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**Exploring betweenness: an autoethnographic journey into the experience of twinship and its therapeutic implications**

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# Exploring betweenness: an autoethnographic journey into the experience of twinship and its therapeutic implications.

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*For Nick*

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# Abstract

With the pronounced increase in twin births since the 1980s, a corresponding need has arisen to better understand the intricacies of twinship and the aspects that may help and hinder twins throughout their lives. This is especially important for counselling psychologists and psychotherapists, yet at present they face a problematic knowledge gap; although a substantial body of psychological research exists on twins, the voices of twins themselves remain largely absent. In response to this, using an autoethnographic methodology this study reclaims a representational space in psychology research for the unheard and sometimes marginalised voices of twins, who are often unknowingly managing the complex situation of existing within and between the 'twin-world' and the 'non-twin world.' Three twins were invited to discover and articulate their experience of twinship and of being a client in psychological therapy through reflexive dyadic interviews, which are presented as a series of stories of twinship, along with the author's own account. Analysis of these narratives using the Listening Guide method elicited themes for discussion, organised under five superordinate thematic categories: *spatial contexts of twinship*; *twin bodies*; *twin-bond and attachment*; *being in the non-twin-world*, and *from harmony to estrangement*. Practice-based implications and considerations for clinical work with twins are subsequently proposed, with the psychotherapeutic situation identified as a potentially helpful and healing 'between world' for twins. The ways in which twins react differently from singletons to counselling and psychotherapy is just beginning to be understood with clarity and seriousness of purpose. This study offers a much-needed contribution to the existing literature on this subject by foregrounding the subjective experience of twins themselves.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

"*What is it like being a twin*"?

It is hard to imagine a twin who has not been asked this question many times. It is certainly one that I have responded to myself on countless occasions, generally with a smile, but sometimes with a sinking feeling too – the kind that tends to accompany tasks where there is sense of obligation and futility. Most twins and non-twins alike will no doubt also recognise the typical answer, "I don't know, because I don't know what it is like not to be a twin" (Martinez, 2021, p.46). Although perfectly reasonable, this has always felt like a last resort to me. It is true that I have often felt it impossible to convey the profound significance of my twinship, but the deep gratitude I feel and the closeness of my relationship with Nick, my twin, is easy to articulate. When I do reply in this way, it is usually met with warm smiles and often, "Growing up I always wished I had a twin too." My response seems to be a reassuring one, in harmony with society's idealised expectations about what twinship is and should be (Klein, 2021a). It may also reflect a common yearning for the ultimate kind of close, intimate relationship: a magical bond with another person that transcends all others (Burlingham, 1945a; Klein, 1963). But although the closeness of the bond between myself and Nick is the most apparent and important aspect of my twinship, it doesn't adequately answer the question "what is it like to be a twin"?

Unsurprisingly, this is a question that twins rarely ask other twins. But over the last few years I began to wonder if perhaps we should. For this research, this is essentially what I have done. I asked myself and three other twins to reflect in depth on what it is like to be a twin. This seemingly simple inquiry belies the complexity of what followed, as well as the significance of the act itself - of a twin asking another twin what it is like to be a twin. Because both the subject and object of this question are both twins, there is an ontological shift in the way that this question is ordinarily asked and received. Here, the question is asked and responded to from *within* the 'twin-world', rather than the 'non-twin world,' which also raises a paradox: how can we study something from which we have no perspective (Martinez, 2021a)? This is a paradox embraced by autoethnographic research, which considers the best way to examine and describe a culture might be to be part of it (Raab, 2013). In this respect, by starting from within the twin-world rather than approaching the investigation from outside it, the typical twin study field conditions are dramatically altered, as if pulled inside out.

## Current picture

Asking twins about their experience of being a twin is important for several reasons. Since the 1980s, the 'twinning rate' (the proportion of twin deliveries each year out of the total number of deliveries) has nearly doubled in many developed countries (Pison, Monden & Smits, 2015), with 1 in 42 people globally now born a twin, equivalent to 1.6 million children a year. This trend has largely been driven by increases in women's age at childbirth and in medically assisted reproduction (MAR). Although this growth has now plateaued, the significant increase in numbers of twins has given rise to a corresponding need to better understand the intricacies of twinship and the particular aspects that may both help and hinder twins throughout their lifespan. This is especially important for counselling psychologists and psychotherapists, who are likely to find more twins presenting for therapy in the coming years. Naturally, as practitioners we might turn to the psychological literature to help with this, and certainly there is no shortage of academic (and popular) texts on twins that attempts to support this need. My own experience navigating a course through the psychological literature on twins though, first as a trainee integrative psychotherapist and more lately as a practitioner-researcher in the development of this study, left me feeling uneasy. Researchers have compared, contrasted, idealised and sometimes pathologised twin participants in a manner that seems to resemble the real-life lived experience of many twins, myself included. Although there have been numerous helpful and important contributions to our understanding of twins as well, taken as a whole, "The prevailing view in current psychological research is that twins are abnormal and even deviant" (Davis, 2016, p.236). A critique of this research highlights how this prevailing view may in-fact mirror the broader sociocultural discourses and stereotypes of twinship (Stewart, 2000; Bacon, 2010), and that twins potentially form a binarily defined, largely invisible, geographically dispersed, non-self-aware and non-self-identifying minority group within the global singleton populace (Hart, 2021a). Furthermore, from immersing oneself in the psychological literature on twins, it becomes apparent that something is missing: the voices of twins themselves. The subjective lived experience of being a twin, full of potential for helping practitioners more fully understand the complexities of twinship, has gone largely unheard. Not only does this represent a significant gap in knowledge for clinicians, it also highlights an important opportunity to advance counselling psychology and psychotherapy's social justice agenda, by raising awareness of and challenging issues affecting minority groups. Research that specifically addresses these issues is therefore of critical importance.

## Giving voice to twins

I am not alone in my belief that 'giving voice' to twins in the psychological literature is important. I have been heartened during the development of this research by the voices of other practitioner-researchers from within the 'twins for twins' movement (for example Klein, Hart & Martinez, 2021; Friedman, 2018) who, like me, have been calling for the subjective experience of twinship to feature more prominently. Together, we agree that "The real-life stories of twins have yet to be told… [and] we believe deeply that these stories must be told" (Martinez, 2021, p.72). First-hand stories of twinship are further necessary because of the limitations of objectivist science in providing insight into the experience of being a twin in a twin relationship. This is true more broadly for the investigation of subjectivity, and the postmodern critique of the dominant positivist approach to research has paved the way for continued innovation in qualitative research methodologies since the 'crisis of representation' in the 1980s and 90s. This innovation presented several possible methodological options for this present research, with narrative approaches leading the way. Indeed, narrative is perhaps "The best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their own lives" (Richardson, 1990, p.183). Writing self-narratives and documenting the narratives of others, then, has the potential to facilitate a deeper knowing and understanding of those in a given culture or group (Raab, 2013) - this speaks to the heart of autoethnography and the aims of this study.

## The spaces between

Also at the heart of autoethnographic research is a commitment to confronting dominant forms of representation and power, in an attempt to "Reclaim, through self-reflective response, representational spaces that have marginalised those…at the borders" (Tierney, 1998, p.66). In Western societies, twins are born into highly individualistic cultures, yet twin identities are not constituted in traditional individualistic terms (Allen et al, 2000). Twins can therefore be understood as occupying liminal cultural spaces (Ibid), *between states*, existing on "cultural fault lines" (Davis, 2014, p.6), often unknowingly straddling the complex situation of existing within and between the 'twin-world' and the 'non-twin world.' Supported by an autoethnographic methodology, this study aims to reclaim a representational space for the unheard and sometimes marginalised twin voices in psychological research, inviting twins - including myself - to discover and articulate our hidden twin-worlds. By opening a space for twins to tell their stories, I hope that we may get underneath the myths, fantasies and stereotypes (Segal, 2017) and into the embodied, lived experience of twinship in all its layers of complexity. If the truths of autoethnography exist *between* storyteller and story listener,

then in this autoethnography they may dwell in the reader's engagement (Bochner, 2001) with the stories of twinship that follow. Although being a twin is in many ways extraordinary, these stories voice the struggles of ordinary people coping with difficult contingences of lived experience (Bochner, 2012), and they are an invitation for clinicians to journey into this otherwise often hidden 'twin-world' of experience.

## The other(s)

*Autoethnographic texts are always written with an 'other' in mind. The presence of another in autobiographical texts means that they are written with at least a double perspective: the author's and the other's. The eye of the other directs the eye of the writer.*

(Elbaz, 1987, p.14).

In my own account presented here, the eye of the other is my (br)other, and I consider this account to be essentially co-created; the literal adding of Nick's editorial voice to my written story sits within a broader context of the inseparable, co-created nature of my story and his. Discovering and telling my own twin story has been challenging; writing an autoethnography is certainly easier said than done (Wall, 2008). I did not know at the outset that this methodology would confront me with some of the very issues that I had been attempting to avoid – not least the representation of my self (Holt, 2003; Haynes, 2011), fear of exposure and vulnerability (Ellis, 2004) and my ambivalence about being seen. Along the way, I have responded to various challenges and dilemmas, for example integrating The Listening Guide (LG) (Gilligan, 2015) to take a softer "standing alongside" (Edwards & Weller, 2012, p.212) position when analysing participant stories, instead of what I felt to be a more objectifying "gazing at" (*ibid*) coding or thematic analysis approach. These 'creative adjustments' are perhaps metaphorical in the sense that they speak to the creative ways that each of us represented in this research have responded as best we can to the challenges of being a twin in the non-twin-world. Arising out of our stories are implications and considerations for clinical practice, presented at the end of this study, which I hope will be a valuable support for clinicians as they journey alongside twin clients too.

# Chapter 2: Literature Review

Although existing studies of twins remain dominated by biogenetic approaches (Segal, 2017), the rapid increase in the multiple maternity rate since the 1980s has stimulated research interest in other fields, most notably developmental psychology, sociology, and counselling and psychotherapy, which collectively provide the focus of the literature review that follows.

## Demographics and birth

### *A minority group*

Despite the rapid increase in the twinning rate since the 1980s, the data clearly shows that twins remain relatively rare (Allen, Allen, and Moore, 2019), with 3.18% of the global population - 245 million individuals - twins in March 2020 (Hart, 2021a). This raises the question, “Is it too far-fetched to consider twins a minority group” (Stewart, 2000, p.731)? The ‘cultural approach’ (Allen et al, 2020) to twin research, spearheaded by Stewart (2000) presents the case that is not, while Hart (2021a) identifies nine overlapping ways in which singleton anti-twin prejudice manifests – a topic I return to later in this review.

### *Twin zygosity*

Monozygotic (MZ) twins are formed when one fertilized egg (zygote) splits into two eggs, leading to the formation of two babies who share 100% of their genetic material (Bryan, 1983). Dizygotic (DZ) twins are created when two eggs are produced at the same time and both are fertilised, each by a different sperm, resulting in two babies who share as much genetic material as singleton siblings, about 50% (Withrow & Schwiebert, 2005). Recent genetic and epigenetic research illuminates a more complex picture though, with in-utero genetic mutation and epigenetics challenging the long-held assumption that MZ twins are ever 100% genetically identical (Hart, 2021). Furthermore, a third postulated form of zygosity - sesquizygotic - has recently been identified and is believed to be an exceptional intermediate between monozygotic and dizygotic twinning (Gabbett et al, 2019).

### *Pregnancy and birth*

In medicine, twinship is often seen primarily as a risk factor, especially from an obstetric perspective (Trikkonen et al, 2016). The infant mortality rate is about five times higher for twins than non-twins (Office of National Statistics, 2012) and twins are born on average

three weeks earlier (Rutter & Redshaw, 1991). However, most twins develop biologically healthily, and physical and cognitive disadvantages tend to be minimal or eradicated by the time of adolescence (Bryan, 2003; Åkerman & Suurvee, 2003).

Twin pregnancies are also associated with greater physical and mental health risks for mothers. Of particular significance for clinicians is that multiple births are a risk factor for postpartum maternal depressive symptoms (Choi, Bishai, and Minkovitz, 2009; Fraser, 2010), with approximately one in five mothers of twins and triplets diagnosed with postnatal depression (PND) and a further one in five thinking they may have had PND, but not receiving medical conformation or treatment (Fraser, 2010).

### *Challenges for caregivers*

Following on from the above, the practical and emotional challenges of caring for two babies simultaneously can often cause considerable stress for caregivers (Bryan, 2003), who tend to experience greater psychological distress than parents of non-twins, with feelings of exhaustion, anxiety and depression common (Goshen-Gosttstein, 1980). An insightful qualitative analysis of mothers' beginning relationship with their twins highlighted these challenges and found a tendency to treat their children as a 'unit' for efficiency (Anderson & Anderson 1987), which may be at the cost of each twin's individual identity development and broader psychological health (Klein, 2003; Schave & Ciriello, 1983). Elsewhere, parents of twins have been found to be less responsive to their infants than those with singletons (Bryan, 2003). An investigation into maternal behaviour and attachment in low-birth-weight twins (30 pairs) and singletons (26 pairs) found that mothers of twins showed fewer initiatives and responses to their babies and were less responsive to both positive signals and to crying, i.e. they demonstrated lower capacity for affect attunement (Stern, 1984). Twin parent–child interaction is therefore likely to be impacted negatively because each twin receives less involvement from parents (Lytton, Conway, & Sauve, 1977).

## Developmental psychology literature

### *A different developmental context*

The idea that twinship constitutes a different developmental context is widely acknowledged in the literature (Penninkilampi-Kerola, 2006) and the presence of twins significantly impacts family relationships and dynamics (Goshen-Gottstein, 1980). Whereas non-twin siblings tend to adopt hierarchical roles based on age, sibling relationships in twin families are typically more intricate (Penninkilampi-Kerola, Moilanen & Kaprio, 2005) with the twins becoming the closest and most significant person in the life of the other from a very early age. It has been

suggested that the relationship between twins is likely to be more intense and constant than the relationship between a twin and his/her parents or siblings (Leonard, 1961), with the typical dyadic parent-child interaction becoming a triad with the twins forming the basic family dyad (Robin, Josse & Tourette, 1988). Psychodynamically, this may be replicated internally (Lewin, 2004) with the most powerfully internalised object for twins said to be the co-twin, not the primary caregiver. Although this present research cannot make claims regarding the validity of this, through in-depth qualitative inquiry it can nevertheless contribute to our understanding of how this complex picture might influence twin relationality, while also suggesting possible implications for clinical practice, for example with regards to the therapeutic relationship.

### *Attachment in twins*

Attachment theory, based on the joint work of John Bowlby (1969) and Mary Ainsworth (1964), has featured prominently in twin psychology research. Overall, the research indicates that the presence of the co-twin does not diminish the need for the mother, nor does the twin prefer the company of the co-twin to its mother (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006). For example, in a modification of Ainsworth's strange situation test (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970), soothing and comforting were sought from and provided by adult attachment figures only, not co-twin infant partners (Gottfried & Seay, 1994). In the same study it was found that upon reunion with mother following separation, the distress of an isolated twin may be transmitted to the co-twin who had remained with its mother during the separation period. However, twins provided significant security to their co-twin partners during twin-together separation from their mother, essentially acting as an "inhibitory buffer" (*ibid*, p.273) for each other against the distress caused by the strange situation isolation. So, while the presence of the co-twin does not diminish the need for the primary caregiver, the research suggests that twins can derive attachment benefits from having each other close by.

### *Twin-attachment: risk or protection?*

Recent research however challenges the idea that twins are more likely to be insecurely attached than singletons due to the challenges caregivers face in raising two infants simultaneously (e.g., Bryan, 2003; Anderson & Anderson 1987; Lytton et al, 1977), and therefore at greater risk of behavioural and emotional problems. In fact, rather than representing a risk factor, research is beginning to point to the potential protection that twinship can afford. For example, in a comparative study of attachment in Finnish twins and singletons, twins were found to be more often 'secure' attached to their parents than

singletons (Tirkkonen et al, 2008) indicating a higher level of bonding and commitment between parent and child. In a follow-up study assessing twin and singleton behavioural and emotional problems at age 4, twinship was shown to be a protective factor against internalising symptoms, such as withdrawal and somatic complaints, even when they were 'insecure-avoidant' attached to parents (Tirkkonen et al, 2016); the reverse was found for singleton children. The authors concluded that twinship can be a protective factor in the trajectory from toddler avoidant attachment to internalising problems at preschool age, explaining their findings by the fact that twins always have someone close by for support – their co-twin. Although this study cannot make claims regarding the above, presenting the life-stories of twins themselves can make a meaningful contribution to our understanding of the complexities of twin attachment, enriching the findings of previous researchers and perhaps challenging some of the dichotomous thinking that can limit its usefulness for clinicians.

### *Attachment in adult twins*

Like infant-caregiver and adult romantic bonds, adult twin relationships may also be considered attachments (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006), characterised by the same four functions defined by attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969): proximity seeking, separation distress, use of other as safe haven, and as a secure base. For example, self-report data from 62 adult twin (30 MZ, 32 DZ) and 928 non-twin adult participants found that twin siblings were more likely than non-twin siblings to utilise one another as attachment figures (Tancredy & Fraley, 2006) and less likely than non-twins to use their parents as an attachment figure, favouring their co-twin instead. Although the self-report nature of this study potentially undermines validity, overall, studies do generally indicate MZ twins to be closer than DZ twins across the lifespan (Landenberger et al, 2021; Tambs, Sundet & Berg, 1985; Neyer, 2002) with DZ twins closer than non-twin siblings too (Landrnberger et al, 2020; 2021; Neyer, 2002). While these quantitative studies do help inform clinicians about the potential significance of co-twin attachment, qualitative 'experience near' research (Hollway, 2009) about 'actual people,' in contrast to a more distanced positivistic approach (Bager-Charleson, 2020) like the studies above, can transform numbers into narrative, bringing to life the complexity and nuance for clinicians in a helpful way. For example, the safety and reliability that co-twin attachment might afford as indicated by the above research is meaningfully enriched by the below findings from a qualitative interview-based study:

> *He was always the one person that I could turn to if I had problems ... if I was scared, if I was nervous, I'd just turn to him, and he knew.*

(Tancredy, 1999, p.4)

*I can always fall back onto my twin and she can always fall back onto me.*

(*idem*, p.6)

Similarly in this present study, my intention is to gather, analyse and re-present complex material in storied forms that explains and describes human experience with much of its messiness and complexity still intact (Etherington, 2020), thereby contributing "intimate knowledge" (Mair, 1989, p.4) that allows the reader to respond emotionally, not just intellectually (Etherington, 2020).

### *Contemporary attachment and neurobiology*

Despite not specifically researching twins, contemporary attachment and neurobiology research emphasises implicit nonverbal processes occurring in dyadic relationships and is therefore of relevance to twinships. This perspective makes explicit a two-person reciprocal view of development, where inner and relational processes are co-constructed (Beebe & Lachmann, 2003) and each partner affects and is affected by the other. If these mutually attuned infant-caregiver synchronized interactions are fundamental to the ongoing affective development of the infant (Schore, 2003) and its ability to regulate emotion in the future as an adult (*ibid*; Siegel, 1999), what might this look like in twin dyads? This is an intriguing – and important – question, given the central significance of implicit nonverbal processes in both psychological development and psychotherapeutic change, as highlighted by researchers such as Schore (1994, 2001) and the Boston Change Process Study Group (BCPSG 1998, 2002). Furthermore, that implicit nonverbal interaction between twins starts in-utero at around 14 weeks gestation (Castiello et al, 2010) hints at some of the communicative intricacies that twins might develop (Martinez, 2021b), and perhaps an enhanced capacity for empathy that has also been reported by researchers (Schave & Ciriello, 1983; Smith 2008). These factors may of course be significant in twins' psychological development and wellbeing throughout the lifecourse, for example their capacity for – and expectations of – interpersonal relationships outside of the twinship (Klein, 2021a; Hart, 2021b) - including a therapeutic relationship. Exploring such intricacies in twin communication is something that this present study is well suited to due to the nature of the in-depth narrative methodology and the focus on intersubjective reflexivity, where interaction between participants and myself as the researcher makes an integral contribution to the findings (Etherington, 2020). A further future contribution to our understanding could also come from research investigating if and how neurobiological development is influenced in

twin-dyads, due to the establishment and refinement of implicit modes of communication between twins since in-utero and beyond.

## Clinical psychotherapeutic literature

Given the developmental picture outlined above, a number of theorists explicitly argue that the complexities of twinship cannot be overstated (Sheerin, 1991; Lewin 1994; Burlingham 1945,1946; Ackerman, 1975; Klein, 2003, 2012, 2017; 2021c; Friedman, 2018). Researchers have understandably sought to consider what challenges these complexities might pose for twins – and clinicians working with them. Overall, it is a concern for closeness and differentiation that is a consistent and unique theme in psychological research pertaining to twins (Allen et al, 2020) with issues typically clustering around separation-individuation, personality and identity, dependence, and interpersonal relationship difficulties.

### *Separation-individuation*

From a psychodynamic perspective, the differing internal structures of twins suggest that while singletons have a dyadic problem to solve, twins have a triadic problem (Leonard, 1961; Siemon, 1980): “Each twin has to engage with the processes of, and tensions between, separateness and relatedness to both the other twin and to mother, and later to father” (Lewin, 2004, p.67). Separation from the internal twin, of ‘oneness’ (Howell, 2013), the ‘we-entity’ (Mellor, 2013), may therefore be experienced as a threat to the integrity of the self at a primal level (ibid) and may manifest in sadness, depression, confusion and anxiety as well as more serious feelings of grief consistent with the mourning of a significant loss (Siemon, 1980). Elsewhere in the literature the term ‘twinning reaction’ has been put forward to describe a fusion of object and self-representation in which the two merge, leading to a loss of ego boundary (Jarrett & McGarty, 1980) or self-non-self-confusion (Ackerman, 1975). The struggle for separateness may therefore result in a revolt against the co-twin to affirm singularity (Sheerin, 1991). Yet this is likely to occur against the backdrop of a degree of dependency and ‘need’ for the co-twin, thereby giving rise to strongly ambivalent models of interaction which may form the basis of interpersonal relationships with the outside world in the future.

### *Patterns of twinship*

Related to the above, Klein (2003) proposes ‘patterns of twinship’ to help articulate the possible outcomes of twin-attachment processes and how this informs the nature of the co-

twin relationship and identity in adult twins. This model emphasises that it is the quality and style of parenting in infancy and childhood that fosters these patterns of twinship. The extent to which a deep attachment is achieved between caregiver and infant – and between the twin pair – along with the degree to which parents foster individuality in both twins is, according to Klein (2003, p.9), said to give rise to four patterns of twinship:

- *Unit identity twins*: characterised by extreme co-dependency between twins, emerging when parenting has been extremely limited or psychologically abusive.
- *Interdependent identity twins*: exhibit some co-dependency but are more likely to develop significant relationships outside the twinship.
- *Split identity twins* are interdependent in ways that are conflicted rather than harmonious.
- *Individual identity twins* are raised as individuals, have a very close attachment to their twin but are also capable of functioning very successfully on their own in separate careers and relationships.

While the current lack of supporting research limits the validity of this typology, research that foregrounds the subjective experience of twins themselves such as this present study can supplement it, adding greater nuance to our understanding of the complexities of twin identity.

### *Twins in therapy*

The review above highlights some of the issues that may bring twins to counselling and psychotherapy. Complimenting this, Friedman (2018, p.22), a twin herself, provides a useful summary of common presenting issues for twins based on her clinical experience:

- *Panic or anxiety attacks*: resulting from separation from one's twin after being in a dependent attachment.
- *Depression*: resulting from inability to acknowledge or confront difficult feelings relating to one's twinship, e.g. jealousy, betrayal, sadness, etc.
- *Uncontrollable anger*: resulting from resentment and anger at co-twin's dependency, or issues pertaining to fairness and equality.
- *Feelings of abandonment*: occurring when one's twin begins to separate and become more independent.
- *Self-loathing and self-esteem issues*: resulting from being dependent on one's twin and unable to separate.

- *Guilt*: resulting from being critical or harsh to one's twin; separating or wanting to separate from one's twin; accomplishing or attaining more than one's twin.
- *Difficulty forming attachments and social anxiety*: resulting from inexperience with relationships and the expectation of instant or deep intimacy.

Although clinical case studies do tend to confirm the expected pathology emphasised in the theoretical literature (Pearlman, 2001), relatively few studies investigating the personality of adult twins exist. One such study (Ibid) compared MZ twins, DZ twins and singletons (n=30 in each group) on objective measures of separation-individuation, object relations and self-esteem, and found no significant differences: the data did not support the popular notion that twins face special problems with personality development or establishing and maintaining close relationships. It was however suggested that the extent to which twins are raised to be either alike or different may be significant in the development of the investigated issues, so further research may look to control for such differences. Although methodologically unable to do that, in-depth qualitative inquiries into the experience of being a twin, such as in this study, can help bring to life these potential issues in a manner that quantitative research studies are unable to do, thereby complementing existing research and inviting clinicians into the twin-world and the challenges faced in a more evocative, impactful way.

### *The twin in the transference*

The psychotherapy situation itself is a particularly conducive context for recreating a 'twin relationship': two people sharing a room and a common purpose, developing a secret language, a close relationship, and a special bond (Joseph, 1961). The patient's need to recreate the twin situation may therefore be fostered by psychotherapy and be present in the transference. The therapist may also need to create a twinship, and this may be particularly so for therapists who are also twins (see Burlington,1945 for a psychoanalytic exploration of twin fantasies). Lewin (2004), not a twin herself, talks of her experience as a 'transference twin' in psychoanalytic work with twin clients, describing herself as an "insider with an outsider's perspective" (2009, p.65) and warning of the potentially intense and tenacious transference relationship which may develop between analyst and patient. Importantly, she notes that analysis of this transference may be experienced as a threat of unity to the internal twin pair, and therefore resisted (Lewin, 2004). Meanwhile Wright (2010) makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the experience of being a twin in long-term psychodynamic psychotherapy. Reflecting on the transference relationship in a way that supports Lewin's insights above, Wright (p.268) cautions:

*If you choose to become my therapist, be prepared to become my twin. And my mother and my father and my brothers and my sister and my favourite English teacher from secondary school. But most of all, know that you will become my twin.*

Based on the above reflections from Wright and Lewin, clinicians might feel somewhat wary about this aspect of the work, perhaps therefore entering it defensively or reluctantly, which may be unhelpful. Kohut's ideas on twinship transference (1971) and its subsequent development by contemporary self psychologists (e.g. Togashi, 2010; Togashi & Kottler, 2012), who see twinship as the most prominent and fundamental selfobject experience (*ibid*), suggests the possibility of a more benign transference, which might naturally hold particular meaning and resonance for twins. Building on Kohut's (1971) position, where "the yearning for twinship is experienced by an individual who seeks a merger with the other, but who, to some extent, recognises the other as a psychologically separate existence" (p.122), Togashi & Kottler (2012, p.331) tease out and describe seven 'faces of twinship', emphasising the multifaceted nature of this phenomenon:

- *Twinship as something between merger and mirroring*
- *Twinship as a process of mutual finding*
- *Twinship as a sense of belonging*
- *Twinship as a way of passing on talents and skills*
- *Twinship in silent communication*
- *Twinship as a sense of being a human among other human beings*
- *Twinship in trauma*.

How might these different faces of twinship manifest in the work with a twin? Better understanding this and the healing potential of twinship experiences for twins in therapy is something that this present study may contribute to, by bringing clinician readers 'into relationship' with the subjective experience of being a twin in therapy.

### *Singleton psychology perspective*

It has been suggested that non-twin sibling relationships have often been taken as the yardstick by which twinships are evaluated (Allen et al, 2020). Furthermore, developmental psychology has largely failed to adapt its infant-caregiver dyadic framework to a triadic model, instead assuming a singleton-psychology framework that may not contribute to twin therapeutic healing (Hart, 2021a). An example of this can be seen in a highly cited paper that explores some of the complexities of psychoanalytic work with an identical twin

(Magagna, 2007). Much of this therapeutic work is clearly skilful and sensitive, yet the title of the paper, “Transformation: from twin to individual” - is less so. While the therapy was transformative, the client nevertheless clearly remains a twin! Furthermore, the title suggests that the therapeutic aim is to somehow ‘cure’ Hannah of her twinship, as if it was a presenting issue. This implicit pathologising of the twin relationship might risk reinforcing twin stigma as well as encouraging therapists working with twins to be overly invested in separation, which may not be appropriate, or indeed ethical. Although apparent, hearing directly from twins about their psychotherapeutic experiences can therefore make an especially important contribution to our understanding of the issues twins may face in this regard, which is one of the aims of this present study. A consideration of the social and cultural influences on twinship helps makes sense of this above-identified risk and further emphasises the pressing need to hear from twins themselves to provide a more balanced and representative picture.

## Sociocultural literature

Sociological research, or the ‘cultural approach’ (Allen et al, 2020) focuses on the “discourses, cultural logics and shared ways of reasoning that contour the boundaries of twinships” (p.54), with twinship seen as an “Irreducibly social phenomenon” (Stewart, 2000, p.719). A central argument from this perspective is that in Western societies, twins are born into highly individualistic cultures, yet twin identities are not constituted in traditional individualistic terms (Allen et al, 2000). In fact, the construction of twinship is paradoxical in nature: it is simultaneously seen as uncommon, special and unique, yet also confounding or deviating from “Normative expectations about self, personhood and identity” (Davis, 2014, p.6). From this perspective, twins occupy liminal cultural spaces (Allen et al, 2020), existing on “cultural fault lines” (Davis, 2014, p.6), and in something of a “double-bind” (Allen et al, 2020, p.51): to fully embrace the specialness of twinship would mean rejecting individualism, yet to reject the twinship would be to rebuff a connection that is prized as extraordinary. Western culture may want twins to appear as individuals, yet it also wants twins to be especially close, thereby forcing twins to balance expressions of individuality alongside their twinship (Bacon, 2006), with some seeing this is an “Unsolvable dilemma” (Stewart, 2003, p. 723). Understanding how twins are impacted by and respond to this dilemma is something that qualitative inquiry like this present study can help illuminate.

### *Being a twin in the non-twin world*

Researchers have made the case that twins potentially belong to a minority group (Stewart, 2000; Bacon, 2010; Davis, 2014), further compounded because most are non-self-aware and non-self-identifying in this respect (Hart, 2021a). Hart (2021a, p.235) identifies nine overlapping prejudicial ways in which singletons may view or interact with twins differently to non-twins, seeing them as potentially: *abnormally different*; *a binary unit* (rather than two unique individuals); *de-individualized "clones"*; *dysfunctional enmeshed persons*; *possessors of a special co-twin bond*; *having "special" abilities*; *deserving of constant comparison*; *requiring birth order identification*; and "*lab-rats*" ideal for scientific experiments.

To help emphasise this issue, a theoretical distinction between the 'non-twin world' (or 'singleton world') and the 'twin-world' is proposed (Klein et al, 2021; Davis, 2014; Stewart, 2000), whereby the former is structured and optimised for non-twins. From this perspective, "Twins live in a singleton dominated world where their respective identities can become confused or conflated and their relationship or twinship…is denigrated more than praised." (Davis, 2014, p.6). Stewart's (2000) review of twin stereotypes, which will be overly familiar to any twin readers, adds weight to this point. While many quantitative research studies have and continue to make valuable contributions to our knowledge about twins, at best they remain less suited to drawing out the complexity of the lived experience of twinship, and at worst may reinforce the 'lab-rat' issue and the general objectification of twins that part-defines the experience of being a twin. Qualitative research like this present study can therefore make a much-needed contribution here by inviting twins to speak about their subjective lived experience of twinship, thereby raising awareness of and challenging prejudiced and uninformed perspectives highlighted by Davis (2014), Hart (2021a) and Stewart (2000).

### *The narrative and autoethnographic contribution: voices of twinship*

Research, including this present study, is beginning to explore how twins navigate being a twin in the non-twin-world and the 'double-bind' identified above. In an autoethnographic study particularly relevant to this current research, Davis (2014, p.6) illuminates the "lived, grounded, day-to-day and lifetime practical experiences and challenges of being a twin" through a study that included participant observation at three twin festivals and two international twin research conferences, along with narrative data obtained during conversations with twenty-two sets of twins, and the author's own lifelong experiences of twinship with her identical twin. The value of this autoethnographic methodology, where the

author is positioned as an expert, both as a twin and a researcher, is that it illuminates twinship through the lens of cultural psychology, where twins' own perspectives on the twin experience can be compared and contrasted with the perspectives of scientists who research twins (Davis, 2014). Adopting the phrase 'self-work', Davis' research shows how, rather than being passive and helpless, as some of the psychological literature on twins portrays, twins are active and skilful agents in their own experiential worlds, advocating and enacting "alternative models of identity, relation and selfhood within the wider domains of the Western culture" (ibid, p.7).

While this may be true, by her own admission, in the development of the study, Davis found herself becoming a 'militant twin' (p.33), championing twins and twinship and resisting the more negative or medicalised portrayals of twins in the popular and academic literature. Although this political, social justice agenda is characteristic of some autoethnographies, I wonder if in this instance it may risk an overemphasis on the active and empowering aspects of twinship and underplay the passive and disempowering, which also appear in Davis' own account. For example, Davis recounts how even as an adult she automatically positioned her body alongside her sister's for inspection by a yoga instructor, who was intent on cataloguing their physical similarities and differences:

*We enacted what, in retrospect, appears to be a long-embodied routine…although neither of us realised it at the time, we were performing our twinship. Realising an assessment was at hand, our bodies automatically moved together, and our faces smiled widely…what I found remarkable was that we just did this without thinking (Davis, 2014, p.53).*

The act of 'performance' and performing twinship emerges elsewhere in narrative accounts of twinship and in the sociocultural literature on twins. Within such a perspective, as Stewart (2000, p.725) reflects, "Twins as actors 'perform' improvisations around already 'given' social identities, namely, the role(s) of a twin as distinct from the role of a non-twin." Several studies provide a valuable sense of how twins actually carry out this self-work and perform their twinship. For example, a narrative analysis of the life stories of 20 older twins aged between 78 and 90 years showed that twins tended to describe themselves from the point of differences in relation to the co-twin (Pietilä, Björklund & Bülow, 2013). The design of this study emphasises the role language serves in gaining access to people's inner worlds, with stories seen as verbalised interpretations of personal experience, and narratives as essentially identity performances (Mishler, 1999) by which people make claims for who they are and would like to be (Pietilä et al, 2013). The authors sorted participant stories or 'episodes' by life stage, with stories concerning presentation of self then compared and

contrasted with each other. Three overall categories were proposed: *alikeness imposed by others, separating life events, and unlikeness emphasized by twins.* The authors suggest that an emphasis on unlikeness was a way of trying to establish a position as an individual within the co-twin relationship and to assert one's individuality to the rest of the social environment. In addition to the rich first-hand accounts of twinship, of particular value to therapists is the finding from this research that for twins, "to claim oneself as an individual was an ongoing identity work along the life course" (p.339). This seems to challenge the assumption that identity work for twins is something done and achieved – or not – during childhood and adolescence, indicating a potentially important area for therapeutic work with adult and older twins.

