

## Feminism Reflected in The Main Character in The Movie Little Women 2019 by Louisa May Alcott

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### ABSTRACT

Feminism is an enduring social issue, persisting from ancient times to the present. The struggles of early feminists resonate today, with patriarchy still evident in modern media, such as Greta Gerwig's adaptation of Little Women. This research examines how Little Women portrays the social issues of feminism, focusing on the experiences of the main character. Utilizing Sugihastuti's feminist approach, which defines feminism as a movement advocating for equality between men and women across political, economic, educational, and social spheres, the study explores the film's depiction of these themes. Additionally, Betty Friedan's feminist theory is employed to delve deeper into the feminist issues presented. The findings highlight several key feminist themes, including the societal expectation that women must marry to secure their future, the notion that women's roles are confined to homemaking, and the resistance to these norms by characters who choose their paths. The film illustrates the tension between traditional expectations and the characters' desires for independence, revealing the complexities of feminism and its relevance in contemporary society. Through this analysis, the research underscores how Little Women reflects ongoing feminist struggles and challenges the persistent patriarchal norms, offering a nuanced portrayal of women's autonomy and empowerment.

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### INTRODUCTION

Literature is used to describe anything from creative writing to more technical or scientific works, but the term is most often used to refer to works of creative imagination, poetry, drama, fiction, and non-fiction. Defines literature as being written works of fiction and nonfiction in which compositional excellence and

advancement in the art of writing are higher priorities than are considerations of profit or commercial (Hancock: 2006). Literature is a work of fiction or nonfiction that is created by the author to convey feelings, ideas, or messages that are by the times when the author was alive, in general, most authors feel first the life as they write in their works and this makes literary works so important because these works are taken from the author's life story and what happened to society at that time. One of the literary works is a movie.

A movie also called a film, motion picture, moving picture, picture, photo-play, or (slang) flick - is a work of visual art that simulates experiences and otherwise communicates ideas, stories, perceptions, feelings, beauty, or atmosphere through the use of moving images. A movie is a group of several pictures that appear in a frame, where frame by frame shown by a projector lens with mechanical so that the picture can be moved and look alive (Arsyad: 2003). A movie is a story, etc. recorded as a set of moving pictures to be shown on television or at a cinema (Homby: 1995). Films can convey hidden signs which can create different interpretations for their audience. Movies are one of the literary works that are of interest to audiences because we can be carried away by the acting of the actors. There are several films based on novels, one of which is "The Little Women (2019)."

Little Women (2019) Is a movie based on the novel Little Women (1868) written by the famous 19th-century novelist and children's book author Louisa May Alcott. Louisa May Alcott was born on November 29, 1832, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Louisa May Alcott was raised by parents who were part of the 19th-century Transcendentalist movement, a popular religious movement of the era. The Little Women, which was still published as a series of short stories, was eventually compiled into one book. Little Women was an immediate success and the book established Alcott as one of the leading novelists of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. This movie tells the story of four sisters from the March family who live amid a thick patriarchal system. The movie focuses on the character Jo who has the ambition to live as an independent woman and break the statement of the patriarchal system at that time.

Feminism is a social, cultural, and political movement to achieve gender equality between women and men (Ali, 2024). Feminism seeks to achieve freedom from oppression, discrimination, employment problems, and other social problems experienced by women and even by the society around them. The feminine mystique says that the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their femininity. It says that the great mistake of Western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of this femininity (Friedan:1977: 19). Josephine March, the heroine of Louisa May Alcott's novel and its movie adaptation, is an example of a woman who fought for freedom and challenged the traditional gender expectations of her time. One of which is found at

duration 35: 28 – 34.37 [no one succeeds alone. Not really, especially women. You have to marry a rich man].

The exploration of feminism within Louisa May Alcott's "Little Women" has been a subject of academic discourse for many years, given the novel's enduring legacy as a classic of American literature. However, the 2019 film adaptation directed by Greta Gerwig presents a fresh lens through which to examine the feminist themes embedded in the original text. This research offers a novel approach by focusing on the intersection of 21st-century cinematic techniques and the 19th-century feminist ethos portrayed in the character of Jo March. The study not only analyzes how the film adaptation modernizes the feminist narrative but also investigates the implications of these changes for contemporary audiences. By comparing the portrayal of Jo March in the film with her characterization in the novel, this research uncovers new insights into how feminism is reflected, adapted, and reinterpreted for modern viewers, thereby contributing a fresh perspective to existing feminist literary and film studies.

