

# the **TRANSACTIONAL ANALYST**

VOLUME 3: Issue 2: Spring 2013

**THE QUARTERLY MAGAZINE OF THE INSTITUTE OF TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS**



Keir and Lucas Jamieson aged 4 weeks

IN FOCUS: Twins, see pages 11-26

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## MARGARET TURPIN TRAINING TRUST

By Kathy Leach, Chair, MTTT

THE MARGARET TURPIN Training Trust has been suspended for some time while we have been unable to find help on the committee. David Tidsall and I have worked for 12 years on the Trust Board and felt that we would like to hand over to someone else. We have both enjoyed our work for the Trust and actually feel quite sad to be handing over.

The great news is that we have found two very willing and able members to take on the job of Chairperson and Treasurer: they are Carole Sitwell and Janet Fengersos. Many, many thanks to them.

The last six months have been interesting as we have had to track down Margaret Turpin, whom I eventually did find in Barbados and Janet Meston (Norfolk). If I give up Psychotherapy, I will have a good start in private detective work!

We are in the process of getting the legal documents drawn up and the papers transferred so that the Trust will be up and running again.

I would like to thank Wendy Argent for her work with the Trust and huge thanks to David who has been an excellent Treasurer, companion and support and all those who supported us financially so generously.

I would also like to thank Roger Grafton (accountant) and Simon Craker (IFA) for their help and advice. They have been in the background voluntarily and with no charge. As they have done this work as a personal favour, they will not be continuing once we have handed over.

The two new Trustees, Janet and Carole, will need help: a secretary and other members of the committee, none of whom need to be Trustees. Do contact them via the ITA if you feel you could work on the committee.

The Trust gives grants from £50 to £150 to help with extra-curricular training. Margaret Turpin, a founder member of the ITA, was keen to help those who were in training but could not afford the extra workshops and training that enhanced the learning of those who could pay for them. Applicants need to be contractual members of the ITA or need to have their Tutor (from a recognised TA training establishment) sign to say they are definitely heading for the written and oral exams and that they do need some financial help. Cheques are paid directly to the training centre where the workshop will take place. Receipts are needed for verification of the payments made from the Trust funds. Many people have been able to attend conference with the help of the Trust as well as attend other valuable workshops. Recipients are only usually entitled to one grant unless there are no other applications and money is available.

I wish the future committee lots of happy hours and success in the running of the Trust.



## FROM THE ASSISTANT EDITOR

Dr Celia Simpson

I AM DELIGHTED to introduce the focus on twins in this the Spring Issue of the *Transactional Analyst*. We are publishing two closely interlinked new articles by Ken Mellor and Lynda Howell, themselves both identical twins.

It feels very apt to share with readers something of the conception and maturation of this twins issue, as it has been a remarkable process for us all. It began when Ken Mellor, who has been reflecting and researching about twins for some years, offered to write an article for the magazine. Shortly after that, at the Harrogate Conference, I was introduced to Lynda Howell who has also been thinking and writing about twinhood. The ensuing connection and cocreation between Lynda and Ken has been full of vitality. With Ken based in Australia and Lynda based in Wales, they have had many stimulating discussions through email and Skype, and even managed a face-to-face meeting. As a result of their collaboration, we are proud to publish this fascinating pair of articles that shed light on what Ken has called 'the mystery of twins'.

In 'Intimate Autonomy: A Worthwhile Goal with Twins', Ken Mellor shares some of his own life experience and research to help parents and caretakers of twins. He argues for the encouragement of 'intimate autonomy', whereby the bond between the twins is honoured and individuation is encouraged. Lynda Howell's article, 'Twinhood: Sense of Self and Identity', is a development of her Masters paper. Lynda develops the concept of 'twin symbiosis', focusing on interactions with each other and with mother in utero. Her article gives therapists working with one of twins some very helpful understanding.

It has been a privilege to take the role of a (very hands-off!) authorial midwife during this birthing process. On behalf of our readership, Ali Bird and I would like to thank Lynda and Ken for giving of themselves and their time so generously.

I would also like to say well done to the conference organisers this year, Cheltenham National Conference 2013 was a big success. The reviews here (pages 6-10) speak for themselves, and I for one share their enthusiasm. At the conference I also received some fantastic feedback on our members' magazine so, on behalf of Ali and I, thank you to all of you for your kind comments.

As usual there is a lot to read in this issue, so sit down take some time and enjoy.

Ali will be back with her editorial in the next issue, she thanks everyone for the many kind wishes and thoughts sent to her during her recent bereavement.

Dr. Celia Simpson  
Assistant Editor

# Intimate autonomy, a worthwhile goal with twins

**KEN MELLOR** presents some common patterns found in twins and offers parents and others ways to encourage individuation and support 'intimate autonomy'.

**M**Y MOTHER OFTEN used to tell the story that she was sitting with my twin brother and me near the bottom of the stairs at home. She was brushing 'our hair.' David went first. We were about four years old and he was squirming around and making her job difficult. 'Stop moving Ken,' she said and kept saying as he kept squirming. Finally, I said, 'He's David; I'm Ken!' and I was not squirming. This scene was a foretaste of a confusion that would follow us into our adult lives, both when we were together and apart.

Twins have entranced, intrigued, confused, and even alarmed people throughout recorded history as non-twins have tried to come to terms with two human beings born together, particularly those who were 'identical.'

These days the interest continues, although with an added impetus. The birth rates of twins and higher multiples, such as triplets, quadruplets etc. have increased markedly. This is attributed to more women having children in their thirties and forties and to the expansion of medical fertility programs. Understandably, given these developments, the demand for information about all aspects of conceiving, gestating, raising and living with twins is high. The many books, websites and other resources currently available attest to this interest.

## Main themes

My main purposes in writing this article are to present some common twin patterns and offer guidelines on how parents can harness and deal with them; and to suggest that it is important to: support intimate autonomy when raising twins, encourage autonomy in each twin similar to the autonomy that singletons (people born single) have with their parents, encourage individuation with each other, and recognise and intervene when twins are becoming co-dependent, ie trying to live as womb-mates.

Lynda Howell (in her article page 18) eloquently describes significant aspects of twin-twin-mother in utero interactions that impact their later lives, with an emphasis on related psychotherapeutic issues. My article is directed towards parents whose job is different from the work of therapists. Together, the articles offer a rich understanding of some of the intriguing world of twins.

## Background

As one of identical twins, my interest in this subject starts with my conception as one fertilised ovum that was soon to split and eventually to become two very similar babies. Our mother, as well as others, frequently had difficulty distinguishing between my brother and me. When watching old home movies as an adult, even I found us indistinguishable – a disconcerting experience. Seventy years later, our individual lives, mostly lived in different countries, have left their imprint on us so that we now look very different. Despite this, when only one of us is present, people are still confused at times.

My long-term interest in personal change systems, psychotherapy, developmental psychology, and parenting was clearly stimulated by this background. Much of my work also had its roots in the Transactional Analysis of the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly the Bernian, redecision and the reparenting orientations. From the early 1970s as well, I was convinced that personal development began at conception, if not earlier, and not, as the experts were still asserting, at birth. Instead of starting life with a 'clean slate' at birth, as it was commonly expressed back then, I knew that our full histories in the womb have profound influences on our later development. (See Mellor, 1980b, pp.215-216)

In this article, I discuss various ways of understanding twins and suggest some practices that help in raising them from conception to adulthood. In the process, I do not repeat many of the relevant general parenting techniques that are already well covered in *ParentCraft* (Mellor, K. & E. 2001) and *Teen Stages* (Mellor, K. & E. 2004), books that Elizabeth, my wife, and I co-authored. At the same time, I also highly recommend Patricia Malmstrom's and Janet Poland's 1999 book: *The Art of Parenting Twins: The unique joys and challenges of raising twins and other multiples*. It is filled with facts, timeless wisdom and practical advice on how to deal with everyday issues throughout a twins' childhood. These authors clearly have firsthand experience. Their many practical hints work and I see the book as a primary reference and 'how to' list for all parents and others who have caretaking responsibility for twins.