Määttä, Päiveröinen, Määttä & Uusiautti (2016) adopted a similar design to investigate how five female identical twins described the development of their individuality. Through in-depth interviews and essays written by the twins in their own time, what emerged from the narratives was how individuality developed within the interactions between the twins' sense of belonging together and other social relationships and relational domains such as the wider family and school context. The challenge of balancing individuality with togetherness was repeatedly highlighted, for example, one participant reflected: "I have been able to fulfil myself a lot, but inevitably, the other's choices have directed my own choices too" (p.39). From a methodology perspective, privileging thick description and foregrounding the voice of the twin participants themselves provides readers with a rich account of twinship and the nuances of identity development for twins. With the findings largely confirming existing research in this area, the contribution of this study perhaps lies more in the value of hearing directly from twins themselves rather than necessarily expanding knowledge of twin identity issues.

Another study (Fichtmüller, 2021) investigating how twins experience and view their identity goes a step further by offering new interpretations. In this study, an intuitive inquiry methodology was used whereby intuitive ways of knowing are joined with the rigour of human science research (Anderson & Braud, 2011). The method involved a five-stage iterative process which included participant interviews with six twins and the author's own reflective account of twinship, which were presented as personal and meta-narratives. From this data, multiple interpretive lenses were provided, with 'new lenses' highlighting unexpected breakthroughs in understanding through the research. One such lens that seems particularly valuable because it helps move beyond the individual or twin identity dichotomy that permeates the literature on twins, states:

*Identifying, witnessing, and embracing all aspects of the twinship no matter how confused, splintered or contradictory they may seem, seems to be the key to a sense of wholeness for twins, and the key to allowing the twin to move beyond the prepersonal and personal into the transpersonal (p.23).*

Participant perspectives on identity development therefore indicated the possibility for twins to embrace both an individual and a joint identity and in some cases, transcend both; "Embracing all aspects of both identities created a sense of wholeness for twins" (Fichtmüller, 2021, p.16).

Of course, it is possible to critique intuitive inquiry as a research methodology; the intuitive, subjective nature of this approach means that it will not be embraced by researchers favouring more traditional 'scientific' approaches to data analysis. Furthermore, although scientific rigour is emphasised as integral, a lack of transparency in terms of what was actually involved in the five-stage iterative process and how the researcher arrived at their findings might limit its influence. That said, I agree with West's perspective (2011) on the importance of incorporating the tacit dimension into qualitative research in counselling psychology: "I would maintain that good qualitative data analysis has always involved hunches, inspired moments, use of the felt sense/body sensations whether explicitly included within the research report or not" (West, 2011, p.44). Because this tacit approach mirrors fairly common practices within humanistic counselling psychology (*ibid*), it may also serve to narrow the gap between therapeutic research and practice explored by Bondi (2012), where practitioner-researchers feel less able to make use of the embodied in their research, while routinely doing so in clinical practice. This perspective is supported by Bager-Charleson and Kasap (2017, p.2) who call for "greater epistemic congruence between relational and emotionally attuned practice for both therapists and researchers", suggesting that emotional and embodied responses to data analysis – "embodied situatedness and emotional entanglement" (p.1) may contribute valuably to research findings. This is something very much embraced by autoethnographic research and central to this present study as well.

Also embracing the tacit dimension is a study by Lousada (2009) exploring the under-researched population of opposite sex twins, who Segal (1999) refers to as "unseen twins" (p.72) because they are neither same sex nor identical in appearance and are therefore often unobserved. Despite this, or perhaps partially because of this, opposite sex twins are said to be at greater risk of mental health difficulties than same sex twins (Klaning, Bo Mortensen and Ohm Kyvik, 1996). The researcher's clinical orientation as a psychodrama

psychotherapist underpinned the Transcendental Phenomenological Methodology of the study, which embraced spontaneity and creative practices like painting and play as well as the verbal thoughts and reflections of the three opposite-sex pairs of twins who took part, “to illuminate what was hidden and forbidden in the relationship experiences of opposite sex twins” (Lousada, 2009, p.46). Among the many valuable insights from this study emerged the theme of *resonance*, whereby participants found they twinned with any member of the group they were paired with, as they did with their own twin. As one participant put it, they “sort of fit together” (p.141). The researcher observed that resonance was something the twins had no control over, arguing that it was deeply unconscious and beyond simple relational exchange, therefore belonging to “questions unanswered about womb experience” (p.141). Although the methodological approach to the study cannot make hard claims about the truth of this assertion, in this present research, participant wonderings about womb experience – including my own – may help further emphasise the likely significance of the pre-birth world for twins and the possible influence this has on psychological development and relationality, whether that be through a transpersonal lens or perhaps a neurobiological one, as I outline in an earlier section.

Resonance might overlap somewhat with intimacy, which was the subject of a qualitative interview study aiming to answer the question “how do twins articulate intimacy within their twinship” (Allen, Allen, & Moore, 2019., p.55). The research focus on how twins *articulate* intimacy aligns with cultural and constructive perspectives on twinship, which stresses that twins’ lived experience occurs within a society that often takes individualism for granted (*ibid*). 31 twins participated in individual interviews about their relationship with their co-twin, with a thematic analysis then carried out on this data which included several rounds of inductive coding. This process helped the researchers move beyond a categorical conceptualisation of intimacy, instead proposing a continuum of ‘twintimacy’ spanning from high to low – with high twintimacy constituted by presence, interdependence, and positivity, and low twintimacy created through distance, independence, and negativity. Importantly, unlike other sibling relationships, twintimacy was informed by the cultural assumption that twins are extraordinary, which high twintimacy twins embraced and low twintimacy twins resisted. One of the contributions of thematic analysis in this study is the distillation of emergent themes from the data into findings that, from a clinician’s perspective, feel useful, for example in terms of how practitioners might formulate their twin client’s presenting issues along a twintimacy continuum. Future qualitative research could expand on this by considering what high or low levels of twintimacy might mean in the context of a therapeutic relationship. Furthermore, a twintimacy framework might be adopted to explore how twinship

impacts other significant relationships, for example with siblings (see Greenwood, 2018b below).

In a further narrative-based study, Greenwood (2018) carried out in-depth qualitative interviews with 113 identical twins. Like I did in this present study, the researcher aimed to invite twins to tell their own story about what it is like to be a twin, however deciding not to disclose that she was also an identical twin to participants until after the interviews – if at all. This reflects a fundamentally different position to the one I have taken with my own research, which I explore in the methodology chapter that follows. Among the important findings from this research are that first and future romantic relationships are potentially affected by one's status as an identical twin; identical twins' sibling relationships can be negatively affected due to their status as an identical twin; identical twins may benefit from the "buffering effect", whereby they are shielded from some life adversity by their co-twins; and that challenges for identical twins include the impact of being geographically separated from their twin. Although these findings are useful to a broad audience including counsellors, teachers, parents, and twins themselves, I wonder if Greenwood's research decision not to disclose her twinship, aiming for a more objective stance, may have limited the nuance and level of depth that participants were able to reach in their narratives. This is something I aim to move beyond in this present study, by embracing my subjectivity as a twin and being curious and open to how that might influence the co-created narrative accounts that emerge.

As part of this above research, Greenwood (2018b) carried out an additional study investigating the potential effect of the twin relationship on their non-twin sibling relationships, which was identified as an important yet under-researched area. 94 of the overall 113 identical twin participants had other siblings and were therefore eligible for inclusion, with the study following the same methodological approach of semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews, providing an opportunity for identical twins to "reveal to 'outsiders' what it is like to be an identical twin having to maintain other sibling relationships" (Greenwood, 2018b, p.8). Results of the study revealed that over half of participants believed that their status as an identical twin did affect the closeness of their non-twin sibling relationships. Some twins were however unsure of the role of their twinship, while about one-half adamantly believed that being a twin had nothing or little to do with the lack of closeness in their other sibling relationships. The study therefore suggests that the experience of being an identical twin and the resulting close attachment between the twins does have the potential to negatively affect the closeness of non-twin sibling relationships (Greenwood, 2018b), which is clearly an important consideration for parents as well as professionals working with twins and those working with non-twin siblings. However, the findings suggest

age differences between twins and their siblings may be as important a factor, with gender differences also shown to be significant, and therefore highlighting the need for further research. Furthermore, incorporating the voices of the non-twin siblings could also support the validity of this research while simultaneously providing richer narratives of family experience. It might also mitigate against the risk of enacting the 'third-wheel' experience that non-twin siblings often report, as highlighted in the study – which might also be the subject of future research.

The above studies highlight the important contribution that narrative-based research has made by foregrounding the voices of twins themselves. In the last few years, practitioner-researchers such as Klein, Hart and Martinez (2021) and Friedman (2018), all twins themselves, have further stressed the critical importance of broadening the twin psychology academic literature to include more first-hand accounts of twinship, particularly - but not exclusively - for mental health practitioners. Some recent publications do include narrative and autobiographical accounts of twinship from these authors themselves, along with clinical vignettes and broader research-informed consideration of the psychology of twinship, thereby representing something close to autoethnographic in nature. For example, Martinez (2021a) in a chapter calling for a phenomenological approach to the study of twinship, writes an autoethnographic account of her own twinship, evocatively - and courageously - 'showing' the reader her struggle with suicidal ideation, which she now recognises to be an outcome of the terrible isolation she felt away from her twinship, despite her natural ease at connecting with others and her popularity amongst peers, friends and colleagues:

*I had a very well-formed twin-self that was naturally oriented toward connections with others. My sense of self privileged other persons' perspective of me because that is what allowed me to make connections with them. What I didn't realise at the time was that this most basic way of relating to others left me disconnected from my own feelings beyond my sense of other people's feelings. That is how it became possible that even while I was seen as so positive, level-headed, caring, understanding, and even inspiring, I was at the same time crafting an internal cellblock to which I returned again and again to find comfort in imagining and planning my own death.*

(Martinez, 2021a, p.71)

Martinez concludes the chapter by explaining, "I have included this very personal account of my life experience because I think it makes clear that twinness is never simply a feature of one's life, but rather, is imbued in our very existence." Her evocative and vulnerable writing, hallmarks of autoethnography, powerfully illuminate an experience of twinship which may

otherwise go unheard, stressing that more real-life stories of twins must be told (Klein et al, 2021) to support twins and non-twins alike to better understand the complexities of twinship.

## Research aims and questions

Accordingly, this study aims to reclaim a representational space for the unheard and sometimes marginalised twin voices in psychological research, inviting twins - including myself - to discover and articulate our hidden twin-worlds for both cultural insiders (twins) and cultural outsiders (non-twins) and for counselling psychologists and psychotherapists in particular.

In this research, my aim is to explore the complexity of the twin experience in relational terms and how this may have an impact on the therapeutic dyad and process. I am interested in the subjective experience of being a twin; what it is like for twins to navigate, negotiate and perform twinship, and what they have to say about their experience of being counselling psychology and psychotherapy clients. My research questions include:

- In what ways do adult twins understand their twinship to be significant in their lives?
- In what ways might the twin-bond influence twins' relationality and being-in-the-world, including the world of counselling and psychotherapy
- What might counselling psychologists and psychotherapists need to be aware of when working with a twin?

## Contribution to the field

This study aims to make a meaningful contribution to the field of counselling psychology and psychotherapy by adding to the extant body of research that currently foregrounds the subjective experience of twinship and approaches this subject from within 'the twin-world,' rather than from outside of it. "Twins talking with twins about their experience of their twin in their twin relationship is an essential first step" (Martinez, 2021a, p.53) in moving beyond the limitations of objectivist research and providing richer, more nuanced and layered accounts of twinship. The primary audience for this research is counselling psychologists and psychotherapists, so that they may be better placed to understand and work with twins in clinical practice. A series of implications and considerations for clinical practice are presented to further support clinicians working with twins. The study also has broader relevance for practitioners and researchers in allied fields such as social work and teaching,

along with twins in general who might benefit from hearing other twins share their stories as part of their own process of healing and transformation, which can also be considered an aim of autoethnographic texts. By ‘giving voice’ to twins, a minority group in society (Hart, 2021; Stewart, 2000), this study also contributes to advancing counselling psychology and psychotherapy’s social justice agenda. This agenda is similarly important to autoethnography, and in the chapter that follows I provide a rationale for why this methodology is well suited to the aims of the study and addressing the current problematic knowledge gap facing clinicians working with twins.

# Chapter 3: Methodology

## Rationale for autoethnography

My rationale for adopting an autoethnographic methodology is multi-layered. As I explore over the following pages, it is well suited to my specific research aims; it is sympathetic to my values as a person and as an integrative psychological therapist; and the tensions inherent within the methodology itself speak directly to aspects of the experience of twinship. For me, this methodology also illuminates and challenges central themes from my own twinship, relating to representation of self (Holt, 2003; Haynes, 2011), being in the between (Siddique, 2011), vulnerability and exposure (Ellis, 2004), and ambivalence about being seen.

### *Historical and philosophical context*

Like many other qualitative research methods, the origins of autoethnography trace back to the 'crisis of representation' in the social sciences of the 1970s and 1980s, where the idea that researchers could separate themselves from the research process and experience (Adams, Jones & Ellis, 2015) came under critique from poststructuralist and postmodernist thinkers. The identity crisis (Reed-Danahay, 2002) that followed prompted the rethinking of the form and purpose of sociocultural investigation and description (Ellis, 2004), and called into question many objectives and practices of mainstream social science research (Adams et al, 2015), particularly the traditional ideas of an objectively accessible reality (Bochner, 2012), the bias against affect and emotion, the refusal to acknowledge the influence of social identity, and a general neglect of ethical considerations for research participants (Adams et al, 2015). Out of this reimagining also emerged a turn towards narrative approaches, where emphasis was placed on the stories people told about their lives as both a means of knowing and a way of telling about the social world (Bochner, 2012).

### *Narratives and storytelling*

Underpinning the narrative turn was a belief that "Narrative is the best way to understand the human experience because it is the way humans understand their own lives" (Richardson, 1990, p.183). Indeed, we all live storied lives, and our stories are relational, embodied and performative (Grant & Zeeman, 2012) – something that I observe and participate in as a relational psychotherapist in clinical practice too. Here, listening and facilitating the telling of stories is foundational, and bearing witness (Siddique, 2011) to people's life stories can be transformational. In this space, "New meanings can be made and new stories told, stories

that may make life more liveable through an enrichment of meaning (Bondi, 2013, p.4). Of the myriad qualitative research methodologies available to me then, it was narrative approaches that most resonated; it seemed natural to me that qualitative researchers should be storytellers, and storytelling should be one of their distinguished attributes (Wolcott, 1994). If “the twin world must be discovered and articulated by twins themselves” (Martinez, 2021b, p.99), then it was these stories from twins that I wanted to share in this research.

### *Choice of methodology*

Like Braun and Clarke (2020) I took the view that there is rarely one ideal method or methodology for a research project, and that a “hallowed method quest” (Braun and Clarke, 2020, p.44) is best avoided. Coherence of fit (Braun & Clarke, 2013) or methodological integrity (Levitt et al, 2017) are nevertheless important when making decisions about which approaches to adopt for a research study and so it was important to consider potential methodologies and methods in this context. Fundamental to this study is the intention to give voice to twins in order to explore the complexity of the twin experience in relational terms. Methodologies philosophically informed by phenomenology, and narrative in nature as discussed above, therefore seemed like a good fit. Narrative inquiry, like many other qualitative methodologies, may be considered “’small p’ phenomenological” (McLeod, 2022, p.114) and I began exploring this as a possible methodology for the study. I liked how the interplay between interviewer and interviewee is considered a core source of information (Miller, 2003); it seemed relational, emphasising mutuality, co-creation, and intersubjectivity, which I recognised as significant elements in my own twinship and ones that linked ‘the personal with the professional’ for me as a twin and a clinician. I noted the contribution of existing narrative inquiries on twins in the research literature. For example, Pietilä et al (2011) explored 35 older twins' experiences of the relationship with their co-twin over the life-course using a semi-structured interview approach. Interviews were transcribed and then organised into lines, stanzas and strophes to facilitate the identification of stories relating to twinship, which were then sorted chronologically into childhood, adulthood and later life. When all of the individual stories had been analysed they were compared with each other and interpreted for findings. Although this study makes a valuable contribution by identifying various relationship patterns that could be helpful for me as a clinician, as a reader I felt somewhat distanced from the participants and their stories. The voices of twins were there, but somehow the analysis process left them feeling impersonal, and even secondary to the voices of the researchers. Twin voices appear as fragments and their individual stories are lost. While the aims of the study are met, I wondered if my own study could present fuller

accounts of twinship and foreground these, rather than merely present fragments of stories to support findings in the results section.

My own experience as a client in therapy and the way in which I had explored my twinship in this setting also made me question some approaches to counselling psychology qualitative research. Despite being carried out by counselling psychologists and psychotherapists and intended for this audience too, in the research literature on twins I recognised the gap between therapeutic research and practice identified by Bondi (2012) mentioned above, where the relational-embodied (Bager-Charleson and Kasap, 2017), the intuitive and tacit dimension (West, 2011) are somehow absent. It felt important to me to find a way to incorporate this into my own study, and so I began investigating intuitive inquiry (Anderson, 2004) and heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990) as possible options. As discussed in the literature review, Fichtmüller (2021) used intuitive inquiry to explore individuation and identity development in twins, with a particular focus on the transpersonal. In reading this study, I found myself much closer to both the researcher and the participants, due to the very relational writing style, the researcher's reflexive positioning of himself as a twin from the outset and his willingness to share significant aspects and experiences of his own twinship, relevant to the research question. Data in this study therefore consisted of not only participant narratives from interviews, but the personal narrative or story of the researcher as well. Feeling somewhat unsure how to move forward, I told my supervisor that I was drawn to narrative approaches and that I wanted to have the opportunity to work intuitively as well as analytically, like I do as a therapist. I also wanted to be challenged creatively as well as academically; I wanted to do something a bit 'different'. My supervisor suggested "Perhaps you could also include your own story?" I was introduced to autoethnography as a possible alternative to narrative or intuitive inquiry and was immediately inspired by this methodology. Papers such as Spieldenner's (2014) account of living with HIV and works by Caroline Ellis, such as "Final Negotiations" (1995) about caring for and losing her partner to chronic emphysema, brought me up close and personal with the messy, emotional, embodied reality of ordinary people coping with difficult lived experience (Bochner, 2012) in such a way that I hadn't imagined research could do. Rather than attempting to tidy up the messiness of lived experience into neat themes and theories, autoethnography seemed to embrace the reality of this messiness (Ellis, 2004). Paradoxically, I found these 'messy texts' to be useful as well as evocative, despite the absence of grand ideas and theories that I had associated with qualitative research. I was therefore persuaded that instead of setting out with new theories of twinship in mind, my research might instead focus first and foremost on being relational; on inviting a relationship between myself, participants and readers – a "turning together" (Bochner, 2012, p.160) – that might bring readers into the twin-world and closer to the

culture and phenomenology of twinship than might not otherwise be possible with other methodologies, such as Grounded Theory, that I had also been considering. The opportunity to foreground my own experience and tell my own story – to make myself more visible and vulnerable – evoked both excitement and apprehension. That it was consistent with a 'growing edge' in my clinical training at the time further encouraged me that autoethnography had the potential to be personally transformative (Raab, 2013) as well as make a valuable contribution to the literature on twins.

### *Gazing out and in*

Autoethnography includes methods of research and writing that combine autobiography and ethnography (Reed-Danahay, 2006), seeking to unite ethnographic (looking outward at a world beyond one's own) and autobiographical (gazing inward for a story of one's self) intentions (Schwandt, 2007). Thus, the subject (knower) and object (that which is being examined) are kept in simultaneous view (*ibid*). Autoethnographic researchers therefore describe and systematically analyse (*graphy*) their personal experience (*auto*) in order to understand cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2010; Quinn Patton, 2004) and to illuminate aspects of this culture or subculture to others, who may or may not be part of the same cultural group.

When writing an autoethnography, researchers aim to produce aesthetic and evocative "thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p.10) by discerning patterns of cultural experience – repeated feelings, stories and happenings (Ellis et al, 2010) as evidenced by collected data, which might include field notes, interviews with people also part of the same culture or sub-culture, and cultural artefacts. With regards to the autobiographical, researchers "Retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from or are made possible by being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity" (Ellis et al, 2011). These 'epiphanies' can be understood as remembered moments of significant impact in the trajectory of a person's life (Bochner & Ellis, 1992; Denzin, 1989), times of existential crises, or events after which life does not feel quite the same (Ellis et al, 2011). A reflexive use of autobiographical material therefore provides a valuable resource for exploring, presenting and representing the self (Haynes, 2006), although autoethnographers vary markedly in their emphasis on 'ethnos', 'auto', and 'graphy,' with different autoethnographies falling at different places along the continuum of each of these three axes (Ellis et al, 2010) and also presented or even performed in a variety of different mediums and ways (Haynes, 2011; Spry, 2001; Patton, 2004).

### *The between*

Researchers have also spoken about 'the between' in autoethnography and how this 'back and forth' process between auto and ethnos leads to a blurring of boundaries between the personal and the cultural (Ellis, 2008), between researcher and researched. Siddique (2011) talks of the discomfort created by this boundary blurring, stemming from her researcher position simultaneously within the insider's perspective (auto) and the outsider's perspective (ethnography). Nevertheless, she also suggests that this tension may contribute valuably to the processes of learning, reflection and meaning making. Indeed, this unique aspect of autoethnography allows for exploration of the interface of self-other boundaries (Siddique, 2011), which holds particular relevance for the present study, given the centrality of self-other and identity concerns for twins discussed in the literature review. Furthermore, the idea of situating myself in 'the between' sits comfortably with my integrative approach to psychotherapy, which emphasises intersubjective processes (Stolorow, Atwood & Orange, 2002), the co-constructed nature of relationships and meaning, and locates 'the between' as the source of much that is healing in psychotherapy (Hycner, 1993). Between-ness therefore permeates this study and links the personal and professional for me as a twin, therapist and autoethnographic practitioner-researcher.

### *A multiplicity of voices*

Raab (2013, p.6) suggests that "The beauty of an autoethnographic study is that the self and the participants appear together within a single narrative that carries a multiplicity of dialoguing voices." As I have been emphasising, giving voice to the unheard experience of twins is fundamental to this study, which comprises my own voice and three other twins – and indeed our respective co-twins – who are also present and implicated. With such a multiplicity of voices, one important consideration was where and how to situate my own within the study. My experience here aligns with Haynes (2011), who suggests that tensions relating to (re)presenting the self are at the heart of how autoethnographies are written and include questions and decisions about the extent and form of disclosure, difficulties in dealing with sensitive or very personal subjects, and the extent and form of theorisation. A willingness to turn towards vulnerability rather than shy away from it is consistently emphasised in the autoethnographic literature (Ellis, 1999, 2004; Ellis et al, 2010; Ellis & Bochner, 2000; Raab, 2013), and despite my ambivalence, this is something I have committed to; "When the autoethnographer becomes vulnerable and reveals his or her deepest thoughts, both writer and reader transcend to place where self-discovery occurs" (Raab, 2013, p.11). However, this must also be done discerningly. To write in a vulnerable

manner means exposing parts of the deeper self, but it does not mean any or all information should be shared with the reader (Behar, 1996); autoethnography should not simply be a confessional story, rather a compelling weaving of both story and theory (Chang, 2008; Raab, 2013; Ellis, 2004; Spry 2001). Researcher reflexivity can act as a 'bridge' here, allowing for dialogical inquiry of both self as other and the self in relation to theory (Haynes, 2011). However, there is considerable debate about the extent to which autoethnography should be "Narrative, emotional, therapeutic and self-focused as opposed to theoretical, analytical and scholarly" (Wall, 2016, p.2). These perspectives have seemingly become polarised between the 'evocative' camp (Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 2006) and the 'analytic' camp (Anderson, 2006; Atkinson 2006), and as such I found it initially challenging to understand where to position my own account, noting that, "What we understand autoethnography to be dictates how we undertake it" (Wall, 2016, p.5). More recently though, a middle ground has been proposed, in favour of a "Moderate… autoethnography that allows for innovation, imagination, and the representation of a range of voices in qualitative inquiry, while also sustaining confidence in the quality, rigor, and usefulness of academic research" (ibid, p.1). This aligns with my own view that autoethnographic texts must be evocative if they are to have impact, yet they must also be scholarly if they are to be considered 'research'. This is particularly true for practitioner-research such as this present study, which aims to make a positive contribution to clinical practice. I therefore position this present study as a 'moderate autoethnography.'

## Reliability, validity, generalisability

A particular challenge for the evaluation of qualitative research is that it has not been easy to move beyond the concepts of validity and reliability (McLeod, 2022), which are synonymous with quantitative research and firmly anchored in statistical procedures that are not applicable in qualitative studies (*ibid*). By necessity then, qualitative researchers have had to develop an alternative language for evaluating research, with the many suggestions and contributions here organised into broad themes known as 'big tent' criteria for excellence in qualitative research (Tracy, 2010). These criteria include elements such as *meaningful coherence*, whereby there is consistency between the goals of the study and the methods used; *sincerity*, which is concerned with how the researcher positions themselves in the study and is transparent about the challenges faced; and *credibility,* demonstrated by rich description, showing as well as telling, and evidence that the participants found taking part to be a meaningful experience (McLeod, 2022).

In terms of this present qualitative research, if twins can be considered as occupying marginal spaces in society, on 'cultural fault lines' (Davis, 2014; Stewart, 2000), the same can also be said about autoethnography and its place within qualitative research, which is the subject of ongoing debate (Wall, 2006). Sparkes (2000) suggested that autoethnography is at the boundaries of academic research because such accounts do not sit comfortably with traditional criteria used to judge qualitative inquiries. As discussed above, these traditional criteria of reliability, validity and generalisability as understood from a positivistic perspective cannot easily be applied to autoethnography (Holt, 2003) because different epistemological and ontological assumptions inform autoethnographic inquiry (Sparkes, 2000). When terms such as reliability and validity are applied to autoethnography, the context, meaning and use of these terms are therefore altered (Ellis et al, 2010). For example, epistemologically, autoethnography can be seen as focused on creating verisimilitude rather than making hard truth claims (Grant, 2010). In other words, traditional notions of validity should be more appropriately assessed with regards to whether the work evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is life-like, believable, and possible (Ellis et al, 2010). Another argument is that the validity of an autoethnography can be judged on whether it helps readers better communicate with or improve the lives of others different from themselves (Ellis, 2004). The usefulness of the autoethnographic story is therefore one measure of its validity (Bochner, 2002; Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al, 2010). The idea that validity is as much about the policing of research and to dismiss forms of research that fail to abide by these norms (Eisner, 1997) chimes with the experience of Sparkes (2000) and Holt (2016), who both described journal review boards who wished to see adherence to traditional scientific tenets (Haynes, 2011). The majority of comments for Holt (2016) were focused on making the autoethnography more realist, thereby enabling an evaluation using more established and acceptable criteria. Nevertheless, Ellis (1991, p.30) emphasises "That we have to take precautions in interpreting, generalizing, and eliminating bias here the same as we do with any data we collect is assumed."

With regards to this study, I used a number of specific procedures or techniques to enhance validity. For example, I provide a transparent paper trail that should allow for readers to follow (and repeat) the research process that took place between data collection, analysis and conclusions (McLeod, 2022); see page 40 for details of this procedure. I have focused on rich description of data, in the form of participant quotes and segments of interview transcripts, whereby I am 'showing' rather than just 'telling' (*ibid*). On page 46 I position myself as a researcher, providing information about my background, my approach to psychotherapy and the philosophical assumptions and ideas that underpin this. I consulted with participants at the end of interviews about their experience of being interviewed

(McLeod, 2022) and later taking part in the research more generally, incorporating details of this in the writeup of the study. Member checking also supported validity, whereby participants read the stories that I had written from their interviews and had the opportunity to comment and feedback on these.

The concept of generalisability in autoethnography is determined by whether the autoethnographer can illuminate unfamiliar cultural processes to the reader (Ellis et al, 2010). This differs to the more traditional notion of generalisability in quantitative research, which typically pertains to sample size and the degree to which findings can be considered applicable to populations beyond those studied. In autoethnography, it is suggested that generalisability be assessed by readers, who determine whether the study speaks to them about their experience or the lives of others (Ellis, 1999). In this study, my intention is that 'generalisability' may be achieved through the resonance of readers' lives and lived experience (Richardson, 1997), thereby opening up rather than closing down conversations (Ellis, 2004) about twins in counselling and psychotherapy. While the autoethnographic connection of the autobiographical and personal to the cultural and social has no explicit analytic commitment to generalisation, it instead reveals situated cultural influences and broader social relevance (Maréchal, 2009). In this respect, the contribution of an autoethnography might be assessed more on the number and quality of the questions that the work raises than by the answers or conclusions offered (Eisner, 1997).

For an autoethnographer, questions of 'reliability' refer partly to the narrator's credibility, which in this present study is supported by my researcher-reflexivity and my position of 'betweenness' in the study as a twin, a twin with experience of psychotherapy and as a practitioner-researcher, drawing on my experience from these cultures. Reliability in autoethnography is also based on the specific interactions that the researcher has with others in the research process. Here, Ellis (1999) recommends reliability checks, whereby the researcher takes the stories back to participants to assess the truth of what has been written, inviting feedback and the opportunity to edit the account, as I have done in this study. This also forms part of the commitment to relational ethics, where the complexities of implicating others is one of several ethical considerations in autoethnographic research that must be worked through sensitively.

## Ethical considerations

Throughout the research process, as with my clinical practice, I was committed to practising relational ethics (Ellis, 2007), acting from heart as well as mind, acknowledging interpersonal bonds to others and taking responsibility for my actions and their consequences. A

commitment to relational ethics is critical in autoethnography as researchers not only implicate themselves with their work, but also close intimate others (Ellis, 2007; Ellis et al 2010). In this research these 'intimate others,' co-twins, are of course particularly close. Careful consideration was therefore necessary in the safeguarding of participants and of myself and Nick. To support this, in addition to the ethical guidelines set out by the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), I adhered to ten specific ethical guidelines for autoethnography set out by Tolich (2010), which cluster around three core ethical considerations: *consent*, *consultation* and *vulnerability* (see Appendix 1), which I elaborate on below.

Autoethnography as a methodology presents particular challenges with regards to participant confidentiality. Participants in this study recounted "Portions of their life stories…characterized by a level of detail and specificity that can make it extraordinarily difficult to offer the protection of confidentiality" (Haverkamp, 2005, p.154). Indeed, despite implementing measures such as changing participant names and disguising certain elements of participant accounts, people who know the participants well may still be able to recognise them (Smythe & Murray, 2000). This poses a certain level of vulnerability with regards to 'internal confidentiality' (Tolich, 2010). For these reasons, I did not see that I could guarantee participants' full confidentiality in the study. My ethical commitment was therefore to be explicit about the limits to confidentiality before, during and after participant involvement in the research. During the initial steps of gaining informed consent, participants received detailed information about the study, the associated risks of taking part, and their right to withdrawal at any point. This participant information (Appendix 2a) was approved by the ethics review board at Metanoia Institute and Middlesex University (Appendix 2b). Nevertheless, I agree with Josselson (1996) that there is something oxymoronic about the idea of 'informed consent' in narrative research, as it is not possible to fully inform a participant at the outset about what they are in fact consenting to, since much of what will take place is unforeseeable. "Thus, consent has to be construed as an aspect of a relational process, deriving from an ethics of care rather than rights" (Gilligan, 1982, p.122). Throughout the research process I therefore reminded participants that they were able to withdraw their involvement at any point. Furthermore, I shared the written-up stories with participants, inviting them to tell me of any elements that they did not feel comfortable being published. Whilst this may not ensure absolute confidentiality, it mitigates against the risk of participants being unwittingly implicated or exposed in ways that they did not foresee, and makes consent an ongoing process rather than a one-off event. Thus, there was an appropriate level of consultation in place throughout. For example, I was particularly aware that the interview process for Alex had been challenging. I felt strongly that her voice was

important to include in the study, but writing her story, I was acutely aware of the tensions of "Constantly [having] to consider…which secrets to keep, and which truths are worth telling" (Ellis, 2007, p.26). Having reviewed the story that I had written, Alex was appreciative of the sensitive way I had represented it, and I was also pleased that she asked me to modify two sentences that she felt uncomfortable about.

With regards to vulnerability (Tolich, 2010), due to the nature of the study I was aware of the possibility of participant distress during the interview process, be that from recounting personal material at the time or subsequent embarrassment from doing so or being asked to. Despite providing informed consent, participants can nevertheless experience in-depth research as intrusive and demanding (McLeod, 2003). During the interviews I was mindful of participant's windows of tolerance (Siegel, 2001), moderating my questions and responses accordingly and checking with participants to make sure they were okay if that was ever in doubt. I also set aside 25 minutes following each interview to debrief participants, irrespective of whether they found the interview challenging or not. This provided participants with an opportunity to reflect on the experience of taking part and to ask any questions that might have arisen from doing so, including next steps. I also used this time to understand how participants were feeling and to identify any concerns. For example, I realised that Alex had found aspects of the interview difficult and that she was left feeling some residual guilt. It was therefore important to reflect on this together and to reiterate that she would be able to remove anything from the story that she did not feel comfortable with or withdraw from the study altogether if she wished. I also made the decision to check in with Alex again over email the following day, which helped establish that she did not require any additional support.

