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# Bereavement in Twin Relationships: An Exploration of Themes from a Study of Twinship

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The primary foci of twin research have been on twins as a biological phenomenon, on the management of medical complications of twin pregnancy and birth and on the study of individual differences and development by psychologists and geneticists for whom twins provide a powerful research tool. The twin relationship — twinship — has received less research attention, including the aspect of bereavement which may occur at any stage of life. This paper presents some findings from a qualitative study that used grounded theory methodology to explore the nature of twinship especially issues relevant to psychological counselling with twins. Fourteen participants were interviewed in-depth about their understanding and experience of twinship. Participants were selected who had a rich knowledge and experience of twinship and of therapeutic work. Segments of transcribed interviews were constantly compared to describe and elaborate frequently repeated concepts in the data. Two of the main themes of discernment, the core category of the theory of twinship, are described. These are 'defining boundaries' and 'managing ambiguity'. Aspects of these as experienced by twins are discussed in the light of current psychological theories about bereavement.

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Until quite recently the primary foci of research involving twins have been on twinning as a biological phenomenon and the management of the medical complications of twin pregnancy and birth. There has also been considerable use of twins in 'twin studies', as research tools for quantifying and clarifying the roles of genetic and non-genetic influences on individual differences in disease and developmental processes. A quick review of the indexes of this journal more than supports this view of the typical content of twin research. The social relationships of twins (henceforth twinship) and the experiences of twins through the life span have been relatively much less the subject of scientific study. This imbalance is not paralleled in other areas of knowledge such as literature (see e.g., Farmer, 1996) or anthropology and mythology (Scheinfeld, 1973, pp. 252–265). Part of the explanation for this may simply be that twins are a numerical minority, albeit one that is increasing with growing use of assisted reproductive technologies (Nygren & Andersen, 2001; Platt et al., 2001) and delayed motherhood (Daniel et al., 2000; Guyer et al., 1998; Keith et al., 2000) in much of the 'developed' world.

There has however been a growing recognition of the need to study twins for themselves (Rutter & Redshaw, 1991; Segal, 1999), partly because some medical and

psychological problems benefit from a twin perspective and also because the social need has been emphasised by well-informed groups (e.g., the Twins and Multiple Births Association (Tamba) and the Multiple Births Association (MBF) in the U.K.).

Most people will experience bereavement — the experience of the death of someone with whom they have a close or intimate relationship. Bereavement is a deprivation — the loss of a loved one and of the relationship. It has long been recognised that a turmoil of emotions and widely varying behaviours and psychological reactions are part of the experience, not just the commonest feelings of grief and anxiety (Hinton, 1972). The familiar pattern of relationships is disrupted, and the process of mourning, of adjustment and the building of new resources occurs over a variable time span. The psychological adjustment is not always straightforward, and much has been written about complicated or 'pathological' mourning (Raphael, 1983; Stroebe et al., 1993).

A number of writers concerned with the medical and psychological care of twins and their families have described the difficult process of grieving for the death of a twin at different stages in life (Bryan, 1995; Engel, 1975; Woodward, 1988, 1998). The hazards of twin pregnancy and birth are widely documented (Keith et al., 2000) and the death of a twin is more common in the period from conception through to the neonatal period (Rydhstroem & Heraib, 2001) than it is for singletons. This means that parents of twins more commonly face an early bereavement as will twin children and their older siblings. Beyond childhood, there is little evidence to suggest that twins are likely to die earlier than non-twins (Christensen et al., 1995).

The death of a twin at any age bereaves the surviving twin of a sibling who has (usually) been a constant companion during childhood at least, and often far beyond. Twinship can be one of the most enduring of family relationships — and can be the longest. The effects of its disruption through bereavement are generally underestimated (Segal et al., 1995).

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Most of the theoretical models of psychological processes, including those relating to bereavement, have been developed through observations and research on the majority singleton population. Twins tend to be regarded as exceptions and irrelevant to empirical research studies; they may even be excluded as a complicating factor (see e.g., Janssen et al., 1997).

For most of the last century the main theoretical and most influential model of bereavement has derived from Freud (1917/1957) whose description of 'the work of mourning' led to the concept 'grief work' in which the goal was the severing of attachment bonds to the deceased. Freud was primarily interested in the aetiology of depression, not grief, and so viewed 'pathological' mourning as a pathway to depression. He saw this as arising through an experience of intense ambivalence that hinders the detachment process.

