

# RIGHTS OF MULTIPLE BIRTH INFANTS, CHILDREN AND ADULTS

Supplementary Submission – Human Rights Bill  
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## Abstract

This submission asserts the right of multiple birth infants, children and adults to protection from discrimination due to their multiple-birth status. It also asserts their basic human right to be recognised as a separate person and for their unique bond to be protected in the same way that cultural, religious and political rights are protected.

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## 1 Overview

The purpose of this supplementary submission is to provide a factual and experiential representation of twinship so the needs of twins can be better understood. A public policy gap exists in the protection of twins. They have no legislative protection from discrimination based on their multiple-birth status and their unique circumstances are not addressed through the protection of cultural, political, religious or other rights under existing and proposed human rights legislation and covenants.

In order to drive change and close the policy gap, it is necessary to demonstrate that twin infants, children and adults are a special group. Being a twin is not a choice, it is an **immutable characteristic** — a factor of birth over which the twin has no control. Twinship transcends race, gender, sexuality, culture and socio-economic status. Although there are many positive aspects to being a twin, when disadvantage or discrimination exists, it can be multi-faceted — based both on twinship and other characteristics including gender, race, culture or disability.

Twins<sup>1</sup> and higher-order multiples are a minority group, representing only 2.7 per cent of the Australian population. Identical twins are a special group, occurring in around 30 per cent of all twin births, and therefore only a very small percentage of the general population, approximately 1/250 births (Segal N. L., 2017a, p. 1). Identical twinning is random, and these births occur uniformly regardless of race. Fraternal twinning varies from 4 per 1000 for Asians, 8 per 1000 for Caucasians, up to 16 per 1000 for people of African descent (Twin Research Australia, 2018).

While society remains fascinated by twins, sometimes idealising their relationship or affording them celebrity status and mystical qualities, the reality can be less positive. In addition to their minority status, twins suffer a number of disadvantages in health and education, negative or exploitative portrayal in the media and popular culture, and erroneous perceptions among the general public. They have been subjected to human rights abuses around the world in both ancient and modern times. Twins often struggle to be recognised as individuals, to be seen as their 'own person', and yet many are treated as a unit. This is particularly acute for identical twins. Conversely, twins share a special bond and yet respect for and accommodation of that bond is currently not protected.

In Section 2, extensive information is provided about the prior mistreatment, current disadvantages and unique needs faced by twins. The purpose of this information is to support the argument for the need to specifically protect twins from discrimination, but also to highlight that the unique circumstances of twins are not protected through more generic human rights raised in Division 2 of the Queensland *Human Rights Bill 2018*, including cultural rights, and the rights to political and religious belief. Whilst not all challenges faced by twins can be addressed by the Bill, appropriate adjustments could be a useful first step in providing broader protection for this group and educating the wider public about their circumstances. As a dialogue model, the power of education and awareness cannot be overstated.

I call on the committee to help close the gap. Please consider protecting twins from discrimination based on their multiple-birth status and also afford them the right to be treated as individuals while at the same time protecting their unique bond. Identity is important.

<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document the term 'twins' refers also to higher-order multiples including triplets, quadruplets and more.

## 2 Twins in Context – Historical and Current Disadvantage

### 2.1 Human Rights Abuses Against Twins

#### 2.1.1 Cultural Beliefs About Twins – infanticide, abandonment and adultery

Throughout history, twins and other multiples have been subject to infanticide and abandonment in some countries and cultures due to superstitious beliefs that twins are evil or represent bad luck. In many cultures, twins have been viewed as evidence of adultery; with those cultures unable to accept that two infants could be the result of one father (de Nooy, 2005). Unfortunately, work is still being done to stamp some of these cultural beliefs and practises out. In 2017, Amnesty International made a submission to the United Nations Human Rights Committee calling for protection of twins in Madagascar (Amnesty International, 2017). Due to superstitious beliefs that twins bring bad luck, some twin infants are abandoned by their parents or discriminated against. Families that keep their twins are ostracised by their community.

#### 2.1.2 Persecution of Twins in World War II

During World War II, approximately 3000 twins were subjected to inhumane scientific experimentation at Auschwitz by the "Angel of Death" - Nazi doctor Josef Mengele (Nordheimer, 1991). Upon arrival at the concentration camp hapless Jews were sorted into the strong and the weak, with this classification leading to work or immediate death in the gas chambers. At the same time, Mengele and his henchman were looking for twins to subject to brutal medical experiments which resulted in unspeakable suffering and death (Segal N. , 1992). These experiments included injecting dye into twins' eyes to change their colour, injecting bacteria and horrifically sewing twins together to create 'conjoined twins' (Segal N. , 1992). One twin of each pair was often kept as a control, but if their sibling died as a result of the experimentation, that twin was immediately killed. Only around 200 twins survived, and their stories are told at the CANDLES Holocaust and Education Centre in the United States (Candles Holocaust Museum and Education Center, n.d.).

You will note that style of references used here: a newspaper article, a twin researcher and a museum set by a twin survivor. This is indicative of the lack of attention shown by historians to the specific human experimentation aspect of the holocaust (Weindling, 2016).

Although the human experiment victims are in many ways iconic of the worst atrocities of the Holocaust (one only has to think of the Mengele twins), the Nazi human experiments scarcely figure in the historiography of the 'final solution' and Nazi genocide. Indeed, the experiments have only tenuous historical position, even though they are widely recognized as the very worst of the Nazi atrocities. (Weindling, 2016, p. 245)

#### 2.1.3 Dionne Quintuplets Canada

In 1934 in Canada, the identical Dionne quintuplets were removed from their family and made wards of the state, ostensibly for their protection (Bregent-Heald, 2018). The children, all girls, were housed across the road from the hospital where they were born. This facility became known as 'Quintland', a virtual Disneyland in which the children were tested and studied and displayed as a tourist attraction (Came, 1994). More than three million people visited the site and gawked at the children at a rate of up to 10 000 visitors per month (Came, 1994). It is estimated that the exploitation of these quintuplets for the purposes of a gawking tourist industry, led to approximately \$500 million in revenue for the Ontario province of Canada (Fennel, 1998). In 1998, the Ontario government apologised and paid the surviving sisters USD2.8 million compensation (Depalma, 1998).

#### 2.1.4 Identical “Triplets” Separated for the Purpose of Scientific Study

A documentary film directed by Tim Wardle released this year, *Three Identical Strangers*, tells the story of Edward Galland, David Kellman and Robert Shafran (Stewart, 2018). Galland, Kellman and Shafran were identical triplets born in 1961 to a young mother in the United States and subsequently put up for adoption. For the purposes of a scientific study, the triplets were adopted to three separate families and were unaware of each other’s existence until they started university in 1980. Each set of adoptive parents were told their son was part of a routine child-development study. In fact, child psychologist Dr Peter Neubauer examined the boys for ten years to study the age-old conundrum of nature versus nurture. This same nature or nurture question still underpins twin research today. The psychological impact on each of the triplets was significant - David Galland committed suicide in 1995.

#### 2.1.5 Gene-edited Babies

Recently a Chinese scientist has faced world-wide condemnation for genetically-editing twin girls while they were embryos (Needham, 2018). While it can be acknowledged, that this may have just as easily happened to a singleton baby, the fact is, that once again, it did not. It is of note that in one media report it was stated that one of the twin girls had one copy of the edited gene and the other girl had two. While I don’t understand the science, I cannot help but wonder if twins were once again being used as a natural comparison (Fox, 2018). Twins continue to be subjected to inappropriate scientific exploitation.