The ethical implications and requirements of this research pertain to myself and Nick, as well as the research participants. In writing such a personal piece, I inevitably implicate Nick and expose myself to a certain amount of future vulnerability (Tolich, 2010), both personally and professionally. Dealing with the ethical complexity of respecting intimate others, while at the same time "being true to what we perceive to be the truth of our story" (Ellis, 2007, p. 210) is therefore an ongoing and fundamental part of the research process itself, not simply a box that can be ticked (Tolich, 2010) before the research begins. Indeed, reflecting on the overall experience of ethically conducting this research, I found the reality of *actually* doing it versus writing about it in an ethics document (Appendix 2b), which although detailed invariably felt somewhat like a 'box ticking' exercise, to be significant. I felt a pronounced sense of responsibility for the ethical wellbeing of participants and so the ethics process evolved from the initial application, where things naturally felt rather theoretical and impersonal. As

Josselson (2007, p.538) reflects, ethical issues in narrative research are too complex to simply produce a guide detailing “Here is exactly what you have to *do* to do this work ethically.” Although the author does indeed offer a helpful chapter on the practicalities of relational ethics, considering the ethics of the researcher-participant relationship, the ethics of the research design and the ethics of the report, which informed my approach to this study, I found it helpful to keep in mind that relational ethics is as much an “attitude” (*ibid*, p.537) as it is a set of procedures to follow. This ethical attitude requires thinking through ethical matters and deciding how best to honour and protect those who participate in one’s studies while still maintaining standards for responsible scholarship, all the while taking responsibility for minimising harm (*ibid*). “Ultimately, people can give informed consent to participate in the *research* project, but they cannot give prior consent to participate in an open-ended *relationship* that is yet to be established” (*ibid*, p.545). Rather than attempting to ‘solve’ ethical issues entirely then, one of the most important safeguards in place to minimise risk was my willingness to remain “Open to the conflicts, dilemmas, and ambivalences that are bound to arise throughout the research process” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2017, p.5). I therefore adopted a process-oriented approach to ethical decision making, “informed by trustworthiness and professional reflexivity” (Haverkamp, 2005, p.155), much like in my clinical practice. In addition, I regularly consulted my research supervisor on ethical matters before and during the research.

## Individuals and sampling

Due to the in-depth nature of autoethnographic research I decided to recruit three participants. For participants to be eligible, they were required to meet the following criteria: being a twin (any zygosity); aged 18-years or over; with experience of psychotherapy or counselling psychology for a minimum of 4 months. The decision to include twins of all zygosity was for both practical and literature-informed reasons. First, twin zygosity is incredibly complex and an ongoing area of research. Often zygosity is assumed rather than known and DNA testing would therefore be required to be certain of zygosity, which I deemed neither practical nor necessary. Additionally, non-identical twins often experience stigma regarding somehow not being ‘proper twins.’ Apart from being absurd in its factual incorrectness, this perspective is deeply insulting and potentially harmful for non-identical twins. Excluding DZ twins from this study would therefore risk further marginalising this twin population, potentially reinforcing ideas they are somehow lower status than MZ twins.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the somewhat niche participant criteria above, I adopted a snowball sampling technique (Atkinson & Flint, 2004). This approach works by

finding individual(s) who have the desired characteristics and then using that person's social networks to recruit similar participants (Sadler et al, 2011). This was partially successful, and I was able to recruit two participants using this approach. The third participant responded to a recruitment flyer (Appendix 3) distributed at the psychotherapy practice I work from, which only became possible once the third lockdown ended in July 2021.

**Figure 1: Participant demographic information**

| Participant Name | Age | Ethnicity | Profession | Twin | Type of Therapy | Reason for entering Therapy | Duration of Therapy |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Harriet | 45 | White British | Psychotherapist and coach | Hannah | Integrative | Psychotherapy training and for support with loss and relationship issues. | 4 years; ongoing |
| Alex | 28 | White British | Marketing and communications | Natalie | CBT; DBT; Art Therapy; Drama Therapy; | Interpersonal relationship and behavioural issues; Eating disorder. | 2 years total. Not currently in treatment. |
| Sarah | 44 | White British | Trainee psychotherapist | Jessica | Integrative | Psychotherapy training and to explore relationality and significance of twinship. | 3 years; ongoing |

## Gathering of stories

As discussed above, the researcher's self can be a significant – if not primary – 'data source' in autoethnographic research. This includes the past and the present of the researcher and might include memories, field-notes, narrative texts such as journals, letters or poems, photographs, drawings, and a variety of artefacts (Chang, 2008). In this present study, the use of my self in data collection is supported by other forms of 'external data' (Chang, 2008;

Duncan, 1994) collected from three in-person participant interviews. These interviews were reflexive and dyadic (Ellis, 2004; Ellis et al, 2010), focusing not just on the content of what was being shared, but also the interactively produced meanings and emotional dynamics of the interview itself (Ellis, 2010). Rather than a pre-defined list of possible questions to ask, I preferred to allow for a more natural conversational style, following my own intuition and curiosity in asking questions and offering my reflections – much like I would in clinical practice.

With regards to my own 'data', I included a 90-minute self-interview, carried out by a training colleague, which contributed to the writing of my story. I also kept field notes throughout the research process. These field-notes captured my thoughts, feelings and reflections on the research process as well as my experience as a twin, be that the mundane day-to-day or in-depth reflections, as well as previously forgotten fragments of memory that resurfaced during the study. I used this material as reflexive data for my own story, along with artefacts such as old photography and personally significant imagery, an extensive collection of dreams which I recorded throughout my clinical training, and reflective notes from my personal psychotherapy as a client. After completing an initial draft of this story, I invited Nick to add his own voice to the narrative by commenting on and editing the piece, thereby making it more collaborative, while also reliability checking my account.

## Procedure

I arranged a short video call of about thirty minutes with each participant following their initial interest in taking part. The purpose of this call was to assess the suitability of the prospective participant for the study, particularly in relation to inclusion criteria; to get a general sense of the nature of their twinship and experience of therapy; to understand any potential ethical issues arising from the above; to talk through consent and the risks of taking part in the study, and to answer any questions that the participants might have about the study. Following this call, I sent across the participant information sheet (Appendix 2a), which also contains information on data protection and the consent form. I invited prospective participants to review the information sheet and respond by email or phone with any questions or points to clarify. Following confirmation that the participant was happy to take part in the study, arrangements for the time and place of the interview were made.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, additional safety considerations included travel arrangements and risk of infection from being in close proximity during the interview. Sensible precautions were made with regards to social distancing and other safety

measures, such as use of hand sanitizers. I met participants either at their homes (Harriet and Alex) or my therapy practice (Sarah). Although I considered there to be a very low risk with regards to my personal safety, I notified a family member and agreed to check in once meetings were over.

Before starting the interviews, I ensured participants understood everything on the information sheet (Appendix 2a). I reiterated the potential impact from taking part in this kind of research, their right to withdraw, the limitations regarding guaranteeing confidentiality, and the availability of resources for emotional and therapeutic support if required. After participants signed the consent form, I started the audio recorder to begin the interview, which lasted between 100-140 minutes per participant.

To ensure data protection and confidentiality, the audio recordings and signed consent forms were kept securely and separately, with the former password protected and the consent forms also locked away securely in a desk at my home office.

After the interview, I transcribed the audio recordings and began the analysis process (described below). After completing a draft of participant stories, I returned these to participants and invited them to comment on and edit the piece. This was to ensure participants felt their story had been accurately portrayed and to provide an opportunity for them to tell me if they wished to remove any details that they were uncomfortable with. This correspondence took place over email (see Appendix 4), and I edited the participant stories accordingly.

## Analysis of stories

As noted above, it is the analytical and interpretative nature of autoethnography that distinguishes it from other forms of self-narrative (Chang, 2008). In this study I used The Listening Guide (henceforth LG) (Gilligan, 2015) for the analysis of participant interviews and to elicit themes for discussion. This relational, voice-centred method is used primarily to analyse qualitative research data and in-depth interview transcriptions (Gilligan, 2015; Petrovic et al, 2015) and is particularly well suited to this study for a number of reasons: its emphasis on the importance of human relationships (Gilligan et al, 2006); the way in which it helps tease out the multiplicity of voices people speak from (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Gilligan, 2015); and its feminist grounding, which provides spaces to hear those who may have previously been silenced (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017; Gilligan, 2015; Woodstock, 2016). This method enabled me to sensitively analyse and illuminate the complex and multi-layered

nature of twinship and “the interplay between self and relationship, psyche and culture” (Gilligan et al, 2011, p.266), as well as my own subjectivity within the research. The LG therefore integrates well with the sensibilities and aims of autoethnography and my relational approach to psychotherapy.

## Rationale for The Listening Guide

I came to use the LG because I experienced considerable difficulty implementing other approaches to coding and data analysis, for example thematic analysis (henceforth TA). Although TA is often understood as belonging to the phenomenological research tradition common in counselling and psychotherapy research (Morrow, 2007) and is centred on the exploration of participants’ subjective experiences and sense-making (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Willig, 2013), my own experience using this approach to analyse participant stories made me feel that I was objectifying, labelling and categorising participants in a problematic way. Not only did it evoke my own feelings from being scrutinised and objectified as a twin, but it also felt in conflict with the essence and aims of the study, of giving voice to the lived experience of twinship, which “Must be articulated by twins themselves” (Martinez, 2021, p.99). On reflection now, I better understand TA as family of methods (Braun and Clarke, 2020) with some approaches such as reflexive TA (*ibid*) recognising coding as an inherently subjective process, which may have made it a potentially suitable option compared to approaches that prioritise coding reliability. Nevertheless, while reflexive TA may have been appropriate in the sense that it would have provided a means of analysing patterns of meaning across participant stories, methods “become infused with theoretical assumptions when enacted in a particular study” (Braun and Clarke, 2020, p.38). In this particular study, I felt that I needed a method that would take a ‘lighter touch’ approach to analysis – one that would honour and preserve the voices of the participants as far as possible. Although I did make use of themes to structure the discussion, my intention is that these act as conduits for presenting different twinship experiences, rather than as categories used to generalise across participants.

Discussing this in supervision, I was introduced to the LG as a possible alternative approach. Researching this method, I was interested to read how in a study exploring change in young people’s sense of self over time, Edwards and Weller (2012) noted a shift in analytic ontology – from gazing at to standing alongside participants – as a result of using the LG rather than thematic analysis. This ontological shift resonated with my own research aims, as did the other fundamentals of the LG. In particular, the way it allows the researcher to listen to the multiple voices occurring in a narrative (Gilligan et al, 2010) and with an ear to

how marginalised people negotiate their lives (Gilligan, 2015), which makes it appropriate for listening to the hidden and sometimes marginalised voices of twins. This idea that people speak from a multiplicity of voices is a central assumption of the LG (*ibid*), as it is in my clinical work. These voices may be simultaneous and co-occurring and "In tension with one another, with the self, with the voices of others with whom the person is in relationship, and the culture or context within which the person lives" (Gilligan et al, 2010, p.4). Given the literature on twins above and the nature of autoethnography also discussed, I deemed this to be particularly appropriate and important for this present study. To identify these multiple voices, the LG proposes a series of four sequential 'listenings' for each interview, which I carried out as follows.

### *The Listenings*

The four listenings I outline below not only refer to the process of analysis, but also form the structure of how I have chosen to present participant stories.

***The first listening*** is the first stage in the analysis where the researcher listens to the conversation for the story or 'plot' – a map of the psychological terrain (Gilligan, 2015), where the main story and themes are identified. To do this, I used a colour-coded system to annotate interview transcripts while listening to interview recordings. I then replicated this on a spreadsheet for ease of use, with colour coded themes along the top of the page, and corresponding verbatim text in the rows beneath these themes. In total, 42 themes were identified from Harriet's interview. I created additional separate tabs on the same spreadsheet to record repeated words and phrases, emotional hotspots, moments of embodied awareness, silence, and metaphors - as recommended by Gilligan and Eddy (2017) to help uncover and bring to life the plot. I acknowledged and brought my own subjectivity into the process by identifying and making explicit my thoughts and feelings about the narrative (Gilligan et al, 2006), which I recorded on another spreadsheet tab under various column headings such as 'countertransference', 'connected', 'merged/joining.' After completing this process for the full interview, I reviewed the various spreadsheet tabs and distilled the themes into a much smaller number of sub-themes that best captured the participant's story or 'plot,' again identifying examples of relevant verbatim text. I then wrote the participant's story based on these plot themes, revisiting the spreadsheet tabs and interview transcripts throughout the writing process to ensure I was staying close to the participant's own voice, while also incorporating my own, with the aim of making the story relational, aesthetic, and evocative (Geertz, 1973; Ellis, 2004; Bochner, 2012). Including my own voice in this way also makes transparent the relational nature of this research, and the

ways in which the stories are shaped through dialogue and co-construction, as well as providing a reflexive layer regarding my own positioning (Etherington, 2020).

This story forms the main body of how I initially present the participants' worlds in the next chapter.

***The second listening*** results in the generation of 'Voice Poems'. These emerge from a systematic way of listening to informants' first-person voice and by attending to any distinctive patterns within it, as well as how they speak of themselves in relationship to themselves and others (Woodtsock, 2010). This is a crucially relational component of the method, whereby listening to what participants know of themselves before talking *about* them is a way of coming into relationship that works against distancing from that person in an objectifying way (Brown & Gilligan, 1992). Each "I" statement along with the following verb or seemingly important accompanying words is identified in the transcript and then sequentially ordered to create a series of 'I Poems,' with each "I' starting a separate line of the poem. I decided to also create 'We Poems' and 'You Poems' for each participant, to track their shifting sense of self throughout the narrative and relationship between their individual 'I' identity and twin 'we' identity. These were also colour-coded in the interview transcripts and then collated into a separate colour coded document containing just the voice poems. I then reviewed this colour coded document identifying particularly intriguing segments of I/we/you poems (Woodcock, 2016) that also spoke to the plot themes identified in the first listening. Although in many ways these selected voice poems speak for themselves, telling their own story, I carried out a further analysis with particular attention to the interaction of participant I/we/you voices and what this might say about self and identity.

In my presentation of participants' narratives, these 'voice poems' follow the story.

***The third and fourth listenings***, the final part of the process, look out for the 'contrapuntal voices', which brings the analysis back into relationship with the research question (Gilligan et al, 2006). Gilligan and colleagues (2011) explain that the logic behind this step is drawn from the musical form 'counterpoint', which consists of the combination of two or more melodic lines. Each melodic line has its own rhythm and 'melodic curve,' and these melodic lines of music are played simultaneously and move in some form of relationship with each other despite also being independent – resonating quite beautifully with aspects of twinship relationality. This stage in the LG process offers a way to listen for the counterpoint in the text being analysed, or the multiple facets of the story being told. It provides a more detailed, comprehensive way to revisit research questions following the first two stages and helps to

“Identify, specify, and sort out the different strands in the interview that may speak to the research question” (*ibid*, p.261). As Gilligan (2015) suggests, I used my research questions as a ‘rudder’ in steering me towards the voices in the text that spoke to my inquiry. For each participant, I listened to the interview again while simultaneously reading the annotated transcript, making note of any different voices within the participant’s expression of their experience (Gilligan et al, 2006) on a separate piece of paper, for example a ‘guilty voice’ or a ‘fearful voice.’ Once completed, I reviewed all the different identified voices with a view to selecting two from the narrative that melodiously reacted with one another or that were in tension with each other (Raider-Roth, 2000; Woodtsock, 2016). This interweaving of the two voices is termed ‘‘contrapuntal” (Gilligan et al, 1990, p.115). At this point, I switched to handwritten notes as I found this an easier way to creatively explore how the different identified voices interacted, and I eventually selected two contrapuntal voices for each participant. I then revisited interview transcripts, selecting segments of text where the participant spoke from the first identified voice, copying and pasting this text into a separate document. I stitched together these segments of text into one paragraph to tell the participant’s story from this voice, for example ‘the voice of guilt.’ I then replicated this process for the second contrapuntal voice. Presenting participant narratives in this way helps foreground important – and possibly marginalised – voices of twinship that may otherwise have remained unheard in the narrative. The relationship between the two contrapuntal voices became my focus (Gilligan et al, 2006) in a further layer of analysis, which helped unveil additional understandings and insight (Woodcock, 2010b) relevant to the research questions.

The third and fourth listenings are presented as condensed paragraphs in the final section of the narrative presentations.

### *Eliciting themes for discussion*

Using the evidence gathered through the guided listenings, the researcher now brings their voice back as the composer of the analysis (Gilligan & Eddy, 2017) and in essence, an interpretation of the interviews is developed that synthesizes what has been learned through the entire process (Gilligan et al, 2010). Like Petrovic and colleagues (2015), I found this step to be challenging due to a lack of logistical explanations within the LG literature; “Integrating the culminating data was not as straightforward as…purported” (p.8). Acknowledging that the LG is not a cookie-cutter approach (*ibid*), it was apparent that I would need to find my own way with this stage. Returning to the essence and principles of a moderate autoethnography (Wall 2016) helped me find my way, and I started a process of

gazing back and forth (Ellis et al, 2010) between myself, participant findings, and my research questions. To support this process, I brought all the participants' plot themes, voice poems and contrapuntal voices together onto a single page so I could more easily explore how they related to each other, simultaneously keeping my research questions in view too. I also followed the recommendation to make use of reflexive writing techniques during this stage (Petrovic et al, 2015) and it was helpful to discuss emerging ideas and possible themes in supervision. In one such discussion, I imagined I was facilitating a therapy group with all three of the research participants, considering the group dynamics and themes that might emerge amongst us. By following this above process, I gradually identified five overarching themes, each containing several sub-themes, which formed the basis of the discussion in this study.

## Researcher Reflexivity

In recognition of the central importance of researcher reflexivity in qualitative research (Finlay, 2002; Dodgson, 2019; McLeod, 2022) and in an analytic autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), I will briefly outline my approach to therapy and the theoretical traditions that inform it, to clearly position myself as a practitioner-researcher in this study for readers. The origins of my integrative approach to therapy are in my deeply relational experience of being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962) as an identical twin. In my integrative framework, the influence of this 'personal in the professional' can be seen in my belief that we become ourselves through relation (Buber, 1970; Spinelli, 2005); my emphasis on mutuality (Maroda, 2010) and multiplicity (Bromberg, 1996; Drozek, 2015); and the presence of the transpersonal (Buber, 1970; Hycner, 1993) as a foundational value system that guides my way of 'being with' clients. My approach centrally integrates this dialogical (Hycner, 1993; Buber, 1970) way of being with a way of working that is informed by developmental psychology (Bowlby, 1969; Stern, 1985; Beebe and Lachmann, 2003), neurobiology (Schore, 1994, 2000; Bromberg, 2011), and intersubjective psychoanalysis (Stolorow, Atwood, and Orange, 2002). In my integrative framework, the phenomenological "illuminates worlds of emotional experience" (Stolorow, 2013, p. 383), that are formed both developmentally and in the psychotherapeutic situation through intersubjective processes (Stolorow, 2013). Consistent with this is my view of the client-therapist relationship as analogous to the infant-caregiver relationship, with right-brain interactive affect regulation a fundamental process of both psychological development and psychotherapeutic treatment (Schore, 2003). I therefore locate the primary reparative process in the therapeutic relationship itself, "in the experiencing of a quality of empathy and attunement that works powerfully at an implicit relational level" (Gilbert and Orlans, 2011, p.139).

# Chapter 4: Findings – The Stories

In this chapter I present my own autoethnographic account, followed by the stories of three twins who participated in this study. Their stories are presented in four parts as per the Listening Guide process outlined above. *The first listening* is presented as a conversation from the research interview between myself and the participant. In *the second listening,* a selection of voice poems is presented with subsequent reflections. In *the third and fourth listenings,* participant narratives are told from two different ('contrapuntal') voices, with key sentences extracted from participant narratives and collated into a paragraph for each contrapuntal voice, thereby foregrounding important voices of twinship that may otherwise have remained unheard.

## My story

*Indwelling: pre-birth*

*My thought and his are inter-woven into a single fabric…they are inserted into a shared operation of which neither of us is the creator…we are collaborators for each other in consummate reciprocity. Our perspectives merge into each other, and we co-exist through a common world.*

(Merleau-Ponty, 2002, p.413)

I was born 21 minutes after Nick, at a hospital in Edinburgh in 1984. The story goes that Nick entered the world wide-eyed and immediately comfortable with his new environment – a contrast to my own more reluctant and distressed arrival. Many years later and with the help of therapy, I came to better understand the significance of that first separation as Nick was born, and to see that our birth also represented a kind of 'death.' It was the end of my world as I had known it up until then, and those 21 minutes represented the first of many experiences of betweenness that would follow. My dreams often recall this "birth material," as my therapist terms it.

*I'm in a small car or a buggy - in control driving it - just me - somewhere on holiday perhaps. Begin to get slowly out of control and crash a little, runup against the side of a table - little bit concerned about damage. The car stops. I look up and I'm in front of a table, outside, at what seems like a kind of resort or hotel or restaurant or something. On the table I notice a tiny little puppy, which is so small it must have just been born. It's covered by a thin layer of*

*fur and is licking up crumbs from the table. My first instinct is to send a photo to Nick. I then realise there are two puppies on the table; one is just out of sight but begins to emerge into view. I wake up.*

(20.01.18)

For me, this dream is particularly rich in meaning. It captures something of my difficult birth; it indicates my urge to find Nick and re-establish our connection; it speaks to the process of me 'finding myself' and establishing my own sense of self and identity as I grew up. The photo reference may also say something about the objectification that I have experienced as an identical twin throughout my life, and themes of self/other confusion, boundary blurring, and separation/individuation are also present in the dream.

The story of our birth - Nick leading the way and more relaxed, me behind and rather anxious – continued to play out similarly in the many new beginnings that we experienced together, for example our first day at pre-prep school, aged 4. I remember Nick calmly walking up the stairs to this new and scary world while I wedged myself halfway up - in the between - crying uncontrollably and in a tug of war with mum below and a teacher above. Eventually, in what must have felt like 21 minutes even if it wasn't, I was pulled up and out of the stairs and into the classroom, rejoining Nick, who presumably expected me to arrive right on cue and wondered what all the fuss was about.

Despite this uneasy start I remember my time at this school very fondly, which was set in a beautiful old stately home with impressive grounds in the North Yorkshire countryside. The class sizes were very small, and we were friends with nearly everyone. While we were slow starters academically, we were good at sport, which became my passion – and Nick's too. We were always together, which was important because this was also a difficult time following the divorce of our parents. Whether going to mum's or dad's, I remember Nick and I insisting on taking all our teddies with us. Upon arrival, bears of all kinds would spill out onto the pavement from the opened car doors, but it was important to keep everyone together. Separation didn't make sense to us, and this was a clever way to demonstrate it, even if we weren't aware of it at the time.

We looked very alike and were often dressed in the same clothes but different colours – Nick in red, me in blue. Our parents were careful to emphasise our individuality and would correct people who might call us "the twins," reminding them of our names. By all accounts we lived up to some of the typical twin stereotypes: we had a secret language that no one else could understand and we were "double trouble" with twice the imagination and half the

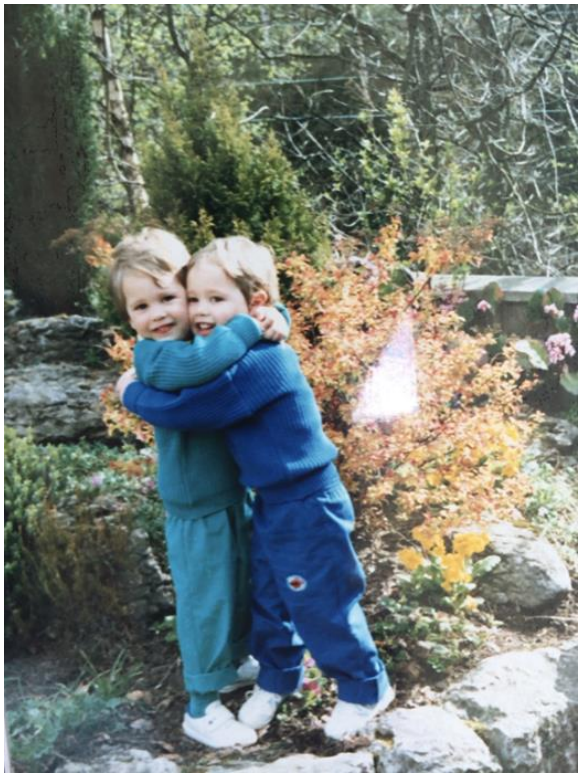
responsibility. There are many stories from our early years. One I particularly like is told by my grandma. She remembers preparing us dinner when we were perhaps two or three years old. We are sat next to each other at the table and Nick is very upset. Nothing at all can calm him down or stop him from crying, until I place my hand on his shoulder, which soothes him immediately. One of the reasons I like this story is it challenged the idea that I was always the upset one, which might have been my assumption based on how sensitive I often felt and what I was told about my birth. Reflecting on this, Nick reminds me:

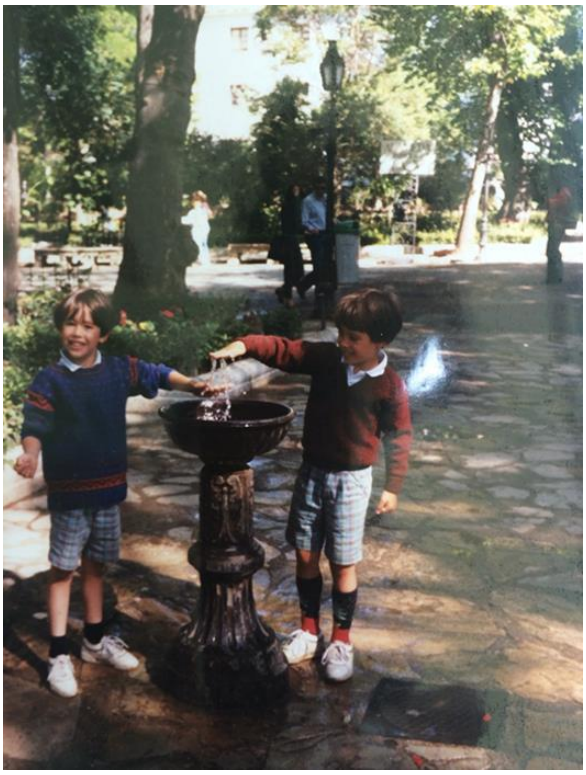
*It's interesting that we've always been told that you were the "climber" - always leading the way, climbing trees, scaling slopes.*

It is also moving for me to think of the early co-regulatory support we provided each other, and how this might in some ways represent the earliest origins of my development as a therapist.

*"In some sense twins are each other's first therapist because of the empathy they have for one another's experiences."*

(Klein, 2021a, p.13)





*Indwelling: cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me!*

Walking out onto a makeshift stage in a sports hall that I'd later feel far more at home in, I feel frozen. It's cold and there is a large crowd, perhaps the most people I've ever seen in my life. I'm five-years-old. A thin white bedsheet covers both Nick-and-I, our heads protruding from two holes cut in the same fabric, which is painted as if to look like a wall. Arms stretched wide, we stand alongside each other, our hands touching in the middle to form a 'chink' through which two of our classmates – 'Pyramus' and 'Thisby' – speak. I know I don't want to be here. I feel very exposed, acutely aware of the bedsheet's transparency and my shivering body beneath it. Standing joined-with-Nick, I literally feel like one half of a whole, embodying thinness and not-enough-ness – self-states I would become well acquainted with. That we are together is a comfort, but I know we both feel ashamed as we are gazed at by the crowd of people in front of us. There is little we can do, and little we are expected to do, beyond stand there looking the same:

> *Thou wall, O wall, O sweet and lovely wall,*
> *Show me thy chink, to blink through with mine eyne.*
> *O wicked wall, through whom I see no bliss!*
> *Cursed be thy stones for thus deceiving me!*
>
> (A Midsummer Night's Dream)

This is my first memory of 'performing' my twinship, my first memory of feeling self-conscious, body-conscious of feeling frozen with exposure, of being presented for others to gaze at. It was also of course a brilliant piece of casting. Some might say we were made for the role: twins are often depicted as two parts of a single whole; seen as sweet and lovely, yet also potentially wicked and deceitful. This 'performance' illuminates how twinship is at once a refuge and a condition of mutual exposure (Gross, 2003); I have often wished to fade into the walls and be invisible, as I did in this instance. I asked Nick if he remembered this experience too:

**Nick:** Yes, but we were thirteen not five! It was our final year play.
**Rob:** What?
**Nick:** Yes! Our first play was out on the terrace. I remember because I was a policeman, and my trousers were too big – they kept on falling down.
**Rob:** Right! More exposure.
**Nick:** Do you remember we tried to get it changed? We didn't like the bedsheet being transparent.

**Rob:** Yes, it didn't work.

**Nick:** No. The whole thing felt really exposing and objectifying, being almost naked in front of the school. We were aware of the spectacle and also the inevitable comparisons that would be drawn between us

**Rob:** I can't believe I thought we were five for this. I was certain of that.

**Nick:** It must have knocked you back some years.

**Rob:** Do you remember our lines? I can recall the melody but not the actual words

**Nick:**

*In this brief interlude it doth befall*
*That I, one Snout by name, present a wall*

**Rob:** Good of them to give us a line each.

**Nick:** Do you remember we tried to get out of the swimming gala as well?

**Rob:** Yes, and the 800 metres at our last sports day.

**Nick:** I wonder if that was out of compassion for each other? One of us inevitably had to lose and we didn't want that – we were always having to compete against each other

**Rob:** We were always the main event. It was a lot of pressure.

*Self-dialogue:*

What happened there then?

Evidently you went to a very young place…

I was thirteen and five at the same time?

Yes. This was overwhelming for you, traumatic even.

Seems like Nick managed to integrate it a little better.

Yes.

I'm glad I asked him about it.

It helps us make better sense of some of your more dissociative moments, when you're feeling overly exposed.

True.

When the walls crumble.

***

*Dream, 18.12.15*

*(Year 2 clinical training, before beginning first placement)*

*I'm in a play. I don't want to act, and I forget my role. I'm aware of hiding a bit, or at least wanting to. Other people are in the same role and are better and more confident. But it's also unclear to me how much doing is required in this role; maybe none. I wake up.*

***

My relationship with being seen, and being seen as a twin, is not at all one-sided though. There is also the restoration and rebuilding of the walls, from the admiring comments, the smiling faces, the "are you twins!" and the celebration of our similarities and our special bond. For as long as I can remember I have been performing a delicate dance between being seen enough, but not too much. My twinship is a refuge, but it can also be a condition of (mutual) exposure. I asked Nick about how he experiences this:

*I definitely shift the attention to you in these situations as I feel you are better at dealing with it, but I also know it is not entirely comfortable for you. The way I see it is that we take shifts with the attention - back and forth between us - instead of all the attention on both of us at the same time as that feels too objectifying.*

## *Performing separation*

If as 'Wall' Nick and I were performing a sociocultural expectation of twinship, in that same year at school we were also performing the flipside. No longer symbolically joined together, we were now required to perform our separation, which ironically was much more enjoyable. The school, which took its name from St Martin of Tours (c 317-397), was celebrating a significant point in its history which I can no longer remember. In an important ceremony for the school, Nick and I were chosen to enact the part of the story where Martin cuts his cloak in half for a naked beggar at the gate of the city of Amiens, in Northern France. I was pleased to be cutting the cloak, while Nick held it taught, and I remember being relieved that we performed this perfectly. The cloak separated easily. It was apparently now time for Nick and I to begin our separation. No longer one half of a whole as 'Wall', but two separate individuals, ready to move out into the world by ourselves.

(Aged 13, cutting the cloak in our final year at St Martins).

Even before our first day at secondary school Nick and I were already once again performing our twinship, although this time there was safety in numbers. There was an unusually large number of twins at the school, as well as a set of triplets in the same year who would become close friends, and we were all invited to a photoshoot for a local paper. I remember feeling shy and awkward when the photographer asked me to place my hand on the shoulder of the girl in front of me, who some year later would become my first girlfriend.

Nick reminds me that we were very shy and quiet for the first two years at school, sticking together whenever we could:

*I remember us thinking that we just had to get through to the weekend in the early days. I think we were just very shy and had gone to such a sheltered primary school.*

Our twinship was once again a refuge but also a condition of mutual exposure; we attracted a lot of attention, but our twin-world was also like a protective bubble and our twinship afforded us a kind of ‘special’ status. As well as advantages afforded by our twinship though, there were also challenges. Our close friends swiftly learned to tell us apart, but we were

constantly confused and mixed up by others and I discovered it was often easier to ‘save face’ and answer to Nick’s name rather than explain, “I’m Rob”.

‘It wasn’t me, sir!’

**Head sees doubles and rebles**

by Sam Greenhill

AD teacher Andrew Trotn is seeing double AND ple.
e faces the usual prospect of hing a record NINE sets of s and one set of triplets.
m September, St Peter's ol at Clifton will have 21 chilfrom multiple births, five at St Olave's site and two at n Preparatory School.
Trotman, said: "It is fun. We never had this many before. of the identical twins can be to tell apart but they have own personalities and their rs know which is which."
aid all of them were high ers, sometimes in comple- ry disciplines.
of the Bainbridge boys is cellent cricketer and the s a very good drummer.
e are moments when, as they can make a terrific Four sets of them are usicians and the Jackson re accomplished choirists linster.
added: "It is also a great bility. They are all indind we must never try to m together. We must eir individuality."
ool will be hoping the

(Clipping from the Yorkshire Post, summer 1997.)

