

THEMATIZING TWINNESS: A FAMILY SYSTEMS THEORY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine audio recordings of naturally occurring conversations between monozygotic and dizygotic twin siblings. This study uses both semi-structured interviews and conversation analysis, investigating communication patterns, practices, and phenomena in everyday twin-to-twin talk. Conversational excerpts displaying the theme of twinning are chosen to guide this study. Thus, the following research questions are posed: (1) How does society's perception of twin siblings influence their interactions with one another? (2) How does society's perception of twin siblings influence their interactions with other people? Findings suggest that the theme of twinning is frequently discussed among the twin sibling participants at home and at school. The family systems theory provides an opportunity to understand the twin sibling subsystem. Although most of the twin siblings' conversations reveal positive sides or benefits of being a twin, one set of twin siblings struggle with de-identification from each other. The purpose of this study is to better understand the relationship and communication between this unique dyad.

Keywords: Twin siblings; conversation analysis, systems theory

INTRODUCTION

Communication scholars are interested in family communication, for its own sake as well as for its greater impact on society. One component of the family unit that has been underrepresented in research is the sibling relationship (Turner & West, 2006b; Vangelisti, 2004). The sibling relationship is distinctive compared to other types (i.e., friendship) because it is essentially a forced relationship which can be a source of joy and/or a breeding ground for conflict. Sibling relationships deserve investigation for other reasons as well. Sibling relationships can potentially outlast marriages, friendships, and parent/child relationships. In addition, most siblings share genetic and social heritage, cultural milieu, and similar earlier experiences within the family. Even though 80% of Americans have this type of relationship (Floyd, 1996), it is not as prevalent in the communication literature compared to other relationships. Various other disciplines have shown more interest in the topic. For example, scholars of child development and psychology have studied siblings, with particular interest in twins and their genetics (Beatty, Marshall, & Rudd, 2001; Graham & Scudder, 2007; Horvath, 1995; Horwitz, Videon, Schmitz & Davis, 2003; Jang, Livesley, & Vernon, 1996; Penninkilampi-Kerola, Moilanen, & Kaprio, 2005; Richardson & Norgate, 2005; Tomblin & Buckwalter, 1998; Turheimer, D'Onofrio, Maes, & Eaves, 2005).

Popular literature on twins addresses the topic of twins and communication; however, they tend to feature articles such as Fierro's (n.d.) "Top Ten Things Not to Say to Twins." She briefly discusses commonly used phrases, explaining why they should not be said to twins, such as

“Why can’t you be more like your twin?” and “I won’t even try to figure out which one you are.” In the communication discipline, researchers have studied sibling subsystems but have yet to analyze sets of twins and how they communicate with each other. The goal of the present study is to analyze naturally occurring talk between twin siblings.

Research on Twins Siblings’ Communication

Although the following studies were conducted by communication scholars, they lack any discussion of natural occurrences of talk. Absent a focus on naturally-occurring talk, these studies do not truly analyze communication because of their reliance on self-reports. However, other disciplines such as communication disorders and health sciences have studied communicative phenomena between twin siblings, referred to as twinspeak/twin language/secret language (Bishop & Bishop, 1998; Hayashi, et al., 2006; Thorpe, Greenwood, Eivers, & Rutter, 2001).

Bishop and Bishop’s (1998) study examined twin participants seven to 13 years of age with at least one of the twins having speech-language impairment. The results indicated that “twin language is usually use of immature or deviant language by two children at the same developmental level” (Bishop & Bishop, 1998, p. 150). Hayashi et al. (2006) found that twins ranging from 25 to 59 months, without an older sibling, are more likely to have their own “twin language.” Unfortunately, the twin language is the result of lack of social experience factors; it is a sign of immature language functioning. In Thorpe et al.’s (2001) study, participants were 20 months to 36 months old. The authors also concluded that the ‘secret language’ is nothing more than “poor cognitive and language functioning” (Thorpe et al., 2001, p. 43). These studies provide interesting findings, yet it is important to note that the participants’ ages range younger than the current study.

Research Using Conversation Analysis

Conversation analysis is a perspective that is here to stay for communication scholars, according to Heritage (1999). He further posits, “I think it is reasonable to treat our knowledge of these practices and their underlying principles as a basic part of what we mean by communication theory” (Heritage, 1999, p. 69). The following pages offer a review of a sample of recent conversation analytic studies that focus on family talk.

Butler and Fitzgerald (2010) examined three short excerpts of a family’s interaction at breakfast. The videotape recordings consist of a young child (two years old), his parents, and his grandparents speaking at the kitchen table. The goal of their study is to examine how identities are made operative in and through moment-by-moment organization of specific sequences of action (Butler & Fitzgerald, 2010). The results of the analysis show how memberships (within stage-of-life, family categories, and as guests and hosts) and how the relevance of these memberships are enacted through phenomena such as turn design, turn-taking organization, and embodied action (Butler & Fitzgerald, 2010).

