

# THE PROCESS OF IDENTITY IN TWINS

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*The Blacky Picture Test was administered to a sample of 12 pairs of male MZ twins, aged 17 to 19 years, and to an equal number of singletons. A score for 30 factors was assigned to each protocol. By comparing the scores of the two groups using the Mann-Whitney U test, only one significant difference emerged, relative to the factor concerned with positive identification and fraternal relationship. Twins chose the sibling figure as the identification object significantly less often than singletons did. A more qualitative elaboration was undertaken in order to interpret this result. From the final data, the precariousness of the sense of identity in the twins comes out indirectly in their passive and conformistic acceptance of the paternal model. It would seem that the twin is induced by his relationship with his cotwin, seen as the origin of this uncertainty as to his own identity, to adhere closely to the paternal image.*

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## INTRODUCTION

This research takes its inspiration from Zazzo's work on twin psychology, and in particular from his observations concerning the confusion phenomena to which identical twins are subject (name and personal pronoun confusion, mirror-image confusion, etc.), phenomena that lead us to presume that a much more profound confusion is present (Zazzo 1960).

On the basis of these considerations, I formulated the following hypotheses:

- (1) A twin achieves a more confused and less defined personal identity than a singleton does.
- (2) The process of identification with parents is blocked (or in any case warped) by the inter-twin relationship.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

Various psychological tests were administered to the subjects; the data derived from the Blacky Picture Test are now available. This projective test, based on psychoanalytical theory, is composed of eleven cartoons depicting a young dog, Blacky, and his family. Each cartoon is intended to explore a specific dimension of psychosexual development: Oral Eroticism, Oral Sadism, Anal Sadism, Oedipal Intensity, Masturbation Guilt, Castration Anxiety, Positive Identification, Sibling Rivalry, Guilt Feelings, Positive Ego Ideal, Love-object. The subject is asked to furnish a spontaneous story for each picture; later, during the interview, clarifications are obtained through questioning.

The protocols thus obtained were evaluated by me according to a method that the author of the test, G. Blum, has devised for cases, such as the one in question, in which the test is used for research rather than clinically (Blum 1962).

To each protocol I assigned a score for 30 factors which Blum distinguished through his factor analysis.

Being as it is an in-depth investigation of a psychodynamic nature, the sample on which I have worked is necessarily limited. It is made up of 12 pairs of male MZ twins, students, residing in Rome (taken from the Register of the Mendel Institute), and from 17 to 19 years old, an age when one's sense of identity is presumed to be consolidating. Subjects were chosen who have no sibling other than the twin, unless separated by a considerable difference in age, so that the effects of being a twin could be seen in as "pure" a state as possible.

The control group is made up of an equal number of singletons, of the same sex, age, scholastic level, and residence as the test group.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I compared the scores of the two groups for each of the 30 factors indicated by Blum, using the statistical method of the Mann-Whitney U test, and only one difference emerged that was significant at 0.05 level, relative to factor C of Cartoon VII. It is extremely noteworthy that *only* for this factor did a difference appear between twins and singletons. Cartoon VII is in fact concerned with Positive identification, and factor C is precisely the one most directly linked to fraternal relationship.

Let us look more closely at this cartoon: it shows Blacky facing a toy dog, and is intended to determine whether the subject has constructed an identification with the parent of the same sex, which, in our case, should show up in a spontaneous story of the “Blacky is imitating Papa” sort.

Later, during the interview, the subject is asked to say who Blacky’s model figure is, whether it’s Mama, Papa, or Tippy, a sibling figure of undetermined sex and age (who can thus easily be interpreted by the twins as their own twin). Blum’s factor analysis distinguished three factors in this cartoon: Factor A, Father as preferred identification object; Factor B, Mother as preferred identification object; Factor C, Evasion of identification issue, because Blum interprets choosing Tippy as a way to avoid choosing either Mama or Papa. The fact remains, however, that score for factor C is prevalently acquired by choosing Tippy, rather than Papa or Mama, as the identification object.

On the Mann-Whitney U test it therefore emerged that the twins chose Tippy significantly *less* often than the singletons did.

In order to interpret this single result adequately, I undertook a more qualitative elaboration of the data from Cartoon VII, without using investigation techniques which, like the U test, could guarantee statistically correct results. I decided to be content, from this point on, with bringing out the actual sense of the data, so that a *tendency* in a particular direction might be determined.

