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Social inequality Experienced by March Sisters in Greta Gerwig's Film *Little Women* (2019)

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ABSTRACT
This research examines social inequality as an issue that affects people's opportunities, daily experiences, physical health, and psychological well-being. This research focused to find the forms and the impacts of social inequality through the March sisters character in *Little Women* (2019) film. This research aims to identify the forms of social inequality and described the impacts through the characters, using sociological approach by Sutton & Giddens (2009), with Hurst's (2010) books' theory of social inequality. The researcher applied qualitative method and the primary data are collected from selected dialogue from *Little Women* (2019) that reflect the forms and impacts of social inequality experienced by the characters. The data collection technique used in this research is documentation by Bowen (2009). The researcher used Creswell's (2014) descriptive technique in analyzed data. The analysis examines how social inequality is represented in the film through the experiences of the March sisters and how these inequalities affect different aspects of their lives. The first result of this research found that the forms of social inequality: 1) class, income, and wealth, 2) status inequality, and 3) sex and gender inequality. The second result of this research found that the impacts on the characters: 1) physical health, and 2) psychological health. The film presents social inequality as more than a social issue, showing how it affects the life of the characters and influences how they feel physically and psychologically.

Keywords: social inequality, forms and impacts, *Little Women*

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long been recognized as an important record of human civilization, through which authors express their ideas, beliefs, values, and emotions. It reflects the social, political, and historical circumstances in which people live, while also preserving cultural identity and encouraging critical awareness of societal conditions. Literature, therefore, functions not merely as a creative form of expression but also as a medium for social reflection, criticism, and education (Klarer, 2004). According to Eagleton (2008), literature generally encompasses written expressions, although not every written work can necessarily be classified as literature in its more specific sense. This distinction indicates that literature cannot be reduced to ordinary written communication because its significance lies in its cultural value and ability to engage with human experiences and social realities. Similarly, film serves as a visual medium through which ideas, values, and social experiences are communicated to audiences. As cultural texts, films reflect and influence societal realities, while also presenting opportunities for examining social conditions and cultural perspectives (Bordwell & Thompson, 2008). Through narrative elements such as characters, plots, and conflicts, films communicate meanings and function as instruments of cultural reflection and social commentary (Stam, 2000).

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Social inequality is a recurring theme in literary works and films. Social inequality refers to systematic and persistent differences in access to resources, power, status, and opportunities among individuals and social groups. These differences are multidimensional because they involve economic conditions, social positions, and unequal distributions of power that influence individuals' life chances within society (Hurst *et al*., 2016). Social inequality does not emerge solely from individual circumstances but is also produced and maintained through historical, economic, and cultural processes. In literary and cinematic representations, this issue can be identified through poverty, differences in social class, gender discrimination, unequal access to education, and limited employment opportunities. Such representations show how individuals experience different social conditions depending on their economic backgrounds and positions within society. For instance, Parasite (2019) portrays the contrasting living conditions and economic divisions between wealthy and poor families, while The Help (2011) shows the unequal treatment experienced by African American domestic workers. These films show that social inequality can influence individuals' opportunities, relationships, and everyday experiences. Similarly, social inequality in *Little Women* (2019) is presented through the economic circumstances and social limitations experienced by the March sisters, whose aspirations and decisions are influenced by their family's financial background. This representation is consistent with Weber's (1978) perspective on social stratification, which emphasizes the influence of economic conditions, social status, and power on individuals' positions and opportunities within society.

