

# Wisconsin Twin Research

University of Wisconsin - Madison

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**Feature Articles:**

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Funding for research is provided by grant awards from the National Institute of Health, National Alliance for Autism Research, Waisman Center & private foundations.



Waisman Center



## Wisconsin Twin Research: Reflections on 2008 and Excitement for 2009

Nicole Schmidt, Research Program Manager



The oldest twins in the Wisconsin Twin Project are now 18 and 19 years old! Many families participated with us in as many as three or four studies over the course of their twins' lives. Our first study included toddler and early preschool twins. The second study included twins at age 7-9. The third study included twins at age 14-17. Some families also participated when the twins were about age 4. I have personally worked with each of these research studies and can hardly believe how fast the time has flown by. In some ways, I feel like the distant aunt who can't believe these kids could possibly be graduating high school when it seems I was only playing *Hungry Hippos* with them a short time ago! It makes me feel a bit old! ☺ On behalf of everyone at the Wisconsin Twin Project, I want to say we have felt truly honored to be a part of so many families lives for so long! The success of our research would not be possible without the strong support and enthusiasm for research from Wisconsin's twin families.

The topics of our research have included social, emotional, communicative, and cognitive development, behavioral challenges, behavioral adaptation, sensory defensiveness, individual differences, family context, and more. In all the years of our research, 2008 and 2009 may be the most exciting yet (and most busy). Last spring, we put all of our resources towards our study of early adolescence and visited with over 41 families and completed shortened assessments with an additional 12 families. Last summer we conducted over 95 home visits and assessed 42 more families in our shortened protocols. The summer home visits involved two university vehicles and eight staff traveling throughout the state five days a

week and amounted to over 3,890 person hours! Our teams drove over 22,000 miles this summer alone.

Many of you know how much we love to do telephone interviews. In addition to being on the road, we had many people on the telephone. This summer we conducted over 64 telephone interviews per week – 768 interviews between June and August. Many talented undergraduate students majoring in psychology work with us during the summer for credit or pay as extra "seasonal" help and the time dedicated by these students this summer amounted to over 10,700 hours. This fall we continued to travel throughout the state and interview families and twins.

The National Institute of Mental Health recently ranked our newest research proposal the second highest in the nation! Highly regarded reviewers cited our "*high productivity and valuable state-wide twin sample as one of the greatest assets to the project*" and potential for some of the most exciting scientific results in our time. The collaborators in our newest work are some of the finest in the field and in the world.

We are preparing two new research studies – one of the oldest twins and a new study of young twins (see page 3 for details about these studies).

These are exciting times and I want to extend our gratitude once again for your participation in twin research and sharing your enthusiasm. Your collective research participation will undoubtedly contribute to improved understanding of individual differences in child emotional and behavioral development, and be incorporated in scientific papers read throughout the world for many years to come!

*Nicci*

## Transitioning To Early Adulthood



As our research on twins continues, twins from participating families grow older as well. Many families are beginning to experience the transition to early

adulthood. Whether that means continuing some form of education or joining the work force, life after high school is a time of change and careful decision-making.

During this critical period of one's life, it is not out of the ordinary to experience a range of feelings about what the future may hold. But when it comes to psychological health, the largest contributing factors to potential problems may surprise you.

Many past theories have pointed toward the inability to acquire employment or not continuing on to further schooling as the main causes of psychological distress during the transition to early adulthood. But according to Borgen, Amundson, and Tench (1996) financial difficulties and trouble finding enough activities that give personal enjoyment and help avoid boredom were more significantly related to well-being during this time.

It seems that young adults are more concerned with the ability to make meaningful choices about their own life and how these choices influence the world around them.

This does not denounce the overall importance of either continuing schooling or landing a good job, but it underscores the importance of being engaged with something that is personally meaningful. It seems as though doing something that you love—whether it is simply a hobby or volunteering for something that you believe in—has important psychological benefits!



