

Differentiation of Self of Lear and His Daughters in Shakespeare's *King Lear*

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Abstract William Shakespeare vividly portrays the relationship between Lear and his daughters in the tragedy, *King Lear*. In the play, Lear incessantly pursues love, authority, and solace. His relationship with his three daughters, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan, is dysfunctional. The research on the family relationship in *King Lear* generally relies on traditional feminist and psychological methodologies. However, this study takes a different approach by examining the father-daughter relationship between Lear and his daughters through the Bowen Family Systems Theory perspective. This article examines the father-daughter relationships in the tragedy by using the concept of differentiation of self in Bowen Theory. According to Bowen's scale of differentiation of self, the levels of differentiation of self of Lear, Goneril, and Regan range from 0 to 25, whereas Cordelia's level of differentiation of self falls between 25 and 50. The findings also suggest that Lear's connection with his daughters is abnormal due to their low levels of differentiation of self. This interdisciplinary study offers a novel way of character analysis in literary works. Additionally, it introduces a fresh perspective to studying father-daughter

relationships and various family relationships in drama and other literary genres.

Keywords William Shakespeare; *King Lear*; Father-Daughter Relationship; Bowen Family Systems Theory; Differentiation of Self

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Introduction

This article examines the level of self-differentiation exhibited by Lear and his daughters in William Shakespeare's play, *King Lear*, and its influences on their father-daughter relationship. The level of self-differentiation exhibited by Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan is analyzed using Bowen Family Systems Theory to get insight into the problematic father-daughter relationship and its underlying causes.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), a well-known English Renaissance playwright and poet, continues to captivate the public with his family romances. Scholars have explored love relationships and master-servant dynamics in Shakespeare's plays. For example, Arbaayah Ali Termizi (2015) applied Mikhail Bakhtin's concepts of the grotesque to argue that love relationships in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* and *The Taming of the Shrew* are characterized by power struggles and the control of "carnal" desires (192). Similarly, Florence Toh Haw

Ching and Arbaayah Ali Termizi utilized Royce's concepts of loyalty to analyze master-servant relationships in Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens*, highlighting the importance of truth-telling and the sacrifice of "self-gratification" (354).

Furthermore, researchers have examined father-daughter relationships in Shakespeare's dramas. Bilal Tawfiq Hamamra (2020) drew connections between the father-daughter relationships in *Othello* and *Romeo and Juliet* and the historical context, suggesting that early modern Great Britain's patriarchal rule fueled daughters' rebellion against "patriarchal authority" (26). Magdalena Cieślak (2017) analyzed the relationship between Prospero and Miranda in *The Tempest* as a representation of "parental authority" and filial duty (161). Lagretta Tallent Lenker (2001) employed New Historicism to examine the father-daughter relationship in Shakespeare and Shaw's dramas within existing social power structures. Öz Öktem (2020) discussed the father-daughter dynamic in *The Tempest* from a social history perspective. Elizabeth Mazzola (2019) drew on biopolitics and feminist readings to explore how female characters like Goneril, Gertrude, and Juliet challenge societal expectations. Previous research on family relationships in Shakespearean studies has predominantly employed social, linguistic, psychological, and ontological methodologies.

Shakespeare's *King Lear* is widely regarded as a masterpiece in literature, and it is a tragedy engaged in emotional bonding between a father and a daughter. *King Lear* is considered Shakespeare's most outstanding accomplishment (Booth I; Lott ix; Jones 159). The play portrays the "emotional bonding" of the father-daughter bond between Lear and his three daughters (Kakkonen and Penjak 26). Lear harbors the strongest affection for his youngest daughter, Cordelia. However, when Cordelia refuses to express her love for him, Lear severs their relationship, deprives her of her rightful inheritance and power, and marries her to France. The relationship between Lear and his other daughters, Goneril and Regan, is even more tumultuous. Despite their exaggerated love for Lear, they treat their father with callousness and cruelty. Lear, in turn, curses them with harsh words, is banished into the wilderness on a stormy night, and descends into madness. The father-daughter relationship depicted in this tragedy is deeply impressive.