### *The Frequency Histograms*

As a first step, since the U test is based on the middle ranges (and thus, in fact, on the medians) and ignores the point distribution, I analyzed the histograms of the frequencies for the three factors of Cartoon VII (Figure).

Specifically, I observed that the points for Factor A, namely: “Father as preferred identification object”, for which the two groups do not have significantly different median values, are however distributed along different curves in the test group and in the control group. The twins’ points show a steady increase, while those of the control group are bunched at the two extremes of the range, so that a gap shows up around the middle values. What interpretation might be given to this phenomenon?

We can start with the hypothesis that, corresponding to very low point values (0 or 1) for this factor, there is, in subjects from 17 to 19 years of age, a need to proclaim one’s independence from parental models, and such a response would seem substantially adequate. This affirmation of autonomy would tend to manifest itself with increased frequency in the control group. The curve along which their points are distributed would in fact represent the presence of these opposite tendencies, towards conformity and adjustment to the Father model on the one hand, and towards independences and autonomy on the other. The twins’ curve can instead be seen as the steadily increasing progress towards the “obligatory”, so to speak, identification with the Father figure.

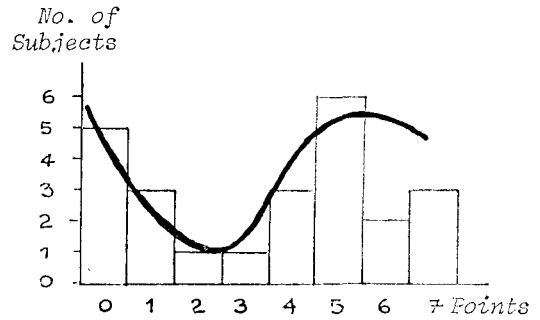
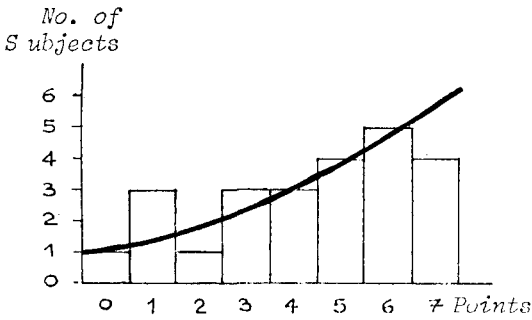
### *Explicit Adoption of a Model Figure*

Among the interview questions regarding this cartoon, the first five require, as we have said, that the subject make a choice, in the nature of a global identification, between Mama, Papa, and Tippy. Very frequently the same response (for example “Papa” or “none of the three”) is given to all five answers. Among these questions, however, the fourth is without doubt the most direct, in the sense that it brings up the problem of Blacky’s identification without beating around the bush (“Whom would Blacky rather pattern himself after — Mama, Papa, or Tippy?”) and is therefore the one that

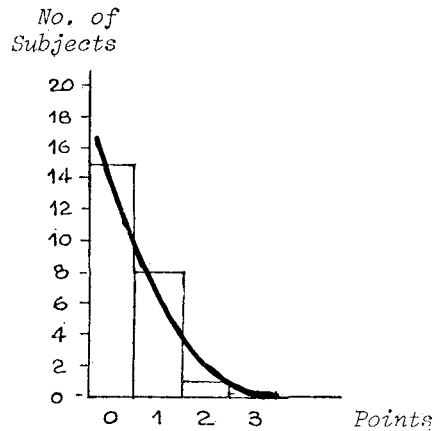
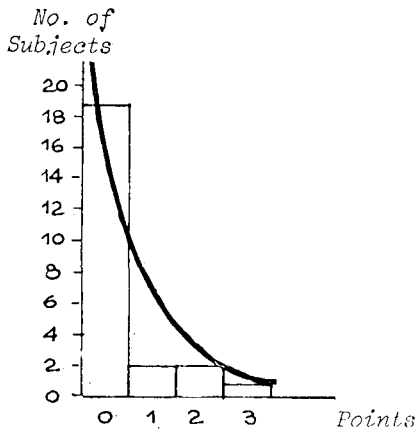
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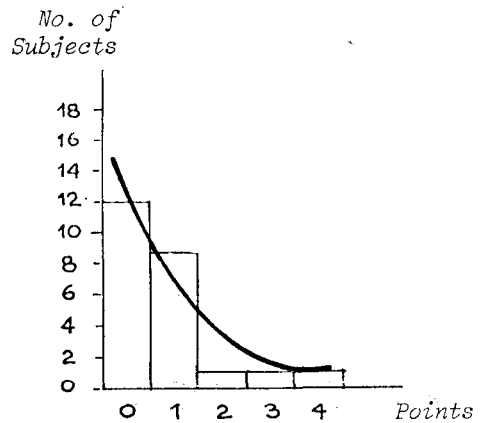
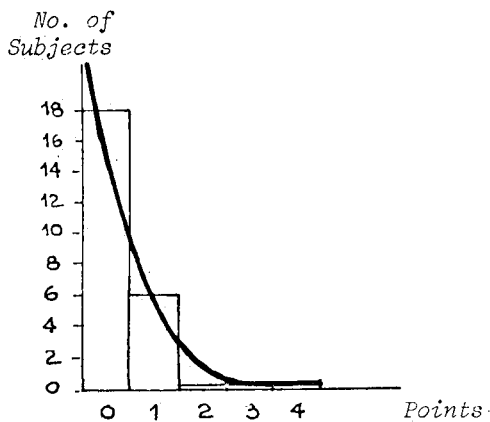
Factor VII A: FATHER as preferred identification object