For more in-depth information see: Borgen, William A., Amundson, Norman E., & Tench, Elizabeth (1996). Psychological Well-Being Throughout the Transition From Adolescence to Adulthood. *The Career Development Quarterly*. 45, 189-199.



## Exploring Culture In Our Twin Studies

Twin studies present a unique opportunity to learn how culture and family background influence child behavior and emotion. We are committed to upholding a national standard of culturally sensitive research, so **we need your help!** We want to enroll more families of ethnic-minority descent, including African American, American Indian, Asian, Hispanic and other families of twins with diverse backgrounds. Families are paid for participation. If you or a family you know may be interested in learning more about this research opportunity, please call us toll-free at (866) 230-2560 or email Patrick at [pheath@wisc.edu](mailto:pheath@wisc.edu).

## By The Numbers...

- More than 500 students have been mentored in Professor Goldsmith's laboratories
- 30 years of professional work by Dr. Goldsmith since completing his Ph.D.
- Longest term for an undergraduate student employee: Helena Ruf, 10 semesters and an additional 3 years after graduation

## New Study of 4-5 year old twins



In 2009, we will begin a new study of twins around their 4<sup>th</sup> birthday, starting with twins born in 2005. This study includes one telephone interview with the twins' primary caregiver and asks a range of

questions about social, emotional, and communicative development. Twins born in 2005-2008 have been recruited by the Waisman Center Research Participation Core's Twin Registry (see vol. XXVII, winter '05). Families are being contacted by the Waisman Center to be added to Dr. Goldsmith's Wisconsin Twin Research. Dr. Goldsmith's professional research staff will begin calling twin families shortly after they reach age 4.

## New Study of Adolescence

We are also beginning a new study of late adolescence. This study is a follow up of twins who participated somewhat recently at age 14-17. The new study has two parts and the first part is one telephone interview with each twin and primary caregiver.

Some families (about 15%) may be selected for a more in-depth follow up which will include a one day, expense-paid visit with us in Madison. While the interview portion will be conducted with over 600 families, the Madison visit will only be conducted with about 100 families. Some families have already completed the telephone interviews.



## Twins and Research on Autism

The study of twins and autism is completing its fifth year of research and preparing a new grant from the National Institute of Health to help understand the complexities of Autism.

We now estimate that there are as many as 200 pairs of twins in Wisconsin under the age of 18 in which one or both twins has autism or some other form of pervasive developmental disorder (PDD-NOS or Asperger Syndrome). We have great personal and scientific interest in these disorders.

In the first phase of our current work, parents are interviewed via telephone about their child(ren)'s developmental and medical history.

The interview generally takes 45-60 minutes and can be scheduled whenever is convenient to the family. Families are paid \$25 for

participating in this interview. In the next phase, we re-contact some families and ask them to participate in a follow up interview, which is also compensated.

In order to accurately assess the prevalence of autism in twin pairs, we would like to know if your family or someone you know has a family where one or both twins have some form of autism, even if they choose not to participate.

Thus far, we have located about 160 twin pairs in which one or both has autism or a related challenge.

We would appreciate a phone call or email from parents of twins with autism living in Wisconsin. It is not important if the twins are identical or fraternal, boys or girls, or even if the co-twin has any behavioral issues or not; we are interested in all aspects of the autism spectrum.



Please contact Shaun Schweigert for more information:  
tap@waisman.wisc.edu  
(866) 230-2560 [toll-free]  
(608) 262-5574 [local]





Thank you for participating in our telephone interviews, questionnaires, and home visits! Your perspective is invaluable to our work, and we have enjoyed meeting so many wonderful families. Your participation contributes to advances in child development research and improves our understanding of individual differences and the complexities of personality and behavior. Thanks again ☺

Enjoy your twins, and have a wonderful winter!

**Moving? Want to know more about how to get involved? Contact us now!**

☎ Toll free phone: (866) 230-2560  
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