

# Gender Behavior and Class Envy in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women

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Asia Pacific Journal  
Educational Perspective  
Vol. 9. No. 1, pp 55-63  
May 2022  
ISSN 2782-9223 (Print)

**Abstract** – This literary research analyzes the gender behavior and class envy of the four female major characters in *Little Women*. Specifically, it investigates frame reference, characterization, its gender norms and social class, and moral dilemma.

The study assumes that *Little Women* reveals class envy and gender normative behavior. This hypothesis is reinforced by the theories of Marxism, Feminism and Formalism. The four female major characters in *Little Women* elucidate their behaviors and stand by their choices in spite of the situations and former textual evidence. They are instilled with values that always resurface in solving a moral dilemma. Their resolutions often arrive for the greater good or for their own long-term happiness. In terms of social class, the four characters exhibit class envy that manifests when they are young and becomes a motivation or a demerit to them. The gender norms may cultivate injustice and toxic expectations. Situations and textual evidences are gathered for three main problems as a reference for discussions.

In conclusion, class envy and normative gender behavior are revealed in *Little Women* through its frame of reference, gender norms, social class, and moral dilemma. This novel shows four powerful women who pursue their ambitions regardless of their circumstances, abide by their values and navigate with their limitations as a woman by making a step to make it better.

It is recommended to be educated in getting rid of harmful stigmas attached by gender binary roles. To learn from powerful women and be aware of gender issues and one's rights, it is also important to question one's feelings of class envy and make a resolution that will not compromise others and oneself.

**Keywords**- gender behavior, class envy, female major characters, *Little Women*

Cite this article as: Canayong, N.J.R., and Matalines, R.C., (2022). Gender Behavior and Class Envy in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, *Asia Pacific Journal of Educational Perspectives*, 9(1), 55-63

## INTRODUCTION

A 2020 study from UNICEF reports 25% of girls from 15-19 are uneducated, in contrast to 10% of boys. The youth literacy rate is 10% more than 25 years ago [1]. Today, women are still fighting for their identity in separation from patriarchal ideologies.

Based on the constricting outfits of the medieval age, false identification of beauty standards and attribution of domestic roles in the 19th century then the upheaval of #MeToo movement in ousting billionaire tycoons, reprimanding sexual harassment to casual sexism in the 21st century, interests in appearance, character, career and hobbies remains to play differently according to norm, generation and status. Gender stereotypes and class discrimination are eminent yet called out freely now than before. Considering one's privileges and seeking to understand these differences puts a dent from labels of sexism and classism. As a reminder, it is important to appreciate past works in empowering one's standpoint. Literature affects the culture of an individual. It influences one's perspective in life and the way they live it. On the contrary, culture can also affect literature. It gives inkling to what is happening at the time when it is written. Interchangeably, literature plays a role in the development of culture, people and their attitude to life. Some books reveal conflict from their identity and class. Liberties that are present today are rare before that they manifest the strength of their character. They struggle to attain their privileges limited to their class and gender. Analyzing the novel colored with Marxist and Feminist perspective will help in understanding how it still remains as a classic. In adding formalism or the novel's frame of reference, it traces the girls' pilgrimage that shapes their identity and helps their decisions as they progress to being an adult female.

It is important to question the limitations of having to behave and live accordingly because of traditions and pressures to reach the norm that is viable for one's sex. Looking into the book, we learn from powerful women and are aware of gender issues and one's rights. Other issues that still remain are the importance of equal pay, domestic responsibility, access to education, among the many. It helps to analyze how the four characters wrestle with these problems along with their social class and moral dilemma.

Consequently, there are no substantial studies pertaining to their moral and social class. It is important to give light on the book's criticism about the characters' misstep and decisions by considering other variables and their circumstances. Analyzing the four female characters with their normative gender behavior, class differences and moral grounds helps establish the crux of the study.

The study assumes that the novel explores the major characters' class envy and gender behavior. It examines its plotline and their moral dilemma with its corresponding moral philosophy. The novel's literary criticism is limited to the interpretation of Feminism and Marxism giving a glimpse of the characters' sensibility on why they choose to follow or disregard their ambitions. It offers perspectives on contemporary ideologies and gives attention to gender biases. The text and its critical reception support in building the literary work analysis.

