daughter were there with us and they both commented on his odd friendship with someone so young. I don't know if it was a sexual relationship, but now of course my suspicions are roused. He loudly proclaimed his love of Cuba and its culture after that, and started going there occasionally on his own starting in 2001. And in 2002, unbeknownst to me, he had met and started living with two f*** in Havana that year, and his trips there became ever more frequent. Then in 2006 we got a computer and he started going to different cities there. He said he had met many friends there, all young black guys whom he called chicos, and on occasion they would call and ask him for money. I was stupid enough to trust him when he told me they were very poor and needed money for their families (mother, father, sisters, etc.). Once in 2004, I went to Havana with him, stayed in a nice hotel there and he kept going over to the slum area where his f** lover lived, whenever the chico called, and left me at the hotel by myself. OMG I was dumb! But I did not know he was a f** yet. I discovered what a scumbag he was by accident. He was in Cuba of course in January of 2012. I did not know where he was staying. I got word that one of his brothers had died. So I went to his email inbox to see if there was an email confirmation from the place he booked to

stay. I opened a message written in Spanish, used Google translate, and lo and behold. Here's what he wrote to one of his whores "I can't wait to feel your big black cock in my ass again". Needless to say my world has been turned upside down after that one single moment. He was devastated to learn about my discovery of course, not so much I'm sure of the pain he had caused and continues to just by being in my presence. But it was all fun and games until he got caught.

Writer: What were some of the emotions you experienced following that discovery?

Ciara: I discovered what he was only a little over a year ago Maggie. I can't even begin to describe the shock and horror I experienced at that moment. I felt like I was going to faint. I've been an emotional roller coaster ever since. I'm never happy though, just not as sad some days as others. My anger and rage is very intense most days, but I can't express it that much with him. He refuses to talk about it now, and is back to his old role playing crap, pretending to be the good husband now. But as I mentioned, his browser history indicates he is still prowling so to speak. He is horrified at the possibility of exposure after all these years of pretending to be straight. As a matter of fact I think he's almost proud of his narcissistic self for being able to pull it off all these years.

Writer: What was it like living with him and how was your sexual relationship?

Ciara: We have been married forty years. We had two children. A daughter who was unfortunately diagnosed with schizophrenia when she was only thirteen and a son who is fine and healthy. Since I was so lacking in sexual experiences when I first became intimate with him I had nothing and nobody to form any comparisons with. I do remember thinking that he sadly lacked in the romantic part of it all. I assumed there would be more passion and

tenderness...never happened, not ever. It was pretty, well always, like the crude old expression "Slam,bam..thank you ma'am". However I was stupidly in love with this fake man and enjoyed the closeness for want of a better word. Eventually as the years passed by it became more and more difficult for him to perform as it were. We never really discussed it. We were consumed for many years with our daughter's devastating mental illness however. He left our marital bed finally when our son moved away. He took over his bedroom about twenty years ago, saying I was too heavy, and I snored too loud. I think he had started to do his gay thing by then and sex with a woman was probably impossible for him. And I had by this time become very tired, had a full-time stressful job, and resentful of his general attitude toward me. Strangely there were some men, even Doctors I worked with who seemed attracted to me in spite of my tendency to be somewhat overweight. Not fat just pleasingly plump then, and I used to be almost amused by it. Occasionally I would share their obvious flirtations towards me with G, and he would always laugh saying things like "what's with those doctors anyways".

Writer: It seems like he made you the reason for his lack of sexual desire. Did that impact how you viewed yourself as a woman?

Ciara: He had become an expert at trying to drag me down. That's the expression our son used one day when he was being over critical towards me. He said "Why are you always trying to drag mom down dad? Think about it, where would you be without her"? Knowing what I know now, the answer to that question is painfully obvious. I think it must have shattered my confidence in myself as a woman. One can only take so much emotional assault.

Writer: How has all this affected you physically, financially, and spiritually?

Ciara: I don't think I've experienced any physical changes. We're still together because I do not want our kids to know, not yet. So financially everything is the same. As for spiritually, I'm not a spiritual person.

Writer: You mind if I ask why the kids don't know.

Ciara: There are two reasons why I'm still here, and they are our daughter with schizophrenia, and our son who is attending university in Vancouver as a mature student and doing very well. My daughter is not mentally stable for this type of information. And I don't want the stress of this to affect my son's studies. I would take a proverbial bullet for them. I've only confided in my sister, brother, and a dear friend, oh and our family doctor. I'm seeing a therapist regularly.

Writer: Has it been helpful?

Ciara: I think the therapy sessions are good for me.

Writer: Did you receive support from those you shared with?

Ciara: They have all been supportive and continue to be so. I would love to shout it from the rooftops so to speak.

Writer: Were there any local support groups available and did you attend any? Overall, do you feel your emotional needs were met?

Ciara: I have not looked for local support groups, just belong to Bonnie Kaye's wonderful online Straight Wives Connection.

Writer: Do you think straight wives would benefit from a regular divorce group or one geared towards straight wives and why?

Ciara: I think the horror of being a straight wife married to a closet f**, pardon my use of such a nasty word but can't seem to stop myself, is probably even worse than a regular marital

break down, for so many reasons. We probably need to have our own separate support groups. So to answer your question regarding my emotional needs being met, it helps to talk with others about this god awful thing, but I think I will only at least partly recover from this when he dies. Hope it's sooner than later, and I hope he goes before me. I married someone who never really existed. He's not going to Cuba anymore, but his internet browser history indicates he at seventy five years old is still a lying cheating f** hypocrite. He has Florida to hide in now. He denies all my outright accusations with a silly outraged pretense. He is too dumb to know browser history exists, so I possess that power over him and have saved documentation on the computer to show his little world to all I will want it to concern when I deem it necessary to do so. That's my sad and sorry tale of woe, and I wish I did not have to stick to it.

Straight Wife #3: Tracie and her former husband Steve

Writer: Tell me about you, your spouse, just tell me your story.

Tracie: I married my high school sweetheart. We started out dating when I was fourteen, he was sixteen, and we dated for seven years; pretty, pretty much all of that time. We only broke up a couple of times but it wasn't for very long. We were very much in love with each other. I never questioned it. He's a farmer, he lives on a farm and we farm with his parents. We have a big, grand farm. We have a daughter that is now seventeen and a son, who is fifteen. And probably about five years ago, we've always had a pretty good relationship, we never fought a lot, we always got along. We were best friends. But I decided that my brain was getting a little fuzzy from staying home with two little kids all the time, so I needed to go back to work, or just to get out of the house. In the meantime, I would come home and I would discover him being on the computer a lot and he wasn't a real sexual creature, I would have to basically go after it. I

would get turned down a lot. I used to rub his back a lot and I would caress him and he would never, ever do it back, ever. And I finally got to the point where I'd get really pissed off, because why bother with all the effort. And I do apologize, I have a really terrible potty mouth. So anyways I started getting a little bit bitter and angry and mad that he would never ever, make any time for me. Everything was always about him and I just learned to accept that. I got to the point where I'd ask him to bring up our holiday trailer, he didn't have time; he never had time for it. So I had to start learning how to do all of this stuff myself and then I finally got to the point where I was like "you know what, I'm going camping, if you want to come fine, if you don't want to come that's fine, too". So I started taking our kids and going camping. I was the social one in our relationship. So I took a lot of that responsibility on my own. He was basically the provider and I did everything else. I raised the kids, although he was always there to read them bedtime stories. That's all he ever did with them.

Probably five years ago, I started to notice that the wheels were starting to fall off the bus. I was working in a neighboring town as a T.A., an educational assistant at the school. And, I would come home and I noticed he was watching porn all the time. Then, he started bring toys and porn into our relationship and then I got to be a lot more, not necessarily okay, but I know him well enough that if I didn't go there with him, he would go somewhere else. I wasn't quite there yet but then he started bringing porn and toys into our relationship. He was looking on the internet for adult friend finder for a third, because it was a desire of him to see me with another man and I really had no desire to go there but I know him well enough to know, I've got to go there, otherwise, he's going to go there. So, then we were very open in our communication and he started telling me that he really wanted to see me with another man. So he found a guy online and we actually went on holiday with him. We met him in the Dominican; he was a lovely guy.

We met him twice before and had sexual relations with him. And we went with him to the Dominican. He rang my bell every freakin night, I tell you. Like, he was lovely. He was not a he-man and he was very much into me, and I think Steve my husband, he was almost a little threatened by it. I think that was the first time that he realized that he may have opened up a big can of worms. He may have just destroyed everything. But at this point, I was just basically going along with the game. And then we wound up meeting another guy and I had kind of checked out of the relationship. By the time, I realized that he's wanting me to have sex with strangers, and in my world that doesn't happen. So, I had started shutting myself off to him. We went to meet with another guy up in the city two hours away. And basically when he walked in the room, I thought there is no way in hell that I'm going there. Because he was kind of scummy and gross and I just, I'm not going there. That's kind of when I threw my hands up and thought "no more". I'm not going through this. I found out he was chatting with guys online and he was saying, you know these guys have mixed emotions, they're thinking they're bisexual, because he figured he was 'bi'. He had an overwhelming desire to be with a man but he wanted to be with a man within our relationship, as to not leave me out. But, as the time wore on, I noticed that he got tunnel vision so bad that he couldn't see outside of his box. He couldn't see me trying to get him to come to bed, he wasn't paying attention. And, once I realized what was going on, I started taking stuff out of the house. It took me about a year to realize that I was going to have to leave and I had never considered divorce. So I started taking stuff out of the house and I would put them in boxes and take to my Mom's house. I started stashing cash. I went to a different branch in a neighboring town and I started putting money into an account. Basically, I found out one night, we were sitting – like he used to always be on the computer and the only time I could ever sit and visit with him was if I sat on the other side of the computer and

talk to him. He would tell me that he was talking to guys and I just had to kind of like, believe it. Like I knew he was but I wasn't quite sure what was going on. We actually went to Mexico with my cousin and his wife and I could see Steve up on the balcony; he left the swim up bar. We're all having a great time and he's goes on our balcony and he's texting guys and I was crushed because I thought, you know what, I'm not an important person in your life anymore. And, so when we came home from that holiday, it wasn't long after and I decided; oh he was on the computer one night, and he'd had enough wine and he was talking to a guy online and I went into the kitchen and the computer was behind him, or behind me, and I came up behind him. I snuck back into the office and read what he was writing over his shoulder, and it basically said he'd been to Edmonton and he'd slept with a man and it was just wonderful. And so, at that point I hit him on the back of the shoulder and said, you know what, you just fucked this whole thing up. And, it was at that moment that I was done. I was done. I was done having him hurt me. After that, he moved to the basement. He'd already found him a man online, a boyfriend. So basically once I moved him down to the basement, he shut me out. I was done. Twenty seven years together and I was done. I would go downstairs and try to talk to him and he'd be on the phone with his boyfriend already, and he'd be leaving and going to spend time with his boyfriend. And here I am in our brand new house we built six years ago, our dream home, with our two children, and I was going to have to leave. So I made him buy me a house in town. And, I backed the horse trailer up one day, and moved.

Writer: You felt you had to leave the house or was there just too many memories in there for you to stay?

Tracie: It was on his family farm. So his mother was right there, right out my kitchen window. So I had to leave.

Writer: Tell me, during the times you had the threesomes, did he ever get involved with any of the men?

Tracie: He tried, but the men that he had, well, we only did it with the one guy and that guy wasn't gay. So he tried but he was frustrated because he didn't get what he wanted, I think. And once I saw what was going on, I didn't want go there, either.

Writer: How long ago did you separate?

Tracie: We've been separated for two years. This August, will be our twentieth anniversary.

Writer: Okay, so you've been together a total of twenty seven years. What about the children?

When we told them, I made him tell them. And, at the beginning I was his biggest advocate, and I'm like okay I'll support you in all this; and which I have to a certain extent. I didn't realize the hurt and anger that I would have to go through, afterwards. And he basically, once I pushed him out, once I said I was done, he was done. He was free to go and live his own life. And, that's basically what he did. My son lives with him most of the time, because that's his home, that's his safe place. He's fifteen years old. He helps with the farming. But I have noticed, that he doesn't like to be touched anymore. Like I went up to him last night and put my hand on his shoulder because we were at a wedding dance together and he flinches, and he's like, "you're smothering me, don't touch me". So, I don't know how much of that is living with a gay man, or just being without your mother for two years. He needs to come and spend more time with me but I think I tend to have a few more rules than his Dad does, and he doesn't like it. My daughter is still with me.

