



My Husband Betty: Love, Sex, and Life with a Crossdresser

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Author Helen Boyd is a happily married woman whose husband enjoys sharing her wardrobe - and she has written the first book on transgendered men to focus on their relationships. Traditionally known as cross-dressers, transvestites, or drag queens, men like Helen's husband are a diverse lot who don't always conform to stereotype. Helen addresses every imaginable question concerning the probable and improbable reasons for behavior that still baffle not only "mental health professionals" but the practitioners themselves; the taxonomy of the transgendered and the distinct but overlapping societies of each group; coming out; bisexuality, and homophobia.

The book features interviews with some very interesting people: a dominatrix and her crossdressing husband; a crossdressing Reiki master and his son; a woman who after dating one crossdresser wanted to date others and fell in love with a transsexual instead; and a woman whose husband promised her he was only a crossdresser who later realized that he was transsexual.

The stories and opinions chosen to represent the spectrum will surely titillate, shock, and disgust some readers; alternatively, Helen's narrative is a powerful lens with which to examine our own notions of gender and equality.

My Husband Betty: Love, Sex, and Life with a Crossdresser Details

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From Reader Review My Husband Betty: Love, Sex, and Life with a Crossdresser for online ebook

Imogen says

When I clicked on the 'add review' button, I heard myself let out this long sigh. I mean, I don't WANT to talk a bunch of shit about this book, right? I want this to be a really valuable resource for the het women who date het crossdressing het men, without any flaws or terrible things in it. And it kind of is! Kind of! It's not totally worthless, which is a pretty weak blurb.

Also, I read the followup first, out of order, and had some kind of mean things to say about it.

So, okay. A couple pages into reading this, it became pretty clear that I was going to need a pencil either to retort in the margins to things I disagreed with, or just to put an X over things she said that were fucked up. Sometimes I'll get bored with a book game like that, but this time I didn't: if you borrow my copy, you'll see that it was pretty rare for me to go more than three or four pages without marking something. A lot of it was small stuff, but that's kind of the crux of what is fucked about this book for me: Helen Boyd almost gets it. But the space between "almost gets it" and "gets it" is ENORMOUS. There's so much room for the fucked assumptions, inferences and miscommunication in "almost gets it."

The problem it's fucked around is the problem it tries to address: "I'm a het woman, and I found out my het man partner likes to wear women's clothes. Can we still have a het relationship? Is my partner going to transition, forcing me to evaluate whether I want to be in a lesbian relationship (which I don't)? Are we going to (continue to) have sex in a way that I can enjoy?" I mean, ultimately, "Is this relationship worth salvaging?"

It's a legitimate question. I wish there were a really good book about it. I mean, my take on these questions- as a trans woman who tried to be the guy in het relationships, before I transitioned- is pretty brutal. My take is, 'well, I don't know, but most likely, if you are going to be honest, you are going to have to face the reality that you and your partner might break up because of your partner's transness (whatever kind of transness it is).'

I mean, look, I could fit my book about what to do with your crossdressing husband on a business card: "communicate honestly." If people can talk about their shit honestly- if the crossdressing guy in the relationship can say 'sometimes I dress in women's clothes and fantasize about men' without the girlfriend feeling threatened- or, with the girlfriend feeling threatened, but still managing to talk honestly about that. I mean, if she hears that, she can very easily be like, 'No way bud. Deal breaker,' and it would be a lot better for the relationship than him keeping it to himself, her knowing something is up but not knowing what, and then both being vaguely unsatisfied forever. Y'know?

But the way Helen is writing, it's like, 'I am in love with my partner and I want to perpetuate this relationship.' Which is fine! You are allowed to want that; it's just, if that leads to not wanting your partner to need to perform certain behaviors, or to censor certain thought processes, whatever... I mean, there's a conflict.

So, yeah.

It's interesting; toward the beginning of the book, Helen writes a lot about how het privilege is a legitimate

thing, which cis-woman, crossdressing man couples should actively work toward maintaining, but then by the end she's like, 'the only way crossdressing men are going to get over their shit is if they renounce their het privilege.' Which, also, is a conflict. You know? I was groaning and scratching Xs all over the place when she was talking about how straight people get privilege and they deserve it and should work to maintain that privilege, because that's fucked. When you maintain your het privilege, you oppress everybody who doesn't have het privilege- especially when it's contingent het privilege maintained by lying. Although, really, isn't all or at least most het privilege maintained to some degree by cleaving to narratives that aren't necessarily completely true in the privilegee's lives?

