



**Wild & Sublime® Podcast, Season 2 Episode 48**  
**“Do you need a surrogate partner?”**  
**November 11, 2021**

**What exactly does a surrogate partner do? In a continuing exploration of sex work today, we hear from two professional surrogates about the intimate work of redressing trauma, dismantling unhealthy assumptions about sex, and helping clients move toward the relationships they want.**

**Host: Karen Yates**

**Guests: River Roaring, Brian Gibney**

[Wild & Sublime theme music]

River Roaring

Our work is really just peeling away the layers that were learned that are not helpful. The true, authentic sexuality is always right there underneath. We were born with it fully developed and ready.

Brian Gibney

If you don't fit into a particular box for what our society considers normal, you don't get to participate in the game of relationships and sexuality — and I think that's bullshit.

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, I talk to surrogate partners about intimate healing. We discuss cultural obstacles, session details, and a whole lot more. Keep listening.

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creator notes, and — just added — merch discounts. And until the end of November, those subscribing at the \$10 a month level receive a Wild & Sublime sticker. Help spread sex positivity throughout the world. You can access The Afterglow and a one-time tip jar in our show notes, or at [wildandsublime.com](http://wildandsublime.com). If you'd like to help out in another way, consider forwarding this episode, writing a review, or telling your friends about us. Thanks so much for your listening support.

Hey, folks. We have such a great episode today, as we talk to two surrogate partners about their work. There are a lot of misconceptions about what being a surrogate partner means. And even though the work has existed formally for over 50 years, it's still not widely utilized as a therapeutic method. But that is slowly changing. This episode exists as part of our sex work series, looking at various types of employment in the realm of sexuality. And the conversation today spans the work of surrogacy itself, but also gets into deeper ideas of sexual freedom, the legalities of the work, and somatic understanding. Side note: we talk a fair amount about somatic work in this episode, and somatic methods are discussed from time to time occasionally on the show, since it's what I have been trained in. Somatic ostensibly means of the body, but unlike the word "physical," say, somatic implies a body wisdom, or the body knowing itself from the inside, irrespective of cultural standards and norms. Somatic work helps reset the nervous system when it's been dysregulated due to trauma. You'll be meeting today members of the Surrogate Partner Collective, a new organization that is centered around professional education, support, and advocacy of surrogate partners and therapeutic professionals. River Roaring is a surrogate partner, private coach, and workshop facilitator based in Austin, Texas. Brian Gibney is a surrogate partner, educator, and intimacy coach based in Virginia. Enjoy.

River and Brian, welcome.

Brian Gibney  
Hi, Karen.

River Roaring  
Thank you, Karen. It's an honor.

Karen Yates  
I'm really excited about this conversation today, because I think this is such an important topic. Surrogate therapy. What is surrogacy? And what does it aim to accomplish?

Brian Gibney

So, surrogate partner therapy is a therapeutic relationship, which consists of a client seeking help, a therapist — usually a talk therapist that we might call just a general clinician — and a surrogate partner practitioner. We enter a relationship with a client that helps them address emotional or physical intimacy issues that may be inhibiting them from having healthy sexual relationships with themselves or others.

Karen Yates

So I saw on — I think, Brian, it was your website, or it was the Surrogate Partner Collective — that it's really meant for people who are not in partnership currently, and who would not be able to enter into partnership easily. Correct?

Unknown Speaker

Yeah, it's really for that. Surrogate partner therapy was developed by Masters and Johnson back in the '60s to '70s. And at that time, they were mired in a view of mental health that they used a lot of dysfunction terms. So at that time, a person would need to be single and have a diagnosed sexual dysfunction by their sex therapist. We've now evolved the profession, and I don't think anyone in the Surrogate Partner Collective wants to use words of dysfunction, or that frame. So you're right, Karen, it is designed for people who are single and having a very difficult problem entering intimate relationship. The idea is that some people could sit and talk with their sex therapist year after year after year, and for some reason, there's a block to actually moving out in the world — you know, taking action, and developing even the beginning of a relationship. So that's when we typically come in.

Brian Gibney

I would love to add that one of the things that we are noticing as the profession evolves is that we are not just professionals who do a certain set of exercises. We are really about helping a client have a somatic, an integrated somatic experience, where they get to feel what it is like to be in relationship with us. One of the reasons why we tend not to work couples as surrogate partners — or, like, individuals in a coupled relationship — is because we want them to be able to come in just as themselves, with a very clear idea of what their feeling is, without being encumbered about, "What might my partner think of this?" How do they start to answer questions honestly, based on their own somatic feelings? Not in reference to other people, which is one of the key parts of the work.

