
Mothers, fathers, and sisters within a selection of Jane Austen's novels

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the complexity surrounding the alternate family dynamics in Jane Austen's *Sense and sensibility* (1811), *Pride and prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1815). By incorporating Walter Toman's *Family constellation: Its effects on personality and behaviour theory* to Austen's characters, an alternative perspective on characters is provided. Through applying this theory alongside Murray Bowen's family systems theory and practice, this article reveals the complexity of family relationships. Through analysing the efforts of mothers and fathers within the novels using this psychological lens, an alternate perspective on Austen's characters is created. Additionally, both theories when applied to the theme of sisterhood within two of the novels justify the impact of sibling position and the power of subsets within larger families. Therefore, this article argues that family systems theory can offer a contemporary perspective on the impact of family relations within Jane Austen's novels.

Introduction

Through the popularisation of the romantic genre, novels such as Jane Austen's *Pride and prejudice* are remembered for their heroine's encounters with love (Austen, 2019). These relationships are important in highlighting the social expectations upon young women during the Regency period which ran from 1811 through to 1820 when George III finally died. This article, however, takes a different approach to the traditional popularised views on Austen's works through analysing the novel's familial foundations and their significance in creating memorable characters from alternate

family dynamics. The three novels explored in this article are *Sense and sensibility* (1811), *Pride and prejudice* (1813) and *Emma* (1815). All three of Austen's novels depict the role of family and its importance in shaping the personalities of their heroines and drive the overarching plot. This article uses critical theory on familial relationships through applying Walter Toman's *Family constellation: Its effects on personality and behaviour theory* which explores the complexity of individuals within family circles (Toman, 1993). Developing Toman's theory, Murray Bowen introduced the family systems theory and practice which explores 'eight interlocking concepts' that help the

functioning of an individual within the family unit (Brown, 1999: p. 95). Although research has already been carried out which explores the familial relationships within Austen's works, many discuss the historical context surrounding the novels. While this article also discusses the contextual research, the application of familial psychology offers a new perspective on Austen's characters.

The first section explores the role of motherhood through analysing the efforts of Mrs Dashwood from *Sense and sensibility* (1811) and Mrs Bennet from *Pride and prejudice* (1813). Both characters highlight their unique efforts in parenting their daughters within a patriarchal society preoccupied with marriage, wealth and status. The mothers are often overinvolved with their respective daughters' potential marriages, with Mrs Dashwood taking a more romantic approach in guiding her children to love, whereas Mrs Bennet stresses the importance of marrying for financial stability. Many critics look upon the women unfavourably in their analysis of Regency parenting and deliver harsh comments on their attempts at mothering during a time of high societal expectations. As Mrs Bennet receives the most criticism of the two, this section defends her efforts through applying Bowenian theory and exploring the reasoning behind her behaviour. Similarly, with the two mothers having favourite daughters, this section analyses the mother's stronger connection to the daughter most like herself.

Considering the harsh criticism faced by the mother figures in Austen's novels, the following section analyses the failures of fatherhood from Mr Bennet in *Pride and prejudice* (1813) compared to the efforts of Mr Woodhouse in *Emma* (1815). Research on fatherhood in Austen's novels usually centralises on Mr Bennet and often neglects Mr Woodhouse. Although this section begins with Mr Bennet, the focus will be on his favouritism of his second-born daughter Elizabeth and the lack of compatibility within his own marriage. As the little research on the overly cautious Mr Woodhouse tends to focus on his restrictive approach to parenting, this section will attempt to defend his

behaviour as a response to his past trauma. Additionally with the lack of research on this character, this section includes two film adaptations that interpret the fathers in alternate ways to Austen's original portrayals. Starting with Joe Wright's Mr Bennet in *Pride and prejudice* (2005) and Autumn de Wilde's Mr Woodhouse in *Emma* (2020), both explore alternate ways in portraying the fathers on screen. This inclusion of the film adaptations is also beneficial in highlighting the stereotypes often associated with the Regency fathers. The closing section of this article explores sisterhood within *Sense and sensibility* (1811) and *Pride and prejudice* (1813). Two of the points in the section analyse the oldest sisters as well as the younger sisters in both novels. The third section explores the middle Bennet sister, Mary, and the impact of subsets in larger families. Furthermore, this section explores the Bowenian theory of subsets through analysing the Bennet siblings' interactions. Additionally, the theory suggests that depending on age and birth order, sibling positions influence the responsibilities one adopts. Therefore, applying Bowen's work to the novels reveals the personalities of the characters and highlights the reasoning behind their actions which may have an impact on the overarching plot.

Motherhood: Mrs Bennet and Mrs Dashwood

This section will examine the maternal efforts of Mrs Bennet from *Pride and prejudice* and Mrs Dashwood from *Sense and sensibility*. The two mothers are poignant figures within Austen's well-known novels and are remembered for their overbearing personalities. During Jane Austen's lifetime, becoming a mother was one of the most important moments a woman could experience. Alongside bringing new life into the world, a young lady's main prerogative was marriage, ideally to a husband of a large fortune. It is important to consider the responsibilities of the mother within the nineteenth-century familial home and the connections between them and their daughters. Many critics, such as Mary Benson,

place heavy criticism on Mrs Bennet and hold a heavy bias towards Mrs Dashwood as the favoured mother (Benson, 1989). However, this section will highlight the importance of both mothers within Austen's novels and celebrate their parenting efforts in a challenging society. It is also important to note that both Mrs Dashwood and Mrs Bennet each favour one of their daughters more than the others. This is especially clear in their interactions with both Marianne and Lydia. The two daughters reflect qualities of their mothers with Marianne mirroring Mrs Dashwood's romantic heart and Lydia channelling Mrs Bennet's obsession with marriage.

Austen depicts the complexity surrounding mother-daughter relationships through crafting characters that captivate readers. This is evident in *Pride and prejudice* which explores Mrs Bennet's attempt at mothering her five daughters (Austen, 2019). Typically, Mrs Bennet is depicted by critics as an overbearing mother who tends to neglect her daughters' needs. However, a more contextual analysis would reveal her efforts as admirable considering her position as a woman in the nineteenth-century family unit. For example, Mrs Bennet and the Bennet family are consistently surrounded by religious influence which often instilled that the opinions of the patriarchal figure were 'taken as reflective of the views of all those residing under one roof' (Morgan & Vries, 2010, p. 12). Ultimately, this meant the caring responsibilities of the children and the domestic home were left to the mother figure. Throughout *Pride and prejudice* Mrs Bennet exemplifies the importance of the 'female head' within the home through 'ensuring domestic stability' is present (Gleadle, 2001, p. 52). Alongside managing the upkeep of the family residence, Mrs Bennet has focused her attention on the futures of her five daughters. However, this extreme interest in the marital affairs of her daughters' lives highlights Mrs Bennet's anxiety surrounding their prospects.