### Raising twins

Doing a good job with twins requires that we pay special attention to promoting both the personal autonomy of each child, and to them learning to manage their capacities for deep intimacy with each other. Without this dual attention, twins can get lost in the twin relationship, become significantly non-functional individually or as a unit, or have extreme difficulties with other people. Examples abound of twins reaching adulthood locked together, their potential greatly diminished because they had not learnt to balance their individuality and their shared consciousness.

Bill & John B, identical twins, died within two minutes of each other at the age of 61. They had been inseparable all of their lives: living together, dressing alike, even wearing the same kind of glasses. Some years before, they had appeared with walking sticks at the same time, because they had both been in hospital together for hip replacement operations on the same side of their bodies. They were eating a meal in a Casino (in Perth Australia) when one had a heart attack. As the ambulance was on the way, he died. Within two minutes his brother was dead of a heart attack, too. The police said that they attributed their deaths to a 'tragic coincidence.' I do not. (Reported on BBC Radio 4 on 27th May, 1996).

This example may seem extreme; however, many twins get caught in such lock-step outcomes, including:

One twin is overtly functional while the other is psychologically or socially challenged.

Their characteristics or talents have become strongly polarised and locked in: intelligent – slow; active – passive; sociable – shy; talkative – mute; dominant – submissive; nice – nasty; etc..

Seeming unable – certainly unwilling – to do anything different from each other: they always live together, or are dressing, acting, talking, thinking, or being alike. (Such twins live as one person, some quite well. However, their stability relies on them staying stuck as womb-mates for life.)

They may become extremely antagonistic as one or both try to fight free of womblike co-dependency. (The impulse for freedom is normal, but they get lost in doing on the surface what needed to be done deeply and gradually in childhood.)

Developing capacities for intimate autonomy as they grow up can help twins to avoid such consequences. This kind of autonomy enables them to fulfil themselves individually and learn to celebrate their unique capacity for intimacy.

### Autonomy

Psychologically, emotionally, socially and spiritually,

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autonomy is a desirable outcome for all children. Without it, people live with many unnecessary limitations and with dysfunctional levels of dependency. Clearly this makes it of fundamental importance to everyone and prompts the question: What is it?

Autonomy is realised when people have an ongoing sense of self (Mellor, 2011, pp63-65) that is well established and available to them as they relate to the people, situations and events of their lives. Autonomous people realise that they can make their own decisions while taking account of other people and relevant situational factors. And they act accordingly. Developing these capacities relies on children expanding their learning progressively as they move through the developmental stages all children go through. This sequence starts at conception and ends in the early twenties.

### Unfolding childhood

Children have long been understood to go through a developmental sequence involving multiple layers and processes that promote their autonomy. By supporting their passage through this sequence for the twenty years it takes, parents help to ensure that their children reach adulthood as autonomous individuals. In what follows, I discuss four crucial transition times or 'births,' a principle for encouraging autonomy on a daily basis, and the value of learning basic living skills.

### Four births

The first transition is their physical birth, when a fetus moves to being a baby. The physical contractions are essential to the process. After bonding with the mother, the baby's learning is done primarily in the context of the mother-baby relationship, with other caretakers also influencing the process. The second is an 'emotional birth' when children make the transition from being a baby to being a child. The usual two-year-old struggles with them are the 'contractions' and are essential to successful delivery. After bonding with the family, their learning as a child is done primarily in its context. The third is a 'cognitive birth' when children make a transition from being a child to being an adolescent (a

newborn adult) at about fourteen years of age. Its essential contractions are the struggles over 'who knows what' that are somewhat similar in process, but not in content, to the two-year-old ones. These newborn adults then bond with the community, which becomes the primary context for their learning as adolescents. The fourth is a 'spiritual birth' when people make a transition from living as worldly adults to being spiritual beings with transcendent consciousness. Its essential contractions arise in our struggles to handle the often extreme pressures in life. Once bonded with transcendence, our learning takes place in spiritual dimensions. The state that follows this last birth is the context in which the full realisation of autonomy can occur. (Chapter 20: *Four births, four bonds* in Mellor, K. & Mellor, E., 2001, pp176-189.)

The fourth birth is a somewhat special case. It can go on for many years and arises when we are faced with worldly pressures and events that overrun our current resources enough for us to notice the challenges they create. These require us to relinquish past world views and ways of coping in favour of realities and understanding that transcend our previous worldliness.

With each of these births, children move into a greatly expanded range of experiences compared with the range available in the womb that they have just left. And after each delivery and the subsequent learning are completed successfully, they will have significantly more autonomous potential than before the labour started. This is both exciting and very encouraging. However, the intensity of the contractions during these births can be so testing for all concerned that some parents think something is wrong and try to find ways to avoid the struggles. If they do this, though, they will stall the current 'birth's' progress and keep their children stuck in the womb or birth canal of that birth – ie, the mother-child relationship, their family dynamics, or the narrow community experience of the teenage years.

The nature of this intensity changes with each birth, too: the physical intensity mothers feel with physical contractions; the emotional intensity felt during the 'I-want/don't-want' of the two year-old struggles; the passionate arguments and contention about 'who knows what' with fourteen year-olds, and the existential struggles we get into as adults. As we are faced with any of the three childhood births, it can help to realise that

**'It is also important to watch for the development of polarised responses so the pair does not rigidly "share out" skills, interests, functions, styles of doing things.'**

the hard labour we are experiencing is necessary for our children to make the transition to much greater autonomy. So my advice is to hang in there!

With singletons, the primary interactions that prompt increasing autonomy occur between baby and caretakers, child and family, adolescent and wider world, and adult and transcendent realities. Twin pairs, who are at least as deeply bonded together as they are to their mothers, have the added developmental task of becoming autonomous in relation to each other. To do this, they need to go through the same unfolding sequence with one another as they do with their primary caretakers. This is crucial to the development of separate autonomous senses of self. Moreover, both types of autonomy – twin-related and other-related – need to be comfortably inclusive and not excluding or over compliant. (Mellor, K., 2008.)

There will be many opportunities for twins to do this, for as they get into the second and third birth struggles with their parents and other family members, they are also likely to contend with each other in similar ways. This is a good thing. Watchfully letting these encounters run their course is helpful, provided the twins move towards real resolutions with one another. Physical or emotional violence is not acceptable and needs to be stopped, whereas contention is part of the process. Also, if they seem to be getting stuck with one another in other ways, parents can intervene so the pair learn to reach resolutions that honour both their positions and involve decisions to act differently with each other from then on. For example, twin one agrees to remain silent, stop interrupting or niggling twin two; and twin two agrees to tell twin one clearly what he/she wants instead of sulking. Mutuality in these types of decisions is significant and needs to be supported by keeping the commitment to act as agreed by each to the other.

As mentioned above, it is also important to watch for the development of polarised responses so the pair does not rigidly 'share out' skills, interests, functions, styles of doing things etc. The aim is two whole human beings, not two fragmented individuals with 'rules' governing who does what, who thinks what etc. At the same time, by being alert for naturally emerging interests and talents, and supporting these as we would with any child, we can support the uniqueness of each of them. At the same time, many people have fixed attitudes about what is best for twins and the mysteries to preserve, so as parents of twins we may need to advocate for autonomy and/or oneness with others, and it is important that we do.