The rationale for this study lies in the growing importance of film as a medium for both reflecting and shaping societal values, including those related to gender and feminism. The 2019 adaptation of "Little Women" comes at a time when discussions about gender equality and women's rights are at the forefront of global conversations. By examining how the film adapts and updates the feminist themes of the original novel, this research aims to understand how historical narratives are recontextualized to resonate with contemporary feminist discourse. The film's director, Greta Gerwig, brings a modern sensibility to the story, highlighting issues such as autonomy, career aspirations, and gender roles, which are as relevant today as they were in the 19th century. This study is driven by the need to explore how these adaptations impact the interpretation of feminism in popular culture and how they influence the audience's understanding of feminist ideals in the context of both the past and the present.

This research is significant for several reasons. Firstly, it contributes to the field of feminist film studies by providing a detailed analysis of how feminist themes are translated from literature to film, particularly in the context of a modern adaptation of a classic novel. The study also holds relevance for literary scholars by offering a comparative analysis of the feminist themes in Alcott's original work and their reinterpretation in Gerwig's film. Additionally, this research has broader implications for understanding the role of media in shaping and reflecting societal values, particularly in the context of gender. By examining the portrayal of Jo March, a character who has long been considered a feminist icon, this study sheds light on how feminist narratives evolve and remain pertinent across different historical and cultural contexts. Ultimately, this research underscores the

importance of adaptation studies in understanding the ongoing dialogue between past and present representations of gender and feminism.

Based on the description above, the researcher focuses on the feminism that happened to the main character. The patriarchal system that exists in the film *The Little Women* (2019) is still very much happening in our lives. This supports us to always be aware that the patriarchal system is one of the things that must not be patented because all humans are created equal so no difference becomes a barrier for only men who can do more things than women.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses descriptive-qualitative methods. According to Sugiyono (2016:9), the qualitative descriptive method is a research method based on the philosophy of postpositivism which is used to research the conditions of natural objects (as opposed to experiments) where the researcher is the key instrument. The data collection technique is carried out by triangulation (combination). The author uses literary works, namely films as research objects in this scientific work. The movie chosen by the authors is *Little Women* by Louisa May Alcott. *Little Women* is a film released in 2019 directed by Greta Gerwig. Based on the storyline in the movie, there is some feminism experienced by the main character, namely Jo. Jo carried out a movement to break the statement that women can be rich or successful without having to have a rich husband, but because of their efforts too.

The author collects data using the document study method. The data obtained is divided into 2, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data are movies and secondary data are journals, books, and internet articles. Document studies carried out by qualitative researchers, their position can be seen as "resource persons". Can answer questions; "what was the purpose of the document written?; What is the background?; What can the document tell the researcher?; under what circumstances was the document written?; For who?; and so on. (Nasution, 2003:86). Document review is a means of assisting researchers in collecting data or information by reading letters, announcements, meeting summaries, written statements of certain policies, and other written materials. This data search method is very useful because it can be done without disturbing the object or research atmosphere. Researchers by studying these documents can get to know the culture and values adhered to by the object under study (Nilamsari, 2014).

After collecting the data, the writer also took a feminist approach in the course of this research. Based on the theory of Betty Friedan, the author uses a feminist approach to prove and analyze the data that has been collected through the movie from the movie's dialogue that alludes to the issues of feminism that occurred in society at that time. The authors analyze the issues of feminism by connecting that the issues of feminism still occur unconsciously today.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Findings*

In Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation of *\*Little Women\**, the main character, Jo March, embodies the feminist ideals of autonomy, self-determination, and the rejection of traditional gender roles. Jo's character is a stark representation of the struggles faced by women in a patriarchal society, where their worth is often measured by their marital status and adherence to societal norms. Throughout the film, Jo resists the pressure to conform to the expectations placed on women of her time, particularly the notion that marriage is the ultimate goal for a woman's life. Her refusal to marry for convenience or societal approval is a clear rejection of the traditional roles assigned to women, and instead, she chooses to pursue her passion for writing. Jo's character challenges the idea that a woman's identity and success are tied to her relationship with a man, emphasizing the importance of individuality and personal ambition.

The film also explores the theme of economic independence, a crucial aspect of feminist thought. Jo's determination to become a writer and support herself financially is a significant departure from the conventional belief that women should be financially dependent on their husbands. The narrative highlights the obstacles women face in achieving economic independence, particularly in a male-dominated industry like publishing. Despite these challenges, Jo's perseverance and eventual success in publishing her work underscore the importance of financial autonomy for women. Her journey reflects the broader feminist struggle for equality in the workplace and the right to be recognized for one's talents and contributions, regardless of gender. This portrayal not only emphasizes the significance of economic independence but also critiques the societal structures that limit women's opportunities and potential.

