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Twins as a Minority: A Minority Building Perspective

Mikko Lagerspetz¹

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Abstract

Not all numerical minorities classify as ‘minorities’ in any political or legal sense, even when they possess easily definable biological or social characteristics. Twins are an example of such a group. The article discusses minorities as the result of minority building, i.e., a process through which some specific human characteristic becomes the basis of group identity, networking, mobilization, and claims on rights and recognition. It presents some of the existing discourse and research on twins as a biological and social category. Subsequent sections inspect twins’ potential claims and mobilization. Many of the claims refer to our culture’s treatment of twins as one social unit, and to the assumption of a ‘special bond’ between them. Although probably not a biological reality, it is a strong social reality with effect on twins’ lives. The idea of the ‘special bond’ conflicts with the prevailing Western discourse on individual personhood and agency. Not unlike other such efforts, a possible twins’ activism would need to find a balance between essentialist and constructionist definitions of the group. The essentialist discourse is part of the claimed problem, but at the same time, it may be necessary in order to legitimate the minority’s claim for recognition. Twins are hardly a repressed minority, but there are specific situations in which they could claim for recognition and more sensitivity.

Keywords Twinship · Minority building · Social movements · Claims making · Recognition

Every human society is characterised by unending diversity. People differ from each other as to their sex, ancestry, age, language, personal history, sexual orientation, religion, abilities, appearance, skills, values, interests, and numerous other characteristics. With respect to at least some quality, every single one of us belongs to a numerical minority. However, a mere characteristic shared by a numerical minority is not a sufficient basis for describing the group as ‘a minority’ in any political or legal sense — ‘bald people, cat owners, members of the armed forces’, and so on are not regarded as qualifying as minorities (Gilbert 1992, 69). Meanwhile, if people sharing that characteristic eventually mobilize and collectively claim rights to be granted and respected by the majority, and if these claims will be accepted, that also implies their recognition as a minority — at least in some contexts (cf. Wheatley 2005, 18). Decisive for determining whom it is plausible to call a minority is the existence of a

claim for rights, appealing to the needs of a community that shares some kind of collective identity. This is a part of the process, which I in this paper call *minority building*. Minorities are indeed a kind of social movements; I will develop that perspective in the first section of this article.

One central feature of all social life is about creating and negotiating boundaries between groups of people. As we know from research on nationalisms and ethnicity, such boundaries are historically contingent and context-specific (Jenkins 2008, 42–50). The ways of defining ‘nations’ (usually, ‘majorities’) and ‘ethnic minorities’ alter, sometimes quickly. Not only do new nations and ethnic minorities emerge through political developments, but also the relative importance of a group’s definitive characteristics (such as language vs. religion) may change (e.g., Hadžibulić & Lagerspetz 2016 on an aspect of the Yugoslav case). Sexual minorities are another example of changing definitions — of a development towards acknowledgement as minority groups (Đurić et al. 2018). At the same time, negotiations about the exact nature and, indeed, desirability of that status continue both outside and within the minorities themselves (Petchesky 2009).

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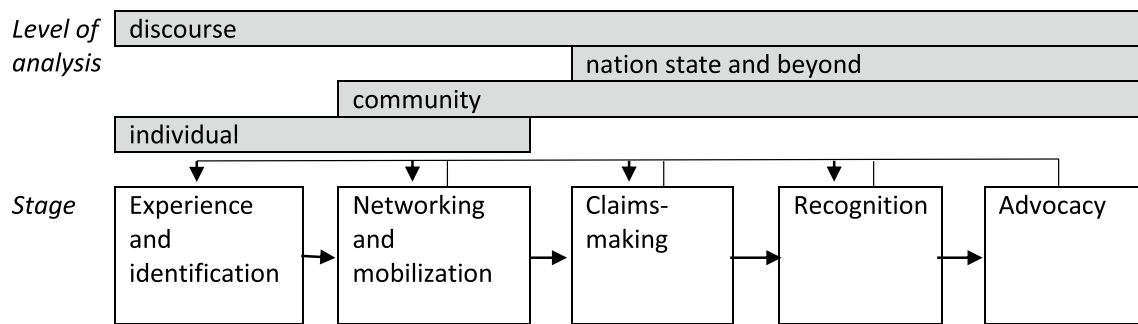


Fig. 1 Minority building as a process: stages and levels of analysis

The present paper introduces one more human characteristic to the framework of minorities and human diversity: twinning. Is it meaningful to discuss twins as a minority group? The point I wish to make and study further in the article's subsequent sections is that new insights can be won by examining such a border case — insights both about problematic conditions specifically faced by twins, and more generally, about what 'being a minority' is about.