Karen Yates

Yeah, it's interesting you're saying that, because I think when we are in long-term relationships, we don't even realize that it has infused so much of our response about sexuality and communication. It's hard to untease the two. It doesn't feel safe sometimes, I think, to do that.

Brian Gibney

And one of the paradigms that we have in coupled relationships is, on a cultural level, a pretty unhealthy enmeshment with a partner, that I think really inhibits owning yourself where you are in a relationship. That we have to unlearn as we go through with clients and surrogate partner therapy. How do we unlearn this cultural messaging, this cultural norm, to really show up as an authentic human being?

Karen Yates

That sounds like it would take a very, very long time.

Unknown Speaker

Well, I like to say, there's really nothing to learn. There are only things to unlearn. So with that, it's surprising, actually, to me how quickly the layers can be peeled away. Because the truth is, our work is really just peeling away the layers that were learned that are not helpful. The true authentic sexuality is always right there underneath. We were born with it fully developed and ready. You know, in a way. I'm talking about sexuality as a creative force, as part of our life force. So it's really fun to uncover it — sometimes quicker, sometimes takes a little more time.

Karen Yates

Yeah, yeah.

Brian Gibney

But there almost always is a general sigh of relief that a client has when they realize they have permission to show up just as they are. So that's one of the things that we like to provide for clients. Like, you are as you are, and we get to define our relationship based on that.

Karen Yates

Before we jump into some, like, what happens in the session, can you outline for me, briefly: when you're working with a therapist and the client, like, how does it evolve? Is it the therapist who decides, oh, the client, I think, would really benefit from surrogate

therapy? Or does the client ask for a surrogate? Like, how does that transition moment happen?

Brian Gibney

I think that's a really interesting question. I think every surrogate partner does it a little bit differently. But I would love to hear how River does it. I would love to say how I do it. And I think there's some common threads there that kind of say what we do as a profession.

River Roaring

Beautiful, thank you. I have a website that does attract some potential clients coming through to see my website directly. And if I'm contacted about this program, I immediately send them over to a therapist. So the person doesn't meet me unless and until they've seen their sex therapist a few times, or a therapist who's willing to work with their sexuality. And they have worked with the therapist long enough to fully understand the program, and also for the therapist to believe it is recommended for them. And so at that point, if the two of them believe this is the best way to go, the therapist will contact me and we'll have a chat to see if the two of us are willing to collaborate together and can come to agreement. And so then, if we have this professional, collaborative agreement, then the client is invited to step in and contact me and set up the appointments. My work is a temporary time with the clients. A typical client for me is frequently six months that I'll work with them. And then the person goes back into the care, and they're with their therapist the whole time, so every time I see the client, I report to the therapist each time about what happened, and the therapist is reporting back to me what happened in their sessions each time, so we can support the client all the way around. And so that the client has someone to confess uncomfortable feelings about me, if they have them, if they can't say that to my face. So they have this really supportive holding by both of us. We wrap around them in a sense. And then at the end of the work with me, the person goes back to integrate and generalize all the work with their therapist, as long as they decide to continue with the therapist, until they feel their goals have been met in their life.

Karen Yates

Yeah, one of the things that's striking me so forcibly is, I think about the triangle, right? Which is always seen in such a negative light. But the triangle is also balance. It is the geometric symbol of balance. And so in the positive aspect, it is being held by two other people, but also, it's a flow of information.

River Roaring

Yes. Actually, the triangle does represent stability. Thanks for pointing that out. Yeah. It's beautiful.

Karen Yates

So Brian, how does it differ, and how is it the same for you?

