



The Portrayal of Marxist Feminism in Greta Gerwig's Little Women

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Character;
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Qualitative Approach.

Abstract: This study examines how dialogue, costume, and gesture characterize Jo, Meg, and Amy in Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019) and articulate gender inequality through Marxist feminism. Using a qualitative approach, 23 time-coded scenes were purposively selected from the film. All data were descriptively coded and interpreted using Hartmann's framework concerning the interaction between patriarchy and capitalism. Six representative scenes were presented in detail to ensure balanced comparison among the characters. The findings reveal three distinct responses to gendered economic structures: Jo demonstrates resistant authorship within a male-controlled publishing market; Meg negotiates chosen domesticity under unpaid labour and limited household resources; and Amy pragmatically approaches marriage, property, artistic ambition, and class mobility. These differences do not represent stronger or weaker forms of feminism. Instead, they demonstrate how women pursue agency through different strategies within shared structural constraints. The film ultimately connects women's choices to unequal access to labour, ownership, education, and cultural authority.

Kata Kunci:

Feminisme Marxis;
Karakter;
Karakterisasi;
Ketidaksetaraan Gender;
Pendekatan Kualitatif.

Abstrak: Studi ini meneliti bagaimana dialog, kostum, dan gerakan menggambarkan Jo, Meg, dan Amy dalam film *Little Women* (2019) karya Greta Gerwig dan mengartikulasikan ketidaksetaraan gender melalui feminisme Marxis. Menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif, 23 adegan film diberi kode, dipilih secara purposif. Semua data dikodekan secara deskriptif dan diinterpretasikan menggunakan kerangka Hartmann tentang interaksi antara patriarki dan kapitalisme. Enam adegan disajikan sebagai representatif untuk memastikan perbandingan yang seimbang antar karakter secara rinci. Temuan tersebut mengungkapkan tiga respon yang berbeda terhadap struktur ekonomi berorientasi gender: Jo menunjukkan kepenulisan yang resistan dalam industri penerbitan yang dikendalikan oleh pria; Meg menegosiasikan domestikasi dengan pekerjaan tidak dibayar dan sumber daya rumah tangga terbatas; dan Amy menginginkan pernikahan, properti, ambisi artistik, dan mobilitas kelas. Perbedaan-perbedaan tersebut tidak mewakili feminisme yang lebih kuat atau lemah. Mereka menunjukkan bagaimana perempuan mengejar agensi melalui berbagai strategi dalam batasan struktural yang sama. Film tersebut menghubungkan pilihan perempuan dengan akses yang tidak setara sebagai tenaga kerja, kepemilikan, pendidikan, dan otoritas budaya.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Literature and film frequently represent women's struggle to enter educational, social, and economic domains from which patriarchal institutions have historically restricted them (Laar et al., 2026). Not only stemmed from the patriarchal system and discriminatory behaviours, the struggle continuously occurs in the distribution of education, paid employment, property, care, and decision-making power. However, this women's economic disadvantage can only be understood through the relationship between employment, income, social policy, and disproportionate responsibility for unpaid care (Bennett, 2024). As a matter fact, these conditions are women's central representation in literary works. Their choices become meaningful only in relation to the resources, institutions, and consequences.

Marxist feminism provides a particularly productive framework for examining these conditions. Rather than treating patriarchy as a set of private prejudices or capitalism as a gender-neutral economy, Marxist-feminism analytically emphasizes how gendered power influence labour and production under capitalism.

Although linked throughout history, patriarchy and capitalism are different in many ways (Hartmann, 1979). Patriarchal relationships are sustained through men's greater control over women's labour power, sexuality, and access to resources. Meanwhile, capitalism benefits from dividing up work in ways that make women's work less valuable. Therefore, research in gender-equality increasingly treats inequality as a multidimensional and structurally connected problem (Belingheri et al., 2021).