#### 2.1.6 Reflection on Research and Twins

Whilst human medical experimentation is covered under various human rights covenants and acts, it is clear that multiples are often the subject of these experiments. The classic “twin design” is used today by psychologists and medical scientists around the world, including Twin Research Australia. While there is no suggestion that any of this work is unethical, it most certainly is not, it is true that the preponderance of this important work uses twins for the benefit of society generally. In my view, there is also a considerable need for further research on the specific needs of twins and their families, particularly beyond the perinatal and preschool years. Encouragingly, some progress is being made. Twin Research Australia is currently working on a white paper in partnership with the Australian Multiple Birth Association (AMBA), TAMBA (UK), and the International Council of Multiple Birth Organisations (ICOMBO). This white paper intends to identify the needs of multiple birth families, including: inequalities in health, educational outcomes and opportunities; identify research gaps; and propose recommendations (Murphy, 2018).

When my sons were toddlers, I registered them with the Australian Twin Registry and I do not regret this. However, I would like to see more research specific to the psycho-social development of twins, particularly as they enter adolescence. Recent research undertaken by ICOMBO has shown that almost half (49%) of multiple-birth families surveyed internationally would be willing to participate in twin research. However, only 30% would be prepared to participate in general research, with the remaining 19% indicating they would only be willing to participate if the research benefited twins directly.

A great deal of research has been done around the issues facing multiples in the perinatal period and the early years of life. Research on twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome, a potentially fatal or disabling condition affecting identical twins is a case in point. Despite this, I do feel I struggled to find definitive research regarding the psycho-social risks facing adolescent twins when personal circumstances demanded it.

I have the utmost respect for many twin researchers around the world and Twin Research Australia in particular. I am keen to see the current ethical approach remain at the forefront of twin research, along with a continuing and increased focus on the needs of twins themselves.

## 2.2 Health Disadvantages

### 2.2.1 Pregnancy and Neonatal Risk

Multiple pregnancies are high-risk pregnancies; the risk to both the mother and the babies is much higher than those encountered in singleton pregnancies (Ferriman, Stratton, & Stern, 2018).

Premature birth is nine times more likely to occur in a multiple pregnancy than a singleton pregnancy (Minakami, Kosuge, Fujiwara, Mori, & Sato, 2000). Preterm birth occurs in 64.2% of twin pregnancies and 98.7% of higher-order multiple pregnancies; this contrast with 7% in singleton pregnancies (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). Compounding this, multiples are also at significant risk of very early delivery with 4.4% of twins and 14% of triplets born before 28 weeks - only 0.5% of singletons are delivered this early (Umstad, 2018). Prematurity brings greater risk of neonatal death and disability. Parents of premature twins often spend many weeks travelling between home and the hospital visiting their premature infants in neo-natal intensive care units (NICU). This places even greater burdens on families if they have older children at home or if one twin is discharged earlier than the other. Sometimes the mother and each baby can be located in separate hospitals, compounding exhaustion and stress.

Twins are more likely to be low birthweight: twins 56%; higher-order multiples 98%; and singletons 4.8% (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016). Being low birth weight impacts on a baby's health and survival both at birth and in the longer term. By comparison, mothers who smoke have low birth weight babies at the rate of 12%.

Rates of caesarean births are higher for multiples: twins 70%; higher-order multiples 94%; compared with singletons 33% (Murphy, 2018). Multiple birth results in longer hospital stays and higher rates of admission to special care nursery or NICUs (Murphy, 2018). The median length of hospital stay for a singleton birth is three days, for twins it is six days, and this extends to 33 days for higher-order multiples (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018).

Sadly, perinatal deaths rates are four times higher for twins, and 12 times higher for higher-order multiples, than for singletons. Recent Australian statistics showed the perinatal mortality rate among the general singleton population at 8.7 per 1000 births; for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies the rates were 13.4 and 12.2 per 1000 births respectively (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018). In contrast, the rate for multiple births were 36.6 per 1000 births (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2018).

### 2.2.2 Maternal Risk

Maternal risk is also elevated in multiple pregnancy including higher rates of hyperemesis, urinary tract infection, pre-eclampsia, gestational diabetes (not confirmed), HELLP syndrome, cholestasis, acute fatty liver of pregnancy, placenta previa, placental abruption and post-partum haemorrhage (D'Alton, 2015). Women pregnant with twins or higher-order multiples are six times more likely to be hospitalised due to complications than those pregnant with singletons (Wenze, Battle, & Tezanos, 2015). These preterm admissions have implications for family stress, financial burden, loss of sick leave and also reduced availability of parental leave after the birth of the infants.

### 2.2.3 Psychosocial Risk – Post-natal depression, child abuse and marriage breakdown

Mothers of twins are five times more likely to suffer post-natal depression than mothers of singletons (Multiple Births Canada, 2006) and this depression can last three times as long (Professor David Umstad, Director of Maternity Services, Royal Women's Hospital, Melbourne, 2018). Given the high rate of PND generally, up to 10 per cent of mothers, these statistics are significant (Multiple Births Canada, 2006). Along with medically diagnosed PND, mothers of new born twins are more likely to report extreme exhaustion; twin mothers 76% compared with singleton mothers 8% (Multiple Births Canada, 2006). Fathers of multiples also experience worse mental health than fathers of singletons in the postpartum period (Wenze, Battle, & Tezanos, 2015). Other research has shown that increased depressive symptoms among the mothers of twins can exist up until the twins are five (Segal N. L., 2017a); the problem is not transient.

Many parents of twins are confronted with a public perception that having twins is no more challenging, and therefore less likely to produce depression, than having two children close together. This is not correct (Segal N. L., 2017a). In contrast, in a meta-analysis of mental health outcomes for parents of multiples, some research evidence indicated that parents of twins have higher levels of distress than parents of closely spaced singletons and also that first-time mothers of twins coped less well than mothers of twins who had a singleton child first (Wenze, Battle, & Tezanos, 2015).

Managing two newborns when parenting skills and identity as a mother have not yet been established may be considerably more taxing. Further, having two or more offspring who are the exact same age presents unique challenges that are not present even when the offspring are extremely closely spaced, particularly in the early years. (Wenze, Battle, & Tezanos, 2015, p. 172)

Marital stress and higher rates of marriage breakdown have also been reported in multiple birth families (Wenze, Battle, & Tezanos, 2015; Segal N. L., 2017). Unfortunately, an increasing body of research demonstrates that twins are at greater risk of child abuse than singletons (Segal N. L., 2017a). One study found the rates of abuse to be 19% in families with twins versus 2% in families with only singletons (Groothuis, et al., 1982). Given that premature birth, neonatal complications, marital discord, financial pressures, larger family size and exhaustion are associated with a higher risk of abuse (Nelson & Martin, 1985), this statistic is not surprising given that many of these risk factors occur in higher rates among multiple birth parents. Although family size, perinatal complications, and length of hospital stay increase the risk of abuse, twin-status has been found to be more a significant factor in whether or not abuse occurs (Groothuis, et al., 1982). Unfortunately, this abuse extends to the siblings of twins, highlighting the enormous stresses on multiple-birth families (Groothuis, et al., 1982). Studies have also found abused twins are more likely to receive fractures and abdominal injuries and to have been abused at a younger age (Lang, Cox, & Flores, 2013).