Brian Gibney

I think River explained that really, really well. And that's very similar to how I work with therapists and clients in a therapeutic triad. Clients usually come to me through therapists. I almost never have clients contact me from my website. And part of that difference may be gendered scripts — that I work primarily with clients. So a female seeking a male for this service, there are other obstacles there. And it may feel more supportive for them to reach me through their therapist, or their therapist may have knowledge of me that a female client might not initially go out and find on their own. Whereas, male clients feel a little bit more motivated, or entitled to their sexuality. So they may go out and do that research on their own. But just like River, I think it's really, really important for a client to have a background relationship with their therapist. You know, their therapist is really the strong base that a client can come back to. Because chances are, there's going to be some kind of conflict in our relationship. And they need to be able to go back to another person that has a bird's-eye view of the relationship, and not just our relationship in the container of surrogate partner therapy, but the broader context of the client and their relationships outside of the work. So they can say, okay, so you're having a conflict with your surrogate partner. Is this a pattern? Is it something that shows up in other relationships that you have? What will working through this conflict work? How does this help you develop better, healthier relationship skills? Is this a you thing? Is this a surrogate thing? Is this something that you're just missing each other? How can we negotiate that? So at some point in time, the therapist inevitably acts as a couples counselor, by helping us bridge the gap between the two of us, and they help provide a broader context for the work. Another thing that I really liked that River said is that because our relationship with the client is temporary, the therapist is there to kind of help with the transition out of the relationship. Because there might be grief. There might be feelings of, oh God, I've just had this incredibly intense emotional experience, where I was held and I was cared for — how am I ever going to find that in the real world? And a therapist can say, well, wait, you've got the skills — let's talk about how you do that. And help them reframe the experience, and bring it out into the wild.

Karen Yates

How do you leave a relationship like this, which obviously has the potential to be so fulfilling and nourishing and nurturing and slightly parental but loving — and like, oh, my God! One thing I liked, that you said earlier, was, there's accountability for the surrogate as well, through the therapist. And that would seem to me that it would lend so much safety. If someone as a client was leery, or if something happened, and it's like, oh, my god, is that normal? Or, am I okay? Are they weird? What's going on? And that they have actually someone to talk to about that.

Brian Gibney

Yeah. There has to be that. And as good as most surrogates are about being introspective and self aware, and saying, okay, this may be coming from my baggage, and, you know, my personal history, and this may not be about you, it's nice to have another person to bounce those ideas off of. It's essential to have another person to bounce those ideas off of.

Karen Yates

What do the initial meetings look like?

Brian Gibney

River, you mind if I start with this? Because I think the general ideas of what we are doing is very, very similar. The tools that we have in our toolbox are a little bit different. So it's really fun to say, okay, I'm using this tool, River's using this tool, but we're both doing the same thing with different tools. In the beginning, the relationship between me and a client is very much like a teacher-student relationship. And it transforms into eventually a more peer to peer relationship. So I'm switching hats as we go through the relationship, slowly creating more freedom, showing up more as myself with my own wants and needs in a relationship, which is a great practice tool for a client. But in the very beginning, there is a lot of structure in how I do the work. So it feels like we are doing these structured exercises where we talk about somatic self-awareness, the interpersonal awareness, their relationship with themselves. We are taught to ignore our body signals — you know, that feeling that we have in our gut, the tingling feeling that we get in our fingers sometimes. We are taught from a very early age to ignore that, and to do the things that we think we should do. And I really like to, in the early sessions, dismantle that — that notion of ignoring those somatic awareness, and teach clients through what I call a somatic body scan, where it's kind of a mindful embodiment meditation — just being aware of all the sensations that our bodies take in. I often do a brief history of the person: what their relationship history is, what their relationship with their parents is like, what their relationship with sexuality and religion

are like. And also — which is key to moving forward — is developing a base of consent and communication. So one of the first exercises that I do is called "May I?/Will you?" I love it. But it really breaks down different communication dynamics in a very intentional way, to help clients experience, "This is what it feels like in my body when we communicate this way." We're always going back to the body and saying, our body is our primary source of information. Then we use our head to process that information. And then we use our mouths to talk to each other. Eventually, we'll be able to get to using our bodies to talk to each other, but that's waaay down the road, and some clients don't ever get there.

Karen Yates

So River, what are some of the things that you do initially in sessions with clients?

River Roaring

Well, Brian and I are in common. And I think the surrogate partner's work is really centered on helping and supporting people in hearing their body again. Because really, the journey itself is to hear the body again. So that's probably where we all come together as surrogate partners, and how we get there are different. I really enjoy the first session. What I now do is, we get coloring pens and pencils out and a blank piece of paper, and I ask them to, in a few minutes, show me on paper their ultimate possible life dream for their love, sex and intimacy world. Draw it out. And in two or three minutes, they sometimes take a second to pause — "I don't know if I can do this, what are you talking about?" Anything can be on that paper, anything in the world. Just put it down. What is the ultimate, no holds barred, the most fabulous outcome of your love, sex and intimacy life and partnerships? And I really am getting a lot out of those pictures. They're so revealing, and really beautiful. From that point on with the client, I let them know, that's our North Star, and everything we do is a walk toward this picture. And, of course, we get to know each other a bit and build some trust. When they're ready to share, I like to hear about their body story of sex so far. And I get to hear a lot about what's happened so far with them in their sexuality, and it's often a series of traumatic events. And when we trace those traumatic events, I like to find out when you feel into that that happened there in that time, maybe it was an attempt at losing their virginity, or maybe it was a shameful experience with them self-pleasuring at some point, or something like this. And it's usually shame and guilt. And when that happened, where do you remember that lingering in your body? What do you remember in your sensations experience from that experience? It's amazing how people hold those traumas, and how often the sensations that were in those early experiences in their body are exactly what's currently locked up today, decades later. So I like to hear their body's story, and show them how the thinking mind has however

