

Exploration of Twin Separation and Adult Experiences: A Qualitative Study

Jocelyne Coan Bond & J. Kelly Coker

Abstract

Many researchers have studied the long-term impact of nontwin sibling separation in foster care, but little is known about the separation of twins. In this study, we examined how one specific set of adult fraternal twin sisters interpreted their personal experiences of separation from each other while in foster care and whether this experience affected their interpersonal relationships. The researchers relied on the theoretical foundations of attachment theory to support the use of existing literature and to integrate the research findings into current child welfare practice for human services professionals. Through personal interviews, each twin was asked to recall experiences from foster care and comment on the effects of being separated from their twin. Thematic analysis of the interview data and observations of the interview process helped to identify four themes: forming successful attachments, mental health issues, trauma history, and number and type of placements experienced. Implications for human services professionals working in social services agencies with youth in foster care are also discussed.

Keywords: twin separation, foster care, attachment theory

Introduction

Twin siblings who have been separated by the Child Welfare System (CWS) can develop complex interpersonal relationships (Bond, 2019). Throughout the United States, children who have been removed from their primary caregiver's home and placed in a foster care setting by the CWS have been found to be victims of child maltreatment as classified by either abuse, neglect, and/or abandonment (United States Department of Health and Human Services et al., 2016). Understanding how twins might experience foster care placement and sibling separation is valuable for human services professionals nationwide due to (a) progressively rising twin birth rates in the United States (Martin et al., 2021); (b) elevated child maltreatment rates for twins (Lindberg et al., 2013; Ooki, 2013; Yokoyama et al., 2015); and (c) complex twin attachment issues (Segal, 2012; Shumaker et al., 2011). We designed this qualitative study to investigate the experiences of one set of adult twins and the subsequent and significant effects of being separated as children while in foster care. Given the unique and complex dynamics of twin relationships, we aimed to identify themes experienced by separated twins through this qualitative study.

Literature Review

Twins are not currently identified as a recognized demographic in child welfare research. For this reason, it is a challenge to identify recent and relevant literature and research on twin attachment, twins in foster care, and the experiences of separated twins in the foster care system. At the time this study was conducted in 2019, there was a dearth of literature specific to the experiences of twins separated in the CWS and resulting outcomes. At the time of this writing, a scan of the literature yielded similar results: there continues to be a lack of inquiry into the experiences of twins, attachment, and separation. Information on twin experiences, birth rates, maltreatment of twins, literature related to attachment theory and sibling relationships, and the effects of separation on attachment contributed to the need for the current study.

Twin Maltreatment

Data gathered from 100% of all birth certificates filed in all 50 states, plus the District of Columbia, indicated that the twin birth rate has steadily risen over the past 3 decades in the United States (Martin et al., 2021). There has also been a significant amount of research conducted that portrays a greater risk of child maltreatment among twins (Haney, 2021). The results of one study indicated that twins were found to have more abusive fractures than nontwin children who suffered abuse (Lindberg et al., 2013). Results from another study reported a



significantly higher rate of substantiated child maltreatment for twins, as compared with singletons or triplets (Ooki, 2013). Additional research findings indicated that the reality of rearing two children of the same age simultaneously overburdens parents physically, mentally, and socially (Yokoyama et al., 2015). These researchers found that families with multiple births had an elevated risk for fatal child maltreatment, both per individual and per family unit. Yokoyama et al. (2015) also discovered that twins experienced significantly lower birth weight and neural abnormality, which are common risk factors for child maltreatment. Furthermore, twin mothers had a significantly higher rate of poor health compared to singleton mothers, which is also a common risk factor for child maltreatment.

