



# *OurVoices*

## podcast

by  OurPath

S4 Ep 3

A “Narcissist in Recovery” Gets Real

Kirstin Kalbli: Hello everyone and welcome to OurVoices, the podcast for Straight Partner(s) and Partner(s) of Trans People by OurPath, formerly the Straight Spouse Network. I'm your host, Kristin Kalbli. Our guest today is Ryan King. Ryan is a university professor and entrepreneur. He frequently posted on the Straight Spouse Network Open Forum, under the pen name, Sean. His thread, a gay ex-husband, answers your questions had 1700 exchanges and over 400,000 views. Ryan was married to a woman for 15 years before he came out, separated and divorced. Welcome to the podcast, Ryan, I'm so excited to have you today.

Ryan King: I'm thrilled to be here. I've been a huge fan of yours and of the podcast.

Kirstin Kalbli: Well, I want to tell our listeners first, this is going to be a super... like... freewheeling unscripted, very honest and uncensored conversation, I have a feeling and I'm actually really excited about that. So first I want to talk about the Open Forum and how we came to know who you were. So OurPath, at the time of recording, we have not yet relaunched as OurPath, but by the time you're listening to this, you will know that the Straight Spouse Network has rebranded as OurPath, Inc. and back in Straight Spouse Network days we had an Open Forum on our website, which I hope by the time you're listening to this, we've got up and running on our new website. And the Open Forum is a place where people can come, anyone can come, it's not restricted to Straight Partner(s) or Partner(s) of Trans People, family members, friends, LGBT+ partners can go.

Kirstin Kalbli: and it's a really sort of wild, wild west uncensored free- range conversation. People can use pseudonyms if they don't want to log in under their real names. There's- whereas, if you're in a Facebook group, you're using your real name, but people can use a pseudonym if they want to and they can read everything without ever commenting or writing anything or if they do write under a pseudonym, it's completely anonymous. So you were on the SSN forum for quite a while and you had this thread, A Gay Ex-husband Answers Your Questions, and that's how we came to know you. So what kinds of- just briefly and then we'll talk about it in depth more. What kinds of questions would you answer for straight spouses or straight partners?

Ryan King: Most of the straight wives, I don't get a lot of questions from straight husbands because obviously I'm a gay man, but most of the straight wives who contacted me, were new to the forum and they wanted to answer the question, "Is my husband gay?" and I think that's the overriding first question that I would get. "Is my husband gay or is he bi or is this just a phase in his sexuality?." My marriage is breaking down and I want to know if my husband is gay.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right and what did you- like I mean obviously they're asking for your opinion as another gay man and did you find most of the times that the kinds of evidence that the women would put forth would- were they red flags to you? Were they kind of like a no brainer or how did you interpret that?

Ryan King: Well, first I want to say that I'm not a mental health professional, nor am I an expert. I'm only sharing my experience and I think as much as every person posting on any forum worldwide thinks that their journey is unique and different, I find that 95% of the women that I interact with have the same-are following the same path or I should say that their husbands are following the same path.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right, I like there's a pattern, a behavioral pattern that you can kind of see.

Ryan King: Yeah and I think that's become more clear to me because I think I've been posting for about the last five or six years and so there are some very, very common themes.

Kirstin Kalbli: So before we talk about those common themes, and we are going to get into this, but let's talk about your personal story about you being a gay husband, married to a woman. Tell us the, give us the scoop.

Ryan King: Do you want me to talk about my relationship or my evolution as a gay boy and then became a gay man? What do you want to start with first?

Kirstin Kalbli: Let's talk about your relationship first and then we'll talk about your evolution.

Ryan King: Okay, I met my then girlfriend when I was 18 years old. I live in Europe and so I came to Europe to work for the summer and she and I met when we were working together at a summer job. And, I was a virgin at the time and we were both virgins and so we had our first sexual experience with each other. And from then, I knew in my heart that I was gay, but we'll get to that after, but I was so relieved to be able to have sex with a woman. And I was in love with this idea of conforming and being a straight man because I didn't want to be gay. I'm 49 now and so it would have been the late eighties to the- just the beginning of the nineties.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right, so when you found that you could have sex with a woman, was that like, (Ryan: It was a huge relief, a huge relief) Oh God? Okay. Okay. So was it maybe (Ryan: it was a huge relief) I'm not gay or was it maybe (Ryan: I'm straight) I'm not all the way gay?

Ryan King: Yeah, I'm straight. I can have sex with a woman. I enjoyed it. I and it was this intoxicating feeling of, yeah, I fixed myself. I was in love with that idea and plus it was the summer, it was Europe, it was very romantic. And so we did long distance, then she came to live in Canada where I'm originally from. I was going to university and then we went back and forth between Europe and Canada before- after having our first child, we then moved back to Europe permanently. And, I think following the same path that I referred to before, I did all of the very classic, gay boy things. When I was younger, I was a bit isolated. I had mostly female friends when I was in the early grades of school and then that continued on to high school. I was into theater. These are all very cliché things.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right, but cliché for a reason, there's, you know, there's some continuity in there.

Ryan King: There's some red flags. I'm not going to call them red flags, but they're sort of pink flags. (Kristin: Yeah, right, okay)(laughter). And then like a lot of people that I've interacted with, what changed for me was when I got access to the internet and then internet porn. And that's when I started really exploring virtually my gay side because I was watching only gay porn. And then eventually when I write to people on the Forum and they say, "Well, my husband only watches porn." And I say, "You can only walk by the bakery so many times before you want to try the cake." And so, then it turned into real cheating and I think I followed a similar path to others is that sex was never very important to me, other than when I was in my teens or early twenties, when I had an extremely high sex drive. I think it was just physiologically and then it tapered after we started having children in our thirties, and then we totally stopped having sex when I was in my forties and then I cheated on her with men and then we separated in 2014 and then divorced in 2015.

Kirstin Kalbli: So did she- how did she come to know that you were gay? Did she find evidence of your cheating or did you tell her?

Ryan King: Yeah and this follows a similar path is that I was leaving a big electronic trail of both looking at gay pornography and then I started hiring male escorts when I was going on business trips and she found that correspondence.

Kirstin Kalbli: She found the correspondent. Did she confront you or what did she do?

Ryan King: No, not until much later. She didn't confront me until it was May of 2012 when I'd come back from another business trip. I'd met a male escort while I was on that trip and then she came and confronted me at my office and I panicked and made up some excuses and- because it totally caught me unawares, I was totally surprised. (Kirstin: Right.) Then she went home- and I do remember this like it was yesterday because it was probably one of the most, I dunno know, one of the most memorable experiences of my life. Most shocking experience in my life because I was like, "Oh my God, this is really happening." And I remember I had to go pay a vendor, I ran a business at the time, and I remember writing out this check and I was like, "This is going to happen."

Ryan King: And the drive home was about 15 minutes and it was like driving down a tunnel and I thought, "I'm actually gonna do this, I'm actually gonna do this." And when I got home she- we a large department and she put the kids in one wing of the apartment and then we sat in the kitchen and I told her "I'm gay". And I was actually surprised when I joined the Forum. I didn't realize- I thought maybe naively that all gay husbands just came out to their wives. I was actually very surprised that most gay husbands don't come out to their wives.

Kirstin Kalbli: No, they really don't.

Ryan King: I shouldn't say gay, I should say maybe not yet. I should say non-straight husbands because I don't want to get into that labeling. But most of these, most of these LGBTQ+ husbands, and in my case, most gay or bi husbands, don't come out to their wives. That was a surprise to me .

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah. Speaking from personal experience, they don't, a lot don't. Many do, many do, a lot d on't. Do you feel like- how did your wife react from your perspective when you told her the truth?

Ryan King: You'd have to ask her. I don't know. I think it was, again, this is my interpretation. (Kristin: Yes, of course). I mean, I think I was blinded by my own emotions at the time, so I don't think I can be really objective. I do remember her looking shocked and hurt. Her immediate reaction was, "Are you going to take the kids from me?", which breaks my heart because I think she immediately knew where this was going. She said, "Are you going to take the kids?" and I said, " No, of course not." And we were sort of in a zombie mixed orientation marriage where she knew that I was gay and we can talk about that after. But to answer your question, I think it was, she finally had the answer, rather than the question because she- I think she finally pieced together that, okay, this is why all of this happened over the course of our relationship. All the squirmy hugs, sort of the dry kisses, the lack of intimacy, the sexual disconnect because- we can get into those details if you want.

Ryan King: But I think for her, is that it was both a shock and maybe a relief because she finally had an answer.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right. I can relate to that, like having something that makes sense of all of this confusion. Was she trying to bridge the phys (physical) I mean, we can get as detailed or as not detailed as possible.

Ryan King: You can ask away, ask away, I'm an open book.

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah, I mean, was she trying to bridge, from your perspective obviously, was she trying to bridge the physical intimacy gap? Was she trying to engage you more than you were comfortable being engaged?

Ryan King: No and at this point I think we hadn't had sex when we had that kitchen conversation that I told her that I was gay and came out to her and I think we hadn't had sex in almost two years. Which seems to be another common milestone when for straight spouses, straight wives to join the Forum, it's usually about one or two years that the relationship has been sexless before she joins the forum and starts asking questions.

Kirstin Kalbli: Asking questions, right, exactly, I like what happened? And it's confusing too because you hear, you know all of these competing narratives when you're in that situation? Why, why aren't we having sex? I thought men were first there's the cultural message that men want sex all the time, What's the matter with my husband? Right? Which is- we know is not true, men are not machines, right. There's all kinds of reasons why men might not want sex, et cetera. But that question first shows up, at least it did for me, and then it's like other questions come on behind that, that sort of make dots on a line. You know like you're putting a puzzle piece together and- but you are also have these competing, other cultural narratives. That's like, well sex isn't everything in a relationship and, you know, you're pretty shallow

Kirstin Kalbli: if you want more sex than your- like you're supposed to make do with a friendship or a companion at relationship. And at a certain point, sex goes away anyway in every relationship so, you know, who are you to expect more sexually. So the woman, or sometimes the husband, is coming to the Forum or the group space with a lot of really confusing, competing narratives in there that they're trying to sift through cultural messages around sex and sexuality, what's supposed to happen in a relationship long-term. You know, you always hear sex wanes, that kind of thing. Well, you know, sometimes it doesn't and maybe it does but there's reasons for it and you got to kind of find the reasons for that. So, anyway, so...



