

Section 6: Reviews

Book Review

***Hidden Twins: What Adult Opposite Sex Twins Have to Teach Us.*
By Olivia Lousada. London: Karnac Books, 2009.**

Reviewed by Zerka T. Moreno

Olivia Lousada has written a remarkable, brave book about a natural phenomenon not reported on in that particular form, a pioneering investigation of the opposite-sex twin pair, the me-not-me relationship of a special kind. The author has thoroughly researched the literature on the neurological, biological, historical, literary, and social aspects of this unique alliance. She recruited a set of three such pairs to explore them from sociometric and psychodramatic perspectives, intrapersonally and interpersonally, studying their various roles and role interactions in great detail, including her own role as researcher.

Olivia is the female partner in such a pair herself, and this work was her PhD thesis. We benefit from its publication. Olivia asked me to write this review, although I am certainly not an expert on twins. In fact, her book taught me a great deal about them; for example, I learned that one third of twin births are opposite-sex pairs. Olivia Lousada is the first to have plowed this field of investigation. An accomplished artist, she includes her own illustrations of sculptures and paintings of opposite-sex twins and paintings by the investigated twin pairs.

A landmark 1940s study of identical twins, published in 1952 by Dorothy T. Burlingham, showed that they are drawn much more than most other siblings to establish a sense of equality with each other. However, what appears as altruism is a way not so much to avoid competition as to manage it, to have not more but the same. This balance is demanding for identical twins, but imagine how difficult such an assignment must be for opposite-sex twins, who are identifiably not the same yet are intertwined from their time in the womb. How are basic needs going to be met for these twins? Their entire development is far more complex than that of singletons or even same-sex twins. Most of their

mothers are overwhelmed, and family histories are generally found to be very complicated or nearly dysfunctional. It must be hard for a mother and other family members, even under the best circumstances, to deal with such twins. The author describes many aspects of their interconnectedness, the love and hate, the feelings of being ignored or rejected. The difference in sex and the general taboo in childhood surrounding it is sufficient to confuse any child.

Considering all these facets, it is remarkable how well the members of the studied group function. Half of the six group members are in therapy, but that is common these days and hardly specific for twins. Having met a number of female halves of such pairs, I can attest to the lasting, deeply personal embedding of connection, especially when it is broken. In one case the twins were separated and adopted in different families at birth. When they were traced as adults, the brother was lost to his sister because their history was too painful for him to pursue. In another, the male twin died two days after birth, and the female suffered from that loss all her life. She sensed her father would have preferred that she had died instead. No matter what she achieved, and she achieved much, her father never forgave her. The dead brother haunted her in the shadows. She resisted working on this history, casually tossing the story off as if it had been merely a missed birthday party.

Every chapter of the book begins with a quote from Viola or Sebastian, opposite-sex twins in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. There is not only a sister-brother theme in the play involving loss—Olivia mourning her dead brother, Viola looking for hers—but also one of a same-sex pair by attraction, that of Olivia and Viola, although the latter poses as a man at first. (Note the similarity of their names: Except for a missing "i" Viola is an anagram for Olivia.) Shakespeare, named as a forerunner of psychodrama by J. L. Moreno, was himself the father of opposite-sex twins. Twins and hidden identities are recurring themes in his plays. His own opposite-sex twin son died at age 11. Olivia Lousada considers how this dreadful loss inspired Shakespeare. Many of his plays show a subtle possibility of some characters being androgynous. Sebastian and Viola yearn for their lost other half. Both assume that this beloved half has been lost at sea, from which, unbeknownst to the other, they were rescued. They look so much alike, described as two halves of a cut apple, that Viola is mistaken for Sebastian when she dons men's clothing. She exclaims, "Most wonderful" when so described. Sebastian in turn expresses great admiration for her before they meet: "Yet thus far I will boldly publish her; she bore a mind that envy could not but call fair." When he meets her in male disguise, he wonders and declares he never had a brother, only a dear missing sister. That dear missing sister, in taking the identity of a man, had been engaged by Duke Orsini to plead his love for Olivia on his behalf, while she herself is in love with the Duke. The mourning Olivia refuses Orsini's love and falls in love with Viola instead. But

not to worry: Sebastian appears, the tangled knot of identities is resolved, and everyone rejoices when the truth is revealed.

This tangled knot of identities in the play is reflected in the subject of the book and evidently inspired the author to link it with her research. Olivia Lousada could not have made a better choice for a sister of her own, Viola, who explores the very edges of who she could be and who she truly is. I found the title of chapter 11 of the book a genuine summary of the research: "The Paradox of Opposite Sex and Resonance." Olivia Lousada's book deserves wide readership, not only by professionals but also by the general public, because of its rich highlighting of what all parents and educators need to know about children, especially twins.