

Anger common in women who find husbands gay

Light-Ridder

ST. PAUL, Minn. — You invest nine years of your life with this man, your husband, and then one day he tells you he is gay.

"I was thunderstruck," said Marian, a 40-year-old white-haired woman. "My husband devoted his entire energy to hiding from me the fact that he was gay. No, I had no idea." Marian is not her real name. All names in this story have been changed for reasons of confidentiality.)

It has been estimated that there are 100,000 gay men in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and that 20 per cent to 30 per cent of them are married. That leaves 20,000 to 30,000 women who knowingly or unknowingly are married to gay men.

Marian is a member of a support group for the heterosexual spouses of gay men.

At a recent meeting, nine women shared their stories. Some were in their 20s, some in their 30s, some in their 40s. The common theme was anger — anger at the spouse who married when he knew he was a homosexual; anger at society for being formidably intolerant of homosexuality; anger at themselves for unwillingly adopting the mantle of "victim."

"I feel like an experiment that flopped," said Georgia, whose husband abruptly moved out and left her with three children and a pile of bills.

Georgia said before she was married, her husband-to-be had confided that he had had some homosexual experiences. "He had been taken advantage of," was how he put it.

"I loved him and I thought our love could solve all his problems," Georgia said. "I never really thought he was gay. I never admitted to myself that he could be gay. It was like something I just put in the back of my mind."

When our situation changed. Everyone else thought he was so gentle, but he was having explosive anger. He was making things and being this really terrifying figure, intimidating me physically. He was out of control, and the least little thing would set him off. I thought, 'There's something wrong with him'."

Georgia said her husband went to two counsellors, but things at home did not improve. "Then we had an argument, and I did something that hurt his ego. He left and when he called to say he wanted a divorce."

"He was so cold. He said he never loved me. He just walked away from all of us. He

used to be so involved with the children, going to their open houses at school. I told him about an open house and he said he had to go to an AIDS benefit."

Georgia paused, her face coloring. Finally she blurted, "Sometimes I just wish he would get AIDS and die."

Susan, who decided to continue in her marriage after finding out two years ago her husband is gay, listened sympathetically to Georgia's story. She said she understood her crushing anger.

"My husband tried so many different ways to be different than he was," she said. "But he's gay, and there's no changing that."

‘ I thought our love could solve all his problems. I never admitted to myself that he could be gay ’

— 'Georgia'

Susan said she and her husband decided to stay together, partly because they have three small children who do not know their father is gay.

"I used to have a real feeling of despair that I was the only one in this position (a heterosexual woman married to a gay man). It gives me such strength that there are other women like me."

When her husband first told her he was gay, Susan said, she felt "such intense sadness, it was like someone had died. My family was supportive, but they treat it (her husband's homosexuality) like alcoholism. They think it's something he'll get over."

Many of the women said that for years before their husbands declared their homosexuality, things were tense between them. "I thought maybe I wasn't pretty enough or interesting enough," Susan said. "I thought if I could only lose 10 pounds, maybe that would help."

Marian said she regrets all the time she spent searching for ways to make her marriage work, only to find out that their problems had nothing to do with her.

Several women said that one unnerving thing that happened after their husbands

"came out" (stated their sexual preference) was that the men started dressing differently and even walking differently. Their husbands felt a sense of freedom, the women said, and they dropped some of their masculine pretences.

"He became a different person," said Wanda. "He lost a lot of weight and his personal appearance changed. He is not as masculine, and it bothers the kids and me."

"There's this huge distance between us now, and when I mentioned it to him, he said, 'Yeah, why did you put it there?'"

"I do care about him as a friend, but it's not the same as husband-and-wife caring."

All of the women in the group said both they and their husbands had been in therapy with varying degrees of success. Some said their children had been in therapy, too. Marian said that for a while, her family's mental health bills were about \$500 a month.

The women said it's tough to find a counsellor who is knowledgeable about their problems.

