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2014 book by a US psychiatrist about married men coming out – text is by the author on this link:

[www.socialworktoday.com/archive/exc\\_051611.shtml](http://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/exc_051611.shtml)

### **Infidelity and Forgiveness: The Complexities of Coming Out in a Straight Relationship. By Loren A. Olson, MD, DLFAPA**

All relationships have rules, but sometimes those rules get broken. When we are in a relationship, we expect that our partner will keep our interests in mind even if he or she is tempted to disregard the rules. When the rules are violated, the wrongdoer may be called on to account for his or her behavior. Sexual infidelity is the epitome of “rule breaking” and can disrupt or end meaningful relationships.

I know something about breaking rules because I was married with two children when I unexpectedly fell in love with a man. Things suddenly shifted inside my head, and I went from thinking I was straight to knowing I was gay; nothing else could explain what I felt.

By most measures, my marriage was good. My wife and I were best friends and had an acceptable sex life. Shortly before I came out to my wife, she had no idea about my conflict concerning my sexual orientation.

Research on gay men has frequently focused on fidelity and the capacity to sustain long-term relationships. Yet almost nothing has been written about men who have sex with men (MSM). These men believe they are too straight to be gay, but others see them as too gay to be straight. Many of them are married.

In *Sexual Fluidity: Understanding Women’s Love and Desire*, Lisa Diamond, PhD, wrote that the gender of women’s sexual desire may be fluid, but researchers generally agree that men’s homosexual attractions never change and may grow stronger over time.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, about 7% of men have sex with men, but gay men are estimated to comprise about 4% of the population. These figures suggest that about 3% of men have sex with men although they do not identify themselves as gay. A study published in 2006 in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* indicated that nearly 10% of men in New York City who were surveyed and were identified as straight had sex exclusively with men, and nearly 10% of married men had experienced sex with another man in the preceding year.

If we accept these percentages as valid, the number of MSM who call themselves straight may be greater than the number of men who identify themselves as gay. Except for the occasional exposure of some high-profile individuals, these men are virtually invisible.

### **Challenges of MSM Coming Out**

Although people seem to be coming out at younger and younger ages, for various reasons, many MSM do not see coming out as a possibility. Early LGBT literature described coming out as a linear process typically completed by the mid-20s. However, for MSM who have led a heterosexual life, coming out is complex. It is like a sailing ship that tacks from port to

port in high seas and heavy winds. MSM don't come out because they don't see themselves as gay and don't want to sacrifice the privileges of being heterosexual.

The decision to remain in the closet is impacted more by the fear of loss rather than the prospect of potential gain. MSM may refer to themselves as bisexual or "curious." They engage in homosexual behavior, but they resist assuming a gay identity because they can't identify with the stereotype. Some gay activists criticize MSM as not being actualized. It is essential for therapists to understand that "being gay" and "doing gay" are not the same, and a client may be a long way from accepting a gay identity.

In therapy with MSM, the first question that must be answered is, "How would you intend to live your life if the homosexual attractions never go away?" The next step is to challenge the expectation of potential losses and gains that may result from coming out.

However, in some societies, coming out is impossible. Many men with whom I have corresponded have said to me, "Please, take this torment away from me." One young African man said, "I may as well kill myself now, because if anyone finds out about me, I will be killed." One young Chinese student said that as the oldest son, his culture expected him to marry and care for his parents. He felt he could not abandon those obligations. He asked whether he should marry even though he could not function sexually with a woman.

### **The Frustration of Sexual Infidelity**

Sexual infidelity is not the ultimate betrayal; the lies used to cover the offense are far more damaging. The injured spouse feels a mixture of emotions: anger, hurt, righteous indignation, and a wish for revenge. Lying erodes the trust that must form the basis of a successful relationship.

Spouses often become suspicious of infidelity because something is disrupting the normal day-to-day functioning of their relationship. The offender may be angry, critical, or dissatisfied. He may act guilty, anxious, or disengaged. Attention, including sexual, may decrease or, in fact, increase.

Being faithful when in a relationship is difficult for many couples, straight or gay. Friends will usually tell the injured spouse, "Get rid of him. Once a cheater, always a cheater," and there is some data to support that conclusion. About 60% of cheaters reoffend. Because homosexual attractions will never go away, the number for MSM may be even higher. When the spouse discovers a reoccurring betrayal, it sends her a message that the offender neither regretted the offense nor seriously intended to change.

"Kevin" is a man in his mid-50s, married with two children. His wife began to suspect he was interested in men and searched for clues of his deception. She found his online name and address for a gay chat room and began sending him e-mails as if she were a man interested in a "hook-up." Not knowing the messages were actually from his wife, Kevin arranged to meet "him" for coffee.

When confronted, Kevin made the perfect apology to his wife. He expressed his guilt and admitted that what he had done was wrong. He gave no excuse or defense for having wronged her, telling his wife she had every right to feel hurt. Kevin's wife begrudgingly put him "on probation." He assumed a submissive posture in the relationship, leading to a complete reversal in the power dynamics within their relationship. He promised to stop seeing men—but he didn't.

The betrayer may believe his confession has erased his guilt. He may argue his intentions were good and that he lied to his spouse to protect her. He may believe his behavior was unintended or due to extenuating circumstances; therefore, it must be excusable. In some cases, the straight spouse clings to her relationship with the MSM in a very dysfunctional way.

In *Secret Historian*, author Justin Spring wrote, "If one does not want to suppress his nature and yet is afraid of expressing it, what is he to do?" Working with couples in which one member is an MSM, the primary issue is whether they should remain married given the permanency of his struggle against homosexual attraction. When couples are committed to remaining married, the question becomes, "Are you willing to modify the rules of the relationship in some way to allow for some same-sex expression outside the marriage?" Any discussion of changing the rules must include an exploration of safe self if the couple is not open to modifying the rules, the questions become, "Can you truly forgive your spouse? What will be the consequences if it happens again?" If the couple chooses to remain together, it can take years to restore trust. The offender must truly regret and be sorry for the pain he has caused his wife. He must assure her that the offense was an aberration and not due to a deficiency in the relationship. He must accept responsibility for what has happened. But his efforts to suppress his homosexual attraction may cause him to experience sadness, depression, thoughts of suicide, drug and alcohol abuse, and other self-destructive behaviors.

