

# **IDENTICAL TWINS: A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY**

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My doctoral research conceptualised twin identity as a multi-layered dynamic, one that changes through performance and it explored twin identity through a social constructionist approach. A social constructionist approach dissented to address the complex nature of twin identity. I set out the background for this study, as it fits well, conceptually, with my critical stance towards mainstream psychology. Moreover, by revealing the constructed nature of psychological phenomena, this approach allowed space to be created for the construction of alternatives to the mainstream psychological research on twins. It further allowed the twins and me as the researcher to have a platform through which to question and challenge what is taken for granted in mainstream traditional psychological research about twins. In addition, while not fully using a narrative approach, my research used life narrative questions for the interviews, in order to gather material that addresses the complexities of twin experiences throughout their lives. The study seeks to map out the social construction of twin identity, through the analysis of twin accounts. The specific research aims of the study were: (a) to highlight the limitations of mainstream psychological research, and the way that assumptions about the nature of twins are confirmed in the way the studies are carried out to reinforce conventional stereotypes (b) to examine how twins understand themselves as twins; (c) to explore how twins describe their experience of being twins.

## **Introduction**

The paper summarises and reflects on the research I have been carrying out with identical twins. In this study, I used a life narrative research approach, coupled with thematic analysis in a social constructionist frame- work. Contextualising the lived experiences of twins as social constructs, the paper proposes that a qualitative and more specifically a social constructionist approach is most suitable for exploring and fully understanding the accounts of twins' lived experiences and identities. Adopting this approach allowed the researcher to show that, our knowledge and understanding is historically and culturally specific, thereby giving more weight to my critical stance towards traditional psychological studies that have been criticised for 'imperialism' and 'colonialism' because of their implicit assumption that western ways of understanding the world can be imposed across other cultures. Moreover, the social constructionist approach was helpful in demonstrating how knowledge and social action go together, how language has practical consequences for people and how such knowledge is sustained by social processes (Burr, 2015).

I will discuss, in succeeding sections, my research findings, looking at common meta-themes within the twins' talk about their lives,

contributions of this study and its practical implications, looking also at my reflections, the limitations of this study and ideas for future research. I also will highlight the possible beneficiaries of this study and finally offering an overall conclusion.

### **Contributions of this Study and Practical Implications for Further Research**

This study has added to the body of existing work on twin identity in many ways, as the overarching meta-thematic analysis I have just presented demonstrates. It shows how twins talk about themselves and persistently takes apart hegemonic representations of 'subjects' in various ways. To start with, this study has shown how twins' representations of themselves and their relationships work continuously to undermine dominant representations of 'individual subjects', both directly, by posing twins and their own particular individuality against 'individuals', and less directly, by articulating themes around 'similarity' and 'the couple' that characterise twin's talk about themselves. In so doing, this study has unlike mainstream psychological studies, attended to the voices of twins. It has used an interview method which includes semi-structured, open-ended questions, allowing the twins to have space to give their accounts with as much liberty as possible, so that new things that have never been studied before could be articulated.

Also, in this study, I have not only used a social constructionist approach in an area where no one has used it before; I have also applied it in a unique way. The uniqueness has to do with carrying out the study's interviews after conducting a review of core psychological themes regarding twin studies as well as looking at some prevalent cultural representations of twins. This embedded the interviews in a cultural context in a very explicit way, thus taking seriously, in the operationalization of my research, the notion of cultural construction, from the very beginning. I further used the understanding gained from these cultural representations to help me interpret the accounts gathered from the interviews. Social constructionist studies tend to assume they know the characteristics of a particular cultural context; my research makes the case for a thorough and specific investigation of cultural context to guide the research. Many social constructionist studies focus only on cultural representations, or only on how people speak about their identity; this study has done both. Moreover, using a social constructionist approach has helped me show how social constructions co-exist, with people acting to reframe themselves, resisting certain constructions and dominant discourses.

