The lived experience of adult twins amidst the cultural and social constructs of twinship

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, herby declare that the work in this dissertation titled ‘The lived experience of adult twins amidst the cultural and social constructs of twinship’ in partial fulfilment of the Masters in Systemic Family Psychotherapy, was carried out by myself. Appropriate citation has been included when referring to studies by other authors.

Justine Bugeja

546291M

Dedicated to the tough that keeps on going, when the going gets tough.

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Abstract

The primary objective of this qualitative study was to attain a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of adult twins amidst the cultural and social constructs associated with twinhood, particularly the notions of "oneness," "sameness," and "closeness". The study included five Maltese adult twin pairs representing different twin types. Data was collected through dyadic semi-structured interviews and analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings revealed themes related to twin differentiation, challenges in romantic relationships, and the influence of parental behaviour on twin identity development. The study offers implications for clinical practice and future research.

Keywords: Twinship, Cultural and Social Constructs, Family of Origin, Siblings, Separation-Individuation, Romantic partners.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

At the beginning of my life, I happened to have a twin counterpart in my mother's womb, which led me to enter a world as a fraternal twin with a boy. When I share this fact with others, some react with disbelief and others with admiration, followed by questions influenced by the dominant cultural and social constructs that idealise and romanticise twins (Friedman, 2014).

My experience of being a twin differs significantly from the perfect image portrayed in Western society. Not only are we of different genders, but we also have distinct physical characteristics and identities. The only common factor is that our names start with the same letter, J, which symbolises our twinship, according to my mother. However, our parents raised us as separate individuals, encouraging us to develop our own identities. This approach was influenced by the realisation that despite being in the same class and sitting next to each other, we would often return home with either missing homework assignments or completely different ones. This was not due to attending different classes but rather to our heavy reliance on each other. Eventually, at the age of 7, we began the process of individuation by attending separate single-gender church schools. Although it was initially distressing, looking back, I recognise that this separation was crucial for discovering aspects of myself that required personal growth academically and socially. This would not have been possible if we had continued functioning as a single unit. Consequently, I realised the need to work hard for good grades, to become more sociable despite my introverted nature, and to take responsibility for all my actions.

Furthermore, as we reached our teenage years, our parents emphasised the importance of forming separate circles of friends and participating in different youth groups. I distinctly remember the chaos I caused when I wanted to follow in my twin's footsteps and be part of his social groups. In retrospect, I am grateful for my parents' insistence because being given leadership positions as a teenager, independent of my twin's shadow, allowed me to flourish as an individual and establish my identity outside of the twin relationship.

In summary, my experience of being a twin transformed from a unified identity in childhood to a sibling identity in early adolescence. This aligns with the perspective of Schave and Ciriello (1983), who argue that the bond between twins can vary from a strong psychological dependency as a unit identity to a significant but less intertwined psychological closeness as a sibling attachment identity. Presently, my twin and I enjoy a secure and close bond, which can be attributed more to our parents' parenting style than our twinship. However, I remain curious and compelled to gain a deeper understanding of how other sets of twins experience their twinhood, both as individuals and as a pair, considering that no twin set goes through this phenomenon similarly (Gehart, 2018).

1.2 Research Rationale

A prevalent and superficial fascination with twins in society often leads to misconceptions and idealised notions about their experiences (Klein et al., 2021). The dominant discourses surrounding twinship emphasise sameness, togetherness, and closeness (Bacon, 2005). However, contemporary researchers in the field of twinship seek to challenge these assumptions in order to gain a better understanding of the diverse experiences of twins (Friedman, 2014). A prominent twin researcher, Nancy Segal, has made significant progress

in debunking these beliefs and highlighting the individuality and variation among twins (Fiegl, 2012). As a researcher and a twin, I have developed a curiosity to explore how these assumptions have influenced the formation and negotiation of twin identity among adult twins in Malta.

1.3 Research Question

The primary research question for this study is: How do cultural and social constructs of twinhood impact the lived experience of adult twins in the Maltese context?

To address the overarching research question, the following specific research questions will be explored:

1. How do adult twins construct their personal and shared meaning of being a twin?
2. How do cultural and social constructs shape the twinship of adult twins, and how do these influences manifest in their relationships within their family of origin and other social systems?
3. What are adult twins' unique experiences and perspectives regarding their twinship?

As a researcher, I will engage in self-reflexivity throughout the study's planning, conducting and writing stages. This will involve keeping a reflexive diary to record participants' comments and my thoughts during interviews and writing memos shortly after each interview. Additionally, I will develop and continually refine my subjectivity statement to acknowledge and manage the ongoing and reciprocal relationship between my subjective responses and the intersubjective dynamics of the research process itself (Probst, 2014).

1.4 Theoretical Frameworks

The primary theoretical frameworks that inform this research are systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) and social constructionist theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). The following section will explain their fundamental roles in this study.

1.5 Systems Theory

Systems theory suggests that human behaviour emerges from the systems of relationships in which individuals are embedded (Campbell, 2003). In this study, exploring twins' experiences within different levels of context, such as family, work, culture, society, and the world, is crucial for understanding the phenomenon of twinship. Systems theory views human interactions as circular and mutual, with behaviours and influences reciprocally shaping one another (Watzlawick et al., 1967).

Twins, who primarily develop within a family system, have their identities influenced by family dynamics and their interactions with their co-twin (Zazzo, 1960) and other family members (Lytton, 1977). Parents play a significant role in communicating twin identity, often emphasising "sameness." However, children also actively construct and express their identities within social circles (Bacon, 2005). Thus, examining twinship as a social identity requires understanding the negotiation and construction of twin identity within parent-child dynamics.

Systems theory also emphasises that individuals and families actively create meaning, regardless of how unconventional or unique their lives may appear to others. Therefore, twins

are viewed as actively constructing their social worlds and shaping intelligible frameworks of meaning in interaction with each other and their contexts (Wren et al., 1986).

1.6 Social Constructionist Theory

The social constructionist theory takes a critical stance toward knowledge and questions existing beliefs and assumptions. It provides space for constructing alternatives to dominant cultural and societal discourses about twins and allows participants and the researcher to challenge what has long been taken for granted.

As a theory of knowledge, social constructionism examines how individuals develop their understanding of the world (Nickerson, 2022). It aligns with this study by acknowledging that there is no ultimate truth external to the observer (Williams, 1992). Constructionism posits that realities are subjective and socially created through conversations, and meanings can change within different social contexts (Gergen, 1999). Each person constructs their unique reality based on their relationships and conversations (Gehart, 2018). Since no pair of twins are identical, the cultural and social constructs that idealise intimate and emotionally close twin relationships can impact individuals' experiences of being a twin. Twins who did not identify with such narratives during childhood and young adulthood may struggle to navigate their authentic emotions and feelings in adulthood.

By utilising systems theory and social constructionist theory, this study aims to comprehensively understand the lived experiences of adult twins in Malta, considering the complex interplay between cultural and social constructs, family dynamics, and the unique meanings constructed by individuals within their social contexts.

1.7 Choice of Methodology

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how cultural and social constructs of twinhood impact the lived experiences of adult twins in the Maltese context, a qualitative research methodology will be employed. This choice is supported by Hatch (2006) and Patton (2015), who argue that qualitative research is well-suited for exploring how individuals engage with and make sense of their lived experiences. Furthermore, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is appropriate for this study, as it aims to delve into how individuals construct meaning from significant life experiences, focusing on an in-depth examination of individual cases before drawing broader conclusions (Charlick et al., 2016).

1.8 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research topic, clearly outlining the objectives, research questions, and rationale for undertaking the study. The theoretical frameworks that provide a solid foundation for the research were presented, as well as the choice of a qualitative research methodology. The subsequent chapter will provide a literature review, offering an overview of existing research on the lived experiences of adult twins, their relationship with cultural and social constructs, and their interactions within the family of origin and beyond.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The phenomenon of twins carries a deep-seated human desire for a close and understanding lifelong companion, as depicted by cultural and societal beliefs (Friedman, 2008). This chapter aims to delve into existing literature and research about twins, shedding light on the influence of cultural and social constructs on their unique lived experiences. Additionally, it will explore various aspects, including the dynamics of twins' relationships within their families of origin and beyond.

2.2 Twins as a socio-cultural phenomenon

Twins have been depicted in various art forms, mythology, religion, literature, and films, showcasing their close bond and the potential for conflict and anger (Klein, 2021). The Bible introduces the first set of twins, Jacob and Esau, who had a naturally hostile relationship (The Catholic Youth Bible, 2010; Genesis, 25: 21-34). In Greek mythology, Castor and Pollux were inseparable twins, and when Castor died, Pollux requested Zeus to grant him immortality so they could remain together (Early Church History, n.d.). Fraternal, non-identical twins are often portrayed as opposites, such as male and female, day and night, or the sun and the moon (Myths Encyclopaedia: Myths and Legends of the World, n.d.).

In the media, twins are frequently used as metaphors for various themes, including identity confusion, jealousy, intimacy, rivalry, and complementary halves (Ncube, 2017). Sometimes, twins are depicted as adorable, funny, mischievous, and possessing a unique

telepathic connection (Friedman, 2014), where they can understand each other's thoughts and emotions without conscious awareness. However, these portrayals may not necessarily reflect twin experiences, as many media content authors and creators are not twins themselves and do not have twins in their families (Hamlett, 2020), thus reinforcing popular cultural representations of twins.

On the other hand, Fleishman (1992) argues that fictional events depicted in literature and films derive their meaning from real-world communities. They are constructed using language and visual symbols influenced by specific cultural histories and the present context. Social constructionism examines how these subjective constructs become so deeply ingrained that they are seen as normal and natural (Berger & Luckman, 1966). This perspective questions taken-for-granted knowledge, recognising that ideas and expectations evolve over time and across cultures and asserting that social processes shape knowledge and social action (Burr, 2003).

From a social constructionist standpoint, twin relationships are formed and maintained through daily interactions in different environments, constantly negotiated rather than static (Klett-Davies, 2008). By adopting this perspective, the depictions mentioned above and assumptions about twins' nature can be challenged, providing a fresh understanding of how twins navigate and express their twinship. It is crucial to comprehend the development of twins' identity, which begins at birth and is influenced by parenting and the socio-cultural environment (Mahler et al., 1975; Marcia, 1980).

2.3 The impact of the socio-cultural environment on the development of twins' identities.

Cultural attitudes and predispositions towards twins often adhere to stereotypes, perceiving them as a unified entity and expecting their appearance, behaviour, and treatment to be highly similar (Fiegelson, 1983; Leonard, 1961; Stewart, 2000). Additionally, the popular image of twins invokes positive perceptions of extreme closeness, trust, and unconditional companionship (Klein, 2003).

However, case studies and clinical research frequently portray twins' close and intimate relationships as inherently problematic (Penninkilampi-Kerola, 2006). This relationship can range from intense closeness to excessive conflict. Some twins find comfort and solace in the constant presence of their co-twin, fostering a sense of mutual companionship (Segal & Knafo-Noam, 2018). On the other hand, for some twins, their co-twin becomes a constant source of comparison, leading to competition and rivalry (Ainslie, 1985; Fraley & Tancredy, 2012; Penninkilampi-Kerola et al., 2005). Noble et al. (2017) argue that societal expectations and pressures often subvert twins' natural inclination to behave as individuals, forcing them to conform to their co-twin's behaviour. Consequently, twins often grapple with ambiguity and confusion about their own identity, influenced not only by the presence of their co-twin (Ainslie, 1997) but also by the language commonly used to describe twins, which diminishes their individuality (Stewart, 2000). Ncube (2018) suggests that the intricate interplay of cultural and societal influences shapes how twins construct and assert their identities.

Furthermore, when examined from a systemic perspective, twins are considered integral parts of a family system within specific social and cultural contexts (Bateson, 1972). Therefore, social and cultural constructs significantly influence how a family perceives itself and operates (Connell, 1987). A family comprises an emotional system spanning at least three generations, held together by biological, legal, emotional, and historical ties (McGoldrick et al., 2016). Over time, relationships between parents, siblings, and other family members undergo developmental transitions, resulting in shifting boundaries, changes in psychological distance, and constant redefinition of roles within and between subsystems (Cicirelli, 1995; Connidis, 2008; McKay & Caverly, 2004; Norris & Tindale, 1994). Subsystems within a family system are organised hierarchically, influenced by generation, gender, and function, and interpersonal boundaries establish invisible barriers that regulate the level of interaction with others (Minuchin, 1974). The unique interactional patterns of a family shape its distinct identity, define its boundaries, determine how the household is managed, and influence the emotional environment within the family (Becvar & Becvar, 2018).

2.4 Fostering the development of twins' identities within their family of origin system.

The arrival of twins represents a significant phase in the family's ongoing evolution, leading to changes in its composition. Parents of twins face unique challenges that can impact the dynamics within the family, potentially placing strain on the couple's relationship (Taubman-Ben-Ari et al., 2008). According to Minuchin (1974), experiencing stress during transitional periods is common for most family systems. This stress catalyses change, prompting the family system to adapt to new circumstances (Laszloffy, 2002). Given that the couple subsystem plays a vital role in maintaining stability and flexibility within the family,

effective negotiation and communication between partners regarding adjustments to family interactions and transactions are crucial during this developmental transition (Cowan & Cowan, 2000).

