

Individualization refers to a process that might be hard to operationalize, but that could be considered as the extent to which a person has gone through various developmental processes to differentiate, and develop the ability to optimally express himself as an individual apart from others. One can hypothesize that, the better this process, the more emotionally healthy the person becomes. To my knowledge, no comparative research has yet been performed between twins and singletons on the extent of individualization they show.

Now what is clear from the scientific literature? Very little; the only paper that I found concerning the comparison of twins with singletons is written in Japanese, so I only had access to the abstract (Nishihara et al., 2006). Nishihara found that parenting of twins is more stressful for parents than parenting singletons. Reversely, it is unclear to what extent the twinning

experience is more stressful for twins than the sibling experience is for singletons. With respect to the parents, the more negative their feelings are towards a twin, the worse the child's mental development. Although that in itself holds for parents of singletons as well, one can imagine that — considering the extra stress of parenting twins, twins might be more prone to parental stress and its subsequent negative impact on mental development than singletons.

The book is very informative on tricks and tips to reduce this parental stress. For instance, the recommendation to take time alone with one child is likely to work well, since it actually gives the opportunity for the parent to take some time out with subsequently a beneficial effect to the whole family. Whether it fuels the twins' individuality — the authors' rationale for recommending the time alone — is unsupported by evidence. Without

wanting to be provocative, I could also argue that positive and mutual twin-bonding is equally contributive to the persons' self-esteem and emotional health as individualization.

What is missing is a chapter about the advantages of raising same-age children within the families, along with tips and tricks to optimize these advantages and to stimulate twin-bonding; too much collectivization seems bad, but what about too much individualization?

### Reference

Nishihara et al. (2006): *Nippon Koshu Eisei Zasshi*, 53(11), 831–841.

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## Emotionally Healthy Twins: A New Philosophy for Parenting Two Unique Individuals

Joan A. Friedman (2008). Da Capo Press, Life Long Books, 224 pp., US\$15.95, ISBN 13 978 0 7382 1087 2

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As young people grow up, most will battle with their own sense of identity, but for twins this struggle can be more painful and prolonged. Some need to prise themselves from a 'twosome package-deal' identity, while others need to cast aside an identity based solely on differences from their co-twin: labelled by the well-meaning in an attempt to find uniqueness 'Linda is the creative one; Laura the scholar'. The path to emotional happiness is difficult to navigate. What can parents do to make the journey less painful? Joan Friedman's *Emotionally healthy twins* provides some useful pointers outlined in a new philosophy of twin parenting.

Friedman has all the credentials for authoring a book about twins. She is both a twin and a mother of twins plus three other children. Furthermore, she is a psychotherapist specializing in the treatment of twins and their parents, bringing to the book a wealth of real-life examples. The fundamental underlying tenet of Friedman's new philosophy is to replace the mindset that twins are a single unit with a mindset that they are two unique individuals. Not much new

about that you might think, but I believe she takes this philosophy several steps further than other authors I have read.

The new philosophy is outlined in the first chapter as seven principles. The usual advice of not choosing 'a pair of names' or not dressing the twins alike is all there of course, as these relate to how you and others perceive the twins as individuals, but that is just the beginning. With a mindset of two individuals in place, the most important of the seven

principles is that parent should create regular 'alone time' for each child. Certainly, this advice was around in 'my day' and such a regime can be a financial burden unless you have family or friends willing to get involved on a regular basis. Friedman emphasizes the importance of the alone time from babyhood right through to teenage years and with each parent separately. The logistics of this can be quite tricky, particularly if you have other children, but Friedman

herself managed it with three other children, so no excuses! Nonetheless the huge importance of this effort is to reinforce the mindset that the children are individuals. If this mindset is firmly established by the parents, then it will be reinforced by the extended family and wider social circles and therefore be taken for granted by the twins themselves. With this foundation stone, some of the other principles will fall naturally into place: 'encourage the twins to pursue their own friendships and interests', 'don't rely on your twins to be each other's constant companion or surrogate parent'. Similarly, the otherwise often difficult decision about whether the twins should be in the same or different classes, will not be an issue as both are able to function independently. A consequence of viewing twins as individuals results in another of Friedman's principles: 'expect to have different feelings for each child'; seeing this in black and white could be a source of great reassurance of parents, particularly of younger twins.

