



Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 47
“Should I leave my relationship?”
November 4, 2021

Is it time to exit an LTR that’s not working? How will you know? Panelists answer a listener question on getting out (or not), plus Karen’s Sermon on what keeps us stuck in situations we don’t want.

Host: Karen Yates

Guests: Heather Shannon, Matthew Amador, Peter/MksThingsHappin

[Wild & Sublime theme music]

Heather Shannon

How can you really take responsibility for your own happiness, and not have that be dependent on a relationship?

Karen Yates

Welcome to Wild & Sublime, a sexy spin on infotainment®, no matter your preferences, orientation, or relationship style, based on the popular live Chicago show. Each week, I'll chat about sex and relationships with citizens from the world of sex positivity. You'll hear meaningful conversation, dialogues that go deeper, and information that can help you become more free in your sexual expression. I'm sex educator Karen Yates. This week, a listener wants to know: "How do I get out? Should I get out?" Our panel answers. Plus, my Sermon on the Pubic Mound. Keep listening.

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Hey, folks. "Stay or go?" That is the question today on this episode. When is the time to get out of a long-term relationship? It's something many of us ponder at some point in our life. The exact question was posed by a Patreon member in a Q&A this past summer. And you'll be hearing from our knowledgeable experts as they respond. And I'll also weigh in on the subject for my Sermon on the Pubic Mound as I recall an old song from childhood.

So, our panel today. New to the show, sex therapist Heather Shannon; kink and relationship coach Peter aka MksThingsHappin; and psychotherapist for love, sex, and gender rebels, Matthew Amador. Enjoy.

Someone writes: "When do you know to end a relationship? I've been with someone for six years, we've lived together four of them, no kids. Things are getting harder rather than easier, meaning we seem like we are more roommates than partners. We've done some counseling together, and it hasn't helped grow the relationship. Neither of us is doing anything different. I tried initially, but didn't see any changes in my partner. I think I'm just afraid to leave. I guess I'm waiting for a breaking point, but maybe that's not going to happen. Do you have any advice? Signed, Can't Jump."

Heather Shannon

So much to say about this.

Karen Yates

Okay, Heather. Have at it.

Heather Shannon

I think that that last piece, actually, the waiting for a breaking point, is something that I see with so many people. And to me, it feels like there's some element of not giving yourself full permission to feel how you feel. And I don't know if that's the case with this person. Also, I'm so used to talking to the human and asking, like, 20 follow up questions -- so, I'm going to do the best I can with the information we have. But, you know, clients, people I love in my personal life, have said these things to me -- like, "Oh, I'm kind of gonna wait till our next fight and break up." And I'm like, "What?!" You know, if you already feel not good, you don't need to wait for a big event. So I guess just this idea that we don't have to justify, we don't have to over-justify to ourselves, to anyone else, why we're ending it. I also think it's really interesting what this person is saying about going to counseling, but nothing is changing. It does make me wonder, is there resistance there? Like, are they -- because I mean, when I work with relationship

partners, there's homework, there's, you know, tips, there's books to read, there's exercises to do. So I'm curious, like, are those things not happening? Is it sort of like a quid pro quo almost, like, "Well, I'm not going to make the effort if you're not making the effort"? And I guess I'll just say on that, like, that's not going to be a helpful way to approach a relationship, if it's kind of like, I'm only going to make the effort and be kind of vulnerable if you're going to do it. So I think when we just really take responsibility for ourselves and show up how -- like, for me, do I want to show up how I want to be in a relationship, regardless of what the other person is doing? So that's what I would encourage this person to look at. Like, are you showing up as the relationship partner that you want to be, in whatever relationship you wind up in, whether it's this one or something else down the road, and that you're really responsible for your own behavior. And oftentimes what happens is when someone really, really owns that, the other person starts responding to them differently. But it could take a while. There is usually a delay. So I'll say that -- like, don't do it expecting the other person to respond. Just do it because that's who you want to be. And then the original basic question of, like, when do you break up? I'm a big believer in the law of attraction. I'm sure Peter will make fun of me for that later. But one of the things that it says is, like, first make yourself happy in the current situation, and then leave, just because you want to go create something else in the world -- not because, you know, you're miserable. And I think there's limits to that, personally. It's like, if you're being abused, if it's super toxic -- but this person saying 'roommates,' which doesn't sound like any of those super-toxic things. So it's kind of like, how can you really take responsibility for your own happiness, and not have that be dependent on a relationship? Which is not a quick thing to answer. But yeah.