2.4.1 Parent-twin relationship

The way parents interact with their twins profoundly impacts their ability to develop separate individual identities while maintaining their twin identities (Cherro, 1992; Klein, 2003, 2012). Bacon (2005) argues that parents not only play a crucial role in communicating twin identities on behalf of their children, but children also actively construct and convey their own identities through how they present themselves physically. Kozlak (1978) observed that twins learn to behave and identify as twins due to their similar physical appearance and matching attire.

However, the treatment twins receive from their mothers is considered the most significant factor in their identity development (Bacon, 2005; Robin et al., 1998). Tourrette et al. (1989) propose that mothers of twins can be categorised into two groups: differentiation-oriented and twinship-oriented. Differentiation-oriented mothers establish individual relationships with each child and prioritise fostering differentiation in their parenting approach. On the other hand, twinship-oriented mothers are drawn to the twinship aspect and tend to highlight their children's similarities, treating them as a pair (Penninkilampi-Kerola, 2006). Similarly, Robin et al. (1988) suggest that mothers often oscillate between two opposing attitudes: viewing their infants as an inseparable unit or emphasising their behavioural differences through early "personality labelling". While highlighting certain traits can contribute to forming individual twin identities, the labelling issue is that children

often conform to those labels, whether they are accurate or not (Penninkilampi-Kerola, 2006). Some researchers argue that certain parents are overly cautious about labelling their twins and therefore strive to avoid showing any favouritism (Abbink et al., 1982; Holditch-Davis et al., 1999; Minde et al., 1990), resulting in less individualised treatment. While fair and equitable treatment of twins is generally considered positive, parents must also differentiate between their twin children to relate to them as distinct individuals (van der Zalm, 1995). However, Klein (2021) argues that parents should primarily focus on the individuality of each twin and their inter-twin communication, as these are the key factors for cultivating a warm and supportive twin relationship that can endure throughout their lives.

2.4.2 The role of elder siblings within the dynamics of twin relationships.

In Western families, there is a traditional cultural norm where elder siblings typically hold a more dominant and influential role within the sibling subsystem. This position within the family hierarchy comes with greater responsibilities and authority, legitimising their more influential position (Lindell & Campione-Barr, 2017). This aligns with Bowen's family systems theory (1966), which suggests that birth order often predicts specific roles and functions within the family's emotional system. A person's functional position in the family system often influences their behaviour and the expectations placed upon them (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2016).

When it comes to elder siblings of twins, they often need to make significant adjustments to accommodate the birth of two infants simultaneously. This can be more challenging for them as they may experience a more significant reduction in the parents' available time. As a result, elder siblings of identical twins may exhibit more resentment

towards the twins and have less involvement with their parents compared to elder siblings of fraternal twins (Sandbank, 1988). This could be attributed to the attention and focus that identical twins often attract from family and friends, inadvertently ignoring the presence of elder children. Additionally, twins may prefer having an elder sister rather than an elder brother, which can contribute to elder brothers harbouring greater dislike towards their younger twin siblings than elder sisters (Sandbank, 1988), creating a circular causality.

Similarly, Hay and O'Brien (1983) argue that male elder siblings may perceive their parents as overly doting on the twins, which can make them feel excluded. Sandbank (1999) suggests that these elder brothers may feel overshadowed or left out, while elder sisters enjoy the company of their new twin siblings and often assume a more parental role. Interactions between siblings, whether positive or negative, serve as essential sources of social learning, and the emotional quality of the sibling relationship can provide support or act as a stressor (Bank et al., 2004; Bowes et al., 2010).

2.5 The co-twin relationship

Non-twin sibling relationships inherently involve inequality due to age differences and diverse family backgrounds resulting from potential changes in family structure and dynamics over time. In contrast, the relationships between twins have the potential to be more egalitarian and reciprocal. Research suggests that twin relationships are closer than singleton siblings' relationships.

The development of a strong inter-twin relationship is often attributed to the constant presence of a same-aged sibling. Attachment theory proposes that being a twin increases the

likelihood of using the twin as an attachment figure, seeking proximity, finding a safe haven during stress, and establishing a secure base.

However, in the literature on multiple births, the co-twin relationship has often been portrayed as a source of risk rather than strength. It is suggested that being a multiple-birth child may limit individuality and lead to behaviours aimed at distinguishing each child's identity, including competition, conflict, or withdrawal. Additionally, close twin relationships have been described as exclusionary, lacking maturity, and challenging the balance between twin and individual identity.

Twinship is a complex relationship that can serve as companionship, support, role modelling, rivalry, and competition. However, the natural depth of the twin attachment may change under environmental and social stress and responsibilities, resulting in shifts from nurturing to draining or relatively superficial to nurturing relationships.

From a structural perspective, extreme relational patterns in twin relationships may stem from unclear boundaries within the twin subsystem. This can manifest as enmeshed relationships with diffuse boundaries or disengaged relationships with rigid boundaries. Maintaining clear boundaries allows twins to preserve their individuality and shared connection, facilitating effective communication and negotiation.

2.6 The Separation-Individuation Process in Twins

2.6.1 Beginnings of Individuality in Childhood

Within the family life cycle framework, individual development occurs within the context of emotional relationships, with family relationships being the most significant

(McGoldrick & Carter, 2001). When twins reach school age, various relationships within the family, including those with parents, siblings, and extended family members, undergo transitions as the family progresses through the third stage of the life cycle (McGoldrick et al., 2016). This stage is associated with specific tasks and changes as the family expands its interaction with society, supports each child's educational achievement (Bevcar & Bevcar, 2018), and promotes the separation-individuation process for twins.

Unlike singletons, twins often experience the constant presence of their co-twin during this significant life event (Piontelli, 2002). Their unique twin bond can bring strengths and limitations as they explore the outside world. Parents play a crucial role in guiding their children towards forming their own identities while maintaining their twin identities (Klien, 2003). They are faced with the class dilemma of separation or togetherness, knowing there is no one-size-fits-all answer.

Both parents and teachers are encouraged to acknowledge and nurture each twin's strengths without making comparisons based on academic achievements (Preedy, 1999). Increasingly, families have the opportunity to choose the educational placement that best suits their multiple-birth children, considering the children's input as well (Thorpe et al., 2020). With the recognition of children as active participants in shaping their own lives (Prout & James, 1997), parents see the decision regarding school placement as part of a phased separation process, considering potential future separations in subsequent school years.

2.6.2 Individuality in Adolescence

During early adolescence, school entry is replaced by more complex considerations for twins, such as whether they should pursue the same subjects, attend the same school, or even be in different year levels (Hay, 1999). This highlights that the issue of separation in academic settings is not a one-time decision but an ongoing dilemma, compounded by the increasing range of options available throughout secondary schooling. Additionally, during adolescence, twins start to seek independence from their parents and co-twin (Hay, 1999). This developmental stage introduces new challenges for the family, particularly regarding autonomy and independence, as parents navigate the shift in the parent-child relationship to strike a balance between freedom and limits. The family undergoes a fundamental restructuring of interactive processes to allow the teenager more autonomy (Harway & Wexler, 1996).

Some researchers, such as Ainslie (1997), Alin Akerman and Suurvee (2003), and Cirillo (1976), argue that the developmental transition is more challenging for adolescent twins compared to singletons, as they need to assert independence from both their parents and their co-twin. However, Pearlman (1990) contends that twins and singletons have no significant differences in encountering specific problems in their personality development or establishing and maintaining intimate relationships (Amani & Shariatipour, 2021).

2.6.3 Separation of twins in adulthood

Twins are commonly treated as a single entity by their family and society, but they cannot be considered one person (Friedman, 2014). As twins grow into adulthood, they

inevitably go through separation and differentiation. Those individuals who successfully achieve a high level of differentiation can maintain their autonomy in intimate relationships and exhibit emotional and rational stability (Bowen, 1978). Emotional challenges arise for twins raised with a shared identity when they attempt to establish their unique psychological identities in adulthood. Conversely, twins treated as separate individuals since birth do not seem to encounter the same difficulties developing their identities as adults (Sandbank, 1999). Understanding the intricate symptoms experienced by twins who separate, as well as the significant impact of their bond on adult development and the formation of intimate relationships, is rooted in the interplay between the desire for a fused identity and the opposing drive for individualisation (Siemon, 1980). From a family life cycle perspective, this stage signifies the time for parents to launch their children and transition into midlife, necessitating the renegotiation of the marital system as a couple and the realignment of relational boundaries within and between family subsystems and beyond.

However, the development of a family is highly unique and cannot be reduced to a predetermined set of stages that unfold according to a fixed timeline (Laszloffy, 2002). Transitions take place over several years, and life stages often overlap. Thus, the family life cycle should be understood within the specific context of social class, culture, and historical period, allowing for periodic revisions as societal changes occur (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 2016).

2.7 Extending the twin world and twin identity beyond familial boundaries.

Attachment theories propose that positive familial relationships form the basis for strong and functional relationships beyond the family and promoting long-term emotional well-being (Cassidy & Shaver, 2008). Additionally, it is widely believed that social networks and diverse peer relationships outside the family are crucial for the psychosocial development of children (Penninkilampi-Kerola, 2006). For twins, their social world inherently includes another child, potentially providing them with more extensive experience in negotiation and cooperation. The bond between twins may facilitate the formation of close relationships, offering a unique context for experiencing others' emotions (Foy et al., 2001). This can enhance their ability to develop empathy, perspective-taking skills, and attentiveness to relationships, often considered valuable attributes in twins' lives within an individualistic worldview (Martinez, 2021).

On the contrary, Zazzo (1984) argues that twins' social maladaptation is often attributed to the close bond between twins, which isolates them from the outside world and discourages the formation of relationships beyond their twinship. If the twin relationship is particularly intense or enmeshed, it may hinder the development of other friendships (Thorpe & Gardner, 2005). Twins who strive to replicate the twin-like connections in other relationships but fail may experience disconnection from others and endure the painful experience of loneliness, which can profoundly affect many twins (Hart, 2021).

2.7.1 Marriage and partnerships

For many twins, marriage serves as a means to alleviate the loneliness that arises from being separated from their twin in adulthood, and their children unknowingly become substitutes for their twin (Klein, 2003). The inclusion of adult romantic relationships in the theoretical attachment model (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1969, 1980) suggests that individuals develop new attachment figures in adulthood (Pietila et al., 2012). Consequently, it is possible to have multiple attachment figures throughout life, referred to as attachment hierarchies in young adulthood (Trinke & Bartholomew, 1997), across the lifespan (Doherty & Feeney, 2004), and in old age (Cicirelli, 1995). A study by Pietila et al. (2012) revealed that while co-twins held a prominent position in the attachment hierarchy among twins, they shared that position with other significant individuals such as friends and romantic partners.

Twins tend to marry later than non-twins, and a more significant number of twins than singletons remain unmarried (Petersen et al., 2011). This could be partially attributed to twins' concerns that their twinship might be compromised upon entering a romantic relationship (Zazzo, 1960). By recognising that the closeness experienced in early childhood cannot be replicated in adult life, twins can acknowledge and accept the existence of differences and distance. Only when twins learn to embrace closeness and distance, along with the similarities and differences accompanying them, can mature intimate relationships develop and thrive (Martinez, 2021).

2.8 Conclusion

In summary, this chapter has examined the relevant literature pertaining to the objectives of this research, focusing on the lived experiences of adult twins in Malta within the context of cultural and social factors influencing twinhood. The literature highlights twin identity as a multifaceted interplay of cultural and societal influences that shape how twins perceive and establish their identities. Additionally, it systematically addresses the challenges twins face and sheds light on their distinctive experiences during identity formation. The subsequent chapter comprehensively describes the research design and methodology employed in this study. It presents the research participants and outlines the procedure for data collection.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive explanation of the research methodology and approach used in this study, which focuses on understanding the lived experiences of adult twins in the context of culture and social constructs in Malta. The chapter discusses the rationale for selecting a qualitative approach and the chosen data analysis method. It also addresses ethical considerations, rigour, and the researcher's reflexivity.

3.2 Research Approach, Methodology, and Rationale

3.2.1 Qualitative Approach

The qualitative methodology aims to capture detailed descriptive accounts of how individuals perceive and interpret the world, their experiences, and the meaning they assign to various phenomena (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research recognizes that truth is subjective and varies from person to person (Vishnevsky & Beanlands, 2004). Given that the main objective of this study is to gain insights into how cultural and social constructs shape the experiences of twins, a qualitative approach is appropriate. This method allows participants to highlight the uniqueness of their own experiences (Dallas & Vetere, 2005) and encourages the expression of complex and personal experiences (Weber & Waldrop, 2000).

