Volume 23 Issue 44
Originally issued as C5



Global Journal of human-social science: C
Sociology & Culture
Volume 23 Issue 5 Version 1.0 Year 2023
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

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GJHSS-C Classification: FOR: 1608



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Abstract- Rereading *Little Women* by Lousia May Alcott, an enduring classic in American literary history, the present paper argues that Mrs. March, as a moderate feminist drawing much from the transcendental thoughts about individualism, parents her daughters with empathy and care, while acknowledging the limitations of gender roles in the mid-19th century New England context. The March girls undergo journeys of growth, coping with negative emotions related to class and gender, and developing individual personalities under their mother's guidance. Mrs. March's empathic parenting leaves a lasting impact on her daughters, empowering them to navigate the complexities of their world and embrace their true selves with strength, compassion, and love.

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I. Introduction

Louisa May Alcott was Born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, in 1832, the second of four daughters of Abba May Alcott and Amos Broson Alcott. Broson Alcott was a prominent Transcendentalist thinker and educational reformer. When the children were very young, the family moved to Concord, Massachusetts, where lived well-known American transcendentalists like Emerson, Hawthorne, and Thoreau. And these great transcendentalists were neighbors to Alcott's family. These American Transcendentalists believed that one could find spirituality through nature and reason. Educated by her father at home, Alcott was under great influence of these transcendentalists. The Spirit of Self-reliance promoted by Emerson found expression in Alcott's character, which later exerts immense influence on Alcott's writing style. Alcott's father's several attempts at educational reform failed and the family suffered from severe poverty. It was Alcott's mother who struggled to shoulder the financial burden of the family. Thus from her youth, Alcott worked at various tasks to help her mother support the family: sewing, teaching, domestic services, and writing. Alcott was keen on reading and writing from her childhood. She dreamed of becoming a writer to save her family from poverty. "Alcott never gave up writing, no matter how tired she might be from teaching or sewing."(Delamar 38) Alcott's first published story entiled "The Rival Painters" was on *Olive Branch Magazine* on May 8, 1852 for five dollars. She published an series of "*Flowers Fables"* dedicated to daughter of Emerson Ellen Emerson, in 1854 for the reward of 32 dollars. In the 1850s Alcott published many stories on *The Saturday Evening Gazette*. In those writings Alcott attempted different genres of narratives, the sensational, the sentimental or romantic, the realistic, and the domestic; or she combined the genres in one story. Through these contribution to the Gazette, Alcott developed her literary professionalism. Drawing on her experiences as a nurse at the Union Hotel Hospital during the Civil War she published *Hospital Sketches* in 1863 in which Alcott for the first time wrote "from real life." and it was in real life stories that her true talent lay. (Delamar 70) In 1868, at the request of a publisher to write a book about girls. Alcott began writing *Little Women*. The publication of the first part of *Little Women* in 1868 was an immediate success. And the publication of the second part in 1869 turned out to be more successful than the first part, which brought Alcott great fame and financial security. Then Alcott was confident to continue her career as a professional writer, to produce *An Old Fashioned Girl. Jo's Boys, Little Men*, etc., which were also popular among readers, but not as popular or successful as her little Women. "There is no argument that Louisa May Alcott's historical reputation is built primarily on *Little Women.*"(Delamar 201) Alcott was also an active abolitionist and suffragist, which is important to her independent identity.

Fully devoted to her career she did not get married and died in Boston in 1888.

In *Little Women* with the American Civil War as the background Mrs. March, a social worker, and her four daughters (Meg, Jo, Beth, Amy) live in a new neighborhood at Concord in Massachusetts in genteel poverty. Mr. March was on front serving as chaplain in the Civil War. With obvious autobiographical elements, Alcott infused into the novel many of the experiences of her family with four sisters. Alcott grew up in a family with atmosphere of warmth and intimacy her parents struggled for in spite of poverty. March's family is also filled with warmth and intimacy despite it's poverty.