Considering Mrs Bennet has not provided the household with an heir to the estate, there is heightened tension in ensuring the family is sustained after Mr Bennet's passing. Furthermore,

Mrs Bennet understands that her unstable financial situation could be potentially repeated with her daughters. Therefore, to prevent hardship, Mrs Bennet ensures the family attend balls with the wealthiest of men and the daughters are introduced into society from an early age. Arguably, Mrs Bennet's efforts in finding husbands for her daughters are, at times, questionable. For example, Jane's fondness of Mr Bingley results in the eldest Bennet receiving an invitation to attend Netherfield Hall to have tea with Miss Bingley. In response to her letter, Mrs Bennet insists that Jane shall 'go on horseback, because it seems likely to rain; and then [she] must stay all night' (Austen, 2019, p. 31). Mrs Bennet's scheming is a response to the level of responsibility she feels for her daughters' futures. Therefore, Mrs Bennet's time within the structured familial home has left her intertwined and she cannot separate herself from the family. Mrs Bennet presents qualities that align with having the inability to differentiate oneself from the family circle. Therefore, when analysing Bowen's family systems theory, those who are overly involved within the family circle and find it difficult to separate themselves as individuals eventually develop a lower differentiation of self (Jeon, 2023). For example, in Bowen's research, 'those with low self-differentiation tend to experience higher levels of anxiety' (Jeon, 2023, p. 1865). Arguably, Mrs Bennet's heightened anxiety stems from making it 'the business of her life [...] to get her daughters married' (Austen, 2019, p. 8). As a result, Mrs Bennet struggles to distinguish between her own life and the lives of her children which, in turn, influences her 'poor nerves' (Austen, 2019, p. 9). For example, this time spent finding husbands for her offspring has resulted in Mrs Bennet lacking any self-awareness. She consistently scrutinises the efforts of other mothers, such as Mrs Long, who Mrs Bennet calls 'a selfish, hypocritical woman' (Austen, 2019, p. 10). Ironically, Mrs Bennet resembles the same qualities as Mrs Long; however, she is too focused on her daughters' lives to realise her own flaws. This over-involvement in the marital affairs of her children originates from the tension surrounding the importance of women marrying well.

Arguably, Mrs Bennet centralises her attention on her children due to her societal and domestic role as a loving wife and mother. Furthermore, during the nineteenth century, the influence of gender roles ensured that mothers 'preside over a loving home, whilst men were to brave the vicissitudes and demands of public and business life' (Gleadle, 2001, p. 84). This suggests that Mrs Bennet, like many women at the time, may have found it difficult to separate her own personality from the wider family.

Alternatively, individuals with a well differentiated self are more likely to 'speak for themselves, take responsibility, [...] be sensitive to the needs of others, and communicate [...] respect for one another' (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1992, p. 78).

Arguably the eldest Bennet daughters, Jane and Elizabeth, find it easier to detach themselves from other members of the family. However, they both suffer 'parental intrusiveness and a blurring of personal boundaries' due to their mother's over-involvement. For example, Mr Collins' interest in marrying Jane is quickly swept away by Mrs Bennet and in an attempt 'to soon have two daughters married' she draws his attention to Elizabeth (Austen, 2019, p. 68). This quick thinking of Mrs Bennet is a perfect example of her scheming ways. However, she neglects to consider the compatibility of the match. Furthermore, Mrs Bennet's decision in suggesting Elizabeth as a potential wife for Mr Collins does nothing for the struggling mother-daughter relationship. As Elizabeth has a higher differentiation of self, compared to Mrs Bennet, she is less likely to connect with her mother on an intellectual or emotional level.

This distance between Elizabeth and Mrs Bennet has allowed the former to form an attachment to her father. As Mr Bennet and Elizabeth have the time and accessibility for reading, they have developed a combined interest in learning and together have identified Mrs Bennet's lack of educational intelligence. In a study examining the mother's favouritism of offspring, daughters who were more engaged with learning were more likely to have a 'decreasing closeness and increasing conflict with less educated mothers' (Gilligan et al., 2013, p. 1232). Therefore, Elizabeth's prejudice

combined with her father's influence has, over time, created a barrier between herself and her mother. Mrs Bennet is known for her lack of education and is first introduced as 'a woman of mean understanding, little information and uncertain temper' (Austen, 2019, p. 9). Like many women during the Regency period, Mrs Bennet's 'first priority in life was to secure a husband' (McElligott, 2014, p. 80). Therefore, Mrs Bennet utilised her assets, and in return Mr Bennet was 'captivated by youth and beauty, and that appearance of good humour' (Austen, 2019, p. 213). This is a reflection on the patriarchal ideals of the period with the importance of appearances outweighing education. As Elizabeth McElligott argues, 'educated women [...] seemed almost unacceptable in Jane Austen's time' as the male figure was considered the more intellectual counterpart (McElligott, 2014, p. 80). Arguably then, Mrs Bennet may see Elizabeth's intellect as being 'detrimental in that it drove potential husbands from [her] company' (McElligott, 2014, p. 80). Therefore, Austen's inclusion of Elizabeth's interest in 'improving her mind' juxtaposes her mother's interest in marrying for economic benefit and highlights the lack of choice for women (McElligott, 2014, p. 80). Both characters symbolise the restrictions surrounding Regency women and their decision in either gaining societal accomplishments through marriage, or self-accomplishment through education.

Regarding Mrs Bennet and Lydia, they have a strong mother-daughter connection due to the younger 'remaining [...] more similar' to the former (Gilligan et al., 2013, p. 1232). Mrs Bennet and Lydia have a closer relationship as they lack the ability to differentiate themselves from each other, hence, Lydia is 'prized because she is like her mother' (Bartlett, 2021, p. 58). Mrs Bennet's continuous stress over the importance of marriage has had a significant impact on the youngest Bennet daughter. Therefore, Lydia's heightened interest in the arrival of the militia matches that of her mother's; however, this over-involvement with these gentlemen has its consequences. For example, the sudden disappearance of Mr Wickham and Lydia causes Mrs Bennet heartbreak. However, Mrs Bennet's stress is erased

by the knowledge that 'her daughter would be married' (Austen, 2019, p. 272). Mrs Bennet's lack of acknowledgement for the 'misconduct' of her youngest daughter communicates the negligence of reputation from Lydia and her mother (Austen, 2019, p. 272). Additionally, this interconnectedness between mother and daughter displays the 'blurred' boundaries of family 'members [who] are fused with one another' (Anderson & Sabatelli, 1992, p. 78). There is no distinction between Lydia and her mother as many of her personality traits and her perceptions of marriage mirror that of Mrs Bennet. For example, Lydia's lack of self-awareness towards her own actions and the effect they have on other people resembles that of her mother. Although Mrs Bennet may portray negative parenting styles, her efforts are reflective of the Regency era in ensuring her daughters' futures are sustained through an advantageous marriage.

Nevertheless, Mrs Bennet has consistently been scrutinised for her attempts at motherhood with Mary Benson labelling her as 'the worst mother a heroine could have' (Benson, 1989, p. 117).

