



REVIEW

by Assoc. Prof. Ivan Stoyanov, PhD

on a dissertation entitled:

“The Influence of New Family Members on Sibling Relationships – An Examination of Differentiation, Parental Attitudes, and Conflict Resolution Skills”

Author: Lilach Schwartz Peleg – PhD candidate in independent form of study at Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”

Scientific Supervisor: Prof. Sevdzhihan Eyubova, PhD

This review has been prepared in accordance with Order No. 193/27.03.2026 of the Rector of Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar” in connection with the defense of the dissertation thesis of Lilach Peleg for the award of the educational and scientific degree “Doctor” in Professional Field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program “General Psychology.”

1. Information about the PhD Candidate

Based on the documentation submitted by Lilach Peleg, a doctoral candidate in independent form of study (2022–2026) at the Department of Psychology, Faculty of Social, Business and Computer Sciences at Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”, I state that the documents submitted for review have been correctly prepared and that no procedural violations have been identified in

accordance with the regulatory framework governing the acquisition of academic degrees in the Republic of Bulgaria.

The professional biography of the doctoral candidate outlines a clearly recognizable, consistent, and integrated developmental path in the fields of family therapy, psychology, and applied arts.

At an early stage of her education (Bachelor's degree in Literature and Theatre), a foundation related to narrative, stage performance, and interpersonal communication was established. This foundation logically evolved into a Master's degree in Drama Therapy – a key transition from the humanities toward a therapeutic and applied field. This is not a random choice, but rather a clear continuation that combines artistic tools with psychological practice.

Her professional experience further complements and reinforces this trajectory. Her long-term work as a drama therapist in an educational environment demonstrates a sustained interest in art therapy and group work. The parallel development of a private practice in family and marital therapy illustrates an expansion from group and educational contexts toward clinical and counseling practice.

Certification as a family and marital therapist represents a natural professional specialization that conceptually connects practice with a deeper theoretical framework in the field of family systems.

The doctoral studies are a logical continuation of this path. The topic of sibling relationships, especially in the context of new family members, demonstrates a clear focus on a specific yet significant aspect of family dynamics. It emerges organically from both therapeutic practice and previous academic interests.

The publications submitted for review demonstrate active scholarly work, with a balanced presence of theoretical, methodological, and empirical studies, and

testify to the development of research competence rather than solely practical expertise.

An additional advantage is the candidate's media presence, which demonstrates the ability to popularize scientific and therapeutic topics to a broader audience – an important aspect of the contemporary academic and professional role.

2. Relevance of the Topic

The topic of the dissertation submitted for review is highly relevant because sibling relationships in adulthood remain insufficiently studied, especially in the context of structural family changes through the integration of new family members. The examination of factors such as parental approaches, differentiation of self, and conflict management skills provides both a theoretical foundation and practical tools for supporting the resilience and adaptability of the family system.

3. Information about the Dissertation and the Abstract

The structure of the dissertation is logically organized and subordinated to the comprehensive development of the research problem, the verification of the proposed research hypothesis, and the resulting research questions.

Lilach Peleg's dissertation comprises 172 pages and includes an introduction, four chapters, a conclusion, a bibliography, and appendices. The bibliography contains 98 sources relevant to the research topic.

The introduction clearly formulates the research goals and questions, arguing for the significance of the topic through a systemic perspective and an emphasis on transitions in the family life cycle. The text demonstrates conceptual consistency, logical structure, and a well-grounded research niche.

The first and second chapters provide the theoretical foundation by outlining a consistent literature review on adult sibling relationships and by substantiating the

scientific gap related to the insufficient study of transformations occurring with the inclusion of new family members.

The theoretical framework integrates psychoanalytic, systemic, and sociological approaches, tracing the limited attention paid to family relationships in the work of Sigmund Freud and introducing the horizontal axis of development (Juliet Mitchell) in addition to the vertical parent–child axis. The structural model of Salvador Minuchin and the concept of differentiation of self developed by Murray Bowen provide a framework for analyzing family reorganization, where the integration of an in-law is viewed as a structural change rather than merely a transitional stage. The dissertation also demonstrates interdisciplinary awareness through the inclusion of concepts by Anthony Giddens and the group socialization model of Moreland & Levine.