As a result of all the above, the study has provided an alternative perspective on understating twin identity, one that mainstream psychological studies do not provide, because of the traditional methods they use. Burr (2003, p. 149) puts it this way: 'We cannot investigate the psychological and social world by using our old practices and assumptions'. My work has taken up the contributions but also the limitations of mainstream psychology, particularly in terms of how its ideas appear in popular culture and in twins' accounts.

The study has highlighted the twin voices and has shown some areas of twin lives which haven't been shown before, for example the aspects of being misunderstood, the idea of misunderstanding oneself

and the links made between twins and the metaphor of a couple; also, it has shown that twin identity does not fit with western representations of individuals. Twin identity has of course been addressed before, but my study is unique in that it has explored twin identity across a broad range of social locations across the UK and across a variety of ethnic backgrounds, including both immigrant and non-immigrant twins, with men and women of different social classes and generations.

I have also shown how the notion of individualism joins the three aspects of twin identity, namely the metaphor of a couple, the theme of being misunderstood and the different dimensions of twin identity. With my detailed investigation of twin identity, through using semi-structured, life narrative interviews and thematic analysis, this study has brought to light the multi-layered complexity of twin identity.

Other than showing that particular themes are constantly found in different media at different times, this study has provided a socio-cultural analytic context for researchers interested in looking at twins' identity or at accounts of twins' lives. In Paper 5, this research highlighted 7 themes drawn from the accounts of twins, which demonstrated the link between twin relationships, their identity and the metaphors of couples.

The themes I focused on, in order to demonstrate the connections in question are: the bond, the team approach, the theme of joint ownership, the theme of power relations, similarity, companionship, interdependence and jealousy. The study has further highlighted that a couple is a kind of a metaphor that could help twins deal with issues of individuality and with being treated as a unit. No other twin study has brought this to light before.

I have also demonstrated how metaphors of couples can be used to solve the problem of misunderstanding twins and being misunderstood on the part of twins, to some extent, although drawing from the notion of couples creates other problems, because twins are not exactly like couples. This is another novel contribution, which no other study has highlighted before. By citing research on couples and linking it to the personal accounts of twins, I have shown, through this study, that the metaphors of couples can be used as a frame of understanding twins in a social context such as that in western societies, where notions of individual difference are dominant and given that the metaphors of couples are very relevant to an understanding of twins. One example of this resemblance concerns the way that twins adopt a language that portrays them as a unit and that represents each other, by using words such as 'we', 'us' and 'our'.

In the chapter analysing the theme of 'being misunderstood', I highlighted that twins are so different in the way they speak about themselves, when compared to the cultural representations of twins in the relevant psychological literature as well as in popular culture. The participant twins voiced feelings of being misunderstood by others, including by psychologists.

I have also brought to light the way that the notion of individual difference causes a problem in terms of being misunderstood for identical twins, showing that by virtue of being identical twins, they do not seem to fully correspond with the notion of individualism that is taken for granted in western society; they do not identify with or fit into it, because twins in a way are a couple. I demonstrated this point by showing, in

Paper 6, how twins reported incidents where they took advantage of their similarity by swapping roles to deceive others, suggesting through such actions that they do not perceive themselves as individuals but as similar, thereby creating a problem for those around them who might view that the twins' behaviour in light of the prevalent notions in their socio-cultural context. This study has shown that twins further complicate the puzzle of their identity through their avoidance of singular pronouns in favour of plurals when speaking of themselves, indirectly implying a joint identity, in a culture where people are mostly treated as individuals.

Furthermore, in this study I have brought to light the dynamics of twin identity, particularly the ways it is constructed and performed by identical twins in different ways in different social settings and to different audiences. In addition, I have demonstrated that the twins' identity in this research was also performed to an imagined audience. This study has also shown that there is no uniformity in the way twins construct and claim their identity. I was able to demonstrate that there are contradictions in how twins speak of themselves, and in how they construct and claim their identities. Examples of this are found in chapter 5, where the claims of a special twin identity from some twins contradicted the claims of being 'ordinary and normal' from other twins.