All relationships have rules; rules are broken. For the straight spouse, two steps form the basis of forgiveness: First, there must be a release of the negative effects of her partner's betrayal, and second, she must be able to experience some sense of empathy for the pain experienced by the MSM. The therapist must help the clients enhance the sense of empathy each member of the couple has for the other's pain.

Whether they remain together or separate, as the straight spouse develops a sense of empathy for the MSM's struggle, it can lead to more positive interpersonal behavior, reduce the wish to retaliate, and increase the motivation for reconciliation. For the straight spouse, healing the assault on her self-esteem will mean reassigning causation for the offense; she must stop blaming herself or her spouse. The offender also needs to be able to see himself through her eyes.

We expect that our partner will always take our interests into account, but the reality is that rules are sometimes broken. Without forgiveness, the betrayal will undermine meaningful relationships. Forgiveness cannot come without empathy. Without forgiveness, a couple may remain bound together through hatred—even if they separate and divorce. Author, ethicist, and theologian Louis B. Smedes said, "Forgiving what we cannot forget creates a new way to remember. We change the memory of our past into a hope for our future."

— **Loren A. Olson, MD, author of *Finally Out: Letting Go of Living Straight*, is a psychiatrist in private practice in Des Moines, IA. He is a Distinguished Life Fellow of the American Psychiatric Association and a recipient of the Exemplary Psychiatrist Award from the National Alliance on Mental Illness. Olson came out when he was 40, after an 18-year marriage. He is now legally married to Doug Mortimer, his partner of 24 years.**

A British man talks about being gay and married in BBC Magazine, June 2015:  
<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33189628>

Video of the same magazine article can be viewed at:  
<http://www.pinknews.co.uk/2015/06/22/watch-these-gay-men-talk-about-being-married-to-women/>

## 'I'm a gay man but married a woman'

By Victoria Derbyshire & Megan Bramall Victoria Derbyshire programme

- 22 June 2015



**Decades ago when gay people faced ostracism and the threat of prosecution in the UK and other Western nations, many chose to marry and disguise their sexuality. But even with increased tolerance now some choose to take the same path.**

Nick, who is in his 50s, has been married to his wife for 30 years. He is also gay.

He thinks his wife had suspicions about his sexuality for years, but things came to a head when he had an affair with a man.

"She asked if I wanted to leave and I didn't. She's my best friend really above all else, so we've decided we would like to remain together as best friends," he says.

Nick isn't his real name - many of the couple's friends and family don't know he's gay and he wants to remain anonymous to protect his wife.

From the beginning, there was unhappiness in the marriage, with doubts about whether they had made the right decision. He'd always felt uncertain about his sexual orientation and this troubled him more and more as he got older.

Like many men in his situation, Nick, a nurse, found himself living a double life. On the surface he was a happily married man, but he was also using gay pornography. He'd get drunk with a gay friend and, he says, "events took their course".

His wife was angry and upset when she found out about six years ago, and Nick knew there was no point denying the truth any longer.

"I felt it was the right opportunity to be honest and tell her what she'd already suspected of me, but there'd been an understanding that if I didn't do anything we wouldn't talk about it - and when I did we had to talk about it."

Nick acknowledges it would have been better for her if he had admitted sooner that he was gay and needed to act upon it. She told him she was disappointed that he hadn't been able to trust her enough to be honest with her, and that if she had known she would have accepted it.

"I still feel inordinately grateful to her each day that she was so tolerant after that," Nick says. The couple chose to stay together not for the sake of children - they don't have any - but because of their feelings for each other.[Men](#)

"Things couldn't have gone better with my wife that, you know, we still love each other and we're still together but it could have been so very different."

While the couple have stayed together, they no longer have a physical relationship and sleep separately.

Nick has promised his wife that he will never again have sex or a relationship with a man - he says he owes it to her.

But can he stick to that promise? He says: "I'm hoping so, it's my intention to. It didn't feel like a choice in the past, it felt like it was enforced on me. I'm now making that choice that I would like to, in a sense, remain celibate."

Nick is a member of a support group called Gay Married Men, based in Manchester and founded 10 years ago. Men travel from around the country to attend meetings.

Group founder John says most of the men are older - they married women in the 1970s and 80s when society was more hostile to gay people.

Now society is more tolerant, they are more comfortable with coming out as gay. But why did they get married in the first place? Nick says many men who contact the website say they did so to try to "sort themselves out".

Andy, 56, a student, adds: "At times you think you're going through a phase and as you've once or twice heard people say, 'You find the right woman and she'll turn you and you'll be a real man.'

"Unfortunately society, at the time when I got married nearly 30 years ago, you were either straight or queer and queer was a really vindictive word." as gay to his children and parents

John, a lecturer at Manchester Metropolitan University who was married for seven years, says it took him a long time to realise he was gay. He knew his sexuality was ambiguous but he didn't have the vocabulary to define it.

"I didn't know what a gay man was. Truthfully, I thought a gay man lived in London. Which people laugh at and it is funny now, it's really strange but I had this kind of naivety.

"I knew gay men were like Larry Grayson, John Inman and, you know, they were camp and effeminate. Well, I didn't feel like camp or effeminate so I couldn't be gay, could I?"

Group members are at different stages - some just suspect they may be gay, others are living with unknowing wives, some are separated or divorced and some have re-married to men. John is now married to a man who has been his partner for 23 years, but says he still finds parts of his life raw and upsetting.

Andy is divorcing his wife after 30 years and four children - she has a new partner. He says: "I still love her, I'm very close to her, in fact we describe each other as best friends - which may sound odd, but when we've got children together..."



Some remain married because of the expectations of friends and family, or because they have children and don't want to break up a family.

