Examining the Twin Bond: A Look at the Psychological Development of Twins and the Differences in Individuality and Identity Differentiation between Fraternal and Identical Same-Sex Twins

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Abstract

Being part of a “twin unit” is a unique experience that can play a positive role in the lives of both twins. However, it also provides a unique set of obstacles, especially in differentiation and personal identity formation. This study aims to assess the features and effects of a twin relationship and to examine the differences between monozygotic same-sex twins and dizygotic same-sex twins in their expression of these features. Results show that monozygotic twins have significantly higher scores than dizygotic twins for three factors: desire to remain undifferentiated, projection of the twin relationship, and enmeshment of self within the twin identity, showing that monozygotic twins have greater difficulties creating a unitary identity and have less of a desire to do so. Further exploration of this topic will provide additional conclusive results on this topic and go more in depth and reveal what societal and biological factors contribute to both the distinctive difficulties that twins face and the unique qualities that they possess.
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Being part of a twin relationship is a unique phenomenon that has a profound impact on the upbringing and development of the twin children. Unlike only children or non-twin siblings, twins are together from conception through young adulthood. They experience significant life events in tandem and spend the majority of their time together. These special environmental conditions, which result from having a life partner from the moment of conception, affect the psychological and social development of twins, as well as the relationships they form throughout their lives.

The primary purpose of this study is to examine these psychological and social effects, focusing on the following questions:

- What are the most characteristic features of the twin relationship?
- How do monozygotic same-sex twins and dizygotic same-sex twins differ psychologically?
- How do monozygotic same-sex twins and dizygotic same-sex twins differ in the way they manifest these twin factors?

A few different types of twins will be discussed throughout this paper. Dizygotic twins, commonly referred to as fraternal twins, are the result of two different eggs undergoing fertilization by two different sperm around the same time and both implanting in the uterus simultaneously, thus developing at the same time. Monozygotic twins are often referred to as identical twins, and occur as the result of one fertilized egg splitting between one and fourteen days after fertilization, forming two separate zygotes. Identical twins have almost exactly the same DNA, except in rare cases of chromosomal mutations.

This study also mentions two different types of monozygotic twins--monochorionic monozygotic twins and dichorionic monozygotic twins. Monochorionic twins split later after fertilization, usually after between eight and thirteen days, and share the same chorion, or outermost layer of the sac. As a result, monochorionic, or one sac, twins are physically very close as they develop. Dichorionic twins split earlier after fertilization, usually after between three and four days, and develop separate amnions and chorions. Therefore, there is slightly more of a physical separation between dichorionic twins than monochorionic twins. A secondary research question in this paper is if the in-utero environment of monozygotic twins influences the later expression of certain twin features and the twin relationship.

Psychological Background: Theories and Studies that Address the Twin Relationship

Perhaps the biggest difficulty that twins face is in the formation of an identity separate from his/her twin. In fact, most of the other difficulties that twins have emerge from this conflict. Many theorists have argued that developing an identity, independence, and individuality are essential to having a healthy ego in adulthood. Erik Erikson, who discussed the various stages of development, developed some theories on the ultimate role of the ego. His theories are derived primarily from Freudian psychology. Erikson addresses the idea of an ego, or the “I,” and states that “we call a sense of ‘I’ certain basic modes of existence . . . namely, a sense of being centered and active, whole and aware –
and thus overcome a feeling of being peripheral or inactivated, fragmented and obscured” (Erikson, 1982). Essential to the “I,” or the ego, is our sense of personhood and central unity, or our identity. Erikson also defined developmental stages that lead people to the discovery of their unitary identity. According to Erikson, adolescence is the phase wherein the main conflict is between identity and identity diffusion (Erikson, 1982). During this phase, individuals are supposed to detach themselves from their parents and home and begin to identify themselves by their own values and ideals. In addition, adolescents in this phase begin to develop some sense of identity continuity and security (Erikson, 1982).