### 2.2.4 Breastfeeding

Breastfeeding is a protected attribute under the *Queensland Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*, accordingly the parents of twins would receive protection via this legislation. Regardless, the issues surrounding the breastfeeding of multiples are more complex than those associated with feeding a singleton baby. Given that the *Human Rights Bill 2018* is a dialogue model, explicit protection for members of a multiple birth would give greater weight to any mother of multiples endeavouring to feed both her infants, particularly simultaneously in public settings.

Specific Australian information on the rates and duration of twin breastfeeding was extremely difficult to find for this submission. In my view, this is in itself a sign of disadvantage. In 2010-2011

the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare produced the *2010 Australian National Infant Feeding Survey* (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). This was the first large-scale survey of breastfeeding practices in Australia, despite this nowhere in the 69 pages of this report are twins, multiples or plurality mentioned (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). Although this a Federal and not a State issue, this is just another example of how the needs of twins and higher-order multiples are overlooked, even at the highest levels. The needs of multiples are not even considered despite World Health Organisation recommendations on the importance of breastfeeding.

Information from the United Kingdom shows that rates of breastfeeding are lower in the case of multiples even after adjusting for the impact of perinatal difficulties such as preterm birth (NPEU University of Oxford, 2014). Research on the rates of breastfeeding of multiples and the factors that impact the initiation and duration of breastfeeding is limited (Damato, Dowling, Madigan, & Thanattherakul, 2005). Also, there is some anecdotal evidence that health practitioners and family members may discourage mothers of multiples from initiating breastfeeding (Damato, Dowling, Madigan, & Thanattherakul, 2005). A systematic review in 2016 also found inadequate or inconsistent research into the support and education factors that may assist mothers of twins and higher order multiples to breastfeed (Whitford, Wallis, Dowsell, West, & Renfrew, 2017). This is despite research evidence showing that appropriate education and support increases breastfeeding rates and duration, and that such specific, directed support being widely available for singleton mothers.

#### *2.2.4.1 Anecdotal and Personal Experience*

I managed to breastfeed my sons for 12 months, but it was extremely challenging, and support was lacking. When one of my sons was only five months old, he was admitted to hospital for a week with a serious infection. I remained in hospital with him as he was a breastfed baby, which is in accordance with World Health Organisation Guidelines. No provision was made for the reality that I was also in the process of trying to fully breastfeed another infant. I was placed in a small room with four cots, so there were three other babies and their families in this room. There was no room to have my other son with me and no privacy to express. Also, due to whatever physiological reasons, I could never successfully express breast milk. On the one occasion I went home for a few hours to be with my other son, I left a friend with my ill baby, along with a bottle of formula. The nursing staff refused to permit my friend to feed my baby formula, ostensibly due to not wanting to interrupt the breastfeeding of my ill son. He spent the entire four hours I was away from the hospital screaming in distress and no doubt due to thirst and hunger. The nursing staffs concern for the breastfeeding of my ill son was really bizarre given that they showed zero concern for the fact that I was basically unable to breastfeed my other son. This is typical of the experiences of many twin parents. Educators, health professionals and the general public appear to find it almost impossible to comprehend, or even consider, that a parent might be trying to deal with more than one child of the same developmental stage. Fortunately, I managed to continue to breastfeed both my sons until shortly before their first birthday. Many other mothers of twins are not so fortunate. I do not think having breastfeeding as a protected attribute is enough. The status of multiple birth needs its own recognition, and this is just one example of where this would provide additional protection in complex circumstances.

In October 2018 I attend the Australian Multiple Birth Association (AMBA) 2018 National Convention in Sydney. At that conference, I heard a number of stories from mothers of multiples who felt they were not given adequate support to breastfeed their infants. One club representative



advised that the feeling among her members was that nursing staff expected them to fail and therefore support was not offered and formula use was seen as a fait accompli.

## 2.2.5 Disability, developmental delay and cognitive disadvantage in childhood

### 2.2.5.1 Higher rates of disability

Many forms of disability are more common among twins than singletons (Bryan E. , 1999). They are approximately five times more likely to have cerebral palsy than singletons (Moore & O'Brien, 2006). The incidence of congenital abnormality in twins is 3 to 4 times that of singletons (Menasinkai, Dakshayani, & Chiniwar, 2013) . Twins also have higher rates of attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) (McDougall, Hay, & Bennett, 2006).

### 2.2.5.2 Higher rates of language and reading delay

Twins have higher rates of language delay than singletons and this risk is greater among male twins (Thorpe, 2006). Once other factors are accounted for, the delay is primarily due to the environment within which twins develop, with a sibling of the same developmental stage, competing for parental attention (Thorpe, 2006). A recent study showed that Late Language Emergence, delayed language acquisition at two years of age, occurred in 13-19% of singletons, but 37.8% for twins (Taylor, Rice, Christensen, Blair, & Zubrick, 2018). The delay was much more marked in identical twins at 46.5% (Taylor, Rice, Christensen, Blair, & Zubrick, 2018). This is of concern because language delay can have a long-term impact on academic outcomes and emotional well-being (Thorpe, 2006). It is important to note the difference between the 2006 study which controlled for perinatal complications and the 2018 study which did not. The later study highlighted the other impacts on twin language development, apart from postnatal factors such as poorer maternal interaction. It also highlighted that there seemed to be some biological factors at play in the delayed language development of identical twins (Taylor, Rice, Christensen, Blair, & Zubrick, 2018).

Although the above language delay has been reported as resolving by school age, other research has indicated these difficulties can persist and therefore impact other language-based skills including reading, spelling and writing (Johnston, Prior, & Hay, 1984). In an Australian study it was found that twin boys had a significantly elevated risk of reading delay when compared to the singleton population (Johnston, Prior, & Hay, 1984). While it is recognised that boys tend to behind girls at 10 years of age, the singleton boys tend to catch up by 14 years; for twin boys, the difficulties persist (Johnston, Prior, & Hay, 1984).

Once again it is necessary to address the perception that the experience of twins may be similar to two singleton sibling who are close in age. The level of consistent language delay is specific to twins and these singleton families show different communication patterns (Segal N. L., 2017a). Young twins are exposed to less speech directed at them individually (Rutter & Redshaw, 1991).

Maternal responsiveness, maternal involvement, and the range of individual experiences are higher in families with two singletons than in families with twins – all three measures have been associated with non-twin siblings more favourable language outcomes. It is easier to focus attention on single children than on twins whose more chaotic circumstances require greater control. (Segal N. L., 2017a, p. 179)

### 2.2.5.3 Cognitive disadvantage – at least when younger

Several studies have shown that twins on average score 4 to 5 IQ points below singletons (Segal N. L., 2017a). Some research has shown that by the age of about 12 years, the difference closes up (Segal N. L., 2017a). Yet other recent studies have shown the discrepancy persists in older cohorts and yet a single study showed the impact on academic performance in adolescence was negligible,

however there was a large proportion of extremely low birth weight children who did not have an academic score included in the study. (Christensen, et al., 2006). A meta-analysis found that the among more recently born twins the disadvantage had dropped to 0.5 of an IQ point and was postulated to be related to better perinatal and postnatal care (Voracek & Haubner, 2008). However, other recent studies have confirmed the previously larger IQ discrepancies (Segal N. L., 2017a), which is concerning given the known correlation between IQ and academic performance (Voracek & Haubner, 2008).