I don't know. It's hard! It is really hard to be very honest in a relationship, especially when it is about stuff that changes the way a comfortable relationship works. Helen argues- and I agree with her- that the sooner the het guy comes out as a crossdresser, the more likely the relationship is to survive. But it's very hard for het dudes who are invested in their het dude privilege to be honest about anything; they just aren't given the tools. I wouldn't argue that a cissexual guy can't be honest about his shit, but I would argue that a cissexual guy is going to have to really want to be able to talk about his shit if he's going to do a good job. And that's not encouraged in cissexual guys who are maintaining their cissexual privilege; it might even be the case that, by learning to be introspective about your shit, and then externalizing that with other people, you are explicitly leaving the het/cis privilege narrative, and therefore losing het/cis privilege. Which is fine! I'd argue that, if nothing else, entering a dialogue with those privileges is fuckin' good for you.

Not to get polemical.

But so anyway, when you try to have an honest conversation about something as difficult and complicated and culturally proscribed as gender and sexuality and what bleeds through the boundaries of heteronormative sexuality... I don't want to say you can't predicate that conversation with 'but I need to maintain some degree of heteronormativity.' You can demand that. But it's going to make it into a different conversation- it's going to get in the way of that conversation being as honest as possible.

Ugh, so not to just say this over and over in a million ways, but being like 'we need to perpetuate this relationship' and 'we need to be honest about one partner's kink that the other partner doesn't share' (assuming the cis female partner doesn't share the kink, otherwise this whole situation would be pretty different)- those two impulses are at odds. One way to reconcile them is to face the possibility that, hey, maybe this relationship isn't going to work. Another way to reconcile them might be to really interrogate the necessity of het privilege in this relationship. I'm sure there are others, but I don't see them in *My Husband Betty*.

The other variable is, look, what would total honesty from the crossdressing husbands look like? Sometimes, in these relationships, the two partners work to impose limits on the one partners crossdressing/transgender activity, right? But what would it look like if that partner were free to fully embody that acticity- what if that partner were free, in this relationship, to embrace, completely and responsibly, their "feminine side" or whatever? (Not to use scare quotes.) (Holy shit, 'the Scare Quotes' would be such a good band name. Or just "Scare Quotes." Without the quotation marks, obvs.) I don't know. That, actually, was the question that this book stirred up in my belly more than any other: what would a crossdresser (language I don't feel stoked about, but language Helen and Betty and apparently other folks on this team use, although it seems like the identity is about a lot more than clothes, so 'crossdresser' seems... like, I don't know. Kind of vernacular, instead of accurate?) who's free to embrace their forbidden impulses (again: whatever) look like?

Would that person be transsexual?

The common wisdom is that there are transsexuals, who are deadly serious about their genders, and know it from the time they are babies, who transition and never look back and never have complicated feelings about their genders- and then, on the other hand, there are folks who are "just crossdressers," for whom it's not serious, who don't want to transition, who are happy to be men "with a feminine side," or whatever. But... I mean, some transsexual women fetishize clothes, right? Some male-assigned transvestites don't wear women's clothes at all, their identities are more inside their heads and ostensibly more heteronormative presentations. Or even effeminate but coded male presentations.

But the more I read in this book about the experience of the crossdressing partners in these relationships, the more I was thinking (and this is just an idea; I am not positing a theory, or my new 100% belief, or saying 'this is Truth,' I'm just saying that this seems possible) that the impulse in a male-assigned person to crossdress/be a transvestite, and the impulse to be transsexual and transition- they might be the same impulse, and the difference might be in how the individual handles it. This doesn't mean that transsexual women are really men; this doesn't mean that all crossdressers secretly want to transition; it doesn't really have to mean anything. It's just something I want to throw out there because, as a thesis, it explains why it's a common thing for people who identify as crossdressers eventually to identify as transsexuals; it explains why so many crossdressers in relationships can't do a good job of talking about their impulses/experiences/crossdressing/whatever; it explains how pervasive gender stress can be in people who, theoretically, are "just crossdressers."

