



Editorial

Too many scientific journals? Undoubtedly, yes. Why then start another? One very good reason is that many scientists interested in twin research have been longing to have a journal entirely devoted to the discipline Siemens¹ first used in 1924 and that should perhaps be called didymology (didymos = twin).

Twin studies generally, and classical twin studies especially, are used across a wide spectrum of domains and disciplines. However, these studies are reported in such a wide variety of journals that it is difficult for the individual reader to keep track of the specific bibliography on twins.

The study of twins and higher order multiple births has evoked a growing interest during recent decades, especially among obstetricians, geneticists and psychologists. An epidemic of multiples is facing countries such as Belgium and The Netherlands where one newborn in 25 was a multiple in 1997, as opposed to one in 50 in 1970. This consequence of infertility treatment and of the aging of the maternal population has to be of great concern to health care specialists because of the high risks associated with multiple pregnancies. Whilst several new journals on reproductive technologies have been launched recently, far too little attention has been given to the sometimes dramatic consequences of these technologies. This journal fills the gap as it will address the issues affecting the increase in multiple births.

Multiple birth organisations are looking for a medium that allows them to voice their concerns, their rights and needs, whilst acting as an interface with science. Finally, the International Society for Twin Studies itself needs rejuvenation and has, quite legitimately, decided to publish its own journal.

Twin Research aims to contribute to the improvement and development of the methodology used in twin studies. Too many articles are still flawed in this respect. Since 1989, International Workshops on Twin Methodology have been held at the Catholic University of Leuven, Belgium, and the University of Colorado at Boulder, Colorado, USA. These workshops grew out of the recognition that the gulf between expert collectors of twin data and experts in analysing them was widening, not closing.² The gulf is probably no longer getting wider, but it is far from

closed. Twin Research hopes to complete the closure.

The future of classical twin studies is promising, especially with current advances in molecular biology. Those who doubt this view should read the commentary by Martin, Boomsma and Machin (1997)³ in which the value of the classical twin study is considered. The authors are well aware of the possible problems and difficulties inherent in twin studies but stress that a maximum return from epidemiological investigations involving twins can still be expected provided that the caveats are properly considered. These include accurate zygosity diagnosis, sufficient sample sizes, appropriate statistical methods and the effect of intra-pair differences in monozygotic twins. Martin et al suggest that far from becoming irrelevant with advances of molecular biology, twin studies can improve the efficiency of quantitative trait-loci detection as well as play an important role in unravelling developmental genetic mechanisms.

Research into twins and higher order multiple births frequently requires multidisciplinary cooperation. This journal calls primarily for papers that will be valuable to scientists coming from horizons far apart, but could lead to productive cross-fertilisation. Both obstetricians and geneticists, for example, are interested in conditions prevailing in utero, especially the structure of the foetal membranes, that result in discordances within monozygotic pairs. (One of the crucial questions is whether monochorionic and dichorionic pairs are entirely comparable.)

The world of multiples woke up during the past decade, particularly in the English-speaking countries where many multiple birth organisations have been founded. Most of them are members of the Council of Multiple Birth Organizations (COMBO) within the International Society for Twin Studies. A special section of this journal, edited by Jacob Orlebeke, is therefore devoted to relevant News, Views and Comments of interest to families of multiples as well as to scientists. Please send comments and interesting information directly to him.

This first issue publishes the Declaration of Rights and Statement of Needs of Twins and Higher order Multiples. Readers of this seminal document will

realise how much should be done to enhance the well-being of multiples and of their families. This section of our new journal should provide a world-wide forum for COMBO to promote its activities. If successful, it will also be published separately and made available to individual subscribers at a very favourable rate.

Robert Derom

References

- 1 Rende RD, Plomin R, Vandenberg SG. Who discovered the twin method? *Behav Genet* 1990; 20: 277–285.
- 2 Martin NG, Boomsma DI, Neale MC. Foreword. *Behav Genet* 1989; 19: 5–7.
- 3 Martin NG, Boomsma DI, Machin G. A twin-pronged attack on complex traits. *Nat Genet* 1997; 17: 5–7.