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An Unfounded Universal Truth: A Contemporary Feminist Understanding of *Pride and Prejudice*

Abstract

Many people have deemed *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen a timeless tale. This story has been adapted through many different mediums and has been reimagined in all different contexts. One of the most recent incarnations of this story is a web-series on YouTube that spanned 100 episodes. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* builds a whole new world for Austen's familiar characters to grow and develop in. Using a feminist lens, the original novel and adaptation are examined in how both works represented the female characters. Through the analysis of Jane Austen's novel *Pride and Prejudice* it is clear that her characters benefit the twenty-first century ideology effortlessly and, more importantly, thrive from the shift. This emphasizes the craft of Austen and her alignment with some feminist ideals.

An Unfounded Universal Truth: A Contemporary Feminist Understanding of Pride and Prejudice

Jenna DeForte

“It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife” (1). This is how the famed love story of Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy begins: with an oversimplification of what every man and woman aspires to have: a marriage. Jane Austen decides to begin her novel *Pride and Prejudice* with this rather interesting line. The next 376 pages are dedicated to how one family tries, rather successfully, to marry off its five daughters. Fast-forward 200 years after the novel is published. This familiar line is sarcastically recited as a 21st-century Lizzie Bennet establishes that a web series vlog would be a far cry from its source material. The adaptation *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, a 100 episode YouTube series from 2012 -2013, switches focus and often surprises the audience in the ways it decides to re-tell this famous story.

There has been a debate about where Austen fits on a feminist spectrum, if she does at all. While developing a full understanding of how *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* adapts the original source material of *Pride and Prejudice*, this essay specifically examines the characters created by Austen, as they are translated to *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* through a feminist perspective. The changes made to these characters most obviously present a feminist perspective that at first glance seems to be new. Yet, upon further examination of Austen’s original writing and characters, as well as with an understanding of feminist ideals of her time, it is apparent that Austen’s characters are less traditional. The web-series capitalizes on a newly forming fourth wave of feminism that utilizes the Internet to bring Austen’s characters into a new light.

Through the analysis of *Pride and Prejudice* it is clear that her characters fit into the twenty-first century ideology effortlessly and, more importantly, thrive from the shift.

Marriage Plot and Feminism

Pride and Prejudice follows a marriage plot and uses marriage ideology of the early nineteenth-century. Lori Halvorsen Zerneck establishes that marriage ideology “demands that gentlewomen find both financial and romantic fulfillment in marriage (1-2). Women take on specific pre-determined roles of wife and mother that limit their freedoms keeping them dependent on men. During Austen’s time a woman had few options; she either got married and raised a family, or she became a spinster. There was not much else for her to do. Education for women was usually nothing more than domestic understandings and left them at a loss to maintain their own lives. Austen’s novel reaffirms and reinforces society’s ideals about women and marriage by ending the novel with three marriages. A happy ending is to fall in love with a very rich man and marry him, which is what her heroines do. The characters may challenge some of the patriarchal notions and rebel against some restrictions placed upon them, but they always end up falling into the role they were destined for.

Even though *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* is an adaptation it quickly separates itself from the marriage ideology underlying *Pride and Prejudice*. The opening lines and major plot points may all be the same, but the focal points are vastly different. Lizzie Bennet quickly flips the immensely recognizable first line of the book on its head. She

skeptically wonders, “universal truth, really?” because she cannot fathom a woman aspiring to only become a wife regardless of the wealth of her husband (My Name is Lizzie Bennet). Her mother’s obsession with marrying off her daughters is presented as ludicrous and often allows Lizzie to turn her mother into a caricature, something that she does through Costume Theater scenes. Lizzie does not buy into her mother’s convoluted plans because marriage is not her only objective in life. Whereas Elizabeth Bennet is concerned with economic stability through marriage, Lizzie Bennet has some room for failure in her society. In the 21st century, marriage is no longer the only option for women. Through Lizzie and the other women, the series focuses more upon women having a career and ambition. Education is finally available to these women so they can possess the tools they need to achieve success. They are creating their own financial stability rather than relying on men for it. This Lizzie Bennet is a graduate student whose goals for her future are not centered on marrying a rich man.