More recently, some writers (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1987; Wortman & Silver, 1989) have observed that in spite of the dominance of the 'grief work' view of mourning there is little empirical evidence to support it. More recent bereavement research has used different theoretical perspectives drawn from other areas of psychology. Bonanno & Kaltman (1999) evaluate such research in relation to a variety of theories but the research they consider tends to relate to bereavement in conjugal relationships, or to loss of a child or a parent, and no specific mention is made of twins. Their theoretical approach may however be readily considered in relation to twin bereavement.

The present study aimed to provide a framework for a description of twinship that included the perspective of twins themselves and especially to build a theory of twinship which explored the needs of twins in psychological counselling. Data was not therefore collected specifically in order to examine the experience of bereavement. Nevertheless, since bereavement is an almost ubiquitous experience, it was a subject commonly discussed by participants and so formed part of the theory of twinship developed. Loss and bereavement are among the major reasons why people seek therapy and twins are no exception. This paper describes some aspects of the larger study (Macdonald, 1999) that pertain to the experience of bereavement and loss in twinship. These will be discussed with reference to current psychological theories about bereavement, primarily drawing on work from the integrative review of Bonanno & Kaltman (1999).

## Materials and Methods

A qualitative research methodology was chosen using the grounded theory approach described by Strauss & Corbin (1990, p. 24) as "...a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon" — in this case, twinship. Data collection and analysis occurred concurrently. Depth-interviews were recorded and transcribed so that the resulting texts could be analysed.

Potential participants were identified through the author's previous work with twins and through UK organisations involved with twins (the Multiple Births Foundation and the Lone Twin Network) and through the

process of snowballing. In order to study in depth, a small number of participants was selected who would provide contrasting views and experiences and would be rich sources of information, a technique called theoretical sampling (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Potential participants thus met at least one and usually more of the following criteria:

1. Being one of a pair of twins;
2. Being a survivor of a pair of twins;
3. Being a close relative of twins;
4. Working as a professional therapist with a knowledge of and/or clinical experience of twins;
5. Professionally involved in relevant research or therapy;
6. A long term interest in twinship with published work about twins.

The 14 participants were aged 29–67 years (mean 48.57 years). Thirteen were female and 10 were professionally qualified or trainee psychologists or psychotherapists. Three were medical professionals, and 6 had strongly relevant research/academic interests in a variety of areas of psychology or medicine, mostly at a senior level. Eight participants had worked with twins as clients and the majority had engaged in their own personal therapy.

Nine participants were twins themselves, three considered themselves to be monozygotic (MZ) and three dizygotic same sexed (DZSS). Three were dizygotic opposite sexed (DZOS) Formal zygosity assessment was not used as it was the participants' beliefs that were important. Three lone twins participated, two of whom were from DZ pairs and one an MZ. In one case the twin had died in childhood, and the two others in adulthood. Other relatives of twins included two mothers, a sister, an aunt and a niece.

Data were collected using in-depth interviews lasting one to one and a half hours. As the subject material would often concern a variety of painful life events, an approach described by Coyle (1998, pp. 56–73) as a 'counselling interview' was used. Using the counselling skills of attentive listening, paraphrasing, reflecting and summarising enabled a closer relationship to be established between the interviewer and interviewee and hence deeper exploration and clarification of material.

Each participant was sent an information sheet prior to the interview, together with a background questionnaire and consent form. Purely to open the discussion about twinship, each participant was first invited to imagine that they were on holiday in a country that unbeknown to them had no twins, through some evolutionary quirk or accident. The participant was in a hotel and chatting to a resident of this twin-less country and happened to mention that they were (as appropriate) a twin, a relative of twins, or that they worked with twins. The surprised resident asked 'what is a twin?' The participant was then asked how she/he would answer. This orienting question evoked a variety of responses that, on expansion, led into each participants' very personal constructions of twinship.

Interviews were recorded (with written consent) by a mid-disc recorder. The transcribed interviews were analysed using an adapted form of the method of 'constant comparison' described by Strauss & Corbin (1990) for developing

grounded theory. Shared meanings within and between the coded transcriptions from participants were grouped into labelled categories and these were searched for shared higher order meanings which could lead to a hierarchical structure, using methods described by Rennie (1994). The practices described by Henwood & Pidgeon (1992) for evaluating trustworthiness of qualitative data were adhered to. Full details of the analytic process are available in Macdonald (1999) or from the author.

Following this process a theory based on the relationships between the many conceptual categories was developed with a core concept that was called *discernment*<sup>1</sup>. Four categories of experience were described at the first level below discernment: these were *two at the same time*, *awareness*, *managing ambiguity* and *defining boundaries* (see Figure 1). The purpose of the present paper is not to describe the entire grounded theory of twinship from which these categories emerged but to explore themes relating to bereavement in twinship. These will be presented with quotations from the transcribed interviews.