Other women said they had been helped immensely by able therapists. They counselled other spouses of gay men to shop carefully for a good therapist.

Kathy Bloomfield, a psychologist with Psychological Associates in St. Paul, said she has had a number of clients who were heterosexuals married to homosexuals.

"It's an interesting issue," she said. "There's not much written about it. The focus (in the literature) has been on the gay partner, not the heterosexual partner."

"There's very little in a person's life that would help her prepare for something like this. We have all heard of extramarital affairs or we have known people who have had them or we have seen movies or read books about them. But nobody talks about it if it (the affair) is with somebody of the same sex. There's no place to put that."

Many women who discover their husbands are gay ask themselves, "I wonder what's wrong with me?" Bloomfield said. "They ask themselves, 'Am I not adequate to keep a man? Did I cause this?'"

Bloomfield said many times, the husband and wife love each other. But the gay spouse says, "Please don't tell anybody." This is very isolating (for the heterosexual spouse)."

The prognosis for women married to gay men is "pretty good if they get help and support," Bloomfield said. "But they will have some tough years."

Her mom will be there when she needs her

les on school nights. They actually agree that a party should have an ending time and they should be allowed to know it is.

her teenagers are less predictable, and that's the tough

ey say they aren't sure what the movie will be over, and might get a ride home and might take the bus, and they stop for a snack.

ese are the kids who should even 25 cents for a phone call the clear message they must and tell you their plans when movie gets out.

is common courtesy lets you know how they are getting home when to expect them. How-

it's not foolproof. There are teenagers who go to a friend's after a movie and relax fully knowing they don't have a rush for the last bus because they've been promised a ride

the meantime, their parents relax at all because this innovation hasn't been passed on. Kids have to know that if it's late, you will always have a phone call.

the suggestion I haven't tried but thought about seriously last time I worried about the whereabouts of a 17-year-old who told me she'd be taking the home, is the alarm clock technique.

is difficult to impress on a teenager that parents actually can be quite frantic wondering if they are safe. Because they've been parents themselves,

some really wonder what all the fuss is about. This is a good way to place the worry where it belongs - on them.

They set an alarm clock in their bedroom for 30 minutes after the time they've agreed to be home. If they're home in time, they turn off the alarm. If they don't get back by then, the alarm will wake you up and you can start worrying, phoning their

friends or phoning the police. Until then, you don't have to worry.

Of course, if they phone before the deadline, you'll adjust the clock.

Editor's note

Do you have questions about parenting? Please send them to Pat Bell. Her first column each month will deal with readers' questions. She'll provide practical answers drawn from her own ex-


perience in raising three children and from writing about parenting for 20 years. If she doesn't know the answer, she'll get one from the experts.

Send your questions to Pat Bell, column, c/o Living department, *The Citizen*, 1101 Baxter Rd., Box 5020, Ottawa, Ont. K2C 3M4.

Include your name, address and phone number — they won't be printed.

HOWARD

Distinguished Designers and Manufacturers of Fine Jewellery



19th Birthday Celebration!

Genuine Cultured Pearls

Elegant cultured pearls in all lengths and sizes complete with fine 14kt gold clasp. Lustrous and beautiful, no jewellery wardrobe is complete without them!

Layaway Now for Christmas

EXAMPLE	
● 16" strand 5½-6mm ...	\$249
● 18" strand 5½-6mm ...	\$278
● 20" strand 5½-6mm ...	\$306
● 18" strand 6-6½mm ...	\$335
● 14kt GOLD Pearl Stud Earrings ...	From \$65

HOWARD

Manufacturing Jewellers Ltd.
The Howard Bldg.-200 Sparks St. 238-3300
Store Hours: NOW OPEN Mon.-Sat. 9:30-6:00; Thurs., Fri. 9:30-9:00

HADASSAH WIZO BAZAAR/FLEA MARKET