

Influences on the Use of Legal and Illegal Substances (2003)

Dr. Kenneth Kendler's study about the use and abuse of certain legal and illegal drugs continues. 'This study examines the reasons people decide to use or not use substances including': caffeine, tobacco, alcohol and other drugs. Study staff have recruited and interviewed approximately 600 pairs of male twins who took part in the Stress and Coping Twin Project in the past.

Environmental Influences on Depression, Anxiety, and Alcohol Use (2003)

Dr. Carol Prescott and Dr. Kenneth Kendler are looking at the influence of life experiences on depression, anxiety, and alcohol use in a new study. This project continues the earlier work of the Stress and Coping Twin Project. This new study consists of three parts:

- 1) completing an interview with questions about physical and emotional health, life experiences, and substance use;
- 2) filling out questionnaires; and
- 3) doing some psychological tasks.

Researchers also hope to collect information on how the brain processes information by asking people to do some tasks using pencil and paper. The first phase of interviews with twins began recently, and the goal is to include up to 300 twin pairs who have participated previously in the Stress and Coping Twin Project.

Neuropsychological Assessments for Temperament (2003)

Dr. Kenneth Kendler continues research to understand why some people are more vulnerable to anxiety and depression than others. His latest effort is a small project that incorporates a newly developed field called affective neuroscience (AN). AN is the study of the human brain pathways that influence moods such as depression and anxiety. AN methods include approaches such as carefully recording people's facial expressions or recording how easily people are startled by a loud noise. The goal of this study is to identify the brain functions through which genetic factors influence temperament and vulnerability to negative and positive emotions. People who take part in the study will be asked to do a variety of tasks, some on computer and some with pencil and paper. The research team hopes to start contacting people for the study in the first half of 2003. They hope to include approximately 60 pairs of identical twins who have previously participated in the Stress and Coping Twin Project.

Parental Effects on Childhood Behavior (Children of Twins- 2003)

Does a person suffer from health or behavior problems because of genetic make-up, or because of the environment in which he or she was raised? This debate, often referred to as "nature versus nurture", is a popular area of research. Past research has shown that very often, both genes and environment influence a person's health and behavior.

Dr. Judy Silberg is tackling this “nature and nurture” question in a new way. Her latest research project aims to identify the factors that help children grow up healthy as well as those that can put some children at risk for problems later in life, especially behavioral problems and depression. The in-depth portion of the study will involve more than 2,000 adult twin pairs and their children. For the first time on this large of a scale, researchers will move beyond the traditional study of twin pairs alone and explore the genetic relationships of multiple family generations and interactions.

Children of identical twins are cousins, but with a stronger genetic similarity. Since their twin parents share the same DNA, the cousins share more of the same genes and are genetically similar as half-brothers or sister. By comparing environments in families with identical twin parents, Dr. Silberg and her colleagues hope to untangle the roles that genes and the environment play in putting children at risk for certain conditions. They hope to better understand, if a child has a certain behavior problem, how much of it is due to inheritance and how much is due to the environment in which the child grows up.

For this study, the MATR is contacting twins who indicate that they and/or their twin have children between the ages of 4 and 17 years old. The study consists of 2 parts: a brief telephone survey with parents and children about their health, feelings, and behavior, and for a smaller group of families, an in-depth home interview.

Twinless Twins

As most people realize twins share a very special bond. This bond is formed even before birth, as twins are constant companions as they grow and develop in their mother’s womb. Many twins continue to develop this bond after birth, and lead a long and happy life together. Tragically though, many twins must deal with the loss of their twin. These surviving twins are referred to as “Twinless Twins,” and they have many unique needs that, unfortunately, may be overlooked.

The loss of a twin at any age has been shown to leave a lasting effect on surviving twins. Those who lose a twin before, during, or shortly after birth may never know their twin. However, surviving twins who learn of their deceased twin in adolescence or adulthood have said that they felt an emptiness or incompleteness their whole life that only made sense once they learned they were twins. Twins who experience the death of their twin in childhood or adulthood usually live with a sense of loss for the rest of their lives. They have never known life without their twin, and the adjustment can be slow and painful. Some twins have reported that they feel an obligation to take on characteristics of their deceased twin. As on surviving twin, Norris McWhirter, stated so eloquently in a book written about the loss of his twin, he had a choice after his twin died, “to exist painfully as half a person or take on the strength of both.”