In this case, the group specific rights that could serve as the justification of a claim for minority status relate most often to an acclaimed 'special bond' between twins, different from the bond between ordinary siblings. It is sometimes thought of as having a basis in biology and genetics. Even if that explanation hardly is correct, the 'special bond' is a strong cultural construct and describes an important element of twins' upbringing and identity building. Thus, the discussion below also touches the age-old question of 'nature vs. nurture', which assigns (monozygotic) twins the involuntary role of 'pieces of evidence'.

Minorities as Social Movements

A seminal book by Armand L. Mauss (1975) was titled, *Social Problems as Social Movements*. It became a starting shot for what later became the Constructionist School in the research on social problems (cf. Spector & Kitsuse 1977). Within this approach, social problems are analysed as discursive constructs that emerge as the result of claims-making activities by individuals and groups.

Mauss (1975, 38) motivates his choice of perspective with the cultural and temporal relativity of which social conditions may or may not be defined as problematic. Instead of 'objective' facts, the definitions rely on what 'people agree to believe', i.e., on reality constructs of various segments and subgroups of society. These reality constructs are related to group interests and lead to the formation of (issue-specific) *publics*, *interest groups*, and *pressure groups*. The latter fight to establish certain conditions as

'problems' (ibid, 36). From the point of view of the discussion in this article, *scientific publics* and interest groups (ibid, 19–20), producing theories and explanations about social problems (and about other social phenomena as well such as minorities and twins), are of a special interest. Among other examples of social movements as champions of social problems, Mauss discusses Feminist movements (ibid, 405–411) and movements addressing US race and ethnic relations (ibid, 511–555). He does that in terms of different 'natural history' phases (incipiency, coalescence, institutionalization, fragmentation, and demise; ibid, 61–66). The movements achieved that women's existing social position and race and ethnic relations became defined as problematic in new ways. According to Mauss' narrative, this change in consensual reality ('what people agree to believe') did not include, however, any re-definition of the relevant population segments themselves. In other words, the rights of 'women' and 'blacks' were re-defined, but the groups remained what they had been.

At the same time, even the most well-established identity categories are politically and discursively constructed. In the same way as the re-definition of some (putative) social conditions as problematic, the creation of group solidarity and gaining others' acknowledgement of a group as a minority results from mobilization and claims making. Construction of a common identity is an essential component of all social movements (Della Porta & Diani 2007, 92).

Figure 1 is a description of minority building as a process. The 'stages' follow a 'natural history model' (cf. Mauss 1975, 61–66) of a minority's development towards institutionalization and recognition; however, the 'later' stages of the model obviously affect the 'earlier' ones, which continue to develop and transform. For instance, mobilization of a minority-to-be makes it possible to make claims in its name, at the same time as people mobilize around those very claims. When successful, claims-making leads to a recognition of the minority status in some contexts, while the recognition itself becomes a fact affecting individual experience and practices of identification.

Not unlike other social movements, minority building is a reaction on some claimed social conditions perceived as problematic; this creates a conflictual relationship with other actors. Publics, interest groups, and pressure groups mobilize around those conflicts. These efforts are both facilitated and restricted by the overall context of culture, politics, and legislation, i.e., the opportunity structure. Legislation on minority rights is a case in point: It is moulded by the claims on rights made by recognized or emerging minorities and accepted by the majority, but it may also encourage attempts of establishing some forms of diversity as minorities, and discourage others. If the minority building movement is successful, the group status and the recognition of the group's rights becomes a matter-of-course, an uncontested fact that both political power structures and common sense knowledge will agree upon ('what people agree to believe').

Even successfully established minorities continue to be involved in advocacy in order to support their status as minorities. The strategies and tactics of advocacy require constant revision of the claims made, the networking and mobilization patterns, and possibly also of the bases of group identification (i.e., who are regarded as members of the in-group). Minority incorporation régimes are legislated upon by nation states, which, however, are growingly dependent on norms set by transnational actors.