However, it is difficult to agree with a statement so judgemental on a mother's attempt at ensuring her daughters remain economically sustained. Within Benson's article, Mrs Bennet is ridiculed for her incapability of 'providing [her daughters] with any moral example' (Benson, 1989, p. 117).

Evidently, there are moments in the novel where Mrs Bennet tends to show her inability to maintain her excessive foolishness. For example, at the Netherfield ball Mrs Bennet openly discusses her 'expectation that Jane would soon be married to Mr Bingley' (Austen, 2019, p. 93). This lack of 'propriety' from Mrs Bennet with her persistent gossiping, paired with the merry evening, has consequences for Jane's marital prospects. (Austen, 2019, p. 179).

However, rather than observing Mrs Bennet's efforts as a reflection of her own 'shallowness', it is important to note the determination behind her efforts (Benson, 1989, p. 117). Mrs Bennet 'does the only thing she knows how to do – she pushes her daughters into marriage' (Lee, 2000, p. 9). Therefore, like many nineteenth-century women,

Mrs Bennet utilises the ball to present her daughters to the eligible gentlemen of Netherfield. These events 'provided the ideal venue for facilitating interaction between business and family networks' both associated with marital prospects (Gleadle, 2001, p. 80). The determination seen in Mrs Bennet during the ball highlights her understanding of the competitiveness in finding a husband of good fortune and status. Additionally, Lee argues that Mrs Bennet 'compounds the concern of two parents into one' as she also adopts the responsibility of the father (Lee, 2000, p. 10). With Mr Bennet's lack of involvement and his consistent isolation from the family, Mrs Bennet understands the pressures surrounding them, which her husband neglects to consider.

Furthermore, Benson's extreme critique of Mrs Bennet alters the perception of the character and paints her as the villain in her daughters' lives. Alternatively, Lee argues, readers tend to 'get too easily caught up in their annoyance of Mrs Bennet's outburst and flightiness to give her credit to her efforts' (Lee, 2000, p. 10). Considering Mrs Bennet has no emotional support from her husband in raising their five daughters, her dedication to their potential marriages is admirable. However, Mrs Bennet is ridiculed by critics for her overbearing personality and her heavy involvement in the family circle. Arguably, Mrs Bennet should be commended for her selflessness in wanting a better future for her daughters. During a time where women had no finances of their own, Mrs Bennet acknowledges her own situation and tries to ensure her daughters avoid the struggle of financial insecurity. In Benson's study there is a clear bias towards Mrs Dashwood in *Sense and sensibility*, alongside the extreme criticism of Mrs Bennet's nature. For example, in her analysis of motherhood in the novel, Benson describes Mrs Dashwood as 'the most loving mother a heroine could have' with her positivity and 'warm affection' (Benson, 1989, p. 117).

Unlike Mrs Bennet, Mrs Dashwood encourages her daughters to marry for love rather than for financial stability. This contrast highlights Mrs

Bennet's self-awareness in terms of her economic situation and Mrs Dashwood's naivety has throughout the novel. As the idealist of the family, Mrs Dashwood tends to avoid the responsibilities associated with being a mother and instead passes them to her eldest daughter, Elinor. Throughout *Sense and sensibility*, Mrs Dashwood highly depends on Elinor, especially regarding the financial accounts of the family home. In response to her husband's passing, Mrs Dashwood distracts herself from grief through hyper-focusing on the romantic love interests that involve her daughter, Marianne.

In the novel, Mrs Dashwood often pays more attention to Marianne and leaves Elinor to solve situations or manage her feelings alone. Therefore, 'Mrs. Dashwood usually acts more like a sister, especially to Marianne', which often leaves Elinor having to responsibly guide her younger sister (Benson, 1989, p. 117). This not only increases the pressure on Elinor to ensure Marianne is cared for, but also creates a separation between Mrs Dashwood and her eldest daughter. Elinor is the representation of 'sense' in the novel, with a methodical approach to situations, whereas Marianne leads with her heart and emotions. It is evident why Mrs Dashwood, like Mrs Bennet, 'finds it easier to sympathise with the daughter who most resembles her' (Bartlett, 2021, p. 53). For example, Mrs Dashwood and Marianne are similar in their frequent romanticisation of life or their tendency to view life through rose-tinted glasses. Furthermore, Marianne's naïve obsession with Willoughby highlights her idealised image of love due to the lack of male validation or interaction she has received. Therefore, as the young girl ventures into a whirlwind romance with this charming man, she neglects to consider him jeopardising her social stature. Interestingly, rather than warning Marianne of the consequences of her actions, Mrs Dashwood encourages her daughter's newfound love and is 'charmed' by Willoughby's 'faultless' persona (Austen, 2008, p. 50).

Over time, the connection between Willoughby and Marianne becomes closer, with them both spending an increased amount of time with one

another. Throughout this time Mrs Dashwood sees the relationship positively; however, Elinor 'thinks it is wrong for them, with no official engagement, to show so openly their preference for one another' (Bartlett, 2021, p. 54). This maternal instinct from the eldest daughter demonstrates the 'sensibility' of Elinor's character and juxtaposes her mother's perception of the pair's new romance. The romantic ideals of Mrs Dashwood outweigh her judgement of the situation, therefore, she does not question Willoughby's interest in Marianne. However, in Willoughby's confessional speech to Elinor, he explains his intentions in growing close to Marianne while at Cleveland 'without any design of returning her affection' (Austen, 2008, p. 299). During this time, Marianne becomes extremely heartbroken and unwell after discovering Willoughby's engagement to Miss Grey. Therefore, Mrs Dashwood's senseless decision in allowing 'Marianne, who is sixteen going on seventeen, [making] all her own decisions about her romantic life' has unfortunate consequences (Bartlett, 2021, p. 53). Evidently, Willoughby regrets his selfish behaviour and his influence on Marianne's feelings; however, her mother's lack of awareness has a negative impact on her daughter's health.

Despite Mrs Dashwood's questionable decisions in parenting, she is attentive when responding to Marianne's illness and relieves the pressure from Elinor in caring for her sister. For example, on her arrival at Cleveland, she attentively manages the situation, knowing 'the life of a child was at stake' (Austen, 2008, p. 312). Through managing Marianne's illness and recognising the efforts of Elinor she understands her negligence as a parent and responds accordingly. The main reoccurring trait of Mrs Dashwood is her good heart and her ability to forgive those who have wronged her or her family. For example, despite Willoughby's mistreatment of Marianne, Mrs Dashwood immediately feels sympathy for the man and 'wished him happy' in his new marriage (Austen, 2008, p. 325).

On many occasions both mothers neglect to consider the impact of their actions, as their main

concerns revolve around their respective daughters' marital futures. However, their affection for their daughters outweighs the negative traits often associated with their characters. For example, Mrs Bennet's overbearing qualities are a product of her anxiety and her lack of detachment from the family circle. Whereas Mrs Dashwood's positively romantic outlook on life is her way of dealing with the passing of her husband. Both characters have been scrutinised for their efforts as mothers and are usually placed in competition with one another to reveal the best Austen mother. Arguably, the two women should be commended for their attempts at parenting during a period where women were expected to marry and maintain strict gender roles.