For twins, however, this phase is more problematic. First of all, discovering their unitary identity is complicated by the fact that twins often define themselves as a unit, part of the set. Therefore, for twins, the oneness that Erikson discussed is achieved not by one person but by two, who share an identity. Another part of this phase--separation from the parents and the home-- is also much more difficult for twins. Research on twins has shown that co-twins experience an extremely close bond with one another to compensate for difficulties parents may face in raising twins; often, parents “may actively encourage one twin as a parent substitute for the other” (Lander, 2008). Given that twins often act as primary caregivers for one another, separation from the twin would be the chief hurdle that twins face during the identity and identity diffusion phases, not necessarily separation from the parent. The literature shows that separation from one’s twin is extremely challenging for twins and often comes with a great deal of conflict and hesitation.

Object relations theory also discusses the concept of the unitary self as being an essential step in development. This theory identifies parting with the mother as essential as well. According to theorist Margaret Mahler, separation-individuation occurs when a child is removed from his/her fusion to his mother and begins to form unique characteristics. Essential to individuation is being able to maintain an internal representation of “important others” as significant, but distinctly separate from oneself. This process is largely influenced by the primary caregiver, who, in a healthy environment, would foster separateness. At around four or five months, a child begins to differentiate their own bodies from that of their mothers, and being to realize that they can interact with the world separate from their mother (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975). For this to be an easier step for babies, there is usually a transitional object, described as a “monument to the need for this contact with the mother’s body, which so touchingly expressed in the infant’s preference for an object which is lasting, soft, pliable, warm to the touch . . . The fact that the object is usually pressed against the face close to the nose probably indicates how well it substitutes for the mother” (Mahler, Pine, and Bergman, 1975). Transitional objects are usually blankets or stuffed animals of some sort. These are proper transitional objects because they contain the physicality and connection to the mother that the baby desires but are inanimate, which by definition makes them-transitional. Twins, however, can use one another as transitional objects. While this might be effective in moving beyond the attachment to the mother, because they have other physical bodies with whom they can create an attachment, twins’ “transitional objects” have the potential to become permanent parts of their identity, largely because of the comfort they provide to each other and the fact that both are available. Therefore, instead of breaking away from the duality of baby with the mother, twins may often simply replace this with a duality with their twin. Not effectively
separating from an attachment object leads to difficulties in later separation and differentiation of one’s own ego.

Most psychologists who study twins have identified certain characteristics of twins that are consistent and are the result of their unusual paths toward ego development, as explained by object relations and developmental theorists. One of the first common reactions to twinship is a concept that can be identified as “twinning.” The twinning reaction is identified as a “fusion of object and self-representation in which the two merge, leading to a loss of ego boundary (Jarrett, 1980). The fact that twins can often use one another as a transitional object makes the process of ego differentiation quite challenging. Instead of detaching from the mother, learning how to self-sooth, and creating a unitary identity, twins have the capability to use each other as self-soothing objects. Having another person instead of a blanket or a stuffed animal is incredibly comforting for babies and toddlers. For this reason, it is unlikely that twins would move beyond this attachment, and in some instances, it is even encouraged by the mothers of twins because it relieves some of the caretaking burden (Jarrett, 1980; Lander, 2008). Twins show this kind of attachment to each other even as infants. Jarrett describes a set of twins who would cry until they were placed together, at which point “they would stop crying and coo contentedly” (Jarrett, 1980). Therefore, because twins were not forced to differentiate from each other, the individual twins have an identity that is not whole and needs to be joined with their co-twin in order to be complete.

Along with psychodynamic theories of ego development, twin ego fusion can also be explained by socialization. Twins seem to fascinate people across the world due to their distinctiveness and the fact that twinship is an unusual phenomenon. Societies worldwide have developed schemas for twins that influence how twins are perceived and the roles that twins are expected to fill. Stewart (2000) describes how societal pressures encourage ego fusion. On a basic level, the naming of twins often takes into consideration the twinship. Parents often use rhyming names or alliteration to signal that they are part of the same unit (Stewart, 2000). This automatically labels the twins as two parts of one whole set, which is a social reinforcer of ego and identity fusion. Reinforcement and social cues often act as guides by which people shape their behavior, which then becomes internalized into identity. Adopting roles in our societies, be it gender roles or roles based on birth order, are important to individuals’ sense of fitting in and to their perception of being accepted. Once twins perceive their role as being “a unit, two halves of a divided whole in which one-half plus one-half” makes up the one, there is immense pressure to maintain that role (Stewart, 2000). Therefore, the ego fusion is maintained as an effort to fit the prescribed role in society that twins are expected to fill.