While scholars have extensively explored the father-daughter relationship in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, most have relied on traditional feminist and psychological research methods. Interestingly, Deng Jianbo, Arbaayah Ali Termizi, and Manimangai Mani (2023) employ Bowen Family Systems Theory to examine the father-daughter relationship in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, arguing that the main reasons for the dysfunctional father-daughter relationship in the tragedy are "the

levels of the differentiations of the self of Lear, Goneril, Cordelia and Regan, the projection of Lear's anxieties or unresolved conflicts onto his daughters and the chronic anxiety brought about by the societal regression" (185). However, the authors did not deeply analyze the levels of differentiation of self between Lear and his daughters and their connection with the father-daughter dynamic. This tragedy lends itself well to exploring the father-daughter relationship through the concept of differentiation of self in Bowen Theory, as specific traits of Lear and his daughters align with the characteristics described in Bowen's scale. Moreover, their level of self-differentiation directly correlates with the quality of their father-daughter relationship. Consequently, this article primarily utilizes the concept of differentiation of self in Bowen Theory to evaluate the levels of differentiation of self of Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan in the tragedy. In addition to analyzing their levels of self-differentiation, the article aims to investigate the influence of their self-differentiation levels on the father-daughter relationship.

Literature Review

Research on *King Lear* in recent thirty years has primarily focused on sibling differences, the concept of "nothing," nature, and love. For instance, Leonard Barkan (2022) argues that Goneril appears to have priority, but Lear's love test reveals that the absolute priority lies with his youngest daughter, Cordelia. The significance of the youngest daughter's superiority lies in her unique "individual character," contrasting the eldest daughter's external privileges (Barkan 13). Paul S. Fiddes (2022) views Lear's journey as a progression towards the idea of "nothing," which he initially invokes when judging Cordelia (122). Marie Addyman (2021) highlights the failure of Lear's human relationships in the play, exposing the king-father and others to the "'unnatural' in humans and the indifference of non-human nature" (79). Mark J. Blechner (1988) stresses, "It is important that Lear is old and that his love is directed toward his daughter" (323).

While research on the family relationship in *King Lear* has gained attention, the father-daughter relationship between Lear, Goneril, and Regan has been overlooked. Peter G. Platt, for example, emphasizes Lear's inability to express and acknowledge his love for his children as a crucial factor in the plot involving Lear and Gloucester. Lear and Gloucester mistakenly attribute love to their children, who, like the problematic examples in Montaigne's work, plot against them. The love that should have been directed towards the faithful children, Cordelia and Edgar, respectively, is preserved until it is nearly too late. Unlike Lord Montluc, Lear has the opportunity to apologize, express his love, and acknowledge Cordelia, even

though she dies shortly after “their reconciliation” (Platt 119). Bilal Hamamra and Michael Uebel argue that *King Lear* portrays the family as a source of emotional intensity and pain, leading to household instability evident in the father’s disavowal of his allegedly “disobedient offspring” (Hamamra and Uebel 380). Although *King Lear* emphasizes that family bonds are a matter of language rather than bloodline, the anger that sparks Lear and Gloucester’s denial speech foreshadows the emotional intensity of their relationships. Furthermore, the anguish experienced by the fathers is a result of losing their offspring, leading to the “dissolution of family bonds” (Hamamra and Uebel 380). The authors primarily discuss the father-son relationship between Gloucester and his sons, Edmund and Edgar, and the father-daughter relationship between Lear and Cordelia, neglecting Lear’s relationship with his two eldest daughters, Goneril and Regan.

Though some researchers have analyzed the characters in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* from the standpoint of character analysis and feminism, no research applies the concept of differentiation of self in Bowen Theory to the character study in the play. Most researchers hold a positive view of Cordelia. For example, Kent R. Lehnhof (2018) argues that Cordelia is often “cast in the role of Christ” (107). Sahabuddin Sk (2018) believes that Cordelia symbolizes “truth, serenity, love, obedience, and forgiveness,” standing as the only morally upright character in the play (145-46). However, Lear, Goneril, and Regan are generally seen as negative figures. Mark J. Blechner describes Lear as “old, sly, and a bit foolish” (313). Dipak Kumar Sarkar (2020) perceives Goneril as “malevolent, malicious, maniacal, malignant and beastly,” which Lear fails to recognize or understand (26).

Scholars have predominantly examined the female roles in *King Lear* through a traditional feminist lens. Elizabeth Mazzola, for instance, uses biopolitics and feminist readings of Shakespeare to view the deaths of female characters like Goneril as acts of “agency, rebuke, and subtraction” (110). However, in *King Lear*, the author only mentions one female character, Goneril, neglecting the others.