Ryan King: Can I comment on that? (Kristin: yes, please do, yes please) I think you said that.. I think, I would probably modify something that you said is that most of the women that I've interacted with on the Forum, they tend to think that the lack of intimacy is somehow their fault, even when the husband is struggling with his sexuality, which I think is terribly unfair. And so- and a lot of the time he's shifted blame on her, to deflect from the issue, which is and it's, quite cruel and you- I hear a lot of-she will write things like, "Well, I gained some weight or I had low libido after having our first child or second child or third child" or it gets a little bit more cruel as well is like, "I'm too demanding."

Ryan King: It's just, I think it's just a lot of gas lighting; which is now I have to take a shower, I'm too sexually aggressive, I'm not sexually aggressive enough. Like the goalposts seem to be shifting all the time in these relationships and so a lot of times the wife joins the Forum and the straight spouse is questioning, "What do I have to do to make this work?" And it almost seems like she's taking on the burden of what has to be fixed in the relationship, whereas, where it's largely the questioning husband's fault, in my opinion.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right or responsibility for identifying the real cause as opposed to projecting a false cause onto the other person. I mean it's- I'm so glad that you brought that up because it is so common. Women, and men too, hear you're an nymphomaniac, your, in my case, I think the comment...

Ryan King: Ya and that's one thing I wanted to talk- I wanted to get your perspective on it because obviously, I mean, I'm not a woman but do you find that as a woman that there's this idea that you can't be sexual because that's seen as being sort of counter to female, what are societal expectations are for women? There seems to be a negativity, negativity attached to women who are sexually open because it's seen as being almost sexually aggressive. Would you agree with that?

Kirstin Kalbli: I would agree that- what I would say is that our culture, western culture, is maybe not quite so much in Europe, but at least in the U S and Canada, we are so messed up about, and this is my personal opinion, I'm not a mental health professional either, but we are so messed up about our sexualities. We have so many competing narratives, and it's almost like, it's kind of like a schizophrenia, multiple voices in the head around when it's okay to be sexual as a woman, when it's not okay to be sexual as a woman. Of course culturally, our bodies are used to market, our bodies- so we have permission to be sexual when we're selling something. We don't necessarily have permission to be sexual when we're actually, you know, in our private lives. You know, girls are still the slut, you know, (Ryan:slut-shaming) is still prevalent, it's still around, it's still exists. And so we have to- I think women have it different. Men have other things put on their sexuality that they have to work through. Women have to work through, you know, what is my authentic sexuality, what is my authentic sexual expression. We have to work through the cultural attitudes about what it means to be, you know, what is too sexual anyway?

Ryan King: I had a conversation recently with a straight spouse who eventually ended up divorcing her gay husband and she's since remarried. And she said, " Well, what was I going to tell my family? That I was divorcing because I wasn't getting laid enough." And I thought that's quite blunt, but that does encapsulate it because she felt shame saying that I'm splitting because I'm not- I don't have an active sex life and she didn't feel like that was enough for justification. So I think that, I think that echoes what you're saying.

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah. I think you feel like - at the time of my divorce, I did not know he was gay, he had not come out yet, and he actually remarried a woman after me and came out to her. (Ryan: Again, that's very common) Yeah, that's very common. And so my ex- part of the reason I had so much difficulty in deciding to leave was because I was like, well you know, we're friends, we enjoyed garden together, we decorate the house together. (laughter)

Ryan King: That's a thing flick. (laughter) Well, I mean, look, we can, I think we can laugh about it and I don't want - I know that straight spouses may be triggered by this but when- how long have you been divorced if you don't mind me asking?

Kirstin Kalbli: Not a problem. I divorced in 2007, so I'm quite a ways out s o, yeah, and I can laugh about it now.

Ryan King: I know. Yeah. I'm six years post-divorce and so even my ex-wife and I can laugh about these things that are such obvious red flags. (Kristin: Sure. Yeah. Yeah.) I can understand i t can be triggering for some people who are questioning, who are in the thick of it.

Kirstin Kalbli: You are so correct and I thank you for pointing that out. There are things that I look back on now that I'm like oh my- and I'm not mad at myself for missing them, but naivete and innocence actually. I met my husband when I was 19. I met him when I was 17. We started dating when I was 19. So, you know, there was an innocence and a naivete and a non-understanding what some of these things might mean and also an unwillingness to pigeonhole and stereotype m y husband. I was trying to be an enlightened person. I was trying to be a progressive person. I'm not going to stereotype my husband just because he likes musicals. I'm not going to put him in that man box that says a straight man can't like this or that, or the other thing. I'm not going to and then of course- and so you kind of- I think I hear this refrain by women as well who are trying to be progressive or trying to be open-minded, who are trying to not put their man in a man box, which you know is a term for sort of a very stylized masculinity that it gets rewards in our culture.

Kirstin Kalbli: So, I kind of got bit in the rear end by doing my best to not stereotype my husband-and so I think- and I hear that refrain as well. So back to your question about sex and sexuality. (Ryan: yes) I think the interesting thing is that the pattern is the transference, not to use an overly psychological term, but the transference of the sort of the locus of the problem from the sexuality of- it's not even that one partner is gay, it's that one partner is gay and another partner is heterosexual and there's a fundamental mismatch in our sexual compatibility. That's the reason we're not connecting sexually, not because it's not your fault that you're gay. It's your gay, I'm straight. We have a fundamental mismatch here, but when the transference of the blame, if you will, gets put on the straight partner because- you know if you're a woman you're told you're a nymphomaniac, or you want too much sex or you're hypersexualized. And that goes into really- or the body shame, you're fat, you gained weight. That goes into some deep- that almost takes advantage of its (Ryan: insidious, isn't it?), insidious (Ryan: very insidious) deep cultural - and if I may...

Ryan King: It's misogyny. Would you say it's like emotional misogyny?

Kirstin Kalbli: It's emotional misogyny. I would say it taps into-it makes convenient use of cultural misogyny that's already in existence. Conversely, I will say this many of our male husbands here from lesbian wives, your sexuality is predatory, "I feel like you're raping me when you have sex with me." Now that's really blunt, but some of our men have heard that and the thing is in this #MeToo era where any conscientious man is trying so hard not to have a predatory sexuality, not to have a- his natural desire for his wife, for his woman his- a heterosexual woman or a woman who is bisexual at least and genuinely into men as well, is like genuinely most of the time going to be cool with that desire. Being desired is-all partners, I think, want to be desired to some degree or another. That's part of the reason why we form romantic and sexual relationships and so when this husband has his desire shamed his amorousness for his wife shamed, told his predatory, told he's all, he always all over her.

Ryan King: You're talking in straight male, lesbian relationships?

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah, yeah, exactly and because there's a parallel and I think that also is insidious and it takes advantage of, you know, misandry. You know, this is very political term right now but there are ways in which these men are shamed for their sexuality as well that parallel the way straight women are shamed for their sexuality in these mixed orientation marriages. It takes advantage of cultural misogyny that's already in place to put those really insidious, heavy things on women, and then the converse ones on men, that were already grappling with this in a culture that shames all of us for our sexuality, all of us.

Ryan King: Absolutely. I think we're moving into like the next topic which is narcissism and, and how that plays in gay, straight relationships. Because the point that you're making is, when I see posts from straight wives who are trying to figure out their husbands sexuality, I think it's kind of like me playing chopsticks on a piano next to a concert level pianist who's been playing since he or she was five or six years old, as far as disguising their sexuality. Like, that's the disconnect and ability here. I don't know if that makes any sense?

Kirstin Kalbli: Okay. So let's unpack that analogy. So you've got someone playing chopsticks on my keyboard, and then, yeah...

Ryan King: And then, (imitating piano playing) and then someone's playing like Rachmaninoff or something...

Kirstin Kalbli: On a baby grand and some concert hall in Vienna and..

Ryan King: Yeah, yeah, let me unpack what that means. Is that what these- what then happens and what I see is that there's overwhelming evidence that breaks through the denial of the straight spouses. So he's no longer questioning whether her husband is gay and I'm only gonna focus on, male, female, gay, straight relationships because that's the only area that I know. I'm not going to comment on, lesbian, straight relationships I don't know either, nor trans.

Kirstin Kalbli: Oh, I may, I may jump in here or there just because as assistant director of the organization, I have at least tangential experience, but yeah, go ahead.

Ryan King: Okay and so it's like that person is stepping up on stage and then they're presented with a piano and you're going to go toe to toe with someone who has spent, at this point it's usually about 30 to 40 years, hiding, distracting and dazzling people and manipulating them in very, very subtle ways from asking the question, "Are you gay?" And so there's just no chance. And as far as this person, and I was that person, I'd had a good 30 some odd 37 years I guess at that point of a skill in staying under the radar, hiding who I was and diverting my spouse from the issue. And so she just didn't have a chance as far as- I think that's why it was maybe such a relief for her to hear the confirmation that I was gay. But I can understand

Ryan King: and I see a lot- I have a lot of exchanges with straight spouses who continue asking the question, not knowing that they're going up against, maybe it's more like a battle, against someone who's been a prize fighter all their lives. They're not going to land any punches because they just can't, they don't have any experience. This person has spent their entire lives hiding the fact that they are a gay male and they're just better at it and they'll use every tool possible and that includes some of these narcissistic tools like gaslighting, attacking, emotional abuse, and just to hide this fact that he is gay. Does that make any sense?

Kirstin Kalbli: It makes total sense to those of us who have lived it. I think it's a controversial thing to say and (Ryan: Controversial how?) and well I think there's the thing, I think so many times we, especially if we're an LGBT+ ally or someone who fully supports rights, equality, all of that, we spend a lot of time parsing our words so as not to put the term gay and narcissist in the same sentence. (Ryan: got it) And because that brings trouble (chuckle) and we have to qualify that I'll often times by saying, yes, of course not all gay men are narcissists. Of course not all narcissists are gay (Ryan: absolutely) but when you get the combination platter, and narcissism, again not a mental health expert, is a spectrum of behavior so you can have, and we all have narcissistic tendencies now

Kirstin Kalbli: and then, but you combine someone who's hiding something very deep, very core to their identity, something deeply personal to who they are, hiding it for a long period of time. Then you have, I think what you're saying, if I'm understanding correctly is that there's a collection of behaviors, gaslighting, script- flipping, projection denial, all of that get just are in the toolbox and you become really facile in using those tools and being able to say, look at this shiny thing over here, not actually going on over here. Is that what you're saying?

