

An Analysis of Women's Ambition in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women Film: A Liberal Feminist Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the representation of women's ambition in Little Women (2019) using a liberal feminist approach. The research focuses on four main aspects: individual freedom, equality of opportunity, rejection of gender stereotypes, and empowerment of education. This study employs a qualitative descriptive method, with data collected from selected scenes and dialogues in the film. The findings reveal that a total of 20 data were identified and classified into the four categories. Individual freedom emerges as the most dominant aspect with 7 data (35%), indicating that the film strongly emphasizes women's autonomy in making personal life choices. Equality of opportunity and rejection of gender stereotypes each account for 5 data (25%), reflecting the limitations faced by women in accessing economic and professional opportunities, as well as their resistance toward traditional gender roles. Meanwhile, empowerment of education appears as the least dominant aspect with 3 data (15%), suggesting that although education contributes to women's development, it is not the central focus of the film. In conclusion, Little Women portrays women's ambition as a dynamic struggle between personal aspirations and societal constraints, highlighting the importance of autonomy, equal opportunities, and the rejection of restrictive gender norms

INTRODUCTION

Literature is broadly understood as a form of artistic expression that reflects human experiences, social realities, and ideological constructions through language and narrative structures. According to Terry Eagleton (2008), literature is not merely imaginative writing but a socially constructed category shaped by cultural values and interpretative practices, meaning that literary works function as sites where power, identity, and ideology are negotiated. Similarly, Rene Wellek and Austin Warren (1949) argue that literature represents life through aesthetic organization, enabling readers to examine moral, psychological, and social dimensions of human existence. Traditionally, literary works are categorized into major genres such as poetry, prose, and drama; however, contemporary literary studies have expanded to include film as a narrative text because film combines visual, verbal, and symbolic elements to construct meaning. As an audio-visual medium, film not only entertains but also represents cultural values and ideological tensions embedded in society. Louis Giannetti (2014) explains that film externalizes internal conflicts through cinematic techniques such as *mise-en-scène*, dialogue, and characterization, allowing audiences to interpret psychological and social struggles in a more concrete form. Therefore, film can be analyzed as a literary text since it presents structured narratives, complex characters, and thematic concerns comparable to conventional literary genres. In this regard, cinematic adaptations of literary works become particularly significant because they reinterpret textual narratives into visual representations, enabling new perspectives on themes such as gender, identity, and ambition within specific socio-cultural contexts.

Feminism as a theoretical framework seeks to examine and challenge the systemic inequalities experienced by women within patriarchal societies. According to Bell Hooks (2000), feminism is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression, emphasizing structural transformation rather than individual complaint. Among the various branches of feminist theory, liberal feminism represents one of the earliest and most foundational perspectives, emerging prominently in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* argued that women are rational beings who deserve equal access to education and intellectual development, while John Stuart Mill (1869) in *The Subjection of Women* advocated legal and political equality between men and women. In the twentieth century, Betty Friedan (1963) further criticized the confinement of women to domestic roles and called for women's participation in the public and professional spheres. Liberal feminism therefore centers on principles such as equality of opportunity, individual rights, access to education, economic independence, and freedom of choice within existing social institutions rather than radical structural overthrow. Contemporary scholars argue that liberal feminism remains relevant in analyzing how women negotiate ambition and self-realization within institutional limitations (Tong, 2009; Walters, 2005). In the context of literary and film studies, liberal feminism provides a framework to examine how female characters pursue intellectual, professional, and personal

ambitions while confronting social expectations that attempt to restrict their autonomy.

Film, as a modern narrative medium, functions not only as entertainment but also as a cultural text that reflects and constructs social ideology, including gender roles and expectations. According to Robert Stam (2000), films should be understood as a complex signifying system that communicates meaning through visual language, narrative structure, and socio historical context. Through characterization, dialogue, and plot development, Films often reproduce or challenge dominant discourses within society. One significant example is *Little Women*, directed by Greta Gerwig and adapted from the novel by Louisa May Alcott (1868). The film portrays the lives of the four March sisters Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy who navigate love, economic hardship, creativity, and personal aspiration in a nineteenth century patriarchal society. Among them, Jo March emerges as a central figure whose ambition to become a professional writer challenges traditional expectations of marriage and domesticity. The film presents women not merely as passive figures confined to private spheres but as individuals negotiating autonomy, intellectual growth, and economic independence. Through its non-linear narrative structure and dialogic emphasis on authorship and ownership, the film foregrounds questions of female agency and self-determination, making it particularly relevant to be analyzed through the lens of liberal feminism. Thus, *Little Women* provides a rich cinematic representation of women's ambition within social constraints, positioning it as a significant object of study in feminist literary and Film criticism.