Jacobs (2007) conducted a study on family talk specifically investigating families’ co-construction of their youth sports experiences. Through the use of ethnography and conversation

analysis, she examined the socialization processes families encounter and use in initial and enduring youth sports involvement. Jacobs (2007) observed approximately 300 families for 100 hours with children whose ages ranged from four to fifteen. She interviewed ten families, and three of the families participated in self-taping of their conversations regarding sports. The results indicated that socialization of children into sports occurs through ongoing communication among family members and with other families at sporting events (Jacobs, 2007). Parents are the primary agents for socializing children 15 and under into sports through motivating, supporting, and encouraging their children's participation. Conversation analysis revealed how families and sport related talk assisted in constructing the shared sporting experience.

Thomas (2009) examined everyday interactions between fathers and their adult sons (ages 18 and above). He investigated patterns, themes, and topics that occurred within daily conversations of such dyads. The study's participants consisted of seven father-son dyads. Data was collected through participant self-taping and interviews. He used interviews to gather additional information such as their perceptions of specific examples from the transcripts. The results focused on five main categories of interest in father-son talk among the seven dyads—supportive communication, humor, conflict, troubles-talk, and informative talk. Thomas's (2009) study provides a model for using conversation analysis as a primary means of data collection and interviews as a second method for encouraging participants to share their perceptions of their conversations.

Staske-Bell (2008) examined a self-taped, 21 minute conversation between a mother and her adult daughter. The goal of the study was to examine changes in the mother-daughter relationship since the daughter moved to an on-campus residence. One significant change in their relationship pertained to a decrease in relative intimacy. Conversation analysis was used as the methodological tool for her study because, she argues, intimacy is developed through and should be evident in interaction. After analyzing their conversation, Staske-Bell (2008) posits, "This study demonstrates that explaining the construction, maintenance, and change in the relational processes over the many years of the family lifecycle requires examination of the conversational practices family members employ in the natural interactional settings that constitute family life" (p. 170). Conversation analysis provides crucial information such as how and where relational and family identities are formed, negotiated, and renegotiated.

Abu-Akel (2002) conducted a study of family talk using conversation analysis. He was specifically interested in the interactional and psychological dynamics involved in introducing, sustaining, reintroducing, shifting, discontinuing, and ending a topic. He also examined underlying factors that govern topics during a family conversation at dinnertime. A video recorder was used to collect the data on a Caucasian-American family's two-hour dinner conversation. The data indicated that only a small number of topics get accepted and developed during dinnertime conversations (Abu-Akel, 2002). "The data suggest that sustained topics appear to be a function of the psychological and social impacts these topics bear on participants" (Abu-Akel, 2002, p. 1787). Gender roles and power relations also influence topic development in Caucasian-American families' dinnertime conversations (Abu-Akel, 2002). This study provides a basis for analyzing family talk and topic maintenance.

In a larger study of family talk, 100 families from Estonia, Finland, and Sweden were video

recorded during dinnertime, with the analysis focusing on “comments” (De Geer, Tulviste, Mizera, & Tryggvason, 2002). The “comment” is one linguistic tool of socialization in family discourse. A comment is defined as an utterance that has “an explicit or implicit aim to influence a conversational partner to behave in a certain way” (De Geer et al., 2002, p. 1757). Communication researchers might refer to it as a persuasive attempt. The results indicated that Estonians and Finns talked less but Swedish families made more “comments.” Their “comments” pertained to moral and ethical behaviors, whereas Estonians and Finns commented more on table manners (De Geer et al., 2002). De Geer et al. (2002) also found that Swedish children, compared to the other groups, commented on and negotiated parents’ “comments” more often. The study highlights the importance of family dinnertime in terms of socialization of family interactions by parents.

Pontecorvo, Fasulo, and Sterponi (2001) conducted a study using videotaped dinner conversations of 20 families, each with two Italian parents, at least one child between three and six years of age, and an older sibling. The goal of this study was to examine the idea that parents and children have mutual involvement in the socialization of one another. Pontecorvo et al. (2001) state, “The paper illustrates both the agentive participation of Italian children in a dialogue on normative behavior and ways that their discursive contributions shape the structure and thematic content of parental talk that ensues” (p. 340). The data collected by the researchers revealed that children shape the parental role and provide learning opportunities for adults (Pontecorvo et al., 2001).