The present study focuses on *Little Women* (2019), a romance-drama film written and directed by Greta Gerwig. Released in the United States on December 25, 2019, and in Indonesia on February 7, 2020, the film received recognition from several film institutions, including its selection among the American Film Institute's Top 10 Films of the Year and awards for Best Adapted Screenplay from organizations such as the Alliance of Women Film Journalists and the Chicago Film Critics Association. The film tells the story of four sisters, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March, who grow up in Massachusetts during the American Civil War and the years that follow. Each sister has different ambitions and expectations for her future: Meg dreams of having a family and a comfortable home, Jo aspires to become a successful writer, Beth wishes to maintain happiness within her family, and Amy hopes to pursue a career as a painter. Their lives are also influenced by their relationships with their mother, Marmee, their father, who is away serving in the war, and their wealthy neighbor and close friend, Laurie. Adapted from Louisa May Alcott's novel of the same title, originally published in 1868, the film retains the central narrative of the four sisters' personal development while presenting their experiences through a contemporary cinematic perspective. Alcott's novel emphasizes the development of moral character through self-discipline, patience, and compassion, with each sister representing distinct personalities and personal challenges. However, Gerwig's adaptation also emphasizes women's awareness of social expectations, their interactions with restrictive social structures, and their efforts to gain greater control over their own lives.

Social inequality in *Little Women* (2019) is represented through the economic limitations and social experiences of the March sisters. Their family occupies a relatively disadvantaged economic position compared with wealthier families in their neighborhood, influencing their access to material resources and social opportunities. One example appears in the Christmas scene, when the sisters receive modest gifts from their mother while recognizing that other girls enjoy more luxurious possessions. Their different economic circumstances become evident through their conversation: Jo expresses her disappointment about Christmas without presents, Meg acknowledges the difficulties of being poor, and Amy

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questions why some girls can possess beautiful things while others have almost nothing. Amy's statement, "It's not fair. How come some girls could have lots of pretty things and others have nothing," particularly shows her awareness of the unequal distribution of material resources. Meanwhile, Beth reminds her sisters that they still have their parents and each other, presenting a different response to their economic circumstances. This scene illustrates how differences in economic status influence the sisters' feelings, perceptions, and psychological experiences. Beyond material limitations, the film also portrays how financial insecurity affects the March sisters' aspirations, family responsibilities, and decisions concerning employment and their futures. Their limited economic resources create challenges in pursuing personal ambitions and accessing opportunities that may be more readily available to individuals from wealthier families. Consequently, the experiences of the March sisters show that social inequality is not merely an issue of material differences but also a condition that influences psychological well-being, personal development, and individual opportunities.

The researcher selects Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019) as the object of this study because the film presents meaningful representations of social inequality through the experiences of the March sisters within nineteenth-century American society. Its recognition as one of the American Film Institute's Top 10 Films of the Year further shows its critical and cinematic significance (IMDb, 2019). More importantly, the film provides an opportunity to examine how economic conditions and social structures influence family relationships, personal aspirations, and individual opportunities. The March family's limited financial resources position them at an economic disadvantage compared with wealthier members of their surrounding community, affecting their access to material resources and possibilities for social advancement. These circumstances also influence the sisters' decisions regarding employment, education, marriage, and their desired futures. Accordingly, this research aims to identify the forms of social inequality experienced by the March sisters and examine the impacts of such inequality as represented in the film. The analysis focuses on how economic disparities and unequal social conditions shape the characters' psychological experiences, social relationships, and opportunities to pursue their ambitions. By examining these representations, the study seeks to explain how *Little Women* (2019) portrays social inequality through the everyday experiences and personal struggles of women within a socially stratified society. Based on this background, the research addresses two questions: what are the forms of social inequality experienced by the characters in *Little Women* (2019), and what are the impacts of social inequality on the characters in the film?

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research method to examine the forms and impacts of social inequality experienced by the March sisters in Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019). A qualitative approach was selected because the research focuses on understanding and interpreting social phenomena represented through the characters, dialogues, and events in the film. According to Creswell (2014), qualitative research is an approach used to explore and understand the meanings that individuals or groups assign to social or human issues. In this study, the approach provides a framework for examining how the March sisters experience social inequality and how their social and economic circumstances influence their lives. Descriptive qualitative research aims to present a thorough description of events, phenomena, or experiences using everyday language while remaining close to the original data. Sandelowski (2000), as cited in Colorafi and Evans (2016), explains that qualitative descriptive studies seek to provide a comprehensive summary of events using the actual terms and descriptions of those experiences.