Fatherhood: Mr Bennet and Mr Woodhouse

This section will examine the attempts at fatherhood by both Mr Woodhouse in Austen's *Emma* and Mr Bennet in *Pride and prejudice*. Considering there is little research surrounding Mr Woodhouse's character and the increasing amount of film adaptations of Jane Austen's works, this section will examine two film adaptations alongside the novels. The films explored in this section are Joe Wright's *Pride and prejudice* (2005) and Autumn de Wilde's *Emma* (2020). It is evident within these adaptations that there is a bias towards the twenty-first century audience as many 'crave the emotion and drama' associated with Regency adaptations (Williams, 2018, p. 5). However, they do explore Austen's father figures through displaying the characters in an alternate light with more affectionate scenes, especially with Mr Bennet.

It is well known that Mr Bennet's efforts in parenting throughout the novel are 'lazy and negligent' with his lack of preparation for the future and his diminishing care for his youngest daughters (Lee, 2000, p. 8). Mr Bennet's involvement in his eldest daughters' lives juxtaposes the lack of interaction with his three youngest daughters. However, Mr Bennet clearly has a favourite daughter in Elizabeth and wishes

her to marry a gentleman of equal intelligence. This concern for Elizabeth's future outweighs his anxiety surrounding the rest of his daughters' potential marriages. For example, when Mr Darcy asks Mr Bennet for his blessing he pleads with his daughter, 'let me not have the grief of seeing you unable to respect your partner in life' (Austen, 2011, p. 337). As Adli Odeh argues, Mr Bennet's 'relationship with his daughter Elizabeth is based on respect and love' (Odeh, 2011: 39). This is evident in the concluding chapter, when Elizabeth's absence ensures Mr Bennet's consistent visits to Pemberley as 'his affection for her drew him oftener from home' (Austen, 2019, p. 344). This not only highlights Mr Bennet's affection for Elizabeth but also communicates the 'unequal marriage' he sees within his own relationship (Austen, 2011, p. 337). Arguably, Mr Bennet portrays his internal fear 'that his favourite daughter may be repeating his own mistakes' (Burgan, 1975, p. 542).

As mentioned earlier, Mr Bennet avoids his responsibilities as a father within the novel and often holds 'judgemental tendencies' towards his own wife (Lee, 2000, p. 6). As the Bowenian theory of triangulation suggests, this 'tension between two people [...] can be relieved by bringing in a third person' (Haefner, 2014, p. 836). Typically, this dynamic is seen through the 'father-mother-child triangle with the tension being between the parents, and the father [moving] to the outside position' (Haefner, 2014, p. 836). However, as Elizabeth is her mother's 'least' favourite child, she moves away from her by finding similarities with her father, hence their strong bond (Austen, 2019, p. 97). This connotes Mr Bennet as an inconsistent father to the rest of his daughters and a distant husband.

With the lack of written research on Austen's father figures, the use of Wright's cinematic adaptation offers a new portrayal of Mr Bennet and in turn provides a new perspective on the original character (Wright, 2005). As the previous section has shown, Mr Bennet's behaviour in the novel is the result of an unhappy marriage and his lack of interest in parenting. However, there is a clear

juxtaposition between the Mr Bennet seen cinematically and the character in Austen's classic novel. For example, in Joe Wright's adaptation of *Pride and prejudice*, Mr Bennet (Donald Sutherland) is portrayed as an affectionate husband and father (Wright, 2005). It is apparent throughout the adaptation that Mr Bennet has a more affectionate nature towards his wife, juxtaposing the aforementioned ridicule within their relationship in the earlier section. On numerous occasions, there are moments of physical affection portraying Mr Bennet as a doting husband. For example, when Mrs Bennet speaks of her 'poor nerves', Mr Bennet identifies them as 'his constant companion for these twenty years' (Austen, 2019, p. 9). This jovial response is accompanied with a tender embrace between the pair, conveying a healthy and loving relationship, whereas Mr Bennet uses 'Mrs Bennet's extravagances [...] to justify his continuous retreats to his library' (Burgan, 1975, p. 539). Wright's adaptation depicts Mr Bennet as a quiet, friendly and caring father who shies away from the chaotic female circle of the family. This differs drastically to the novel as the 'sarcastic humour, reserve and caprice' of Mr Bennet are more prominent characteristics (Austen, 2019, p. 9). Additionally, the film does convey the societal norms of the modern day through creating likeable on-screen characters which once again differs to Austen's Mr Bennet. However, the director clearly felt the need to change the character's negative qualities to ensure Mr Bennet was more appealing to modern audiences.

Nevertheless, there is a slight redemption seen in Mr Bennet's character during Lydia's disappearance and in the latter half of the text. Surprisingly, Mr Bennet suddenly begins to care about his daughters' futures after the large social taboo surrounding Lydia and Mr Wickham's engagement. For example, post-Lydia's departure to Newcastle, she 'frequently invited her [Kitty] to come and stay with the promise of balls and young men, [however] her father would never consent to her going' (Austen, 2019, p. 344). This sudden placement of restrictions around Kitty highlights Mr Bennet's potential 'humiliation of

having had to transfer his powers of fatherhood to his tradesman brother' in finding Lydia and Wickham (Burgan, 1975, p. 540). Arguably, Burgan's comment connotes the 'carelessness' of Mr Bennet's behaviour and his depleting social status since his daughter's rebellious actions (Burgan, 1975, p. 541). In terms of Wright's adaptation, this passage about Lydia and Kitty is not included in the final scenes. Instead, Mr Bennet's concern is portrayed in an earlier scene when he returns to the family home looking visibly exhausted after searching for Lydia. The adaptation works well in portraying Mr Bennet as a thoughtful father. However, his constant lack of interest is apparent through his physical distancing from his five daughters throughout the adaptation and the novel.

Alternatively, when exploring Austen's 1815 novel *Emma*, the lack of parenting from Mr Bennet in *Pride and prejudice* differs to the fatherly 'affection' from Mr Woodhouse (Austen, 2009, p. 7). As regards to his parenting style, Mr Woodhouse leads with an anxious mindset and continuously worries over his daughter's health. This is further enhanced by his controlling behaviour that over time has become a defining trait of his daughters. Throughout the novel, Mr Woodhouse differs from the traditional norms of society with his level of education and involvement within his daughters' lives. Interestingly, Autumn de Wilde's adaptation differs from Austen's classic through incorporating the traditional stereotypes usually associated with wealthy gentlemen during the Regency period.