I mean, if this thought is true- and obviously I'm not the first person to have it, I'm just thinking about it because I (and so many other folks) have rejected it out of hand because, politically and experientially, it's a lot easier if I am over here on my team, and those weirdos are over there on their team, and never shall the twain play even volleyball in the same league. Y'know?- it's pretty useful for understanding crossdressing. It doesn't really shed any light on transsexuality, because we don't know what causes either transsexuality or crossdresserism. Transvestism. It seems like there's a consensus, or at least a mostly -consensus, that transsexuality is about a gender being hardwired into a brain, and the body connected to that brain contradictorily developing as the other gender, which the person attached to both eventually brings into line with the brain. It's how I conceptualize transsexuality, just 'cause I don't know a better way to. But wouldn't crossdressing behavior- the stress and the pervasiveness and the reluctance to address problems stemming from it- make sense in that context, too? "There's a gender in the meat of my brain, which is different from the gender my body grew up to look like, and I've fetishized the correction of this schism," seems to be a legitimate way a crossdresser could discuss their crossdresseriness.

Maybe? I don't know. I know that this got really long and I kind of stopped talking about Helen Boyd's book, but I am telling you about the things it inspired! This is reader-response criticism, which my college English professor told me was considered legitimate at one point.

Anyway, because yeah: the divide seems to be between transsexual women, whose experience of their (female) gender is sexless (as in, fucking-sex-less, not gender-sex-less), and transvestite folks, whose experience of their gender (which is male) is that they sexualize a female gender. Transvestites are fetishists; transsexuals are neuter angels who sometimes let men fuck them, just like other women.

These things are fucked. I'm a trans woman with a libido, with kinks, with a complicated sexuality just like anyone else. Most trans women have this experience, of embodying a complicated sexuality. (So do most cis women.) That divide I was just talking about? I wouldn't be surprised if it were false, if it turned out that the primary difference between transsexuals and transvestites was what the individual groups do with the same impulse (whatever it is; I can't pin it down. Maybe brain sex?) . Right? Transsexuals see transition as a viable option- a difficult one, but one worth trying- and transvestites don't, they see this impulse (this Impulse, as

Stephen King might capitalize it) as something to be masturbated into submission, or otherwise dealt with on the downlow.

Like I said, it's something to think about.

Anyway, okay, getting back to Helen's book, one other thing: stuffed right in the middle, amidst all the things I disagreed with so much, there is a four or five page bit that's the most lucid, intelligent and compact history of the science around male-assigned trans folks I've ever read anywhere. I don't have any shit to talk about it at all. And the conversation that follows- about the controversial (bullshit, catch-22) concept 'autogynophilia'- is also very well done. I think it might be because, in those sections, Helen has extricated herself from having to solve her relationship and can just talk intelligently about something she's smart about. Which I love.

Melvina says

One of my favorite books, part memoir, and part Trans 101, Helen gives a good, thorough review of what it means to be a crossdresser, and a crossdresser's wife. There's also a very tender love story weaved throughout. She follows up with her next book, *She's Not The Man I Married*, by detailing in more intimate and painful ways, what it means to be married to a man who has decided to be a woman. Helen's writing is so raw and honest, there are no easy conclusions and answers. But you find yourself rooting for this couple, as their love for each other is quite obvious.

Janice says

For gender studies and to learn more about cross-dressing and the confusing and abundant terms used in the LGBTA world, this book was very helpful. I enjoyed this book because it was from Helen's viewpoint and she stated as such. She shared resources and groups that were both good and bad, didn't hold back on criticism or suggesting ways systems and programs could be improved. The dictionary of terms in the back was extremely helpful, but more so - was the fact that throughout the book she stated that no one cross-dresser or TS or any person is the same so assumptions couldn't and shouldn't be made. I enjoyed the chapter on political activism and how individuals who identify with certain groups could and should support causes, bills, etc that help others - as in the end they/we will all benefit from a world where people are truly free to be who they are, as they want to live, and not be hurt or killed because of it (hurt - on many levels).

Rachel Eliason says

My Husband Betty is an interesting book and very well written. I found it an interesting glimpse into the lives of cross-dressers and their wives. The book seems to give a fairly balanced view of the subject, it is not the rosy view a cross-dresser might give nor the completely negative view that some of the wives might give. I would give two small disclaimers on this book. The first is that this book is not in fact about her husband Betty. This is about cross dressers and their wives. The personal story of Helen and Betty is in her second book, "*She's not the man I married*." The secondly and on a related note, Betty is transgender. Heterosexual male cross dressers and transgender women are two quite different things. As a transsexual woman myself reading this book brought that home to me. I found myself identifying more with the concerns of the wives

then with the cross dressers.

Minerva says

A frank and honest portrayal of life with a cross dresser highlighting the positives as well as the negatives and paranoias that come with it. Written by a feminist the chapter on gender politics is particularly fascinating pointing out the irony of the female persona many cross dressers' chose to portray versus the reality of life facing women in the modern age.

