

PARENTING STYLE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE  
MAIN CHARACTERS IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*



Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirement for the  
Master of Arts Degree in English  
at Srinakarinwirot University

May 2011

PARENTING STYLE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE  
MAIN CHARACTERS IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*



Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirement for the  
Master of Arts Degree in English  
at Srinakarinwirot University

May 2011

Copyright 2011 Srinakharinwirot University

PARENTING STYLE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE  
MAIN CHARACTERS IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN*



Presented in Partial Fulfillment of Requirement for the  
Master of Arts Degree in English  
at Srinakarinwirot University  
May 2011

Udomphon Ratprutthikul. (2011). *Parenting Style and Moral Development of Female Main Characters in Louisa May Alcott's Little Women*. Master's Project, M.A. (English). Bangkok: Graduate School, Srinakharinwirot University. Project Advisor: Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo.

The purpose of this study was to investigate mother's parenting style that influences moral development of female main characters in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*. The analysis was based on Barbara Welter's concept of true women in the nineteenth century American society, Diana Baumrind's theory of parenting style, and Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

The result of the study indicated that mother is an influential factor who encourages the young characters: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy growing up as refined ladies of the society. The mother herself portrays a role model of true woman who lives virtuously, submissively, and domestically. She also passes the quality of women of the nineteenth century America to her daughters by teaching and nurturing them with warmth and reasons. Her child rearing style is related to an authoritative parenting style. She treats the girls with love and care, however, expects them to overcome their faults and conform to social's standards. With mother's love and guidance, the young girls learn to structure and to evaluate their conducts. From vain, selfish, and aggressive girls, they turn to be kind, submissive, and domestic expected by the American society in the nineteenth century. The moral development of the four female characters related to the third stage in Kohlberg's theory of moral development—that is interpersonal concordance orientation. At this stage, children are aware of other's point of views and learn to conform to standards of conduct accepted by the group.

การเลี้ยงดูและพัฒนาการด้านจริยธรรมของตัวละครเอกหญิงในเรื่อง *Little Women*

ของ Louisa May Alcott



เสนอต่อบัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ เพื่อเป็นส่วนหนึ่งของการศึกษา

ตามหลักสูตรปริญญาศิลปศาสตรมหาบัณฑิต สาขาวิชาภาษาอังกฤษ

พฤษภาคม 2554

อุดมพร รัตน์พฤษกุล (2554). การเลี้ยงดูและพัฒนาการด้านจริยธรรมของตัวละครเอกหญิงในเรื่อง *Little Women* ของลูซ้า เมย์ แอลคอต. สารนิพนธ์ ศศ.ม. (ภาษาอังกฤษ). กรุงเทพฯ: บัณฑิตวิทยาลัย มหาวิทยาลัยศรีนครินทรวิโรฒ. อาจารย์ที่ปรึกษาสารนิพนธ์: อาจารย์ ดร.ประไพพรรณ เอมชู.

จุดประสงค์ของงานวิจัยครั้งนี้เพื่อศึกษาลักษณะการเลี้ยงดูของแม่ที่ส่งผลต่อพัฒนาการด้านจริยธรรมของตัวละครเอกหญิงในเรื่อง *Little Women* โดยศึกษาจากลักษณะของสตรีในศตวรรษที่ 19 ของบารบารา เวลเทอร์ ทฤษฎีการเลี้ยงดูของไดอาน่า บุมรินด์ และทฤษฎีพัฒนาการด้านจริยธรรมของลอว์เรนซ์ โคลเบิร์ก

ผลการวิจัยพบว่าแม่เป็นบุคคลสำคัญที่ทำให้ตัวละครเอกหญิงในวัยเยาว์อันได้แก่ เม็ก, โจ, เบ็ธ และเอมี เติบโตขึ้นเป็นสตรีที่ดีมีลักษณะตามที่สังคมคาดหวัง แม่เป็นแบบอย่างของสตรีที่ดีที่มีคุณความดี ถ่อมตน และเป็นแม่บ้าน เธอยังได้ถ่ายทอดลักษณะที่ดั่งงามเหล่านี้ไปสู่ลูกๆ ผ่านทาง คำสอนและการอบรมเลี้ยงดูด้วยความอบอุ่น และเหตุผล ลักษณะการเลี้ยงดูของแม่เป็นแบบ Authoritative คือ การให้ความอบอุ่นและแบบแผนที่เหมาะสม แม่เลี้ยงดูลูกด้วยความรัก ความห่วงใย และคาดหวังให้ลูกแก้ไขข้อบกพร่องของตนและดำเนินชีวิตตามมาตรฐานของสังคม ความรักและการดูแลของแม่ส่งผลให้ลูกเรียนรู้การปรับเปลี่ยนพฤติกรรมของตนจากเด็กหญิงที่ย่อหยิ่ง เห็นแก่ตัว และก้าวร้าวเป็นสตรีที่ดั่งงาม ถ่อมตน และมีคุณลักษณะแม่บ้านตามความคาดหวังของสังคมอเมริกันในศตวรรษที่ 19 การเติบโตของเด็กทั้งสี่ที่ดำเนินตามแบบแผนของแม่และสังคมสอดคล้องกับทฤษฎีพัฒนาการด้านจริยธรรมของโคลเบิร์กด้าน interpersonal concordance orientation ซึ่งเป็นขั้นที่เด็กสนใจความคิดเห็นของผู้อื่นและเรียนรู้การปรับตัวเข้ากับสังคม การอบรมเลี้ยงดูที่ดีจะช่วยปลูกฝังพฤติกรรมที่ดั่งงามและทำให้เด็กเป็นที่ยอมรับของคนในสังคม

The Master's Project Advisor, Chair of the Master of Arts Program in English, and Oral Defense Committee have approved this master's project Parenting Style and Moral Development of Female Main Characters in Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* by Udomphon Ratprutthikul as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in English of Srinakharinwirot University.

Master's Project Advisor

.....

(Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo)

Chair of the Master of Arts Program in English

.....

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Supaporn Yimwilai )

Oral Defense Committee

.....

Chair

(Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo)

.....

Committee

(Asst. Prof. Dr. Nitaya Suksaeresup)

.....

Committee

(Dr. Walaiporn Chaya)

The Master's Project has been approved as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in English of Srinakharinwirot University.

..... Dean of the Faculty of Humanities

(Dr. Wanee Aujsatid)

May....., 2011

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this Master's project has been possible because of the assistance of the following people. My greatest appreciation goes to my project advisor, Dr. Prapaipan Aimchoo, who provided guidance, valuable suggestions and encouragements. I also would like to extend my thanks to Asst. Prof. Dr. Nitaya Suksaeresup and Dr. Walaiporn Chaya, my readers, for their assistance and invaluable suggestions.

Furthermore, my sincerest thanks also go to all my teachers, friends, relatives, and my sisters for their kind supports. Finally, I would like to acknowledge my indebtedness to my parents for their love, encouragement, and understanding.

Udomphon Ratprutthikul





## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	
Background .....	1
Objective of the Study .....	4
Significance of the Study .....	4
Scope of the Study .....	5
Definition of Terms .....	5
Procedures .....	6
<b>2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE</b>	
Louisa May Alcott's Biography and Book, <i>Little Women</i> .....	7
Psychology of Adolescents and Their Moral Development.....	10
Psychological Theories on Parenting Styles.....	12
True Women of the Nineteenth Century American Society.....	14
Related Studies .....	16
<b>3 AN ANALYSIS OF MOTHER'S PARENTING STYLE AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE MAIN CHARACTERS IN <i>LITTLE WOMEN</i></b>	
Marmee as a Refined Woman of the Nineteenth Century and her Parenting Style.....	19
Moral Development of Female Main Characters.....	27

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (continued)

Chapter	Page
4 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION .....	37
WORKS CITED.....	41
VITAE.....	45



## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

A society comprises individuals who come from different ethnic groups, genders, and ages. To be a part of the community, one must learn to conform himself/ herself to others. In school, children learn to interact with friends; they play with peers who differ from them and share their food or toys with their friends. When children grow older, they learn to work with others in a work place. They consider another's viewpoint and interpret another person's response. Each individual has to be more considerate and has to conform to pattern accepted by the group in which he or she belongs to. Human beings have to pass through several stages of development from childhood to manhood to enable them to live in a society happily (Cobb 14-16). Adolescence is one of the developmental stages that a person has to learn about other people and society. Parents, teachers, and other significant adults play influential roles in forming acceptable characteristics of young adults in a way that meets social rules.