While the pressures of being a twin and acting like a twin have the potential to cause conflict with the identities of the twins, it is nevertheless undeniable that twins, regardless of type or gender, share an extremely close relationship with one another. This bond is understandable, given that twins are literally with one another from the point of conception throughout the majority of their childhood. (Lander, 2008; Miliora, 2003; Klein, 2003). While this close bond is complicated and often riddled with issues of identity confusion, the twin relationship remains close and vital throughout their lives.
A final key attribute that is seen throughout twinship is identified in this study as “projection of the twinship onto other relationships,” but has been identified in previous literature as “twin yearning,” or “the apparent need to reestablish the twin relationship with other objects [people] in adult life” (Jarrett, 1980). Numerous case studies of twins show this pattern, in which twins latch onto a significant other, a child, or a friend in an attempt to find another ego to fuse with and another person with whom to mimic their vital primary relationship (Jarrett, 1980; Klein, 2003; Ainslie, 1985). According to Klein, “twins consciously and unconsciously regressed into thinking that they could expect the same intensity with new people in their lives as they had with their twin sibling” (Klein, 2003). This twin yearning behavior is an understandable reflection of the unit upbringing of twins and the socialization that occurs. However, the continuous longing for another twin is a maladaptive behavior that causes a strain on the relationship between twins and is a hurdle for twins seeking own identity to overcome.

Most of the actual research that has been conducted on twin identity and the twin relationship thus far has been in the form of case studies. Many of the twin characteristics described here, such as ego fusion and twin yearning, have been identified in these case studies. One case focused on Bernice, a 53-year-old woman who was in therapy for depression. She showed little differentiation between herself and her twin. Bernice would cry when her twin cried, and would become upset and feel reprimanded whenever her twin was scolded (Jarrett, 1980). This inability to separate her own identity from that of her sister, to the point where she would react to any action made on her sister as if it was her own experience, shows an how extreme the identity fusion can become. In another case study of a young boy, he expresses his own issues with developing an individual identity and indicates that he “feels he is incomplete and that he is not always sure of who he really is” (Lander, 2008). This sense of feeling lost and not whole is a result of the emotional dependence to his twin that he never moved beyond. These two case studies exemplify the detrimental effects that a lack of proper differentiation can have on the state of a person.

Although related to ego fusion, twin yearning is slightly different in that it is often the result of a lack of ego boundaries. A twin exhibiting this characteristic will want somebody else in their lives fill the role that their twin filled, essentially "completing" them by comprising the other half of their identity. This twin yearning is often seen in romantic relationships, but can also influence the way twins form friendships and how twins treat their children. In a study of male twins, Orr (1941) found that many of the men “reported a mutual problem of establishing identity and an unceasing attempt to ‘find a twin’” (Miliora, 2003). In addition, because of a lack of boundaries, Joseph 1959 found in a case study of a male that the twin “tended to make a twin out of everyone he met, including the analyst” (Miliora, 2003). This indicates that twins often find it extremely difficult to form relationships without attempting to find another twin. In Ainslie’s book The Psychology of Twinship, a woman exhibited twin yearning in her relationship with her ex-husband. The relationship had ended, but she indicated “I really feel like I relied on [ex-husband] a lot more quickly and became not dependent but intimate with him a lot more quickly, because of looking for something or someone whom I could be close to” (Ainslie, 1985). While many aspects of having a close bond with a twin can be positive, there are evident maladaptive effects when one’s identity is not complete without another.
Unit identity and ego fusion, twin yearning, and closeness are factors that encompass other characteristics examined in this study. In this study, unit identity and ego fusion is defined as differentiation, and is further examined by the characteristics of attachment, individual confidence, external differentiation (how the outside world perceives the twin set), and the desire to remain undifferentiated. Twin yearning is redefined in this study as “projection on other relationships.” Closeness is its own characteristic assessed in this study. In addition to these characteristics, questions from the differentiation category and the projection category were merged as one variable entitled "enmeshment." for further analysis. By breaking down the twin relationship into these factors, the goal of this research goal is to shed light on the twin relationship between twins and the effects of twinship on identity, as well as assess whether the type of twin has an effect on how profoundly these characteristics are expressed.