Women's ambition, within feminist discourse, is not merely understood as the desire for personal success but as a conscious negotiation against structural limitations imposed by patriarchal ideology. Historically, ambition has often been coded as a masculine trait, while women were socially conditioned to prioritize domesticity, marriage, and emotional labor over intellectual or professional achievement. According to Simone de Beauvoir (1949), women are socially constructed as "the Other," positioned in relation to male subjectivity, which limits their capacity to define themselves independently. Liberal feminist thinkers argue that ambition becomes a crucial site of resistance because it reflects women's demand for equal access to education, authorship, economic participation, and self-determination within public spheres. Naomi Wolf (1991) further explains that cultural expectations often discipline women's confidence and aspiration, creating internal conflicts between societal approval and personal fulfillment. In literary and cinematic representations, women's ambition frequently appears as a tension between marriage and career, love and autonomy, conformity and individuality. From a liberal feminist perspective, ambition is therefore linked to the principle of equal opportunity and individual liberty, emphasizing that women should possess the same freedom as men to pursue intellectual recognition, financial independence, and creative authority. In the context of *Little Women*, ambition becomes a central thematic force, particularly through the character of Jo March, whose aspiration to become a writer reflects both personal desire and ideological resistance against restrictive gender norms. Consequently, analyzing women's ambition through liberal

feminism allows this study to explore how female agency is constructed, challenged, and negotiated within nineteenth-century social structures as represented in the film.

One pivotal dialogue in *Little Women* that explicitly reveals women's ambition occurs in a conversation between Jo March and Marmee (01:43:45) :



Jo: "Women, they have minds, and they have souls, as well as just hearts."

Marmee: "You are not angry with Laurie?"

Jo: "No... I'm angry nearly every day of my life." Marmee: "But with what?"

Jo: "With the way our lives are arranged. Women, they've got ambition, and they've got talent, as well as just beauty. And I'm so sick of people saying that love is all a woman is fit for."

This statement is delivered after Jo rejects Laurie's marriage proposal, a moment that intensifies her awareness of the restrictive social expectations imposed on women. Contextually, the dialogue reflects Jo's realization that marriage is socially constructed as the primary fulfillment of a woman's life, while intellectual ambition and professional aspiration are often marginalized. From a liberal feminist perspective, her declaration represents resistance toward patriarchal ideology that confines women to domestic and emotional roles. As argued by Betty Friedan (1963), the cultural expectation that women should find complete satisfaction in marriage and motherhood suppresses their intellectual and professional potential. Likewise, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) contends that women's subordination stems from limited access to education and public participation rather than natural inferiority. Jo's assertion that women possess "ambition" and "talent" therefore aligns with liberal feminism's emphasis on rational equality and individual autonomy. Consequently, this dialogue functions not merely as personal frustration but as an ideological articulation of women's ambition as a legitimate pursuit of equality and self determination within a patriarchal social order. Greta Gerwig's 2019 adaptation of *Little Women* serves as a significant object of study because it reinterprets textual narratives into visual representations, offering new perspectives on ambition within nineteenth-century patriarchal society. Central to this narrative is Jo March, whose ambition to become a professional writer reflects both personal desire and ideological resistance against restrictive gender norms. Within feminist

discourse, ambition is understood as a conscious negotiation against structural limitations. By using liberal feminism as a theoretical framework – which centers on principles of equality of opportunity, individual rights, and autonomy – this study examines how female agency is constructed and challenged within the film's social structures.

Several previous studies have examined women's ambition and gender representation in film and literary adaptations, although with different theoretical perspectives and analytical focuses. A recent study by Putri et al. (2025) in *Jurnal Onoma* analyzes female ambition in *The Queen's Gambit* using Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, concluding that modern women's ambition is closely related to self-actualization and social recognition; however, the research frames ambition primarily through humanistic psychology rather than feminist ideology. Other scholars have explored *Little Women* through perspectives such as gender discrimination, identity formation, and intersectionality, emphasizing how female characters negotiate societal pressures but without specifically grounding the analysis in liberal feminist principles of equal rights and institutional reform. Additionally, several studies on *Little Women* adaptations focus on narrative structure, sisterhood, and romantic ideology rather than on ambition as a political claim to intellectual and professional equality. While these studies contribute valuable insights into gender representation, they tend to either approach ambition psychologically or discuss feminism in broader or radical terms without isolating liberal feminism as the central analytical framework. Therefore, although women's struggles and aspirations have been widely discussed, there remains limited research that explicitly analyzes women's ambition in *Little Women* through the lens of liberal feminism by systematically connecting dialogue, characterization, and socio-historical constraints to liberal feminist concepts such as equality of opportunity, autonomy, and economic independence.