There are many literary works that reflect how young characters adjust themselves to meet with social standards. In Claude Brown's *Manchild in the Promised Land* (1965), a young black man, Sonny, is rejected by white American people. Instead of having an anti-social behavior, Sonny tries to interact with other people around him. He learns to adjust himself to others and learns to work with them. In Herman Wouk's *Marjorie Morningstar* (1955) a Jewish girl, Marjorie, break out of the Jewish norms to become an actress. The story explores Marjorie's determination to pursue her dream. However, in the end, she decides to live up to Jewish's tradition. These two stories point out the significant of adjustment and adaptation which helps people live happily in the society.

Likewise, *Little Women* (1868), one of the best known books of Louisa May Alcott, shows how young girls adjust themselves to survive in the society and grow up into refined ladies of the nineteenth century America. In the nineteenth century, American society values women obtain piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (Welter 152). *Little Women* is a story of four young female characters: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy who grow up in the March family. Their father has to stay away from home to serve as a soldier. The four sisters who are in their adolescent period aging from twelve to sixteen years old are looked after by their mother who they call Marmee. With their mother's love and care, the girls gradually change their childish behavior and become decent women within a year.

In the aspect of psychology, adolescence is a period of life that reflects how young people become aware of rules and social norms. They learn to be part of society by conforming to social rules (Shaffer 557). Lawrence Kohlberg, a psychologist, explains that this adjustment is in the second level of moral development which is conventional moral reasoning (Santrock 423). It is a stage of human life that a person becomes aware of community's standards that he/ she needs to live up to the expectations of others such as parents, relatives and people in the society. Similarly, Carol Gilligan (1982) explains that the adolescent period shows how individuals are concerned with other people around them (72). The ability to consider another's viewpoint increases with age (Glazer 214). Therefore, adolescents differ from children in the developmental tasks. Adolescents become aware of others and learn to live up to social's norms whereas children act in accordance with their self-interest. Furthermore, adolescents are expected to know what is right or wrong and to conform to the standards of their group. In order to develop their morality to meet social expectations, parents, teachers, and other significant adults play the most important role in

educating their children and instilling proper conducts to them (Hurlock 371). The four girls in *Little Women* are not different from Kohlberg and Gilligan's explanation. They learn to concern with others and live up to the social expectation.

Psychologists explain parenting styles in different ways. According to Diana Baumrind (1967, 1971) there are three patterns of parenting: authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Authoritarian parents are highly demanding. They expect their children to follow the rules and regulations they set up. They attempt to shape, control, and evaluate the attitudes and behaviors of their children according to an absolute set of standards. The second type of parenting is permissive. Permissive parents do not expect from their children as much as authoritarian parents do. They, on the contrary, tend to be warm and responsive. They respond to their children's needs. However, authoritative parents integrate both demandingness and responsiveness in their parenting. They set rules and maintain regulations for children to follow with fair limits; in the mean time, they are responsive to them. Accordingly, parenting styles are influential in shaping children's behaviors. Each child-rearing style brings important consequences of children's development, especially on morality. According to Baumrind, authoritative style brings favorable competence in children more than authoritarian and permissive parents. Children of authoritative parents tend to be social responsible, independent, and high levels of achievement (Meece 499). Mr. March, the father, and Marmee, the mother, in *Little Women* are not too demanding or too responsive with their children. They are close to the girls and raise them with reasons.

Many literary works present various aspects of young characters' development. It is not only to entertain readers but also to provide them with better understanding of how young characters have been developed. In *Little Women*, The four sisters have transformed from childish girls to refined women within a year. The process of their development is the

significant point of this study. The researcher believes that mother is an influential person of the girls' moral development. Additionally, this study aims to investigate how mother develops the four daughters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, main characters, in *Little Women* to acquire desirable behaviors of the community. The researcher used Baumrind's theory of child rearing to examine mother's parenting style while the girls' behaviors were analyzed by the concept of true women in the nineteenth century American society and Kohlberg's theory of moral development.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The purposes of the study are the following.

1. To study mother's parenting style that influences the behavior of female main characters in *Little Women*
2. To examine moral development of the female main characters

### **Significance of the Study**

The study helps readers read novels with understanding and find them useful and practical. This study also helps readers understand children's and adolescent's nature as well as their development. The findings show how parenting style and social's norms affect the behavior of young female characters. The study signifies the quality of parents and social which relates to the quality of children and adolescents in today's society.

## Scope of Study

The study focuses on five female characters: Marmee, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy in *Little Women* and social expectation of women in the nineteenth century America.

## Definition of Terms

**A parenting style** is a particular way that a parent consistently behaves toward children. This study refers to three style of child-rearing: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive.

**Moral development** is the process of learning moral standards of being right and wrong. It is divided into three levels: preconvention, convention, and postconvention. Each level comprises two stages of development. Preconvention consists of stage 1 and 2 which are punishment and obedience orientation and individualism and purpose orientation. The convention level comprises stage 3 and 4, interpersonal norm orientation and social system orientation. The final level or postconvention composes stage 5 and 6, community right and individual right orientation and universal ethical principle orientation. This study focuses on stage 3, interpersonal norm orientation.

**True women** refer to women who conform to social expectations of women in the nineteenth century America which covers four qualifications:

- a. Piety: the intimacy of religion
- b. Purity: moral compulsory that expects women to preserve their virginity until marriage
- c. Submissiveness: the expectation of women to be passive and inferior
- d. Domesticity: woman's responsibility related to home and family life.

## Procedures

The procedures of the study are as follows:

1. Accumulation of information

Information was collected in four parts:

- 1.1 The biography of Louisa May Alcott

- 1.2 The story of *Little Women*

- 1.3 Psychology theories on moral development, and the elements of parenting styles on adolescents

- 1.4 Social expectation of women in the nineteenth century America

- 1.5 Related studies of *Little Women* and parenting on adolescence

2. Information analysis

- 2.1 The primary text of *Little Women* was examined.

- 2.2 Five female characters: Marmee, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March were analyzed based on a concept of true women in the nineteenth century American society and psychology theories on parenting style and moral development.

3. Report of findings

Findings of the study were discussed.

4. Conclusion and suggestion for further studies

The findings of the study were concluded and discussed, and then suggestions for further studies were presented.



## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There are four main parts in this chapter. The first part provides information of Louisa May Alcott's biography which includes her life, family, and book, *Little Women*. The second part explains psychology of adolescents and their moral development while the third part is psychological theories on parenting styles. The fourth part provides information of women in the nineteenth century American society while the last part of this chapter related studies of *Little Women* and parenting of adolescents.

#### **Louisa May Alcott's Biography: Her Life, Family, and Book, *Little Women***

Louisa May Alcott, thereafter will be referred to Alcott, was the second daughter of the March family. She was born in 1832, in Germantown, Pennsylvania, and was raised in Concord, Massachusetts, and Boston. Alcott had three sisters; Anna, Lizzie and Abba May. Anna, the oldest sister was passive, greedy and self-love (Saxton 14). She got married when she was thirty years old. Lizzie, Alcott's younger sister was quiet, undemanding, and blameless. She died of scarlet fever when she was twenty-two. The youngest of all girls was May. She enjoyed travelling, clothing, and art lessons. Alcott, herself, was like a tomboy. She was interested in reading books, playing games, and running through the field of Concord. When she was a child, Alcott had problem with the ladylike behavior that was expected of girls in the nineteenth century. She was required to be calm, passive, stay at home, and take care of other people as the other girls at that time (Myerson&Shealy 5).

Alcott's father, Amos Bronson Alcott, was a philosopher, abolitionist, and teacher. Bronson himself educated his children at home. He cannot provide enough money for support

the family when his temple school failed. It was his wife, Abigail May “Abba” Alcott, who had to take care of the family. She handled all housework and also worked outside to make a living for the whole family. Alcott recalled the memory of her mother in her diary, “All the philosophy in our house is not in the study; a good deal is in the kitchen, where a fine old lady thinks high thoughts and does kind deeds while she cooks and scrubs” (qtd. in Myerson & Shealy 8). Alcott noted that her mother worked excellently in the house. Seeing that her mother took great burdens, Alcott decided to earn money to support the family since she was sixteen years old (Thongma & Kusuma-Na-Ayudaya 3).

Alcott took several jobs such as a teacher, seamstress, servant, and writer. As a writer, she wrote many books. Among her books, *Little Women* is one of her best known book. It was sold more than 2,000 copies immediately when it was firstly published in 1868. It was adapted in other media, such as plays, movies, condensations, and countless translations. Accordingly, Alcott became one of the authors of the nineteenth century who had much fame and money (Drew 11).