Ryan King: Yeah. I'm saying is that the pattern that I see, and I used this before I basically got caught and then admitted to it is, it follows a similar pattern which is sex starts tapering off or stops altogether. And the fact that the straight spouse comes to the Forum and is not blaming her husband- all of the women that I've interacted with think it's their fault and I don't think that that idea came from them, I think it came from husbands who are manipulating them into thinking it is their fault because the straight spouse she wouldn't need the Forum to ask those questions, she would just separate and divorce. Lots of people do that because there's a lack of intimacy, but I think what's insidious in these relationships is she feels like she has to fix the relationship.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right, fix herself . She feels like she has to fix herself in order to fix the relationship.

Ryan King: I've never read a post from a spouse who says, " My husband won't have sex with me, w hat a bastard he is." It's like, " My husband won't have sex with me because I gained weight after our daughter was born, or he's working a lot." There's a lot of excuses and maybe enabling on some level a nd I think that that comes from the husband spending his entire life manipulating people a nd he's then using those tools against his spouse because she's starting to question his sexuality.

Kirstin Kalbli: I'm just absolutely s o grateful, I guess, to be able to talk about this sort of core experience without having to dance around it, without having to parse words, without having to make sure that feelings are not hurt or et cetera or that we're- we know we're not painting with a broad brush. We're not talking about everybody. We're talking about this particular dynamic and the pattern that shows up in these male, female, gay, straight marriages and mixed orientation relationships. And I just, I'm so grateful that you're willing to come on and have a very frank honest and clear-eyed discussion about it. I want to take a quick break and then I want to keep talking about this idea because, it just to let our listeners know I think you've talked about yourself as a recovering narcissist, s o I want to talk about that more after a break.



Kirstin Kalbli: (music) Hey everyone, we want to take this moment to thank everyone who donated to make the new website for Our Path.org a reality. Your generosity means we can help people in new ways. We can provide more resources than ever before and we can reach more people who need our help. You made this website happen, and we could not have done it without you, but the work isn't over. Websites require upkeep and maintenance, podcasts need to be produced and general operations need to be funded. If you would like to contribute to Our Path, please head over to OurPath.org and click on, Give Support. (music stops) And we're right back with Ryan King. So before the break, Ryan, I brought up the word recovering narcissist and that's something you've used to describe yourself. Is that correct?

Ryan King: Absolutely. Yeah. 100%

Kirstin Kalbli: So why label yourself that? Why do you think you are a recovery- why do you think you were a narcissist or are recovering narcissist?

Ryan King: Well, that's a deep question. I think I would have to leave it up to a mental health professional diagnosed who I am now. (Kirstin: Yeah) But, and I can only speak from my experience, again I'm not a mental health professional, but I found that once I let go of this secret that I'd been keeping all of my life, which was gay. And particularly when I came out to my mother, I found that a lot of the lack of empathy, a lot of the narcissistic traits that I'd read about through exchanging with straight spouses through the Forum, "I was like, oh my God, their husbands are narcissists and then I was reading about this and I was like, oh my God, I'm a narcissist." But I found that a lot of those- once I let go of this big secret and accepted myself as a gay man and not seen it in a shameful way and actually seen it as a more beautiful and positive part of who I am. Once I let go of that shame, then I found that I could then empathize with people.

Ryan King: I could listen to people. I was doing a lot more things that were the complete opposite of what narcissists do. (Kristin: Right) So I think maybe that answers your question is to recovering. I, you know how- I don't know if you have pets at home, maybe dogs or cats. What animals tend to do is when they're wounded is they tend to hide the wound and then they tend to get aggressive, if not attack, when people try to treat their wounds. And I think that gay men, when we get cornered, it's sort of the same way, which is, we hide and then attack those who are trying to help us. And I think as well- intentioned as a lot of these straight spouses are, and we had a conversation before this, I hope you don't mind me disclosing that. Isn't that- (Kristin: Yeah)

Ryan King: I said that I think that's why once he has been confronted by his spouse, this is the gay or questioning or non-straight husbands, is that he almost sees his spouse as like the vet coming towards to treat this wound because it's been so scary and it's been so part of our existence that there's this fear that the procedure is going to be painful and that it's- and I think there's a fear of letting go of that shame and that self hatred that we've lived with our entire lives. I don't know if that makes any sense?

Kirstin Kalbli: It does to me. It would seem to me that if you- to certain extent, whatever the wound is, whatever the wound is, as a human being, we sometimes can get attached to our wounds and we sometimes can have a hard time seeing or conceiving who we would be without them. (Ryan: Exactly) And so letting that go, that concept of ourselves, whatever it is, can be really, really frightening, terrifying and especially if we're being pushed into it before we've decided we want to relinquish that identity, that wound, that concealment, whatever it is, then it makes sense that we could get aggressive if we're being sort of pulled in a direction that we haven't decided. You know usually if someone comes out they've decided or gotten real with themselves about whatever their personal hiding is that they've gotten real, that the cost of staying in authentic is too high. And so they realize that they have to be authentic because the cost of staying in authentic is too high. Until you get to that point, the cost of being authentic is too high.(chuckle) So you're going to be pissed at anybody who tries to confront you, bring that in authenticity up, hold a mirror up to that in authenticity, if you're still, you know, reaping the benefits and rewards of that in authenticity. Does that make sense?

Ryan King: It does and I think there's a common question that I get which is, "Why doesn't he just admit it?" And the way that I can put this in perspective for people who haven't struggled with their own sexuality, as I say, take the scariest, deepest, darkest secret about yourself, that you don't want to share and imagine if your spouse sits you down and you know that maybe by disclosing this your marriage will end, your life will end, you may be rejected by your friends and your family. And so it's like, "Are you gay? Why didn't he just answer yes?" And it's like the apprehension comes from a lifelong of fear, whether it's real or completely imagined that by disclosing this and accepting, this is that I'm vile, I'm dirty, I'm sexually perverted and my whole life is a lie. That's a big ask when you're asking someone to just admit that

Ryan King: and for people who don't understand that, particularly straight spouses, think about if anyone has a person, if they have an addiction themselves, or if they have anyone in their family who has addiction, there's a culture almost of denial around that addiction. And the hardest thing for the addict to say is that "I am an alcoholic or I am a shopaholic or I have a gambling addiction", (Kristin: right) Because quite often, a lot of times they don't think that that it is a problem. And so when the gay, when the questioning spouse has sat down and then they inevitably have the conversation, "Are you gay?" there's an author, Bill Damron, who I think you've had on the podcast. He and I are friendly and I loved his answer to that when his wife answered that- she asked him that question and he said, "I don't want to be." I think that's the honest answer. (Kristin: right) is that I know who I am, but I don't want to blow up your life, our kids' lives if they have children and, and change everything in my life because I've cradled this wound my entire life and it's become part of who I am.

Kirstin Kalbli: You know, I think I completely, just personally I have empathy for that and I have come to have empathy for my ex-husband around that. The wounding for I think a lot of straight partners, at least that I see in my work with the organization, for myself as well, I'll say that but it's not isolated to me, it seems to be common is the question of... I can have empathy for my closeted partner, spouse, or partner. I can wrap my brain around how difficult that must be, or I can work to do that, or try to do that. The hard part is feeling like there wasn't empathy for the straight partner. Like at any point, did you, well, I'll just ask you. At any point did you in your marriage, did you say, "Hmm, what what impact does this have on my wife? What impact does me protecting myself, protecting my secret, protecting my identity, what could that do to her? Does she have a right in all of this to decide for herself if she wants to be married to a gay man? Should I let her choose?" Does she- was there, was there thought of her?

Ryan King: I'm going to be honest that this may shock you, but no. Yeah, I was so wrapped up in my own. (Kristin: Right) And maybe this is narcissism, maybe it isn't, but I was so wrapped up in my own narratives (Kristin: Right) - and I can almost hear the posts and the messages I'm going to get through the Forum after this interview - I don't want to explain, mansplain away the terrible things that a lot of closeted, gay- in- denial husbands do. But no, I think this is my opinion, I think men have an innate ability to be very self centered almost to the expense of anything else. If you look at a man who just focuses on one task, there's an ability that men can just focus on one thing, no matter what that thing is, and then finish that and then compartmentalize so I think perhaps the correct word. So to answer your question, no. I was so wrapped up in my own stuff and then trying to contain my wife, tried to hide my sexuality and still function as a father and a businessman that I had almost no regard for my spouse. If I had any empathy or regard for her, I would've come out to her years before she confronted me.

Kirstin Kalbli: Thank you. Thank you. I think that is so- such an honest take because, here's the thing, I think as wives we get- like when there's defense offered for the behavior, the deception, the ...

Ryan King: Please let's talk about that. (Kristin: Yeah. Yes. Yeah. Yeah) Please let's talk about all the tricks. Let's talk about all the tricks. Please go ahead.

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah. We'll talk about that. Yeah, but I think when there are the, " Well, you know, I was, I was scared, I didn't want to lose you, I didn't want to lose..." like all of this kind of stuff. That is proffered as the sort of, you know, the defense's case, if you will, for why I didn't come out sooner or why I didn't tell you, or why (Ryan: ladies and gentlemen of the jury) ladies and gentlemen but I had these extenuating circumstances preventing me from telling my wife the truth or my husband, the truth or whatever. The thing is that wife has that question, "Did you have any empathy at all for how this might impact me during any of this time?" That you were, whether you were totally in denial, whether you were grappling, whether you were... at any point, you know that you were still... while I was still questioning, I wasn't sure, et cetera. That the wife just- we know like on some kind of level in our bones, that we were not a factor in your decision-making and that is a wounding that is so deep

Kirstin Kalbli: and so( tearful) well I'm surprising myself in getting emotional and I'm just going to let this...

Ryan King: I'm sorry if I triggered you. I'm sorry if I triggered you.

Kirstin Kalbli: No, No, No, you didn't, you didn't trigger me at all and I'm just going to let this be real because I'm just gonna let this moment be real.  
(tearful)

Ryan King: Yeah ok. Look, I think maybe what I would try to share here is that, I've never thought of myself for evil and I don't think that these men who are hiding their sexuality are evil. (Kristin: Right) What I lacked was I didn't know how to love myself because from the age of five when I came home from day camp and I told my sister and her best friend, Brenda, that I was in love with the male lifeguard and they told me that that was dirty and disgusting. And then in television, the only people that I saw that were gay were- this was the eighties and they were dying of aids and they had lesions and I thought gay, dirty. And the lack of empathy towards my spouse, I don't see it as me being a bad person. I hadn't- I didn't have the capacity to love, I just didn't. (Kristin: right) One therapist that I saw that changed my life with this, he said, "We all learn a spoken language, but we all learn an emotional language." (Kristin: right) And the emotional language that people who are closeted or denying or people who have addictions or anyone who's self-hating or self-harming, is self-hatred. And it's not that we don't love you, it's that I didn't have the capacity to love anyone else. I just didn't know how because I can only love others as much as I love myself.