Separation and Attachment

In general, childhood sibling separation can complicate both developmental progression and successful adult independence, depending on the type and duration of the placement experienced by each sibling (Shumaker et al., 2011). This separation and placement differentiation can also affect each siblings' capacity to parent their own children by compromising their ability to establish healthy and secure attachments (McCormick, 2010; Shumaker et al., 2011). A younger sibling's secure attachment with an older sibling can effectively reduce the potential effects from adversities such as parental substance abuse, parental mental illness, and loss (Gass et al., 2007). The separation of twins during childhood could influence their interpersonal relationships with their own children, their intimate partners, and each other to a greater extent than is presently known about nontwin sibling attachments (Fortuna et al., 2010; Segal, 2012).

The tenets of attachment theory espouse that a child's sense of security is directly related to their perceived responsiveness and accessibility of their attachment figure (Sloman & Taylor, 2016). When this responsiveness and accessibility are lacking or missing altogether, the parent/child attachment system is affected (Sloman & Taylor, 2016). The concept of attachment theory suggests that infants can develop specific sets of expectations regarding attachment relationships in general. These expectations form the basis of a cognitive internal working model (Sloman & Taylor, 2016), which can influence an individual's future interpersonal expectations and ongoing attachment behaviors. Researchers agree that attachment relationships developed during childhood can influence how people relate to others in adulthood, including their ability to regulate emotions, develop trust, and self-soothe (Shaver & Mikulincer, 2010; Sloman & Taylor, 2016). According to Ensink et al. (2017), parent/child attachment type might be linked to personality disorders in adults, effectively creating an overlap between the determinants of infant security and long-term predictors of adult stability.

Twin Attachment. The most identified characteristics of attachment are proximity seeking, separation distress, and the establishment of a secure base from which to explore (Ainsworth & Wittig, 1969; Bowlby, 1969). Based on a review of existing twin research, twin relationships often meet most, if not all, of these characteristics (Fralely & Tancredy, 2012). In many cases, these attachment characteristics are developed out of necessity. Mothers of twins must meet the needs of two infants simultaneously, often resulting in reduced individualized attention to each child (Fralely & Tancredy, 2012). In fact, some researchers suggest that mothers speak to their twin infants only half as often as they speak to their singleton infants (Kehoe et al., 2016). Koch, who first published her research on twins in 1927, is one of the original researchers to consider attachment issues with twins. In a groundbreaking study for its time, Koch (1966) explored attachment issues as they relate to preschool-aged twins. She found that twins were more likely than nontwins to spend time together and share playmates. Whereas nontwin siblings said they were happier without their brothers or sisters, twins reported that they preferred being together. In fact, most of the twins Koch interviewed expressed a desire to be in the same classroom as their co-twin. Kehoe et al. (2016) suggested that the twin relationship experiences an enduring attachment that lasts throughout childhood and well into adulthood. Kehoe et al.



(2016) concluded that, regardless of age and situation, a twin would naturally retreat to the twinship for safety and security. Fraley and Tancredy (2012) also reported this finding in a study exploring twin attachment, which suggested that twin children rely more heavily on their co-twin for safety and security than do nontwin siblings. Differently aged siblings also claimed to be happier without their brothers or sisters around, whereas twins stated a preference for being in each other's company (Anderson et al., 2015).

Twin Zygosity. In theory, full biological siblings should be just as likely as fraternal twins to rely on their siblings as attachment figures because both kinds of siblings share an average of 50% of their genetic variation (Fraley & Tancredy, 2012). From an attachment-theoretical perspective, full siblings and fraternal twins have had distinct relational experiences and different relational identities. As such, fraternal twins should be more likely than nontwin siblings to use one another as attachment figures, even though both sibling types share the same coefficient of relatedness (Fraley & Tancredy, 2012). Other researchers have suggested that twinship is overall beneficial for twins, with benefits varying in magnitude from one twin group to another (Hegedűs et al., 2014). Using the alternative attachment-theoretical explanation, Fraley and Tancredy (2012) argued that the so-called "twin situation" naturally encourages the development of a secure attachment bond, regardless of whether the target siblings are identical or fraternal twins. These researchers claimed that twins form distinctively close relationships in comparison to nontwin siblings due to circumstances such as sharing birthdays, peer groups, bedrooms, and spending a lot of time in proximity to one another. In a more recent study, researchers compared the nature of the twin relationship, specifically between identical and fraternal twins, to determine the effects that genetics might have on this familial bond (Mark et al., 2016). Mark et al. (2016) suggested that there were no significant differences in the levels of attachment between identical and fraternal twins, and that nontwins were less attached to their siblings than any type of twin. Finally, in a recent examination of attachment and zygosity using the Attachment Features and Functions measure, de Oliveira Landenberger et al. (2021) found that identical twins reported a higher level of attachment to one another than fraternal twins or non-twins.