Factor VII B: MOTHER as preferred identification object.



Factor VII C: Evasion of identification issue



Figure

Table 1. *Explicit adoption of a model figure: answers given by the groups*

	Twins	Singletons
Papa	17	14
Mama	2	0
Mama and Papa	2	1
Tippy	0	2
Papa and Tippy	0	1
No one	3	6

Table 2. *Explicit adoption of a model figure: differences in percentage*

	Twins	Singletons
Parents	87.5	64.5
Brother	0	10.3
No one	12.5	25

calls for the response nearest to the conscious level.

I therefore sifted out my subjects' answers to this question (which obviously invites the choice of the parent of the same sex), to see whether they accepted the invitation contained in the question itself. Table 1 shows the answers given by the two groups.

We see that among the twins 21 out of 24 took a parental figure as an explicit model (87.5%), namely 70.8% for the Father, 8.3% for the Father and the Mother indistinctly, and another 8.3 for the Mother. No twin chose the sibling figure, and 12.5% chose no one.

In the control group (attributing half the "P. and T." choice to one and half to the other) we have on the other hand: 64.5% took a parental figure as model (of whom 60.3% for the Father, 4.1% for Mother and Father, and no one for the Mother), 10.3% chose the sibling figure and 25% chose no one.

The percentages are summarized in Table 2.

These differences in percentage seem interpretable in the following way: faced with a question that invites identification with the parent of the same sex, the twins' acceptance is greater than that of singletons, and the affirmation of their independence from a parental model (paternal and maternal together) is correspondingly less.

This suggests that a more uncertain sense of identity leads the twins to stay anchored to the paternal figure as identification model (and sometimes even to the maternal figure), as to a prop without which their precarious self-image risks toppling.

And it is interesting to note that this support is never looked for in the brother, precisely as if the twin brother were in fact at the origin of this uncertainty as to their identity.

#### *Confirmation Furnished by Cartoon X*

We find significantly similar responses to Cartoon X, concerning the Ego Ideal, which shows Blacky dreaming of himself as an adult. The first question of the interview is: "Whom does the figure remind Blacky of?"

A previous study (Molish et al. 1954) had showed that, contrary to expectations, "normal" subjects from 17 to 23 years of age answered "Blacky himself" to this question in a greater percentage than did disturbed and immature subjects of the same age, who more often responded "Papa". The authors interpreted this result as an indication of a stronger self-concept in the normal subjects. Since this interpretation is in perfect agreement with my observations on my subjects made as regards Cartoon VII, I went into my two groups' responses to this question in detail to see if it was possible to find some confirmation of my hypotheses. To this end I divided the responses (which were quite varied, in that it is a free question, and not multiple choice) into three categories:

1) Choice of Papa as Ego Ideal;

Table 3. *Choice of a figure as Ego Ideal*

	Twins	Singletons
Papa	9	6
Self	12	11
Someone else	1	7

Only 22 responses are listed for the twins because two twins saw a female figure in the dream, thus distorting the meaning of the cartoon.

