

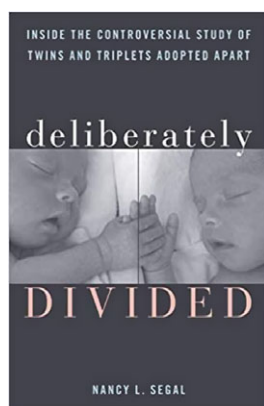
Book Review

Deliberately Divided: Inside the Controversial Study of Twins and Triplets Adopted Apart

Nancy Segal, Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, 2021, 491 pp, ISBN: 9781538132852 (hardback), 9781538132869 (electronic)

Reviewed by Veronika V. Odintsova, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, the Netherlands

Email: v.v.odintsova@vu.nl



The book *Deliberately Divided* is one of those cases in which the story shown on screen presents a demand for a more detailed analysis. The films, *The Twinning Reaction* and *Three Identical Strangers*, describe the events around a cohort of triplets and twins who were separated at birth in the USA in the 1960s. These events were not only shocking, but raised questions and internal controversy in the audience, including for twin researchers around the world. The five identical twin pairs and one set of triplets were given up for adoption by their mothers at around 6 months to the adoption agency Louise Wise Services, and separated and given to different families. The adoptive parents were not informed about the existence of co-twins or co-triplets, or the medical history of the biological families, but gave their consent to participate in a study of ‘child development’ conducted by the Child Development Center in New York. The children were followed by researchers who knew all about the circumstances of the separated twins and triplets during the first 12 years of their life. On becoming adults, one by one the children found out the truth and searched for information about their biological parents through DNA testing companies and via the media. Their emotional first reunion meetings and stories appeared in TV shows and journals. The small scientific group of American researchers known as the Louise Wise Service (LWS) – Child Development Center (CDC) Twin study,

led by Professor Peter Neubauer, with the support of the adoption agency, has created a precedent that may become a stumbling block in collaboration between scientists and research participants around the world and linger for a very long time.

The book can be divided into two parts. The first part includes scrupulously presented material of all the cases of twins and triplets who took part in the LWS-CDC study. The information was collected from all possible sources: interviews, articles from the press and from highly specialized journals read only by small groups of professionals, emails, and telephone conversations. Sometimes participants refused to meet with the author, but still contributed to the story with an explanation for their refusal. We find out details about the biological families, the twins’ birth, the first months the twins spent together, the adoptive families and life after separation, the reunion between twins, and life afterwards. This part reads as an engaging detective story. So many parallel lines of discovery are described, many of which are tragedies, of the sensitive reactions to the discovery of being a divided twin, with sometimes a long search for the co-twin, or the loss of one of the twins due to suicide or illness. At times it seems as if an invisible reality inexorably sets in motion certain physiological mechanisms. This determinism is associated with the history of the study participants (often psychopathological diagnoses in biological parents), vulnerability to emotional and stressful events, and possibly not yet studied long-term consequences of the twin bond and separation.

The second part of the book provides new facts around LWS-CDS and the author’s explanations of their conduct, based on the understanding of the case in three dimensions — legalities, framework for research, and moralities.

The genre of the book is different from the documentaries. As Erik Barnouw notes in his book *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*, a documentary cannot consider ‘the truth’, but rather the testimony of a fact or event within a social and historical context, when ‘each selection is an expression of his [documentary filmmaker’s] point of view’ (Barnouw, 1993). The film *Three Identical Strangers*, as a documentary, shows that part of reality that is available to the film director with his worldview, the facts he sees, the emotions and questions that have arisen, and all in the context of cinema. The film emerges from the context of already existing television shows, investigative journalism, cherry-picked facts, and triggering.