Within Autumn de Wilde's romantic comedy, *Emma*, there is a likeable charm to Mr Woodhouse and his relationship with his daughter (de Wilde, 2020). De Wilde takes an interesting approach to Mr Woodhouse through portraying emotional scenes that reflect the hopelessness of his character and his reliance on the company of others (de Wilde, 2020). Additionally, de Wilde portrays Mr Woodhouse as an intelligent man who frantically worries over the health of his family and the cold weather. On numerous occasions, he is seen either reading novels or newspapers while sitting in quiet solitude, whereas in the novel Austen hints at Mr

Woodhouse's lack of education through Emma's risk of being in 'great danger of suffering from intellectual solitude' (Austen, 2009, p. 8). De Wilde's decision to present Mr Woodhouse as an intelligent man communicates the stereotype of Regency men typically being well-educated. As previously mentioned, men were seen as having 'a greater capacity for learning' than women (McElligott, 2014, p. 80). However, Austen's Mr Woodhouse ventures away from the traditional stereotypes of an educated gentleman within her novel and presents the character as having little intelligence. Furthermore, de Wilde's decision to present Mr Woodhouse as an educated gentleman allows the audience to feel sympathy for him more easily as he may not have anyone to share that knowledge with if his daughter leaves. If Mr Woodhouse were to be presented on screen as an annoyingly 'stupid' character, there would be less empathy for his situation as Emma's intelligence may have been wasted (Gibbs, 1986, p. 48). Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the power of adaptation in altering our perceptions of characters.

In terms of his loneliness, more recent critics such as Najean Lee suggest that Mr Woodhouse's constant fear of 'being alone' has influenced his 'distaste for marriage' (Lee, 2000, p. 14). It is possible with the passing of his wife and the marriage of his eldest daughter that Mr Woodhouse has found great comfort in Emma, hence his fear of her marrying. The relationship between Emma and Mr Woodhouse does not reflect the typical father-daughter dynamic of the nineteenth century. During the Regency period, fathers 'were not expected to spend much time with their children' (Charan, 2018, p. 8). Once again, Austen steers away from Regency stereotypes as this hyper-dependency from Mr Woodhouse on Emma is unusual for the time, but it is inevitable when widowed and motherless. This dependency is also portrayed in de Wilde's adaptation when Mr Woodhouse exclaims, 'you must never leave me Emma' as Isabella departs from Highbury with her own family (de Wilde, 2020). This comment communicates the innocent manipulation of Mr Woodhouse in ensuring his

youngest daughter remains close. Additionally, the empathetic delivery of the aforementioned line from actor Bill Nighy creates sympathy for Mr Woodhouse's situation and conveys his desperation for company (de Wilde, 2020). On reflection, this on-screen Mr Woodhouse seems authentic to the character by displaying the innocent vulnerability alongside his obvious flaws.

However, this sympathetic perception of Mr Woodhouse has been overlooked as many critics continually express their annoyance of his possessiveness over Emma. Arguably, Mr Woodhouse's 'selfish' behaviour is apparent when he expresses his belief that 'matrimony, as the origin of change, was always disagreeable' (Austen, 2009, p. 9). Therefore, over time Emma has developed the same ideology and openly communicates her lack of interest in 'the usual inducements of women to marry' (Austen, 2009, p. 82). As regards to Bowen's theory, Emma and her father show signs of 'the family projection process' where 'the parents project their anxieties onto the children' (Brooks, 2017, p. 108). This mirroring of opinions coincides with Bowen's discussion on how "parental anxiety takes many forms, but most commonly it can be observed in a preoccupation with a child" (Brooks, 2017, p. 111).

Evidently, Emma's perceptions of the world originate from her father's influence and in turn are reflected in her persona. For example, Mr Woodhouse is known for his controlling behaviour which Emma also adopts when playing her game of matchmaking in the village. Christine Gibbs disputes Mr Woodhouse's influence on his daughters' views by labelling him 'a stupid, selfish hypochondriac' (Gibbs, 1986, p. 48). It is easy to dislike the restrictive nature of Mr Woodhouse in Gibbs' argument with his often opinionated comments and the 'peculiarities' in his behaviour (Austen, 2009, p. 90). However, Gibbs fails to consider Mr Woodhouse's past experiences and the loneliness he may have developed since the passing of his wife. Furthermore, Gibbs confuses Mr Woodhouse's nature with that of a 'hypochondriac' who considers themselves to be always sick. However, Mr Woodhouse is known for his anxiety

over his own wellbeing and the health of the people dearest to him, hence the more appropriate label of a 'valetudinarian' (Austen, 2009, p. 9). Although Gibbs provides a persuasive argument regarding Mr Woodhouse's conduct, it is difficult to ignore the sympathetic tone attached to his character.

Another significant aspect to Bowen's family projection theory is the child lacking the 'capacity to think and act autonomously for themselves' due to the parent's influence (Brooks, 2017, p. 111). This is evident when Isabella returns to Highbury and worries about the health of her child, Bella. Like her father, she demonstrates the generational anxiety surrounding the wellness of her family and mirrors his controlling behaviour. Clearly the young woman has taken it upon herself to find the children a reliable doctor in the form of Mr Wingfield. However, Mr Woodhouse is adamant that Mr Perry is the most trusting professional and confides in his expertise. On numerous occasions, he tells Isabella that she should get a second opinion from Perry by implying: 'my dear, whenever he comes, you had better let him look at little Bella's throat' (Austen, 2009, p. 97). Evidently, Mr Woodhouse's anxiety surrounding the wellbeing of his family is his way of showing affection and signals his awareness of the dangers of the common illness. This is also evident in Chapter Fifteen when the family are dining at the Randalls' home and suddenly the weather changes. Immediately, Mr Woodhouse begins to frantically panic by seeking reassurance through asking Emma 'what is to be done?' (Austen, 2009, p. 120). As the family gather in separate carriages, Mr Woodhouse fears the drive home and insists the family 'must keep as much together as they could' (Austen, 2009, p. 122). Mr Woodhouse's confidence in Emma's judgement displays his insecurity at first; however, his quick decision making and strict instructions preserve his masculinity. This asserts Mr Woodhouse's position in the family as the gentle patriarchal figure who uses his position to protect his loved ones.

Although this article does not wish to favour

certain characters over others, it is quite difficult to dislike Mr Woodhouse as his affection outweighs the lack of attention Mr Bennet gives to his daughters. This comparison between the two fathers is refreshing as the mothers in Austen's novels face the most scrutiny and are often placed in competition with each other. The two fathers have quite different parenting styles and display this through their level of involvement within the family circle. Through applying Bowenian theory, it is evident that Mr Bennet views his own marriage as a lesson for Elizabeth in the importance of marital compatibility; however, he neglects to relay the same message to his daughters. In contrast, Mr Woodhouse has a heightened sense of anxiety and continually dotes on his daughters to ensure they remain close to him in proximity. With Mr Woodhouse his fear of abandonment pushes him into creating this connection with his children and moves away from the traditional fatherly role of the time. Furthermore, the cinematic adaptations of the novels provide an alternative perspective of the characters and highlight how father figures are presented positively in Regency pieces.

Sisterhood: The Bennet sisters and The Dashwood sisters

It is evident within *Sense and sensibility*, as well as *Pride and prejudice* that the connections between sisters are equally as important as the romantic relationships seen later in the plots. Furthermore, the compelling interactions between characters painted by Austen reflect the connections seen within the dynamics of modern-day sisters. This mixture of the level-headed eldest daughter who often adopts a motherly role towards her younger naïve sister highlights the effects of birth order and sibling positions. This section will also examine the Bennet sisters' formation of 'subgroups' in relation to Toman's research on larger family dynamics (Toman, 1993).

