

National
Organization of
Mothers
Of
Twins
Clubs, Inc.

SUBJECT:

EXPERIENCES OF TWIN LOSS

RESEARCHER:

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PURPOSE: To describe the nature of twin loss and illuminate the phenomenon in a manner that aids surviving twins, psychotherapists and other non-twins in coping with this unique life event.

METHOD: Ten research participants who had lost a twin were interviewed by the researcher to answer the question, "What do twins experience when their co-twin dies?"

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

1. Ten participants were interviewed.
2. Twintype of the participants included:
 - A. Six identical twins, one of whom was male and the remainder female.
 - B. Four fraternal twins, all of whom were female same sex except for one opposite sex female twin.
 - C. This pattern of participation is consistent with previous research stating that same sex fraternal females and identical females are more likely to participate in research studies and to report the most severe grief reaction.
3. The time since the participants had lost their co-twins ranged from 4 months to 63 years.
4. Surviving co-twins ranged in age at the time of their twin's death from 6 to 61 years old.
5. Two twins had died by suicide, six died from disease and two from auto or motorcycle accidents.
6. The researcher is herself a twinless fraternal female same-sex twin of 13 years.

RESULTS:

1. The experience of twin loss is greatly determined by the nature of the twinship the survivor experienced with his/her co-twin.
2. The researcher described the nature of the twinship in two ways:
 - A. Differentiated or Undifferentiated
 - B. Caregiver or Caretaker
3. A "differentiated" twin is one who had achieved more of a sense of individuality while still experiencing the twinship identity.

4. An "undifferentiated" twin is one who had achieved very little sense of individuality while also experiencing the twinship identity.
5. The Caregiver-Caretaker description was determined by the degree to which a twin experienced herself as the one who gave more support or took more support from her co-twin.
6. The type of twin, as determined by these descriptions, influences the duration and range of emotions which make up a surviving co-twin's experience of loss.
7. Undifferentiated Caregivers:
 - A. Express a feeling about their twinship that "two halves make a whole person."
 - B. Described themselves as the "mommies," or the "thinkers" of their twinships.
 - C. Described their co-twin as the "child" or the "feeler."
 - D. These twins, who felt stronger or more resourceful than their co-twin, often experienced their twin's deaths as their own abandonment of their deceased co-twin. A sense of shock seemed to mask the intense sense of guilt they experienced.
8. Undifferentiated Caretakers:
 - A. Express a feeling of being less capable, sometimes less preferred by parents and less independent than their co-twins.
 - B. Felt they were the "tag-along" to their co-twins adventures and decisions.
 - C. Often didn't know themselves as an individual until after their twin died.
 - D. These twins had a greater and more enduring sense of shock around their twin's death. Felt dissatisfied with their lives as a result of the death of their twin.
 - E. Their positions as caretakers sometimes brought up feelings of resentment, helplessness and disorientation; it appeared that feelings of being the lower status twin were mixed with grief reactions, making it harder for these twins to go on after the loss.
9. Differentiated Caretakers:
 - A. Experienced herself as the "backbone" of the twinship.
 - B. Deeply satisfied by the nature of the twinship and valued their roles with respect to one another.
 - C. These twins managed to develop individual talents and interests such that the twinship was not threatened by feelings of competition.
 - D. The loss experience was the loss of mutuality and of a dear "friend."
10. Differentiated Caregivers:
 - A. Express feelings of responsibility toward their co-twin before, but not after their death.
 - B. Reminiscent of parent-child relationships but also attempted to meet some of their twin's needs with the awareness of their own self, separate from the twinship.
 - C. Able to differentiate from their twin, while their co-twin does not.
 - D. These twins expressed a deep sadness about the loss of their co-twin and sometimes resentment for having had the additional responsibility of a co-twin who required so much care.
 - E. They had a clear sense of their own entitlement to go on with their lives even though they had lost an important part of themselves.

CONCLUSION:

1. No single factor in particular can account for or predict any surviving twin's response to loss.
2. Participants who talked about their co-twin's death as something they were "getting through" tended to have experienced one of more of the following:
 - A. A clear sense of individuality separate from the twinship identity.
 - B. Relatively minimal conflict between themselves and their co-twin at the time of death.
 - C. Low expression of feelings of responsibility for their twin's death.
3. Participants who talked about their co-twin's deaths as something that still greatly influenced their inability to find happiness in life and relationships tended to have experienced one or more of the following:
 - A. Minimal individuation from the twinship identity.
 - B. An individual identity that was founded upon guilt and/or lack of worthiness.
 - C. High expression of feelings of responsibility for their co-twin's deaths.
4. The bereavement process of surviving twins begins with intense feelings of shock, guilt and lack of support and is experienced as one or more of the following losses: loss of self, loss of a part of one's body and/or loss of an ability. Depending upon the nature of the twinship experienced by the surviving twin, he/she begins the adjustment process to the loss.
