



The Girls Next Door: Into the Heart of Lesbian America

Lindsay Van Gelder , Pamela Robin Brandt

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What Tom Wolfe did for astronauts and Roger Angell did for baseball, journalists Lindsay Van Gelder and Pamela Robin Brandt do for lesbians in this landmark book.

Long misperceived as a separatist coven, a default option, or a sort of ladies' auxiliary to the gay men's movement, lesbian life has achieved a new visibility in the past few years. But for all the interest in who's out and who's not (yet), there's been surprisingly little understanding of the diversity and richness of lesbian experience.

This funny, lively, and perceptive book will change all that. Drawing on more than a hundred interviews with women around the country, and on their own keen wits and eyes, Van Gelder and Brandt have composed an unprecedented portrait of how gay women today -- "born" and "made," lipstick and flannel-shirted alike -- think, feel, love, and live. Three major "tribal" events -- the long-running Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, "Dinah" (the annual Dinah Shore Golf Tournament and party circuit, a mecca for upwardly mobile luppies), and a cross-country trek with the activist Lesbian Avengers en route to the 1994 Stonewall commemoration -- provide points of entry into an exploration of lesbian identity, social dynamics, and politics that's as entertaining as it is revealing. The result is a kaleidoscopic portrait that will resonate with lesbians themselves and reveal to their "neighbors" a world of unsuspected vibrancy and depth.

The Girls Next Door: Into the Heart of Lesbian America Details

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From Reader Review The Girls Next Door: Into the Heart of Lesbian America for online ebook

Nicki Hill says

actually felt generous with the two stars, but given this book is essentially from a different time, some allowances can be made, I suppose.

Courtney Stirrat says

Ok. So for those of you who fail to understand The L Word, The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, Flannel Shirts, Bright Red Lipstick, wearing ties (which I never do because I refuse to learn how to tie them. Tying my shoes is complicated enough), and generally all things girl-oriented, READ this! Seriously. Click on amazon, find a nice cheap used copy, enter your credit card information and buy it. Read it.

Sara says

I tried to read this because it was in my university's gsc library. I was dismayed because of the general brushoff towards trans women and men by the lesbian community, especially in the womyn's festival chapter.

Pants says

so far, so fun. interesting.

Syd says

I don't know what I was expecting, but it wasn't a "we're-just-like-you" book. I'm not like my neighbors...that's why they call me queer.

Michelle says

This book is hilarious. An awesome read.

Marks House says

Lisa says

where I first learned about Michigan Womyn's Music Festival.

Audra (Unabridged Chick) says

Non-fiction book by journalist partners on 'lesbian America' in the 1990s. Funny enough but fairly superficial; feels very dated now.

Aria says

So, I'm not sure how to rate this book. Having been around in the 90s as well as friends with both bi, lesbian, and gay identifying people (as well as straight) I recognize as familiar the situation as it was described when this book was published. It was interesting as it made apparent by my relative experience just how quickly things have changed since that time in my recent (enough) memory. The experiences from those older generations from the eras of the 70s and prior was not entirely new, but not entirely known to me, either. (How could it have been?) That whole concept of actively choosing to play a male or female role in earlier-era (40s and 50s) relationships was a fascinating bit of sociological information, and really demonstrated the grip those societally-imposed roles have on our psyches.

Reading as a Gen. X-er, I was able to put this 90s-published information in perspective, even the ugly bits that I knew would make my Millennial daughter cringe. The language and thinking that is second nature now (to anyone paying attention, but especially to the younger set) was so new at the time of writing it had yet to be explored and understood in the wider culture.

For example, the term transvestite. Simply unacceptable in modern parlance, seeing this word used repeatedly in the text makes one realize how recently the trans movement has come to the forefront even among other marginalized groups. Another example: the descriptions of obese females and the not exactly fat-shaming, but rather the explicit notice of this body type with some surprise of positive sexuality being associated with it was something I gleaned happening more than once in the book. Counter that with the happy reports of all body types unashamedly living in various clothed and nude states during the (now defunct) Michigan Womyn's Music Festival. It doesn't exactly match up. Yet another example: omg that arguing of what does and does not constitute a lesbian identity, and the (never understood by me) avoidance of the bi-sexual identity by most parties. The idea of sexuality as a fluid concept existing on a spectrum of possible choices had not yet been well-circulated at the time of publishing, although the foundational research itself was not exactly new. The confusion the lack of such a concept caused over how to use the (then oh so ever important) labels for sexual attraction was endless. I am so grateful that concept is coming more into the mainstream consciousness, and the understanding of most humans as being bi-sexual to some degree, even if they don't act on it or even realize it, is more accepted. It thankfully renders nearly moot most of those mental gymnastics people went through trying to make concrete something that almost always is not. (Thankfully the younger generations will benefit from this fluidity perspective, as so much damned time

and energy was burned up tediously and endlessly arguing over those insufficient prior labels.)

My favorite part by far was how they chose to close the book. That interplay was absolutely honest and beautiful. What a perfect way to sum up what it is really all about, without having to spell it out. (Kudos on that.)

Like I said though, I'm not sure how to rate this book. If I think of it in the era it was written, it's a solid 3 leaning to a 4 star rating. If I think of it now, I want to say maybe 2 stars leaning to a 3, but it really depends on you are when you approach this material, and what context you can give it. That said, as far as the writing goes it's well done enough, although the bit about the Womyn's Festival was the most tedious to read for some reason. The part about the lesbian avengers was also somewhat painful, but I can imagine it had to be so much worse to be there with all of the ad-naseum "processing" that went on....frankly, I'd have had to leave them. I'm impressed at the patience of the author(s) to stick it out. It did seem an accurate portrayal of what anyone who has spent anytime with such groups of people knows from experience to be true. Finally, yeah, that U-Haul joke has been around a long time.

I will pass this on to my similarly-aged friend and she what her thoughts are on it. Will be interested to see what my daughter's thoughts will be, reading it with her young, modern worldview. Am so glad though, that my confusion over how to rate this 1990s decade publication is due to the many great forward changes that have occurred since it was written. That's awesome.