Almost a couple of centuries since its publication the themes of *Little Women* stay relevant. The crossroads between gender and social power remains true and should be discussed in the open. By citing similar cultural outlook of the literary work, it exposes the radical shift or the lack thereof regarding casual sexism, power dynamics and female autonomy.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The research method used is discourse analysis which includes the interpretation and analysis of texts in a literary work. It uses the qualitative method which is descriptive in its design. Verbal data are gathered and investigated to prove the study's assumption corresponding to its main problem and sub-problems. The primary source of data is the multiple editions of *Little Women* which is Penguin Classics, published in Great Britain: Penguin Group in 1994 with 217 pages and Signet published in USA: Penguin Random House in 2019 with 507 pages. Both of them are mass-market paperbacks written by Louisa May Alcott that explores 2 parts of their character development from early age to adulthood.

The secondary source of material is taken from reference materials such as books on critical theories, encyclopedias and web sources for the literature review. It also includes online sources from various critical analyses and some unpublished thesis that contain literary investigations. Lastly, scholarly journals are overlooked to justify the novel's characterization.

The research design follows three phases: (1) evaluating the frame of reference; (2) analyzing the characters' social class and gender norm; and (3)

synthesizing the characters' moral dilemma.

Phase 1 is evaluating the frame of reference. The data exhibits the frame of reference of the character in the novel. It is supported by its textual and situational context revealing the characters' value and development. Phase 2 is analyzing the characters' social class and gender norm. The data imparts the major characters' normative gender behavior and their social class. In gender norm, it reveals their conformity of gendered identity. In social class, it relays the characters' expectation and strife or indifference to status. Phase 3 is synthesizing its moral dilemmas. The data shows the moral dilemmas by establishing the characters' volition and the results of the circumstances.

This study does not deal with personal data or any involvement of a participant since it is purely discourse analysis. The research gathering and data interpretation include discourse analysis and textual evidence to further the claim of the paper.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the collected data to resolve the three problems raised in the study, generated through literary discourse analysis.

### *Evaluating the frame of reference*

Regardless of their blood relations, each sister has their distinctive personality, value, interest, skill and aptitude. Their character manifests inherently or as a result of exposure to the environment and social upbringing. A person's identity is always challenged by circumstances rewiring their mindset, priorities and principles. These changes happen gradually, paving to their previous experiences and current orientation. Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy have different aspirations and strengths. Their frame of references is either compromised or beneficial to the situations that are similar or in contrast to each context[2].

*"I shall write more, and he's going to get the next paid for, and I am so happy, for in time I may be able to support myself and help the girls (Alcott 162)".*

Jo aspires to be independent and support her family through her written works. She gains satisfaction in seeing her work published that she joins different writing contests that earns her sister and mother a two-month vacation. This instance did not go unobserved by her father and she is advised to stay away from vanity and materialism. Blackford explores that woman determines with the male domain of language and writing, addition to

maternalism with domiciliary creativity and receiving power [3]. Her sensational tales earn her family comfort and she wants to expand her horizon to continue supporting her sisters. Trying to avoid the situation in complicating Laurie's relationship and wanting to be independent, she opts to travel to New York and finds a job in becoming a governess. Estes & Lant attributes it to witnessing marriage and how it accompanies submission, self-sacrifice, and repression[4]. Being Laurie who receives proper education and blessed with affluence, Jo's character cannot compensate with his endowments. New York is Jo's opportunity to find another angle to her writing. The determination to set aside her emotions toward a woman's first job in exchange for financial gain stamps the early stages in the irreverence of her femininity[5]. Jo defies convention in the domicile with her temper, the expectation of her keeping appearances, the compliance of enduring romance by dismissing Laurie. In practice, she is the editor-in-chief of *Pickwick Portfolio* that was originally exclusive to the girls when they were young. Their covert publication serves as her writing practice until she gains courage to submit it to publishers. People humanize themselves through their labor. They attain free consciousness by naturalizing themselves. In order to publish their paper, the March girls assume a male pseudonym distinctly presenting the patriarch. Their explanation in building their portfolio using a male counterpart is to practice the tradition of artistic expression and they portray their meeting as a silly merrymaking to practice their writing and deliver quips. De Beauvoir further explains that most little girls are really tomboys, children who lack the consent to be boys. Alcott in her later years recalls the needlessness of marriage in becoming a woman[6].