Alcott wrote *Little Women* by using her childhood experience as a background of the story. She and three her sisters are presented in four characters: Alcott is similar to Jo, Anna is akin to Meg, Elizabeth is related to Beth, and May is represented in Amy. Abba, the girls’ mother is presented in Marmee. Most of events in the story are based on Alcott’s experience: Meg gets married as Anna did and Jo as well as Alcott works to support the family’s economy. Also, Abba had to take care of the family when Bronson failed to construct his temple school. Marmee, in *Little Women*, looks after her family while her husband is away at war (Saxton 3, 14).

Based on Alcott’s life, *Little Women* presents four sisters who grow up in the nineteenth century American society. The story begins with four girls, their mother, and an

absent father who is away from home to serve as a volunteer chaplain in the Civil War. The four girls, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy were daughters of Mr. March and Marmee. They were looked after by Marmee while their father went to the war. The four sisters were expected to be good young ladies, that is to be generous, humble, and dutiful. Throughout the story, they learn to deal with problems and difficulties. Eventually, all the girls grow up as true women of the time.

Meg is the eldest of the four girls. She is sixteen when the story begins. She is pretty and proud of her beauty with smooth hair and small, white hands. She adores wearing fine dresses, having nice things, and being a rich person. After having bad experiences with some rich people at the party, Meg learns to cope with poverty. She realizes that money cannot bring peace to her life. She falls in love with a poor clerk and learns to be happy with a simple life. Following her mother's guidance, Meg gradually grows up into womanhood who live up to community's rules.

Jo is the second-oldest sister. She is an outspoken tomboy with a love for reading and writing. In her fifteen years old, Jo resists to grow up as a conventional lady. She prefers to play and work outside with her friends than staying home or doing domestic work. Her bold nature often gets her into trouble. With Marmee's guidance, Jo learns to overcome her flaws and eventually transforms from a tomboy girl to a refined lady of the society.

Beth is the second youngest of the March girls. She is thirteen when the story begins. She is quiet, selfless, and warm. She loves playing the piano and looking after her dolls. Beth never asks for anything for herself but seeks to make those around her happy. She suffers from scarlet fever when visiting a poor family. Though Beth does not correct misdeeds like her sisters, she learns to follow Marmee's rules and to live as a traditional lady.

Amy is the youngest of the March girls and is twelve years old. She is spoiled and always throws tantrum when things do not go her way. Her family strives to correct her behavior before she gets older. Like Meg, Amy loves luxury and takes an interest in her appearance, which is unusual for someone at her age. She is a sociable person who enjoys being popular among her peers. Like her sisters, Amy obeys her mother's instructions, learns to correct her faults, and grow up as a good girl.

The four sisters, in their adolescent period, learn to correct their faults and grow up into refined ladies. Meg, a proud lady, struggles with her false pride and grows up into a modest woman while tomboy Jo learns to understand social's norms for women and she eventually grows up as a neat lady. However, Beth does not have to struggle with her flaw like other sisters, but she learns to take care of other people as Marmee does. The youngest sister, Amy, is transformed from being spoiled into a sweet girl. The four girls learn from their mother, Marmee, to live up to social's standards. American society in the nineteenth century expects women to be passive, generous, and domestic (Welter 152). Like most young American women in that period, the four sisters must learn to conform themselves with social expectations. While the story of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy in *Little Women* reflects American girls' lives in the nineteenth century, their story can be explained from psychological aspect especially on moral development of adolescents.

### **Psychology of Adolescents and Their Moral Development**

Adolescent is a period of transition from childhood to adulthood (Santrock 26). Their ages range is from ten to twenty-two. Psychologists explain that young people of this period becomes aware of others and social rules. They construct a set of values and behaviors according to the community they live in. The development of this process begins during

childhood and becomes a major developmental task of adolescence (Dusek 109). According to Lawrence Kohlberg, children learn to construct social's values and to behave in accordance with social's rules step by step. He believes that children pass through a number of stages as they develop and mature (Santrock 423). Kohlberg explains three levels of moral development; preconventional, conventional, and post conventional which starts from childhood to adulthood. Each level comprises two stages of development.

The preconventional level consists of the first two stages, stage 1 and stage 2. Stage 1 is punishment and obedience orientation. Children at this stage cannot distinguish right from wrong. They obey rules in order to avoid punishment. When children develop to stage 2, individualism and purpose, their behavior is motivated by self-interest and rewards. They do things for others with a purpose to get something in return. Children ages four to ten develop at this level. As children grow older, they will pass through further stages.

At conventional level, individuals ages between ten to twenty-two which in adolescence period, learns to follow the rules and social norms in order to obtain the standard of other, such as parents or society's laws. Adolescents' morality develops through stage 3 where they learn to follow interpersonal norm. They define what is right by people close to them. At this stage, they often adopt their parents' moral standards, desiring to be recognized as a "good girl" or a "good boy." When young adults develop at stage 4, social system, they concerns with the rules of society, and considers to doing right for maintain a social order. They live up to the standards of their group rather than by themselves. The four sisters: Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy in *Little Women* who are sixteen, fifteen, thirteen, and twelve years old respectively develop their morality at this level.

At the final level of moral development or postconventional orientation, young adults between twenty two to thirty five years old do things in accordance with their beliefs rather

than social's orders. The person at stage 5 of moral development concerns much about community right and individual right. He/ she recognizes the relationship of social laws and people's rights. One believes that laws can be changed by considering human values, such as life and liberty. At the sixth stage, universal ethical principle, individual's reasons for doing right is related to his or her own conscience and the belief of universal moral principles.

In this developmental process, individuals gradually grow from one stage to the next. Not all people have similar levels of moral development. Theorists believe that higher levels of moral development were related to individuals' intellectual growth and the influence of environment (Shaffer 521). L.C. Lee (1971) found that the level individual's intelligence, independent of age, correlated highly with the level of moral reasoning (qtd. in Dusek 123). Similar results have been reported in the study of preadolescents and adolescents and adults (qtd. in Learner 115). Other researchers have provided evidence relating the influence of environment to level of moral reasoning. According to Kimberly Schonert-Reichl (1999), they believed that the interaction with peers contributes higher moral levels in children's development (qtd. in Cobb 374). Breen & Crosbie-Burnett (1993) found that the structure of the family and the style of parent-child interaction can influence moral functioning among youth (qtd. in Learner 115).

### **Psychological Theories on Parenting Styles**

In the aspect of psychology, parents are the first and important persons who encourage children to acquire proper behaviors. Children learn desirable and positive behavior, such as generosity, kindness, and empathy by observing their parents' model (Marion 52). Diana Baumrind (1967, 1971) identifies three styles of child-rearing as authoritarian, permissive, and authoritative. Expanding on Baumrind's theory, Eleanor

Maccoby and John Martin (1983) describe four styles of parenting. There four types of parents are authoritarian, authoritative, indulgent, and neglectful.

According to Baumrind's theory, authoritarian parents are highly demanding. They establish an absolute set of standards on their children and attempt to control them. These adults are low in responsiveness. They ignore their children's needs (Marion 40). Children of authoritarian parents are unhappy, withdrawn, repressed, and nervous (Brook 58).

Permissive parents set few limits on their children. They are highly responsiveness, but avoid making demands or imposing controls of any kind. They allow children to make their own decisions, whatever children's age (Marion 47). Their children are the least independent and self-controlled and could be best classified as immature (Brook 58).

Authoritative parents set appropriate and clear standards for children's behavior. At the same time, they are flexible, and listen to their children's needs. They are warm and responsive to their children (Santrock 564). They express love and sympathy to children whenever they can. Their kind of parenting results in building self-reliance and self-confidence in children. It encourages children to explore their worlds with excitement and pleasure (Brooks 58).

Each parenting style influences children's development. Children of authoritarian parents are low in self-confident, while children of permissive adults are low in self-controlled. However, a number of positive child competencies are associated with authoritative parenting styles, such as self-reliance and social responsibility. An authoritative parenting style also promotes emotional and social skills (Santrock 564). Authoritative parenting is related to academic achievement, a positive identity, and adoption of appropriate roles in adolescence (Brook 59). According to these three parenting styles, an authoritative pattern is closely related to Marmee's style of child-rearing in *Little Women*.

During adolescence period, individuals change rapidly from childhood to adulthood (Brook 293). They become aware of others' viewpoint and social's rules. Parents have to establish certain guidelines and rules for young people to follow. According to Marmee, she not only teaches her daughters to behave properly as refined ladies of the nineteenth century America but also raises them with love and care.