Contemporary economic research supports the continuing relevance of this relationship. It was found that women's disproportionate share of unpaid household work is associated with lower participation and earnings in paid employment (Andrew et al., 2024). Another finding shows how care responsibilities constrain economic independence (Bennett, 2024). Hence, Marxist feminism directs attention not simply to whether a woman works or marries, but to who controls wages, property, domestic labour, cultural production, and the consequences of marriage.

The above questions are especially significant in Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019), adapted from Louisa May Alcott's 1868–1869 novel and set during and after the American Civil War. The film follows Jo, Meg, Amy, and Beth March as they negotiate ambition, affection, family responsibility, and economic insecurity. Its postwar setting represents a period in which women's legal and commercial opportunities were changing without producing full equality. On the contrary, the enforcement of Married Women's Property Laws stimulated women's commercial activity by granting rights over property and earnings that had previously been restricted (Khan, 1996). This historical evidence complicates any claim that nineteenth-century women possessed no legal rights at all. Still, it shows that marital property laws had a real effect on women's economic activity and that formal change did not immediately end social dependence or occupational exclusion.

Gerwig's film makes these structural tensions visible through characterization. Characterization is conceptualized as an inferential process through which narrative information enables audiences to attribute traits and motives to characters (Garvey, 1978). A similar argument also posited that literary character emerges from patterned relations among narrative cues rather than from isolated descriptions (Weststeijn, 2003). When applied to film, this means that dialogue, costume, gesture, spatial positioning, action, and narrative consequence work cumulatively.

Relevant research has established several important dimensions of *Little Women*, but there are still elements that have not yet been explored. For instance, existing research has highlighted the tension between women's domestic choices and public ambitions in films, showing that Gerwig's film cannot raise a simple relationship between marriage and career (Galpin, 2023). This insight explains why Meg's domestic aspirations should not be automatically read as self-surrender. However, explanations that focus on choice do not fully account for how unequal access to wages, property, education, and cultural authority shapes the choices themselves. Another study looks at how moral education and the rise of consumerism affecting each other and showing that materials and consumerism play a role in shaping what it means to be a woman (Sherman, 2001). The above findings might explain Meg's anxiety about fashionable clothing, but they do not examine how Gerwig's dialogue, gestures, and appearance reconstruct that consumerism tension as unpaid domestic labour and women's dependency.

More specifically, previous studies have not sufficiently connected four relations that repeatedly organize Gerwig's characterization of the March sisters. The first is labour: Jo sells creative work, whereas Meg performs unpaid educational and domestic work. The second is ownership: Mr. Dashwood controls the commercial conditions of Jo's manuscript, while Amy identifies the historical

vulnerability of a wife's money and children to male authority. The third is marriage: Jo experiences it as possible containment, Meg chooses it while confronting material dependency, and Amy treats it as an economic proposition. The fourth is authorship: Jo's effort to represent an unmarried heroine demonstrates that control over women operates not only through material institutions but also through the cultural forms in which female lives become publishable. When these dimensions are examined separately, the sisters can appear to embody fixed and competing models of femininity. When they are analysed relationally, they reveal different negotiations with the same gendered economy.

This study addresses that gap through a multimodal Marxist-feminist analysis of Jo, Meg, and Amy in *Little Women* (2019). It asks: (1) How do dialogue, costume, gesture, action, and narrative consequence characterize Jo, Meg, and Amy as distinct subjects negotiating gender inequality? (2) How do these characterizations articulate a Marxist-feminist critique of labour, ownership, marriage, and authorship? The study's novelty lies in treating characterization as the mechanism that connects individual conduct to political-economic structure. It proposes that Jo embodies resistant authorship, seeking income and representational control within a male-governed publishing market; Meg embodies domestic negotiation, affirming marriage and care while confronting the invisibility of unpaid labour; and Amy embodies pragmatic accommodation, recognizing marriage's economic logic while preserving artistic aspiration. These positions do not represent stronger and weaker degrees of feminism. They disclose the unequal strategies available to women situated differently within the shared system of patriarchal and capitalist.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

The study employs a qualitative approach to examine how characterization represents gender inequality and the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism in Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019). Qualitative research is appropriate for interpreting how social meanings are constructed through textual and contextual evidence Creswell (2017). In this study, interpretation was based on observable evidence from the film, including dialogue, costume, gesture, action, character relationships, and narrative consequences. The analysis moved from specific cinematic details to broader patterns concerning women's labour, ownership, marriage, class position, and authorship.