Edwards and Middleton (1988) analyzed participant-recorded conversations between mothers and their children, ages two to six years old. Five families were involved in the study, which also included a younger and older sibling within the age range. The purpose of the study was to analyze ways mothers and children use pictures as “depictions of a shared past that could be constructed and communicated in conversation” (Edwards & Middleton, 1988, p. 3). The results indicated that the photos provided rich conversations regarding the content of the pictures, and the opportunity to recall or infer events that were not depicted. The mothers demonstrated to their children important principles of how to remember. The study revealed ways mothers not only demonstrate and communicate their shared past with their children, but also how they assist their child’s own efforts at remembering (Edwards & Middleton, 1988).

In 1984, Vuchinich conducted a family talk study specifically analyzing sequencing and social structure in family conflict. Data was collected from 64 recordings (54 video, 10 audio) of 52 different families during family dinnertime (Vuchinich, 1984). The total number of families who participated in self-taping was 52. The results from the study demonstrated a link between the “dynamics of social interaction and the stability of social structure” (Vuchinich, 1984, p. 217). Status (i.e., father, mother, daughter, or son) played a significant role in regard to oppositional exchanges. According to Vuchinich (1984), “Through the oppositional interchange, the person displays respect for the ‘sacred’ status he or she holds and expresses a relation to other statuses” (p. 233). The data collected from the participants also revealed that family ritual displays are important in organizing verbal family conflict (Vuchinich, 1984).

In another family talk study, Taylor (1995) examined how children interpret and react to their parents’ talk. The families were recorded by the researcher on both videotape and audiotape on

two evenings starting before dinner. The data analysis showed how the two children in the study, ages five and eight, expressed an awareness of face threat comments made by their parents to each other during dinner. Taylor (1995) analyzed the children's interpretive phrases and awareness of face threats in comments such as "you were talking me:::n." (Colons indicate a prolonged sound.) Wilson, Cameron, and Whipple (1997) also analyzed the children's reactions to their mothers' regulative strategies. Regulative strategies refer to the regulation of children's misbehaviors such as reflective-enhancing messages. Wilson et al. (1997), using conversation-analysis-style transcripts, analyzed five parent-child interactions and found "three ways that parental regulative communication has been oversimplified and distorted in prior work" (p. 87).

As Stamp (2004) noted, "The field of family studies is a complicated entity, intersecting numerous disciplines and areas of inquiry" (p. 1), and within family communication research there are many different perspectives and competing theories. Stamp performed the daunting task of synthesizing research studies from 12 different journals covering the communication, personal relationships, and family fields. According to Stamp, the objective for his chapter was to "obtain a large sample of recent research and theoretical trends" in a 12-year time frame—1,254 articles total—and within these articles 16 guiding theories received the most scholarly attention (p. 2). Perhaps the most prevalent theory in family communication research is family systems theory (Littlejohn, 1996; Vangelisti, 2004). Systems theory will provide a framework for this study.

Theoretical Perspective

Systems theory. According to family systems theory, family dynamics are organized based on a hierarchy of systems that represent both qualities that expand beyond the combination of individuals (or dyadic relations) within the system, and also subsystems (or subsets) of relationships rooted within the system (Henry, 1994). There is more to the theory than hierarchy and subsystems; family system theory is comprised of key qualities: wholeness and interdependence, hierarchy, balance, change and adaptability, and equifinality (Turner & West, 2006b; Vangelisti, 2004). Although a family can consist of several relationships, the theory holds that a family as a whole is greater than the sum of its parts (i.e., the individual members). A primary goal of a family system is to maintain balance. As Littlejohn (1996) noted, "One task of a system, if it is to remain alive, is to stay in balance. The system must somehow detect when it is off kilter and make adjustments to get back on track" (p. 47). Thus, when the family system is in balance, the theory predicts that family members are living in relative harmony. The value of studying families from a systems perspective is best explained by Yerby (1995), who observed that "Systems theory has taught us to see our own and other family members' behavior as interrelated, to locate the predictable patterns of interaction that seem to exert more over the family than do any individual family members themselves" (p. 339). Examining the family as a dynamic whole can yield advantages by allowing us to see the big picture. Yerby continues by addressing how system theory has taught us "to see problems in terms of relationship struggles rather than the 'fault' of one person who is 'scapegoated' and 'blamed' for others' pain, and to explore the intergenerational legacy of family experience" (p. 317). Yerby's perspective highlights the value of using systems theory when working with families.

An additional advantage of the systems perspective is that the theory is logically simplistic, and parsimonious in nature (Bavelas & Segal, 1982; Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006; Henry, 1994;

Littlejohn, 1996; Turner & West, 2006b; Vangelisti, 2004). This theory assists in explaining how the family system is affected by different roles members play, establishment of implicit and explicit rules, and boundaries. In other words, it offers a “sense-making map” for understanding family behaviors which can range from day-to-day situations to unpredictable undertakings (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006).