Most of the literature reviewed suggests that there is very little information readily available on the separation of twins within the CWS. It is therefore imperative that more information is known about how this specific demographic responds to the phenomenon being considered. We have begun to address this gap in the literature by exploring the story of one set of twins who were separated while in foster care.

Method

This qualitative study was approved by a university IRB to use individual interviews with a set of adult twins who were separated while in the foster care system. The use of qualitative research in this study was justified based on the gap in the literature regarding the lived experiences of twins who were separated from each other as children in foster care. Rudestam and Newton (2015) stated that while quantitative research typically works to isolate specific phenomena, often down to a single variable, qualitative research requires an aspect of spontaneity and flexibility when exploring phenomena in their natural environment. Narrative inquiry has long been employed as a tool for qualitative analysis in the social sciences (Dowding, 2013). This method of inquiry supports the notion that people naturally talk about their lives and selves in a storied way, which can foster learning in both the individual and others about the experiences, consequences, and lessons learned through telling these stories (Byrne, 2017). Narrative inquiry as a methodology is not just about collecting stories or telling them; the narrative approach is an overarching principle where data, analysis, and representation are all narrative in form (Byrne, 2017). Riessman (2015) concluded that the human narrative is the primary mode of understanding phenomena that occur in real life and therefore lends itself well to the social sciences.



Research Questions

The primary research questions guiding this study were: (1) How does one specific set of adult fraternal twin sisters interpret their personal lived experiences of being separated from each other as children, while in the custody of CWS? and (2) How does one specific set of adult fraternal twin sisters explain the effects of this separation on their current individual abilities to develop secure interpersonal relationships as adults? The first author interviewed each subject.

Role of the Researcher

In the current study, the first author gathered information through personalized interviews and observations relevant to her research topic. The second author, although not involved in the original study, assisted with additional literature review and writing of this manuscript. As the first author was a child protective services social worker, she had previous knowledge of this pair of twins as children being in the legal custody of the CWS agency where she was previously employed. Having been aware of their unique situation and of their ongoing desire to contribute as adults to the success and wellbeing of other foster children, she determined their participation and contribution to this research was vital in the quest to understand this phenomenon.

Participant interviews were recorded to capture their verbal responses and to maximize accuracy. A responsive interview approach was used, which is supported by the interpretivist paradigm (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). This approach encouraged flexible and adaptive questioning to promote the sharing of new information and adapt to an unexpected direction in conversation. The goal of responsive interviewing is to concentrate on depth rather than breadth of understanding regarding the investigated topic. The primary responsive interview questions are typically open-ended, followed up by sub questions and probes (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is one of the most essential elements of any qualitative study (Rubin & Rubin, 2011). Particularly in this study where the first author was familiar with her subjects, the need for ensuring the validity of the results was paramount. One practice to ensure credibility was for the researcher to engage in reflexivity, which is the reflection of the influence of the researcher on the research (Hammarberg et al., 2016). Specifically, during the coding process, the first author systematically considered her previous knowledge of the participants and their experiences against the transcribing of interviews and identification of themes. To address transferability, the first author used a rich description of data, as provided both by the participants through the process of interviewing, as well as through the inclusion of field notes and observations (Rudestam & Newton, 2014). Transparency of the descriptive details was also established regarding both the subjects and the setting of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2014). To determine dependability in this study, digital audio recordings of the interviews were used to accurately convey the interview content and to assist in the process of coding. In addition, recoding was used to revisit the data collected after the initial coding process. This contributed to dependability within the data analysis process. To achieve confirmability, the first author maintained a field journal to document feelings, impressions, values, and interests as they related to the research process.