Regarding a social phenomenon as a social movement is a methodological choice. Both social problems and minorities have been viewed from other angles, too, and there have been good reasons for that. In policy development, one frequently needs a starting point that is a politically defined best state of affairs. In everyday policymaking, an essentialist approach can sometimes be useful, despite best theoretical knowledge.

I will continue with an overview of the treatment of twins in research and popular discourses. After that, I will focus on the issues of mobilization and possible claims for rights, and try to explain why twins usually do not classify as a minority. The article ends with a clarification of its purpose and ethics.

Research and Discourses on Twinship

Biologically, twins (and other multiple births) fall into two categories. The division of one egg fertilized by one sperm produces monozygotic or 'identical' twins. This means that they share the same genes and are indistinguishable by ordinary DNA tests. They are assumed to share exactly the same genetic inheritance; according to recent evidence, this assumption might, however, not be altogether accurate (Jonsson et al., 2021). The share of monozygotic twin births is constant at about 0.4 to 0.45% of all births. Dizygotic

or 'parental' twins are born out of two separately fertilized eggs. They can be either of the same sex or of opposite sexes, and their genetic proximity is similar to that of other siblings. The number of dizygotic twins varies from place to place (in the USA and Europe, it is about 1 to 2% of all births), and has grown recently because of the availability of assisted-reproduction technologies (Viney 2014, 49–50).

As relatively rare occasions among humans, multiple births have aroused curiosity and even fears¹ reflected by folklore and literature. They have been interpreted as proofs of the mother's marital unfaithfulness or excessive sexual desire (Viney 2014). Shakespeare introduces twins as central characters in two of his plays, *A Comedy of Errors* and *The Twelfth Night*. According to the literature researcher (and twin) Daisy Murray (2017, 180), Shakespeare's depiction of twins is more positive and markedly different from the early modern prevailing view of twins as something unnatural. The playwright instead builds his comedies around twins' similarity in appearance and personality. He was himself the father of a pair of dizygotic twins, born in 1585.

Now as then, twins' similarity and the time they spend doing things together has led to a widely shared belief about a 'special bond' between them that is more intense and intimate than the usual bond between siblings. They are expected to suffer excessively from forced separation, and to understand immediately each other's feelings and intentions. There are plenty of popular stories about how this 'shared consciousness' even functions across distance, bordering with telepathic connection (Radford 2018).

There is no lack of studies exploiting twins as sources of data. According to one estimate, 1.5 million persons were in 2012 'participating' in twin studies worldwide (Hur & Craig 2013). In 1875, the Victorian scientist Francis Galton authored the paper, '*The History of Twins, As a Criterion of the Relative Powers of Nature and Nurture*', and thereby established the lines along which much of twin research would proceed (Chiew & Barnwell 2019, 472–473). It was the nature/nurture debate, or the set of questions about the respective importance of genetic inheritance vs. environment for individual abilities, etc., which was expected to be answered by evidence from twins' life trajectories. The eugenics movement that Galton helped to establish had one of its peak moments in Josef Mengele's experiments with 3000 twins in Auschwitz/Birkenau (Joseph 2003, 32–33; Blakemore 2019), of which only 200 survived.

Modern medical and genetic research have used comparisons between monozygotic and dizygotic twins in order to establish heritability coefficients of various physical and psychological traits. As a background, there is the assumption that as raised in the same family at the same time (equal

¹ Or, Didymophobia (from Greek διδυμος (twin) and φοβία (fear)).

environment assumption, EEA), monozygotic twins share the same ‘nature and nurture’, while dizygotic twins only share the same ‘nurture’ (Joseph 2003, 58–84). While this looks like a perfect experimental setting, it must be said that EEA, both in its classical and modified forms (Fosse et al. 2015, 2–3; 5) ignores much of what psychiatric, psychological, and sociological research tells about parents’ and the remaining social environment’s treatment of monozygotic and dizygotic twins, respectively, or about both types of twins’ relation to each other.