Research Methodology

Participants

A total of forty people participated in this study. Thirteen monozygotic twins and twenty-seven dizygotic twins participated in this study. Of the participants, thirty-six were female and four were male. Two of the men were in a dizygotic twin set and the other two men were dizygotic twins participating alone. Of the females, thirteen of the twins were monozygotic. One identical female twin participated alone, and the other twelve female identical twin participants are comprised of six twin sets. Of the twenty-three female fraternal twins, twenty of these females make up ten sets and three of the females participated solo. The average age of the participants was 21.24, with ages ranging from 18 to 32.

Research Questions and Research Design

The questions of this study are 1) what are the most characteristic features of the twin relationship?; 2) how do monozygotic same-sex twins and dizygotic same-sex twins differ psychologically?; and 3) how do monozygotic same-sex twins and dizygotic same-sex twins differ in the way they manifest these twin factors?. The study was conducted in the form of an online survey. Participants were obtained from American University, Georgetown University, and George Washington University via postings on websites and email blasts. Additional participants were obtained through postings on Facebook. The survey was administered online using the website surveymonkey.com. After giving informed consent, each participant completed the survey independently and anonymously. The participants were all given codes so that, in the event that both twins in a set were participating together, these twins could be identified as part of the same set and the data could be used for future analysis of co-twin concordant responses.

This study was an experimental design wherein there were two primary groups being tested, fraternal twins and identical twins. Secondary subgroups that were analyzed were dichorionic and monochorionic identical twins, pulled from the identical twin group. The different twin groups were the independent variables of this study. The dependent variables, or twin factors being analyzed, were derived out of the many questions on the questionnaire. The factors were closeness, external differentiation (how the outside world perceives the twin set), differentiation (internal feelings of
Differences Between Fraternal and Identical Same-Sex Twins

...differentiation), desire to remain undifferentiated, attachment, confidence as an individual, projection of twinship onto other relationships, and enmeshment. The data were analyzed using SPSS.

**Measure**

A new measure was devised for this study. The measure consists of demographic information, mainly gender and twin type. The second section of the measure has the questions about the twin relationship; from these 31 questions, the factors were created based on the details of the question. Participants scored these items on a Likert Scale, where a score of “1” meant “Strongly Disagree” and a score of “5” indicated “Strongly Agree.” A small amount of qualitative data was also collected at the end of the study. The participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on anything that they felt the survey did not adequately assess, describe in more detail their feelings about their twin and about being a twin, and discuss any information that they felt was relevant and wanted to share. This portion of the survey, however, was optional.

**Results**

**Interpreting Characteristic Scores**

Closeness – 5 = very close, 1 = not very close

External Differentiation – 5 = little external differentiation, 1 = a lot of external differentiation

Differentiation – 5 = undifferentiated, 1 = differentiated

Desire to Remain Undifferentiated – 5 = strong desire to remain undifferentiated, 1 = little desire to remain undifferentiated

Attachment – 5 = very attached, 1 = not very attached

Individual Confidence – 5 = strong individual confidence, 1 = little individual confidence

Projection onto Other Relationships – 5 = strong tendency to project, 1 = little tendency to project

Enmeshment - 5 = identity very enmeshed within twinship, 1 = identity not enmeshed

**Identical Twins versus Fraternal Twins**

The results of independent sample t-tests comparing dizygotic twins to monozygotic twins show a few significant differences between fraternal and identical same-sex twins. Two of the assessed characteristics, "desire to remain undifferentiated" and "enmeshment," showed significant differences at a p value of .05. For both of these characteristics, monozygotic twins had significantly higher means, indicating that they have a greater desire to remain undifferentiated and that their identities are more enmeshed within the twin unit. Another characteristic that is not significant at a p = .05 level but is
important to note is the characteristic “projection of the twin relationship.” Monozygotic twins have a higher average in this characteristic, to a p-value of .067.

