

Separate or Together?

As the time for school rolls around, parents of twins have a big decision to make... should I separate my twins or keep them together in the classroom? There are a lot of points to consider when discussing this issue with teachers and other school officials. We have compiled a list of pros and cons to help make the decision easier. It is important to remember that no decision is irreversible. Parents and school officials should be flexible in determining what is best for your children. Classroom placement should be reviewed yearly. Also, your twins can be the best resource as to whether they want to stay together or be apart.

Pros of keeping twins together:

- Multiples get a sense of security and comfort from one another
- Most twins work well together (One twin can help her/his co-twin excel in the skills that s/he may lack)
- Keeps parents' life simpler by having only one teacher and one set of homework (cuts down on teacher comparisons)
- Twins can learn independence through working in separate groups and socializing with others in the classroom
- Teachers are more likely to understand how the children operate as multiples (twins teach the teacher about the special bond of multiples)
- Avoid the stress that would be put on twins if they were to be separated against their will. Stress could cause problems socially and academically.

Cons of keeping twins together:

- If one twin is more academically advanced than her/his co-twin, then separation may be the best option
- Teachers are likely to confuse the identities of the twins, possibly upsetting the twins
- Twins are more likely to be compared by the teacher and other students
- Twins may not be able to operate as individuals within the classroom
- Some twins may demonstrate disruptive behavior if placed together
- Twins may compete with one another, so that their main goal is to keep up with or beat their co-twin
- If they are closely dependent, they may have problems socializing with other children in the classroom
- There may be lack of privacy if one twin reports on the progress and activities of the other to parents

Resources:

1. "Raising Twins: From Birth Through Adolescence" by Eileen Pearlman, PhD, and Jill Canon
2. "The Art Of Parenting Twins" by Patricia Malstrom and Janet Poland
3. Latrobe Twins Study, "Twins In School" produced by Australian Multiple Birth Association (limited availability on line at <http://www.amba.org.au/>)

"Stupid Twin Questions"

Per our informal poll of MATR staff, the following are questions most commonly posed to twins and their parents.

- Are you twins?
- Do you have ESP?
- Can your parents tell you apart?
- How did your parents know that you were twins?
- If I hit you will your twin feel it?
- Do you have the same parents?
- Do you ever switch places?
- Are you the same age?
- Who's the oldest?
- Are your boy and girl twins identical?
- How do you tell each other apart?
- Why aren't you dressed alike?
- Which one is the good/bad twin?

If you have been asked a funny question that was not listed, please e-mail us at matr@vcu.edu.

Twin Myths

Twinning skips a generation.

Dizygotic (fraternal) twinning, or the tendency for a woman to produce more than one egg at a time, is hereditary, but monozygotic (identical) twinning has never been shown to have any genetic factors.

One will always be the leader and one the follower.

Many twins have a balance in their relationship where first one then the other is the leader. One may also be the dominant twin in an aspect of their relationship while the other takes the lead in another.

Identical twins have the same fingerprints.

Although identical twins share the same DNA, their fingerprints are never exactly alike. Identical twins have highly similar ridge patterns (the technical term for lines on your finger), but certain environmental factors cause the ridges to be a little different on each twin. For example, if the twins encounter a virus while in the womb, finger ridge patterns can be changed. According to Dr. Walter Nance at VCU's Department of Human Genetics, fingerprints can be one of the best ways to distinguish between identical twins.

Twins have a secret language that you won't understand and will cause problems with proper speech later.

Some twins do exhibit what some refer to as "twin language." Many times, this language is a series of short cuts that they use with one another. These short cuts partly result from all the time they spend with one another. As long as proper speech develops by preschool/kindergarten age, there should be no problem. If you are worried about the speech of your twins, please consult a pediatrician for an expert opinion.

When one twin dies, the survivor is no longer a twin.

One who is born a twin is always a twin. The death of a twin, at any age, can be devastating and sadly, loss of a co-twin for a child or infant may also deprive them of the unique experience of a twin relationship.

Address Changes/ Questions/ Comments

Please let us know if your address or phone number has changed or will change soon. This will help us get information to you more efficiently. Write, call our toll-free number 1-800-URA-TWIN (872-8946) or email us (matr@vcu.edu) with your updates and comments.

Keep those Pictures and Stories Coming!!!

Thank you to everyone who has sent in photographs and twin stories. Please continue to send us pictures of yourself and your twin (adults as well as young twins) and intriguing twin stories. Remember to include full names and nicknames on the back of photographs. We will use as many pictures as we can in our publications and website.