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The novel is a coming-of-age stories of the March sisters. With intertextuality references to the 17th century British novel, *Pilgrim's Progress* by Bunyan March sister's growing up journeys are the pilgrimage journeys in which each of them with burden of weakness would go though difficulties and challenges to pursue their goodness and happiness. Chapters entitled "Playing Pilgrims", "Burdens", "Amy's Valley of Humiliation," "Meg goes to Vanity Fair", "Pleasant Meadows", "The Valley of Shadow" indicate intertextuality with *Pilgrim's Progress*, which runs through the whole novel. "The book has remained true to women's lives, but its meaning has shifted through time. Twentieth-century views of Alcott's book often are very different from those of past generation."

Since it's publication in the 19th century critics have studied the novel from perspectives like intertextuality, feminism, family romance, etc., few critics discuss the girls growth journey in relation to Mother's parenting with empathic care. The present paper studies March sisters' growth journeys under the Mother's parenting with empathy and care taking into account the mother's gendered limitations about the concept of female self in the historical context. Kohut defines empathy as, "the capacity to think and feel oneself into the inner life of another person" (Kohut, 82). Empathy is our ability to feel into the feeling and thinking of another person. Care ethics developed in the 1980s as a challenge to traditional principle-based ethical theories stresses the role of empathy. Proponents of care ethics argue that moral thought and action require both reason and emotion, as well as attention to the needs of particular others. Many care theorists identify empathy as an important element in ethical life. Nel Noddings holds that care is closely related to empathy since caring means attending to the specific needs of particular others and attempting to understand situations from the other's point of view.(quoted from Coplan and Goldie, XXVII) For Philosopher Michael Slote, care motivation is based in and sustained by empathy. (Slote, 16) This paper will argue that in *Little Women* March sisters undergo growth journeys under Marmee's empathic parenting guidance in the domestic world to develop healthy female selves in an ethical way, particularly resolve negative emotions appropriately in relation to gender and class in the middle 19th century New England context.

II. Girls' Growth Journeys under Marmee's Parenting with Empathy and Care

a) *Meg's Growth Journey as a Virtuous Traditional Woman*

Meg, is the oldest of March sisters, in *Little women*. Meg is 16 year old when the story starts. Meg is a traditional girl, fulfills expectations for women of that time. She is a pretty, gentle girl, manages the household when her mother is absent. As a teenager Meg admires luxuries, hates poverty, she dreams of marrying a rich husband in the future. She is employed as a governess for the Kings, a wealthy local family. Meg's pilgrimage journey involves her going to vanity fair, 2 weeks stay in the rich and fashionable family, her friend Annie Moffat's house to experience the fashionable family style she admires. Though Mrs. March is reluctant to consent Meg's visit for the fear that "Margaret would come back more discontented than she went."(85) But Meg has begged so had, Mrs. March empathizes Meg's eagerness for the visit and imagines that for Meg "a little pleasure seemed so delightful after a winter of hard work" (85), thus she yields. With exposure to the rich family daily life, Meg is shocked by what she sees, "The Moffats were very fashionable, and simple Meg was rather daunted, at first by the splendor of the house and the elegance of it's occupants."(85) Then Meg suffer from negative emotions in the rich family as Foote argues that Meg "falls prey to a half-understood feeling of injury and resentment". (Foot 71) "The more she saw Annie Moffat's pretty things, the more she envied her, and signed to be poor herself. Home now looked bare and dismal as she thought of it, work grew harder than ever, and she felt that she was a very destitute and much injured girl, in spite of the new gloves and silk stockings."(85) Such negative feelings derive from Meg's fragile inner self without stable view about the value of herself and her family of genteel poverty. Compared with her friend's fashionable family life, Meg as an teenager for the first time feels ashamed of herself and her family in relation to class and status. When the evening for the "small party" came, Meg is ashamed of the fact that she has only one good dancing gown and saw the other girls were putting on nice dresses and making themselves very fine. Though they are kind to her, Meg "saw only pity for her poverty, and her entire heart felt very heavy as she stood by herself."(86) In fact Meg is ashamed of her poor social class. What's worse, she hears the adults' gossip about her mother's plan to marry her to the rich neighbor Mr. Lawrence's grandson Laurie, which disgusts her. Yet she appeared to be proud, with all her gentleness, and her pride was useful, "for it helped her hide her mortification, anger and disgust at what she had just heard."(87) Meg did her best to seem gay till the party is over. But it was a restless night for her and she no longer felt peace and content with the old world of her home in which she grew up and the overheard gossip spoilt her innocent friendship with Laurie and shook her faith in her mother. She got up heavy-eyed, "unhappy, half resentful toward her friends, and half shamed of herself for not speaking out frankly and setting everything right."(88) Then the puzzled Meg with complex negative feelings associated with her poverty lets the rich girls dress her up as a "little beauty" to