### 2.3 Educational Disadvantage

As a result of their unique circumstances, including the developmental delay discussed above, the education system does not always effectively cater for multiple birth children. In my experience, and in the experience of many twin parents I have met, the lack of understanding of the unique circumstances of twins and their specific challenges and needs is very surprising given the strides, albeit incomplete, our society has made elsewhere towards a more inclusive education system where diversity is valued. One of my sons is currently enrolled in a Bachelor of Education (Secondary) and a review of his course outlines reveals that the issue of multiple births is not raised in any of his courses on diversity, inclusivity or social justice. This appears to also be the case at other leading Queensland universities. As mentioned in the introduction, twinship transcends race, gender, sexuality, culture and socio-economic status. While I detest twin clichés, it is pertinent to point out that some twins can face “double trouble” in the education system.

It is important that there is sufficient education in place for preservice teachers and sufficient professional development in place for existing educators and school administrators to ensure the needs of twins are met. These needs and challenges include, but are not limited to (Hay & Preedy, 2006):

- Awareness of the pre-term birth catch-up that many twins face, which can mean they may need to start school later or have adequate support systems in place to support their gestational age adjusted development
- The impact of comparisons can have on multiples
- The impact of competition
- Reading and language delay, ADHD and other challenges faced in higher proportions by multiples
- A recognition that twins have two identities: that as an individual and that as a multiple and this represents an important part of their human existence

#### 2.3.1 Mandatory Classroom Separation Policies

Historically, many schools have mandatory policies on the separation of twins. Often these policies mandate separation in the misguided belief that it is necessary for the twins' individual development. A review of the websites of multiple-birth organisations around the world, including that of the Australian Multiple Birth Association (AMBA) highlights what a significant concern this is for many families and the level of distress it can cause. The AMBA website has a wealth of resources, including letters of support from twin experts and educators specialising in twins on this topic.

Surveys have demonstrated that many parents feel they were not sufficiently consulted on the placement of their multiples in school (Hay, 2004). Mandatory separation policies, particularly when based on the belief that is necessary for the twins' individual development, are not backed by research (Hay, 2004; Segal N. L., 2017; Hay & Preedy, 2006). On the contrary, some research has

shown that forced separation can be harmful, particularly for identical, with twins separated at 5 years of age showing greater outward behavioural problems than those separated at an older age. The advice of twin experts, AMBA and ICOMBO is that decisions are made on a case-by-case basis with input from parent and with due consideration of the needs of individual twins.

As at 2016 there were 12 US states that had enacted legislation to prevent policies on the mandatory separation of twins in school and to give the parents the right to have input, approximately 10 more had bills under consideration (Segal N. L., 2017a).

Dr Nancy Segal is a world-renowned expert on twins, a faculty member in the Department of Psychology and Director of the Twin Studies Centre at California State University. She is the author numerous research papers on books and is often engaged by the media, including SBS Insight, to speak on twins. She has advocated extensively on this issue and is one of the experts who have provided letters of support for parents facing this issue.

Previously in the UK, twin and higher-order multiple children often had to attend different primary school due to a 30-student cap on infant class sizes that could only be relaxed if the child had 'excepted student service status'. If the first twin was number 30 on the list, the other twin had to go to another school entirely. The UK multiple-birth umbrella body TAMBA campaigned for 10 years on behalf of distraught parents and finally had this changed in December 2014 with the introduction of the *School Admissions Code* (TAMBA, 2018).

I am aware of no such legislation for the protection of multiples in Australia. I did read of a Queensland Education Department directive against mandatory separation policies in Queensland schools apparently in existence in 2004, but a recent extensive search of the Education Queensland and associated website uncovered no current evidence of its existence (Hay D. , 2004).

### 2.3.2 Accusations of Plagiarism Against Identical Twins

Unfortunately, due to their similar cognitive processes and thinking styles a number of identical twins around the world have been accused of plagiarism. These accusations are often very unjust. I am aware of a recent incident in Brisbane where identical twins were subject to such an accusation (not my own sons). The stress this caused for those twins and their family was enormous. Also, at the recent AMBA National Convention 2018 in Sydney, I was advised by the Deputy Director of Twins Research Australia, Kate Murphy, that they recently had to intervene on behalf of Australian identical-adolescent twins subject to such an accusation and advise of the school of the wealth of research supporting identical twins in this circumstance.

Dr Nancy Segal believes accusations of plagiarism are often unjust and even disturbing as '...evidence from numerous twin studies has shown that identical twins' shared genes contribute, in part, to their closely matched academic ability and skills' (Segal N. L., 2017a, p. 155). She has appeared as an expert witness in a number of cases before administrative school committees and even in courts of law.

The conclusion from this research is that genetic factors influence general intelligence as well as specific skills. It is, therefore, not surprising that identical twins sometimes obtain exactly the same test score, make the same unusual mistake, or reach the same unexpected conclusion when writing a paper or completing a thought. (Segal N. L., 2017a, p. 156)

As an example of the ridiculous preconceptions and mystical beliefs that exist around twins, Dr Segal was even advised of **one case in which twins were accused of cheating via mental telepathy** (Segal N. L., 2017a). This is the modern world - you cannot make this stuff up. It beggars

belief that these things still happen in modern societies, but families of twins would not be surprised.

### 2.3.3 The Lived Experience of Twins in School

Many groups within society experience discrimination within the school environment, with some experiences being worse than others. However, many groups at least have legal protection on the basis of protected attributes such as sex, race, religious belief, sexuality and gender identity. Twins can be treated less favourably directly, for example by being expected share resources or benefits of enrolment in ways that a singleton would not, or indirectly through policies that impact mainly on twins.

The biggest issue for my identical twin sons, and for me as their mother, is to have each of them treated as a separate person. It is difficult for non-twins to understand and this is probably best summed up by twin psychologist, Dr Barbara Klein:

Because people tend to be so taken by the similarities in twins' appearances, they may forget to think more deeply and try to understand what it might really feel like to have a double in the world. (Klein, 2003)

In interviewing both my sons for this submission, they both stated the worst aspect is being seen as the same person. Cameron reported to me that students and teachers would get his name wrong and then say - "Oh well, it's the same thing anyway." Aaron reported to me that in high school he has been confronted by teachers whom he did not know over incidents in which he had no involvement. When it was explained that the teacher was probably referring to his brother, no apology was forthcoming. In isolation these incidents may seem minor but they build up over a lifetime – the desire to be their own person is real.

The second most annoying aspect of schooling for my boys is the constant comparisons. This is not the same as comparisons between other siblings who are at different stages of development and are not also seen as the same person. When one of my sons was working extremely hard, but struggling at Math B, teachers would ask why he couldn't do the same as his brother. My son felt that these types of questions were once again driven by the view of him as the same person as his brother with the same intelligence, aptitude and skills. This assessment also extended to sporting team performance; they were often on the same team, but the lower-graded twin was criticised when they were not. Even identical twins can experience considerable differences in physical and academic ability, despite their shared genes, due to discordant weight at birth due to either twin-to-twin transfusion syndrome (TTTS) or inter-uterine growth restriction (IUGR). TTTS affects only identical twins and IUGR is more common in identical twins.

As a parent I have had instances of teachers wanting to cover of both my sons in the one parent-teacher interview. When they were in the same class in primary school, one teacher gave me a detailed assessment of one of my boy's progress in the numeracy area, but then added that she didn't know which son she was speaking about. This was despite my sons wearing quite different versions of the school uniform options for easy identification. I have also had the wrong photos on their reports and comments that were clearly intended for the other child. It is not that difficult to overcome the issue of identification if adequate effort is made and teachers work with parents.