The eldest sisters

To begin, this section will examine the complexity

surrounding the Bennet sisters through applying sibling position theory and the impact of subsets. Initially, Toman developed the sibling position theory and Bowen later enhanced the concept through highlighting the generational subsets within larger sibling groups (Toman, 1993). Applying Toman's sibling position theory to Austen's *Pride and prejudice* highlights the separation between the female characters and their responsibilities within the family unit. This is evident when analysing Toman's research on the eldest sisters who were more likely to 'be up to date and in control' of situations regarding the family (Toman, 1993, p. 167). Together, Jane and Elizabeth work to ensure the Bennet name is not tarnished. As they both have a healthy amount of self-awareness, the young women understand the ridicule the family may receive from wider society.

It is evident that both Jane and Elizabeth have adopted a more parental role towards their sisters as they tend to control and manage their behaviour. For example, in one conversation, 'Lydia was bid by her two eldest sisters to hold her tongue' (Austen, 2019, p. 66). This correction of Lydia's behaviour highlights the two sisters actively being 'more conscientious' than their neglectful mother and father in maintaining the reputation of the family name (Morgan, 2022, p. 7). However, when analysing Jane and Elizabeth's personalities, they each have different qualities but still reflect Bowen's theory surrounding older siblings. For example, Elizabeth resembles the more 'self-confident' older sister who offers a 'more assertive' nature with her family (Morgan, 2022, p. 15). This is evident in Elizabeth's ability to observe situations and quickly resolve them. For example, when Mary is singing at the ball Elizabeth looks 'at her father to entreat his interference' to save the family from further embarrassment (Austen, 2019, p. 95). On the other hand, Jane is known for her good heart and forgiving nature. Therefore, when Mr Bingley apologises for the heartache he and Mr Darcy caused Jane, she immediately accepts the apology due to her love for him. According to Toman, Jane's response highlights the maturity of her sibling position as she wants a marriage built on love and in turn 'will remain faithful to him for

many years' (Toman, 1993, p. 168). Luckily for Jane, the marriage arrives with loving affection and compatibility alongside financial security.

In *Pride and prejudice*, the over-involvement of their mother and the actions of their younger sister drive the pair into distancing themselves from the family home. For example, at the end of the novel, Jane and Mr Bingley 'remained at Netherfield only a twelve-month' (Austen, 2019, p. 344). However, being 'so near a vicinity to her mother and Meryton [...] was not desirable to his easy temper, or her affectionate heart' (Austen, 2019, p. 334). The pair fortunately purchase an estate in Derbyshire which results in 'Jane and Elizabeth [...] [being] within thirty miles of each other' (Austen, 2019, p. 334). This detachment from the Bennet home relates to Bowen's research into 'emotional cut off' where 'people use physical or emotional distance to regulate their unresolved attachment to their parents' (McCollum, 1991, p. 247). Both daughters use their marriages as routes for escapism from their dependent families and to become somewhat free of the responsibilities of an eldest daughter. Overall, the sisters complement each other well with Jane's timid, forgiving nature and Elizabeth's confident independence making a strong 'subgroup' within the larger family (Toman, 1993, p. 18). Together, they have 'somehow grown up intelligent, confident and [...] morally discerning young women' despite having little to no guidance from their parents (Bartlett, 2021, p. 58).

Similarly, Elinor Dashwood in *Sense and sensibility* resembles these positive qualities and like the eldest Bennet sisters, consistently wishes 'to be up to date and in control' of situations involving her beloved family (Toman, 1993, p. 167). However, this 'people-pleaser' quality often leads to the young woman willingly adopting more duties within the family. For example, at the time of her father's unfortunate passing Elinor is given the responsibility of caring for the family finances and remaining 'the counsellor of her mother' (Austen, 2008, p. 8). As previously mentioned, Elinor takes on a more maternal role towards Marianne when the pair go to London. As Benson argues, Elinor

‘acting as the mother figure’ is due to her having ‘the strongest inner sense of right and wrong’ (Benson, 1989, p. 117). This juxtaposes her mother’s often romantic perceptions and instils in Elinor the duty to remind Marianne of the social expectations that surround her.

Furthermore, throughout *Sense and sensibility* there is an element of isolation on Elinor’s behalf with many situations leaving the protagonist silenced and unable to express her true feelings. This contrasts with the constant reliance Jane and Elizabeth have on each other, as Elinor has a higher level of ‘emotional maturity’ compared to Marianne (Benson, 1989, p. 117). Arguably, this isolation relates to Elinor’s ‘efficient, strict and straightforward’ behaviour which correlates with her position as the eldest sister of sisters (Toman, 1993, p. 167). Therefore, it makes sense as to why ‘Mrs Dashwood does not find it convenient to worry about Elinor’ as her heightened sense of independence shields her from portraying her true feelings (Bartlett, 2021, p. 55). This connotes the sacrifice Elinor chooses to make to prioritise the needs of others and control the situation to her advantage. For example, this is noticeable when Elinor is told by Lucy Steele that her and Edward Ferrars, the man she is in love with, are secretly engaged. To protect her own feelings and the reputation of Lucy, Elinor loyally keeps the information private while dealing with her heartbreak in isolation. This sacrifice from Elinor is one of many and highlights the selflessness of her character to ensure the people around her remain protected.

Overall, the three eldest daughters across the two novels adopt a caretaker personality in managing and directing the behaviour of their siblings. Without their influence the other daughters may completely lack the social skills or appropriate behaviour to function in high society. Furthermore, both novels explore the dependency on the eldest daughters and their response to their situations. Jane and Elizabeth depend on each other when sharing their problems which allows them to divide the responsibility that comes with being an eldest daughter. Whereas with Elinor,

although she does confide in Marianne on numerous occasions, she often chooses to remain silent to protect the feelings of her mother and her sister. Arguably, the three women are likeable because of their ability to adapt to situations and address the flaws in their own character.

The middle sister

It is important to consider here the structure of the Bennet family and its effect on certain individuals, such as the middle daughter. Evidently, Mary’s position is very isolating and like many middle siblings she is the ‘least connected to their family and parents’ (Morgan, 2022, p. 16). Therefore, this section of the article will explore the effect of Toman’s research in the development of ‘subgroups’ within larger families, which result in certain members feeling isolated (Toman, 1993). Mary has a higher level of maturity than her two youngest sisters and the bond between the two eldest sisters leaves Mary feeling excluded.