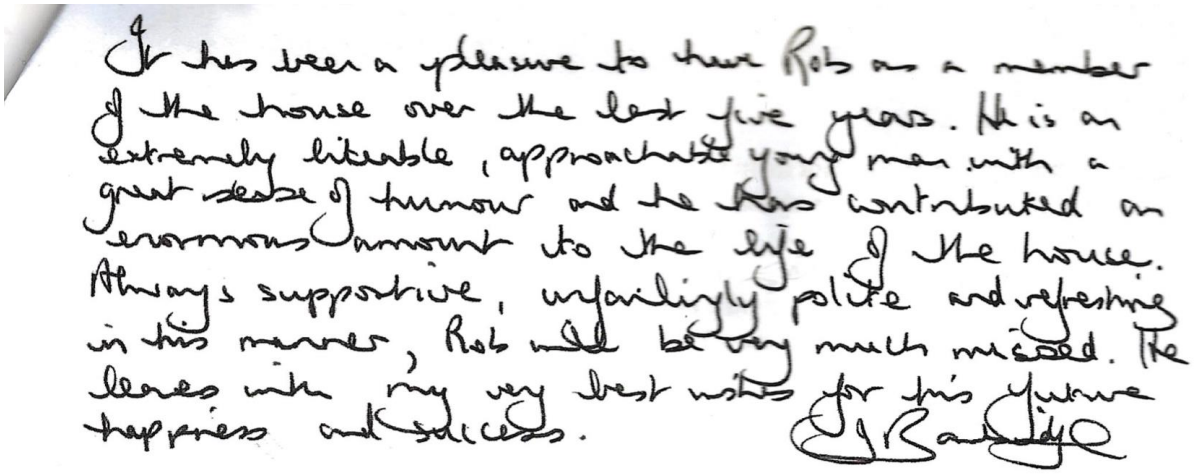
*Exploring the non-twin-world*

Throughout our time at secondary school, we continued to use each other as attachment figures to navigate and explore this non-twin world. The exploration was at first naturally led by Nick. I remember feeling scared and even a little betrayed when he said he wanted to go to a party we’d been invited to in our second year. I didn’t understand why that was necessary since we had each other and up until then that had been quite sufficient! I asked Nick about this:

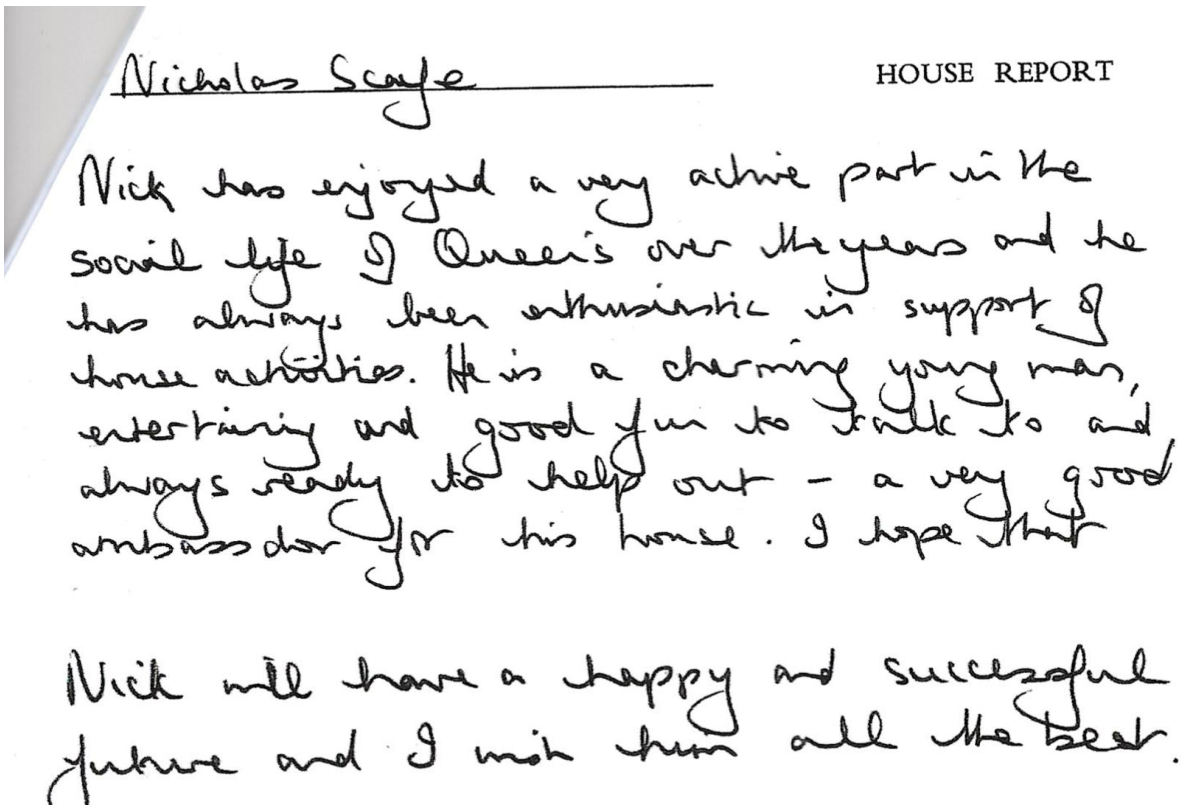
*I didn’t want to go - the idea terrified me. But I remember feeling like we should. Also, ‘girls’ were becoming a thing…*

Gradually though I became surer of myself, while also retaining a shyness and sensitivity that I would later – but not just yet – learn to accept rather than reject. I loved my time at this

school, particularly the final three years. We had the same friends but developed individual relationships with them, and they played an important role in recognising and honouring our individuality and separateness as well as our especially close twinship, which I am grateful for. Our final house reports, written by a mother of twins, indicate some subtle personality differences but also much in common:



It has been a pleasure to have Rob as a member of the house over the last five years. He is an extremely likeable, approachable young man with a great sense of humour and he has contributed an enormous amount to the life of the house. Always supportive, unfailingly polite and refreshing in this manner, Rob will be very much missed. He leaves with my very best wishes for his future happiness and success.



Nicholas Scaife HOUSE REPORT

Nick has enjoyed a very active part in the social life of Queen's over the years and he has always been enthusiastic in support of house activities. He is a charming young man, entertaining and good fun to talk to and always ready to help out – a very good ambassador for this house. I hope that Nick will have a happy and successful future and I wish him all the best.

(Final house report, June 2002)

### *Exploring separateness*

Following school Nick and I both took a year out before university. It was the first point in our lives that held the possibility for separation, which we began to explore. Nick was to go travelling with his girlfriend, and I was going separately with two of our best friends from school. We both got jobs but in different companies to save up for our travels, and I worked in a fashion store that I'd return to over the years during university holidays. This was the first time that I made friends by myself and *just for me.* In no way did I reject my twinship, I was simply in a setting where I was also – and first and foremost in the eyes of others' – an individual as well as a twin. It was a nice feeling to know that people liked me because of me, not just because I was a twin. I don't remember it to be difficult being away from Nick for the five months we were travelling. Up until that point, the longest we'd been apart was probably no more than a weekend at the most.

### *University years*

**Rob:** Something we've never talked about is why you applied to a different university to me as your first choice. What was going on for you there?

**Nick:** I think I thought it was for the best, but I'm certain my heart wasn't in it. I think I can be a bit bloody minded like that sometimes. Perhaps it was what I thought other people thought would be better for us, and I was just responding to that external perceived pressure. I'm not sure who these people would have been though.

I was secretly relieved that Nick didn't get into his first choice, and so we arrived at university together. I distinctly remember mum and dad driving us there, and how anxious and scared I felt when we arrived. It was like the first day at primary school all over again; I was revisiting my birth material. We were in different halls, and Nick's housed two of our best friends from school, which felt unfair, although I was pleased we would already have some established friends there. I was going to have to navigate at least some of university life by myself, and I didn't really know how to do that. In this huge place I often felt anxious and exposed walking around, conscious that many people, most in fact, couldn't tell us apart. I resented the artificial separation imposed on Nick and I, who was also at the same time too close for me to need to or want to develop my independence, even if I felt I probably should. I was stuck in the between. Despite this, I made some good friends and for the second two years Nick and I lived together in a shared house with three of them, which felt much more manageable. Meanwhile, I was struggling in a relationship that was proving impossible to maintain long-

distance and had become co-dependent, which was contributing to what I now recognise as a significant period of depression. I spent many weekends in London visiting my girlfriend, who was finding the separation tough. I knew that I needed to end things, yet I was unable to do so. I just couldn't do it and I was terrified of what would happen if I did. Eventually the relationship ended badly, reinforcing my fear of endings, and that ending relationships is dangerous and not okay - things I would later work on in therapy to feel and understand differently. I asked Nick for his reflections on this time:

*I probably resented you a bit during that period as often you would leave me for the weekend to go to London. I never really felt happy at university, despite having nice housemates in our second and third year. I wanted it to be the great time that everyone says it is, but I think we were still too dependent upon each other. It felt like a real regression back to the first few years of secondary school. Perhaps this does in some ways vindicate my decision to apply to a different university. However, when it came down to it, I was always happy we were together, and we supported each other through this period like we always do.*

Some better times followed but nevertheless I couldn't wait to leave university. I'd never really felt at home there, but I ended well academically, finally getting one over on Nick who had consistently outperformed me in the last few years at school. What followed was something of a rebirth. I moved to London immediately after being offered a job at a large advertising agency – something I had been aspiring to throughout university. Although I was initially overwhelmed in this new setting, I gradually settled in and began to enjoy it. It was a work hard play hard environment, which ultimately left me feeling burnt-out and unfulfilled though.

### *Turning towards therapy*

*The analytic situation is a situation par excellence for re-creating a 'twin relationship.' There are two people who share a common purpose and develop a secret language in a common room.*

(Joseph, 1961, p.162)

I remember feeling at home, sat in the dimly lit consulting room of my first therapist, a softly spoken Italian woman who I'd found on Counselling Directory. It was a relief to tell my story and to feel listened to, understood, and supported. Curiously, she did not seem terribly interested in me being a twin. Perhaps we'll come to that, I thought. I spoke mainly about the

ending of my last relationship, how that had impacted me and was still making me feel scared about the possibility of future relationships ending badly. Quite suddenly, my therapist became more interested in my twinship, then soon after told me that, to her surprise, she had become pregnant with twins and was therefore winding down her practice. We were both curious and a little shocked; what did this mean for the work we had been doing? Despite it ending prematurely, my first experience of therapy had been a positive one. Around the same time, it became clear to me that I was, without having fully appreciated it, on the way to becoming a therapist too. I left my job in advertising to formerly start this journey. My friends and family were very supportive, and no one was at all surprised. For the first time I was also stepping out into something completely separate from Nick, who at around the same time also left advertising to become a photographer.

### *A relational home*

"*It's like being the last to be collected back at school all over again, isn't it*"?

I smile back at the only other person left in the waiting room now. It's the autumn of 2013 and I'm at a therapy practice in West London. I'm here for an initial assessment with a therapist who I'll work with for over five years, throughout my clinical training and beyond. I'm simultaneously relieved and anxious when she arrives and greets me warmly. I follow her upstairs in what seems like an endless ascent to the very top of the building, which leaves me a little short of breath. I sit down, in another dimly lit room, expecting some formalities – contracts and confidentiality – but instead I'm invited to start: "how might I be able to help," she asks with a curious and warm smile. I'm feeling stuck in a relationship – unable to fully commit to it but also unable to end it. The bad sort of 'between' that I had experienced in my prior long-term relationship, which had caused so many difficulties. I was beginning to feel exasperated: "I need some help in understanding why this is so excruciatingly difficult for me. Why can't I just do what's best for me?"

*"An observable and uniquely held problem for twins is in making their own decisions by putting themselves first"*

(Klein, 2021a, p.14)

I provide some of my backstory and emphasise the importance to me of my twinship. I leave this first session feeling a lot lighter. My new therapist seems well versed in twinship issues and I feel less alone with my difficulties now.

### *Therapy training – integrating the personal with the professional*

Despite feeling sure that training as a therapist was the right fit, it occurred to me early on that I had somehow found myself in an incredibly exposing place. Up until this point I had done everything possible to avoid exposure; I dodged presentations throughout my undergraduate degree and was terrified of speaking in a group or being the centre of attention. At the end of my psychotherapy foundation, the course tutor reassured me I was a "natural" but expressed some disappointment that they didn't get to "see more" of me in the group. Funnily enough I thought I'd done pretty well! But this was to be one of my growing edges in the counselling psychology and psychotherapy training I had just begun. As the training progressed and my own personal awareness developed through group process and personal therapy, I began to more fully understand my relationship with exposure, and how it related to my experience of being a twin and the objectification that had been a constant in my life. The training process allowed me to experiment with 'finding my voice', to explore being seen, and to express myself as an individual in a setting where Nick was present, but only internally.

### *A sense of belonging; but where?*

I felt very much at home throughout the training, despite the many challenges it presented. Yet as we traversed the academic literature, particularly developmental psychology, I struggled to neatly place myself within it and the infant-caregiver dyadic framework that seemed to underpin almost everything. "How does this work for me, as a three", I wondered? In therapy I was beginning to understand the nature of my attachment and the role Nick and I played in providing some additional security during childhood, and how our adult relationship constituted an attachment relationship too. Nearly everything I read in the psychotherapeutic literature though seemed to emphasise problems stemming from twinship, not protection or benefits. My own experience was leading me to believe it could afford both, and that it was misleading to only focus on the negative. I decided this would inform my later research.

As the training progressed, it became clearer to me how significant my twinship was in my decision to train as a therapist, and also the type of training I was doing and how my approach was developing. I came to understand that, having been thrown (Heidegger, 1962) into the world as an identical twin, I experience the world from a starting point of relationship; "What we touch inevitably also touches us" (Orange, 2010, p.69). The notion of 'inseparability' is therefore fundamental for me, yet from work in therapy I was discovering that relationships require both distance and relation (Hycner, 1993) – something that I had

been struggling to find balance with. My reflective notes from the time indicate that a lack of separateness was causing me difficulties:

*I've lost my identity within all of this. Without a true sense of my self anymore, how am I able to make such an important decision? I need to regain my sense of self again – build a new, better one.*

*I need some space to myself. A room somewhere that's mine. I really need that.*

A room somewhere that's mine… I was beginning to feel that my therapist's room was the space that I needed. I admired how she modelled a deeply empathic way of being, yet also maintained clear boundaries. I never felt that my twinship was pathologised; it was explored, respected, celebrated, empathised with, and understood. She entered my twin-world while also providing a non-twin-world perspective, which I believe has helped me to better stand in the spaces between these worlds.

### *Going first*

Nick and I were now living together and needless to say we felt very much at home; it was a very happy time. Although it felt difficult to bring this to an end, I was also pleased and excited that I felt able to move in with my partner – something I had felt unable to do in previous relationships – which said a lot about how I felt about her, and the work I was doing in therapy. Again, my dreams recalled my birth material:

*I'm in a big house and there are building works going on. It's clear to me that it's going to fall down; it's listing badly, like a sinking ship. I'm upstairs on the roof, passing objects down and saying that we need to evacuate. I shout at people to stop drilling but then realise they are in an adjacent building. Nick comes up a ladder to help me pass things down. He gets soaked with water but manages not to fall off – I go to grab him…*

"What is it like to go first?" my therapist wondered with me, understanding the significance of this change and new beginning for me. As our work continued, therapy helped me understand and develop my boundaries, promote my own needs as well as supporting others, and to recognise my need for separateness, not just relatedness. At the same time, along with the clinical training, it also helped me understand, embrace, and make use of the aspects of my twinship that inevitably call me towards connection and interconnectedness (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Buber, 1970), responsibility to the other (Levinas,

1969) and emotional availability (Orange, 1995). I learnt that these elements could be in harmony, not conflict – like the place that Nick and I had arrived at in our relationship – separate and also together.

### *Recreating twinships*

The therapy world is as close to the twin-world that I can find in the non-twin-world. I feel a sense of homeliness and belonging, but I also appreciate that at least on one level, I find myself working as a therapist to recreate twinship relationships and manage the separation that Nick and I have carefully nurtured in our relationship together over the recent years. I know not all twinships are the same, as the following stories illuminate. But I am incredibly grateful for my close and harmonious twinship with Nick and the joy and support it has always brought to my life. I consider this story first and foremost a love story, the depth of which however remains beyond my words.

## Harriet's story

Harriet had kindly agreed to meet me at a nearby train station. It was a cold morning, and as we journeyed the short distance to her home along muddy country roads, I was struck by her friendliness and warmth, which had the effect of thawing both the wintery cold and my apprehension. Harriet's dog Bubba greeted us enthusiastically when we arrived, and after chatting for a while in the kitchen the three of us moved next door beside the log fire with a pot of tea, which evoked a strong sense of being back at home for me.

*"How does it feel to get underway?",* I asked.

*I have been looking forward to it. I'm aware of being in a very healthy place with my twin at the moment, very together.*

Harriet started by telling me that although their mother had been sure there was "more than one," the arrival of twins was something of a surprise to everyone else; *"*Our heartbeats were right behind, aligned. One right behind the other*."* Harriet was born first, twenty-five-minutes before her sister Hannah, and upon hearing this I noticed how I oriented myself-in relation to her, taking up the 'youngest twin' position. Harriet continued to explain how being born first along with Hannah's initial fragility, which meant she spent her first days in an incubator, profoundly shaped her identity:

*I definitely got the dominant card… The narrative is I'd beaten, you know kicked my way out… You know, these narratives all just start forming*.

"*How do you feel about that dominant twin identity, and how it influenced you*?" I asked.

"*I have really mixed feelings about it",* responded Harriet.

*I do things first. I was always in A&E as a kid because I was always the first to jump off something or try something… But of course, there are times when that can be a real button for me… When I feel someone's putting me out front and saying, "I'll be behind you, cheerleading", it can really, really push my buttons. I don't want a cheerleader. I want somebody next to me*.

I asked Harriet what she could remember from her early childhood and her relationship with Hannah:

*We used to kind of cuddle up together… I had a transitional object until my adulthood, but I was her transitional object, so she used to want me…and I comforted her. She wanted me as her comfort.*

Harriet paused for a moment, before continuing:

"*I can't remember going to anybody."*

Acknowledging this silently but empathically, we both sat still for a few moments. I wondered how Harriet was feeling and nearly asked her. Perhaps sensing my indecision, she took the lead:

*How do you help somebody individuate without cutting part of them away?*

Tensing in response to her question, I listened as Harriet told me about her experience of boarding school, and how she and Hannah were separated in their first year "to make life easier for the teachers." I rolled my eyes. "I didn't like it. I didn't see the point of it," Harriet said. I understood entirely and felt that this implicitly understood experience of twinship did not need further comment. Yet listening to her, it became clear that Harriet also "sort of wanted to break free" from her sister, something she was able to acknowledge - but even all these years on, not without a palpable sense of guilt and discomfort:

*I remember feeling, and again this is really difficult to acknowledge. I remember feeling, "Go away. Leave me alone." And it's really difficult to admit that. "Stop hanging about, I want to be with the cool kids".*

*"*I can see it's really difficult to share," I offered – not noticing the twin meaning of these words, nor how accurately they spoke to Harriet's struggle - both then and now. "But perhaps so natural as well. That sort of natural need to differentiate at that point. But I can hear the guilt around that too, and the dilemma then – that conflict."

*Yeah, absolutely. And I think it came out in like I'd be naughtier, you know? I hung out with the naughty people… I actually really wanted to differentiate because Hannah would never have hung out with those people… It was a territory that she wouldn't have come into… It was me on my own.*

Although boarding school was an environment in which Harriet began to explore her separateness, Harriet and Hannah were often treated as a 'unit' by their peers, for example when both girls were shamed as a response to Harriet rejecting one of the boys at the school:

*The kind of flip side of everything is right in that story. That you want to be different, you want to be cool, then suddenly, you know, the shit hits the fan, something horrible happens, you're both rejected, but you've got each other. So, there you are, thrown back again into this safe haven… And even with our ruptures, it's always there isn't it?*

Following school, Harriet and Hannah went to different universities, a move which represented the first point of real 'separation' in their lives so far. Reflecting on this together, we acknowledged the significance of this change and the challenges and opportunities it presented. Harriet recalled:

*I remember using the pronoun 'I' and they would be using 'you' as in the singular, and it was so unfamiliar. I remember thinking, they don't know I'm a 'we'! They think I'm a solo person, it was so weird.*

Although going to different universities had been a conscious "we need to live our own lives" decision, I noticed Harriet's mood shift as she continued to reflect on this time, and how vulnerable she now sees that they were, being away from the safety and security of the twinship for the first time:

*I don't know if we really knew how to take care of, to protect ourselves, keep ourselves safe without each other, if I'm honest. I think we always turn to each other. I think we were very vulnerable.*

I thought about my own sense of vulnerability at this time; for both of us then, twinship seemingly held safety and vulnerability, and that these two states were somehow inextricably linked – inseparable even. For Harriet, it seemed that the emerging story so far was one of a struggle to reconcile her needs for both separateness and safety. How - and where - in the world could she find this?

*I don't want a cheerleader; I want somebody next to me.* Still reverberating around in my thoughts, I decided to revisit this earlier statement with Harriet. I asked her whether it was

something that had come up for her in therapy at all: “Oh my goodness, and not that long ago,” she replied emphatically.

*It caused a massive rupture in my relationship [with my partner], and we’ve repaired now in a very healthy way I think, but that came up for me big time, because what I couldn't then see was the value of the relationship if you're not going to be with me, if I'm just out on my own again*.

I listened as Harriet continued:

*I went into a very young rage. I mean just screaming at my therapist; let it all out in my therapy*.

“*Was that something that was understood by your therapist, in the context of your twinship?*” I asked.

*Yeah, totally. She'd sort of been waiting, waiting for that that sort of held energy of “nope, yep I can do it, that's what I do, that's my role, that's the identity.”*

*She allowed it to happen*?

*I think expecting it, waiting for it. Of course, that rage was directed at my twin. And the words that came out were very telling*.

As Harriet continued to tell me about one of the most significant ruptures with her twin, which occurred shortly after the death of her previous partner, I noticed it was not easy for her to do so:

*I just lost it with her. And the words that came out as I was screaming were “there's nowhere safe”. Because that rupture with her was devastating. Devastating. I didn't know what to do with myself for a few days. I mean she’s [Hannah] my attachment figure. There was no hiding from that then, and it was, it was it was worse than the grief. Honestly it was worse.*

“*You felt ripped apart*,” I replied.

*Oh my God, it was you know, that disintegration, like the shattering glass*.

*And that featured in your therapy at the time*?

*Yeah very much so. I imagine I probably messaged my therapist during that time.*

We sat quietly for a moments, perhaps both needing to settle, before Harriet spoke again:

*I might have some more tea. Do you want some more tea*?

Harriet poured us both another mug of tea and exhaled deeply, before announcing, "It reminds me of something that is probably relevant to this conversation." Steadying herself before continuing:

*It's interesting being in therapy as a twin, because that's a really fine line for a therapist to be walking. Especially when you've had a rupture* [with your twin]. *There's such a strong line for what's okay for the therapist to say*.

"*It's a tightrope!"* I exclaimed.

*It's a tightrope to support me without crossing that line that would be challenging to come back from, when everything's repaired.*

As Harriet told me more about her experience of therapy, I learnt that her therapist herself had twin sisters:

*I think she was really careful about disclosing them, so when she told me, I sort of thought "why wouldn't you have told me that before, about having twin sisters"? But by that point it was a really lovely thing to hear, and it sort of made sense to me… And so I sort of saw her as the observer of twins, who would have seen the closeness, but would also have seen the challenges with it.*

*Yes, and also something maybe about for her, you know your therapist being able to be close enough maybe, and to move into some twinship-ness, but also to have that separateness.*

*Yes, absolutely.*

Harriet continued to describe a therapeutic relationship that had the quality of a “sort of weaving of twinship and mother, in quite an intense way,” particularly early on in their work together.

*I think she's done an amazing job with the parts work… acknowledging the more vulnerable parts or all the parts that were not okay for my mother or Hannah… Angry me, rageful, sad, vulnerable, helpless, desperate me… I mean that was just a huge, probably the hugest part for me*.

I was moved to hear how this process in therapy for Harriet had subsequently benefited her personal relationships, and also her own work as a therapist, where she is able to help her clients identify and integrate their split-off ‘not-me’ self-states too. I asked Harriet what else had been significant for her in her therapy:

*I mean, it's given me a place to be able to work through my relationship with my twin. Therapy was a really healthy space for me for the first time to be really able to explore the water in the goldfish bowl that I’d just lived in and couldn't really see.*

Mindful that Harriet’s first experience of therapy hadn’t been as helpful - it was an intellectually based relationship and one in which the significance of her twinship had not been considered at all - I wanted to know what she felt was important for therapists to hold in mind when working with twins:

*Stop thinking in terms of separation and start thinking about the healthiest relationship that you can create*.

Harriet’s response struck a deep chord with me and reminded me of one of the reasons I’d set out on this research journey in the first place. Meanwhile, outside the wind had calmed and the day had brightened. Inside it felt as if we were drawing towards a close, like the smouldering fire, it’s heat beginning to fade. Yet Harriet seemed on the edge of something important; there was more to say still.

*There's one thing that comes up just as we’re talking… I guess there’s sort of two parts to it, there’s the gaze and there’s the sort of holding... But I guess what strikes me about it is the one-to-one nature of that holding space.*

“*Yes*,” I replied.

*It's just you and them. And there's something really special about that one-to-one, that I think wasn't there, as a child; there just wasn't time to have one-to-one.*

*Do you mean with mum*?

*Yes. Gazing and holding and being held and safe. "I'm here. I'm just with you. I'm just with you. It's just you." I mean even as I say that, it could make me cry, "it's just you. It's just about you.*

*Yes, it's been absent*.

*Oh my God, Rob, that's just it in itself.*

*It's been absent but also kind of present in a different kind of way. With your therapist, when you have those moments, how does it feel?*

*Oh, it just feels like love.*

Back in the car we chatted freely during the short drive back to the station, at once transitioning together and apart, back into the non-twin world. Stepping out of the car I thanked Harriet again and we said goodbye. The station was deserted, the next train not departing for nearly two-hours. Walking slowly up and down the platform, I contemplated Harriet's moving story and the warm feeling that remained from our meeting.

The second listening: voice poems

I remember
I remember just not even thinking about it.
we were going to a new thing
I would never look to her
I would assume
I would go first.
I mean
I didn't even think about it.

*

I remember
we were at boarding school
we were in the school band
we must have been about 14
I can't remember
we're in the wing
we're about to play
I was the actor
I did drama
we're in the wings
I was just absolutely terrified
I said
“I can't do it
I'm not doing it”
[she said] “yes we are;
“we can do it”
I remember that moment.

*

I think
we always turn to each other
I think
we were *very* vulnerable
I mean
I know
we were
I mean
we were just not good at it
We just weren’t good at it
I don't think
we'd ever had to
we’d had each other.
I think the world just suddenly happened to us
[and] we'd come from this cocoon, really.

*

We
we did
we were suddenly there
I'm sure
I do remember
I had
I had my safety person there.

*

I suppose
you want to be different
you want to be cool
you're both rejected
you've got each other.
[there] you are

*

One of the first things I noticed about Harriet's voice poems is that she does a lot of "thinking" and "remembering" with regards to her experience of twinship. Harriet seems to remember the occasions when Hannah, her "safety person" is alongside her and providing attachment security and support. For example, in the first poem, we can see Harriet's dominant twin "I," standing confidently alone and "out front" on the page. However, in the second poem her "I" has a moment of stage fright and needs to receive support from her "we" ("we can do it") before making it out on stage. This is visually signalled on the page, where the "we" seems to prop up the "I". In the third poem, Harriet's "I" voice is hesitant and unsure ("I think", "I mean"), whereas her "we", despite expressing vulnerability, does so with conviction and certainty, which paradoxically feels more secure. In essence, Harriet's story told through her I Poems can be seen as a story about where and how can her "I" stand alone and still feel safe in the world. This seems to be well expressed in the final poem, where the "I" does indeed stand alone on the page, supposing this very question. This tension between states of aloneness and states of togetherness is further illuminated by Harriet's contrapuntal voices, explored below.

## The third listening: the voice of “it’s me on my own”

Although I initially identified Harriet’s “dominant twin” voice for the third listening, I was aware of a nagging sense of self-doubt, as if something was being overlooked or left behind, and I became curious about what this might be telling me about Harriet’s experience. I listened again and heard the emotions that accompany Harriet when she is out on her own. I heard anger, then fear and vulnerability; Harriet’s dominant twin often seems ‘young’ and scared. I therefore made the decision to write Harriet’s story from her “me on my own” voice, identifying significant statements from the transcript relating to this voice and the accompanying emotion and feelings that sit with it – typically aloneness, anger, fear, vulnerability, and protest:

*When I feel like someone's putting me out front and saying, “I'll be behind you cheerleading,” it can really, really push my buttons… I don't want a cheerleader. I want somebody next to me… it can really put me into a rage, like a rage! You know it’s real young stuff!... I went into a very young rage… it's me on my own, you know… that rage was directed at my twin… I just lost it with her… I remember even at the time feeling like this is like a three-year-old, on their own in a room, screaming and stamping their feet. I was screaming “there's nowhere safe”… I would never look to her. I would assume I would go first… I was just absolutely terrified, and I said “I can't do it. I'm not doing it”… Sometimes I don't want to climb a mountain… that's when the rage came… And a few days later there was just rage… It was me on my own… the world is not safe.*

Reading from this voice led to a surprise for me, in that I began to relate more closely to Harriet. I thought that I had adequately heard her struggle stemming from being the first-born “dominant twin”. However, it seems that like others’, I had initially underestimated the underlying difficulty Harriet faced from this, despite her explicitly telling me. Making space for her “me on my own” rather than her “dominant twin” allowed me to *really* hear her fearful, vulnerable, overwhelmed, sometimes lost and young voice too, which spoke to me in a way that was instantly recognisable as also often my own voice.

## The fourth listening: the voice of “togetherness”

Alongside Harriet’s voice of “me on my own” is her voice of “togetherness”, a state-of-being that she finds both in her twinship with Hannah and also in therapy. This voice has an altogether different tone and quality to “me on my own,” and was most identifiable not by words, but by how I noticed feeling while hearing this voice; soothed and calmed – almost blissful. When Harriet speaks of her together experiences with Hannah or in therapy, her voice evokes a sense of feeling held, safe, secure, content, loved, at peace.

*I'm aware of being in a very healthy place with my twin at the moment, very together… We always had each other… That's your safety net… It was this sort of weaving of twinship and mother… there was this very strong, sort of wrapping up in her. Another twin and a mother - you can be all of that for me… I mean it’s a regression and it’s about going back to a place of safety… I just went right into babyhood… we’d be curled up together into maybe twelve years old… I had my safety person there…. you’ve got each other… thrown back again into this safe haven…it's always there isn’t it… The one-to-one nature of that holding space… It's just you and them… Gazing and holding, and being held and safe. “I'm here. I'm just with you. I'm just with you. It's just you…” It just feels like love… if I bring the idea of twinship into therapy… it's two people, and it's you.*

During my listening to Harriet’s “together” voice, I became aware of the seductive nature of this voice for me, like the Sirens’ song in Homer’s Odyssey, such is my own relationship with states of oneness and togetherness. I wondered about Harriet’s own ‘odyssey,’ and the way in which her “me on my own voice” and her “together” voices interact and are in tension with each other. This is at the heart of her story; how might she position herself in the world with a sense of separateness, interconnection and safety?

## Relationship between the voice of “me on my own” and the voice of “togetherness”

Reading the above two passages sequentially, I became aware that both contrapuntal voices often seem to speak from a ‘young’ place, and so I wondered about regression. Speaking from the voice of “me on my own”, Harriet is, “*like a three-year-old, on their own in a room, screaming and stamping their feet”.* Meanwhile speaking about a time in therapy from her “together” voice, “*I just went right into babyhood*;” then, “*Gazing and holding, and being held and safe*.” Here, there is a sense of a deeply enjoyable, healing experience, in contrast to the “me on my own,” which seems to be speaking from a scared place. I wondered if this suggests a degree of unmet attachment needs and maternal holding in

infancy. Whilst the ‘Sirens’ call’ towards states of togetherness might hold a potentially seductive pull for a twin, it may also risk dependency and the loss of oneself. Listening to the relationship between these contrapuntal voices makes audible the soundtrack to this delicate dance that Harriet and many other twins perform as they negotiate their being-in-the-world.

## Alex's story

I arrived fifteen minutes early and waited at the top of Alex's road in a busy part of South London; it was a breathless mid-summer day and one of the hottest of the year so far. Checking my watch once again, I rang the doorbell and was greeted by Alex, who welcomed me warmly. Having moved inside we chatted happily in a large room filled with plants and natural light. Alex had kindly made time for me during a busy workday, so after a while I suggested we could get underway, so as not to take up too much of her space.

Alex began by telling me that she was born nine-minutes before her sister, Natalie.

*Apparently, my sister kicked me out, that's the party line, because we even fought in the womb. And that's kind of summarized our relationship up until the age of about twenty.*

Before Alex moved away to university when she was eighteen, she and Natalie shared a room while their older sister had the third bedroom to herself, which although understandable was nevertheless frustrating:

*I moved out, as soon as I could. I think that was quite stressful because even though we never got on, we were always very much forced to share small spaces… I really think separation would have helped us so much. And I actually get quite wound up by that.*

Listening to Alex, it seemed that this struggle for space and separation had been compounded by the fact that she and Natalie had often been treated as a 'unit' by other people, although not their parents: "I don't know if you were ever referred to as 'the boys,'" Alex asked me, slightly unsure whether it was okay to do so.

*But when one sibling gets their own name and then two siblings get "the girls," you can, I think resent that a lot.*

I smiled and noticed some sameness as Alex told me how her parents had done "the smart thing" by choosing to dress them in different coloured outfits, usually red or blue, just as my parents had done for myself and Nick. I wondered if Alex was 'blue' like me, or 'red,' like Nick.

*It was lots of sharing and mixing and matching… you had to be completely equal…So one of you is going to open the card, the other one is going to take it out. One of you can cut the cake and the other one picks the, you know… Anything that she would have I wanted, and vice versa.*

Although Alex shared several humorous examples, I also understood the seriousness of this for her and how, like for many twins, issues of fairness and equality became significant themes in childhood and beyond. Later in our conversation I would recognise these as core values for Alex, informing her politics and her commitment to supporting less fortunate people in society, for example in her long-term volunteering with homeless people. As Alex continued, I noticed a change in her otherwise animated and outgoing energy when she began to tell me more about Natalie and the challenges she faced growing up, which included some health issues and learning difficulties. Speaking more softly, she told me:

*The thing is Natalie…she's got some conditions and they have held her back a lot. I think that actually was definitely the kind of tricky thing growing up because I think… It sort of felt like nothing I did mattered.*

While Alex therefore naturally outperformed her sister academically, it "felt pointless because, what's the point? What is the point of me achieving if Natalie doesn't have to and gets just as much reward"? I empathised with Alex and acknowledged how hard this must have been to manage. "I wasn't emotionally mature enough to understand that we were different and that we should be celebrated for differences." Understanding what she meant, it seemed that it was the refusal of other people to recognise and acknowledge their differences that had been problematic; everything had to be the same, yet there *was* difference.

