‘Beings in their Own Right’? Exploring Children’s Sibling and Twin Relationships in the Minority World

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Abstract

This paper examines the contributions that the sociological study of sibship and twinship in the Minority World can make to childhood studies. It argues that in providing one forum within which to explore children’s social relationships we can add to our understanding of children’s interdependence and challenge the myth of the autonomous agent. As emergent subjects, both children and adults are in a process of ‘becoming’. However, this does not mean that they can ‘become’ anything they choose to. The notion of negotiated interdependence (Punch, 2002) is useful in helping us to grasp the contingent nature of children’s agency.

Keywords:

Being

Agency

Becoming

Interdependence

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Sibship

Introduction

Traditionally, research on siblings has been contained within the discipline of psychology. Here, the main focus has been to explore the impact of age spacing, birth order and gender on children's development, personality, educational outcomes and future lives. This research has relied heavily on the accounts provided by parents and teachers (see Edwards *et al.* 2005a). However, notwithstanding this, there is now a growing body of research on the sociology of sibship which takes account of children's own views, attitudes and experiences. Paralleling the defining tenets of childhood studies, this research has positioned children as active social agents. Some key emergent themes within this research include children's negotiations of intra-generational power relationships (McNamee 1999, Punch 2008a), gendered features of children's sibling relationships (Edwards *et al.* 2005b), sibship and identity (Edwards *et al.* 2006), children's contributions to the division of labour (Song 1999, Punch 2001, Evans 2010) and the nature of sibling interactions (Punch 2005, Punch 2008b, McIntosh and Punch 2009).

Research on twins has taken a slightly different trajectory. Typically, twins have been (and still are) used as methodological tools to test for the relative influences of heredity and environment. Research on twins has therefore been dominated by psychology, medicine and biology where researchers have investigated the relative influence of heredity in shaping

disease, health and morbidity, personality, temperament and intelligence (Stewart 2003). Other studies (see Burlingham 1952, Koch 1966) have been more interested in how the 'twin situation' and the 'twin relationship' impact on twins' lives. Although there is a relatively developed body of anthropological research examining cross-cultural understandings of twinship (for example see Corney 1977, Levi-Strauss 1995, Diduk 2001, Frazer [1922] 1996, Evans-Pritchard [1956] 1977), there is still very little sociological research about twins and that which has been conducted has been from a Minority World perspective. For example, Stewart (2000, 2003) has provided an extensive overview of cultural discourses and academic theorising on twins and pointed towards the significance of a sociological approach to twinship. As part of this theoretical overview, she examined public attitudes towards twins in Britain. More recently, I (Author 2005, 2010) have examined how twins perform and negotiate their identities in Britain.

This paper examines the contributions that theory and research relating to the sociology of sibship and twinship can make to childhood studies. It begins by outlining some elements of theorizing on sibship and twinship and then moves on to examine how this might help us develop our understanding of children's agency.

Theorising sibling relationships sociologically

Sociological research on siblings and twins tends to either come from or support a broadly social constructionist perspective. Of course, there are different degrees of social constructionism and authors vary in how much they emphasise action and structural constraints. Some have also developed a multi-disciplinary approach, combining elements of social constructionism with other perspectives like psycho-dynamics (see Edwards *et al.* 2006).

Because social constructionism does not represent a single or uniform doctrine, it is probably best thought of as a collection of perspectives which have certain things in common. Burr (2003) identifies four key features of social constructionism. Firstly, it adopts a critical stance towards taken-for-granted knowledge. Rather than accepting knowledge as 'fact' it asks us to be suspicious about our assumptions. Secondly, in demonstrating how our ideas and expectations change over time and across cultures, it draws attention to historical and cultural specificity. Thirdly, it argues that knowledge is sustained by social processes. As such, knowledge is constructed and maintained through social interaction. Finally, it argues that knowledge and social action go together. Knowledge is built up and reproduced through social action and knowledge shapes social action. Social constructionist perspectives, therefore, tend to want to explore how the social world is created, how categories and knowledge become established. Given this, a social constructionist perspective on sibling relationships will tend to suggest that 'sibling relationships are

being created and maintained through everyday interactions in different environments. They are constantly negotiated rather than static' (Klett-Davies 2008, p. 13).