many years they've been on Earth knowledge up in there, as information. I've been on the earth 53 years; I have 53 years of information up here in my brain. Below that, on my body, I have 3 billion years of wisdom, because every cell in my body is holding the wisdom of all humanity. And you know, that's the Western science now. It's not just woo-woo. That's proven now. In our DNA strands. So I like to let — why don't we learn how to open up your 3 billion years of wisdom, and then start living from that place? And your 3 billion years of wisdom will let you know when to move forward, when to move backward. And so, that's how I like to begin to set up our framework together.

Karen Yates

So, there's a lot of misconceptions about surrogacy work, and I think one of them is all sex, all the time. And it's a sort of a therapeutic prostitution. I'm just going to put it on the table, right?

Brian Gibney

Oh, yeah.

Karen Yates

Talk to me about that. I think that was my initial misconception about it. I was stunned to find out that really — well, as you probably will tell me, the sex part may not even happen.

River Roaring

If you think about when surrogate partner was created, that was during the Mad Men show. If you watched Mad Men — I loved it. And think about that. So we're teaching people how to be in a Betsy/what's-his-name relationship. You know, so if you can get the actual thing inside the thing, you have a relationship. [laughs] But today, we have far more sophisticated relationships in the real world. And so, we prepare them for all of those aspects in the real-world relationship, which includes emotion, communication, conflict. I love showing a new version of conflict, where we welcome conflict and we love it, because we get to learn more about one another. And so, bottom line is, as sex may or may not occur, and will develop methodically through a real relationship, same with us. And for me, the body keeps the score. So for me, in my work, I define safety, Karen, as you know, through Betty Martin's work, as the nervous system feels safe. So I work with the client's nervous system, and we go forward step by step, as their nervous system is ready. And so taking a client who's having a problem, and possibly never experienced a healthy sexual experience in their life, taking someone like that straight into an intense sexual experience would be extremely traumatizing. Trauma is

about our nervous system. So we go forward physically as their body wants to. And it's relaxed, and can take in relaxed pleasure. That's the short answer.

Karen Yates

Brian, let's hear your response.

Brian Gibney

Thank you, River. I definitely feel like clients come to us, and feel like they're broken. "I have an orgasm too quickly." "I'm a woman and I can't have penis-in-vagina intercourse, it hurts." "I have these traumatic experiences in my life, can you please help me fix the sex?" And they want to fix the sex so they can get to intimacy. And I think that's one of the things that our culture has completely backwards, is that we try and reach intimacy through sex, through the act of sex. So when we come and we flip that around and say, "Well, no, actually, we're building a foundation of intimacy to get to sex," and say, "Maybe the sex will come, maybe it won't" — it's a little bit jarring for them. Many clients, when they get halfway through that arc of intimacy to sex, they actually — the thing that I really thought I needed to work on isn't the thing at all. I needed to work on safety, I needed to work on communication and connection with my partner, taking up space and asking for what I want. And they may ultimately say, "No offense, but I really don't want to do that with you." And that's great. They get to go out in the wild, and they get to use those tools and experiment with people, and use the tools that we have to say, "This is the kind of relationship that I want." There have been some good scholarly studies saying that, like, only about 15% of the time is there explicit sexuality with the surrogate partner therapy. So that 85% is a lot of time doing everything else. And I think most people who have been exposed to surrogate partner therapy have maybe seen "The Sessions," with Helen Hunt, which was reflective of how one surrogate partner worked, which was in very brief amounts of time, getting to sexuality very, very quickly. But that's not really indicative of most surrogates, and certainly how most people do it. So I think, even though the profession is pretty diverse, there's a common understanding of, like, what River is saying. We are working on getting the nervous system calm. We're building up good relationship skills. And then we're asking ourselves the question, do we want to move forward? And why? What will this give us? Because what we really want to do, what I want to do in my practice, is start to disassemble the sexuality and relationship escalator that many people feel is necessary. I don't want to be a part of that. So if a client says, really, I want to come to you, and I just want to work on finding my yes, and nos — great. And if we learn how to do that in different contexts, sometimes that's a platonic relationship. And sometimes that is more intimate. Then, also great.