Researchers have invoked systems theory in studying family communication because it provides a rich, extensive framework of concepts. For instance, systems theory identifies and discusses concepts such as wholeness, interdependence, and hierarchy. Wholeness (or nonsummativity) refers to how one can acquire a sense of family by studying the entire system as opposed to focusing on its individual parts (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). In other words, if only one member of a sibling dyad was interviewed for research purposes, the end result would not be an accurate analysis of the sibling subsystem. Every member of a subsystem or system needs to be studied to get a complete understanding of the relationship(s). Family, in a sense, is its own life form, where members play a crucial role in forming and sustaining its existence.

Systems theory is also heavily attuned to the notion of interdependence. Interdependence explains how each member of the family can have an effect on the entire system (Braithwaite & Baxter, 2006). This concept sheds light on how people are interconnected and influenced within the family unit. For example, when parents engage in conflict it has the potential to not only affect the couple but the couple’s children, and other family members. Everyone in the system experiences the disruption either in a direct or indirect manner, when interpersonal conflict erupts in a family.

The concepts within systems theory can provide keen insight into the family dynamic. Hierarchy examines the family system as a series of levels which include suprasystems and subsystems (Littlejohn, 1996). A suprasystem would be one’s extended family, and a subsystem could represent the relationship between siblings in the immediate family, for instance.

Systems theory is prevalent in family communication research and is highly regarded as a vital research tool (Bavelas & Segal, 1982). This theory will help describe how twin-to-twin talk relates to communication in other subsystems as well as the overall family system.

Several studies within the literature on twins investigate this sibling relationship with the main focus on genetics. Family communication scholars and researchers in related disciplines tend to show interest in comparing twin siblings to address questions of nature versus nurture. A majority of these studies rely on self-reported data; however, there are other valuable ways of understanding communication among twins. To date, researchers in family communication have yet to investigate actual communication among twin siblings. The purpose of this study is to examine naturally occurring talk between pairs of twin siblings through the use of conversation analysis. Conversation analysis (CA) is implemented because it is an approach that places the focus on the communication process, describing what the participants are “doing” in their conversations, and uncovering layers of rich data. As a supplement to the CA data, excerpts from semi-structured interviews with the participants’ parents and the twin participants are included in the analysis. The purpose of the interviews is to help clarify the analysis of the conversations. Thus, the following research questions guide this study: 1) How does society’s perception of

twin siblings influence their interactions with one another? 2) How does society's perception of twin siblings influence their interactions with other people?

METHOD

Conversation analysis allows researchers the opportunity to investigate naturalistic conversations on audio or videotapes. The researcher transcribes the conversation, providing transcripts that are a visual representation of the participants' talk. After the transcriptions are completed, it is the job of the researcher to analyze and uncover what is happening in the conversation. Conversation analysts are interested in how participants construct everyday social order and through talk (Turner & West, 2006b). In the present study, conversation analysis provides the opportunity to capture and analyze naturally occurring talk between twins in the privacy of their homes. Audiotapes were used as a less intrusive and less intimidating means of collecting data than videotapes. The minimum age was set to ensure that the participants have developed adequate language and conversational skills. For data collection purposes, it was vital that participants reside together, which may not be the case for adult twin siblings.

Turner and West (2006b) report that qualitative interviewing is the most widely used research method among qualitative communication researchers. Baxter and Babbie (2004) discuss five specific reasons for using interviews in communication research. Interviews assist with understanding a communication phenomenon that cannot be directly observed. They help the researcher understand feelings and thoughts of the interviewee regarding a specific experience. Interviewing provides the opportunity to witness how the participant uses language within his or her natural environment. It can be used as validation for an already observed behavior or a supplement to a previous interview. And interviews can be considered as a performance of the interviewee's communicative style. Given the five purposes of qualitative interviews, the participants, and the goal of this study, interviewing was implemented as another research method in this study.

In sum, conversation analysis and interviewing are the two methods implemented in this study. Conversation analysis allows the researcher to investigate natural talk. Since the purpose of this study is to analyze twins communicating with each other in their homes, conversation analysis was chosen as the primary method. In addition to transcribing participants' conversations, I implemented semi-structured interviews to provide insights from parents and twin siblings. Interviews allowed the parents to provide their thoughts, experiences, and examples in regard to the communication of their twins. The interview sessions with the twin siblings presented the opportunity for twins to express their feelings, attitudes, and experiences of being a twin sibling. Face-to-face interviews also provide the researcher an opportunity to learn more about the participants' communicative styles.