Karen Yates

There were a couple of points I really liked. One point of, like, change doesn't happen quickly. But I really like this idea of coming from a place of, this is who I want to be; I am going to be this person in the relationship, no matter what. Peter or Matthew, thoughts?

Peter/Mksthingshappin

Seven-point-six billion. There are 7.6 billion people in the world. Which means that if something isn't working out, you probably can find a better match. Here's the thing: if you're asking the question, "Should I stay in the relationship?" That means there's a lot of root causes creating that question. There's a lot of problems. And it is up to the individual to decide if the relationship is going to work for them. Is it going to add value, is it going to enhance their life? Are they going to get something out of it? Or is it going to bring them down? Because quite frankly, when you interact with anyone, either

they're going to add value to your life, or take it away. It's kind of a simplistic way of viewing things. But the reality is that you choose the people that are in your life. I was married for 15 years. The last two years were a roommate situation. We did have kids, so there were definitely a lot of other considerations that needed to happen. It was the house, it was the children, it was finances. There's a lot of legitimate things to stay there. But much like what Heather was alluding to, you need to first decide your value. What do you bring to a relationship? What do you bring to the world? And then decide that the people in your life are going to enhance those values, or take away from them. There's, once again, no two ways about it. And if this person has already approached their partner to say, "I'm not happy," have taken concrete steps to see a therapist -- that is a very proactive thing to do to try to make it work -- and it's still not working, then the question is: Why are you still there? What is preventing you from getting over the fear? Because it's scary to be alone. But what is preventing you from getting out of that relationship and working on yourself, or finding one of these 7.6 billion people in the world, that most likely is a better match? Just to extend this a little bit further, my current relationships are much better than in my marriage, mainly because I clearly defined what I brought to the table, and then decided what kind of people I wanted in my life. When I did the self work, the self discovery -- and it took years. It wasn't just sitting there with a piece of paper and coming up with it. It took a lot of self reflection, work, mistakes, messing things up. But once I've had the template, the people that I attracted, the people I spent time with, was a much easier decision. And it's really easy for me to not interact with people who I perceived as having a red flag. I'll stop there. I could go on. [laughs]

Karen Yates

Well, what I like about what you're saying is, at one point you said, "Well, this is rather simplistic," but sometimes I think when you're in a relationship, a long-term relationship, the mind becomes kind of like a hall of mirrors. You can kind of go around and around and around, and sometimes that really is just really basic. Like, you know, what's going on here? Is this person adding to my life, period? That can be really helpful. Or, why am I still here? What is keeping me from actually leaving? So, yeah. Matthew, what are you thinking here?

Matthew Amador

Yeah. "What keeps me from leaving?" That question, it keeps going through my head. And I'm wondering, what could keep the person there? I really wish I could sit down with "Jump" right now and ask some follow-up questions. It makes me curious about expectations of the relationship. Have they evolved with you? Are these expectations that are -- like, are you recognizing flaws within the relationship, or concerns about the

relationship that just are not meeting your true needs? Or do you have an idea of what the relationship should be? Which can sometimes be counterintuitive to actually what you need. Like, sometimes, yeah, I would love to have a relationship where, oh yeah, we're having sex all the time, we're going on a jet over to that other country that doesn't have Covid, and we're having caviar, champagne... That's great. I'm probably not going to get that right now. For one thing, Covid is in most countries, so that's one thing that's off the menu right there. But I might not get that. It sounds cool. It's hyped up in a lot of romantic notions of a relationship like that; it can be sold to us through media, through TV, through books. Maybe it's not true for what I actually want. Like, if I sit down and I think about it, I'm like, actually, you know what? What could be cool is just macaroni on the sofa. That could be awesome. So I would just do some -- I'd be curious about what their personal expectations are. Just to be clear about them. Not at all to gaslight them and be like, "Oh, no, you must be wrong about this." No. Just to clarify. Then once that is underway, then I'd be curious about -- "Yeah, why haven't you left yet? Why?" There's a thing that a lot of us do, where we, for some reason, think things have to be absolutely terrible. Things have to absolutely be rock bottom before we can actually make a change like this in our lives. That's not true. That's not true. There's so many things we do in our lives right now that we don't wait until things are absolutely catastrophic. I don't wait until I am completely stinky to go take a shower. Sometimes it's just time.

Karen Yates

Okay. Any other thoughts?