Identifying details have been removed to preserve confidentiality of participants.

**Results**

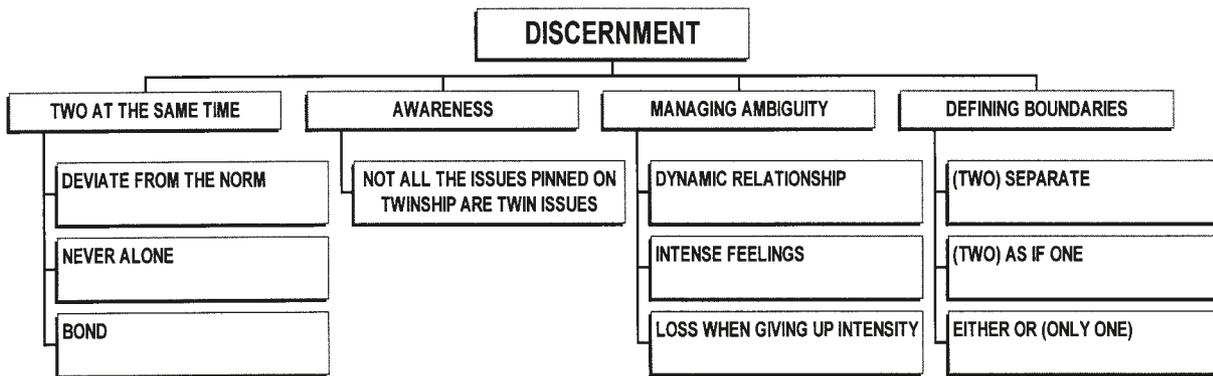
Since bereavement represents a disruption or change to a twinship this section begins with how the boundaries of twinship were defined by participants, and then focuses on bereavement arising through the death of one twin in a pair of twins.

**The Different Structures of Twinship: Defining Boundaries**

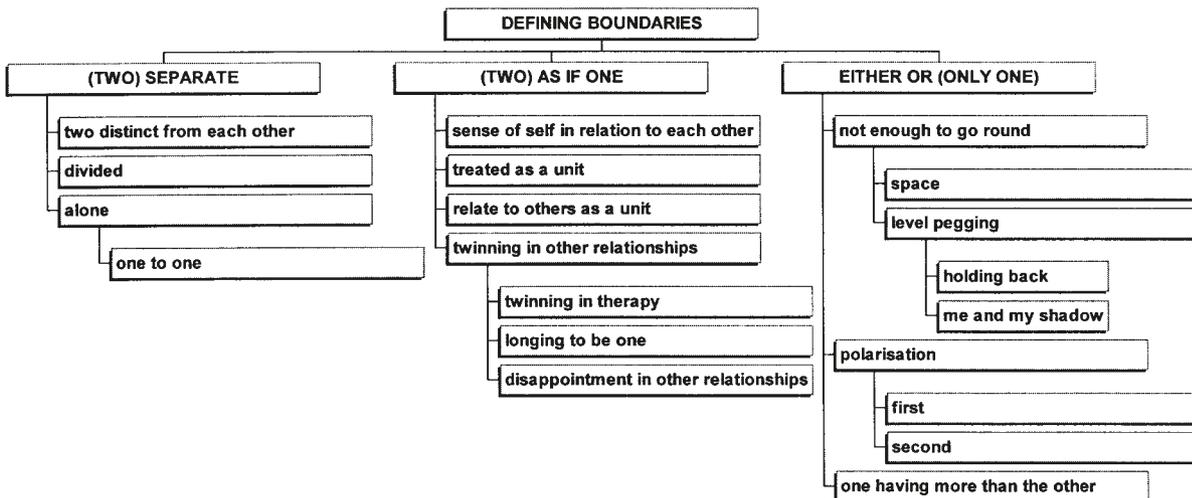
One of the four main themes that emerged as part of the core theme of discernment (Figure 1) was named *defining boundaries*. The subcategories of this theme are shown in Figure 2.

While originating in the definition of territory, boundaries are of course also sociocultural constructions, and the metaphor of boundaries has come to be extended to the ways people circumscribe families (Rosenblatt, 1994).