Moreover, most researchers have approached the study of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* from a traditional psychological standpoint. Roy Schafer (2010), drawing from Freud and Klein, argues that Lear’s punishment represents a merging of perceived internal contradictions with “a dominant version of the narcissist’s self” (1506). In *Cordelia, Lear, and Forgiveness*, Schafer (2005) interprets Cordelia’s forgiveness of Lear from a psychoanalytic perspective (389). Nicolas Brémaud (2015) asserts that *King Lear* is the tragedy of a father, a “beautiful, rich, and complex” character that reflects “the beginning of a psychosis” (403). In *‘Poor, bare fork’d animal’: The Representation of Dementia in King Lear*, Tess Maginess and Hannah Zeilig (2018)

argue that Shakespeare's play engages with advanced ideas on "dementia" and challenges existing constructs surrounding the condition (53). Vin Nardizzi (2020) connects the subplot involving Gloucester in *King Lear* with the rich history of Oedipus, suggesting that "Oedipus" serves as a source for the suffering Gloucester endures (347). Kelly Lehtonen (2019) asserts that the representation of traditional negative emotions in *King Lear* heralds "the emergence of modern cognitive theories of emotion," which involve intelligent and strategic emotions (259).

Although a few scholars have examined the father-daughter connection in Shakespeare's plays using a psychological lens, their methodologies have adhered to conventional psychological research methodologies. Psychological literary criticism generally deals with complex and "imaginative texts," but the psychological methods used in the early 20th century are insufficient to tackle the complicated challenges that arise in the 21st century (Knapp, *Family Systems Psychotherapy, Literary Character, and Literature: An Introduction* 225). Family systems therapy, a popular "therapeutic models in the 'real world'", has not been extensively studied or discussed by scholars in literary criticism (Bump, 1991; Cohen, 1991; Knapp, 1996, 1997).

Despite these discussions on family relationships in *King Lear*, the exploration of the father-daughter relationship in the play has been limited to Lear and his youngest daughter, Cordelia. Bowen's scale has not been applied to investigate the father-daughter relationship in *King Lear*. Besides, Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan in *King Lear* have been investigated through character study; no scholar has yet used Bowen's scale to analyze the characters in the tragedy. Hence, a new way of analyzing the relationship between the father and daughters in *King Lear* is greatly needed. Applying Bowen's scale to the analysis of the selected characters in *King Lear* might provide new paradigms for studying characters in drama and other literature. Since Bowen Theory has brought a new way of studying literary works, this research can provide a reference for studying the father-daughter relationship and other family relationships reflected in literary genres like drama.

Concept and Methods

Bowen Family Systems Theory, also called Bowen Theory, was developed by the psychiatrist Murray Bowen (1913-1990). It is an extraordinary "new theory of human behaviour," which has the potential to replace much of Freud's theory and applies to "human family and nonfamily groups, including large organizations and society" (Gilbert vii). Unlike the psychoanalytic and behavioral schools, Bowen Theory takes a different system view. Bowen believes that the family is an

emotional unit and a web of interlocking relationships, and the emotional disruption of a family member will affect their relational system. An integral concept in Bowen Theory is chronic anxiety, which serves as the underlying cause of family dysfunction. Chronic anxiety is a universal phenomenon and a biological response shared by all life forms. It is triggered when an “organism” perceives real or imagined danger (Brown 94-103). The theory identifies eight forces contributing to chronic anxiety and simultaneously shaping family dynamics: Differentiation of Self, Emotional Triangle, Nuclear Family Emotional System, Family Projection Process, Emotional Cutoff, Multigenerational Transmission Process, Sibling Position, and Societal Regression.

Differentiation of self refers to the capacity to maintain one’s individuality while remaining connected to others or the ability to be separate while maintaining commitment (Titelman 146). Bowen has categorized the scale of differentiation (basic differentiation) into four ranges (0-25, 25-50, 50-75, 75-100) and has outlined specific characteristics associated with individuals in each range. Furthermore, he has acknowledged variations within each range, accounting for whether individuals fall on “the high or the low end of a particular range” (Kerr and Bowen 98).

