



## **OPINION**

**by Prof. Velislava Atanasova Chavdarova, PhD**

Department of Psychology, Faculty of Philosophy

**St. Cyril and St. Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo**

regarding a dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of

**Doctor (PhD)**

**Doctoral Programme:** General Psychology

**Varna Free University “Chernorizets Hrabar”**

**Author:** Lilah Schwartz-Peleg

**Dissertation Title:**

**The Influence of New Family Members on Sibling Relationships: An Investigation of  
Differentiation, Parental Attitudes, and Conflict Resolution Skills**

**Scientific Supervisor:** Prof. Sevdzhikhan Eyubova, PhD

### **1. Relevance of the Research Problem Addressed in the Dissertation**

The research problem is formulated in accordance with contemporary scientific inquiries and reflects real socio-psychological processes. Current trends in family psychology demonstrate a growing interest in horizontal family relationships, particularly those between adult siblings, which are characterized by their longevity and significant role in emotional support and social identity formation. In this regard, the dissertation addresses an existing gap in scientific knowledge concerning the impact of major life transitions, such as marriage, on these relationships. The study focuses on the dynamics of adult sibling relationships in the context of family system expansion through the inclusion of new family members (brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law), a topic that has traditionally been underrepresented in the scholarly literature.

Particularly valuable is the emphasis on the integration of a new family member as a systemic event that alters communication patterns, role expectations, and emotional bonds. This gives the study considerable practical significance, including implications for family counseling and therapy.

The assessment of the current state of research on the problem is accurate and well substantiated. The author clearly highlights that, although sibling relationships are fundamental to personality development and family functioning, they have received comparatively less attention than parent–child and marital relationships.

The dissertation correctly notes that existing research has focused predominantly on childhood and adolescence, whereas the dynamics of sibling relationships in adulthood, particularly under conditions of structural family change, remain insufficiently explored. This observation accurately reflects the current state of scientific knowledge in the field.

The author also appropriately identifies a specific research gap—the lack of empirical studies examining the influence of new family members on sibling relationships. Furthermore, the study is successfully positioned within established theoretical frameworks, including Family Systems Theory, Attachment Theory, and the concept of Differentiation of Self, demonstrating the author's comprehensive understanding of the scholarly domain.

## **2. General Characteristics and Evaluation of the Dissertation**

The dissertation leaves the overall impression of a conceptually well-structured and logically coherent scholarly work, demonstrating a high level of theoretical competence, familiarity with both classical and contemporary research in the field, and effective integration of diverse research approaches.

The selected research methodology is appropriate to the stated objectives, research questions, and hypotheses. The application of a mixed-methods research design (quantitative and qualitative) is methodologically justified, as it allows for the simultaneous examination of statistical relationships and an in-depth understanding of participants' subjective experiences.

The quantitative component is implemented through the use of established and validated instruments (e.g., the *Sibling Relationship Questionnaire* and the *Differentiation of Self Inventory*), ensuring the reliability and measurability of the principal variables. This enables an objective analysis of the relationships among differentiation of self, parental favoritism, conflict resolution strategies, and relationship quality.

The qualitative component, conducted through semi-structured interviews, complements the quantitative data by revealing participants' individual interpretations and lived experiences. This is particularly important when investigating complex family processes that cannot be fully captured through standardized questionnaires.

The integration of the two methodological approaches enhances both the internal validity and the interpretative depth of the findings. At the same time, the author appropriately acknowledges the limitations of the methodology, including self-report data, the cultural specificity of the sample, and the cross-sectional design, demonstrating critical reflection and scientific maturity.

The empirical findings presented in the dissertation are logically linked to the stated research objectives and questions and demonstrate a consistent application of the chosen methodology. Quantitative analyses reveal significant relationships among sibling relationship quality, levels of self-differentiation, perceived parental favoritism, and conflict resolution strategies. Simultaneously, the qualitative findings contribute to understanding participants' subjective interpretations and experiences, thereby enriching and refining the statistical conclusions.

The results support the author's central thesis that the influence of new family members on sibling relationships is not unidirectional but rather moderated by a complex interplay of psychological and family-system factors. Consequently, the dissertation achieves a comprehensive and interdisciplinary explanation of the phenomenon under investigation.

No evidence of plagiarism has been identified.

### **3. Scientific Contributions**

- An integrative model is proposed that connects three key variables—**Differentiation of Self, Parental Favoritism, and Conflict Resolution Strategies**—within a unified analytical framework.
- The application of Bowen's concept of **Differentiation of Self** is extended to horizontal family relationships in adulthood, representing a contribution to the development of Family Systems Theory.
- Practically significant conclusions are derived, applicable to family counseling and psychotherapy, particularly in interventions involving conflicts between adult siblings.

- The findings may be utilized in the development of intervention programs aimed at improving communication and conflict management within the extended family system.
- The study demonstrates the potential for an indirect socio-economic impact through the enhancement of family functioning and the reduction of interpersonal tensions, although a direct economic effect has not been explicitly established.

#### **4. Critical Remarks, Observations, and Recommendations**

The sample is culturally and socially specific, which limits the generalizability of the findings.

Furthermore, the majority of the data are based on self-report measures, creating a risk of social desirability bias and subjective distortions.

#### **Conclusion**

The dissertation is an original, significant, and defensible scholarly work. The results obtained are valid, logically substantiated, and contribute both to the advancement of scientific knowledge and to its practical application. The scientific contributions are clearly articulated, well justified, and fully meet the requirements for a dissertation submitted for the award of the educational and scientific degree of **Doctor (PhD)**.

In conclusion, the dissertation by **Lilah Peleg** represents a completed, original, and scientifically valuable research study.

On this basis, I provide a **positive evaluation** of the dissertation and consider it fully deserving of the award of the educational and scientific degree of **Doctor (PhD)** in the field of **3.2 Psychology / General Psychology**.

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**Prof. Velislava Chavdarova, PhD**