### **True Women of the Nineteenth Century American Society**

During the nineteenth century, girls were expected to grow up as perfect women which Welter called "true women" (152). Welter explains in "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" that American women were required to have four virtues; piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity (152). Women were expected to be inferior to men. Proper women were expected to be passive, sweet, and obedient. Good ladies had to maintain their virginity until marriage. Women were taught to be good wives and to take care of the household, and nurture the children, while husbands worked outside the home as the providers and protectors. Similarly, in "The American Woman: Her Past, Her Present, Her Future," Abbott suggested that in the nineteenth century, American established ideal types of female behavior and trained all women to be "ladies" (14). These women should be submissive, pure, domestic, and pious (Abbott 15). They had to stay at home and do routine work in the house. Every family taught their daughters to do housecleaning, laundry, mending, and ironing. In addition, they were taught to be modest, patient, and unselfish. Additionally, they grow up as a housewife who can handle all housework and bring happiness to the home for their husbands and children.

According to Welter, American society in the nineteenth century imposes four virtues; piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity on women.



1. Piety or religion is the core of woman's virtue. Christian's doctrine defines women to be virtuous and honor: "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies... Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised..." (New International Version, Prov. 31.10-31). Women are expected to pay attention to religion; to be close to God, to accept the Bible, and to do goodness. Religion gives women strength and dignity. In this way religion provides guidelines for proper behavior and attitude. It also leads women to fulfill their role of domesticity and help them be good friends, wives, and mothers. Without virtuous quality, it is believed that women would be restless, unhappy, and fell into a decline.
2. Purity is the second required virtue that is considered as moral compulsory. Women are expected to preserve her virginity until marriage. All women have to pure in mind, thought, and body. They would be admired as well-educated young ladies. Women who ignored their virginity would be regarded worthless.
3. Submissiveness is the most important virtue that the nineteenth century American society expected women to be. While men are supposed to be movers, doers, and actors, women are supposed to be passive and submissive responders. True women should submit to men and had the spirit of obedience. They are urged to be passive, patient, and avoid a controversial spirit.
4. Domesticity is the last virtue of true women. Daughters are taught to take care of their family's members and responsible for household work. Their duties are to manage household tasks such as cooking, cleaning, laundry, and mending. As a wife, women have to make their homes cheerful places that comfort husbands and children. Moreover, they work as a nurse in the house when someone is sick. It requires women to be patient, merciful and gentle. At home, women are also

expected to be good mothers. It is the most important role for women to nurture their children and teach the moral standard of the family.

Women are required to follow social expectations since they were young. As a daughter, they were taught to be kind, passive, and to take care of other people. As a wife, they had to submit to their husbands and manage household works. As a mother, they were expected to take care of children and to teach them with proper standards. According to social standards, American girls are expected in a traditional way with desirable behavior as expected by the society.

### **Related Studies**

In “At Home We Work Together”: Domestic Feminism and Patriarchy in *Little Women*”, a thesis by Bethany S. Wester, it explores deeper issues of the March family that makes *Little Women* remained a classic story in American children’s literature. She analyzes the roles of domesticity and patriarchy, Transcendentalism, struggling women artists, and domestic feminism and reform ideas throughout the novel as well as through Alcott’s own life. She found that in *Little Women*, the March girls serve as an example of feminist, which women have more self-reliance, exercise their talents, and still maintain femininity.

In “Alcott’s *Little Women* and the Domestication of Female Desire”, a thesis by Jennifer Lee, the researcher examines three characters; Jo, Amy, and Meg March who are repressed by class and gender ideologies. Textual analyses were used to analyze the main characters’ lives throughout the course of the novel. The findings shows that all three women are transformed from their individual ambition to societal standards; modesty, altruism, humility, and silence.

In “Telling ‘truth truly’: The startling self of adolescent girls in nineteenth-century New England diaries”, Catherine Elizabeth Robert study the adolescent development of learning and relationship within families and communities. The study addresses the adolescent development of three girls educated in early nineteenth-century Massachusetts; Sarah Connell Ayer, Anna Cabot Lowell, and Louisa May Alcott, as revealed through their diaries. The researchers apply the theoretical framework of Carol Gilligan and colleagues to analyze the girls’ relationships and their educational experiences. The findings showed that their pattern of development were unique to them as girls and as adolescences. Their developments were driven by girls’ ability to adolescences who can mediate the interaction between learning and relationship.

In Journal of Moral Education (1998), Marvin W. Berkowitz examines the relationship between parenting techniques and children’s moral development in the topic of “*Fostering Goodness: Teaching Parents to Facilitate Children’s Moral Development.*” The findings revealed that five parenting techniques related to children’s moral development. Parents’ use of induction, nurturance, demandingness, model, and discussion are each positively related to moral development of their children such as empathy, conscious, self-esteem, self-control, and social responsible.

Similarly, Barbara D. Hillaker et al. (2008) analyzes the relationship between parenting process and youth’s social development in the topic of “*The Contributions of Parenting to Social Competencies and Positive Values in Middle School Youth: Positive Family Communication, Maintaining Standards, and Supportive Family Relationships.*” The findings indicated that three aspects of parenting; positive family communication, facilitation of supportive family relationship, and maintenance of standards in family related to youth outcomes, both independently and in interaction with each other.

In this study, the researcher assumes that mother's parenting style is a major influence on moral development of the young female characters. Accordingly, the researcher used Baumrind's theory of parenting style to examine Marmee's roles as a woman and a mother and how the roles affect her daughters' moral development. The March girls' behaviors were explored by the concept of true women in the nineteenth century and Kohlberg's theory of moral development.



**CHAPTER 3**  
**AN ANALYSIS OF MOTHER'S PARENTING STYLE**  
**AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF FEMALE MAIN CHARACTERS**  
**IN LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S *LITTLE WOMEN***

This chapter analyzes Marmee's character and how her parenting style affects the girls' moral development. The first part is an analysis of Marmee as a refined woman of the nineteenth century, and her parenting style will be analyzed. The second part is a study of moral development of the female main characters; Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy which were influenced by their mother's parenting style.

**Marmee: a Refined Woman of the Nineteenth Century**

Marmee is the four girls' mother who is perfect and hard working. She takes care of her children, supports her husband, and helps other people. Her goodness is clearly exhibit to everyone, especially to her daughters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. By Marmee's role model, they learn to be good ladies.

In the nineteenth century, American women were expected to conform with society standard. The ideal women should be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic (Welter 152). Piety is the first quality of being a true woman. Women were expected to pay attention to religion and perform virtuous behavior. Robert E. Riegel notes that women are close to God by nature and they have the duty to do goodness (35-36). Besides, ladies are required to be pure. They have to preserve their virginity until marriage (Welter 158). True women live the innocent lives which are free from any thoughts of love or sexuality. The most important virtue of all women is submissiveness. Women are placed in a responsive role while men are the leader and provider (Burstyn 119). Good wives should accept and follow their husbands'

command. They live humbly, modestly, and patiently. Domesticity is the last virtue of true women. American tradition places ladies to stay in the domestic sphere (Abbott 14). Women have to work at home and take care of their husbands and children. These four virtues are required of female behaviors in the nineteenth century America.

Marmee's characteristics are related to the quality of a true woman. She is virtuous, pure, passive, and dutiful. Her virtuous quality is clearly shown through her living and rearing her children. She believes in God and depends on God, especially when she is in trouble. God is her helper when her husband is away at the war. Marmee tells her story to Jo when Jo is confused how her mother live without a husband. Marmee explains that God comforts and strengthens her when she suffers through hardships, "If I don't seem to need help, it is because I have a better friend, even than Father, to comfort and sustain me" (77). The "Father" that Marmee refers to is her husband. When Mr. March stays away from home, she resorts to God as her helper. This can be seen that Marmee is close to God. She trusts in God and believes that He can help her to overcome any trouble.

As a religious woman, Marmee sets herself as a model of purity. She tells Jo about her experience of dealing with anger and encourages Jo to wrestle it the way she does,

I've been trying to cure it for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it; and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so. (75)

Marmee tries to control her anger for forty years. When Mr. March sends a letter to remind his daughters to be good, Marmee follows his will. She advises the girls to play as pilgrims, a role play from the girls' childhood in which they act out scenes from John Bunyan's didactic novel, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. Marmee says,

We never are too old for this, my dear, because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another. Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City. Now, my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get before Father comes home. (11)

Marmee teaches the girls to cope with difficulties and temptations for reaching goodness and happiness. The burdens stand for real life flaws, and the Celestial City stands for heaven. By supposing themselves as the pilgrims, the girls are willing to practice their living in a virtuous way.

Apart from the virtues of piety and purity, Marmee teaches her children that she is responsive and passive which are the quality of a true woman in the nineteenth century. She is inferior to her husband and tries to follow his will. Marmee tells Jo about Mr. March and her. She says that Mr. March expects her to be a role model of their daughters, “He helped and comforted me, and showed me that I must try to practice all the virtues I would have my little girls possess, for I was their example” (76). Marmee tries to practice all virtues and set herself as a good example for her children.