*"you must keep watch over your 'bosom enemy' or it may spoil your life. Try with heart and soul to master this quick temper, before it brings you greater sorrow and regret than you have known today (Alcott 86)"*

Jo and Amy often display their temperance because of their clashing prides. Marmee will advise them to conceal and always make decisions while they are level headed. In controlling their disposition, it can be repressive. The matriarchal circle of the family stays completely self-contained and entirely female [7]. Their mother raises them to gentility and becoming value-driven that it is difficult to move beyond criticisms and conflicts. The household shifts between the harmony of working together and the discords of tempers and holding grievances [8]. For Marmee's response to conflict is reeling it in and surrender to the unalterable dilemma. In Jo and Amy's temperamental

nature, it proves to be tough advice resulting in a critical situation. It can possibly result in holding a grudge, seeking out revenge and feelings of apathy. It will be counterproductive if there is no outlet in meeting their conflict. As it turns out, Marmee succeeded in schooling Jo and it backfires when she had an internal struggle between choosing her writing and her fear of losing Bhaer's respect. Marmee's advice was detrimental in Jo's strive for independence. Murphy adds some disputes whether the book is repressive and sentimental, or a medium to promote domesticity and silence. Or on another spectrum, matriarchal and implicitly revolutionary, cultivates discontent in performing female domesticity [9]. Even if the meaning is implicit or explicit, the challenge is whether it befits the current version of female qualities.

*"Money, position, fashionable accomplishments, and elegant manners were most desirable things in her eyes, and she liked to associate with those who possessed them, often mistaking the false for the true, and admiring what was not admirable[2]"*

One of the striking differences between Amy and Jo is their prejudice or fascination with social class. Both recognize the extent of their vanity and while the former uses it to her advantage, the latter finds it as a flaw. They often chastise Amy for her selfishness but this outward conformity veils her sturdy independence. Keyser detects a strong sense of self that everyone masks as selfishness and vanity because of age [10]. When the March girls get entangled with mischief and trouble, they always learn their way again and 'correct' their mishap. In a way the book promotes prevailing notions of fitting femininity and womanhood [11]. When following the social conventions is the norm and begets blessings exemplified by Amy's permission to go to Paris instead of Jo. She always follows the proper decorum and commits to her desires of social advancement. Jo's independence and boyish attitude result in exclusion to high society and Amy's social manipulation results in recognition[12]. Her practicality is often misconstrued as selfishness for she goes beyond the values taught by everyone. Some instances where she sacrifices her lot of arts and craft in place of selling flowers to the bazaar and being nice to her Aunt despite her initial frigid personality gave way to her opportunity to go to Paris. In these situations, her propriety is her practical weapon in elevating herself. (Weber 89) emphasizes the limits of

positivism and crude materialism which expose the reliance on experiences or empirical evidence for the former and necessity for material circumstances for the latter.

*“Meg didn't like to be pitied and made to feel poor. It irritated her, but she was ashamed to confess it, and now and then she tried to console herself by buying something pretty, so that Sallie needn't think she had to economize [3].”*

Meg and Amy share the same fondness for luxury but their inclination to achieve it is different. One of the factors is their upbringing. Meg was born rich until the March family had declined in wealth while Amy as the youngest makes the best of her pre-owned belongings. Being the prettiest out of the four sisters it takes a hit on Meg's ego and pride. But her powerlessness is an indication that she needs to recede since it's not a necessity and her earnings. Gender conformity helps to indemnify for uncertain class position [12]. Meg remains consistent in her vanity and jealousy of material things. Knowing this flaw, Marmee keeps reminding Meg to continue to work to prevent idleness and mischief. She also advises her to prepare ‘in finding a good man, while married, be committed to what he likes and apologize first as not to awaken his anger.’ While newlywed, these series of expectations are given to Meg but never to Jo in her decision to pursue Bhaer and Amy's elopement. While Meg harbors some of this bitterness, it is a good thing that she ultimately likes being a mother among all.