Sample

The sample for this study consisted of two adult twin sisters that were separated from each other as children in the CWS. At the time of the interview, these twins were 24 years old. A combination/mixed purposeful sampling strategy was employed, combining both critical and convenience sampling methods; the criteria for inclusion was individuals who are a part of a twin pair and who were separated from their twin while being in the legal custody of CWS. This type of sampling meets multiple interests and needs (Dowding, 2013).

Data Collection and Analysis

To capture the lived experiences of the target population of this study, face-to-face interviews were conducted with each participant. The first author arranged each interview for the



time and date that best suited participants' personal schedules and scheduled a private study room at a local university library. Interviews were conducted separately at different times. The interview with Participant 1 lasted for approximately 1.5 hours; the interview with Participant 2 lasted for about 2 hours.

These interviews were also audio recorded and transcribed to ensure complete accuracy of the information gathered. The first author then applied a method of data analysis commonly used in qualitative research known as thematic analysis (Riessman, 2008). Thematic analysis requires the researcher to become very familiar with the data by reading the material multiple times (Riessman, 2008). The goal of this analysis method is to search for themes and/or patterns throughout the collected data that are significant to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Braun and Clarke (2006) identified six steps to use when conducting a thematic analysis: (1) familiarizing yourself with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and finally (6) producing the report. To become familiar with the data, the first author re-read the transcripts while listening to the audio recordings of both interviews. Once familiar with the data, the first author labeled the entire text with codes that represented previously identified themes specific to the research questions, including references to an emotion, feeling, action, event, and/or response to an event. To maintain a high degree of accuracy and interpretation, each interview transcript was hand coded within 3 days of conducting the interview. By identifying these themes, a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the twins being interviewed and how this experience has affected their lives was obtained. This method of data collection helped to answer both research questions being considered by determining if mutual themes are present in each twin's interview. Since each twin faced a very different foster care experience, it was interesting to see if the effects of their separation were experienced in similar or different ways. This could inform child welfare professionals on the variations of effects that might be a result of the type of foster placement used, regardless of whether a separation has occurred.

Findings

The names and other identifying information of each participant have been excluded to ensure privacy. For each identified theme, the predominant subtopics that emerged during the interviews are presented. The themes identified were Forming Attachments, Mental Health Issues, Trauma History, and Number and Type of Placements.

Participant 1

Participant 1 was a 24-year-old Caucasian woman, who was a part of a twin sibling group taken into protective custody by the CWS at the age of 9 years old. After being moved around to several foster placements, she was adopted at the age of 13 by her last set of foster parents. She is the biological mother to two male children from different fathers and is currently providing kinship parenting to her biological nephew. She has never been married but is currently living with her boyfriend, who is the father of her youngest child. She is a full-time stay-at-home mother and says that she lives in a constant state of fear of her children being taken away from her:

I feel like I have to be the perfect mother...never make a mistake. I'm afraid that if I look overwhelmed or like I can't control my kids, someone is going to call [CWS] and report me. All of that pressure adds up and makes me feel like I'm going crazy, and then I look crazy. I can't seem to get it all together.

Participant 2

Participant 2 is the co-twin of Participant 1, and is also a 24-year-old Caucasian woman taken into protective custody by the CWS at the age of 9 years old. She was never adopted like her sister, and she stayed in foster care until her 18th birthday, living in over 40 foster care placements. She is the biological mother to one daughter, who was taken into custody by the CWS at 1 year of age and subsequently adopted. She has limited contact with the adoptive



parents, who send her photos of her daughter on an annual basis. At the time of the interview, Participant 2 was homeless and had been for many years. She resided at the transitional living center located within the local homeless shelter. She reported having multiple medical and mental health problems, as well as substance use issues. She stated that she was not currently in a relationship and that she felt very alone.