Malmstron & Poland (1999) give wonderfully clear and explicit pointers on many of the issues involved in promoting twin-related and other-related autonomy. These are relevant both to the periods during which the four births occur and to the times between them. Their suggestions are accompanied by specific examples of

what can be done at the different stages, too: Do they sleep together or apart? Do they always play together? Do you let them argue or fight? Do they attend different schools or classes at school? What about separate birthday cakes or celebrations? Do we encourage different presents? How do we handle teenage dating? What can we do about confusion of identity?

### Managing their lives

At the same time as the above transitions, our children need ongoing encouragement for individuation in ways that avoid limitation or co-dependency. A simple principle can guide what to do here.

Principle for promoting autonomy: Make plans for the twins to separate from each other at the same rate as they do from their caretakers (their parents in the early years).

A summarised set of examples of what can be done includes:

- Upon discovering you are having twins, start to think of them and relate to them as two babies. If you know their sexes, consider naming them and talking about and to them by name. Also, throughout their lives, use their names in preference to 'the twins.' Using their names individualises them; calling them 'the twins' does not.
- Use the same crib immediately after birth and ensure they spend lots of physical time together. Then, progressively put them in separate cribs in the same room, then in separate cribs in different rooms. The availability of rooms could determine the way this is managed.
- As they start to sit up and crawl then walk, give them opportunities for separate and joint experiences, play and activities. They don't always have to be together or doing the same thing. Entertaining each other is just one skill.
- As they become more verbal, encourage them both to wait their turn with others and make sure that the overall balance of who waits and who is the focus of attention is evenly distributed.
- As they move out to kindergarten, think about ways for them to spend separate time there too. This may require negotiating with the teachers. Encourage spending time with different children in such settings.
- Similarly, when they go to school, which usually is a longer separation from caretakers than previously, explore the opportunities for them to be in separate classes. They can still come together during breaks. (Some schools are strongly pro or anti in these areas. Discussing the unique needs of each child can help.)
- Generally, doing things with different people is good, too. For example, one stays at home with mother while the other goes shopping with father; and when they stay with relatives or friends, they do not always do it together.

**'This process involves honouring the need for individuality to be supported, at the same time as honouring the reality of the deep connection twins have with each other.'**

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- Encourage shared and single friendships with other children so they can learn to relate one-to-one and not get stuck with a two-to-one pattern.

And so the principle goes. Again, Malmstron & Poland (1999) give many suggestions that go all the way to the end of the teenage years. The preferred end result is for each of them to be capable of living their lives comfortably with or without their co-twin.

This process involves honouring the need for individuality to be supported, at the same time as honouring the reality of the deep connection twins have with each other. It is also important that all plans are carried out sensitively and, as the twins get older, with their participation in the decision making. All the same, participation does not automatically mean they have the final say. Some twins want to stay bound together, some to force a separation, and parents may need to decide to do things over the objections of one or both of them. In fact, singletons also need parents to make the same kind of decision at times.

### Living skills training

By their early twenties, all young people need to have acquired the knowledge, skill and experience upon which living in the adult world depends. And the same applies to twin pairs. Starting this learning when they are young is easiest, especially if it is embedded naturally into everyday life. And there is a lot to learn. However, each day offers opportunities to learn new skills and to consolidate others.

This training is so obvious when stated, yet teaching children and young people what they need to know by the time they leave home is often resisted by parents. What we parents all have to realise is that for children to get what they need, childhood should not be a vacation in which there are few expectations to contribute practically to the household, a time 'to be a child' and play continually; nor a coaching college in how to manipulate or compel their staff (parents and other siblings mainly) to do all the household chores for them.

Without basic survival level learning, autonomy is badly affected, because people are forced to depend on others. I have known people whose lives were greatly diminished because they could not boil water, do their

washing, budget their money or handle other basics.

This practical learning includes cleaning, making beds, washing clothes, cooking, doing dishes, sweeping or vacuum cleaning, bathing, writing, using a keyboard, managing everyday equipment, studying, shopping, budgeting, making plans and completing them, meeting obligations, handling multiple jobs together, sharing tasks with others, and much more. It is fortunate that we have about two decades during which to do all of this! And there can still be plenty of time for play and fun.

Encouragement: When parents expect their children to contribute, they often discover that everyone is happier. Children and others who contribute to the systems that support them (family, school, community etc) are much happier and more fulfilled because they develop a sense of purpose that transcends their own gratification.

Allocating jobs often also has other unexpected benefits. It takes some of the weight off parents. It also gives children something to struggle about when in the midst of the second and third births. During these times, parents also get to determine what their children's struggle is over, which is often preferable to waiting for them to choose something. The point is that if we do not choose, they certainly will, because, as already discussed, they need to struggle in order to live more fully. The struggle is the birth contractions. Putting the cutlery in a drawer is much easier to manage than a nine year old getting into fights at school or a teenager staying out all night with the latest boyfriend or girlfriend.

Decide what to teach: If unclear on what they need to learn, list all the basic things that you do to manage your life. Use this list as the curriculum of the course that, as a parent, you need to complete with your children before they leave home in their late teens or early twenties.

You can start the learning as a game with toddlers, for example, carrying something like a sock, to help take the washing to the laundry; have fun with four or five-year-olds washing a few robust dishes or cutting vegetables (safely). This can expand to filling or unloading the dishwasher. Give them pocket money and teach them to budget. Then every day can have its responsibilities that match a child's current abilities. By about eleven have them ready to take responsibility for cooking a simple family meal each week. Of course, these jobs gradually accumulate, too; they don't simply have one thing to do at a time, nor do they have to learn them all together.

Selective responses to twins: Clearly, the tasks done when they are older will be more demanding than when they are younger. With twins it is also important to adapt our expectations to their individual talents, interests, skills, and rates of getting things done. There are many basics that both will need to learn, whether or not they take to them with ease, and other activities that will be more to do with preferences and interests. In the end, we aim for both to have a complete basic skill set, to be

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comfortable doing things alone or together, to have had opportunities to learn at their own pace, and very importantly, to have been guided, supported and encouraged in themselves without perpetual comparisons.

It is also important that they learn to do their chores alone and together; that, if there are brothers or sisters, they learn to cooperate with them with chores; and that each one of the pair has a chance to specialise in areas that they favour, as long as their co-twin also develops basic skills in those areas, too. Some twins may need to be watched to ensure they take full responsibility for their own chores and that they do not make regular deals about how to get out of doing their own jobs. Along with all of this, which is fairly easy to manage as long as parents stay alert for any developing patterns, we can encourage more activity in some areas in which one of the pair has special interests or talents, as long as this does not inhibit the other's necessary learning. Similarly, we can encourage more activity in areas in which one or both need more practice.

### **Intimacy**

Living in a womb with someone produces a deep existential intimacy. This sharing and oneness of consciousness creates a profoundly united foundation in the two growing fetuses, establishing a ground that underlies all their later development. The resultant level of blending is hard for people born single to imagine, although some can get close to understanding it during sexual intimacy. During sex the sense of self often dissolves from the 'I-entity' of each of them, with which they are familiar, to a 'we-entity' of shared consciousness. (For discussion of intimacy from this perspective, see Mellor, K. 2008, pp.192-194; and Howell, L. in this issue.) Similarly, a small taste of such blending may arise during the oneness experienced as we hold a baby just after a feed, or when in love as our feelings dissolve our usual boundedness and immerse us in the oneness of shared consciousness.

By contrast, twins have this oneness automatically and, perhaps surprisingly, do so whether they know it or not. 'No, I'm not aware of anything like that between us,' from one twin, only means, 'I am not aware of it consciously.' It does not mean that the existential oneness is absent; for without a contrast to alert them to it, the direct

experience may not have occurred to them. At the same time, it seems to me impossible for them not to have a 'we-entity,' since their shared experiences in the womb are what 'hard wires' the oneness into them both.