Throughout the novel, Mary symbolises the isolation felt in larger families and the internal abandonment of a child who, in later life, seeks external validation. For example, it is noticeable in Austen’s description of Mary, ‘being the only plain one in the family’ that her features do not compare to that of her more conventionally attractive sisters (Austen, 2019, p. 26). Mary acknowledges that she does not meet the same level of beauty as her sisters and in response works ‘hard for knowledge and accomplishments’ (Austen, 2019, p. 26). This implies the insecurities within Mary’s character and justifies the reasoning behind her consistent efforts in playing the piano or singing. Additionally, Toman argues that ‘siblings are constantly competing amongst one another for attention and validation from their parents’ (Morgan 2022, p. 15). Therefore, considering Mary’s position as a middle child, it is understandable to see why she chooses to prioritise ‘improving her mind’ to seek that external support (McElligott, 2014, p. 80). This creates sympathy for Mary as she faces the ignorance from her family and their lack of involvement within her life.

According to Toman, this separation Mary feels is a result of the formation of 'subgroups [...] among the siblings' especially in larger families (Toman, 1993, p. 189). For example, in a group of five siblings 'it is likely that the first two and the last three will form subgroups' (Toman, 1993, p. 189). However, as Mary's interests do not align with Kitty's and Lydia's, she often finds herself alone and detached from the subset.

In the concluding chapter, Mary has a disappointing ending compared to her sisters, as Austen portrays her as a potential spinster 'who remained at home' (Austen, 2019, p. 345). However, it seems Mary enjoys the newfound silence as she no longer endures 'the comparisons between her sisters' beauty and her own' (Austen, 2019, p. 345). The comments put a strain on Mary's perception of herself, therefore Austen implies Mary finally gains peace from the constant ridicule of her appearance. Overall, there is a level of sympathy for Mary as she is often lost within the chaos of the Bennet family and seeks validation from those around her.

The youngest sister

Unlike the oldest sisters who tend to have a more cautious approach to life, the younger siblings of Austen's novels tend to be more rebellious. It is clear to see that the younger sisters of the protagonist often find themselves in unfortunate circumstances. Therefore, this section will explore the actions of Lydia and Marianne, two young women who are manipulated by gentleman who prey on their lack of education and innocence. Both characters display their immaturity in their decision making; however, Marianne's level of self-awareness outweighs Lydia's lack of acknowledgement of her actions.

Lydia Bennet is a perfect example of Toman's 'vivacious, impulsive, even erratic' younger sister who often 'loves change and excitement' (Toman, 1993, p. 171). Throughout *Pride and prejudice*, Lydia is painted as the overly confident Bennet sister with an ignorant, self-centred personality.

Like many young girls during the early nineteenth century, Lydia's main prerogative is dancing with eligible bachelors and eventually marrying. However, the 'untamed [...] and fearless' Lydia has a heightened interest in charming the men of the militia regiment who have recently arrived in Meryton (Austen, 2019, p. 280). Evidently, Lydia's lack of guidance from her parents and her inability to think of 'nothing but love, flirtation and officers' connotes the character's age and naïve decision making (Austen, 2019, p. 252).

Later in the novel, the vulnerable Lydia is manipulated by the cunning Mr Wickham into eloping to 'Gretna Green' (Austen, 2019, p. 259). With Lydia being the absent minded 'well-grown girl of fifteen', she quickly agrees to the proposal without thinking of the consequences, for not only herself, but also for her family (Austen, 2019, p. 45). The frivolous act immediately travels around the higher classes of society and Lydia's marriage is quickly known as 'a patched-up business' (Austen, 2019, p. 319). Despite her reputation being close to 'ruin', Lydia naively maintains the idea that the relationship is healthy (Bartlett, 2021, p. 59). As Nora Bartlett argues, in *Jane Austen: Reflections of a reader*, with Lydia 'no one has attempted to instil any principles, or even any realistic dread of consequences in her while she was growing up' (Bartlett, 2021, p. 59). Therefore, the actions of Mr Wickham seem romantic in Lydia's eyes, whereas her older sisters perceive his behaviour as irresponsible and reckless. Furthermore, Bartlett's argument highlights the difference between Elizabeth's and Jane's perspective of maintaining the family's reputation, compared to that of Lydia's. As explained in Toman's theory, the youngest sister's 'ideas about honour and a good reputation, [...] are not always of the conventional type' (Toman, 1993, p. 172). This is also reflected in the lack of self-awareness from Lydia and her inability to see the little compatibility between herself and Wickham. Both Elizabeth and Jane are aware that 'Wickham's affection for Lydia, was [...] not equal to Lydia's for him' (Austen, 2019, p. 283). This reveals Lydia's immaturity in her lack of awareness in seeing the relationship as problematic. Arguably,

Lydia's unhealthy relationship is a result of her mother's continual emphasis on marrying for economic stability and slight affection, rather than love.

As Toman's theory suggests, Lydia and Wickham's marriage should inevitably 'produce [a] happier, long-lasting relationship' because of their 'complimentary sibling positions [being] an older sibling marrying a younger sibling' (Morgan, 2022, p. 14). However, their nuptials are tainted due to the weak match and their questionable intentions. It is also implied in the novel that the pair had a doubtful future, as 'little of permanent happiness could belong to a couple who were only brought together because their passions were stronger than their virtue' (Austen, 2019, p. 278). The 'passions' for wealth on Wickham's side and the obsession with marriage on Lydia's behalf connotes their individual motives behind their actions (Austen, 2019, p. 278). Lydia's motive originates from the surrounding cultural expectations and the heightened importance of young women finding a husband to ensure their futures are sustained. As Elizabeth reveals, Lydia 'wanted only encouragement to attach herself to anybody' (Austen, 2019, p. 249). Therefore, Austen implies that the youngest Bennet is in love with the idea of marriage and would have married any gentleman if Wickham did not arrive in Meryton. This implies the shared desperation of marriage that Lydia and Mrs Bennet adopt to ensure their social status is maintained.

Despite the shame attached to her marriage, Lydia instead uses the arrangement to portray her accomplishments in finding a husband. For example, on her return to Meryton, Lydia takes 'off [her] glove, and lets [her] hand rest upon the window frame' so that Mr Goulding might see the ring (Austen, 2019, p. 281). The social taboo of the marriage slips Lydia's mind and her mother's. Instead, the pair see it as an accomplishment that she has married so young. Furthermore, Lydia demonstrates her obsession with wealth and luxuries throughout the novel. For example, when shopping in town Lydia begins 'showing her purchase [exclaiming] look here, I have bought

this bonnet' (Austen, 2019, p. 197). Considering Toman's research, Lydia's obsession with 'material goods' mirrors that of her sibling position as it 'may be important to her' as a younger sister to show off her accomplishments (Toman, 1993, p. 172). This heightened interest in 'material goods' is also reflected with her marriage being a possession she can simply present to wider society.

In terms of influence, Lydia's actions have an impact on her sister Kitty, who often shared an interest in the men 'of Longbourn' with Lydia (Austen, 2019, p. 29). However, towards the end of the novel, Kitty when 'removed from the influence of Lydia's example, became [...] less irritable, less ignorant, and less insipid' due to spending time 'with her eldest sisters' (Austen, 2019, p. 344). As Kitty is one of the youngest 'her mind may be changed and her intentions diverted more easily than other peoples can be' (Toman, 1993, p. 171). As previously stated in the previous section, Kitty is restrained from seeing Lydia later in the novel because of her antics. Arguably, Kitty's naivety makes her character likeable as she portrays the innocence surrounding the desire for romantic love.