There are many other examples and I am sure most twin parents could add their own. Stories I have heard include one twin not being offered an academic scholarship, merit award or higher sporting team opportunity due to the existence of the co-twin. If an individual earns the position or award,

they should receive it. One sporting coach asked one of my sons if he would be able to be in the A Grade Football team, because his brother was only a B Grade player. The answer was a resounding – Yes!

### 2.3.3.1 *Discrimination at [REDACTED] Graduation Event*

In my sons' final year of high school at [REDACTED], each boy was told he could invite two adult guests that had played a significant role in their lives to the 2017 Valedictory Dinner. The rule was not parent's only. The boys were told they could invite two adult who had played a significant role in their life. If a student was from a single parent family, they could still invite two guests. If a boy had a parent away on business, he could still invite two guests. However, despite being advised numerous times both verbally and in writing from the end of Year 11 through to the end of Semester 1 in Year 12 that each boy could bring two guests, only one of my sons was offered guest tickets. The other son received no guest tickets at all. When I complained, they were given one ticket each. I was labelled difficult and subjected to blatant misogyny by the then Deputy Headmaster. I didn't want to fight that battle, even though discrimination on the basis of gender is a protected attribute. I wanted to fight for the right of each of my sons to be seen as a separate person and a graduating student in his own right. This was a significant milestone.

This whole episode was extremely upsetting as graduation from high school is a major individual achievement and once again my sons were being treated as the one person. For us it was not about the tickets, it was the rights of twins to be seen as separate individuals entitled to the same benefits of enrolment as singleton students. It was also about an acknowledgement that each of my sons would have to share this important occasion with a sibling in a way that the vast majority of the singleton cohort would not.

Some people may see this as trivial. I would argue strongly that it is not. Please remember that twins and higher order multiples represent just 2.7% of the population. Also remember that this shared environment that twins experience from the moment of conception has other impacts such as language delays discussed above. It also impacts on their ability to just be "me" and not "us". Graduation from high school is an important life milestone and one that would usually be just about the singleton child. A twin has to share this event in the same way they share birthdays, parental attention, and the first day of school. Their sibling is "always there" in a way that singleton siblings are not. While twins may have a special bond, or they may not, many twins I have spoken to are universal in their agreement that being treated as a unit is the most upsetting part of being a twin. In the ICOMBO *Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher or Multiples*, which I included as part of my initial submission, this issue is dealt with explicitly:

Multiples and their families, as any other individuals, have a right to full protection, under the law, and freedom from discrimination of any kind. – Right I

Multiples, as any other human being, have the right to be respected and treated as individuals with their own needs, preferences and dislikes. – Right VII

I would like to explore the issue of triviality here in greater detail. I received a letter of support from world-renowned twin expert, Dr Nancy Segal, on this matter and I have attached it in Appendix A. Also, I would question what society's reactions would be if a graduating student were treated in the way that my sons were due to being part of single-parent family, their own homosexuality, the homosexuality of their parents, gender identity or disability. It would have been totally unacceptable. And yet, twins are treated as half of a whole and higher-order multiples are merely fractions.

When we appealed to the then Headmaster, now retired, he wrote a five-page letter dismissing our complaint. In this letter he went to great lengths to explain that there was nothing in Australia's Federal or State anti-discrimination laws to stop the school from making this decision. He also went on to explain that there was nothing in any international human rights covenants that limited the school's position. Sadly, I believe he is right. We then appealed to the [REDACTED] [REDACTED] on 5 September 2017. Despite, providing more than 50 pages of evidence, research and expert opinion, our complaint was dismissed less 48 hours later in a one-page letter. We ultimately sort an injunction through a breach of contract claim as this was our only option under the law. The Chairman of the [REDACTED] then became personally involved and met with my husband. He is an identical twin and we believe he was sympathetic to our position. We were offered a small settlement of [REDACTED] to help cover some our legal and expert opinion costs but this was tied to request that we sign a non-disclosure agreement via a deed of release. I refused to sign the agreement as this experience made me determined to fight for the rights of all multiple birth infants, children and adults. Ultimately due to the late attempts at settlement, we ran out of money to fight a large and powerful institution and time to seek an injunction, so we did not proceed further. In the end the school sat my sons' home-room teacher at our table as a compromise. I believe this only occurred because we threatened legal action. Prior to that, the Headmaster treated our feelings and concerns with contempt. Despite this compromise, written advice was then issued to the Year 11 cohort stating that 2018 Valedictory Dinner guest tickets would be limited to two per family. Clearly, this per family policy was directed at twins and higher-order multiples as the net effect would be that singletons would get two guests each, twins would receive one guest and I guess higher-order multiples would have to invite their guests in fractions.

In November this year I wrote to the new Headmaster of [REDACTED] and I received a positive response and I am hopeful that this will not happen again at this otherwise wonderful school. I also provided the new Headmaster with some of the research I have presented here about the special needs of multiples. I am currently in discussions with the [REDACTED] to ensure that appropriate policies are put in place to protect multiples in their four schools and to ensure that educators and administrators receive appropriate professional development in these matters

This was not about the tickets, it was about a principle. As is clear from the rest of my submission twins and higher order multiples are in dire need of better protection and recognition of their needs, particularly in the areas of health and education. This was incredibly hurtful for my family and my sons on this important life milestone. Graduating from high school is an individual achievement and yet they were treated as a unit, effectively as one person.

## 2.4 Grief and Multiple Birth

Grief and loss associated with multiple birth is poorly understood by the general public and professionals and probably represents an area where multiples and their families are in the greatest need of protection from discriminatory and/or inappropriate practices that inadequately address their needs, or worse, exacerbate their suffering. Fortunately, research has indicated that health professionals have desire for better information on how to support bereaved parents of multiples (Richards, Graham, Embleton, & Rankin, 2016).

### 2.4.1 Pregnancy and Neonatal Loss

The requirement for sensitive care of parents who have experienced a perinatal loss is well documented, but as is the case in many other areas of multiple birth, the specific care needs of parents who have lost a twin infant are much less well-researched (Richards, Graham, Embleton, &

Rankin, 2016). Given the life-long impact the care from health professionals can have on grieving parents, this is a concern (Richards, Graham, Embleton, & Rankin, 2016).

The loss of a twin is a complicated loss (Richards, Graham, Embleton, & Rankin, 2016). In the case of the loss of one twin, the grief is especially complicated. The parent has deal with the conflicting emotions of joy at the birth of one baby and grief at the loss of another. Parents are confronted with feelings of guilt trying to balance the right amount of grief over the loss of one baby and joy over the survival of the other (Cuisinier, de Kleine, Kollee, Bethlehem, & de Graauw, 1996). The parent experiences not only the loss of a much-loved infant, but also the loss of their role as the parent of twins. They also must contend with insensitive treatment by family, friends and healthcare professionals who erroneously believe that the loss of a twin or high-order multiple is somehow less tragic due to the existence of a surviving baby or babies. The research could not be more clear: **the loss of a multiple is just as devastating and painful as the loss of a singleton** (Cuisinier, de Kleine, Kollee, Bethlehem, & de Graauw, 1996). In fact, the surviving baby serves as a reminder of the lost child and can compound the loss (Segal N. L., 2017a).