Alice says

HB really takes for granted her white privileged straight girl lifestyle. She is constantly making generalizations based on her small bubble about all people who are not gender normative. It's so biased towards her own small community and her uncomfortableness with crossdressing that I do not see this as being a useful resource to others. She flirts with and occasionally embraces some transphobic points-of-view and her interviews with trans people come off as more voyueristic and self-serving than anything else. Read Whipping Girl instead.

Chris says

I cross-dress. And it has had a major impact on my life, including the demise of my marriage. In fact, my ex-wife is still pretty upset about it. So I finally decided to get more familiar with the "why" of cross-dressing, and the various aspects of how it affects our relationships. Why? Because I don't want it to adversely affect another relationship I get into. Now that I have read most of this book, I COMPLETELY understand my ex's point-of-view and I have a new appreciation for how to incorporate this into my current relationships with my girlfriend, family and friends. As a result of reading it and incorporating what I have been learning, I find that my girlfriend is slowly accepting it and participating with me. And my parents are coming around, as well. Now most of my close friends know, too. And the best part is I know I am not alone in this and that it's ok to be me. Though I don't agree with everything in the book, I want to say thank you to Helen for having the incredible courage to write this book, and for not pulling any punches. If you are a man who likes to wear women's clothes for any reason, this book is a must. If you are loved-one or friend of a man who likes to wear women's clothes, again, this book is a must.

Jesse says

This book is written by a woman who is partnered to a person who is a crossdresser and sometimes identified as transgender. As a trans person, reading this book was really enlightening for me to hear what some partners (particularly people who are based mostly in the straight world) experience when their partner explores transitioning. I got angry at the author from time to time but for the most part it made me a more compassionate person. I've lent this book out a couple of times when I feel like someone I'm friends with and I aren't quite on the same page about the transition issue and they usually come back a bit more able to talk about it. It's a good thing.

Will&lena says

The writer writes from the heart in this book. Her husband is a cross dresser who also has a deep need to know what it is to be a woman. The book covers everything from dressing, going out, living with, emotions, sex and a bunch of other stuff. She wrote about her experiences and experiences of other people she has met or talked to and made friends with. The book is sad and it kicked me in the face when I read it. It also made me cry a couple of times. I had no idea what other people might go through with transgender relationships. There's a lot more to it than that and, she gets really deep into her feelings. I loved it and I'm very glad I read it.

Shawn says

A comprehensive read for those looking for an introduction into the broad spectrum of gender politics. Especially interesting because it adds yet another twist into the confusing issue of gender and gender identity.

Vern L. Bullough sums up the book well: "This is an insider's view of transvestism. It is sympathetic, understanding, but also realistic and critical. It should be essential reading not only for wives of transvestites (the author is the wife of one), but for transvestites and transgender individuals themselves. I know of no other book that gives such a realistic and encompassing view of the topic. For those who are not involved in or with the transgender community, it ought to be a fascinating read about a group of whom they know little. I recommend it highly."

Brain Food:

"A woman in a man's shirt is sexy, assumed to be straight, perfectly normal, and well adjusted, while a man in a woman's negligee is assumed to be gay, sexually deviant, or comic" (2).

"The *Transgenderist* has deeper feelings about his gender and uses crossdressing as a way to express his 'inner woman.' 'She' spends more time en femme than en homme, and might be willing to try hormones for awhile, or not.

The Transgenderist is not a transsexual woman; 'she' can and will dress as a man if the need arises" (42).

"No man or woman is 100 percent male or female, no matter how much they like to think they are. We are in reality all individuals somewhere within the sphere" (95).

"I worry every time my husband goes out dressed without me that he will be hurt. It's why I usually don't allow it. Not

because I don't trust him, but because I don't trust you" (97).

"I'd tell the younger crossdresser: don't be afraid of who you are. it may take some time to accept yourself. Don't do anything crazy until you've figure it out. Lots of people are pushed onto hormones without being ready. Some are never ready and that's okay" (103).

"In other words, the self-identity of the transsexual is already female, and she pursues transition in order to make her body and appearance suit the gender that is already present in her head and heart. The crossdresser, on the other hand, may need to express his desire to be female by crossdressing, but still needs to learn how to be feminine, and remind himself not to think and act in masculine ways" (127).

"I finally told him that when my husband is dressed as a guy, we're straight, and when he's en femme, we're lesbians" (211).

