



# **TWIN STUDIES IN BEHAVIORAL AND HEALTH RESEARCH**

## **CURRENT STATUS, PROSPECTS AND APPLICATIONS**

**ORGANIZED BY EMMA OTTA  
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# Chapter 15

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## *Overview of the Clinical Branch of the University of São Paulo Twin Panel*

*Maria Livia Tourinho Moretto and Gustavo Di Giorgi Ramos*

In this chapter, we share the work we have done at the Braço Clínico do Pánel USP de Gêmeos [Clinical Branch of the University of São Paulo Twin Panel] and part of the results obtained so far.

At the invitation of Professor Emma Otta, who leads the Pánel USP de Gêmeos at the Instituto de Psicologia, Universidade de São Paulo (IPUSP), the first author is very pleased to coordinate the clinical branch of the twin study, which was founded in 2017, and is composed of a group of professionals and students who are equally interested in researching the subject

The clinical branch offers free clinical psychological care for twins enrolled in the Pánel USP de Gêmeos and their family at the IPUSP school clinic. From June 2017 to December 2020, we assisted about 30 people and approximately 800 sessions were held.

Earlier last year we started a scientific cooperation partnership with the "Gemelarity and assisted reproduction" research group, which is part of the Clinical and Research Sector of the Departamento Psicanálise com Crianças do Instituto Sedes Sapientiae [Department of Psychoanalysis with Children of the Sedes Sapientiae Institute]. Until 2019, this was a closed group formed by professors Adela Gueller and Ada Morgenstern, who had been researching the subject since 2010 and are the authors of the book "Psychoanalytical care for twins" (2018). After the advent of the partnership with the clinical branch, the group admitted students from the fourth and fifth year of the Psychology undergraduate program at USP, master's and doctoral students, as well as those from the third and fourth year of the Psychoanalysis with Children Training Course and members of the Department, changing its name to "Gemelar" ("twinned").

Last year, the group held weekly meetings. The work began in person at Sedes, but with the arrival of the pandemic, an online meeting format was adopted, with weekly research meetings, consisting of a

reading and reflection group, interspersed biweekly with clinical supervision meetings.

The group is currently composed of three students from the fourth year of the training course in Psychoanalysis with Children, Taísa N. Martinelli, Juliana P. de C. Pedroso and Josseline Capua Rodrigues Sanches; Paulina Mei, third year student; Vanessa Freitas, member of the Psychoanalysis with Children Department; Gustavo Ramos, master's student at LabPsi-Usp; and Maycon A. Fraga, member of LabPsi-Usp, in addition to the professors and coordinators Ada Morgenstern, Adela Gueller and Maria Livia Moretto.

Clinical care, which usually takes place in person at the USP School Clinic, continued through online meetings. Throughout the year, we held discussions on the texts and clinical cases, and are in the process of producing an article relating twin experiences with those portrayed in the film "The Double Lover" (2018) by François Ozon. Despite the adversities we are facing during this pandemic, the work continues.

After introducing the working group we formed, and all the researchers and clinicians who make it possible, we will present a little of what we have been discussing during our sessions and conversations with the twins under study.

In psychology, there is a consensus regarding the function of the other or of otherness in what we call the constitution of human subjectivity, that is, the Ego is constituted by the Other. The development of the human psyche takes place through a series of processes that we call identification and differentiation. In other words, for me to become myself, I need to have taken another as a strong reference, in order to later build the conditions needed to differentiate myself from it. These identification and differentiation processes are the basis for constructing more complex psychic processes, such as attachment and how the separation occurred, that is, the processes of identification and differentiation are not disconnected from the psychic processes that involve the possibilities of someone bonding and separating.

Some questions guide and motivate our clinical research, especially those that question identification and the psychic possibility conditions of differentiation in twins, and their conditions for binding and separating. The psychological care offered to twins and their parents has allowed us to ascertain the specificities of the demands presented to us in such a way that clinical care is the basis for research that aims to investigate the specificities of the subjectivity of twins and those that must be considered in the clinical care devices for patients in this condition. If the function of the parents is essential to the constitution of subjectivity, our hypothesis is that the co-twin plays a central role in

the construction of identity, in situations in which the parents are truly in the background.

Listening to the twins and their stories has revealed their focus on certain issues, which we will share with you: the difficulties of differentiating themselves from each other; the way they bond with each other seems to be related to the way they bond with other people, in both establishing bonds of friendship and love relationships. The feeling of protection with the existence of the double is undeniable, as is the anguish of separation and the difficulties of mourning in cases of significant loss. Rivalry and resentment between twins is also a relevant issue. The tendency to humor is present in stories that involve some form of cheating and how it is possible to laugh at oneself and one's own image when one has a double as a source of inspiration.