This kind of perspective is valuable because it allows us to see how social relationships become inscribed with social meanings and get constructed and reconstructed across time and space. For instance, in relation to the Minority World, both Edwards *et al*. (2005a) and Punch (Punch 2008a, McIntosh and Punch 2009) have demonstrated how birth order status positions can change depending on the kinds of activities and roles siblings take in relation to one another. Not only does this show how sibling power relations cannot easily be mapped onto age hierarchies but also how siblings rely on each other for securing their status as the more powerful sibling. Edwards *et al*., explore how sibling relationships are 'constructed around femininity, masculinity, birth order and age hierarchies, and thus are infused with power dynamics that are related to wider social differences' (Edwards *et al.* 2006, p. 19). Following Morgan's (1996) lead in defining 'family practices', they argue in favour of conceptualising sibling relationships as 'sibling practices'. By drawing attention to the 'doing' of sibship (the actions siblings take towards each other) we can see how siblings actively work to construct their relationships and identities and how, for instance, gendered power relations are enacted and challenged.

My own research with twins utilised Jenkins' (2004) concept of the 'internal-external dialectic of identification' to examine how twins' identities are socially produced. From this point of view identity is never fixed but rather has to be established. In this UK-based qualitative study I spoke with 21 twins: 12 child twins and nine adult twins. Two of these twins were sure they were identical, 14 were non-identical and five were unsure. Although the twins' ages ranged from 8-36 years old, most of the twins were either older children (13-17yrs) or young adults (18-24yrs). Aside from the twins I also spoke with 15 parents of twins and five siblings of twins. I collected data using semi-structured interviews and a range of 'participatory techniques' (drawings, vignettes and an open-ended self return task). Where possible, I spoke with the child twins together and separately so that I could potentially observe and record their interactions with each other and also help them to feel more at ease being the first interviewees. (For a more extensive overview of the methodology and ethics see Author, 2005 and Author, 2010.) As well as examining dominant cultural discourses of childhood and twinship and parental understandings of twinship and growing up, I examined how twins utilised various resources to perform and negotiate their identities.

Of course social constructionist perspectives like this have been heavily criticised for failing to take enough account of materiality (for instance the material dimensions of the body and the environment) and reproducing the dichotomy between nature and culture (Prout 2005). Whilst also

engaging with some of these criticisms, the rest of this paper will utilise some of the theorizing and empirical findings from this field of research to address one concern raised in relation to theorising within childhood studies: the perpetuation of the myth of the autonomous agent.

Agency and Being

Ever since Prout and James consolidated the new paradigm for childhood studies, children have been positioned as social actors who are 'active in the construction of their own lives' (1997, p. 8). In addition, children have been identified as social agents. Through their social interaction with others, children participate in shaping social life (James 2009, p. 41). From this perspective, children are to be regarded as beings 'in their own right' rather than pre-adult future 'becomings'. This enables us to acknowledge the competencies that they do have in the present and to challenge understandings which define the child through notions of lack. Prout, however, argues that:

> by emphasising children as beings 'in their own right' the new sociology of childhood risks endorsing the myth of the autonomous and independent person, as if it were possible to be human without belonging to a complex web of interdependencies. (2005, p. 66)

Similarly, Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) suggest that this Cartesian model of agency assumes a coherent, autonomous and identifiable subject. As such it implies a static model of subjectivity which, through its focus on the here and now and its emphasis on children's autonomy, denies the reality of children's changeability and interdependence. The implication of 'stability' which seems to accompany this notion of agency could, so Lee (2001) argues, make it difficult to explain contemporary social trends. As 'standard' adulthood is eroded and childhoods become increasingly ambiguous, the positioning of children alongside adults as human 'beings' makes it difficult to grasp the uncertainty and unpredictability of social life.