In addition to the above, in this study, through the analysis of themes, (for example the theme of identity confusion in chapter 6), I was able to point out a possible major cause of identity confusion issues in twins' lives. I did this by showing how similarity is imposed on twins by parents through a similar dress code, rhyming personal names, serving them similar food or making them eat from the same plate while growing up and by encouraging the twins to see themselves as one person.

This study has further brought to light something else that no other study has highlighted before, the complexity of twin identity and the misunderstanding of self issues. I demonstrated that in the misunderstanding self chapter, where identical twins were shown to speak of being a twin as a complex experience which they do not understand nor expect others to understand. This study has also revealed that the misunderstanding of self in twins also has something to do with the way they were brought up but also with the way they were treated as a unit in society.

Another way in which this study contributed to the body of knowledge on twins has to do with how it has underlined the different dimensions that misunderstanding twins constitutes of. The dimensions emerged in a thematic format and include the following: being misunderstood, questions from non-twins, strange knowledge, blame, marriage problems, comparison, complexity, identity confusion, popularity and denial.

Another important contribution of this study is that it has shown that there is a complex web of influences, including culture and society, in the experiences of identical twins and in the way that twins claim their identities, something which mainstream psychological twin studies have ignored or have failed to show.

Moreover, this study has brought to light different dimensions in a thematic format in terms of how twins construct and claim their identity. These dimensions are: joint identity; twin identity as something from within; the performance of twin identity, similarity; identity confusion;

twin identity tied to personal name; claims of special identity; twin identity as a social construct; and finally pathology-free twin identity.

### **Common Meta-Themes within Twins' Talk about their Lives**

This section will highlight and discuss the links between all my analysis chapters. I will briefly summarise what each chapter was about before making these connections.

My first analysis chapter looked at how twins draw on the metaphors of romantic couples in the way they speak about their lives. In that chapter, I identified 7 themes from the accounts of twins which resemble the way a romantic couple would usually operate in western society.

In the second analysis chapter, I explored themes around the dynamics of twin identity, particularly looking at how twin identity is constructed and performed by identical twins in various social settings and to different audiences. I finished off my analysis by looking in the third analysis chapter at the themes of being misunderstood and how the notion of individual differences causes a problem in terms of being misunderstood for identical twins, since by virtue of being twins and through living their lives within a nexus of twin discourses and practices, they do not seem to fully correspond with the notion of individualism that is taken for granted in western society. Having briefly outlined the summary of my analysis papers, I will now go on to show the connections that exist between them.

### **Couple Representations**

I will first show how the presence of a 'couple' representation across all analysis chapters serves as a connection. To begin with, looking at twins through the metaphor of a couple solves the problem of being misunderstood because while individual differences can be one way of understanding twins, it is also a way to misunderstand them, as treating twins as individuals does not fit with twin experiences, they are a couple and a pair. A couple therefore is a metaphor that could help twins to understand something about the issue of individuality and about being treated as a unit.

Although concept of a couple solves the problem of misunderstanding twins to some extent it creates another, because twins are also quite different from couples. For example, members of a romantic couple do not share their development, like twins do; they grow up in different environments and meet at some point later in life. Also, the development of a romantic couple relationship may start from a friendship, later being motivated by attraction; that is not the case with twin relationships. Twins develop together from the very onset of their lives. In addition, twins often experience identity confusion but no such identity confusion exists with couples. Above all, members of a couple come together out of choice, while identical twins do not choose to be a pair, they are born being a pair. In spite of these differences, a couple, as we can see in the twins' own accounts, can be used as a good metaphor for understanding twins in a social context like that of western society, where representations of individual differences are dominant and where there is a strong resemblance between twins and romantic couples.

