

# Analyzing The Marriage and Love View of The Film "*Little Women*" From the Perspective of Feminism

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**Abstract.** Contemporary women often encounter problems in their views on marriage and love, such as materialization of selection criteria, lack of spiritual support in love, and lack of unity between love and marriage, thus being unable to have the ideal love or marriage. This study aims to explore the marriage experiences, concepts, and inspirations of Meg, Jo, and Amy in the movie "*Little Women*", and provide new solutions and methods to address the aforementioned issues faced by women in their views on marriage. Based on Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, this study concludes that contemporary women should be more inclined to choose partners who can meet their spiritual needs in their views on marriage and love, and establish their material selection standards. At the same time, they should establish the concept that marriage and love cannot be separated, to achieve their ideal love and marriage. This study has practical significance in proposing reasonable suggestions to address the issues above.

**Keywords:** "*Little Women*"; views on marriage and love; feminism; Louisa May Alcott.

## 1. Introduction

There is no clear definition of the concept of marriage and love in the academic community, and its concepts vary in different cultural backgrounds [1]. The author of this article defines the concept of marriage and love as the mutual admiration and choice exhibited by both sexes or same-sex individuals out of love or marriage, which includes views on love, marriage, and sexuality. This study focuses on the problems that contemporary women often encounter in their views on marriage and love, such as materialization of selection criteria, lack of spiritual support in love, and lack of unity between love and marriage, making it impossible for them to have the ideal love or marriage. This study has practical significance in proposing reasonable suggestions to address the issues above. This study mainly focuses on the marriage and love experiences, concepts, and inspirations for the audience of Meg, Jo, and Amy in the movie "*Little Women*". On this basis, the literature analysis method was used to search and read the movie "*Little Women*", the original book, other related books, and movie reviews. The advantage of this method lies in its ability to analyze in detail the specific manifestations of the problems encountered by women in their views on marriage and love, as well as the different opinions and solutions of different people towards the above problems, which is conducive to the conduct of this study. The ultimate goal of this study is to address the issues that women face in their views on marriage and love, such as materialization of selection criteria, lack of spiritual support in love, and lack of unity between love and marriage. Starting from the new perspective of the movie "*Little Women*", the aim is to provide new solutions and methods for this issue. To achieve the goal use Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory as the basis, combined with the development status of feminism and views on marriage and love, to analyze the solutions to the above-mentioned problems faced by the three women in the movie "*Little Women*", and inspire for contemporary women to solve these problems.

## 2. Feminism and the Current Development of Marriage and Love

Feminism, also known as Womanism, is a critique of social relationships. The purpose of feminist theory is to understand the essence of inequality and focus on sexual politics, power relations, and

sexual consciousness. Feminism focuses on addressing occupational discrimination, wage inequality with men, workplace sexual harassment, as well as issues such as gender bias and domestic violence that women, as a vulnerable group, face in society.

With the rapid development of the internet in contemporary society, information flow has become very fast and convenient, and more and more contemporary women are choosing "fast food love" ('Fast food love' is a popular modern way of dating, characterized by a short cycle of mutual understanding and rapid entry into a romantic relationship. However, after the novelty wears off, it may quickly break up. The reason behind this phenomenon is that people often pursue a new sense of freshness and excitement, rather than a deep emotional understanding of the other party.) fewer people choose to spend a long-time walking into the other person's heart, truly becoming spiritual companions. The public is also increasingly valuing the improvement of material living standards and pursuing the enjoyment brought by money. In such a materialistic society, many contemporary women will lose their standards for measuring the value of money, be blinded by material possessions, and fall into feelings that are not true love. In addition, with the increasing divorce rate in contemporary times, more and more women believe that marital relationships are difficult to maintain. Some choose not to get married, while others choose marriages that lack love. And this is ignoring the unity of love and marriage. The increase in divorce rate also indirectly reflects that marriages without love are unstable.