Karen Yates

Yeah, when you talked about the relationship escalator, you know, River, you were talking initially about, it's really about unlearning. This is a process of unlearning. And I think about the relationship escalator of, oh, we went on a date. Now we are going to move in with each other. Now we are going to have a civil union or a marriage. And now we are going to bring children - I mean, it's like, quickly leveling up. Leveling up, leveling up, maybe not in a particularly healthy way.

River Roaring

Well, I want to say, Karen, you're right on. You can go into a more granular place with the script. And in popular culture, it's first base, second base, third base, home. That script has got to go in the trash can, ASAP! That is terrible. It's like, I never want to participate in that script the rest of my life. And so, we're peeling people off of that, into, well, what do you actually desire deep inside? Let's do that.

Karen Yates

It just occurred to me — it had never even occurred to me that the base system was also a type of sexual escalator. Right? It's like, okay, you know: foreplay, penetration. I mean, yeah.

River Roaring

And look at all porn. Just totally, boom, reinforcing it, reinforcing it, reinforce it. Come on, guys. Come on, get creative.

Brian Gibney

And that base system is very goal-oriented. It's not about the process. It's not about finding out more about each other. It's about obtaining something. It's very transactional. Yeah. So we want to shift away from transactional relationships, to more relationships based on curiosity and connection.

River Roaring

And pleasure! The purpose of going in for sexual experience, for me, is expanding pleasure for a long time. Totally different than that script.

Karen Yates

Yes. I'll return to my conversation with Brian and River in a moment. Do you know, every episode of Wild & Sublime has a transcript? Go to [wildandsublime.com](http://wildandsublime.com), select the specific episode, and the transcript link is just below the player. Wild & Sublime is

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And now, the second half of my conversation with River Roaring and Brian Gibney. In this half, we talk about the legalities of surrogacy, sexual rights, and sex-negative culture. It is outlined fairly clearly on the Surrogate Partner Collective website — legality. You know, I've started a series on sex work on the podcast, coming in every so often. And this strikes me as a little gray zone. Like, surrogacy could be considered a gray zone. Is it a gray zone?

Brian Gibney

Oh, God, please, please do not use the word "gray zone."

Karen Yates

Is it not? Is it fine?

Brian Gibney

Okay, so the way that the American legality system works is, if it's not explicitly illegal, it's legal. And people balk at that, because they're like, "Oh, it sounds like it should be illegal." So let's talk about what it means when we say "it sounds like it should be illegal." Usually what people mean when they say that is, you're having sex with clients, and that's kind of like prostitution, and prostitution is illegal. Now, I am a proud sex worker. I will say, "decriminalize sex work." That's not the question in this case, although it's part of a really bigger umbrella. The question is, as far as legality is concerned, when sexuality is on the table, is there a quid pro quo? Is there a business agreement that says, if I pay you money, will I get the sex? And, at least in surrogate partner therapy, there is no agreement like that. There might be points in time in the work where sexuality is on the table, but it's always like, let's do this in the context of broader therapeutic work. It may or may not happen. It's not like, you pay me and I will do the thing for you, and that's going to fix your sexual problem. It's like, I pay you and we explore a lot of different things — our communication and consent, our relationship dynamics — which may play out in a sexual capacity. And that's the distinction between where the law is on sexual touch, versus where surrogate partner therapy is.

Karen Yates

Love it.

River Roaring

That's right.

Karen Yates

River? Former lawyer. [laughs]

River Roaring

I was a 20-year trial attorney with my own office here in Austin. And just to cap that off — which was perfect, Brian — I just want to add that the very definition of prostitution is exactly what Brian said: "I pay you money, you give me sex." If someone said that to us, we would be like, "That's a no." That's a solid no. So it just is not prostitution. There's never been a prosecution in the 50 years or whatever we've been doing this, and as a profession. And there's never been, that we can find — we cannot find any documentation of any therapists being in trouble in their licensing because of it. We've heard some rumors that might have happened; we cannot find any documentation of that. We believe there's never been a therapist who's been in trouble for working with surrogate partners. And just thinking about everything we've said here today, together, this is important for our future. And it is important that we stop any rumors that this is an illegal situation, because a lot of therapists are refusing to offer this to their clients who need it, because of this false rumor. So thank you, Karen.