In addition, across the analysis papers it has been shown that the twins speak of themselves as couples, by using words that portray them as a unit, such as *we*, *us* and *our*. This does not only make a connection between twins and couples but it also paints a picture that twins can use to make other people understand their identity. Other people, therefore, can draw on the metaphor of a couple to understand twin identity.

The metaphor of couples emerges as a connection in the analysis chapters, in different ways. For example, in chapter 4 it emerges in the theme of joint identity. Twins spoke in a way that identified them not as unique individuals but members of a couple. Again, in the chapter on twin identity, elements of the metaphor of a couple emerge through performance. For example, within the theme of twin identity performance, twins described how they perform 'typical twins', the list including things to do, with similar interests, something which is part of the popular representation of couples, as discussed in Paper 4

### **The Notion of an Individual**

I will now show how the notion of individual difference, dominant in western society, creates a two-way problem across all data and analysis papers. First, it is a problem for identical twins, then, it is a problem for others around them, not just in terms of the themes that emerged from the 'being misunderstood' chapter, but also in relation to themes from other analysis chapters. The plural way in which twins speak about themselves does not fit with the western social context within which they live. As a consequence, this poses a problem for the twins and for other people in their society. The problem is that being one, or being an individual, seems to mean one thing for twins and another for other people. It appears that twins do think of themselves as 'individuals', albeit in a different way.

Another good example of departure from the hegemonic western representation of twins and individuals is theme of 'performance of twin identity' in second analysis chapter. It indicates that twins sometimes swap roles, taking advantage of their physical resemblance. In order to effectively swap identities and confuse people, twins need more than just their physical resemblance; their conduct and way of doing things is often, in their accounts, uniform too and that means that, in the eyes of others, they are 'one' or 'the same' person. That uniformity is arguably problematic. It promotes similarity at the expense of individuality and therefore goes against the notions of individual difference and uniqueness, which are both dominant in western culture. The very act of swapping identities suggests that twins do not see themselves as unique but as similar. As I have explored in more detail in my second analysis chapter, this is one of the areas that creates the problem of 'being misunderstood' for twins.

### **A Reflexive Perspective on the study**

I think I impacted the research in many ways because, to start with, although the participants had a voice in this study, my own version of events inevitably has a 'louder voice' and a greater warrant. After all, I was the one who interpreted the accounts of twins' experiences, giving

them meaning as I understood them. I was the one making all the decisions about what was important for analysis and what was not. In addition, the analysis of the interview material and the question of how it would be reported in the thesis was in itself to a certain degree my own social construction, because the writing style and literary devices that would provide a specific view on the participants' experiences would be my choice (Burr, 2015).

As a researcher, I was the one making most of the decisions which directed the course of the study, to suit and to aid the exploration of my study interests. The decisions in question include, among others, the following: the design of the research project, the methodological procedure, the data collection method, the research aims and the decision about what questions to ask. In addition, the interviews were structured according to the interview guides which I had created, outlining the themes to be covered during the interviews; all this and other decisions that I had made formed the background against which I carried out my field work and analysis and informed the way that I reported the findings of my study.

My interest before, during and after the interviews had to do with the lived experiences of identical twins, something which influenced my transcription and analysis, in terms of paying no or less attention to other things, such as bodily expressions, breaks, sighs, stammers, other sounds, even silence, the general interaction between myself and the participants, the atmosphere during the interviews and all other non-verbal information. Generally, what I did not consider for analysis received less or no attention during the interviews and also during the transcription of the interviews. I focused on, though I did not exclusively restrict my transcription to, materials of relevance to me, and by that I mean that which the twins have said, not how they have said it.

As I thought about the analysis process, I coded and categorised the materials that I had transcribed. The definitions and names I gave to the categories went a long way in influencing the analytic process because the way the categories were defined was based on how I understood them. I aimed for the results of my analysis to be connecting all the categories, forming a web of meaning for the comprehension of the overall narrative from all interviews. Again, it is I who defined the strings that would constitute this web of meanings and their coherence. In doing all this, the coding and analysis of materials, to some extent, I used my own personal knowledge and experiences as tools to make sense of the material. That inevitably brought in some of my own impressions, which might not always be obviously evident and documented.