Beth was truly the best among them. She knows Jo's erratic behavior the best, humbled Amy and is dear to the family. She loves to play the piano but is incredibly shy in voicing her opinion. Once she is given a chance to play her neighbors piano but in exchange for not disturbing anyone. She is hesitant in talking to a different gender but always sees the best of people. Their physical and internal fragility wins her affection in the case of Laurie, Mr. Laurence and another male limped acquaintance.

Based on the characters upbringing, motivation and personality, they can react and act according to the situations. On some levels they can follow through or be surprised to what extent they can do basing on their priorities. In small bits and pieces Jo did pursue her independence and chose to take heed of her mother's advice. Amy and Meg shoulder criticisms and make it a motivation to improve them. Even Beth can go against her nature and comfort to achieve what she truly wants.

The four major characters show distinct situational actions that are entirely independent or similar to their textual evidence.

### **Social Class**

The character's desire and indifference to social class reveals the personality of each sister. They might aspire for greater comfort, an indulgence to luxury or a rise of status. Oddly enough, Amy and Jo made it as their driving force but with different methods. They are persistent to attain it as an adolescent and then as a woman. In some way, both of them really gained assistance from their spinster aunt whom they loath as a child because they are taught of the perils of material things. But the lack of financial security endangers the lives of Beth and his father making it is a critical point in the novel.

With four growing adolescent girls, a clergy father without steady income serving for a war, a mother who is the head of the household that still serves for the poor and a housekeeper who cooks for their meals and keeps the house tidy, it is no wonder how they are struggling to make ends meet. At 16, Meg works as a governess, Jo at 15 assists her aunt and Beth at 13 helps with the household chores. It was not unusual to work at this age at that time. The family helps themselves and supports others both by their domestic chores and the older sister's employment (Butler 4). But it is ironic when Mrs. March, in whose absence the girls suffer from their livelihood, is out helping a less fortunate family. It creates tension to their family dynamics due to a parent's idealism and insufficiency to support their children's daily needs [5]. Usually with the wife's dowry and the husband's stable income associated with class or position, the children will live well-off furthering their connection and family name. Both of their parents really valued their morals leaving their children obligated to work.

Jo's biggest insecurities are Amy's accomplishments. Matching in pride but with different interests, they often have huge misunderstandings. Jo was an outlier in behavior and in her ambition. She is puzzled by how effortlessly Amy seems to pull off fitting in the society and gets rewarded for things she tirelessly struggled for. The biggest blow that happens to her is when Amy was chosen to go to school in Paris in spite of her service to her aunt for years. Years after, this insecurity materializes again when Amy achieves love, money and passion when she finds herself jobless and desolate. But she never competes with her. She chose her own path with minimal assistance from others and always took action with her aspirations. The

character's financial troubles lead to former anger, resentment and envy but it also serves as a testing ground for the outside world [12]. It reveals the evolving regime of class and status distinctions and how it is impenetrable.

According to Murphy, it is through Jo that we ask the painfully narrow choices available to women artists[9]. Jo's drive for independence tethers to supporting her family, always having sufficient funds and to widen her knowledge. Gramsci, a Marxist, proposed that there is a great necessity for workers' education to encourage development of intellectuals from the working class. They are often unprepared from their moments of class shame and humiliation from their catapulting desires and ambition. Some scenes elucidate the painful lessons of repression. The two crises of her father and Beth made her question the rich and the unfairness of their abundant wealth. But years after she writes and earns in New York, Jo recognizes the opportunities for self-reliance, independence, assertion and adventure as those customarily reserve for the opposite sex. Her acceptance to Mrs. Kirke's job offer is her window of opportunity to find other material and sell her stories. She actually fulfills her dreams to give allowances to Amy and her mother even in a short period. Ironically, she inherits the mansion from her ferocious paternal aunt, who deprives her of independence because of her failed conformity to girlish etiquette, permits her to run a school and by extent provides her husband with far greater financial support.