3.2.2 Theoretical Frameworks

The study is underpinned by two main theoretical frameworks; systems theory (Bertalanffy, 1968) and social constructionist theory (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Integrating the principles of social constructionism into the research design is vital for comprehending the intricate dynamics of twinship. Embracing a systemic perspective, it is acknowledged that individuals are not isolated entities but interconnected elements within a broader social framework. The prevailing cultural, historical, and institutional systems constantly shape this interconnectedness.

By recognising the mutual influence between society and individuals, this study explores how collective perceptions, norms, and ideologies contribute to the construction of reality and the formation of identities and meanings related to the phenomenon of twinship. Adopting a systemic approach aid in exploring the fundamental processes that influence the investigated phenomenon's occurrence, continuity, and possible evolution. This approach aids in gaining a holistic comprehension of the complex interactions between social elements and individual experiences, leading to valuable insights into the contextual aspects of twinship.

3.2.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) draws on the fundamental principles of phenomenology and hermeneutics (Alase, 2017). It aims to describe the essential qualities of phenomena or experiences that make them distinct from others (Smith et al., 2009).

IPA assumes that individuals actively interpret events, objects, and people in their lives (Taylor, 1985). Consequently, participants’ accounts reflect their efforts to make sense

of their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Moreover, IPA acknowledges the active role of the researcher in the study process, employing a "double hermeneutic" where the researcher interprets the participant's world (Smith & Eatough, 2007).

To mitigate the influence of the researcher's preexisting beliefs, the use of bracketing, a methodological device in phenomenological inquiry, is essential. Bracketing involves setting aside beliefs about the phenomenon under study throughout the research process (Carpenter, 2007). Reflective practices and a cyclical approach to bracketing are employed in consideration of the likelihood of unconscious preconceptions (Smith et al., 2009).

The principle of idiography, which involves an in-depth analysis of individual cases and the examination of unique perspectives within specific contexts, is central to IPA (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). Subsequently, similarities and differences across participants' accounts are identified before making general statements. The study findings are then discussed in relation to existing psychological literature (Smith et al., 2009).

Considering these factors, IPA was selected as the analytical tool for this study. It aims to provide a detailed account of experiences, acknowledging individual differences while seeking commonalities among participants (Mills, 2012). IPA is well-suited for investigating meaning-making in cross-sectional and retrospective experiences, which aligns with the study design and research questions. Additionally, it facilitates the examination of the social context surrounding the phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

3.3 Comparing Different Approaches

In qualitative research, there are different approaches available for analyzing data. Two of these approaches are the Narrative Approach and Discourse Analysis. According to Smith et al. (2009), choosing a methodology that aligns with the researcher's epistemological stance is crucial.

Discourse Analysis focuses on how language is used to accomplish personal, social, and political projects (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). Its main goal is to examine the functions of language and how meaning is constructed in various discourse contexts. However, this approach did not complement my research because I was more interested in understanding the phenomenon of twins through their embodied experience rather than their language.

On the other hand, Narrative Analysis aims to understand how individuals make sense of their experiences and perceptions by examining the events presented in their stories. Researchers in this approach look for plot development, causal connections between events, and the characters that play a significant role in the sense-making process. However, this design did not suit my study as I was not primarily focused on interpreting participants' stories but instead on understanding their lived experiences and how they made sense of them.

3.4 Research Context

The study was conducted as part of the requirements for a Master's degree in Systemic Family Psychotherapy at the Institute of Family Therapy (IFT), Malta. The participants in the study were sets of twins of Maltese nationality.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research study received ethical clearance from the Institute's Research Ethics Committee at IFT-Malta. Written consent was obtained from both individuals within each twin set who agreed to participate. Measures were taken to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants, and potential distress during and after the interviews was acknowledged.

Additional ethical considerations were considered due to the paired interviews with the twin sets. Ensuring a safe environment during the interviews was crucial to prevent potential conflicts between the twins that could adversely affect their well-being. Moreover, a delicate balance was maintained between the individual needs of each twin within the sets, employing non-confrontational techniques that promoted equal, neutral, and dedicated attention to all parties involved (Voltelen et al., 2018).

3.6 Research Design

3.6.1 Sample Size and Participant Recruitment

In the context of IPA studies, the focus is on obtaining detailed accounts of individual experiences rather than prioritizing a large number of participants (Eatough & Smith, 2017). A smaller sample size enables a deeper exploration and analysis that may be hindered by a larger sample (Smith, 2007). Therefore, five sets of twins were recruited, as this number allowed for meaningful and in-depth engagement with each set, facilitating a thorough examination of similarities, differences, convergences, and divergences (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

A purposive sampling technique was employed for participant recruitment to ensure alignment with the requirements of IPA research studies (Smith & Osborn, 2003). IPA emphasizes the need for participants who can provide a representative perspective or experience rather than aiming for population generalization (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, the participants were deliberately selected to include a diverse range of twin types: identical male, identical female, fraternal female, fraternal male, and different-gender twins. Furthermore, participants were required to be over 18 years of age to focus specifically on the lived experiences of adult twins. Both individuals within each twin set had to agree to participate, as dyadic interviews were to be conducted. By interviewing participants in pairs, a richer dataset was obtained by capturing extensions, corroborations, and even disagreements during the interview process (Bjornholt & Farstad, 2014)

3.6.2 Recruitment process

The recruitment process involved employing the snowball strategy to select participants, whereby initially identified individuals enlisted additional participants for the study. Additionally, social media was employed successfully as a recruitment tool which eventually demonstrated its effectiveness in identifying suitable sets of twins that fulfilled the inclusion criteria.

Names	**Thea**	**Lara**	**Brandon**	**Charles**	**Maris**	**Lydia**	**Benjamin**	**Norbert**	**Gabriella**	**George**
Age	27		41		33		32		35	
Gender	Females		Males		Females		Males		Female	Male
Types of twins	Identical		Identical		Fraternal		Fraternal		Fraternal	
Status	Single		Married with one son	In a committed relationship with two daughters	Single	Married with one son	Single		Married with one son	Married with one daughter
Career	Archaeologist	Creative Designer	Medical Assistant	Handyman & Medical Assistant	Teacher	Learning Support Educator	Customer Care & Waiter	Waiter	Architect	Draftsperson & Architect
Leadership Emergence	Follower	Leader	Leaders		Follower	Leader	Leader	Follower	Leader	Follower
Siblings	1 elder sister		No siblings		1 elder brother 1 younger sister		2 elder sisters		2 elder sisters	

3.6.3 Demography of the participants

3.7 Data Collection

The data for this study was gathered through dyadic semi-structured interviews using a predetermined set of questions. These questions were designed to be open-ended and non-directive, encouraging participants to share detailed information (Willing, 2008). The interview schedule provided a framework for the conversation but was also flexible, allowing for adjustments based on the interview process and dynamics (Burck, 2005). Each interview lasted between 60 and 120 minutes and was recorded and transcribed verbatim.

3.8 Data Analysis

The analysis of the interview data followed the procedures outlined for Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as described by Smith et al. (2009). IPA emphasizes the idiographic approach, starting with a detailed examination of each individual case and then exploring patterns of responses across cases (Smith et al., 2016). In this study, a thorough exploration of each case was conducted before moving on to analyse the remaining cases equally.

The initial stage of the analysis involved listening to the interview recordings multiple times. Each transcript was carefully read and analysed line-by-line, noting descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual elements (Smith et al., 2016). I recorded observations and reflections on the interview experience and any thoughts or comments that I considered potentially significant. In the second stage, these notes were transformed into emerging themes, and this process was repeated for each interview.

In the third and fourth stages of analysis, the focus shifted from a purely textual examination to a more interpretative approach. Correlations between emerging themes were identified, leading to the clustering of themes. Techniques of abstraction and subsumption were employed to generate superordinate themes, providing an understanding of concepts within the text (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, a table summarizing the identified superordinate and subordinate themes was created as the concluding step of the data analysis process.

3.9 Validity and Reliability

The challenge in qualitative methodology lies in generating credible and robust research that demonstrates rigour, as its processes and meanings cannot be examined experimentally (Ryan et al., 2007). Critics often argue that qualitative research is subjective, anecdotal, and susceptible to researcher bias (Koch & Harrington, 1998). To ensure the integrity of the research, researchers must strive to separate themselves from the topic they are investigating (Moustakas, 1994). As a twin, I had to consciously set aside my preconceptions, personal emotions, and experiences and engage in reflexivity throughout the planning, execution, and documentation of the research. This involved an ongoing and iterative interaction between my subjective responses and the intersubjective dynamics of the research process itself (Probst, 2014).

Various criteria have been developed for generating and validating findings in an IPA research study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Trustworthiness is one such criterion (Alase, 2016), as well as triangulation (Mathison, 1988), both of which were employed in this study.

3.9.1 Trustworthiness

To establish a comfortable atmosphere during the interviews, they were conducted in a setting chosen by the participants. Since all the participants were Maltese, the interviews were conducted in Maltese rather than English. This was done to eliminate language barriers and facilitate richer and more detailed narratives of their experiences.

Data analysis necessitates a close interaction between the analyst and the text, with researchers employing their interpretative skills (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). In this regard, I took great care in identifying themes to ensure that they were genuinely present in the analyzed transcripts and not a result of my own over-interpretation (Smith et al., 1999). Additionally, I developed a friendly and non-judgmental rapport with the participants to alleviate any self-consciousness they may have had during the interviews (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Furthermore, I maintained a curious and open attitude to manage both the double hermeneutic and the dual roles of being a researcher and being researched (Rodham et al., 2015).

3.9.2 Triangulation

Triangulation involves using multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to understand phenomena (Patton, 2015) comprehensively. The central idea behind triangulation is that when different methods lead to the same results, it increases confidence in the research findings (Rothbauer, 2008), overcoming biases that may arise from relying on a single method (Noble & Heale, 2019). Moreover, as Denzin (1978) and Patton (2015) identified, theory triangulation involves employing different theories to analyse and interpret

data. In this study, I made a concerted effort to utilize this form of triangulation and link the interpretation of findings to other research studies, whether they shared similar or divergent perspectives.

3.9.3 Transparency and Coherence

Transparency and coherence are established principles that characterize an effective study (Yardley, 2000). I strived to maintain transparency throughout the entire research process, from the study's design to the data analysis, by clearly describing each stage (Shinebourne, 2011). Additionally, I included excerpts from the transcripts in the results section to allow readers to evaluate my interpretations critically and consider alternative perspectives.

3.10 Researcher Reflexivity

Reflexivity was crucial in maintaining my engagement in critical self-awareness throughout the research process (Probst, 2014). I actively engaged in self-examination at every stage of the research, including selecting topics and participants and presenting and disseminating findings (Probst & Berenson, 2014). To explore my assumptions, emotional reactions, and cultural positioning, I kept a reflexive diary documenting my thoughts, feelings, and perceptions. The following sections of the research design were particularly important for reflection:

In the literature review, I discovered that the topic of twins was relatively scarce in the systemic literature. This process expanded my understanding of the topic and inevitably changed my presumptions. However, during the analysis phase, I consciously tried to rely on something other than existing literature. Instead, I maintained an open-minded approach and ensured that my interpretations were grounded in the data rather than influenced by external sources.

During the recruitment process, I was pleasantly surprised by the high response rate from potential participants. Social media proved to be a powerful tool for recruiting participants with priority given to those who expressed interest and met the inclusion criteria.

Conducting semi-structured interviews with the initial set of participating twins allowed me to self-critique my interview schedule and technique. One important improvement that emerged from this was the inclusion of additional probes to guide the interviewees and keep them focused on the current topic rather than veering off into unrelated areas. Additionally, interviewing twins allowed me to observe and interpret their interactional patterns, such as power and gender dynamics, which might not have been fully evident when interviewing them individually.

While I found the process of analyzing the data using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) enjoyable and exciting, I underestimated the amount of time and effort it would require. I also had concerns about potentially losing the depth of the participants' experiences, particularly when transitioning from exploratory comments to developing emergent themes. This process phase took me a considerable amount of time as I

struggled to create concise and clear statements that captured the essence of the participants' narratives.

3.11 Conclusion

This chapter gave an elaborate explanation regarding the methodology employed in this study and the reasoning behind selecting this particular approach. The subsequent chapter will unveil the outcomes derived from the twins' personal experiences, exploring the influence of cultural and social constructs within the context of Malta.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the main research findings are introduced. Through analysis, five overarching themes were identified, which are outlined in Table 4.1. Excerpts from participants' accounts are included to highlight the shared aspects and variations that emerged during the research. The legend below assists in identifying the specific twin dyad to which the findings pertain. To prioritize data protection and ensure confidentiality, pseudonames were assigned, replacing the original names.

Identical twins	Fraternal twins*	Fraternal twins
Thea and Lara **27 years** 	**Maris and Lydia** **33 years** 	**Gabriella and George** **35 years** 
Brandon and Charles **41 years** 	**Benjamin and Norbert** **32 years** 	

* These fraternal twins are very similar in appearance.

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
The twin's network reinforces the social construct of twins as one unit.	• Parents effectively impose twin identity on their children. • Educators perceive and interact with twins as a singular entity.
Managing twinship and individuality.	• The separation-individuation process in adolescent twins. • Resorting to polarisation to establish separate identities.
Twins possess a strong affectionate inter-twin bond.	• The experience of growing up together strengthens twins' co-relationship. • Twinship ensures that a constant companion is always present. • Twins depend on their co-twin to fulfil their emotional needs.