Oneness starts off at the very beginning with a fertilised ovum that then splits into two (monozygotic 'identical' twins) or the conception of two ova at close to the same time (dizygotic 'fraternal' twins). Whether monozygotic or dizygotic, the twins are bathed in their mother's consciousness: physical, emotional, cognitive, spiritual and environmental. And it is this, plus whatever the developing fetuses contribute as their gestation progresses, that is the shared foundation in them both. Significantly, this bathing of consciousness is a not like the bathing of a baby in a bath where the separation between the child and the water is obvious. This bathing in the womb is a total immersion in consciousness with no inside or outside, and no distinctions. Each fetus and the mother all contribute, and all three contributions are blended. (This kind of saturation between mother and fetus applies to singletons as well.)

This is not to imply that co-twins are the same in utero. Although not always obvious, they are different from the very beginning, something that some mothers become aware of from fairly early in the pregnancy. While the source of these differences may be largely unknown at the time, we do know that as gestation progresses differences in physical development can occur. For example, one fetus may be less active than the other, one more viable, one gets less nutrition, one may be a boy and the other a girl, or, later in the pregnancy, one may be cramped with the other dominating the available space. (Lynda Howell explores various other illuminating dimensions of in utero difference in her article.) All of this—all that is physically shared or different – goes into the mix and is imprinted in the consciousness of them both.

### **They are different**

Their oneness of being is part of what makes twins different or disconcerting to some people born single. Someone with an individualised identity (I-entity) meeting people who are a we-entity often sense the deep differences. But without any way of explaining it to themselves they are at a loss to know what is going on. As fundamental as the differences between boys and girls are, we cannot understand boys by imagining they are some species of girl, nor understand girls by imagining they are some species of boy. They are what they are in themselves, and there are differences.

Similarly, we will not easily understand twins by imagining that they are some species of singleton. Discovering the mystery of twins, just as with boys and girls, becomes easier when we adopt a curious acceptance in our encounters with them. With twins we

cultivate open curiosity about what it is like to be one of two, and acceptance that differences exist, without trying to force what we observe into the mould of our experience as singletons. This is also true for twins seeking to understand what it is like to be a singleton. Interestingly, twins who have or are developing a separate sense of self are usually much easier for members of the born-single population to relate to.

From a personal point of view, women and men need to embrace and honour the physical nature of their womanhood and manhood in order to develop a grounded, autonomous sense of self. Encouraging this acceptance as girls and boys grow up lays a good foundation. Similar self-acceptance is just as important for twins. They need to embrace and honour the physical fact of their twin-hood in order for each of them to develop a grounded, autonomous sense of self. Their shared nature is basic to them and embracing it can open each of them to an inherent availability and perceptiveness that they can use with everyone. Doing so can also open up inner sources of beauty, strength, resilience and fulfilment in their lives.

### **Embracing the oneness**

As twins grow, their oneness can become a resource for a deep availability that they consciously use, a knowing of what is happening in each other, and for some, the recognition of extensive intuitive abilities in relation to people generally. (See mirroring in Lynda Howell's article.) Parents and others can help to normalise and cultivate these talents. Having others accept the blending is very empowering as it will help each of the twins to understand the influences – physical sensations, feelings, thinking, impulses, desires, goals and many other things – that can arise from their co-twin or from other people.

I have lived with this type of awareness consciously from my young teenage years onwards, but found it initially difficult to accept because of a prevailing scepticism when I was growing up. Thought transference or mental telepathy, as it was then called, was often regarded as a myth by many, as an exotic capacity of the unusually gifted by others, and as a delusional fantasy by professional people. As a result, it took me a long time to accept as real what I was experiencing, longer still to discover the ever-present nature of what was occurring in me, and still longer to learn to harness it. (For an account of this process, see Mellor, K. 2010, Chs.10-16.) Some of this learning was extremely challenging.

Knowing what I now do makes a big difference to me. These days I also recognise this availability as present in all people, although many do not know it is there. At the same time, I know many of the confusions and problems that can arise (Mellor, 1980a) that would be unnecessary with supportive parenting and guidance along the lines suggested above.

**Parental support**

The following summarised list can help twins and others learn to live with their 'sixth sense'.

Demeanour is important: be as casual and gentle about this learning as you would with any other area; particularly avoid exaggeration (excited or otherwise) and the rapture of specialness that some parents express about their children's alleged or actual abilities.

Stay grounded at all times. (How to do this is available in Mellor, 2011, Chs.9-10). Grounding helps us to normalise our experiences and to remain balanced.

When you notice instances of shared experience, comment ('You seem to be feeling, thinking ... the same way'; 'What about telling each other what was going on inside you then?' 'That's interesting. Are you feeling, thinking ... the same at the moment?') These kinds of comments sensitise twins to communication through their oneness and helps them to identify when they are not sharing experiences. Both aspects are important.

Avoid explanation and discussion until they are about five years of age. Four-year-olds are busy learning the difference between fantasy and reality and it is good for twins to have done some of that learning so it is a basis when thinking about their potentially telepathic experiences.

Have guessing games: 'Guess what X is thinking (feeling, wanting ...) right now'; 'What do you think I'm feeling, wanting, hoping ... now?'. As they get older, they can also be encouraged to think about what each other is doing when they are not together, to note the time of day and to check later.

It is most important to be realistic and not to imagine accuracy just because we may want it to be true. Being inaccurate, and knowing it, is fundamental in this learning.

Encourage them to express differences of feelings, thinking, desires, impulses etc. They are separate people and there will be many differences.

If they are interested, keeping simple diaries of examples is a way of anchoring their learning.

**Twinhood**

The processes of conception, gestation, birth and, thereafter, the unfolding life of a single child are extraordinarily mysterious miracles. Add twins (and higher multiples) to the mix and the miraculous and mysterious are even greater. This is worth mentioning because the great challenges of having twins are real and can overshadow the wonders of the process. At the same time, anything that is a challenge is often pathologised these days and this can distort our views of what is necessary if things are tough.

So as a final word, then, I want to make the point that raising twins involves completely normal processes, although somewhat more complex ones than raising

singletons. And as a normal process, while twins are growing up, it is parenting that they need: love, acceptance, guidance, reinforcement for creativity, fun, limit-setting, containment, shelter etc. As our first choice, they do not need pills, psychotherapy or counselling. Twinhood (and childhood) is not an illness nor a psychiatric condition, so when the going gets tough, I suggest that we think of parenting and other normal life processes first.

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# Twinhood: Sense of self and identity

**LYNDA HOWELL** explores symbiotic attachments and narcissistic character styles in identical twins.

## Abstract

Working with twins, particularly identical ones, challenges therapists to look beyond the individual and consider the influences of the client's twinhood. In Transactional Analysis, theoretical emphasis often focuses on the influence of parents. While this is an important factor, I submit that in order to facilitate growth and change in identical twin clients, therapists need to take account of the influence that their co-twins have on the development in utero of each other's script protocols, senses of self, and identities.

When exploring twin symbiosis in this article, I suggest that the nature of the twin pair's transference reactions to each other develops from their pre-natal implicit memory, and that a somatic twin bond that develops in utero forms the foundation of three common later developments: post-birth mirroring, twin yearning and characteristic twin-related script developments.

Triadic bonding between mother and twins is also diagrammed and partly explained through a somatic twin bond and partly by identifying a 'twin mirroring' symbiosis. The aetiology of the subsequent narcissism illustrated here will help explain the deep and often inseparable attachment dilemmas that can arise for each twin.

In relation to the psychological factors that influence and maintain twin symbiosis, a Type 4 Impasse is proposed that emanates from conflicts between pre-natal implicit memory and each twin's drive for growth and individuation.

When further developing my theories of twin symbiosis, I discuss the ensuing exhibitionist and closet narcissistic character styles. I suggest that they may arise when a twin mirroring symbiosis is present. Understanding the interlocking nature of these twinning types of narcissism can aid recognition in therapy of the enmeshed attachments between twins and highlight their individual dilemmas regarding separation and personal identity.