Table 1: A Summary of the Data for Identical and Fraternal Twins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twin Characteristic</th>
<th>Identical Twin Mean and Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Fraternal Twin Mean and Standard Deviation</th>
<th>T – Score</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>4.872, .217</td>
<td>4.716, .469</td>
<td>1.135</td>
<td>p = .263, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Differentiation</td>
<td>3.231, .854</td>
<td>3.111, .837</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>p = .676, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>3.744, .884</td>
<td>3.333, .728</td>
<td>1.557</td>
<td>p = .128, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>3.198, .737</td>
<td>2.984, .627</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>p = .346, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to Remain Undifferentiated</td>
<td>2.923, .454</td>
<td>2.136, .622</td>
<td>4.060</td>
<td>p &lt; .001, significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Confidence</td>
<td>3.551, .432</td>
<td>3.784, .418</td>
<td>-1.631</td>
<td>p = .111, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection of Twinship onto Other Relationships</td>
<td>2.808, .878</td>
<td>2.315, .723</td>
<td>1.883</td>
<td>p = .067, not significant, but relevant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeshment</td>
<td>2.972, .569</td>
<td>2.458, .535</td>
<td>2.78</td>
<td>p = .008 - significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dizygotic N = 27, Monozygotic N = 13

Chart 1: A Graphic Display of the Data for Identical and Fraternal Twins
Monochorionic versus Dichorionic Identical Twins

Monochorionic identical twins had significantly higher scores in the “enmeshment” characteristic than dichorionic identical twins. Dichorionic identical twins had significantly higher scores in the “external differentiation” factor.

Table 2: Data for Monochorionic and Dichorionic Identical Twins

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Twin Characteristic</th>
<th>Monochorionic Twin Mean and Standard Deviation</th>
<th>Dichorionic Twin Mean and Standard Deviation</th>
<th>T – Score</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Closeness</td>
<td>5, 0</td>
<td>5, 0</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Differentiation</td>
<td>3, 0</td>
<td>3.78, .19</td>
<td>-.5.422</td>
<td>p = .012, significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attachment</td>
<td>4.833, .235</td>
<td>4.222, .384</td>
<td>1.955</td>
<td>p = .146, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Differentiation</td>
<td>3.8571, .000001</td>
<td>3.476, .459</td>
<td>1.113</td>
<td>p = .347, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to Remain Undifferentiated</td>
<td>3.500, .236</td>
<td>3.111, .192</td>
<td>2.049</td>
<td>p = .133, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Confidence</td>
<td>3.250, .589</td>
<td>3.778, .255</td>
<td>-1.450</td>
<td>p = .243, not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projection of Twinship onto Other Relationships</td>
<td>4.250, .354</td>
<td>3.000, 1.000</td>
<td>3.273</td>
<td>p = .049, significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enmeshment</td>
<td>3.8125, .265</td>
<td>3.167, .191</td>
<td>3.238</td>
<td>p = .047 - significant</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Monochorionic N = 2, Dichorionic N = 3

Chart 2: Graphic Display of the Data for Monochorionic and Dichorionic Identical Twins
Limitations of Results

While the study did result in significant data and interesting findings, there were some limitations to this study that need to be addressed. First, the measure was designed for this study, and due to time and resource constraints, has not previously been examined for internal and external validity. Second, the sample size is small. A larger group would have given a clearer picture of the population as a whole. Also, very few men participated in this study, so the results reflect the experiences of female same-sex identical and fraternal twins more than anything else. Lastly, the number of people who were included in the analysis of differences between monochorionic and dichorionic identical twins was incredibly small. Most of the identical twins did not know whether they were monochorionic or dichorionic. Particularly for this aspect of the study, the results can only be taken as speculative, because no real conclusions can be made given the shortage of data.