Based on the previous studies discussed above, it can be observed that research on women's ambition has generally been approached from psychological, sociological, or broad feminist perspectives; however, there is still limited scholarly attention that specifically examines women's ambition in *Little Women* through the framework of liberal feminism as a focused theoretical lens. While earlier studies have highlighted themes such as gender discrimination, identity formation, sisterhood, and self-actualization, they tend to treat ambition either as a psychological drive or as a general feminist struggle without systematically connecting it to liberal feminist principles such as equality of rights, access to education, economic independence, and individual autonomy. Moreover, few studies analyze how specific dialogues and narrative structures in the 2019 adaptation directed by Greta Gerwig articulate ambition as an ideological resistance within a nineteenth-century patriarchal context. While several previous studies have examined *Little Women* and the concept of women's ambition, they often do so through different analytical focuses. For instance, recent research by Putri et al. (2025) analyzes female ambition through the lens of humanistic psychology rather than feminist ideology.

Other scholars have explored *Little Women* through general themes of gender discrimination, sisterhood, or identity formation without specifically grounding their analysis in the focused principles of liberal feminism. There remains a lack of research that systematically connects the specific dialogues and cinematic narrative structures of the 2019 adaptation to liberal feminist concepts such as institutional reform and economic independence. This study seeks to fill that gap by providing a theoretically specific and textually grounded analysis of how ambition functions as a political assertion of equality and self-determination in Greta Gerwig's film. Therefore, this research seeks to fill that gap by providing a focused analysis of women's ambition as represented through Jo March's character, employing liberal feminism as the primary analytical framework to examine how ambition functions not only as personal aspiration but also as a political assertion of equality and self-determination. Through this approach, the study aims to contribute a more theoretically specific and textually grounded understanding of women's ambition in contemporary film adaptation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Liberal feminism is one of the major perspectives within feminist theory that focuses on achieving gender equality through legal reform, educational access, and equal participation in social, political, and economic institutions. Rooted in Enlightenment philosophy, liberal feminism is grounded in the belief that women and men are fundamentally equal as rational human beings and therefore deserve the same civil rights and opportunities within society. Early liberal feminist thought can be traced to the work of Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), who argued that the perceived inferiority of women is not a natural condition but a consequence of social structures that deny women access to education and intellectual development. In her influential work *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, Wollstonecraft criticizes the social system that confines women to domestic roles and discourages them from cultivating rational abilities. She famously challenges the societal tendency to infantilize women, stating, "My own sex, I hope, will excuse me, if I treat them like rational creatures, instead of flattering their fascinating graces, and viewing them as if they were in a state of perpetual childhood, unable to stand alone" (Wollstonecraft, 1792).

Wollstonecraft further asserts that society deliberately constructs women's dependence by limiting their opportunities to participate in intellectual life, which ultimately reinforces the misconception that women are naturally weaker or less capable than men. She argues that when women are denied mental stimulation, they are forced to focus solely on their appearance: "Taught from their infancy that beauty is woman's sceptre, the mind shapes itself to the body, and, roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adore its prison" (Wollstonecraft, 1792). According to Wollstonecraft, when women are provided with equal access to education and intellectual cultivation, they are able to develop the same rational capacities as men and contribute meaningfully to social progress. Therefore, within the liberal feminist framework, education is viewed as a crucial instrument for empowering women and enabling them to challenge patriarchal structures that restrict their personal and professional ambitions.

The argument for gender equality was further developed by John Stuart Mill (1869) in *The Subjection of Women*, which strongly criticizes the legal and social institutions that perpetuate women's subordination. Mill argues that the unequal treatment of women represents one of the most enduring forms of injustice in modern society, particularly in areas such as marriage, employment, property ownership, and political participation. He emphasizes that excluding women from public life not only violates the principle of individual liberty but also deprives society of valuable intellectual contributions. From the perspective of liberal feminism, equality should therefore be based on merit, rational capability, and individual achievement rather than biological sex.

In the twentieth century, liberal feminist ideas were further strengthened by Betty Friedan (1963), whose influential work *The Feminine Mystique* critiques the cultural expectations that confine women to domestic roles. Friedan introduces the concept of "the problem that has no name," referring to the widespread dissatisfaction experienced by women who were encouraged to find fulfillment exclusively through marriage, motherhood, and household responsibilities. She argues that the idealized image of the contented housewife conceals the suppression of women's intellectual and professional aspirations, preventing them from realizing their full potential as individuals. Within this theoretical framework, liberal feminism emphasizes the importance of individual freedom, equal opportunity, and institutional reform as mechanisms for dismantling gender inequality. By advocating equal rights in education, employment, and public participation, liberal feminism ultimately seeks to create a social structure in which women are recognized as autonomous individuals who are capable of pursuing their ambitions and defining their identities beyond the limitations imposed by traditional gender roles.