Becoming and Interdependence

Gallagher and Gallagher (2008) suggest moving towards an 'ontology of emergence'. This recognises that we are all incomplete and 'unfinished': '"we" are all fallible: imperfect and naive, learning and changing: "immature" rather than fully formed, rational, competent and autonomous agents' (2008, p. 511). As emergent subjects, then, children as well as adults are always in the process of being 'finished off'. The notions of 'interdependence' and 'becoming' could therefore be used more widely to reflect a *positive* sense of this incompleteness. Lee (2001), for instance, argues that we should multiply the category of 'becoming' so that it becomes applicable to both children and adults and takes account

of the multiple ways we all ‘become human’. The notion of becoming has been resisted by childhood studies in order to emphasise the child’s value and competence in the here-and-now. However, ‘the ontology of emergence’ could help to reflect changeability and transcend some of the (false) dualisms that have been erected within childhood studies – most notably being/becoming; competent/incompetent; child/adult (Lee 2001, Prout 2005).

Even though children’s relationships (especially with parents) may be more interdependent in the Majority World (see Punch 2002) this theme of ‘interdependence’ emerges within both Majority World and Minority World childhood studies literature. For instance, in her research in Bolivia, Punch (2004) has shown how older siblings may use younger siblings to help them avoid carrying out certain household chores. Evans (2010) has discussed the dynamics of sibling care within sibling-headed households affected by AIDS in Tanzania and Uganda. She found that it was through developing interdependent caring relations that these siblings were able to independently manage the household and reconfigure it as a more autonomous space. Within the UK, Morrow (1994) has concluded that we may ignore elements of exchange between children and adults. Edwards (2008) has highlighted the important role that siblings take in negotiating each other’s identities, social networks and moral reputations in their local communities. Edwards et al. (2006) have demonstrated how siblings relate to each other by establishing varying degrees of connection and

separation. Indeed, they argue that their 'social identities are continually formed, embedded and also contested, in and through their relationships with their siblings' (2006, p. 59).

My own research with twins in the Minority World context of Britain has shown that they are subjects-in-the-making who make and re-make their identities in relation to each other. For instance, twins utilised each other to help describe their own personalities and tastes (by comparing and contrasting themselves with each other) and to map out the boundaries of their identities in space. Twins also had a role to play in shaping and finishing off each other's bodily presentations of self. This could be seen when some twins pushed their fellow twins into dressing differently:

> **Peter:** I used to say, let's dress the same [...] But then Ian used to say no, and then I thought, 'no' [...]

It also occurred when twins regulated each other's bodies by monitoring what clothes they bought and wore. Charlotte explained that if her twin sister Hannah wore the same outfit as her then she would 'force her to change' and adult twin Andrea remembered the disputes she and her twin sister had over who could buy what:

> **Andrea:** [...] Sometimes if I saw something that I was gonna get, I'd like [say], 'no you're not getting it'.

Some twins were also quite explicit about how the physicality of their own bodies communicated messages about their identity and thus had to be kept in check vis-a-vis their twin. Liam (a non-identical twin, aged 17) explained the significance of having long hair and how this made him feel different to his brother Dan:

> **Liam:** I've got […] long hair, I listen to loud music, I get drunk before school and turn up to school drunk, as Dan, he's, 'can't go out tonight, playing rugby tomorrow', 'can't go out tonight, I've got a test'. […] If he had long hair he'd shave it off. As I'm more, I'm not going to conform, I'll do what I like.

For Liam, his embodied sense of difference was important in shaping his own sense of identity and his relationship to his brother. He often explicitly identified Dan as the 'responsible' twin and in line with this explained that Dan would often provide him with moral guidance: he'd 'tap me on the shoulder and he'd go "you shouldn't have done that"'.

This also seems to point to the value of a social constructionist perspective which, sharing with the 'ontology of emergence', allows us to see how 'subjectivity is performatively produced through the continuous unfolding of action' (Gallagher and Gallagher 2008, p. 510). More particularly, it points to the value of conceptualising social relationships

and identities as ‘relational’, shaped by our interactions with others and the social meanings available to us (Edwards *et al.* 2006, p. 9). My research, however, suggests that there are some important limitations to this process of becoming. Below I consider three main ‘limitations’ (although there are more that could be explored): the body; space and intergenerational power relationships. I therefore want to examine the role of materiality (the physical make-up and appearance of the body, physical space and material objects) and child-adult relations in shaping who and what we can become.