The primary data source in this study is the film script of *Little Women* directed by Greta Gerwig. The script was downloaded from https://www.scriptslug.com/script/little-women-2019?page=32#google_vignette. When differences occurred between the screenplay and the performed dialogue, the audiovisual version of the film was treated as authoritative because the study examines the completed film rather than the screenplay alone. The unit of analysis was a time-coded segment containing verbal or visual evidence relevant to the characterization of Jo, Meg, or Amy and to gendered political-economic relations. The final coding register contained 23 analytical units. These units should not be interpreted as 23 completely separate scenes because one narrative sequence could be coded under more than one analytical dimension. Fifteen units concerned characterization: six represented character role and development, three focused on costume or appearance, three on external action and gesture, and three on dialogue. Eight additional units contained explicit representations of gender inequality. These eight units were re-examined through Hartmann's (1979) concepts of patriarchy and capitalism. The research data consist of scenes displaying the dialogues, costumes, and gestures from the characters of Jo, Meg, and Amy. The data were purposively selected for inclusion with the following criteria:

1. It showed Jo, Meg, or Amy performing paid, unpaid, domestic, artistic, or creative labour.
2. It referred to women's access to income, employment, education, property, inheritance, or material resources.

3. It presented marriage as a social expectation, economic arrangement, source of dependence, or individual choice.
4. It demonstrated male authority over women's labour, bodies, property, mobility, or creative production.
5. It used costume, gesture, spatial positioning, or action to reinforce or challenge a gendered or class-based relationship.
6. It contributed to the development of Jo, Meg, or Amy in relation to autonomy, domesticity, artistic ambition, or economic security.

The film was viewed several times. The first viewing established familiarity with its plot and the development of the three characters. During the second viewing, potentially relevant sequences were identified. Each selected segment was then reviewed repeatedly and entered into a data-recording matrix. Timestamps were recorded in the hour:minute format from the beginning of the digital film. For segments containing dialogue, both the beginning and ending timestamps were recorded; for a single visual frame, one timestamp was used. Additionally, costumes and gestures were not interpreted as independent proof of a character's personality. Their meanings were established by comparing them with dialogue, actions, relationships, and narrative outcomes.

There are five stages in data analysis. First, the 23 units were organized by character and characterization: character development, appearance, external action or gesture, and dialogue. Second, each unit was descriptively coded to identify what happened in the scene without immediately assigning an ideological interpretation. Third, the initial codes were interpreted using Hartmann's (1979) account of the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. Accordingly, patriarchal coding was applied when the data showed male authority, gendered social expectations, control over marriage, or restrictions on women's autonomy. Capitalist coding was applied when a scene involved wages, markets, property, class position, commodification, or access to economic resources. Fourth, the researcher examined how the two systems intersected. A scene was coded as a patriarchal-capitalist interaction when gendered authority was materially supported by economic dependence. Finally, the coded units were compared across Jo, Meg, and Amy. Similarities and contrasts among the characters were then used to develop the study's broader interpretation. Conclusions were drawn only when dialogue and visual evidence jointly supported the interpretation.