Equality of Opportunity

Equality of opportunity constitutes one of the most fundamental principles within liberal feminist theory, emphasizing that women and men must possess equal access to education, employment, and participation in social and political institutions. Liberal feminists argue that gender inequality is not rooted in biological differences but rather in social and legal systems that historically restricted women from entering the public sphere. According to John Stuart Mill (1869), the subordination of women is largely maintained through institutional arrangements that prevent them from developing and demonstrating their abilities in the same manner as men. Mill criticizes the social structure that limits women's participation in intellectual and economic life, arguing that excluding women from public opportunities not only harms women themselves but also deprives society of valuable talent and knowledge. Similarly, Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) maintains that women appear intellectually inferior only because they have historically been denied access to rigorous education and professional development. Within this framework, liberal feminism emphasizes that a fair and democratic society must eliminate structural discrimination and provide equal starting conditions for all individuals. When women are prevented from entering professional fields or decision-making spaces, their ambitions become constrained regardless of their competence. Therefore, equality of

opportunity is considered essential for enabling women to pursue intellectual, economic, and professional achievements based on merit, rational capability, and personal aspiration rather than being restricted by socially constructed gender roles.

The structural limitation of women's opportunities is illustrated in the following dialogue from *Hidden Figures*, which portrays the experiences of female mathematicians working within a male-dominated scientific institution:

Al Harrison: "Here at NASA we all get paid the same, regardless of color."

Katherine: "They let women do some things, sir, but not everything."

Al Harrison: "What do you mean?"

Katherine: "There's no protocol for a woman attending the briefing."

Contextually, Katherine's statements "they let women do some things, sir, but not everything" and "there's no protocol for a woman attending the briefing" reveal how institutional structures subtly restrict women's participation in professional environments despite their intellectual competence. Although Katherine Johnson possesses exceptional mathematical ability and plays a crucial role in calculating orbital trajectories for NASA missions, she is excluded from attending official briefings where scientific discussions and strategic decisions take place. This exclusion demonstrates how gender discrimination can operate through seemingly neutral organizational norms that systematically limit women's access to professional recognition and influence. From a liberal feminist perspective, Katherine's experience illustrates the gap between the formal rhetoric of equality and the actual conditions faced by women within professional institutions. Theoretically, this situation reflects Mill's argument that social progress is hindered when capable individuals are prevented from contributing fully due to discriminatory cultural assumptions and institutional practices. Katherine's awareness that women are permitted to participate only partially within the scientific environment indicates that legal or institutional claims of equality do not automatically translate into genuine equality of opportunity. Therefore, the dialogue functions as a critique of structural barriers that restrict women's ambitions and intellectual participation, reinforcing the liberal feminist demand for institutional reforms that guarantee women equal access to professional opportunities, decision-making spaces, and intellectual recognition so that they may pursue their aspirations based on merit rather than being constrained by gender-based limitations.

Empowerment of Education

Within liberal feminist thought, the empowerment of education is considered a fundamental mechanism for achieving gender equality because it enables women to develop intellectual autonomy and participate fully in social, economic, and political life. Liberal feminists argue that women's historical marginalization is not caused by biological inferiority but by systematic restrictions on their access to knowledge and formal learning. According to Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), society deliberately limits women's intellectual development by providing them with superficial forms of education that emphasize beauty, manners, and domestic skills rather than rational cultivation. Wollstonecraft contends that if women were granted the same educational

opportunities as men, they would demonstrate equal capacity for reasoning, creativity, and professional competence. This argument was later expanded by Betty Friedan (1963), who explains that the cultural expectation that women should prioritize domestic life over intellectual growth often suppresses their ambitions and prevents them from pursuing careers that require advanced knowledge and training. Within the liberal feminist framework, education therefore functions not merely as an academic process but as a transformative instrument that equips women with the intellectual resources necessary to question patriarchal norms, develop independent aspirations, and compete within professional fields traditionally dominated by men.

The relationship between education and women's empowerment can be illustrated through the following dialogue from *The Queen's Gambit*, which portrays a female character cultivating intellectual mastery within a competitive environment traditionally dominated by men:

Townes: "You've been studying the Sicilian Defense, haven't you?"

Beth: "I read everything I could find about it."

Townes: "Most girls don't usually study the theory."

Beth: "I don't just play. I study. That's how you win."