Furthermore, the film delves into the complexities of sisterhood and the different ways women navigate societal expectations. While Jo rejects traditional roles, her sisters' choices reflect the diverse experiences of women during that period. Meg, for instance, chooses marriage and motherhood, embracing the conventional path that Jo resists. However, the film does not diminish Meg's choice, instead portraying it as a valid and empowering decision for her. This contrast between the sisters highlights the feminist principle of respecting women's choices, regardless of whether they align with traditional or progressive ideals. By showcasing the different paths taken by the March sisters, the film underscores the idea that feminism is not a one-size-fits-all movement but rather a framework that

supports women's right to choose their own destinies. It emphasizes the importance of agency and the recognition that empowerment can look different for each woman, depending on her circumstances and desires.

Greta Gerwig's *\*Little Women\** effectively reflects feminist themes through its main character, Jo March. Jo's resistance to traditional gender roles, her pursuit of economic independence, and the film's exploration of diverse female experiences collectively highlight the ongoing struggle for women's rights and equality. The narrative critiques the societal constraints imposed on women while celebrating their resilience and determination to define their own lives. Through Jo's character and the contrasting choices of her sisters, the film presents a nuanced portrayal of feminism, one that acknowledges the complexities of female identity and the importance of individual agency. This adaptation of *\*Little Women\** serves as a powerful commentary on the relevance of feminist ideals in both historical and contemporary contexts, offering a timeless reflection on the pursuit of equality and empowerment for women.

Through Betty Friedan's thoughts, this analysis strengthens the understanding of the importance of women's liberation from restrictive traditional roles, the lack of personal freedom they often face, as well as the importance of personal identity and criticism of consumer culture which influences views of women. Solidarity between women is also emphasized as a key element in fighting for women's rights and freedoms. Thus, "Little Women" (2019) is not only a tribute to the feminist spirit but also a call to continue fighting for equality and freedom for all women. In analyzing "Little Woman" (2019) through Friedan's perspective, several key feminist points emerge:

### ***1. Women's Liberation from Traditional Roles***

Friedan emphasized the importance of women's liberation from traditional roles that are limited to being mothers and wives. For her, women should have the same opportunities as men to pursue careers, education, and fulfilling lives. In the movie *The Little Woman* (2019), several parts show that Josephine refuses to follow traditions, such as women having to get married and not having to work.

*Josephine: It's just a short story (21.39-21.41)*

*Josephine: But I'm working on a novel (21.44-21.46)*

*Josephine: I want to help my mom financially (22.00-22.05)*

In this excerpt, Josephine breaks the paradigm that women must depend on men and women must marry and work to take care of the household, but Josephine is not carried away by that, Josephine still aspires to be a writer even though she is a

woman It does not discourage her. By becoming a writer Josephine also hopes that she can help her family's economic situation. With this Josephine has freed herself from the traditional role that women should be married and not work.

*Josephine: So the only way to get rich is to marry a rich man?*

*Marmee: Yes*

*Josephine: But there are honorable things to do to make money for women.*

*Marmee: That's not true (35.45- 35.55)*

In this clip, Marmee teaches Josephine that the only way to get rich is to marry a rich man or to get rich by becoming a prostitute or building a brothel. However, Josephine rejects this by saying that there are many honorable things that women can do to gain wealth without having to do the things that Marmee says. From here we see that Josephine is different from other women, who are not bound by the status quo (default) and she seeks her path according to her wishes.

## ***2. Lack of personal freedom***

According to Friedan, women are often caught in domestic roles that bring a lack of personal freedom. Betty fought for women's equality and freedom and emphasized the importance of women having control over themselves in the new culture, namely equality with men. The quote that is relevant to Betty Friedan's opinion is: "In almost all fields of profession, business, art, and science, women are still treated as second-class citizens. It would behoove us to tell girls who plan to work in society to anticipate this subtle and uncomfortable discrimination to tell them not to be silent, and to hope it will go away, but to fight it. A girl should not expect privileges because of her gender, but neither should she "conform" to prejudice and discrimination."

This quote emphasizes that women have the same potential and ambition as men and should be valued, as well as recognized. The film *Little Women* depicts women's lack of personal freedom through several aspects. The first aspect, women in the film struggle against the stigma and discrimination attached to them. They have to face pressure to marry and take care of the household, and have to fight to have the same rights as men. This is reflected in Jo's struggle.

In the film *Little Women* (2019), there are several scenes, which show the lack of personal freedom for women:

*Jo: she told me to be good so Dad would be proud when he came home.*

*Laurie: Where is he?*

*Jo: volunteering for the Union Army. I want to fight with him. I'm disappointed to be a girl. (minutes 00:14:38-00:14:50)*

The dialog shows Jo's disappointment with herself because she is given limitations and cannot do many things that men do, one of which is fighting.