Twins (where both survive) differ from other siblings in that from conception there are two at the same time, of the



**Figure 1**  
A grounded theory of twinship: the first three levels of discernment.



**Figure 2**  
Defining boundaries.

same age, and for MZs they may be so similar in appearance as to be hard to distinguish. There seemed to be three main ways that defined the boundaries of twinship. If the twins are figuratively represented as two overlapping circles, there are three types of boundary — the first is around each individual: (*two*) *separate*. The second is around the whole pair: (*two*) *as if one*, and the third has an emphasis on *only one* (*either/or*).

It is important to note that one or more of these boundaries may apply to the same pair of twins, at different times, or when 'drawn' by different people (or by the twins themselves). They are dynamic, fluid boundaries which, like other family boundary metaphors, may become 'as if' fixed. People can become stuck in rigid ways of being seen or related to.

Sometimes, or for some twins, differences are easy to discern and the two of them are seen by themselves and others as unique individuals, two 'ones', the category called (*two*) *separate*. These twins will be *two who are distinct from each other*, commonly applied to DZ twins:

...non-identical twins were more like brothers and sisters so they were two separate fertilised eggs that happened to share the same womb... (1.2)

For MZ twins to be (*two*) *separate* means they must have *divided*:

...that this other person is a part of yourself, that's quite literally true in terms of biology. You know, this thing that has been chopped in half, this egg it's divided... (2.71)

Blurring can occur of the metaphorical line marking (*two*) *separate*. In our language one is a whole number, unique, indivisible, so that it must be doubled to make two (like DZs). If one is halved, or divided there is a question about whether the resulting 'ones' are incomplete or not whole in some way. In twinship, somehow the issue is to metaphorically divide the whole oneness of the pair to find two whole separate people, as usually occurs in the actual division of the fertilised egg that leads to MZ twinning.

Being (*two*) *separate* also means one can be *alone* and twins are likely to have less experience of this, and also of *one-to-one* relationships with carers. Your experience of growing up as a twin may be this:

...you are never on your own, you are never isolated, you have always got someone there to complain about things to... (10.33)

If so, the prospect of being *alone* may be unimaginable:

...I'm always longing for it I think, but also terrified that when it happens I won't be able to cope. I think that's one of the main things that's different about feeling the [pause] about not knowing how, about wanting to be separate and alone but terrified, probably, about how it would really feel because it's such an unknown... (6.8)

A second type of boundary may be drawn 'around' the twins — seeing them as a pair, a unit of two as distinct from other family members, the (*two*) *as if one*. Excerpts from the meaning units illustrate this type of boundary:

...I think emotionally you're that close it's the same person I think... (8.50)

...some are so intertwined that they don't know where their boundaries are. I think there are lots who have some difficulty in some of their boundaries but I think there are a few, I mean one sees the caricatures doesn't one, where they are really a single unit... (3.9)

...The fact that they share the genetic material is very profound. They were one egg and I cannot get away from that. I hate that thought. Not that they were one. I quite like that thought that they were one, but the fact that they were not themselves... (9.117)

...we were a unit it just happened to be 2 people... I didn't see it as a twin and a twin I always ...in fact we used to call each other the same name for when we were small we just decided on one name would do until we went to school, we didn't particularly want to separate our names... (14.80)

Twins with this boundary may be *treated as a unit* or *relate to others as a unit*. This is sometimes seen as acceptable or cute in childhood, but by adulthood twins who continue to live 'as if' they are one may be viewed by others as strange, freakish or immature. Participants nevertheless viewed this (*two*) *as if one* boundary as psychologically present for all twins with a bond of twinship:

...I think they can feel individuals and feel a certain part of them is amalgamated... (3.9)

One aspect of development *as if one* is that twins may develop a *sense of self in relation to the other* that is, or seems to be, stronger than any sense of individual identity.

For example:

...I thought and I realised I couldn't think about it that way I couldn't think about my weight unless it was in relationship to her and I hadn't ever really realised the importance of that that I could only see myself in relationship to her... (6.16)

This may have particular implications for bereavement (see *losing a twin* below).

Twins may try to repeat their experience of twinship (or avoid doing so) by *twinning in other relationships* and some participants described this as what happened when one of the twins died, or as a familiar relationship to seek at other times of stress:

...I made friends with a little boy in the primary school when we moved...I suppose I was compensating in some ways. As a child I didn't know I was doing that I just knew that that person was like was my twin for a bit... (5.64)

...she was twinning with [her daughter] to go back to a relationship she felt cosy and comfortable in even though she knew it was not helpful to her... It does get repeated particularly under stress. It's something you return to under stress... (1.65)

In part this was due to *longing to be one* when separation occurred:

...there's always the basic longing to break them and not have the boundaries which again is in the normal perspective but probably at the extreme end that symbiosis feels more comfortable than separation... (6.53)

Sometimes other relationships proved disappointing especially when others did not understand immediately, and

this has been described previously in twins (Adelman & Siemon, 1986).