*Now I can kind of go well, yeah, because you're on your own different journeys and actually Natalie nearly getting a C is really special! I think that's where I get a lot of guilt from, because now I'm older and I can realise that I just…didn't understand, I think.*

"*And you suggested that that's the point when some difficulties started to arise for you*", I asked.

*You know, I developed loads of behavioural problems. It was like, Natalie was the ill one and I was the naughty one.*

*You were kind of labelled with those identity pieces?*

*Yeah. I was the naughty one and Natalie had the problems.*

*And what do you think your, kind of 'naughty behaviour' was an expression of?*

"*Anger*", Alex replied emphatically.

*I was a very angry child, I think. I feel incredibly strongly about stuff and I had a very strong belief in right and wrong and what is fair. When I saw unfairness around me, I couldn't understand that.*

I wondered how this 'bad' or 'naughty' twin' identity might have impacted her, but decided not to share this thought for now, not wanting to take the space from Alex as she continued to reflect:

*Obviously, there's been a lot of work in therapy as well, dealing with emotional problems. I started CAMHS twice, but I found that frustrating. I don't know, I also felt a little bit like it wasn't my fault and therefore, why am I the one having to do this kind of thing, I guess.*

As Alex told me about her experiences with mental health diagnosis and treatment, I couldn't help feel that she had had a difficult time finding the right kind of support.

*I was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder when I was fifteen, but then re-diagnosed when I was about twenty-seven. I was quite heartbroken by that because I didn't agree with that diagnosis. But then I discovered what are called "quiet borderlines", whereas instead of externalizing you internalise, and well, that's more like me; I'm nasty to myself and I'm loving to other people. But I find the diagnosis really hard to accept.*

I was moved by what Alex had shared. We both reflected on the nature of diagnoses, and the often-problematic nature of BPD in particular. I was relieved to hear that despite a difficult start with therapy, Alex had later experienced something far more helpful, following a referral to outpatient treatment for an eating disorder:

*I left my job for three months and we did therapy every day. Most of it was talking therapies, but we also did art therapy and drama therapy. And I loved DBT. I was finally like this makes sense, because I mean, don't get me wrong, I loved going into depth, why I felt the way I did,*

*but DBT actually gave me tools. I fully engaged with that, and since then, it's almost like I'm a completely different person.*

Alex continued to tell me how supportive her therapy group had been, which seemed like an integral aspect of the treatment for her. I was curious about this, and what it had been like for her to share space in this setting, given how central the theme of searching for her own space had been in her life:

*I'm just thinking about being in group settings as a twin, obviously it was a bigger group than just two, but did your twinship or your experience as a twin feel significant in any particular ways in that setting, or was it not present for you?*

*No. No. She didn't come into it at all. But then, I think when I was talking to you before, it was suddenly realising that, yeah, maybe potentially, there were… Yeah, yeah.*

We both laughed a little, perhaps sensing the tension that Alex was sitting with and her reluctance to bring her sister into this space too.

*"Can you tell me more about that?"* I asked.

*It was about me, and honestly, I wouldn't even have thought of her or wanted to think about her, because, this isn't about her. And God did you see the like hard-done-by-ness in my voice? "This isn't about her."*

I could well understand this response, while at the same time noting our differences here and how I felt that I needed to bring Nick into the therapeutic space, rather than keep him out. Perhaps drawing on her work in therapy, Alex recognised and acknowledged that "ten-year old Alex" had come into the room now. I was pleased to see her, because I understood that this 'younger Alex' was expressing something very important about her experience of twinship. However, I could also see that this was difficult for Alex, who was feeling conflicted:

*I think I've said already that guilt is a very strong feeling, a central theme around my relationship with my sister.*

Trying to make sense of this with Alex, I suggested how difficult it can be for twins to promote their own needs without feeling this to be at the cost of their co-twin. I noticed that I began to experience something of a dilemma myself too: I felt it important for Alex to be able

to speak of her anger and resentment, yet acknowledging the extent of these feelings brought her more in touch with the guilt, which was clearly uncomfortable for her. I shared with Alex that I thought her experience was not uncommon, but that maybe it could feel that way because of the sociocultural expectation that all twins must be close and have harmonious relationships.

Meanwhile, the more I listened to Alex, the more clearly I could see her resilience and how hard she had had to work to overcome challenges in her life. For example, struggling with mental health and making ends meet while at university, but nevertheless nearly getting a first-class degree; and the success she had subsequently found in her career, too. She *was* a high achiever, even if that had been frustrated for the early part of her life, where she had faced considerable challenges navigating the complex terrain of twinship. I suggested that this seemed a significant – and perhaps overlooked - part of her story, which might also be recognised. “Weirdly I’ve never thought about that.” I was pleased we made some space for this possibility.

Although I was aware that it was not always easy for Alex to talk, I was also nevertheless struck by just how much there did indeed seem to be to talk about. It was as if now that the door had been opened ajar, new understandings were rushing through, alongside the sometimes-difficult emotions. For example, the importance of equality and fairness was now also being understood through the lens of early attachment needs:

*I suppose you're too young to know what sharing is, and so all you're seeing is your caregiver is being taken away by this thing, so that thing therefore is bad and that could be a mobile phone or that could be going to work. But my thing was Natalie. You need your caregiver with you. No wonder it builds in competition.*

Despite this realisation, as Alex continued to tell her story it seemed as if a guilt followed her around, refusing to give up its hold. At one point she remarked, “I'm definitely going to text her saying “I love you” after finishing this!” But listening to Alex speak about her relationship with Natalie, their enduring love for each other was a constant theme too, and not something that I had doubted. Indeed, Alex provided many examples of loving acts and gestures, but also suggested how these had sometimes been misinterpreted as hostile attempts at out-competing each other:

*I’ve just realised now that when I was saying that I do a lot for her, that she shows her love to me too, and has done.*

I was moved by this. It seemed that although Alex and Natalie's twinship had often been a fraught one, their twin-bond was strong, and perhaps all the more so for it.

Aware that we had been speaking for over ninety minutes now, we began drawing things to a close. In doing so, I was surprised to find myself thanking Natalie instead of Alex. It was as if I was simultaneously acknowledging her presence and contribution in the space, while also underscoring the challenges Alex had experienced in her twinship and her hard-won process of finding her own separateness. We both laughed and agreed I should know better! Travelling home, I knew I had witnessed a very important – and courageous – voice of twinship, which I was sure needed to be better heard and understood.

The second listening: voice poems

I moved out
I could
I think that was quite stressful
we never got on
we were always very much forced to share small spaces!
I went to uni
I never looked back
I think
I came back
I could have the floor

*

I think
we were born
we felt
I don't know
you need the affection

I suppose
you're too young
all you're seeing
I suppose
you see your caregiver being taken away
I mean
I responded
that's what you learn
You need your caregiver with you.

*

I think
I think
I have
I find it annoying
I'm like
I can’t believe
you just said that
you never really like want to say
you feel like such a terrible person

*

I think
I've had lots of like identity problems
I am now

I'm quite happy
I know
I'm a nice person
I'm a good person
I'm very giving
I'm very loving

you have this little part of you
you're a bit of a bitch there
aren't you

I said
I'm not manipulative

you start going

[am] I like
I'm just masking the fact
I'm actually not a nice person.

As well as the actual poems themselves, it was interesting to note the ratios of I/we/you in Alex's narrative. Alex's "we" voice features significantly less than her "you" voice (in contrast to Harriet, where the reverse is true). Alex therefore appears to construct and position herself as a twin less often in her narrative. This seems to be in keeping with her attempts to distance herself and find space from her twin, Natalie, which is a central theme running throughout her story: Alex is less comfortable as a "we" than an "I" or a "you."

Meanwhile, her "you" voice appears most prominent when she is feeling guilty (for example "you feel like such a terrible person") or when she is acknowledging unmet needs ("you see your caregiver being taken away"). I wondered if this shift from first to third person might be a way of defending herself from these difficult emotions. Similarly, Alex makes use of her "you" voice when questioning whether she is a "bad person", perhaps to psychologically distance herself from this possibility. For example, "*you're* a bit of a bitch there aren't *you*," contrasts with when Alex experiences herself as a "good person," where she uses the first person (*I'm* a nice person; *I'm* a good person; *I'm* very giving; *I'm* very loving). This tension between the "I" and the "you" seems to manifest as an internal conflict between Alex's "good" and "bad" selves, which is identified and explored below as a contrapuntal voice.

## The third listening: the voice of “guilt”

Listening to Alex’s narrative, her “voice of guilt” emerges quietly at first, but before long appears to all but drown out her other voices, including her “angry voice”, which was initially the most audible:

*Guilt is a very strong feeling - central theme around my relationship with my sister… I always feel bad because sometimes… I'm like, you can't get wound up. I think that's why I feel so guilty about it. Like how rude of me to be irritated… Because then I feel really guilty... With Natalie it’s guilt… Like even now, everything I'm saying makes me feel guiltier… I think that's just how much internal guilt I have. Some of those thoughts you never really like want to say, and you feel like such a terrible person… I know I feel guilty… I feel more guilt about not being close… I'm definitely going to text her afterwards saying “I love you!” I was just thinking more guilt stuff has come up, about erm, the stuff she does for me, like how I've never really liked, fully appreciated it… That makes me feel bad.*

Listening to Alex’s story as told by her “voice of guilt,” it is clear that this emotion is, as Alex articulates herself, “a central theme” in her relationship with her twin. Alex feels guilty for being irritated by Natalie; for having negative thoughts about her; for not being close; and for underappreciating her loving gestures. In the interview, I found myself wanting to reassure Alex that it was quite natural to have mixed feelings about one’s twin, and that the particular challenges of twinship make it all but inevitable. Perhaps I felt a sense of guilt and responsibility myself as the researcher for Alex’s emotions, which were clearly difficult for her to encounter. Despite my attempts at normalising these emotions, it felt as if we were both powerless against the guilt.

## The fourth listening: the voice of “am I good or bad”?

Listening to Alex’s story again, I noticed that as her “voice of guilt” gains momentum, two further voices speak up – “I’m good” and “I’m bad.” For this fourth listening, I decided to combine these voices into one:

*I'm genuinely a nice person… am I only a nice person because I'm being manipulative? … I'm really nasty to myself and I'm loving to other people… I'm going to be good... I’m not that person, and then you kind of go, oh shit, am I that person? And then you start spiralling a bit of being like, “am I a bad person”? I always feel bad because sometimes I just find myself getting really like wound up… I do lots of volunteering… I do want everyone to be happy, I feel like it's my duty... I'm just so like hot and cold… I've been trying to make more of an effort. Trying to do little things … You feel like such a terrible person… I know I'm a nice person and I’m a good person, I'm very giving and I’m very loving… I wonder if there's always a good twin bad twin… It’s one of those feelings where it’s like does this make me a bad person.*

As Alex’s narrative develops, it seems that the conflict with Natalie, foregrounded at the start of her account, shifts to a new front: an internal conflict between her “good” and “bad” self. The relationship between these two voices is such that they are hard to separate, as if locked into a struggle. However, in presenting them as one here, I became aware that I was also essentially treating them as “a unit.” I then wondered if this could perhaps speak to an issue that may be at the heart of this conflict, i.e. Alex’s experience of sharing space and being treated as a twin-unit, rather than as an individual. Alex’s question “I wonder if there's always a good twin bad twin” also made me wonder in-turn whether the good twin / bad twin cultural discourse of twinship may have been internalised by Alex.

## Relationship between the voice of “guilt” and the voice of “am I good or bad”

Allowing myself to imagine what kind of relationship these above voices might have, the phrase that came to mind was a “love/hate relationship.” The voice of guilt loves to torment Alex’s voice of “I’m good,” and fuels her sense of being bad. As soon as Alex suggests she might be a good person, the voice of guilt swiftly intervenes to remind her “I’m bad” voice to speak up. Alex’s “I’m good” voice hates the voice of guilt, but somehow can’t live without it. I wonder if this intricate relationship between love and hate might also partially speak to Alex’s twinship. Alex and Natalie clearly love each other, yet their mutual expressions of love have often been misinterpreted as hostile. I found this very poignant.

## Sarah's story

It was a bright autumnal morning, and I was excited to meet Sarah. We had spoken briefly the week before and it was clear that her twinship was very much at the forefront of her mind, as both a trainee psychotherapist and a client in therapy herself. Sarah had responded to a flyer that I had left in the waiting area of a therapy practice in North London where I work, and so it was here that we decided to meet. As we entered this space and closed the door, it was as if walking through a looking glass, leaving behind and sealing off the non-twin-world. Perhaps indirectly speaking to this, Sarah also expressed that she was feeling excited: "there is excitement, you know, about being with a twin and talking about this. I don't get to do that – ever."

Sarah began by immediately bringing her twin Jessica into the room, reflecting on early childhood and how close – emotionally and spatially – they were: "I just think of Jessica and I, always sharing a space… If you look at all the photos, we are facing each other or next to each other, or, you know, holding hands down the street… so just the closeness of our bodies is something that I really think about." Sarah gave the impression that this was a special time, something that resonated with my own experience too. But it also came under threat when the family moved to a new home and Sarah and Jessica were nine-years old:

*They wanted to build Jessica and I separate rooms. And I really remember this, so distinctly, like our life depended on persuading mum and dad to only build one big room... I can feel it now, you know, the panic of what if we can't persuade them that this is the right thing. Like, they've got to understand that this is not just what we want, we need it.*

I was relieved to hear that Sarah and Jessica successfully saw off this attempt at their separation, and interested to hear how Sarah understood it through the lens of her therapy training, as "The threat of annihilation… what happens if our bodies aren't together?" Although Sarah clearly cherished this time, she also acknowledged it to be an intense way to live, referencing that it wasn't always straightforward, particularly as they got older: "When we got to sixteen, it was a bit more problematic!" Although Sarah does not remember much from this time, according to her mother and elder sister it was "full of conflict", which was perhaps an expression of the growing need for separateness.

It wasn't until a few years later though that the first significant separation occurred, when Sarah went to university and Jessica stayed in their hometown and began working. I was curious about what this had been like for Sarah:

*We'd been together and ensured that we were together so intensely, and then it was like, okay, now we need to be separate. Looking back, I think, you know, we were clumsily individuating, but in a very like, "it's got to happen now" way.*

Sarah got on well at university, but the change was more challenging for Jessica, who seemed to struggle with the separation: "She was really lost and really, probably an enormous part of it was, you know, individuating from her twin." I think I knew what this sense of lostness felt like; it sounded as if Jessica had fallen into the cracks between the twin-world and the non-twin world and couldn't get back out. Sarah continued to reflect on this time, naming the anger she felt at how poorly understood and managed this process for twins can be, as it was for her and Jessica:

*It is really anger, you know, that nobody held us, that nobody said, you know… that this was a big deal. There was no allowance for the fact that we were not singletons. We were twins and it was just expected that I would be able to go to university and leave Jessica… It was never conscious to me that that was a difficult thing to do… It just was not considered by anyone.*

With Jessica's secure base away at university, it was her mum that provided the additional holding that Jessica required:

*I think mum held her, she would say… Mum really saved her.*

I wondered about birth order and how, so far, all the older twins I'd spoken to seemed to manage new beginnings and the separation/individuation process somewhat more easily. Sarah alluded to this too, before telling me how she had been born fitter and stronger than Jessica, who was just three pounds compared to Sarah's five:

**Sarah:** *That's very little, and her lungs weren't fully developed… She's struggled with asthma all her life, but she was really poorly when we were younger. So, having read about attachment… about who was held, you know. Jessica was held far more than me.*

**Rob:** *Because she needed it*

**Sarah:** *Because she needed it*

**Rob:** *But you needed it too…*

**Sarah:** *Exactly. And this has been massive for me. I'm just beginning, you know, last year was a big year for understanding this for me, but… I hate being on the periphery.*

This new understanding seemed very significant for Sarah, and there was pain here, too. We both understood the dilemma:

**Sarah:** *Obviously, babies need to be held by their primary caregiver, and as a twin, there's the "what about me"? And then when you are being held, there's the "what about my sister"? You can't even just relax in that. You are taking away.*

**Rob:** *You're either being impinged or impinging upon, so it's a dilemma.*

**Sarah:** *Exactly.*

I was curious to hear more about Sarah's relationship with being on the periphery that she had alluded to, and this delicate dance between trying to have her own needs met without compromising her sister. Inviting some further reflection on this, Sarah introduced a new and important character in her story. Placing a hand on the left side of her lower abdomen, she continued:

*My inner child is here. This battle has been going on forever. I, we, she's, she's screaming, "but what about me." But the guilt and shame I feel for that, because she was poorly and she needed to be held is, you know, that conflict is just…*

Gesturing to imply the enormity of these emotions, Sarah softened back into her chair, and all three of us took a few moments to settle.

I learnt that one of the ways Sarah responded to this situation was to become a high achiever:

*I strived, to get noticed, to get loved, I strived, and I achieved. The interesting thing about being a twin is, there's only one gold medal… And I made sure that I got that.*

I admired Sarah's resilience and how, despite the pain and anguish from having received less maternal holding, which seemed to continue to play out to this day, her unconditional love and support of her sister Jessica was never in question; it was clear they shared an incredibly close twin-bond.

I was struck by the ‘emergent’ and alive feeling to our conversation so far. At this point in her life Sarah was now developing a deep understanding of the significance of her twinship and how it was fundamental to her being-in-the-world in a way that reminded me of my own journey during psychotherapy training: Sarah remarked:

*It feels to me as though my blinkers are being widened, and so ultimately, I am viewing the world differently.*

While this was productive it was also often challenging. As Sarah had articulated herself during our initial conversation a week or so ago, she sometimes felt stuck between two worlds, on the boundaries of the twin-world and the non-twin world, and this could be uncomfortable. Her first experience of psychotherapy seemed to illuminate this. Despite some helpful elements, it didn’t address Sarah’s twinship at all – it wasn’t well understood or seen as particularly significant by her therapist; Jessica wasn’t in the room at all. Furthermore, on one occasion Sarah remembers feeling judged by her therapist, who she feels misunderstood her natural “twin-world” way of relating as “intense.” I could understand why Sarah had found that to be, “Jarring…because that wasn’t meeting me.”

I was also interested to hear how Sarah had been drawn to Martin Buber’s ideas on I-Thou and I-It relating (Buber, 1970), in the same way I had, as a way of making sense of this “intense” level of relating and communicating, which seemed to not always be well-received or understood outside of her relationship with Jessica. “I wonder if a twin’s normal mode of relating is I-Thou,” Sarah suggested. It was certainly something I had wondered myself, and I was keen to hear more from Sarah about what it meant to her:

*For me it is where I feel safe. It's where I feel at home. You know, it is just, it's like comfort.*

This did not feel to be on offer in her first therapeutic relationship, so Sarah made the decision to bring things to an end and start the search for a new therapist, who she had recently found and started working with. Sarah recalled their first meeting, and how she was “quite forthright” about stating her needs and what hadn’t worked in her previous therapy:

*I said, I don't need you to be a twin therapist or have experience of twins, but, you know, to know that this is important to me. And what she said really made me tear up, because what she said was, “Oh, what I'm hearing is that there really needs to be space in this room for Jessica”. And I was like, oh my God. Yes, you've got it. That's it. It really touched me, you know, I was like, yeah, I need, I need space for Jess too.*

I was also moved to hear this. It sounded like Sarah had found a ‘relational home’ for both herself *and* Jessica. Thinking back to their early years, it was as if they’d been allowed to share a bedroom again, rather than being separated into different rooms. Leaving Jessica out just wasn’t going to work, as Sarah put it:

*Because she’s here! She’s here! And nobody else makes space for that.*

Catching a glimpse of the time, we were both shocked to learn that we’d been speaking for nearly two hours. It was time to transition back into the non-twin world. As we did so and Sarah finished her story, I was left with the sense that it was also somehow only just beginning. I felt that Sarah and her new therapist had much of value to learn still about their respective worlds, and that somewhere in the between of these worlds, more answers - and healing - awaited.

The second listening: voice poems

I think back
I just think of Jessica
and I, always sharing a space
I think
just the closeness of our bodies
I really think
I often think
we were
we
we moved house
we were nine
I really remember
we just were always together
we had the same friends
we'd had the same hobbies
we were
we were
I just think
you look back on that.

*

We were always called ‘the twins.’
we’d, you know
we were taken around
we were:
“…and this is ‘the twins.’”

*

I think
I look back
I think
I think
when you look at how intense
I say
I mean
we were 18
until, we separated
I went to university
I mean
I took myself away
we'd
we'd
we were together
we need to
we need to be separate

I think
we were clumsily individuating

*

I think Jessica
and I,
we're together
we
we
we just
*we are one*

*

I
I had to know
I
I think
when you're born
I was always pushed aside
that's where you want to be
I think
I've spent my life
putting myself, *right in the middle.*

*

*I*
*we*
*she*
*she's screaming,*
*"but what about me."*

*

I find Sarah's voice poems touching; there is a very strong sense of her close, loving relationship with Jessica and their special twin-bond. In the flow of the poems above, the I and the we are together, then move apart to "clumsily individuate," then find themselves back together, reunited again; this typifies the dance between separateness and togetherness. Reading through Sarah's voice poems, there seems to be little tension between the I and the we; they are harmonious. This seems to reflect her narrative, where despite a brief reference to a (not-remembered) period of conflict when Sarah and Jessica were around sixteen, there is no speak of rupture or conflict. Furthermore, it seems that while Sarah strongly identifies as a twin (she is comfortable being a "we"), she is also comfortable as an individual "I", embracing both identities. In the penultimate poem though, there is no "we"; it seems that when Sarah's inner child is present, she feels very much on

her own, a small ‘i’ feeling excluded and on the periphery, hence she tries to put herself “right in the middle” so that she might become a big ‘I’ or a ‘we’ again. In the last poem, although her inner child is screaming, it seems to have the quality of a silent scream, as if she is screaming into the void of space and cannot be heard. It is only later in her story that this voice becomes audible – first to herself, and then later to Jessica and her elder sister, who finally acknowledge how she has sometimes been “pushed aside.”

## The third listening: the voice of the inner child – “what about me”?

Building on the previous listenings as explored above, I felt it important to recognise and validate Sarah’s ‘inner child,’ her “what about me” voice.

*Jessica was held far more than me… [But I needed it too]… I hate being on the periphery… I hate, you know, exclusion is a killer… as a twin…there's the “what about me”? My inner child is here… she's screaming, “but what about me”. How I experience it is being dismissed, again. And, you know, not being heard. I was like, “yeah, it's really painful.” … To get attention and be seen, I, you know, I was the good girl… I strived, to get noticed, to get loved… I strived and I achieved… God, it was so painful…to not be included in that, was excruciating. Mum holding Jessica and not me and I was always pushed aside. It activates this inner child that is like, “what about me”? There's this bit of me that feels like it was unfair… And it was, that was unequal. And I had to work so bloody hard to get the same.*

The above story told by Sarah’s inner child reveals the pain and anguish from a lack of maternal holding and being “pushed aside,” due to Jessica’s additional needs in infancy. Sarah’s inner child protests “what about me”, but this voice has been dismissed and downplayed. Listening to Sarah’s story as told by her inner child also reveals how she creatively adjusted to these circumstances to feel seen, safe and loved: she strived and achieved and forced her way into the middle of groups to avoid feeling on the periphery.

## The fourth listening: the voice of the inner children – “what about us”?

As I continued with the third and fourth listenings, I began to hear a “what about us” voice as well as a “what about me.” I therefore wondered if Sarah might have more than one inner child? Listening again, it seems that there are two or even three ‘inner children’ here: Sarah’s ‘me’ and also her ‘we’, which I understand to comprise both herself *and* her twin. In the below paragraph I have pieced together Sarah’s story as told by her “what about us” voice.

*It's like the threat of annihilation…what happens if you know, our bodies aren't together… This is not just what we want, we need it… We lived in this non-twin world and we were expected to behave as singletons and there was no holding of that. There was no allowance for the fact that we were not singletons… It is really anger, you know, basically that nobody held us… Nobody saw that… I think I have some anger that it's just not better known that this is a big deal… Because she's here! And nobody else makes space for that… Why is it not better known? Why aren't we better held in this world?*

When Sarah speaks from her “what about us” voice, she is protesting at the singleton-world and the lack of “holding” and understanding that herself and Jessica experienced as twins. Typically, her “inner children” feel angry and let down. The first “what about us” experience that Sarah recalls is her parents attempt at separating herself and Jessica into their own bedrooms; the iinner-children’ are panicky and experience this as an existential threat, which they manage to survive – the angry protests work. Something of this seems to play out again when Sarah moves to university, which is their first real separation; it is not recognised as a “big deal” and there is no holding. Jessica is distressed and “lost”, so it stands to reason that Sarah’s ‘inner children’ would be too, hence although it is Jessica who experiences this time as challenging, Sarah speaks as an “us:” “nobody held us.”

## Relationship between the voice of “what about me” and the voice of “what about us”

As highlighted above, Sarah’s “what about me” speaks of a lack of maternal holding that she experienced, while her “what about us” is directed at the lack of societal understanding and holding that both her and Jessica received as twins in the non-twin world. Both voices run through Sarah’s narrative, but we hear her “what about us” first; she foregrounds her experience as a “we”, then later makes space for her “me.” As identified in the other listenings too, Sarah is concerned to keep space available for Jessica – she doesn’t shut her out, “because she’s here!” I therefore wonder if Sarah’s need to make space for Jessica in her therapy might also indicate a need to heal not only her inner child, but her “inner

children" too, i.e. herself *and* Jessica, and their collective experience of a lack of societal "holding." The contrapuntal listenings suggest that both voices are expressing unmet needs and that they cannot easily be separated.

# Chapter 5: Discussion

A number of 'twin worlds' have been discovered and articulated by the participants in this study, including that of my own. The stories, poems and voices of each twin are unique, and I wish to honour their individuality first and foremost. Each illuminates the phenomenology of twinship; each twin can stand alone, whole. At the same time, by bringing these multiple narratives and voices into relation with each other through use of the Listening Guide, themes relevant to the specific research aims and questions in this study are elicited for discussion. This discussion is organised into five thematic headings: *spatial contexts of twinship*; *twin bodies*; *twin-bond and attachment*; *being in the non-twin-world*; and *harmony to estrangement*. For each theme, practice-based implications for clinicians working with twins are also considered.

## Spatial contexts of twinship

Issues relating to physical space and how space is negotiated between twins was a central theme amongst all participants. I will begin by considering space in twin relationships and how this may influence how space is organised in the therapeutic relationship between client and therapist. The importance of the pre-birth space for twins and how this might influence narrative identity is also discussed.

### *Space in the co-twin relationship*

In the stories presented in this study, both Alex and Sarah foreground issues relating to sharing space. Sarah begins her story by reflecting:

*I think back to my childhood, um, I just think of Jessica and I, always sharing a space.*

While Alex remarks:

*We were always very much forced to share small spaces.*

With regards to how this sharing of space was experienced, Alex and Sarah also provide the most striking contrast in this study. Alex and her twin Natalie "fought in the womb" and bitterly resented having to share a bedroom together. One of the ways Alex adapted to this was by taking long baths, so that she could find space that was just hers and not shared – a habit that has stayed with her to this day. Walking to school separately was another way of

finding space when it was in such short supply. This mirrors both the frustration with and creative responses to sharing space in childhood reported by Bacon (2010), who in qualitative research found that twins Hannah and Charlotte, who were required to share a room until their late teenage years, created other ways to get their own space, for example by naming and claiming objects and sections of space in their bedroom. Hannah especially, "Searched out space where she could be alone in private – choosing the bathroom because 'there's a lock on [the door] and no one can get in'" (p.141).

In contrast, Sarah and Jessica cherished sharing a bedroom together. In fact, the possibility of being separated into individual bedroom spaces when they were nine was experienced as an existential threat, which Sarah recalled powerfully:

*I can feel it now, like the panic of what if we can't persuade them that this is the right thing…they've got to understand that this is not just what we want, we need it.*

It is also interesting to note in the participant stories the many references to where and how bodies (discussed as a separate theme below) are positioned in space and in relation to their twin. I therefore wonder if because of having had to share space so intimately, twins might naturally develop a particular sensitivity to where and how other bodies are constellated in-relation to them. Furthermore, twins may also have quite specific needs and requirements regarding space and how it is shared with others. This raises important implications for clinical practice.

### *Space in the therapy room*

Considering the above, I began to wonder, what does it mean for a twin to 'share' the space in psychotherapy with their twin? By this I mean symbolically speaking, although therapy with both twins can sometimes be recommended (Sheerin, 1991; Klein, 2021c; Friedman, 2018). In this study, Alex was adamant that she didn't want Natalie to be present in her therapy:

*It was about me, and honestly [I] wouldn't even have thought of her or wanted to think about her, because this isn't about her.*

In contrast, Sarah is moved to tears when her new therapist extends an invitation to make space for Jessica:

*It really made me tear up because what she said was, "What I'm hearing is that there really needs to be space in this room for Jessica." It really touched me, you know, I was like, yeah, I need, I need space for Jess too.*

It is striking how for both Alex and Sarah, their wishes here parallel their earlier childhood needs and requirements regarding space in relation to their twin. Similarly, it felt natural for Nick to be in the therapy room with me and it was essential to me that my therapist had a degree of twin psychology knowledge and experience working with twins, which she clearly demonstrated in our first session. This certainly does not seem to be the norm though, based on the experience of participants in this study and from accounts in the literature. For example, in our first experiences of therapy, myself, Alex and Harriet all had therapists who were seemingly uninterested in our twinships. Harriet reflects:

*I left that [therapist] because I realised I wasn't getting what I needed. We definitely didn't talk about Hannah. She wasn't in the room at all! She needed to be.*

This is an experience echoed by Friedman (2018, p.151), a psychotherapist herself: "I saw an analyst four times a week for four years, and my twinship never came up." I am not suggesting that therapists must always have their 'empty chair' occupied by the client's co-twin. However, based on the stories from this study, I suggest that a twin's early and ongoing experience of sharing space with their twin may influence how they feel about symbolically sharing space with them in the therapy room too. For Alex, it is very understandable that she needed that space to herself, and this should of course be respected. Understanding this need in the context of her history sharing a space with her twin though, helps a therapist to keep the door ajar. Alex reflects in her interview:

*She didn't come into it at all, but then, I think when talking to you it was suddenly realising like that, yeah, maybe potentially, there were. Yeah, yeah.*

It seems hard for Alex to explicitly voice the possibility that it might be helpful for her to include Natalie in therapy. But I wonder if that might be an important aspect of the early stages of therapy with a twin client who has struggled for space like Alex. A skilful, empathically attuned clinician could moderate this with their client, inviting them to decide on their own terms when they might be ready to bring their twin into the room – and when they might want them to leave it. Equally for Harriet, while therapy very much accommodated her twin, her most healing moments seemed to be intense states of oneness with her therapist where the space was just for her:

*“I’m here. I’m just with you. I’m just with you. It’s just you”. I mean, even as I say that it could make me cry. “It’s just you. It’s just about you.”*

If we consider the significance of this one-to-one experience, because twins must share the maternal attention in infancy, the one-to-one bidirectional “looking at the mother and being looked at by her” (Kohut, 1971, p.117) that activates a mirroring need (Togashi & Kottler, 2012) has typically not been experienced in the same way as for non-twins. Alongside this, the ever-presence of the co-twin means the twin baby's primary identification may not be with the mother, as in singletons, but with the other twin (Lewin, 1994). This raises important questions regarding what it means, and what it is like, for a twin to have a one-to-one experience in the therapeutic relationship – when the space is just for them. The question of who the therapist might become in the transference – twin or mother – is also significant. As noted in the literature review, clinicians might hold in mind the possibility that it could well be both, but especially the client’s co-twin (Lewin, 1994; Wright, 2010). As put by an identical twin reflecting on long-term psychotherapy and the presence of her twin in this process, “I may seem alone when I sit with you, but she will be there, beside me or behind me or in front of me or in my rucksack or peeking out from behind the cushion, she will be there” (Wright, 2010, p.268). Ignoring the twin in the transference (Lewin, 1994; 2002) is therefore unlikely to contribute to the process of twin therapeutic healing. However, a good working alliance and clinician sensitivity and reflexivity will likely be required here, especially as analysis of the transference may be experienced as a threat to the unity of the internal twin pair (Lewin, 2004).

The findings from this research emphasise the intricacies of ‘sharing space’ for twins in therapy, which does not seem to have been reported elsewhere. Previous narrative-based studies have highlighted important issues such as identity (Pietilä et al, 2013; Määttä et al, 2016; Fichtmüller, 2021) and intimacy (Allen et al, 2019) which might influence the extent to which twins include or exclude their twin in therapy. For example, twins who experience higher levels of intimacy or 'twintimacy’ (Allen et al, 2019) compared with those on the other side of the continuum might naturally feel more comfortable including their twin in psychotherapy, making space to explore the significance of this relationship. However, a link does not seem to have been made between the relational process of negotiating space between twins during their development and how that might inform their requirements for space with or without their twin in therapy, which emerged as a clear implication from this research. These findings therefore add a new perspective to existing research and suggest a

potentially worthwhile area for future research, which could investigate how early and ongoing negotiations of space in the twinship might influence psychotherapeutic process.