However, most research in clinical psychology emphasizes difficulties that twin siblings have in differentiating themselves from each other, since their intense bond can often be an obstacle to forming relationships with others. This is because clinical psychology studies traditionally focus on cases involving some type of suffering or pathology. Our intention, however, is to fill the gap in studies that target mood and well-being, by examining the playful and pleasant side of having a twin sibling, which undeniably exists, but has only appeared in the psychotherapeutic process of the clinical care we have provided to date.

In the master's research currently conducted by Gustavo Ramos, one of the members of the clinical branch, we started our work with a survey of recent clinical studies on twins produced by psychoanalysts. At the beginning of this work, we wondered whether or not it was possible to think about 'specifics' in the clinical psychoanalysis of twins. Since this is not a recurring theme in psychoanalysis, we asked ourselves if there are specificities in the condition of twins that should be considered and/or justify the singular attention and care provided to these patients in psychoanalytic clinical devices.

Here we have an explanation: since clinical psychoanalysis par excellence is the clinic of singularity, we are far from confusing specificity with specialty, that is, thinking about the clinical and specialized clinical psychoanalysis of twins is not the same thing. Once this important difference is considered, the question arises: are there specificities that should be considered in clinically managing the psychotherapy treatment of twins? If so, what are they?

We started by conducting a survey in the databases of articles published in Scielo and Pepweb (psychoanalytical database) over the last decade. More than a thousand results were found for the descriptors 'twin' and 'psychoanalysis'. However, after refining the

search and analyzing these results, only 27 were considered relevant for the subject investigated because they effectively deal with the intersection between twinning and psychoanalysis, and not with diverse subjects containing only the words researched. In 10 of the 27 publications found, twinning was part of the primary objectives of the article, and the other 17 were mostly clinical articles of cases involving patients who are twins.

In general terms, the authors discussed the following topics: Jeanne Magagna (2007) [psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, lecturer and supervisor at the Tavistock Clinic, London, England] discusses the individuation process of twins in the passage from twin to individual. Althea Hayton (2009) [from London, England, founder of the "wombtwin survivors" or "surviving twins" project, which seeks to study and research the subject] discusses the loss of a twin in utero and the suffering it can engender for the survivor. Elizabeth Wright (2010) [from London, England], in an article entitled "A twin in psychotherapy", recounts her own therapeutic process, and defends the fact that there was no discussion of her specific twin condition. Charlotte Kahn (2012) [PhD in psychology from Columbia University, psychoanalyst and family therapist in New York City] discusses Pierre Lacombe's hypothesis regarding the possible existence of an essential twin neurosis. Based on his personal experience and interviews, Oliver Shirley (2016) [author from London, England] discusses difficulties that opposite sex twins may face in relationships with other people of the opposite sex. Ruth Simon (2016) [US psychotherapist and psychoanalyst working in Oakland and San Francisco] discusses infant twin development based on Winnicott's theory.

Catiesca Pereira Dorneles and Vladia Zenker Schmidt (2015) [psychologists and researchers at FADERGS, in Rio Grande do Sul state, Brazil] conducted a bibliographic survey on twins, psychoanalysis, bonding and maternal care. Mariléia Orn Scalco and Tagma Marina Schneider Donelli (2014) [psychologists and researchers from the UNISINOS graduate program in clinical psychology, in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil] discuss cases of twins under 1 year of age and psycho-functional symptoms. Marta Knijnik Lucion and Norma Escosteguy (2011) [researchers from the Psychiatry Department of the PUCRS Medical School, in Rio Grande do Sul, Brazil] discuss the condition of mothers and caregivers of one-year-old twins.

In this literature survey, we found that there was no broad discussion about the intersection of twinning with psychoanalysis, and that this discussion emerged through diverse, timely and more specific issues. In these several issues, two main themes caught our attention:

the first was transference within clinical care and the second the status of differentiation in twins.

In regarding to transference, there is a debate on whether the therapist, in the transferential relationship with twins, occupies or not, at certain moments of the treatment, the role of the patient's co-twin, as well as possible maternal and paternal positions, among others. The importance of paying attention to this possible transference in these treatments was also discussed.

Jeanne Magagna (2007) and Klaus Fink (2007) [a German psychologist and psychoanalyst, respectively, living in Hamburg] reported that at a certain moment of their care, they occupied the transferential position of a co-twin of their patients in the sessions. Elizabeth Wright (2010) argued that psychoanalysts who work with twins have to be prepared to occupy the co-twin's position; otherwise, their work will be incomplete. Amanda Dowd (2012) [from Sydney, Australia, a member of the Jungian Society of Analysts, an analyst instructor and private practice psychoanalyst] and Sue Grand (2013) [a clinical psychologist trained at the New School for Social Research in New York City] reported that it took a long time to recognize and pay attention to the uniqueness of the twin condition in the transfer of their cases, and that when they did so it was very important for the progress of those treatments. In opposition to the authors cited above, Joaquin Cañizares (2010) [member of the Scottish Institute of Human Relations] reported that one of his patients "invited him to occupy the empty space left by his missing twin, instead of using him as a therapist" and that this made him feel like a "lonely twin" and any attempt he made to interpret it was unsuccessful, making it difficult to treat this case.

