

Book Review: Head Over Heels: Wives Who Stay With Cross-Dressers and Transsexuals (2007). Virginia Erhardt, Binghamton, NY: Haworth, 233 pages, US\$13.57.

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Article:

Most individuals get into relationships with the knowledge that they do not know everything about their romantic partners and that they may spend a lifetime getting to know their partner through all the life stages and changes that will occur. However, most individuals are not prepared for the “getting to know you” aspect of a relationship to include that one’s romantic partner cross-dresses or would like to go through sex reassignment surgery. However, for some individuals, this has become their reality.

In *Head Over Heels*, Virginia Erhardt pulls together the stories of multiple women whose husbands and life partners either cross-dress or are or have gone through sex reassignment surgery. Each chapter in the book is a woman’s individual story, including how or when she found out about her husband’s desire to dress in women’s clothing, and the impact it had on her life. A reader can almost hear the women’s voices, feel the confusion they felt, and experience the pain, shock, and fear during the initial moment they realized their husbands’ desires and hidden world, as well as feel the emotions throughout their journey of healing. During the healing process, each woman discusses her anxiety over being usurped in the relationship by the female side of her husband, the anger over the secret world her husband had, the fear over what would happen to the relationship or what other individuals would think, the anxiety of deciding who to inform (including children, extended family, neighbors, and friends) and the impact it might have, and, finally, where each woman found support (if she did) through organizations, groups, family, or online chat rooms and resources.

Prior to the each woman’s story, at the beginning of the book, Dr. Erhardt provides information on the struggles that a cross-dresser or a male-to-female transsexual might experience. This provides a background for some readers and possibly to natal female wives of cross-dressing/transsexual partners to assist in the understanding of the process these men and women go through. In addition, at the end of each chapter, or woman’s story, Dr. Erhardt provides information that includes clinical opinions or explanations of what the wife went through, along with normalizing the experience provided by the woman. Finally, a bonus of this book is if a reader is unfamiliar with the terms or acronyms in the culture of gender dysphoria, transsexuals, or cross-dressers, the back of the book contains definitions and explanations of main terms that are frequently used. In addition, a section at the end of the book is provided on resources or referrals, including online support groups, organizations, or books.

Head Over Heels could have a wide variety of uses in clinical and educational settings. In a clinical setting, this book would be great for a therapist to read to gain a better understanding of what a client may be going through—either as the partner who has found out about his or her romantic partner cross-dressing or preferring sex reassignment surgery, or a client who is experiencing these desires and is determining whether to tell or how to inform his or her partner. In addition, this book is written so that a therapist could provide specific chapters or sections to a client to read to assist in normalizing a process one might be going through. In an educational setting, this book could be used in a variety of classes, from professional orientation to help

students understand their own values and opinions on a tough subject matter, to specific classes on couples counseling, family counseling, and human sexuality.