Kirstin Kalbli: I think that that is very accurate and very true. And then I think as my emotion and vulnerability in that moment just displayed, that it makes sense on a logical level. Of course, we understand that if someone can't be vulnerable or loving or empathize with us, it's because they're probably not able to be vulnerable or loving or empathetic with themselves. That makes a tremendous amount of sense and the thing that is the thing that keeps me in this work and the thing that continues to be heartbreaking for me on a personal, but then also on a collective level, is the disconnect of not understanding how that feeling of, I wasn't considered in the most important relationship in my life, in the most important intimate relationship in my life, I was not considered. And that is a big hurdle to heal from, as you can just see from that very raw emotion that I just had, just even - and I'm well over a decade past my divorced, I've healed a lot of stuff,

Kirstin Kalbli: been a lot of therapy, spent a lot of money on it, right. And, and there are still things in there that are like, w ow, that is such a huge- to be used in some way to that level by your intimate partner, because there is a factor of use in here. I'm not, I'm not saying, you know, that it's completely mercenary, a lthough in some cases it absolutely is completely mercenary. But there is something that is a sense of being used to a high level by the person who you are most- supposed to be cared for by, your partner, your spouse, et cetera a nd that's a wounding that doesn't go away easily. And I think as back to what I was saying about why I continue to do this work and what continues to be heartbreaking, is alot of times when gay husbands come and say, " I just don't understand why my wife was so angry, I don't understand why she can't get past it." (Ryan: we can get into that) S o we've got a lot, we're still talking, w but let's go back to w e were talking about the ladies and gentlemen of the jury. (Ryan: Yes) And we'll talk about the why my wife is so angry, d on't worry listeners, I won't forget, w e'll go back to that. But we were- got sidetracked on the idea of ladies and gentlemen of the jury, t his is my case for why I had to do what I did, why I didn't...

Ryan King: Oh you mean why I've been acting out with other men you mean.

Kirstin Kalbli: Or why I a have been acting out with other men or, you know, we get the ladies and gentlemen of the jury a lot. Yeah.(laughter)

Ryan King: You mean a lot of the BS excuses that closeted, husbands use?

Kirstin Kalbli: I'm not going to say it, but you can say it.(laughter)

Ryan King: I don't know if we can swear on this. So okay...

Kirstin Kalbli: So, you can swear, I give you full permission.



Ryan King: So I think this will probably be the part- maybe this will be helpful to straight spouses who are listening to this. If they want to determine if their husbands, husbands are gay, there've been books that have been written about this, Joe Kort, (Kristin: we've had him on the show) you had him on the podcast. Dr. Joe Kort wrote a book of, I think, Is My Husband gay?, is the title.

Kirstin Kalbli: Yep, Is my husband Gay, Straight or Bi?

Ryan King: Yeah, exactly and so there are people who've written books about this, but I'm going to share what I see as the common pink flags that your husband is probably not straight. So the first is that usually the relationship starts as- could they meet quite young, usually in high school or maybe in college and it's initially a friendship rather than a sexual attraction. And I think that she's initially attracted because she's like, wow, this guy, isn't only interested in sex with me, which she misinterprets as, rather than them being of different sexualities, she sees that as alluring. And so, and then, often if he's from a religious background, he'll insist on they remain virgins until the wedding nights or until they're married, which is a cop- out because he's trying to avoid sex with a woman because he's not interested in sex with a woman. Usually he is a theater kid. I don't know how many times I've heard the word, " We met in show choir" and I'm like, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, show choir...

Kirstin Kalbli: He was the rehearsal pianist at my - at the musical of Godspell.(laughter)

Ryan King: Okay and then the first big disappointment, because usually he's using the excuse of "I want us to remain pure until we get married" or maybe if they have sex before premarital sex, is there's a disconnect that she can feel right away. There is no way that a woman can kiss a gay man. There was a no way there's, it's very, very difficult, if not impossible for a gay man to shake a sexual interest in a woman if he's purely a gay man. And so the kisses are dry and perfunctory. (Kristin: and performative) Yes and he- and then there's a sexual disconnect that he cannot fake it in the bedroom and I'm not sure if this was your experience, it was certainly mine because I had to imagine that I was having sex with men, and so women are extremely intuitive

Ryan King: and so there's that sexual disconnect from the beginning. (Kristin: Right) And then it gets muddled because we then become young professionals and we have kids and like you said, there's that cliché of, "Well, nobody has sex when they have kids, where too tired", which I think is wrong. There are lots of couples who have very active sex lives throughout their relationships right up until the very end. So I think that's an excuse that's convenient. Then he starts to explore his homosexuality through electronic means. So that means he starts getting- he gets very secretive with his technology, with his phone, with his iPad, with his computer. And then but things- because he has this whole other personality in the virtual world, eventually a pop-up comes up, there's a history that's left open, we can't completely lock things down and so he starts to explore his sexuality virtually safely.

Ryan King: Typically, a closeted husband will get a job where he'll travel a lot and then he eventually, he can only walk by the bakery so many times before he buys a cookie, and so the virtual then becomes the reality because then he has an experience with someone in the real world. And then once that happened in my relationship, once I'd acted and actually had sex with a man. The first time I'd had a sexual experience with a man, I was actually later, I was 38 or 39 and I was on a business trip. And then once that happens, there's a seismic shift. Normally that's when sex diminishes or completely stops in the relationship because he can no longer pretend now that he's accepted on subtle level, without sharing it with anyone, that he's sexually attracted to men and he's actually acted on it.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right. So that's the progression.

Ryan King: And then, yeah, sorry and then the classic progression is sex stops, she starts questioning why, he starts manipulating her to think that it's her fault but on the - I mean, these women are very intelligent and highly intuitive, but then they start looking for answers. And I've said this before, and I've gotten a lot of backlash for it. I say the fact that you were posting on the Straight Spouse Forum, is a pretty good prime facie case that your husband is gay because you probably Googled the question, Is my husband gay?, in order to find the Forum and then there are a number of steps that you have to go through in order to become- you have to create a membership, a profile, activate your membership and then first post. There are a lot of barriers to that and so by questioning that and wanting to get answers, there's a high probability that your husband is not straight.

Ryan King: So, (Kristin: right) and then she starts to question his sexuality and that's when things start getting very tense because he's usually the husband is quite comfortable living in this sexless relationship where, let's be honest, women in most relationships take on the burden of child-rearing, managing the household. Women do 90% of the work (Kristin: right) and so he's quite comfortable and now she's no longer sexually demanding. So, and men can be quite lazy both emotionally and physically and so this is a situation that he's quite comfortable with because he gets the cover of having a straight spouse and a straight existence and then he can have his "cake" on the side as well. It's when she starts really questioning his sexuality, that then he releases his sort of sometimes narcissistic arsenal on her, to keep her in check more or less. Does any of that make any sense?

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah. Yeah. That makes a lot of sense. And I'm glad you said it (laughter) and not me because it's one of the things that we kind of feel like we're screaming into the void about sometimes. I think straight partners feel like they're screaming into the void about what this dynamic really is. What's really involved in this dynamic and its- so to hear you say it to you, you say, I lived it, this is what I did, and this is what I see others doing and this is the pattern that I observe in your personal interactions with others in similar circumstances with straight wives, et cetera. You know, I think it's very validating and very affirming to have someone, I think, to have someone who lived on, if you will, the opposite side of the battlefield and not that it's a battle but sometimes this particular style of gay, straight, man woman relationship, it can be.

Kirstin Kalbli: And so for you to say yeah, I used all of these tactics, I deployed all of this, I did this pattern and I know I did it and it gets repeated over and over again. I think is a sort of a way for women to feel really validated, acknowledged and seen in what we go through. And I love what you said about, you know, it kind of gives women permission to say, you know what - when you say basically you're no match for him, he's been doing this for 30 years.

Ryan King: No, you're not going to out, you're not gonna do survivor. You're not going to outwit, out smart, and outplay someone who has been hiding anything, but has been hiding in this case, his sexuality, his attraction to men. Since most of the studies that I've read, and again I'm not a mental health professional, but most men start feeling their attraction in early childhood between ages five and seven. That's when he knows that he's been attracted to men and depending on the age and the environment that that man is raised, that boy is raised in, that's typically when we start hiding it.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right. Right. And so you get used to, I would imagine you get used to hiding, you get used to deflecting, you get used to look at the sparkly thing over here, not...

Ryan King: It's more insidious than that and this is my- so what becomes- what we're not looking for love from people, what we're looking for as gay men is validation, and we're looking for recognition and so this plays into... So this is another thing that's confusing for straight spouses. When that gay husband, as distant and cold and cruel as he can be when it's just the two of you, when he's on stage, he can play the best husband the most attentive because he's looking for that validation, that recognition from others because this is a role that we gay boys have been playing, if we choose to marry straight women, since we were children. And so there's this disconnect is- and that is a manipulation into itself because you'll get a lot of people saying, " Well, oh my God, you know, he seemed like such an attentive husband", and it's he's attentive when he's on stage. He's not attentive when it's just the two of you or when you're in the bedroom. There he doesn't care and he can be almost cruel. I shouldn't say he, I should say I, but when I was on stage and there were other people there, women were swooning because they were- I would make a big show of giving gifts to her. These were all manipulations and this was to trap her in our sexless, emotionally abusive relationship.

Kirstin Kalbli: Well, (pause) that's the first time on this podcast that anyone has basically said that.

Ryan King: Does that resonate with you? Was that similar to your relationship?

Kirstin Kalbli: It does resonate with me. I mean, I absolutely, yes. That it totally resonates with me. Absolutely.

Ryan King: And that, that is a manipulation. But do you mind if we talk a little bit about all these tricks, that closeted men use?

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah. Absolutely. Let's do it.

Ryan King: I don't know if you had some questions that you wanted to go over but this is something that I would like to discuss because I think it speaks directly to your viewership. (Kristin: Yep) Okay, so when she- when the evidence starts becoming overwhelming that he has either he's having cyber sex or he's having real-world sex, I consider both, I don't know if you agree. I think if someone is having virtual sex, I consider that cheating as well. Do you?