Amy's notion of paying back the kindness of her rich acquaintances is to play nice. She is envious of the rich yet she understands that there will be no benefit in being bitter in her own circumstances. She also grasps that kindness is a choice and a person who has a lot of wealth can choose to be selfish and if it is bestowed, the receiver should choose to be grateful rather than snub the giver. Jo interprets this one as self-deprecation, a means of debasing oneself for the favors of others. In which Amy countered as pride and requesting demands are only reserved for people who gained it. Estes & Lant finds the contention between favorable womanly behavior and the human inclination for fulfillment and assertiveness [7]. Women do not need to be inhibited by an insufficient choice of proficiency, motivating mentor, or appropriate partner and most importantly they do not need to be at the mercy of damaging prohibition of suitable female identity. All of their actions are done by all of their choices.

Meg's biggest insecurity is her social class. Without anything to contribute to the table, she thinks that a woman should just stand plainly. She also accepts

the criticisms of the Moffatts, a proof of how effective her mother's advice is and how repressive it is. She tries to change these flaws but its familiarity always pervades even if she became a woman and a mother.

Jo takes the lead in changing her course and getting a job to sustain herself and her family, Amy tries to make the best of her belongings and improve her skills in Paris and Meg rejects the notion of marrying someone for stature and chooses love instead.

The March sisters circumvent their social class differently by tackling their distinct drives, obligations and outlook towards prioritizing material things in relation to their values.

### **Gender Norm**

The March sisters are exemplary because of their keen characters, good intentions and strong will. But in their period being female limits their power, restricts their behavior and controls their movement. They are placed below the hierarchy, a dichotomous relationship between enacting what is expected to their sex. Following the norm receives acceptance and being deviant becomes a social outcast.

Jo originally submitted her works anonymously but since she was clueless in terms of handling and negotiating about her royalties, she settled for less. This is because of her gender, her youth and her poor clothing, even if she dressed as best as she could, she was taken advantage of. As a woman living independently, having a job is a new concept in her time and they are barely educated in handling finances. The wage disparity becomes the norm and it has never been questioned by Jo since she never interacted with a woman who earns from their work. The injustice is widely accepted and it has never been questioned in the book but subtly put. By careening from one form of class, one kind of exploitation and oppression from another, Marx believed that the abundance of material wealth can destroy one's morality. People cultivate complex desires and needs, build new relationships and discover ways to be fulfilled. He also understands that in developing this spiritual fulfilment it needs a material base. For Marx, morality in its deepest sense is enjoying oneself [13]. As a part of a capitalist society, people are incapable of improving their living situation due to the compensation of achieving great profit by cutting employee's wages. The greater the laborer manufactures the smaller he has to absorb, and the greater he appreciates on the entity the greater he depreciates his identity, since his output and his endeavor are alien (britannica). The laborer hangs on

his job that is dispensable; in contrast he loses his existence in a capitalist society: no work, no pay.

*"I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boy's games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy[3]."*

Jo March's determination to withhold her emotions pointing to her creation in exchange of receiving a profit stamps the beginning of her irreverence in femininity. She often laments of her sex and its associated discrimination. When she burns her writing, she destroys her self-reliance, authenticity and expressiveness. Weighing the sacrifices of her previous goals and unattained vision, Jo reaps off what she expects but loses what she dreams of, to become a prolific writer. All her promises to be self-sufficient and write to provide for her family were broken. Marriage and motherhood exemplify the female expectations of Jo's mother, aunt and the society.

Jo realizes the importance of looking presentable to a prospective editor. She dressed to get utmost best but it still did not impress the editor. Being a woman and being poor, her work is taken for granted. Her clothing restricts her talent since she is held down by lower standards. There are many instances in the novel where she soiled and destroyed a lot of garments because she detests dressing up and considers it as superfluous. In return it makes her sisters stop her from borrowing anything and discourage Aunt March to bring her to Paris. Not caring about one's appearance affects Jo in a trivial manner or helps deny her on what she truly wants. She learns that investing time on what you wear interprets as making an effort to look good. Kornfeld postulates that the average boy studied the classic, mathematics, natural science, history and theology and absorbed an aggressive language suitable for debate whereas girls learned literature, art, language dance and music meaning a docile language intended to soothe and to smoothe over controversy [14].