John says the men are often quite desperate and struggling to cope with no support - many are suffering from quite severe depression.

"We've had bursts of tears when people have come because they're so upset and also so relieved to find out there are other people that are just like themselves. Because that's part of the problem, because we're a myth, we don't exist.

"We don't exist in [the] gay world - we're on the cusp of [the] gay world because we're married men. We don't exist in [the] straight world. So we seem invisible."

The group members say they don't judge anyone and Nick, who helps run the site, says his main message is that people don't have to struggle alone.

"There are people who are successfully managing their sexuality with their family. You still have connection with your children and you don't have to be cut off, out in the cold. I'm definitely happier, a weight has lifted and I can be honest with my wife."

Follow up to BBC Magazine article about gay married men from the wife's point of view, July 2015.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-33382824>

## 'How I found out my partner was gay'

By Sarah Bell Victoria Derbyshire programme

- 8 July 2015



**Many gay men and women end up marrying people of the opposite sex. But what is it like for the spouse who eventually finds their marriage breaking down?**

Recently we told the stories of gay men who had married women. It prompted a strong response from readers who had experienced it from the other side - those whose wives and husbands had come out as gay.

"It feels almost homophobic to say anything about them. To me it's not brave to spend 10 or 20 years with someone only to destroy and discard them," says Emma. She found out her husband was gay a year ago.

"They may go on and have a wonderful new life while leaving a crushed wife behind. You just feel like your whole life is wasted and there's no closure."

One of the most difficult things for many spouses is watching their former partner being celebrated as brave for coming out, but knowing the damage they've left behind.

It is an experience to which Carol, 43, can relate. With her former husband now active in gay rights, she received a message calling him an inspiration and a role model.

"I was disgusted by this, that someone actually considered him to be both of these things when he had spent our entire relationship lying to both himself and myself.

"To me, there is nothing to be proud of - he destroyed our family through his failure to admit that he was in fact gay," she explains.

They had married in 2003 and have two children - she says she was "very happy and in love." But there were signs something wasn't right, including gay dating profiles on his computer, which he explained away. In 2009 he said he was bisexual but wanted to be with her.

Carol admits she was probably in denial but thought they would find a way through it as he was the man with whom she wanted to spend her life.

A year later it came to a head when he came home, said he was gay, and left.

"I thought my whole world had fallen apart but then he came back and said let's stay together for the sake of the kids. I didn't know what to do so we lived a lie for two years. To anyone else we looked like a normal happy couple," she said.

But it didn't work and they divorced.

Carol says the difficulty was the shock - he'd had time to get used to it but for her it happened so quickly. He's now married to a man and she says they get on for the sake of their children.

"It took me a long time to get over it, for me it is a trust issue. How can I trust anyone again? I can't compete with other men, I'm a woman, but he should have been truthful from the start.

"It would have been easier if it had been a woman - at least he would have loved me in the first place. He says he loved me but I don't believe him."

Kevin, 51, had been with his wife for seven years when she asked if he'd mind living in the spare room while she had a female partner. He'd had no idea she was gay. "One day, she came to me and said: 'Is it OK if I had a girlfriend?'

"If a partner has an affair with the opposite sex you can be angry but this is so much more complicated. She'd been feeling like this for two years but said nothing," he says.

She wanted to remain married, but he couldn't live a lie and they divorced. They haven't spoken since and she now has a female partner.

Kevin's life fell apart and he became suicidal.

"I wanted to make a go of my marriage, I had everything invested in it, I didn't want to be a failure. I felt a failure as a man and a husband. It was bad, very, very, bad."

There are all kinds of reasons why people commit to straight relationships when they are gay - they may not have fully realised their feelings, hope they will go away or fear they will suffer prejudice. Some may have been together for years after marrying at a time when society was less accepting of gay people.

Former Welsh rugby player Gareth Thomas has talked about how he doesn't believe he would have reached the top in the sport if he had been openly gay. When he came out in 2009 he said he had been in denial about his true feelings and had genuinely been in love with his wife.

Both Carol and Kevin have a clear message for those who are in straight marriages but think they may be gay. "You have to be honest with yourself and your partner, especially when kids are involved. Not knowing your own sexuality and taking time to decide hurts everyone involved. Be true to who you are," says Carol.

Kevin adds: "The sooner you come out the better for everyone concerned. It might be difficult, it might end a marriage, but the fact is you can't start to repair while they're in the closet but you're nailed to the outside and don't even know it."

Six years on, he describes his life as "brilliant" and now supports people going through the same experience. He says people in his position should contact the support group Straight Partners Anonymous.

"It will get better. It's been difficult, my life has now taken a completely different path, but is better than I could have ever hoped," he says.

A UK woman writes about her husband being gay in the UK's *The Telegraph*, September 2015.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/women/womens-life/11848909/Like-Mrs-Keegan-Hirst-I-married-a-gay-man.html>

## Like Mrs Keegan Hirst, I married a gay man

**When Keegan Hirst became the first rugby league player to come out as gay, I was thrilled for him. But my heart also went out to his wife**



Sara Hirst spoke about her marriage to rugby league player Keegan Hirst, the captain of the Batley Bulldogs club, after he revealed he was gay Photo: SUNDAY MIRROR

By Anonymous

07 Sep 2015

 [335 Comments](#)

When Keegan Hirst became the first active professional rugby league player to come out as gay, I was thrilled for him. As the likes of Emma Watson and Stephen Fry applauded the 27 year-old's courage, I waved my metaphorical rainbow flag from the sidelines. But my heart also went out to his wife.

For she is now part of a group of which I am myself a member – a straight woman who, unwittingly, married a gay man.

There are a lot of us out there, but this surprisingly large community is as closeted as any 19th-century MP. As our spouses are praised for coming out, supported by a well-organised community – Hirst got a roar of approval last month when he was brought on stage by Sir Ian McKellen at Manchester's Mardi Gras – we often find ourselves feeling more isolated than ever.

Just as the life we thought we had evaporates, we have to face some painful questions, not least: "Surely you must have known?"