This article applies Bowen Theory to examine the father-daughter relationship in Shakespeare’s *King Lear* by analyzing the level of self-differentiation exhibited by Lear and his daughters. The analysis primarily focuses on Bowen’s concept of differentiation of self and employs it as a tool for literary criticism in interpreting the tragedy. Differentiation of self serves as the cornerstone of Bowen Theory, and for the purpose of this paper, the concept will be explored within the selected play due to the prominent portrayal of the father-daughter relationship. Bowen’s scale of differentiation of self represents his unique contribution to understanding fundamental human characteristics. It enables an analysis of the extent to which individuals can differentiate their emotions from rational thought. Bowen’s scale divides the scale of self-differentiation into the profile of low levels of differentiation (0–50), the profile of midrange differentiation (50–75), the profile of high levels of differentiation (75–100) (Goldenberg et al. 197; Roberto 12). Bowen has defined the characteristic features of individuals within each range. Classifying the self-differentiation levels for the selected characters provides a novel perspective on comprehending the portrayal of the father-daughter relationship in the chosen drama.

The study employs Shakespeare’s *King Lear* as the principal reference. Reviews from scholars and critics serve as valuable sources for gaining insight into the current research trends around the selected play. To analyze the portrayal

of father-daughter relationships in literary works, the assessments made by critics are also considered. In King Lear's case, examining Family Systems Theory allows for a deeper understanding of the father-daughter connections depicted in the play. The examples are taken from the chosen drama and are used to examine the father-daughter relationship in the tragedy, employing the concept of differentiation of self in Bowen Theory. The process involves thoroughly analyzing the chosen text and applying Bowen's scale to assess the degree of self-differentiation exhibited by Lear, Cordelia, Goneril, and Regan in *King Lear*. A critique is developed by engaging in persistent close reading that employs creative and critical thinking skills to arrive at a well-founded interpretation of the father-daughter connection in the tragedy.

Even though Lear and his daughters live in their own private space, they cannot communicate well with one another. Lear and his daughters can be perceived as emotionally, physically, and socially handicapped, although Lear is the only family member who is physically disabled. The level of self-differentiation in Lear and his daughters is vital to their relationship. This aligns with Robert M. Gilbert's assertion that individuals with a higher level of differentiation are more likely to adhere to their principles, leading to "smoother relationships" (188). To elucidate this further, this study assesses the levels of differentiation of self of Lear, Goneril, Regan, and Cordelia.

The Level of Differentiation of Self of Lear

Lear is the most problematic member of his family's emotional system, struggling with mental and emotional dysfunctions. Lear is an imprudent monarch, and the tragedy stems from the partitioning of his kingdom. Lear's final official action before retirement was transforming his throne into an auction block. The arrogant, stubborn, and boastful Lear divides his kingdom among his daughters based on their expressions of love for him. According to Fauzi (2019), Lear, who should possess profound insight as a result of "a lifetime of mistakes," is instead simply characterized by foolishness (90). Ibrahim (2012) believes that Lear's most "foolish yet devastating decision" is his insistence on keeping the title of King and its "prerogative rights" while relinquishing the actual responsibilities of reigning (17). Lear's decision to allocate territory and authority to his daughters demonstrates his lack of intelligence.

Lear's imprudence is further demonstrated by his vulnerability to Goneril and Regan's flattery, inability to discern Cordelia's sincere motives, and dismissal of Kent's counsel. Goneril and Regan, while carrying out the obsequious parts to which they were placed, offer elaborate displays of affection that mask their

true intentions and make them seem like submissive extensions of Lear's self. Their duplicity facilitates Lear's "fantasies of self-sovereignty" (Lehnhof 112). Conversely, Cordelia declines to express her affection and submission, causing Lear to become furious. Lear gives his whole estate to Goneril and Regan, who hate him. Lear "gives nothing to Cordelia," even though she genuinely harbors affection for him (Fauzi 91). Kent, a reliable minister, acknowledges Cordelia's genuineness and boldly proclaims, "Thy youngest daughter does not love thee least" (1.1.152). Kent comprehends that splitting land and power symbolizes King Lear's loss of authority, foreshadowing tragedy. Nevertheless, Lear neglects to recognize Kent's unwavering allegiance and sagacity. The love trial reveals Lear's vulnerability to manipulation and his "irrational choices" (Sarkar 29).

These irrational actions emphasize Lear's folly in his role as a monarch. According to Kerr and Bowen, individuals within the range of 0-25 experience a sensory environment, with those at the lower end exhibiting an extreme sensitivity to their surroundings that can result in a loss of sensation, rendering them "numb" (98). Lear's impairment exacerbates his difficulty distinguishing between thoughts and feelings, thus classifying him in the 0-25 range on Bowen's scale.