The Body

The physicality of the body is probably the most important and obvious material limitation: we cannot simply become anyone we choose to be and we cannot be socially recognised as having a particular identity if the physicality of our body does not permit it. For twins, the biology of twinning, the impact this has on their relative degree of bodily sameness, together with dominant cultural stereotypes of sameness mean that twins who do not look the same may find it harder to be immediately socially recognised as twins and may have to do more identity work to convey this identity to others. Hence, Hannah and Charlotte (non-identical twins, aged 15) told me that people did not believe they were twins because ‘we don’t look like each other and I’m small and she’s tall’ (Charlotte). In contrast, twins whose bodies look very alike and whose bodies

communicate their 'twin' identity on their behalf may find it much more difficult to 'pass' as non-twins. Emma and Ruth (identical-looking[i] twins aged 13) explained the consequences of being in different 'year groups'[ii]:

> **Emma:** In my half of the year, people are just finding out that I've got a twin.
>
> [...]
>
> **Ruth:** And most of [the] people know in my year.
>
> **Emma:** People like see you around and say, 'oh have you got a twin?!'
>
> **Kate:** Right, so would you introduce yourself as a twin?
>
> **Ruth:** No.
>
> **Emma:** No.
>
> **Kate:** How do you think they found out then?
>
> **Emma:** Well sometimes we stand together at break time and when they're walking past they can see us looking the same. Most people do.

Any account of human becoming must take account of both the physical and social dimensions of the body. Shilling's (2003) notion of the 'unfinished' body is a useful conceptual tool in this respect. He identifies the body as a simultaneously biological and social phenomenon:

> the body is most profitably conceptualized as an unfinished biological and social phenomenon which is transformed, within certain limits, as a result of its entry into, and participation in, society. (Shilling 2003, p. 11)

This approach, then, constitutes a weaker form of social constructionism (Nettleton 2006, p. 113). Whilst the body has a material base, it is also shaped and altered by social and material practices, social meanings and social context. For instance, notions of the 'body beautiful' and material practices of dieting can literally shape the appearance and size of the body. But just as society works on the body, so the body works on society. Indeed for Shilling, the very fleshiness of the body, its material substance, provides the basis for the formation of social relations. Social action is, therefore, always embodied action and bodies can constrain and enable social action (Shilling 2003).

This model helpfully explores the middle ground between another classic modernist dualism which has been seen to underpin theoretical developments in childhood studies: the nature/culture dichotomy. Prout (2005) has argued that by claiming childhood as the product of 'culture' (by arguing it is a social construction), childhood studies has perpetuated this dichotomy. In short, it has bracketed out biology and replaced biological reductionism with sociological reductionism. Shilling's notion of the unfinished body, however, allows us to see how biology incorporates and can be altered by culture and how nature provides the foundations for culture. It therefore goes some way towards closing the gap between 'nature' and 'culture'.

Space

Another potential physical limitation is space: the organisation of space and the objects within it. As social geographers remind us, our relationships and identities are constituted in and through space (Holloway and Valentine 2000). In my research with twins, I found that the spaces of the home and school could provide children with various opportunities and constraints for negotiating their identities and relationships with one another. For instance, at home, many of the older children who still shared a room (same-sex female teenage twins) found this frustrating:

> If I wasn't a twin I would be able to have my room all to my self and I wouldn't have to share anything (Ruth, aged 13).

Without having their own individual bedroom to control, characterise and contain their personal property, they had to find alternative ways of securing their individuality and independence. TVs, hi-fis, CD players and videos, which were often bought by parents and defined by them as 'shared' property, were often re-named in order to divide up and 'claim' space:

> **Ruth:** Emma's side is where the radio is so she likes to have the radio and my side's near the window and I've got my own television but it's like both of ours really.

If space was perceived to be under threat of invasion then it could be locked up to make it secure:

> **Hannah:** And I've put like, had to put a lock on some of my stuff so she can't get to it and use it, 'cos she always like uses it so there's hardly any left for me. She just like comes and nicks my make-up and stuff. So I've got a lock on it so she can't use it and hid the keys.