The nature/nurture debate has given rise to a rich flora of anecdotes, to which genetic researchers and science journalists actively contribute. University of Minnesota researchers’ 1979 report about the amazing similarity of a pair of ‘identical’ twins reared apart is continuously cited when twin research is presented to the public. The 39-year-old twins James Arthur Springer and James Edward Lewis, or the ‘Jim Twins’, were re-united after allegedly having been separated at the age of one month. They were reported, among other things, both to have ‘married and then divorced a woman named Linda. Their second wives were both named Betty’; ‘Each man grew up with an adopted brother named Larry. During childhood, each owned a dog named Toy’ (Chen 1979). Both ‘smoked Salem cigarettes, drove the same type of car and even vacationed at the same beach in Florida. The culprit for the odd similarities? Genes.’ (Lewis 2014). To be fair, the researchers (see below) never claimed to have established a hereditary explanation for the preference of certain vacation resorts, or for marrying somebody called Linda or Betty. Thinking soberly, the ‘odd similarities’ rather show the opposite of what the storyteller intends: the powerful effects of place of residence, social class, gender, and age cohort. However, stories like this are constantly reproduced in order to persuade, in the way what Harry G. Frankfurt (2005) calls ‘bullshitting’.

The “Minnesota Study of Twins reared Apart” (Bouchard et al., 1990), in the course of which the Jim Twins’ story was created, has won wide recognition within psychological research (Gold Medal 2014). The researchers’ ambition was to establish the heritability of psychological traits by means of comparing monozygotic twins who, according to their definition, had been ‘reared apart’. Based on the correlations of Wechsler (WAIS) IQ between pairs of monozygotic twins, they claimed to have established the heritability of cognitive abilities.

The genes sing a prehistoric song that today should sometimes be resisted but which it would be foolish to ignore. [...] If genetic variation was evolutionary debris at the end of the Pleistocene, it is now a salient and essential feature of the human condition.

... was how Bouchard and his co-workers ended their 1990 contribution to the nature/nurture debate.

Criticism has targeted the researchers’ more than lenient definition of ‘twins reared apart’; their failure to report details about their samples of the experiment group (monozygotic twins) and the control group (dizygotic twins); and the fact, that the correlations of IQ within the control group and the experiment group did not differ on a level of statistical significance ($p=0.05$) (Joseph 2022). Serious doubts about the study’s validity remain unanswered.

Similarly, much psychological research on twins has been triggered by an interest in the respective roles of genetics and environment, for instance in formation of temperament, personality, and cognition. In addition, an important field of psychological twin studies deals with their identity formation (which the studies often treat as problematic) (Bacon 2019). The focus is on childhood and adolescence, and on the specific challenge of establishing individual identity — which in our culture is a requirement for ‘normal adulthood’. Few studies address later stages of twin life (Pietilä et al, 2012). A general notion about this vast strand of literature is that it treats twinship either as an anomaly welcome for research purposes, or as another kind of anomaly that individuals need to cope with through successful socialization.

There is also an amount of anthropological literature inspecting beliefs and customs related to twinship in non-Western societies. Ideas about twins vary across cultures. In some, twins confer special honour while in others they invite fear (Bacon 2019, 108). Douglas ([1966] 2001, 40; 169 f) lists twin births among the ‘ambiguous or anomalous’ events with which a culture needs to deal. In contrast, sociological analyses of twinship in modern societies are hard to find; there do exist a few articles and books, however, showing the route that such an analysis could take (Bacon 2010; 2019; Stewart 2000; 2003). The issues brought forward are rooted in the interactionist and constructionist approaches. From a sociological perspective, twinship is ‘an irreducibly social phenomenon’ (Stewart 2000, 719) manifesting itself as cultural beliefs, expectations, stereotypes, ascribed social statuses, and roles. The simultaneous birth of two (or more) children to the same mother transgresses the cultural norm of differentiating children by age (ibid, 721). Interaction with others reinforces and stresses the specificity of the twinship condition as different from the individuality and autonomy of a single person (ibid, 724; Bacon 2019, 114). Dominant (Western) discourses of childhood depict children as innocent and dependent, gradually growing towards ‘individualistic, knowledgeable independence’ and thereby achieving ‘full personhood’ (Bacon 2019, 112). For twins, this has resulted in a complex set of contradictory norms, requiring similarity of appearance and conduct in childhood, and individualization in adolescence and adulthood. Failure to complete this process will result in a number of ‘problems’ that the psychological twin studies inform about (ibid, 115).