In addition, Lear has a profound desire for affection from his daughters, particularly Cordelia. This is consistent with Bowen's classification of individuals with differentiation levels ranging from 0 to 25, whose most of life's energy is directed towards pursuing love, either by loving others or by seeking to be loved. Additionally, a significant amount of energy is used in response to "the reactivity to having failed to get love" (Kerr and Bowen 98). The love contest initiated by Lear is a manifestation of his deep desire for unwavering love and complete submission from his daughters. Nevertheless, his three daughters disillusion him with their misconduct. Goneril and Regan utilize insincere compliments, while Cordelia exhibits "high pride" (Ibrahim 18). Lear conveys his affection and hopes for his unwed daughter Cordelia when he confides in Kent: "I loved her most, and thought to set my rest/ On her kind nursery" (1.1.123-24). Lear's exceedingly elevated "expectations of his daughter" and his emotions towards her must be why he decided to sever the fundamental bond of fatherhood (Pulido 12). Furthermore, Lear's anguish stems from "his disowning of Cordelia," exposing his reliance on the daughters and their emotional connection (Hamamra and Uebel 381). Lear's emotional attachment to his daughters suggests his low level of self-differentiation.

Furthermore, Kerr and Bowen argue that persons between the range of 0 and 25 "experience a high level of chronic anxiety, making it challenging for them to find situations in which they can be truly comfortable" (Kerr and Bowen 98). Lear

harbors the strongest affection for Cordelia and longs for her love. Nevertheless, when Cordelia is on the verge of transitioning from being a daughter to being a wife, Lear has overwhelming anxiety and fear, compelling him to take steps to interfere with her marriage. This conduct, motivated by anxiety, reaches its peak with the love test. Schafer (2010) notes that Lear's furious response is derived from profound and unacknowledged anxiety, as evidenced by his previous portrayal of his aging self's "crawl toward death" (1. 1. 41). Anxiety may bring about manifestations of "destructive narcissism" (Schafer, *Curse and Consequence* 1510-1511). Goneril astutely notices Lear's heightened state of anxiety, remarking on the effects of his advanced age and his unwise decision to disown Cordelia.

You see how full of changes his age is.

The observation we have made of it hath been little.

He always loved our sister most, and with what poor

judgment he hath now cast her off appears too grossly (1.1.288-291).

Goneril also comments, "the best and soundest of his time hath been but rash" (1.1.294-95). Lear has been plagued by anxiety for a long time in his own home, and his sudden outburst is just the result of the cumulative effects of chronic anxiety. Lear's lack of wisdom, intense desire for affection from his daughters, and high level of anxiety suggest that his level of self-differentiation is in the 0-25 range.

The Level of Differentiation of Self of Goneril and Regan

Goneril and Regan's level of self-differentiation is also within the range of 0-25. Three primary reasons support this classification. Firstly, individuals at a basic level of 25 or below are deeply immersed in their emotions and "are mostly unaware of an alternative" (Kerr and Bowen 98). Stephen Reid suggests that Goneril represses "her original love of her father" and harbors an intense hatred for her mother, Regan, and Lear (240). In line with Bowen Theory, individuals between 0 and 25 tend to be "complete emotional appendages of the relationship systems to which they are attached" (Kerr and Bowen 98). Goneril and Regan demonstrate heightened sensitivity to Lear's demands and recognize their father's appreciation for sweet words of affection. Consequently, they craft flattering statements to please him. Goneril claims to love her father more than "eyesight, space, and liberty" (1.1.56), attributing her love as being "no less than life; with grace, health, beauty, honour" (1.1.58). Similarly, Regan boasts about her willingness to sacrifice all happiness for her father's love. However, shortly after Lear moves into Goneril's house, she

mistreats him, instructing Oswald to ignore him and claiming illness: “When he returns from hunting/ I will not speak with him. Say I am sick” (1.3. 7-8). On the other hand, Regan experiences Goneril’s jealousy and harbors her anger toward her father for favoring her mother and Cordelia. Additionally, Regan expresses her “murderous wishes” toward her mother and Cordelia (Reid 240).