Contextually, Beth's statements "I read everything I could find about it" and "I don't just play. I study" reflect her conscious effort to develop intellectual competence through continuous learning and theoretical understanding. In the narrative context of the series, chess represents an intellectual domain that has historically been dominated by men, where female participation is often viewed as unusual or exceptional. Beth's dedication to studying chess strategies and theories demonstrates that her success is not based merely on innate talent but on disciplined intellectual development. Her response to Townes's assumption that "most girls don't study the theory" reveals the persistence of gender stereotypes that underestimate women's intellectual seriousness. From a liberal feminist perspective, Beth's emphasis on study and knowledge represents the process of intellectual empowerment through which women gain the confidence and competence to compete within male-dominated spaces. Theoretically, Wollstonecraft's claim that education cultivates women's rational potential is clearly reflected in Beth's determination to master complex chess strategies, proving that intellectual ability is not limited by gender but shaped by access to learning. Furthermore, Friedan's critique of restrictive gender expectations can be observed in the way Beth refuses to conform to the stereotype that women should engage in intellectual activities only casually or recreationally. Instead, she approaches chess as a professional discipline that requires rigorous study and strategic thinking. Therefore, this dialogue demonstrates that education functions as a powerful form of empowerment that enables women to challenge patriarchal assumptions, gain recognition based on intellectual merit, and pursue ambitious goals within competitive intellectual environments.

Individual Freedom

Individual freedom represents a central objective within liberal feminist theory, emphasizing that women must possess the same autonomy as men to determine the direction of their own lives, careers, and personal aspirations.

Liberal feminists argue that patriarchal societies often restrict women's autonomy by imposing social expectations that prioritize domestic responsibilities, marriage, and emotional labor over personal ambition and self-development. According to John Stuart Mill (1869), true liberty can only exist when individuals are free to pursue their own interests and goals without being constrained by unjust social norms or institutional restrictions. Mill criticizes the traditional structure of marriage and family that historically placed women in positions of dependency, limiting their ability to act as independent and rational agents. Similarly, Betty Friedan (1963) argues that cultural expectations that confine women to domestic roles often suppress their desire for self-fulfillment and professional achievement. Within this framework, liberal feminism emphasizes that women must be recognized as autonomous individuals capable of making rational choices about their lives. Therefore, the principle of individual freedom focuses on women's right to determine their own ambitions, career paths, and personal identities without being forced to conform to restrictive gender norms.

The concept of women's autonomy and personal independence can be illustrated in the following dialogue from *The Devil Wears Prada*, which portrays a female character negotiating the demands of her professional ambition and personal life:

Nate: "The person whose calls you always take, that's the relationship you're in."

Andy: "I'm trying to build a career here."

Nate: "You used to care about what mattered."

Andy: "This is what matters to me now."

Contextually, Andy's statements "I'm trying to build a career here" and "this is what matters to me now" reflect her assertion of personal autonomy in determining her professional priorities. Throughout the narrative, Andy faces criticism from those around her who believe that her dedication to work represents a betrayal of her previous identity and relationships. However, her response indicates that she views career development as an important aspect of her personal growth rather than a rejection of personal values. From a liberal feminist perspective, Andy's insistence on defining her own priorities demonstrates the exercise of individual freedom in a society that often expects women to prioritize relationships and emotional obligations over professional ambition. Theoretically, Mill's concept of liberty emphasizes that individuals must be free to pursue their chosen paths as long as their actions do not harm others, a principle that supports women's right to prioritize career ambitions without social condemnation. Similarly, Friedan's critique of domestic expectations helps explain how women's aspirations are frequently dismissed when they challenge traditional gender roles. Therefore, the dialogue illustrates how women's ambition can function as an expression of individual freedom, reinforcing the liberal feminist argument that women must have the autonomy to shape their own identities and life trajectories without being restricted by patriarchal expectations.

Rejection Gender Stereotypes

Another significant principle within liberal feminist theory, emphasizing the importance of dismantling socially constructed assumptions that define women as naturally passive, emotional, or suited only for domestic roles. Liberal feminists argue that gender stereotypes function as ideological mechanisms that restrict women's ambitions by defining what is considered socially acceptable behavior for women. According to Mary Wollstonecraft (1792), the perception that women are intellectually weaker than men is largely the result of social conditioning that encourages women to prioritize beauty, obedience, and emotional sensitivity rather than rational development. Similarly, Betty Friedan (1963) explains that cultural narratives often construct femininity around domesticity and dependence, which discourages women from pursuing intellectual or professional ambitions. Within the liberal feminist framework, rejecting gender stereotypes becomes an essential step toward achieving equality because it allows women to redefine their identities beyond the limitations imposed by traditional gender expectations. When women challenge stereotypes that portray them as incapable of leadership, intellectual achievement, or professional success, they open opportunities to participate fully in public life and pursue ambitions that were historically reserved for men.