Table 4. *Attitude towards the authority figure*

	Twins	Singletons
<i>a</i>	3.5	5
<i>b</i>	13.5	8
<i>c</i>	3.5	4
<i>d</i>	3.5	7

In those cases where a subject chose two possibilities, a half-point was counted for each.

2) Choice of Blacky himself, or in any case of an ideal model that Blacky has autonomously constructed for himself;

3) Choice of someone else.

Table 3 shows how the two groups' answers were distributed.

We can see that the two groups do not differ as to the number of subjects (about half) that affirm having an autonomously constructed Ego Ideal. The differences emerge in the other two categories: 37.5% of the twins as opposed to 25% of the control group declare that their Ideal is based on the paternal model. The difference between the two groups is still more striking (4.1% of the twins, 29.1% of the singletons) as regards the choice as Ideal of a concrete, but not parental figure.

These data, therefore, strengthen the interpretation given before: it is more and more likely to be true that a weaker sense of identity leads twins to model their Ego Ideal on the closest and, so to speak, most "obvious" figure, while a greater number of singletons, with more autonomy, choose their model figure outside the family circle.

#### *Attitude Towards the Authority Figure*

Returning to Cartoon VII, we find another element that supports our thesis if we examine the answers that the tests group and the control group give to question 6 ("What would Bl. have an impulse to do if he were in the position of the toy dog?"). Such a question allows us to note the attitudes and reactions of the subject as regard the authority figure, and the way in which such reactions are handled and elaborated.

The possible reactions to this questions are:

- (a) Get frightened and hide.
- (b) Stand there and take it.
- (c) Get mad and sulk.
- (d) Start fighting.

We immediately see that the attitudes expressed by these responses range from a maximum of dependence and self-punishment to a maximum of reaction and other-directed aggressiveness: attitudes that are taken to be aimed at the figure in authority. We can see in Table 4 how the two groups' answers were distributed.

We note that the twins' answers are clearly concentrated on choice "b", while those of the singletons are more uniformly distributed among the four reactions. While the two groups do not differ considerably as concerns choices "a" and "c", we find a more marked discrepancy in the other two choices: 56.2% of the twins, as opposed to 33.3% of the singletons, chose "b", and 7.3% of the twins, as opposed to 14.6% of the singletons, chose "d".

Thus the twins adopt an attitude of greater dependence and passivity towards the authority figure, namely the father; the singletons manifest reaction and aggressiveness more often. We therefore

have a more and more consistent picture of a tendency in twins towards infantile and conformist positions, while singletons show a more autonomous and self-confident attitude. In the twins' lesser independence from the parental model we again find the inability to stand apart from the identification figure, as if this would mean for them the risk of no longer knowing who they are.

## CONCLUSIONS

It seems to me that the results of this investigation, even if they doubtless lack some of the demonstrative value they would have had through the use of severe statistical techniques like the U test, have nonetheless the merit of leading in a single, coherent direction. That is, they seem to indicate, in confirmation of my first and main hypothesis, that twins at the end of adolescence show a sense of identity that is less stabile and defined than that of singletons. This characteristic doesn't show up directly on the test, in the sense that the test doesn't bring to light quantitatively significant signs of confusion in the test group. The precariousness of the sense of identity in the twins comes out indirectly, in their passive and conformist acceptance of the paternal model.

This would seem to mean that my second hypothesis, which held that the process of identification with parental figures in twins is blocked or warped by the inter-twin relationship, is almost paradoxically contradicted by these results: as if the twins, by virtue of being such, identified more easily, and without conflicts, with the paternal figure.

A closer examination, however, shows this identification to be, as we said, conventional and forced to a great extent. One suspects that behind such affirmations of full adhesion to the paternal model there is the inability to take a more autonomous and independent position, which would entail the risk of loss of identity, of no longer knowing who one is.

In the same way, the twin sibling does not directly interfere with the identification with the parent of the same sex, in that he doesn't constitute an alternative model that could conflict with the parent; in fact, the twin is never used as an identification object, contrary to the occasional use of a brother by the control group. But it would seem that the twin is induced by his relationship with his cotwin, seen as being at the origin of this uncertainty as to his own identity, to adhere closely and passively to the paternal image.

The two hypotheses we began with thus emerge confirmed, at least as a tendency. The elaboration of the data obtained with the other testing methods applied to the same test group ought to provide further evidence in this direction.

## REFERENCES

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