

# Family relationships in pride and prejudice according to mr. bennet

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Austrian psychologist Sigmund Freud once stated “ I cannot think of any need in childhood as strong as the need for a father’s protection.” What this quote means is that children need a father figure in their life; someone to care for them throughout their adolescence. This idea does not only apply to today’s society; even though the perception of a father has changed along with the child-raising environment, the duties of a father have never changed or faltered. This idea can be seen in the novel *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen. *Pride and Prejudice* takes place during the 19th century. It is a story about five young women being pushed by their demanding mother to bring home a husband- and maybe even fall in love in the process. The five girls must face the rigid expectations of society as well as the problems that arise within their own seemingly unconventional family. Many of the girls, especially Miss Elizabeth Bennet, do not meet society’s ostentatious expectations in that they are opinionated and not as well-mannered as other young ladies. This can partly be blamed on the girls’ father, Mr. Bennet. There are certain traits that were expected and necessary of fathers during that time period, and Mr. Bennet does not explicitly meet them. Mr. Bennet’s lack of appropriate parenting traits lead to the events of *Pride and Prejudice*- as well as the downfall of his family.

Possibly one of a woman’s most important characteristics, as valued by society back then, were her manners. Society expected women to be perfectly prim and proper- to be the ideal ladies that the culture demanded. If women did not show proper etiquette, it was believed that they had terrible breeding and that they would never prove to be valuable wives. Mr. and Mrs. Bennet apparently do not understand this concept, seeing as how

their children are hardly in the know of proper etiquette. Due to the fact that Mr. Bennet does not properly imbue politeness into his children, there is no wonder that “ they [are] ignorant, idle, and vain”- hardly the picture of gentlewomen. This impoliteness is particularly exemplified in Lydia and Catherine, who are described as being “ self-willed and careless” and “ weak-spirited, irritable, and completely under Lydia’s guidance”, respectively (182). However, these traits are understandable if one takes the girls’ parents into account. Mr. Bennet “ would never exert himself to restrain the wild giddiness of his youngest daughters”. Their mother, “ with manners so far from right herself,” is concerned more with giving her daughters away than the traits actually needed in order to give them away (182). The daughters take after their parents, especially Mrs. Bennet; they never learned any better. They never learned how to act like what was believed to be the proper lady at the time.

One major responsibility of fathers during the 19th century was to make sure that their young girls were watched over. Girls had to be restrained in order to ensure that they were kept civilized and did not run rampant with some bachelor. When their daughters did meet said bachelors, they had to go through a series of trials with the dad first. The young man’s personality and manners were judged, and they had to be deemed acceptable for the daughters before the couples got to go out. In this respect, Mr. Bennet fails as a father. Mr. Bennet rarely ever shows good judgment with his children, especially when it comes to Lydia’s elopement. After a barrage of begging and pleading. Mr. Bennet eventually agrees to let Lydia run off, without much

supervision, to visit the officers in Brighton, arguing that “ Lydia will never be easy until she has exposed herself in some public place or other” (196). It is fairly disastrous when even Elizabeth—his own daughter— recognizes Mr. Bennet’s blindness regarding the matter. She is aware of “ the very great disadvantage to [them] all, which must arise from the public notice of Lydia’s unguarded and imprudent manner” and the consequences that might follow (197). Despite the warnings of his daughter, Mr. Bennet precedes to let his younger child run wild. It is this lack of restraint on Mr. Bennet’s part that leads to Lydia’s elopement— as well as “ injurious to the fortunes of all the others. For who... will connect themselves with such a family” (251)? Had Mr. Bennet expressed this important fatherly trait of supervising his children, there would have been far fewer consequences to his family in the long run.