The utter rejection of the sentiment that this first line of the book represents demonstrates how this series has been born out of a new ideology fitting for a twenty-first century woman. The main women characters are unapologetic for taking the things that they want. These women find romantic relationships come second to their career choices. The strong female characteristics of the book’s characters are only enhanced by the web series. The marital union that closes the book is not the ideal for the ending of the adaptation. While the book moves toward marriage, the web series moves toward female autonomy and agency. Lizzie Bennet is trying to navigate her career opportunities and finishing her graduate degree, not trying to find a husband.

The terms feminist and feminism did not come into use until the late 19th century and emerged from the French word “feminisme” (Oxford English Dictionary). This does not mean, however, that there were not women who found a voice on the subject of the second-class citizenship that women largely experienced at this time. Mary Wollstonecraft is one of the most notorious persons who led the way in describing and advocating for women’s rights.

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman was published in 1792 by Mary Wollstonecraft detailing her highly radical views of women to receive the same fundamental rights reserved for men. She applied these beliefs specifically to women’s education and morality. She is specifically addressing and describing the women of the middle class which she claims are in the most “natural state” (11). Her aim is to expose the injustice that women experience in their “slavish dependence” upon men (12). She believes that women are not inherently weaker than men and that women should thus receive the same benefits as their male equivalents. Women have a right to education other than just domestic understandings. They also should not be restricted in their morality because they are perceived to be weaker in mind and body than men.

Mary Wollstonecraft’s writings challenged her society’s constructs for women in education. She claimed that the male dominance and fear of allowing women a proper education “contribute to enslave women by cramping their understandings and sharpening their senses” (25). Women are forced to be dependent on their husbands for everything from political participation to economic stability, both in knowledge and lawful rights. This system forcibly makes women seem weaker; they are not allowed to grow in society as men are allowed to do.

It was believed at the time that if a woman ever presented herself as independent she would appear less appealing to male suitors. Wollstonecraft states, “The woman who strengthens her body and exercises her mind will...become the friend, and not the humble dependent of her husband.” (33). Women who do not limit themselves will become partners with their husbands. If women are allowed to receive a proper education they can find a balance with their husbands.

From Wollstonecraft’s radical views women were allowed to find commonality and begin to fight for their right toward equal rights with men. What is called first wave feminism addressed women’s right to vote. The second wave of feminism spurred women to rally for economic, personal, and political equality. Next came the third shift toward women using media platforms to fight for not only white women’s equality, but also equality for all women of all ethnicities, sexual orientation, and gender identities. Now, however, there has been a new shift toward a more unapologetic realization of equality. Gathering strong reactions from online sources and a growing community within social networking sites define this new feminist movement.

This new shift has been defined as fourth wave feminism. Women finding their own voice and independence largely define the fourth wave. These women take what they want. They are not shrinking into submission, but finding a rather unapologetic voice arguing for their autonomy over their lives. Kira Cochrane, in *All the Rebel Women*, notes that this is largely accomplished through online communities. She states the Internet “enables women to raise their voices, bring feminist issues into the mainstream, and organize powerfully across borders” (Cochrane location 610). This has been highly evident on Tumblr, Twitter, and

Facebook in movements such as #HeforShe and #GirlsLikeUs. With these online actions women can pick and choose what they affiliate themselves with.

The *Lizzie Bennet Diaries* grows out of this relatively new movement. It is not all that hard however to shift these characters and problems into the 21st century dynamic. The women of the novel demanded more for themselves even though they had so few options. The web series strips away the limitations that Austen’s female characters had, to allow these characters to develop toward their potential. Jane Austen wrote strong female characters that were confined to the conventions of their time. When they are set free from the social constructions that Mary Wollstonecraft points out as limits to women’s agency, Austen’s female characters become a reflection of all the radical notions Wollstonecraft described and are present in fourth wave feminism.

