

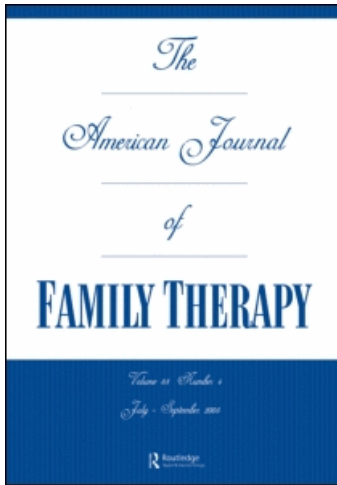
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### Book Review

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## Book Review

REBECCA A. JONES, Ph.D., *Editor*

**Erhardt, V.** (2007). *Head Over Heels: Wives Who Stay with Cross-Dressers and Transsexuals*. Binghamton, NY: Haworth Press.

From television talk shows and in-depth documentaries to shocking exposes on the evening news, men who crossdress or “change sex” have become a mainstay of the media in recent years. Struggles with gender identity and expression are often portrayed to take place in isolation, involving personal soul-searching and medical procedures. In reality, men who crossdress, as well as those who have complete sex reassignment, are often married or romantically partnered, and exist within a wider circle of family. Far from isolated, they are involved in a matrix of intimate human relationships that impact their gender explorations in both beneficial and challenging ways.

Until very recently, the voices of spouses of transgender people have been virtually silent. Erhardt’s book is a long-awaited and essential contribution to the literature on transgender people and their families, revealing the nuanced experiences of women who love men who cross the gender binary and live as, or express themselves as, women. There has been little information in the literature for clinicians working with transgender people about their familial relationships. Helen Boyd’s two books (*My Husband Betty*, and *She’s Not the Man I Married*), Mary Boenke’s *Trans Forming Families*, and my own book *Transgender Emergence* are harbingers of a new wave of transgender literature that more accurately reflects the reality of transgender lives. Gender-variant people exist within a matrix of family and have loved ones who are impacted by their gender dyphorias as well as their gender euphorias.

Erhardt’s book is an enormous gift to this community, and is essentially the first book that has provided us with detailed and engaging narratives of the wives and partners of crossdressers and transsexuals, exploring their mixed emotions and challenges. First, the women tell their stories in their own words, and then Erhardt reflects on the story, giving a professional viewpoint and placing the individual story within a larger context of couple relationships. This glimpse into the interior lives of women who love men who love being (or dressing as) women is an essential window into a fuller understanding of gender identity and exploration.

It seems obvious that wives and partners would be deeply impacted by their husband's desires to explore being the other sex. Some are comfortable with it, some enjoy it, and some are profoundly confused, embarrassed, frustrated, and disappointed. Most feel a range of emotions that shift and change over time. Women also come to diverse decisions about how to cope with these experiences. There is no doubt, in my professional opinion, that hearing other women's stories is essential to ending the isolation and shame that many spouses experience.

This book will provide essential insight for clinicians and lay readers alike on gender transgression in families and the power of committed loving partnerships. The myth that marriages to transgender people are doomed to failure has been put to rest. Erhardt's book will hopefully guide clinical theory to better serve families struggling with the lifecycle upheaval of transgender emergence.

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