Participants

The study includes a total of eight sets of twin siblings from the Midwest, ranging in ages 10 to 17 years old. However, only three sets of twin siblings were chosen for this manuscript due to their topics of conversation. Each set of twins and parents volunteered to participate in the study, signing the appropriate documentations. Although there was no preference as to the types of

twins, the study will note the following dyads: two sets of female/female dyads (monozygotic MZ and Dizygotic DZ) and one set of male/male dyad (DZ).

RESULTS

A conversational topic evident in the twin siblings' interactions is the theme of twins. Twins are referenced in each excerpt, functioning as a conversational topic and/or as twin identification. Identification happens when siblings identify themselves as twins and/or identify other twin siblings. It is important to investigate these twin references because they occur frequently, potentially affecting interactions within the twin sibling subsystem.

The first excerpt of conversation is between Stacey and Samantha who are conversing about their day at school. Their interaction takes place in the bedroom of one of the girls. In their interviews, Stacey says she talks to her sister like a friend, whereas Samantha elaborates on their relationship, stating "I talk to Stacey like other people. We don't have a lot of the same friends even though we are twins." During the interviews, they reference twins and use the pronoun "we", displaying their relationship as twins. Their mother said in her interview, "When they were younger the girls used 'we' when communicating. Now that they are older, they use 'I' more often."

Excerpt 1.1: St (Stacey) & Sa (Samantha), MZ twin sisters, age 15

- 58 Sa: Mae is like "Okay today's fashions" I'm fashion disasters see I rolled up
59 my sleeve=
60 St: =You're always fashion disaster
61 Sa: I rolled up one of my sleeves an my hoods inside out an my pants are
62 rolled up an my shacks don't match
63 St: My shacks don't match awesome
[
64 Sa: An Mister Baker comes- goes to my room an
65 Mister Baker's talkin' to another student an he's like "Mae, can you please
66 hold on a second I am talkin' here" ((performing)) "Mister Baker, what's
67 tomorrow's thing?" "I'll look it up in a second Mae hold on tomorrow is
→68 duplicity day Mae" ((performing)) "Thank you (.) gosh somebody needs
69 just hold on a second an calm down so you can tell me" that is just what
70 she literally said I'm like "oh my gosh there's something wrong with you"
71 St: She's really like that
72 Sa: Oh yeah
73 St: Heh
74 Sa: My friend told me that- that's how that's the way she talks to her mom
75 St: (oh my gosh so mean)
76 Sa: An then- an then um (.) ah she ah ah (.) an then we were through an I was
77 in class thinkin' you know even though we're- we dress- you an me are
→78 gonna dress up tomorrow an look exactly the same (.) I don't really
79 wanna tell Mister Baker that. I wanna surprise him. I want to see if he
80 notices hh so like "Mister Baker, do I have to dress up tomorrow?" he's

- 81 like “Well yeah of course you have to dress up” I’m like “really? I don’t
 82 really want to dress up today- tomorrow” he’s like “What’s tomorrow?”
 →83 “duplicity day” he’s like “really?” “yeah they dress like a twin day” “I
 84 guess you don’t have to” an like this girl’s like well first I’m like this
 85 girl’s like “You have to dress up tomorrow you- you can’t not just skip out
 86 it’s not fair” an (.) an Mister Baker’s like “oh it’s fun” an then he’s like
 →87 “oh yeah you can’t” I was like “but I’m a twin already. I don’t have to
 →88 dress up like my sister when I already have a person who looks just like
 89 me” he’s like “that’s right! you don’t have to dress up tomorrow I’ll just
 90 count you already” an that girl’s like “that’s that sucks! That’s not even →91
 be- you can’t use- use your twin like that an saying that since you guys
 →92 looks alike you guys can ah just not skip out on the spirit week”
 93 St: We’re not skippin’ out on the whole freakin’ week
 94 []
 95 Sa: An it’s like then another girl thinks it’s mean too because um
 →96 Nicole an me both have twins are twins so we don’t have worry about
 97 dressing up (.) awesome
 98 St: People are still going to anyway. I still would have looked at her an said
 →99 “Yeah I’m sorry your mom should’ve had twins get over it” (.) hehe
 100 Sa: Yeah I really don’t care ((yawning))

In lines 68, 83, and 99, the conversational topic of twins is used to highlight this type of sibling relationship, making it relevant to everyone in their high school (twins and nontwins). Sa’s and St’s utterances display their supportiveness of each other and their roles as twin siblings (lines 78, 87, 88, 91, 92, and 96). Sa and St use the pronoun “we” to indicate their shared identity, togetherness, and co-ownership of responsibility (Jacobs, 2007). The types of twin references present in their talk share the end goal of supporting Sa’s and St’s roles as female identical twins at school and home.