### 3. Literature Review

Although many scholars at home and abroad have analyzed this novel from the perspectives of transcendentalism, feminism, cultural studies, etc., few scholars have analyzed it from the perspective of marriage and love. Some scholars have focused their research on the author of *Little Women*, while others believe that this novel is a growth story. Wang Lujin praised Alcott as the son of nature. She believed that if Alcott did not feel the spiritual nourishment bestowed upon him by nature, he would not be able to write about the March family who were so close to nature. Alcott is in a period of alternating new ideas and old consciousness, and her works stand out, particularly in the historical and cultural context. Bildungsroman is an important genre of American literature that extends from family roles to career, social status, and culture. Zhao Peiyu analyzed the growth process of the four sisters, believed that they had gradually grown from naive girls to fully self-aware, self-reliant women, and praised their growing process of unremitting struggle [2]. At the same time, Zhou Ling also interpreted the growing process of small women as sisters and called on women to be independent, self-respecting, and strive for equal status with men [3]. Transcendentalism was proposed by Emerson in the 19th century and is the most important component of Americanism, having a significant impact on American humanism. Li Chunhui believes that the four sisters of March adhere to their spirit and never give up even in adversity, which is the embodiment of transcendentalism [4]. Transcendentalists place great emphasis on individualism, independence, and human subjectivity, while also promoting the unity of humans, nature, and God. Wang Jie pointed out that the March family has been constantly comforted by nature, and the four sisters of March have therefore willed to maintain a harmonious coexistence relationship with nature [5]. Feminism is a widely used analytical method in many work reviews. The four female protagonists in the novel emphasize individualism and have been trying to break away from traditional concepts and customs. As Yang Shumeng said, *Little Women* conveys advanced feminist views, builds women's authority, and establishes a supportive female community [6]. In Ding Xiaoxia's paper, he praised the qualities of women's freedom in small women who conform to the traditional values of patriarchal society and have a female consciousness that yearns for equal rights [7]. Some critics have commented on this novel from the perspective of traditional American culture, which presents a phenomenon of social life in the 19th century. This is a period of social transformation in American society, where ideologies such as radicalism and conservatism, nostalgia and innovation, tradition and progress are intertwined throughout the entire historical period. Huang Yuegui believes that by comparing

arrogance and prejudice with *Little Women*, it can be seen that traditional American culture is a replica of British cultural tradition. However, as the United States has been separated from British media for a longer time, various changes have occurred in politics, economy, lifestyle, etc., which has led to significant changes in the values of both countries [8]. Tan Yanju believes that in the unique multicultural background of the United States, due to the protagonist's unique historical period and the influence of the social environment, specific values have emerged, which have influenced and constrained women's growth paths [9]. Although many scholars at home and abroad have interpreted this work from multiple perspectives, few have analyzed it from the perspective of marriage and love. This study aims to supplement existing research gaps by combining Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory with feminism, analyzing the psychological and behavioral views of the female protagonists in *Little Women*, to guide modern women in making choices in their daily lives.

#### **4. Louisa May Alcott and the *Little Woman***

Louisa May Alcott was born in 1832 as the second daughter of the famous transcendentalist writer Amos Bronson Alcott and Abigail May Alcott. During her childhood, she lived a life of asceticism with her parents, embracing transcendental ideals. In 1834, the Alcott family moved to Boston, where Louisa's father established an experimental school. The family had close ties with famous transcendentalist colleagues such as Emerson and Thoreau. As she grew older, Alcott became an abolitionist and feminist. In 1868, she published her most famous work, "*Little Women*," which was based on her childhood experiences and tells the story of four daughters in a family pursuing their dreams during the American Civil War. The fame and wealth that this novel brought to Alcott changed her family's impoverished situation in one fell swoop, and it was later adapted into cartoons, movies, and TV dramas multiple times. In 2019, Greta Javi once again brought it to the big screen. Alcott also created multiple sequels for *Little Women*, including *Good Wives* and *Little Men*.