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The primary data source in this research was Greta Gerwig's *Little Women* (2019), a film adapted from Louisa May Alcott's novel of the same title, with a running time of approximately two hours and fifteen minutes. The researcher watched and accessed the film through the Apple TV application, while the screenplay was obtained from the publicly available document at https://assets.scriptslug.com/live/pdf/scripts/little-women-2019.pdf. The data consisted of dialogues, character interactions, and selected scenes involving the four March sisters, namely Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. To collect the data, the researcher employed documentation techniques, which involve systematically reviewing and examining printed or electronic materials relevant to a research topic. According to Sutton and Austin (2015), data collection is a process that determines the success of a research study and may involve different techniques, including handwritten notes and video recordings. Bowen (2009) explains that documentation is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents, both printed and electronic, to gather relevant research information without directly interacting with participants. The data collection process involved several steps, beginning with downloading and accessing the film and its screenplay, followed by watching the film repeatedly and reading the screenplay carefully to identify relevant dialogues and scenes. Subsequently, the researcher took notes of the identified data and classified the dialogues and interactions according to their relevance to the research questions concerning the forms and impacts of social inequality.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative technique supported by close reading and content analysis to examine the dialogues, character interactions, and narrative elements that represented social inequality in *Little Women* (2019). According to Creswell (2014), qualitative data analysis involves organizing data, dividing them into manageable units, synthesizing information, and identifying patterns to develop an understanding of the collected data. Krippendorff (2004) defines content analysis as a systematic method for examining texts and media to produce valid and reliable conclusions about their meanings within a particular context. Based on these approaches, the researcher conducted the analysis through three stages: identification, classification, and verification. First, the identification stage involved examining the film and screenplay to recognize the dialogues, scenes, and interactions of the March sisters that indicated the presence of social inequality. Second, the classification stage involved grouping the identified data according to the forms of social inequality and their impacts on the characters, ensuring that each selected dialogue and scene corresponded to the research questions. Third, the verification stage involved reviewing the classified data and examining their relevance to the research objectives and the theoretical framework used in the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Forms of Causing Social Inequality on the Characters

Social inequality is reflected in differences in access to economic resources, social recognition, and opportunities. Hurst (2010) explains that social inequality has several forms, including class, income, and wealth inequality; poverty and welfare; status inequality; political inequality; sex and gender inequality; inequality related to sexual orientation and gender identity; and racial and ethnic inequality. However, the analysis of *Little Women* (2019) identifies three forms that are particularly evident in the experiences of the March sisters. These are class, income, and wealth inequality; status inequality; and sex and gender inequality. Although these forms are discussed separately, they frequently overlap in the film. The March sisters' limited financial resources, for example, influence how they are treated by wealthier people and restrict the choices available to them as women.

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Class, Income, and Wealth Inequality

According to Hurst (2010), class refers to an individual's position within the economic structure of society, which influences access to resources, employment opportunities, and financial security. Income inequality concerns differences in the amount of money individuals earn, whereas wealth inequality relates to unequal ownership of assets, property, savings, and other valuable resources. These differences influence people's ability to fulfil daily needs and maintain a stable standard of living. Individuals from wealthier families generally have greater financial security and access to resources, while those from economically disadvantaged backgrounds may need to work harder or make sacrifices to meet their needs. In *Little Women* (2019), the March family experiences these limitations through their dependence on employment, the difficulty of purchasing basic necessities, and their limited access to valuable resources. Jo, Meg, and Beth particularly show how economic circumstances influence their daily decisions and personal aspirations.

The economic pressure experienced by Jo is evident in her conversation with Friedrich, when she explains why she continues working as a teacher and writer. Jo states, "Money is the end and aim of my mercenary existence" (00:05:44-00:05:50). Her statement indicates that earning money is a major motivation behind her work, rather than writing being solely an expression of personal ambition. Although Jo is passionate about writing, she also recognises that her family needs financial support. This situation becomes clearer when Friedrich asks why she does not publish her stories under her real name. Jo responds, "I want to help with the money I make" (00:22:01-00:22:11). Her decision to conceal her identity shows the extent to which financial responsibility influences her professional choices. These scenes show that Jo's work is closely connected to the economic difficulties experienced by her family, making financial independence a necessity rather than simply a personal preference.