Romantic relationships are perceived as potential threats to the twin bond.	• Romantic partners often feel intimidated by the strength of the twin bond. • Some twin pairs make space for romantic partners and preserve the twin relationship. • Some twins perceive potential partners as a threat to their sibling bond.
Positioning the twin sibling relationship with elder siblings.	• Elder siblings maintain their distinct position within the family hierarchical structure. • Twins' perception of differential treatment by their parents. • Elder siblings exert a position of power in their relationship with their younger siblings.

4.2 Superordinate Theme 1: The twin's network reinforces the social construct of twins as one unit.

In Malta, cultural attitudes and predispositions towards twins continue to be predominantly stereotypical, as they often perceive twins as a collective entity rather than recognizing them as distinct individuals.

4.2.1. Parents effectively impose twin identity on their children.

Every participant verified that during their early childhood, they were dressed in matching or similar attire.



Brandon Charles

Charles: When we were young, our parents loved dressing us the same. We kept wearing similar outfits until the age of 10.

Mothers, especially, assumed a significant role in determining how their children were dressed and presented to the outside world. This was evident from participants' statements such as "*yes, yes, mummy used to love it*" (Maris) and "*from top to bottom*" (Norbert).

Additionally, Maris and Lydia's mother employed a strategy of incorporating elements of "difference" within the overall "sameness" by opting for "*the same or similar dress but in different colours*" (Maris).

In the case of twins of different sexes, the acknowledgment of gender difference was also apparent. Gabriella and George's mother would sew their clothes and dress them in versions that corresponded to their respective genders, effectively modifying the prevailing stereotype of identical twinship.



Gabriella
George

Gabriella: Our mother used to make sure that we wore the same thing, the dungaree; for example, George used to wear it without a t-shirt, and I, being a girl, wear it with a t-shirt.

Clearly, mothers held a significant responsibility in conveying the identities of their children as twins. As a result, participants were influenced to embrace their twin status and foster a strong sense of mutual identification.



Benjamin
Norbert

Norbert: When we used to go out shopping with mum, besides wearing the same outfits, we used to walk hand in hand, my brother and I.

Aligned with the cyclical nature of the phenomenon, mothers actively reinforced the prevailing belief of "similarity", resulting in children having no choice but to conform to their mothers' expectations and societal norms regarding their appearance and clothing in order to uphold their twin identity.

Furthermore, all participants' parents established a familial environment where twins were compelled to share various aspects of their lives, including bedrooms, wardrobes,

clothes, and possessions. As Benjamin mentioned, they were "*always in the same room*". Maris described having separate wardrobes for different seasons, "*we had one wardrobe for summer clothes and another for winter clothes*" while Charles emphasized the practice of wearing each other's clothes and sharing many things, "*we used to wear each other's clothes, mix and match, we used to share many things*". Gabriella pointed out that "*we used to play with the same toys*".

This approach implied that being a twin involved a collective ownership of belongings rather than individual possession. This notion was further supported by Brandon, who expressed, "*to date, I have learned not to be attached to anything*."

4.2.2. Educators perceive and interact with twins as a singular entity.

Participants encountered difficulties in their educational path when they were consistently addressed as a unified identity by their teachers. Looking back, Lara, who faced academic challenges, expressed a preference for being in a different class to avoid the constant comparisons made by educators.



Thea
Lara

Lara: It might be better being separate, as people might not compare us being in different classes, but again, me, as a person, it did bother me but did not break me, the comparison, erm, so, as Thea said, our bond will be of a lesser level if we were not at the same class.

Likewise, Maris shared a similar feeling of resentment, but she experienced an additional setback. Her twin sister, Lydia, who was a highly capable student and demonstrated

independence from a young age, often caught the attention of teachers. When teachers wanted to convey a message, they would solely address Lydia, as if the two sisters were inseparable.



Maris
Lydia

Maris: I was Lydia's shadow, she leads, and I follow. In class, knowing that Lydia was the spokesperson, teachers used to communicate only with her, and they assumed that by doing so, they communicated with me also.

Lydia: Yes, she was always a reflection of me. I was always independent. It did not bother me being the leader of the pair. I always did what I wished to do, yet I always asked her whether she wished to join. Join me or not, I always continued to pursue my desires and dreams.

*Maris: On entering sixth Form, I purposely enrolled in the same subjects as her because I had said that if I won't be in the same class, I would stop studying. *laughingly* …. I took the same subjects, but we were allocated different classes. So here we go…it was a problem. My father had to speak to the Head of school to be placed together.*

Lydia: *I knew that she had the potential to succeed and therefore, it would be a pity if she did not continue her studies, so I encouraged my father to intervene*.

Upon entering her tertiary education, Maris came to the realization that her reliance on her twin had become detrimental and unhealthy.



Maris
Lydia

Maris: Nowadays, knowing that I found it challenging being alone for the first time during my first year at the university, today, if I had the choice, I would separate twins from a young age to gain their own identity. Everyone learns how to be responsible and independent.

The accounts of Thea and Lydia regarding the age-old question of whether twins should be educated together or separately revealed that being in the same class with their co-twin strengthened their bond, providing them with a sense of "support" and "security". As a result, they advocated for twins to be placed together in the same class.

However, Lara and Maris expressed contrasting views. Sharing their class with their twin siblings, according to them, hindered their ability to establish a sense of individuality and autonomy. Consequently, they were opposed to the idea of being in the same class as their co-twins.

4.3 Superordinate Theme 2: Managing twinship and individuality.

4.3.1 The separation-individuation process in adolescent twins

The process of developing individual identities and moving away from being perceived as a single unit emerged during the early adolescence of some participants, coinciding with their transition to secondary school. They deliberately introduced physical differences to establish their distinctiveness. "*To be different, I used to keep my hair shorter than him*" (Brandon), "*for the sake of difference, I started to wear a moustache*" (Norbert).

As they reached their teenage years, Brandon and Charles began to follow separate paths. Brandon recalled, "*we were about 18 or 19. It was our time. I went my way and he went his way. We also formed different circles of friends*". The process of separation continued for Benjamin and Norbert, leading Benjamin to make the decision to purchase his own property after negotiations with his twin. "*Separate, because I could have a partner, he could have a partner, we still have our own individual lives, and we decided that if we can buy a property, we buy it on our own*" (Benjamin). It is noteworthy that this decision required negotiation between the twins, which is not typically seen in non-twin siblings who naturally assume that each individual purchases their own property. In addition to living independently, Brandon's concept of leading an individual life apart from his twin included establishing distinct social settings. For Benjamin, emphasized "*our own individual lives*" indicates that while he and his brother appreciate their twin bond, they also recognize themselves as unique individuals who willingly seek separate paths in life.

4.3.2 Resorting to polarization to establish separate identities.

In their pursuit of establishing their individual identities, Thea and Lara, as a twin pair, took different approaches. Thea made a conscious choice to adopt behaviours and attitudes that were the opposite of her co-twin. She recalled, "*I distinctly remember making the decision because I wanted to differentiate myself from Lara, without any intention of disrespecting her*."



Thea
Lara

Lara: Once we reached 8, 9 or 10, we had our own clothes and started developing our style, but then we went two significant extremes. I became the ultimate girly girl, wearing pink most of the time, with skirts and a handbag.

Thea: hmm, and I was the ultimate tomboy; you will not catch me dead in a skirt, my hair pulled up, with a baseball cap and gym shoes.

The statement "will not catch me dead in a skirt" reflects Thea's resolute determination to forge her own unique identity separate from her co-twin. Initially, her mother questioned this shift in behaviour, as Thea recalled, "*I still vividly remember her asking me why*?" Thea expressed her desire that, "*I want to be different as Lara and Bernice (their elder sister) always with dresses, and I always wanted to be different, hmm.*" Her mother recognized and supported her choices, realizing that she had a specific style preference. Their mother played a crucial role in facilitating Thea and Lara's journey towards individuality, fostering a positive self-image that extended beyond the stereotype of uniformity.

4.4 Superordinate Theme 3: Twins possess a strong affectionate inter-twin bond.

All five pairs of twins expressed that they have strong bonds and solid relationships with their respective co-twins, which differ from their relationships with other family members.

4.4.1 The experience of growing up together strengthens twins' co-relationship.

According to the participants, their twin connection is characterized by its intensity, primarily because their co-twins have been a constant and unwavering presence throughout their lives. From the time of their birth until their early adolescence, participants "*grew up together, lived under the same roof, and shared their experiences*" (Charles). This prolonged period of shared childhood and early adolescence fostered a strong and profound bond between them. As Benjamin aptly described, "*our bond is truly indescribable*".



Gabriella
George

Gabriella: Our closeness is due to growing up together.

George: We grew up together most of our childhood and the fact that nowadays, as adults, we have the same circle of friends, and go out together, our connection remains strong.

Nevertheless, Lara (part of Thea and Lara pair) and Maris (part of Maris and Lydia pair), while acknowledging the strength of their bond with their co-twins, have also expressed some resentment towards constantly being together. As previously mentioned, Lara regretted being in the same class as her twin due to the negative effects of constant comparison, while Maris experienced a sense of dependency that later on, she found problematic.



Thea
Lara

Lara: I should be recognised as an individual before I am seen as a twin.



Maris
Lydia

Maris: Spending so time growing up with my twin had led me to become overdependent on my co-twin.

4.4.2 Twinship ensures that a constant companion is always present.

In adulthood, participants described their twinship as a nurturing relationship, where they have a lifelong companion who fulfills the roles of a best friend, confidant, and advisor. Maris, specifically, highlighted the presence of this bond, stating, "*we always had each other*" with a stronger emphasis on her connection with Lydia. Gabriella and George expressed the perpetual companionship that comes with being a twin, stating, "It's as if you're never bored, as you always have your twin to play with." Brandon and Charles emphasized the understanding they share as twins, with Brandon noting, "*my brother can understand me, so he can easily give me good advice, as we are living at the same time*". This close connection enables them to deeply comprehend one another's perspectives.

4.4.3. Twins depend on their co-twin to fulfil their emotional needs.

With the exception of Maris and Lydia, all sets of twins confirmed that they shared their vulnerabilities and found emotional support in one another. Lara expressed that whenever she needs to vent without fear of judgement, she knows she can always rely on her twin, saying, "*if I need to vent out without judgment, I will always find her*."

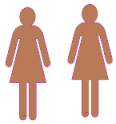
Brandon highlighted the trust and belief they have in each other, understanding that when they criticize one another, it is for their mutual benefit. He stated, "*we trust in each other and believe that when we criticize each other, it is for our own good*." Working closely with his brother, Brandon and Charles feel that their partnership allows them to provide help and support to each other, both physically and emotionally. Charles stated, "*we do whatever it takes to help each other, both physically and emotionally*."

Sharing personal and intimate secrets further deepened the connections between Thea and Lara, as well as Benjamin and Norbert. Lara revealed that her twin sister is the first person she turns to for advice, and when she has profound dark secrets, her twin is the first one she confides in, stating, "*She is the first person I will go to for advice, and if I have a profound dark secret, she is the first one I will tell*." Benjamin explained that they grew closer to each other when they both came out, suggesting that sharing this significant aspect of their identities strengthened their bond. "We got closer to each other when we both came out." (Benjamin).

4.5 Superordinate Theme 4: Romantic relationships are perceived as potential threats to the twin bond.

4.5.1 Romantic partners often feel intimidated by the strength of the twin bond.

Thea and Lara encountered situations on at least three occasions where their romantic relationships did not thrive. Potential partners felt intimidated by the deep emotional bond between the twins and were reluctant to engage in a relationship that might involve a threesome.



Thea
Lara

Thea: Erm, yes, in three separate incidents… claimed that we, as twins, are too close; that is, our bond is too intimidating. The prospective partners think the relationship would be between the three; obviously, it would not, but anyway, they are intimidated by our bond.

Thea and Lara voiced their feelings of hurt and frustration regarding their prospective partners, as these individuals did not allow enough time for the relationship to develop. Despite this, both Thea and Lara affirmed that there is no need to alter their twin bond due to another relationship, "*there is no need for a change in the twin bond because of another relationship*". They expressed their intention to establish boundaries to navigate their personal lives, "*We will set some boundaries for each other*".

Similarly, Benjamin and Norbert are encountering difficulties as well. They believe that their shared physical resemblance and similar preferences make potential partners hesitant to approach them. As a result, they have yet to experience a long-lasting romantic relationship.



Benjamin
Norbert

Norbert: It is a weird thing because, for example, the prospective partner likes Benjamin; I think he would like me too, having the same face, everything the same, then for this person, it would be weird to go out with twins.

Benjamin and Norbert recognize that their joint identity as twins poses a challenge in their romantic pursuits, leading to identity confusion among potential partners. Alternatively, these individuals may perceive twinhood as an exclusive and insular relationship that excludes others.