Jaye says

This is a good book on a subject that is seldom covered outside of psychological texts. It doesn't speak to me as much as it once might have, but there's still some good material here. I heartily recommend it to anyone who crossdresses or loves someone who does.

Karen says

This is a great book it helped me with understanding the world and how people need to be more accepting of who people are. What matters is on the inside not the out.

If you have a friend going through the "trans" processor this is a must read.

Moonyean Carlton says

I have had several relationships with TG people, and am interested in the psychology of both partners in this kind of relationship. Cross-dressers are not my especial interest, but My Husband Betty is one of the first books I have read which presents a candid view of how the "significant other" is affected by any change in gender identity in her partner. Helen Boyd, the author, is both funny and very sharp in her autobiography of her husband's journey into cross-dressing, her struggles with wondering if the situation puts her into a lesbian role and her resentment that her husband often looks "prettier" than she does. Boyd also posits the question of whether her

husband might decide to "transition", and what that would mean for her. *My Husband Betty* is one of the few books

I have encountered that expresses the anger, compassion, and love of a partner. Generally, the autobiographies

of TG's and cross-dressers stress the peace and contentment transitioners find in their new lives.

However, very few of these books speak honestly and in detail about their old or new relationships. I applaud the understanding awarded to those who need to live in a different body or simply in different clothing. But I feel there is an lack of balance in publications about the genuine confusion of, say, a life-long lesbian who tries to make a relationship with an MTF woman, who has been acculturated in a male, heterosexual world. Would love comments on this.

Jill says

This was hit or miss for me. Solid research reporting, but somewhat disjointed. The author seemed to discuss about her husband's crossdressing as a badge of her own hipness at times, which had me rolling my eyes. However, I applaud her efforts for writing this book. Lots of information and intelligent, compassionate (albeit biased) writing.

Kira says

I'm giving this four stars rather than three, because Boyd (her nom de plume) really does think her way through crossdressing unlike any other author on the subject. The only one who comes close is Julia Serano, whose first book is really not about the same subject, despite having one excellent chapter on crossdressers.

The long answer to why I give it four stars: Boyd 'gets' that MtF crossdressers are transgendered, but also that they're not transsexuals or fetishists (for the most part). Crossdressers tend to experience gender dysphoria at a lower pitch, let's say, than most transsexuals. This difference would seem like something to celebrate, since it represents relatively less suffering. The only problem is that there's really nothing to ~do~ about it for crossdressers; "presenting as female" for the sake of congruity with one's gender i.d. is nowhere near accepted for a male-bodied person who claims, in fact, to ~be~ male. This, I believe, is why crossdressers are often so closeted, miserable, and lacking in self-confidence.

That brings me to my next point. This one explains why I hesitated to give the book four stars. Boyd goes all out to provide comprehensive factual reporting on crossdressers, and even offers some highly compelling theoretical speculations on the causal history of crossdressing. Her account of masculinity, when she

describes the male person a crossdresser is, does not get to the core of the problem. Boyd presents herself as a somewhat masculine woman, compared to her more feminine husband, at least. So why doesn't she watch football and shout at the t.v. and make lewd jokes about women? That's what she seems to take as the essence of a crossdressing man's masculinity. Masculinity is plural. And I think that for some CDs, it's arbitrary to call it the core of their personality, just because they are male.

I finished this book thinking "My masculinity, such as it is, resembles Helen's more than Betty's! And I'm not sure that I have the same attraction to traditional femininity as Betty does." In other words, there are indeed male tomboys, whose masculinity is different than that of most male-bodied people. Maybe it's because I've socialized mostly with women; women socialized me, in other words. I have a hunch that many self-identified crossdressers piss off women and especially feminists because as men, they are more likely to have been socialized by men in their adolescence. *Whether their everyday masculine persona is their core personality or not, it can't 'play nice' with their femininity because the two have not grown to meet each other half-way, so to speak.* This is ~not~ to say that gender dysphoric people just have imbalances between masculinity and femininity. We are not all the same, and we ought not to be androgynous clones. Having identified as one for a long time, I just can't help but think that crossdressers' suffering is exacerbated by keeping their gender i.d. within two relatively autonomous "departments." I'll end by throwing out the wild idea (possibly offensive) that this departmentalization of gender may lead to problems in one's personal life similar to the problems that bureaucracy creates in, say, a state. Another angle on it: I'll wager that crossdressing is an ~insight~ had only by some, into a form of alienation of a human being from what is constructed as his "femininity," brought about by the process of socialization in an advanced industrial, bureaucratic, and patriarchal society.