Meg's experience further shows how limited income affects everyday consumption and family priorities. When Sallie Moffat encourages her to purchase an expensive dress, Meg initially explains that John needs a winter coat and her children need new clothes. However, after being persuaded, she considers purchasing the dress before reacting to its price: "Fifty dollars? What was I thinking?" (00:08:42-00:09:16). This hesitation reveals the difference between Meg's financial circumstances and Sallie's more privileged position. While Sallie can encourage the purchase without expressing the same financial concerns, Meg must consider how the expense will affect her household. Her situation becomes even clearer when John admits, "I can't afford it, my dear" (01:02:32-01:02:52). The statement indicates that even basic necessities, such as a winter coat, can be difficult for the couple to purchase. Consequently, the film portrays income inequality through the contrast between individuals who can spend money freely and those who must carefully prioritise their family's needs.

The March family's limited wealth is also showed through Beth's access to the Laurence family's piano. When Mr. Laurence offers her the opportunity to practise on his deceased daughter's piano, Beth responds enthusiastically, "Oh sir, they do care, very, very much!" (00:55:16-00:55:45). Her reaction indicates how meaningful the opportunity is because the March family cannot afford to own a piano. The difference between the two families is therefore represented through their access to material resources. Mr. Laurence possesses an instrument that Beth deeply wishes to use, whereas Beth must depend on his generosity to develop her musical interest. A similar financial limitation appears when Jo sells her hair to obtain money for Marmee's journey to visit their sick father. When asked where she obtained the money, Jo explains, "I only sold what was my own" (01:12:25-01:12:30). This sacrifice shows that the family's financial difficulties sometimes require its members to give up personal possessions to fulfil urgent needs. The two scenes show how unequal wealth ownership affects access to opportunities and forces economically

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disadvantaged individuals to make sacrifices.

The family's dependence on Jo's writing also appears when Mr. Dashwood asks whether her family needs money immediately. Jo replies, "They do, which is why I wanted upfront payment" (02:05:28-02:05:33). Her request for advance payment reflects the urgency of the family's financial circumstances and their inability to wait for future earnings. Taken together, these scenes show that class, income, and wealth inequality influence the March sisters' employment decisions, consumption patterns, access to resources, and family responsibilities. Their economic position differs from that of wealthier characters, who have greater freedom to purchase goods and access valuable resources without facing the same level of financial pressure. The film therefore presents economic inequality as an everyday experience that shapes the sisters' opportunities and decisions.

Status Inequality

Status inequality refers to differences in social position, recognition, and respect between individuals or groups. According to Hurst (2010), social inequality affects how people are valued and treated within society, and individuals with lower social status may experience exclusion or unfair treatment. Unlike economic inequality, which primarily concerns financial resources, status inequality is also reflected in social interactions and expectations. People may be judged according to their possessions, clothing, family background, or ability to participate in activities associated with a particular social group. In *Little Women* (2019), the March sisters encounter these differences when interacting with wealthier individuals and communities. Their experiences show that limited financial resources can influence how they are perceived and whether they feel accepted by others.

One example appears during the Christmas conversation, when the sisters compare their circumstances with those of wealthier girls. Meg expresses her disappointment by saying, "It's so dreadful being poor," while Amy questions, "How come some girls could have lots of pretty things and others have nothing" (00:25:57-00:26:04). Their statements reveal an awareness of the differences between their family's social position and the lifestyles of wealthier families. Amy's question is particularly revealing because she recognises that access to attractive possessions is distributed unequally. The sisters' comparison shows how economic differences become visible in everyday social experiences. Their feelings of disadvantage are therefore connected not only to the absence of material possessions but also to the perception that other girls enjoy a more privileged position in society.