4.5.2 Some twin pairs make space for romantic partners and preserve the twin relationship.

Benjamin and Norbert expressed concerns about sharing similar preferences for romantic partners. However, Benjamin emphasized that, "*if someone gives him more attention than he gives to me, no jealousy would be involved; instead, we are more supportive*." He continued to say that he would willingly step aside to allow his twin to pursue the relationship.

For Maris and Lydia, when the latter entered into a serious romantic relationship with Shawn, it caused feelings of threat and resentment in her co-twin, Maris. Lydia acknowledged Maris's negative reaction, stating, "*Maris took it badly when I started going out with Shawn*." Maris expressed her sentiment, "*now that you took my sister, you have to take me too, buy one get one free.*"

Maris felt that Shawn posed a threat to her close bond with Lydia, as she had to reduce the amount of time spent with her. In contrast, Lydia did not experience conflicting loyalties in terms of dividing her time between her partner and her co-twin. She explained, "*no, no, I used not to bother. Why did I have to share my time?*"

Maris held some resentment towards Shawn, as she attributed the changes in her relationship with her co-twin to him, "*because of him, I had to reduce my time with her*!" On the other hand, Lydia struggled to understand Maris's reaction, "*sincerely, I could not understand her attitude. I never actually understood*."

Maris, however, feared that Lydia's new romantic attachment would jeopardize their twinship, reflecting the exclusivity of their bond in Maris's perspective. However, Maris mentioned that she placed this fear aside and accepted Shawn as her co-twin's partner and currently, she has a good relationship with Shawn, "*I have a very good relationship with Shawn, rather very good*." However, Lydia, being the independent and decision-making twin, has shifted Maris to a secondary position in her attachment hierarchy, prioritizing her romantic partner as the primary figure in her life.

4.5.3 Some twins perceive potential partners as a threat to their sibling bond.

During Charles's early adolescence, he entered a new romantic relationship that posed a threat to his bond with Brandon, eventually leading to its deterioration and ultimate breakage.

Brandon: He had a girlfriend, and she broke our bond and separated us; she was jealous of certain things… that was when I lost my brother.



Brandon
Charles

Charles: Jealousy was involved; she hated my brother, and she broke the bond; …. from my side, we spent six months without any communication.

Following the end of Charles's romantic relationship, Brandon remarked that "*we became even closer*." The disharmony that arose in their twin/romantic relationship caused a rift between them, as Charles had to make a choice between his partner and his twin. However, as they worked through the rupture, their bond grew stronger, leading to them becoming even closer than before.



Brandon
Charles

Brandon: I used to find excuses to avoid meeting with him. His attitude and behaviour hurt me.

4.6 Superordinate Theme 5: Positioning the twin sibling relationship with elder siblings.

When twins are born into a family with existing elder siblings, it is not just a matter of adding two new members to the family. Rather, the family dynamics undergo significant changes, and the family itself becomes a new entity. It is worth noting that all participants, with the exception of Brandon and Charles, who are the only children in their families, have elder siblings.

4.6.1 Elder siblings maintain their distinct position within the family hierarchical structure.

The introduction of twins into the family system has caused emotional vulnerability among the elder siblings of twin pairs, namely Maris and Lydia, as well as Thea and Lara.



Maris
Lydia

Lydia: When he was young, he used to tell our mother, why did you get two? One would have been enough, so he initially took it badly. He was alone for four years, and suddenly, two other individuals arrived.

Their elder brother David, as the firstborn, made efforts to maintain his position of superiority within the family hierarchy. Maris claimed that their brother, "*did not want to lose our mother's attention and affection, so he always wanted to play with her and spend time with her.*"

On the other hand, the elder sister Bernice of Thea and Lara welcomed the presence of the twins with great joy. Lara expressed that home videos revealed that she "*took us under her wing*" and Thea continued to say that, "*she treated them like her own dolls*". She quickly assumed a parental role, offering them security and comfort whenever needed.

4.6.2 Twins' perception of differential treatment by their parents.

Thea and Lara, as well as Maris and Lydia, were conscious of the additional parental attention given to their elder siblings as they were maturing. Nevertheless, they claimed that they did not experience any negative impact from this situation. On the contrary, they asserted that they recognized and comprehended the reasons behind such preferential treatment.



Thea
Lara

Lara: Mum prefers our elder sister; it was a thing for a very long time.

Thea: The actual reason is that we used to push her aside or ignore her (referring to the elder sister) as we were closer; we always had company, so mum used to give her more attention, as we had each other's attention.



Maris
Lydia

Maris: Mum does not admit it; she prefers our elder brother.

Lydia: … because we always had each other, even when we used to play, we always had each other. It was as if our elder brother was always alone.

4.6.3 Elder siblings exert a position of power in their relationship with their younger siblings.

The elder sisters of Thea and Lara, as well as Gabriella and George, took on the responsibility of babysitting the twins when their parents were not available. In the case of the first twin pair, they had one sibling who fulfilled this role, while the second pair had two siblings involved in taking care of them. Thea mentioned, "*whenever our parents were away, she would be there to look after us*." Similarly, Gabriella shared that, "*when our mother had to work, our two siblings would help take care of us*."

However, their position of authority sometimes led them to misuse their power, and they would often boss their younger siblings around, giving them orders. Lara recalled "*we would say no, you are not our mummy, and we used to gang against her*." One of Gabriella and George's siblings used to threaten them and Gabriella stated that "*when we got on her nerves; she used to lock us out in the garden or tie us up behind the sofa*." George continued to say that *"they used to give us household chores, what we need to do and where we have to clean."*

Both twin pairs express resentment towards the times when their siblings mishandled their authority, as those moments often resulted in conflicts.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

5.1 Introduction

"Oneness" "sameness" and "closeness" are the three defining features in Western societies that reflect the common understanding and cultural representations of twinship. They capture the unique dynamics and characteristics that are typically associated with the twin relationship, highlighting the interconnectedness, similarities, and emotional bond between twins. Research advancements in the field of twin research have challenged these assumptions, as they have been found to hinder our comprehensive understanding of twins' experiences (Friedman, 2014).

As a researcher who is also a twin, I have developed a curiosity to investigate the impact of these assumptions on how Maltese adult twins negotiate and express their twin identity. The overarching research question guiding this study is "How do cultural and social constructs of twinhood impact the lived experience of adult twins in the Maltese context?" This chapter delves into the analysed data derived from dyadic semi-structured interviews conducted with five pairs of twins, all coincidentally reported predominantly positive experiences of their twinship. Against this backdrop, the results are discussed, incorporating findings from other studies and relevant literature.

5.2 The findings of the current study in relation to the existing literature

The current study's findings align with existing literature in several key areas. Firstly, it confirms that twins undergo a distinct process of differentiation and individuation during their transition into adulthood, which has been previously explored by various researchers

(Ainslie, 1997; Alin Akerman et al., 2003; Cirillo, 1976). Additionally, the current study reinforces that societal constructs surrounding twinhood can impede open discussions about twins' emotional complexities and challenges. This result aligns with studies carried out by Case, 1996; Friedman, 2014; and Schave Klein, 2003.

Moreover, this study highlights that twins with a tightly-knit bond may encounter difficulties establishing and maintaining romantic relationships, echoing previous studies on the unique dynamics of twin relationships (Pietila et al., 2012; Sandbank, 1999). The current study also supports the significant impact of parental behaviour and cultural context on developing twin identities, which aligns with previous research (Noble et al., 2017). Furthermore, another finding of this study was the importance of supporting other children within the family to foster meaningful relationships with their siblings, and this was supported by a study conducted by Namyslowska & Siewierska (2010).

However, a distinctive finding of this current study was that parental differential treatment was directed towards the elder siblings rather than between the twins themselves. While numerous studies have discussed parental differential treatment between twins, the literature search yielded little information on parental differential treatment towards the elder siblings within the twin context. This novel discovery sheds light on an understudied aspect of twin relationships and warrants further exploration to understand its implications fully.

5.3 Growing up as a twin involves a unique differentiation and individuation process into adulthood.

Studies on twins have highlighted a notable distinction in the process of individualization compared to singletons (a person who was not born as a multiple-birthed individual). While adolescents who are singletons typically focus on differentiating themselves from their parents and forming their own identity, twins face additional hurdles as they must also establish independence from their co-twin, in addition to their parents (Ainslie, 1997; Alin Akerman et al., 2003; Cirillo, 1976).

Participants in the current study, did not report that they faced significant challenges during the process of differentiating themselves from their parents. Through their narratives and body language during the data collection, I could observe that the participants enjoy a deep connection with their co-twin which led me to hypothesize that their inter-twin bond is so strong that it could have substituted their attachment to their parents. The validity of this assumption is supported by a study conducted by Trias (2006), which discovered that twins utilize their bond to alleviate the distress and unease that accompanies the process of separating from their parents.

However, in order to establish independence from their co-twin, findings of the current study indicated that as twins transitioned into adulthood, each pair embarked on a unique process of differentiation and individuation. As they entered secondary schooling around the age of eleven, most of them started to focus more on their differences than their similarities. It is likely that the quest for their individuality began during this period and became more significant in adolescence. This is consistent with Hay's (1999) study, which

suggested that twins may feel the need to establish independence during their secondary school years. For instance, twin pairs Benjamin and Norbert and Brandon and Charles initiated the process of creating distinctions in their physical appearances, which included adopting different hairstyles and deliberately choosing contrasting outfits. These findings align with the conclusions drawn from a study conducted by Schave and Ciriello (1983), which suggested that twins seeking individuality may intentionally emphasize slight differences in their behaviours, even if those differences are somewhat artificial.

Furthermore, data from the current research indicated that a notable endeavour towards distinctiveness and autonomy occurred when Benjamin expressed a strong desire in acquiring an apartment, a decision that both Benjamin and Norbert recognised should be pursued solely by Benjamin to preserve their separate individual identities. However, this instance highlights the contrasting experiences between being part of a twin pair and being a singleton. In the context of the twin relationship, the purchase of an apartment required negotiation between the twins, whereas for singletons, such a decision would typically be made independently without involving other siblings.

Another interesting finding pertains to the lengths twins go to in order to cultivate their individuality. Thea and Lara, in their pursuit of defining their unique identities, employed polarisation tactics by resorting to extreme behaviours as a means of cultivating a sense of ‘distinctiveness’. Thea fully embraced a tomboy persona, while Lara wholeheartedly embraced traditional femininity. This finding is in line with Friedman’s (2008) study, which argues that when twins, especially during adolescence, are not allowed to develop their individuality authentically, they often resort to extremes to prove how distinct they are from their same-aged siblings. Similarly, Penninkilampi-Kerola (2006) suggests that these feelings

and behaviours may contribute to establishing and reinforcing individual identities among twins.

As evidenced by the findings of this study, the process of developing an authentic individual identity tends to be more demanding for twins who have grown up with a constant companion, compared to individuals who are singletons. Consequently, striking a balance between preserving their inter-twin bond and fostering independent lives can be a delicate process for individuals in twinship.

5.4 Social constructs around twinhood might silence individuals from discussing the intricacies and possible pain that arises from being a twin.

The findings of this study revealed three distinct complexities associated with twinhood; twins being treated as a joint identity, the practice of comparing academic achievements between twin pairs in classroom, and the development of an excessive reliance on one's co-twin having a detrimental impact on twins' sense of individuality and independence during their educational journey. Due to the shared class with their co-twins, Lara, from the twin pair Thea and Lara, frequently experienced being compared to her co-twin while Maris, from the twin pair Maris and Lydia, developed an excessive dependency on her co-twin. Yet, the perspective of their co-twins indicates that if the twin pairs had been placed in separate classes, they believe that their inter-twin bond would not have been as strong as they assert it to be.

It is worth noting that during the interviews, both Lara and Maris expressed feelings of resentment to the abovementioned complexities of twinhood. This result aligns with

Case's (1966) study that indicates that treating twins as a single unit rather than acknowledging their individuality often leads to feelings of resentment. Furthermore, when Lara and Maris discussed their experiences in the presence of their co-twin concerning comparison and dependency, it was notable that they often used the phrase "not to disrespect her". On the other hand, their co-twins seemed slightly withdrawn upon hearing these accounts. This observation suggests that Lara and Maris might have refrained from openly expressing their authentic feelings about being twins and having a twin sibling. Perhaps, it can be argued that the experience of being a twin can indeed be characterized as a hidden struggle, as twins may feel compelled to conceal their ambivalent feelings about a relationship that is often idealized. Friedman (2014) argues that this struggle arises from the fact that masking one's emotions can be stressful and emotionally taxing for twins.

Referring to the comparison of academic achievement between twins, Lara explicitly conveyed that it did bother her being consistently compared in class. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Hagedorn and Kizziar (1974), which found that while most twins cherish a close and special relationship with their twin, they generally dislike enduring constant comparisons from others. Additionally, Lara conveyed her strong desire to be acknowledged and recognized as an individual first before being seen solely as a twin. This viewpoint aligns with several studies, and experts in the field of psychology and education, such as Feinstein (2003), Tucker-Drob and Bates (2016), and Lykken (2012), emphasize the significance of recognizing and valuing individuality while avoiding comparisons among twins.