As a wife, Marmee represents a submissive wife who always thinks that she should work honestly and take care of the girls for her husband, “speaking of Father reminded me how much I miss him, how much I owe him, and how faithfully I should watch and work to keep his little daughters safe and good for him” (77). Marmee loves and adores her husband. She is delighted to support her husband and is willing to look after the family for him. Marmee never complains about her trouble but she honestly cares for the family and the girls. Jo also sees how her mother is responsiveness and passiveness. Jo tells Meg, “don’t let us grumble but shoulder our bundles and trudge along as cheerfully as Marmee does” (32). Jo

encourages Meg to be patient and to bear her work as Marmee does.

According to Marmee's role as a wife and mother, she reflects a domestic woman. Her main task is to run the household work and takes care of her children. Marmee lets the girls help her do the jobs and teaches them to value their duties, "Don't you feel that it is pleasanter to help one another, to have daily duties which make leisure sweet when it comes, and to bear and forbear, that home may be comfortable and lovely to us all?" (110). Marmee teaches the girls after they try to live without work for a week. They find that the house is dirty from the lazy time and each acknowledges herself that she should be responsible for her jobs.

As a mother, Marmee spends most of her time with her children. The story details an enjoyable hour of the family that Marmee leads her daughters to sing a song before they go to bed.

At nine they stopped work, and sang, as usual, before they go to bed...And it had become a household custom, for the mother was a born singer. The first sound in the morning was her voice as she went about the house singing like a lark, and the last sound at night was the same cheery sound, for the girls never grew too old for that familiar lullaby. (11-12)

Marmee sings songs for her children every day and night. She creates a happy time with her daughters and nurtures them with love and warmth. She also takes good care of her girls when they fall ill. When Amy and Jo have an accident while skating at the river, Marmee nurses and looks after them, "When Amy was comfortably asleep, the house quiet, and Mrs. March sitting by the bed, she called Jo to her and began to bind up the hurt hands" (74). With Marmee's love and care, her children are saved and pleased.

Throughout her life, Marmee presents the quality of piety, purity, passivity, and domesticity. She believes that she should be the example of her daughters. She sets herself as



a role model for the girls to follow. “I would have my girls possess, for I was their example (76).

In conclusion, Marmee represents a refined woman of the nineteenth century America who performs her role flawlessly. She is a good mother who takes care of her children with love and care and also set herself as a role model for them to follow. She teaches and guides her daughters to be good little women.

### **Marmee’s Parenting Style**

Being the model of a true woman, Marmee expects her daughters to follow her steps. She teaches and guides the girls to structure and to evaluate their conduct. With Marmee’s love and rules, children can acquire desirable behaviors of the society.

Marmee expects the girls to conform themselves with social’s standards. She teaches them to value woman convention and to acquire the qualities of piety, purity, humility, and domesticity. At the beginning of the story, Marmee guides the girls to do good things by imagining themselves as pilgrims in the religious book, “Now, my little pilgrims, suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far on you can get before Father comes home” (11). She explains that in reality everyone has to encounter with difficulties as the pilgrims do in a play. She tells them that with goodness and happiness, one can overcome troubles and reach the peace of life, “Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace which is a true Celestial City” (11). The girls learn to improve their behaviors, overcome evil and live righteously as pilgrims. In this way, Children absorb piety and purity in them.

Apart from being piety and purity, Marmee expects her daughters to grow up as modest ladies.

That is perfectly natural, and quite harmless, if the liking does not become a passion and leads one to do foolish or unmaidenly things. Learn to know and value the praise which is worth having, and to excite the admiration of excellent people by being modest as well as pretty, Meg. (91)

Marmee knows that Meg is a girl who is proud of her beauty. She reminds Meg that she should not be indulged with her looks, but humble herself with the praises. Like Meg, Amy was taught to deal with her arrogance and learn about humility. Marmee's guides Amy to understand how to be a modest person.

You have a good many little gifts and virtues, but there is no need of parading them, for conceit spoils the finest genius. There is not much danger that real talent or goodness will be overlooked long; even if it is, the consciousness of possessing and using it well should satisfy one, and the great charm of all power is modesty. (67)

Marmee explains that a talented person will not show off, but he/ she will use gifts to satisfy others. She guides Amy to correct her boasting manner and become humble. Modesty is an important virtue that all women of the nineteenth century should have. Marmee is concerned about it and tries to teach her daughters to be aware of it and to behave themselves in a humble way.

According to domestic value, Marmee teaches her daughters that doing house chores honestly can make home a livable place. When the girls stop working for some time to enjoy themselves, they found that the home becomes an uncomfortable place. Having let the children do something on their own, Marmee uses this situation to teach her daughters to be responsible for their work,

I wanted you to see how the comfort of all depends on each doing her share faithfully...Don't you feel that it is pleasanter to help one another, to have daily duties which make leisure sweet when it comes, and to bear and forbear, that home may be comfortable and lovely to us all? (110)

In this way, the four girls learn to value household work as well as honesty on their duties. Meg and Jo, the oldest sisters, are taught about the subject of love and marriage.

Marmee speaks to them,

I sincerely hope my girls may know this beautiful experience. It is natural to think of it, Meg, right to hope and wait for it, and wise to prepare for it, so that when the happy time comes, you may feel ready for the duties and worthy of the joy. (92)

Marmee teaches Meg and Jo to prepare themselves for their own families and to be good wives. It is significant for a mother to train her daughters to be domestic ladies who have the quality of good wives and responsibility for household work.

Despite the fact that Marmee teaches her children, she is a responsive mother. She is attentive to the girls' needs and nurtures them with love and warmth. She spends time with them, and participates in solving their problems.

Marmee is interested in her children's needs. When the girls ask her for a rest and want to stop working, she allows them to try it for a week, "You may try your experiment for a week and see how you like it. I think by Saturday night you will find that all play and no work is as bad as all work and no play" (103). Marmee lets her children take their rest and hopes that they will learn the lesson on their own. She is a rational, flexible, and responsive mother. Instead of ignoring her children's needs, she listens to them and responds to their request.

In term of responsiveness, Marmee is concerned with the girls' feelings and is always attentive to their problems. When Amy was punished by teacher David at school, Marmee comforts Amy with love and sympathy. The story details that, "Mrs. March did not say much but looked disturbed, and comforted her afflicted little daughter in her tenderest manner" (66). Marmee does not approve of corporal punishment as Mr. David, her daughter's teacher does. On the contrary, she believes that a milder method is a better way of mending a fault (67). Marmee never beats or uses any negative way for correcting the girls' misbehaviors, but she tries to teach, encourage, and help her children to correct their false attitude and conform in an appropriate manner. In the case of Jo, Marmee does not blame or punish Jo when she does not look after Amy and let her sink in the water. While Jo is sad, instead of blaming, Marmee encourages Jo to try to cure her fault, "Watch and pray, dear, never get tired of trying, and never think it is impossible to conquer your fault" (75). Marmee shows her sympathy and gives comfort to the crying Jo. She draws Jo's head to her shoulder and kisses the wet cheek tenderly (75). Through Marmee's love and care, Jo feels better and has more confidence to struggle with her flaws again. Alcott describes that "The patience and the humility of the face she loved so well was a better lesson to Jo than the wisest lecture, the sharpest reproof. She felt comforted at once by the sympathy and confidence given her" (75).

Marmee is a good comforter and helper for her children. She spends time with them, attentive to their feelings and helps them deal with any difficulties. Marmee never blames them when they do wrong, but she encourages them to correct their faults.

It is Marmee who is a demanding and responsive mother. She imposes guidelines and rules for children to follow. At the same time, she expresses warmth and responsiveness to her children. She nurtures them with love and care, and is attentive to their needs. In terms of parenting style, Marmee is an authoritative parent. Diana Baumrind suggests that parents of authoritative style are demanding and responsive. They set reasonable limits for their

children. However, they express warmth and affection, listen to their child's opinions, and respond to their needs (Marion 50). Several studies indicate that authoritative parents improve children's development to become self-esteem, have social and moral maturity, involvement in school learning, academic achievement in high school, and educational attainment (Santrock 564). The four sisters as well, they transform from childish girls into refined ladies.

### **Moral Development of the Four Young Women**

According to Marmee's model and guidance, the four young women; Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy grow up with desirable quality—modesty, domesticity, piety, and purity. The following part discusses how the four little women learn to correct their flaws and develop their morality.