#### *2.4.1.1 Anecdotes – appalling public behaviour*

Perhaps one to the saddest examples of the callous disregard for the feelings of parents who have lost a multiple birth infant, was relayed to me many years ago by an Australian mother of quadruplets. This mother had the extraordinarily rare blessing of giving birth to four babies as the result of one pregnancy. Like any other mother, she loved each baby equally and infinitely. Unfortunately, one of her babies died in the first weeks of life. She reported that her grief was seen in many settings as less due to the fact that she had three other babies. One day she was out shopping and was approached by a member of the public, as many of us are, and it was an older lady, as it often is. When this woman discovered that she was cooing over three surviving quadruplets and not triplets, rather than expressing sympathy she said, "Oh well, three is quite enough." It is difficult to imagine that any other mother who had lost a baby or a child would be treated this way simply because she had other children. A child died. A mother was grieving.

#### *2.4.2 Loss of a Twin – Twinless Twins*

The loss of a twin affects not only parents but also profoundly impacts the surviving twin, whether that loss occurs prenatally, in infancy or much later in life (Segal N. , 2009). Research has shown that grief and distress associated with the loss of one's twin, whether identical or fraternal, is only surpassed by the loss of a spouse (Segal N. L., 2017a).

For identical twins the pain can be particularly acute as their own image serves as a constant reminder. There was an example of a male twin who grew a beard to avoid being reminded of his lost brother each time he saw his own reflection when shaving (Bryan, 1999).

It may be difficult to make the connection with human rights, but if this is viewed in terms of freedom from discrimination, the connection may become clearer. If the 'cultural' (not really the right word) needs of a special group are not well understood, they cannot be catered to. An adult who loses a spouse may receive greater consideration in the workplace than an adult who loses a twin, and yet the research shows that equivalent consideration should be given.

#### *2.4.3 Disclaimer*

This is a sensitive topic and I acknowledge that I, thankfully, have no personal experience of twin loss. I would have liked to research even more widely and covered even more aspects of this very important issue, but, due to time constraints, my preparation of this submission has been rushed.

There are issues I haven't discussed, including the loss of one twin during pregnancy and selective reduction. Despite this, bereavement is a critically important issue, and I felt the need to highlight it. I apologise to anyone who is in anyway hurt by my portrayal of this multiple-birth issue.

## 2.5 Portrayal in the Popular Culture, Literature and the Media

Ancient and modern popular culture, media and literature have been fascinated with twins, concocting stereotypical representations, exploring human dilemmas and assigning mystical qualities (Shelton, 1997; de Nooy, 2005; Segal N. L., 2017). Segal believes that twin qualities and qualities assigned to twins, including in the popular media and public discourse, make them especially susceptible to 'half-truths' and 'folk tales'; these misconceptions can be both psychologically and physically harmful (Segal N. L., 2017a, pp. xix-xx).

The portrayal of twins in popular culture, literature and the media lead to ridiculous beliefs such as mental telepathy between identical twins, and the assigning of hurtful stereotypes. In children's literature one study found these stereotypes include: twins as a unit, rather than as individuals; twins with special abilities, possibly ESP; and twins as opposites, good or evil, smart or dumb, naughty or nice (Shelton, 1997).

The portrayal of twins as good or evil or uniformly evil is also prevalent in adult literature and film. Twins are popular in advertising and female twins are often sexually exploited as a male fantasy – two for one.

Historically, conjoined twins have been treated as "freaks" and in the 1800 and 1900s were displayed in sideshows and theatrical performances (Kerns, 2013). Have we moved on? – possibly not. In 2007, a Canadian doctor wrote an article in the Canadian Medical Association Journal claiming that the celebration over the birth of conjoined twins, Tatiana Hogan-Simms and Krista Hogan Simms was disturbing, a waste of taxpayers funds, and suggested that the pregnancy should have been aborted (Walker, 2007). In 2017, Tatiana and Krista celebrated their eleventh birthday; they attend school and, like many children, have learned to swim. Even modern academics make startling comments such as: 'At a time of destabilisation of traditional masculine identities, conjoined twins in the horror genre provide an ideal opportunity to feminise the male body" (de Nooy, 2005, pp. xv-xvi), while at no time reflecting on how the portrayal of twins in the contemporary culture and literature might impact upon twins themselves.

These stereotypical portrayals are annoying and even harmful to twins as they live their public lives. A female twin writing for McMaster University student magazine, *The Silhouette*, explained it like this:

The first question is whether we are identical or fraternal...after this question things start to go down hill and my sister and I become an oddity. The questions of telepathy, dominance, which one of us is the good and evil twin, and [sexual] fantasies start rising... Pop culture promises a variety of stereotypes from the nice twins, the creepy twins, the long lost twin, the troublesome twins but in all these varieties these twins are the same person. Twins aren't supposed to have an identity out of being a twin. (O'Connor, 2013)

Australian Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, is a twin. When an article was written about this fact, former MasterChef 2010 winner, Adam Liaw, took to twitter and announced: '*Of all the categories of twin (vestigial, evil etc.) I think "secret" is the most unsettling*'. Mr Shorten is a politician and I am sure he takes much more than this in his stride, but if Mr Liaw had replaced the word 'twin' with 'queer', 'homosexual', 'disabled' or even 'ethnic' I am wondering what the public response



would have been. There are adolescent twins in Australia today working on establishing their identities and trying to work out who they are; these types of public portrayals are not helpful.

### 2.5.1 Parenting Twins and Being a Twin in the Public Eye

The public portrayal of twins and the failure of public policy in meeting their needs leads to some very uncomfortable public experiences for both twins and their parents. Parents on public outings with their twins and higher order multiples become a public sideshow. People feel at liberty to stop you every few steps to admire or gawk at your twins and make the most inappropriate comments and ask the most invasive questions. They also feel at liberty to touch the babies. This is of particular concern when many twins are born prematurely and therefore medically fragile. I purchased an insect screen to go over my twin pram for the sole purpose of stopping people from touching my babies. I called it my "Granny screen"!

Parents are asked if the babies were conceived by IVF. Many parents are deeply affronted by this highly personal medical and sexual question from complete strangers. The more sharp-witted ones respond: "No, we had sex. Any other questions?" Parents are asked which baby is the naughty one, which is the smart one and can they read each other's minds. Perhaps one of the most ridiculous questions is that asked of boy/girl twins – are they identical? Many fed-up parents reply – "No, one has a penis". Comments shouted out such as 'double trouble' did not concern me, but I know they distressed and angered many other mothers, particularly those who had gone through gruelling IVF procedures to receive their double blessings.

I again must address the topic of triviality. When you consider the already discussed perinatal health disadvantages of twins, the higher levels of maternal PND and stress, and the sheer logistics and exhaustion of getting out of the house with more than one infant, often with older children in tow, it might be easier to understand the twin parent's desire for the public to just back off and watch their manners.

We all enjoy being told our babies are beautiful, if you don't plant yourself in front of our pram and impede our access! We are busy.

As twins grow, they become the subject of many of these comments and questions themselves. Some love the attention, many hate it.

### 2.6 Twins - Identity and Individuation

As a mother of identical twins, I have had more than 18 years' experience in developing an understanding of the importance of treating twins as individuals. I know it is very important to my sons. I have spoken to numerous twin children and adolescents (identical and fraternal), parents of twins, and adult twins now married and raising their own families. The message has been universal: being treated as a unit is extremely annoying, and I would add damaging. Conversely, the twin bond is also important along with the identity of twinship. Some fraternal twins, particularly boy-girl pairs, struggle to have their twinship recognised, which can also be hurtful.