Kirstin Kalbli: Virtual sex. Yes. I do consider that cheating personally with another, with another person. Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

Ryan King: So let's go through maybe the top five, depending on how much time we have excuses that I hear all the time. The first denial pattern that you'll see with a with a gay-i n- denial questioning our closeted husband is, "I was just curious". I was just curious is the keyword is, "I was curious about gay sex and that's why I watched it online. I was curious, that's why I had my first sexual experience" And curiosity, and this sort of it just happened, are usually used within the same justification when she's found proof that he's been either on a gay hookup apps like Grindr, Scruff, Hornets or others, or he's been engaging in cyber or watching gay porn for example. (Kristin: Right) And, and that's just BS. Is that, I mean, curious is, and I've written this in the forum before, curious is, I was in college and I got drunk and I made out with my male roommate.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right or I- we got drunk in the dorm room and someone dared us to go look up gay porn. (Ryan: Like exactly) Yeah.

Ryan King: Curious, curious is, and I've written this before, it's like curious is trying something at the Chinese restaurant that's sort of on the spicy menu once, it's not gorging on the all D menu all day long. I mean, that's a little bit blunt, you know (laughter). Curiosity is like once, and then you're kind of like, "oh, that was fun" and then you kind of walk away from it. Obsession is where hours and hours of porn every day, engaging in cyber sex with men or having sex with men. It goes the infrequent and sort of once in a lifetime and then, "Ooh, well that was interesting but I'll never do that again for me", that's what curiosity is. (Kristin: right) If this person has been watching gay porn and having sex with men repeatedly over and over again, then that's more than curiosity. That's just a false hood and this idea that, oh, it happened just once, this is a minimization when people cheat either gay or straight or LGBTQ+ relationships. Cheaters often say it only happened once. That's false. I just, I consider that sort of like an iceberg. You know, nine tenths of it is under the water and so you've been - I only got caught once, or you only have proof that it happened once. (Kristin: Right) That's the way that I interpret that.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right. So you've given us a ton to think about in terms of these pink flags. In terms of some of these patterns of behavior and some of these - and quite frankly, I'm just going to say this, I'm going to articulate this, it's been kind of disappointing. We've had different psychologists and doctors and things like that on the show before. It's really been kind of disappointing not to have frank acknowledgment of the pattern of behavior that resonates as in the truth of the experience that so many women and some men have lived and experienced.

Ryan King: I'm glad that you brought that up. I'm glad that you brought that up because I've- often when you'll put up a podcast out, quite often it's discussed on the Forum, sometimes in not so flattering terms. I mean, it's never about you, but it's usually about the guests. (Kristin: Sure, sure) Let's look at one who fascinates me to no end, which is your interview with Dr. Malebranche . I think that was his name. (Kristin: Yes) Yeah.

Kirstin Kalbli: Dr. Malebranch, we did a two-part series. We did one where it was all about sexual health and STDS, which is completely factual, a ll medical. Anybody can listen to it anytime, if you're interested in, you know, just if you're dating. We did that because straight partners and partners of trans people are out there dating again. And maybe they're dating for the first time in 30 years and they don't know how the sexual sexually transmitted infection landscape has changed. And so we found an expert on sexually transmitted infections to come and talk about that a nd then the second interview we did with him was on men who have sex with men. So, and then...(S2Ep9,Ep10)

Ryan King: Which is an issue that Dr. Joe Kort talks about because he has this thesis that men can have sex with men and still identify as straight. (Kristin: right Yes) And this is incredibly confusing because I think-I 'm in my forties a nd so I'm not quite dialed in with the fluidity of what sexuality is with people who are sort of under the age of 30 but I- maybe I'm old fashioned in the way that I think that when a man has sex with a man he's gay. If he no longer has sex with his wife at the time, and maybe they haven't had sex in years, then I think that that's a sign that he's gay. If he watches only gay porn, then he's gay. If he fantasizes about gay men, then he's gay. And what a lot of these mental health professionals do



Ryan King: and I think this is to their credit rather than- they don't take into account that people could be lying to them. And so what they do is they take the facts as they interpret them, but they don't make a judgment. And Joe Kort when I talked to him, he admitted this and he said, " Ryan, if I could read who's lying to me and who isn't, I would be a millionaire." And so this is where I come in, because I know how easily I could lie about my sexuality because I'd been doing it since I was six years old. (Kristin: Right) And so now what I say to straight spouses more recently is- I don't talk about gay, straight, it's too triggering. What I do now is I asked the straight spouses as I say, " Okay, let's, let's rate your husband, not on his sexuality scale, but let's rate him on a scale of 1 to 10, based on the last five years of your relationship. Where is he as far as honesty? Where would you rate him as far as his honesty?" So 10 is a 100% honest all the time and forthcoming. Zero is, he's a pathological liar and five is in between. "So where would you rate him based on how he's disclosed all these things to you? Did he openly disclose this cheating, the porn that this, or did he lie about it?" And usually these men are clocking about between a two and a four I'd say on the honesty scale.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right and zero being - tell me which one was the pathological liar side, the zero? (Ryan: The zero, zero or one) So they're closer to zero is what you're saying.

Ryan King: Yeah. But these women love their husbands and so they don't want to say my husband's a monster. So they'll usually go, you know, but lower on the scale, less than a five. (Kristin: Yep) And then I'll say, " Okay, so now that you've identified that he's dishonest, how can you then assume that he's being honest about his sexuality? It's the most triggering and damaging thing that he's dealt with his entire life. Should we not then apply the same scale of honesty?" So if he says I only cheated once and you rate him at about a sort of a two or three, then you can sort of ramp up the frequency of that based on how honest he's been about things in the past. (Kristin: Yes. Yes) Okay so, and then= but what I find troubling in these situations is that somehow there's a reset

Ryan King: and then, okay, now he's scoring at 10 out of 10 on honesty because now I know and everything he's telling me from here on out is honest. And I'm going to talk about something that's controversial, which is usually when the straight spouse is on the verge of really seriously starting to think about leaving, or she's even brought it up with him, maybe we should separate, maybe we should divorce. Systematically, this is usually when the questioning spouse or the gay-in-denial spouse talks about, sexual abuse history. Which he's never brought up before, he's never alluded to. And I've gotten a lot of flack because, as someone who knows what a lot of these men are capable of, and again, I'm not judging the person, I'm just judging him on a scale of what his honesty is defined by his wife.

Ryan King: Is that what I tell straight spouses, as I say, you can be skeptical about this because it just fits the narrative too. Well, what it does is it shows him as the victim and then it absolves them of all of this behavior. (Kristin: right) It makes questioning his sexuality, or even talking about his sexuality, taboo, completely taboo. (Kristin: Now you can't, you have no room to..) and it activates every codependent tendency with the straight spouse to try to save him. And it just fits too perfectly in as a manipulation and as someone who is a recovering manipulator and narcissist, and I've gotten a lot of heat for this is, because we, especially in modern times, is that we're not supposed to question whether someone's story of sexual abuse or rape, or whether a sexual assault is true or not. We can't because it's seen as being insensitive.

Ryan King: And you alluded to this with gay lesbians relationships where the female spouse then says, "This feels like I'm being sexually assaulted" which completely changed the narrative and then it puts the power back into the questioning spouses hands. (Kristin: right) And unfortunately, what happens is Stevie Wonder is now driving the bus because you have someone who's pathologically dishonest, who is now in full control of the relationship again, and is now, dictating how he or she is going to define his or her sexuality in this case, he is. And so when I hear - it's happened too many times and it's happened in the same conditions and with the same personality type for - and the only thing that I say to straight spouses is I know that this is going to, this is going to trigger you to try to want to save him, but you have to attach the same honesty scale to his history of lying about his sexuality that you do to this. And then what the couple does is normally he starts demanding that they go to couples counseling, which is bewildering to me because if he has been sexually assaulted, that is something that he has to explore with a professional by himself but he'll refuse to do that.

Kirstin Kalbli: Oh, wow.

Ryan King: Is any of this making any sense?

Kirstin Kalbli: Making a lot of sense and it's actually making me question, it's making me wonder why? Why mental health professionals have not been able to get at this, in this sort of deep, honest way?

Ryan King: Because I think mental health professionals are trained, you'd have to ask a professional for this, but the ones when I was treated for depression- because near the end of when I was seriously contemplating separation and divorce, I was contemplating suicide as a way out. As many men who were about to come out do, particularly men who are coming out later in life. (Kristin: Right) And so, I don't think that- I think that the mental health professionals that I've interacted with, either I'm just asking them questions about our situations or as a patient, what they have to do is they have to take what I'm saying at face value. They're not there to question my honesty which is where I think that I have the right to do that because I know how dishonest a lot of these men can be. And so when I hear that, he brought up, he said " That he was abused, as a child " and I say, " Okay, look, I hear that and I validate that. Do you think he's lying? Is there a possibility that he's lying about this because it just fits too well?"

Kirstin Kalbli: Right or even if there was abuse, it's not necessarily like the way they're using it in that moment is not appropriate.

Ryan King: Well, look, I can comment on that and you don't have to strike this because I've heard this from gay men who are in my situation. I've had as many interactions as I've had with straight spouses, I've had just as many, if not more, with gay men who have lived through my situation. (Kristin: Right) And the common conclusion is that, it's sort of a hangover from conversion therapy, is that religious groups and conversion therapy, which is mostly faith-based, they have for decades have treated, homosexuality as a curable mental illness. And so that it has to have been created by something that's external to the person. For example, the cliches are the dominant mother, the effaced reserved father. I mean, who didn't have a talkative mom and a dad who was more quiet.

Kirstin Kalbli: Who didn't have a dad who was...(laughter)

Ryan King: Who was like a mom was like, " Shut up, Gerald, y ou know, I'm trying to make a point." (Kristin: right) And so that describes this it's so general. And then it goes into this hangover of conversion therapy or reparative therapy or religious groups that when they won't validate that people are born gay a nd they say that it has to come from some form of abuse. And for the men that I've interacted with, the minority of them who have had sexual abuse and they've accepted it, a nd they say," I was, I was a gay boy who was abused. I wasn't abused and then became a gay boy." That's the way that they interpret it. (Kristin: Right, right) And so I'm weary about dishonest husbands, if not pathologically dishonest husbands bringing this up at the 11th hour when they're losing control of their relationships for the first time. (Kristin: Right) And, and then it too neatly changes the dynamic, the power goes back to him, s he goes back into the role of trying to save him and fix him a nd then it neatly ties a bow over the issue of, we can no longer discuss my sexuality because it's too triggering for me. It's just too perfect to fit.