Heather Shannon

Yeah. One thing I wanted to say, and this is a little bit because I know Peter, but you know, I feel like -- [laughs] don't worry, Peter, it's gonna be fine. But like, you know, you're saying, "Yeah, find people who line up with you, and there's all these billions of people in the world." Yes. And, you're someone who really puts work into your relationships, too. Like, you have done so much personal growth work, you've really worked on your side of the street. And so, I just reiterate that. Yes, go find someone who fits well with you. But if you haven't worked on your side of the street, you're going to be bringing those problems into whatever relationship you go into next.

Matthew Amador

Absolutely.

Karen Yates

One hundred percent. Yeah. We're all like, "Yes!" [laughter]

Peter/Mksthingshappin

To kind of piggyback, clarify: one of the reasons I am capable of walking away from a relationship -- and it didn't have to be something bad happen, as Matthew was saying -- I am quick, in the beginning, if someone doesn't jive with me by violating some of the things that are important to me, is because I have done the work, and I do know what I bring to the table, and I can articulate what I bring to the table. And I, once again, just know my value. So why would I, quote-unquote, waste my time with an individual that really is not going to, once again, enhance my life. And it sounds very selfish -- and on one hand it is. But it is your life. You know, how can you make someone else happy if you're not happy? I think that was said. Well, you need to be able to define clearly what makes you happy. And when you can do that, things just open up for you.

Karen Yates

I one hundred percent agree, in the fact that, like, the more I know myself as I go on, the clearer I am when choosing a partner. Period. I mean, it's really that simple. And I don't have to go on endless dates. It's like, sometimes just a text on a dating app. It's like, "Oh, okay, no. This isn't gonna work." Whereas, maybe like, two years ago, I'd be like, [wishy-washy noises]... Matthew?

Matthew Amador

I just want to say, Peter, you kind of said this thing is selfish. I don't think it's selfish. I think it's for yourself, but it is in no way taking away from somebody else. There's not a word in the English language that is about 'for yourself.' We seem to use 'selfish' a lot, and it has a very negative tinge to it. And what you're talking about is not hurting anybody. It's not hurting a damn person, Peter. Go fuckin' be you. I'm proud of you

Heather Shannon

[laughs]

Peter/Mksthingshappin

It actually saves the hurt. I have messed up many relationships in my life. This is why I've taken the stance, and I have realized that by doing the hard decision now, it's saved me from bad experiences. And I've lived long enough where I have seen me make a decision that I'm like, "Oh, was that really the right call?" And five years down the line, I go "Yup!" I meet the person, and I see them in another relationship -- I'm like, "Missed that bullet!"

Matthew Amador

And you know, you were talking about acknowledging what you bring to the table. It reminds me of what Can't Jump was talking about, going into relationship therapy and not feeling like anything's changed. It reminds me that no matter how much extra credit we put into a relationship, we are only going to be 50% of it. No matter how much extra credit you're doing, you're only going to be up to 50%. So really, you need that other person to actually come and meet you halfway.

Peter/Mksthingshappin

I disagree with the percentage.

Karen Yates

Seriously?

Peter/Mksthingshappin

Yes.

Karen Yates

Let's hear it. Let's hear the wisdom.

Peter/Mksthingshappin

Assuming that you want the relationship to work long term, it's 100-100. You're giving 100% of yourself. Now, that doesn't necessarily mean you're dedicating your life to this individual, but you are looking to improve your life with this person in it. So, you know, you have to make concessions for part of being in a relationship. But you're not giving yourself half to this person -- you're all of it. Your flaws, your positive stuff, your annoyances, your pet peeves. All of it is there, whether the person wants to realize it or not. And it's really up to you to make sure that you are doing the best job you can with the 100 that you're giving them.

Karen Yates

Well actually, this is reminding me of what Heather began with, with this idea of, "Be the person you want to be." In any relationship you are you. So it's more like, just step into it, and be it. And I mean, Matthew, don't get me wrong, I totally understand what you mean -- like, if the other person is not.... And I've been in those situations, where it's like, dude, I'm doing all the fucking work! [laughs] I'm holding the emotional luggage.

Heather Shannon

Me too, Karen! [laughter]

Peter/Mksthingshappin

Me too!

Matthew Amador

But I'm also presuming that the relationship we're talking about, this idealized relationship, is one that promotes mutuality. It isn't, like, a power exchange relationship, for instance, or isn't like a secondary -- where you're going to put secondary energy into it. Like, I'm going to assume that is not the case. But yes, absolutely.