Amy knows what she wants and even in the cusp of confession she worries about the bluntness of her words. Unlike Meg, she is not pressured to act a certain way, it comes naturally. There are many instances in the novel where she is put in a compromising situation but she always handles it gracefully and accepts the consequences. It is really rare for her to ask for advice but instead she asks for acceptance. She decides to initially accept rich Fred

then Laurie. She is not fickle-minded in expecting rewards for her sacrifices but stands on her decision (i.e dropping school, giving her table, taking responsibility for her failed gathering). She understands people and in her marriage, she is not subjugated.

Meg understands that appearances can be deceiving and Jo discovers that appearances matter in the society. She bathes in the attention of being special and well-liked that she forgot that her borrowed clothes are a veil to her identity. She always wants to dress and look well but it only masks her resentment of people that are financially stable and the physical pain that she had to endure to keep up with the appearances. The eagerness to look the part is not overlooked by her friends who commented that her only goal is to marry for money. Blackford states that although the initial presumption of dressing up is vanity, appreciating one's self aesthetically is conspicuously empowering, a power that is important to girlhood [8].

Out of the four sisters, Beth has been the best example in showing the normative behavior of female sex at that time. Everyone loves her because of her quiet and cheerful exterior. As such, women are held to different standards. Jo has missed some opportunities because of failing to behave to what is normative, Amy believes that a woman can only be recognized if they are exceptional and Meg is obligated to disregard her desires in order to be a mother. They all need to sacrifice a sliver of their freedom, ambition and power to fulfill one role. Despite the differences of their character, their age gaps and the difficulty of their situations, they always go back to the core values that they learned at home.

The four sisters distinctly affirm and negate gender normative behavior.

#### ***Moral Dilemmas***

Little women are known for the sisters' pilgrims. The book started highlighting each character's flaws and it sets on shaping their values. Each character has their own volition to choose between two moral quandaries. Oftentimes they need to choose between what is best for them or what is best for others. Their thought process is often revealed alongside their regrets. Their resolution reflects with their character and almost always has negative or positive consequences.

When the family is desperate for money because of the crisis of Beth and their father, they tried to scour some money from their neighbors and relatives going so far as selling one's possessions. Desperate to help her mother, Jo sacrificed her pride and sold her

hair to finance her father's health. She humbled herself without anyone asking her to. Alcott tries to go beyond their frustrations on necessities but also the ultimate indignity of class infraction. It is more than Meg's and Amy's humiliation towards social calls, it is also manifested in Jo's sacrifice to cut her hair for her father's sustenance in the hospital and the on-going recovery of Beth to Scarlet fever.

*"I almost wish I hadn't any conscience, it's so inconvenient. If I didn't care about doing right, and didn't feel uncomfortable when doing wrong, I should get on capitally[2]."*

In publishing her stories, Jo found that in New York it will be easier to sell sensational stories. When she was researching crimes, sins and inflicted miseries, she often felt guilty but she set aside her moral qualms as she pondered about her financial compensation. Originally Jo attempts to include her crafted lessons to the edited manuscript but accepts the compromise about the readers interest and the evolving times. Then her fear and shame won and she decided to burn her writings and to never write again. Jo meets Professor Bhaer who became a catalyst in her writing process. The man becomes a retreat from the gloomy surface of that foreign place, the suburban atrocities that are connected with unfavorable consequences of materialism, consumerism and renovation [5]. Their convening interest brings them closer and she regards his opinion as reputable. Jo takes lessons from Bhaer and ultimately cedes her opinion, even her moral and intellectual vision. His short-sighted moral ponderings help annihilate her piece [7]. Publishing her stories anonymously, she never minds about the criticism but when it's someone who she regards as an esteemed companion, her confidence droops and she starts to burn all her published short stories. Because of her respect and admiration to the professor she forgets the essence in writing her stories and leaves her pen until she is urged by Beth to write for her. Her primary motives and her zest to become a writer is replaced by another objective. Leaning on the identity of Bhaer that is described by Murphy as both suggestively feminine which is powerless, poor and alien and patriarchal which is authoritarian, scholarly and repressive [9]. Jo is an upstanding character if readers will disregard her espousal. Weighing the sacrifices of her previous goals and unattained vision, Jo reaps off what she expects but loses what she dreams of, to become a prolific writer. Regarding the content Dawson describes Jo's sensational fiction as an indirect representation of the economic and the social conditions of urban life [5]. These stories should not garner ill-conceive judgments since it does not promote reprehensible behavior rather it is read for entertainment. In Jo's renunciation of her

dream's adult readers discern "our own sense of betrayed adolescent possibilities" [15].