The different levels of relationship that I formed with the twins during the time of recruitment and organising the interview dates and also during the time of interacting with them, including during and before the interviews, must have made them feel more at ease to tell their accounts and more relaxed in the interview environment. Besides, my personal empathy must have had an impact on how twins told their stories to me as well. Another aspect that was certainly affected by me as a researcher is anonymity. The participants in this study are not anonymous to me, though they are to the reader of this study, because I met them and know them to some extent. This lack of anonymity in the relationship between researcher and respondents might unconsciously

cause the researcher to treat the material with a degree of unintentional bias.

In addition, another researcher effect on this study is the way I asked the research questions. Though the nature of questions, by virtue of being open-ended and semi-structured allowed room to the participants to tell their unique stories about their experiences, I did direct the course of the interviews. I had a set of life narrative questions that I had prepared in advance, which were related to my research aims, and I asked these to all twins in different sequences, depending on the direction of the conversation I was having with each set. This way of asking, especially coming in to the interviews with a set of questions to guide the conversation, guided the twins to tell their stories in particular ways. This means that other experiences which did not fall within the interview guide were indirectly excluded.

### **Limitations of this Study**

There are spheres that did not come within the remit of this research, which were however potentially significant. So in this section I will discuss the limitations of this study. To begin with, as indicated earlier, the method of analysis used in this study centred on language and did not go much beyond that when examining the twins' accounts. However, these accounts featured a lot of laughter, stammering, hesitations, gestures, yawns and many other forms of communication, which are all rich in meaning and subjectivity. All these paralinguistic features were thus not explored fully and I consider that a limitation, as they are 'not text'.

Due to time constraints, I only had one face to face contact with the participants of this study, which was on the day of the interview. I think the work would be richer if I had met the participating twins more than once, before the interviews. We would have come to know each other better and the twins might have said more things to me, based on the relationship between us, possibly enriching the exploration of twin identity. A longitudinal study by Holland (2011) is a good example of how meeting participants several times, on different occasions, can help develop good rapport.

Another limitation of this study is the fact that the participants knew that I was a psychological researcher. This might have made them careful about what they said and how they said it, thinking I would analyse and interpret what they said in a particular way. Had the participants thought I was a historian, with an interest in broader questions and not just their personal experiences, or a journalist who would be publishing their stories in popular newspapers, they might have given their accounts with fewer or no reservations although they might have not.

The sample size was another limitation. Additionally, out of the 14 sets of twins who took part in this study, only 2 were males. Future studies can balance the sample size and include more males. In addition, 13 sets of twins were either both married or both single—by that I mean living with a partner or living alone. Only one set had one twin living with a partner and the other living alone. Future studies could focus on the accounts of twins where one lives with a partner and the other lives alone.

The majority (11 sets) of twins who took part in this study were between the ages of 18 and 40. Only 3 were in their fifties. Future studies could focus on the accounts of twins who are 50 or more. Moreover, 10 out of 14 sets of twins in this study were white, and future studies could involve other ethnicities too and could thus balance the sample.

Besides, in this study I have focused on twins who were identified themselves as twins. Other studies might focus on twins who are not interested in identifying themselves as twins, those who reject twin identity.

Another limitation of this study is that the identical twins' accounts were taken to mean exactly what was said. The problem with treating accounts like this is that there is a strong possibility of reproducing rather than challenging the regimes of truth and discourses about twins which in the first place have helped produce or influence some of the negative experiences they have had in life and continue to have in life.

Lastly, my analysis did not take into account the influence of demographic and other personal factors around each participant's life that could have potentially impacted the production of his or her account. For example, aspects such as race, religion, level of education and age could be taken into account, among others. But these areas were not in the sphere of my research aims, as in this study I just was focusing on the social construction of twin identity. Other studies could take these factors into consideration.