The third way of defining boundaries in twinship seemed to be based on a sort of false separation, effectively seeing *only one*, either one or the other of the two:

...it's only one that can be anything it's one that's the favourite because they're smarter or prettier or fatter or thinner or whatever there's got to be one...(6.13)

Rather than attending to the individual qualities of each person, or simply seeing them as the same, one is described in relation to the other. Within this category lie many of the familiar aspects of competition attaching to twins. It may feel as if there is *not enough to go around*, be that attention, love, money, space or other things. A twin may feel that one is having more than the other. They may be *polarised* — it is interesting how we say twins are born together, and yet also feel it important (as do many twins) to say who was born first and who second. Some participants described a process of 'level pegging' where the constant comparison and attempt to make equal (usually to be 'fair') leads to a feeling of being tied together in a dance, where one may hold back, or the twins may feel like *me and my shadow*.

**The Emotional Consequences of Twinship: Managing Ambiguity.**

*Managing the ambiguity* of being both an individual person and a twin gives rise to a range of intense feelings that may alter when a twin is bereaved. Participants poignantly described their own experiences in relation to loss, either of their own twin, of the anticipation of losing a twin, or of other twins known to them who had lost a twin and the processes of adjustment that occurred. In some ways these paralleled the experience of separation that occurred for many twins as part of the normal maturational process (Atthanassiou, 1985; Siemon, 1980). Figure 3 shows the subcategories of the main theme *managing ambiguity*.

The process of *managing ambiguity* was viewed as central to twinship, both for twins and for those relating to them as twins, because of the ongoing need to relate to two people in one or more of the boundary configurations described above. Participants reported an *intensity of feelings*.

...so it's all the ordinary human relationships writ large isn't it in twinship... (5.132)

Frequently, this was related to the tension between being (*two*) as if *one* or (*two*) *separate* and the feelings generated could have a *life or death* quality.

...sometimes intense feelings sometimes quite murderous and angry and other times the most intense love you could have like a mother has for a child that kind of intense bond like being in love at that age...(1.38)

Contradictory feelings and confusion were experienced with *ambivalence*, a *pushme-pullyou* quality of being pulled together and apart, or like a *magnet*, as illustrated by the participants' own words.

...there was a strong sense of loyalty and partnership there that sat right next to a strong sense of sometimes almost a homicidal wish to be separate... (1.20)

...And I think it is more of a problem with identical twins because how can I have bad feelings about someone who looks and is so like me... (11.51)

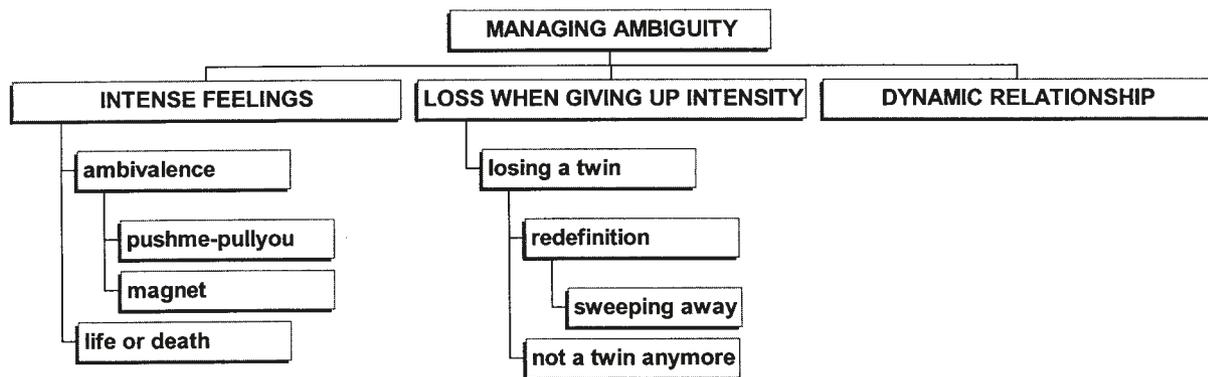
...it's very bound up with part of it is there is this attraction the magnet poles like that so its just finding the point where the magnets can just sit parallel to each other and its OK they don't have to keep...(1.58)

With such an intensity of feelings, twins experience loss, whether by separation or death, profoundly. *Losing a twin* was more than the loss of another person, it reflected a loss of identity because of the definition of identity in relation to the twin.

