

Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers: A History of Lesbian Life in Twentieth-Century America,

by Lillian Faderman. New York: Columbia University Press, 1991.

Moirá

Among the numerous reports of hate crimes and the steady climate of homophobia, I found Lillian Faderman's book, *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, a ray of light. It reaffirmed my sense that homosexuality is not an affliction, not some twist of nature, but for many such as myself, a direct expression of my nature. It also enabled me to see how far we have evolved in looking back through the twentieth century.

Ms. Faderman starts with a quote from William Cullen Bryant's essay for the *Evening Post*, written in 1843, which describes two "maiden" women and their love relationship. "In their youthful days, they took each other as companions for life, and this union, no less sacred to them than the tie of marriage, has subsisted, in uninterrupted harmony, for 40 years...They slept on the same pillow and had a common purse."

I found in reading *Odd Girls*, a time when women's love for each other was

not questioned. We are given many examples of women whom she documents as having "romantic relationships." For those of us who have searched for our sisters before, many of these women are familiar.

Faderman documents the pressure many lesbians felt to keep hidden, never expressing what to them was natural, and therefore leading very lonely existences. In reading their accounts I realized how much freedom our time allows us. A woman named Jackie, who lived in New Orleans in the '50's tells about her encounters with the police. "They would ask if I was a man or a woman. They could arrest a woman for impersonating a man, so you had to be sure you were wearing three pieces of woman's clothes...Any woman wearing pants was suspect." That pressure to remain hidden remains with us today. I think of the taboos that keep me from kissing my lover in public, in a place as unimportant as a hardware store.

For me, always questioning and exploring, this book is a great resource. Faderman has researched a great wealth of information. Feeling the connections through the ages and hearing the personal struggles has given me a better understanding of my self and the determination to continue in believing. None of our rights have come easily, without a fight or without exposing the misinformation. As lesbians we have both the uphill struggle of defining ourselves as women and as women who love women. We still have to be guarded, have to be careful who we open ourselves to, but by reading *Odd Girls and Twilight Lovers*, one can sense how far we have come and feel the unity among women as a growing force that will not back down or go away. Once again I salute those brave women who have come before me and carved this hard path we now tread upon. I am grateful to Lillian Faderman for this much needed tribute to lesbian life. ▼

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