Kirstin Kalbli: She's she has no room to maneuver in that scenario. None at all.

Ryan King: No, I mean what and again, think about the husband onstage, h e's thinking now, and I hope this isn't too shocking, h e knows that there's- that the relationship might come to an end. And he' typically, and I've interacted with lots of gay men in this situation, h e's starting to prepare his exit. And so what he's starting to do is he's thinking about- because the currency for a lot of gay men in denial is validation and recognition. Imagine the barrier for a straight spouse then telling her best friend's sister, family, mother, "W ell, you know, John, I left John because he's gay and then they find out well, but he was gay because he was sexually, he was assaulted when he was a child, h e was abused." I mean, what a scarlet letter that would be for- then all everybody hears is, wow,

Ryan King: she left him when he needed her the most. And it just works to neatly in trapping her in the relationship a nd so I guess my point being is that look, believe what he's saying on face value with reservations but that part of his life is not for her to fix. Couples c ounseling does not address the issue of sexual abuse, whether it's real or fabricated. (Kristin: Right) And, he has to get counseling on his own to deal with it a nd you can't heal him for it, h e has to want to heal from it .

Kirstin Kalbli: Right, some of- one of the other things that you said earlier was so interesting to me is like when you look at kind of the scale of deception and early on he might be a two or four, but now he's disclosed a nd now he's a 10 in terms of honesty, et cetera. Like I'm not...

Ryan King: Yeah, it whitewashes all of it.

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah, I'm not sure that actually learning to be honest works that way. Like, it isn't a switch being flipped. I think that even in my own life, being honest about various things and practicing vulnerability and practicing selling, what's the saying, what's true for me to the people that I love, has been a process that I've learned over years. So I'm not sure that a switch has flipped and now it's like everything, I was dishonest and cagey and hiding and things like that a nd now all of a sudden, I am this 100% honest person all the time about everything. So, I think you bring up a really good point in being able to sort of gauge a person's honesty. I mean- and that has such implications for straight partners, right? Like one of the things after this, as you begin to question whether or not you can never tell if anybody's ever lying to you ever again or not.

Ryan King: I can imagine. Yeah. You mentioned your former husband duping another woman into marrying him. So...

Kirstin Kalbli: Right and of course I saw that and went, " Oh my God, I guess I'm"- I suspected that he was gay, I had confronted him, he denied all that, but I saw that- I was like, "Oh my gosh, I'm fricking crazy. You know, I like he not gay, he wouldn't..."- because in my mind, as a woman, it was just so inconceivable that someone would marry somebody that they didn't love. That just didn't, that did not register when I was 19, it didn't occur to me to be on the lookout for someone who was, you know, if I was in the theater, we were in the theater. So, you know, if you were gay, you were out. And we were in a pretty progressive space in our high school theaters. High school, college years was when all of our friends, our theater friends were coming out.

Kirstin Kalbli: And the way I very simplistically and naively really calculated was, "If you're gay, you're either coming out right about now or if you're gay and in the closet, you're certainly not going to be looking for a woman to marry because eww", Right, so that was my calculus. So it didn't even occur to me to be on- that anybody would marry somebody that they weren't interested in or attracted to, just to hide or to- because they were in denial. It wasn't on my radar and I think that's what happens to a lot of people is that it's not on their radar to even know to look for that or to be on lookout for that. And then this happens to you and you get on the other side of it and you go, " Oh my gosh, I don't even know if I can trust myself to determine if anyone is lying to me about who they are or about anything."

Ryan King: I can imagine. I can imagine. It's so disorienting because, I don't think, and other straight spouses who have divorced and are now out of that situation, they don't realize how smoky their house was before the flames came out because it's a very gradual process. (Kristin: Right) And it's also crazy making because being gaslit for so many years and worn down and it's exhausting and it's exhausting and so I understand. I understand about being gun-shy. There's one thing that I'd like to discuss before we end is how do you know if your husband's cheating because there's some very obvious telltale signs that I like to discuss.

Kirstin Kalbli: I want to circle back to something before about when the gay spouse is like, "Why is my wife so mad?" You know, when all it all comes out in the wash and everything, and then she's angry for the next 15 years. So, I want to talk about that and then I want to just follow up and see how things are with your ex wife now. (Ryan: sure, okay) We're going to take a quick break. We'll be right back with more Ryan King. (music) Hey, everyone. OurPath, formerly the Straight Spouse Network, is looking to add new support contacts to expand our volunteer force. Support contacts are the people who reach out to Straight Partner(s) and Partner(s) of Trans People in those critical days, post discovery or disclosure support contacts are the heart and soul of OurPath and we need more of them. If you remember those early weeks and months in this process, you know, how critical, compassionate, neutral, nonjudgmental support can be. And if you're far enough along in your own healing, that you are ready to be there for someone else, we hope you'll join us. Visit [OurPath.org](http://OurPath.org) and click on become a support contact under Give Support to learn more.(music ends)

Kirstin Kalbli: And we're back with Ryan King. Ryan this has just been such a refreshing freewheeling uncensored conversation. I really appreciate it. It's probably going to be controversial. There's probably going to be a lot of dust kicked up with it but I definitely appreciate you coming on to talk about it. So we want to talk about how to, in your estimation, how you tell if your husband is cheating.



Ryan King: Yeah, there there's this I have a lot of experience with. Okay. When - let me use myself as an example. And so when I knew- there's a perception of the closeted husband looking in at the gay community that you have to have certain traits in order to be accepted sexually within the gay community. And so the tell-tale signs are; he's going to start working out like a fiend before he has his sexual debut, for example. And this is when he's moving, not to sort of like verted sexual experiences, † his is when he's looking for a sexual partner, if not a life partner. So he's- you're going to see an almost obsessive interest in physical fitness and then his appearance is going to change, contact lenses or corrective surgery. You're going to see a new hairstyle, y ou're going to see body shaving because these are the standards that he perceives as being the standards for someone who's sexually active in the gay community. And so if your husband is suddenly after years of being surfing the sofas, now he's cross-training like a mad-man then you know that he's probably getting ready for his sexual debut or he's on the market, so to speak. And you're going to see a change in a lot of flashy u nderwear's going to start showing up in discrete packages at your place.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right and different underwear than you've been used to seeing before, maybe slightly tighter. (laughter)

Ryan King: You may find the odd sex toy. You might, you may find his tickle trunk. Lube is required for gay men to have intercourse. You'll probably see Viagra because it's very damaging and I'm not excusing gay men but it's very hard - imagine any person as a straight person being forced to have sex with the same sex, years after years after years, that can be very sexually damaging to a straight person. And it's the same damage that's done to a gay person, although there is consent to it. (Kristin: Right) And so with a man is going to manifest itself probably in erectile dysfunction and so you'll probably see some erectile dysfunction drugs, discreetly kept in the car or found in the medicine cabinet but all of this is hidden rather than out in the open. And then you're going to see a lot of sort of unexplained absences. Another tell-tale sign is, and this happens a lot with gay men, quite often gay men will, closeted gay men who are family men, they'll start dating or seeing other gay men, almost like a Brokeback Mountain situation because they deem those men as safe. And they'll sometimes be as bold and go so far as to introduce that new partner or friend to his spouse. Whereas previously, before he didn't have any male friends, that's another tell-tale sign.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right. That's yup. I can see that one. Also enemas, correct? Like you might find an enema.

Ryan King: Yeah. In order for, I hope this isn't too graphic, in order for- gay men are usually broken into three categories; which are tops, which are- I always say that's the car, the bottoms are the garage and then there are men who can be versatile, could be either the car or the garage.

Kirstin Kalbli: I love that. I haven't heard that analogy before. (laughter) I was just going to go there and be like the tops do the penetrating, the bottoms do the region or the baseball analogy, the pitcher and the catcher .

Ryan King: I'm trying to keep this clean. I'm trying to keep this as family friendly as possible.

Kirstin Kalbli: Exactly, Let's hope nobody's listening with kids in the car. If you're doing that, you know, too late. (laughter) right. So, okay. That makes sense. So yeah, you got the cards.

Ryan King: There's going to be a physical transformation because he's out there dating a nd this will typically occur after - this is again based on my own relationship and based on my experiences and exchanging with over the years with straight spouses. This usually happens after about the third, fourth or fifth breakdown which is confrontation about some gay activity denial and then it goes back to normal or they're not talking about it. And so after about the third, fourth or fifth time, and she's given him the ultimatum. He's maybe come up with the Hail Mary, whether it's true or false, that he was sexually abused, maybe they're moving towards counseling. He's being very - narcissists are very intuitive to people, a nd I'm not saying all gay men in this situation are narcissists, but men who've been hiding their sexuality t heir entire lives are extremely intuitive to other people's emotions because we have to be . That's how we deflect and dazzle and deny. And, and then you'll see this, this physical transformation, because unfortunately he's probably back on the market and looking actively looking for a partner.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right. Right. And when you're dealing with someone of this caliber of- I want to say they can manipulate the couples therapist and they can manipulate their own therapy.

Ryan King: Oh, such a good point, 100%. And, I listened to your other podcast, y ou can tell that I'm a fan, a nd I forget who the doctor was, who was a specialist in narcissistic personality disorder, codependency...

Kirstin Kalbli: Ross Rosenberg. Yeah.

Ryan King: Yes and he said, and I'm glad that he said this, that even he has been manipulated by narcissists because- and again I'm not making the link between- and I like what he said, and I echo what he said and I believe what he said is that, "I don't think that people are- show all of these pathologies that may or may not be narcissism." Again, if someone wants to find out if their spouse is a narcissist, they should talk to a mental health professional to diagnose that person. (Kristin: Right) Don't take my word for it. But I don't want to say that all people who are denying their sexualities suffer from are sociopaths and narcissists. (Kristin: Right) But I like the point that your former interviewee had his, he said, these someone's sexuality doesn't cause narcissism, nor does it happen, vice versa. They just have, it's like saying that someone is a blue-eyed narcissist. It just, it has nothing to do with our sexuality is independent of the narcissism.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right. It's just that the sexuality is the thing that the narcissism covers like versus a gambling addiction or- which is why it gets really confusing for the straight partner. It can be very difficult to tease apart the experience of having a gay husband and having a narcissistic husband. It can- because the lies are around the sexuality. Does that make sense? Do you see what I'm trying to say?