...I think the issues of separation and loss are very profound, because if a twin dies it isn't just a death, it's the death of a twinship it's the death of your identity because you cannot help but have your identity as reference to another person... (9.124)

This was not always entirely negative.

...Because some twins feel that they can actually do things other twins do and not be in a competitive situation...they can also become more like the other twin...Because the other twin is not around. No one can make comparison and it can be almost an enriching or liberating experience, but it



**Figure 3**  
Managing ambiguity.

is not at all entirely a loss situation. People grow because of it. Some twins hold their other twin back... (11.63)

When a twin was bereaved, a process of *redefinition* was necessary at the deepest level in order to feel whole:

...because I have my twin now whereas before he was a shadow and then there has been this hugely painful period of discovering twinship and realising that I couldn't have the good bits of twinship...(5.115)

For some, this meant *sweeping away* the twinship, treating it as if it was not there any more:

...we moved and left where we'd been brought up and we came to live in [a southern county]... and I left behind a fairly rough school in [a big city] to go and live in a very, very easy place where I was seen as quite intelligent it was like all that got sort of swept away and we started a new life... (5.62)

...if a baby loses another baby, in other words its twin baby, it cannot really understand this in an intellectual way. It cannot discuss it, talk about it, or express feelings or any of this kind of thing so the baby has to internalise all this stuff and very often the parents don't know how to deal with it, they don't discuss it. The baby [may be] very distressed because they have lost a baby so the needs of the baby are not really dealt with and this is not infrequent I think...(11.04)

Some bereaved twins (and separated ones) felt they were *not a twin anymore*:

...it's changed in the sense that I don't view myself as a twin anymore actually it's not a big thing for me she's just like a sister — she's like my younger sister — we're separate...(1.11)

...it's quite difficult because for me I am still a twin but I am no longer a twin and so I guess it would be difficult for me to actually talk about what it was like to be a twin because for me one of the problems has been that I didn't know what it was like to be a twin but I was aware that I was a twin and so I think for me the whole journey has been about trying to re-find out about being a twin and then in a sense having to let go of that because I don't have a twin that's still living and so there is no, there is a part of the life that I have in the here and now that can't be acted out as if I am a twin and yet I remain a twin... (5.56)

...In some senses, in reality, I don't feel like a twin because a twin is a unit, it's not a separate thing so the fact is I'm not in a unit as a twin. I don't actually feel like a twin in one sense and yet I've got a whole...Every single image of my childhood and until my 40s is as a twin...(14.81)

## Discussion

From this grounded theory study of twinship two of four main themes (see Figure 1) may be examined in relation to bereavement in twins. Twins (and those who relate to them) must balance the fact that there are two together with the development of individual identity or 'self'. In twinship this is accomplished through the establishment of three forms of psychological boundary — *(two) separate, (two) as if one, and only one (either or)*. These are dynamic, fluid states and twins might relate to each other in one or

all of these ways. The process of managing the different boundaries is seen as filled with *ambiguity*, giving rise to *intense feelings*.

For twins, rigid or extreme patterns of relating may become so established that an individual has difficulty in moving beyond the one way of relating. Twins who consistently relate 'as if' one may actually have little experience of being separate or alone, and have a limited sense of an identity that is not formed in reference to the other twin. When loss of a twin occurs, the surviving twins may lose an intensity of experience, and their sense of self may need to be redefined. One bereaved twin participant's words describe the magnitude of this task:

...To me it's a bit like being transsexual, you know if you are transsexual you are born a man and turn into a woman... what are you. On the birth certificate you are a man you know in the world you now live in you are a woman. I'm born a twin. If someone says what are you I wouldn't say easily I'm a twin because the first question is 'oh you are a twin, what about your twin sort of thing'. And then you have to go through the rigmarole of not being there. In some senses in reality I don't feel like a twin because a twin is a unit it's not a separate thing, so the fact is I'm not in a unit as a twin I don't actually feel like a twin in one sense and yet I've got a whole... Every single image of my childhood and until my 40s is as a twin... So it's like say having been a man until I had a sex change...(14.83)

On the other hand, as one participant described, learning unexpectedly that someone related to as a singleton is actually one of a pair of twins also causes a loss to others of the identity that had been constructed for that person, and introduces ambiguity, and a need to clarify and redefine the relationship:

...I mean at the gym I go to there's a set of twins, and I didn't know he was a twin, and so I'd chat away to him and suddenly [my husband] said to me 'do you know he's a twin', and so now when I go in I don't know whether I'm talking to the one I first got to know. And that really worries me because I could just as easily be talking to the other one... and so now I don't know which one at all and he's lost his they've both lost identity... how weird if you're a twin and you wonder when people meet you if they are actually thinking is this me or is this the other one and how weird if you are also wondering where you are... (5.90)

Thus, the task of managing ambiguity is not just that of twins within twinship, but also of others who relate to them. When a bereavement occurs this ambiguity will be highlighted for both the surviving twin and those who relate to him/her, an experience also described by Engel (1975).