It is plain to see that Mr. Bennet plays favorites with his daughters. The man even goes so far as to plainly proclaim that Elizabeth is his favorite, telling Elizabeth and Jane that they have “ a couple of— or ... three—very silly sisters” (43). What Mr. Bennet does not seem to realize is that having a favorite child can cause a multitude of problems: from Mary’s withdrawn personality to the brashness of Lydia. This deficiency of attention can result in inferiority complexes amongst other children. Mr. Bennet lacks the equal love that proper fathers should have for their children. If this outright favoritism had not occurred, the novel might have taken a much different path. For example, if Mr. Bennet had not so “ often mocked Mary, subtly or otherwise, as he does the only times we hear him address her in the first all-family conversation”, Mary probably would not have been as reclusive as she

is throughout the events of the novel (7). If her father had shown as much paternal affection towards her as he did towards Elizabeth, Mary could have been a much different person. It is a proven fact that children crave attention; if they do not receive said attention, they may act out in order to get it. This might have been the case with Lydia and Kitty. By the time the two younger siblings showed up- without “having a son to defeat the entail”- Mr. Bennet is fairly done with the whole family notion. He is facing the “disappointment which his own imprudence had brought on” (201). Lydia and Kitty thus end up receiving the impatient end of Mr. Bennet’s line. The younger children are not as elevated in Mr. Bennet’s eyes as the older children are because of this.

Throughout history, simply spending time with family has been an important way of connecting and creating close bonds amongst members. Mr. Bennet lacks in this aspect, being more “fond of the country and of books” than his own family (201). The man prefers to keep to himself, completely ignoring the concept of family time. Without this precious time, fathers do not get to learn about the goals and thoughts and feelings that their offspring are experiencing throughout the difficult times of their lives. Without this precious time, Mr. Bennet could not have possibly known about the “evils of so ill-judged a direction of talents”, or of the absurd ploys that Lydia often comes up with (202). This household deviation could be a reason as to why the Bennet sisters are not raised to society’s standards; without a father figure constantly there as guidance, there is a lot of room where things can go astray.

One of the most important things that parents can do for their children is believe in them. Simply put, they are to push them forward, to make them reach for the stars and go as far as possible in life. Parents are to educate their children to the best of their abilities in order to ensure that they will be successful adults later on in life. Instead of following this important concept, Mr. Bennet chooses to take the easy path with his daughters. Mr. Bennet is like a figure standing on the sidelines, simply watching the events that transpire in front of him. He merely watches rather than admonishing his children or giving them advice on life- rather than letting them grow.

Growing up, the five Bennet siblings “ had teachers but no regular governess, were encouraged to read, and were allowed to be idle if they chose”(164-65). Because of this, they were not as educated as many of the other ladies of higher class. Society expected the ideal woman to “ have a thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages” (32). The sisters lack many of these traits, subjecting them to the judgment of the public. If Mr. Bennet had pushed his children further and actually put effort into ensuring that they would be well educated, well-rounded individuals, they would not have been looked down upon as much as they were by society. This lackluster parenting approach had terrible consequences in the long run.

Mr. Bennet’s parenting- or lack thereof- is not the proper caring that fathers need to possess in order to raise successful, honorable children. During the 19th century, society had specific expectations of what a proper young woman was to look and act like. Because of the way the Bennet sisters are

brought up, they do not meet their era's expectations and are looked down upon because of it. Mr. Bennet fails to teach his children proper manners; manners are one of the first things judged by others, and are capable of creating a first impression. The man also blunders in restraining his daughters properly. If Mr. Bennet had kept a closer eye on them, many events, such as Lydia's elopement, would not have occurred. The father also fails to push his offspring towards greater things in life, and just simply spend time with the family as a whole. Also, he even goes so far as to pick a favorite daughter, possibly creating a sense of inferiority amongst the other sisters. While Mr. Bennet may be a very intellectual man, he is an inadequate father figure to his five daughters. The musician Miriam Makeba once proclaimed " Girls are the future mothers of our society, and it is important that we focus on their well-being." Mr. Bennet could learn a thing or two from this idea!