#### **5. The Four Sisters' Views on Marriage from a Feminist Perspective**

##### **5.1. Meg's View of Marriage**

From Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, in addition to the first level of physiological needs and the second level of security needs, good family, friendship and love relationships can meet the third level of social needs. The need to belong and love refers to the individual's desire to have a good relationship with people and to have a place in their group and family. The need for belonging and love is the third level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, he recognized that needs are interconnected and influence each other. Higher-level needs arise only after the lower level of need fulfillment is largely satisfied or partially satisfied. As mentioned in an ancient Chinese book, Guan Zi, "When granary is full of food, one understands propriety; when the clothes are sufficient, one understands honor and shame." Lower needs are never in opposition to higher needs. The need for love and belonging is also a type of social need, a higher level of human need. After Meg's basic needs, which are safety and physiological needs, are met, she develops higher needs. She longed for the love and approval of others and wanted to have a sense of presence and belonging in society. Meg, the eldest of the *Little Women*, chose to marry Mr. Brooke, and they had two children. The family's poverty made it necessary for Meg to live very frugally and buying a fifty-dollar piece of fabric put a great deal of financial strain on the family. Perhaps forming a family with Mr. Brooke could not bring her the need for respect, and the need for higher status and fame, but having the sense of belonging and security of a family brought Meg a truly happy and fulfilling life. In contrast, some young girls today would rather cry on a BMW than sit on a bicycle and laugh. If they are unable to reap the benefits of self and love from a marriage relationship, then higher needs will only turn them into marionettes. It is as if Mrs. March had said, "I would rather that you should be the wives of poor people who have happiness and love in abundance, than queens who have no self-respect and no peace of mind."

## 5.2. Jo's View of Marriage

As time passes, it is as if the sisters have left their families of origin and have lives of their own. This sense of kinship estrangement is intensified after her sister Meg marries. Using Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs to look at Jo, who has always believed that relationships and marriage are a prison that binds the freedom of the individual woman, she is adamant that she will not marry for money but will instead go after freedom and uniqueness of the individual, a career in writing, and a soul that resonates highly with her own. Jo leaps to the fifth level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, the need for self-actualization, and she continues to explore her abilities and potential and find her self-worth in her writing. The need for self-actualization refers to the need for people to pursue the realization and perfection of their abilities or potential. Self-actualization needs are the highest level of needs, and Maslow believed that the need for self-actualization is based on the desire of the self, a desire to persist in perfecting the self and achieving a better self. People in the stage of self-actualization needs will try every method and make every effort to exploit their potential to realize their value. Jo doesn't have sexual intimacy and love like Meg. Jo wanted someone to read her works and have a spiritual level of attachment to him, but this process of creating alone was even longer and more torturous. Jo has not lost sight of the unity of love and marriage, which is one of the reasons why she is afraid to step into love, but the cage will eventually backfire and shackle the ability to love freely.