Regarding to Maris's over-reliance on her twin, upon examining the data of the current study, contrasting roles within the twinship of Maris and Lydia were revealed, with

Maris assuming a passive and submissive role while Lydia assuming an active and dominant role. During their early adolescence, the inherent complementarity between Maris and Lydia likely contributed to their ability to present themselves as a cohesive and efficient team. This finding is consistent with previous research conducted by Ainslie (1985) and Moilanen and Ebeling (1998), who suggest that twins assuming opposing roles in their twinship can aid in the establishment of a harmonious and well-functioning unit. Yet, the current study revealed that when Maris was compelled to function as an individual rather than as part of a unit (precisely, when she began attending university alone due to her sibling's absence), she encountered separation anxiety and emotional turmoil. This finding aligns with a study conducted by Dimitrovsky (1989), which proposed that the shared complementary attributes between twins can hinder the functioning of one twin when the other is not present.

On the other hand, Lydia, Maris' co-twin, may have been shaped by societal expectations, parental attitudes, and physical resemblance, leading her into a bond she did not actively choose, but which became an integral part of her identity. As a result, she may have felt a sense of responsibility for her co-twin's well-being, and due to the heightened expectations associated with twinship, Lydia, although not explicitly mentioned, might have experienced a sense of disappointment in their twin relationship, despite their apparent closeness. Ainslie (1997), Schave and Ciriello (1983), and Stewart (2000) propose that the heightened expectations placed on a devoted twin relationship can even cause close twins to feel let down by their twin bond. Furthermore, according to Lydia's perspective, the constant presence of her twin by her side, which she referred to as being her "shadow", likely led to a limited sense of personal space and privacy. It is plausible that Lydia might have experienced a constant sense of being observed and followed due to the constant presence of her twin.

This situation might have felt claustrophobic for her, creating a desire to seek moments of escape from their twinship.

It is crucial for society to recognise and respect the individuality of twins and provide them with the space to express their own perspectives and feelings. By acknowledging the complexities and challenges that can arise within twin relationships, we can create a more inclusive environment that allows twins to freely discuss their experiences, both positive and negative without shame and guilt. This can help foster understanding, empathy and support for twins as unique individuals, rather than assuming their experiences are solely defined by their twinship.

5.5 Tightly knit twins may face challenges in forming and maintaining romantic relationships.

As twins begin to expand their social circles beyond their twinship, the findings of this study offer two key insights into how the inter-twin bond can potentially impact romantic relationships. The first insight reveals that when a twin sibling enters a romantic relationship, their partner may feel intimated by the close bond between the twins. For instance, twin pairs such as twin pair Thea and Lara and twin pair Benjamin and Norbert have encountered difficulties establishing long-term romantic relationships. They claimed that their prospective partners have expressed concerns that a relationship with a twin would mean being involved in a threesome. From a systemic perspective, an emotional triangle (Kerr & Bowen, 1988), occurs when a third person is brought into a dyad to stabilise the primary relationship, primarily when tension arises within the dyad (Gehart, 2018), resulting in either the prospective partner or the co-twin feeling like a third wheel in the relationship. In fact, data

from the current study indicates that prospective partners may encounter difficulties when it comes to establishing intimate relationships with twins.

This finding is consistent with the results of Pietila et al.'s (2012) study, which revealed that the combination of twinship and marriage can present challenges for the spouse, as twins often perceive each other as primary attachment figures. As a researcher, I find it interesting to investigate the perspectives of romantic partners involved with a twin sibling, as it could provide insights into whether they consistently perceive their relationship as having a "third wheel".

Viewing this from a social constructionist lens, it might suggest that prospective partners are influenced by the dominant discourse surrounding twinhood, which portrays twins as inseparable entities. Observing how twins are depicted in movies and literature, it is understandable that potential romantic partners might have reservations about entering a serious and committed relationship with a twin. They might fear complications arising from the co-twin, who may be unwilling to let go of their sibling or unable to do so. According to Martinez (2021), it is argued that romantic relationships frequently act as a counterbalance to the dominant presence of the twin relationship in each twin's life. This dynamic can be perceived as a loss or a threat to the other twin.

The second insight derived from this study's findings is that the twin bond can become vulnerable when twins engage in romantic relationships. For instance, the co-twin relationship between Brandon and Charles was severely jeopardised, leading to six months of estrangement due to Charles's jealous girlfriend, who sought to separate them. This finding

supports Sandbank's (1999) research which indicates that certain partners may attempt to create distance in order to disrupt the close bond between twins. Noble et al. (2019) argue that although the twin bond has the potential for increased intimacy, it also carries an inherent element of threat. This estrangement contradicts the prevailing discourse of twin closeness and does not fit within our social expectations that twins share an unbreakable twin bond. When we set aside this misconception, according to Martinez (2021), we can acknowledge that twin relationships can often be filled with conflict and complexities that may result in life-long struggles and estrangement.

From this study, it is perceived that rebuilding trust, intimacy and connection can be challenging for twins and their partners when a romantic relationship has experienced estrangement due to the influence of the twin bond. It was evident that it requires time and effort from all parties involved. A key recommendation for supporting twins and their romantic partners is to foster an environment that encourages open and honest communication. This includes actively discussing their unique bond and addressing any concerns or misunderstandings that may arise. This establishes a foundation of understanding and ensures that all individuals involved would know each other's needs and expectations.

5.6 The impact of parental behaviour and cultural context on the formation of twin identity

This study revealed that participants' parents adopted an egalitarian approach and demonstrated impartiality in their parenting styles towards the twins throughout their childhood. Parents had created a familial environment where all participants shared living spaces and belongings with their twin siblings. This observation suggests that the cultural

norms in Malta strongly emphasize the concept of “oneness” and “sameness”, as evidenced by the consistent behaviour of parents in treating their twins similarly. Similar to the findings of the current study, Noble et al. (2017) found that twin participants shared similar environments, facilitating opportunities for mutual interaction. Furthermore, it could be contended that continual sharing of possessions among twins may impede their comprehension of personal belongings in comparison to individuals who are not part of a twin pair. In fact, according to one participant, Brandon expressed that he had acquired the ability to avoid forming strong attachment to belongings. Furthermore, the consistent practice of sharing among the participants suggests that their perception of “sharing” was influenced by a shared reality shaped by prevailing discourses surrounding twinhood, lending it an apparent sense of objectivity in their eyes. Various researchers specializing in twin studies argue that the inherent nature of sharing among twins is so deeply ingrained that it profoundly affects their development and their capacity to comprehend others (Friedman, 2008; Hagedorn & Kizziar, 1974; Klein, 2003).

Another significant finding that emerged from the current research was that both parents and participants heavily relied on using identical or slightly gender-variable clothing as a vital element in constructing their twin identity during childhood. This result aligns with Bacon’s research (2005), which suggests that mothers, in particular, play a significant role in determining their children’s attire and influencing their identity through dress choices. However, the underlying motivations that drive mothers to reinforce societal expectations regarding twins might raise some inquiries. The sight of two children of the same age, sharing a resemblance and exhibiting a unique bond, can evoke an emotional response associated with cuteness, which in turn leads people to express admiration. Participants mentioned that their mothers experienced a sense of pride when engaging with others in

public settings. From a systemic perspective, a positive feedback loop was established, wherein the attention given to twins and their parents reinforced the parents' tendency to maintain their twins' similarity by treating and dressing them similarly. This finding aligns with the results of Ainslie's (1985) study which demonstrated that the special attention received from others serves as motivation for parents to persist in treating twins as a unit and dressing them in similar attire. Viewed through a social constructionist lens, this behaviour towards twinship among Maltese parents may suggest that they have been socialized within a cultural context where twins are frequently regarded and treated as a unified entity. Therefore, it may be plausible that Maltese parents consciously instil this social identity of twinship in their children, assuming a vital role as socializing agents who transmit these societal expectations and actively promote their reinforcement.

Moreover, these parents might also be influenced by discourses surrounding 'childhood', where children are perceived as dependent beings in the process of forming their individual identities. Consequently, parents may not fully recognise their children's agency in constructing their identities and shaping their unique "twin situation." Bacon (2005) argues that both parents and twin children are social actors who contribute to the construction, performance, resistance, and reformulation of twin identity. The current study's findings are reinforced by this statement, indicating that the social experience of twinship for both Maltese parents and participants is influenced by the dynamics of parent-child relationships and actively shaped by the twins themselves.

In hindsight, all participants hold fond memories of their childhood years when they embraced and conformed to twin stereotypes. Nevertheless, as they transitioned into early adolescence, they perceived their personal growth as a journey that necessitated transforming

expressions of sameness and oneness into individuality. Notably, none of the twin pairs reported encountering any objections from their parents when they started taking initiative in establishing their own individual identities. This observation suggests that Maltese parents may view twinhood as a transitional phase in their children's lives and value their development as unique individuals. Simultaneously, their parents had to reevaluate their parenting styles and grapple with the loss of the awe-inspiring factor associated with their twins' childhood. Presumably, this could have been an emotional process for them, especially considering their previous appreciation for their twins' similarity. Nonetheless, despite treating twins as a "unified unit" during childhood, the data from the current study clearly demonstrated that Maltese parents, at some stage, shifted their focus and wholeheartedly embraced the participants' path towards individualization, actively providing support for their personal growth.

5.7 Other children within the family also need to be supported to find their place within the family and with their twin siblings.

One insight gained from the findings is that the arrival of newborn twins in a family system can lead to distinct patterns of interaction among the elder siblings. It is important to note that the participants have only elder siblings and do not have any younger siblings. Consequently, this study focuses specifically on the dynamics between the twins, their parents, and their elder siblings, without considering the influence or interactions with younger siblings.

Regarding twin pair Thea and Lara, the elder sister took on a caregiving role, whereas in the case of twin pair Maris and Lydia, the elder brother exhibited resentment and actively

distanced himself. These findings align with the research of Sandbank (1999), which suggests that elder brothers tend to dislike their younger twin siblings as they feel overshadowed and pushed aside, while elder sisters often enjoy being the big sister to the twins. From a social constructionist standpoint, these different behaviours exhibited by the siblings may have been influenced by cultural gender roles. In several Western societies, including Malta, the conventional perception of the feminine gender role highlights nurturing qualities, which could account for the elder sister's inclination towards caring for her younger siblings (Eisenberg & Lennon, 1983). Conversely, Landsberg (2020) argue that some traditional gender roles may discourage emotional expression or nurturing behaviours, leading to a perceived emotional distance between the elder brother and his younger siblings. However, it is important to note that these traditional gender roles have been widely challenged and critiqued in recent years. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) advocate for more inclusive and fluid understandings of gender that allow individuals to express a broader range of characteristics, regardless of gender identity.

Another insight gained from the data of this study highlighted that the inter-twin bond can have an influence on family dynamics, including the possibility of parental differential treatment. Although not universally observed among all participants, this pattern specifically emerged in the narratives of the twin pairs (Maris and Lydia and Thea and Lara). They reported that their inter-twin bond resulted in the unintentional exclusion of their other sibling within the family. Friedman (2014) contends that the sense of exclusion felt by elder siblings can be attributed to the inherent closeness shared by twins, which poses challenges for other siblings in forming equally intimate connections with either of the twins.

In response to this situation, participants claimed that their parents, particularly mothers exhibited differential treatment in favour of the elder siblings as a counterbalance by showing more attention and affection to them. A systemic hypothesis might be that parents have resorted to parental differentiation as a way to restore balance and maintain equilibrium within the family system. This assumption arises from the understanding that when the elder siblings received greater attention and affection compared to the twins, it could have disrupted the balance and harmony within the family dynamics. Consequently, in order to compensate for this imbalance, parents unconsciously engage in differential treatment towards other children, aiming to restore a perceived sense of fairness or equilibrium.

Despite this, both twin pairs, Maris and Lydia and Thea and Lara expressed understanding regarding the reasons behind the preferential treatment and harboured no negative sentiments towards their siblings. This is in line with a study by Boll et al. (2005) that revealed that the evaluation of perceived fairness of perceived parental differential treatment is a more powerful predictor of the quality of sibling relationships than the perceived parental differential treatment itself (Boll et al., 2005; Kowal & Kramer, 1997).

In contrast, the other participants in this study who have elder siblings, highlighted that their parents were mindful of avoiding any favouritism between the twins and their other siblings. They consciously followed the cultural norm of equality, aiming to foster positive and equitable sibling relationships. Boll et al. (2003) provide support for this perspective, asserting that adult sibling relationships tend to be more positive when parents treat their children equally.

However, one might argue that treating all siblings in a family in the same manner could overlook the importance of parental sensitivity to individual differences in siblings' interests and desires. It may be more appropriate for parents to consider differentiating their treatment based on the unique personalities, interests, or needs of each sibling. Perhaps, considering equity, which involves fair treatment based on the specific needs of each child, may be a more suitable approach. This approach acknowledges and addresses the individual requirements of each sibling, ensuring that they receive appropriate attention and support.