*My first inkling that something was amiss came 15 years ago, and it was nothing short of a bombshell*

In 1992, I met my husband at work. We were both single, in our late 20s, and had had several previous relationships. It didn't occur to me to question his sexuality when one day he asked me out.

We went for a meal, and ended the night with a pretty good snog on my doorstep. It wasn't long before we were an item. We told our colleagues, met each other's friends, went on holiday together – once with some gay friends of mine, who didn't suspect a thing either.

We dated for four years before getting married, in a church surrounded by all our families. I sold my London flat and gave up my job to set up a home with him in the country.

At no stage did any alarm bells ring. My husband is fantastically untidy, can't cook and doesn't like musicals. But that doesn't make him straight.

He was in the Territorial Army, so it wasn't unusual for him to spend weekends away. He'd been doing this his whole adult life, and I'd never be sure how late he'd be home on a Sunday.

Being the trusting soul that I was, I believed him when he said that training had overrun again, the traffic on the way back was terrible, and he must have been in a mobile blackspot on the motorway when I rang for the umpteenth time. It was not until I started looking that I found out why.

My first inkling that something was amiss came 15 years ago, and it was nothing short of a bombshell. Tidying the house one day, I found a postcard he had been using as a bookmark. It had been sent to him by another man, one he had clearly been seeing for some time. Its content was graphic and entirely unambiguous.

I burst into tears, the first of many howlings at the moon. When he came home from work, I confronted him, more in sorrow than in anger (I'm not the kind to take pink shears to his wardrobe). We sat at the kitchen table and talked and cried. I realised there's a difference in finding out about an infidelity, and that your partner is gay.

As Sara Hirst, Keegan's wife, recalled at the weekend: "I was shocked, but... it was almost like 'Oh, you're just gay...' It was surreal, but I was kind of fine. I was never angry because he was gay. I've got gay friends. It was thinking 'Was it all a lie? Why have you strung me along? Was our marriage all a sham?'"



Rugby player Keegan Hirst (Photo: PA)

As we sat there, I thought he would now finally come out to me. The biggest shock was that he didn't: in fact, he denied he was gay at all.

We went to counselling, together and separately, and he persuaded both me and the counsellor that he was, in fact, bisexual. He was adamant that he wasn't "100 per cent gay". It's very hard to grasp that someone is not who you thought they were – but I wanted to believe him. I was, and still am, in love with him, so I gave him another chance. If he was bisexual, couldn't we just resume our marriage?

We tried starting a family. I was 37 at this point and we'd been talking about having a child for a while. I knew my clock was ticking, and if I split up with him, by the time I found someone else, it would have been too late. If I'd been 25, I probably would have ditched him. He would have been a brilliant father, too.

Fundamentally, our relationship was good: we had converted a barn in the country, we loved our dogs, we had a great set of friends. We both loved gardening, travel, art and architecture. We were having a great time. This was the life I wanted. I was committed as much to the lifestyle he offered as much as the man himself.

*I weep for my precious memories of our sex life, when I can only suppose he was pretending to enjoy himself*

After we went to counselling, I chose to stay with him. A lot of wives wouldn't have – but I'd never wanted a marriage in which I was constantly on his case. That was 15 years ago. I still don't know how many guys there have been, how many times he visited a club or sauna on his way back from a TA weekend. I thought about hiring a detective, but there was no need.

I've found ticket stubs for gay venues in his trouser pockets as I've put them into the wash, membership cards to gay saunas in his wallet, gay magazines in his briefcase, gay hook-up sites on his browser. I've also made a conscious decision to stop looking for "evidence".

Did I never suspect? Not once – though when I found out, it was as if I'd put on glasses and everything came into focus. I had queried whether the relationship was right, but not his sexuality.

What hurts the most is that, since the day he took our wedding vows, he has never committed to being monogamous. Perhaps foolishly, I've never looked elsewhere myself. I'm terminally monogamous, and didn't want to go down that route; I wouldn't like the person I would have become.

In my darkest moments, I think I am simply a front, and I weep for my precious memories of our sex life, when I can only suppose he was pretending to enjoy himself. At other times, I think he cares for me very deeply and our sex life was, if not all he wanted, at least a part of it.

We haven't had sex for a long time, not for a decade, but we don't have separate rooms. We're still quite touchy-feely. Is this really any different from any more conventional marriage? Over time, most couples' sex lives decrease and turn into companionship. Would mine not have followed the same trajectory had I married a straight man?

I can sympathise with his decision not to come out – we live in a rural bit of Britain and I testify to overhearing some shockingly homophobic comments – but his decision to remain closeted has made my life harder.

Now in our fifties, we will soon be going through a divorce without being open about the real reason: his family and many of our friends will be bemused and uncomprehending; why on earth am I tearing apart my apparently very nice life with an absolutely lovely man, and at my advanced age? Those of my family and friends who do know are equally bemused; why, if I've known for 15 years, bother to divorce him now?

Well, to be honest, I'm just tired of it all. Being married to a gay man has been a gilded cage. Since I found out, I have been waiting for the sword to fall – though I didn't realise what a weight it was until I made my mind up to leave. I have had to steel myself mentally for the day my husband tells me he has found the courage to come out, or for the knock at the door from a long-standing boyfriend. I have speculated whether it will be a mid-life crisis or the death of his parents that will finally push him out of the closet. I have asked myself every single day, should I stay or should I go? But I don't really want a divorce – I just want to unmarry him.

If my husband ever chooses to come out, I know I won't be surrounded by a wave of affirmation and support as I face up to life on my own. I won't be a hero – though I am as much a victim of society's bigotry as my husband.

For our estranged partners, it is the end of a painful journey. For us, it is just the beginning.

An article on gay married men in the UK from Vice magazine, December 2014.

<http://www.vice.com/read/mixed-orientation-marriages-724>

## **When a Gay Man Marries a Straight Woman**

**December 29, 2014**

**by Gareth Platt**

*This post originally appeared on VICE UK*

After 20 years of marriage, Mark couldn't take it anymore. He still loved and cared for his wife, but had started to feel a strong attraction towards a close male friend. These feelings started to saturate his thoughts, and gradually an urge to escape the rut he'd found himself in as he entered his mid-40s brought everything to the fore.