*Aunt March: One day you'll need me, and you'll regret your behavior.*

*Jo: Thank you, Aunt March, for your work and kindness, but I intend to succeed on my own.*

*Aunt March: No one succeeds alone. Especially women, you should marry a rich man.*

*Jo: You didn't marry Aunt March.*

*Aunt March: Because I'm rich.*

*Jo: So the only way to get married is to be rich?*

*Aunt March: yes (minutes 00:35:18-00:35:47)*

The dialogue shows the limitations of women. At that time there was no respectable way for women to make their own money except to open a brothel or perform on stage. Women's nature is to marry, become a male companion, and depend on men. Women's unequal position with men makes them not have the same opportunities. For example in terms of earning a living. There are not many jobs that can be done by women, even if there are stereotypes attached to women making the results of their work underestimated.

*In the field of education, men are favored so that women only need to study at home without going to school.*

*John: "Yes, women are more appropriate to study at home"*

*Meg: "Because schools for women suck."*

*John: "That's right" (minute 00:39:33-00:39:38)*

The conversation shows that there were limitations for women, women at that time did not go to school much, and also the quality was not very good, so it was better for women to study at home.

### ***3. The Importance of Personal Identity***

Friedan underscored the importance of personal identity for women beyond the roles of wife and mother. She championed the opportunity for women to pursue individually meaningful lives, including in the areas of work, education, and creativity.

According to Desmita (2005), "Self-identity is a recognition and feeling of confidence in an individual's identity that requires a long and complicated thinking process to become an "I" who is different from others around him to get meaning or meaning for his own life."

According to Marcia, "Self-identity includes exploration and commitment. Exploration is the period in which a person tries to explore various choices, and establishes and gives attention to these alternatives. Meanwhile, commitment refers



to making decisions about work or ideology, and determining various strategies to realize these decisions," Marcia (1993).

In the movie "Little Women" (2019) directed by Greta Gerwig, there are several scenes related to the personal identity of the main character, Jo March, which is also related to feminism.

The scene featuring a conversation between Jo and Beth at the minute (1:20:07 – 1:20:29):

*Jo: "The post office in the woods is a small-capital institution, and it thrives because lots of things come through here. Poems and pickles, music and gingerbread, invitations, nagging and even puppies."*

*Beth: Is this about us?*

*Jo: Right*

In this scene, Jo and Beth have a very close relationship and Jo shows how she struggles to maintain her identity as a writer while also maintaining a relationship with her sister. This shows how feminism can help women to maintain a balanced relationship with their careers and identity.

The scene that also displays the strong Personal Identity of the main character is also shown in the scene between Mr. Dashwood and Jo which is found at the minute (2:02:35 – 2:03:05):

*Mr. Dashwood: Honestly, I don't know why she didn't marry her neighbor.*

*Jo: Because his neighbor married his sister*

*Mr. Dashwood: Right, sure, then who did he marry?*

*Jo: Nobody, she married neither of them. Throughout the book, she said she didn't want to get married.*

This dialog proves how Jo is trying to fight to maintain her identity as a writer and does not want to be forced to succumb to traditional female roles. In this case, Jo shows how feminism can help women to maintain their independence and identity.

In the two scenes that researchers took, it shows that the personal identity that Jo March as the main character displays has a connection with Betty Friedan's theory of feminism. Jo March shows women's freedom through her desire to become a writer and fight to achieve equality with men in various aspects of life. This freedom is by Betty Friedan's theory, which emphasizes the importance of education and the role of women in society. Jo March also shows resistance to stereotypes and discrimination experienced by women in a patriarchal society, which is by Betty Friedan's theory which emphasizes that patriarchy is the source of women's oppression. Jo March shows openness and courage in striving to achieve goals and overcome limitations experienced by women. This openness is by Betty Friedan's theory which emphasizes that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men in various aspects of life, including education and career. Jo

March also shows that women do not have to be limited by stereotypes and can have the same goals and dreams as men, which is by Betty Friedan's theory which emphasizes that women should have equality with men in various aspects of life.

#### **4. Criticism of Consumer Culture**

Friedan also criticizes consumer culture that places value on material goods and images that often ignore the true needs and aspirations of women. For her, women's liberation also involved liberation from the pressures of unhealthy consumption.

According to Featherstone (2007), consumer culture has become part of the lifestyle of modern society which is driven by the desire to own, consume, and display goods as symbols of social status. According to Swanson (2014), Consumerism is an ideology that glorifies the consumption of goods that are less needed as a lifestyle.

In the film "Little Women" (2019), there are several scenes that depict consumerism. One standout is the scene when Meg March, one of the March sisters, decides to buy a pair of luxurious silk gloves despite her family's financial difficulties.