Status inequality is also evident when Meg attends a social gathering with Sallie Moffat and other wealthy girls. When Annie asks which dress Meg intends to wear, Meg answers, "I will wear this one." Sallie responds with surprise, "Only the one? Oh, that's so funny" (00:56:55-00:57:03). Sallie's reaction makes Meg's limited wardrobe a source of ridicule and highlights the difference between their social positions. Meg's lack of clothing options becomes a reason for her to be treated as unusual among the wealthier girls. This situation illustrates how material possessions can function as symbols of social status and influence the way individuals are treated. The film further explores Meg's attempt to fit into this environment through the nickname "Daisy." When Laurie asks why people call her by that name, Meg explains, "It's just like playing a part, to be Daisy for a little while" (00:58:13-00:58:24). Her response suggests that she temporarily adopts a different identity to participate in the social environment of her wealthier companions.

Amy's experience at school provides another example of how seemingly ordinary possessions can become markers of social belonging. She explains, "The other girls are all trading pickled limes. I'm in debt, I owe ever so many limes" (00:34:13-00:34:27). The other girls can participate in the exchange, whereas Amy feels excluded because she cannot afford to obtain the same items. Meg recognises her sister's embarrassment and responds, "I know

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what it is to want little things and feel less than other girls." Her response shows that even inexpensive possessions can carry social meaning when they determine whether someone can participate in a group activity. Amy's experience therefore reflects the relationship between economic circumstances and social acceptance.

Sex and Gender Inequality

Sex and gender inequality refers to unequal treatment and opportunities arising from social expectations about the roles of women and men. Hurst (2010) identifies sex and gender inequality as one of the forms of social inequality that influence individuals' access to power, resources, and opportunities. In the film, women are frequently expected to prioritise marriage, beauty, and family responsibilities rather than pursue independent careers or personal ambitions. These expectations restrict the choices available to women and reinforce their dependence on men. The March sisters experience these limitations in different ways, particularly through Jo's ambition to become a writer and Amy's understanding of marriage as a source of financial security. Their experiences show that gender inequality operates through both direct statements and broader social expectations.

The publishing industry provides an example of how male authority influences women's creative opportunities. When Jo discusses a story with Mr. Dashwood, he instructs her that if the main character is a woman, she must be "married by the end, or dead either way" (00:03:43-00:03:56). This statement reflects the limited narrative roles available to female characters in the literary market portrayed by the film. Rather than evaluating women's stories solely according to their literary quality, Mr. Dashwood expects female characters to follow conventional endings associated with marriage or death. Jo's response, "Excuse me?", indicates her disagreement with this expectation. The same social belief appears when Aunt March tells Jo, "No one makes their own way, not really, least of all woman. You'll need to marry well" (00:35:16-00:35:34). Aunt March presents marriage as the most reliable means for a woman to secure her future, directly challenging Jo's ambition to become independent.

Jo's discussion with Aunt March further reveals the relationship between women's financial independence and their social position. When Jo asks, "So the only way to be an unmarried woman is to be rich?", Aunt March simply answers, "Yes" (00:35:40-00:35:56). This exchange highlights the limited economic options available to women who wish to remain unmarried. Aunt March's financial security allows her to maintain an independent life, whereas women without wealth may have to depend on marriage. Amy expresses a similar concern when she tells Laurie, "I'm just a woman, and as a woman, I have no way to make money, not enough to earn a living and support my family" (01:05:39-01:06:00). Her statement shows her awareness that women's economic opportunities are restricted by the social conditions of her time. She therefore views marriage partly as an economic decision rather than exclusively as a romantic relationship. These dialogues show that women's dependence on marriage is closely connected to unequal access to employment and financial resources.

The unequal position of women is also reflected in education and family expectations. During a conversation with John, Meg states, "Only because the schools for women are so poor" (00:39:30-00:39:36). Her response challenges the assumption that women should be educated at home because it is more appropriate. Instead, she identifies the poor quality of educational institutions for women as a structural limitation. This suggests that women's educational opportunities are restricted by the unequal provision of educational resources rather than by their intellectual abilities. In another scene, Aunt March tells Amy, "So you must marry well and save your family" (01:22:40-01:23:17). She places the responsibility for the family's future on Amy and identifies marriage to a wealthy man as the expected solution.