## Twin attachment in utero

**I**N RECENT YEARS new research has given us a deeper understanding into the functions of the brain. It is recognised that perception is activated by neural circuit responses to sensation (Allen, 2000, p.261) and, 'a number of disciplines are now converging on the centrality of the basic principle that the growth of the brain is dependent upon and influenced by the socio-emotional environment.' (Schore, 1994, p.78)

Gilderbrand notes that the amygdala-based system of implicit memory generates our primary emotions and is thought to be close to maturity at birth (in Sills & Hargaden, 2003, p.6). Developed earlier than explicit memory and not replaced by knowledge, implicit memory 'involves how we feel and is a major element in relationships' (Allen, 2000, p.262).

As emotional, behavioural, perceptual and possibly bodily somatosensory forms of memory are held here (Tronick et al., 1998 p.290-9), in my opinion it must then follow that in twins, and higher multiples, the implicit memory carries an imprint, commenced in utero, of a uniquely shared sensory impression of the two that possesses no recognition of separateness, which only starts developing post-birth between two to nine months of age (Sills & Hargaden, 2003, p.17). Explicit memory, on the other hand, develops even later, is conscious, has a sense of self and time, and contains recognition that we are recalling something (Allen, 2000, p.262).

As implicit memory is anchored in the forming bodies of the fetuses, I propose that the sense of 'something missing' felt by individuals whose twin pairs, unknown to them, died in utero, or were separated following birth, arises from the sensory impression of oneness imprinted in utero.

It is this implicit memory that I submit underpins the foundation of each twin's script. There is some further support for this dimension of scripting in Pointelli's (1999) research showing that twin fetuses respond to the light strokes and deep pressure of the other twin. Also, with the use of ultrasound, the beginnings of behavioural

diversity in utero can be seen (Sandbank, 1999, p14). In her earlier studies of twins before and after birth, Pointelli also observed the appearance of individual temperament and couple patterns of behaviour, noting that these seemed to continue into the twins' post natal lives (1989, p417).

Furthermore, a fetus develops implicit memories associated with low frequency sound such as music, internal body noises and mother's voice, the last aiding attachment after birth (Hepper, 2006). Also, in later life, the conscious and verbal script decisions we remember having made, overlay and are rooted in our implicit memories, which remain non-conscious (Allen, 2000, p261-2).

The impact of the primal blending imprinted in a twin's implicit memory is very significant when therapists are working with twins as it has a powerful scripting influence on their senses of self, identities, levels of individuation, and interpersonal relationships past and present. It seems clear to me also that twin fetuses are born with a fundamental oneness and post-birth attachment to each other that have arisen from their implicit memories.

In early childhood, babies make no distinction between their bodies and the outside world; sensations predominate and constitute the core of the self (Tustin, 1972, p3). Their sense of being has little or no recognition of objects as separate and mother is experienced as a 'sensation-object' which is called 'normal primary autism' (Tustin, 1972, p6). It is my conjecture that each twin becomes a 'sensation-object' for the other in utero, and that this process predates what occurs with their mother. In this respect, I concur with Leonard (1961) that twins have the extra developmental task of separating from each other as well as from their mother (in Davidson, 1992, p360).

Tustin's (1984) research into autistic children suggested that smell, sound, sight and taste were 'shapes' that appeared to be 'felt' rather than seen, tasted, heard or smelled (p279). I hypothesise for twins that the awareness of sensations heightened by the proximity to another in utero is a blended aspect of these 'shapes' and is held in implicit memory at a somatic cellular level.

To illustrate the above dynamics and the unique twin blending that takes place, I have expanded Hargaden's & Sills' (2002, Ch.2) model of the development of Self (see Figure A). The model highlights the somatic twin bond which is significant in itself and is at the foundation of my proposed Type 4 Individuation Impasse (see Figure B), discussed later. In these figures, while Berne (1969) meant zero-subscript ego-states to signify 'at birth' (p.111), I have used them as Mellor (1980) did to mean starting at conception. 'F' represents the fetus of each twin in utero.

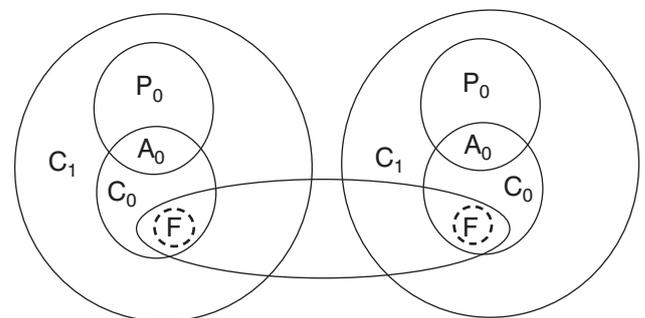
This model illustrates the influences that both fetuses

have on each other's C1 core self. I concur with Hargaden's and Sills' view that C0 and P0, which overlap, are not distinct ego states at this developmental stage and that the 'type of amniotic sac' between the two contains the yet undeveloped A0 which will eventually become the infant's sense of cohesive OK self (Hargaden & Sills, 2002, p18).

From this it can be understood that the blending in utero between the pair can be the foundation of a deeply somatic confusion that could lead to a core self that includes a somatically blended sense of affect, coherence and history. In Ken Mellor's article 'Intimate autonomy: a worthwhile goal for twins' in this issue, he meaningfully terms this twin's sense of oneness as the 'we-entity'.

Given the fundamental nature of this pre-natal sensate 'oneness' of twins, the trauma arising from their separation at birth can be better understood. Each twin already forms a part of the other twin's sense of self, which becomes evident when the newborn becomes

**Figure A: The Somatic Twin Bond**  
Adapted from Hargaden & Sills (2002, p18)



**Bond in Utero**  
**Blending between the pair**

- C1 – The Core Self (including the Somatic Child) – starts developing from conception.
- P0 – Sense of Self impacted by the environment – twin before mother.
- A0 – Child's sense of cohesive OK self, created by P0 and C0
- C0 – The Emergent Self – the seat of mirroring and idealizing yearnings.
- F – 'Shapes' – earliest sensory imprint from contact with other in utero. No sense or experience of separateness.
-  – Implicit Memory, anchored in the forming body of the fetus.

distressed in the absence of the other, perhaps a similar distress to a baby's experience of the absence of mother as the 'self-object' after birth (Tustin, 1972, p.6-9). This early absence of the 'sensuous object' abruptly ends the previous comfort experienced in the womb, and can be likened to the amputating of part of one's self (Tustin, 1984, p.97). Evidence of the somatic twin bond is there for all to see, too. For example, there are many stories of firstborn twins being apparently unable to breathe unassisted until the second-born twin arrives. Ken Mellor's brother, David and my sister Christine both arrived first in this way.

This uterine oneness is largely unconscious in many twins so that its importance may only dawn on them in later life, often when they are separated and no one else is there to fill the void that the other twin's absence creates. Separation from each other frequently heralds extreme anguish and inexplicable loss, or childhood temper tantrums, by one, other or both of the twins – responses that can thwart normal personality development (Jarrett & McGarty, 1980, p196).

### **Symbiosis in early infancy**

When developing healthily, babies start to evolve a sense of identity through the 'not me' experiences that arise naturally in relation to their mothers. It is the dawning awareness of mother as 'not self' that prompts this. My conjecture is that the powerful in utero blending of twins continues after birth leading to each twin being the self-object for the other, pre-dating that with mother. These highly confused blendings between the pair can hamper the post-natal bonding process between mother and child, particularly when parenting does not enhance separateness between each baby.