The second reason for categorizing Goneril and Regan within the lower range of self-differentiation is their high level of chronic anxiety, which hinders their functioning within the family system. According to Bowen, individuals in the 0-25 range exhibit “a high level of chronic anxiety” (Kerr and Bowen 98). Goneril and Regan’s chronic anxiety is evident in their words and actions toward Lear. First, Goneril and Regan engage in the love test, expressing exaggerated and unrealistic declarations of love to Lear to gain power and authority, and their deceptive behavior reflects their anxiety about securing their positions and manipulating Lear. Second, Goneril complains that Lear and his men are violent and unruly, suggesting a lack of patience with Lear’s behavior. This impatience indicates their anxiety about handling Lear’s arbitrary and picky disposition. Goneril warns her father about his behavior and accuses his knights of changing her court into “a riotous inn” (1.4. 222), “a tavern or a brothel” (1.4.223) rather than “a graced palace” (1.4. 224). The conduct of Lear and his followers offers Goneril a compelling reason to evaluate herself. Goneril’s fundamental issue is “a certain anxiety” that she will be unable to overcome her lifelong attitude of being dominated by her “wilful, blind, and tyrannical” father (Reid 229). Third, Goneril and Regan’s disrespectful treatment of Lear indicates their disrespect toward his authority and growing impatience with his actions. Their abuse of Lear reflects their anxiety about maintaining control and power in the face of his aging and declining mental state. Lastly, Goneril and Regan worry about managing a father they consider irrational and unpredictable. Goneril and Regan attribute Lear’s actions to “infirmity of his age” and question his self-awareness, reflecting their anxiety about Lear’s mental stability and decision-making capabilities (Sarkar 28-29). Goneril perceives her rule as a natural consequence, challenging the notion that younger generations are inherently superior. She begs her father to understand her intentions correctly, emphasizing his old age and stating that he should exercise wisdom: “As you are old and reverend, should be wise” (1.4.218). Overall, Goneril and Regan’s chronic anxiety for Lear is evident in their impatience, deceptive behavior, disrespectful behavior, and questioning of Lear’s state of mind. Their actions and words convey their fears and insecurities in maintaining power and authority in the face of Lear’s aging and changing behavior.

The third reason for placing Goneril and Regan in the lower self-differentiation range is their extreme selfishness, as they resort to attacking their father and others to consolidate their power. Bowen states that individuals with a self at the 0-25 level have poorly developed senses of self, often limited to “narcissistic pronouncements” such as “I want, I hurt, I want my rights” (Kerr and Bowen 98). Under enough stress, “very poorly differentiated people” may “murderously strike out at others,” especially those they depend on the most (Kerr and Bowen 98). Both Goneril and Regan compete against each other “for the sake of their own kingdom,” engaging in displays of power, stating “psywars,” and issuing threats (Fauzi 9). After gaining control of their father’s land and power, they suppress Lear. Overthrowing “the hierarchical structure,” they launch attacks against their father and other men in positions of power, determined to dominate and “reduce them to inferiors” (Dreher 106). Regan cruelly orders Kent to remain in the stocks “till night” and throughout the night (2.2.137). When they capture Gloucester, Goneril sadistically suggests plucking out his eyes. Regan “remains behind to accomplish this heartless deed” (Dreher 106).

In summary, Goneril and Regan are deeply immersed in a world of affection. They suppress their feelings and harbor profound hatred and hostility toward their father and Cordelia. Their anxiety levels are high, and they exhibit extreme selfishness by attacking one another, their father, and others. They disrupt the traditional notion of daughters’ obedience, with Goneril boldly expressing her unwillingness to endure her father’s wrongdoing: “By day and night he wrongs me. Every hour/ He flashes into one gross crime or other/ That sets us all at odds. I’ll not endure it” (1.3.3-5). Despite Shakespeare’s potentially exaggerated portrayal of Goneril and Regan, it effectively highlights their low level of self-differentiation.

The Level of Differentiation of Self of Cordelia

Cordelia possesses a slightly higher degree of self-differentiation than Lear, Goneril, and Regan. Kerr and Bowen (1988) note that individuals in the range of 25-50 have “poorly defined selves but a budding capacity to differentiate” (99). Cordelia exhibits a combination of slight silliness, moderate reason, and chronic anxiety. Cordelia’s level of self-differentiation falls within the range of 25-50.