Stewart (2000) discusses several sociological concepts with reference to twins: stigma, stereotyping, and labelling. She also engages in a short discussion of twins as a minority group. Stigma, in this context, does not mean any automatic exclusion from social relationships, but inclusion dependent on pre-set conditions (cf. Goffman 1963, 168). The acceptable twin role is defined by a stereotype: Twins are expected to exercise limited autonomy and individuality. They are expected to be emotionally close to each other and to fit into the unit of one individual by displaying either similar or complementary characteristics. Twins are not treated as two individuals but as one.

Stewart (2000, 731) remains cautious, perhaps wisely, in her discussion of twins as a minority group; she raises the issue in the form of a rhetorical question. She points at the distinctiveness of twins as a social category, and at that category's incommensurability with the society's prevailing ideas about the natural order of things. Twins are treated differently from non-twins; in some contexts, they are a deviant category; and being a twin is a central ingredient of a person's individual and social identity. However, Stewart does not address issues that, from the point of view of this paper, are crucial in turning diversity into minorities: mobilization, and a perception of rights.

The Twinship Condition as a Foundation for Minority Building

As discussed above, the process of constructing minority status needs to be anchored in experiences specific for a certain population segment, which can then function as a base for identification. For twins, such experiences are many and obvious. From their birth (at the latest), they are treated differently from others, and from their early childhood they become aware of that (Bacon 2006; Segal & Russell 1992). The available social roles and discourses around them single out twins as different from the rest of the human population. They may accept or rebel against being denied individual actor status (or for that matter, also against having that status enforced upon them later in life), but they will unfailingly need to respond to that in some way.

Do the shared experiences, then, create a group identity? There is not much evidence of twins networking with other twins. The stigma created by individualistic culture rather discourages that. There are organizations that stage gatherings of twins, such as the International Twins Association founded in 1932 (ITA 2020); the Festival Committee of Twinsburg's (Ohio) annual Twins Days Festival (Twinsdays 2023); the largest one in Europe, Association des Deux et Plus de Pleucadeuc (A.D.P.P. 2023); or The Mary Slessor Twin Club in Calabar, Nigeria (Kurzen & De Wilde 2019). Other organizations (MBF 2022; Twins Trust 2022) and

social media networks (Twiniversity 2020) provide consultation and support for twins' and multiple's parents, for health care professionals and educators, finance research, and mediate discounts and special offers for their members. While the twin gatherings might represent identity based mobilization, they seem to be mostly about entertainment (for instance, contests for most alike (and most different!) twins in various age and gender categories; see ITA Newsletter 2020), or just about twins socializing with other twins (Barrell 2003). The charitable trusts address parents of twins and those working with twins, not the twins themselves. None of these contexts is mass mobilization in the sense that a majority or even a significant minority of twins would be involved or even conscious of their existence.

As shown by Mauss' (1975, 55–56) analysis, successful mobilization evolves around claims about issues that members of the interest group perceive as important from their group-specific perspective. In minority building, they are typically about rights and recognition. Right for life is the most fundamental but also the right for equal opportunities in family life, education, professional advancement, and execution of power, or in any other field of public life concern the fundamentals of (democratic) society. Those rights sum up as non-discrimination (MRG 2021). True, for (some) members of such minority groups whose group status is not immediately visible in their body, it has always been possible to avoid discrimination by means of superficial assimilation with the majority — this applies to sexual minorities, disadvantaged ethnic groups, etc. Asking for anything more can easily be dismissed as a quest for 'preferential treatment' or 'privileges'. The obvious fault in this reasoning is that the successfully assimilated people have needed to give up much more than what most members of the majority would be willing to do; and that for various reasons, the path of advancement-through-assimilation is not available for everyone. Accordingly, proper non-discrimination policy also includes recognition of the minority's specificity as equal with what characterizes the majority. Recognition of a minority means that public institutions customize relevant parts of their policies to accommodate with the minority's specific characteristics (cf. Patten 2014, 158). Of course, recognition sometimes involves symbolic acts without direct relevance for day-to-day policymaking (such as public statements, construction of historical memory, review of the words used when referring to the group, public celebrations, and media campaigns). They contribute to policymaking indirectly, legitimizing new standards in the eyes of policymakers and the public.