I have nobody. Nobody cares about me except for people that try to help me in the community. I can't remember the last time I saw [Participant 1]. I keep texting her, but she never texts me back.

Theme 1: Forming Attachments

A predominant theme that emerged from the study was the inability of both participants to form successful attachments. Each twin reported feelings of not belonging, not feeling connected to people or places, alienation, and extreme sadness. Other topics participants identified that relate to this theme included family relationships, twin relationships, parenting, romantic relationships, and friendships. Both twins stated that they do not have successful attachments with their family or each other. While Participant 1 reported having a successful parenting relationship, romantic relationship, and friendships, Participant 2 only reported having successful attachments with her friends. When the twins were asked whether they see one another, they responded as follows:

Participant 1: Not really. It's really hard to see her now. She has really gone downhill...and I feel so guilty that I couldn't take care of her daughter when she went into custody. There is just so much history between us, and none at the same time if that makes any sense. Our relationship was stolen from us.

Participant 2: No, I don't talk to anyone. They don't talk to me either. Nobody ever calls me, even on Christmas. I spent a week in the ER a few months ago and nobody even bothered to visit me. I almost died in there. [My twin] came to see me once, and that was it. Some of the staff from the [homeless shelter] came too.

Theme 2: Mental Health Issues

Another theme consistent throughout the data was the presence of mental health issues. Both participants reported having struggled with mental health issues throughout their time in foster care and since becoming adults. While some of their experiences varied from each other, both participants indicated feeling depressed, anxious, and often confused when it came to functioning within the constraints of society. The other identified topics within this theme include mental health diagnosis, mental health treatment, medication management, and hospitalization. Participant 1 stated that she has received a mental health diagnosis, as well as treatment. However, she reported that she has never been on medication nor been hospitalized for mental health issues. Participant 2 stated that she has not only been diagnosed and treated for a mental illness, but that she has also received medication management and hospitalization services. When asked whether they had any mental health diagnoses or treatment and the effects of that on their experiences, the twins' responses included:

Participant 1: I was diagnosed with all kinds of stuff when I was in foster care, I don't really remember what. But when I got adopted, I was only told that I suffered from separation anxiety and attachment disorder. I used to go to a therapist every week when I was a kid. I never took any medication for anything though.

Participant 2: No one knew how to deal with me, so they would run tests and stuff all the time. Every time I moved somewhere new, they would put me on another medication. I felt like a zombie, you know? I hated it. Sometimes when I got sick of it all, I would just do something crazy...you know what I mean? I would just go off so that they would get me out of that place. That's usually when they would just put me in the mental hospital for a while until I calmed down. Then I would go someplace new! It worked like that.



Theme 3: Trauma History

Another theme identified in the data analysis process was the existence of a trauma history for each participant. Because child maltreatment is a precipitating event for any child in foster care (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services et al., 2016), it was determined that the participants had experienced some level of trauma as children. As they shared their lived experiences, it became evident that their trauma history played an integral role in their overall development as adults. Events cited by the participants included childhood neglect, childhood abuse, parental separation, twin separation, and adult trauma. Although both participants reported being victims of childhood neglect, only Participant 2 stated that she was also a victim of childhood abuse. Similarly, both participants stated that they have been separated from their parents, as well as from each other. However, only Participant 2 stated that she was a victim of adult trauma. Participant 1 told one story of neglect that highlighted both participants' early experiences:

Participant 1: I remember we were in a hotel somewhere out of state. My mom and her boyfriend had gone down there to party and brought me and [my twin] with her. I think we were left in the hotel room alone for like 3 or 4 days or something before somebody noticed and called the cops. [My twin] would go out and try to find us food, but mostly we just stayed in the room and watched TV. I remember being really hungry, and kind of mad at my mom for leaving us alone for so long, but I didn't really feel scared. She did this kind of thing all the time. Anyway, when the cops came, they called the [CWS] in their state. Once they found out where we were actually from, they sent us back to our home county and put us in foster care there.