In Frances Tustin's (1972) work, she describes the need for an infant to have parental support in 'bearing the ecstasy of "oneness" and the tantrum of "twoness" if the necessary primal differentiations are to take place' (p94). I suggest that intense primal and mutual C0 post-birth yearning between twins emanate from the somatic twin bond and is a powerful force between them. Any challenge to this can result in distressed confusion between twin and twin in the earliest stages of life, confusion with flow-on effects in the bonding process between the mother and each child.

The degree to which the individuation of twins develops throughout their lives partly depends on their separate bonds with their mother. These in turn may be significantly influenced by their mother's ability to maintain a separation of each infant in her own mind, to manage any feelings of guilt she may experience about not being able to give exactly the same to each twin, and to deal emotionally with any rejection by one, other, or both of the twins in the bonding process. At the same time, environmental influences and

## **'The degree to which the individuation of twins develops throughout their lives partly depends on their separate bonds with their mother'**

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cultural attitudes towards twins may also play an important part in the separation/individuation process. In Ken Mellor's corresponding article, *Intimate Autonomy*, he sensitively highlights the different requirements needed for parenting twins, as opposed to singletons, in order for healthy individuation to take place between the pair.

Added to these influences, the triadic relationship between the mother and twins can become psychologically more complicated because of their rivalry for their mother's 'breast', attention, cuddles etc. Sometimes one or both twins will also reject their mother's contact because she is seemingly unavailable when needed (Sandbank, 1999, p167). The resultant divided attention may provide what one needs while causing a lack of consistent mirroring with the other. This second twin may, nonetheless, develop a needed symbiosis through a deeper relationship with another carer (eg father, grandmother or an older sibling). In such circumstances, each twin has the opportunity to develop a separate identity and sense of self.

Alternatively, when the mother bonds with only one of the pair or one twin opts out of the relationship in order to avoid rivalry, the excluded twin may form what Athanassiou (1986) refers to as 'a parasitic relationship with the co-twin in order to have a proxy relationship with the mother' (Sandbank, 1999, p168). Figure B shows this 'parasitic' relationship as a 'twin mirroring' symbiosis. I developed this model by extending the Cathexis Institute model of symbiosis (Schiff, J., Schiff, A., Mellor, K. et al, 1975, pp6-9).

In Figure B, I have shown a 'twin mirroring' symbiosis with mother who is available to her Child ego state. Being open in this way gives her significantly more capacity to nurture her babies than if she were not available to her Child. (In that event her Child would be shown outside the envelope in the figure.) It is important to note also that, unless there is ample support for mother from the father and/or others, her ability to bond individually with one or both babies will be diminished. This is important because when there is sufficient sustenance for mother from her support team and from her to twin 1, a healthy bond will develop for this twin to evolve a separate sense of self and identity.

To explain; when Twin 2's projection, introjection and identification with mother become blurred, Twin 1 may become an additional 'mirror' and the primary

object for Twin 2. Of course, the co-twin is unable to contain and reframe the other's emotions, and as a result, 'Where the twin is the primary object, the projective and introjective identifications between the two set up powerful interpenetrating forces creating a confusion of identities that is not adequately resolved by such processing because neither twin has yet developed the capacity to do so...' (Lewin, 1994, p.501).

In a 'twin mirroring' symbiosis, Twin 2 projects unwanted feelings onto Twin 1, who learns to hold them, instead of the mother, experiencing them as his or her own. In this transformational transference that emanates from primitive affect in C1/P0 (Hargaden & Sills, 2002, p49 and p60-1) the pair maintain an enmeshed identity with Twin 1, often developing profound empathic abilities.

Furthermore, a desire for emotional sustenance from Twin 1 by Twin 2 can become a lifelong dependency as well as creating difficulties to do with identity and sense of self (Sandbank, 1999, Ch10). To quote Sandbank: "This can result in the twin remaining a dangerous as well as a "safe" object, one that is life threatening as well as life-giving, and the infant feeling of omnipotence may continue inappropriately because the "object" has become a part of his/her own identity. The mother may remain outside because she is seen to have failed to supply what has been obtained from the twin.' (ibid. p168).

Ken Mellor's article about twin autonomy effectively reveals how healthy parenting skills can prevent this 'twin mirroring' symbiosis.

**The development of an enmeshed twin relationship**

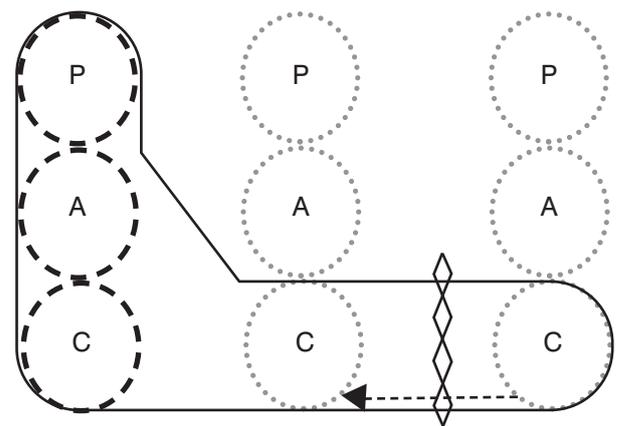
Intense twin relationships, in which each of the twins need each other to feel complete, develop more often when there are no other brothers and sisters. For identical twins particularly, developing identity and an individuated sense of self presents a problem if, as children, they spend a considerable amount of time together and are treated symbiotically – like two parts of a whole.

In babyhood, identical twins recognise each other in a mirror before recognising themselves. They are several months behind fraternal twins in recognising their own mirror images (Bernabei & Levi 1976, p381-3), showing a delay in establishing their self-identity. If an enmeshed connection manifests between the pair, it will inevitably impede their development further, as they each identify with and place some of their sense of self and identity in the other: 'They become like two pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, each needing the other to become complete.' (Sandbank, 1999, p177).

Post birth, the somatic twin blending commenced in utero will continue to develop if the twins' preoccupations with each other lead to a reduction in their demands for their mother. This may in fact give her respite from the

hectic routine and attention required in looking after two babies and be welcomed as such. However, further development of this enmeshed relationship then ensues in which both twins view the other as part of themselves; with the introjective transferences between the pair incorporating mirroring, twinning and idealising (Hargaden & Sills, 2002, p51-6).

**Figure B: "Twin Mirroring" Symbiosis**  
Adapted from Schiff, Schiff & Mellor et. al. (1975)



- Normal Dependency Symbiosis: mother to both babies.
- (dashed) Lack of support for mother from the father and/or others reduces her ability to bond fully with one or both of the twins and creates an unhealthy symbiosis within the triad.
- (dotted) Undeveloped ego states. (Adult functioning starts between two to three years of age and Parent autonomous structure by nine to ten years.) Schiff, Schiff, Mellor et al., (1975, p25)
- ◇ (vertical) A "twin mirroring" symbiosis between the twins. Mother doesn't develop a bond with Twin 2 or this twin opts out of the symbiosis to prevent rivalry with Twin 1. Twin 2 then has a partial symbiosis with mother, creating inconsistent mirroring with her.
- ← (dashed) Pathological Proxy Symbiosis, with Twin 1 being used as an additional mirror. (The seat of interlocking twin narcissistic development.)

These transferences emanate from euphoric and blissful C0 longings that are a normal, unconscious developmental process we all use psychologically to achieve health and autonomy. They can also, however, become a defence to diminish separation anxiety in twins and so preserve the safe, secure feelings of the symbiotic 'oneness,' inhibit stabilising identifications and accentuate pathological fixations of the grandiose self (Ackerman, 1975, p 405).

Bearing in mind the 'twin mirroring' symbiosis, when Twin 1 develops a sense of self through the mother's bonding, a message from Twin 2 that reinforced the unhealthy enmeshed symbiosis might be: 'You can have the sustenance you require from me only if you deny the development of yourself.' (Johnson, 1994, p136).