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This advice illustrates how gender roles can turn marriage into an economic responsibility imposed on women. Rather than being encouraged to pursue her own career, Amy is expected to secure financial support for her family through marriage.

Gender inequality also appears in the way Jo's writing is evaluated and controlled by Mr. Dashwood. After reading her chapters, he describes them as "not very promising" and asks her to send more stories of a scandalous variety (01:56:20-01:56:31). His response shows that Jo's work is subject to the preferences of a male publisher who determines which subjects are considered commercially acceptable. When Jo proposes an ending in which her female character marries neither of the two men, Mr. Dashwood immediately rejects the idea, saying, "No, no, no, no, that won't work at all" (02:02:54-02:03:04). He later insists that a heroine who ends her story unmarried will make the book commercially unsuccessful. Jo responds, "I suppose marriage has always been an economic proposition. Even in fiction" (02:03:25-02:03:29). Her statement criticises the expectation that women's stories must conclude with marriage, reflecting the broader social belief that women's futures are tied to economic dependence on men. Through these interactions, the film portrays gender inequality as a system that influences women's education, employment, financial independence, creative expression, and expectations surrounding marriage.

The Impacts of Social Inequality Through the Characters

Social inequality affects individuals beyond their economic and social positions because unequal living conditions can also influence their physical and psychological well-being. According to Hurst (2010), the consequences of social inequality can be observed in different aspects of people's lives, including physical and psychological health. Individuals with limited financial resources may encounter difficulties obtaining healthcare, nutritious food, and other necessities that support a healthy life. Economic pressure and unequal social treatment can also create stress, insecurity, and emotional exhaustion. In *Little Women* (2019), these impacts are reflected in the March family's experiences, particularly through Beth's illness and the sisters' emotional responses to poverty, social comparison, and gender expectations. The findings identify four data concerning physical health and eight data concerning psychological health.

Physical Health

Physical health is one of the impacts of social inequality discussed by Hurst (2010). Differences in economic circumstances can influence people's access to healthcare, medical treatment, nutritious food, and healthy living conditions. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds may face greater difficulties obtaining professional medical assistance, particularly when illness requires continued treatment. Limited financial resources can also place pressure on families who must balance healthcare expenses with other daily necessities. In *Little Women* (2019), the March family's economic circumstances are reflected in the way they respond to illness and provide care for their family members. The film presents these circumstances through Beth's illness and her father's recovery, showing the family's reliance on personal care and the financial concerns surrounding medical assistance.

The relationship between living conditions and physical illness is illustrated when Mr. Laurence discovers that Beth has a fever. He asks, "My child, you're burning. How come?", and Beth responds, "The Hummel's are very sick" (01:19:18-01:19:25). This conversation occurs after Beth has visited the Hummel family, who are living in difficult economic circumstances and experiencing illness. Beth's response indicates that she is concerned about the family's condition, even though she has also become sick. The scene connects the health difficulties of economically disadvantaged families with the risks faced by people who interact with them. However, the dialogue does not establish that poverty alone caused Beth's illness; rather, it shows the vulnerability associated with illness and the difficult living

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circumstances surrounding the Hummel family. Through this scene, the film draws attention to how poor health conditions can affect individuals beyond the household in which an illness first occurs.

Beth's worsening condition further shows the difficulties faced by the March family when seeking medical assistance. When Jo returns home and asks about her sister, Marmee explains, "We all thought she was better but the fever had weakened her heart" (00:43:54-00:44:07). Jo immediately offers her money so that Marmee can find the best doctor available. However, Marmee refuses because she knows that Jo needs the money to support herself in New York. This exchange reveals the family's financial dilemma: the money could be used to obtain medical assistance for Beth or to meet Jo's living expenses. The situation shows how limited financial resources can complicate decisions about healthcare, even when family members recognise the seriousness of an illness. Rather than suggesting that the family deliberately neglects Beth's health, the scene shows how economic limitations create difficult choices when medical needs arise.

