

## A Twin's Dilemma: Being Noticed or Being Known

Joan A. Friedman, PhD

*Note from the editor: Joan A. Friedman, PhD, a psychologist specializing in twinship issues, has sent us this article, which may be of interest to members working with twins. She has written a book on the subject, and wishes to apprise us of her work.*

When I began my research on the psychology of twinship over thirty years ago, many psychoanalysts wrote exclusively about extreme abnormalities in twin dynamics. Understanding the role that twinship can play in causing serious emotional dysfunction is certainly important; however, the extreme case studies in my research did not mirror the issues that I struggled with in my own twinship and that I knew other twins grappled with as well.

The lack of psychological literature that reflected common twinship issues motivated me to write *The Same but Different*, a book for adult twins. I wanted to offer adult twins the opportunity to learn about the expectable—rather than the extreme—developmental issues that often arise as a consequence of being a twin, and I wanted to describe the positive and negative impacts that a twinship can have on one's emotional health, relationships, and sense of self. As my therapy practice grew, I realized that many of my twin clients had experienced difficulties with previous therapists who were unfamiliar with twin psychology. My current book, *Twins in Session: Case Histories in Treating Twinship Issues*, addresses these concerns.

A twinship is a marriage that one does not choose. Biological destiny determines the twin coupledness. For many twin pairs, the course of their emotional lives is dictated by simply being born at the same time. While all of us enter relationships with baggage, twins have unique childhood experiences.

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Without a healthy separate self, twins have a tendency to bring higher emotional stakes into a relationship. Outside of their awareness, they demand excessive loyalty, undivided attention, and unwavering possessiveness. Since many twins feel that they made tremendous sacrifices and compromises for the well-being of the twin connection, they feel entitled to make tremendous demands of one another.

Twin clients often develop a unique relationship with their analyst. The therapist will likely define her twin patient as if she herself were part of a twin relationship. She may experience unconscious envy, competition, and loss.

Parents may feel a tremendous sense of failure when their adult twin children do not get along. When one twin succeeds more than the other, the parent expects that the happier twin should reach out to and care for the less successful sibling. So, in addition to the societal expectation that he and his sibling should be best friends forever and soul mates for life, the adult twin also feels pressured to assume a caretaking role. This variant of pathological accommodation undermines healthy individuation.

The twin relationship is not a developmental bond—children cannot be parented by a same-age sibling. The treatment of a twin client requires attunement to specific dynamics that significantly impact attachment and the progression to healthy adulthood.

Dr. Joan Friedman is an identical twin, a mother of twins, and a longtime therapist to twins. Learn more about Dr. Friedman at [www.joanafriedmanphd.com](http://www.joanafriedmanphd.com)