#### **Meg: from a Proud Beautiful Girl to a Humble Young Lady**

Meg, the eldest sister, is in her sixteen years old when the story begins. She is a pretty girl with plump figure, large eyes, brown hair, and small white hands. She is proud of her looks and enjoys being praised. Meg speaks to her mother after she coming back from the Moffats' party, "But it is nice to be praised and admired, and I can't help saying I like it" (91). She also wants to have a luxurious life, "The more she saw of Annie Moffat's party things, the more she envied her and sighed to be rich" (81). Meg feels envy of her wealthy friend, Anny Moffat. With her ambition, Meg is not satisfied with the poverty of her family and does not want to work as a baby-sitter as she does for earning money.

As Marmee treats Meg with love and understanding, knows that Meg is fond of a luxurious life, she allows her to visit the Moffats' house which is a fashionable family. "Mrs. March had consented to the visit rather reluctantly, fearing that Margaret would come back more discontented than she went" (81). The Moffats, a rich family, invites Meg to enjoy a party at their house. Although Marmee is worried about Meg, but she hopes that Meg will experience a fashionable's life on her own. While Meg is at the Moffats' house, she enjoys attending the party, wearing beautiful dresses, and talking about fashions. At the same time, she gets embarrassed to such life. Meg tells her mother when she returns home that, "It does seem pleasant to be quiet, and not have company manners on all the time. Home is a nice place, though it isn't splendid" (90). Meg realizes that a fashionable life is confused. She is satisfied with the condition of her life and family. It shows that Meg's attitude was changed. She learns to leave her false pride and humble herself which pleases her mother. Marmee says after Meg returns home, "I'm glad to hear you say so, dear, for I was afraid home would seem dull and poor to your fine quarters" (90). Marmee is glad when her ambitious girl learns to live submissively.

After the party, Meg becomes more willing to do hard works and serves the others rather than worrying about herself. Meg helps her mother run the household and take care of her younger sisters. Her domestic quality is exhibited to everyone especially to her father who returns home a following year. He observes Meg's development and praises her, "Meg, my dear, I value the womanly skill which keeps home happy more than white hands or fashionable accomplishments. I'm proud to shake this good, industrious little hands" (205). Meg grows up as a domestic woman as the expectation of her parents and the society.

Apart from Meg's quality of humility and domesticity, Meg learns to be a virtuous woman. She pays attention to religion and desires to do goodness. When Marmee gives her a religious book, she reads it every day. After receiving the Bible from Marmee on Christmas day, Meg tells her sisters, "I shall keep my book on the table here and read a little every morning as soon as I wake, for I know it will do me good and help me through the day" (13). Meg believes that she will be a good girl when reading the book. She also persuades her sisters to follow her, "Mother wants us to read and love and mind these books, and we must begin at once. We used to be faithful about it" (13). Meg values her mother's regulations as well as the Bible.

Because Meg is the oldest sister, Marmee brings up the topic of marriage to teach her. She wants her "...to be beautiful, accomplished, and good; to be admired, loved, and respected; to have a happy youth, to be well and wisely married" (92). Marmee expects Meg to be a good lady, and has a happy marriage. With Marmee's teaching, Meg learns to be aware of her dignity and purity. She and Jo, her sister, respond to their mother's teaching, "We will, Marmee, we will!" (93). When Meg is in love with Mr. Brook, she tells him to wait for her because she thinks that she is too young and wants much time to learn about love and to prepare herself. She obediently, "I've got so much to learn before I shall be ready, it seems a short time to me" (216). Meg's answer shows that she follows her mother's teaching.

It can be seen that Meg learns to change her manner from vanity to humility. With Marmee's nurturing and teaching, she becomes a refined lady who has the quality of piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity. The change of Meg's behaviors can be referred to Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development at stage three, interpersonal concordance orientation. At this stage, adolescents need to live up to the expectations of their parents. Meg learns to be aware of her mother's rules and social norms rather than herself.

### **Jo: from a Tomboy to a Neat Lady**

Jo is the second daughter of the family. She was fifteen when the story begins. She is a tomboy who is against being a lady,

I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as China aster! It's bad enough to be girl, anyway, when I like boys' games and work and manners! I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy. (5)

Jo prefers to play games and work outside like a boy than to stay home and behave like a lady. Her favorite activities are reading and writing. She reads many books when she looks after Aunt March, Mr. March's sister, at Aunt March's house. Jo enjoys writing plays and can earn money from the writings. With her boyish character, Jo has to face many temptations before becomes a refine lady.

Marmee teaches Jo to realize her flaws and to deal with them. When Jo is angry with Amy because Amy burned her book, Marmee tells Jo to forgive Amy, "My dear, don't let the sun go down upon your anger; forgive each other, help each other, and begin again tomorrow" (72). Marmee is a kind and calm person. Because of her love of her daughters, she never scolds at them or uses bad words with them. On the contrary, Marmee shows her understanding and encourages Jo to overcome her anger as quickly as she can. However, when Jo failed to control her fiery temper, Marmee is always on Jo's side. Marmee gives an example of herself on trying to stop anger to Jo to be confident when fighting the enemy.

I've been trying to cure it for forty years, and have only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it; and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another forty years to do so. (75)



By telling Jo about herself, Marmee let Jo know that she shared the feeling as Jo and had tried for years to stop it. With Marmee's soothing explanation, Jo feels better and gains confidence to resolve her problem more easily.

She felt comforted at once by the sympathy and confidence given her; the knowledge that her mother had a fault like hers, and tried to mend it, made her own easier to bear and strengthened her resolution to cure it. (75)

Jo gradually changes from her aggressive behavior to become a reasonable lady. When her father returns home, he notices that Jo has obviously developed.

I don't see the 'son-Jo' whom I left a year ago," said Mr. March. "I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug as she used to do...I like to look at it, for it has grown gentler, and her voice is lower; she doesn't bounce, but moves quietly, and takes care of a certain little person in a motherly way which delights me. (205)

Mr. March sees that Jo is gentle, neat, and quiet when he came home. Jo moves carefully, talks sweetly, and takes care of others in a proper way. It is a desired behavior which he hopes to see in Jo's life.

Not only does Jo change into a polite young lady, but she also has a quality of domesticity. Jo learns to be responsible for her duties at home. Marmee tells her children that helping one another makes the living pleasant, "Don't you feel that it is pleasanter to help one another, to have daily duties which make leisure sweet when it comes, and to bear and forbear, that home may be comfortable and lovely to us all?" (110). Marmee teaches Jo and her sisters to value household work. According to Marmee's reasoning, Jo becomes more awareness of her duties. That is to look after aunt March and to help Marmee do household works. Jo is willing to serve the other and does household works instead of running outside

home. When Marmee goes to visit her husband in the war, Jo helps Meg do all hard chores. Meg writes a letter to tell Marmee that “Jo helps me with the sewing, and insists on doing all sorts of hard jobs” (157). Meg also sees that a naughty Jo has changed to be a refined woman.

Like Meg, Jo values the guide book given to her by Marmee, so she tries to follow its regulations. Jo feels better when she reads the book as she told her mother that “I read my book, felt better, resolved not to let the sun set on my anger, and ran over to tell Laurie I was sorry” (158). Reading the book, Jo learns to calm down and does not get angry easily. She even forgives her friend, Laurie. When she is in trouble, she prays to God, “in the silence which followed the sincerest prayer she had ever prayed left her heart without words” (77). Instead of burning her temper or fighting with others, Jo asks God for help when she wants to overcome her temper. In this way, Jo follows her Marmee’s way of attentive to religion.

Jo grows up as a refined lady. Though she has a close relationship with Laurie, she never thinks and treats him as a lover. When Laurie was sick and lonely, Jo visited him and took care of him as a friend, “The solitary, hungry look in his eyes went straight to Jo’s warm heart. She had been simply taught that was no nonsense in her head, and at fifteen she was as innocent and frank as any child” (47). Jo feels pity for Laurie, however, she does not do anything inappropriate even when they are together. This shows that Jo is a good and innocent lady.

Jo’s moral development can be explained as the third stage in Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, interpersonal concordance orientation. Children and adolescents at this stage are aware of their parents’ moral standards. Jo values her mother’s teachings and tries to follow them. She attempts to control her temper and stay calm as a modest lady. Jo can overcome her anger and become a polite, humble, and dutiful woman.

### **Beth and Her Refined Quality**

Beth is the second-youngest daughter of the family. She is sweet and helpful, and has a shy and quiet manner. She is an angel at home, “Elizabeth—or Beth, as everyone called her—was a rosy, smooth-haired, bright-eyed girl of thirteen, with a shy manner, a timid voice, and a peaceful expression which was seldom disturbed” (6). Beth prefers to live quietly at home and avoids most public situation. She enjoys serving and treating others, never thinking of any reward but to be loved (37). Beth is a good girl by nature and with Marmee’s nurturing and modeling, she learns to live up to the social convention of female behavior.