After one drunken night out, the two friends had sex. This soon became a regular occurrence; Mark now recalls that he was "a bit blasé" about the whole thing, believing he'd never get caught. His nonchalance was misplaced—one day, Mark's wife caught the pair kissing in the kitchen.

While Mark's affair was a surprise, that it was with a man was not. Mark's wife had found a stash of gay porn shortly after they married in their early 20s, and he'd formally come out to her (although not to the rest of the world) at the age of 28. Despite his sexuality, Mark told his wife that he'd never sleep with another man, promising to stay faithful to her for as long as they were married.

But after catching him, his wife didn't walk away. In fact, today—after 30 years of marriage—they're still together.

A gay and a straight person trying to maintain a marriage seems like quite an ordeal to put yourself through. Yet for millions of people in mixed-orientation marriages, it's a basic fact of life.

When psychologists and counsellors talk about mixed-orientation marriages, or MOMs, they are describing unions in which one partner is openly gay, the other straight. And such marriages are far more common than you might think. There's currently no single set of figures available for MOMs in the UK but, [according to stats](#) released by the Straight Spouse Network, an organization set up to help the female partners of gay Mormon men in Utah, there are 2 million mixed-orientation marriages in America alone.

Although it's far more common for a gay partner to come out *after* the couple marry than before, this is by no means universal, according to Douglas Chay, a Maryland-

based therapist who runs his own practice, Pride Counseling, and describes himself as an MOM specialist.

Douglas says that "in some cases, before the actual marriage people agree to have what they think of as a non-traditional marriage. They set rules on whether the homosexual partner can have sex with other people. They may have deals where they can both have sex with other people. But often it's simply the homosexual partner who wants that."

### **AS LONG AS THEY DON'T FLAUNT WHAT THEY'RE DOING, THEY CAN KEEP THEMSELVES SATISFIED AND MAINTAIN THEIR FRIENDSHIP WITH THEIR WIFE, ALBEIT BY MAINTAINING CELIBACY**

The proliferation of support groups on the internet suggests a relatively sizable chunk of Britain's homosexual community are in mixed-sex unions. Mark himself is a long-standing member of Gay Married Men, a group that meets in Manchester and has around 50 members who range in age from their 20s to their 50s. The vast majority of members are already "out" to their wives.

"Those who have carried on [their marriage] are on a similar agreement to me," says Mark. "As long as they don't flaunt what they're doing, they can keep themselves satisfied and maintain their friendship with their wife, albeit by maintaining celibacy."

According to Mark, Gay Married Men doesn't offer counseling; it exists to provide regular group meetings where "people share experiences of how they have managed to come out, coming to terms with their sexuality, maybe the breakup of their relationship or the struggle they have had to carry it on." However, it's not all serious emotional support; members also occasionally swap tips on where to go cruising in the local neighborhood—which suggests the vow of celibacy might mean different things to different people.

Similar support is available across the UK; just type "mixed-orientation marriage" into Google and you'll find a support group in pretty much every major British city (though not all offer advice on cruising). Intriguingly, the vast majority of the groups are aimed at men, suggesting the homosexual partner in an MOM is invariably male.

One of the oldest MOM support bodies, Courage, was founded back in 1988 by Jeremy Marks, who was himself about to embark on an MOM at the time. Jeremy, a committed Christian, says he knew he was gay from puberty but couldn't pursue his true feelings because "people thought it was beneath contempt. It was very demoralizing—you had society telling you [that you] were a monster."

After years of living a single, celibate life, in the late 80s Jeremy began a platonic relationship with a longtime female friend who shared his devotion to Christianity. "She was fully aware that I was gay, but she didn't know what that meant because I

wasn't involved in homosexual relationships, and perhaps we were slightly afraid of loneliness and wanted to make our families happy," he recalls.

"We 'dated' for about 18 months before marrying. We were really getting to know each other as friends, but we never slept together. Even after getting married it was never a sexual relationship."

Although the couple decided to separate in their 50s, Jeremy is now dedicated to helping other people make their MOMs work. He's left Courage and now runs his own counseling service. He says he's in regular contact with between 20 to 30 MOM couples today, hailing from all over the world.

"Many of them have kids. It's a terribly difficult dilemma for the men—and of course it's very difficult [for the women]," says Jeremy. "Some men are closer to the middle of the Kinsey scale [the formula that uses a continuum to grade a person's sexuality] and get some enjoyment out of sex. However, there's always that tension for them, that they'd like to be with people of the same sex as well."

Yet, for all the obvious sexual barriers that can afflict an MOM, many gay men end up with children, which can make things even more complicated down the line.

One such man is Steve Williams, who runs Gaydadsupport.net, an organization set up to facilitate online conversations and meet-ups between homosexual fathers. Steve says he knew he was gay at the age of five and that his initial sexual experiences were all with men, but he's still ended up with four kids.

In his early 20s, Steve met a woman by chance after falling asleep on a bus, and found he enjoyed her company. Living in Basildon, life was far easier at the time if you were heterosexual; Steve recalls that his first heterosexual relationship "wasn't love at first sight, it was convenience."

The couple soon got engaged, and as they were planning their nuptials Steve's fiancée announced she was expecting. "I was lucky she got pregnant quickly," Steve recalls, "so she didn't want sex that often. Sex wasn't difficult, it just wasn't overly pleasurable. But when we had sex, she just tended to get pregnant."

"I actually never intended telling my wife that I was gay—I genuinely believed I could live that lie for the rest of my life. But soon after I married, a guy I'd had a relationship with reappeared, and it appeared my wife knew him. So I basically had to tell her. Even then, like a lot of wives, she assumed I was bi, not gay, and I didn't feel the need to correct her."