What are, then, the specific challenges twins are facing, and what could their claims for rights and recognition look

like? As for the right for life, the higher mortality rate in multiple births is a well-documented fact, which twin-related charitable trusts already pressure for health-care systems to deal with (Draper et al. 2021). One of Africa's most established twin organizations, The Mary Slessor Twins Club, was originally born out of an initiative to stop a wide spread practice of killing twins as supposed bearers of bad luck (Kurzen & De Wilde 2019; cf. Douglas [1966] 2001, 40).

Some US court cases indicate possible further lines of argumentation on 'rights'. As quoted by Segal (1993, 48–49), a monozygotic twin was awarded compensation for an accident that had (years before the actual court case) altered his co-twin's physical appearance and ability to engage in joint sports activities. In another case involving the death of a dizygotic twin in a traffic accident, the spouse and the twin sister of the deceased were both granted the same compensation for 'past and future loss of society' (ibid, 51). In divorce cases, the court may decide against splitting up twins in child custody arrangements because the children could be adversely affected by distance from each other (HG.org 2021). In other words, the specific and intimate bond between twins is sometimes recognized in courtrooms. From here, one could go much further: If marriage is a factor affecting decisions on citizenship and residence permit, should not twinship be that as well? Refugees' right for family reunification usually excludes grown-up siblings. However, should not twin siblings be treated here in analogy with spouses, taking into account their 'special bond'? More generally, should not (some of) the legal principles meant to protect marriage be applicable to the twin relationship also? This is not the case today. It appears, based on a search with the term 'twins' in the database of the European Court of Human Rights (2021), as if the Court had not dealt with this topic in its material decisions.²

Another set of legal questions especially concerning monozygotic twins (identical or close to identical as to their genetic heritage) arises from the advances of medical technology. As the only completely suitable organ donor, can a minor twin be used for transplantation in order to help his or her monozygotic twin? If s/he is an adult and refuses, can s/he be forced to do that (Segal 1993, 53–54)? If one of a pair of monozygotic twins is screened for genetically transmitted diseases, should the results not be automatically forwarded to the other twin also? Finally, the genetic parents, sometimes even egg cell and sperm donors, have in some jurisdictions the right to at least information about their genetic offspring growing up in another family. If genetics is as important as it in such a case seems to be, should the same right not be extended to the monozygotic twin of the 'genetic parent'?

As to the discursive public representation of twins, there is much to object. Is it OK to present twins as 'spooky', as in many examples of popular fiction and movies? Should twins continue to be impersonated by non-twin actors (as almost universally seems to be the case)? Does not the popular term 'identical twin' effectively deny monozygotic twins' individuality beyond what is determined by genetics? What, then, about the cultural effects of over 140 years of twin studies that 'both draw on and contribute to the separation and exceptional status of twins, loading their every act with experimental potential' (Viney 2014, 56), or about the popular presentation of such studies? Their large mainstream reduces twins to nothing more but carriers of genetic heritage, totally ignoring their life situations and own agency. The monozygotic twins themselves immediately and intuitively reject the Equal Environment Assumption (EEA), and it has received severe scientific criticism for both empirical and logical reasons (Fosse et al. 2015; Joseph 1998); however, it has been the leading paradigm in genetic twin studies for decades. Finally, addressing the most sombre side of twin studies: Could something more be done to commemorate the twin victims of Auschwitz/Birkenau? More generally, have twins a claim for visibility in history writing? Certainly, most of these issues have no direct policy relevance; nor have they been, to my knowledge, visibly campaigned for in public. However, they are a mirror of our society's views on twinship.

Twins as a Non-minority

Unlike some other (recognized or prospective) minority groups, twins do not need to convince the public about their 'objective', or biological existence. Twins do exist as an easily definable biological phenomenon. The challenge could be about changing the prevailing views about twinship as a social category.