Trustworthiness was strengthened through repeated viewing, comparison of the film dialogue with the screenplay, and maintenance of a time-coded analytical matrix. Screenshots and detailed descriptions provided an audit trail connecting each interpretation to observable evidence. The researcher also compared dialogue, costume, gesture, and narrative context to avoid relying on a single sign. Interpretations that were not adequately supported by the audiovisual data were revised or excluded. This procedure improved the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the findings while recognizing that qualitative film analysis remains interpretive rather than statistically generalizable.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This analysis has identified six key sequences of scenes that most clearly link the characterizations of Jo, Meg, and Amy to gender relations regarding work, ownership, marriage, class, and cultural authority. Two sequences are presented for each character. In each instance, visual evidence from the film is presented first, followed by a discussion of the characterization, the specific form of inequality illustrated, and a Marxist-feminist interpretation grounded in the work of Hartmann (1979).

Tabel 1. Six Scenes Linked The Characterizations to Gender Relations

Characters	Timestamp	Primary Evidence	Analytical Focus
Jo (J1)	00:03:24-00:03:58	Payment and 'married or dead' dialogue; professional clothing; publisher's desk	Creative labour and cultural gatekeeping
Jo (J2)	01:39:01-01:39:18	Laurie's appeal to social expectation; Jo's refusal	Marriage, property, and representational labour
Meg (M1)	00:39:29-00:39:35	Home education dialogue; Meg turns to challenge Mr. Brooke	Education and unpaid intellectual labour
Meg (M2)	00:08:49-00:09:06	Household clothing expenses; reference to John's approval	Domestic labour, consumption, and resources
Amy (A1)	01:05:45-01:06:15	Marriage as an 'economic proposition'	Earnings, marital property, and children
Amy (A2)	00:06:52-00:07:00	Engagement condition; painting lessons; blush and letter	Marriage market, class, and artistic ambition

1. Jo March: Resistant Authorship and Marriage as Social Containment

a. Scene J1: Negotiating Publication

Scene evidence (00:03:24-00:03:58). In Mr. Dashwood's publishing office, Jo asks, 'What compensation...?' He replies, 'We pay twenty-five to thirty for things of this sort. We'll pay twenty for that.' Shortly afterwards, he instructs her to make a female protagonist 'married by the end. Or dead, either way.' Jo wears a dark waistcoat and high-collared white shirt with little decoration. She keeps her body tense before the desk, whereas Dashwood remains comfortably positioned behind it and handles the manuscript while setting the terms of publication.

The combination of professional clothing, direct questions about compensation, and visible tension characterizes Jo as ambitious and work-oriented but not institutionally secure. Her clothing helps her claim a professional identity; her hesitant speech and restricted bargaining position show that this identity has not yet produced equal authority. The scene directly shows asymmetrical control over remuneration, editing, and narrative acceptability. It does not, by itself, establish a general gender pay gap because no comparable male author is shown. What the evidence supports is that Dashwood possesses the power to reduce the offered payment and regulate the representation of a female protagonist.

Hartmann's (1979) framework explains the scene as an interaction between capitalist market power and patriarchal cultural authority. Jo's story becomes a commodity whose price and form are controlled by the publisher. At the same time, the 'married or dead' condition restricts the socially marketable future of a fictional woman. Jo therefore enters paid creative labour without escaping patriarchal control: her work can circulate only after negotiation with a man who controls access to the market.

b. Scene J2: Refusing Laurie's Proposal

Scene evidence (01:39:01-01:39:18). Laurie tells Jo, 'Everyone expects it - Grandpa and your family, Jo,' and asks her to accept him. Jo answers that he will find an 'accomplished girl' who

can become 'a fine mistress for your fine house.' She describes herself as 'homely and awkward and odd' and states that she would hate elegant society while Laurie would hate her writing.

Jo's reply characterizes her as self-aware and protective of her creative identity. Rather than merely rejecting romantic affection, she anticipates the social role attached to marriage and explains why that role would conflict with her temperament and authorship. The evidence directly establishes collective pressure to marry and a class-coded expectation that Laurie's wife will manage a wealthy household and participate in elite society. The scene does not explicitly state that every married woman is financially dependent. It shows that the marriage proposed to Jo is organized around Laurie's house, status, and social world.