The surviving twins are not the only family members who are profoundly affected by the death of their twin. Parents must also face the reality that one of their children had died. When this death occurs while the twin is a newborn, parents have the double job of adjusting to caring for one newborn, while grieving the loss of another. When the death

of one twin occurs in childhood, parents may feel helpless because they may not know how to relate to the surviving twin as a single individual. It is a very important for parents to appropriately work through their own grief, as it can have a profound effect on the surviving twin's understanding of the loss, as well as his or her self-esteem.

We at the MATR recognize that surviving twins and their families have unique needs, and may not be aware of available resources including organizations that have helpful websites. The international organization, Twinless Twins, located at www.twinlesstwins.org, provides information and resources for surviving twins and their families. This organization (founded by Dr. Raymond W. Brandt, an identical twin whose co-twin was killed at age 20) has approximately 1,900 surviving twin members. Twin less Twins offers a newsletter, publications on twin loss; contact information for a support group, and an annual conference where surviving twins may get helpful information and share their experiences with each other. (Dr. Raymond Brandt also wrote a book, *Twin Loss*, which discusses all aspects of the loss and also speaks to the family members on how to help the surviving twin.)

The second organization, founded by Lynne Schulz, is the Murrayland Lutheran Stillborn Infant Support Service: Specializing in Twin Loss. Mrs. Schulz is a volunteer grief counselor and mother of twins, one of whom was stillborn. Mrs. Schulz lives in South Australia and specializes in the area of twin loss. Visit this organization's website at www.lm.net.au/~schul/. As a resource for parents who have lost one twin, this website offers everything from personal stories to research papers in twin loss, to links to relate websites.

Mrs. Schulz has also written about her own experience in a book entitled *The Diary*. She will soon be publishing a sequel, *The Survivor*, which focuses on the needs and experiences of surviving twins and their family members.

Special Twin Birthdays

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Recent news reports have highlighted some special twin birthday in Virginia and North Carolina. In Charlotte, twin sisters were born in different years. The Associated press reported that Laney Danielle Love as born at 11:51 PM on December 31st, 2002, and sister Lauren Tegan Love arrived at 12:32 AM on January 1, 2003. Their parents said that the end of the year in their house will always bring a big party.

The Richmond Times-Dispatch recently told the stories of two sets of senior twins who had milestone birthdays. On December 25th, 2002, Mable Furgerson and Myrtle Moore celebrated their 90th birthdays. Born in Chesterfield County near Richmond, "M & M," as they have been called, have lived through a lot – including the Great Depression, personal illnesses, and loss of loved ones. They say that they've been able to get through life's challenges by relying on "the three F's" – Family, Faith, and Friends.

Throughout their lives, Myrtle and Mable usually did things together – including getting into trouble as kids, sleeping together (until they got married), and getting sick. They don't live together now, but they try to talk or visit with each other every day. Mable still drives a car and likes to bring pies to her friends who aren't able to get out and about. Altogether, the twin have had 23 children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great grandchildren.

Richmond twins Willie Alcorn Wells and Nannie Alcorn Wright celebrated their 100th birthdays on January 5, 2003. The twins moved in together about 25 years ago, after both became widows. They like to shop and go out to lunch almost every day and prefer seafood and Chinese and Mexican food. Last year the twin went to an 'N Sync concert in Washington, DC, where they had third-row seats and backstage passes thanks to their nephew, a manager for one of the opening acts. They met 'N Sync band members Joey and Lance and had dinner with members of some of the show's opening bands. They've also recently visited Sea World in Orlando, Florida, where, Willie said, "We really had a time!"

Willie and Nannie were born near Ruffin, NC, and grew up on a farm. They traveled to Richmond in 1923 to attend nursing school and were roommates there. They have spent most of their lives together. Nannie said that they have never fought – and Willie added, "No one will love me as much as she does."