The most serious physical consequence appears in the narrative scene in which the March family gathers to mourn Beth. The screenplay describes the family as having gathered "to lay their Beth to rest on an impossibly beautiful day" (01:30:34-01:31:19). This moment confirms that Beth has died after experiencing a prolonged illness and shows the emotional and physical consequences of her declining health for the entire family. Her death represents the most severe health outcome presented in the film. Nevertheless, the scene alone does not establish that financial inequality directly caused her death. Instead, when considered alongside the earlier scene in which Jo offers money for medical treatment, it highlights the family's concerns about accessing appropriate healthcare during Beth's illness.

The family's reliance on personal care is also visible in the discussion about their father's illness. Meg reads a letter explaining, "Father is still very weak, but improving. Mr. Brooke also says Mother is the best nurse a man could have" (01:16:29-01:16:37). Jo then responds, "I wish all the letters were from mother, and not Mr. Brooke." The dialogue indicates that Marmee is personally caring for her husband while he is recovering from illness. Her role as a caregiver shows the family's reliance on support within the household during a period of poor health. Although the conversation does not explicitly state that the father cannot access professional medical treatment because of financial limitations, it shows that family members play a central role in providing care. When viewed alongside Beth's illness, this scene illustrates how health difficulties require substantial family involvement and can place additional responsibilities on relatives.

Psychological Health

Psychological health is another impact of social inequality represented in *Little Women* (2019). Hurst (2010) explains that unequal social and economic conditions can contribute to stress, insecurity, and emotional pressure. Individuals who experience financial difficulties may feel frustrated or exhausted when they are unable to fulfil their needs or achieve the lifestyle they desire. Social comparison can intensify these feelings, particularly when individuals regularly interact with people who have greater economic advantages. Gender expectations can also create psychological pressure by restricting personal choices and influencing how individuals view their future. In the film, these conditions are reflected in the March sisters' disappointment about poverty, Meg's financial frustration, Amy's concerns about marriage, and Jo's struggle to maintain her independence and confidence.

The psychological impact of economic inequality is first visible in the sisters' conversation about Christmas. Jo says, "Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," while Meg responds, "It's so dreadful being poor." Amy then asks, "It's not fair. How come some girls could have lots of pretty things and others have nothing?" (00:25:57-00:26:04).

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These statements reveal the sisters' disappointment when they compare their circumstances with those of wealthier girls. Meg's response particularly expresses the emotional burden of living with limited financial resources. Amy's question also shows how differences in material possessions can influence the way children perceive their own social position. The scene shows that poverty affects the sisters' feelings and sense of satisfaction, rather than being limited to their inability to purchase presents.

Meg's emotional exhaustion becomes more explicit when she discusses her financial circumstances with John. She explains, "I can't resist when I see Sallie buying all she wants, and pitying me because I don't. I try to be contented, but it is hard, and, and… I'm tired of being poor" (01:02:08-01:02:30). Her statement reveals that her frustration comes from both limited financial resources and the experience of being compared with someone who is wealthier. Meg attempts to accept her circumstances, but repeatedly seeing Sallie purchase whatever she wants makes her feel dissatisfied with her own life. John's response, "I was afraid of this. I do my best, Meg," also indicates that the situation creates emotional pressure within their marriage. Their conversation shows that financial inequality can affect personal relationships when one partner feels unable to provide the lifestyle that the other desires. The scene therefore presents poverty as a source of emotional exhaustion, frustration, and tension between family members.

Amy's understanding of marriage also reflects how economic insecurity can shape an individual's thoughts about the future. When Laurie questions her perspective on wealth and marriage, Amy states, "I've always known that I would marry rich. Why should I be ashamed of that?" (01:05:24-01:05:36). Her response indicates that she has come to regard wealth as a means of securing a more stable future. Rather than viewing marriage exclusively as an expression of love, Amy considers the economic circumstances that may follow it. This perspective is further explained when she tells Laurie, "Even if I had my own money, which I don't, it would belong to my husband the minute we were married" (01:06:01-01:06:19). She continues by explaining that the children would also belong to her husband, before insisting that marriage is an economic proposition. Her statements reveal her awareness of the unequal position of women within the social and economic system represented in the film. The psychological impact appears in the pressure she experiences when considering a future in which her financial independence may be restricted. Thus, Amy's decisions and expectations are shaped by the economic insecurity and gender inequality surrounding her.