## Psychological Perspectives on Bereavement

Relevant psychological theory can be helpful. Bonanno & Kaltman (1999) consider research on bereavement not only in terms of Freud's (Freud 1917/1957) theory of mourning, but also from the perspectives of cognitive stress theory, attachment theory, a social-functional account of emotion and trauma theory. They suggest integration in terms of four primary components of bereavement — the context of the loss, the continuum of subjective meanings associated with the loss, the changing

representation of the lost relationship, and the role of coping and emotion-regulation processes. I will discuss the present findings firstly in relation to the Freudian 'grief work' theory, and then using Bonanno & Kaltman's (1999) four components of bereavement, together with additional insights from other work on twins.

As noted in the introduction, the Freudian view of the work of mourning involves detachment from the 'non-existent object', the dead person. This view reflects the central themes of psychoanalytic thinking, that development is a process of movement from symbiosis, or 'one-ness' with mother in early infancy through separation-individuation to independence and autonomy, allowing investment in new object relationships (Mahler, 1972). Mahler viewed this gradual development as a 'a life-long mourning process' (p. 333).

Siemon (1980) has considered the separation-individuation process in twin development (where maturation also involves separation from the twin) as involving possible problems arising from mutual interdependency and insufficient self-identity (see also Macdonald, 1994, 1999). These conditions could be described as emphasising the (*two*) as if *one* type of twinship boundary at the expense of (*two*) *separate*, or of the *only one* (*either or*) boundary where identity is primarily defined in relation to that of the other twin.

The 'grief work' view sees successful mourning as impeded by a 'conflict of ambivalence' where unconscious identification with the lost object leads to the turning inwards of negative feelings about the deceased, and results in depression. In this view, where the present study indicates that ambiguity and intense feelings are part and parcel of twinship it might be expected that bereavement for twins would be a more intense and difficult experience. It may be more likely to result in a lack of resolution, perhaps depression or prolonged mourning. More research is needed to examine whether this is the case, and the conditions that lead to negative outcomes.

Engel (1975, this issue), a psychoanalyst whose MZ twin brother died suddenly aged 49, examined his own reactions to the loss over a 10 year period and was struck by how strongly he was confused about whether he or his twin had died. This was in spite of both the twins having separated from each other as adults and formed their own marital and family bonds. He recognised that he had an expectation that he would not live longer than his twin and this was particularly attended to on anniversaries. As Engel wrote:

Once again the issue of separateness and unity was joined. But upon his death, to be separate was to live, to be joined was to die. The battleground was in the unconscious where boundaries between self and twin representations were fluid and where time and numbers were used in symbolic and magical, not in chronological and metric, senses...to be a twin is also to be simultaneous in time (p. 36).

In considering bereavement of twins, it is probably necessary to look beyond the usual factors — age, gender, income level, type and expectedness of loss, previous experiences of loss or depression and perceived social support. Segal et al. (1995) found that bereaved twins

scored higher for grief experience than other bereaved individuals, and there was a negative correlation of age at loss with level of grief. Bereaved MZ twins reported higher grief scores than bereaved DZ twins, in particular feelings of responsibility for, and preoccupation with the deceased. The over-representation of bereaved MZ twins in the study may reflect sampling bias, and MZ's greater motivation to participate in the study. This is not an uncommon problem in bereavement research that tends to rely on survivors identified through participation in support groups or referrals. Such samples may be unrepresentative.

Nevertheless, zygosity and social closeness are clearly factors deserving more investigation. The degree to which the survivor's identity is bound up in the twinship would be expected to be an important aspect of the loss. In contrast with evolutionary views of loss and grief, (see Segal et al., this issue), this is not necessarily tied to zygosity but to the way the psychological boundaries of the twinship had become defined by the twins and others during development.