Ryan King: And you were asking about couples therapy and so to answer that question is, this does not resolve anything in a gay, straight relationship. (Kristin: Right) Because, and I'm not sure if that was your experience, so we as a culture, what we do is when we have problems with our relationships, we go see our pastor, or we go see a counselor. It's just the script that we all follow. What I encourage straight spouses to do is for the first 90 days when there's been conflict, is they should go to individual counseling. Because what happens and this is the example that I use is; your husband is drowning in a swimming pool and he doesn't know how to swim and couples counseling is you getting in the pool with him and then he just latches onto you. (Kristin: Right) And so, so what happens often in this...

Ryan King: Did you go through couples counseling? (Kristin: Of course) Okay. What it - usually the two things typically happen, and this was my experience, and this is what I've seen time and time again through the exchanges on the Forum, is that it becomes, huge and medically validated, exercise in blame shifting. Whereas all you talk about is his sexuality. The focus is on him and everything is her fault. And quite often, because we're so adept at manipulating other people, quite often, we get through either fabrication, exaggeration, or just through distorting the facts. We often recruit that person to our side, into saying, "Look, this sexuality issue is off, is off - I mean, we can't talk about this. It goes beyond, it's too early" and then there's the blame shift that she starts thinking, well yeah, maybe everything wrong in our relationship is my fault.

Kirstin Kalbli: Right.

Ryan King: I don't know if that was your experience.

Kirstin Kalbli: Oh, for certain but in my case, I was actually seeing somebody- well what had happened was I confronted him, he had denied. Actually, what I had said was after a sexual rejection in the bedroom, I'd said, "Are you gay?" And he goes, and it just came out of my mouth, I wasn't even planning on asking it. Of course there's things that, you know, had given me the thought before then but- and he goes, "Why?" and I go, "If you're gay, you owe it to me to let me out of this marriage." And he goes, "Do you want out of this marriage?" And I go, "If you're gay, yes." And he goes, then he takes a minute, he pauses and he goes, "I'm not gay." And I completely didn't know what to, I didn't believe him, I didn't disbelieve him, but I didn't believe him. And what I did was then I separated from him. And I was in a show, I was an actor, my co-star was hot, I knew it- was like all of a sudden, you know, like, what did you say, you can only walk by the bakery so many times before you go in. Right. In my case, what I did was I separated from him. I said, "Look, I don't know what's going on in our relationship. I'm separating from you. I'm going to- I need to date other people because I need something to compare this to."

Ryan King: Absolutely, I don't think- you weren't just walking in front of the bakery, you came out of the desert and the first thing you saw was a bakery.

Kirstin Kalbli: That is exactly the metaphor. I came out. I'm totally using that. (Ryan: or a well, or a well) I came out of a well, exactly (Ryan: of a drought) of a drought, an empty well, and the first thing I saw was a bakery. And I said, heck yeah, I'm going to - and I told him, I said, "I'm going into that bakery." Like I said, "You need to know I'm separating from you. This is what's going to happen."

Ryan King: And let me guess, then he weaponized that cheating.

Kirstin Kalbli: He absolutely weaponized it as cheating. Oh my God, he turned into the town crier, you know, our neighbors on either- our dentists knew Kristin cheated on me.

Ryan King: Because he was again, back on stage. This gels with what I was saying before. I totally.. Yeah... I'm not surprised.

Kirstin Kalbli: And then also, and then I was the nymphomaniac who just wanted hot sex and I was a very shallow person. And how dare I reject him for some, you know, some walking sex on the stick actor guy. Right? And how dare I reject this robust, you know, wonderful intellectual husband I had for some...

Ryan King: Hope that was the best sex of your life.(laughter)

Kirstin Kalbli: It got way better after that I, it...

Ryan King: Did you, do you mind if I ask a question? Did you feel guilty about that?

Kirstin Kalbli: It's a complicated answer, I do. I felt - yes, I bought the shame- I swallowed the shame pill that I had cheated on my husband and was, you know, he did a very good job of telling the whole family, telling the neighbors,

Ryan King: He was a concert pianist, and...

Kirstin Kalbli: I bought that pill I like I have just done the most horrible unforgivable thing, I'm a cheater, I'm a scarlet woman, I'm, you know, I'm a whore.

Ryan King: It's quite common that. I've had exchanges with other straight spouses who they after a few exchanges, they'll say, "Well, and I cheated" and I'm like, of course you did, you were sexually starving.

Kirstin Kalbli: You're starving. And you can't...

Ryan King: I'm surprised - Dan Savage is, he's a gay writer.

Kirstin Kalbli: I listened to him, listen to him all the time. Yeah.

Ryan King: And Dan Savage, I loved that he flipped a script on monogamy. Is that he said, "You know, when you find out that your grandfather at age 80 cheated on your grandmother once while he was in the war, that's not someone who's a bad person. He's actually really good at monogamy. He's actually really good at monogamy because the only strayed once." (Kristin: Right. Right.) And this idea that in the face of these husbands who are emotionally abusive, are sexually starving you and there's zero intimacy. (Kristin: Right) And the idea of - no one would ever, no one would ever begrudge you a glass of water because you were dying of thirst and sex and sexuality can be as much of a necessity emotionally to us. And so I, you know what, I applaud that affair. I think you had every right to do that.

Kirstin Kalbli: Well, I truly have come full circle. And, (Ryan: good for you) and now I, you know, it launched me on a, quite a trajectory. One day maybe there will be a podcast just about the things I've uncovered on my personal sexual journey that are so enlightening and absolutely tremendous. But I feel like...

Ryan King: Look at the difference between the way that we're talking about what you did... And did your husband cheat on you? I'm assuming he did.

Kirstin Kalbli: Well, he did not cheat on, well, let me put it this way, I do not. (Ryan: not that you knew) not that I knew and I actually don't believe he did. I do know for a fact that he did cheat on his second wife robustly.

Ryan King: Okay, but look at the different way that were - you didn't come to me and say, let's flip the script here - you didn't come to me and say, "Well, I had an affair because, I was abused. I had an affair because I was curious." I had an affair because all of these justifications ring false and hollow when we're using them for your situation because you're an honest person. And yet a society's tying itself into knots to explain away why men are having sex with other men. It's a double standard and it's totally unfair.

Kirstin Kalbli: Total double standard and you have to work really hard as a woman to get out of that shame box. Because...

Ryan King: I think Joe Kort, where I agree with him, I didn't agree with everything that he said. (Kristin: Sure. Yeah) But I agree that he said that when, and he talks a lot about bisexuality, which is a whole other podcast, but he said, women who are sex workers are working pornography, it's just expected that they're going to have sex with other women, but they're not labeled as lesbians. And he said, the minute that a man has sex with both women and men, then we label him as gay. (Kristin: Right) And he said, it's just a ridiculous, double standard.



Kirstin Kalbli: And I also think, you know, there's so much more permission, culturally, this is my personal opinion, that there's so much more permission for women to be sexually fluid. There's not- it doesn't make sense to me personally, that men wouldn't be, you know, more sexually fluid that there isn't more room for men to be more sexually fluid. So...

Ryan King: At least to here in Europe, that's changing. I think, I don't know how it is in America.

Kirstin Kalbli: I think it's, beginning to change and so I think there's more room around that. We strayed a little bit, (Ryan: no sorry, that's me, my fault) but I want to, no, no, no, I it's totally fine. The last question I want to ask you before we close and I want to ask you this question, and then I want to just see how you and your ex-wife are doing now. (Ryan: Yes) You know, one of the things we talked about before, but just briefly was the- a lot of times after it all comes out in the wash, and if there's been a divorce and you know, it's 10 years down the road and there's some effort at a blended family, or they tolerate each other at their daughter's wedding or whatever, you know, and the gay husband just says, "My wife is so angry still, it's 10 years from now."

Kirstin Kalbli: And it's like, there's just this total non- understanding, I think, which goes back to what I got emotional about before was the disregard, the level of disregard and that's the wounding that takes so long to heal to me. And I'm just wondering, and I wish I could convey to the gay husbands if, assuming that they do care, that level of not having been considered and how is this impacting- Does she get it- You know, one of the things I often say is, "That it, you know, it's not that my husband was gay, it wasn't even that he was closeted, it's that he didn't, knowing what he knew, set me free, to find real, fulfilling love, and a sexual partnership with someone who could reciprocate, who could desire me, who could actually fulfill those needs that he knew I was having, because I was asking for them." You know, I was asking for intimacy, I was asking for sex and knowing what he knew. To not say, you know, what she deserves to find a man who can actually give her all of those things that she desires and wants, and that he didn't let me go to find that, that's the offense.

Kirstin Kalbli: And to me, for me, that's the offense. And, and that is the thing that took me the longest to heal from and so that is the thing (Ryan: The deception?) No, that he didn't let me go.

Ryan King: Oh, I see that he didn't...

Kirstin Kalbli: In that kempst he fact that he didn't let me go was because he chose his closet over- he chose his comfort zone in his closet over my life until I chose my life over his closet. And so the fact that he wasn't able to, even for a moment, think outside of his closet, how is this impacting her, maybe she deserves a hug, you know, because I was asking him for a sexual relationship, I twisted myself into knots. And you would think that at some point, if he had cared about his wife, that he might have said, "She deserves a man who can reciprocate, s he deserves a man who can love her fully, who can desire her, who can..." - and the fact that he didn't is the wounding. And I had to work a really long time to accept that and just be like, okay, that's exactly what, you know, he just wasn't capable. But I think a lot of gay husbands when they sit there and say, " My wives are still angry 20 years later, and I can't comprehend it and I don't understand why she's still so mad..."

Ryan King: Okay. So he's almost, he's almost offended that she's still angry at what happened in the relationship.

Kirstin Kalbli: Correct, that's what I'm talking about. Okay. Yep.

Ryan King: Okay, and do you want me to respond to that?

Kirstin Kalbli: Yes, please.

Ryan King: Okay, there's a lot to unpack there. Okay, first what I'm-I think the relationship from the outset is fundamentally unsound. I think if, again if most straight spouses- I think when they're questioning their husbands' sexuality, I think they have to turn the narrative away from it being all about him and focusing 100% on herself. And so what I suggest straight spouses do is; I want you to write down, you know, love for me means or marriage for me means, and those sentences, or even be more direct than write a help wanted ad for what your husbands should be, and assume that you're interviewing husbands and focus on your own well-being, with a therapist or by talking to your family, focus on a present on yourself. And here's my point, is that I think from the outset, I think that they, the couple is they are together for the wrong reasons.