The goals, research questions, and scientific novelty are clearly formulated, with a focus on loyalty conflict, coping strategies, and the adaptability of adult sibling relationships. Key concepts and theoretical perspectives on sibling relationships are systematized using the model of Furman & Buhrmester concerning warmth and closeness, rivalry, mutual knowledge, empathy, and acceptance. The dissertation also integrates attachment theories (Bowlby, Ainsworth), social learning theory (Bandura), and the structural family approach (Minuchin), emphasizing the differentiation of self as a mediator between parental approaches, structural characteristics, and relationship quality.

The third chapter presents the framework of the empirical design, offering a combined approach that includes quantitative and qualitative methods and semi-structured interviews, ensuring both breadth and depth of analysis. The use of standardized instruments for measuring perceptions of relatives, conflict communication, and differentiation of self constitutes a reliable basis for conducting the empirical study and ensures methodological coherence.

Particular attention is devoted to ethical aspects: informed consent, anonymity, voluntary participation, and personal data protection. This underscores the study's compliance with academic and professional standards and enhances its legitimacy.

The fourth chapter presents the empirical results, analyzing changes in the quality of sibling relationships before and after the integration of a new partner. The study demonstrates the significance of parental attitudes, styles, and approaches in shaping primary perceptions of closeness and fairness, the role of differentiation of self in adapting to structural changes, and the influence of conflict resolution skills on relationship resilience.

The results confirm the dynamic and procedural nature of sibling relationships, identifying key scenarios of transformation and adaptation, including the emergence of a loyalty conflict between the partner and siblings.

The fourth chapter further expands the understanding of the family life cycle by defining the integration of an in-law as an independent transitional moment and offers a synthesized systemic perspective that unites individual, interpersonal, and intergenerational factors. Particularly valuable is the formulation of the new loyalty conflict and the adaptive mechanisms for maintaining family homeostasis.

The dissertation combines innovation and methodological precision, demonstrates an integrative approach and interdisciplinary awareness, provides a solid foundation for empirical analysis, and proposes a model with potential for cumulative scientific contribution and direct practical applicability in family counseling and psychotherapy.

The Conclusion summarizes the results obtained from the dissertation research. The conclusions drawn follow logically from the text and are directly related to the research problem.

The publications presented are fully consistent with the dissertation topic.

The abstract concisely reflects the content of the dissertation; however, it should also follow the structure of the dissertation itself.

4. Scientific Contributions

After reviewing the theoretical and empirical analysis presented in Lilach Peleg's dissertation, I consider that the following major contributions have been achieved, which I classify as scientific and applied contributions:

- **Reconceptualization of the family life cycle.** The dissertation expands the classical concept of the family life cycle by distinguishing the emergence of in-laws as an independent transitional stage. Thus, adult sibling relationships are viewed not as stabilized, but as subject to structural change.

- **Dynamic model of sibling relationships.** The dissertation proposes a view of these relationships as a dynamic system that adapts during family expansion. This affirms a process-oriented rather than static approach, in line with systemic theories.

- **Integrative systemic model.** A model is developed linking differentiation of self, parental favoritism, and conflict communication. In this way, a multifactorial explanation is offered for changes in sibling relationships upon the inclusion of a new partner.

- **A new type of loyalty conflict.** A specific tension between loyalty to one's partner and loyalty to siblings is identified. A conceptual framework ("insiders–outsiders") is formulated to explain the dual status of in-laws.

- **Introduction of a structured and applicable research toolkit.** The conclusions and recommendations contribute to therapeutic practice with families, expanding diagnostic and intervention possibilities.

5. Remarks, Questions, and Recommendations

I have no remarks or questions regarding the scientific work presented. I would nevertheless like to offer several recommendations, which in no way diminish the overall highly positive evaluation of the dissertation. Specifically, I encourage the doctoral candidate to continue her research activities and to monitor the practical implementation of the recommendations proposed in the dissertation. I also recommend publishing the study as a monograph in order to reach a broader audience interested in the topic.

6. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis of Lilach Peleg's dissertation entitled "The Influence of New Family Members on Sibling Relationships – An Examination of Differentiation, Parental Attitudes, and Conflict Resolution Skills," I give my positive assessment of the work and propose that the esteemed Scientific Jury award the educational and scientific degree "Doctor" in Professional Field 3.2. Psychology, doctoral program "General Psychology." I shall vote in favor of awarding the degree.

04.05.2026

Veliko Tarnovo

Signature:

(Assoc. Prof. Ivan Stoyanov, PhD)