The unequal relation is both gendered and material. Laurie's wealth allows him to imagine marriage chiefly as personal happiness, whereas Jo anticipates domestic and representational labour within property that belongs to his social world. Marriage would offer status but could subordinate her writing to the duties of becoming the socially appropriate mistress of a 'fine house.' Jo's refusal thus represents resistance to a gendered division of labour, not a rejection of intimacy in itself.

Jo's two scenes reveal that entry into paid work does not automatically produce equality. In the publishing office, she receives payment for creative labour, but Dashwood controls both its price and its representational form. Hartmann's (1979) framework clarifies why this relationship is simultaneously capitalist and patriarchal. Jo's manuscript is treated as a commodity within a market controlled by its buyer, while the instruction that the heroine must be married or dead regulates female identity through a patriarchal narrative convention.

This finding extends Galpin's (2023) analysis of women's choices in *Little Women*. Galpin demonstrates that Gerwig avoids a simple opposition in which professional ambition represents emancipation and domesticity represents failure. The present findings add that professional participation itself remains materially constrained. Jo may choose authorship, but she does not choose the conditions under which her writing becomes publishable. Her agency is therefore negotiated rather than absolute: she enters the market, accepts some editorial demands, and later attempts to retain greater control over her book. The film does not position her outside capitalism; it depicts her learning to bargain within a system whose gatekeepers possess more economic and cultural authority.

The proposal scene develops this tension by placing authorship against the classed labour expected of a wife. Laurie presents marriage as a collectively approved route to happiness, whereas Jo imagines herself becoming the mistress of his 'fine house,' participating in elegant society, and facing conflict over her 'scribbling.' Her refusal is not evidence that marriage is inherently oppressive or that all wives lack autonomy. Instead, it identifies the particular labour attached to the marriage offered to her: household management, social performance, and conformity to Laurie's elite environment. Because Laurie already possesses wealth and property, he can treat marriage primarily as an emotional choice. Jo anticipates its effect on her time, identity, and writing. Her resistant authorship therefore involves refusing both narrative containment in Dashwood's office and domestic containment in Laurie's proposed household.

2. Meg March: Domestic Negotiation and Unequal Resources

a. Scene M1: Women's Education at Home

Scene evidence (00:39:29-00:39:35). When Jo protests that she already teaches Beth, Meg states, 'You're a good teacher.' Mr. Brooke responds, 'Yes, women being taught at home is much more proper, I believe.' Meg turns to him and counters, 'Only because the schools for women are so poor.' He then agrees: 'Indeed, quite right.' Meg's immediate correction characterizes her as observant and quietly assertive. Her response relocates the problem from women's supposed nature to the poor quality of the institutions available to them. Jo's role as Beth's teacher simultaneously establishes women's intellectual competence.

The scene directly identifies unequal educational provision and a norm that confines women's learning to the home. It does not prove that women were entirely unable to pursue careers. More precisely, it shows how inadequate institutions make domestic education appear naturally 'proper' and leave Jo's teaching without formal recognition. Hartmann's concept of the gendered division of labour helps explain the contradiction. Women are represented as capable of producing knowledge within the family, yet this intellectual labour remains private, unpaid, and institutionally unrecognized. Patriarchal respectability directs education toward the domestic sphere, while the absence of equivalent educational investment limits women's later access to paid and authoritative work.

b. Scene M2: The Dress and Household Expenditure

Scene evidence (00:08:49-00:09:06). Meg lists the family's needs: 'John needs a new coat for winter, and Daisy and Demi need new clothes.' When Sallie adds that John's wife needs a dress, Meg repeats, 'I can't.' Sallie answers, 'He'll be so pleased with how you look, he'll forget all about the expense.' Meg then says, 'I don't suppose it's too much of an extravagance.' The sequence characterizes Meg as responsible and accustomed to placing her husband and children before herself. Her hesitation also reveals a desire for social participation and fashionable appearance. She is neither simply submissive nor economically free; she negotiates between family responsibility, personal desire, and class pressure.