The results comparing fraternal and identical twins are more informative and imply certain trends and traits that are consistent, but overall, this study provides implications regarding the relationships between twins and the development of twin identity that can be utilized and examined further in future studies to solidify conclusions.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Monochorionic versus Dichorionic Identical Twins

The findings in this part of the study suggest that the environment in utero might have an impact on the expression of twin characteristics. Before discussion of these results, however, it is important to note that the two monochorionic twins were of the same set, and really only provide information about their own experience. Therefore, these results cannot be generalized.

One of the more unexpected findings was the fact that the dichorionic twins described fewer experiences of external differentiation, meaning that they perceived the world as treating them more like twins, than the monochorionic twins. Potentially, the dichorionic twins look more alike or are together more and thus experience more “twin treatment.” However, it is not possible to surmise that these differences are due to the in utero environment as opposed to other environmental factors.

The findings that may suggest a pattern that could be examined further: monochorionic identical twins’ scores on enmeshment and projection are both significant higher than the scores of the dichorionic twins for these characteristics. The monochorionic twins appear to have a very strong bond and signs of definite ego fusion. They do not seem particularly differentiated from one another, which is expressed in lack of individual confidence and high scores on enmeshment and projection of the twinship. A hypothesis that can be derived from this finding and would be fascinating to explore is the idea that perhaps the closeness of the twins to one another in the womb has an impact on later ego development. The physical aspect of being two halves confined to one sac, which is the case for monochorionic twins, potentially could translate into a psychological phenomenon wherein the development as an entity, rather than as individuals, affects the mental state of the twins. The result is that each twin feels as though he/she is half of something and that something is missing when their
“other” is not present. Again, given the limitations in sample size, this idea remains a hypothesis, not a conclusion derived from this study.

Fraternal versus Identical Twins

Overall, the data revealed more similarities between fraternal and identical twins than differences. One of the most obvious characteristics of the twin relationship is the degree of closeness, regardless of zygosity. The average closeness score for monozygotic twins was 4.872, and the average score for dizygotic twins was 4.716. These data are consistent with a previous study comparing monozygotic twins and dizygotic twins, which showed that twins were closer to one another than non-twin siblings and that same-sex twins had a tighter bond than opposite sex siblings (Koch, 1966). The bond between twins is distinctive regardless of whether they share the same DNA. This fact signifies that the environment may have more to do with the formation of the twinship bond than genetics (Klein, 2003). Especially for outside onlookers, “the social label ‘twin,’ for both types of twins, is more valid or consequential than the label monozygotic twin or dizygotic twin” (Stewart, 2000). Therefore, fraternal and identical twins would receive the same input on the social roles they are expected to play and exhibit many of the expected twin characteristics. What’s more, “psychologists believe the bond between twins begins in utero and develops, consciously and unconsciously, throughout the twins’ lives so that there is a thread connecting them emotionally” (Klein, 2003). The study shows that this emotional bond occurs regardless of the type of twinship, revealing that the factors that influence the degree of closeness are common to both types of twins, making zygosity largely irrelevant to the bond.

Whereas the similarities in the twin bond between fraternal and identical twins are worth noting, the most interesting aspects of this study lie in the significant differences between the two. Although there were no significant differences between differentiation, one of the significant findings was the difference between monozygotic and dizygotic twins in their desire to remain undifferentiated. Results indicated that identical twins have some desire to maintain a fused ego and to be seen as part of the set more than fraternal twins do.