As outlined above, but repeated here for emphasis, the *ICOMBO Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher or Multiples*, deals with this issue explicitly:

Multiples, as any other human being, have the right to be respected and treated as individuals with their own needs, preferences and dislikes. – Right VII

In addition to the quite formal document on the rights and needs of twins discussed above, multiple birth associations provide a myriad of less formal advice to parents and other interested parties on the importance of fostering individuality amongst twins.

TwinsUK suggests the following top ten tips for encourage individuality (Twins International Limited, 2008):

1. Avoid labelling
2. Identify each Twin/Multiple
3. Avoid dressing alike
4. Spend one-on-one time
5. Cultivate individual interests
6. Praise each child
7. Make double celebrations special
8. Give separate presents and card for each child to open
9. Use humour to divert comparisons (by family, teachers and the public)
10. Nurture their twin bond

In 2017, AMBA's theme for Multiple Birth Awareness Week was "*Born a multiple; also an individual.*" (AMBA, 2017). According to AMBA's website the week was focused on:

...raising awareness around the individuality of multiples; that even though they share a special bond as multiples, they are still unique individuals. (AMBA, 2017)

Multiple Births Canada has published a three-page document on their website entitled "Encouraging Individuality" (Multiple Births Canada, 2015). This document covers many of the ten points outlined by TwinsUK above. It also advises that parents and caregivers of monozygotic (identical) multiples must take special care to assist their children to develop individual identities due to the perceptions and expectations of the wider community.

### 2.6.1 Theories of Twin Identity Formation

Twins are often seen as having two identities: one as a twin; and one as an individual (Segal N. L., 2017a). Whilst some twin researchers and psychologists believe twins have no greater difficulties forming their own identities than singletons, others believe the reality is more complicated.

One theory of twin identity formation was put forward by educator and researcher Professor Pat Preedy, who recognised three types: extreme individuals, mature dependants (Preedy, 2009). Extreme individuals accentuate differences in a polar opposite way and reject their twinship in an attempt to be seen as individuals. Closely coupled twins behave as a unit, dress similarly, have few friendships apart from each other, and are therefore viewed by others as unit. Mature dependents function well as separate people, even when they have similar interests, and also enjoy their twinship.

Dr Barbara Schave Klein, psychologist and twin expert, outlined five patterns of twinship: unit identity; interdependent identity; split identity, idealised identity and individual identity (Klein, 2003). Whilst according to Klein, parenting is a major influencer of outcomes, it is important to note that interdependent identity develops when twins are treated as a unit. In contrast, Dr Nancy Segal believes that problems with identity are most likely to be caused by influences outside the family (Segal N. , Correspondence with Author, 2017b). The healthiest outcome, individual identity, is found when children are treated as and encouraged to function as individuals (Klein, 2003, p. 105).

### 2.6.2 Identity and Individuation Struggles and Their Psychological Impact

Growing up as a twin is different to growing up as a singleton; the experience is more complex due to the constant presence of the co-twin, who is at the same developmental stage (Klein, 2003; Ainslie 1997 cited in Noble, 2014). Despite this there is limited research on the psychological aspects of twin development (Ainslie 1997 cited in Noble, 2014). Some of these issues include constant comparisons, at times bitter competition, and attempts at differentiation.

During adolescence these issues become even more important. The teenage years are not easy for adolescents. Aside from the fact that the teenage brain is still under construction, laying down myelin and creating and destroying neural pathways in a crazy journey towards prefrontal-cortex maturity sometime in the mid-twenties (Feinstein, 2013), adolescents have so much other work to do. In her book *The Developing Person*, Berger introduces her section on adolescent psychosocial development by advising that the discussion began with identity and ended with drugs notably pointing out that both matters were influenced by other people (Berger, 2015). Leading Australian child psychologist Dr Michael Carr-Gregg also raises the concept of identity and separation from significant others when he describes the four tasks of adolescence as (Carr-Gregg & Shale, 2013):

1. To form a secure and positive identity
2. To achieve independence from adult carers and parents
3. To establish love objects outside the family
4. To find a place in the world by establishing career direction and economic independence

Developing a secure and positive identity is more complicated for twins because not only do they need to separate from their parents, they also need to separate from their co-twin (Bryan E. M., 1998). Clinical Psychologist and Senior Lecturer at Swinbourne University of Technology, Katie Woods contends that an adolescent twin's success in navigating this phase depends on how well they can convince others of that 'me' part of their identity is greater than the 'us' part (Wood, 2018). She also warns that identical twins can face mental health issues if they are too closely-coupled or conversely too competitive.

Studies have shown that multiples experience higher levels of depression in middle-adolescence and this is possible due to this coinciding with separation and individuation work or adolescence (Tias, 2006). Twins, particularly identical twins struggle with their public perception as 'exceptional', which leads to the others responding to them not as individuals but as twins (Bryan E. M., 1998). Twins are concerned about being too similar to their twin (if they place greatest emphasis on their individual identity) or too different from their twin (if they place greatest emphasis on their twin bond (Noble, Bradley, Parr, & Duemer, 2017).

Twins suffer constant comparisons and competition in ways that singletons do not which can further complicate adolescence. Their public perception as exceptional along with hurtful remarks from the public, which offer involve comparisons and exacerbate competition and impact their identity development (Noble, Bradley, Parr, & Duemer, 2017). This can lead to them making decisions in contrast to their own interests and purely in reaction to their twinship. Some identical twins can be humiliated by the actions of their co-twin which drives them to distinguish themselves even more (Klein, 2003; Pogrebin, 2010 cited in Noble et al, 2017).

The recognition of their competitive dilemmas among twins may cause them to differentiate between areas of interest simply so they can have areas in which they can excel without worrying that there will be need to compete with their co-twin. (Noble, Bradley, Parr, & Duemer, 2017, p. 347)

American psychotherapist, Dr Joan A. Friedman is a prominent twin expert and author of three books on the psychology of twins: *Emotionally Healthy Twins*, *The Same but Different*, and *Twins in Session*. Based on her research work and many years of working with troubled twins, she underlines the importance of parents, professionals and the public treating twins as individuals. She also provides insights into the ambivalent feelings many adult twins hold towards their twin relationships.

The issue of twin identity is an important one and this is widely recognised by those with experience in the field.

### 2.6.3 Personal Experiences and Anecdotes

Aside from the expert advice and books on the topic, parents of twins often see their school-age and adolescent twins' desperate search for individuality and their own space played out in the rough and tumble of the daily grind of family life. All siblings fight and are compared, but the experience is much more acute for twins who move through life at the same developmental stage with their sibling who is almost always present.

One of my sons threatened to drop out of basketball if his brother joined. The other made the same threat when it came to rowing. I have spoken to other twin parents who have had similar experiences. Unfortunately, even though as identical twins they have common interests, they want part of their lives to be about them and them alone. Siblings of different ages get this space automatically: they are rarely in the same grade at school; rarely on the same sporting teams; and rarely have the same circle of friends.