The dialogue demonstrates scarcity and Meg's low priority within household spending. It does not explicitly show that she must obtain John's permission. Instead, Sallie's argument makes the anticipated pleasure of the husband the justification for Meg's purchase. The scene also contrasts Sallie's comfort with fashionable consumption and Meg's anxiety about expense.

Meg's care for the children and management of household needs constitute reproductive labour that sustains the family but does not provide her with separate earnings. Her consumption is shaped by both class and gender: the market creates pressure to display respectable femininity, while the purchase is made acceptable through male approval. This interpretation is consistent with (Andrew et al., 2024) and (Bennett, 2024), who show that unpaid care and unequal access to household resources can constrain women's economic autonomy. The film, however, adds an affective complication: Meg values domestic life, so inequality lies not in her choice to marry but in the material organization of that choice.

Meg complicates interpretations that equate feminism solely with rejection of marriage and domestic responsibilities. Her correction of Mr. Brooke shows that she can challenge gender ideology from within a conventionally feminine position. By stating that women are taught at home because their schools are poor, she rejects the assumption that domestic education is naturally more appropriate. Jo's role as Beth's teacher reinforces the contradiction: women possess intellectual competence and perform educational labour, yet that work remains located in the family and

receives neither wages nor institutional recognition. Hartmann's concept of the gendered division of labour explains how this arrangement can be both culturally respectable and economically unequal.

The dress scene transfers this inequality from education to household consumption. Meg first identifies the needs of her husband and children, hesitates to include herself, and accepts Sallie's reasoning that John will be pleased by her appearance. The dialogue does not show that John directly controls the purchase or that Meg must request his permission. The stronger evidence-based interpretation is that Meg has limited room within the household budget and has internalized a hierarchy in which her own consumption requires additional justification. Sallie's appeal to John's pleasure reframes Meg's dress as relational and marital rather than simply personal.

This result converges with Andrew et al. (2024), who demonstrate that women's greater responsibility for unpaid domestic work is associated with unequal participation and earnings in paid employment. It also supports Bennett's (2024) emphasis on the relationship among care, income, and individual financial autonomy within households. The film nevertheless adds a dimension that aggregate economic evidence cannot capture: Meg finds emotional value in marriage, motherhood, and care. Her domestic preference should therefore not be treated as false consciousness or political failure. The inequality lies in the economic organization of domestic life, particularly the invisibility of reproductive labour and the scarcity that makes her needs negotiable. In this respect, the findings support Galpin's (2023) rejection of a hierarchy between career and marriage while showing that respect for women's choices must include analysis of the resources available to enact them.

Meg's interaction with Sallie also introduces class difference within womanhood. Sallie treats fashionable consumption as ordinary, whereas Meg experiences a new dress as an extravagance that competes with basic family needs. This contrast resembles Sherman's (2001) account of *Little Women* as a narrative in which material objects and consumer desire participate in moral education. Gerwig's film, however, shifts the emphasis from individual temptation to household political economy. The dress is not merely a symbol of vanity; it exposes how class aspiration, respectable femininity, unpaid care, and limited money converge in an apparently minor purchase.

3. Amy March: Pragmatic Accommodation and the Economics of Marriage

a. Scene A1: Marriage as an Economic Proposition

Scene evidence (01:05:45-01:06:15). After Laurie suggests that poets might disagree with her view, Amy replies, 'I'm not a poet; I'm just a woman.' She states that she has no way to earn enough to support herself or her family, that her money would belong to her husband after marriage, and that their children would be 'his property.' She concludes, 'Marriage is an economic proposition... It may not be for you but it most certainly is for me.' Amy's sustained explanation characterizes her as pragmatic, analytically aware, and capable of connecting personal decisions to legal and economic institutions. Unlike Laurie, she does not treat marriage only as romance because she recognizes that women and men enter it from unequal material positions.

