

Joan A. Friedman, PhD



Beware the Myth

When I first began researching the works of psychoanalysts who had written about twins, I was amazed and thrilled to come across an article entitled "Twins: the myth and the reality" written in 1953 by psychoanalyst Marjorie R. Leonard in the journal *Child Study*. The observations and insights that she conveys are as relevant today as they were more than fifty years ago. As the mother of identical twin girls, she infused her psychological knowledge with real life experiences. I wish that I could quote the article in its entirety because it offers such a rich combination of practical and emotional advice. I hope that the following few snippets give you a feel for her perspicacity and wisdom.

My intention is to present a realistic expression of the twin bond so that people do not simply assume that all twins will forever be ESP bound soulmates designated for a lifelong intimate attachment. A healthy twinship is terrifically complex but certainly not impossible to attain. My primary thesis is that healthy twin relationships develop when twins are able to spend time alone with each parent and time away from their twin. I want to quote extensively from an article written in 1957 in a book entitled *Mother and Child* written by renowned British psychoanalyst and pediatrician Dr. Donald Winnicott. In the 1950's twin births were an unusual event.

". . . although the twins are theoretically brought up under the same environmental conditions, actually the environment differs by just such little actions on your part. If you permit yourself to react to the needs of each of the babies individually, the personality differences will continue to develop."

"Their 'oneness' [twinship] is a defense, a protection against the world. This is the reality in the advantage of the twinship which is felt by those who wish to have a twin. However, advantageous as it may seem to others, as far as the twins themselves are concerned it is apt to be a deterring factor in the development of individual personalities."

". . . I believe that in most instances the longer the twins cling to their twinship, that is, remain identified with each other, the more difficulty there will be when the time comes for them to try to live independent lives. Once the twins can reach the stage of accepting their differentiation and each feels secure as a person in his own right, jealousy and rivalry will once more diminish, if not disappear completely. The twins will again feel close to each other and will be able to enjoy their twinship."

"This close tie, this emotional and mental intimacy, is indisputably the advantage of twinship over all other human relationships. But there is a great difference between mutual understanding and dependency of one upon the other." ■