First and foremost, Cordelia exhibits a certain degree of anxiety. When Lear tests the love of her daughters for the first time, Goneril and Regan boast about their love for Lear, while Cordelia chooses to remain silent, stating, “What shall Cordelia speak? Love and be silent” (1.1.62). Cordelia is aware that her words are not as flattering as those of her sisters, causing her to feel nervous. She hopes that

her father will perceive the truth behind her silence and comments aside, “I am sure my love’s/ More ponderous than my tongue” (1.1.77-78). These expressions reflect Cordelia’s transient “emotional state of anxiety” (Kour 112). Her love for her father must have been mixed with grief and anxiety (Bradley, *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth* 277). Cordelia fears her father will be displeased by her straightforward words, but she insists on remaining silent.

Additionally, Cordelia exhibits a certain degree of foolishness. She should have better understood the temperament and personalities of her father and two sisters. Cordelia understands that openly expressing her true thoughts to her father would make him unhappy and possibly even angry. However, she chooses to speak the truth, putting him in an awkward position. Cordelia realizes that once her sisters acquire land and power, they will mistreat their father and leave him homeless. Furthermore, Cordelia informs her father that she will give half her love to her future husband, which is unwise. Greenfield (1977) notes that due to her “poor judgment or weak spirit,” Cordelia is satisfied with presenting herself to her father as a vague idea of a woman whose virtue lies in the fact that she is merely half her father’s daughter and half her husband’s wife (48). At that moment, Cordelia has no husband, so the idea of reserving half of her love does not apply. Cordelia fails to distinguish between familial love and romantic love. Familial love pertains to natural or instinctive affection, such as the love between parents and children (Yarber et al. 228). Romantic love, on the other hand, involves “intense attraction” within an “erotic context,” with the expectation of lasting for an extended period (Jankowiak and Fischer 150). While both types of love coexist, they are distinct forms of love. However, Cordelia fails to comprehend this distinction, believing that the more she loves her father, the less love she can give her husband. This demonstrates that Cordelia’s level of self-differentiation is not high.

Based on Bowen’s scale of self-differentiation, Cordelia falls within the 25-50 range. Apart from being able to differentiate her thoughts and feelings moderately, Cordelia is not wholly driven by the lower range of emotions (0-25) like Lear. Cordelia’s emotional nature aligns with the traits described in Bowen Theory, where individuals in the 25-50 scale segment reside in “a feeling-dominated world” (Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships* 188). After discovering that her father has been expelled from the house by her sisters and left to wander in the wilderness, Cordelia decides to go back to England to seek justice for him. She believes her sisters will be captured once her commanding army arrives in England. However, Cordelia fails to consider the factors essential for victory in war, such as justice, combat purpose, strategic and tactical insight, exceptional military leadership,

excellent troops, and noble combat convictions. Cordelia remains oblivious to her position as the Queen of France, and her army is not Lear's royal guard but the French army. Consequently, her expedition turns into a French invasion of British territory, arousing anger among British citizens. As Albany states,

Where I could not be honest,
I never yet was valiant. For this business,
It touches us as France invades our land,
Not bolds the King, with others whom, I fear,
Most just and heavy causes make oppose (5.1.24-28).

Cordelia's emotional attachment has transformed a family's internal conflict into aggression against her homeland, resulting in a disastrous failure.

While Cordelia's actions are motivated by her feelings for her father, she sometimes demonstrates rationality and a certain level of self-awareness. Cordelia can differentiate herself to some extent and exhibits characteristics of individuals in the 25-50 segment of Bowen's scale, who possess a reduced "fusion of selfs" and an "increasing capacity to differentiate a self" (Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships* 188). In the love test, Cordelia, whom Lear most loved, could have said sweet words that her father liked and inherited the most property. However, Cordelia insists that her silent love is worth more than flattery. Lear was furious and severed the father-daughter relationship with her. Nevertheless, with her remarkable "self-awareness," Cordelia knows what she is doing and understands Lear's anger and cruelty (Schafer, *Cordelia, Lear, and Forgiveness* 399). She does not resent her father's contempt for the father-daughter relationship. Cordelia firmly believes in her vision of love. Her silence is a reflection of her ability to differentiate herself. It is clear that Cordelia stays true to herself and does not stray from her principles, regardless of her father's wrath. Her beliefs are ingrained in her character and cannot be changed. This aligns with the pertinent assertions presented in Bowen Theory. Individuals at the higher end of the 25-50 range on the Bowen scale have some understanding of "intellectual principles" (Gilbert, *Extraordinary Relationships* 188). Cordelia understands her sisters' true nature and recognizes the underlying motives behind their flattery. In Act I, Scene I, as Cordelia prepares to leave, she says to her sisters: "Love well our father. / to your professèd bosoms I commit him" (1.1.270-71). Cordelia does not condemn the hypocrisy of the sisters but attempts to persuade them. This demonstrates Cordelia's level of self-differentiation is between 25 and 50.