Certain female characters in *Pride and Prejudice* push against the societal expectations and pressures that are placed upon them. According to James Fordyce (1765), young women of the 18th and 19th century should be not be “spirited” or “witty” (96). He specifically states, in terms of marriage, “men of the best sense have been usually averse to the thought of marrying a witty female” (192). His advice to women is to remain submissive to their male counterparts. Fordyce sought to “keep women down, silenced, and powerless,” a state which Austen’s main female characters revolt against (Dabundo 45). The only one who may come close to Fordyce’s ideal is Jane in her passive courtship with Mr. Bingley, but this is quickly proven to be the worst way to win a man since he is easily convinced that she does not like him and she almost loses him forever.

Web Series

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries is the brainchild of Hank Green and Bernie Su. Both men are well versed in the ways of the Internet, where Hank Green is of Vlogbrothers fame and Bernie Su is credited with writing and directing numerous critically acclaimed web-based series. On April 12th, 2012 Hank Green released a video describing his hopes for the new web series. *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* was aimed to be a low production value series based off of a girl creating a video blog in her room. Green specifically states the idea came from him wanting to “take a previous work and put into this new media [YouTube]” (Introducing Lizzie Bennet). This series would span two books, 100 series-related episodes, multiple spin-off episodes, and the beginning of YouTube becoming a format to generate fictional web series based off of classical books.

The series began April 9th, 2012 and introduced one of the most snarky, relatable Elizabeth Bennet characters.

Living in present day California, the Bennet family is still crazy as ever. These characters come to life through transmedia storytelling and twenty-first century social networking sites. Lizzie is a lot like her book counterpart in the fact that she is immensely headstrong and stubborn in her views of the world around her. This does not detract, though, from her loving and very entertaining side that the viewers and readers enjoy so much. Charlotte, Jane, and Lydia find themselves in their own spin-offs of Lizzie’s original vlog. The story follows Lizzie through her last year of graduate school. The struggles of the twenty-first century become intermixed with the romantic and platonic plots within the book.

Elizabeth/Lizzie

Elizabeth works against the expectations that she should keep her mouth shut and get married to the first man who offers. She is not passive like Jane. Elizabeth is not afraid to speak up against people who presume to have power over her. After Darcy insults her and her family in offering his hand in marriage, fully expecting her acceptance because he is so rich and powerful, she reprimands him for failing to address her in a gentleman-like manner (189). Elizabeth is looking for an equal partnership in her marriage. Even though she knows that she is dependent upon a man to provide for her, she believes that she should have some power in the relationship. This reflects Wollstonecraft’s view that men and women should have an equal partnership in marriage (33). Elizabeth, defending her possible marriage with Darcy to Lady Catherine, specifically notes that “[Darcy] is a gentleman; I am a gentleman’s daughter; so far we are equal” (345). In the realm of their society, Elizabeth views her status to be equivalent to Darcy.

It should not be forgotten, however, that Elizabeth does indeed marry Darcy and in some ways becomes the woman that Mr. Collins describes in his proposal to her: “I know it to be the established custom of your sex to reject a man on the first application” (91). Elizabeth rejects Darcy on the first proposal, but accepts on the second. It is interesting that Elizabeth’s feelings toward Mr. Darcy begin to change at Pemberly. Essentially Elizabeth acts like the women that Mr. Collins described – indirectly, of course – as denying Mr. Darcy and causing him to change becoming more appealing to her. Darcy must change to be compatible with Elizabeth, and Elizabeth also transforms by the end of the novel. She takes on a slightly more submissive role, as

she becomes Darcy's wife and mistress of Pemberly.