Karen Yates

Oh, I'm so glad. And P.S., if you want to look at law, go to the Surrogate Partner Collective, because there is a whole page about it. And it's very, very clear.

River Roaring

Thank you, Karen.

Brian Gibney

I think the only gray area here is that we have, as a profession, allowed misconceptions and half truths to exist, instead of coming out and saying in plain terms what it is.

Karen Yates

Mmm.

River Roaring

The gray area is in perception.

Karen Yates

Yeah, yeah. The gray area is in the shame.

Brian Gibney

I want to say this for a second, because it folds back into identity of sex workers, which I feel very strongly about. Not everybody wants to say that they are a sex worker that is a surrogate partner. And I think that's totally fine. We have, as therapeutic professionals, a position of privilege. And historically, we have maintained that privilege by othering other touch professionals, by saying, "You're closer to what we think of as sex work, or prostitution, and we're not you, so therefore, we must be more legitimate." And one of the things that I believe very strongly in is saying that that's not really the best way to go about doing things — for our professional identity, but also for the client's well-being. Sometimes the client doesn't need surrogate partner therapy; sometimes they need another touch modality that in the past we might have othered. And let's talk about what its utility is for the client, because really what it is all about, at the end of the day, is a client's well-being.

Karen Yates

You're reminding me that in the the first sex work episode we did, we talked about "the whorearchy." The hierarchy of whores.

Brian Gibney

Yeah. I love that word.

Karen Yates

The fluidity of, like, "Oh, I'm doing this, but I'm not doing this... You're doing that." So that's really great. I'm really glad we opened up this part of the conversation to talk about it. Let's talk about trans folks and folks with disabilities. On one of the websites I saw — I'm not really sure who, because I was just pulling in a lot of information — you know, helping trans folks work with new identity, like, moving forward into the world, surrogacy can help with that. People with disabilities, maybe not having partners, or reassessing after perhaps an injury. Can you talk a little bit about that, those populations?

Brian Gibney

Especially with respect to disability, it's near and dear to my heart. My second child was born with a severe physical disability. He's not with us anymore. But he was with us long enough for us to start asking the question, "What are his relationships going to be like? What is his development into adulthood going to look like?" And we realized that there's a lot of othering — that if you don't fit into a particular box, for what our society considers normal, you don't get to participate in the game of relationships and sexuality. And I think that's bullshit. So what do we do in our work to say, okay, this is

who you are, as you are. Let's talk about how you can use whatever tools you bring to your relationships and have a healthy, happy, pleasure-filled life — whether it's in transition from one body to another, whether it's questioning what type of gender you're attracted to, whether it's saying, "My body can't do certain things, but that's okay. And how do we interact with each other?" I think one of the big things we do is, we are very permissive to clients. We say, you're able to be as you are, and deserve to have happy, healthy pleasure-filled lives.

River Roaring

Absolutely perfect. And Karen, you and I met, years ago, in person, with Betty Martin. And you know what she says, which is, each human has a unique sexual expression, unique to them. So it's beautiful to find out where certain people's unique sexuality lies, especially when they're in sort of bodies that are not following the script. It's very exciting.

Karen Yates

Yeah. So that leads me to this idea of sexual citizenship, an idea that is so hot for me, which is sex is a basic human right. And let's just open this up, because I think that's where, at least as I see, surrogacy fits in as a puzzle piece, of bringing people more fully into their sexuality and the full spectrum of sensation and pleasure for themselves. Do you have some thoughts about sex as a basic human right? I would love to hear your mission statements, as it were, I guess, if I may be so bold.

River Roaring

Brian, would you like to start?

Brian Gibney

So, I come at this work from a very academic background. And I am acutely aware of the fact that we have been taught that our personhood is justified in terms of our brain, in terms of our productivity that we can have in our jobs, and our intellectual capacity. And I reject that. I think that we all are having a human experience, and our human experience can be our jobs, our family, but also our sexuality and our pleasure. So I think it is a fundamental right, just to be human, that we are allowed to be fully sexual. This is part of our journey on the planet, to have relationships, to fall in love, to fall in like, to have sex, to make families or not make families. So yeah, I mean, I think this is a huge thing, because it speaks to our autonomy and agency as people, rather than our roles in a capitalist machine. And I might be getting a little bit too counterculture, but —

Karen Yates

Oh, please. You have a home here. [laughs]

Brian Gibney

No, I really do feel like our worth is more than what we can provide for the machine of capitalism, and the societal 'shoulds,' of "This is what you should do to benefit society." We're allowed to just be humans having a human experience. Not only allowed to, but we should fight for that right. We should protect each other's rights to be able to do that. We should be invested in each other's ability to live out a full human experience.