Similarly, in *Sense and sensibility*, Marianne Dashwood navigates her life with the romantic ideal; 'to wish was to hope, and to hope was to expect' (Austen, 2008, p. 23). Unfortunately, this prophecy does not work in Marianne's favour, especially with her infatuation with the 'affectionate' Mr Willoughby (Austen, 2008, p. 50). Marianne hopes for a whirlwind romance with a handsome gentleman who appreciates 'the same books [and] the same music' as herself (Austen, 2008, p. 19). Furthermore, Marianne admits that she 'could not be happy with a man, whose taste did not in every point coincide with my own' (Austen, 2008, p. 19). This conveys the naivety of the younger Dashwood sister in the knowledge of love and compatibility. Like Lydia, Marianne 'wants to stand out through the influence and effect she can exert over men', which Toman argues is due to her sibling position (Toman, 1993, p. 172). Marianne 'succeeds at this' by not only enticing Willoughby but also influencing Colonel

Brandon's affections towards her (Toman, 1993, p. 172). The downfall of Marianne is her ability to have an 'effect' on Willoughby who jeopardises her reputation by parading their affections around Devonshire (Toman, 1993, p. 172). Elinor, aware of the relationship, 'only wished that it were less openly shown' as the pair enjoy each other's company without the promise of an engagement (Austen, 2008, p. 54). This once again reiterates Marianne's lack of 'propriety' and the neglect of her own reputation (Austen, 2008, p. 54).

Although Marianne is more 'rebellious' than her older sister, she has an interesting character development as she matures through the heartache caused by Willoughby (Toman, 1993, p. 172). When comparing both Marianne's and Lydia's complex encounters with love, the maturity of the former and the lack of change seen in the latter is evident. For example, with Marianne, her feelings towards Willoughby are developed over time and are genuine, hence, her finding it difficult to detach herself from the romance. Furthermore, with her experiences, Marianne eventually becomes more self-aware in acknowledging the faults of her actions. Therefore, when reading *Sense and sensibility*, there is a level of sympathy towards Marianne's heart-breaking experience of unrequited love and the cruelty of Willoughby towards such a young girl. However, with Lydia's situation it is difficult to empathise with a character whose actions are purely self-centred. Evidently, Lydia lacks the emotional maturity to understand her actions and the effect it has on the marital prospects of her sisters.

Throughout Austen's two novels there is a heavy reliance on sisterhood and its power in shaping the personalities of characters. Arguably, Austen's depiction of responsibility through the eldest daughters displays their adaptability to situations and their understanding of their role within the family. Furthermore, the three eldest sisters are prematurely given roles that often lead them out of childhood quicker than their sisters. Alternatively, the younger sisters typically have less awareness of their actions in damaging their reputations and often find themselves in unfortunate

circumstances. Whereas, with Mary her quiet solitude and exclusion from the rest of family because of her sibling position ensures she remains reputable.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jane Austen's heroines are heavily involved within the family unit and tend to adopt weighty responsibilities. Excluding Emma, they all have overly enthusiastic mothers who only wish the best for their children, with Mrs Bennet praying for financial stability for her girls and Mrs Dashwood wishing her daughters marry for love. Juxtaposing this affection, Mr Bennet has a different approach in caring for his children in the novel and is improved in the adaptation to create a likeable father figure. Whereas Mr Woodhouse, despite his flaws, is committed to his two daughters and has anxiety over their wellbeing. Arguably, *Sense and sensibility* and *Pride and prejudice* would not function without the chaos which arrives with their unique parental figures and troublesome younger sisters.

Furthermore, Mrs Bennet and Mrs Dashwood are important characters in shaping their daughters' lives and personalities. Both mothers find it easier to connect with the daughter most like themselves and understand the importance of marrying well during the Regency period. Mrs Bennet's lack of differentiation of self originates from the sole responsibility of parenting their five daughters alone due to her husband's lack of involvement. Unlike Mr Bennet, she has a heightened awareness of the family's financial situation and instead of ignoring the issue she tries her best to ensure her daughters are comfortable in the future. Furthermore, the restrictions of gender roles have inevitably created Mrs Bennet's anxiety and therefore impacted her ability to differentiate from the family circle. Although she does have her obvious flaws, Mrs Bennet cares for her children the only way she knows how to, by worrying about their prospects. Similarly, Mrs Dashwood's caring and gentle nature outweighs her often poor decision making in parenting; however, her actions

originate from a place of love for her daughters. Although Mrs Dashwood has her flaws in acknowledging Elinor's heartbreak, she redeems herself through addressing her ignorance of her daughter's needs. This self-awareness is later mirrored in Marianne's decision making and highlights a character growth in both mother and daughter.

In terms of fatherhood and the exploration of the relatively recent adaptations, both characters have been altered. It is evident that Wright's presentation of a loving father in Mr Bennet is a clever tactic in creating this harmonious image of the family for viewers. Furthermore, this portrayal fits the twenty-first-century's audience's stereotype of a Regency family. However, this interpretation re-writes the novel's plot and presents a man who dotes on his wife. Clearly, Mr Bennet's attentions are solely devoted to Elizabeth in the novel as they develop a shared interest in learning, whereas in the film adaptation there is a shared devotion between his wife and second-born daughter. However, in the original novel, Mr Bennet completely lacks interest in the rest of his daughters and continually disregards his wife's emotions which overall outweighs his positive qualities. In contrast to this, Mr Woodhouse is a considerate father who is rarely researched. As Austen steers away from the traditional father figure in *Emma*, she creates a likeable character who readers sympathise with due to acknowledging his past trauma of losing his wife. Although de Wilde presents Mr Woodhouse in a more comedic yet intelligent light, the adaptation honours the character by keeping his charm through mirroring Austen's language. Overall, both novels and adaptations work well in presenting these fathers in either non-traditional or traditional ways.

In the concluding section exploring sisterhood, the application of both Bowen's and Toman's theories reveal that characters tend to behave in certain ways depending on their sibling position. This was interesting to research as their thoughts provided reasoning behind the behaviour of specific characters, such as Lydia Bennet. Furthermore, the

Bowenian theory of subsets when applied to the Bennet sisters provided a unique perspective on their relationships and highlighted Mary's sense of loneliness within the larger family. The theory also justifies the independence of older sisters and the responsibilities attached to their position.

Overall, the application of family systems theory to Austen's classic novels reveals a deeper understanding of the characters and their behaviours. Collectively, Bowenian and Toman theory explores the interconnectedness of families and the effects it can have on individuals. Furthermore, the research produces an insight into the bonds certain members of the family create. Arguably when applied to Austen's novels, the theories allow readers to reflect on individuals who are often scrutinised and understand their behaviour through a psychological lens. Although these characters are fictionalised and are figments of Austen's imagination, it is interesting to analyse their personalities through this alternate lens and gain an insight into the societal pressures that surrounded the familial homes of Regency England.

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