*"Nothing more, except that I don't believe I shall ever marry. I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in a hurry to give it up for any mortal man[2]."*

Jo never aspired to be married even if she had a chance with Laurie. She always dreams of supporting her family, primarily Beth. Enjoying the liberties of being an author and building a family is difficult to juggle. Jo understands that a woman, owning a family is a sacrifice of professional work and without financial means is a personal loss. But when she died and her two sisters were settled in matrimony, at 25 she did not realize the onslaught of loneliness and pressures of becoming a spinster. She is in conflict between her longing for independence and the solitariness of her situation. Living in her parents' home, she laments on the prospect that she will be alone and grow embittered as seen from her aunt. She did not think of Bhaer in particular but found his company when he visited the March family. With everyone living their lives, she developed feelings and decided to marry him when he was offered a professorship in his hometown. Alcott refuses to marry Jo to Laurie because of their childhood history and different class standing. As a comical alternative she chose Professor Bhaer, given Jo's lust for independence, her devotion to her own development and power, viewing their relationship as a camaraderie than the romantic [7]. In marriage, Murphy expresses that women achieved a holistic accomplished identity at the expanse of sexual intimacy and creativity (369). It relinquishes the female choice to demand to ask the trade-offs and protest the price. Alcott denies her marriage for love because it reduces her to submission. As both parties suffer because of their meager income, the only salvation for their dilemmas is their aunt's property.

Amy is aware of her vanity and her willingness to fit in the society so she worked hard in making her things nicer. Jo told the story of how she repainted her shoes and confessed to Laurie about her dress and her will. Now and then she complained about their status especially when she invited her friends over. It was pride that she bought new things, cleaned their house tirelessly and bought a lobster in haste. She was embarrassed when she saw Laurie's friend while carrying the cold meat but moved on anyway. It is important to note that it was taken from her account and not to the expense of her family. She knows her weaknesses but it doesn't deter from what she really wants.

*"if Fred asks me, I shall accept him, though I'm not madly in love. He is handsome,*

*young, clever enough, and very rich—ever so much richer than the Laurences[2]”.*

While Amy was abroad, she only had letters as a means to correspond with her mother. Without any guidance from her family, she initially decides to marry Fred for a better match in the family. She admires beauty and nice things so she was pleased with her match. But when Fred was called to help his parents, Laurie accompanied her in her studies and social calls. Amy's justification for receiving social calls is for her to repay some of the kindness given for being poor equating to little rights and holding on to pride is futile. Studying abroad, Amy's transformation from a spoiled girl into a refined woman grabs attention from various suitors including Laurie. He is reprimanding his aristocratic laziness and incompetence to be industrious despite his privileges (Foote 81). When they were young and Beth was ill and when they got older and Beth died, they complimented each other. It was enough to reject Fred even if she did not know Laurie's feelings. She chose love without expecting anything but found both. In the end she prospers, achieving affection and fortune although she is not quite as fulfilled with her career as she only wants what is best.

As the prettiest among the March sisters, Meg took care to be polished and to remain in good behavior. Her biggest weakness is her desire for wealth and being envious without doing anything. She has a lot of suitors and once being gossiped that to marry is her only way in alleviating her circumstances. In the act of marriage, Trites believe that patriarchy eventually separated and conquers the women who enable each other through their love. When her aunt blatantly accused John of marrying her because of her rich relations, all her frustrations and previous anger resurfaced, triggering her to proclaim her marriage to John. She chose love even if she did not plan it at that time. But in spite of her ongoing struggles, she found fulfillment in being a wife and a mother.