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satisfy her vanity. However Laurie is shocked at Meg's fashionable appearance unlike her self and frankly told Meg his disapproval. Though Meg felt offended and resented towards Laurie's words, her genuine self told her that honest Laurie was right. Also she overheard that she was dressed like a doll instead of herself further confirmed her uncomfortable feelings that the fancy dressing up spoilt her. Thus Meg came back home to cherish her er own poor but warm household, as she says, "It does seem pleasant to be quiet and not have company manners all the time. Home is a nice place, though it isn't splendid."(95)

Though Meg has reconciled with her negative feelings to some degree, she is still puzzled with what she has experienced at Moffats' house. Mother is very quick to observe that changes in Meg, and empathized with Meg for what she had been emotionally struggling in the past two weeks and "had given her many anxious looks that day." She responded to Meg with much empathy, "I'm glad to hear you say so, dear, for I was afraid home would seem dull and poor to you, after your fine quarters."(95) Mother's empathic words allow Meg to feel understood and safe, thus Meg is willing to share her adventures gaily then she began to confess all the unpleasant things she did and her negative emotions she experienced. Marmee listened to her with full empathy without any scolding words, "Mrs. March looked silently at the downcast face of her pretty daughter, and could not find it in her heart to blame her little follies." Meg could feel Marmee's empathic care for her at the moment when Marmee listened attentively, smoothed Meg's soft cheek and encouraged her "There is something more, I think." Meg then tells Mum and Jo about the silly gossip about how Marmee planned to marry poor daughter to rich Laurie. While Jo responds indignantly, Marmee while lending her empathic ears to Meg's confession about her anger and shame about the gossip, says gravely, "No, never repeat that foolish gossip, and forget it as soon as you can."(96) She further confesses that she was unwise to let Meg go among people of whom she knew so little, and expressed her objective view about those people "kind, I dare say, but worldly, ill-bred, and full of these vulgar ideas about young people."(96) She then sincerely makes apology for Meg, "I am more sorry than I can express, for the mischief this visit may have done you. Meg."(96) Empathic care together with modesty and sincerity shines through Marmee's response, which heals Meg's injury and empowers her to grow resilient to reconcile with her negative emotions. Thus Meg responds positively that "Don't be sorry, I won't let it hurt me; I'll forget all the bad and remember only the good; for I did enjoy a great deal, and thank you very much for letting me go. I'll not be sentimental or dissatisfied, mother; I know I'm a silly little girl, and I'll stay with you till I'm fit to take care of myself. But it is nice to be praised and admired, and I can't help saying I liked it."(96-97)