Elizabeth's feminist views and characteristics are magnified as she is translated to the silver screen of YouTube. Zerne points out "by earning a seemingly frivolous graduate degree in mass communications, Lizzie seems to be resisting our culture's emphasis on beginning a career, much as Elizabeth seems to have no urgency to marry" (6). Elizabeth and Lizzie both reject their society's pressure to fit a mold. They want to do things on their own terms. Through her vlog, Lizzie literally gets a forum to explain to the world her thoughts and feelings on a multitude of subjects. She is never silenced. Like Elizabeth, Lizzie is also out-spoken toward those who try to show power over her, and reprimands Darcy for declaring his love for her. However, in this version her reproach of him lasts longer because he is directed to watch her 59 previous episodes cataloging how much she hates him (*Are You Kidding Me*). Lizzie still views herself as an equal to Darcy even though he has a much more entitled social position. She will not allow him to stake a claim to her because he says he loves her. When Darcy offers her a job at his well-established media company, Pemberly Digital, he even states that he would set up a whole department just for her. Lizzie declines the offer saying, "I don't want to be the girl that dates the boss" (*Future Talk*). Lizzie does not want the charity of her boyfriend, where, in reality, he is not valuing her abilities and skills but her presence. She wants to take control of her own life and see what she can do on her own merit. Lizzie continuously tries to push against what people are telling her is right for her life to achieve the dreams that she has.

Charlotte and Jane

Charlotte, on the other hand, does not necessarily work against society's expectations, but uses them to her advantage. Charlotte is a great manipulator of circumstances. Charlotte, in the book, realizes that she is reaching an age when marriage will no longer be an option. Laura Dabundo characterizes Charlotte as a woman who "acts in accordance with her own wishes to devise and then implement her own marital strategy" (42). All she has ever wanted is "a comfortable home" and is confident that her "chance of happiness with [Mr. Collins] is as fair as most people can boast on entering the marriage state" (125). Mr. Collins is her ticket to finally achieve what every girl is supposed to achieve in the 18th and early 19th century. She has an economical view of marriage that allows her to manipulate Mr. Collins into marrying her after Elizabeth has rejected him. Charlotte navigates and calculates her way to her end goal. She does not fit a feminine mold of a woman in love, but is somewhat masculine in her pursuit of financial stability.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries uses Charlotte's practical views and economic worries as the plot focuses more on career than courtship. Charlotte Lu is realistic in her goals for what she wants in life, very much like her book counterpart, Charlotte Lucas. Where Charlotte Lucas is looking for someone to offer "stable finances and romance," Charlotte Lu is looking to procure her own "finances and personal fulfillment" (Zerne 6). Often during the web series, Charlotte is a foil for Lizzie. She does not live in an "imaginary fantasyland" as Lizzie often does. She recognizes that success comes with "luck, hard work, and more luck" (*Happiness in the Pursuit of Life*). Charlotte is actually pretty conniving in taking the job from Lizzie at Collins and Collins. She sees the opportunity for a relatively good job

with possible paths for promotions, and seizes it. She essentially hijacks Lizzie's vlog – without Lizzie's knowledge – and manipulates Ricky, who never even realizes that he has been manipulated, into giving her the job (Your Pitch Needs Work). Charlotte, again, does not fulfill typical female stereotypes, but exhibits immense business savvy to gain the security of a bright career.

Following the fourth wave feminist ideology, Charlotte is unapologetic for accepting a job that may not be as glamorous as Lizzie would want for her. She sees this job as a stepping-stone toward a fulfilling career that optimizes her skills. Charlotte proves to Lizzie that “there are different paths to personal fulfillment and that [they] may be negotiated in diverse ways” (Zerne 6). In this moment Charlotte is concerned with her individual goals and is disappointed that Lizzie does not share in her satisfaction.