### *Pre-birth space and identity*

In this study, stories about sharing space in the womb and the experience of birth were centrally important to all participants and seemingly significant in informing ideas relating to narrative identity. For example, Harriet's 'dominant twin' identity can be understood as originating pre-birth: she "kicked her way out" of the womb towards space and light and continued to do so throughout childhood and beyond, always going first and developing a climb-any-mountain persona. This contrasts with how I understand the presence – and then sudden loss – of the idealised space that Nick and I shared. Like Harriet, my 'knowledge' of these earliest moments seems to help me make sense of aspects of my personality and identity, and certain experiences throughout my life, for example new beginnings such as the first day at school and university. Similarly, Alex recalls:

*Apparently my sister kicked me out, that's the party line, because we even fought in the womb. And that's kind of summarized our relationship up until the age of about twenty.*

In one of the few first-hand narrative accounts of a twin's experience of psychotherapy, ideas about the pre-birth space were also significant: "Our fantasy was that we had fought to be first (or was it last) to get out (or stay in) and that I had won (or lost!)" (Wright, 2010, p.268). Clinicians might therefore consider the significance of the pre-birth space for twins and be open to exploring this. Intrauterine memories of twinship experience have generated some research and therapeutic attention (Speyer, 2015) and I wonder if a residue of pre-birth and birth experience can be 'remembered', albeit not consciously, but perhaps tacitly known instead. For each participant, and perhaps most clearly seen in my own account, it seems that our sense of self and identity is partly informed by a combination of what we have been told (explicit, observable knowledge) and what we might tacitly know or 'remember' of our time in the womb and our birth experience. For me, my dreams (tacit knowledge) support what I have been told by my parents (explicit knowledge) and what I can remember - certain 'epiphanies' that I have written about in this study. The bridge between the explicit and the tacit can be understood as the realm of 'the between' or the intuitive (Moustakas, 1990), and via intuition "We may be able to utilise an internal capacity to make inferences and arrive at a knowledge of underlying structures and dynamics" (p.23). This is in many ways akin to what happens in psychotherapy. Indeed, in my own therapy my therapist and I arrived at knowledge of my underlying structures and dynamics via a

combination of explicit and implicit knowledge, which was helpful for me. In clinical work then, neglecting the significance of the pre-birth world for twins risks overlooking what could be an important factor in contributing to an understanding of a twin's narrative identity and potentially their presenting issues too. Therapists might therefore 'make space' for ideas and intuitions around their twin client's experience of sharing space with their twin in-utero and beyond, remaining curious about how this could also influence how twins set about organising the therapeutic space, as indicated in this study.

## Twin Bodies

Although not a prominent focus in twin research, the significance of the body has been emphasised by some researchers, primarily in the social sciences (Bacon, 2010; Davis, 2014). My own experience tells me that my twinship cannot be separated from my body; twinship is principally signified through the body or, more specifically, through bodily expressions of sameness (Bacon, 2010). This may be more so for identical twins like myself and Harriet, however the various listenings indicate the importance of the body in the experience of twinship across participants in this study. Specifically, the listenings highlight the physical closeness of twin bodies to each other and the philosophical and practical implications of this; the role of the body in self and identity work; and the objectification of twin bodies and possible psychological implications.

### *One body or two?*

For Sarah, the significance of the body is almost immediately acknowledged. She is aware of and curious about the closeness of her body with that of her twin throughout childhood, posing the question *"*Where does my body end and hers begin*"*? Similarly, as I remarked in my own account, growing up it was as if I had "two bodies not one", such was the level of confusion caused by the physical similarity in myself and Nick. That we were "always together" (like Harriet and Hannah and Sarah and Jessica) compounded the issue and most likely contributed to some people treating us as a "unit." I therefore wonder if it is more accurate to say that it was as if I shared a body with Nick, rather than that I had two bodies – or perhaps both conditions may hold true. Indeed, sharing a body is how Nick and I were depicted as 'Wall' in the school play; the closeness *and* the similarity of our bodies was significant in the use of this visual metaphor. As I reflect in my story, "standing joined-with-Nick, I literally feel like one half of a whole," and so like Sarah, I am left wondering, "Where does my body end and his begin"?

This question is more than just philosophically intriguing though - it has real and practical implications for twins – and clinicians who work with them. Findings from the BCPSG (2018), informed by developmental psychology and neurobiology, help us take this question into the clinical domain, illustrating how we live in the bodily experiences of others as we interact with them. From this perspective, the embodied process of "being moved by another or moving *through* another" (*ibid*, p.299) is central to therapeutic change, conveying "The dual sense of being moved in feeling and also of transcending space and body boundaries by directly experiencing the other's affective and intentional and action orientations toward the world" (*idem*, p.303). This notion of transcending space and body boundaries certainly speaks to the themes illuminated in this study and discussed so far. Expressed phenomenologically, Merleau-Ponty (1945, p.215) reflects, "it is as if the other person's intention inhabited my body, and mine his," which again resonates strikingly with an experience of twinship for some and the process of therapeutic change emphasised by the BCPSG. Furthermore, Lousada's (2009) qualitative study exploring opposite sex twins, which incorporated creative and embodied practices in data collection, highlights the theme of resonance, whereby participants found they twinned in an embodied manner with any member of the group they were paired with, as they did with their own twin. Lousada observed that this resonance was something the twins seemed to have no control over, arguing that it was deeply unconscious and beyond simple relational exchange. Her transcendental phenomenological methodology may have informed the view that this process relates to "questions unanswered about womb experience" (p.141), while the neurobiological perspective discussed above might also partially help make sense of this finding and inform future research. Taken together with findings from this present research, which as discussed above highlighted the central importance of womb and birth experience in the narratives of twins, the case for further exploring the significance of these womb experiences and how they might influence psychological development, identity, and relationality, is strengthened. A variety of methodological approaches can contribute here, with those that allow for intuitive ways of knowing (e.g. Moustakas, 1990) and narrative based approaches like the one I have taken here potentially complementing research from a more traditional scientific epistemology, such as Castiello et al (2010) discussed below.

The embodied nature of twinship, or even the intercorporality (Merleau-Ponty, 1945) of it, identified in this study and emphasised elsewhere (Martinez, 2021b; Klein et al, 2021), also raises questions and implications more broadly for embodied therapeutic work and, for example, transference / countertransference processes and enactments. In language that again resonates with the above, from a contemporary self psychology perspective, Togashi (2010) suggests that a "mutual finding process" (p.336) between analyst and patient is the

essence of a twinship experience, which is organised as a delicate balance between a patient's finding themself and not-themself in their analyst, and vice versa (Togashi & Kottler, 2012). For twins, the need to recreate twinships in significant adult relationships, particularly intimate ones where partners may represent twin-replacements, is well documented (Jarrett & McGarty, 1980, Sheerin, 1991; Martinez, 2021c), and something I acknowledge in my own account. Also acknowledged is that the psychotherapeutic situation itself is rich in twinship symbolism and might therefore foster a twinship transference (Kohut, 1971) which clinicians will need to be especially cognizant of when working with twins (Joseph, 1961; Lewin, 1994, 2002; Wright, 2010). Here, the question of whether a twinship transference is likely to be healing in the same way that it might in treatment with a non-twin client, or a less helpful kind of merger that might not facilitate the development of a separate sense of identity and self, is a tricky one. My sense is that the answer to this question might be "potentially both", therefore emphasising some of the complexities of working relationally with twins. Yet it also emphasises the healing possibilities arising from a clinician's openness to the often messy, ambiguous reality of working with the embodied unconscious. That participation in an enactment is also due to the therapists "unconscious conflicts, impulses and desire" (Chused, 2003, p.686) stresses the importance of therapists critically reflecting on their own possible twinship needs and fantasies (Burlingham, 1945a; Klein, 1963) and their countertransference, too.

### *The body: self and identity*

Ironically, although embodied processes between client and therapist are at the heart of therapeutic change (BCPG, 1998, 2018; Schore, 2000, 2012), therapists might also need to consider the need to help twin clients '*disembody*' their identities and 'uncouple' or differentiate self from other. Harriet's experience and my own suggest that the closeness of our bodies *and* the similarity of our bodies may have served to undermine the extent to which we were perceived as individuals, thereby necessitating this to become an active part of self-work for both of us. This supports the argument that "Being identical is not a superficial fact of twinship; it is central to the practical experience of twinship and demands some sophisticated self-working on the part of twins" (Davis, 2014, p.107). According to Pietilä and colleagues (2013), for twins claiming oneself as an individual is "ongoing identity work along the life course" (p.339) and this is supported by the stories from identical twins presented in this study. For example, although the most intense phase of this self-work seemed to occur for both Harriet and myself and our respective twins during adolescence and early adulthood, we are routinely faced with having to still reassert our individuality as adults in certain contexts. Harriet reflects:

*Trying to be who you are for that person while trying to be who you are for that person is something I found very very challenging in my life.*

More recently though, she has been able to meet this task with greater acceptance too:

*But I've you know, I've done enough work over the last few years, I went through quite an angry phase with various things and dynamics, but actually, I'm usually able to kind of just sort of roll my eyes and then you know, say to my partner afterwards, you know, "that's the story that comes out."*

Although identity work may often be additionally complex for identical twins than for non-identical twins, the stories of twinship presented in this study suggest that it is an ongoing process and perhaps even a lifelong one for non-identical twins too, thereby extending research findings that are focused solely on identical twins by Davis (2014) and Pietilä et al (2013) discussed above. For example, Sarah references this directly, saying:

*When I look back on that, now what I think about is, you know, it's a lifelong endeavour, really, for twins to individuate.*

For Alex, the rejection of her twin identity suggests that identity work for her could also be somewhat unfinished. Significantly, while a considerable body of research stresses the importance of twins developing individuality, little is written about the need for some twins to also develop their *twin* identity. As already discussed, Fichtmüller (2021) suggests embracing both individual and twin identities can lead to a sense of wholeness for twins; both identities are important for the psychological wellbeing of twins.

Clinicians can therefore expect varying degrees of progress with identity work in the twins that they work with, and it may also be reasonable to expect that in clinical settings this essential task may have been less successful and therefore potentially significant in presenting issues. The stories in this study illuminate several ways in which self-work is done and the often-central role of the body in this.

For Alex, physically separating her body from Natalie, for example walking to school separately, seems to support her self-work and her attempt to be seen as an individual, not a twin. Harriet also engaged in self-work at boarding school in a variety of ways related to the body. For example, through her use of dress, an important resource for twins in constructing identity (Bacon, 2010) because it essentially modifies the physicality of the body (Shilling,

2003), as well as physically separating her body from Hannah's by inhabiting separate spaces, what she termed "territory exploration."

Literally separating bodies from each other to promote individuation was further highlighted in this study. For Harriet, Sarah, and Alex – but not me – moving away from their co-twin to go to university was seen as very significant in establishing a separate sense of self and individuality. Sarah reflects:

*We'd been together and ensured that we were together, so intensely, and then it was like, okay, now we need to be separate… Unknowingly, that's what Jessica and I did; if we were going to not be together, we needed to not be together.*

Similarly, Harriet's decision to move to university allowed her to develop an individual identity in a way that seemingly had not been possible up until this point, where the similarities and closeness of her body with that of Hannah's had constrained it:

*I remember thinking they don't know I'm not a "we"'! I remember thinking, "they think I'm a solo person", it was so weird.*

Sarah, Harriet and Alex then essentially 'disembody' their twinship by physically separating their bodies from their twins at university, which is something Nick and I did not achieve, despite Nick's appreciation that this may have been for the best. Clinicians might therefore be curious about the ways in which twins have attempted to claim themselves as individuals and try to understand the extent to which this task may have been achieved during initial assessment and throughout treatment.

As explored in the literature review, identity or self-work for twins is an often intricate, subtle, co-created process (Davis, 2014; Stewart, 2000), and qualitative studies have contributed valuably by drawing out this nuance. For example, in their narrative analysis of older twins, Pietilä et al (2013) highlighted how twins work together across the lifespan to emphasise 'unlikeness' in the face of ongoing attempts by others to emphasise sameness. Similarly, Bacon (2005) showed that if twins are to receive external validation for their status as individuals, they must work together to fashion their bodies as different, for example through use of clothing. Although these findings are supported by the stories presented in this study too, what seemed to emerge more strikingly than reported elsewhere is the need for some twins to take what might seem like the quite drastic measure of physically separating themselves to find and develop a sense of individuality. My choice of methodology and

design for this study may have been significant here. Perhaps participant knowledge of me also being a twin supported a more honest dialogue than might have been possible with a non-twin researcher, due to the expectation of close and harmonious twinships that pervades society as I have discussed elsewhere. For each of the participants, guilt accompanied reflections on active measures taken to distance themselves from their twin. Perhaps this was nevertheless easier to voice because, as a twin too, participants felt I might be more likely to understand in a non-judgmental manner. Rather than contradicting the view that self-work is often a subtle and co-created process, an important and less reported finding from this study is therefore that it can also be a rather not-so-subtle and sometimes even quite brutal process, and a decision made by one twin rather than both. As Bochner (2012, p.161) suggests, "autoethnography aspires to emotional, dialogic and collaborative truth." The choice of autoethnography for this research then, and my willingness to embrace my twinship during participant interviews rather than hide it, may have contributed to the emergence of this finding, thereby adding another layer of understanding to the role of the body in self and identity work for twins.

Based on the stories presented here, and my experience in clinical practice, I wonder if the body is however overemphasised in this task of differentiation, at the expense of other important factors. My sense is that due to the considerable focus on their bodies from others, twins can get 'stuck' perpetuating differentiation through the body, becoming hypervigilant to changes in both their own and their twin's appearance, for example body shape or style of hair. I have found a crucial task of therapy with some twins to be helping them identity and draw out unique aspects of themselves, such as personality characteristics, core values, interests and so on. Klein's (2003) patterns of twinship framework suggests that this task will be harder for twins who have been treated as a unit by caregivers, compared to those who have had individual differences emphasised from an early age. Holding the patterns of twinship framework (*ibid*) in mind might therefore assist clinicians with this aspect of treatment.

### *Objectification and shame*

The above discussion adds weight to Davis' (2014) position that far from being the passive objects of ruminations of others, twins take control of the discourse. To me however, twinship is synonymous with objectification, and even if it has largely been an active and agentic endeavour, it has often felt otherwise - the 'Wall' play at school an example, along with many more everyday experiences. While twins certainly do actively individuate in certain situations and contexts, as Davis's autoethnographic research also acknowledges,

they may also “Surrender themselves to the pair in others” (*ibid,* p.106). My concern from a clinical perspective is that this ‘surrendering’ may sometimes be as a last resort response to intolerable objectification, thereby having more in common with dissociation than identity work. Based on my own experience as a twin and a clinician working with twin clients, I have found Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997) to be a helpful framework for understanding the possible implications for twins who are seen first and foremost as a body in society. This theory was proposed as a framework for understanding the experiential consequences of being female in a culture that sexually objectifies the female body, whereby women and girls are acculturated to internalise an observer’s perspective as a primary view of their physical selves (*ibid*). The theory suggests that the accumulation of such experiences – and the subsequent internalised objectification of self – can help make sense of the array of mental health disorders that disproportionately affect women, for example eating disorders and depression. As we have seen in the literature and this present study, twins also experience considerable levels of objectification in society, their bodies regularly gazed at and scrutinized. I therefore wonder if twins may also internalise an observer’s perspective as a primary view of their physical selves – with certain repercussions. Shame is highlighted as one such possible consequence from this (*ibid*) and the subsequent fusion of negative self-evaluation with the potential for social exposure – of which there is plenty as a twin. This very much speaks to my own experience and susceptibility to shame-based disintegration of self (De Young, 2015), when my “walls crumble,” as I refer to it in my account. Although this experience was not explicitly echoed by the other participants in this study, I do nevertheless wonder about the body-related concerns that I have observed as presenting issues in twin clients that I have worked with, and how being a woman may intersect with being a twin, as this may result in particularly acute levels of objectification. This may therefore be an important area of research that so far has received little or no attention.

Klein (2021a) raises related concerns regarding the impact of objectification, but more so in terms of the shame and humiliation that can be caused by comparisons and comments about differences between twins – for example who the more handsome or pretty one is. She suggests that “Comparison creates deep pain and shame for twins because comparisons highlight differences in a public forum by outsiders…that outsiders talk about twin differences is an afront to twin identity” (ibid, p.24). Not all twins will necessarily agree with this being an afront, but it does align with my own experience. Furthermore, such comparisons might threaten to erode a co-twin relationship “Incident by incident” (*ibid*). The inclusion of Nick’s voice in my story helped identify that we may have had some level of awareness of this possibility during school:

**Nick:** Do you remember we tried to get out of the swimming gala as well?
**Rob:** Yes, and the 800 metres at our last sports day.
**Nick:** I wonder if that was out of compassion for each other? One of us inevitably had to lose and we didn't want that – we were always having to compete against each other.

It seems that we may have been implicitly moderating exposure to comparison to protect our twinship from the harmful consequences that might arise from it. Furthermore, albeit it with a small sample size in mind, I have certainly observed the deep and painful impact of this 'erosion' with twin clients in clinical practice, and how an acute and ongoing experience of being compared and contrasted seemingly becomes internalised. I wonder if social situations might trigger this internal comparison process, causing or reinforcing low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, and perhaps other mental health issues such as eating disorders – as suggested by Objectification Theory (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). In earlier work, Klein (2003) highlights how external comparison-making fuels the potent tendency for twins to make comparisons between themselves (and perhaps others) and to engage in fierce competition, which one imagines could include a therapist too. Friedman (2018) similarly highlights competition and comparison as important to be aware of when being a twin's therapist, suggesting envy and competition are magnified.

Clinicians and researchers alike may therefore wish to adopt something of a 'standing alongside' rather than 'gazing at' stance, as I have tried to do in this study through use of the Listening Guide, when inviting twin clients to reflect on their experience of having a body. Being curious about the ways in which this relates to identity and sense of self, but also being mindful for the possible presence of shame or even dissociation when doing so, and how acute levels of objectification may be significant in presenting issues may also be important. I therefore recommend adding issues relating to objectification and shame to Friedman's (2018) helpful summary of possible presenting issues for twins in therapy. Finally, although 'gazing at' may activate a potentially helpful twinship selfobject experience (Hershberg, 2011), the bidirectional nature of this - a mutual mirroring process – is necessary (Ibid; Kohut, 1971). The therapist's sensitive empathically attuned awareness and moderation of their gaze at twin clients may therefore be very important, as the threshold between something healing and something dysregulating here may be slim.

The experience of objectification and possible consequences arising from this does not seem to have been the focus of qualitative research on twins per se to date. That it has emerged in this present study, through my own reflections on being a twin and from what I

have witnessed in clinical practice working with twins, suggests that it could be an important area for future research.

## Twin-bond and attachment

Issues and considerations relating to the twin-bond and attachment were repeatedly voiced in this study; the participants seem to appreciate that their twin-bond and attachment is significant and complex, and that their attachment to primary caregivers was likely impacted because of there being two children to care for simultaneously. The stories also speak to certain communicative intricacies of twinship, particularly with regards to the implicit nonverbal, which raises various implications for clinicians.

### *Communicative intricacies*

While the developmental literature highlights that infants are born with the fundamental capacity to apprehend the intentional and emotional cues of others (Beebe & Lachman, 2002), research confirms that twins have a head start, already interacting purposefully in the womb together from fourteen weeks gestation (Castiello et al, 2010). In the same study, kinematic profiles of movements in twin foetuses using four-dimensional ultrasonography illuminated how twins execute movements specifically aimed at the co-twin from the 14th week of gestation. Twin foetuses preferred to interact with each other rather than themselves and did so in special ways; contact between them appeared to be *planned*, not an accidental outcome of spatial proximity. This clearly points to a developing twin-bond in-utero and the presence of nonverbal, relational modes of communication and behaviour between twins before they are born, further enhanced during infancy and childhood due to the ongoing experience for most twins of being nearly always together with their twin. Although much of our communicative experience remains outside of conscious awareness (Martinez, 2021a), implicit throughout most of the stories was an awareness of the communicative intricacies of being a twin, particularly for Sarah, Harriet, and myself. Although twins and singletons of course have the same basic tools of communication available to them, a difference may lie in how twins utilise and develop their communicative capacities compared to non-twins (*ibid*). As highlighted above, twins begin to communicate nonverbally in-utero, and observational research confirms that twins tend to be very sensitive to each other's non-verbal behaviour once born (Burlingham, 1946, 1954; Lytton et al, 1977; Pearlman, 1990), typically developing greater sensitivity and perceptive capacity related to their twin than singletons do related to their siblings or playmates (Martinez, 2021a).

The concept of implicit relational knowing (BCPG, 2010) - the implicit experience of what it is like to be together with another person (Lyons-Ruth et al, 1998) - is relevant here. The often ongoing closeness of twins to each other means that twins who have had this experience might best be understood as “always already inside the experience of their twin” (Martinez, 2021a, p.79), with empathy within the pair the normal flow of experience. This may at once be a blessing and a curse for twins and it also has implications for clinical practice. Several researchers suggest that having a twin may enhance a person’s ability to understand and be empathetic toward others (Klein, 2003, 2012; Schave & Ciriello, 1983; Smith, 2008), along with more nuanced perspective taking and enhanced relational attentiveness (Klein et al, 2021). However, twins may simultaneously face the paradoxical risk of feeling disconnected and lonely in adult life (Hart, 2021b; Friedman, 2018; Klein, 2012) if they assume non-twin relationships will be characterised by the same automatic “instant intimacy” (Friedman, 2018, p.23) and communicative ease as the twinship. This was true for myself, Sarah and Harriet; we all encountered periods of confusion and loneliness stemming from this. It also permeates the autoethnographic account of Martinez (2021a), whose sense of disconnection in relationships outside of her twinship nearly led her to suicide. The findings presented in this study therefore seem to confirm what has been reported elsewhere in autoethnographic writing and by clinicians working with twins, while also suggesting that further research is needed to investigate communicative intricacies and the opportunities and potential challenges these might pose for twins in interpersonal relationships. Clinicians might therefore need to be mindful of how this may be significant in presenting issues and help twins manage expectations of interpersonal relationships outside of the twinship (Hart, 2021a; Klein). With regards to the therapeutic relationship, it might be a relief for some twins to find a level of attuned empathic connection not typically experienced away from the twin. But certain therapeutic boundaries – such as generally no contact between sessions or breaks in contact when a therapist goes on holiday – might consequently feel especially hard, or for some simply not make sense when constant communication and connection is their model of twinships.

There is further significance for the therapeutic relationship here too, particularly with regards to implicit non-verbal exchange. Research from the BCPSG (1998) illuminates that most therapeutic change "Occurs in the realm of procedural knowledge that is not conscious, especially implicit knowledge of how to act, feel, and think when in a particular relational context" (p.307). So how might the local level moving along (BCPSG, 2002; 2010) in the therapeutic relationship be altered when working with a twin, a “super-communicator” (Martinez, 2021b, p.89), given the possible enhanced capacity for implicit non-verbal communication outlined above? Although the stories in this study cannot make firm claims

here, the implicitly negotiated moving along process, where “we arrive at the feeling of being ‘in sync’ with another or are left with the feeling that the other is a million miles away” (BCPSG, 2002, p.10053) resonates profoundly with the stories about being a twin in this study – in and out of the consulting room. If we understand the twin-bond to be the original scaffold through which felt-sense, bodily gesture, and later, language is established (Martinez, 2021b), then it makes sense that the experience of “in-sync connection” (p.82) would be an understandably essential aspect of psychological health for twins.
Clinicians might therefore anticipate the need to work particularly sensitively with empathic affect attunement (Stern, 1985) and be alive to when the flow of ‘in-sync’ communication may have been broken for their twin clients, who could experience this interruption acutely and perhaps as an alliance rupture in need of repair (Safran & Muran, 2000). This was confirmed by Harriet and Sarah, who associated deep, implicit interpersonal communication and connection in their significant relationships with a sense of safety, comfort, and homeliness:

*I feel like it's, you know, for me it is where I feel safe.*

*It's where I feel at home. You know, it is just, yeah. It's like comfort.*

Similar narratives are found elsewhere, for example in interviews conducted by Tancredy (1999):

> *He was always the one person that I could turn to if I had problems ... if I was scared, if I was nervous, I’d just turn to him, and he knew.*
>
> (Tancredy, 1999, p.4)

> *I can always fall back onto my twin and she can always fall back onto me.*
>
> (*idem*, p.6)

Meanwhile interviews conducted by Davis (2014) at the annual Twins Day Festival at Twinsburg in the United States are full of similar sentiments. This may be expected from a population of twins actively choosing to celebrate and perform their twinship in such an overt manner. However, quantitative research also indicates that twins are more likely than nontwin siblings to use their sibling as an attachment figure (Tancredy and Fraley, 2006) and that “certain factors, such as empathy, including the other in the self, and shared experiences, may impact the extent to which twins use one another as attachment figures” (p.78). This conclusion sits comfortably with the theory referenced

above, that some twins are essentially “always already inside the experience of their twin” (Martinez, 2021a, p.79) and that empathy within the pair is the normal flow of experience.

Clearly there are multiple perspectives from which we can seek to understand twin bond and attachment, be that a more traditional attachment theory framework or a neurobiologically informed one as we have been discussing. From the stories presented in this study, a transpersonal perspective also emerged. To me, there is resonance with the ideas expressed by the BCPSG (1998) and those in dialogical psychotherapy (Hycner, 1993), where I-Thou encounters (Buber, 1970) might be understood as a kind of transpersonal “now moment” (BCPSG, 1998, p.304), whereby client and therapist enter the ‘interhuman' domain (Hycner, 1993) or ‘the between’. It seems significant that myself, Harriet, and Sarah have all been profoundly influenced by Buber’s I-Thou (Buber, 1970) because it resonates deeply with our twinship experiences. Indeed, Sarah wondered if an I-Thou mode of relating might be more natural for twins than I-It due to the twin-bond, but it seems this aspect of her twinship has sometimes been misunderstood and judged as “intense”, including within her own family and in psychotherapy with her first therapist:

*I remember saying this to my therapist and he said, “I think, you know, basically I think you are quite intense.” I did find that really jarring, you know, because that wasn't meeting me.*

“Intense” is a word that I noted appeared many times and throughout Sarah’s narrative, and there invariably *is* something intense about the experience of twinship and the nature of the twin-bond. Although not a word that Alex used in her own story, my sense was that she embodied the intensity of her twinship experience in the way that she spoke about it – and perhaps some of the mental health challenges that she has experienced as well. Perhaps the intervention from Sarah’s therapist was not too far off the mark, but instead could have been considered more sensitively. For example, what might this have been saying about the embodied unconscious, with regards to countertransference or a potential enactment, which may have held the possibility for something healing rather than “jarring”? Through this lens, with enactments seen as nonconscious messages (Bromberg, 2003), a conduit through which we may get a sense of what cannot be verbalized by the client, only enacted or shown (Ginot, 2009), “We can begin to understand relational patterns and self-representations that cannot become recognized through verbal interchanges alone" (p.296). Working in the domain of the implicit relational therefore takes on particular significance and meaning when

working with twins, who have embodied this way of being-in-the-world even before being born.

The notion of “twinship in silent communication” (Togashi & Kottler, 2012, p.341) also speaks profoundly to this discussion. For Kohut (1971), one of the important features of a twinship tie in the therapeutic relationship is that both participants can sense and share the feeling of connection without verbal communication, which again anchors this idea firmly in research that emphasises implicit interactive regulatory processes (Beebe & Lachmann, 2002; Stern, 2004; BCPSG, 2012, 2018) as well as aspects of dialogical and transpersonal psychotherapy. If therefore, “we begin with the assumption that patient and analyst are generally working hard to intuitively grasp each other’s implicit intentions and directions” (BCPSG, 2012, p.729), when working with twins, we may also need to assume that twin clients might assume a level of “grasping” beyond the clinician’s expectations, especially early on in treatment before more attuned or ‘in-sync’ ways of being (Maroda, 2010) with each other have been established.

Overall, although the framework for understanding what exactly constitutes the twin-bond and attachment differs in the research, knowledge of its presence – and importance – is consistently voiced by twins themselves in qualitative narrative-based studies, including this one. What matters for twins in therapy is not so much the precise mechanics of what the twin bond *is*, but rather that their therapists recognise its importance and facilitate understanding of how it influences their twinship and other significant relationships. My own journey of discovery with this, shared in this research, supports the claim that twins must discover and articulate their own twin worlds, which is also persuasively made by Martinez (2021b) in her own autoethnographic account. Further autoethnographies of twinship are needed to help practitioners and non-practitioners alike better understand the phenomenology of twinship, thereby highlighting the themes that tend to be common for most twins whilst also emphasising the important point that “not all twins are alike” (Klein, 2003, p.1).

### *Unmet primary caregiver needs*

In each of the participant stories, we hear voices that speak of a degree of unmet needs from primary caregivers, while also acknowledging the challenges of raising two infants simultaneously, which is repeatedly emphasised in the literature (Goshen-Gosttstein, 1980; Bryan, 2003; Gottfried & Seay, 1994). Here, the implications of this primarily and understandably focus on the attachment deficits that twins may experience (Klein, 2021b; Friedman, 2018; Bryan, 2003, Anderson & Anderson 1987; Lytton et al, 1977) and the

stories in this study lend some support to this. For example, Harriet, Sarah, and Alex were all born first and were physically stronger. Harriet's twin was in an incubator for several weeks after birth, and Sarah's sister Jessica weighed just three pounds compared to Sarah's five pounds. The upshot of this for Sarah was that:

*Jessica was held far more than me… because she needed it.*

Knowledge of this helps Sarah make sense of her attachment style and the potential implications, which clinicians can readily understand and find validated in the above-mentioned research. Something that has received less research attention though is the additional dilemma that this situation poses twins, which was illuminated by participant narratives and use of the LG in this study, thereby adding another layer of insight and extending existing research findings. For example, as articulated by Sarah:

*Obviously babies need to be held by their primary caregiver and as a twin, you know, there's the "what about me"? And then when you are being held, there's the "what about my sister"? You know, you can't even just relax in that. You are taking away.*

Friedman (2018, p.6) explains "The second twin is perceived as distracting the mother from her engagement with the first twin, impinging on his time with her, and interrupting his own mother-baby attachment. And when the mother turns to focus on the first twin, he then experiences the reverse: he is impinging upon his twin". This resonates with Sarah's experience and also Alex's. In a particularly poignant voice poem, Alex begins to make sense of how this same scenario may have impacted her own development:

We were born
we felt
I don't know
you need the affection

I suppose
you're too young
all you're seeing
I suppose
you see your caregiver being taken away
I mean
I responded

that's what you learn
you need your caregiver with you.

Alex's poem simultaneously lends support to research that warns of potential attachment deficits for twins, while also emphasising the poignant situation that twin infants might face in the struggle to have their own needs met at the cost of their twin. The contribution here is in the richness of the narrative approach, which might bring readers closer to the experience of being a twin – the painful dilemma as voiced by Alex above – in a way that compliments and broadens quantitative studies referenced above. Furthermore, her poem provides another way of making sense of the internal conflict between her "I'm good" and "I'm bad" voices, which were identified in the contrapuntal listenings. Alex tends to experience herself as "bad" when promoting her own needs, for example for space. Considering how this delicate negotiation between impinging and feeling impinged upon might occur in the therapeutic relationship is therefore important for practitioners working with twins. As already noted, for Harriet, having her therapist all to herself was significant, yet it may not be a straightforward or guilt free process for some twins. Clinicians may therefore need to be aware of the potential for being drawn into this impinged/impinging dynamic with twin clients. For me personally, learning that it is okay to put myself first and that my own needs are not secondary in close and intimate relationships has been a lengthy but important process in therapy. This was supported, for example, by my therapist observing in a non-judgmental way when she felt I was looking after her or considering her needs above my own.

### *Twin-attachment and safety*

While twins can and do develop attachment bonds with each other, it is critical that this is not seen as a substitute for primary caregiver attachment (Savić, 1980; Tancredy & Fraley, 2006; Klein, 2021b), with parenting the critical determinant of twin-attachment and subsequent mental health in twins (Klein, 2021b). While this may be true, most of the stories in this study seem to suggest that co-twin attachment is at least phenomenologically the most important, superseding primary caregiver attachment, with twin-attachment often spoken of in terms of "safety". Indeed, twinship is synonymous with safety for Harriet, Sarah and myself, and this is echoed by Klein (2021a, p.28), who states that in her clinical experience, "Most twins report that childhood was a time of great safety when they were together." In my own account, Nick very much agreed that our relationship has always represented safety, but his voice also spoke of "dependence", which on reflection is a possibility I might have been avoiding. Speaking about secondary school and then university, Nick shares:

*I guess I knew that we were still quite dependent on each other.*

*I wanted it to be the great time that everyone says it is, but I think we were still too dependent upon each other. It felt like a real regression back to the first few years of secondary school.*

Harriet expresses something similar when she says:

*I don't know if we really knew how to…keep ourselves safe without each other, if I'm honest… I think we were very vulnerable. We'd come from this cocoon, really.*

As I noted during Harriet's interview, it seems that our respective twinships therefore afforded both a high degree of safety, but also a degree of vulnerability too. Returning to the literature, it seems that one of the challenges that besets making sense of twin attachment is to do with terminology. The stories of twinship in this study support the claim that "there is no doubt that the depth of twin attachment is profound and psychologically irreplaceable" (Klein, 2021a, p.18) but it is difficult to know what is actually meant by "attachment" here. In many instances, it appears to have become a somewhat generic term which encompasses some aspects of attachment theory as well as a strong emotional, implicit, or empathic connection between twins. The voices in this study speak with a certain clarity on the matter that is sometimes absent in the literature, which taken together can appear contradictory. For example, it seems that in some instances researchers might have conflated attachment with dependence (Penninkilampi-Kerola et al, 2005), with twins, their parents and potentially therapists therefore receiving mixed messages about what constitutes healthy psychological development and co-twin relationships. While Nick and I both identify as "independent identity twins" (Klein, 2003, p.9), there have clearly also been periods in our lives where we depended on each other and displayed characteristics of dependence. I wonder if this might not be so problematic though, despite the negative connotations of the word. Viewed from a different perspective – perhaps a twin-world perspective – twins often have the advantage of "being able to face together the frequently terrifying moments of their development" (Sheerin, 1991, p.14), which is what we did, along with Harriet, Sarah and their respective twins. This may also be true for Alex, although she did not voice this. An implication for clinicians then is the need to assess the extent to which twin clients can make productive use of the safety their twinship may afford, while also considering the potential 'flipside' of fear of independence or the presence of separation anxiety from their twin (Friedman, 2018).