This is the film's most direct statement of gendered economic inequality. The dialogue explicitly connects restricted earning capacity, control of a wife's money, paternal claims over children, and the need to consider marriage as financial security. The claim about marital dependence is therefore attributed specifically to Amy's description of her historical circumstances rather than asserted as a universal condition of all marriages.

The speech closely illustrates Hartmann's account of the material basis of patriarchy. Gender norms limit women's access to independent earnings, while marital and property arrangements concentrate resources and legal authority in men. Capitalism and patriarchy operate together: exclusion from adequate income increases the economic value of marriage, and marriage can reproduce male control over women's resources and reproductive lives.

Khan's (1996) evidence that Married Women's Property Acts increased women's commercial activity supports the importance of property rights, while also indicating that nineteenth-century conditions changed unevenly rather than remaining legally static.

b. Scene A2: Engagement and Painting Lessons

Scene evidence (00:06:52-00:07:00). Aunt March tells Amy, 'You shouldn't go home until you and Fred Vaughn are properly engaged.' Amy blushes, puts away the letter, and answers, 'Yes, and until I've completed all of my painting lessons, of course.' Aunt March looks momentarily confused. Amy's verbal addition characterizes her as strategic rather than passively compliant. Her blush and concealment of the letter acknowledge the courtship, but her insistence on completing the painting lessons preserves artistic development as a condition of her return.

The scene shows that Aunt March prioritizes a socially advantageous engagement, whereas Amy places artistic education beside it. The evidence does not establish that marriage was universally considered women's 'primary achievement.' It demonstrates that Aunt March treats engagement as the principal requirement in this particular exchange and is surprised when Amy adds an artistic goal. The exchange connects patriarchy with class strategy. Fred represents access to wealth and security in a context where Amy has already described women's weak earning capacity. Painting lessons provide cultural capital and personal development, but the film does not show that they offer Amy a reliable livelihood. Her agency is therefore constrained but active: she operates within the marriage market while resisting the reduction of her artistic identity to a courtship accomplishment.

Amy provides the film's clearest internal explanation of the relationship between gender and economic structure. Her statement that she cannot earn enough to support herself, that her money would belong to her husband, and that children would be his property joins labour, marriage, ownership, and reproduction in one argument. The length and coherence of her turn characterize her not simply as calculating but as institutionally literate. She recognizes that Laurie can romanticize marriage because the same arrangement does not threaten his economic or legal position in the way she believes it threatens hers.

This scene closely illustrates Hartmann's (1979) central claim that capitalism and patriarchy should be analysed as interacting systems. Limited access to adequate earnings increases women's need for marriage as economic security, while marital arrangements can reinforce male control over property and family authority. Amy's speech therefore does not reduce marriage to financial opportunism. It exposes how romantic choice is structured by unequal resources. The finding also parallels to Feng and Talif's (2021) analysis of Kim Jiyoung, in which employment discrimination, domestic labour, and reproductive expectations operate together. The historical emphasis differs: Amy identifies marital property and class mobility, whereas the contemporary Korean narrative examined by Feng and Talif foregrounds modern employment and motherhood. Across both contexts, however, private decisions are shaped by institutions that distribute economic risk unevenly between women and men.

Amy's account should also be interpreted with historical caution. Khan (1996) shows that Married Women's Property Laws increased women's commercial activity by expanding their control over property and earnings. Nineteenth-century legal conditions were therefore changing and varied across jurisdictions; the film's dialogue should not be treated as a complete statement of law for every woman after the Civil War. Its analytical importance lies in dramatizing the insecurity produced when women's control of income and property is uncertain or limited. The scene represents Amy's understanding of her position, while Khan's evidence helps explain why property rights materially affected women's participation in economic life.