The psychological effects of unequal access to resources can also be observed in Jo's reaction to Laurie's wealthy household. When she sees the books and library in his home, Jo exclaims, "What richness! Theodore Laurence, you ought to be the happiest boy in the world" (00:38:48-00:38:54). Her reaction reflects her admiration for the resources available to Laurie, particularly because she has a strong interest in reading and writing. The contrast between Laurie's access to numerous books and Jo's more limited circumstances makes the difference between their economic positions visible. Jo's response suggests that she recognises the advantages associated with wealth and the opportunities that such resources can provide. Although the dialogue does not directly express severe psychological distress, it shows her emotional reaction to a lifestyle that she cannot easily experience herself. The scene therefore shows how differences in wealth and access to educational resources can influence feelings of envy, admiration, and dissatisfaction.

Jo's views on marriage reveal another psychological dimension of gender inequality. When Laurie asks about her future, she states, "I don't believe I will ever marry. I'm happy as I am, and love my liberty too well to be in any hurry to give it up" (01:39:01-01:39:10). Her response shows that she values her independence and does not regard marriage as a necessary condition for personal fulfilment. This perspective contrasts with the expectations

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placed on women in her society, where marriage is frequently presented as the appropriate path for their future. However, Jo's feelings are more complex than a simple rejection of marriage. When speaking to Marmee, she declares, "Women have minds and souls as well as hearts, ambition, and talent as well as beauty and I'm sick of being told that love is all a woman is fit for, but… I am so lonely" (01:42:30-01:42:53). Her statement expresses frustration with the limited roles assigned to women, while her admission of loneliness reveals the emotional conflict behind her desire for independence. Together, these scenes show how gender expectations can influence women's emotional well-being and create tension between personal freedom and the desire for companionship.

The pressure of gender expectations also appears in Jo's uncertainty about her writing. When Meg asks what she is working on, Jo replies, "I started something… but I don't think it's very good" (01:55:20-01:55:31). Amy attempts to encourage her by saying that everyone likes her writing, but Jo responds, "No, they don't." This conversation reveals Jo's self-doubt despite her established interest and ability as a writer. Her uncertainty can be considered alongside her experiences with Mr. Dashwood, who repeatedly judges her work according to commercial expectations and conventional ideas about female characters. The contrast between Jo's creative ambitions and the limited recognition she receives contributes to the portrayal of insecurity in her professional life. The scene does not establish that gender inequality is the sole cause of her self-doubt, but it reflects the emotional difficulties associated with pursuing an ambition in an environment where women's creative work is subject to restrictive expectations. The eight data concerning psychological health show how poverty, social comparison, economic insecurity, and gender expectations influence the sisters' emotions, confidence, and perceptions of their futures.

CONCLUSION

Little Women (2019) portrays social inequality through three forms identified by Hurst (2010), class, income, and wealth inequality; status inequality; and sex and gender inequality, with sex and gender inequality appearing most frequently. Class, income, and wealth inequality are reflected in the March family's financial difficulties and limited resources, while status inequality is shown through differences in social recognition and treatment. Sex and gender inequality is evident in the expectation that women should marry to secure their financial future due to limited opportunities for economic independence. The findings also reveal two impacts of social inequality: physical and psychological health, with psychological health appearing more frequently. Physical health impacts are illustrated by illness and difficulties in obtaining medical treatment, particularly in Beth's experience, whereas psychological impacts include loneliness, insecurity, frustration, jealousy, and self-doubt. The film shows that social inequality extends beyond financial circumstances, influencing the characters' health, confidence, relationships, decisions, and future aspirations. Nevertheless, the March sisters' determination to pursue their goals and support one another shows their resilience in facing the limitations imposed by social inequality.

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