A growing body of evidence suggests that siblings play considerable roles in each other's development and that the quality and character of the sibling bond may have far-reaching effects (Szymanska, 2020). Although the relationship between twin siblings and their other siblings can vary greatly depending on family dynamics, personalities and individual experiences, open and effective communication is vital in all sibling relationships. Both twins and siblings in the family system are encouraged to participate in open dialogue, active listening and understanding between all siblings. This attitude helps resolve conflicts, address concerns and build a foundation of trust and support. Mutual respect, empathy, and support are essential in fostering strong relationships between all siblings.

5.8 Twins identity development within the family of origin system

The parental and sibling subsystems within a family system exert significant influence over the dynamics and outcomes of twin relationships and the development of their identities. Within the parental subsystem, parents' behaviour and attitudes towards their twins can shape how the twins perceive themselves and their relationship. When parents emphasise individuality and uniqueness, the twins are more likely to feel supported in exploring their

distinct personalities. Conversely, if parents prioritise maintaining the twins' similarity, the twins may face challenges in developing separate identities and feel compelled to conform to the twin identity. Additionally, the parenting style employed by parents can impact the twins' emotional well-being and self-esteem, influencing their confidence in forging independent identities.

Meanwhile, the twin sibling subsystem significantly impacts how the twins perceive and interact with one another. The closeness, rivalry, or cooperation level between the twins can affect their willingness and ability to establish their identities during early adolescence. The parental and twin sibling subsystems form a complex interplay that shapes the twins' journey towards defining themselves as unique individuals while maintaining their special bond as twins.

Alongside the parental and twin sibling subsystems, the presence of other siblings in the family influences the dynamics of twin relationships and the development of their identities. Directly, the attention and resources from parents may be divided among multiple children, including the twins and their other siblings. This allocation of resources can impact the twins' sense of identity and individuality, as well as their feelings of inclusion within the family unit. Moreover, the interactions and relationships with their other siblings can create additional social contexts for the twins to navigate, influencing how they perceive themselves concerning others. These interactions reinforce the twin identity or allow them to assert their uniqueness.

Systemically, the dynamics among all the siblings in the family can contribute to the overall family atmosphere, which, in turn, can affect the twins' emotional well-being and the

development of their identities. However, the other siblings also need to be supported by their parents, and it requires a delicate balance of individualised attention and fostering strong sibling bonds. Promoting open communication within the family allows all children to express their feelings, ensuring that each sibling feels valued and supported in their own right.

5.9 Limitations of the Study

The recruitment process used in this study can be viewed as a potential limitation, as it depended on the twins who initially expressed interest and met the inclusion criteria. Consequently, this could have resulted in a biased sample, as only twins with predominantly positive experiences chose to participate. The prevailing social construct in Maltese society, which discourages open discussion of personal issues and is often referred to as "not airing one's dirty laundry," may have played a role in inhibiting twins with negative experiences not coming forward.

Another factor that could have influenced the outcome of the results was interviewing twin sets together. Being in the presence of each other might have limited any antagonistic information twin pairs might have wished to share.

Furthermore, another limitation of this study was the lack of younger siblings in the participants' families. It is important to recognise that the dynamics between twins and their elder siblings may differ from those between twins and younger siblings. Consequently, the findings of this study may not fully capture the interactions and influences that occur in families with both sets of siblings.

5.10 Self-Reflexivity

For the integrity of the research process and the quality of the knowledge generated, I was aware of my influence on participants or the topic being studied while simultaneously realising how the research experience affected them (Gilgun, 2008). Thus, my bias and preconceived ideas might have impacted the interpretation of the findings. I acknowledge that my assumptions were influenced by my own experience as a fraternal twin to my brother. As a young child, we shared similar experiences, and our bond was strong. However, our inter-twin relationship gradually changed as we entered early adolescence and began engaging in separate experiences outside the home. Eventually, I felt my twin identity recede into the background of who I am. Nevertheless, we maintained a close connection, albeit more akin to a sibling bond. Despite this, I have strived to approach the interviewing process with wonder and openness while actively restraining my preconceived notions.

As I conducted interviews with each set of twins, I was struck by the resemblance in their physical appearances, regardless of whether they were identical or fraternal twins. This surprised me because I held a preconceived belief that only identical twins shared such similarities. Unknowingly, I was adhering to stereotypical twin stereotype. Perhaps this stemmed from my own experience as a non-identical twin, where the concepts of “sameness” and “similarity” did not apply. Furthermore, I could notice a consistent pattern among the participants: they all cherished their twin bond, evident through genuine laughter, frequent smiles, attentive eye contact, and active listening. However, this observation evoked mixed emotions, as it made me realize that I don’t share the same close bond with my fraternal twin as the participants do with theirs. While I don’t necessarily require my twin’s presence to have a complete sense of self, I yearn for a special bond with him. Previously, I hypothesized

that our different genders and attending different schools might have influenced our twin bond. However, the findings of this study challenge that assumption, as Gabriella and George, despite their different genders and attending different schools, affirm having a unique and special connection compared to their other siblings. These observations allowed me to explore and acknowledge twin relationships' diverse and individualistic nature rather than assuming a uniform experience. It motivated me to delve deeper into the complexities and nuances of twin dynamics and approach this research with a broader understanding of different twin pairs' varied experiences and perspectives.

One of the most notable findings that stood out to me was the observation that parental differential treatment was directed towards the elder siblings rather than occurring between the twins themselves. During my literature search, I came across numerous studies and articles that discussed this issue within twin relationships. However, to the best of my knowledge, I did not come across any specific research or literature that specifically examines parental differential treatment towards the elder siblings within the context of twins.

5.11 Recommendations for future research

On reflection, I acknowledge that there was a limitation in capturing the negative aspects of the lived experience of twins amidst the dominant discourses of twinhood in the current study. Serious issues related to the challenges and difficulties faced by twins may not have been adequately addressed or fully captured. In future research, it would be valuable to explore and delve deeper into the negative aspects of twin experiences, shedding light on the

potential struggles and complexities that twins may encounter within the given societal and cultural context.

Also, in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of how other children within the family can be supported to find their place and establish positive relationships with their twin siblings, it would be highly beneficial to conduct further research that encompasses families with both twins and younger siblings. This approach would provide a more inclusive perspective on the dynamics between twins, younger siblings, and parents within various sibling configurations. By examining the interactions and experiences of all children in these families, valuable insights can be gained into the effective strategies and interventions to foster harmonious sibling relationships and ensure the well-being of all family members.

Furthermore, the potential impact of the inter-twin bond on romantic partners is a significant finding from this study. Exploring the lived experiences of twins' romantic partners would be an interesting direction for future research. By gaining insights into these experiences, researchers can better understand the unique dynamics that may arise in relationships where one partner is a twin. This exploration can offer valuable insights into relationship patterns, communication styles, and levels of intimacy that might be influenced by the presence of the twin bond.

5.12 Implications for family therapy and systemic practice

The findings of the current study can provide support to parents by enhancing their understanding of the distinctive needs and challenges that come with raising twins. It can also offer strategies for fostering positive sibling relationships and assist in managing any feelings

of guilt or inadequacy. Additionally, systemic therapists can play a crucial role in promoting healthier family dynamics and facilitating effective communication among family members.

Furthermore, therapists can assist twins in understanding their unique relationship, exploring their roles and expectations within the twinship, and developing strategies to balance closeness and independence. Systemic therapists can help twins build a strong foundation for healthy and fulfilling lives. They can help twins navigate the process of identity formation, addressing feelings of confusion, competition or pressure to conform to societal expectations. Since twins often face such expectations and stereotypes that can influence their self-perception and identity formation, therapists can help twins to challenge and deconstruct these expectations. They can also support them in exploring and expressing their individuality without guilt or shame by assisting twins in developing their distinct identities to their overall well-being and self-acceptance. Systemic family therapists can help twins develop resilience and self-confidence in navigating societal pressures, fostering a sense of empowerment and autonomy.

5.13 Conclusion

The information presented in this chapter highlights the complex experiences of adult twins within the cultural and social discourses of twinhood. These narratives were compared to previous research mentioned in the literature review, while also introducing new literature that could contribute to a deeper comprehension of the subject.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this research was to examine the influence of cultural and social constructs surrounding twinhood on the everyday lives of adult twins in Malta. In Western understanding, twinship is characterised by notions of similarity, unity, and strong bonds, whereby twins are anticipated to have similar appearances, be regarded as a single entity, and maintain a close relationship. Despite the prevalence of twins' births in Malta has increased, primarily due to the utilization of assisted reproductive technologies, Maltese society still holds onto stereotypical views and attitudes towards twins.

This study demonstrates that all twin pairs embraced the conventional ideas of "sameness" and "oneness" during their childhood. However, as they underwent developmental changes, they acknowledged the existence of "differences", and their collective identity evolved to strike a balance between unity and individuality within their twin relationship. Moreover, this research revealed that regardless of being identical or fraternal twins, all twin pairs in this study claimed to share a special bond of emotional closeness. Nevertheless, the intensity of the twin bond naturally fluctuated as the participants expanded their social circles beyond their families. Despite this, all twin pairs expressed that being a twin gave them a constant companion, friend, and advisor. Overall, they viewed their twinship as an exceptionally positive experience, accompanied by a peculiar sense of pride in being a twin.

When viewed from a systemic perspective, the development of twins' identities has an impact on the entire family, as the interactions among family members are reciprocal and circular in nature. Within the family's hierarchical structure, parents hold the most influential position and play a critical role in how twin pairs shape and reshape their identities over time and in

different contexts. Concurrently, elder siblings strive to maintain their authority and responsibilities within the sibling subsystem. Given that sibling relationships are among the most enduring in human life, it is particularly advantageous for parents to foster positive qualities from an early stage. Cultivating a close, intimate, and supportive sibling relationship, characterised by constructive criticism and a healthy dose of competition, can enhance interpersonal and intrapersonal skills. Moreover, it can contribute to the resilience of the family system and enhance its adaptability to potential changes that may arise.

Participating in this research has provided me with a sense of personal satisfaction, greatly enriching my knowledge and research skills. As I have progressed through this research endeavour, my fascination with twins' narratives has deepened, and this interest will continue to develop as I pursue my path as an educator and a systemic family therapist. Having gained a more profound understanding of how twins, beyond my own experience, have navigated their twinship, I am now better prepared to sustain my curiosity, empathy, and increased sensitivity when engaging in both educational and therapeutic contexts.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Information Sheet and Consent Form

Name of the Researcher: Justine Bugeja

Title of Research: ***The lived experience of adult twins amidst the cultural and social constructs of twinship.***

Dear _____,

The following is some information about a research project I am undertaking towards completing a Masters degree in Systemic Family Psychotherapy at the Institute of Family Therapy, Malta. I would like to invite you to be part of my dissertation under the guidance of my tutor, Ms Karen Bishop.

Some information about my research project

Myths and legends about twins very often focus on the similarities or differences, and are portrayed as partners or rivals, opposites or two parts of a whole. However, contemporary researchers and writers are challenging some of these beliefs as they argue that twins and their relationships are as diverse as non-twins. In fact, I intend to gain a rich understanding of how twins' cultural and social constructs impact the lived experience of being twins, both as individuals and in how they navigate their relationship.

What does it involve for you as a participant?

If both you and your twin accept in participating in this research, an interview that will last approximately one hour takes place at your convenient time and date. You will choose your preferred location where to meet. With your consent, I will record the interview so that I can

work on the analysis at a later stage. Quotations from the interviews might be used in my final presented work however confidentiality and anonymity will be respected. Under the Data Protection Act Chapter 586 of Maltese Law and the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) (EU2016/679), you, as participant have the right to access, rectify or erase the data concerning you. You can contact me or my tutor Ms Karen Bishop at any time before or after the interview process if you have any questions or preoccupations you need to discuss.

Voluntary Participation – Right to Refuse or Withdraw

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can decide to stop the interview process anytime without the need to provide a reason. If that would be the case, send an email to inform me. Additionally, you can withdraw your participation up to three weeks after the interview.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

I appreciate that safeguarding your confidentiality and anonymity is an important concern for you. I will ensure that any identifiable information about you does not find itself in any of my writing. I will change your name to a pseudonym of your choice and be using it throughout my research. The original interview recordings and transcriptions will be kept on a password protected laptop and encrypted hard drive to which only I will have access to them. Handwritten notes taken during the interview will be kept in a locked drawer. If you would like to, I will show you what I am writing so that you have the opportunity to ask for any changes you deem necessary. Once the final grade for the dissertation has been completed, all recordings and transcripts shall be destroyed.

Risks and Benefits

Risks are minimal, however if during the interview you show in any way that you are being distressed as some personal issues which might emerge, together, we will discuss whether you would wish to terminate the interview. Furthermore, I will discuss with you whether you would like to be referred for therapy to IFT-Malta's clinic or other professional services.

Sharing the Results

I will send you a copy of the completed research project containing the research findings. The completed research project will be submitted in partial completion of my Masters degree in Systemic Family Psychotherapy with the Institute of Family Therapy, Malta.