When Participant 2 was asked about the effects of being separated from her twin in foster care, she shared:

Participant 2: I was kind of used to my mother's ways, and her being gone for long periods of time you know, so being away from her wasn't as hard on me as it was on [my twin]. But when they took me away from [my twin], I thought I was going to die. I was her protector, and I took care of her. I remember thinking that no one was going to take care of her now that I'm gone. I used to worry about her all the time, like was she getting enough to eat and stuff. It's like I was her mom. I used to cry and cry all the time to take me back to her, or to at least let me talk to her you know? But they never would. I guess she started having her own life and stuff, you know, without me.

Theme 4: Number and Type of Placements

The final theme found to be relevant to the research questions were the number and type of placements that each participant had. This theme recurred throughout the interviews in various ways. The data analysis suggested that the number of foster care placements seemed to indicate a level of stability and security experienced by the participant. The participants described relative placements, family foster homes, therapeutic foster homes, group homes, and adoption. Although both participants experienced relative placements and family foster homes, only Participant 2 had placements in therapeutic foster homes and group homes. Also, only Participant 1 was adopted as a child. Each participant was asked about her perceptions of the respective placements:

Participant 1: I called them Mom and Dad, you know? Like they were my parents. For a long time, they took really good care of me and loved me. I could feel it. I had a nice house, and my own room.

Participant 2: Forty-two. I have been in 42 different placements between the ages of 9 and 18. I've been in every type of placement you can imagine, sometimes 4 or 5 in the same year. If I didn't like a place when I got there, I would already start thinking, "How can I get moved?"

When asked about how constant changing of placements affected her ability to form relationships now, Participant 2 shared:



Well yes! Doesn't that make sense? Like I said before, I don't know how to be with people, how to act around them, you know? I never know what people want from me, so I feel like I don't know what I want from them either. Sometimes I just want a hug, you know? But I wouldn't even know how to say that to someone.

Throughout the course of the interview, both participants shared stories relating to their position within their family of origin, as well as their twin sibling position. They discussed various family dynamics, which they felt helped to contribute to their current state of being, and to their ability to formulate successful relationships at this stage of their lives. Participant 1 talked about a time when her stepfather had attempted to take care of her, and how it created significant difficulties for her other siblings and family members. Participant 2 shared a story about her self-identity as the leader of the twin pair, tasked with the responsibility of protecting her "younger" twin sibling.

Discussion

As noted in the literature review, early research on twins shows they often rely on one another and prefer being together (Koch, 1966). Although the participants in the current study had vastly different foster care experiences, themes generated about their separation from one another were similar.

For the theme of *Forming Attachments*, the twin participants clearly defined the significant effects that their separation had on their childhood and continued to have on their adult lives. Both twins expressed a sense of loss for being separated from one another and noted that their adult relationship with one another remained fractured. Both participants reported historical events that include episodes of drug use, homelessness, academic difficulty, and running away from various placements—all which they associate to some degree with their separation from each other.

These findings suggest that adult twins have difficulty establishing successful interpersonal relationships if separated from each other as children in a foster care setting and regardless of their placement type or duration. According to Fortuna (2010), successful attachment to others in adulthood is predicated on developing secure attachment in childhood. These early bonds affect the expectations of attachment to others in adulthood (Sloman & Taylor, 2016).

During the interviews, the twin participants communicated their sense of reliance on each other as children, making statements that reiterated their dependence on one another for love, support, nurturance, and safety—characteristics often expressed toward a parent or caregiver. This experience is supported in the literature that suggests twins are equally attached to one another as to caregivers (Shumaker, 2011), and that the twin bond can strengthen even further when child maltreatment is present (Goldberg et al., 2013).