According to Bowen's scale, individuals whose levels of differentiation of self

are between 25 and 50 possess a heightened sensitivity towards emotional discord, the perspectives of others, and the need to make “a good impression” (Kerr and Bowen 98). Cordelia’s impression is “emphatically one of unity” (Danby 133). Cordelia seems to “reconcile opposites: passion and order, innocence and maturity, defenselessness and strength” (Danby 133). For instance, upon discovering her sisters’ mistreatment of Lear, Cordelia strives for justice on her father’s behalf, ultimately sacrificing her life for him. These actions reveal Cordelia’s kind-hearted and righteous nature and her capacity for self-differentiation to some extent.

Cordelia’s blend of foolishness and reason indicates her ability to distinguish between her thoughts and feelings. While Cordelia can be perceived as silly, anxious, and emotional, she is not irrational. Her actions are often guided by reason, even in adversity. Despite her father’s rebuke and expulsion, Cordelia maintains her dignity and reason, avoiding sinking into irreparable pain and sorrow. Instead, she expresses her love for her father through her words: “O my dear father, Restoratian hang/ Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss/ Repair those violent harms that my two sisters/ Have in thy reverence made!” (4.6.23-26). These statements and behaviors indicate that Cordelia’s level of self-differentiation falls within the range of 25 to 50.

The Father-Daughter Relationship

The degree of self-differentiation that Lear and his daughters exhibit impacts their father-daughter relationship. Lear, Goneril, and Regan demonstrate a lack of self-differentiation and remain emotionally fused inside the system. Lear is depicted as foolish, anxious, and desperately longing for his daughters’ affection, with a self-differentiation level ranging from 0 to 25. Goneril and Regan inhabit a psychological domain characterized by chronic anxiety, self-centeredness, and offensiveness, with levels of self-differentiation ranging from 0 to 25. Cordelia exhibits a higher level of self-differentiation compared to her father and sisters. Despite her anxiety, silliness, and emotional tendencies, Cordelia demonstrates a capacity for intellectual principles, indicating a self-differentiation level between 25 and 50. Lear and his daughters have lower levels of self-differentiation. According to Bowen Theory, those with lower levels of self-differentiation are more focused on seeking affection, acceptance, and approval from others. People are more likely to neglect their values due to relational factors influencing their behavior, exacerbating relationship issues. People with high levels of differentiation can control their emotions well, whereas people with low levels of differentiation are more susceptible to emotional influence. Persons with a high level of self-differentiation can consciously select and

successfully utilize their emotional states.

On the other hand, persons with lower levels of self-differentiation have emotional and thought systems that are strongly intertwined, resulting in increased levels of anxiety. According to Gilbert (1992), people with lower levels of self-differentiation tend to feel more anxious, whereas those with “higher levels of differentiation of self” tend to feel less anxious (24). Lear and his daughters experience chronic anxiety and lack a high degree of self-differentiation, which makes them easily influenced by their emotions. Individuals with limited “differentiation of self” are more susceptible to encountering issues and challenges in their interpersonal relationships (Gilbert 188). Based on Bowen Family Systems Theory, the levels of self-differentiation of Lear and his daughters are low. Thus, the father-daughter relationship between them is problematic.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that the level of self-differentiation between Lear and his daughters is directly proportional to the quality of their father-daughter relationship. The article does not intend to examine the social, economic, or cultural reasons behind the father-daughter relationship in *King Lear* from a sociological or historical perspective. Instead, this analysis uses Bowen’s scale to examine the levels of self-differentiation of the selected characters in the tragedy. Additionally, it investigates the link between their levels of self-differentiation and the father-daughter relationships using Bowen Theory as a compass.

The father-daughter relationship is a prominent issue in *King Lear*, and Bowen Theory offers a novel approach to examining it. The concept of self-differentiation in Bowen Theory provides a more objective and scientific method for evaluating the relationships between the characters. Moreover, Bowen Theory presents a novel methodology for examining familial dynamics, particularly father-daughter relationships in drama and other literary genres.

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