Due to Twin 2's requirement for merger with Twin 1 in order to feel secure, attempts at separation by Twin 1 are either punished or blocked by Twin 2. These defensive behaviours by Twin 2 prevent connection to their real self that would be experienced as vulnerable, rage-full, empty and desolate. This shared sense of false self is maintained comfortably unless one or both twins develop a healthy symbiosis with mother or another in which a separate sense of self can develop. Of significance, when a degree of separateness by Twin 1 is achieved, empathy and tenderness are learnt through the developing bond with mother, enabling Twin 1 to give and receive love and empathy in future relationships (Ackerman, 1975, p391).

In the confusion between self and other, differentiation between the internal and external world may also be only partial with a belief developing that the other is the same as self. In these cases, arrested development of the self follows; the twins' relating then becomes dependent on projective and introjective identification and splitting, which may be used as a defence to avoid experiencing separateness and envy. While for some twins this transference relationship leads to mutual closeness, others may experience bitter rivalry as one of the twins fights to stay in the unhealthy symbiosis (Sandbank, 1999, p.180-1), whereas the other struggles to get away in order to maintain and develop what little sense of self and identity he or she may possess. 'The yearning for the other twin can be intense as can the hatred, and some literally wish for the other twin to die as the only apparent means of ridding themselves of the hated parasite.' (Lewin, 1994, p500).

In all of this, I share the view held by Freud & Dann (1951), Leonard (1961), Dibble & Cohen (1981) and Athanassiou (1986) that a twin symbiosis appears to be equivalent to an infant/mother symbiotic relationship, and may compete with and, at times, weaken or replace entirely the mother-child symbiosis (in Davidson, 1992, p369).

When an enmeshed twin symbiosis is present, severe separation anxiety will be experienced if one or other

twin leaves the relationship through death, marriage or personal decision, and relationship problems are likely to develop between them as the individual twin seeks the other part of him or herself in another person. This highlights the importance in Ken Mellor's article of raising twins to be both autonomous and available to their inherent oneness.

### **Somatic impasse in twins**

Awareness of the somatic twin bond leads naturally to considering the high probability of a deeper level impasse than both Goulding & Goulding (1976, pp41-8) and Mellor (1980, pp213-21) proposed. I suggest that a Type 4 Impasse exists that is experienced as somatic discomfort.

In this respect I concur with Erskine (1997, pp147-148). However, I diverge from his conjecture that 'The conflict occurs between the introjected emotions of the parents and the fetus/baby's affective response to the situation.' (ibid. p147). I consider that the disturbance involved is primarily between the twins and is somatic rather than emotional, as the fetus is still to become available to the emotional realm. Furthermore, I suggest that the effects of the parent's emotions are secondary as they only begin to be significant in early post-birth stages of Type 3 Feeling Impasses formation.

Preferring to view impasses in Mellor's (1980) developmental terms (Figure C), I also suggest that a Type 4 Somatic Twin Impasse occurs between the sensate imprint of 'oneness' in C0 (held in the twins' implicit memory) and their internal drive to individuate that starts during the later stages in utero as their differences, which are held in P0, start to impact each other in subtle ways.

These impasses begin during fetal life and continue developing up to nine months post birth. Arising out of the pre-birth somatic twin bond, they can result in an underdeveloped sense of separateness.

Figure D shows how I have extended Mellor's impasse diagram to include a Type 4 Somatic Twin Impasse in C0, an impasse involved in the twins yearning for a sense of complete "oneness" in the face of their internal drive to individuate.

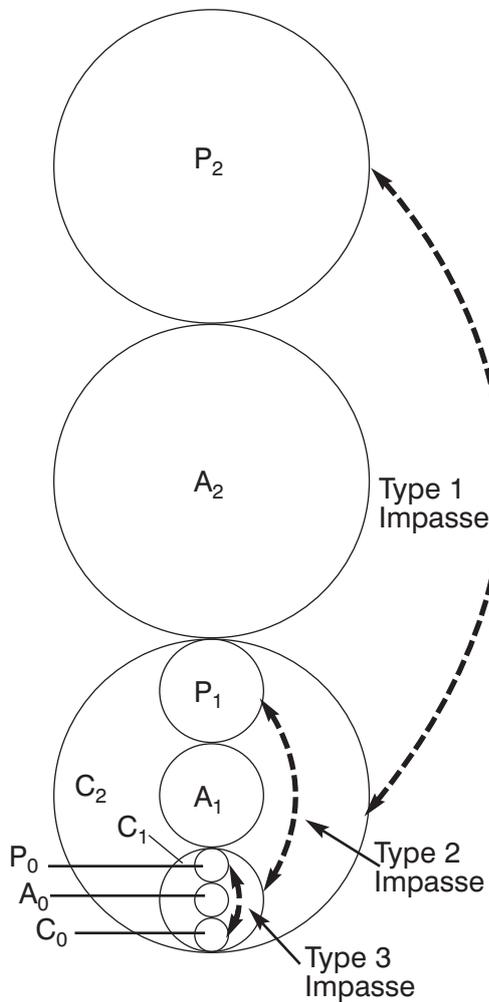
In Figure D, note that the dotted lines around the ego stages are to indicate that these are located in implicit memory with little or no form or structure.

In this type of impasse, the conflict is between 'no sense of separateness' (an imprint of ongoing 'oneness') and a human 'drive for growth and individuation.' The experience of this is unique to each twin. In therapy, unpacking and releasing the primal roots of later developments that arise out of such impasses requires a depth of process that is often not easy to realize.

### **Co-joined 'Don't Exist' injunctions**

In therapy, the presence of Type 4 Impasses highlights

**Figure C: Structural Impasse Diagram**  
 Mellor (1980) pp.213-21



the importance of considering the possible later development of a 'Don't Be, (Don't Exist)' injunction (Goulding and Goulding, 1976, pp9-10). Both twins may have these relative to each other in ways that have developed from any existent Type 4 Somatic Twin Impasses, an active 'twin mirroring' symbiosis and parental/others' messages that oppose separation/individuation.

During my work with twin clients it was apparent that a number presented with a 'Don't Exist' Injunction in which one twin believed he/she could not exist without the other, while the other believed that he/she would exist only at the expense of the other.

For example: Twin 1 presented with a 'You Won't Exist Without Me' position, which was created out of omnipotent fears of annihilating the co-twin through separating/individuating. This is consistent with Winnicott (1971, pp144-145): 'In the unconscious fantasy, growing up is inherently an aggressive act.... If the child is to become an adult, then this move is achieved over the body of the dead adult/twin (unconsciously).'

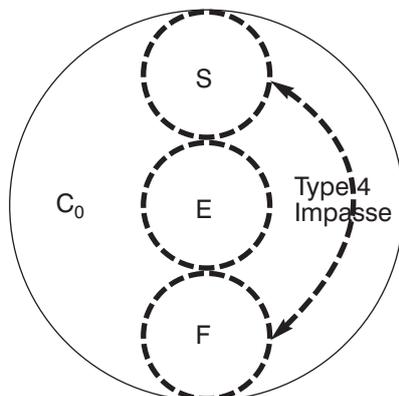
When a 'twin mirroring' symbiosis is present in which Twin 2 uses Twin 1 to seek his/her sense of self, and identifies with and idealises the other twin instead of the mother, I found that Twin 2 presented with an 'I Don't Exist Without You' injunction.

Generated through identity confusion in a self-contained narcissistic system, each twin experiences a sense of individual incompleteness, inseparability, and fears of being unable to survive alone.