Writer: They know their father is gay and they're okay with it? Was there ever any anger on their part?

Tracie: I think there was anger with my son, at the beginning. But, I basically made him go camping with my husband. I think that saved their relationship, I think it needed to happen. So far my kids, like we live in a very small community, I grew up here, we both grew up here and my kids have never been bullied, that I know of, because their Dad is gay. They're both fine with it. I think they see Dad is happy. And they're okay with it, as far as I can see.

Writer: And how is their relationship with you?

Tracie: My daughter and I are very very close. I've had to kind of give up my relationship with my son because, for a while he was using me and playing us against each other. So I basically just threw up my hands and I thought you know what if you're staying there with your Dad, just let your Dad deal with your issues; because I'm not there and I can't. It's been really, really hard for me to let go of that because I feel like I raised my child for fourteen years and I don't get to finish it.

Writer: I'm sorry to hear that. Now you said your husband was not very sexual, but he had these fantasies and was into threesomes. Yet, you still had to chase him. What was the reason he gave for not wanting to have sex with you?

Tracie: He actually called me a nymphomaniac. I mean, he was the only guy that I knew, like I was the only woman I knew of that got turned down all the time. All these other men that I saw were chasing their wives and wanted to have sex, and mine never did. He would make excuses; "oh I don't have time or not right now". For the first fifteen years of our life, we had a

passionate sex life. And, I really never questioned it until the porn started coming in and he was bringing gay porn into the bedroom. The last five years took a toll on the marriage.

Writer: Sounds like you were in an asexual marriage towards the end. How did that affect your view of yourself as a woman?

Tracie: I felt very unattractive. He would never, ever compliment me. The big one for me is rejection. I felt rejected. I didn't realize how badly the separation and the losing him hurts. But he still lives here in our neighboring town. I can see him, and I can talk to him, and he looks the same, and he sounds the same, but he's not the guy I married. The guy that I married has died. But how do you mourn the loss of somebody who's still alive? You still have to see them; I still have to deal with him. The other day I saw him. I was talking to him. I was just kind of reaching out to him. He still feels the same but he's not there. The guy I married is not there anymore.

Writer: Do you believe that your husband was sincere and was in love with you when he married you, and as time progress gave into his urges?

Tracie: I pursued, he pursued me in the beginning and there came a shift in our relationship when I felt that we weren't quite in the same area. I look back on it now and hello, red flags are going up all over the place but I didn't see it at the time. I think he loved me as much as he possibly could when we got married. And I think, I know that I was desperately in love with him, I know I was. And, I think he was desperately in love with me as much as he could possibly be as a gay man. I don't think it was until he hit forty; he went into a big depression when he turned forty, maybe thirty nine, and I put him on depression medication. It took a couple of years before we started saying okay where is this going? There's a lot of porn

going on; okay who are you talking to? You're talking to people all the time. And it got so I didn't trust him anymore. I didn't know what he was doing; like he was doing it right in front of me, under my nose. He really didn't care. He really had no regard for my feelings which really hurt me.

Writer: Did you feel less of a woman or felt like other men would still want you? And once you really realized your husband was gay, did it make you feel differently about how you viewed yourself?

Tracie: I felt utterly rejected. I can't say it's him that has made me feel different but it's the reaction I've gotten from other men. I've had a few relationships, well not relationships, encounters with other men that think I'm absolutely gorgeous and stunning, just the way I am. I've never heard that. I've never felt that. So it's really weird for me. I feel sexier now more than I ever have. But it's taken me two years to get there.

Writer: So what I'm hearing is that you were insecure during your marriage, but you have regained your confidence. Did finding out he was gay give you a sense of relief, knowing that it wasn't you, but that he was attracted to men?

Tracie: Everybody asks us that. They say isn't it better that he likes a man than a woman? But to me it's no different. He rejected me. It's no different than if he went off and got another woman. I am pissed off and mad that he fucked up my family. That was the most important thing to me in my world, was to be a good mom and a good wife, and I was. I had everything that I could have ever wanted and he took it all away from me. I realize now that this is the path that I had to go to. I had to close the chapter on that book to be able to open a new chapter. I even went to a lady who is into Reiki and she basically helped to center me. I was so dead inside. She

helped to realign my chakras. At that point, once she kind of helped build me back up, I put a wall in front of me and he was not getting through any more.

Writer: So that was during the marriage. How long ago was that?

Tracie: That was probably three years ago.

Writer: Is that what empowered you to move forward to make a final decision?

Tracie: Yep. And the question that you asked about him being gay, I could see that we were in a train wreck. The gay card was the opening of the door. I'd been peeking out for a long time; that was my ticket to get the hell out. Because I basically outted him to the whole community. Some people were shocked, some people weren't. They'd gone to school with him for years and known him for their entire lifetime and said, "I could've told you that". And I'd say, why the hell didn't you? I was surprised to hear them tell me that. But I was still in shock after I had left him. I was almost in a state of euphoria, where I was so thrilled to finally be rid of him and to be rid of the whole thing. But that's when I went through the whole . . . it was a death. I went through a death, but at the very end he was still living in my house with his boyfriend and my son there. And that pisses me off.

Writer: So he's living as an openly gay man. He's not hiding it?

Tracie: He's not hiding it at all. I didn't let him have that choice. He wanted me to stay. He wanted us to save our family. And he wanted us to have an open relationship, where he could go and do what he needed to do. And I could do what I needed to do and then just come back and live under the same house, and I refused. To this day, he tells me that I gave up because I left.

Writer: There's some blaming. Seems like there's a pattern where it's always the woman's fault.

Tracie: Yes of course. I never could do anything right.

Writer: Are you religious, and if so has this affected your religious views?

Tracie: No, we're both not really religious people. What I have found is I went to a friend's wedding yesterday, and I'm sitting in the back listening to the marriage ceremony which I take very seriously, but I'm calling bullshit all the way through it. I didn't do it out loud but it doesn't hold truth for me. I said all those words and he didn't follow through. He didn't hold up his end of the bargain.

Writer: As most people would ask you, was there any clue at all?

Tracie: Not until the end. I had no idea. I was truly in love with him and he was in love with me and I just accepted him. One of my girlfriends says don't ever expect more than what someone is willing to give. So I just accepted the fact, that I was a super woman. My Mom was super woman, although my Mom didn't go through the same situation that I did. My Mom settled. My Mom was a bit miserable for a lot of years in her marriage. I was not willing to go there. I didn't want my daughter to see me settle and I had to save myself and that's why I chose to leave. I wanted to teach my daughter that what he'd done is unacceptable and I'm not staying there.

Writer: Would you say you got support from your friends, family, and community?

Tracie: A lot of my friends, I find, backed away. They didn't know how to deal with it. They didn't know what to say. Everybody's doing couple things and then all of a sudden, you're by yourself. I was bitter and angry, and that came out. But I'm starting to find that, even in the last, probably the last two months, I finally woke up one day and I would always ask myself, are

you still mad at him today? Do you still hate him today? Finally one morning I woke up and thought I'm tired of hating him. I will never ever forgive him. Well I can't say that. I think you have to forgive them at some point. I will never forget what he did. As for forgiveness, I don't know if I'm there yet. I don't know if I will ever be able to forgive him. I'm trying desperately to move on. I'm trying to figure out who I am and be okay in my own space. I'm very much a people-person. I thrive with people and I don't do well being on my own. I've noticed that since I've moved into town. My daughter is seventeen years old and doesn't spend a whole lot of time, I mean she's home, but in the summertime she's gone all the time. It's really been a struggle for me to just be okay with just me.

Writer: You're open to dating?

Tracie: I'd need to leave town, but yes. I mean, I know everybody here. I'm related to half of them. The guys that are dateable, are not worth dating. I'm ready to go there again. But I think someone would really have to knock my socks off for me to get married again. And I've never experienced that. So, I don't know, yet. They'd have to dazzle me.

Writer: Do you feel victimized?

Tracie: Yes.

Writer: This is a multi-layered question. Did you see a therapist? Did you attend any support groups? And were your emotional needs met?

Tracie: No. I went to see a therapist because everyone kept saying you need to see a therapist. I went and saw two separate therapists and they have no concept of where they're to even go. They have no idea. The only support group that I have found, that is even worthwhile is

Bonnie's. She's formed a little Facebook page. I find it a really hard to get on to chat with her. There's a lot of people that chat that are still so angry. I realized, like I lived in the anger stage for a long time, and nobody can tell me – I will never, ever say to anybody “okay, get over it already; it's been too long”. To me it doesn't matter, you will get over it when you are ready to get over it. And I felt like now if I have a question or something to complain about or bitch about, I'll type it on there and I'll get the support, the love, and the respect from the other ladies that I have met. Because I did go to Philadelphia and meet some of the ladies, it's like a sisterhood. Divorcees, they're all over the place, but divorcees of gay men are not. I'm the only one in my town that I know of. I'm sure that they're coming out, but they're not here yet. It scares me too for my kids, because my husband of course thinks they're just fine; they don't need counseling. I think it's really going to rock their world one day, but they don't want to go there right now.

Writer: So they are not open to counseling. Do they seem at all angry about his sexual orientation or it didn't faze them much?

Tracie: The sexual orientation, no I don't think it has affected them at all. The anger that I have felt, the emotions that I have felt, I think is part of what has driven my son away. Because I was so angry and so distraught with emotion and I think there came a time when he couldn't watch me cry anymore. He had to remove himself from that because I cried for a year over him, and had nightmares and everything. I still have nightmares about him and I will be trying to hit him, and punch him and I can't, and it pisses me off, and I can't hit him! And he doesn't care. And this man who professed his love to me, and how could you do this to me? I realize that you didn't know. And he says to me now, “there's really no other way we could've come here”. And there isn't. But it doesn't change the fact that it hurts. It hurts a whole lot.

Writer: Are you saying he did not know or feels he was gay until later on in life?

Tracie: I think he always had an inkling but we just chalked it up to sexual experimentation, like when kids are younger. I think we just kind of chalked it up to that. Basically I was his first. He was my first. And he was only ever with another couple of women. He never went towards guys. He'd comment if someone was a good looking guy. The fact that we went to watch *Brokeback Mountain* in the theater was a huge red flag. But I mean all the blue hairs are there watching it too. I don't know, red flags all over the place. I think he's known deep down inside, but he denied it and he covered it up. We live in such a small community. Like he graduated with twenty five kids. He'd gone to kindergarten and school with most of them for his whole entire life. What I have the problem with is if you are gay, if you are feeling that you might be gay, live it. Don't hide it and take us down with you because that's what I have a problem with. I know my husband was never malicious or intended to hurt me in any way at all. I know that, but it still doesn't change the fact that he did it anyway.

Writer: Would it have made a difference if he'd told you sooner, like once he realized he wanted to be with a man?

Tracie: I don't think it would have made any difference because he would have destroyed what we created anyways.

Writer: Did this take a toll on you financially?

Tracie: No. He is supporting me, and I also have a job. I think I've got the guilt card because he has come out, he has not denied that he's gay. He's living the gay lifestyle. He's kind of turned into a hermit. You don't see him very often. I see his boyfriend every once in a while, driving around town with my son in the vehicle, and that really pisses me off. But I don't think

he's happy. I know that he's not happy that he's destroyed my world and our children's world. But there's nothing he can do about it. It is what it is. That's my motto, "it is what it is".

Writer: Was your family supportive?

Tracie: My Mom especially has been my rock, because there have been many times when I have gone to her place just balling. My Dad doesn't like to see my hurt, of course. My brother, like I leaned on my brother and sister-in-law quite a bit, and it got to be where I couldn't do that anymore. It got to be a bit much because he didn't want to hear any of it anymore. He didn't want to be a part of it. My brother hasn't spoken to my husband since I told him. I think it kills him to see me hurting.

Writer: If there was a support group for straight wives, would you have attended?

Tracie: I would have attended, yes for sure. I do know that this has happened in our county. There's another lady that I do know of. But how do you phone her and say, "Hey, is your husband gay"? I got your name from so and so. You're looking for that support but can't find it. I did feel like I was alone until I found Bonnie's group. And once I found Bonnie's group I thought, oh my god there's way more people out there that's just like me; and in worst situations than me. We've been separated for two years but we're still not fully divorced. So we're still in that process and he's paying for the whole divorce. It's all coming out of the farm. He just bought me brand new windows and doors and siding for my house. Then when I went to the farm and discovered he had brand new tractor and speed drill in the yard, I decided to get shingles as well. I'm taking him to the cleaners. I need to write a book about how to leave your husband.