But is it possible that the scientific community would have given its explanation and reacted to the described events much earlier and before the films were produced? And why did not this happen? Even if many scientists did not know about the study, there were those who at some stage had tested separated twins and felt uncomfortable (‘something that was not quite right’, ‘doesn’t feel good’), or who had heard of the study and discussed it. Why did these representatives of science not initiate an investigation into the events and assumptions of the study, or publish an explanation to the public as soon as the first interviews with the triplets appeared in the 1980s, or when Neubauer and Neubauer (1990) published *Nature’s Thumbprint* and explicitly presented the cases of identical twins separated at birth?

In sociology, there is a concept known as ‘walls of silence’, which is a phenomenon when witnesses and participants in events

remain silent and do not disclose errors, misconduct, or crimes (Cohen, 2001). It is quite amazing how dense the ‘walls of silence’ can be when dazzling ideas are intertwined in which many years of scientific research under the rubric of secrecy have been invested, and the emotions of people who discover that their fate has been determined without their awareness are completely disregarded. Nowadays, we are more likely to talk about the ethics of artificial intelligence than about the ethics of human intelligence.

For *Three Identical Strangers*, at least two letters of protest appeared in response to the film and created cracks in the walls of silence. Earlier in her previous book, *Twin Mythconceptions*, Nancy Segal (2017) used a myth-debunking technique regarding twins. And this time, the technique was applied with full descriptions of what errors are contained in the use of facts by an authoritative group of scientists in a letter criticizing the film and preventing it from receiving ‘authoritative’ awards. Despite all the resistance, Segal managed to interview or obtain interviews with some of the researchers who participated in the LWS-CDC study, as well as their colleagues and relatives, putting together an incredible archive, the list of which is about 100 pages at the end of the book. When the question ‘How could this happen?’ arises, an unbiased position of an expert who takes the courage to answer the question and is not afraid to be in the cross-hairs, is extremely important.

Nancy Segal is an extraordinary expert who has been devoted to twin studies for most of her professional life. Thanks to this experience, her presentation encompasses much more than a single research project. She knows the detailed stories of hundreds of twins from the unique cohorts of twins who were reared apart or switched-at-birth (Segal, 2012). Her talent as a writer has presented readers with several books on these topics, and perhaps no one could better tell the story of the LWS-CDC study, which has shocked the viewers of the TV shows and films about the study. It is quite easy to take the side of the creator of the hottest news. But truth requires sensitivity, expertise in the field of the research object, and Socrates’ ability to catch and explain contradictions and change optics, to reveal the motivation of all participants in the described events. In this book, Segal managed to accomplish those feats.

What distinguishes this book from Segal’s previous ones is precisely the analytical search for the motivations of not only the twins, but also the researchers themselves and the adoption agency involved. This is where we learn much more about the other side of

twin research — often invisible, and impersonally presented in mass media as ‘scientists have made a discovery . . .’. The LWS-CDC study was not initiated with a scientific perspective, but from the belief that to grow up with a twin (being also from a family with psychiatric anamnesis) could be harmful to children. When Segal seeks the researchers’ motivation, she provides an excellent sociological description of the scientific context of the time, and approaches it from the mindset of those surrounded by ideas circulating about psychoanalysis, nature and nurture, genetics and the environment. This was a time just after the discoveries of molecular biology that irrevocably turned science towards zooming in on the chemistry of human life. In fact, this book is unique in its analysis of human delusions — not just philistine delusions due to ignorance or emotional upheavals, but highly intellectual, argued delusions regarding the Machiavellian postulate ‘the end justifies the means’. This means that it finds a place on the shelf not only of scientific literature but also of philosophical and legal literature.

The scientific value of twins is undeniable. The classical twin study is a very clever and elegant study design, based on two types of twins — identical and fraternal (mono- and dizygotic), developing in parallel from the moment of conception. Twins around the world are active in scientific research and have contributed to many discoveries in the fields of psychopathology, genetics, behavior, and development. As Segal notes, ‘Twins usually enjoy being in research because they are eager to learn more about themselves and are happy to advance scientific understanding in the process’ (Segal, 2021, p. 21).

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