Then Marmee admits with empathic understanding that Meg's reaction about praise is natural and further admonishes that "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."(97) Marmee's advice is given in an empathic way, which would touch Meg's hearts. Regarding her plan for girls as well as relationship between money and marriage, Marmee guides girls this way: "My dear girls, I am ambitious for you, but not to have you make a dash in the world, marry rich man merely because they are rich, or have splendid houses, which are not homes, because love is wanting. Money is a needful and precious thing and, when well used, a noble thing, but I never want you to think it is the first or only prize to strive for. I would rather see you poor men's wives, if you are happy, beloved, contented than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace." (97-98) Thus regarding marriage Marmee insists that love instead of money should be the most important factor, which shapes girls' view about marriage. And as Meg and Joe question that as poor girls, the chances of getting married are slim and Jo says that they will be old maids. Marmee expresses her feminist view about old maid decidedly "Right, Jo; better be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands. Don't be troubled, Meg; poverty seldom daunts a sincere lover...Leave these things to time; make this home happy, so that you may be fit for homes of your own, if they are offered you, and contented here if that are not. One thing remember, my girls, mother is always ready to be your confidant, father to be your friend; and both of us trust and hope that our daughters, whether married or single, will be pride and comfort of our lives." Here different from the Victorian middle class mother in England who are anxious to marry their daughters to rich gentleman as represented by Mrs. Bennet eager to marry her five daughters in *Pride and Prejudice*, Mrs. March in Victorian New England influenced by self-reliance and individualism advocated by Transcendentalist Emerson, tends to cultivate girls' independent spirit and subvert the conventional discrimination against old maid, which empowers the girls to have courage to pursue the their happy life with love as priority in marriage.

Later Meg happily marries Laurie's tutor, Mr. Brooks, who is not rich but honest and hardworking and loves Meg deeply. After getting married, Meg learns domestic experiences, self reflective about her own vanity and selfishness, appreciating her husband's strength of characters despite his poverty after going through trials and conflicts with her husband. Then as a mother of two children, Meg, absorbed in her children, neglects her husband at home. It's another challenge

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for her to confront. Under Marmee's empathic guidance, Meg learns that she should empathize with her husband and should not neglect husband for children or put him out of the domestic engagement, "don't shut husband out of the nursery, but to teach husband to help nursery to let him feel that he has his part to do." With Marmee's empathic care and guidance Meg is becoming mature and wise to maintain domestic happiness. Meg learns that "a woman's happiest kingdom is home, her highest honor the art of ruling home—not as a queen, but a wise wife and mother. (399) Thus Meg fulfills the virtuous conventional female's role in the family as a wise wife and mother with skills of domestic democracy rather than a passive "angel in the house" .

b) Jo's Growth Journey as an Independent Woman

Jo is the principal character, of *Little Women*, based on the author, Alcott herself. Jo is 15 years old at the beginning of the book, different from sister Meg, the traditional girl in that age, Jo with strong personality rebels against conventional feminine traits and tends to become an independent young woman. She is the first tomboy in American fiction. Jo says "It's bad enough to be a girl, any-way, when I like boy's games and work, and manners. I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy."(3) From girlhood, Jo is reluctant to identify with her gender and suffers from the negative emotion of disappointment. Also she has a hot temper and stubborn personality In real life Alcott herself, as a little girl told her elder sister Anna, "I wish I were a boy. They have more fun."(Delamer 10) Joe' disappointment about female gender stereotype and hot temper mirror Alcott's rebellion against conventional gender expectation about woman as a wife and mother in the mid 19th century New England. Jo regards herself as man of the family to take special care of mother while Mr. March was gone.

Jo's growth journey mainly involves her struggling to subdue her hot temper and stubborn personality as well as her adjustment about her gender in-conformity under Marmee's parenting with empathic care and influence from her sisters. With the help of her mother she works on controlling her bad temper. After Amy gets Jo's writings burnt, Jo is so angry that she refuses to take Amy to the skate. Amy almost died by accident during skating on river when she followed Jo and Laurie on river. Jo has deep reflection about her dreadful temper and asks Marmee to help her control the bad temper. Jo confessed her faults to mother in despair and is eager for Marmee's help, "It's my dreadful temper ! I try to cure it; I think I have , and then it breaks out worse than ever. Oh, mother! What shall I do! What shall I do?"(p.79) Marmee first accepts Jo's anxious and remorseful feelings with empathy and encourages her to watch and pray, and never think it is impossible to conquer her faults. Jo further confesses that she could do anything when she is in a passion "I get so savage, I could hurt anyone and enjoy it. I am afraid I shall do something dreadful someday, and spoil my life and make everybody hate me. O mother help me, do help me."(79) With much empathy Mother sincerely confesses that she also has bad temper just like Jo, and she spent 40 years to control her bad temper with the help her mother and her husband. Marmee's sharing of her own weakness and her long journey of overcoming the hot temper makes Jo feel both understood and confident to overcome her bad temper. Marmee's emphasis on her husband's love and support for her makes Jo feel her father's deep love and empathic care for Marmee, which exerts great influence on Jo's view about marriage.