The exchange with Aunt March reveals how Amy acts within rather than simply submits to these restrictions. Aunt March makes engagement to Fred the condition of returning home, thereby treating an advantageous marriage as a class strategy. Amy verbally adds the completion of her painting lessons, and Aunt March's confusion registers the difference between their priorities. Amy does not reject the marriage market as Jo does, but neither does she allow it to erase artistic development. Her position is best described as pragmatic accommodation: she recognizes that wealth can provide security while continuing to claim an identity beyond marriage. Yet the film does not show that painting offers her a reliable independent income. Artistic cultivation supplies agency and cultural capital, but not necessarily economic liberation.

The six scenes reveal a shared political-economic structure but three different responses. Jo confronts male control over creative production and resists a marriage that could absorb her authorship into elite domestic expectations. Meg challenges unequal education and negotiates household scarcity from within a domestic life she has chosen. Amy articulates the economic structure of marriage most explicitly and uses pragmatic awareness of class while continuing her artistic education. The characters should therefore not be ranked from most to least feminist. Their characterization demonstrates different strategies available within the same unequal organization of labour, property, marriage, and cultural authority.

The comparison also separates choice from the conditions under which choice becomes possible. Galpin (2023) argues that Gerwig's film avoids presenting career as automatically superior to domesticity. The present findings support this argument through Meg, but extend it by showing that neither marriage nor professional work is economically neutral. Jo's authorship remains subject to market gatekeeping; Meg's domestic choice includes unpaid labour and constrained spending; and Amy's courtship decisions respond to limited access to income and property.

The findings further parallel to patriarchy and capitalism as mutually reinforcing systems (Feng & Talif, 2021). However, Gerwig's historical setting places particular emphasis on publishing authority, marital property, household consumption, and the class value of marriage. The film's critique does not depend on declaring every male character individually oppressive. It shows how apparently ordinary interactions - setting a publication price, describing home education as proper, justifying a dress through a husband's pleasure, or recommending a wealthy engagement - reproduce unequal access to resources and authority.

Overall, dialogue supplies the clearest evidence of institutional inequality, while costume and gesture qualify how each woman negotiates it. Jo's restrained professional clothing conflicts with her anxious bargaining position; Meg's turn toward Mr. Brooke converts polite conversation into correction; and Amy's blush, concealed letter, and verbal addition combine awareness of courtship with insistence on artistic development. Reading these modes together prevents visual details from becoming speculative personality labels and grounds characterization in observable narrative relations.

D. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study concludes that *Little Women* (2019) characterizes Jo, Meg, and Amy through different negotiations with a shared system of gendered economic inequality. Jo's dialogue, professional costume, bodily tension, and conflict with Dashwood characterize her as a resistant author whose participation in paid creative labour remains subject to male-controlled market access and cultural conventions. Meg's corrective speech and household decision-making characterize her as a domestic negotiator who values marriage and care but encounters inadequate educational provision, unpaid reproductive labour, class pressure, and limited personal spending. Amy's extended account of marriage and her response to Aunt March characterize her as a pragmatic institutional thinker who understands how earnings, property, children, and class shape women's marital choices.

Through Hartmann's (1979) framework, these experiences reveal the interdependence of patriarchy and capitalism. Patriarchal norms define appropriate femininity and allocate authority to men, while economic arrangements give those norms material force through wages, ownership, unpaid work, and access to markets. The film does not suggest that all marriages are oppressive or that paid employment automatically liberates women. Instead, it demonstrates that both domestic and professional choices can remain constrained when resources and decision-making power are unequally distributed.

The study's contribution lies in treating characterization as the mechanism connecting individual conduct to political-economic structure. Dialogue provides direct evidence of inequality, while costume and gesture show how each character inhabits, contests, or strategically manages that inequality. Jo, Meg, and Amy should therefore not be reduced to fixed personality types or ranked according to a single model of emancipation. Their contrasting strategies reveal that gender equality requires more than personal choice: it requires material access to education, income, property, recognized labour, and cultural authority. Finally, future research should extend the framework beyond gender and class. The present study focuses on three white female protagonists and does not fully examine race, disability, sexuality, or the labour of less socially privileged women surrounding the March family.

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