In the context of the shared room, twins can feel frustrated by the lack of information control and property control this provides and thus may feel irritated by the familiarity and restrictions to autonomy that this spatial arrangement affords them. The same-sex female teenage twins who still shared a room spoke of their conflict and arguments and sometimes, their potential strategies for dealing with these. Hannah (aged 15) explained that she would sometimes go to sit in the bathroom because 'there's a lock on [the door] and no one can get in'.

At school, being apart in classes could, for twins that looked very alike, help to momentarily draw attention away from their 'visibility' as twins. For others it could allow them to meet different friends and identify themselves as belonging to different kinds of social groups: the swotty

people or the ‘in’ people (Andrea), friends who ‘don’t really give a damn about work’ (Liam). For one of the youngest twins, being together could offer opportunities for further experiences of connectedness, but for some of the older child twins, being together could set some limits on their abilities to negotiate a sense of their own individuality and autonomy. Teachers and children at school may define and treat them as a ‘unit’ by passing on homework or referring to them as ‘twins’. As Liam explained, when his brother Dan is ill, ‘everyone always comes up to me and goes, “oh what’s the matter with Dan, what’s he doing?” [...] and the teachers will ask and they’ll transfer work to me’. Ann (a different-sexed twin aged 24) also recalled that ‘when we went to secondary school we were kept in the same class and introduced as twins’.

Some twins had different experiences of these spaces and the relationships they formed within and through them. For example, Charlotte was more positive about the companionate aspects of twinship. She said she would probably be scared if she had her own room and that she would choose to be a twin because ‘when you’re starting a new school [...] you’re always with somebody, you’re not on your own’. Her sister Hannah was more adamant about the negative aspects of being together. ‘We’ve got to live with each other day in day out. And we’ve got to share most things’. Although they shared a room, she actively wanted to spend time apart from Charlotte at home (sometimes she locked herself in the bathroom) and she seemed to take greater lengths to protect her own

property from being invaded or stolen (by locking up her make-up). School may therefore give Hannah an opportunity to escape from a situation that, to paraphrase her, made her pull her hair out. In this sense, twins' sibling relationships with each other at home may provide a context for their attitudes towards being together or apart at school and vice-versa.

We therefore need to appreciate the interconnectedness of some of the physical environments that may shape children's relationships with each other. Of course, the specific examples I have given here may be far less applicable in some Majority World contexts where the spaces of home and school may be limited. For instance, in her research in a rural community in southern Bolivia, Punch tells us that 'schooling is available only for the first six years of primary education' (Punch 2004, p. 102) and members of a household often shared one bedroom – sleeping communally in one room with sometimes two or three children to one bed. In her research with sibling-headed households in Uganda, Evans (2010) found that, due to poverty and their caring responsibilities, many siblings were unable to continue with their primary or secondary education.

More generally, these examples demonstrate the importance of acknowledging how our interactions with our physical surroundings are implicated in the process of 'becoming'. As Lee argues, all humans interact with their physical surroundings – shaping them and being

transformed by them. This interplay makes it difficult to think of humans as independent, autonomous beings. Instead, we should think of all humans as being involved in multiple 'becomings' (Lee 2001, p. 115):

> Rather than possessing themselves, humans, regardless of age, 'borrow' from their surroundings to make themselves what they are. These views make of human life an endless and endlessly variable process of becoming. (Lee 2001, p. 104)

Intergenerational power relationships

The unequal power relationship between children and adults has been identified within both Majority World and Minority Worlds contexts (see Alanen and Mayall 2001, Penn 2001, Punch 2004, Bell 2007, Klocker 2007). The notion of 'generation' has been used to identify how society is organised and ordered into two main groups ('children' and 'adults') and to explore the process of constructing and reconstructing generational relations (Alanen 2001b). As such, generation can be thought of as both an objective structure which underpins family life and as a matrix of 'internal connections' (Alanen 2001b, 20) through which people become constructed and positioned as 'children' and 'adults'. This concept, therefore, helps to build a middle ground between structure and agency:

> In exploring the generational structures within which childhood (and adulthood) is continuously produced and lived, an essential component of one's understanding is that children are agents. That is, they are not merely 'actors' – people who do things, who enact, who have perspectives on their lives. They are also to be understood as agents whose powers or lack of powers, to influence and organise events – to engage with the structures which shape their lives – are to be studied. (Mayall 2001a, p. 3)

Reflecting this, some studies have explored how children's sibling relationships are contextualised by child-adult relations. For instance, Evans (2010) has highlighted how sibling-headed households in Tanzania and Uganda may be formed as a result of relatives' refusal to care for children, adult NGO project workers' decisions, children's fears that they will lose property which rightly belongs to them and because this concurs with their parents' wishes. In her research with child-headed households in Zambia, (author, paper 4 this volume) found that children living without an adult in their household were more likely to experience strong sibling bonds.

In my study with twins, I spoke with parents of twins about their parenting strategies and I also spoke with the child twins about what it was like to be a twin. This revealed how children engaged with the structures which shaped their lives but had varying degrees of power to influence and organise events. For instance, the parents of the youngest

twins (Ash and Harry, aged 8) wanted to keep their children as children for as long as possible. As Clare explained, ‘our idea is that we try and keep ‘em as young and innocent as we can’. Activating this mission statement, they regulated their children’s access to ‘adult’ knowledge by censoring TV programmes and films so that their children were not exposed to ‘too much swearing’ (Anthony). In addition, they monitored and controlled their use of outdoor physical space. As Anthony told me, ‘I don’t let ‘em go and play out on street’. In contrast to this, they valued their children being together at home in the same bedroom. They recounted how Ash and Harry sometimes bunked up together, slept top-to-tail (head-to-toe) with each other and played on the play station together.

This had an impact on how their children defined their relationship with each other. For instance, not surprisingly, Ash and Harry identified being together as a defining feature of twinship. But Ash also told me ‘[Harry would] spend more time with me cos we’re stuck in [the] house all day’. His lack of choice is here reflected through his assertion that he is stuck at home. Yet whilst parents have a role to play in choosing the appropriate spaces for their children, Ash and Harry also utilised this home space for their own pleasure: they would play on the play station together, construct games and clubs. Hence they had some role to play in organising events and utilising resources albeit it not necessarily in circumstances of their own choosing.

The control that parents have over children's use of space has been documented by other studies in the UK. For instance, Mayall's (2001b) research in London showed how 'traffic danger' and 'stranger danger' have become important factors influencing parents' regulation of children's space. This broad trend may be more typical in a 'Minority World' context where children are increasingly restricted and controlled because of fears for their safety (Punch 2000, Maxey 2004). Notwithstanding this trend, it is also important to acknowledge childhood diversity here. Research within childhood studies has also suggested that the significance attached to the age (Author 2010) and gender (Valentine 1997) of the child may be important factors influencing parents' decisions. This broad trend may also be less applicable to some countries within the Minority World. Thus Alanen (2001a) found that, due to a range of social policies that ensure, amongst other things, safe routes from home to school, children living in a suburb of a Finnish town go to school unaccompanied by adults and organise their own time after school.

Negotiated Interdependence?

Thus far then, it seems that if we are to draw attention to children's interdependence we need to do this in conjunction with an appreciation of structural constraints and materiality. Given this, Punch's (2002) notion of

‘negotiated interdependence’ may be a useful way of taking account of the contingent nature of children’s agency. According to her, this concept:

> reflects how young people in the Majority world are constrained by various structures and cultural expectations of family responsibilities yet also have the ability to act within and between such constraints. (Punch 2002, p. 132)

Her research in rural Bolivia revealed how, despite having a strong sense of responsibility towards family, when making decisions about their future, children balanced their commitment towards family demands alongside their personal desires. Children made these rational choices about their school-to-work transitions against a myriad of structural constraints: physical and environmental constraints, family attitudes and expectations, attitudes towards and the quality of education, financial resources, social networks and role models. Examining how these shape children’s choices meant exploring how their choices emerged from the interconnections between these different issues (for instance, between the arenas of the home and school). This meant that whilst children have a strong sense of obligation to their families, ‘the ways these are fulfilled in practice are negotiable’ (Punch 2002, p. 132).