Karen Yates

Yeah. Heather, did you want to say something about holding emotional luggage? Hermes or Versace luggage? [laughter]

Peter/Mksthingshappin

I keep mine in a Target bag.

Heather Shannon

Yeah! I mean, I think I'm thinking back to a relationship, you know, with a nice human, but it was one of those things where -- and I think, especially as a therapist, sometimes I'm like, "If we just try hard enough, transformation is possible!" And like, we can, you know, just learn and just figure it out. And we went to couples counseling, actually. And my big takeaway -- and the counselor was cool, because he was like, "What is going to allow you to thrive as an individual?" He's like, "You're not married, there's no religious sacrament or legal bond happening here. So what is going to allow you to thrive?" And it just became very clear that it's like, oh, I'm really trying to force this. Like, I'm really trying to just dig in and make this be a fit, when there's some fundamental differences that are just never gonna line up. And so, I think just really accepting that, and not making our lives more difficult -- I highly recommend that.

Matthew Amador

Absolutely. That's actually what I was thinking of, in terms of, like, you're responsible for 50% of the relationship. Not fifty percent of the energy -- fifty percent of the relationship. And if you do extra credit to try to make it fit, it's not yours to do.

Karen Yates

You're reminding me of the old Germanic original version of Cinderella, where the step-sisters were cutting their toes and heels off to fit into the slipper.

Heather Shannon

Yes! It feels like "shoulds," and "supposed tos" we have, that we're like, "I must hack off my foot to fit in the slipper!" Really, emotionally, it's terrible.

Peter/Mksthingshappin

And being in a relationship, not the work behind it, but being with someone, should be easy. It should be organic. I mean, think about your best friend in life. If you say, who's your best friend? And this person you name. There was not a lot of work forging that relationship. It just happened. And you love that person to death; you'll do anything for them, because they accept you for who you are, and vice versa. And for some reason, in relationships -- and I think, Matthew, you were talking about movies and books, and you're supposed to have this meet-cute, and all this stuff is piled on it where it's supposed to be perfect. And that's not really going to happen. It's not really gonna happen. It should be easy. Maintaining it, getting what you need, that requires work. But being with them should be easy.

Karen Yates

For more information on Heather Shannon, MksThingsHappin, and Matthew Amador, go to our show notes.

Wild & Sublime is supported in part by our Sublime Supporter, Full Color Life Therapy. Therapy for all of you at fullcolorlifetherapy.com. And when I am not producing Wild & Sublime, I work with folks, helping them to shift energetic and emotional patterns in their bioelectric field, using frequency. Similar to acupuncture, except with sound, biofield tuning, as this method is known, gently restores energetic flow to the body, and can be done remotely. Go to karen-yates.com or the show notes to book a session or learn more. And now, it is time for my Sermon on the Pubic Mound.

[organ music]

So, for the lead-in to today's episode, I was going to rip the iconic intro, performed by drummer Steve Gadd, to Paul Simon's song "50 Ways to Leave Your Lover." You know, it goes, [mouth drumming]. So, as I went to listen to it on YouTube, I stumbled onto another video: Drummer Steve Gadd himself showing a dude how he pulled the riff together -- and it's complicated. So then, I see another video of another drummer

breaking it down even further, to the point where it's completely comprehensible to a beginner. And I'll stick all of those links in the show notes, by the way. So I got to thinking about these two videos, and how what's easy for some people is not easy for others. And in listening to the panel again, I began thinking about the reasons people stay in relationships. Things that didn't come up today at all in the original question, but do keep people in relationships, can be financial reasons, children, perhaps illness, disability. So there are many reasons -- tangible, but usually intangible -- that we tell ourselves about why we need to stay in a relationship. Those reasons, as complicated as they seem, can be worked through if we're determined to work through them. Maybe we need to make a financial plan, or a housing plan before we tell our partner we're leaving, or create a network of support to help move us out, figuratively and literally. The most important thing, though, and something that was alluded to today, was, why am I telling myself I can't leave? What is it that I'm most afraid of? Being alone? That I'll never be with anyone else again? Or that I'll somehow not make it, whatever that means? While most of our fears are groundless, until we look at them carefully, and break them down piece by piece, like the drum solo, can we begin to slowly change our perspective in order to make beneficial changes for ourselves. Maybe we need to engage a professional to look at trauma patterns, a seemingly invisible matrix that can keep us in situations long after the expiration date. Whatever action is needed, small steps do eventually add up, giving us the courage we need to leave.

Next week: do you need a sexual surrogate? We talk to two surrogates about all the questions.

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