Elizabeth and Charlotte Lucas have the most feminist characteristics, but Jane also has her moments. On the surface, Jane Bennet represents the pure and passive female idealized during the 19th century. Dabundo characterizes Jane as a very static character that “does not...act for herself” (43). She goes on to say that Jane benefits from having others intervene on her behalf (43). This is not the whole story. Jane is passive and quiet in her whole affair with Mr. Bingley, but she does not possess the personality of Elizabeth to be outspoken. And even Elizabeth, very outgoing and strong-willed, gets an offer of marriage from a man she hates, because she does not express her disgust toward Darcy enough, as Jane does not express her strong attachment to Bingley enough. This silence puts both sisters in unfavorable situations at first. It can be argued, as well, that when Jane goes to London and meets with Caroline Bingley, she is more actively trying to interact with

Mr. Bingley. Even though she is essentially following Bingley to London, she is still active in this decision. She is still active in this decision, rather than sadly and passively waiting for his return.

Jane finds her voice in the web series because she does not always follow social conventions to achieve her goals. In *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* Jane is still a passive and quiet person. She is “practically perfect in every way” and largely follows this description throughout the series (My Sisters). She is nice to every person she meets and tries to see the positive side to everyone, as she does in the book, but in this series she fights for what she wants. This Jane is happily pursuing her dream career in fashion without a man by her side. The focus for Jane is always her career. She does enjoy dating Bing and dearly loves him, but will not let him stop her from achieving her goals. The tables get turned in the web series. When Bing comes to visit Jane before she leaves for New York City she immediately assumes he is going to ask her to stay and she quickly shuts it down saying, “how unfair of you to ask [me to stay].” To which he responds, “I'm asking if I can go with you” (Goodbye Jane). He decides to drop out of medical school and follow Jane to New York City. Jane, like Lizzie and Charlotte, puts herself and her goals before a relationship. In this sense, Bing takes on the role normally reserved for the woman, while Jane takes the role normally reserved for the male.

Lydia and Social Media

The character of Lydia has the most significant changes and the most pointed use of social media through the world of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*, which underscores the new feminist movement.

Like Jane, the representation of Lydia in *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* challenges both our initial view of Lydia Bennet and the novel's judgment of her. She is reckless, boy-crazy, and unrelentingly ignorant of the situations she gets herself into; Lizzie defines Lydia as a "stupid, whorey slut" (My Sisters). However, where book-Lydia never recognizes that her choices have consequences, adaptation-Lydia is allowed to come to terms with her consequences and to mature into an independent woman. Austen's one-dimensional character is fleshed out and given a full range of emotions, allowing the audience to empathize with her in the web series.

Austen offers a full description of Lydia's manner early in the book. It is explained that her spoiling mother thrusts Lydia into society, which only further fuels her "high animal spirits" (46). Lydia is petted and praised by everyone who surrounds her, from officers to her Aunt and Mother. Lydia is very blunt about the things she wants. When visiting Jane at Netherfield Lydia takes no time before addressing Mr. Bingley to hold a ball in a "sudden attack" (46). She is direct and abrupt. Lydia is never reprimanded for her outburst and rude interrogation of Mr. Bingley.

It is not until Elizabeth objects to her father about Lydia's trip to Brighton that the reader is made to understand her troubling manners. Lydia is now sixteen and worse off than she was when she was fifteen. Elizabeth worries that "the assurance and disdain of all restraint which mark Lydia's character" will undoubtedly fix her as the "most determined flirt" if she goes to Brighton (226). The things that Lydia values are superficial: boys, clothes, and herself. In the view of Mary Wollstonecraft, Lydia's wild manners leave her a "slave of her own feelings" so that she will be "easily subjugated by those of others" (108) This

comes to fruition when Wickham uses her for sex. Lydia is the epitome of her society's constructs, but to the utmost extremes that leave the reader with no pity because of her lack of remorse.

Lydia's downfall is partly a product of her upbringing. Mrs. Bennet's overindulgence in her youngest daughter leaves Lydia feeling entitled and unaware that her actions have consequences. Added to the lack of discipline from her father this fuels Lydia's ignorance of the world around her. Not once throughout the whole book does Lydia ever truly have to face consequences. She never specifically recognizes that her actions risked ruining the family name. Lydia does not even consider what Mr. Darcy does a rescue, but rather sees him as another option to give her away at her wedding. Lydia cannot see to how her actions are wrong because she was never forced to understand the difference between right and wrong.