By drawing attention to how children’s agency is practiced within a myriad of other social relationships, structural, physical and

environmental constraints, this concept seems to have the potential to capture some sense of how social life is produced and reproduced and to challenge the myth of the autonomous and independent person. We might argue, then that the child is both embedded within and contributes to the social world. Rather than being positioned as an independent atomic being, this child, like the adult, is an interdependent agent whose power to shape and organise events is negotiated within various possibilities.

Do we learn anything different from studying twins?

Before concluding it is worth asking whether we learn anything different from researching twins. As we have seen, much of the sociological research about siblings has concentrated on singleton siblings rather than twins. Looking across these two literatures it seems that whilst sibling and twin relationships may share certain characteristics (a mixture of love, hate, irritation, frustration and so on), twins' relationships are constructed against a backdrop of cultural discourses which stereotypically construct twinship as a more 'intense' version of sibship. Describing the stereotype of twinship, Leonard (1961, 301) writes, '[t]wins look alike, think alike. They never fight. They have a closer relationship than any other known to mankind'. This reflects our understanding of the biology of *identical* twinning:

> *Monozygotic twinning* is the result of one egg being fertilised by one sperm, which then splits into two separate zygotes (embryos) … Monozygotic twins are genetically the same and are always the same sex and have the same blood type. They are very similar in their physical appearance, intellectual abilities, temperament and so on. Due to their many similarities, monozygotic twins tend to have a close relational bond' (Pearlman and Ganon 2000, 5,6)

Given this, twins may perform their identities and construct and reconstruct their relationships amidst social expectations that they will be 'the same' ('two peas in a pod'), 'close' ('soul mates') and 'together' ('joined at the hip'). If we look even closer we can also see how twinship is a condensed symbol of childhood itself. Whilst children are often constructed as dependent beings, twins are seen to be doubly dependent – dependent on their parents *and* each other. Whilst children are often constructed as persons in the making, who gradually acquire a sense of their own individuality (usually 'adolescence' is pinpointed as a particularly important 'stage' in this respect), the dominant stereotype of identical twinship (which structures our thinking about twins) denies them individuality.

Because twins have to develop their relationships and identities against this backdrop, the social situation of being a twin may be different to being a sibling. Amongst other things, twins – especially twins who look the same - may have to respond to public accusations of sameness which

deny them their individuality. Older children in particular will tend to emphasise their differences from one another to distance themselves from this. This is not to deny the importance that difference has for older child siblings too but to say that this may be more pronounced for twins whose juxtaposition to an 'adult' ideal of individuality is even more intense (both because they are denied full individuality as 'children' *and* as 'twins') (Author 2010).

Conclusion

Sibling and twin relationships are diverse and multi-faceted. Children make and re-make their relationships with each other as they move in and between different spaces and relationships and as they interact with objects and social structures. Twins, however, construct their relationships amidst stereotypes of sameness and this may make the experience of being a twin different (in degree) from being a sibling. By revealing children's interdependency and changeability, the sociological study of sibling and twin relationships can offer us an empirical basis for beginning to challenge a static notion of agency that assumes children are autonomous subjects. This paper has explored how we might move towards developing an 'ontology of emergence' (Gallagher and Gallagher 2008) that positively acknowledges both children and adults as incomplete subjects-in-the-making. It has suggested that whilst positioning children (and adults) as 'becomings' may help to break down

some long-standing dichotomies between incompetent child/ competent adult, the sense of changeability that this carries needs to be tempered with an appreciation of materiality (the fleshiness of the body, physical space and material objects) and structural constraint (such as intergenerational power inequalities). The notion of 'negotiated interdependence' may help to position children as interdependent persons who negotiate their social relationships amidst various opportunities and constraints.

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[i] I use the term 'identical-looking' to confer the fact that these twins looked very alike whilst also indicating that they were also unsure about their zygosity.

[ii] Emma and Ruth's school divided pupils (who were in the same school year) into different groups. For instance, group X and group Y. Pupils in group X were unlikely to be in same classes as those in group Y.