Overall, it seems crucial for clinicians to be wary of overlooking the significance of twin-attachment in presenting issues and the development of the therapeutic relationship. Reflections from an identical twin support this:

*And yet she didn't understand that my unwillingness to be separate, apart, was not merely an adolescent refusal to take responsibility for my life but also an acting out of my twinship. My template, my blueprint for attachment.*

(Wright, 2010, p.271)

Taken together, there is a strong case for suggesting that when working with and formulating treatment plans for twin clients, therapists should consider both the nature of the co-twin attachment bond and caregiver attachment. Klein (2017) conceptualises the primary attachment to be the co-twin attachment, which is subsequently overlayed by parental attachment, thereby leading to a double attachment bond. While this study cannot make claims regarding the validity of this, it does clearly underscore the significance of twin-attachment, and that the "Twin bond is complicated and intertwined" (Klein, 2021c, p.291). This might admittedly be a challenging conclusion for clinicians to hold. However, qualitative and narrative-based methodologies like the one used in this present study, which do not strive for neat and tidy explanations, are essential compliments – and sometimes challenges – to findings from more traditional research methodologies. In my own clinical experience, making sense of how these 'double attachment bonds' might interact is a far from simple, yet crucially important aspect of the therapeutic work with twin clients. The stories in this study help illuminate how twins' complex attachment needs may be supported in this setting.

### *Twin attachment in therapy*

Following on from the above, Harriet's "me on my own" and "togetherness" voices seem to speak of both her unmet attachment needs and also her yearning for and deep sense of contentment from one-to-one psychological holding. Listening to Harriet reflect on her experience of therapy, it is as if the one-to-one could sometimes dissolve or merge into states of 'oneness', with her therapist becoming mother and/or also twin in the transference:

*There was this very strong, sort of…wrapping up in her… Another twin and a mother - you can be all of that for me.*

Listening to the tonality of Harriet's voice throughout the listenings as well as the words she uses, I had a strong sense that this aspect of her therapy was deeply healing and reparative for her, and for clinicians it is important to try to understand why. Is it for example because she is receiving, perhaps for the first time, a kind of maternal attachment that as Harriet says is "just hers"? Or is this better understood as a return to a state of 'oneness' that she may have experienced with her twin from even before they were born that feels so deeply healing? This is where the attachment literature might risk breaking down into unhelpful dichotomy, taking a black and white view through the lens of singleton psychology perspective. From this view, it would be understandable for a well-informed and well-intentioned therapist to problematise their clients need to merge, perhaps theorising that they have been drawn into a tenacious transference relationship (Lewin, 2004; 2009) as the co-twin, due to their client's need to recreate a twinship relationship in therapy (Joseph, 1961) and subsequently set about focusing on separation, independence, and boundaries as priorities in the work. While this of course may in some instances be appropriate, Klein (2021a, p.11) suggests that "in general, therapists of twins see twins as having 'boundary' issues that can be 'fixed' by being firm with others, especially their twin" and that this "cold and uninformed approach" can offer only superficial solutions. Instead, might it be possible that for twins there may be something very natural and even psychologically necessary about merged states of oneness? The understanding that Harriet and I co-created in her interview was that her therapist was skilfully able to "Be close enough to sometimes move into 'twinshipness', but also able to hold and support separateness." Through the lens of contemporary self psychology, Togashi and Kottler (2012, p.331), identify one example of the "many faces of twinship" as "something between merger and mirroring" (ibid, p.333), whereby the yearning for twinship is experienced by an individual who seeks a merger with the other, but who, to some extent, recognises the other as a psychologically separate existence (Kohut, 1971). This seems to capture something of Harriet's profound experience in therapy, illuminated by the LG and highlighted above. The healing and therapeutic potential of twinship experiences for twins (and non-twins) inside and outside of the consulting room therefore provides an important counterpoint to what sometimes appears in the literature to be a pathologising of this perhaps natural predisposition for some twins (Sheerin, 1991; Ackerman, 1975). Like Harriet's therapist, clinicians might therefore allow rather than resist twinship transferences in the treatment of twins, although this might also be informed by their client's capacity for tolerating separateness, amongst other attachment considerations discussed above. Indeed, returning to Wright (2010), this valuable narrative account of what it is like to be a twin in long-term therapy, suggests something inevitable about the therapist being pulled into a twin transference relationship:

*If you choose to become my therapist, be prepared to become my twin. And my mother and my father and my brothers and my sister and my favourite English teacher from secondary school. But most of all, know that you will become my twin.*

*Wright, 2010, p268.*

Precious little exists in the way of first-hand accounts of being a twin in therapy. Although this present study makes a contribution here, future research that foregrounds twins' experience of therapy is still much needed. Furthermore, qualitative research that explores therapist experiences of working with twins, with a particular focus on the therapeutic and transference relationship, could be additionally helpful for clinicians. So far, if we listen to the twin voices in this study and the few that exist elsewhere, they seem to "want to stress how vital it is for the therapist to be aware of the centrality of the twinship relationship when working with a client who is a twin" (Wright, 2010, p.268). Furthermore, the narratives in this study do more than hint at the positive, beneficial and protective aspects of twinship, suggesting that this warrants further research attention. Disappointingly, this was a view expressed by Sheerin as far back as 1991, with little take up.

## Being in the non-twin-world

Each of the participants in this study remarked on the unique nature of speaking to another twin about being a twin and were surprised at how rarely, if at all, they had done so before. This in itself was significant and facilitated discovery of the challenges arising from existing within and between the twin and the non-twin world, which is the focus of this theme. Based on the stories in this study, I suggest that when these challenges are too great, twins are at risk of 'falling between worlds.' Yet the stories also illuminate how twins creatively adjust and respond to these challenges, as well as the potential for counselling and psychotherapy to represent a kind of 'between world' of significant value for twins.

### *Discovering the twin-world*

*For God's sake, you know, how can I be forty-two and talking about this for the first time, it's crazy.*

Sarah's reflection above emphasises the scope of the challenge in terms of raising awareness of the psychosocial complexities of twinship for twins, and the reality of their existence in the singleton or 'non-twin world' (Hart, 2021a). While some twins may arrive at a

helpful level of understanding via their own reflective thinking in adulthood, and growing numbers of twins are being supported in this task by the few existing books on the subject written by twins on twins, the vast majority remain unaware and non-self-identifying as a member of a minority group (*ibid*). In this study, Sarah concluded towards the end of the interview, “Ultimately I am, I’m viewing the world differently.” To me, it seemed as if Sarah was peering back into her twinship from a new vantage point that had previously been obscured, or as she put it:

*It feels to me as though my blinkers are being, you know, widened.*

Harriet adopts a different metaphor to Sarah to express something similar, likening her twin-world and its discovery, aided by therapy, as:

*The water in the goldfish bowl that I’d just lived in and couldn't really see.*

Meanwhile in a follow-up communication after her interview, Alex reflected:

*So interesting that until we spoke, I'd never considered my twinness being something that had relevance to my life (of course this was likely because I would have refused to acknowledge the possibility due to wanting to carve an identity outside of it!) but our chats were definitely enlightening.*

The experience of the participants in this study then, including myself, mirror findings from clinical practice and research reported by Klein and colleagues (2021) where nearly all the twins they have spoken with expressed moments of profound realisation whereby the entire scope of their life now made sense because of beginning to see how deeply set patterns of their twin-bond and being in the non-twin world have impacted every aspect of their life. Twins therefore face the task of discovering the existence and particularities of their twin-world, and how this interacts with the structure and nature of the non-twin world. While all of us may benefit from learning to see the complexities of our own experience and the meaning we come to make of them, for twins in particular, “This can create a shift in thinking that is life-changing because we can come to see and understand the predicaments of our own lives in ways that we might never have otherwise” (Martinez, 2021, p.73).

Clinicians working with twins therefore need to be mindful of underestimating the significance of their client’s twinship, even if it is downplayed by their client, who may need the knowledge and guidance of their therapist to help them with the discovery process Klein

and colleagues (2021) speak of. In my experience, introducing twin clients to some fundamental aspects of twin psychology can be very helpful, much like we might incorporate psychoeducation with any other client. Friedman (2018) emphasises this point, describing how she felt it necessary to educate her therapist about twinship issues: “Had I not been able to describe to her some of the basic elements of twin psychology, she would not have known how being a twin related to my deficit of self” (p.153). It is apparent that more qualitative research exploring the subjective experience of twinship is needed to aid this discovery process, for twins and non-twins alike; we need to listen and learn from twins *themselves*. Whereas other client and minority groups have featured more prominently in qualitative narrative-based research following the crisis of representation in the 1980s and 90s, it seems that twins have been left behind – perhaps partially because in psychology research they are synonymous with quantitative nature versus nurture studies. In this current study, the use of the LG helped tease out the multiplicity of voices present in participant stories, highlighting important implications that have not appeared elsewhere in qualitative research on twins.

### *Falling between worlds*

For example, the stories in this study support the idea from the theoretical literature that twins are often unknowingly straddling the complex situation of existing within and between the twin and the non-twin world (Martinez, 2021b), thus often in something of a predicament. Existing research and theory exploring the challenges twins face generally focuses on either developmental psychology and the interpersonal twin relationship (e.g., Anderson and Anderson, 1987; Bryan, 2003; Burlingham, 1845; 1954; Fraley and Tancredy, 2012; Gottfried et al, 1994; Leonard, 1961) or sociocultural influences (Stewart, 2000; Davis, 2014), rarely an integration of both. In this study, the autoethnographic methodology and subsequent analysis using the LG helped bridge this gap, intentionally focusing on “the interplay between self and relationship, psyche and culture” (Gilligan et al, 2011, p.266). For example, the tensions between existing in the twin-world and the non-twin-world are explicitly addressed by Sarah in her interview and the contrapuntal listenings highlighted that the language she uses to describe this experience is the same as when describing her unmet attachment needs: a lack of “holding:”

*The way I feel about it is that, we lived in, you know, in this non-twin world and we were expected to behave as singletons and we, there was no, there was no holding of that. There was no allowance for the fact that we were not singletons. We were twins.*

Each story in this study contains experiences that can be seen and understood as a sort of 'falling through the gaps' between the twin-world and non-twin world; where for each of us, at times, the fractures and fault lines (Davis, 2014) *between* these worlds have been too great to successfully straddle. In the writing of this study, I could not help but wonder how much of the psychological difficulties and disturbances that twins are purported to have in the literature, some of which we have also reported ourselves, might actually stem from the 'failings' of the non-twin-world to better understand and respond to the unique needs of twins, and from the marginalisation and prejudice of twins in society highlighted in the literature review (Stewart, 2000; Davis, 2014; Klein et al, 2021). Indeed, it is possible to revise Friedman's (2018) list of typical presenting issues for twins through this lens. For example, "guilt from separating or wanting to separate from one's twin" (p.22) perhaps itself cannot be separated from the impact of society's seemingly impossible to resolve "double-bind" (Allen, et al, 2020, p.51) for twins: to fully embrace the specialness of twinship would mean rejecting individualism, yet to reject the twinship would be to rebuff a connection that is prized as extraordinary (*ibid*). This argument seems even more persuasive when listening again to Alex's "voice of guilt," for example when she says:

*I feel more guilty about not being close.*

Similarly in this study, Harriet, Sarah and myself seem to feel more "abandoned" (Friedman, 2018, p.22) and let down by society's lack of understanding and "holding", unmet primary caregiver attachment needs, and uninformed or disinterested therapists, than we do by the efforts of our co-twins "To separate and become more independent" (*ibid*). While all of us in our stories acknowledge this period of separation/individuation as a challenging one, we also recognised its importance and that our twins were, like ourselves, trying their best to navigate a very difficult transition. Existing studies stress the significance of this period for twins and the findings from this study can extend our understanding by voicing what this experience is actually like, and the ambivalence that might often characterise it. For example, Nick clearly expresses this dilemma in our discussion around his decision to apply to a different first choice university:

*I think I thought it was for the best, but I'm certain my heart wasn't in it… Perhaps it was what I thought other people thought would be better for us, and I was just responding to that external perceived pressure. I'm not sure who these 'other people' would have been though.*

Also reflecting on university and separation/individuation, Harriet and Sarah both speak of a level of vulnerability and also of co-twins who became “lost” without them. Again, Sarah sees this as a failing of the non-twin world:

*I'm just noticing that it is really anger, you know, that nobody held us, that nobody said, you know…that this was a big deal. And [Jessica] had a really, you know, she had quite a rough time actually.*

Of course, the voices in this study cannot and surely do not speak for all twins, and neither am I suggesting that all the emotional and psychological issues that twins may experience are due to a world somehow deliberately conspiring against them. A more useful perspective, again aided by the LG’s sensitivity to “the interplay between self and relationship, psyche and culture” (Gilligan et al, 2011, p.266), might be that it is the complex interaction of twin psychology with the sociocultural - where the twin-world and the non-twin world collide – that leaves twins vulnerable to ‘falling between’ these planes of existence.

Klein (2012) proposes the metaphor a “Hall of Mirrors” to bring to life the experience of being a twin in the non-twin world, which resonates with the accounts of twinship in this study. The Hall of Mirrors is a maze-like widening corridor, surrounded by mirrors of all shapes and sizes that are designed to distort the viewer’s reflection (Hart, 2021a). The distorted reflections metaphorically evoke an individual who is losing their sense of self. “The reflective surfaces comprise singletons’ attitudes to, expectations of, and prejudices against twins…moreover, through protracted exposure…twins can even start to believe these distortions” (Hart, 2021a, p.222). This is perhaps one way of partially understanding the identity problems that Alex speaks about in her story, and perhaps the struggles reported by Martinez (2021b) in her autoethnographic account explored in the literature review. It also resonates with my own experience, particularly following university and in certain relationships, whereby I felt I was losing my sense of self. A field note from February 2014 recalls:

*I’ve lost my identity within all of this… Without a true sense of my self anymore, how am I able to make such an important decision? I need to regain my sense of self and identity – build a new and better one.*

The opportunity for clinicians is therefore to provide a different kind of mirror, one that does not distort but rather provides a truer reflection for the client, and one that can also illuminate the creative ways that they have responded to the challenges of their environment.

*Creative twinship adjustments*

The gestalt psychotherapy idea of creative adjustments is helpful here, in that it emphasises the active nature of movement as we create new ways of being in response to situations (Mann, 2010); for example, as we journey through the Hall of Mirrors, thereby acknowledging the active, agentic nature of twinship as highlighted by Davis (2014) and other social-cultural researchers (Bacon, 2010; Stewart, 2000). Mann (2010, p.8) explains, "As we journey through phases of development from infancy to old age, we find the best solution to the situation into which we are thrown". If we adopt the gestalt psychotherapy notion of creative adjustments, then we can emphasise the inadequacies and lack of support of the field (non-twin world), while also recognising the active and creative ways twins respond to this environment. Nick's shifting of the attention back and forth between us that he highlighted in my story is one such example of a creative adjustment. Distilling this, it seems that this creative response is co-created and implicitly and non-verbally activated *between* us under certain conditions. As Nick describes:

*The way I see it is that we take shifts with the attention - back and forth between us - instead of all the attention on both of us at the same time, as that feels too objectifying.*

In the clinical setting, as suggested earlier, a too-focused gaze might therefore be dysregulating for some twins; I found this true for myself, particularly in the first few years of therapy. Yet the absence of a sense of specialness (Friedman, 2018) from receiving 'focused' and admiring attention might also be difficult, suggesting that clinicians could hold in mind the possible presence of narcissistic personality traits (Benjamin, 2003) or character styles (Johnson, 1994) when working with some twin clients.

Further examples of co-created creative adjustments can be found by listening to the narrative accounts of twins in other studies. For example, in her autoethnographic research, Davis (2014) suggests twins are active and skilful agents in their own experiential worlds. In an interviewed exchange between adult twin sisters, both social-workers, Davis highlights how the sisters "strategically act to both express and constrain mutuality that characterises their experience of twinship…they put forth an interactive strategy for playing mutuality against autonomy in the context of their careers…communicating both empathetic connection and authoritative distance" (p.164). This finding supports the finding from my own study that twins creatively adjust to their environment in implicit and co-created ways. It may also extend it by showing how these adjustments, or interactive strategies, can lend twins an

advantage, rather than just represent coping mechanisms as in the example from myself and Nick above. Based on the findings in this study and those reported elsewhere, I therefore wonder if what I will term 'creative twinship adjustments,' which are implicitly co-created and performed together in the service of skilfully negotiating being a twin in the non-twin-world, might be an area of focus for future qualitative research – and something for clinicians to hold in mind when working with twins.

### *Bridging worlds*

Bringing the above discussion together, in the stories presented in this study there are notable examples of when the 'psychotherapeutic world' becomes a kind of 'bridge' between the twin-world and the non-twin-world. Sarah's therapist acknowledging the need to also make space for Jessica is one such example. Similarly, the apparent capacity of Harriet's therapist to empathically move in and out of Harriet's twin-world, rather than failing to meet her there at all, as was the case with her previous therapist and that of Sarah's first therapist, is clearly significant. For me, my therapist's recognition of the importance of my twin-bond with Nick and her patient and empathic approach to helping me explore the influence of this bond, while also providing an 'outsiders' non-twin perspective was helpful. The twin voices in this study therefore suggest that the 'psychotherapeutic world' has the potential to become a vitally helpful *between-world* for twins, bridging the fractures and fault lines between the non-twin-world and twin-world. For Alex, her reflections following participation in the study (as detailed above) also speak to the 'bridging' possibilities that might arise from introducing twin clients to the idea that they belong to a minority group and that being a twin in the non-twin-world can be a challenging and disorienting experience. Finally, helping twin clients understand how they have creatively adjusted to the challenges of the non-twin-world, and if necessary, supporting them in introducing new and more adaptive responses, might be considered a core aspect of psychotherapeutic work with adult twins.

## From harmony to estrangement

This final theme explores twinships along a continuum from harmony to estrangement, identifying the challenges twins face in negotiating the reality of their twin relationships against the backdrop of sociocultural expectations, and the stigma and shame that surrounds 'failed twinships.' Within this overarching theme, the participant stories illuminated a core tension at the heart of twin relationships: managing needs for both separateness and togetherness. The stories in this study clearly show that not all twinships are alike. While this

may seem apparent, it contradicts cultural stereotypes of twinship, and the idealised notion of twin relationships as always close and harmonious (Stewart, 2000; Bacon, 2010; Klein et al, 2021), sometimes termed the “twin mystique” (Freidman, 2018, p.9). The truer picture, as articulated by the voices in this study, is that twinships move forwards and backwards along a continuum from harmony to estrangement.

Although Alex was most vocal about conflict and rupture in her twinship, both Harriet and Sarah also spoke about shifting levels of ‘closeness,’ of conflict and ruptures, and fears of estrangement. Harriet highlighted one particular rupture with Hannah, and just how frightening this was for her:

*That rupture with her was devastating. Devastating. I didn't know what to do with myself for a few days.*

Harriet seems ‘lost’ as a result. In the interview, she reflected on how scared she felt that they “might never recover.” In fact, Harriet’s story highlights shifting patterns in her experience of closeness with Hannah throughout their lives, and that this was a fluid and dynamic process. At the time of the interview, Harriet was:

*Aware of being in a very healthy place with my twin at the moment, very together. And I did reflect yesterday how different this could have felt at a different point.*

Sarah also spoke of her evolving relationship with Jessica, and her worries that they could somehow become less close with time, or not be “on the same page” in the way they always have been:

*I don't know how that's going to be with Jessica and, you know, maybe it will be okay, you know, like we will have those, that really healing moment in the summer, you know, where she'll get it. But what if she doesn't? Like, that worries me.*

Sarah and Harriet were also vocal about societal expectations and pressure and how that was unhelpful and even damaging to their relationships. Harriet likened this pressure experientially to being in a “sort of contracted space,” where “options become limited.” I wonder if when this pressure to conform to idealised notions of twinship becomes too great, a twinship rupture becomes more likely. Sarah was more specific about this, saying:

*That's when my anger comes in…with the pressure on twins of it being perfect, because how damaging is that for those twins? Twins could survive a rupture and be okay with that but add this [pressure] on top of it, and…the shame, like how wrong is that?*

Alex agreed emphatically about this too, following my reflection on the pressure for twin relationships to be close and harmonious:

*I think that's so interesting… You become a bit older, and you realise you don't have to get on with your twin just because they are your twin, but then you still have those feelings that you're supposed to.*

All of us were passionate about this piece and expressed frustration and a wish for a more realistic and balanced view of twin relationships in society. Our voices add weight to the critique of the way that twin relationships are culturally idealised (Bacon, 2006; 2010; Stewart 2000; Davis, 2014), but little research exists exploring how this might impact twin relationships. One qualitative study that does explore the impact of socio-cultural influences on twinship focuses on intimacy in twin relationships – or 'twintimacy' – and how this is articulated by twins themselves (Allen et al, 2019). Thematic analysis of interview data revealed that twins who reported high levels of intimacy in their twinships embraced the cultural assumption that twins are extraordinary, with low intimacy twins rejecting it. Readers of both studies could feasibly place myself, Harriet, Sarah and Alex along a twintimacy continuum, with clinicians similarly able to usefully apply this framework with their twin clients. The findings from my own study can complement those from Allen et al (2019), with in depth interviews exploring individual experience offering practitioners a sense of the nuances and complexities of 'twintimacy' that may not be captured by more positivistic research. For example, myself, Harriet and Sarah acknowledge and even embrace the idea of twinship being extraordinary, but our narratives also speak of the struggles associated with this and the ways it has impacted us in various ways; we therefore feel somewhat ambivalent. For me, acceptance of this complexity and of having mixed feelings is a more useful position to adopt than aspiring to resolve it in a binary manner – to either embrace or reject. Indeed, it is worth considering that both ends of the twintimacy continuum proposed by the researchers could potentially be problematic, and equally it is not necessarily the case that high levels of twintimacy would be associated with harmonious twinships and low levels with estrangement. However, a twintimacy framework might represent a helpful perspective for further understanding twinships and those at greater risk of estrangement, with more qualitative research needed here to better understand the risk factors for twin estrangement.

This is additionally important because twins who do experience estrangement in their twin relationships risk feeling that they have somehow failed at being a twin, or that there is something deeply defective about themselves and/or their twinships (Klein, 2021a). Furthermore, and for the same reasons, some twins are at risk of remaining locked in patterns of unacceptable or even abusive relating in their twin relationship which would not, or at least should not, be tolerated or accepted elsewhere (Martinez, 2021b; Friedman, 2018). The internalised cultural idealisation of the twin bond may therefore limit twins' capacity to critically examine and change aspects of their twin relationship, with potentially serious consequences for psychological health and wellbeing. In the clinical setting, practitioners might therefore be cognizant of these risks and help their twin clients arrive at a more personal and nuanced perspective that perhaps neither wholesale accepts nor rejects the cultural stereotype that being a twin is extraordinary, while also appreciating the powerful influence this cultural stereotype exerts on self, identity and twinship.

Additionally, this highlights the potentially delicate nature of alliance rupture and repair (Safran & Muran, 2011) with twins, who may be especially sensitive to a rupture in the therapeutic relationship due to the nature of their twin-bond and internalised expectations of harmonious twinship relationships. My own experience as a twin and a clinician working with twins, along with the stories from this study, suggests that twins may be exquisitely sensitive to what for some people may be less apparent fluctuations or hairline cracks in the security of a relationship, potentially resulting in a sense of panic and an urgent need to repair. This might represent one of the biggest therapeutic challenges and opportunities for clinicians working with twins. In my own case, with time and supported by therapy, I have come to appreciate the normality of ruptures in a relationship, experiencing these with less fear, while also seeing my sensitivity to fluctuating levels of connection and security in relationships as an asset in therapeutic work and in personal relationships too.

### *I and we: harmony or conflict?*

Jacqueline Martinez (2021b), an identical twin herself, suggests that one of the factors that can lead to twin estrangement is when twin identity and individual identity are in conflict. In this study, the participant voice poems were especially helpful in illuminating the relationship between participant's "I" and "we" selves, and the extent to which they were in harmony or otherwise. For example, Alex's voice poems suggest that there is conflict between her "I" and "we" and that she thinks of and constructs herself as a twin less often than Harriet and Alex. As noted in the findings, this seems to be in keeping with her attempts to distance herself and find space from Natalie, which is a central theme running throughout her story.

Harriet's voice poems also reveal some tension between the "I" and "we", where the "we" appears to at first be absent as she tries to "stand alone" as an "I", yet the vulnerability of her "I" requires the support of her "we," which is reliably "always there" when needed. For Harriet then, there is a natural urge towards separateness and individuation, but a clear acceptance and appreciation of her twin identity, too. For clinicians, listening to the interplay between "I" and "we" voices may therefore be instructive, alerting to possible twin estrangement, as well as the extent to which twin and individual identity is split or more harmoniously integrated. This identity piece is generally highlighted as one of the core challenges twins face (Friedman, 2018; Klein, 2021c; Mellor, 2013; Noble et al, 2017; Sheerin, 1991). As Klein (2021a, p.7) puts it, "The struggle for individual identity is a point of struggle for all twins, and the conflict between individual and twin-identity can lead to life-long struggles between twin pairs." While helping twin clients foster an individual identity may well be a treatment goal for many, the stories presented here and the above literature findings suggest that clinicians should be wary of pitting the I against the we or overemphasising individual identity over twin identity. Neither is likely to support psychological wellbeing and they need not be seen as mutually exclusive. Indeed, as I highlighted in the literature review, an intuitive inquiry by Fichtmüller (2021) found that it was possible for twins to embrace both an individual and twin identity and, in some cases, transcend both (Fichtmüller, 2021). The study found that embracing all aspects of both identities created a sense of "wholeness" (p.16), which might therefore be considered a kind of self-actualisation for twins and a profoundly important task for therapists to assist with. This study, along with the findings presented in my own research here, extend existing knowledge of twin identity issues by moving beyond the black and white dichotomous way of thinking about twin identity, which is the dominant perspective in the literature at present. As with my own study and that of Fichtmüller (2021), methodologies that allow for intuitive ways of knowing (e.g. Moustakas, 1990), incorporating the tacit dimension (West, 2011) and embracing rather than shying away from embodied situatedness and emotional entanglement (Bager-Charleson and Kasap, 2017) in the research process can play a critical role in adding nuance to – or challenging – existing quantitative and qualitative research studies. For example, in the writing of my own account, periods of indwelling (Moustakas, 1990, p.24) and intuition allowed me to 'revisit' what my pre-birth and birth experience may have been like, rather than ignoring or discounting what instinctively feels like a profoundly important time. I also found the analysis process using the LG to be a very embodied experience. For example, when listening for contrapuntal voices in Harriet's narrative, I was very much guided by what I was feeling as well as hearing, which helped me identify that I might have overlooked something important about her experience, as detailed on page 71.

*Negotiating separateness and relatedness*

Dialogical psychotherapy (Hycner, 1993) speaks helpfully to this tension between the I and we, acknowledging that relationships require both separateness and relatedness, and that managing the rhythmic balance between these positions can be considered a hallmark of healthy relating. This negotiation between separateness and relatedness seems to run through all stories in this study, and it emerges elsewhere in narrative accounts of twinship in qualitative research too. For example, the challenge of balancing individuality with togetherness emerged as an important theme in a study investigating how female identical twins described the development of their identity (Määttä et al, 2016).

*I have been able to fulfil myself a lot, but inevitably, the other's choices have directed my own choices too.* (Mary).

*I have always liked to have a twin sister, but there is that problem too: how to think about yourself as you are as an individual.* (Sharon).

(Määttä et al, 2016, p.39)

In my study, with his decision to apply to a different university, Nick seems very much torn between what he feels society expects at this point and what he actually wants. Similarly, Harriet talks of, "you know, sort of wanting to break free," which captures the ambivalence that resides in the between of these two domains of being – separate and together. Harriet's story in particular – but perhaps this is true for all the stories in this study – is in essence about how and where to find a simultaneous sense of safety and separateness in the world, and the delicate dance of balancing these needs against the backdrop of societal pressure and a profound and irreplaceable twin-bond. Yet the cultural idealisation of the twin bond runs alongside the tendency for singletons to also treat twins as defective if they are seen as too close to their twin (Klein, 2017). Similarly, singleton psychotherapy often views twin intimacy as pathological and dysfunctional (Davis, 2016), something I also raised as a concern in the literature review. For example, journal articles titled "Transformation: from twin to individual" (Magagna, 2010) imply that successful treatment of a twin somehow requires 'killing off' the twin identity or twinship. From Friedman's (2018) perspective, this increases the risk of estrangement and in some instances might be considered unethical practice. Helping twins find a healthy balance between separateness and togetherness in their twinships and other relationships is surely an important therapeutic goal in many

instances. My concern though is that despite best intentions, in some instances a singleton psychology perspective might risk inadvertently causing or exacerbating twin estrangement by overemphasising separateness. This seems to reflect the wider context that the psychological language available to twins "Has singleton overtones that do not necessarily fit easily with twins experience as a twin, as one pair of twins and as a person in a minority group" (Shackle, 2016, p.61). There is therefore a risk that such singleton psychological perspectives may not facilitate the process of twin therapeutic healing (Hart, 2021a; Friedman, 2018; Klein, 2021c). As Harriet cautioned in her interview, therapists overly invested in separation may find this self-fulfilling, with the work ending abruptly. Furthermore, with regards to the therapeutic relationship and the transference, clinicians might need to tolerate a degree of 'togetherness' or sameness, as reported by Magagna (2007), who found that in the first phase of therapy her client Hanna needed her to be "An identical twin to be valued: thinking the same as Hanna and feeling just as she felt…difference of views could not be tolerated, for a different point of view would be a threat to twinning in the transference" (p.60). However, as treatment progressed, Hanna was increasingly able to see her therapist as different and tolerate their different views, therefore allowing more 'separation' in the therapeutic relationship and supporting individual identity development too.

While managing the balance between separateness and togetherness is something that twin or non-twin, we all must negotiate in our important relationships, it seems for twins this already challenging enough task must be achieved against the backdrop of conflicting societal requirements. As clinicians, we therefore need to be mindful of the potential for this to be present and enacted in the therapeutic relationship. Overall, given the above discussion, it hardly seems surprising that many twins end up estranged. The suffering from this is likely compounded by the shame and stigma of a 'failed twinship', with twin estrangement currently representing a taboo subject (Klein et al, 2021). Thankfully, this still hidden voice of twinship is beginning to be heard and reported (*ibid)*. My hope is that this present study makes a meaningful contribution here, raising awareness of the psychosocial challenges twins' face in successfully maintaining their twinships throughout the lifecourse, so that clinicians and people more broadly can better support twins with this most vitally important task for their happiness and wellbeing.

# Chapter 6: Implications and Considerations

In the above discussion I have identified and explored practice-based implications and considerations for clinicians working with twins, which are now collated in this chapter. My intention is for these to be seen as instructive suggestions for clinicians to refer to in their work with twins, rather than directives that must be followed or that will necessarily apply to all twins seeking counselling and psychotherapy. Furthermore, these implications should be considered alongside fundamental aspects of therapeutic work more generally, such as the stage of treatment, the nature of the therapeutic alliance, and so on. For example, exploring in-utero experiences may feel too intimate and potentially intrusive during early stages of therapy. The implications are organised under the relevant thematic headings from the discussion for ease of reference.

## Spatial contexts of twinship

- Consider making space for a twin's ideas, intuitions, and knowledge of what sharing space might have been like with their twin in-utero, childhood, and beyond, and how this might influence narrative identity.
- Consider how early and ongoing experiences of sharing space with the co-twin might influence how twin clients 'organise' the therapeutic space, for example needing the work to include or exclude the co-twin.
- Consider that the client's twin will be present in the therapeutic space at different levels of relational exchange, including the transference.

## Twin bodies

- The body may be of central significance for twin clients' sense of self and identity.
- Consider the possible need to help twin clients 'disembody' their identities and 'uncouple' or differentiate self from other, perhaps helping them identity unique aspects of themselves, such as personality characteristics, core values and interests to support this process.
- Objectification Theory may be a helpful framework for understanding the possible implications for twins arising from significant levels of objectification and body scrutiny.
- Consider the potential for shame and dissociation in presenting issues resulting from objectification and being compared with the co-twin.

- The clinician's sensitive moderation of gaze may be necessary for some twin clients prone to shame-based dysregulation resulting from an accumulation of objectifying experiences.
- Consider how being a woman or girl may intersect with being a twin, as this may result in acute levels of objectification.

## Twin-bond and attachment

- Consider that even under best circumstances, attachment deficits may be likely for twins due to caregiver challenges raising two infants simultaneously.
- Be mindful of the potential for being drawn into an impinged/impinging upon dynamic in the therapeutic relationship.
- Consider that twinship may afford both safety *and* vulnerability – not necessarily one or the other – and how this might have influenced twins' development, and accordingly the therapeutic relationship.
- When working with twins, consider both the nature of the co-twin attachment bond and primary caregiver attachment, i.e. a double attachment bond.
- Consider the need to work sensitively with empathic affect attunement and remain receptive to when the flow of 'in-sync' communication may have been broken for twin clients, who could find this particularly challenging.
- Be cautious in emphasising separation from co-twin as a therapeutic goal.
- Consider allowing rather than resisting twinship transferences, although this might also be informed by the client's capacity for tolerating separateness and other attachment considerations.
- Clinicians might also critically reflect on their own possible twinship needs and fantasies and track countertransference carefully.

## Being in the non-twin-world

- Consider introducing twin clients to the idea that they belong to a minority group and the theoretical distinction between the 'twin-world' and the 'non-twin-world.'
- A goal of treatment might be assisting twin clients in the discovery and articulation of their twin-worlds.
- The 'Hall of Mirrors' may be a helpful metaphor, with clinicians providing a 'truer reflection' for twin clients rather than a 'distorted' sociocultural image.

- Considering with twin clients how they have creatively adjusted to the challenges of the non-twin-world, and if necessary supporting them in introducing new and more adaptive responses, might be considered a core aspect of treatment.

## From harmony to estrangement

- Consider twinships as moving forwards and backwards along a continuum from harmony to estrangement.
- Curious listening to the interplay between “I” and “we” voices may help identify twin estrangement issues, and the extent to which twin and individual identity is ‘split’ or more harmoniously integrated.
- Be mindful of imposing a singleton psychology perspective, which could inadvertently cause or exacerbate twin estrangement by overemphasising individual identity and separateness.
- Consider how shame resulting from an estranged twinship might be significant in presenting issues.
- Consider how managing the tension between needs for both separateness and togetherness in the twinship and other interpersonal relationships might be significant in presenting issues.
- Assisting twins with the ‘reclaiming’ and embracing of both their individual and twin identities might foster a sense of ‘wholeness’ and improved wellbeing.