An illustration of the rejection of gender stereotypes can be observed in the following dialogue from *Legally Blonde*, which portrays a female character confronting assumptions about women's intellectual abilities:

Professor Stromwell: "Do you have a point, Miss Woods?"

Elle: "I'm not here because I'm a joke."

Professor Stromwell: "Then why are you here?"

Elle: "I'm here because I'm just as capable as anyone else in this class."

Contextually, Elle's statements "I'm not here because I'm a joke" and "I'm here because I'm just as capable as anyone else in this class" demonstrate her resistance to the stereotype that women who display traditionally feminine traits cannot be intellectually competent. Throughout the narrative, Elle Woods is frequently underestimated by her peers and professors because of her appearance and personality, which conform to stereotypical notions of femininity associated with superficiality rather than intelligence. However, her determination to prove her capability challenges these assumptions and reveals that intellectual ability cannot be judged based on gendered expectations. From a liberal feminist perspective, Elle's response represents a direct challenge to the cultural stereotypes that attempt to limit women's participation in intellectual and professional environments. Theoretically, Wollstonecraft's argument that women's perceived inferiority is socially constructed rather than natural is clearly reflected in Elle's determination to demonstrate her competence in a highly competitive academic setting. Furthermore, Friedan's critique of restrictive gender roles helps explain how societal expectations often discourage women from pursuing ambitious careers by labeling them as unsuitable or unrealistic. Therefore, the dialogue illustrates how rejecting gender stereotypes becomes an important strategy for women to assert their intellectual capability,

challenge discriminatory assumptions, and pursue professional ambitions on equal terms with men.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative descriptive method to analyze women's ambition in *Little Women*, directed by Greta Gerwig, using the framework of liberal feminism. The primary data source of this research is the film itself, particularly the dialogues, monologues, narrative sequences, and character interactions involving Jo March as the central figure representing women's ambition. The data consist of selected utterances and scenes that explicitly or implicitly reflect liberal feminist principles such as equality of rights, access to education, economic independence, individual autonomy, and freedom of choice. From the total duration of approximately 135 minutes, the researcher identified 18 significant dialogue excerpts that meet specific criteria: (1) they articulate women's intellectual or professional aspirations, (2) they reveal tension between personal ambition and social expectations, and (3) they demonstrate resistance toward patriarchal limitations. The characteristics of the data include verbal expressions of dissatisfaction, negotiation of identity, assertions of self-determination, and statements challenging traditional gender norms. Data classification was conducted by grouping the dialogues into thematic categories based on the core components of liberal feminism, while data identification involved close reading and repeated viewing of the film to ensure contextual accuracy and narrative coherence. The analytical process applies a contextual-theoretical approach in which each selected dialogue is interpreted within its socio- historical setting in nineteenth-century patriarchal society while simultaneously examined through liberal feminist concepts as articulated by theorists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill. Through this method, the study does not merely describe textual evidence but critically interprets how cinematic representation constructs women's ambition as both a personal aspiration and an ideological assertion of equality within institutional structures.

RESULTS

The results of this study show that women's ambition in *Little Women* (2019) is represented through four aspects of liberal feminism: individual freedom, equality of opportunity, rejection of gender stereotypes, and empowerment of education. Based on the analysis of selected scenes and dialogues, a total of 20 data were identified and classified into these categories. Individual freedom is the most dominant aspect, with 7 data (35%), indicating that the film frequently presents women's efforts to make independent life choices. Equality of opportunity is represented by 5 data (25%), which reflects the limitations faced by women in accessing economic and professional opportunities. Rejection of gender stereotypes is also found in 5 data (25%), showing how female characters challenge traditional views about women's roles in society. Meanwhile, empowerment of education appears in 3 data (15%), indicating that educational aspects are present but less frequently emphasized compared to other categories.

Table 1

No	Women Ambitions	Number (Scenes)	%
1.	Equality of Opportunity	5	25%
2.	Empowerment of Education	3	15%
3.	Individual Freedom	7	35%
4.	Rejection of Gender Stereotypes	5	25%
5.	TOTAL	20	100%

DISCUSSION

Equality of Opportunity

Scene: 00:33:21 - 00:33:41



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

Aunt: No one succeeds alone. Not really. Especially women. You should marry a rich man.

Jo: You're not married, Aunt March.

Aunt: Because I'm rich. And I save my money. Not like your father.