Ryan King: He's with her because she has invested all of her time, love and energy in him. The relationship from the outset is all about him. And I think from- I don't want to analyze you, what you said at the beginning is that I think you were kind of dazzled by your boyfriend then. (Kristin: Yeah) and I think that's quite common and "I'm so lucky" and this- and so from the outset, even before marriage, then it becomes all about him. And so I think that quite often a lot of these straight spouses are co-dependent and co-dependent live 100% for others, almost to the detriment of their mental health, their physical health and well-being. So I think that even before the relationship begins, I think there's some level of codependency because and so it's a perfect fit. It's peanut butter and jelly...is a burger and fries is that, he was looking for someone who wants to make the relationship all about him and she's looking for someone who she can fawn over.

Kirstin Kalbli: Or help, or however that codependent script goes, whether you're the rescuer or you're the fawner, or you're the dedicated supplicant, however, whatever those archetypes are of that codependent relationship. In a sense, like you can't have a secret that big in a relationship and not have it be a narcissist because when your secret is that big and everything goes into maintaining that secret all of the energy and the relationship just naturally- it's like it gravitates towards that one pole, you know, that one individual and that's inherently a narcissistic and energy exchange.

Ryan King: I agree. But they're fighting, you're fighting for two different things in these broken relationships. What he is fighting for is the status quo. What she is fighting for is to fix him and let him live up to what her ideal man. (Kristin: Yes) So there's a disconnect and I think that you're justifiably angry- you can be angry until the end of your lives because of all the crap that we put you through (Kristin: Right) and the mental abuse, the sexual neglect, the lying, the deception. But I'll give you the gay man's view of this, which is not going to help you, it may even make you angry, so I hope you're ready. (Kristin: Oh, I'm good. Go for it.) Okay, what I hear from the gay husbands and I've been guilty of doing this is, they shift the blame onto the wife yet again or the ex-wife...

Kirstin Kalbli: Is she can't get over it, s he's bitter, s he's, you know...

Ryan King: It's more insidious than that. It- the way that he justifies it to friends and family is, " Well, she knew on some level, she had to know that she was part of this grand bargain." And whether it's true or not a lot of these closeted husbands, particularly if they're from very evangelical communities, he often discloses that he is attracted to men, but you don't know how he discloses it, but then he weaponizes that and he says, " Well, she knew before we were married, that this is who I was."

Kirstin Kalbli: Yup, yup, yup. We talked about it. Yep.

Ryan King: So she knew what she was getting into, again, it's her fault, blame shift, blame shift, blame shifts. (Kristin: Right) And, and so I think women tend to be very loving and empathetic. Men tend to express, I think we have one note, which is anger and violence and so, and that- and we also have very delicate egos, typically men, whether gay or straight, we can't be wrong. And that's why we sometimes prey on you and we say, "Well, she knew she had to know on some level or, oh, she knew about the cheating and she accepted it." It's somehow becomes her fault. Now to answer your issue about the anger. The narrative then becomes well, and this is the way that I see it now because I think maybe I see the reality bit more is, I think what he's trying to say as well, "She knew before this, I abused her for 25 years and I gave her the house, so I'm good." You know, it moves into like, "Oh my God, I can't believe she's fighting me in this divorce." (Kristin: Right) I was on porn five, six hours a day and I was going to peep shows or gay saunas or whatever...

Kirstin Kalbli: I was having sex with men while she was.. I was having sex with men while she was eight months pregnant with our third child.

Ryan King: Yeah and "Now wait, now she doesn't want me to see the kids?" Of course, she doesn't want you to see the kids because she doesn't know who you're going to introduce the kids to- but that's the idea of Bennett. We weaponize this idea of, "Well, this is just another angry woman who wants full custody" and so these are often very messy divorces (Kristin: very messy) and so I think the husband, I think, and men tend to do this in general is that, "I'm now out and everyone's accepted it so you just have to, you just have to catch up to me. Like you, why are you not okay with this in 48 hours?"

Kirstin Kalbli: And if you're not okay in 48 hours, you're homophobic.

Ryan King: And then that becomes the weapon, the weaponized homophobia. And as I said before, when we had chatted before this is, I love that comment that a woman had- I'm not going to swear- but she said, "Where's my F and parade?" Is that I can understand the anger is that this, sociopath, this narcissist, this delinquent husband, this cheater, this pathological liar, and now he gets a flag and a parade. I mean, WTF, like what's going on? So I understand the anger and my ex-wife was very angry after we split, which I understand.

Kirstin Kalbli: Which brings us back -y ou know, we - I feel like we could talk, we could do a whole other episode and maybe we'll have to, we'll see what kind of response we get, w e'll see what kind of energy this kicks up. But you know, this is being recorded in June, which is pride month, which many straight partners really grapple with, they grappling with the parade a nd they grapple with, you know - like they may even have LGBT+ kids. They're like, "Y ou know, I'm happy for my kids, that they can be who they are. I'm pissed at my spouse. I'm pissed. I'm pissed that, you know I hadn't lived in a mixed orientation relationship and didn't know it for 15 years. You know, I lost the best years of my life to this person."

Ryan King: I lost my by best friend. I lost my partner...

Kirstin Kalbli: my best friend. I'm not young anymore a nd I... All of that comes up for every single pride, e very single June straight partners have to process the cheering and the parade a nd, you know, the memes that come around because we have a whole other...

Ryan King: or the Facebook posts where suddenly he has a pride parade, a pride flag, or he's there with his new partner and everyone's saying how great it is. Yeah. It's very triggering.

Kirstin Kalbli: How courageous, when...

Ryan King: She's there, like, where's my F-ing parade?

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah. She's like, I bore this man's three children and (laughter)

Ryan King: Yeah and supported him and supported him for most of our relationship.

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah, so I think it's wonderful to have you acknowledge that. So before we close, just circle this back around to your ex-wife. How are things with you guys now? You have kids together, you know, are - is it amicable? Is it still hostile? Is, or is there still, you know, fire being, you know, exchanged across the battlefield occasionally? What's happening there?

Ryan King: Yeah. No, very, very friendly and - but we're not friends. That was an adjustment that I, that we had to make, I'll say I had to make, because I don't want to speak for her. I did something that I thought was helpful, is that after- I was the one who asked to divorce because I was- for different reasons and I insisted us on getting counseling to work through the details of the divorce so that we could talk about everything before we finally split. And I think that was maybe one of the few good decisions that I made and also the counselor that we saw was also a child psychologist. So we focused also on our children and how this was affecting them and what we should do and how we should handle my coming out to the kids as well.

Ryan King: I wanted a professional opinion on that. (Kristin: Right) And so to answer your question, we were friendly. We're co-parenting. I, she, luckily she, we live in Europe, we live in her home country and she still lives in her hometown. So she had a family network that was very supportive. They were very, very loving and welcoming with me as well and in Europe people tend to speak more openly about their emotions, depending on what country they're from. But she told them everything, absolutely everything. And so she got the support and I just saw them recently. It was, we had a religious event for one of my sons, I have three kids, two sons and a daughter and so I sat with her family and they were very friendly and they invited me to the meal after and so things are amicable. We're friendly, but not friends.



Kirstin Kalbli: Got it. And you said, you know, in the conversation we had before we recorded today, you said, "I loved the beard role that my wife played, I loved conforming." And do you feel like, you know, now you've come full circle that you understand, do you feel like you have a deeper understanding of how that may have impacted her?

Ryan King: Oh, absolutely and that was the motivation for- I think there were two reasons that I started posting on the forum is; one I wanted to, I wanted absolution, I wanted forgiveness. I asked for her forgiveness during one of our counseling appointments and she said, "I've forgiven you, you have to forgive yourself." So it was part of my journey and yes, absolutely. I mean, with all the exchanges that I've had, I now have a very-a much stronger, perception of, of your side of the relationships and yeah, y eah. So, but I did, I did ask for her forgiveness at the end.

Kirstin Kalbli: Yeah and so all of this engaging with straight partners, helping them understand their situations based on your observations of others you've interacted with is an exercise in making amends. And, and...

Ryan King: Usually, It was like, it was like me working a 12 step program to overcome all the monstrous things I did in my own relationship.

Kirstin Kalbli: Wow. Okay. I want to thank you, Ryan, for coming on the show today. As I said before, I feel this conversation was refreshing, frank, honest. It got down to some core issues that continuously we feel like we have to dance around. And this, I think will resonate sort of in the bones of some of our listeners and we'll see what their - where their responses are. I just thank you for coming on today and for telling us the truth.

Ryan King: I can't thank you enough and I have to say that I applaud all of these straight spouses because, as I've said many, many times, you do deserve a parade. Heck, I think you deserve the presidential medals of freedom for all that you've endured, continuing to raise the kids in the face of husbands who are abusive, maintaining the household, doing the shopping, things that most men are not capable of doing and rebuilding your lives and keeping the family unit together, all while working. I mean, I often say that what you go through is like treading water with kids in each hand, and then a gay-in-denial husband, standing on your shoulders. It's not easy and so, I think he should be applauded and I think you're justified in your anger. I think it's a healthy part of the healing process.

Kirstin Kalbli: Thank you. That's a perfect way to end. I want to thank our listeners for tuning in today. Be on the lookout for all new episodes. We know season four has been truncated because of the rebrand, relaunch, the new website and all of that. We hope you're having fun looking at the new website and finding all of the different resources that are available for you there. And we're hoping, I'm hoping at the time that we're recording this, that by the time you're listening to this, that the Open Forum is up and running on the new website. It works in hopefully exactly the same way as it did on the old Straight Spouse Network website. I want to thank Mia, our engineer and editor, right here at Gwynne Sound in Cincinnati, Ohio. Just a friendly reminder that the views of the host, yours truly, are not necessarily the views of OurPath, Inc, or its board of directors. This is Kristin, your host reminding you until next time, keep using your voice.(music)

Ryan King Bio: Ryan King is a university professor and entrepreneur. He frequently posts on the OurPath (formerly the Straight Spouse Network) Open Forum under the pen name "Sean." His thread, "A gay ex-husband answers your questions" has 1,700 exchanges and over 400,000 views. Ryan was married to a woman for 15 years before he came out, separated, and divorced.