Straight wife # 4: Ranita and her former husband Rodney

Ranita: Bonnie she's a lifesaver to so many of us, the fact that she trusts you and that so many of my friends - my sisters on the chat room, have interviewed with you already and I think we all want to do this just to help others. I'm fifty three and I met my husband when I was twenty four, and we got married the following year, so I was twenty five years old. There were red flags that I ignored because I wanted a family so badly. I loved him and I just chose to ignore that. He had a little girl that was two and a half. I raised her. She's now thirty one. We had a son together who's twenty two. Just graduated from Army boot camp, so I am pretty proud of him. I grew up with a Dad that would get in my face and yell at me, and I hate yelling, I just can't tolerate it. I don't think there's ever a need for yelling or to disrespect someone that you supposedly love; that's just how I am and so I would just shut down when he would yell. Over the years when the kids were little, they called their Dad the temperor. He has a real bad temper. Then it got to the point where he would feel the need to go on vacations by himself and the kids were little and I said, why do you need to go away from your wife and your little kids who want to be with you? He was like, oh, my job is stressful. I said okay, and I just let him go because what was I going to do. I caught him hiding condoms from me, this was about eighteen years ago, and I was devastated. I thought he was having an affair with a woman. He tried to convince me that we had used them when we were going through all these infertility tests. I'm like, okay, I'm not stupid, you don't use condoms if you're trying to get pregnant. He would like talk circles around me; he would just try to make me feel like I was really stupid. Then, I would question myself you know, I would think, did we use condoms? I don't remember that. He let me think that he had an affair; that's what he let me think. I couldn't eat, I lost weight, I just was devastated, but I didn't want to break up my family, they meant everything to me. There was a gal at his work that I knew he had the hots for, or so he acted like it. He denied everything. He

started desiring strange sexual, okay I don't mean to be too graphic; it's kind of embarrassing and I guess I feel ashamed that I took part in something that I was not comfortable with just in order to please my husband because I grew up in a strict Christian home. He would like to be tied up, tied to chairs, and then have me do things to him; but really it felt kind of creepy. But if I started feeling that way and tried to share that with him – like uh, I don't know about that. He would tell me I was such a prude, that I was no fun, and I didn't want to do anything. So I would go along with it, and then I would just feel dirty.

Writer: So he was into bondage?

Ranita: He was, and he also liked a vibrator up his butt. He told me that was normal; that most guys liked that. Who was I going to ask? Was I going to ask my Mom; do guys like that? Was I going to ask my girlfriend? You just don't talk about that kind of stuff. So, I would just feel really disgusted with myself, and he would never want sex in the morning, like rollover and say I love you and want to snuggle or anything like that. It was always at night, always after showering and I'd have to dress up like a hooker, in lingerie and everything, and that just wasn't me. I'm just simple and plain. He would tell me all guys like their wives to do that. Again, who am I going to ask? I'm not going to talk to my girlfriends about something that personal. I just wondered, because of the anal thing, if he was gay. Then it got to the point where the sex was getting less and less. We kind of drifted apart, we were more like business partners. We bought a big home; we bought a vacation home up in the mountains; we bought a time-share; we traveled, we had money. He's vice-president of a company. He was always stressed out, and he started drinking a lot, and was starting to get verbally abusive. Telling me what a horrible person I am, I'm always angry. I was like, oh my gosh, I am the easiest person to get along with. I didn't understand. My parents would come to visit and it would be so stressful because he hated

my parents to come and visit. I would be a nervous wreck all the time. If I tried to talk to him and he was watching television, he would get really angry that I interrupted his TV show. He was just getting really demeaning, and I felt myself just shutting down. I would cry all the way to work. I work at a dental practice, I've managed a dental practice for twenty years, and the patients love me. I love these people, and I would go there to get validated. Every day I would go and love on these people from young to old. Then I would cry all the way home because I knew what was coming.

The summer of 2011, I found gay websites on his laptop and I was sick to my stomach. I sat there and looked at it in disbelief. When he walked in the door that night from work, I just said, what the hell? What is going on? What is this crap on our computer? What are you doing? He just lied, just like that, so easy. He said, I don't know what you're talking about, the kids must've been goofing around. Oh my god! He lied so easily. I knew he was lying; he knew I wouldn't go to our son and say, hey Sam are you looking at shavedcocks.com? I didn't know what to do, I just thought oh my god. Then that Christmas, I did everything, I decorated the house and I bought gifts for everyone, I just went all out, and it was just the worst Christmas ever. That day, on December 25th, 2011, I went in, I got on Facebook and I looked up this old friend of mine from high school. He was in Afghanistan serving intelligence for the Army and I said, hey how's it going? We just started chatting. I was portraying that everything in my life was fantastic, just like I did to everyone. You know, I'm so blessed, I'm so happy and nobody knew this nightmare that I was living in. I fell in love with this guy and in April of 2012, when my husband decided to go on a golf trip with his golf buddy, I thought you know what, I've had enough. I can't do this anymore. I found this guy that I liked in high school, we fell in love and we met in Washington, and so I cheated, I did, I cheated, but my husband hadn't touched me in

years. He cheated on me a long time ago. I have beaten myself up for that because I know cheating is wrong. I know it is but I was desperate. I needed that lifeline and I grasped onto it and I held onto to it with my whole being. When we met after thirty five years that we hadn't seen each other; I got off the plane in D.C., I held onto him and it felt like so right. It felt like the most wonderful feeling and we're together now, we are. But my kids, now won't talk to me because I cheated on their Dad and I lost my grand-daughter, she's three years old. I used to pick her up every Thursday and watch her. My daughter, when I tried to talk to her in a restaurant, she physically assaulted me. She called me a fucking whore and hit me upside the head. I was trying to tell her, yes I cheated on your Dad, I did, and I know that was wrong, but I want a relationship with you. They don't want to hear anything their Dad did wrong.

Writer: Do the kids know?

Ranita: I told both my son and my daughter. I met with them separately and I told them. I said, I've been putting up with a lot all these years that you don't know about. I told my daughter, I've raised you since you were two and a half, I love you like you are my own. I said, I love your little girl, I love your husband, you're my family. I said, I never imagined in my whole life cheating on your Dad, but I caught him hiding condoms from me when you were little, and I stayed because I wanted a good life for you, I wanted our family. I said he left me a long time ago. I said, I found gay websites on our computer, and I stayed and I tried. I said, I can't do it anymore, I can't. She just doesn't want to hear it. They blame me, and it breaks my heart but I'm not sad he left because he is cheating on me. He did cheat on me, no matter what he says, that he never did, I just can't believe it, but yet now I beat myself up. I talked to him two weeks ago, and I said I want healing for our family, and in order to get healing for our family you need to come clean with what you did. You need to talk to the kids and you need to tell them what

your part in this was. Yes, I cheated on you and I'm apologizing for that because that wasn't the right way to do it and I know that, but you are killing me piece by piece. He won't, he blamed me. He said, it wasn't the gay websites that destroyed our marriage, it was the fact that you would never listen to me when I tried to talk to you. Unbelievable!

Writer: So he has never admitted?

Ranita: No. I told him I did some research on this. He was so angry with his mother and his brothers; he has not spoken to them for like three years. I said that when you were an altar boy, the priest at that church- because he was convicted; I said I believe that you were one of his culprits and that's why you're so angry at your mom, and you need to talk to her about it. He's like, not true, not true, not true. I believe that you have desires for men that you don't want to have, but you took your anger out on me and I gave you and our family 110%, and I lost them because of you. My son won't even talk to me now. I drove 3600 miles roundtrip to South Carolina, picked up my parents and went to his graduation. I got to spend two hours with him and now, he won't give me the time of day that he's back at home. He's my only child that I tried for, for five years to get pregnant; infertility tests and everything and I was so happy when I got pregnant, and I lost him. I've lost them all.

Writer: How long ago did you separate – you and your husband?

Ranita: April of 2012. I got an apartment and I gave him the house and everything. I didn't want anything because things don't make you happy. Our divorce was final in July of 2012.

Writer: Who filed for divorce – was it you or him?

Ranita: I did. I told him one morning when he just was starting in again and telling me what a horrible person I am and how he doesn't like who I've become. I mean I did everything at the house. We had a big four bedroom, four bath house. I did everything. I did all the grocery shopping, all the cooking and I work full-time. I have Fridays off but I work long days, Monday through Thursday. I told him, if you're so stressed we can sell the house, sell the log home in the mountains, and we can live in an apartment and live off what I make, if that will make you happy, if that will save our marriage, then let's do it. When I brought that conversation up to him a couple of weeks ago, he said, "It was all in your presentation, you were just angry when you said it." I said, I wasn't angry, I was desperate, there's a big difference. I said, you talk about how I say things with my expressions or my tone, you didn't know my heart and you never did. I said, my family was the most important thing to me, they still are. I said, you won't come clean because you're unhappy with your little secret and now you've got this other girl. The girl that I thought he had the hots for back like eighteen years ago. I found a receipt on our Comcast account that he had sent her a romance package of a \$120 bouquet of flowers this February, saying that she was the kindest, most considerate person he's ever met. That's gone on for eighteen years behind my back. I sent her get well cards when she had surgery. I offered to go and help her clean her house and take her groceries, what a fucking joke that was to them. I'm sorry about my language. How can you turn this around on me? He won't admit it. He said that I made all of them feel uncomfortable.

Writer: Did you show the children that receipt?

Ranita: No, they won't talk to me. I told him if you don't come clean with the kids, I'm not going to protect your dirty little secret from your family. His family doesn't even know we're divorced. We've been divorced for almost a year. I'm going to call your brother, I'm going to

put it on Facebook that it's devastating to find your husband looking on gay websites, and he said "you'll hear from my attorney". I said, why for telling the truth? It's the truth, its fact. I did find you hiding condoms. Then last summer, I was trying to get closure; I work at a dental office and he came in to have his teeth cleaned. I followed him out and I said, I want the truth. We stood in the hallway and talked and I said I want the truth about the condoms. And he said, "Oh you want the truth"? I said, yeah I do. And he said, "Well the truth is that I hid the condoms from you because you were such a prude, I wanted to butt fuck you but I knew you wouldn't do it because you were so judgmental of me, I couldn't even talk to you about it". He said, "You're so boring in bed that I wanted some excitement." I was like oh my god I can't believe it. I did all that stuff you wanted to do and he stands here and just insults me and makes me feel like crap even more. Then he admitted to looking at the gay websites. He said, "All guys do that, they all check out each other, even guys look at each other in the shower." The guy I'm with now, he's a retired marine, he said, "No, you look at some guy in the shower, you're getting the shit kicked out of you." You don't do that, guys don't do that. Guys don't look at gay websites, straight guys don't want it in the butt, ever.

Writer: Did the kids know that part?

Ranita: They don't. I want them to have a relationship with their Dad. My son told me "Mom every time I try to talk to you, you try to talk about things about dad." I said because you need to understand why I did what I did. He goes "All I need to know is you cheated on my Dad." I said, you need to understand why. He doesn't want to hear it.

Writer: Have you seen a therapist?