In this dialogue, Jo's declaration "I intend to succeed on my own" articulates a direct challenge to the socio-economic limitations imposed on women's access to success, revealing how opportunity is structurally unequal rather than individually determined. Contextually, the exchange highlights a generational and ideological conflict between Jo and Aunt March, where Aunt March represents a pragmatic acceptance of 19th-century gender norms that restrict women's advancement to marriage as a primary economic strategy. Her assertion that "especially women" cannot succeed alone underscores the systemic barriers that prevent women from achieving independence through education or professional work, thereby normalizing dependency as a necessary condition for female survival. In contrast, Jo's insistence on succeeding independently reflects an emerging resistance to these constraints, emphasizing her belief in merit-based achievement. From a liberal feminist perspective, this moment exemplifies the absence of genuine equality of opportunity, as articulated by John Stuart Mill, who argues that women's apparent "choices" are

often shaped by restrictive social structures that limit their access to resources and professional pathways. Aunt March's viewpoint demonstrates how inequality is perpetuated not only through formal exclusion but also through internalized social norms that define marriage as the only viable route to success for women. Therefore, Jo's statement functions as a rejection of structurally imposed dependency and a demand for equal opportunity, asserting that women should have the same right as men to pursue success through their own abilities rather than being confined to socially prescribed roles.

Empowerment of Education

00:22:49 - 00:23:00



Friedrich's Friend: I don't think it's good.

Jo: The story was published in the newspaper, and people said I was talented.

Friedrich's Friend: I think you're talented, that's why I'm being honest.

Jo: I don't want to starve for the sake of being praised by people.

In this dialogue, Jo's statement "I don't want to starve for the sake of being praised by people" reflects the tension between creative aspiration and the material realities that shape women's access to intellectual and professional development, thereby illustrating the concept of empowerment through education. Contextually, the scene depicts Jo presenting her literary work as a product of her self-education and intellectual effort, only to be met with critical feedback that challenges not only the quality of her writing but also its practical value. While Jo initially defends her work by referencing its publication and public recognition, her final response reveals an acute awareness that intellectual talent alone is insufficient without economic sustainability. This highlights the broader constraint that women face in transforming education and creativity into viable careers, particularly in a society that offers limited institutional support for women's professional advancement. From a liberal feminist perspective, this moment aligns with Mary Wollstonecraft's argument that education is a fundamental tool for women's empowerment, enabling them to develop rationality, independence, and self-worth; however, the scene also exposes the gap between possessing education and being able to fully utilize it within restrictive socio-economic structures. Jo's refusal to romanticize artistic struggle signifies a pragmatic assertion of agency, emphasizing that empowerment is not merely about acquiring knowledge, but also about having equal opportunities to

convert that knowledge into economic independence and social mobility. Therefore, the dialogue underscores that true educational empowerment requires not only intellectual development but also structural conditions that allow women to sustain themselves through their talents without being marginalized or economically vulnerable.

Individual Freedom

Scene: 00:14:31-00:14:50



Jo: Oh, there it is. See? Girl in purple dress.

Laurie: Very beautiful.

Jo: He reminded me to be nice so Dad would be proud when he came home.

Laurie: Where is he?

Jo: Volunteer for the Union Army. I want to fight alongside him. I'm disappointed to be a woman.

In this dialogue, Jo's statement "I'm disappointed to be a woman" reveals an early articulation of constrained individual freedom, shaped by rigid gender roles that limit women's ability to act according to their desires and capabilities. Contextually, the scene occurs in a social setting where traditional femininity is emphasized, as seen in Meg's participation in dance and adherence to social expectations, while Jo positions herself in contrast by expressing a desire to join the Union Army alongside her father. Her aspiration to participate in war, an activity exclusively reserved for men in that historical context demonstrates her inclination toward autonomy, agency, and active contribution to the public sphere. However, her disappointment signifies an awareness that her gender functions as a structural barrier that prevents her from exercising the same freedoms afforded to men. From a liberal feminist perspective, this moment reflects John Stuart Mill's argument that women's lack of freedom is not a result of natural incapacity, but of socially constructed limitations that restrict their choices and opportunities. Jo's frustration illustrates how individual freedom is curtailed by institutional and cultural norms that define what women can and cannot do, thereby denying them full participation in society. Thus, the dialogue serves as a critique of gender-based restrictions on personal liberty, highlighting the liberal feminist demand that women should have the same freedom as men to pursue their ambitions, make independent choices, and engage in all spheres of life without being constrained by socially imposed roles.

Rejection of Gender Stereotypes

Scene: 01:42:08 - 01:42:49



Marmer: But do you love him?