Beth absorbs her mother’s way of living and learns to help others. When her mother goes to visit her husband at the war, Beth takes care of the Hummels, a poor family which Marmee and the girls try to help them. “I have been every day, but the baby is sick, and I don’t know what to do for it. Mrs. Hummel goes away to work, and Lottchen takes care of it; but it gets sicker and sicker, and I think you or Hunnah ought to go” (163). After Beth visited the Hummels and found that the baby was sick, she refers to her mother’s teaching when she asked Meg for help, “Meg, I wish you’d go and see the Hummels; you know Mother told us not to forget them” (163). From this situation, Beth nearly dies by contracting the scarlet fever from the baby. Everyone sees how sweet and helpful Beth is.

...learned to see the beauty and the sweetness of Beth’s nature, to feel how deep and tender a place she filled in all hearts, and to acknowledge the worth of Beth’s unselfish ambition to live for others, and make home happy by the exercise of those simple virtues which all many possess, and which all should love and value more than talent, wealth, or beauty. (169-170)

Beth's life makes her sisters aware of being kindness, selfless, and goodness. Beth is willing to help Hannah, the maid of her family, to keep home neat and comfortable out of her genuine kindness, "She was a housewifely little creature, and helped Hannah keep home neat and comfortable for the workers, never thinking of any reward but to be loved" (37). Beth enjoys doing the household work. She performs her duties honestly. She sometimes helps her sisters do their tasks when they forget. The March's house is neat and livable by Beth. Marmee is a role model of housewife. She teaches and trains her daughters to be responsible for their house chores. Additionally, Beth and her sisters learn to do domestic work.

Taking Marmee as a model of piety, Beth pays attention to God and the Bible. "When her heart got heavy with longing for Mother or fears for Father, she went away into a certain closet, hid her face in the folds of a certain dear old gown, and made her little moan and prayed her little prayer quietly by herself" (162). Beth prays to God when she thinks of Marmee and worries about her father. And she reads the Bible every day, "I read every morning, try to be good all day" (159). Beth writes a letter to Marmee when Marmee visited her husband.

Among the four little daughters, Beth has little to do with her behavior. She is a good girl by nature as Mr. March comments that "There's little of her, I'm afraid to say much, for fear she will slip away altogether, though she is not so shy as she used to be" (206). Mr. March found that Beth is not as shy as she used to be. However, Beth looks like her mother and is obviously influenced by Marmee's model. She is willing to conform to being a lady. According to Kohlberg's moral development in children, the third stage happens when children want to please others. They want to be approved by their parents as a "good girl" or "good boy". For Beth, she does not want any rewards, except to please others and to be a good girl.

### **Amy: from a Spoiled to a Sweet Girl**

Amy is twelve years old and the youngest sister of the family. She is spoiled by everybody's love and is inclined to throw tantrum when things do not go her way. Like Meg, Amy loves luxuries and takes an interest in her appearance. She is also proud of her artistic talents—drawing, scrupling, and speaking French. With her talents and good-tempered, Amy is popular among her friends. They call Amy a “perfectly elegant” girl (38). However, Amy learns to cure her false pride and spoiled behavior and conforms herself as an ideal woman.

Like Meg, Marmee teaches Amy how to deal with her pride in a modest way.

You have a good many little gifts and virtues, but there is no need of parading them, for conceit spoils the finest genius. There is not much danger that real talent or goodness will be overlooked long; even if it is, the consciousness of possessing and using it well should satisfy one, and the great charm of all power is modesty. (67)

Marmee reasons that Amy's gifts are useless when she boasted of them, but by humble herself, she can satisfy the others. Amy absorbs her mother's teaching with understanding. “I see. It's nice to have accomplishments and be elegant, but not to show off or get perked up” (67). She realizes the value of being humble and learns to be a talent person with modest manner. It is an important quality which was expected on women in the nineteenth century.

Amy becomes a girl who is willing to serve the others rather than concerning about herself. Her father notices that his daughter is helpful, patient, and humorous. “I observed that Amy took drumsticks at dinner, ran errands for her mother all the afternoon, gave Meg her place tonight, and has waited on every one with patience and good humor” (206). At dinner, Amy serves her mother and her sisters with cheerfully. Amy learns to do the household work from Meg when Marmee is away to visit her husband who was sick in the war. Meg writes a

letter to Marmee and tells her that; “Amy minds me nicely, and I take great care of her. She does her own hair, and I am teaching her to make button holes and mend her stockings” (157). Amy learns to do things by herself.

Amy is also interested in reading the Bible and sets a room for reading it when she lives at aunt March’s house. She asks God to save Beth from the scarlet fever. “On the table she laid her little Testament and hymnbook...and came every day to sit alone, thinking good thoughts, and praying to the dear God to preserve her sister” (179).

The development of Amy reflects the third stage of Lawrence Kohlberg’s theory of moral development or interpersonal concordance orientation. At this stage, children want to please others, such as parents, relatives, and other people in the society, and seek to be recognized in the community they live. From a girl who needs to be loved and accepted by her family and her friends, Amy learns to correct her spoiled and arrogant behavior.

To sum up, the four sisters learn to instruct and to evaluate their conduct according to the standards of Marmee and the society of the nineteenth century America. They clearly exhibit the quality of piety, purity, humility, and domesticity. Their development refers as the third stage in Kohlberg’s theory of moral development, interpersonal concordance orientation. Children and adolescents at this stage are aware of their parents’ moral standards. Each needs to be a good person of others. The four girls want to be good girls according to the expectation of their mother and their father. They follow Marmee’s rules and steps of becoming refined ladies of the society. Eventually, they can overcome their flaws, reach desirable conducts, and are praised as refine ladies.

## CHAPTER 4

### CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

This study focuses on the mother's parenting style of Marmee that influences moral development of her four daughters—Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. Marmee, a traditional woman, expects her daughters to be refined ladies of the society. How Marmee helps her little girls to acquire approved standards of behavior is the objective of the study. The researcher examines Marmee's parenting style and how it influences moral development of the four sisters.

The study shows that Marmee has the quality of refined woman. She is virtuous, submissive, and domestic. She believes in God, pays attention to the Bible, and tries to do goodness. As a wife and mother, she is inferior to her husband and takes care of her children. When Mr. March is away at the war, Marmee has to raise the children on her own. The study indicates that Marmee's style of child-rearing is close to an authoritative parenting style. According to Baumrind, parents of authoritative style establish reasonable rules to their child conducts. However, they are flexible, reasonable, and show love and affection to their children (Santrock 564). Marmee reflects her authoritative mother by her teaching and love. She teaches the girls to value women norms and guides them to live up as true ladies. That is to be pious, pure, submissive, and domestic. However, Marmee never blame the girls when they do something wrong. She encourages the sisters to cure their false attitude and behaviors. She shows love, warmth, and responsiveness to her children, takes good care on them, and is attentive to their needs. When her daughters have problems, she always listens to them and helps them overcome any obstacles. With Marmee's love and rules, the four girls learn to adjust themselves and to become true women like their mother.

By Marmee's nurturing, the four little women who are Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy learn to be refined ladies of the nineteenth century America. They transform from vain, naughty,

and spoiled girls into modest, neat, and sweet ladies.

Meg, the oldest sister, is vain; however, she grows up as a modest and refined lady. Marmee as a role model, Meg learns to be humble and become satisfied with her family rather than a luxurious life. Without complaining, Meg helps her mother run the household and take care of her sisters. She is a pious lady who is attentive to read and follow the guide book which she received from her mother. Apart from her virtue, Meg has a pure life. She concerns to be admired and to prepare herself for marriage. In this way, Meg values female's norms and follows her mother's teaching in order to be a refined lady of the society.

Jo, the second eldest sister, changes from a tomboy to a neat girl. She learns to deal with her anger by follow her mother's model and guiding. Marmee encourages Jo to try to overcome her flaw and to live pleasantly as Marmee does. Taking Marmee as her model, Jo becomes a calm and refined lady. Jo speaks and acts politely when treating others. She is responsive for the household work instead of playing outside the house. As a virtuous lady, Jo pays attention to the bible and always prays to God. It is obvious that Jo's development is influenced by Marmee's love and care.

Beth, with her refined quality, is also influenced by Marmee's nurturing. She is taught to value and concerns the standards of the community. Beth learns to do her duties honestly. Like a housekeeper, she always keeps the house neat and comfortable. She is willing to please and treat others. Beth reads the bible every day and tries to be a good girl in order to reach her mother's expectation. It can be concluded that mother plays an influential role in making Beth to conform to social standards.