*Meg: The silk was the first big expense*

*Meg: I don't mean to waste your money, but I can't stand it when I see Sallie shopping as she pleases and feel sorry for me because I can't.*

*Meg: I try to feel satisfied, but it's hard (01:01:34-01:01:37)*

*Meg: And I'm tired of being poor (01:02:10 - 01:02:23)*

This scene depicts Meg's internal conflict between her desire to conform to a higher social status and her responsibility for her family's financial condition. This reflects the consumer nature, where someone prioritizes purchasing luxury goods to fulfill social or emotional urges, even though they are rationally unable or unnecessary.

#### **5. Solidarity between Women**

Friedan emphasized the importance of solidarity between women in fighting for their rights. She encouraged women to unite and support each other in their fight for equality and freedom.

In the film "Little Women" (2019) there are several scenes involving Jo March's brotherly solidarity with her four siblings. They support each other, both in words and actions.

*\_Amy: Why do some women have nice things and some don't (26.02 -26.04)*

*\_Beth: At least we have Dad, Mom, and each other. (26.04-26.05)*

In the clip, Beth shows solidarity between women by highlighting family relationships and support for each other as a source of strength, despite differences in ownership of goods or wealth. This emphasizes the importance of building sisterhood and support between women in society.

*Meg: If I had a lot of money and servants I wouldn't have to work anymore (26.09-26.12)*

*Jo: Or you could be a good actress. Not all women are depraved. (26.13 -26.15)*

In the trailer, Meg voices her desire to have enough wealth to never have to work again, highlighting a social aspiration that many people may have. However, Jo responded by providing a more empowering alternative, illustrating the potential and value of women in the arts industry, and rejecting the stereotype that success can only be achieved through material wealth. The message conveyed is about the importance of arousing aspirations and avoiding relying on happiness and success solely on material wealth.

*Amy: How about your music, Queen Bess? (26.36-26.37)*

*Beth: I just want to play music for us. Other people don't need to hear it (26.38-26.40)*

*Amy: You must not limit yourself (26.40-36.41)*

In the clip, Amy shows interest in the music played by Queen Bess, showing curiosity and appreciation for Beth's talents. Beth responded by stating that she just wanted to make music for their enjoyment, without caring about other people's opinions. Amy then suggests that Beth should not limit herself, implying that Beth's talents should be expressed and shared more widely. The message conveyed was about the importance of having the self-confidence to express talents and interests without thinking about other people's views but was also balanced with advice not to curb creative potential.

## **Discussion**

Feminism, as a social issue, has persisted throughout history, from ancient times to the present day. The struggles of early feminist pioneers continue to resonate in modern society, particularly evident in cultural representations such as Greta Gerwig's adaptation of "Little Women" (Gerwig, 2019). This film serves as a lens through which we can examine the ongoing challenges faced by women in a world still shaped by patriarchal structures. Sugihastuti's approach to feminism, which defines it as a movement for equality between men and women across various domains including politics, economics, education, and social spheres,

provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the feminist themes in "Little Women" (Sugihastuti & Suharto, 2015). This perspective allows us to identify and scrutinize how gender inequality manifests in the lives of the March sisters and the society they inhabit.

The film portrays several key feminist issues, chief among them being the societal expectation that women must marry to secure their future (Ali, 2024). This notion is particularly evident in the character of Amy March, who initially views marriage as an economic strategy rather than a romantic choice. Her pragmatic approach to marriage reflects the limited options available to women of her time and highlights the intersection of gender and economic inequality, a theme that resonates with Betty Friedan's critique of women's limited roles in society (Friedan, 2001). Another significant issue addressed in the film is the confinement of women to the domestic sphere. The expectation that women should primarily be caretakers of the home and family is challenged through the characters' varying aspirations and life choices. This aligns with Friedan's feminist theory, which critiqued the societal pressure on women to find fulfillment solely through marriage and domesticity (Friedan, 2001).

The film also explores the limitations placed on women's professional ambitions. Jo March's determination to become a writer serves as a powerful representation of a woman defying societal norms to pursue her passion. Her struggle to be taken seriously as an author reflects the broader challenges faced by women seeking to establish themselves in male-dominated fields, a theme that echoes throughout Alcott's original novel (Alcott, 2018) and is amplified in Gerwig's adaptation. Gerwig's adaptation delves into the complex relationship between marriage and personal autonomy. While some characters view marriage as a form of submission to societal expectations, others use it as a means to chart their path. This nuanced portrayal reflects the diverse ways in which women navigate and sometimes subvert patriarchal structures, a concept explored in depth by feminist theorists like bell hooks (hooks, 2015).