MID-ATLANTIC *twin* REGISTRY
Medical College of Virginia of Virginia Commonwealth University
<http://www.matr.vcu.edu>
1-800-URA-TWIN (872-8946)

P.O. Box 980003, Richmond, VA 23298

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Twin Matters

A Family Newsletter from the Mid-Atlantic Twin Registry Volume VIII



In this Issue:

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A Message From the Directors

As you may know, this past fall kicked off many new studies at the MATR. We are still seeking participants for some of these studies as well as for some new studies that will be starting soon. While we always want twins of all ages, we are especially in need of adult twins for these health-related studies. Most of our participants are drawn from Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina, but the registry includes twins from all over the U.S.—as far away as Florida, California, New Mexico, and even other countries such as Italy, Germany and Australia.

Much of our data collection efforts would not be possible without our new team of research interviewers. We would like to introduce them to you.

- Allison Schreiber -

Allison hails from Ohio and is a graduate student in VCU's genetic counseling program.
- Kim Taylor -

Kim comes to us from California. In addition to working with the MATR, Kim is a genetic counselor with VCU's Department of Human Genetics.
- Liz Thomas -

Liz grew up in Northern Virginia and is a mother of three. She has a BS in Psychology and hopes to pursue a career in research.
- Mattie Coll -

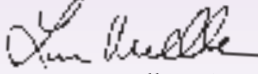
Mattie grew up in the Richmond area and has a Master's Degree in counseling. She is pursuing a second Master's Degree in Reading Education at the University of Virginia.
- Misty Gamble -


Misty comes to us, most recently, from North Carolina. She is an identical twin, who also happens to be a member of the MATR! She will be attending medical school in the fall.
- Patty Rubal -

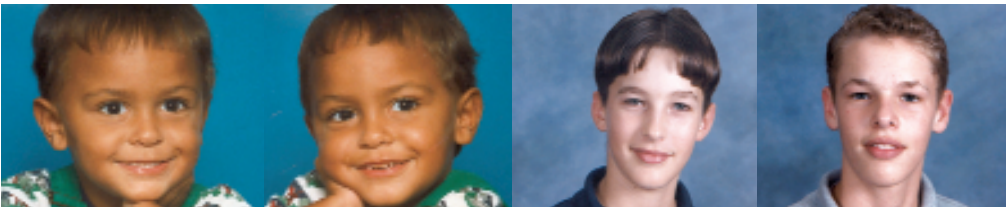
Patty is from Ohio and is a graduate student in VCU's genetic counseling program.



Sincerely,


Lenn Murrelle, MSPH, PhD


Linda Corey, PhD



DO YOU OR YOUR TWIN PULL YOUR HAIR?

Researchers at Regions Hospital in St. Paul, Minnesota, are seeking both identical and fraternal twins for a study on compulsive hair pulling. The researchers hope to learn if there might be a genetic cause for compulsive hair pulling, which is also called trichotillomania. The study does not involve any travel. Simple questionnaires and phone interviews are conducted with both twins in a pair. If it is not 100% clear whether you are identical or non-identical twins, the researchers will ask both of you to provide a cheek swabbing for genetic analysis. The study is funded by a grant from the HealthPartners Research Foundation. If you are interested in taking part in this study, please call the MATR at 1-800-URA TWIN (872-8946). Please mention the hair pulling study when you call.

More MATR Twin Stories

After 40 Years – We're Identical!

Our names are Jane and Lynn. We were born on December 31, 1960, at 11:52 AM (Jane) and 11:57 AM (Lynn). We were due on January 13, 1961, but our mom delivered 13 days early at Long Island Jewish Hospital in New York. We weighed in at 7 lbs., 10 ozs. each! Our parents, Jerry and Marion, had one other child, our 9-year-old brother, at the time of our birth.



indistinguishable—even our own mom cannot correctly identify which one of us calls on the phone unless we tell her! We also were told that identical twins can be “mirror images” of each other, and we were aware of our mirrored characteristics: Lynn is left-handed and Jane is right-handed, and we have identical cowlicks on opposite sides of our hairline as well.

Our mother had had a miscarriage the month before we were conceived and was delighted to find out that she was expecting once again. In November of 1960, she discovered that she was carrying twins. Since technology was not what it is today, she had no idea whether she was carrying identical or fraternal twins, but was told at the time of our birth that she had delivered fraternal twin girls. Our mother was 32 at the time of our conception. She was told that her age and the miscarriage may have contributed in producing fraternal twins. In addition to these factors, our father was a fraternal twin.

We were always skeptical of whether we were really fraternal, because we have always been similar in so many ways. Our early birth photos showed that we closely resembled each other. We grew up sharing friends and interests. We were always very close and loved being twins! We were always mistaken for each other to the point where our parents bought us initial necklaces to wear around our necks. While in college, we were both hired as managers at the same shopping mall and were constantly mistaken for each other. Customers thought that we were one person holding down two full-time jobs!