Karen Yates

River?

River Roaring

I just want to sit with that, Brian. So perfect, too. Exactly. Thank you, Karen. I'm really excited that you're asking this question. Because, wow context. So deep with me, because I've dedicated my entire life to relational evolution, especially sexual freedom. And that's because there are oppressive forces in the world trying to make us smaller. However you see them, whatever names you give them, it's true. There are oppressive forces in the world trying to make us smaller and less powerful. That's just true. And so, if they take our sexuality from us, they will win. Because our sexual, creative life force is the source. It's the most potent energy inside a human being. And it's shut down through fear, isolation, shame, and guilt. The human, physical body when in fear and isolation and shame — this is also Western science — it's unable to think rationally, or come up with creative solutions to things. It takes away our function, literally, when we're gripped up in our bodies. And so, to put a society into those places removes our creative life force, our juice, our creativity, our imagination. So I am dedicated to making sure that our sexual life force and creative power, which makes us human, and is the most potent force to work with along those lines, stays alive and stays vibrant, so that we can stay human. So I couldn't be deeper into the question you're asking, and I'm so grateful you asked it. I think it's just the most — for me and my purpose for being here, my divine message is: You're here for this. It's the most important thing you can possibly do in the world. So thank you.

Karen Yates

In one of the first live shows I did, I talked about the concept of, if you're fully in touch with your pleasure, you can't be controlled.

River Roaring

Exactly it, Karen, in one sentence,

Karen Yates

And that is — I want people to hold on to.

River Roaring

Oh, oh yes, you could just drop the mic, babe. [laughs] Yes, it is our power. Your creativity is your power. What makes us human? Our imagination. That's what we have that others don't: our creative imagination. Our ability to dream new things that haven't existed yet. And that comes — a lot of people don't understand the connection to creativity and sexuality.

Karen Yates

Yes, it's the play aspect. I've been thinking a lot about play lately. We just did an episode on sexual roleplay, where I was in deep dialogue with a friend of mine. And this idea of, you know, you're juicing everything when you're in play. I think about kink and the imagination that is sort of tapped into when you start, you know, moving outside of these really very narrow scripts, right? And in some regards, I think you can look at it like a volcano, except not in a destructive way. But like, we have this fiery furnace inside. And then as the lava starts bursting out, it will start flowing and moving in many different ways. It's beautiful, but I think it's terrifying to people. It's terrifying. I would love you to answer this, both of you, and River, we'll start with you. We live in a sex-negative culture. You've outlined some of the things that lead to sex negativity — shame, guilt — some of these come directly from a lot of the millennia-old religious concepts that have seeped into culture. You know, I think people always say, "I'm not religious." I'm like, "It doesn't matter, because it's in everything!" So you have this shame/guilt complex; you have other things, like when people are traumatized, they want to control, right? So control is safe. So it's like, all of these things are coming into play. How does surrogacy answer to sex-negative cultures? What does it bring in?

River Roaring

Thank you. When we are with our clients, we of course — removing shame and the guilt from their ideas of the past, about sexuality and who they are. So many people, so many people I find from work, my experience with working with so many people, is that a lot of people are not allowing themselves to go into sexual fantasy. And it's like, wow. So I guess I want to say this: that desire and sexual fantasy, which is our creative imagination in the world of sexuality — a lot of healing in the last 100 years has been focused on the problems that we faced. So, trauma is something that constricts our

bodies and shuts down and removes possibility. And when we free that up, instead of focusing healing on the trauma, that's one philosophy, and that's been going on for a good 100 years here. And I'm speaking about the United States — that's the only place I know really well. And in the United States, we focus so much healing on fixing the problem, fixing the problem, the problem! I have this problem, I have this obstacle, this block, this trauma — let's go over it again. What did it mean? And I like to take people off that, and let's heal through positive desire opening into fantasy, and imagination and the creative future, new possibility. So the future, I believe, of healing, is to heal through fun and imagination, and, oh, reopening that lid. And I want to just give one tiny example. I had a client last week who I assigned to tell me a sexual fantasy. He had to go home and work on that. And of course, I want it to come from the body, from the dream world, not the head, not some kind of analysis of a plotline. But we've already learned how to hear the body, so I want his body, and his dream world, and his imagination to come up with a fantasy and show it to me. And he comes in and he tells me about this awkward childhood experience that really happened. And he tells me what really happened, which is, he got caught in the woods with a girl with his pants down when he was a teenager. And the fantasy is, instead of getting caught, the whole thing turned into a fun, really exciting sexual experience when the other person found them in the woods.