The theme of education and intellectual pursuit is another crucial aspect of the film's feminist narrative. The March sisters' varying educational experiences and aspirations highlight the importance of access to education in achieving gender equality. This theme resonates with both Sugihastuti's and Friedan's emphasis on education as a key component of women's emancipation (Sugihastuti & Suharto, 2015; Friedan, 2001). The film's exploration of women's economic dependence underscores a fundamental feminist issue. The financial constraints faced by the March family, and particularly the sisters' limited options for financial independence, illustrate the economic barriers that have historically hindered women's autonomy and continue to do so in many contexts today. This economic

aspect of gender inequality is a central concern in feminist theory, as highlighted by Hooks (2015) in her intersectional approach to feminism.

Jo, long celebrated as an emblem of nonconformity and feminist ideals, is portrayed in the film with nuanced depth that bridges 19th-century and 21st-century feminist discourse. The film's portrayal of Jo not only emphasizes her resistance to traditional gender roles but also explores her internal struggles with societal expectations, self-identity, and the conflict between artistic ambition and economic necessity. Gerwig's adaptation brings Jo's feminist struggle to the forefront, emphasizing her desire for independence, her rejection of conventional marriage, and her pursuit of creative fulfillment. These aspects of Jo's character are not merely historical reflections but resonate strongly with modern feminist ideals, making the film a powerful statement on the timelessness of women's struggles for autonomy and equality.

One of the most compelling elements of the film's feminist narrative is how it uses Jo's character to critique and subvert traditional gender norms. Throughout the film, Jo's rebellion against the societal expectations placed on women is portrayed not just as a personal quirk but as a deliberate and thoughtful stance against the limitations imposed on her because of her gender. The film underscores this by emphasizing moments where Jo confronts the constraints of her time, such as her frustration with the limited career opportunities available to women or her resistance to the notion that marriage is a woman's ultimate goal. These struggles are highlighted in the film through poignant dialogues and narrative choices that reflect Gerwig's modern feminist perspective, offering audiences a critical lens through which to view Jo's actions and decisions. This approach invites viewers to consider the broader implications of Jo's rebellion, connecting her personal journey to ongoing conversations about gender equality and women's rights.

Moreover, the film's non-linear narrative structure plays a significant role in deepening the feminist themes, particularly in how it portrays the evolution of Jo's character. By juxtaposing scenes of Jo's youthful exuberance and defiance with those of her more mature, reflective self, the film illustrates the complexities of her feminist journey. This narrative technique allows the audience to see the lasting impact of societal pressures on Jo's sense of self and her creative aspirations. The scenes where Jo negotiates her writing career, grappling with the commercial realities of publishing, serve as a powerful commentary on the intersection of gender, economics, and creativity. This aspect of the film highlights the enduring relevance of feminist critiques of capitalism and the commodification of women's work. Through Jo's experiences, the film not only reaffirms her role as a feminist icon but also engages with contemporary issues such as the challenges women face

in achieving professional recognition and the ongoing struggle for gender parity in creative industries.

Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019) offers a richly layered exploration of feminism through the character of Jo March, blending historical context with modern sensibilities to create a narrative that speaks to both past and present feminist concerns. The film's portrayal of Jo as a multifaceted character who challenges traditional gender roles and navigates the complexities of self-identity and creative expression is a testament to the enduring power of Alcott's original narrative, as well as the relevance of its feminist themes in today's society. Gerwig's "Little Women" (2019) also touches on the concept of female solidarity and collective action. The support and encouragement the March sisters provide each other, as well as the guidance of their mother Marmee, demonstrate the power of women uplifting each other in the face of societal constraints. This aspect of the film aligns with feminist theories that emphasize the importance of women's networks and collective action in challenging patriarchal norms, a concept that has roots in Alcott's original work (Alcott, 2018) and continues to be relevant in contemporary feminist discourse (hooks, 2015).

### *Women's Liberation from Traditional Roles*

Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, published in 1963, was a groundbreaking work that critically examined the stifling domestic roles assigned to women in mid-20th-century America. Friedan's analysis revealed the widespread dissatisfaction among women who were relegated to the roles of housewives and mothers, highlighting a pervasive sense of unfulfillment and confinement. She argued that this domestic ideal was not only restrictive but also detrimental to women's personal development and societal progress. Friedan's call for women's liberation emphasized the need for equal opportunities in careers, education, and personal growth, challenging the notion that women's ultimate fulfillment was found solely within the confines of home and family life.

In this context, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868) precedes Friedan's critique but anticipates many of the themes central to the feminist movement that Friedan would later articulate. The character of Jo March is a vivid embodiment of the desire to break free from traditional gender roles. Jo's rejection of societal expectations is a powerful reflection of the themes that Friedan would later champion. Unlike the typical female characters of her time who are often portrayed as submissive and content with their domestic roles, Jo is depicted as fiercely independent, ambitious, and determined to forge her own path. Her character challenges the conventional norms of the 19th century by aspiring to become a

successful writer, a profession that was largely dominated by men and considered unsuitable for women.