Wollstonecraft would argue Lydia's book character to be a representation of how the lack of education causes morality issues. Wollstonecraft suggested that teaching women only to value love, sensual feelings, and thoughts of that nature, will "lead them shamefully to neglect the duties of life, and frequently in the midst of these sublime refinements... plump [them] into the actual vice" (192). As in Wollstonecraft's warning, Lydia acts on vices and stays with a man out of wedlock, presumably having sex. Both Austen and Wollstonecraft seem to suggest that if Lydia had received a proper education and been given the tools to assess her situation and worth, then she might not have fallen as far as she did.

Lydia's book character, however, lends herself easily to the values represented by fourth wave feminism. Lydia is unapologetic for her choices. She takes what she wants. She decides to go with Wickham because

she wants to and sees no reason why she cannot. Most often her behavior is considered ignorant, but what if Lydia simply does not care about conventions? Elizabeth Veisz states, “[Lydia’s] free-spiritedness allows the reader to imagine the world around Longbourn from a point of view unencumbered by a consciousness of female privation or inferiority of status” (35). Lydia decides to put “her sexual desire ahead of both financial concerns and propriety,” which of course is not completely smart but she is doing this for herself (Zerne 3). She is only sixteen, her mindset is still very childish, but this is the life that she wants. All the qualities that are often considered bad such as being outspoken and having high spirits recommend Lydia to 21st century ideology.

The adaptation at first presents Lydia as problematic, which aligns itself with Austen. She gets the same treatment that book-Lydia gets. No one in the family holds high expectations for Lydia. Her family celebrates little victories that often mock Lydia and reinforce her reputation as an overtly sexual woman who likes to party. Lizzie even jokes about how it is an achievement that Lydia has surpassed the age of being a teen mom. She is like a puppy, “a cute, adorable, humps the neighbor’s leg, never knows where she sleeps puppy” (My Sisters). Also in this episode, Lydia is called a slut, not any slut but a “stupid, whorey” one. Lizzie, the elder sister, views her sister as irresponsible and promiscuous. It would seem that this Lydia is very much like the Lydia of the book, but as the series progresses adaptation-Lydia is revealed more complex than this.

Lydia’s persona as a party girl is largely a role that her family has thrust upon her. When she creates her own video blog she defines herself as “a treasure” and “any essence of Lydia is better than no Lydia”

(Boredom). She projects confidence and a love of life that no one can really match. She is forced to be reckoned with. Adaptation-Lydia, though, is not just energetic and solely focused on herself; she cares about her family and their troubles too. However, her family has a hard time reciprocating her love. Trudy J. Morgan-Cole states “it’s not easy being the least obviously bright and talented of the Bennet daughters, nor being the odd girl out of Lizzie and Jane’s tight sisterly bond” (Zerne 3). The family often brushes Lydia off as childish and ignorant just waiting for her to finally fail. Being shut out from her family leads her to find solace with Wickham. Lydia is often times separated from her sisters by the action of her parents or her sisters themselves. She even gets defensive when cousin Mary asks why Lydia is not with her sisters at Netherfield (Boredom). This separation is where Wickham comes in. Through Lydia’s own vlog the viewer witnesses Lydia’s spiral into an abusive relationship with Wickham who takes advantage of her isolation. Lydia is coerced into consenting to a sex tape because she is afraid of losing Wickham’s love and attention like she has lost her family’s attention. Where in the book Lydia’s downfall is partly a product of her upbringing, this downfall is a product of Lydia’s isolation from her family.