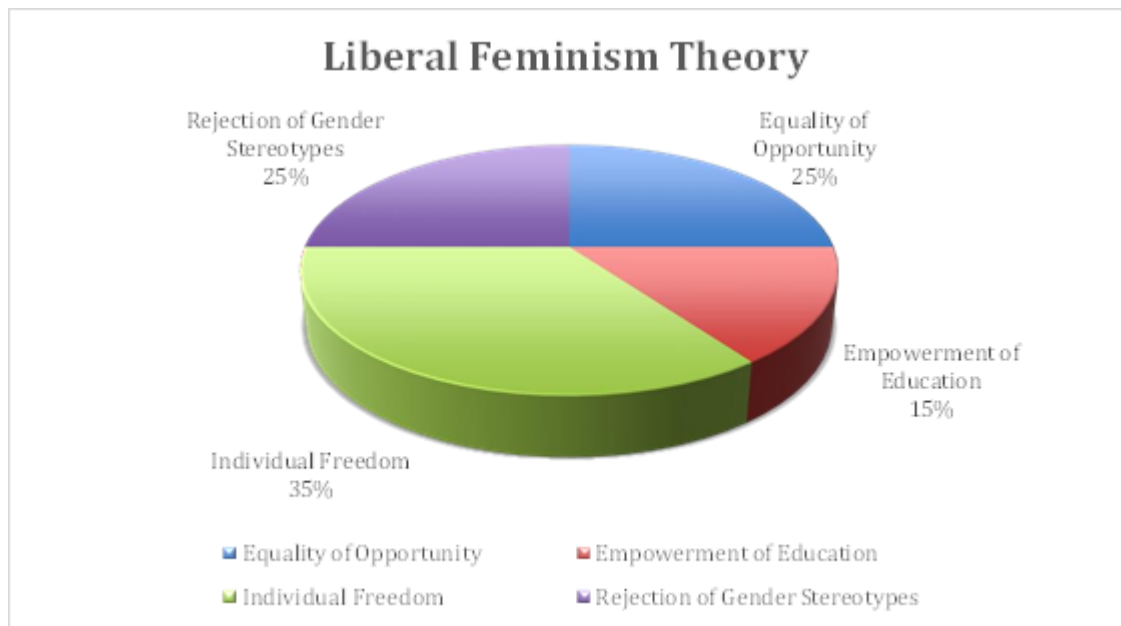
Jo: The important thing is that I am loved.

Marmer: That's not the same as loving.

Jo: I just feel... I feel that women have a mind, soul, and also a heart. They also have ambition, talent, and beauty. I'm sick of hearing people say women are only meant to be loved. I am sick of!

In this dialogue, Jo's statement "I'm so sick of people saying that love is all a woman is fit for" represents a direct rejection of gender stereotypes that confine women to emotional and romantic roles, thereby limiting their identity and social function. Contextually, the conversation occurs when Jo is confronted with the expectation that her fulfillment should be rooted in romantic love, as emphasized by Marmee's question about whether she truly loves the man in question. Jo's response reveals an internal conflict, but more importantly, it exposes the societal pressure that defines women primarily through their capacity to love and be loved. Her assertion that women possess "minds," "souls," "ambition," and "talent" challenges the reductive stereotype that equates femininity with emotional dependence and physical beauty. From a liberal feminist perspective, this moment reflects the critique of socially constructed gender roles that restrict women's self-determination and limit their participation in intellectual and public life. As argued by feminist theorists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and John Stuart Mill, women must be recognized as rational and autonomous individuals rather than being confined to predefined domestic and emotional roles. Jo's rejection of the idea that love defines a woman's purpose highlights the demand for equal recognition of women's intellectual and personal capacities, thereby asserting that identity should be based on individual choice rather than socially imposed expectations. Therefore, this dialogue functions as a powerful critique of gender stereotyping, emphasizing that true equality requires dismantling cultural norms that narrowly define what women can be and aspire to become.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



This study analyzes the representation of women's ambition in *Little Women* (2019) through the perspective of liberal feminism, focusing on four main aspects: individual freedom, equality of opportunity, rejection of gender stereotypes, and empowerment of education. Based on the findings, a total of 20 data were identified and classified into these categories, as illustrated in the diagram below. The results indicate that individual freedom (7 data / 35%) emerges as the most dominant aspect, showing that the film strongly emphasizes women's desire to make independent choices and determine their own life paths despite societal expectations. Meanwhile, equality of opportunity and rejection of gender stereotypes each account for 5 data (25%), reflecting the persistent limitations in women's access to economic and professional opportunities, as well as their resistance toward traditional roles that define women narrowly. On the other hand, empowerment of education (3 data / 15%) appears as the least dominant aspect, indicating that although education contributes to women's intellectual development, it is not the primary focus of the film. Therefore, the findings suggest that *Little Women* portrays women's ambition predominantly through the lens of personal autonomy, while still addressing structural inequalities and cultural expectations that shape women's experiences.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations, so it is necessary to conduct further research related to the topic "An Analysis of Women's Ambition in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* Film: A Liberal Feminist Approach" in order to perfect this research and increase insight for readers.

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