Ranita: No, I found Bonnie. She's been a lifesaver and I did talk to Bonnie one on one. She said, "Do you think you need a therapist, or do you need validation or affirmation?" I need him to tell me, yeah it's true, and, he won't. I have chatted with a lot of women. I did come out to my Mom and my Dad, I sat down with them with my new guy holding my hand; his name is Andy and he's wonderful. He said you need to talk to your Mom and Dad, you need to tell them. They are so happy I left Rodney. They said they knew for years and years that something was up. They thought he was cheating on me years ago, and that he would leave me for someone but they never knew about the gay thing. They said when they would visit they saw how he treated me and they thought I would have a nervous breakdown because he twisted everything around. They are so happy for me, now that I'm with this guy. You know, I can honestly say at fifty three years old, I know what love really is. It is the kindest most gentle feeling, and it's so tender and so wonderful to be with someone who cares about me, and that I don't have to tie him to a chair and do perverse things. I don't have to dress up in the whole get up, and he loves me for who I am. I can put on my jammy pants and t-shirt and he wraps his arms around me and tells me how beautiful I am. I never had that my whole life. I look at you, you're beautiful, and these men take advantage of our good hearts and our kindness. They just take advantage of us and it's just not right. To lose our children on top of it, that's just the greatest pain a woman can bare. It's just hard but I know I will get through this. Every day I wake up thinking about it. Two weeks ago when we met I said, I loved you; I trusted you and you took everything away from me because of your secret, and I supported you and you have the nerve to stand here and say it was me. How dare you? He said, "You didn't have to leave; you should have said we needed counseling." I said, "I asked you to go to counseling, you wouldn't go." I went to Al-anon because you were drinking and I learned I had to change myself; that you weren't going to

change; that you didn't want to change so I had to change. So I changed and I lost my family. You can't replace your kids. My beautiful little granddaughter that was sleeping in a basinet when she was six months old by my bed, now she's three and a half and I haven't seen her since October. It kills me. I try to go on and be strong. I go to work and I see these wonderful patients, and they ask me how's that little granddaughter of yours, because they lived my life with me and I just feel like I've been slapped in the face, and I just smile. Some of them I will share what I've gone through with, and they're so wonderful and loving and supportive. I've been overwhelmed with the love and support from these people that I've nurtured for twenty years. I've been so blessed because as I open up to other women, they say to me can we have coffee? Can we have lunch? Can I meet with you some time? They open up with me and share the heartache that they've gone through and we've bonded. It's amazing. I feel like a butterfly. My Mom says, "we got our Ranita back, this wonderful, giving, loving person back. He was killing you and you didn't even see it". She said, "I'm so thankful to God. We've been praying for you for years, that you would see the light". We are so thankful to Andy, that he was your lifeline.

Writer: I guess their prayers were answered, because it sounds like you found out by accident. And all these years you've been with him, you didn't have access to his Laptop before?

Ranita: No, he left it at home. I guess by accident. Maybe he didn't delete his history, he forgot. I looked in his history, I was looking for something, and I thought, what the heck; then I thought, okay what else is on here? So I went in and found in one file, there was a gay video of these two young men, they were like in their twenties, one was giving the other a blow job, and I felt ill. I felt like I was going to vomit, I couldn't believe it. It just made me sick. I thought this man is disgusting to me, I don't want him touching me, I don't want to sleep in the same room

with him, and I moved into another bedroom. He just hated it and he was getting more and more violent, and finally I said, I want a divorce; I can't take your abuse anymore. He was on antidepressants, he had a concealed carry permit and drinking all the time. I was scared, I was really scared. I talked to a woman's advocate and she said, you've got to get out of there. You have got to get out of that house, that environment is not healthy for you. So I did and the first night in my apartment, I cried my eyes out. I moved in, my friend helped me with a mattress and a love seat. And I moved everything else by myself, box after box after box. I have a little full sized bed that's got a lump in it. I've got my grandmother's hand-me-down table that has cracks in it, but I love it because it's mine. I don't have all our fancy furniture and our big fancy house, but I'm happier with a man that just loves and nurtures me. But, I'm so broken about my family. It's like this hurdle that I can't get over. I try, but I get more tired and more tired, and I try to get up and go to work and be happy and strong and do my job but inside, I just want to curl up and just cry.

Writer: Besides your family, who else have you talked to?

Ranita: I have a really good friend at work. That last February, I was at work and I broke down and I couldn't stop crying, and I had to leave work. She's a dental hygienist, she didn't have a patient at the time and she's like, come on let's go. I went out and I told her. I didn't tell her about the gay things, but I told her I've fallen in love with someone else and I'm going to ask Rodney for a divorce and she was, "what!" She's known me for thirteen years and she thought we were the happy-go-lucky, all-American family and that's what I wanted everybody to believe. That's what I wanted and I tried so hard for, to make this life for all of them. So, she was shocked. Then last June, I told her there's more to the story and it's very hard for me to talk about, it's very painful. I told her about the gay things and she was shocked, just shocked. And,

she cried with me. Since then, I've talked to a lot of ladies in the chat room, you know where we email back and forth. That's my support. And my parents, they're unbelievably supportive. I talk to my Mom. She calls me every morning on my way to work and encourages me and just loves on me and is so thankful that I got out of the situation. She can cry for me but she doesn't understand the pain of a woman that gave twenty seven years to a man that deceived her in the worst possible way, the worst. And, you can't get answers, you can't get closure. I need closure and I told him that when we met. I said, I need closure, and I want answers, and I want the truth, and I want healing for our family; and damn it, you owe this family that because this is all on you; this is not me. He just blamed me. He said he could never talk to me about anything, I was always angry. That's not me, that's not me, at all. I'm the most open, easy-go-lucky person.

Writer: You didn't see a therapist, one on one for the divorce?

Ranita: No, I didn't.

Writer: Did you share friends together?

Ranita: He isolated me a lot. He isolated us from his family and he isolated me from my family a lot. He hated it when they came to visit and I was a nervous wreck because he's rude, he's just down right, rude to them. It was embarrassing because I'm all about family and I'm all about helping each other and love, and having fun and laughing. My family would come and we'd be playing a game in the dining room, and he'd turn the TV up really loud in the family room. My Mom would say, "Does it have to be that loud?" I'm like Mom, I can't go ask him to turn it down, it's going to be all out war. He isolated us a lot. We didn't have a lot of couples friends. I had a lot of friends on my own, but he just had his golf buddy that he would go on golf trips with.

Writer: You have a lot of friends but you didn't talk to any of them?

Ranita: I couldn't, I didn't want anyone to know my pain. I wanted a good life. I wanted that perception. I wanted people to think that we were all happy.

Writer: Even after the fact, do you feel uncomfortable talking to friends about it?

Ranita: I have started talking to friends. It's painful because I cry, the pain is so deep, and I just get tired of crying cause I am really a happy person most of the time; but I just cried so much. Andy has been wonderful. He's been so patient with me and I don't want him to lose that patience. He says he's not going anywhere. But I just need to get over it and move on.

Writer: Did this affect you financially? Did it affect your religious views in any way?

Ranita: Well the financial part, we went into a lot of debt to send our son to a really good school in Arizona, so I split that debt 50/50. Our 401k and profit sharing, all of that he said that since he made more money that I shouldn't get as much. We had a pretty easy divorce. In Colorado you can file your own, so we each wouldn't have to spend thousands of dollars on attorneys. Even though we made a lot of money, our money was all tied up in our investments, our log home in the mountains, and things like that. He took over. I didn't get anything out of the house, so he bought me out of that. He took over the debt of the student loan for our son, so I'm debt-free. I make good money managing this dental practice, but I'm trying to refinance our log home in the mountains because that was my dream, it was never his.

Writer: He gave you the log home?

Ranita: No, we are in negotiations with that. I told him he should sign it over to me because of what he did to me, he owes that to me. I told him that if he didn't, I was going to tell

everyone what happened and he said, “You’ll be hearing from my attorney, that’s blackmail.” I said, call it what you want. He said, “The cabin’s more important to you than your family?” I said, no amount of money could ever give me back my family. You couldn’t pay me enough money, this is two different issues, it’s not about that, I just feel that you owe that to me for what you put me through in my life, and the way you used me, and what it cost me so greatly. You should let me take it over. So, we’re still negotiating that. So financially, I’m fine. I mean I’m going to have a really long commute, like an hour and a half to my job each way, but it’s beautiful in the mountains and my boss has said that I can work from home when they close the mountain pass. I don’t have his income, which was really good, but I’m happier.

Writer: You don’t want alimony?

Ranita: No, I don’t want anything from him. I wanted away from him, and I left. We had a lot of Thomas Kincade paintings and I didn’t care; I didn’t want the memory of when we bought them; I didn’t want anything that would take me back to something with him. My 700 square foot apartment is home and it’s all me, and I’m happier than in that big house. Religious – when I grew up, my Dad and Mom were mission workers. And I grew up in a very strong Christian background, but I married a Catholic, which was the ultimate no-no. We didn’t go to church. I always knew in my heart and feel that God’s in here, in my heart. You don’t have to go to a building on Sunday, and then go home and be a jerk. That’s a lot of what hypocrisy is, I said, “That’s not what it’s about. It’s about being kind and knowing Jesus died for you and all of that.” The first night in my apartment, I had my Bible; I brought my Bible with me. But I hadn’t read my bible in twenty something years, and I thought okay God, it’s you and me right here in this apartment. And I said speak now or forever hold your peace. I picked up one of my Bibles...do you mind if I read you something? Out of my Bible fell this letter, and this letter was

from a friend of mine. I was her junior camp counselor in church camp. The letter's dated 1982 and a paragraph in it said: "Ranita, while cleaning out one of my files at home, I found the enclosed. I don't remember how I got a hold of it, but I only remember that you wrote it, and remembered how comforted I was at different times after reading it. I know that this isn't an easy time for you; maybe your own writing can be a gentle reminder that the Savior loves you and that he cares."

And inside this letter was a poem that I wrote when I was sixteen years old. It says,

Troubled? Whenever I am troubled and lost in deep despair, I bundle all my troubles up and go to God in prayer.

I tell him I am heart sick, and lost and lonely, too.

That my mind is deeply burdened and I don't know what to do.

But I know he's still the tempest and calm the angry sea,

And I humbly ask if in His love, He'll do the same for me.

Was that God speaking directly to me, in my own words? Wow! Powerful! I balled my head off. I balled and sobbed, and sobbed and sobbed. It was amazing!

Writer: Wow that is amazing. Did this whole ordeal have an effect on you emotionally?

Ranita: It did. The thing that impacted me is that I used to be thin. I was 100 pounds and he liked the way I looked. He liked when we had to go to company dinners, and I would dress up and look good. People loved me; they loved talking to me. I'm very social and I talked to everybody. I love people; I like to hear their story; everybody has a story, and I really got into that; so people would love when I'd come. We got invited to dinners that sometimes he wasn't

supposed to get invited to, but they wanted me to come, and it was fun. We got to meet some really cool people. I felt that he liked the way I looked for the most part, but he didn't like me inside, like my heart. He didn't know me. He knew the outside and what he wanted me to look like, but he didn't know my heart. That made me feel so inadequate. It's like, how can I talk to strangers and they love me, but yet this man that's supposed to be my husband doesn't know who I am at all. That really took a toll on me. Then when he said that I was awful in bed, oh my god, it was just another slap down; it made me feel inadequate. Everything was my fault, always; it was never his responsibility.

Writer: How did you feel after you found the website? Did it make you feel like, wow at least now I know it wasn't me?

Ranita: I didn't feel that way, I just felt like, why couldn't he trust me enough to talk to me about his desires? I know the person I am inside. It's taken a toll on me but like I said, so many other people validate who I am. He's so off base, and I realized that after last Sunday, or two Sundays ago. I recorded our conversation. I didn't ask him, so I know that's not right but I recorded our conversation because I needed to hear it over and over again to understand how he twist things around. I asked my friend if she would listen to the conversation because I said, I just need to know if you're hearing what I'm hearing. She's going to listen to it sometime, but it's a long forty eight minute conversation.

Writer: How do you feel about yourself as a woman now?

Ranita: I feel surprised that Andy thinks I'm sexy and desires me, and that I don't have to have makeup on all the time. I'm a jeans and t-shirt kind of gal; I'm 'jammy-pants and t-shirt kind of gal, and fuzzy robe in the morning, hair up in a clip most of the time. He loves that. I'm

simple and he loves it. I'm so comfortable with him. I'm comfortable with myself, but I'm still learning; trying to accept that. How can he say I'm beautiful and I don't have any makeup on right now; I have morning breath, don't kiss me, and he doesn't care. He rolls over and grabs me in the morning, and loves me, for who I am. I'm learning to love myself again because Rodney was destroying that inside of me. He was telling me how horrible I was all the time. Andy says, "I adore you, I cherish you, I value you". He's amazing! May 31st 1977, he kissed me in his parents' living room in New Mexico. Last year, May 31st, thirty six years later, is that thirty six, he kissed me in his parents' living room.

Writer: Going back to Bonnie and therapy, what do you think?