Episode by episode Lydia’s façade is stripped away to reveal a more sympathetic and deserving woman. Lydia slowly moves toward becoming her own independent woman separate from her sisters. Before the downfall she is confident, but lacks the strength to separate herself from the role her family has given her. She maintains her gives-no-shit attitude throughout the series, though. Lydia disregards the pressures of financial stability and propriety for what she deems “Lydia’s Laws” (Enjoy the Adorbs). One of the “laws” that Lydia creates is “nothing gets done without alcohol,” which

places emphasis on her partying behavior and persona. These types of actions in the book force the reader to dislike Lydia, but for the web series Lydia is presenting her laws as ways to bring Jane and Bing together. She is not completely self-absorbed, as it would seem. Lydia continues to display to the audience that she is not a vapid party girl; instead she uses her outgoing and unrelenting personality to persuade people to do what she wants. She gains sympathy from the viewers because she becomes a real and likable person. She is unapologetic for seeing things from a different perspective. Lydia thus becomes an admirable character that the audience is rooting for.

The YouTube medium allows viewers of the show to interact through comments that both push against and perpetuate patriarchal ideals. Within the first nine episodes there is already a push from viewers who defend Lydia's behavior. Aseasyash comments on YouTube "Lydia is excitable, inexperienced and led astray. That, to me, says party girl more than slut." (Single and Happyish). The fans already want to give Lydia the benefit of the doubt rather than allow Lizzie to present Lydia as an unintelligible child who does not know right from wrong. But they also turn on her. The real life viewers comment and tweet at Lydia about her behavior with Wickham. The comments say "Lydia, get over yourself" and "Lydia, stop being so dramatic" or "I think Lydia needs to take responsibility for her actions and reactions" (Consequences). These comments are tame compared to what other women face on a regular basis, but get close to how misogynistic and patriarchal thinking is often reflected in YouTube comments and other internet forums (Cochrane Location 707). Yet, there are also viewers who comment about Lydia's right to make her choices and how Wickham is an awful person for using her in this way. The video

targets the people who slut shame and victim blame, but there are also viewers that openly speak out against these attitudes.

In both instances – the book and adaptation – Lydia becomes a victim. Regardless of her understanding of her situation, Lydia is misled and easily manipulated, a "victim of the double standard against which women are measured" (Dabundo 46). Wickham is allowed to have sex with whomever he wants and never be judged for it in the book and the adaptation. Lydia, both times, risks her reputation and her family's reputation. Though it seems that the stakes are higher in the book because of 19th century values, Lydia's sex tape scandal still provides a life-altering, inerasable tarnish to her reputation and name. Zerne points out "Lydia's story demonstrates that even with greater sexual freedom and equality, women remain vulnerable to unscrupulous men" (3). Lydia addresses this in the 88th episode "Okay," and becomes a victim of slut-shaming comments that blame her for her actions and even praise the guy for his sexual accomplishment. One commenter points out how Wickham would hardly get any backlash in the reveal of the sex tape, and Lydia would get all of it (Consequences). The web series proves the constructed ideology of women needing to be pure and non-promiscuous because real people comment on a fictional character's prowess with men.

The web series is able to expand these well-known female characters mainly because of the different ideologies that drive the plots of the two works. Zerne says, "while *Pride and Prejudice* focuses on love as a means of gaining financial security, *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* emphasizes the importance of pursuing a career and finding a mate who supports that career" (5). Based on the marriage ideology and restrictions upon women's independence, the only way to

move up in the world for the women of Austen's creation was to get married. It is important to note, though, that even though Austen decided to give her characters "happy endings" with marriage she did not leave them as damsels in distress. Her characters fostered feminist ideals that reflect, to a degree, Wollstonecraft's writings. The newest wave of feminism is where *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* has grown out of and developed a space to maximize the feminist appeal of Austen's female characters, by minimizing the romantic and marriage plot in favor of female agency.

