

Deliberately divided: Inside the controversial study of twins and triplets raised apart

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The scientific study of twins separated and reared apart burst into both popular and academic consciousness in 1979 when Thomas Bouchard and his colleagues at the University of Minnesota revealed the story of the “Jim Twins,” serendipitously reunited after 39 years, and their uncanny similarities. But not all separations are accidental or incidental. Nancy Segal's *Deliberately Divided* unsparingly examines the activities initiated at the Louise Wise Services adoption agency in New York City starting in 1960 where a policy of separating twins dovetailed with a research program involving 12 years of follow-up visits and data collection, about which all of the adoptive parents and the twins—and in one case triplets—were kept in the dark. The full extent of this study program became apparent only very gradually in the 30 years following its termination in 1980, largely through the activities of journalists, investigative reporters, and documentary filmmakers.

Segal's purposes were twofold: to advocate for justice for the twins and families involuntarily inducted into this study, and to assign responsibility for the program's conception, rationale, and continuance. She accomplished the first of these by tracking down not only the twins that were separated and studied but also several others who were separated and not studied, interviewing them as far as availability allowed, and assembling the results into often poignant personal testimonies fully respectful of her respondents' sensibilities and voices. The second aim met formidable obstacles familiar to any historian: uncooperative and/or dissembling interviewees; the passage of time which has removed most of the principal players from the scene; and archival restrictions. While the evidence gathered so far strongly suggests intentionality and complicity between those setting adoption policies and those conducting the longitudinal study to provide separated twins for study and to maintain their separation during the study period, the documents that would be most conclusive to proving this remain archivally locked, by stipulation of the agency and the principal researcher, until 2065.

Stylistically, the book oscillates between documentary narrative, whodunit, exposé, legal argument, insider intimacy, and academic circumspection, with much doubling-back and foreshadowing. Keeping track of these streams and the many persons involved is helped by the dense references and a logically constructed and accurate index. While it is more a record of a recent investigative journalistic quest rather than a work of history per se, the book contains much material that could interest historians of psychology and psychiatry. The description of the opportunistic and contingent nature of this episode of longitudinal twin research along with the evident prevarication and temporizing of those carrying it out has affinities with the recent debunking of apparently settled research (e.g., Calahan, 2019). The role of media at its highest levels (from Mike Wallace and Walter Cronkite in the 1980s to CNN today) in both maintaining and unveiling the program's secrecy over time should interest those at the interface of psychology and popular culture. An example of the level of intrigue surrounding the intersection of media with this twin study, as well as of Segal's persistence and thoroughness, is the letter sent to the committee reviewing documentary films for the 2019 Oscars. Its author and 52 signatories asserted that the film *Three Identical Strangers* (Wardle, 2018), which recounts the history of the set of triplets separated by Louise Wise Services and

subsequently studied, unfairly impugned the activities and motives of the study's researchers. Segal (not a signer) not only supplied this letter but also contacted nearly all of the signers (three refused to respond) and abstracted and published, anonymously, all their comments. This is typical of the level of detail throughout. Those working on the history of research ethics and informed consent will engage with Segal's challenge to the idea promoted by some of the Louise Wise program's defenders that the relative laxity of ethics codes circa 1960 is a mitigating or even exonerating factor for intrusive research carried out without knowledge or consent. Finally, and most importantly for the history of human sciences and clinical practice, Teo and Ball (2009) identify twin research as a prime area where ideology and insider status is crucial in determining the direction of research and its situation in a historical context. Segal cannot claim to be an actual insider to the Louise Wise program and its consequences, but nevertheless, as a veteran of the Minnesota Study of Twins Reared Apart as well as the author of several other books and hundreds of research articles on twins, is a well-placed and articulate representative of twin research at many levels. The multiple and dense professional networks described in *Deliberately Divided*, along with Segal's clearly and forthrightly expressed points of view, provide a strong foundation for extending the chronology of twin research and its associated agendas into our current era.

REFERENCES

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