For the theme of *Mental Health Issues*, both participants received diagnoses requiring therapy, and one participant was hospitalized and put on medication for myriad concerns, including depression, bipolar disorder, and ADHD. Consistent with findings of Schumacher et al. (2011), these experiences point to how separation can complicate developmental progression and successful adult independence. Longer term mental health issues followed the participants into adulthood. Participant 2, continued to struggle with depression, anxiety, and difficulty forming healthy interpersonal relationships. In response to the second question for research, specifically, the participants clearly identified a link between their separation and their resulting mental health conditions.

Participants also experienced a significant *Trauma History*, the third identified theme. Both participants experienced childhood neglect, and one participant experienced both childhood and adult abuse. This trauma history informed their perceptions of the effects of these experiences on themselves, on one another, and on their resulting relationship, or lack thereof. Both participants expressed intense feelings of guilt about being separated from each other, each taking



some level of responsibility for the separation. Participant 1 made statements about her regret for leaving her twin behind, saying she should have done more to keep them together. Participant 2 also stated her feelings of guilt and remorse regarding her separation from her sister, saying she should have behaved better and might have been able to remain with her twin. Based on the heightened level of attachment often experienced by twins (Fraley & Tancredy, 2012), twin siblings might feel a greater level of impact from being separated than nontwin siblings.

For the theme of *Number and Type of Placements*, both participants identified difficulty with attachments in adulthood, but it is noteworthy that Participant 1, who had fewer foster placements and was adopted, reported having positive parenting relationships with her children, a romantic relationship with her boyfriend, and strong friendships. It is possible that even though Participant 1 experienced the loss of the relationship with her twin, the stability she experienced in her foster placement and her eventual adoption provided opportunities to enhance attachment to others. This evidence further supports existing research on how the frequency, duration, and type of placement can affect the overall stability and self-sufficiency of those who grew up in the CWS (Shumaker et al., 2011).

Limitations

There are several potential limitations of the current study. Researchers used the lived experiences of only one set of twins separated while in foster care. A sample size of several different twin sets of varying zygosity, gender, and ethnicity, would yield more comprehensive findings. A greater diversity of sample might rule out results that were specific to the twin set identified as participants for this study. The purpose of qualitative research, however, is not to be generalizable, and this study was exploratory in nature.

Also, since the research was conducted with interviews and field notes, the data collected may not fully convey the complexity of the phenomenon being researched. Future research could include a quantitative analysis to measure more concrete variables, contributing to the depth of information gathered on the topic of twin separation in foster care. Another potential limitation was selection bias, due to the first author's previous knowledge of the participant's unique situation. This could have contributed to the specific information gathered during the interview process, or even in the application of the thematic analysis.

Conclusion and Implications

Children in foster care suffer in ways most of us cannot understand. Many children suffer at the hand of their parents, while others are forced to witness events that damage them emotionally. Human services workers are often faced with the imperative to remove these children from their biological parents for the children's safety and wellbeing, placing them in the foster care system.

When these children have siblings (or twins) who are also removed, another complex layer is introduced to the situation. Placing siblings together might lead to more positive outcomes. Conversely, when they are separated, a vast array of negative outcomes affects the remainder of their childhood, and potentially their adult lives as well. Separating siblings from each other not only compounds existing trauma, but also has the potential to devastate any hope they might have for a healthy adulthood. Human services professionals who work with children in foster care have an opportunity to support, when possible, keeping siblings together. When twins are involved, this imperative is potentially even greater. The CWS needs to expand its understanding of the effects of separated placement of twins, specifically, and create appropriate policy. That there is not even a searchable term, "twins," in the CWS database is noteworthy. Through this study, we aimed to shed light on the limitations of human services agencies in identifying the specific needs of twins in foster care, and to better understand the lasting effects of twin separation.



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