Jo's resistance to traditional roles is evident in several key aspects of her character. She defies societal expectations by rejecting marriage as the ultimate goal for women and instead prioritizes her career and personal aspirations. Her choice to pursue writing and her subsequent struggles with the literary world reflect a deep-seated desire for intellectual and creative fulfillment that transcends the limitations of domesticity. Jo's character embodies the spirit of women's liberation by questioning and ultimately rejecting the notion that a woman's worth is tied to her role within the home. This aspect of Jo's character resonates with Friedan's arguments about the need for women to explore opportunities beyond traditional domestic roles.

Furthermore, Jo's character serves as a precursor to the feminist ideals of self-determination and equal opportunity that would become central to later feminist movements. Her story illustrates the challenges faced by women who sought to redefine their roles in society and highlights the barriers imposed by societal norms. By presenting Jo as a complex, multidimensional character who grapples with both personal and societal expectations, Alcott provides a nuanced portrayal of women's struggle for liberation. Jo's journey mirrors the broader feminist struggle for equal opportunities and recognition, echoing the themes that Friedan would later address in her work.

Jo's dialogue, "But I'm working on a novel" (21:44-21:46), is a clear assertion of her refusal to conform to the traditional female role. She acknowledges her desire to contribute to her family's finances through her writing, challenging the notion that a woman's place is solely in the home. Jo's ambition and determination to become a writer despite societal pressures reflect Friedan's call for women to seek fulfillment beyond domesticity. This liberation is further emphasized in a conversation with Marmee, where Jo challenges the idea that marriage is the only respectable path to financial stability for women. Jo's rejection of this notion highlights her refusal to be bound by societal expectations, as she believes in honorable work that does not compromise her independence. Through Jo, the film illustrates Friedan's argument that women should not be confined to traditional roles and that they have the right to pursue their dreams and aspirations, regardless of societal norms.

### *Lack of Personal Freedom*

Friedan also critiqued the lack of personal freedom women experienced, often being confined to roles that restricted their autonomy and self-determination. In *\*Little Women\**, Jo's struggles vividly illustrate this point. Jo expresses frustration

over her inability to participate in activities traditionally reserved for men, such as fighting in the war, when she says, "I want to fight with him. I'm disappointed to be a girl" (14:38-14:50). This statement encapsulates the limitations placed on women during that era, reflecting the societal belief that women were unfit for roles outside the domestic sphere. Jo's disappointment highlights the lack of freedom women had to pursue their passions and interests.

The conversation between Jo and Aunt March further explores this theme, as Aunt March asserts that a woman's success depends on marrying a wealthy man, reinforcing the idea that women are dependent on men for their social and economic status. Jo's response, "I intend to succeed on my own," is a powerful declaration of her desire for personal freedom and independence, rejecting the notion that her success should be tied to marriage. This dialogue underscores the film's critique of the societal constraints that limit women's freedom and reinforce their subordinate position. The film also addresses the lack of educational opportunities for women, as seen in the exchange between John and Meg. John's statement that "women are more appropriate to study at home" reflects the belief that women's education was not as valuable as men's. Meg's frustration with the poor quality of women's education highlights the systemic barriers women faced in accessing knowledge and opportunities, reinforcing their limited personal freedom.

### *The Importance of Personal Identity*

Friedan emphasized the importance of women developing their personal identity beyond the roles of wife and mother. She advocated for women to explore their individuality and pursue their passions and interests. Jo March's character is a prime example of this quest for personal identity. In a conversation with Beth, Jo discusses the significance of their "post office in the woods," which symbolizes Jo's creative space and personal identity as a writer. This scene underscores Jo's commitment to her craft and her desire to carve out a space for herself outside of traditional roles. Jo's dedication to her writing and her refusal to conform to societal expectations reflect Friedan's belief that women should pursue their passions and develop their identity beyond the confines of domestic life.

Another key moment is Jo's conversation with Mr. Dashwood, where she firmly states that her character, based on herself, "didn't want to get married." This statement is a powerful assertion of Jo's personal identity and her resistance to traditional gender roles. By choosing to remain unmarried and focus on her writing, Jo embodies Friedan's vision of a woman who defines herself by her ambitions and talents, rather than her marital status.



Jo's journey of self-discovery and her determination to maintain her identity as a writer, despite societal pressures, aligns with Friedan's call for women to explore their individuality and pursue their dreams. The film celebrates Jo's personal identity as a writer and her resistance to the roles imposed on her by society, making a strong case for the importance of self-fulfillment and personal autonomy.