"We continued to have sex sporadically, and this kept producing kids. Yet, as time went on we started living in separate beds, then separate rooms, and reverted to a friendship rather than marriage. She allowed me to have dates and she had dates as well, on the pretext that we knew we were going to get divorced at some point. We just wanted to wait until we found someone worth getting a divorce for."

"Eventually I met a guy and got very close to him. One day, my wife asked me to choose between her and him. I chose the guy."

### **SOME COUPLES DO MANAGE TO GO THE DISTANCE, DESPITE THE OVERWHELMING ODDS**

Steve, Mark and Jeremy have all negotiated the MOM journey by very different routes. However, the support they have provided to other people allows them to take a panoramic view of the MOM landscape.

So, is there a "typical" demographic for MOMs? All three are adamant that it's impossible to pin this down.

Marks insists that "there's no dominant occupational group, although the majority are skilled or professional—well-educated. It does seem to be people who've had a career and knuckled down and done what was expected of them."

Steve, meanwhile, says, "I would love to say there's a clear stereotype, but there isn't. I've had everyone from doctors, airline pilots... all sorts. If anything, there's probably a lack of manual professions. You don't get many factory workers; I can only assume it's the environment where they work."

The three men also agree that the vast majority of MOMs will, eventually, end in divorce. However, this is by no means a universal rule; some couples do manage to go the distance, despite the overwhelming odds.

When asked how a couple can manage this, Mark suggests that "to some extent they want to stick with it through fear of the unknown, the fear of loneliness. And also they value what they have, someone who's a very good friend. It seems a mutual thing in most cases. The wife has been given the opportunity to separate and it's not been taken.

"In my own case, first and foremost we are best, best friends—always have been—and we felt we had a lot together. I wish I could answer why my wife has stayed with me; I suppose there would be the fear of explaining it to family if she left. I don't imagine it would go down too well."

In a sense, the accounts provided by Steve, Mark, and Jeremy paint a negative picture. The world they describe is hemmed in by fear, embarrassment, and a desire to please everyone but oneself. Perhaps in time, people will look back on MOMs with pity, just as the children of the Enlightenment scorned the God-botherers of the Middle Ages.

Yet, we should also acknowledge the sacrifices these people have made, the struggles they have endured to make their marriages work. A straight marriage was never their dream, but they've followed it to the end of the rainbow

An article from Salon from April 2015 about married gay men.

[www.salon.com/2015/04/19/we do have a very good sex life gay men with straight wives are coming out as happily married](http://www.salon.com/2015/04/19/we_do_have_a_very_good_sex_life_gay_men_with_straight_wives_are_coming_out_as_happily_married)

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## **“We do have a very good sex life”: Gay men with straight wives are coming out — as happily married**

"Mixed-orientation marriages" have always existed, but now they're in the middle of the marriage equality battle

TRACY CLARK-FLORY



On the surface, the question seems simple enough: “Are you sexually attracted to your wife?” That’s what I asked 34-year-old Joshua Weed during a phone call. He breathed in deep. “That’s a really difficult question,” he said. “It’s hard to say that with clarity.” Weed is sexually attracted to men, but he’s married to a woman. “I love her very much and we do have a very good sex life,” he said. “I think she’s beautiful.” But he adds: “I’m gay.”

Weed’s wife, Laurel, is well aware of his sexual orientation. They grew up together in Utah and she was the very first friend he told about his sexual attraction to other boys. For a while, he considered the possibility of a relationship with another man,

but he ultimately decided to pursue relationships with women, despite his lack of sexual attraction to them. Weed is a practicing Mormon and the [Church's current stance](#) on the topic of homosexuality can be summed up like so: "The attraction itself is not a sin, but acting on it is." While Weed says he does not pass judgment on gay relationships in general, when it came to his own life, he says, "I didn't feel it was right." So, he married his best friend.

There's a term for this kind of relationship: It's a "mixed-orientation marriage." Sometimes, the men in these scenarios are referred to as "same-sex attracted men married to women."

It's a demographic that recently came to public attention with an [amicus brief](#) filed in opposition of marriage equality by a group that described itself as "same-sex attracted men and their wives." The petitioners argued that "man-woman marriage laws" are not discriminatory, because, look at them! *They* managed to marry straight, despite their same-sex attraction. The petitioners added that same-sex marriage would necessarily insult their own marital arrangements, because it would send "a harmful message that it is impossible, unnatural, and dangerous for the same-sex attracted to marry members of the opposite sex," says the brief. Note that we're not talking about so-called ex-gays. In fact, the term "same-sex attracted," or SSA, has taken off as the notion of "ex-gays" has fallen out of favor.

There are some key differences between the two groups: "Ex-gays" believe that they have successfully "cured" themselves of homosexuality. Self-identified SSA men in heterosexual marriages generally accept the reality of their same-sex attractions but have chosen to get hitched to a woman. "Ex-gays" have a rightful reputation for being bigoted, whereas SSAs are not *necessarily* opposed to homosexuality. I'll give you a moment to digest all of that, because it gets much more complicated from here. As Warren Throckmorton, a psychology professor who has studied this group, told me, "They're not all the same," he said. "It is hard to keep it straight." *Ehem.*

When Throckmorton surveyed SSA men in relationships with women, he found that the largest sub-group were bisexual. "These were the men who viewed themselves as attracted to women in general and men in general, to varying degrees," he said. "There was a general attraction to people."

The next largest group was what he calls "pretty exclusively gay." He explains, "They didn't really feel much present attraction to their wives, they didn't feel a whole lot of attraction to their wife when they married, but they felt they needed to

marry, they felt they would grow into attraction to their wives.” Of all the sub-groups, this category of men were most driven by religious pressure.

The third-largest group consisted of same-sex attracted men who experienced sexual attraction to a single woman. “One guy described it to me as, ‘She literally is the only girl for me,’” says Throckmorton. “He didn’t think it would ever happen, he had resigned himself to being gay. He prayed and prayed and prayed and nothing happened — and then he met this girl and they got to be friends, they got to be really good friends.” Even more than friends: “Eventually something changed and he found himself being attracted to her,” he says. “They have a whole complete sex life. He fantasizes about her sexually. But he still fantasizes about men too.” He doesn’t fantasize about other women, because his wife is the only woman in the world to whom he is sexually attracted.