The characteristic described as “twin yearning” in much of the literature and described in this study as “projection of twinship onto other relationships” did not show significant differences to a p-value of .05, but was at a p-value of .067, which is still worth addressing. Related to the idea of ego fusion and lack of differentiation, projection of the twinship implies that identical twins, more than fraternal twins, look to find a relationship that is of the same intensity as the twinship. The twin yearning of identical twins was previously described by much of the literature. As a result of the fact that the ego is not fully developed, twins look to find someone to complete them. The items that made up the “twin yearning” variable in this study were “I consider myself closest to someone when I feel like we are one” and “If I have one person who I am close to, then that is all I need.” The average score for this characteristic for identical twins was 2.807, with a standard deviation of .879. While the score overall is slightly below neutral, leaning more toward less twin yearning, the range indicates that some of the scores did in fact lean in the positive direction. These findings show that identical twins feel the need to fill the position of their twin with other people more than fraternal twins do. Furthermore, the findings for the projection of the twinship indicate a higher amount of ego fusion on the part of identical twins,
because the lack of ego boundaries leads twins to duplicate that relationship with everyone they meet (Miliora, 2003). And because the twinship is gratifying in many ways, twins “unconsciously tried to re-effect [the twin relationship] with surrogates” (Jarrett, 1980).

The enmeshment variable, which is a combination of variables from the differentiation category and from the projection category, also showed significant differences between fraternal and identical twins, with identical twins being significantly more enmeshed within their twinship than fraternal twins. This result further reinforces the concept that developing an identity as a twin and reaching the ultimate goal of individual identity development, as described by Mahler, is thwarted by having an alternate self-object to the mother and having a convenient and permanent transitional object.

There are a few possible explanations for the reasons why identical and fraternal twins differ in the characteristics all related to ego fusion and having a whole identity. The findings are not a result of the fact that monozygotic twins are closer to one another than dizygotic twins, given the fact that the closeness results for the two groups were nearly the same. The reason for this difference between identical and fraternal twins can most likely be explained as a result of stronger socialization forces, specifically from the mother, and perhaps a small number of genetic factors as well.

Stewart (2000) explained that as a whole, societies react to twins regardless of zygosity and will place the same expectations onto fraternal twins as they do onto identical twins. However, for mothers, who are the primary caregivers to their children and thus have the most significant effect, zygosity does appear to have an impact on the upbringing of the twins and the encouragement or lack thereof of forming a unitary identity. In a study conducted in 1998 about mothers’ child-raising attitudes toward their children, Robin et al. found that “mothers of monozygotic twins appear to have a greater tendency to dress the children alike and to bring them up in an identical and symmetrical environment” (Robin, 1998). In addition, this study found that “parents of monozygotic twins, more than those of dizygotic twins, have a tendency to consider and treat the children as a nondistinct entity” and that “parents of twins tend to amplify the similarities of monozygotic twins via an ‘assimilation effect’ and the differences between dizygotic twins via a ‘contrast effect’” (Robin, 1998).

What this literature suggests is that mothers of identical twins are influenced by the zygosity and, perhaps the appearance of their twins, when it comes to how they go about raising their children and encouraging individuality. Twins then respond to the feedback from their mother. One of the biggest indicators of the identity development of twins is the treatment of the mother (Robin, 1998; Bacon, 2005). If identical twins are treated more like a solitary unit by their mother, then it is likely that, due to expectancy and learned habit, the twins will act as a unit. Furthermore, Stewart’s research suggests that mothers often revel in the novelty of having twins, especially identical twins, since it garners much attention and interest from the outside world (2000). Therefore, mothers will more likely provide positive feedback to their identical twins if they play the part of being two halves of a whole. This kind of reinforcement would make it very difficult for identical twins to separate or even want to separate, and the continuous desire to both fit the expectations of society and of a mother could likely explain why identical twins in this study were less interested in differentiating than fraternal twins.
Identical twins may also perceive their co-twin to be an extension of themselves simply because when they look at their twin, they are essentially looking at a clone of themselves. One might expect a similar reaction to fraternal twins who look identical. Because identical twins can see another version of themselves, they might internalize that perspective and feel as though their twin is legitimately an extension of themselves. Furthermore, the companionship that twinship provides is comforting, and because it is both convenient and reinforced, will likely decrease twins’ desire to break away from that relationship.