Systems theory as a worldview model explains how interactions between society and the family system influence its family members. Turner and West (2006a) claim, “Families are open systems that receive information systems outside themselves such as schools, the media, and religious organizations” (p. 61). This excerpt displays the influence school has on the twin sibling subsystem. The sisters discuss how teachers and students (nontwin and twin) react (positively and negatively) to their twin relationship in the context of Duplicity Day. Duplicity Day is an event during spirit week where students are encouraged to pair with someone and dress alike. Positive feedback about twin siblings is presented when Sa quotes Mr. Baker stating that Re does not have to participate since she is a twin. Negative feedback is addressed (twice) when Sa quotes two female students who say it is “unfair” and “mean” to use your twin as an excuse to skip Duplicity Day.

In this excerpt, Sa’s and St’s roles as twin siblings are enacted through the use of twin references. They are supportive of their unique relationship, and eager to acknowledge it on Duplicity Day. St states “We’re not skippin’ out on the whole freakin’ week” (line 93). According to Turner and West (2006a), “Families create boundaries to restrict this flow of information from the outside and to delineate relationships on the inside” (p. 61). Sa and St are

creating a boundary around their subsystem while discussing reactions from people at school. They evaluate the feedback presented by others, keeping negative responses from affecting their relationship. The property of interdependence, in systems theory, is evident in Sa's and St's interaction. Sa reports to St the comments from people at school, affecting St and the family system. The excerpt shows how the sisters become a unified front at home in preparation for their school's spirit week.

The next excerpt also provides several instances of twins as its theme. Amy, Nicole, and their mother are in the minivan leaving school for the day. Amy and Nicole's topic of conversation is their summertime co-babysitting job. In their interviews, Nicole and Amy made twin references several times using the phrase "my twin" instead of "my sister."

Excerpt 1.2: M (Mother); N (Nicole) & A (Amy), DZ twin sisters, age 13

- 14 A: Hey mom you think I can bring that sign out that says
 15 babysitting?
 16 M: It'll cost you five dollars (.) you still owe me nine
 17 N: Five dollars plus the nine (inaudible) then five dollars=
 [
- 18 A: Well technically if you wouldn't have put
 19 our money in the bank then we would've still had money for us
 20 (inaudible)
 21 N: =that wouldn't be bad (.) that's a pretty good income
 22 A: But remember (.) you can't you can't just say babysittin' one person →23
 it's twin babysitting
- 24 N: That can be
 25 M: What's your babysittin' name?
 →26 A: The Twinkie babysitters (.) Momma we decided when we go to=
 [
- 27 N: Smiths for hire
 →28 A: =Julibarber we're thinkin' about doin' the twin power
 29 M: Nice

In this instance, identification is used as a marketing tool: twin babysitting (line 23), Twinkie babysitters (line 26), and twin power (line 28). N and A are using their twinship to market themselves for business and recreational purposes. The word "Twinkie" implies twins because the Hostess dessert comes with two identical sponge cakes, and the name "Twinkie" contains the word "twin." Twin power implies that both sisters are competitive; their team is doubled in power.

N and A are enacting their roles as twins to reach a shared goal of increasing their savings account. This excerpt of talk and excerpt 1.1 provide several instances of identification of twins. Both sets of twins identify with their unique relationships, and take advantage of the benefits of being a twin sibling. St and Sa are treated special/different during Duplicity Day, whereas N and A benefit monetarily from their twin identities.

Systems theory provides the opportunity to understand twin sibling subsystems through the properties of interdependence and hierarchy. In excerpt 1.1, Sa is reporting to St the various comments people uttered regarding their twin relationship and Duplicity Day. This is a display of interdependence because what Sa experiences affects her sister and potentially influences (positively or negatively) the family system.

Hierarchy refers to how a system can contain several subsystems such as sibling/sibling, parent/child, and husband/wife. There are inputs and outputs, boundaries, rules, feedback, and goals that are crucial elements in systems theory. Each subsystem and family system may differ in regard to expectations for each of the elements and individual roles. Sabourin (2006) posits, “It is important to recognize that the components are not just the family members themselves but also the roles that are played in the family” (p. 51). Twin subsystems are constructed differently in family interactions as a result of enacted roles, expectations of roles, value implied for each role, and the functions each role serves in the family system.