The success of minority building movements depends on their ability to mobilize interest groups around the claims they make about rights and recognition. Twins have had no, or limited success. One possible explanation lies in the absence of any ideology or set of beliefs that would appeal to all prospective members of such an interest group (Mauss 1975, 55–56). There is no agreed-upon 'twin perspective'. Many of the possible claims discussed above refer to a 'special bond' assumed to exist between twins. However, the assumption of the 'special bond' is also an ingredient of the stereotype about twins lacking complete personhood. For twins, the option of escaping that stereotype can be equally important. Any presumptive effort of minority building would then find itself split between the aims of discursively stressing either the specificity, or the assimilation potential of the group. This dilemma is

² My friend and colleague Markku Suksi, Professor of Public Law at the Åbo Akademi University, kindly did this search on 27 April 2021.

not unique for twins (see Petchesky 2009). Besides sexual minorities of today, it has for a long time been faced by movements of disadvantaged ethnic minorities as well. It is echoed by the ‘loyalty’ criterion sometimes used in definitions of minorities qualifying for protection (Gilbert 1992, 71–73). The ‘deaf/Deaf’ dilemma is also a case in point: Are the persons with impaired hearing a medical category, or a minority with its own culture, language, and identity (e.g., Nakamura 2006)? Those writing on minorities tend in practice to end up in an insecure balance between essentialist and constructionist definitions. The essentialist discourse with which minorities are met encourages stereotyping, which often is one of the largest problems they face. At the same time, essentialism may be necessary in order to legitimate the minority’s claim for recognition.

The ‘special bond’ between twins is probably not biologically conditioned; it is not ‘real’ outside the society and culture that construct it. It is something created through child rearing practices, cultural norms and expectations, not through biological facts. Most twins assimilate successfully. The experience of being a twin remains remote and maybe enigmatic for most singletons who do not have twins as close friends or family members — hence the frequently heard, non-answerable question: ‘How is it like to be a twin?’. However, twins living in a society designed for non-twins will eventually learn much about ‘how it is like to be a singleton’. Given the actual degree of assimilation, questioning widely spread stereotypes is motivated. At the same time, the ‘special bond’ is ‘real’ in the social world that twins inhabit. A society and culture, which nourishes stereotypes and creates the conditions that make people live in accordance with them, should also recognize their consequences. Through an understanding of the ‘special bond’ as a socially constructed fact nevertheless having real impact on twins’ lives, one can bridge over the controversy between stress either on twins’ specificity as a category, or on their need to be accepted as individual persons outside the twin unit. An adequate understanding of what socially constructed facts are and what they are not, is a key to the dilemma between stressing group specificity or legitimacy through assimilation potential. ‘Rather than asking whether these identities [...] are authentic or socially constructed, we should instead acknowledge that they often are both’ (Weinberg 2014, 153).

A Final Note on the Purpose and Ethics of This Article

Some readers may be confused about what I am trying to do with this article. Am I trying to initiate a social movement to promote twins’ rights? Am I presenting twins as a repressed

minority? — Both ideas seem implausible. At the same time, I have shown that there are specific situations where twins could claim the right for recognition and more sensitivity, but that does not yet make them repressed in general. It is easy to find examples of other social groups in a similar position. Consider, e.g., the following statement by the Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology (2017):

In October 2016, The Finnish Migration Office (Migri) denied asylum from an Iraqi viola player. In the decision, it was accepted as a fact that in Iraq, the person in question had been threatened and assaulted because of his musicianship. Yet according to Migri, it would be safe for him to return to Iraq, if he changed his occupation. [...] The Finnish Society for Ethnomusicology together with the undersigned organisations and institutions object the decision. [...] By banning musical performances not only publicly but also privately, the psyche of a person dedicated to music is hurt in a way not dissimilar from torture. This is comparable to banning the use of one’s native language. It is true that no-one is born as a musician – but neither is anyone born as a native speaker.

Nobody would probably claim, that viola players in general are a repressed minority, or even a ‘minority’ at all. Nevertheless, in this specific case, they come so close to being that as possible.

By claiming that ‘being a minority’ is situation specific and socially constructed, and by using twins as an example, do I then at the same time pull out the carpet from under the feet of other social groups with much more urgent claims for acceptance and respect? I do not think so, and that has not been my purpose. Acknowledging the fact that social groups and relations, including power relations, are socially constructed does not make them less ‘real’.

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Declarations

Conflict of Interest The author declares no competing interests.

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