Ranita: I've talked to my physician about it and she gave me some names, but I just feel like I don't want to go to a therapist that doesn't get it. Unless someone has been through what we have been, this nightmare, they have no clue. You can have all the training in the world, but if you haven't suffered this pain, then don't counsel me about it because you have no idea. That's how I feel. I get so much from the girls on the chat rooms, the encouragement and the positives. I mean for a while on the chat rooms it was way too negative for me. This is way too deep, I can't deal with this right now. These women are angry, vengeful and yes we have times that we're angry, but for the most part, we need to pick each other up, and be there for each other, and encourage each other. And that's what this new group that's on there now is like. It's amazing. I feel like I can go anytime and say how I feel. I've got those girls, they are my sisters, they're there, and I love every one of them. We lift each other up, and I think that's more valuable to me than actually going and seeing a therapist.

Writer: Did you attend any divorce support groups?

Ranita: I didn't.

Wrter: Do you think a divorce group would be sufficient for women in this situation, or a special group would be more beneficial?

Ranita: A special group for women who think their husbands are, who have kind of proof but don't really have the confession. I kept asking the same question over and over in the chat rooms. My husband didn't touch me in years, he liked anal sex, vibrator up the butt, I found gay websites, I found gay videos, he shaved his armpits, but he says he not's gay. Every one of them said, "Girl he's gay." "Ranita, sorry, gay." "Ranita, sorry, wake up." I still couldn't get my head around it. I think you met with Kim, she's from Colorado. That's like an hour and a half to two hours from me, so we can get together. Then Joy is another gal that Bonnie hooked us up with and we want to get together because I think the questions we can ask each other, we can't ask that in a normal support group. We can be so graphic. The new girls coming onto the chat room; there's like no holds barred here. You ask anything; you can say any words you want; there is nothing sacred here. You can just let it out girl, because this is a safe environment. I think that has been my saver. I have never met Bonnie. I hope to someday. I love that woman, and she has a special place in heaven for what she does for us. She cares and she's passionate about helping women. I'll tell you what, one day I was at work, and I thought, "I'm going to email this woman." Bonnie – she was the first contact, and I thought, "No I can't do this." I didn't think I sent her anything, but I must have clicked send instead of exit or something, because the next day I came into work and I had an email from Bonnie. How'd she know? All it said was, "Ranita, do you need help?" I sat there and thought, that's God. I did not send her an email. I did not. I love her. I love her. She has been...oh my god! The chat room is sometimes fast and furious and you can't keep up. Sometimes I have things I want to say, but so many

conversations are going on that it gets a little overwhelming. But, it's great! You just have to sit back and read. Sometimes I'm not in the mental; I can't go there, yet. The Facebook page, "The Straight Wives Club" is awesome because you can go back and read. I would love to have the chat room conversations where you could go back and read, but the Facebook page is really nice because you can go back at any time and read the thread.

Writer: Would you attend a straight wives support group, if available?

Ranita: Yes, I would definitely have gone because I got a lot of support just by going to Al-Anon with his drinking, and I got some really good learning tools for myself. The support there was amazing. People were there because they needed help and they wanted answers, and it was sincere and it was safe. It was such a safe place. The support that I got from total strangers was amazing! I mean the first night I went, I sat by the door in case I wanted to leave, and this man came up to me afterwards and he said, "What's your story?" "What can we do for you?" I just cried. I couldn't even talk. I was crying and crying and he said, "Excuse me, this lady needs a hug over here." Another lady came up and just wrapped her arms around me, and I sobbed like a baby. I think we need that nurturing and support. If we had a group of women like us, we could just sit and cry and support. Not a man-bashing session, but nurturing and safe environment. I would certainly go. I think it's really important.

Writer: Has Bonnie been able to recommend a therapist in your area?

Ranita: She has. It's a little ways for me. I'm trying to get through it by myself right now. I'm in the process of moving up to the mountains and getting that house refinanced, working full-time, being in a relationship, and dealing with my kids and stuff, it's like when I get home I just want to go for a walk. I'm trying to get together with Kim and this other lady Joy.

We live like in this triangle and we could meet some place central. I think that would help too. I haven't ruled out therapy. I'm not against it. It would have to be someone that Bonnie recommended, otherwise forget it.

Straight Wife #5: Sharon and her former husband

Writer: Tell me your story

Sharon: I met him when I was nineteen. I was a sophomore in college, he was a freshman and I tell people we never really dated, we were just together all the time, and then I graduated three years later. He had a summer internship. So he lived with me, and at one point he had mentioned something about a girlfriend to a coworker. And I was like you have a girlfriend, who's your girlfriend? Because it just kind of evolved, and then we moved in, and I pressured him to get engaged. I'll admit that, and then we did. We almost had a two year engagement. We got married in 1998. We had our daughter in 2001. And I guess the other significant thing as far as our relationship, ever since I had known him, from day one he had suicidal tendencies and a culmination of this was in October 2011. He had a near attempt because he thought really hard about trying and didn't. Called crisis, and ended up hospitalized for a week. When he came out of the hospital, we had group therapy and all of this stuff, and unbeknownst to me at the time, when he decided not to kill himself, was when he decided he'd have to come out. So the two months' worth of therapy was him adjusting to that and getting up the nerve to tell me, I guess.

Then one Sunday, I guess he had planned to do it after Christmas, but we had a fight a few months before over something stupid. He had bought six cupcakes at a bakery. Fancy cupcakes and he refused to give our daughter one. And this made me upset, that he would send a message that she wasn't good enough for him to give her one of these cupcakes. And I had questioned

then, whether I was being a bad mother keeping him in the house. I had looked for some apartments closer where he worked and I had mentioned it to him. Well this day, he had asked me, “you still looking for apartments for me in Worcester”, which is where he worked. And I was like no, I hadn’t really thought about that, and he started to cry. Our daughter was there, and so I just let it go. The next morning when we woke up I was like, why did you start to cry? So eventually he said he was going to move out. I got upset. Like what do you mean, you don’t want to try anymore? ‘Cause, you know, we had been to marriage counseling, all kinds of things. He says, “No, it’s not going to work”. And I go, how do you know? I could see the way he was struggling, and I just sat there looking at him as he was crying. And I thought, oh my god he’s going to tell me he’s gay. I just kept saying, just say it, just say it. Because, I knew what he was going to say. And sure enough, it’s what he said.

Writer: How did you know what he was going to say?

Sharon: I had one of my gay friends, when I told him we were getting engaged, he was like “oh you can’t marry him he’s gay”. And I’m like, no he’s not. Just because he grew up with a single mother, and had no male role model, and has a few feminine qualities doesn’t mean anything. I had even asked him point blank at one point, because he kept eluding early on in our relationship there was things I didn’t know about him and there was things I would never understand. And I asked him if that’s what he meant and he said no, and so I chose to believe him. So long story short, we faked it through Christmas. And waited to tell our daughter after Christmas. We told her the weekend that he was moving out. And I was adamant that we tell her the whole truth because I didn’t want her thinking any of it was her fault, or that her parents would get back together or anything like that. We had had gay friends, so she knew the concept. I’ve explained to her many a times that’s just how some people are. He moved out and we’re still

legally married because one of the ways he tried to make himself happy, was to spend us into oblivion. So we filed for bankruptcy back in 2009. And it's a Chapter 13 payment plan. It was just so cost-prohibitive to separate the bankruptcy case and file for divorce; that's going to be done in January. We're just hanging on until then. He's happy, has a boyfriend, and I'm taking care of things like mothers do.

Writer: How old is your daughter?

Sharon: My daughter, she just turned twelve.

Writer: Married for how long?

Sharon: We are still, so we're having our fifteenth anniversary next month.

Writer: How long have you been separated?

Sharon: He moved out January 2012; a year and a half.

Writer: Does your husband have a good relationship with your daughter?

Sharon: I would dare say it's probably better now than it was before, because he was always depressed and crabby. He would work late on purpose because he didn't like to come home. And then on the weekend, he would sleep all weekend. Even though she sees him less, she probably has more time with him that's real.

Writer: How did you know that's what he was going to say?

Sharon: You know, I don't know. I mean I use to think I knew him like a book, and he could never lie, which is kind of ironic considering the lie that he got away with for so long. I just could tell it was something big and it was something he was struggling with, and it was something painful. I don't know if subconsciously I had an inkling. Something happened in that conversation and I saw it in his face, and I thought to myself, oh my god, he's going to tell me.

Writer: Was there anything that made it look like he was possibly having an extra-marital affair?

Sharon: I don't think so. He admitted going to a local porn shop, and they had booths in the back, and he wouldn't go into great detail on what went on in the booths other than he told me he never did anything that would put me in physical harms' way. And in the same kind of conversation, he told me he went and got tested for everything and he was fine. Well why did you get tested if you never did anything to put yourself at risk? "Well you know, I'm paranoid". I know the porn shop story is true because it was something he had confessed. I just didn't know, I thought it was a movie show. I did not know there were fellas on the other side of the wall. I didn't know anything that went on in this place. So I thought it was just a place to go watch dirty movies.

Writer: What was your first reaction?

Sharon: My first reaction, I had so many reactions. Even though I knew what he was going to say, it was still shocking. I needed to hear him say it. There was a lot of crying. At one point, I had to get up and leave the room because I thought I was going to vomit. So I ran to the bathroom and dry-heaved a few times. To this point, there hasn't been as much anger as I think there should be. And being in Bonnie's chats and things like that. I see there are a lot of angry people out there. And I still don't know why I'm not more angry. A lot of it was fear; what I was going to do; how I was going to manage everything by myself. He didn't want to leave home. Basically, we were living as roommates for three years prior anyways. We slept in the same bed, but that was about it. He wanted to continue living as roommates and then he'd go off and do his thing with his fellas' on the weekends, and still come home. And I was like, I can't do that. He had joined, unbeknownst to me, he had started going to this gay father's group in Boston. There were other people there that still lived with their wife, and they have their boyfriends, and I'm like, that's great for them but that's something I can't do.

Writer: Would it have been difficult to accept his lifestyle while he is still living in the home?

Sharon: Yes, it would have been. I tend to have an obsessive personality, and I knew that I would constantly obsess where he was, who he was with, he wouldn't be able to live here anymore.

Writer: Your husband is living with a roommate or boyfriend?

Sharon: I believe he met his boyfriend last July; they're going to be cohabitating at the end of June. Probably a month and a half ago now, his boyfriend had his first sleepover while my daughter was there and I was very upset by that. And I told him, I'm very uncomfortable on the one night a week our daughter is with you, and he argued back and forth and said he's been with this guy for a long time and he's not role modeling nothing but a healthy relationship that's progressing, blah, blah blah. He talked to his therapist and his therapist thought he was right and he was not going to abide by my request, to deny him sleepovers. I didn't think I was asking for that much, I mean, it's one night a week. Not that I've had more than a date but I can't imagine ever having my boyfriend sleep overnight. I mean, I know I'm a little prude when it comes to stuff like that. Yeah, I don't think a twelve year old girl should have to think about her parents doing it outside of marriage. I'm starting to realize that I can't control everything when it comes to my daughter's world.

Writer: Did you talk to her about it?

Sharon: I did, I did. I was very torn how to talk to her about it because I didn't want to bad mouth her father, so I said, 'you know, Daddy, you know, thinks grown up sleepovers without being married is okay but Momma thinks you should be married before you have grown up sleepovers and she knew what I was talking about. She's like, o-k-a-y. And, I'm like, do you not want to talk about this anymore, and she's like, no. And, I'm like okay, I just wanted you to

know how Momma felt about it; I'm not saying anything, that Daddy's wrong or anything like that, I just wanted you to know how I felt about it.

Writer: Does she feel uncomfortable?

Sharon: She likes this boyfriend. The only thing she's said in the last couple of months is, "why do I have to go to Daddy's anyway? He's always talking to Brian and he never pays any attention to me, anyway, so why do I have to go?" And I can see that, he never really interacted with her much, before. So I mean even though he's interacting with her more now, it's still not a great father-daughter relationship.

Writer: How was your relationship sexually?

Sharon: Oh, it was always like pulling teeth. It was constant rejection and I made excuses for this, and I made excuses for that. We lived together for almost three years before doing the full blown deed. I mean we'd do some things, but not sex. First I interpreted it to that he was a good Catholic boy, and that's what I wanted, you know. Then after that, it was his depression and his antidepressants, and it said right on the package "decreased libido". And I had gained some more weight, because I'd always been a big person; I gained some more weight and was like oh I'm too fat, or I'm too this. I always made excuses for it.

Writer: Did you have people to support you?

Sharon: I mean, I had my friends, if that's what you mean. I did not feel like I had to keep the secret. That afternoon I left him here with our daughter, and I had lunch with a friend and went and saw another friend because I just had to get out of the house. I had to talk to someone else.