I am grateful that my sons have now begun tertiary studies, they are at separate universities and, for the first time in their lives, they have a chance to be seen as an individual. This is a common theme. Sometimes one twin, who may have received less nourishment in-utero struggles with always be in second place both academically and in the sporting field. One mother of adult identicals told me that one of her sons finally found personal success and space in a university course after spending many years living his brother's shadow. When the other twin, who had achieved greater academic success at high school but had struggled with finding his passion at university, wanted to join the same course as his brother, the first twin wanted to quit. These are incredibly difficult experiences for adolescent and young adult twins, and also for their parents as they try to navigate these struggles, being fair to both children, but ever mindful of not making things worse.

In 2017 when fighting my sons' school for their right to be treated as individuals at their graduation dinner, I watched the two-part series *Twins* on SBS Insight. In the second part, an incredibly brave and mature young man, Michael Cameron, spoke poignantly about the suicide of his identical twin at the age of 16. I felt such compassion when he described the surges of relief he felt alongside his own grief; the relief at finally having the opportunity to be seen as just Michael. I have attached a copy of the promo in Appendix B. My heart goes out to this family, but having watched my sons, I can understand his reaction. What a brave and beautiful young man.

### 3 Conclusion

It is clear that twins are a minority group defined by an immutable characteristic – a factor of birth over which they have no control. Despite the significant blessings of twinship, they also face considerable disadvantage and challenges that are directly related to their multiple-birth status. While other minority groups may suffer greater oppression or disadvantage, two points need to be made: twinship transcends other disadvantaged minority groups; and, in some cases, particularly in education and health settings, the impact of discrimination can be very distressing for twins and their families. They deserve protection.

Furthermore twins, particularly identical twins, have a right to be treated as separate individuals. Australian society continues to mature and develop and, as it does so, it shows greater respect for the importance of individuals being accepted for who they are. Twins are two people, with their own needs, preferences, personalities and desire to be seen as unique individuals.

I know not all twins, or parents of twins, will feel as strongly about this as my sons and I do. Conversely, I know through personal experience and extensive reading that the issue of being seen as a separate person is of great importance to many twin individuals. Seemingly ironically, it is also equally important to have their special bond acknowledged. The Queensland Government has the opportunity to be a leader in this field and make the first tentative step towards equality for twins by protecting them from discrimination.

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## Appendix A - Letter from Dr Nancy Segal

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

September 4, 2017

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Dear Headmaster [REDACTED]:

I have been asked by Sandy Horwood to review the materials concerning the situation regarding the denial of graduation tickets to her identical twin son, Aaron. I have agreed to do this as a faculty member in the Department of Psychology and Director of the Twin Studies Center at California State University, Fullerton.

It is my strong belief that the failure to allocate two tickets to each of the Horwood twins was an unfair and unjust decision on the part of the school because it does serious harm to the individuality and uniqueness of these identical twins. In addition, this policy sets a dangerous precedent for the twins who will enroll in the [REDACTED] subsequently. For many years, twins and their families have had to educate the professional community and the general public with regard to the fact that twins should not be “lumped” together as a single unit, but should enjoy all the benefits given to non-twin individuals. It is true that many identical twins share an especially close social bond, but that in no way interferes or denies their individuality or personhood. To the extent that twins experience social and psychological difficulties with identity and self-esteem, the source likely comes from outside the family. The decision to grant only two tickets to the Horwood twins, when in fact two tickets are promised to each student, *and* to give them to just one of the twins is one of those types of damaging influences.

I applaud your attention to this situation which is not trivial by any means. I also note that you provide welcome discounts to families who enroll more than one child in your school. However, the odd logic of denying two tickets to each twin also implies that their parents should only have to pay tuition for one twin—after all, it is the same family!

The Horwood family has made every effort to treat their sons as unique and separate individuals, beginning with giving them very different names and taking turns being with them as children. This has given each boy a strong sense of individuality, but that sense is

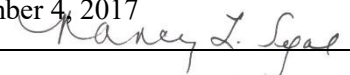
now being threatened by offering only two tickets to these twins. I understand that another mother of twins, having heard about this decision, was similarly concerned, and in my experience any mother and father of multiple birth children would feel the same. I fear that this experience may put Aaron and his brother on the defensive in future educational, occupational and/or recreational situations in which they find themselves, and that is unfortunate. Moreover, this comes at a time when adolescent often question who they are, how they relate to their family and where they should be headed. For the Horwood twins to have this extra burden imposed on them at this time is extremely insensitive on the part of the administration.

I have written a great deal about twinship and twin relations in my recent book *Twin Mythconceptions* and in my first book *Entwined Lives*. I have noted that twins often develop two identities, one as a twin and one as an individual. The way in which society treats twins is a huge responsibility, especially school official who deal with your people on a daily basis. There is now a sizeable literature on twins, as well as experts who can be consulted regarding decisions and policies for twins. It is surprising that the decision was made without taking advantage of any of these sources. In fact, Brisbane has many twin researchers at the Queensland Institute who would have been happy to have assisted you.

I trust that it is too late to remedy the situation at present, but it is certainly possible to avoid it in the future. I appreciate the time you have taken to read my letter and I am happy to provide additional information should it be required.

Sincerely,

Nancy L. Segal, Ph.D.  
Professor of Psychology  
Director, Twin Studies Center

:	Date: September 4, 2017 
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## Appendix B – SBS Insight Twins, Part 2, Promo

**'Unexpected surges of relief': one reaction to the death of a twin brother**

Michael Cameron

14 March 2016

In many ways, being a twin can be a lot like being in an abusive, unhealthy relationship. Imagine you have this person in your life that looks exactly like you, wears their hair similar to yours, has the same circle of friends, and everything down to their voice, their gait, their mannerism's all almost identical to your own.

And what's even more frightening is your own thoughts, aspirations, that little voice inside your head telling you right from wrong, good and bad, even your fears, insecurities – this person has them too.

It should feel like an invasion of privacy but you become so used to this person in your life that you can't imagine a day without them. You base your morals and sense of worth and accomplishment off them. Living without them is unthinkable. All this is extremely unhealthy when you're an adolescent trying to figure out who you are. It seriously complicates that process of becoming your own person.

While this is all extremely pessimistic, make no mistake – losing this person is even more unhealthy. You lose so much of what you are and are left disorientated. This is how I felt when my brother committed suicide in 2009 when we were 16 years old.

But I have found positives in the death of my brother. It gave me something I had never had before and always craved – a sense of individualism. It forced others but also me to see myself as my own man. Unexpected surges of relief would hit me for the next few months after his death and I was not sure why. I felt guilty to no end. The shame of that feeling was unspeakable and I could not even admit its existence to myself, let alone to anyone else.

For all the conflicted feelings my brother's death brought though, I came to conclusion that both grief and death give people a lot more than we give them credit for.

**Grief and death give people a lot more than we give them credit for.**

Alongside the sadness and confusion, so many strings were cut when my brother died that I now feel unrestrained to do as I please without fear of copying or being copied, without that crushing feeling that I am no more than two of a kind; without that feeling that my actions and thoughts, my whole being, are entirely restricted and pre-destined to what my genetics determine them to be. I no longer have that 'control group' and it feels amazing.

Grief is not a competitive sport; I make no amends for how I feel. I do not wish to be the most bereaved person in the room or to justify to the world why my insides aren't dark and depressed 100% of the time. I am strong and hard inside, but can also talk openly about my emotions. I am empathetic and emotionally secure.

And the thought of losing people close to me is not feared. When grief eats me up and makes me choke on my own thoughts, when tears are slowly dropping from my eyes, as depression is looming over me, I think about him. I am washed away with an overwhelming sense of warmth and gratitude. That's when it feels like my brother is so close to me again.