Secondly, in Jo's fourth level of needs, she is very confident, has her ideas and opinions, and is also very stubborn and emotional. The fourth level of respect needs, it includes self-esteem needs and other-esteem needs, which means respecting oneself as well as being respected by others. When she wrote an essay and thought her essay was good, she was pointed out by Fredrich for her shortcomings, which touched her pride and self-confidence and made her feel humiliated and unjustly treated. It is evident in this that Jo's self-confidence and self-recognition are also easily influenced and unstable by outside influences. This can also be seen in the fact that Jo is ashamed of writing sensationalist fiction and asks to remain anonymous as an editor at *The Daily Volcano* and that Jo's practice of skipping the stabilizing intermediate-stage needs (i.e., the third level of socialization and the fourth level of respect) to go for the highest level of self-actualization will make it very difficult for her to thrive. Therefore, one can see that for women in the present age, the marriage relationship is only a part of the third layer of needs, and this kind of need in most cases, compared with the family, friendship, and so on is more difficult to satisfy, so the contemporary women should not put the sense of belonging to all in the marriage relationship. In conjunction with the Status Expectancy Theory, the entry of both genders into gender-mixed target dynamics groups reduce women's self-efficacy, prestige, and power in group interactions because the group's expectations of men are higher than those of women. In a contemporary patriarchal society, it is more difficult for women to gain respect for their needs than for men, and this can prevent women from pursuing higher levels of self-potential and cognitive exploration. Women's adult needs for honor, status, dignity, and self-confidence are mostly acquired in the workplace, but marriage can have a significant impact on this. From role theory, one can see that women have dual role conflicts at home and at work. In the event of a conflict between these two roles, women's work roles are often subordinated to their family roles, thus depriving them of a large number of opportunities for work and promotion, resulting in a lower motivation for women to pursue their careers, and thus affecting women's access to the fourth level of needs. In this case, women will shift more focus and energy to the third level of needs with the family marriage and children, but also gradually put their lives in the family, thus losing the pursuit of true self-worth. The increase in cheating and divorce rates in society nowadays will also break the socialization needs of many women, which in turn provides the possibility for women to get a higher level of needs. But in the overall economic downturn, with companies drastically downsizing and women at a disadvantage in the workplace, it seems that women's quest for the fourth level of need has always been the main conflict, and marriage will merely exacerbate this conflict.

### 5.3. Amy's View of Marriage

Amy was the youngest yet had the most acute awareness of the reality of her family's poverty and decay than all of her sisters. The family struggled to make ends meet on the meager salary of his father, who was a pastor, and on the dilapidated ancestral property. So, in terms of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, Amy's need for respect was never met. The need for respect is the need for self-esteem and self-love based on self-evaluation and the expectation of recognition by others, groups, and society. Once the need for respect becomes a driving force, it fills people with positive energy. The need for respect enables people to experience the usefulness and value of their existence and makes them enthusiastic about everything around them. Amy's late awakening of self-awareness and her previous unmet need for respect prompt Amy to strive and fight for self-respect and other-respect, and ultimately to experience the ultimate feeling that comes from having her need for respect met. In the early days, she had longed to marry a rich man, to be free from poverty, and to make marriage the security of her life. As Zhang Lu mentioned: women can only depend on rich and powerful men to lead a decent life [10]. Amy said to Laurie: You always knew I wouldn't marry a poor man. She believed that only by marrying a rich man could she completely turn things around and make a good life for her family. However, when she finally made her choice, she chose Laurie. She realized that the standard of marriage based on property is not the right one but should be based on love so that even if you live in poverty, you can still get the true love of life and reap the rewards of a fulfilling family and a happy life. Amy's ideas are also appropriate today, as the current social environment promotes women's rights and has created an illusory aura of 'women are strong and can do anything'. As long as women want to start their own business, or go to the workplace to fight, they will feel that the so-called social environment friendly to women's employment and entrepreneurship are all illusory. In contrast, marrying a rich man is the easiest shortcut of all. Of course, it's about choosing the person you love and not just looking at money, like Amy she still followed her heart and chose Laurie, who she has had a crush on since childhood, out of two very rich men. In China, it is often said that "marriage is a woman's second birth". Although in contemporary terms, putting one's life hopes on others is depriving women of their freedom, it has some truth to it, which is summarized by the practice of thousands of women.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings of this study are that women should be more inclined to choose a partner who can satisfy their spiritual needs in their view of marriage and establish their material selection criteria, and at the same time set up the concept that marriage and love cannot be separated, to be able to realize the ideal relationship and marriage. This study provides a new direction for the study of the female image in *Little Women*, which is to pay attention to women's views on marriage and love and to provide practical help for contemporary women in the choice of love and marriage. Future research should focus more on different types of contemporary women, such as female college students, women in the workplace, unemployed women, etc., to study their views on marriage and put forward reasonable suggestions on the problems they encounter in their views on marriage and love.

## Authors Contribution

All the authors contributed equally, and their names were listed in alphabetical order.

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