Writer: Did you go to therapy?

Sharon: I did start, probably a month after he came out and I still go. I cut it back to once every four weeks, but I still go.

Writer: Do you find it useful?

Sharon: People have asked me that question before, and I don't know because I don't know where I'd be if I hadn't gone. I mean, I feel like I'm not where I wish I was, but if I hadn't gone, I might be even further behind. My therapist is very understanding; she's trying to help me build some esteem, but it's not like there's a magic pill where you can all of a sudden think one thing when you've been thinking something else since you were nineteen.

Writer: When referring to esteem, specifically what do you mean?

Sharon: I mean, he always made me feel I was not good enough, I was not enough; you know, I smell bad, I was ugly, I was fat. I was this, I was that. You know, you're conditioned to believe it and it's hard to let that go.

Writer: Sounds like blame on his part?

Sharon: Oh, definitely.

Writer: Did knowing bring you relief?

Sharon: People have said that to me before and just because you're told for most of your adult life that the sky is blue, and then all of a sudden somebody says oh no that's a mistake, the sky was green, you still spent your whole life thinking the sky was blue and that was your truth and that's what you lived and the other important information here is, I never dated anyone prior to my husband. He is my whole reference point when it comes to dating and men. I'm trying to date now and I'm like, I don't know what I'm doing; I don't know how I'm supposed to act, I don't know what I'm supposed to say. I don't know. We dated in high school and he's it. It's like starting over again from scratch, like you're thirteen going on your first date.

Writer: What's your feeling towards your husband now?

Sharon: I came to the realization a couple of months ago that I'm not missing him anymore, I'm missing having a partner in life. But it's not him I'm missing. For me, that was a big point for me. I don't know why, but one day I just had this realization it's not him I'm missing; I'm lonely as hell but I'm not lonely for him. And to me, that was a big step. I'm still frustrated by the injustice of it all, I guess it's a good way to put it. You know, he's the one that lied for twenty one years, and he's got this great relationship supposedly, and he's moving on and he's happy, la la la la, and I'm stuck here in pittsville. So it doesn't seem quite fair because I worked my ass off to make him happy. I mean, he was a miserable person. I don't want to bash because I see a lot of women bashing on these sites, and I just find it such a wasted effort. It just concentrates on the anger; to me it doesn't accomplish anything. But he was a horrible person and I know he was under a lot of stress trying to maintain this lie; to be someone he wasn't. You know he has confessed that he knew all along, he just hoped it would go away. And if he did what society expected him to do, it would be alright. If you grow up Catholic, you admit you're gay, you're going to hell. You don't want to go to hell. I mean, I have some sympathy for him, and I think that's why I don't have the anger that I think is deserved to have. And sometimes I wish I could've been more angry and not so sympathetic to his situation, because I think it would have been easier to be angrier initially. We tried, well I tried an experiment. He moved out in January, so it was probably September or October of 2012, I tried a little experiment of bringing down the wall just a little bit in our relationship to see if we could be friends, because we were best friends. The therapist kept saying that she thought that one day I may be able to be friends again, and I tried to bring the wall down, and it was just too much. It put me back, so the wall went back up. I've been building the wall higher and higher, and it seems to be better. I keep

my conversations with him just relating to our daughter. I try to do much of it via email and text messages as much as possible because that's easier. He still, to do this day, tries to suck me in. Yesterday I got an email, because he's still on my medical insurance, and he says we'll probably be hitting our medical deductible because he had a cardiac event. He had cardiac bypass surgery at thirty one. It read, "I had a cardiac event, but I'm okay. But it did require an ambulance ride and an ER visit". And I knew he was just fishing for me to say, oh my god what happened, are you alright? I just replied okay. I did it on purpose because he needs to realize where the boundaries are too.

Writer: He probably misses his best friend.

Sharon: He's told me that before but we haven't been because I put the wall up. Last August we went on a family vacation because we had promised our daughter that we would. We won't do that again. We had a frank heart to heart conversation then, because I had shared one of Bonnie's letters that had talked very specifically about how the wife felt, not realizing that she wasn't the only one whose husband told her she was too ugly, she smelled or whatever, and how that had affected her. So I shared that with him because it spoke to how I'd been feeling and I wanted him to know what he'd done. Because to this day, I still don't think he feels bad enough for what he's done.

Writer: What was his reaction to the letter?

Sharon: He got upset, and he cried. He said that wasn't his intention and he wanted me to know, "I hope you know it wasn't you, it was me. It wasn't your fault". He said everything he should've said, it didn't change anything really because I've just been conditioned to think it was me. I've explained this to my therapist before, and she gets on the whole self-esteem kick. I said, I don't think I have low self-esteem, per say. I know there are many very good qualities about

me. I am very funny. I'm very smart. I'm articulate. There's probably not very many things that I wouldn't do for my friends or family, if they ask me. How I've explained it to my therapist is, I know I have all these great qualities and but there's nobody buying those qualities. There's no men out there who want those qualities. They want the skin toned, hot mamas. She keeps saying they're not all that way. I don't buy it. For me it's not necessarily a self-esteem issue, I just feel I'm very honest in my strengths and needs.

Writer: So you're open to dating?

Sharon: I'd been on a few dates and guys weren't doing what they said they were going to do. I talked to some of my girlfriends and they're like, it's just because you haven't done it very often, you'll toughen up and you'll become more cynical. And I'm like, I don't want to toughen up and I don't want to become more cynical. One of things I like about myself is that I trust people, I believe people are good, and I don't want to lose that. There was a guy that I've been talking to since January, I still talk with him. But he cancelled our sixth attempt at a face to face meeting, and I'm like I've had enough. I deleted my accounts and I'm struggling. I only deleted my account since Friday and I'm struggling; I want to see who's new and who's there. I just didn't like what it was doing to me, it was making me obsessive and asking why didn't he answer my texts. How come he didn't do this? He said he was going to do that. Like I said, he was my one and only you know. What if I'm not very good at it? The few interactions I've had, I've probably been more honest than I should have been. But to me, I kind of relate it to when I go on job interviews. I'm not going to tell people what I think they want to hear because then if I get the job, they're going to figure it out that I'm not who they thought I was, so I get fired. Why would I do that in a dating relationship, pretend I'm something I'm not. They're going to figure

it out after they've been with me for a while. I can only fake being somebody else for a while. Well, he did it for twenty one years. I couldn't do it that long.

Writer: What advice would you give to women in the same situation?

Sharon: That's tough. I guess for me the advice that I would give is try to get rid of the anger because the anger isn't going to heal you. I've seen people in the chat rooms and on the blogs just spew anger, and I can understand it, but dwelling on it isn't getting them anywhere. I mean they don't even have to forgive. They don't even have to forget. But that anger is just making it worse, if you ask me. I wouldn't have mind having a little of that anger but it just seem like some people, they are just consumed with that anger and I don't know how that's doing them any good.

Writer: From what you said earlier, it sounds like you're not in therapy because your husband is gay but because your marriage has dissolved. Is that so?

Sharon: More so, I mean I still do have a few issues of feeling so stupid. You know growing up, the only thing I had to feel good about was that I was smart and I could figure things out and I got the good grades in school. I didn't have the boyfriends. I didn't play the sports but I was on the math team and I'd go to a math meet and I'd be the top scorer. Or, things like that. So to wake up one morning and realize half of your life you were fooled, it kind of took that smart thing away from me. Most days, I've come to a place where I've accepted that as a consequence of my choice to be trusting. I've said all along to myself, probably to others too, that when you choose to be so trusting, you're opening yourself up to get hurt. For me, it was better than the alternative. I don't dwell on it very often, anymore. I mean initially, it happened a lot. I was having a lot of anxiety attacks. I mean physical anxiety attacks. My chest would get tight, I couldn't breathe. The first month or so, that was almost a daily occurrence, but that's kind

of diminished. I haven't had an anxiety attack in months. I still don't sleep very well. I made a decision a long time ago, that I was going to be a trusting person as opposed to a non-trusting person. I do worry, it does leave me open to get taken advantage of again. If there's some fella out there who pretends to like me so he can get something, or a loser who wants someone to pay his way, or whatever, I know that I'm vulnerable for that. I'm trying to be aware of that. My friends who have told me thank God he told you, I've put them on all on warning. If I ever start dating someone, interview him, make sure he's straight because the other one wasn't.

Writer: Do you know why they didn't tell you of their suspicions?

Sharon: Well I can understand why they wouldn't have told me. Most of these people, except for the one that did tell me, I met them after we were together and married. I would never tell one of my friends, oh my god I think your husband's gay. I would never be mad for them not telling me ahead of time, and I think it's easier for somebody outside that doesn't love the person to be objective. One of the clues for them was his cleaning habits; for me it was just his mother was a neat freak and he took after his mother. He was very concerned with how he looked because his mother always told him people were talking about them. If he didn't look a certain way, people would talk. I just relate it back to things like that. I had an excuse for everything. If they caught him making out with a guy somewhere, I suppose I would expect them to tell me as if it had been a girl. Nothing like that ever happened.

Writer: Do you think a support group for women married to gay men would be of help?

Sharon: Yes. I don't think a divorce group would work for me. It's a whole different thing, granted some of it is the same as far infidelity. You still have the betrayal. That brings up an interesting point, and you may have come across this, have you ever had any people say "At least he didn't leave you for another woman?" People think it's easier because he's gay. I didn't

have that relief so much. I do remember talking to my therapist about the hopelessness part because for me that was a very painful thing. I am a control freak and I like to get in there and do things, and there was nothing I could do to fix this. And the therapist, she brought up a good point, she says “Are you willing to go have surgery to become a man?” I’m like, no. She says then there’s nothing you can do.

Writer: If you could have fixed it somehow, would you have allowed him to stay then?

Sharon: The answer is no. I told him, I did offer to stay in the relationship if he vowed to remain faithful to his vows, and he said he did not want to live life like a priest. I would have tried to stay with him if he promised to keep his vows. He didn’t have to sleep with me but he couldn’t sleep with anybody else, either.

Writer: But what would that do to you for the rest of your life with him? Were you okay with an asexual relationship?

Sharon: It had been like that anyways. I remember being arrogant about it, looking down on these other relationships that were built on lust and passion, you know. We were companions. We were best friends, and that was what was going to get us through to the end; because we weren’t relying on physical passion and urges, and all that stuff. I was very arrogant about it.

Writer: Now are you really okay with it or it just became a way of life and you got accustomed to it?

Sharon: It became a way of life.

Writer: Are you okay with sex and intimacy in a relationship or do you feel that is not necessary or so important?

Sharon: I don’t know the answer to that question. I mean I’ve been on a couple dates, and how do I say, we made out. I did like it. I do like it. It’s a scary thing for me. I think I

would like it. With my husband it was, you know, you can only get rejected so often. You can only hear so many “not tonight” and “I’m tired and I don’t feel good”. You only hear that so much and something inside of you shuts off. My first make-out session was in December. I would say that whatever was shut off has probably turned back on, but the prospect of exploring that avenue seems very faint and dim, not very likely. So it’s kind of if it happens, it happens. I have been in my blue periods, and I’ve gotten to a point where if this is as good as it’s going to get. My twelve year old child is a hormonal nasty piece of nastiness; but my work life is good and I have a home; I’m healthy; so if this is as good as life’s going to be, I’m trying to find a way to be okay with that. Does it make me very sad and is it depressing to think that no one’s going to cuddle with me at night, that I’m never going to kiss another person, and I’m never going to have a partner in life? It’s very depressing. But for me, if I can find a way to accept that and not be hopeful and disappointed, it’s much better for me. I have a saying when it comes to customer service, you always overpromise and under-fulfill. So if I can lower my expectations for my life, I won’t be disappointed. Hope is a hard thing for me to have as well. But anyways, I want to go back to your whole society thing. You’re absolutely right. What’s driven me crazy lately is the whole basketball star thing that just came out. He’d been with a woman for eight years and they had been engaged and he broke off the engagement, like four weeks before they were supposed to get married, and he is praised like this hero for coming out. Even the President said something about him and I saw one little interview with her and no one is exposing the pain. This woman went eight years of her life, and he knew all along, just like mine knew all along. I know a lot of people, like in Bonnie’s group, they don’t watch the Fran Drescher show. I watch it and there have been a few instances where I’ve actually cried at something that happened. They were married for twenty years. He comes out of the closet. They can’t sell the house. Neither one of

them can live in the house on their own. So for financial reasons he moves into the den and they live together. And there are very funny things that happen. But, she does also get in little zingers; like one time he said something about what did I ever steal from you, or something like that, and she comes back to him and says “my youth”. It’s done in humor but there’s truth in that and I think he’s not glorified as a hero. They do talk a lot about how much they really do love each other. I think that’s one thing that’s kind of missed sometimes in this whole mess. There are a lot of these men, I shouldn’t say a lot, but mine was not just using it as a cover. I really believed mine cared about me and loved me in the only way he could. It’s been a very painful process for him, too. I’m sure there are some scoundrels out there that just do it to keep up appearances. Mine wasn’t living down low, I think they call it. Other than the little porn shop visits, he didn’t have relationships with other people. He really sincerely hoped it would change. And I think any exposure, even if it’s done in a humorous way, is better than none. I know a lot of people are adamant against this show and think it’s horrible. I think she gets a pass because it happened to her.

