Twins Torn Apart: A Look at *Deliberately Divided*

By Mary Adcock, President

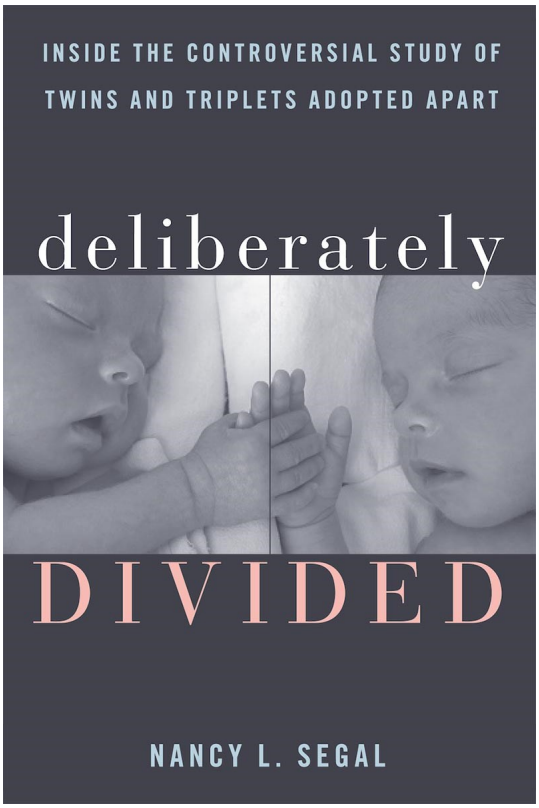
Research is at the heart of nearly every moment of our daily lives. Turn on the television. That package of digital data beams into your house because of discoveries made through research. Brush your teeth. That cavity-preventing toothpaste is the result of research. Know someone who has cancer. Their chemotherapy medication was developed through research. Research looks for the better way, leads to new discoveries, or affirms our ways of practice.

But can research ever go too far? Nancy Segal, a well-known researcher and expert on twins, explores that question in her book, *Deliberately Divided: Inside the Controversial Study of Twins and Triplets Adopted Apart*.

The book details the story of a twin study completed through a New York City adoption agency in the 1960s. Now considered to be controversial and ethically questionable, the study intentionally adopted twins and triplets into separate homes, never telling the children or their adoptive parents that they were part of a multiple set. Researchers then followed the children's developments from birth to age twelve. The study was not well-known until the release of two films, *Three Identical Strangers* (2018) and *The Twinning Reaction* (2017), which spotlighted the stories of some of the multiples.

Reaction to those documentaries spurred Dr. Segal to take a deeper look into the study. Segal shared that journey of discovery as part of an online Deakin Science and Society seminar, held April 3, 2023, and now available on YouTube (link below).

In order to learn more about the study, Segal said she completed interviews with colleagues of the primary researchers, Drs. Viola W. Bernard and Peter B. Neubauer. She also spoke with Dr. Neubauer (now deceased), and consulted some leading ethicists and attorneys. Most importantly, she interviewed many of the twins and their families involved in the study.



As she gathered information, Segal evaluated the basis of the study. The researchers' premise was that by separating twins they would be able to determine which parenting practices would result in the best child outcomes. Segal said her determination was that the methods and practices of the study were "bad science."

Parenting is "best handled by sensitive parents who pay attention," Segal said. "You don't tear a family apart (to understand that). You don't deny somebody a twinship and you don't deny adoptive parents everything they can know about their child."

Segal added that the researchers theorized that the multiples would instantly get along when they met as adults. However, Segal explained, the reverse was often true since the twins had no shared social history.

"When the identical twins learned what they could have had and what they were deprived of for no solid reason, there was anger, sadness, and hurt," Segal said.

Plus, “nearly all of the parents in the study would have taken two or more babies,” Segal added.

In the end, Segal said there was “very little to gain from the study.” In fact, she found the data has been deposited in the Yale University archives, with the stipulation that the files not be opened until 2065. The twin participants do have access upon their consent, but must undergo an arduous process to receive them. Scholars have been invited to apply to review the material, but no one has gained access. Dr. Segal applied several times and was denied access each time.

Given the negative outcomes of the study, one might wonder: Are twins still being adopted into different families today?

“There are no rules regarding the placement of twins,” Segal explained.

And Segal confirmed there are times when twins are separated through adoption for various reasons.

“Sometimes, agencies can’t find a family that wants to adopt twins,” she said. “Sometimes, the biological family only wants to keep one twin.”

However, Segal added, there are no instances when the separation through adoption is due to a research study.

Researchers, such as Segal, do continue to use twins as a part of their research studies. The unique genetic relatedness of identical and fraternal twins allows researchers to better isolate genetic vs. environmental factors. But, Segal warns, “We want to make sure that we’re not taking advantage of that bond.”

View the entire Deakin Science and Society seminar online at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V1JtHGnZq_I

Find out about one of Dr. Segal’s current research studies, Pairs of a Different Color: What Extraordinary Twins and Siblings Reveal About Person Perceptions, Prejudice and Family Relations at: https://multiplesofamerica.org/segal_research/

Dr. Segal is currently professor of Psychology at California State University, Fullerton, and Director of the Twin Studies Center. Her newest book (her eighth one), *The Twin Children of the Holocaust: Stolen Childhood and the Will to Survive*, was released in March 2023. And her ninth book, *Gay Fathers, Twin Sons: The Citizenship Case that Captured the World*, will be available in August 2023. Read more about Dr. Segal’s work at: www.drnancysegaltwins.org