It is important to note that systems theory encourages the analysis of how the family interacts with its environment (Turner & West, 2006a). Outside environments such as school influence the twin subsystem: “For example, parents must adjust constantly to their children’s relationships outside the family and deal with the influences from friends, teachers, and television” (Littlejohn, 1996, p. 47). The family has certain roles and expectations which could support or conflict with society’s expectations of twin siblings. Sa’s and St’s school is promoting Duplicity Day, implying that it is fun and unique to be a twin. Their mother said in her interviews that Sa and St are treated as individuals, not as a pair. This is important because their family unit seems to understand the need for individuality, whereas nontwins and the school display the expectation of twins as a couple, a twosome, a duo, or a matched pair.

The last example of thematizing twinning takes place at the dinner table with Justin, Brian, and their mother. The topic of conversation is initiated by Justin who is imagining aloud what it would be like to attend another school. Justin says he would like to fool new classmates into thinking he and Brian are not twin siblings. In Justin’s interview he said, “Brian and me are different a lot. Others get along more than us. Brian and I don’t get along, most of the time.” Brian described what it is like to have a twin: “They are troubling sometimes, they are mean, and throw stuff at you.” Their mother said the following about Justin and Brian: “I’ve always treated them as individuals not as a unit ‘the twins.’ Teachers have said that the boys don’t interact with each other at school. The only thing in common is birthday and last name.” This was also reflected in the quality of one-on-one conversations between Justin and Brian.

EXCERPT 1.3: M (Mother); J (Justin) & B (Brian), DZ twin brothers, age 10

- 73 J: Wouldn’t you move somewhere else just to go- (.) if we
74 moved somewhere else we could
75 B: Dress like Irish people
76 (1.0)
77 J: No
78 M: Dance like Cinderella
79 J: No we try to convince people that some other person who I

- 80 just met an we're friends with (.) was our sibling
 81 (1.0)
 82 J: ((laughs)) Then we can see how far we can go with it an
 83 confuse a bunch of people (.) I think it would be fun
 →84 M: You could both do it next year (.) say this is my twin
 85 (1.0)
 86 J: An that would be confusing
 87 (1.0)
 88 J: I doubt we would be able to (skip) into seventh though
 89 B: I'm not doing that
 90 J: Hm
 91 B: In seventh grade
 →92 J: But we are twins hh
 93 B: I'm not gonna joke about it
 94 J: What?
 95 B: I'm not gonna joke about it
 96 (1.0)
 97 J: It's not jokin' about it
 98 (1.0)
 99 M: Well like, you were pullin' a prank
 100 J: An that's when you came up with one
 101 M: Okay
 →102 J: It's not a prank to say that we are (.) twins (.) me an Brian (.) er it's okay
 103 B: To say it is me an you
 104 M: No I was talkin' about you could=-
 105 B: =Even an eighth grader won't think that=
 106 M: =you could say even some random person in eighth grade is
 →107 your twin (.) some new person that you met
 108 J: Hm that would be weird

This excerpt of talk is interesting because there are four instances of identification of twins uttered by J (twice) and M (twice). Unlike the previous excerpt of talk, their mother suggests de-identification to J and B for the purpose of pulling a prank. J expresses his desire to participate in the joke while B does not, making it difficult to successfully fool new classmates. The earlier excerpts (1.1 and 1.2) display each set of sisters' supportiveness towards identification as a twin sibling. The twin references in Sa's and St's excerpt (1.1) function as a means of supporting their twin role in the school environment and the family unit. The goal of their subsystem is to express appreciation towards Duplicity Day, promoting their biological likeness. N and A use their twin identification as a marketing tool to reach their mutual goal of profit. Both sets of female twins recognize the benefits of their relationships; however, B does not agree that pulling a prank is beneficial (1.3). In this instance, twin references function as a way to trick people, which is J's and M's intent. B says he does not want to participate in the prank, implying that de-identification is not an effective way to fool classmates. It is uncertain whether J and B will participate in the prank. Turner and West (2006a) claim, "siblings do not always support one another, and their failure to do so can be a major source of stress in the family" (p. 243). If

negative tension is experienced in J's and B's relationship, it could potentially lead to stress within other subsystems and the family system.

DISCUSSION

The conversational excerpts in this section were chosen because they represent themes of twinning. References to twins in the excerpts are used as a conversational topic and as a way of marking twin identification. Two out of the three excerpts display the positive side or benefits of being a twin. In excerpt 1.3, the set of twin brothers show how tensions arise when one sibling expresses negativity towards his twin identity. Systems theory is the guiding theory used in this section to analyze how twin references affect interactions within twin sibling subsystems, the family unit and sibling subsystems, and twins and society. Twins enact socially constructed roles and biological roles assigned to them by the family. The family system has different role expectations for their twins, making the family unit an important part of the analysis. This is another reason why interviews were used to provide crucial information from parents and twin siblings. The roles twin participants enact outside the system are constructed socially through interactions with friends, classmates, and school officials. Classmates and teachers have different role expectation for twins, making school an important influence on their sibling relationship.

