

SERIES II: FRATERNAL SAME SEX TWINS

A great deal of diversity exists among same sex fraternal twin pairs. Some same sex fraternal twins highly resemble each other and are often mistaken for identical twins whereas others may look completely different. Those that are dissimilar may not attract as much public attention as identical twins. However, it may be easier for them to maintain their individuality since they tend to differ more physically and behaviorally. Elizabeth Noble states in her book, Having Twins, that fraternal twins experience more frequent use of their names since they look less alike while identical twins are more likely referred to as “the twins”. Therefore, it may be much easier for same sex fraternal twins to establish separate identities since their differences are more apparent.

Unfortunately, some parents tend to overemphasize the differences between their same sex fraternal twins. In these cases, twins may develop a “contrast effect” where they become opposites and fit into highly inflexible roles in their family. For example, one twin may be labelled as outgoing and the other as shy in an effort to magnify the differences between them. Parents need to strike a balance between encouraging their children’s similarities and exaggerating their differences. They must allow their children to accentuate their twinship when appropriate.

Most research conducted up to now has focused on identical instead of fraternal twins. However, one interesting study conducted by the University of Chicago compared same sex fraternal and identical twins to singleton siblings from two sibling families. The study determined that both groups of twins were closer to their twins siblings than the matched singletons were to their siblings. The twin sibling pairs believed that their parents treated them more fairly than did the singleton siblings and they also had a less critical opinion of each other. In addition, same sex fraternal twins appeared to share more interests and received more similar treatment from their parents than singleton siblings. The researchers concluded that twins may be treated more alike since they are born into the family together as a unit whereas singletons may be treated less alike due to their different birth orders.

Fraternal twins share the same genetic relationship as singleton brothers and sisters and typically have about half of their genes in common by descent. Therefore, their differences can be explained by both genetic and environmental factors whereas the differences between identical twins is mainly attributed to environmental influences. In the case of fraternal twins, two eggs are released by the mother and are fertilized by two separate sperms from the father. This explains why they may look as much alike or unlike as any brothers or sisters since they have their own assortment of genes.

There also appears to be a greater degree of variation in social relationships among same sex fraternal twins when compared to identical twins. In general, research on twin relationships indicates that identical twins seem to have a closer bond than same sex fraternal twins and are also less competitive. However, this does not imply that fraternal twins cannot share the same degree of intimacy as their identical counterparts. Even though they may not have identical genes, the twin bond between same sex fraternal twins can be very strong. After all, they are the same age and sex and have experienced a common family environment. Whether same sex fraternal twins look and act alike or not, they truly have a unique relationship.

Sources:

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3. Novotny, Pamela Patrick. The Joy of Twins and other Multiple Births New York: Crown Publishers, 1994.
4. Segal, Nancy Ph.D. “Fraternal Male Twins” Twins Magazine March/April, 1998, page 52.
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