The principle that I found was the most enlightening was 'Don't attempt to provide a 'fair and equal' childhood for your twins'. I think that a desire to treat their children fairly is a basic instinct for parents. With children of different ages, we are happy that this fairness works out, more-or-less, over their childhood years without the need for fairness over a short time horizon. After all, some opportunities are best undertaken at specific age, and if the opportunities change over time so that one misses out, it wasn't intentional on our part. In fact, one reason why twins traditionally may have been treated as a single unit is to avoid any perceived unfairness. Friedman provides examples of how applying misguided fairness can undermine your authority as a parent in disciplining your children. Friedman suggests that we should 'redefine 'fair' to mean fair to each child's unique needs and emotional makeup'. Moreover, she advocates exposing our children to unfair situations so that they can learn the appropriate life skills to deal with such events.

The principle I found hardest to take on board was 'Don't compare twins to each other; each is on his or her unique life path', but perhaps my problem was one of semantics. To think

that we don't compare two same-aged children is as much of a lie to ourselves as thinking we can provide a completely fair environment for them. Just as Year One children quickly know that of the graded reading groups cleverly disguised as fruits, the pomegranates can read and the tangerines can't, twins can see the comparisons for themselves. To avoid comparisons at all costs sounds to me like more 'head-in-the-sand' stuff. However, the detail of Friedman's principle is much more in line with my way of thinking: to avoid labels, to avoid value judgments made on comparisons and to avoid making differences where none really exist. She writes, 'They need their parents to know who they really are, not how they stack up against the brother and sister'. This is true, but life is not that simple, because the family unit is not the only source of comparisons. The society in which we live does make value judgments based on success and achievements. If one twin achieves accolades valued by society then twins need the skills to cope with either their comparative success or failure. Ideally, both twins may each have a taste of the limelight at some level; but that will not always be happen. I think it would be much more in line with Friedman's philosophy to tackle comparisons head-on, and to provide parents with the tools which will lead to our children having the skills to deal with the comparisons forced on them by society and which they are quite capable of seeing for themselves, even if those close to them tiptoe around such issues. This is a tricky one, which has been placed by many authors into the 'too hard' basket. Certainly, my sons are more able to show genuine pleasure for accolades of their younger sister, than they can for each other's achievements, because by admitting their brother's success is to acknowledge a lesser success in themselves. I would like an expert to show me the way to the ideal whereby our twins can value the successes of their co-twin as acknowledged by society, but have the self-esteem to realize that such accolades are not necessarily the ingredients of love, long-term happiness or of being valuable contributors to our society. To be fair, by the time Friedman discusses teenage years she does acknowledge difficulties in comparisons that are imposed on twins by

the value judgment of society, but practical guidance on how to deal with these issues is limited.

Friedman often avoids making a distinction between identical and nonidentical twins, perhaps taking the view that the issues are in the mindset of the parents in raising two children of the same age within the same household. I would have thought that some of the issues she raises are more likely to apply to different twinship types. Some of the classic 'twins reared apart' stories show the uncanny similarity of identical twins in their interests and attitudes. Given that the genetic component of many personality traits is high, it is likely to be harder but also more important to reinforce actively the mindset that your identical twins are unique individuals.

By using case studies, Friedman provides a wealth of examples, so that all readers are likely to find scenarios with which they can identify. A case study of opposite-sex twins exemplified some more subtle dependencies that can arise, such as adopting protector-protectee roles. Six of the eight chapters deal with a different life stage of the twins' lives from prebirth through to adulthood. Each chapter ends with some guidelines on writing down your thoughts as a journal.

In my experience, there is often little general appreciation of the unique psychological challenges experienced by twins past elementary school years. It should be possible to teach twins how to deal with these challenges so that by the time they leave school they have a level of emotional maturity and self-understanding that exceeds that of their singleton contemporaries. But the road to this ideal is neither smooth nor well signposted. Friedman's book makes a valuable and novel contribution to the twin parenting literature and is one that I will recommend to other parents of twins and indeed to parents of multiple singletons.

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