# Chapter 7: Conclusions and Reflections

In this research, my intention has been to journey alongside three other twins who have given voice to their experiences of twinship and psychotherapy, and to invite you, the reader, along for this journey too. I hope the richness of these 'twin-worlds' have been encountered (Bochner, 2012) and illuminated for non-twins, but also perhaps for those twins who might be in the process of discovering the richness and intricacies of their own 'twin-worlds' for the first time. Above all else, I feel a deep sense of gratitude to the twins who took part in this study. I have been moved by their willingness to share their life stories with me, which just as in my work as a psychotherapist, I receive with a sense of great privilege and responsibility. Hearing that the participants found their involvement to be meaningful and enriching – as did I – is the most important outcome of this research for me.

In this final chapter, I reflect on the research journey for me personally as well as limitations of the study and possible future explorations.

## Being alongside

Much like my intention to be alongside the participants in this study, with regard to my own process, I have become aware that being alongside is and always has been at the heart of my being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962) as a twin and an integrative psychological therapist. My wish to be alongside in this research, rather than adopt a position of power over those who took part, has in itself been interesting and important to reflect upon. My decision to use the Listening Guide for the analysis of stories arose out of my resistance to using more traditional methods of analysis and coding, which I felt risked enacting the done to (Benjamin, 2004) objectifying experience of twinship that has also sometimes occurred in twin psychology research. This decision was therefore congruent with my own values and the sensibilities and aims of the study. It may also say something about my relationship with power more broadly, a tendency to sometimes dilute it, and perhaps a hesitancy to make bolder statements or firmer conclusions in my academic and professional life, which a different methodology might have allowed for and even invited. Through a twinship lens, there is also an apparent concern with keeping things fair and equal – a theme across participants and something that Nick's voice highlighted in my story as a reaction to the comparisons and competitions we were habitually exposed to in childhood. Nevertheless, I am also aware that the idea I can be without power or that I can somehow evenly distribute it amongst participants, is illusionary; I have been in a position of power throughout. For me personally then, I feel there is something still in the becoming in terms of my relationship with

power and the balancing of my core twinship-informed values with what I might also still wish to become - personally and professionally - and what might be required to achieve that. This research process has therefore illuminated an area of potential further exploration and growth for me personally. Furthermore, future research on the experience of being a twin could look to foreground themes of power and power dynamics while also considering the relevance of difference in its various manifestations - for example in the research process and in relation to the research question and the resultant themes that are generated. Certainly, this is something that I would be more mindful of, were I to carry out the study again.

## The story of my life

A central component of autoethnographic research is the process of gazing back and forth between ethnos and autos lenses (Ellis, 2008) – comparing and contrasting one's own experience with that of the culture or subculture that the researcher is embedded in. This notion of gazing back and forth between self/other and of being compared and contrasted is evocative for me; I could even say it has been the story of my life. It was not until some way into the research however that I realised I had found myself using a methodology that required me to enact this very same gazing back and forth process on myself and fellow research participants; I must admit to feeling initially appalled by this discovery! However, this quickly gave way to curiosity and a deeper appreciation of the less conscious factors that might have also been informing my choice of methodology; was there something about my own 'betweenness' that I was trying to resolve here (Siddique, 2011)? Ironically, adopting an autoethnographic approach also enabled me to literally write the story of my life, and although perhaps not transformative, it has helped me reposition the comparing and contrasting with Nick and general objectification that I have experienced as a story within a story, rather than just being *the* story itself, which has been unexpectedly healing.

## Issues of narcissism for twins and in autoethnography

Closely related to this, the writing of my own story also spoke to something core for me, in terms of what it is like to be seen, and my ambivalence surrounding this. Again, using an autoethnographic methodology exposed this, shining a light on my own relationship with exposure. Bearing in mind my struggles with self-regulation when receiving attention, I am curious about why I would choose this approach for the study. A theme that was present in most of our stories is the 'specialness' of being a twin. Harriet, Sarah and I all speak to this in varying degrees of directness. In therapeutic work with twins, Friedman (2018) recognises how the feeling of being special can be fuelled by the twin identity and the social capital

(Bacon, 2010) it receives. However, she cautions that feeling special often masks a sense of fragility, thus it may have a narcissistic quality. This is something I clearly recognise in myself, particularly during my late teens and twenties, and I can see how part of me invited the level of 'attention' that writing an autoethnography affords, while another part feels discomfort with it. It is therefore interesting that a central point of critique of autoethnography as a methodology surrounds the use of the researcher's self and personal experiences, leading some to label it as self-indulgent (Coffey, 1999; Atkinson, 2006) and narcissistic (Marechal, 2010). This may hold some truth; however, it is also true that the self cannot be de-contextualised (Bochner, 2001). For twins, this may perhaps be all the more so: "Those who complain that personal narratives emphasise a single, speaking subject fail to realise that no individual voice speaks apart from a societal framework of co-constructed meaning" (Wall, 2006, p.155). Incorporating Nick's voice into my story therefore seems to serve an additional purpose beyond an acknowledgement of this co-constructed meaning and to reliability check my account. On reflection, noting how his voice punctuates my own in the text, it is as if I am moderating and shifting the attention away from me and onto him. In other words, "taking turns" with the attention, as Nick made sense of it, so that I am not overly exposed in the piece. For me, there *is* and always has been something very special about my twinship. The stories presented here also acknowledge that, while simultaneously highlighting the possible narcissistic fragility that may accompany it, which speaks to my own experience. Although this study highlights that there is much that is unique about being a twin though, perhaps it also points to what is universal amongst us all, such as these narcissistic grapplings with the self, our need to belong, and what Togashi and Kottler (2012) recognise as the most significant 'face of twinship,' "a confirmation of the feeling that one is a human being among other human beings" (Kohut, 1984, p.200); addressing these needs is often the very essence of relational psychotherapy, for twins and non-twins alike.

## Limitations

Although I have involved participants at post-interview stage with the sharing of stories for comments, amendments, and reliability checks, if I were to carry out the study again, I would consider making the analysis stage more collaborative. Brigham (2012) proposes that a sharing and discussion of the LG data with each of the research participants, such as the voice poems, can lead to another fruitful layer of research analysis. Working with participants to identify emergent voices in the narratives would perhaps therefore add another layer of 'alongsideness', while also being potentially rich in twinship processes too, thereby facilitating further meaning and insight. However, that the entirety of the research process beyond the initial planning stages was carried out during the COVID-19 pandemic presented

significant challenges, especially with regards to recruitment and carrying out participant interviews. Ultimately this resulted in significant time and logistical pressure on the study, thereby making possibilities such as a collaborative analysis process less viable.

The lack of participant diversity in the study is also something that I would look to address in future research. Clearly there are many twins in Western society with different ethnicity to the 100% white British sample in this study. How does someone from a mixed cultural background, for example, where identity might be constructed in more collective than individualistic terms, experience and negotiate their twinship? Twinship is an "irreducibly social phenomenon" (Stewart, 2000, p.719), so that it has only been considered from one sociocultural perspective in this study represents both a limitation and an opportunity for future research, which might explore intersectionality – for example how ethnicity and twinship might intersect.

Reflections on Methodology choices

There are of course strengths and limitations associated with any qualitative research methodology or method chosen for a specific study, compared with other possible approaches. I will briefly consider the strengths and limitations of autoethnography and The Listening Guide in relation to narrative analysis and intuitive inquiry, which have also contributed to knowledge and understanding in this topic area (as reviewed on page 19-26).

Narrative inquiry and autoethnography have much in common, perhaps even representing two sides of the same coin (James, 2018), with the researcher's story often intrinsic to a narrative inquiry study as it is in autoethnography. Narrative inquirers engage in intense and transparent reflection and questioning of their own position, values, beliefs and cultural background (Trahar, 2009) and there is therefore significant potential for articulation of self-awareness and reflexivity to be used in and to enrich the research (*ibid*). That said, autoethnographers typically include more of their own life experience than narrative inquirers; whether this represents a strength or a limitation depends more on the aims of the research, its methodological integrity, and the overall effectiveness of the study than on the methodology itself out of context. "Most of us, most of the time, do not find our research interests as deeply intertwined with our personal lives as autoethnography requires" (Anderson, 2006, p.396), which can in some ways be seen as a limitation of the methodology. However, my own research interests are indeed deeply intertwined with my personal and professional life as a twin and a psychotherapist. Furthermore, given the intention to give voice to twins themselves, which I have argued the importance of

throughout, my decision to foreground and voice my own story and thereby write an autoethnography represented an opportunity to strengthen this particular study, rather than necessarily highlighting a limitation per se with narrative inquiry.

Autoethnographies are “highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experience of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes, 2000, p.21), and I agree with Raab (2013) that the best way to examine and describe a culture might be to be part of it. A methodological advantage here relates to the ways in which being a complete member researcher facilitates the availability of data (Anderson, 2006), with the resulting analysis recursively drawing upon our personal experiences and perceptions to inform our broader social understandings and upon our broader social understandings to enrich our self-understandings (*ibid*). Admittedly, some may see this aspect of autoethnography as a limitation due to lack of objectivity and the potential for bias (e.g., Delamont, 2009) and limited generalisability, as discussed on page 35. While there is perhaps the possibility of greater generalisability with narrative analysis, for example in Greenwood (2018b) which highlighted the impact of twinship on non-twin sibling relationships, an autoethnographic account on the same topic – a ‘messy text’ – might offer readers a more personal and possibly emotional first-hand insight into the nuance of actually navigating these interpersonal and relational complexities. These studies might therefore complement each other rather than being seen as in competition.

However, the potential for ‘messiness’ can also represent a possible limitation of autoethnography and the LG in relation to narrative analysis and other qualitative methodologies such as thematic analysis, both in terms of the challenges of conducting these studies and also how to (re)present findings in a way that is acceptable to academic journals and useful to audiences. The LG in particular is loosely defined, which can be a blessing and a curse in terms of how to apply it to data analysis, but certainly a challenge for those inexperienced with the method. I found the labour-intensive nature of the analysis process to be a strength and a weakness. It allowed for an incredibly deep immersion in participant stories through the multiple listenings, but at times I felt overwhelmed by the multiplicity of voices identified and decisions about how to organise and interpret these. Here, my experience aligned with Petrovic et al (2015, p.2), who reported “For the logistical implementation and application of the LG to our research scope and data set we note a general lack of guidance in the literature”. No qualitative research process is black or white or straightforward (Petrovic et al, 2015), but the relatively undeveloped and niche nature of the LG compared to other qualitative methodologies may limit its appeal for some

researchers. More studies using the LG are therefore needed and my hope is that this present study may make a modest contribution in this regard.

Meanwhile, the success of an autoethnography is more dependent on the writing skills of the researcher than other methodologies, and autoethnographic accounts can easily slip into self-indulgence and leave readers wondering 'so what;' the writing of an autoethnography must be well crafted and capable of being respected from both a literary and a social scientific point of view (Spry, 2001). Autoethnographers may also find it harder to get published in academic journals than researchers using more 'traditional' and neatly defined qualitative methodologies, as discussed on page 33.

Although intuitive inquiry has not appeared much in qualitative studies of twins to date, Fichtmüller's (2021) research on twin identity suggests that this methodology could make valuable future contributions. A strength of this approach that was visible in the study was the use of the relational-embodied, which was fundamental to the research process and was well conveyed in the writing as well. In my view, incorporating the intuitive, tacit and the embodied into counselling and psychotherapy research can strengthen and enrich studies (Bager-Charleson and Kasap, 2017; West, 2011) and there is plenty of scope for autoethnographers and those using the LG to also make space for this dimension, not just those using intuitive inquiry. Related to this, given that counselling and psychotherapy is concerned with personal transformation and growth, methodologies like autoethnography and the LG which have the potential to facilitate personal growth for both the researcher and participants might offer something additionally meaningful compared with other qualitative methodologies. In this present study, the meaningfulness of the inquiry process from the point of view of the participants was evident during interviews, and also highlighted in follow up conversations:

*For God's sake, you know, how can I be forty-two and talking about this for the first time, it's crazy* (Sarah).

*So interesting that until we spoke, I'd never considered my twinness being something that had relevance to my life…but our chats were definitely enlightening* (Alex).

*I can't remember speaking to a twin for a very long time…and it wasn't this kind of conversation* (Harriet).

A strength of both narrative and autoethnographic approaches might therefore be in the potential for them to be meaningful and even therapeutic for researcher, participants, and

readers alike. As White & Epston (1990, p.21) put it, “I can be a story analyst with an analytic goal, but the stories may also have a therapeutic value”.

Reflections on the use of the LG

My decision to use The LG for the analysis of stories was appropriate for the reasons discussed, however it was not without challenges. By design, it is a somewhat undefined methodology; as the name suggests, “It is intended to be a guide, or a set of steps that provide a basic frame, rather than a set of prescriptive rules to be followed” (Gilligan et al, 2011, p.266). While this affords opportunities to tailor the approach to one’s specific research, it was initially rather bewildering in terms of practically using the method. However, after a while I noticed that the very relational nature of this method and its emphasis on listening for multiplicity of voices spoke to ‘the practitioner in my practitioner-researcher’, which helped me find my way through the listening stages more naturally. There is also surprisingly little in the way of critique to be found in the literature on the LG. A point of curiosity rather than critique might be regarding why the “ontological narratives” (Doucet, 2018, p.91) told in this study were indeed told, and why they were retold by me in the way that they were. Doucet (*ibid,* p.92) suggests that “People tell and emplot stories selectively, in particular conditions of possibility…these stories are constituted, in turn, within and through the conceptual narratives of researchers, who ask particular questions from among many ‘matters of concern’ and then relay these stories as scholarly narratives to particular epistemic communities.” While the intention with this study has been to explore twinship from the ‘inside out’ - from within the ‘twin-world’ - I am also curious about the ontological narratives that might be told by twins talking with non-twin researchers, and how the LG might uncover something instructive in this ‘outside-in’ process, where the twin-world and non-twin-world meet.

Reflections on the use of autoethnography

If writing an autoethnography is easier said than done (Wall, 2008) and certainly no easy task (Sparkes, 2020), it seems that deciding whether to accept, revise or reject an autoethnography for journal publishing might be almost as difficult (ibid). Various lists and criteria for assessing whether an autoethnography is first of all indeed an autoethnography, and secondly its overall quality and effectiveness do exist (e.g., Holman Jones, Adams and Ellis, 2013; Adams and Herrmann, 2020), but assessing an autoethnography is a somewhat “non-linear, complex, and messy process of embodied engagement” (Sparkes, 2020, p.293) much like my experience of writing one. One of the challenges is that autoethnographies come in all shapes and sizes, ranging from analytical to evocative and performative, with

considerable diversity in between. Given this variation, different criteria need to be drawn upon for judging different kinds of autoethnography (Sparkes, 2020). In critically reflecting on this present autoethnography then, which attempts to blend analytic (Anderson, 2006) and evocative approaches (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) into a "moderate autoethnography" (Wall, 2016, p.1) various criteria are important to consider. From an analytic perspective, Anderson's (2006) five key features are satisfied, for example complete member researcher status, dialogue with informants beyond the self in the form of in-depth interviews, and a commitment to theoretical analysis. As McMahon (2016, p.307) puts it, there is a "focus both on telling readers what the tale is about" in the form of stories of twinship "and how it should, ideally, be read" (*ibid*) by offering sociocultural analysis and interpretation (Chang, 2008) and proposing implications and considerations arising from this for clinicians working with twins. Thus, the autoethnography attempts to make a scholarly contribution with its conclusion (Chang, 2008). More than this though, my intention has been to evoke an emotional response in readers by *showing* rather than telling (McMahon, 2016) about the emotional experiences of myself and fellow twin participants; it is first and foremost an invitation into the phenomenology of twinship and the twin experience. Whether this is achieved or not is of course subjective, and best left for readers to decide. However, I hope that the authentic and meaningful research-relationships that developed between myself and participants, my commitment to honouring and articulating their voices in compelling but ethically sensitive (Bochner & Ellis, 2016) narratives, and my own willingness to, as far as possible, embrace vulnerability in the telling of my own story (Bochner & Ellis, 2016), all add up to something that resonates with and moves (*ibid*) readers while also providing an understanding of the culture central to the story being told (Sparkes, 2020).

## Future explorations

If the contribution of an autoethnography might be assessed more on the number and quality of the questions that the work raises than by its answers or conclusions (Eisner, 1997), then I am left wondering what questions may have arisen for the reader. I hope these questions will stimulate curiosity, dialogue, and future research. In terms of future research, there are several themes that did not emerge saliently in this study, but which could be significant in further qualitative and narrative based research on the experience of being a twin. For example, implicit in my own account especially is the possibility of twinship being a great source of strength and a positive 'resource' or asset. As noted in the literature review, research is beginning to challenge the notion of twinship being a liability, for example that it might 'buffer' against the negative impact of life events (Greenwood, 2018) and that twins may actually gain attachment advantages rather than deficits from their close bond (Gottfried

& Seay, 1994; Tirkkonen et al, 2008; 2016). On the flip side of this, an area which on reflection I may have unconsciously avoided is the topic of twin loss. Little research has been done to investigate the effects on the grief process when one twin dies (Withrow & Schwiebert, 2008) yet clinicians working with the bereaved surviving twin will need to understand the unique aspects of the twin relationship as well as the resulting complications for the grief process (*ibid*). If few counsellors understand the intricacies of the twin bond, even fewer understand the loss of that bond (Segal, 1999). This is something that future qualitative research, and perhaps especially those adopting an autoethnography methodology, are well placed to address.

For me personally, having 'completed' this research, I am nevertheless left with a sense of it not being altogether finished. This may reflect the reality that "the project of twin-self-understanding remains a lifelong project" (Martinez, 2021a, p.72), and that there is more for me to do personally in terms of my own understanding of my twinship, but also professionally as a practitioner-researcher and a therapist working with twins. Although twins have been the object of significant psychological research, the ways that twins react differently than singletons to psychotherapy is just beginning to be understood with clarity and seriousness of purpose (Klein et al, 2021). Yet "As twinship becomes more commonplace, new ideas about twin relationships and the intimacy that is shared will hopefully be explored by researchers and clinicians" (Klein, 2021c, p.291). My hope is that this study makes a meaningful contribution in this respect, supplementing the current body of research that foregrounds the subjective experience of twinship and approaches this subject from within 'the twin-world,' rather than from outside of it. In answering the question, "what is it like to be a twin?", twins talking with twins about their experience of their twin in their twin relationship remains an essential first step (Martinez, 2021b). So too though, is twins talking with well-informed clinicians, who might explore - embrace even - the realm of betweenness and the healing potential that resides there.

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# Appendices

**Appendix 1: Ten guidelines for ethics in autoethnography (Tolich, 2010)**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Consent | 1 | Respect contributors' autonomy and the voluntary nature of participation, and document the informed consent processes that are foundational to qualitative inquiry (Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, 2007). |
| | 2. | Practice "process consent," checking at each stage to make sure contributors still want to be part of the project (Ellis, 2007). |
| | 3 | Recognize the conflict of interest or coercive influence when seeking informed consent after writing the manuscript (Jago, 2002; Rambo, 2007). |
| Consultation | 4. | Consult with others, like an IRB (Chang, 2008; Congress of Qualitative Inquiry) |
| | 5 | Autoethnographers should not publish anything they would not show the persons mentioned in the text (Medford, 2006). |
| Vulnerability | 6. | Beware of internal confidentiality: the relationship at risk is not with the researcher exposing confidences to outsiders, but confidences exposed among the contributors or family members themselves (Tolich, 2004). |
| | 7. | Treat any autoethnography as an inked tattoo by anticipating the author's future vulnerability. |
| | 8. | Photo-voice anticipatory ethics claims that no photo is worth harming others. In a similar way, no story should harm others, and if harm is unavoidable, take steps to minimise harm. |
| | 9. | Those unable to minimize risk to self or others should use a nom de plume (Morse, 2002) as the default. |
| | 10. | Assume that all people mentioned in the text will read it one day (see Ellis, 1995a). |

**Appendix 2a: Participant Information Sheet, privacy notice and consent form**

**Metanoia Institute**

# PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET (PIS)

Participant ID Code:……

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Ask us if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

## Study title

Exploring twinship and the experience of psychotherapy for adult twins.

## What is the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this research is to explore the experience of being a twin and the intricacies of the co-twin relationship, and how this might impact counselling and psychotherapy for adult twins. Although the twin relationship has been described as the most unique and intimate relationship of all and the closest possible tie between two individuals, little research has investigated how the uniqueness of this relationship might be significant in the context of psychotherapy. There is a particular need for this research because of the rapid increase in the multiple maternity rate since the mid 1980's. In line with this increase, it can be expected that there will be a corresponding increase in the number of twins receiving counselling and psychotherapy in the future.

It is therefore hoped that the results of this research will help psychotherapists and counsellors better understand and meet the specific needs of twin clients in therapy, with the ultimate aim of improving therapeutic outcomes for twins.

## Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been invited to participate because you are an adult twin with experience of psychotherapy. A total of 3-5 participants will be taking part in this study.

## Do I have to take part?

Taking part in this research is entirely voluntary. If you decide you would like to take part, then you will be asked to sign a consent form which you will be given a copy of to keep, along with this information sheet. If you decide to take part, you are still free to withdraw at any point up until the write-up stage without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform myself (the researcher) as soon as possible, and I will facilitate your withdrawal.

**How will I be involved if I do take part?**

Your involvement in this research will be in the form of one or two informal interviews carried out by myself, which will last for approximately one-hour each. During these interviews I will invite you to talk freely about your experience of being a twin and your experience of psychotherapy. Following the interview/s, I will set aside further time (approximately 30-minutes) for a debrief. This will allow us to attend to any questions that you may have and for you to provide further reflections on your experience of the interview should you so wish.

The interviews will take place at a private location of your choice (or over Zoom) and will be recorded using a dictaphone, which once complete will be securely transferred to a password-protected laptop accessible only by myself. The interviews will then be transcribed by myself and you will have the opportunity to read the transcript in order to check that you are happy with what is written. At a later stage I will analyse and interpret the interview transcript. During this process I may contact you to ask for clarification on parts of the interview/s. I may also ask you for your thoughts on the analysis and interpretations offered, and you will have the opportunity to review sections of your account to be included in the study. This will also provide you with an opportunity to identify anything you do not feel comfortable about being published.

Please note that in order to ensure quality assurance and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the research ethics committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

It is my hope that you will find taking part in this study to be interesting and potentially helpful, and that your involvement will make a positive contribution to improving understanding of twins and their particular needs in psychotherapy for counsellors and psychotherapists. However, due to the nature of this type of research, such outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

**What are the possible risks or disadvantages of taking part?**

It is possible that talking about your experiences of psychotherapy might cause you to revisit some difficult or distressing feelings. Similarly, depending on the nature of your relationship with your twin, it is possible that reflecting on this relationship could also be challenging and potentially distressing. Reflecting on the relationship with

your twin could also affect how you feel about this relationship. Although information about you which is used in the research will have your name and other personal details removed, it may nevertheless be possible for people to identify you if they read the research once it is published.

I would therefore recommend that you consider discussing your involvement in this research with your twin before taking part. I also recommend either being in on-going psychotherapy, or a willingness to make contact with a therapist if you feel you require further support. I can give you information about sources of support, some of which are listed below.

**Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

There are a number of procedures in place to protect your confidentiality should you choose to take part in the study. You will be allocated a participant code that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data, for example, the consent form that you sign will be kept separate from your data. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only by myself, and all electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer, also only accessible by myself. Unless you wish otherwise, your name will be changed so that published data from your interview/s is less easily identifiable as yours. However, it is important to consider that it may still be possible for people to identify you and/or your co-twin in the study, particularly if the text describes a highly particular experience. Again, you may therefore wish to discuss your involvement in this research with your co-twin.

All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the UK Data Protection Act.

**What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this study will be published in the form of a Doctoral thesis. The research may also be presented at conferences or in academic journals. I can tell you where you can obtain a copy of the published results if you would like to see them.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

The study has been reviewed by the Metanoia Institute Research Ethics committee (MREC) and received full ethical clearance.

Who can I contact for further information?

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

Robert Scaife (researcher)

robscaife@outlook.com
07961 979 943

Dr Julianna Challenor
Director of Studies (Research)
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology

Metanoia Institute
13 North Common Road
Ealing, London
W5 2QB

**Sources of support**

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
Find a therapist database
Telephone: 0870 443 5252
Website: itsgoodtotalk.org.uk

UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP)
Find a therapist database
Telephone: 020 7014 9955
Website: psychotherapy.org.uk/find-a-therapist

Thank you for your interest in taking part in this study. You will be given a copy of this participant information sheet and signed consent form to keep.

*Please carefully review the Metanoia Institute Privacy Policy in Section 2 below.*

## *SECTION 2*

### Metanoia Institute Privacy Notice for Research Participants

The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) protects the rights of individuals by setting out certain rules as to what organisation can and cannot do with information about people. A key element to this is the principle to process individuals' data lawfully and fairly. This means we need to provide information on how we process personal data.

The Institute takes its obligation under the GDPR very seriously and will always ensure personal data is collected, handled, stored and shared in a secure manner. The Institute's Data Protection Policy can be accessed here: http://metanoia.ac.uk/media/2363/privacy-policy-metanoia-institute.pdf

The following statements will outline what personal data we collect, how we use it and who we share it with. It will also provide guidance on your individual rights and how to make a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Officer (ICO), the regulator for data protection in the UK.

### Why are we collecting your personal data?

We undertake research as part of our function and in our capacity as a teaching and research institution to advance education and learning. The specific purpose for data collection on this occasion is to investigate twinship and the experience of being a twin in psychotherapy in order to help psychotherapists and counsellors better understand this population and their experience.

The legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

### Transferring data outside Europe

In the majority of instances your data will be processed by Metanoia Institute researchers only or in collaboration with researchers at other UK or European institutions so will stay inside the EU and be protected by the requirements of the GDPR.

In any instances in which your data might be used as part of a collaboration with researchers based outside the EU all the necessary safeguards that are required under the GDPR for transferring data outside of the EU will be put in place. You will be informed if this is relevant for the specific study you are a participant of.

### Your rights under data protection

Under the GDPR and the DPA you have the following rights:

- to obtain access to, and copies of, the personal data that we hold about you;
- to require that we cease processing your personal data if the processing is causing you damage or distress;
- to require us to correct the personal data we hold about you if it is incorrect;

- to require us to erase your personal data;
- to require us to restrict our data processing activities;
- to receive from us the personal data we hold about you which you have provided to us, in a reasonable format specified by you, including for the purpose of you transmitting that personal data to another data controller;
- to object, on grounds relating to your particular situation, to any of our particular processing activities where you feel this has a disproportionate impact on your rights.

Where Personal Information is processed as part of a research project, the extent to which these rights apply varies under the GDPR and the DPA. In particular, your rights to access, change, or move your information may be limited, as we need to manage your information in specific ways in order for the research to be reliable and accurate. If you withdraw from the study, we may not be able to remove the information that we have already obtained. To safeguard your rights, we will use the minimum personally-identifiable information possible. The Participant Information Sheet will detail up to what point in the study data can be withdrawn.
If you submit a data protection rights request to the Institute, you will be informed of the decision within one month. If it is considered necessary to refuse to comply with any of your data protection rights, you also have the right to complain about our decision to the UK supervisory authority for data protection, the Information Commissioner's Office.

None of the above precludes your right to withdraw consent from participating in the research study at any time.

**Collecting and using personal data**

The personal data that will be collected from you in the course of this research includes your name and contact details (mobile number and email address). It will be used in order to identify you as a research participant and in order to contact you regarding logistics of the research process (e.g. arranging interview times and venues). This data will be collected by requesting it from you. Your data will be stored securely and will not be shared with anyone.

**Data sharing**

Responsible members of the Institute may be given access to personal data used in a research project for monitoring purposes and/or to carry out an audit of the study to ensure that the research is complying with applicable regulations. Individuals from regulatory authorities (people who check that we are carrying out the study correctly) may require access to your records. All of these people have a duty to keep your information, as a research participant, strictly confidential.
If we are working with other organisations and information is shared about you, we will inform you in the Participant Information Sheet. Information shared will be on a 'need to know' basis relative to achieving the research project's objectives, and with all appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the security of your information.

**Storage and security**

The Institute takes a robust approach to protecting the information it holds with its encrypted server and controlled access.

**Retention**

Under the GDPR and DPA personal data collected for research purposes can be kept indefinitely, providing there is no impact to you outside the parameters of the study you have consented to take part in. Having stated the above, the length of time for which we keep your data will depend on a number of factors including the importance of the data, the funding requirements, the nature of the study, and the requirements of the publisher. Details will be given in the information sheet for each project.

**Contact us**

The Principal Investigator leading this research is Robert Scaife
Flat 10, 313 Essex Road, N1 2EB
07961 979 943
robscaife@outlook.com

In case you have concerns about this project you can contact:
Dr Camilla Stack
camillastack@gmail.com

The Institute's official contact details are:
Data Protection Officer
Metanoia Institute
W5 2QB
Tel: +44 (0)20 8579 2505
Email: dataprotection@metanoia.ac.uk

Participant Identification Number:

## CONSENT FORM

**Title of Project:**

***Exploring between-ness: an autoethnographic journey into twinship and the experience of psychotherapy for adult twins***

**Name of Researcher: Robert Scaife**

**Please initial box**

**1.** I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions. 1

**2.** I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason and without penalty. 2

**3.** I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor. 3

**4.** I agree that my research data may be stored in National Archives and be used by others for future research. 4

**5.** I understand that my interview will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. 5

**6**. I agree to take part in the above study. 6

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Name of participant | Date: | Signature |
| Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher) | Date | Signature |
| Researcher: Robert Scaife | Date: | Signature: |

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher;

## Appendix 2b: Ethics committee approval letter

METANOIA INSTITUTE

13 Gunnersbury Avenue
Ealing, London W5 3XD
Telephone: 020 8579 2505
Facsimile: 020 8832 3070
www.metanoia.ac.uk

Robert Alexander Scaife
Doctorate in Counselling Psychology and Psychotherapy by Professional Studies (DCPsych)
Metanoia Institute

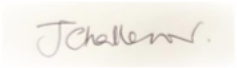
10th June 2020
*Ref: 08/19-20*

Dear Rob,

*Re: Exploring between-ness: an autoethnographic journey into twinship and the experience of psychotherapy for adult twins.*

I am pleased to let you know that the above project has been granted ethical approval by Metanoia Research Ethics Committee. If in the course of carrying out the project there are any new developments that may have ethical implications, please inform me as research ethics representative for the DCPsych programme.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Julianna Challenor
Director of Studies DCPsych
Faculty of Post-Qualification and Professional Doctorates

On behalf of Metanoia Research Ethics Committee

Registered in England at the above address No. 2918520

Registered Charity No. 1050175

**Appendix 2c: Research Supervisor Confirmation of Consent**

METANOIA INSTITUTE

## Research Supervisor Confirmation of Consent

Name of student: Robert Scaife

Name of research project: *Exploring betweenness: an autoethnographic journey into the experience of twinship and its therapeutic implications.*

This is to verify that as Research Supervisor for the above research project I have seen proof that appropriate consent has been obtained from the participants used in the project.

Supervisor's name: CAMILLA STACK

Signature:

Date: 27.6.23

## Appendix 3: Recruitment advertisement

METANOIA INSTITUTE

Middlesex University London

CALL OUT FOR RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Research Title: *Exploring between-ness: an autoethnographic journey into twinship and the experience of psychotherapy for adult twins.*

Are you a twin with experience of psychotherapy?

I am conducting research into the experience of being a twin and what psychotherapy is like for twins. If you are interested in taking part, I would love to hear from you.

**Criteria to be included in the research:**

- You are a twin (identical or non-identical)
- You are aged 18 years old or over
- You have experience of psychotherapy for a minimum of 4-months duration and/or a minimum of 16 sessions

Participating in this research will provide you with an opportunity to confidentially reflect on the nature of your twinship and your experience of psychotherapy. Your participation will also make a meaningful contribution to understanding the intricacies of co-twin relationships and what this means for practicing psychotherapists working with twins.

To take part, please contact Robert Scaife: 07961 979 943 / robscaife@outlook.com
Research Supervisor: Dr Camilla Stack camillastack@gmail.com

## Appendix 4: Excerpts from participant feedback following the reviewing of stories

### Alex:

Hi Rob.
This was a great read! And I want to thank you for being so sensitive with your handling of it all.

I was wondering if I was allowed to ask for a slight amendment to two of the things I said? Just for further clarification on what I meant.

The first being when we first introduce Natalie.
I say [redacted]
I was wondering if it was possible to adjust the "[redacted]" slightly to something like "she's got some conditions and they have held her back a lot"
Just for sensitivity sake to her. Basically saying the same thing without saying it, and giving it slightly more context to the why.
I think she would agree that her [redacted] held her back, but saying she's [redacted]" is quite a harsh way of putting it that I think she could be quite hurt by.

And secondly when I talked about BPD. I talk about discovering quiet borderlines, and then finish by saying "But I find that really hard".
It could come across like I'm saying I find it hard to internalize instead of externalize. Which is totally not what I meant at all!
Would it be possible to have me say "But I find the diagnosis really hard to accept" because this is what I meant by that.

### Harriet:

I have finally read your story based on our conversation and Rob – it is just wonderful. I am so moved reading it. I am going to re-read it again right now. But first I wanted to email you to say – all good, all brilliant and all very very insightfully, carefully and beautifully written. Thank you.

I have made two tiny edits in red. One where I think it was meant to read ‘we’ rather than ‘I. And one to clarify the death of my previous partner.

The edits are on the attached.

It’s just great. Thank you again. It was a pleasure and a privilege to be part of your work and I hope our paths cross again.

### Sarah:

I loved reading it. There is no content in the story which feels inaccurate and to see it written and analysed in that way is fascinating. I know I will learn so much when I re-read it a few times. I particularly loved reading your analysis and the voice poems. I experienced it as such a gift to receive. Thank you for allowing me to read this and be a part of this project. It feels like such a privilege.