While Segal et al.'s (1995) work suggests that grief at the loss of a twin declines with increasing age, this may be related to changing types of coping. Loss in childhood may represent loss of a playmate and constantly present twin sibling as well as major changes in the relationship with bereaved parents and other siblings. In mid-life the experience may largely depend on the adult relationship of the twins. In later life, the impact of bereavement could have different implications again depending on the survivor's own health and age. Again, this factor may be particularly relevant for twins: twin research suggests that longevity is in part genetically influenced (Iachine et al., 1998; Yashin et al., 1999) so the death of an ageing twin may indeed be a relevant signal that the survivor's own death will occur sooner rather than later.

One aspect mentioned by participants in the present study and also noted by Engel (1975) and Woodward (1998) is that death of a twin from a disease not only affects the survivor's expectations of mortality but may lead to health checks that actually identify treatable disease, thus enabling future survival to be prolonged.

The loss of a twin may lead to changes ranging from pragmatic to deeper questions and intense feelings about identity and wellbeing. Bonanno & Kaltman (1999) suggest that over the longer term a process they call 'retrospective reappraisal' occurs. This is seen as the survivor's long term and ongoing evaluations of the impact of the loss and of how well he or she has coped over time.

In relation to the present study, participants' observations about bereavement emerged from such a retrospective reappraisal of reactions to *losing a twin* and the engagement in a process of *redefinition* (see results above). The process was sometimes liberating where the surviving twin had felt held back by their twin, while for others their whole life had to be re-evaluated. Woodward (1998) describes a similar range of experiences from loss of identity, because the sense of self has been largely held within the twinship; through moving on; appreciation of shared life being an addition to the survivor's sense of self; and the loss of the twin leading to the prolonging of the survivor's life. Further research on bereavement in twins might usefully investigate

how loss may sometimes be incorporated into existing meaning structures and how stress related growth may occur.

Bonanno & Kaltman (1999) suggest that how the lost relationship is represented over time is important. In attachment theory terms, grief is seen as leading to redefinition of the lost relationship into a continuing enduring bond (as opposed to the detachment of 'grief work'), a point also emphasised by Woodward (1998). While Western European society may emphasise 'letting go', other cultures have different views as shown by anthropological studies of ancestor worship. For example, the Yoruba in Nigeria have a kinship cult of twins (Oruene, 1983, and this issue) that persists in changing forms to the present day (Renne, 2001). In its traditional form, carved wooden figures of twins are made (Ibeji) and if one of a pair of twins dies the figure is cared for and often carried by the survivor, as if it were a living twin.

Bonanno & Kaltman (1999) suggest that research shows that there may be a level of grief severity beyond which the retention of a supportive and ongoing bond with the deceased becomes difficult. When grief becomes unmanageable, there may be increased ambivalence and less favourable evaluation (Bonanno et al., 1998), perhaps to reduce too-painful memories. This research was carried out with conjugal relationships, another form of couple (Zazzo, 1976) and, given twins' experience of *redefinition*, these issues would be interesting to examine further.

Bonanno & Kaltman (1999) also considered coping and regulation of emotion. Talking about a loss is moderated by perceived social constraints about disclosure (Lepore et al., 1996) and this may also apply, perhaps more strongly, to bereavement in twins (see *not a twin anymore* above and Engel, 1975). The need to talk to someone who is sympathetic and non-judgemental may be hard to fulfil, especially for twins (and the parents) who lose a twin in the perinatal period, perhaps because it involves the loss of what might have been as much as what was (Woodward, 1998).

#### Limitations of the Study

The present study was designed to explore the concept of twinship rather than specifically to address the issues of bereavement. It would therefore be useful to conduct a qualitative study that did this across the lifespan for twins. The participants here were mainly women, and it would be useful to include more males to see if there are gender differences. Woodward's (1998) work also discusses at length the experiences of twins bereaved early in life, through still-birth or perinatal death, that represent a different sort of bereavement from that experienced by any other siblings or relatives. There is little data on these issues in the present study where the focus was on later life bereavement.

Many readers of this journal may be unfamiliar with qualitative work in an interpretive paradigm. Such research does not permit quantification of, for example, severity of grief reactions or the generalisation of findings from 'representative' samples. Instead it seeks to explore personal meanings that may be especially valuable in fields of human experience like bereavement. This may apply particularly in areas where there has been limited empirical research, where the use of questionnaires with fixed responses may

limit findings or where a particular theory has dominated thinking and new ideas are beginning to emerge. A design involving open-ended interviews can enable new or revised conceptualisations (Rennie et al, 1988; Rennie, 1998) and thus play a crucial role in identifying the dimensions of interest for further research.

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#### Footnote

- 1 Category labels from the grounded theory analysis are shown in italics in the text. See also Figures 1–3.

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