In recent years it became more apparent to us that our twin type may have been incorrectly identified. Even with age we began to look more alike. Our skin tones are the same and are prone to freckling. Our voices are

After working as a management consultant for two years, she realized that consulting wasn't for her. So, Amy decided to pursue producing, because it seemed like the perfect blend of business and creativity. Her first job in film was with October Films as Director of Operations and Administration. Through this job, she has met several influential people, including documentary film producer Eames Yates, who gave her the opportunity to co-produce *Suicide* for HBO. Since then, Amy has worked as a freelance producer and writer. She is now a documentary film producer in New York and has just finished co-producing a PBS documentary entitled *The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow*. She is



currently working on another film about the battle over sex education in a small Texas community. Amy and Lisa are currently in the process of raising money for their twin film project. The entire film will cost \$30,000. UCLA will contribute approximately \$10,000 for the project. All actors and crew will work for free. To cover the remaining expenses, Amy and Lisa are working with various twin organizations in search of funding. Amy says, “If 4,000 twins each gave \$5, we would be able to pay for the entire project.” The Kohns are also offering special thanks credits to anyone who donates money.

Amy and Lisa Kohn are accepting donations for the film at 333 East 43rd Street, 901, New York, NY 10017. Amy Kohn can also be contacted via e-mail at amykohn@yahoo.com for more information.

If you have a question of whether you and your twin (or your twins) are identical or fraternal, here are some clinics that handle zygosity testing. The MATR located these labs and clinics through Internet searches. The MATR is not endorsing any one of these labs, but is providing the information as a service to its participants.

| | DNA Diagnostics | Proactive Genetics | Genetics & IVF Institute | Beta Paternity Testing | Affiliated Genetics | Molecular Genetics Clinical Lab |
|-----------------|--|---|-----------------------------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| Location | Ohio | Massachusetts | Virginia (and other locations) | None specified | Utah | Florida |
| Website | www.dnacenter.com | www.proactivegenetics.com | www.givf.com | www.paternity-dna-test.com | www.affiliatedgenetics.com | www.allkids.org |
| Phone No. | 800-613-5768 | 781-639-5126 | 800-234-2528 (ask for Lonna Hall) | 800-798-3810 | 800-362-5559 801-582-4200 | lab: 727-892-8985 director: 727-892-8611 fax: 727-892-8367 |
| Email | N/A | lab@proactivegenetics.com info@proactivegenetics.com | givf@givf.com | N/A | service@affiliatedgenetics.com | N/A |
| DNA Sample | amniotic, blood, umbilical, cheek cell | cheek cell testing | blood and cheek cell | cheek cell and hair follicle | cheek cell | blood |
| Turnaround Time | 9 working days | 10 business days | 3-4 weeks | 15 working days | 10 working days | 2-4 weeks |
| Cost | Starts at \$400 | \$140 per pair | \$270 per person | \$290 per pair | \$120 per pair + \$10 (shipping and handling) | \$517 per pair |

Lights, Camera, Action!

Amy and Lisa Kohn are members of our own MATR family and in June will produce their short film entitled *Mad Twin*, which is a black comedy about the chaos that ensues when one of a set of identical twins decides to get a nose job.

Amy explains, “Although *Mad Twin* is a comedy, it explores the very serious issues of identity that we believe all twins struggle with: wanting to be individuals, but loving the cachet of being part of a special set; wanting to pursue individual goals, but also feeling a sense of competitiveness to perform equally well in all venues.”

Lisa adds, “Like most twins, we are very proud of being twins and feel that our relationship with each other is unique, wonderful and almost indescribable to someone who is not a twin. *Mad Twin* delves into the wonders and frustrations of being a twin in a way that has never been done before. We hope that this project will finally show non-twins what it feels like to be a twin.”

Amy and Lisa aren't newcomers when it comes to film. The two entered the world of film after both graduating from Stanford University and began writing together while living in New York. During that time they wrote two screenplays: *Call Me Lisa Loeb*, which made it into the semi-finals of the Sundance lab; and *Clown Love*, a romantic comedy about three young women finding their way in New York.

Lisa is an award-winning writing and directing student in her final year of the MFA (masters film program) at UCLA. Prior to that she worked freelance in film and television as an assistant editor and script reader. She began her career working as the Executive Assistant to the head of the HBO Documentary and Family Department. Her award-winning documentary, *Apart From My Doll*, was seen at festivals throughout the country. *Killer Cello* appeared this year at the Austin Film Festival.

Amy entered the field a little differently.