It is important to note that this study does not attempt to make generalizations that all twin siblings engage in these conversational practices and phenomena. There is still an abundance of undiscovered information regarding twin siblings and communication between them. This study does open up for discussion the notion that twin siblings do engage in specific communication patterns.

Future studies in the area of family communication are needed to further investigate conversational patterns, practices, and phenomena as they relate to the unique twin siblingship. The purpose of this study is to report these findings as preliminary insights into twin siblings' everyday conversations; nevertheless, this study has limitations that need to be addressed.

LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study is the demographics of the twin sibling participants. There were a total of eight sets of twins whose ages ranged from 10 to 17 years. The age of the participants was initially capped at age 18, but no twins older than 17 volunteered for the study. The sets of twin participants were Caucasian, living in a rural Midwest town. There were two sets of female/female twins, six sets of male/male twins, and no female/male twins. This study was not interested in comparing MZ to DZ twins, which is a limitation for researchers interested in generalizing these findings to twins of each type. The youngest sets of twins were males age 10. They were not able to maintain conversations like the oldest set of twins (age 17), who conversed at length in private. The younger boys wanted to engage in activities that were distracting to the recording process. For this reason, parents participated in their conversations, facilitating their twin-to-twin talk. Other limitations regarding the participants pertain to no representation of minorities, rural location, common social class, no male/female twins, and seven sets of twins were from nuclear families, with only one set from a single-parent family. A

representative sample might include Hispanic, Asian, and Black minorities from urban locations and participants from various socioeconomic classes, as well as participants age 18 and younger who are raised by other types of families such as stepfamilies and gay and lesbian parent families. A sample that includes female/male sets and mirror-imaged MZ twins would also be ideal.

Another limitation regarding the participants is how they engaged in the process of self-taping. I gave each set of twins a tape recorder, back up batteries, and four 90-minute audiotapes. The data-base provided a rich amount of data from the twin siblings in addition to family conversations worthy of future investigation. The transcription process took six months to complete, ending in a total of 150 pages. Typically, I would transcribe an entire tape while the twin siblings recorded their second, third, or fourth audiotape. The two sets of twin girls are the only participants that recorded four tapes, resulting in a larger amount of talk by the females than the males. Each set of twin boys recorded two tapes of their everyday talk. There were several hours of tapes that included parents, other siblings, friends, and/or neighbors. This was problematic because individuals interrupted and distracted the twin siblings' conversations. Other pitfalls of participant self-taping include cell phone interference and texting while talking. I did not anticipate the younger siblings having their own cell phones. A number of cell phones caused electronic interference with the tape recorder, making it difficult to decipher what the participants were saying. A number of twin siblings had similar voices which became time consuming to differentiate when their utterances overlapped.

This leads to another limitation which is participant recollections. There was a time lag of a month between transcription and any follow-up interviews. I discovered that most of the participants could not recall exactly what they said, or what they were referring to at the time of the recordings. During the follow-up interviews with the participants, they frequently talked about their reliance on nonverbal communication with their twin. There were instances in the transcripts that would have benefited from the use of videotaped interactions. Videotaping the participants interacting would assist the researcher during the process of transcription, helping with voice recognition. However, videotaping would have been more intrusive than audiotaping the participants' conversations, and more time-consuming to transcribe.

CONCLUSION

These findings contribute to research on twins in related fields by introducing CA as a new approach to twin-to-twin talk. Future scholars can build and extend on this preliminary collection of talk-in-interaction by twin siblings. This study advocates CA as a method of research for all family communication scholars to explore, analyzing instances of real-life communication by participants. In the family communication literature, there are only a small amount of studies that analyze relationships that are commonly shared in America such as siblingship, mother/daughter dyads, mother/son dyads, father/daughter dyads, father/son dyads, cousins, and aunts/uncles dyads (Floyd, 1996; Turner & West, 2006a).

This study calls for scholars in family communication and related disciplines to make wider use of the CA approach. This study contributes to the area of family communication as it provides a new understanding of an underrepresented participant sample in the research. Twins are a unique

relationship that is becoming more prevalent in our society due to advancements in fertility treatments. Our culture and others have been fascinated with this type of siblingship for hundreds of years, yet it does not receive as much attention from family communication scholars as other types of family relationships. Even though most of the family communication studies are quantitative in nature, qualitative methodologies also have their place in the research (Vangelisti, 2004). Qualitative research, such as conversation analysis, needs to be implemented more frequently within family communication research. Conversation analysis reaches the heart of communication through studying natural occurrences of talk. I argue that the combination of participants—twin siblings—with an underutilized methodology—conversation analysis—offers new insights for family communication research.

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