All of which is to say: Taken together, SSAs are an incredibly broad group. If a partner in a heterosexual relationship rates as anything other than 0 on the 7-point Kinsey scale, you arguably have yourself a mixed-orientation marriage. (Note that Kinsey’s “Sexual Behavior in the Human Male” found that only 10 percent of men were “more or less exclusively homosexual.”) So, what marriage is *not* at least to some small degree mixed-orientation? But where things get really interesting are relationships like Weed’s in which one partner is predominantly attracted to the same sex and yet is married to a member of the opposite sex.

Religion is often a strong motivator for these couples. Throckmorton, an evangelical Christian, developed [a framework](#) for counseling people whose sexuality is in conflict with their religious beliefs. Although he once supported conversion therapy, about a decade ago he came out against it and does not believe that gay people can be made straight. His therapeutic framework emphasizes that both sexuality and moral beliefs are “important aspects of personality,” and that “the therapist should not attempt to persuade clients about how to value these dimensions but can assist clients to determine their own valuations.” This can mean that a client decides to embrace a gay identity over their religious identity. It can also mean that they choose their religious identity over their sexual desires. Or they might adapt their religious beliefs to allow for the expression of their sexuality. In 2009, the American Psychological Association came out in support of this approach, noting that it can be beneficial for some clients.

I mentioned earlier that SSAs are not necessarily anti-gay. But there are plenty of SSA men who believe that homosexual behaviors are a religious sin — and, as the

recent amicus brief shows, some are willing to go so far as to politicize their identity in order to fight equal rights for gays. So it's no surprise that religious institutions are increasingly embracing the SSA concept. The Mormon church has begun promoting the idea that it's possible for same-sex attracted men and women to either enter into heterosexual marriage, despite their attractions, or live a fulfilling life of celibacy. There was even a recent TLC documentary, ["My Husband's Not Gay,"](#) about Mormon households in Utah composed of same-sex attracted men married to women. A recent Catholic documentary called ["The Third Way"](#) promotes the same choice.

But religion isn't the only motivator here. "Some men I've talked to over the years, and some women too, just prefer a more traditional life," says Throckmorton. "They just felt it would be more of what they'd always hoped for when they were growing up. They thought it would be easier to get along in society in general, even with the tolerance that exists now." So they choose a life partner of the opposite sex, while acknowledging that it wholly contradicts their sexual orientation.

This does not sit well with a sex-positive liberal like myself who dreams of sexual freedom and fulfillment for everyone. But Throckmorton urges open-mindedness. "If we're really going to be tolerant and non-judgmental, *that's what they want to do,*" he says. "In some ways, a very religious, exclusively gay man married to an asexual woman, they can have a very nice friendship, a very wonderful relationship in many ways, and it wouldn't be a family therapist's dream, but it would be fine for them." Indeed, it seems fine for Weed: He emphasizes the joy he gets from his friendship with his wife and the three daughters that they've had together. Weed, who has never had sex with a man, insists that his sex life with his wife is fulfilling: "Sexuality, I contend, is a lot about intimacy and vulnerability and connection between two human souls and not just about that carnal heat," he explains.

That said, they do miss that carnal heat. "We both acknowledge that while our sex life and romantic life and emotional life is really, really good, we both at the same time acknowledge it's missing a component, and sometimes that's really sad," he said. "Sometimes we grieve that and wish it could be a different way."

An article about gay men in straight marriages from the Huffington Post August 2014.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-dameron/gay-men-straight-marriage\\_b\\_4550705.html?ir=Australia](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-dameron/gay-men-straight-marriage_b_4550705.html?ir=Australia)

## Gay Men, Straight Marriages: The Lost Generation

Posted: 08/01/2014 08:18 AEST Updated: 09/03/2014 20:59 AEST

My friends Alex and Michael are in a loveless relationship. They rarely have sex and trust has been drained to the point that Alex monitors all of Michael's e-mails, texts and phone calls. Michael had an affair several years ago and confessed this to Alex. Before the affair occurred they adopted a child and for the sake of the child, they continue to exist in a relationship that is at best a business arrangement and at worst, mentally damaging. Alex thinks that they should stay together because so much time has been invested in the relationship and Michael wants to split up, but is afraid of the stigma that the divorce will bring. He has admitted that he is not in love with Alex.

They have tried marriage counseling, but even the counselor agrees that their marriage was never fully functioning and most likely never will be. Michael has a secret that he has shared with Alex. Michael is attracted to women and indeed had an affair with a woman several years ago.

Why do they stay together? They remain in the relationship because they made a commitment and will stick by it. Society has told Michael that only same-sex relationships are valid and that opposite sex attraction is an abomination. Michael is afraid that if he comes out as "straight" to his family they will disown him and that his church will excommunicate him. But he knows deep in his soul that he can only truly romantically love a woman.

This sounds like an impossibly unbelievable scenario, doesn't it? How could we expect a straight man to marry, have sex with and raise children with a gay man? But I hear of this happening every single day, not with two men, but with a gay man and a straight woman. While the names above are fictional, the plot is not.

Your background, generation and religious upbringing will likely shape the way you view this story. You will either be outraged by the insinuation that same sex marriages could be viewed as normal or outraged that we ever brainwashed our children into believing that being gay was a disease which could be cured and that happiness could only be achieved through an unhealthy marriage. Whatever your background, you will most likely agree that a

straight man and a gay man should not remain in a marriage together. Why should it be any different between a gay man and a straight woman?

Since my last post ["Is My Husband Gay? The Other Side of the Closet."](#) I have heard from many closeted gay men who are in long term marriages to women. They are part of a generation that has been left behind by the progression in public opinion towards gays and trapped in a time warp that prevents them from making a change. They are wracked with guilt, self-hatred and have a fear of the unknown.