Karen Yates

Oh, yeah! Right?

River Roaring

I was like, wait a minute, this story is different in this version. And in this one, we all had a great time, we smiled, everyone was happy and enjoying themselves. And if you think about what he did there, his own imagination led him to a challenging childhood emotional experience and rewrote it. And he re-blueprinted that traumatic experience. And he's now joyful, thinking about that time, and it released something new. And so when we can approach life with new possibility, we are actually healing trauma by opening ourselves rather than trying to figure out how did I get closed? How did I get closed? What's wrong with me? What's wrong with me? Like, hey, why don't we just open some new doors and walk through it that way? And that's my funnest — that's really the cutting edge of where my work is right now, Karen.

Karen Yates

Love it. Thank you. Brian?

Brian Gibney

I love this question. Because I think that encapsulates the shift that we are asking clients to make, where they are coming to us, often with questions of, "Am I doing it right?" Like, specifically in terms of sex? Or, "Am I normal?" A very outward-facing question. Is there someone else out there who can tell me, please, am I doing it right? And we shift to a more inward-facing question, of "How's this feel for me?" And that relates to play, because like, if you think about how kids play, they are entirely self-conscious about how they play. Somewhere along the line, we learned that we have to ask ourselves this question — are we doing it right? Whose approval am I looking for in my play? So let's not do that. Let's come back to: does this feel good? Is this fun? Is this helping me relate to the people that I want to relate to? And if we can go through play, we can go through se — which is a wonderful arena for adult play. Then, you know, maybe we're doing that work that you said, River, of not fixing the problem by trying to fix the problem, but just opening doors, and peeking our head through, being like, oh, this is where I want to go next? Cool. Let's try that out. Being curious, following the juiciness instead of following some kind of external script.

Karen Yates

Tell me about the Surrogate Partner Collective.

Brian Gibney

So, the Surrogate Partner Collective is a group with four founders — River and myself, Andrew Heartman, and Nicole Ananda. And we all have very different backgrounds. But we collectively came together through some circuitous roots to basically say, the profession isn't where we all want it to be. Very few people know about the work, the trainings that we have are inconsistent, the support systems that we have for professionals are not as strong as they could be. So how do we, as members of the profession, grow up a culture where we can teach clients about the work that we do, where we can teach therapists about the work that we do, where we can provide resources to peers and support for our peers, so we can bolster the profession, grow it, and really provide others access to this amazing healing modality that has been a little sleepy for the past three or four decades?

River Roaring

I can't even add to that, other than we're in formation stage. We're going to be opening for membership soon, and eventually training new surrogate partners ourselves, the way that we feel the modern world requires us to be. And we're really excited about providing training in a new way. Yeah, gender inclusive, real different from your "Mad Men" version of us. [laughs]

Karen Yates

Excellent. Brian and River, thank you so much for this conversation today. I enjoyed it so much, so much, and I hope to have both of you on the show again,

Brian Gibney

Thank you.

River Roaring

I'm so grateful for what you're doing, with this entire show. It's beautiful. Thank you.

Karen Yates

For more information on River, Brian, and the Surrogate Partner Collective, go to the show notes. And if you'd like to work with me to help get unstuck and add more ease to your life, consider a biofield tuning session. Like acupuncture — except using sound — biofield tuning gently restores energetic flow and shifts emotional patterning in the body, bringing greater awareness of yourself and the choices you can make. And it can be done remotely. Go to [karen-yates.com](http://karen-yates.com) or the show notes to learn more about individual or group sessions.

Well, that's it, folks. Have a very pleasurable week. Next week, Brandon Hunter-Haydon and I go deep on the latest episode of Eavesdropping: unscripted, unplanned conversations on intimacy and sex. Don't miss it.

Thank you for listening. If you know someone who might be interested in this episode, send it to them. Do you like what you heard? Then give us a nice review on your podcast app. You can follow us on social media @wildandsublime and sign up for newsletters at [wildandsublime.com](http://wildandsublime.com). I'd like to thank associate producer Julia Williams and design guru Jean-Francois Gervais. Theme Music by David Ben-Porat. This episode was edited by The Creative Imposter studios. Our media sponsor is Rebellious Magazine, feminist media, at [rebelliousmagazine.com](http://rebelliousmagazine.com).