### **Future Research on Twins**

One of the motives of this study was to open a window into twin identity and thus I will now present my recommendations for future research.

I have already discussed a potential area for further investigation, which has to do with the implications of the social representations and discourses about twins. As I have argued earlier, mainstream psychological studies on twins appear to have ignored the consequences of the discourses they have helped create about twins; no study seems to have investigated the impact of these discourses, so future research could follow up on this.

In addition, in Paper 2 I presented an analysis of cultural representations in a selection of texts (films, novels and plays) and mentioned the fact that these texts spread over from the early 16<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century. They thus range from the time of William Shakespeare to modern day films and novels. I did not have space and time in this thesis to look at the changes within these representations over a long period of time. Other studies might specifically look at the changes of twin cultural representations across centuries and at the specific ways in which twins are viewed in different genres of films, plays and novels. I would expect these fictional representations to be different in documentaries, where identical twins actually produce some of the text by speaking for themselves.

It could have also been possible to do an analysis on the different ways in which male and female identical twins are represented. Other studies could follow up on that. I expect that twin representations in western culture would be different from those found in non-western cultures, especially in areas where a more verbal tradition is used and

where films and novels are less important. Other studies thus could look into cultures that use a verbal tradition, in order to investigate whether twin representations are different in those contexts, and if so, in what ways. I also could have ordered the different fictional representations that I presented chronologically, but I wanted to show how specific themes run across different texts; a narrative study could be done to reflect the chronology more precisely.

Having shown in this study some of the ways in which psychology influences culture, for example in terms of the way twins use psychological ideas in their accounts, it would be interesting for future research to also look at the way psychological ideas form part of these cultural representations and how psychological theories feed into popular culture.

Another issue, which is the flip-side of this same point, is that future studies could look at the influence of cultural representations on psychological research, and particularly at the way psychological research takes ideas from cultural representations to develop its theories. There could be a possible argument that these theories too are socially constructed. I have shown elements of this in my analysis of popular culture representations and in the way twins have spoken to me, making reference to psychological theories. Future studies can build on my work in that respect.

Furthermore, other thematic issues could enhance further understanding of twin identity, for example issues around gender difference, ethnicity and age. These factors seemed central in the twins' accounts. For example, in Paper 5, in the context of the theme of joint identity, Jackie says: 'When we were kids, we did not have the word 'mine' in our usage. Our chest of drawers, whatever was there, when I say that I mean from them bloody knickers under our skirts to the hats on top our heads, was just for the twins. I had nothing, she had nothing. Stuff belonged to us. Anyone could pick anything; we lived like that most of our childhood'.

This extract shows that age is very important in particular aspects of twin identity at different developmental stages. It is important to mention that mainstream psychological studies, using quantitative approaches, have taken some of those factors into account but no one has done so with twin experiences and through use of a qualitative approach.

In chapter 5, in the theme of twin identity as something from within, Tony says something that downplays the role of demographic factors in twin identity: 'There is something about twins that has nothing to do with whether you grew up together or not. One of them is that you just mirror each other. You will notice also with time that there are things you do exactly the same. I don't mean a few, I mean many things. If people think that growing in same home makes you to be proper twins they should think again. Twins are in the blood.'

This extract and others analysed in that theme suggest that demographic factors do not account for much in twin identity. What matters is what is in their blood. Future studies could investigate this claim further, by exploring the impact of demographic factors on sets of twins that were brought up in different environments.

Family is mentioned a lot in the accounts of twins. All the analysis papers have themes where twins mention family. This suggests that the

notion of family is very close to twin identity and plays a key role in different aspects of twin identity. Future studies could focus more closely on the role of family as it influences the development of twin identity.