They ask me for advice and all that I can tell them is that sometimes it is necessary to look at the puzzle from a different angle in order to see the solution. The end of a long term relationship can be the most difficult, heart-breaking and sad thing that any couple may endure and every spouse deserves the time and support necessary to heal and move on. But, it is time to stop expecting any couple in an unhealthy relationship to maintain it and it is also time to stop suggesting that it is all about sex. Just as we would never tell a straight man that his desire to love a woman is only about sex the same is true for gay men and women.

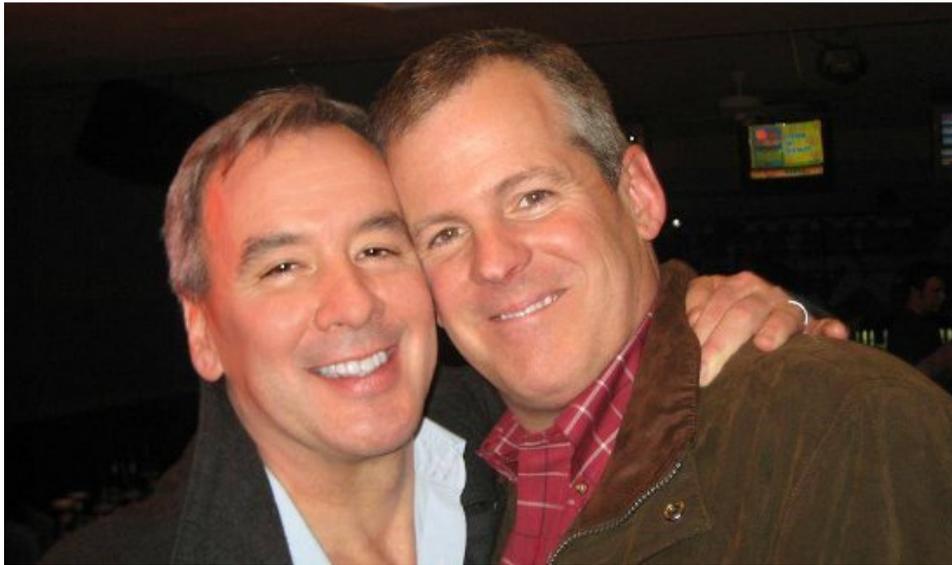
As marriage equality and gay rights continue to progress, instances of these marriages will dissipate. But there is a generation of marriages lost in the middle. If the story above about Alex and Michael strikes you as preposterous, good, that is the first step into understanding that marriage equality means that all marriages should afford the opportunity for both spouses to be equally happy.

A follow up to an article from the Huffington Post about gay married men written by a wife – September 2014.

[http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-dameron/is-my-husband-gay-the-oth\\_b\\_4412616.html?ir=Australia](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/william-dameron/is-my-husband-gay-the-oth_b_4412616.html?ir=Australia)

## Is My Husband Gay? The Other Side of the Closet

Updated: 09/02/2014 21:59 AEST



On a Wednesday night seven years ago my wife and I drove our gold mini-van in silence through the center of town and pulled into a Wal-Mart parking lot. After I parked the car, she turned to me, hesitated for a moment and then spit out a question. "I just have to ask you this. Are you gay?" I watched a family of four get out of their car, grab each other's hands, fade into the dark and then briefly reappear under a circle of light cast from a parking lot lamp.

"I don't want to be," I said.

"Oh God," she inhaled.

I exhaled.

It was one of the truest statements I had uttered in 22 years of marriage. I don't want to be gay. I don't want to tear my family apart. I don't want to go to hell. I don't want my family and friends to disown me. All of my "Don't wants" were laid out like the wooden planks of a bridge behind me and I watched them catch fire from the spark of that five-word sentence and crash in a terrific blaze. It was horrifying and exhilarating and devastating. But at the end of all those "don't wants" was a big Want. I want to love and be loved, body and soul.

I was born in the 1960s in one of the most intolerant states in America, North Carolina. Being gay was not an option. It was a mental illness listed right there in the American Psychiatric Association's DSM II until 1974. I married a woman, had two children and suppressed what I was told was unhealthy.

I am a human face to one of the statistics referenced in the recent [New York Times article which states that 5% of American men are gay](#). The article also states that the detrimental effects of living a life in the closet is most strongly felt in those intolerant states, the band of southern states.

Maybe you are one of those statistics too. Maybe you cruise the Internet late at night searching for images of men having sex with men. Maybe you self-medicate with prescription drugs and alcohol attempting to numb that part of yourself. Maybe you and your wife have not had sex in over a year. Maybe you think that you can survive for the rest of your life hiding just a part of yourself, without realizing that what you hide is more than that. Because the closet doesn't contain just your arms or legs, or body, it claims everything, including your soul. Maybe your wife is searching the Internet right now typing in the search term "Is my husband gay?"

After I admitted that I didn't want to be gay I became another statistic referenced in the New York Times article. I became an openly gay man living in one of the most tolerant regions in America, New England. Here is what became of my "Don't Wants." Yes, my marriage fell apart, but after that I married a wonderful man and we merged our two families. I didn't lose any friends or family. The hell I was living in was self-made. Waking up next to the man I love, body and soul, is heaven on Earth.

It is never too late to open the closet door and breathe for the first time.

Last night, my husband and I drove our car through the middle of town and parked in front of [MaineStreet](#), a local gay friendly club in this small corner of Maine. We took each other's hand and walked across the street in the dark and then into the warm holiday lights of the bar. Inside most of the residents of Ogunquit gathered with plates of cupcakes, cheese and other homemade items to share, each of us carrying a toy to donate to a needy child. Families, gay and straight hugged and kissed each other. Children ran to meet Santa as the gay men's choir sang carols.

There is a saying here in Maine, *The way life should be*. It was a long road from one side of the closet door to the other. Last night, my husband Paul turned to me and asked "Are you happy to be here?"

And I replied "There is no other place I would want to be."

Over the Cliff – a US book about gay married men coming out, link on

<http://www.gayhusbandsupport.com/>