**Narcissistic character styles in identical twins**

A lack of bonding between mother and Twin 2 in the 'twin mirroring' symbiosis (see Figure B), generates a situation in which an infant does not experience the mirroring required to manage the emergent difference between 'self' and 'not-self' that occurs when

**Figure D: Type 4 Somatic Twin Impasse**  
 (extending Mellor (1980, pp.213-21)



- S: Separateness and a sense of self normally come into evidence between two and seven months after birth.
- E: The uterine environment – shared space with others. The seat of a twin's C0 primal yearning.
- F: 'Shapes' with no experience of separateness during fetal and early stages of life. Earliest sensate blended imprint from contact with another in the uterus.
- Co: The Emergent Self. The baby 'is thought to occupy some kind of presocial, precognitive, preorganised life phase.' (Hargaden & Sills, 2002, p18)

**INTERRELATING CHARACTER STYLES OF IDENTICAL TWINS**

*Drawing on the work of Johnson (1994, p.129-99) and Masterson (2000, p.51-6 & 64-72)*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Twin 1</b> <b>Symbiotic/Closet Narcissistic</b> <b>Character Style</b></p> <p>Gives up his/her sense of self in the twinhood to prevent opposition, aggression &amp; rivalry. Separation is experienced as anxiety provoking and dangerous when punished by twin.</p> <p>Gains a sense of security through experiencing the false self &amp; merging with twin to avoid abandonment depression.</p> <p>Takes responsibility for the affective states and well-being of the other twin and of other people and may display emotional instability when separated from his/her twin or other symbiotic relationship.</p> <p>Develops profound abilities for empathic mirroring, overvalued and reinforced by the twin who needs merger in order to feel safe.</p> <p>Makes the co-twin the 'perfect object' and gains grandiose gratification by basking in his/her light.</p> <p>Looks outside self for identity, experienced as 'A self I can't call my own'. Doesn't know his/her own likes and dislikes.</p> <p>Has a reduced ability to self-care and self-soothe.</p> <p>Relies on external Strokes to maintain his/her self-esteem.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Twin 2</b> <b>Exhibitionist Narcissistic</b> <b>Character Style</b></p> <p>Uses his/her twin instead of the parent in order to seek a sense of self, creating a lack of mirroring with mother that reinforces the 'twin mirroring' symbiosis.</p> <p>Requires merger with the other twin to prevent connection to the real self that would be experienced as desolate, vulnerable, rage-full and empty.</p> <p>Projects affective states onto the other twin/others in an attempt to prevent feelings of intense vulnerability. Objectifies and controls the other twin in order to feel safe.</p> <p>Lacks empathy; doesn't really hear, feel or see the true presence of others – they are objects</p> <p>Believes self to be special and expects to be treated so. Projects a grandiose sense of self.</p> <p>Forms little or no experience or comprehension of the real self and develops a compensatory false self.</p> <p>Covers deep sense of worthlessness with perfection, achievement, pride &amp; manipulation.</p> <p>Requires excessive admiration Strokes to maintain their grandiose defence.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Blocks integration of:</b> Oneness – Individuation</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Blocks integration of:</b> Grandiosity – Vulnerability</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Shared Don't Exist Injunction:</b> Arising out of the Somatic Twin Bond - no sense of separateness. Reinforced by parents/others stroking twinhood and devaluing individuation.</p>	
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Injunction:</b> You Won't Exist Without Me. "If I individuate I will destroy you."</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Injunction:</b> I Don't Exist With You; Real self; punished if emerging when with Twin 2</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Injunction:</b> I Don't Exist without you. "If I individuate I will be destroyed."</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Autonomy = danger/abandonment.</b> Experiences stance of co-twin to them as: "You can have me (false self) or you (real self) not both."</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Autonomy = annihilation/abandonment</b> Feels annihilated/abandoned whenever they experience any form of individuation as this threatens the false self.</p>

experiencing mother's separateness and when starting to develop a sense of self. A degree of schizoid unreality is then created in object and reality relatedness that can pave the way for a highly narcissistic character adaptation.

When there is also parental/other idealisation, as is often the case with identical twins, and humiliation when they attempt to project their true selves, the impetus towards narcissistic resolution can become overwhelming. According to Masterson (2000, pp11-12), if this continues through what Mahler (1968) refers to as the rapprochement sub-phase from fifteen to twenty-two months of age, the narcissistic character traits can deepen. In order for individuation to take place during this phase, the children must gradually and painfully work through their delusions of grandiosity. The extent to which they do this will depend on the strength of their enmeshed twin relationship and the ability of their parents to support each child individually through this life phase of separation and individuation.

The degree of psychopathology present in one, other, or both twins is paralleled by the corresponding degree of bonding each one encounters with mother or another. When both experience each other as the 'self-object' their senses of self will be inhibited and lead to pathology in which one twin develops an exhibitionist narcissist character, while the other is likely to present with a symbiotic/closet narcissist character.

I have compiled the table below to aid therapist awareness of the enmeshed and interrelating nature of identical twins who present with narcissistic character styles. Identifying traits from the chart will highlight possible script issues and the potential transference realms that might arise within the therapeutic relationship.

### **Twins in therapy**

As therapists we need to be aware that a twin client's interpersonal relationship issues will stem from the somatic twin bond and Type 4: Somatic Twin Impasse. These will inevitably emerge in the therapeutic process as the client will have a drive, unavailable to conscious awareness, to invite the therapist into a transference twinning relationship in order to diminish separation anxiety and/or prevent connection to his or her real self. Mindful of the importance of introjective transference as a normal developmental process to attain health and autonomy, gradual change can be effected through a relational integrative psychotherapeutic approach (Erskine, 1997, pp20-35) with twin clients seen individually or together.

Also, as any therapeutic work with one twin is bound to affect the co-twin, who may not be in therapy, unacknowledged collusion between the pair outside the therapy room may be present and have a strong impact

on therapeutic outcomes. A psychotherapy-by-proxy can also develop in which the non-client twin 'establishes a transference to the therapist through the intermediary host of his or her identical twin.' (Sheerin, 1991, p24); in a 'twin mirroring' symbiosis with the therapist.

When one twin enters therapy, we need to consider the basis of their scripting and the degree to which a lack of a sense of self and identity is influencing their presenting problems. In order to find a true self, twin clients each need both to re-introject those unbearable parts of self that they project onto their other twin and manage their fear of their own and/or their co-twin's annihilation (Lewin, 1994, p.509). For some this may simply be intolerable. Sheerin (1991 p.25) makes the observation that: 'The separation of Siamese minds may nonetheless be a difficult and dangerous task.'

Autonomy can come at a price for some twin clients; attachment to the real self may create confusion and rejection if their co-twin needs the false self to survive in order to feel complete. To celebrate the uniqueness of twinhood, these clients will also require support in grieving the loss of the harmony experienced in the twin mirroring symbiosis. This is not an easy journey.

It is worth noting that, while twins discounting themselves in order to maintain the twin symbiosis may appear dysfunctional to a singleton, it may simply be blissful to a twin. A symbiotic relationship of this type can be an enormously enjoyable, fun, beautiful and life enhancing experience when the discounting of both parties remains in balance with each other. Accordingly, in any therapeutic process, along with dealing with pathology, it is important to encourage the celebration of the parts of the client's positive and life enhancing twinhood scripts that work well for him or her. Mellor also mentions this as a worthwhile orientation when parenting twins.

Working therapeutically with twin clients creates a challenge for singleton therapists. They will need to consider twinhood and how it may be impacting on their client's presenting problems. It also challenges therapists to consider autonomy and twinhood and the subtle and sometimes profound differences inherent between singletons and twins.

Naturally drawn to it, my work with twin clients has been a challenging and profoundly growth enhancing experience, as has my understanding of twinhood both from my clients' and my own perspectives as I am also an identical twin.

I would like to thank Ken Mellor for all his enthusiastic support and for taking the time to write his article *Intimate Autonomy: A Worthwhile Goal for Twins*. I hope that these two pieces of work will stimulate thought and discussion of an area that is little written about in psychotherapy.

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