Like her oldest sisters, Amy follows Marmee's regulations and adjusts herself well to them. Amy learns to correct her spoiled and selfish manners. She also learns to serve others. She learns to take care of people in the family rather than concern about herself. Besides, she becomes religious as her mother. In this way, Amy learns to be a refined lady who lives up to



the standards of society.

It is clearly seen that Marmee's model and her parenting style is a major influence on the four sisters' moral development. By Marmee's guidance, the children learn to value and behave appropriately as the expectation of community. They pay attention to religion, believe in God, and obey the Bible. They are humble, passive, and take care of others.

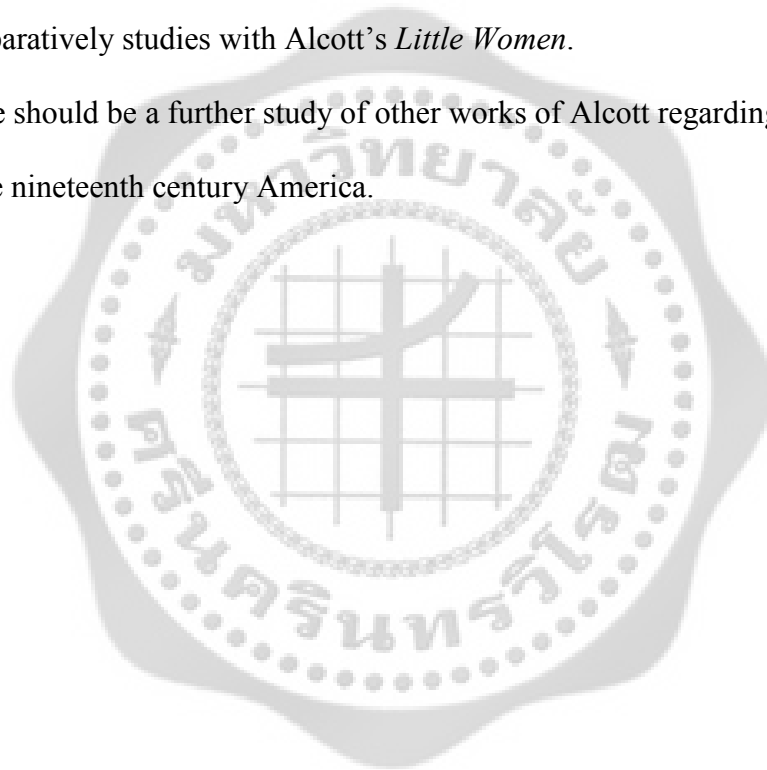
Their development relates to the third stage of Kohlberg's theory of moral development. Normally, adolescents adopt the standards of their community and reach the level of conventional moral development (Cobb 367). Within this level, adolescence at stage 3, interpersonal norm, needs to live up to the expectations of others and to be recognized as a "good girl" or a "good boy" (Shaffer 519). The March sisters, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy want to be good girls in order to meet the expectation of their mother and father. While learning to correct their faults, they gradually grow into refined womanhood. Within a year, they can overcome their blemish and conform themselves with social's standards. In the end of the story, they are praised as good ladies by their father who returns home from war.

This study shows that the female main characters develop their moral development in a way that meets social expectations of the nineteenth century America. The study also shows that with mother's love and care, the young girls learn how to deal with misconduct and how to behave appropriately. They are concerned with behaving in a right way that will help them to be accepted by the other in their groups. The moral development of adolescents can be guided by parents who maintain moderate love and control to their children. With parents' guidance, youths would understand what kinds of behavior they should follow and what to avoid. They would learn to conform to social rules and regulations and be a part of their group. Without such guidance, it is possible that young adults may become spoiled, selfish, unruly, and cannot live in society happily.

### Suggestions for Further Studies

In this study, the researcher focuses on the mother's parenting style of Marmee that influences moral development of her four daughters. However, there are some points that should be further studies as follows:

1. Other factors that will affect the girls' development, such as peers, education, and economic should be studied.
2. The works of other American writers in the nineteenth century should be comparatively studies with Alcott's *Little Women*.
3. There should be a further study of other works of Alcott regarding woman's role in the nineteenth century America.





**WORKS CITED**

## WORKS CITED

- Abbott, Marie Richmond. *The American Women: Her Past, Her Present, Her Future*.  
New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979. Print.
- Alcott, Louisa May. *Little Women*. Great Britain: Penguin Group, 1994. Print.
- Berkowitz, Marvin W. "Fostering Goodness: Teaching Parents to Facilitate Children's  
Moral Development." *Journal of Moral Education*. 27.3 (1998): 371-391. Web. 10  
June 2009.
- Brooks, Jane B. *The Process of Parenting*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 2004. Print.
- Burstyn, Joan N. *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood*. New Jersey: Rutgers  
University, 1984. Print.
- Cobb, Nancy J. *Adolescence: Continuity, Change, and Diversity*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. New York:  
McGraw-Hill, 2007. Print.
- Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: Woman's Sphere in New England, 1780-1835*.  
New Heaven: Yale University, 1977. Print.
- Drew, Bernard A. *The 100 Most Popular Young Adult Authors: Biographical Sketches  
and Bibliographies*. Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1996. Print.
- Dusek, Jerome B. *Adolescent Development & Behavior*. Englewood Cliffs:  
Prentice-Hall International, 1987. Print.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*.  
Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993. Print.
- Glazer, Joan I. *Literature for Young Children*. 3th ed. New York: Macmillan  
Publishing Company, 1991. Print.
- Hildebrand, Verna. *Parenting: Rewards and Responsibilities*. New York: McGraw-Hill,  
1994. Print.

- Hillaker, Barbara D., et al. "The Contributions of Parenting to Social Competencies and Positive Values in Middle School Youth: Positive Family Communication, Maintaining Standards, and Supportive Family Relationships." *Family Relations*. 57.5 (2008): 591-601. Web. 20 May 2010.
- Hurlock, Elizabeth B. *Adolescent Development*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1949. Print.
- Lerner, Richard M. *Adolescence: Development, Diversity, Context, and Application*. New Jersey: Pearson Education, 2002. Print.
- Lee, Jennifer. "Alcott's Little Women and the Domestication of Female Desire." MA thesis Ball State U, 2006. web. 18 June 2009.
- Limmanhong, Jaturaporn. *Adolescent Psychology*. Bangkok: Ramkhamhaeng University Publishing, 2003. Print.
- Marion, Marian. *Guidance of Young Children*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1995. Print.
- Meece, Judith L. *Child and Adolescent Development for Educators*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2002. Print.
- Murphy, Ann B. "The Borders of Ethical, Erotic, and Artistic Possibilities in "Little Women". *The Ideology of Mothering: Disruption and Reproduction of Patriarchy*. 15.3 (1990): 562-585. Web. 23 June 2009.
- Myerson, Joel, eds. *The Journals of Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: The Estate of Theresa W. Pratt, 1989. Print.
- Norton, Donna E. *Through the Eyes of a Child: an Introduction to Children's Literature*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Columbus: Merrill Publishing Company, 1987. Print.
- Riegel, Robert E. *American Women: A Story of Social Change*. New Jersey: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1970. Print.

- Roberts, Catherine Elizabeth. "Telling 'truth truly': The startling self of adolescent girls in nineteenth-century New England diaries." *DAI-A* 60.6 (1999): 1-262. *Proquest*. Web. 18 June 2009.
- Santrock, John W. *Adolescence*. Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1996. Print.
- Saxton, Martha. *Louisa May: A Modern Biography of Louisa May Alcott*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1977. Print.
- Shaffer, David R. *Developmental Psychology Childhood and Adolescence*. 6<sup>th</sup> ed. Belmont: Wadsworth Group, 2002. Print.
- The Holy Bible New International Version*. Ed. International Bible Society. Michigan: Zondervan, 1973. Print.
- Thongma, Phrakob and Kusuma-Na-Ayudaya, Teuak. *English Language (Literature): Little Women Guidline*. Bangkok: Kurusapa Business Organization, 1968. Print.
- Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860; American Quarterly." *American Quarterly* 18.2 (1966): 151-174. Web. 9 Dec. 2008.
- Wester, Bethany Suzanne. "At home we work together: Domestic Feminisms and Patriarchy in Little Women." MA thesis Florida State U, 2005. web. 18 June 2009.



**VITAE**

**Name:** Udomphon Ratprutthikul  
**Date of Birth:** May 20, 1979  
**Place of Birth:** Suphanburi  
**Address:** 105/31 Somdejprajaotaksin 41, Bangpakok, Ratchaburana,  
Bangkok 10140

**Education Background:**

2005 Bachelor of Arts (English) from Ramkhamhaeng University  
2011 Master of Arts (English) from Srinakharinwirot University