### *Criticism of Consumer Culture*

Friedan was critical of the consumer culture that often pressured women to conform to certain ideals through the acquisition of material goods. She believed that true liberation involved freeing oneself from these superficial values. *Little Women* addresses this theme through the character of Meg March, who struggles with the allure of consumerism. Meg's desire to buy luxurious silk gloves despite her family's financial difficulties highlights the tension between material aspirations and practical responsibilities. Her internal conflict reflects the pressure women face to conform to societal expectations of beauty and status through consumerism. Meg's dissatisfaction with her financial situation and her envy of those who can afford luxury goods illustrate the impact of consumer culture on women's self-worth and identity.

In *Little Women*, Louisa May Alcott subtly addresses the theme of consumer culture through the character of Meg March. Meg's struggle with the allure of materialism highlights the tension between financial realities and societal expectations. Her desire to purchase luxurious silk gloves, despite her family's financial constraints, symbolizes the broader societal pressure on women to align their self-worth and identity with material possessions. Meg's internal conflict between her yearning for these luxuries and her practical responsibilities underscores a critical examination of how consumer culture influences women's perceptions of themselves and their status.

Meg's envy of those who can afford luxury items and her sense of dissatisfaction with her own financial situation reflect a deeper commentary on the impact of consumer culture on women's self-esteem and identity. Alcott portrays Meg as a character who, despite her admirable qualities and strong familial bonds, is not immune to the pressures of societal expectations. Her longing for elegant items and her occasional frustration over her family's modest means illustrate how consumer culture can create a divide between personal desires and practical realities. This internal struggle exemplifies Friedan's critique, highlighting how the pursuit of material goods can lead to a sense of inadequacy and discontent.

Furthermore, Meg's character arc illustrates the broader societal implications of consumer culture. As she matures, Meg gradually comes to terms with her financial situation and learns to value her family's love and support over material possessions. This transformation signifies a critical shift away from the superficial values promoted by consumer culture towards a more genuine appreciation of what constitutes true happiness and fulfillment. Through Meg's journey, Alcott offers a nuanced critique of how consumerism can shape women's aspirations and self-worth, aligning with Friedan's argument that true liberation involves rejecting superficial values and embracing more substantive goals.

The film critiques this consumer culture by portraying Meg's realization that true fulfillment does not come from material possessions but from meaningful relationships and self-acceptance. This aligns with Friedan's belief that women's liberation requires breaking free from the pressures of consumerism and finding value in oneself beyond material goods.

### *Solidarity Between Women*

Finally, Friedan emphasized the importance of solidarity among women in their fight for equality and freedom. *Little Women* highlights this theme through the strong bonds between the March sisters. The scenes where the sisters support each other, both emotionally and financially, illustrate the power of female solidarity. Beth's reminder to Amy that they have each other, even if they lack material wealth, emphasizes the importance of sisterhood and mutual support. Jo's encouragement of Meg to pursue her acting aspirations, rather than conforming to societal expectations, further underscores the film's message of women supporting one another in their personal and professional endeavors.

This solidarity is crucial in the context of Friedan's feminism, as it emphasizes the collective strength of women in challenging societal norms and pursuing their rights. The film celebrates the bonds between the March sisters as a source of empowerment and resilience, highlighting the importance of women uniting in their struggle for equality.

The character of Jo March embodies key aspects of Friedan's feminist critique, including the liberation from traditional roles, the struggle for personal freedom, the importance of personal identity, the critique of consumer culture, and the solidarity between women. Through Jo's journey, the film not only reflects the challenges women face but also celebrates their resilience, autonomy, and the enduring power of sisterhood. By portraying characters who both conform to and challenge societal expectations, the film invites viewers to reflect on the progress made in women's rights while acknowledging the work that remains to be done. The relevance of

these themes to modern audiences underscores the ongoing nature of the feminist movement and the importance of continually striving for gender equality across all spheres of life, as emphasized by feminist scholars from Friedan to Hooks and contemporary theorists like Sugihastuti.

## CONCLUSION

In the film "Little Women" (2019) by Greta Gerwig, the depiction of the main characters as feminist figures is the main highlight, depicting their struggle to pursue liberation from restrictive social norms. Gerwig succeeded in showing the diversity of female identities through March's characters who struggle to achieve freedom and fulfillment without being bound by traditional expectations. This analysis through the lens of Betty Friedan reveals how Gerwig's adaptation confronts the complexity of women's identities and challenges conventional gender roles, in line with Friedan's call for women's liberation.

Through Betty Friedan's thoughts, this analysis strengthens the understanding of the importance of women's liberation from restrictive traditional roles, the lack of personal freedom they often face, as well as the importance of personal identity and criticism of consumer culture which influences views of women. Solidarity between women is also emphasized as a key element in fighting for women's rights and freedoms. Thus, "Little Women" (2019) is not only a tribute to the feminist spirit but also a call to continue fighting for equality and freedom for all women.

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