Pride and Prejudice is a relatively conservative novel, but does reflect feminist ideals in two ways. The first, of course, is her characterization of the female characters. Austen describes women for what they truly are, not the idealization that men have constructed (Xueqing Wang 1829). This is exemplified largely in Elizabeth's rebuke of Darcy's list of an accomplished woman. A woman may only say she is accomplished if she "has thorough knowledge of music, singing, drawing, dancing, and the modern languages," and she must "add something more substantial, in the improvement of her mind by extensive reading" (40). Elizabeth disparages the idea of there ever being a woman able to meet such an incredible standard. Elizabeth, as a representation of a female rebelling against her society's rules for women, does not condone or follow the idealization of women. In *Pride and Prejudice* Austen creates amazing female characters that do not even get close to meeting the standard set by the beloved Darcy.

Austen also allows for feminist moments in her narrative content. Austen writes novels about young women for young women by a young woman. They offer a woman-centered story that does not focus on a male fantasy of what women should be. She is

writing about women's lives, which largely consisted of love and marriage during her time (Xueqing 1828). As much as a reader would love to get into the head of Darcy and Bingley, the narration is Elizabeth's female perspective on a male-dominated world. The reader feels the frustration of being a powerless female as Elizabeth watches her family almost fall apart several times throughout the novel. Darcy, the man she decides to marry, has the power to destroy her life and people in her family, but he is also the only one with the power to put her family back together after Lydia's downfall. The narrative content of *Pride and Prejudice* is female-centered and female-driven at most parts, allowing for certain feminist aspects.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries situated itself in an arena that largely facilitates the major movements of fourth wave feminism, specifically the Internet aspect. Fourth wave feminism utilizes the Internet to rally people around multiple feminist campaigns and demonstrations (Cochrane location 623). It is important to note that even though there are these feminist movements other anti-feminist language and culture still exists on the Internet, as evident of how people react to Lydia's indiscretions in the series. Yet, the web series addresses these issues in a way that makes it a manifestation of the Internet's influence upon the new feminist movement. Most of the episodes have only female characters talking to each other about issues not related to men, which passes the Bechtel test (a simple test where two women in a work of fiction talk to each other about something other than a man). No male character enters the vlog until episode 25 and then men are present in only 26 of the 100 episodes of the main vlog. The show, then, largely represents a female perspective that validates a woman's choice to have a meaningful and powerful career.

Additionally, each female character is given her own Twitter and Facebook account where she continues to voice her opinion on matters. Most often these tweets and Facebook posts discuss real-life current topics. The characters interact with the audience and often respond to things that people say whether it is on twitter, in Q&A videos, or even Facebook comments. Through social media, characters defend the choices they make on the screen, like, for example, when Charlotte left the show to pursue her career at Collins and Collins. Many viewers were sad to see her go and even felt the same anger that Lizzie felt. Charlotte tweets, though, about her excitement for starting her new job, and viewers respond (@thecharlottelu). The web series as a whole truly uses the expanse of the Internet to its advantage.

The web also exhibits Wollstonecraft's hopes for women to receive the same education as men with the same opportunities for learning. She expressed ideas of how men feared "strengthen[ing] the female mind," and losing women's blind obedience (Wollstonecraft 27). The women

of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* all have a college education and prove to be just as, if not more, cunning as men. These women do not rely on men. Charlotte earns her job at Collins and Collins. By the end of the series she is essentially the CEO of the United States division of Collins and Collins. Lizzie herself has found many potential inventors interested in her start-up company that would be in direct rivalry with her new boyfriend, Mr. Darcy (Future Talk). This web series proves Wollstonecraft's point that women, given the proper education, can be just as successful as men, and sometimes even more successful.

Jane Austen may not have been as revolutionary as Mary Wollstonecraft, but her disapproval of the treatment of women in the 19th century is clear in the strengths of her characters. Elizabeth Bennet is one of the most independent women for her time. The writers of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* capitalized on Jane Austen's credibility and strong female characters. Lizzie, Charlotte, Jane, and Lydia all find happiness on their own terms with or without a man, but they are the same women that they are in Austen.

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