A second explanation for this difference, and any difference, between fraternal and identical twins is of course genetics. Technically, identical twins have the same DNA, with the exception of some potential mutations that could have occurred during the gestation period. Fraternal twins are genetically as similar as any other sibling pair. It can be argued that because identical twins are genetically clones of one another, they will immediately have more in common, making it easier for them to become attached and stay attached throughout their lives.

A final aspect of the fraternal versus identical twin results that is essential to address is the qualitative data. Most of the qualitative data in this study reflected similarities between fraternal and identical twins. Many of the responses indicated a strong bond between the twins, reiterating the results that displayed extreme closeness. Numerous participants also suggested that growing up as a twin was difficult due to competitiveness and social expectations to act a certain way. This implies that the twins were aware of the role they were expected to fill, which may have made for some conflicted feelings, especially if the twins did not feel as though they fit the mold perfectly. However, most of the twins stated that overall, they love being a twin and having the type of close relationship and bond with their co-twin.

Another comment that came up repeatedly in the qualitative data was the fact that many of the twins, both monozygotic and dizygotic, noted that they unconsciously use the pronoun “we” instead of “I” when talking about themselves or when talking about their experiences. This could be a partial reflection of the fact that twins share the majority of childhood experiences, and given that they were together all the time, using the pronoun “we” to describe events is actually legitimate. This slip of the tongue also reflects confusion in developing the “Ich,” ego, or “I” self that Freud described in his work and that Erikson addressed later on (Erikson, 1982). This recurring tendency in twins indicates that there is somewhat of an unconscious ego fusion or identity confusion as a result of growing up as a twin.

There were only a few visible differences between fraternal and identical twins in the qualitative data. On the whole, fraternal twins tended to assert their independence from their twin, whereas identical twins did not address independence. One identical twin openly stated that “the strongest relationship I have is with my twin. I would not be the same person without her – I would not be whole.” This acknowledgement of some ego fusion reflects the fact that the unit identity might be a bit more acceptable and reinforced in identical twins, and that they are sometimes even aware and comfortable with maintaining that shared identity.
Twinship is clearly a very complex relationship that is decidedly unique from other sibling bonds. While twinship is something very special and having a twin is described as an amazing experience by most who understand it, twins experience distinct challenges in their development of ego identity. Some twins differentiate more than others, but the evidence suggests that being a twin is a significant aspect of who they are regardless of zygosity or differentiation. The relationship between twins is unlike any other, and the effects of this relationship result in an individual that is unique in her expression of self and in her interactions with the world.
References


Appendix A: Twin Questions

Closeness

I like my twin.

I love my twin.

I am close with my twin.

External Differentiation

People treat me and my twin the same.

My twin and I had the same friends growing up.

My twin and I have the same friends now.

Differentiation

It would be a problem if my boyfriend/girlfriend and twin did not get along.

If somebody liked my twin but not me, it would make me upset.

If somebody liked me but not my twin, it would be difficult to like them.

It would be a problem if my boyfriend/girlfriend and twin did not get along.

If somebody liked my twin but not me, it would make me upset.

If somebody liked me but not my twin, it would be difficult to like them.

When I meet new people, it is important to me that they know I am a twin.

When my twin does something bad, I feel like it reflects badly upon me.

I feel like my twin is a part of me.

I don’t feel whole without my twin.

Desire to Remain Undifferentiated

If my twin finds something he/she is interested in then I will want to participate in that as well.

I would prefer for me and my twin to perform the same on tasks and tests.

I want people to treat me and my twin the same.

Attachment
I want my twin to approve of what I am doing in my life.

I do not like to be far from my twin.

I prefer to talk to my twin before making any decisions.

Individual Confidence

I feel confident in the personal life decisions I make.

I do my best to avoid fighting with my twin.

I feel comfortable telling my twin how I am feeling, even if he/she will be upset or angry.

I am comfortable making decisions on my own.

When I became of age to go to college/graduate high school, it was important to me to geographically separate from my twin.

I prefer to work alone.

I like having activities that I do without my twin.

Projection Onto Other Relationships

I consider myself closest to someone when I feel like we are one.

If I have one person who I am close to, then that is all I need.

**other items did not fit into scoring mechanism**