*“I know you are angry, John, but I can't help it. I don't mean to waste your money, and I didn't think those little things would count up so. I try to be content, but it is hard, and I'm tired of being poor [2].”*

When Meg prematurely marries John Brook, a bookkeeper with a modest income, she struggles to recreate domesticity. It fuels on various fights and a lot of frustration from both ends. The recreation of playing

house might be fun at first but when both of them take their roles seriously, conflicts start to arise. In one of her bouts of frustration, Meg confessed about how she is tired of being poor. She chose love and realized the work that she needs to commit. Being a new housewife, she missed the liberty of having calls and playing dress-up. Confounded with the reality, she decided to splurge for a new dress but never realized the cost. Her pride hindered her to be honest and decided that she earned it. The guilt sets in when Brook decides to sell his new coat for the expenses. It started as her response to the distress of her financial situation but she feels guilt-stricken from her ingenious response even if it reflects her reality. She decided to make financial amends by selling her purchase and learns to be content with what she has. A woman realizes about the vice of the higher class and the negative consequence of capitalism, she accepts the alternate model of female adulthood given by her mother. (Murphy 520) Meg's lessons on doing household and rearing their twins are an arduous process especially in the beginning but she finds fulfilment in motherhood. A woman's dependence, political confusion, and unhealthy disparity between the two genders is the cause of women's oppression. The subjugation of women is a manifestation of class oppression since it serves the benefit of the bourgeois (Britannica). Marxist-feminist tackles issues of domestic labor, wage work and other issues.

Elizabeth has reservations in voicing out her greatest desire, to play the piano. Her family knows that she loves music so when they help her get acquainted with Lawrence. Seeing their kindness and vulnerability she overcomes her shyness with the opposite gender. She was the personal favorite of Mr. Lawrence because she reminded her of her daughter and her kindness is endearing. She is also able to connect with sickly and handicapped people so charmingly and not out of pity. She loves so big that she always chooses the benefit of her loved ones rather than herself.

The balance of nature and nurture can be disputed with the persons' free will. In facing two contrary options people are forced to decide between what is important to them or to choose between the good of others or themselves. What makes it difficult is taking responsibility for the decision and accepting the consequences. In long term decisions, the March sisters often find it difficult to choose between independence or marriage and material comfort or love/moral. It always comes with an expense but they never run away with the situation or let it be decided by others.

There are substantial research studies about their missteps, their inability to perform with what is expected, criticisms about their love interests but hardly any about the impact of their status. They are born in a lower-middle class family without initial connections and an absentee father. They depend on themselves which carries consequences entirely on their own. If the family is well-provided, will Jo still want to write and be independent? In the research gathering, the journals pertain to gender, symbolisms, and behavior but in bits and pieces and there are fewer studies about the novel's moral and status even if it is the central theme of the novel.

Little Women is one of the classics that is shared for their exemplary attitude for growing women. It shows camaraderie between the four sisters, obedience for their parents and perseverance to achieve what they want in life regardless of their social status.

The four sisters value their morale and the good of others over their desires.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the research, the following findings are summarized from the data analysis: The frame of reference shows distinct situational actions that are dissimilar or similar to their textual evidence. Their social class differs in relation to their values. The four sisters distinctly affirm and negate gender normative behavior. The four sisters value their morale and the good of others over their aspirations. Thus, Louisa May Alcott's Little Women reveals class envy and normative gender behavior.

Based on the conclusion, the following recommendations are established. First, that people are flexible according to situations; change can happen over time, and they cannot be categorized based on circumstances. The individual's intention may change when he encounters a situation. Accepting the responsibility when the decision is conscientious is much more significant than being driven by previous biases. Second, other concerns in the book reveal the importance of equal pay- employers may pay women the same as men if their work is in the same line, men shouldering responsibilities at home, better access to education for women, among others. People may start encouraging others to achieve what they want in terms of status, ambition or other drives. Envy of one's level of comfort is human nature but it might not hinder the other one's aspirations. Lastly, a person encountering a moral dilemma may make them feel guilty, eased, tormented or doubtful. It is important to understand their reasons for their actions and to sympathize with how they feel before passing judgment.

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