Writer: From earlier statement, it sounds like you think a support group would be beneficial. Are you open to local support groups, and not just online?

Sharon: I think it would be. I’m just trying to evaluate if whether or not, I would go. I don’t know. There’s kind of a safety when it comes to chat rooms and video chat. But to get into a room with real people, it might be a little intimidating for me. I have been very upfront and willing to talk about it with people I know. Because for some reason, I wanted to make sure people knew it wasn’t my fault and I did everything. I really should have left him years and years ago. The emotional abuse, I don’t want to say abuse, but the abuse that I took, I really

should have left him a long time ago. For me, it's important that everyone know that I did everything I could, that it wasn't me.

Writer: Do you have a pen pal or someone to see face-to-face, or someone from Bonnie's group?

Sharon: Just my friends I've had previously. I'm not an active participant in Bonnie's group. I like getting her newsletters and reading her newsletters. Early on, I would get on with the chats at night. I just found it was too much negativity and it wasn't good for me, so I just read her newsletters. Most of her newsletters have good information because it comes from her directly, and not necessarily everybody else. So, I do find her newsletters very helpful and I do still subscribe to those and read them every week or every month, when they go out.

Results of Data Collected and Data Analysis Results

The three research questions (RQ), as listed below, were expanded and incorporated in the interview guide. The responses were reviewed and the results are presented below.

RQ1: Is there a significant impact on the ego identity formation of heterosexual women who find out that the man they have married or are engaged to is gay?

Erik Erikson's 1963 theory of psychosocial development, characterizes individual development as occurring through a series of eight stages across a person's lifespan (Karkouti, 2014). One of the main elements of Erikson's psychosocial stage theory is the development of the ego identity, which is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction (Karkouti). For many of the women in this study, what Erikson describes as his core stages of ego identity formation (trust, identity, and ego integrity), have been compromised. Results showed that the women finding out their spouses or long-term partners were gay had significant impact on their ego identity formation. Following are some of the respondents' statements:

“I’m learning to love myself again because Ron was destroying that inside of me. He was telling me how horrible I was all the time.”

“I was so dead inside. I never could do anything right. I’m trying so desperately to move on. I’m trying to figure out who I am and be okay in my own space.”

“I mean, he always made me feel I was not good enough, I was not enough. You know, I smell bad. I was ugly. I was fat. I was this. I was that. You know you’re conditioned to believe it, it’s hard to let that go.”

“He had become an expert at trying to drag me down. That's the expression our son used one day when he was being over critical towards me. He said “Why are you always trying to drag mom down dad; think about it where would you be without her?” Knowing what I know now, the answer to that question is painfully obvious. I think it must have shattered my confidence in myself as a woman. One can only take so much emotional assault.”

“He said I was too fat and I'm pretty sure that I thought that for a long time. He never said I was attractive. I didn't feel attractive anymore. It was the physical, womanly, feminine thing that was never acknowledged, for I don't know how many years. You know, he never hugged me, we never sat around and held hands, none of that and I just thought that's who we are together. I don't know what that's like, I haven't had that in years and I begin to accept that as normal.”

RQ2: Do straight wives feel victimized by their spouses?

Webster (online) defines victimize as: treating someone cruelly or unfairly; harming or committing a crime against someone, and subjecting to deception or fraud. Twenty of the participants endured emotional abuse from their spouses. Five women reported physical abuse. All twenty four participants in this study were completely unaware their husband or fiancée was

gay when they met. Therefore, all felt they were subjected to deception, if not fraud. Although participants felt victimized, they made the distinction between being victimized and being a victim. Participants did not feel they were victims. One respondent reported, “I refuse to be a victim. He will not have that kind of power over me”. The following statements extracted from the interviews support the findings that the participants felt victimized by their gay spouses.

After nearly forty years married, this straight wife was forced to sign a gag order if she was to receive any financial support from her affluent husband. “It’s part of the divorce decree that if I talk to anyone about him being gay, I can be incarcerated for a year”.

“My thing with the perpetrators is that they’ve known since adolescence, they went into a relationship in which they did not get your consent, they did not advise you of their same sex attraction or need, and that makes you a victim to their perpetrated, deliberated event in their life. That’s the gist of it.”

This participant’s husband became increasingly physically abusive once she began confronting him about his sexual orientation. “We’d had a fight and he punched me in the head in front of the kids and that’s why I left, I came back and he said he never did that, “that never happened”. However, I had a big lump in my head. I took pictures of all the red marks all over my body, he deleted them from the camera. We went to a counselor once that he recommended but we weren’t allowed to talk about the violence, we weren’t allowed to talk about the porn and so in the end, it wasn’t worth us going. He said I wasn’t allowed to bring those things up, or we weren’t going and I was embarrassed about it as well.”

“He isolated us from his family. He isolated me from my family, and eventually turned my own children against me. They blamed me for the divorce. Even though I told them the

truth, that their father was gay, they didn't believe me and wouldn't talk to me. My step daughter even slapped me, and won't allow me to see my granddaughter."

"We're in the middle of this divorce and this custody thing and that entire Craigslist ad (of him soliciting sex from a man) was admitted into court evidence because it's shocking. And that was my point with my lawyer; this is shocking that somebody would lie on purpose and make me believe he was a loving husband and wanted this family, when in reality he's doing this the whole time. I'm pretty pissed that I can't sue him for fraud. Some legal changes need to be made, the whole no-fault thing is b.s."

RQ3: Is society overlooking the emotional needs of straight wives?

Collectively, the women felt that there is a lack of institutional support that address their emotional needs. Participants expressed they were encouraged by support groups comprised of women with like experiences. Approximately one third of the women reported they received the most support from their family and friends. The following statements reflect the participants' sentiments regarding the lack of available and/or effective support.

"A lot of my friends, I find, backed away. They didn't know how to deal with it; they didn't know what to say."

"I went to see a therapist because everyone kept saying you need to see a therapist; I went and saw two separate therapists and they have no concept of where they're to even go. They have no idea. The only support group that I have found, that is even worthwhile is Bonnie's, she's formed a little Facebook page. I find it really hard to get on to chat with her. There's a lot of people that chat that are still so angry. I realized, like I lived in the anger stage for a long time, and nobody can tell me – I will never, ever say to anybody okay get over it already; it's been too long. To me, it doesn't matter, you will get over it when you are ready to get over it.

And I felt like now if I have a question or something to complain about or bitch about, I'll type it on there and I'll get the support, the love, and the respect from the other ladies that I have met.”

“We are an important part of society that no one acknowledges and we have a voice. I think that's our opportunity to help people, not to educate the rest of the world. More awareness needs to be raised for the next generation, they are already well on their way, it's really to prevent this from happening, it really shouldn't happen.”

“If we had a group of women like us, we could just sit and cry and support. Not a man-bashing session, but nurturing and safe environment. I would certainly go. I think it's really important. I haven't ruled out therapy. I'm not against it. It would have to be someone that Bonnie recommended, otherwise forget it.”

“I think the horror of being a straight wife married to a closet f*g, pardon my use of such a nasty word but can't seem to stop myself, is probably even worse than a regular marital break down, for so many reasons. We probably need to have our own separate support groups. So to answer your question regarding my emotional needs being met, it helps to talk with others about this god awful thing, but I think I will only at least partly recover from this when he dies.”

Themes

Through an analysis of the data, three unanticipated themes emerged: Betrayal, Inadequacy, and Trauma. The themes were consistent across all interviewees. Following is a discussion of the three themes.

Betrayal. According to the Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, betray is to hurt someone who trusts you, such as a friend or relative, by not giving help or by doing something morally wrong.

Based on the above definition, betrayal involves the act of one person violating the trust of another. Without exception, participants reported they felt betrayed by their spouse. The responses distilled from the interviews revealed that the women's perception of betrayal is when someone you trust lies to you, cheats on you, abuses you, or hurts you by putting their own self-interest first as evidenced by these statements.

“I can see the dilemma of not wanting to be gay but it's crazy to me that you're willing to sacrifice other people's lives and even his own. He's not happy and he's never going to be happy, living this secret, this lie, and he's going to destroy more women's lives.”

This is from a women who had two separate relationships with gay men. The second man knew she had divorced her first husband because he was gay: “Let me just explain why I'm more confused in a lot of ways. The first one, he never touched me. This one, we had the greatest sex life of anyone, ever.” She explained, then one day “He's crying and crying and then, he starts spilling the entire story. His lifetime of sleeping with men since he was fourteen years old, on a frequent basis, unprotected and that he'd done this all through his first marriage. He's a fifty five year old man, he's been doing it since he was fourteen. This was the ultimate betrayal.”

“He was hanging out a lot with this guy at work. So Rob comes to my house for dinner and he's crying to me of how his partner of so many years died, left him with bills and blah, blah, blah. And, even at that point, I still didn't get it. I was packing gourmet meals for my husband for lunch, so I started packing lunches for Richard. I'm thinking poor guy. And then my husband started disappearing with Rob. Then he comes home one night in late July 2009, and he said to me, “You know, I'm going to get the guys at worked fired; they're reporting me for having an affair with Richard. Can you believe they said something like that about me?” But that still wasn't my wake-up, 'ah-ha' moment. He was being tested for Leukemia and one day I

found a text he sent to Rob which said “I know if something is wrong with me, you will take care of me”. So not only did I have the people at work reporting him for having a homosexual affair, I now had Rob who was going to take care of him no matter what. And I thought, oh my god he’s doing Richard. That’s when I got the gut kick in my stomach. I welcomed this guy in my house. I felt so deceived by them.

To quote Buxton (2006)

Like identity issues, concerns about deception cause pain on many levels. Having their partners’ core truth hidden from them by the very persons who presumably trusted them the most is viewed not only as a betrayal but also as an act that shatters their moral compass and makes them question their own integrity. No matter how far along their partners were when they disclosed their true orientation or gender identity, spouses feel duped and bereft of a credible measure of what is true or false, right or wrong. Most wonder what was real, imagined, or a charade in their marriage and no longer trust their partners’ word or their own judgment. Many extend distrust to anyone’s word, and those who divorce fear dating.

Inadequacy. Inadequacy is defined as the quality or state of being inadequate, which means not enough or not good enough (Merriam-Webster Online). In this study, the feeling of inadequacy was with reference to sexual inadequacy.

Most participants reported that sex with their husband was virtually non-existent, either from the beginning or shortly after they married. Participants shared that they were lead to believe that the lack of sex in the relationship was a result of something they did or how they looked. Some of the women stated that they felt obligated to engage in sexual activities they would typically find degrading, in order to keep the spouse satisfied. The following statements convey the verbal insults participants were subjected to, and examples of the sexual activities they took part in.

This statement is from a woman who reported to have gained over fifty pounds during the course of her marriage as a result of the stress she dealt with on a daily basis: “I mean, he always

made me feel I was not good enough, I was not enough. You know, I smell bad. I was ugly. I was fat. I was this. I was that, so he wouldn't have sex with me. You know you're conditioned to believe it, it's hard to let that go, you just feel inadequate."

Another reported; "When he said that I was awful in bed, oh my god, it was just another slap down; it made me feel inadequate. Everything was my fault always; it was never his responsibility."

A third participant reported that had she not taken part in her husband's sexual escapades, he would have left her. "I realized that, he's wanting me to have sex with strangers, and in my world that doesn't happen. We went to meet with a guy up in the city two hours away. And basically when he walked in the room, I thought there is no way in hell that I'm going there. Because he was kind of scummy and gross and I said, I'm not going there. That's kind of when I threw my hands up and thought no more. I'm not going through this."