Since this project highlighted twin identity from a perspective that looked across ethnicities, with British twins of different ethnicities involved, it is my suggestion that a richer and more comprehensive understanding of twin identity could focus on the accounts of twins from within and between ethnicities. For example, in Paper 6 I highlighted an interesting controversy around the claim of special identity among some twins. Different twins said contradictory things about this issue of a special twin identity. I will present an example from the section where the claim of a special identity was made. This extract comes from the account of a set of white female twins. Amina says: 'Twins live in their own world, which is a little above planet earth and is outside the normal world.'

This extract gives the impression that there is something special about twin identity. But another twin, Susan, speaks in a way that contradicts that claim, directly rejecting it by saying: 'We are not so peculiar; we will just describe ourselves just as anyone else would do'.

Further studies, comparing within twin groups, can investigate why such controversies exist within groups in the way that twins speak about their identity. It is also noteworthy that the theme of special identity does not use extracts from black and Filipino twins, because none of them made claims of a special identity; they described themselves as 'normal people'. This too can be further investigated, by doing a between groups study, focusing on the accounts of identity from black twins and white twins.

There were differences noted between twins with a Zimbabwean background and those who were white and were born in the UK, in the way they spoke about being similar and being treated the same. All sets of twins with a Zimbabwean background did not voice any concerns about similarity and about being treated the same while growing up. For example, in the theme of identity confusion in Paper 5 Shalom, a female white twin, says: 'I think, people think we are the same person and that does me a headache because we are not.'

On the other hand, Amanda, a black twin from a Zimbabwean background, in the theme of joint identity in Paper 5 says: 'But to us we are one because we do everything together'.

Others studies could do a between groups twin research study and examine these differences in more detail, in order to investigate and establish their causes.

As this study explored themes across many transcripts, it would be ideal for other studies to look into the individual biography of each set of twins, looking at them as case studies, for a more in-depth analysis, in order to produce a more comprehensive understanding of each transcript in terms of twin identity and other aspects of twins' lives. An in-depth analysis such as this could also return to the interviews and analyse the way that twins gave their accounts to me, as a particular kind of a researcher. For example, one set of twins from Bradford raised issues about race and expressed anger at immigration, which I did not have space to explore in detail in this study. I just highlighted the issue, but other studies could follow up on it.

I have argued that a qualitative—and more specifically, a social constructionist approach—would be the most suitable for studying and analysing the twins' accounts. I discussed the fact that this approach throws the whole project of mainstream psychology into question. I argued that more critical and qualitative approaches should be used to study twins' accounts. Especially suitable would be those approaches that go beyond language, because the meaning of what is said can be found between the lines too, for example by looking at implicit ideas or by focusing on what is communicated through laughter, stammering, gestures and hesitations

## **Conclusion**

We have seen in this paper how twins are spoken about, used in mainstream psychological studies and represented in popular media. We have also seen how twins speak of themselves in their own accounts. We have seen that in mainstream psychological studies, twins' voices have been neglected and therefore particular aspects of their lives have been silenced. One example is the aspect of being misunderstood, as this study has shown. We have also seen the limitations of mainstream, traditional psychological studies on twins and the way in which psychological ideas about twins have been used to reinforce conventional everyday inequalities.

We have further seen how twins are represented in popular culture. Among other things, they are represented as objects of adoration, extreme fear, superstition, and as individuals who understand each other's thinking, who are telepathic and sinister. Another thing that we have seen in this thesis is the way that cultural representations of twins in texts (films, novels and plays) spread over from the early 16<sup>th</sup> to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, ranging from the time of William Shakespeare to modern day films and novels.

In the analysis papers, we have seen that twins' representations of themselves and their relationships work continuously to undermine dominant representations of 'individual subjects', both directly—by posing twins against 'the individual'—and less directly, by articulating 'similarity' and 'the couple'. We have further seen that twins speak of themselves as being misunderstood and as if they are a couple. We can see that the representations of twins which I reviewed earlier in this thesis do not correspond with what twins have to say about themselves. From all this, we can learn that it is important to listen to twins' own voices and also to locate them in a social historical context, in order to appreciate the stories that twins tell and the language they use in drawing from the available representations.

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