If you have any questions about any aspect of this process, please contact me:

Ms Justine Bugeja, Researcher – IFT

Mobile number: 00356 79546291

E-mail address: justine.bugeja@ift-malta.com

If at any point you feel the need to speak to my supervisor, Ms. Karen Bishop, Director, IFT-Malta, is contactable:

Ms. Karen Bishop, Supervisor – IFT Malta

Mobile number: 00356 79704058

E-mail address: karen.bishop@ift-malta.com

Kind regards,

Justine Bugeja

Appendix B: Consent Form

The lived experience of adult twins amidst the cultural and social constructs of twinship.

Please tick the statements below if you agree.

- ◯ I confirm that I have read and understood the information attached with this consent form and voluntarily I have agreed to participate in this research project detailed above.
- ◯ I understand that I am free to withdraw from the study up to 3 weeks after the interview, without giving a reason and without any consequences of any kind by contacting Justine Bugeja.
- ◯ I understand that if I do withdraw, any information about me will be permanently deleted.
- ◯ I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research, and any questions I have asked, have been answered to my satisfaction.
- ◯ I understand that I am free to contact the researcher to seek further clarification and information.
- ◯ I understand that all data published will be anonymous and that there will not be any connection between the personal information provided during the interview and the published data.
- ◯ I consent to be audio-recorded for the purpose of the research.

◯ I consent to my data being transcribed and that the data from the transcription will be kept confidential, and only the researcher and the tutor will have access to it and will be kept until successful completion of thesis.

◯ I understand that my identity will remain anonymous in any form of dissemination, written or otherwise.

◯ I understand that there are no known risks or hazards associated with participating in this study.

Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
_____	_____	_____

Appendix C: Interview Guide

1. Popular culture often portrays twins as having the ideal intimate relationship and are assumed to be each other's life partners, feeling lost without the other.

2. How do you think society looks at you within the various contexts you form part in? (educational system, youth groups, work, leisure, etc?)

3. The fact that you are twins, how did your parents treat you?

4. How do you describe your relationship with your parents?

5. What type of relationships, have you with your siblings, if any?

6. How do you describe your twin bond?

7. Describe the influence of your twin bond in the formation of other relationships, especially other intimate relationships?

8. When do you think, if so, you started to want to be more distinctive from your twin? Why?

9. Who do you turn to in times of distress or upsetting situations e.g., your twin, mother/father, partner. friends?

10. What does it mean to be a twin?

Ending question:

Suppose you are raising a twin pair yourself: how do you visualize their upbringing?

Appendix D: Transcripts Translations

4.1.1 Parents effectively impose twin identity on children.

Twin Pair: Brandon and Charles

Charles: When we were young, our parents loved dressing us the same. We kept wearing similar outfits until the age of 10.

Charles: Meta konna żgħar, il-ġenituri tagħna kienu jieħdu gost ilibsuna l-istess. Bqajna nilbsu l-istess outfits sakemm kellna 10 snin.

Twin Pair: Gabriella and George

Gabriella: Our mother used to make sure that we wore the same thing, the dungaree; for example, George used to wear it without a t-shirt, and I, being a girl, wear it with a t-shirt.

Gabriella: Il-mama' kienet tagħmilha biċ-ċert li nilbsu l-istess ħaġa, pereżempju, id-dungaree, George kien jilbsu mingħajr flok, u jiena, peress li tifla, kont nilbes t-shirt.

Twin Pair: Benjamin and Norbert

Norbert: When we used to go out shopping with mum, besides wearing the same outfits, we used to walk hand in hand, my brother and I.

Norbert: Meta konna immoru nixtru mal-mama', minbarra li konna nilbsu l-istess outfit, konna nimxu id f'id ħija u jiena.

4.1.2. Educators perceive and treat twins as one.

Twin Pair: Thea and Lara

Lara: It might be better being separate, as people might not compare us being in different classes, but again, me, as a person, it did bother me but did not break me, the comparison, erm, so, as Thea said, our bond will be of a lesser level if we were not at the same class.

Lara: Naħseb, kienet tkun aħjar li kieku konna separati, għax in-nies ma joqogħdux jqabblu jekk nkunu fi klassijiet differenti, imma, jiena, bħala persuna, ma kisritnix, li jikkumparaw, erm, hekk, kif qalet Thea, il-bond kienet tkun inqas, jekk ma konniex fl-istess klassi.

Twin Pair: Maris and Lydia

Maris: I was Lydia's shadow, she leads, and I follow. In class, knowing that Lydia was the spokesperson, teachers used to communicate only with her, and they assumed that by doing so, they communicated with me also.

Maris: Jiena kont id-dell ta' Lydia, hi tmexxi u jiena nimxi warajha. Fil-klassi, naf li hemm Lydia bħala spokesperson, l-għalliema kienu jikkomunikaw magħha biss, u billi jagħmlu hekk, jassumu li qed jikkomunikaw miegħi ukoll.

Lydia: Yes, she was always a reflection of me. I was always independent. It did not bother me being the leader of the pair. I always did what I wished to do, yet I always asked her whether she wished to join. Join me or not, I always continued to pursue my desires and dreams.

Lydia: Iva, dejjem kienet id-dell tiegħi. Jiena dejjem kont indipendenti. Ma kontx niddejjaq nkun il-leader tagħna t-tnejn. Dejjem għamilt dak li xtaqt jiena, pero' dejjem staqsejtha jekk tridx tiġi jew le. Tiġi jew le, jiena xorta bqajt nagħmel kollox biex insegwi x-xewqat u l-ħolm tiegħi.

Maris: On entering sixth Form, I purposely enrolled in the same subjects as her because I had said that if I won't be in the same class, I would stop studying. *laughingly* .... I took the same subjects, but we were allocated different classes. So here we go…it was a problem. My father had to speak to the Head of school to be placed together.

*Maris: X'ħin dħalna Sixth Form, jiena apposta ħadt l-istess suġġetti bħalha għax għedt li jekk mhux se nkun fl-istess klassi magħha, ħa nieqaf nistudja. *tidħak* Ħadt l-istess suġġetti, imma poġġewna fi klassijiet differenti. Heq, hawn aħna … kienet problema. Missieri kellu jkellem lil Kap tal-iskola biex ipoġġina fl-istess klassi.*

Lydia*:* I knew that she had the potential to succeed and therefore, it would be a pity if she did not continue her studies, so I encouraged my father to intervene.

Lydia: Kont naf li għandha l-potenzjal li tirnexxi, u għalhekk, kienet tkun ħasra li ma tkomplix l-istudju tagħha, għalhekk għedt lil missieri biex jintervjeni.

Maris: Nowadays, knowing that I found it challenging being alone for the first time during my first year at the university, today, if I had the choice, I would separate

twins from a young age to gain their own identity. Everyone learns how to be responsible and independent.

Maris: Illum, li naf li sibtha diffiċli li kont waħdi għal ewwel darba fl-ewwel sena tiegħi l-universita', illum il-ġurnata, kieku kelli għażla, kont nissepara lit-tewmin minn eta' żgħira biex jakkwistaw l-identita' tagħhom individwali. Kulħadd jitgħallem ikun responsabbli u independenti.

4.2.1. The separation-individual process in adolescent twins

Twin Pair: Maris and Lydia

Lara: Once we reached 8, 9 or 10, we had our own clothes and started developing our style, but then we went two significant extremes. I became the ultimate girly girl, wearing pink most of the time, with skirts and a handbag.

Lara: Minn meta kellna 8, 9, 10 snin, kellna l-ħwejjeġ tagħna u beda jkollna l-istil differenti tagħna, però, imbagħad spiċċajna morna żewġ estremi kompletament. Jiena sirt 'the ultimate girly girl', nilbes r-roża l-ħin kollu, bid-dublett u l-handbag.

Twin Pair: Thea and Lara

Thea: hmm, and I was the ultimate tomboy; you will not catch me dead in a skirt, my hair pulled up, with a baseball cap and gym shoes.

Thea: hmmm u jiena 'the ultimate tomboy'; qatt ma kont se tarani b'dublett, xagħri miġbur, beritta u papoċċ.

4.3.1 Growing up together strengthens twins' co-relationship

Twin Pair: Gabriella and George

Gabriella: Our closeness is due to growing up together.

Gabriella: Aħna naqblu daqsekk, minħabba l-fatt li kbirna flimkien.

George: We grew up together most of our childhood and the fact that nowadays, as adults, we have the same circle of friends, and go out together, our connection remains strong.

George: Kbirna ħafna flimkien, l-aktar waqt it-tfulija tagħna, u l-fatt, li illum bħala adulti, għandna l-istess ċirku ta' ħbieb u noħorġu flimkien, aħna bqajna verament maqugħdin.

Twin Pair: Thea and Lara

Lara: I should be recognised as an individual before I am seen as a twin.

Lara: Għandi nkun rikonoxxutha bħala persuna individwali qabel ma nidher bħala t-tewmija.

Twin Pair: Maris and Lydia

Maris: Spending so time growing up with my twin had led me to become overdependent on my co-twin.

Maris: Li qattajt ħafna ħin nikber mat-tewmija tiegħi, spiċċajt niddependi żżejjed fuq oħti t-tewmija.

4.4.1. The twin bond intimates romantic partners.

Twin Pair: Thea and Lara

Thea: Erm, yes, three separate incidents claimed that we, as twins, are too close; that is, our bond is too intimidating. The prospective partners think the relationship would be between the three; obviously, it would not, but anyway, they are intimidated by our bond.

Thea: Erm, iva, 3 inċidenti separate, fejn qalulna li aħna, bħala twins, maqugħdin wisq, u li l-bond tagħna jsibuha intimidanti. L-għarajjes prospettivi tagħna jħossu li r-relazzjoni tispiċċa bejn tlieta, ovjament, mhux se tkun hekk, pero', huma iħossuhom intimidati bil-bond tagħna.

Twin Pair: Benjamin and Norbert

Norbert: It is a weird thing because, for example, the prospective partner likes Benjamin; I think he would like me too, having the same face, everything the same, then for this person, it would be weird to go out with twins.

Norbert: Hija xi ħaġa stramba għax pereżempju, il-partner jieħu grazzja ma' Benjamin; jiena nassumi li jieħu grazzja miegħi ukoll... għandna l-istess wiċċ, kollox l-istess, allura, għal din il-persuna, tkun vera stramba li joħroġ ma' tewmin.

4.4.3. Other twins view prospective partners as a threat to the sibling bond

Twin Pair: Brandon and Charles

Brandon: He had a girlfriend, and she broke our bond and separated us; she was jealous of certain things… that was when I lost my brother".

Brandon: Kelli tfajla u din kissret il-bond li kellna u sseparatna; kienet tgħir għal ċertu affarijiet … dak kien meta jiena tlift lil ħija.

Charles: Jealousy was involved; she hated my brother, and she broke the bond; …. from my side, we spent six months without any communication.

Charles: Kien hemm l-għira involuta, ma kinitx tmur tajjeb ma' ħija u kissirt dik il-bond….minn naħa tiegħi….qattajna sitt xhur mingħajr ebda kuntatt.

Brandon: I used to finnd excuses to avoid meeting with him. His attitude and behaviour hurt me.

Brandon: Kont nsib ħafna skużi biex nevita li niltaqa' miegħu. L-attitudni tiegħu u l-imġieba tiegħu weġġawni.

4.5.1 Elder siblings hold on to their unique position in the hierarchy of the family system.

Twin Pair: Maris and Lydia

Lydia: When he was young, he used to tell our mother, why did you get two? One would have been enough, so he initially took it badly. He was alone for four years, and suddenly, two other individuals arrived.

Lydia: Meta kien żgħir, kien jgħid lil ommna, għalfejn ġibt tnejn? Waħda kienet tkun biżżejjed, għal bidu kien ħadha ħazina ħafna. Kien waħdu għal erba' snin u f'daqqa waħda, spiċċaw ġew żewġ individwi.

4.5.2. Perceived parental differential treatment by the twins.

Twin Pair: Thea and Lara

Lara: Mum prefers our elder sister; it was a thing for a very long time.

Lara: Ommna tipperferi lil oħtna l-kbira, kienet xi ħaġa ta' minn dejjem.

Thea: The actual reason is that we used to push her aside or ignore her (referring to the elder sister) as we were closer; we always had company, so mum used to give her more attention, as we had each other's attention.

Thea: Ir-raġuni vera kienet li aħna konna nwarbuha jew ma nagħtux kasha,

(jirreferru għal oħthom il-kbira) għax aħna konna aktar maqugħdin; dejjem kellna l-kumpanija, allura, ommna kienet tati iktar attenzjoni lilha peress li aħna kellna l-attenzjoni ta' xulxin.

Twin Pair: Maris and Lydia

Maris: Mum does not admit it; she prefers our elder brother.

Maris: Il-mama' ma tammethiex din, imma tippreferi lil ħuna l-kbir.

Lydia: … because we always had each other, even when we used to play, we always had each other. It was as if our elder brother was always alone.

Lydia: .... għax aħna dejjem kellna lil xulxin, anke meta konna nilagħbu, dejjem kellna lil xulxin. Kien qisu li ħuna l-kbir dejjem kien waħdu.