This is reported from a conservative Christian woman. "If he likes anal stimulation, maybe this should be part of our sex together, and I was willing to do that. He would put a plunger on the wall, and he would back up into the plunger during our sex, and that would arouse him. He couldn't get aroused unless there was some type of anal stimulation for him."

Trauma. Trauma is a difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems, usually for an extended period of time (Webster Online).

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), trauma is an emotional response to a terrible event like an accident, rape or natural disaster. Immediately after the event, shock and denial are typical. Longer term reactions include unpredictable emotions, flashbacks, strained relationships and even physical symptoms like headaches or nausea (APA.org).

In this study we are looking at psychological trauma. Some of the women reported either being diagnosed with or experiencing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), as a result of their marriage to a gay man. PTSD is one of the Trauma-and stressor- related disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychological Association, APA.org). The American Psychiatric Association's 1994 definition of PTSD states that, a person must have experienced or witnessed an event or events that involved actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self or others, which involved fear, helplessness, or horror (APA.org). The participants of this study described their marriages as traumatic due to the psychological and emotional breakdowns they experienced. The following statements further substantiate the theme of trauma.

After discovery, this participant's husband used his financial power to take their children away from her. "I told him I was going to the hospital, I was having trouble talking to him, and I couldn't breathe very well. I had never ask before so I spit out the question because it was all starting to click in my head. Are you gay? Tell me the truth. And he laughed at me. He then says that I'm never going to see him or the kids again and hung up. He didn't answer again. I text message him and said, please tell me what's going on. He didn't reply. I didn't hear from him for the rest of the night. I'm having a panic attack wondering what he will do to the kids."

Another participant reported; "I mean this whole thing, where your head is spinning and you have to grieve, and then there's the whole other thing on top of it. I'm finding that things trigger post-traumatic stress in me that probably wouldn't if he wasn't gay. I drove by a street, "Swallow Rd" it never phased me in a million years, and now I drive by and feel this is really gross. I start sweating, I'm nauseous, sick to my stomach. This is not a regular divorce."

This is from a woman who discovered her husband was gay forty years ago: “I was getting a suit of his ready to go to the cleaners, and took some stuff out of the pockets, and there was a card in there, a valentine card from a guy. I still remember what that card looked like and the disbelief of it. Forty years later, and here I am still reliving that memory

“There was a gay video of these two young men, they were like in their twenties, one was giving the other a blow job, and I felt ill. I felt like I was going to vomit, I couldn’t believe it. It just made me sick. I thought this man is disgusting to me, I don’t want him touching me, I don’t want to sleep in the same room with him and I moved into another bedroom. He just hated it and he was getting more and more violent, and finally I said, I want a divorce. I can’t take your abuse anymore. He was on antidepressants, he had a concealed carry permit and drinking all the time. I was scared, I was really scared. I talked to a woman’s advocate and she said, you’ve got to get out of there. You have got to get out of that house, that environment is not healthy for you.”

Summary of Results

The interview questions presented for this research were of particular significance in finding base commonalities amongst participants. Results of the interview analyses supported the hypothesis that there is a significant impact on ego identity formation of women engaged or married to men who are later identified as being gay; straight wives feel victimized by their former spouse; and the emotional needs of straight wives are generally overlooked by society. In analyzing the interview responses, there was a consistency with the women reporting that they felt victimized by their gay spouses. In an attempt to keep their deception hidden, the husbands abused their wives either verbally, emotionally, sexually, financially, or physically. Many of the women were made to feel as though the challenges in the marriage were entirely their fault. It’s important to reiterate that despite being victimized, none of the women identified as a victim.

Out of the twenty four interviewees, four did not identify with their discovery having a significant impact on their ego-identity formation. Most of the women felt their experience changed who they are as it relates to how they view themselves in the context of male –female relationships. Four women denied any impact on ego-identity formation, due largely to feeling that their self-esteem remained intact. However, one could argue that all twenty four were impacted. For example, all felt their husbands violated their trust, and trust is a core stage of ego-identity formation (Karkouiti, 2014). As it relates to societal support, all twenty four participants expressed that there is a lack of institutional support for addressing the unique emotional needs of straight wives. There was a reverberating message amongst those who sought professional counseling, which was that the therapists were not equipped to counsel regarding gay-straight marital issues. Three unanticipated themes emerged during the data analysis: Betrayal, Inadequacy, and Trauma. Betrayal was manifested in the way that the husbands' sexual orientation was not revealed prior to marriage. It was reported that while some of the women had suspicions of their husbands' infidelity, none were aware of the homosexual preference. There was a lack of intimacy throughout the marriages, which resulted in the wives feeling sexually inadequate and less than desirable as women. The women unanimously stated that their marriage to a gay man was traumatic. They described their marriage as a difficult and unpleasant experience, with some lasting emotional effect.

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

This semi-structured, qualitative case study was an in-depth look at the lives of twenty four women who either were married to, or were in a long-term relationship with a gay man. The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not straight wives are psychologically and socially impacted by their experiences. The hypothesis stated that there is a significant impact on the ego identity formation of women engaged or married to men who are later identified as being gay; straight wives feel victimized; and society overlooks the straight wives' emotional needs. Data results supported the research hypothesis. Of the twenty four participants, twenty reported that finding out their spouse was gay had a significant impact on their ego identity formation. All of the study's participants reported feeling victimized by their former spouse, and that their unique emotional needs are overlooked by society.

An interview guide was used for this study. During the interviews, some standard questions were asked of each participant. These questions examined relationship satisfaction, sexual functioning, self-esteem, and reactions to the discovery of their husband's homosexuality. Based on participants' responses, three common themes emerged; betrayal, sexual inadequacy, and trauma. All of the women reported poor relationship satisfaction. Of the twenty four participants, twenty one were divorced or in the process of being divorced. Of the remaining three, two chose to cohabitate with their husband, but lead separate lives. The other woman

remaining in the relationship stayed to avoid the devastating impact the discovery would have on her children.

Conclusion

In summary, straight wives are a unique population that is understudied and perhaps less understood. As laws change to include equal rights for the LGBT community, there is a risk that the straight wives population will increase. It is important for society, specifically mental health professionals, to familiarize themselves with the straight wives population in order to move towards better understanding and effectively addressing their needs.

Much like other spousal issues and abuses, such as domestic violence, the straight wife/gay husband relationship forms a lasting psychological damage on the straight spouse. The straight wives' experience subjects them to loss of identity, victimization, and therapeutic deficiencies. For many of the wives, the primary goal after marriage is raising the family in an intact structure. They therefore sacrifice who they are at a core level in attempt to achieve this goal. Unfortunately, the goal is never achieved as envisioned because it is based upon the hopes of the straight wife that the gay husband will change to accommodate goal achievement. Instead, the gay husband overtime becomes more intense and intractable in his pursuit of the gay lifestyle.

In delineating occurrences contributing to identity restructuring, many wives endured extended periods of rejection during their marriages until their children became independent. In efforts to make the marriage work and keep the family together, especially where children were involved, straight wives betrayed their own moral compass. One straight wife said that

she was brought up with a clear road map of moral standards to be followed by all “good catholic girls”. However, at this point virtually everything transpiring in her life was inconsistent with the morals she learned prior to the years of marriage to a gay man. Another woman admitted to being upset with God. She said “It was sort of like I did everything I was supposed to do, why are you doing this to me? And then life goes on and then you realize very few things in life are fair. So my Idea of God has changed pretty drastically since that time”.

When asked if straight wives would benefit from a regular divorce group or one geared specifically to straight wives, one response which seems to capture the response of the majority went as follows: “I think we need our own group along the lines of Bonnie Kaye’s online Straight Wives Connections. I think the horrors of being a straight wife married to a gay man (closet f**) ...is probably even worse than a regular marital breakdown for so many reasons and I think I will only partially recover from this experience when he dies”. By introducing conversations concerning straight wives issues, new avenues of support and healing become available for those suffering from their experiences. These research findings are intended to inform future studies and to assist in the development of future interventions for identifying and treating the straight wife.

Recommendations

Many of the straight wives reported that the therapists they saw knew the theories to assist them with coping skills and self-esteem issues, but lacked the understanding of their unique needs. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that more evidence-based research be conducted in order to begin developing guidelines that will equip therapists to work with straight wives. It is also recommended that research be focused in the areas of betrayal,

inadequacy, and trauma as they relate to straight wives. Such research would provide some of the critical information and data for preparing skilled therapist to work with the straight wife population.

Peer support in a safe place has been reported to provide the basis for which straight wives can begin to heal. Many stated that professional therapy was not very useful. The unique needs of these women are not usually incorporated in a university curriculum for therapists. Knowledge of the effects of discovery or disclosure on the straight wives is critical for therapists. Understanding what these women face, their reactions, and how they cope may help therapists work with them more effectively. The limited literature and attention to the straight wives' issues, leaves a vast area for research with this population.

There is also a need to educate society and increase awareness about the indirect cause and effect of homophobia on this population. Participants report that many of the men they were involved with chose a woman as a way to camouflage their true sexual orientation. It is believed that society is not ready to fully embrace the LGBT community, therefore, keeping men and women ashamed of coming out. One of the participants stated, "Only when we as a society begin to allow people to be who they are without judgment, will we begin to see a decrease of straight wives." Society is in need of research that can be a catalyst for bringing about attitude change through increased education on the LGBT population, and through changes in legislation.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT FLYER

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Participant's demographics: age, race/ethnicity, educational level, socioeconomic status

Tell me your story, how you met, dating, marriage, etc.

How was your sex life with your husband?

Did your spouse tell you he was gay or did you find out yourself? If the latter, then how?

What was your initial reaction?

Describe in details some of the emotions you experienced following your discovery?

How long after you found out did you separate or divorce?

Did this experience have any impact on how you view yourself as a woman?

How has this affected you emotionally, financially and spiritually?

Has it reshaped you in any way?

Do you feel you had any part in his being gay?

Do you feel victimized by your gay spouse?

Do you have any children, together &/or separate? If yes, how many?

How has it affected your children (if any), family, friends, and career?

Did you receive support from your community, church, family, friends, etc.?

Did you go to therapy? If so, was it helpful?

Were there any support groups available and did you attend any?

If you did not attend a support group, would you have wanted to participate in one?

Overall, do you feel that your emotional needs were met?

ARE YOU OR WERE YOU MARRIED TO A MAN WHO IS GAY?

I AM A DOCTORAL CANDIDATE AT THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF CLINICAL SEXOLOGISTS IN ORLANDO FL AND I INVITE YOU TO LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD BY SHARING YOUR STORY

I AM CONDUCTING A RESEARCH STUDY TO DETERMINE THE NEED FOR CLINICAL SUPPORT FOR WOMEN WHO ARE OR WERE PREVIOUSLY MARRIED TO A MAN WHO LATER IDENTIFIED AS GAY. THIS RESEARCH IS PART OF MY DOCTORAL DISSERTATION. STUDY PROCEDURES INCLUDE AN INTERVIEW AND ONE-ON-ONE FOLLOW-UP SUPPORT SESSION AS NEEDED.

IF YOU OR SOMEONE YOU KNOW IS AN ELIGIBLE CANDIDATE AND WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY, PLEASE CONTACT ME FOR MORE DETAILS. PRIVACY AND CONFIDENTIALITY WILL BE MAINTAINED AND I WILL NOT RECORD ANY NAMES AS PART OF THIS RESEARCH STUDY.

YOUR SUPPORT IS GREATLY APPRECIATED.

MAGGIE KELLEY, PhD (c), LAPC, RN

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617-686-7794

RELEASE

In exchange for consideration of the sum of one dollar (\$1.00), I hereby give permission to _____ and/or The American Academy of Clinical Sexologists to use my name, my private history and notes from private consultations; my photographic likeness and voice in all forms and media for the purpose of education, exhibit, or research as well as any collateral advertising or trade which may be involved in such productions, and for any other any other lawful purposes.

Print Name:

Signature:

Date:

ADDENDUM: Please note that above release statement will be used only as needed and with prior approval from participant. For this research study, participant's name will be replaced with a case number to protect identity.

DISCLOSURE: Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, this student will offer up to three (3) follow-up support sessions to participant as needed. Thereafter, participant will be encouraged to seek services from a therapist of her choice for continuum of care.

Marguerite Kelley, PhD(c), MA, LAPC, RN

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