On the subject of differences, Jeanine Vivona (2007) [professor of psychology at the University of Massachusetts] wrote that there is no consensus in the literature as to whether or not twinning leads to the highest degree of differentiation among siblings in relation to siblings who are not twins. The author quotes a survey by Davison (1992) in which analysts separate the effects of twinning into two opposing positions: those who describe that it leads to strong similarity and even symbiosis between siblings and others who notice opposing characteristics and contend that it leads to greater differentiation between siblings.

In this initial part of the research, considering what had been found in recent studies, we were able to answer one of the questions that we initially asked ourselves, concluding that there were indications of relevant specificities in twinning experiences that should be taken into



account in the clinic, and that these indications justified broader and more in-depth research on the subject.

We realized that even in the articles that specifically addressed twinning and psychoanalysis issues, there was no general debate on the status of twinning experiences. This is partly due to the very format in which the articles are published and how knowledge advances in psychoanalysis, with the sovereignty of the clinic and its discoveries in the production of knowledge. As such, most of the publications we found dealt with specific cases. In other words, they were articles written by psychoanalysts who treated cases of twin patients or family members with questions about the twin experience and its effects. In these sessions, the psychoanalysts asked themselves about the twin experiences and how to listen to them amidst the difficulties and possibilities that arose, and decided to write about the subject.

At this point, we would like to return briefly to the issue of specificity in psychoanalysis. The clinic with children, for example, involves specificities. Psychoanalysts who are aware of them can likely do a better job with their patients. Throughout the course of the master's research, we presented our work to the public and debated the issues encountered. At times we have been able to talk to psychoanalysts treating twins and discovered that they had never heard of such issues in their training, and that by learning about them through our research or other sources, they were able to pay more attention to these questions. We would like to underscore that this does not mean that everyone necessarily has questions about their twin experiences (several patients have talked to us about issues other than twinning), but rather that such issues may emerge in the clinic and psychoanalysts who are made aware of them may be better equipped to deal with them.

Since the literature review, our research has advanced and one of the issues we are currently discussing, and would like to briefly share with you, is related to the uniqueness of pair experiences. After all, one of the main characteristics of twinning, both for twins and their families, concerns almost simultaneous births. Compared to other siblings, twins live together at the same ages and for most of their development. Thus, several experiences are shared by the twin pair. Some authors even consider love relationships, or very strong friendships, where even those who are not twins undergo a significant experience or pair relationship.

Historically, the first authors within the psychoanalytic field who contemplated the effects and questions brought about by the twin experience, emphasized the importance of each sibling having his or her own individual experience, beyond what occurs in a dyad. To deny the singular dimension of each of the siblings, and only treat them as

an undifferentiated pair can cause suffering and difficulties. According to psychoanalysis, whether we are twins or not, we experience subjectivity in the field of language and desire, in an inexorably singular way.

However, theorizations about the importance of respecting one's uniqueness have sometimes been interpreted by psychoanalysts and caregivers as prescriptions and followed as if they were absolute norms. We have heard reports of cases where too much concern was expressed by those caring for the individual dimension of each twin, and the entire dyadic dimension was disregarded. The same can occur in clinical care: psychoanalysts excessively concerned about "individuality" and the differences of those they are treating may not be sufficiently attentive to important experiences related to the pair.

We have heard during the sessions, in case reports and clinical discussions, that denying the dimension of the pair can cause suffering, because the pair is fundamental to the twin experience and provides comforting, beneficial and enriching experiences.

If the relationships between parents and children are excessive, there are two poles that cause suffering: on one hand, there would be an attempt to treat the twins in exactly the same way, which would treat difficulties during separation or sibling differentiation. An example of these attitudes are the cases that Gueller and Morgenstern describe of parents who even spend an equal amount of time with each child in order to guarantee no inequality in their relationship with them. At the other extreme is the possibility of parents' treating each child in an excessively "different" and "individualized" way, creating "small differences" where they do not exist, which could be construed as attempts to deny the dimension of their shared experiences.

Adela and Ada denominated this and other challenges that twinning poses "impossibility of twinning", which arise not only from the relationships and experiences of each family, but also reveal our culture and ways of loving, the difficulties and tensions that we encounter between individual experiences, and other transindividual experiences, where such boundaries are unclear.

We would like to conclude by emphasizing that this was a brief summary of our work and the results found in our research thus far, and that there are a number of important topics and discussions taking place in this field. However, these discussions seldom reach a wider audience for clinical and psychoanalytical debate. We believe that one of the main contributions of our psychoanalytic work at the University, in partnership with the researchers and institutions that support it, is to bring these issues to public debate and to a greater number of psychoanalysts, in order to address their challenges and potentialities.

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