Jo as a teenager rejects the idea of marriage and romance, feeling that it would break up her family and separate her from the sisters. While employed as a governess in New York City, Jo meets Mr. Bhaer, a German professor, whose maturity and learning attract Jo. On her return home, Jo rejects Laurie's marriage proposal. In the end Jo Marries Professor Bhaer, and sets up a boys' school on her inherited plumfield from Aunt march, happily taking care of the boys who need help. Thus Jo, who first rejects romance and marriage, in the end grows up to be a mature woman who strikes a balance between a marriage of compassion and intimacy and being a career woman capable of bringing talents into full play as she happily and successfully runs the homelike boys school with the help of her husband. In the end Jo exclaims that "I do think that families are the most beautiful things in all the world."- In the final chapter of "Harvest time" Jo "was a very happy woman there, in spite of hard work, much anxiety, and a perpetual racket. She enjoyed it heartily and found the applause of her boys more satisfying than any praise of the world...As the years went on, two little lads of her own came to increase her happiness."(48) Thus Jo accomplishes her growing up journey to become a mature woman who enjoys domestic happiness and fulfills her career of running a homelike boarding boys school in cooperation with her husband. Different from Alcott herself, who fulfilled her personal aspirations as a well-known writer rejecting the conventional gender role for woman as wife and mother in the 19th century, Jo under Marmee's parenting with empathic care achieved her independence financially and intellectually to some degree as well as domestic happiness being a loving wife and mother through striking a balance between being an career woman and fulfilling the domestic duties and enlisting her husband's assistance .

Jo's growth journey also involves her adventures of women's unconventional possibility of living through writing. Like Alcott herself, Jo is keen on reading and writing from her childhood. Working as companion for Great Ant March, the rich widow, what attracts Jo best at Aunt March's house is the large

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library of books, where Jo enjoys reading various books like a book-worm the moment Aunt March took her nap. Jo composes plays for her sisters to perform and writes short stories. In Beth' eyes Joe is Shakespeare! Different from traditional girls' games, Jo, together with her three sisters successfully organizes Pick wick Club, practicing writing talents with intertextuality reference to Charles's Dickens' novel *Pick Wick Papers*. Eager for self-reliance and in hope of becoming the breadwinner of the family, Jo made several successful attempts to publish her genre writings for reward of money to help support the family, quite similar to Alcott herself in real life.

In the final chapter of "Harvest time" Jo "was a very happy woman there, in spite of hard work, much anxiety, and a perpetual racket. She enjoyed it heartily and found the applause of her boys more satisfying than any praise of the world...As the years went on, two little lads of her own came to increase her happiness." (48) Thus Jo accomplishes her growing up journey turning from an unconventional girl full of disappointments about conventional gender expectations into a mature woman who not only enjoys domestic happiness but also fulfills her career of running a homelike boarding boys school in cooperation with her husband. Different from Alcott herself, who fulfilled her personal aspirations as a well-known writer rejecting the conventional gender role for woman as wife and mother in the 19th century, Jo under Marmee's empathic parenting achieved her career fulfillment through providing empathic care to the boys in her homelike boarding school as well as domestic happiness being a loving wife and mother through striking a balance between being an career woman and fulfilling the domestic duties with her husband's assistance .

c) Beth's Growing up Journey as a Model of Confronting Illness and Death

Beth is 13 years old at the beginning of the story. She is a shy, quiet, gentle girl, and enjoys music. Bethe is too shy to go to school. she is the peacemaker of the family and gently scolds her sisters when they argue. Beth is always ready to sacrifice herself to lend empathic care to others. Beth unfortunately contracts scarlet fever while taking palace of Marmee to visit the poor Hummels when Marmee is away home to visit husband with serious illness. Beth is especially close to Jo. And Jo takes special care of Beth, does most of the nursing for Beth when Beth is ill, which enhances the close bond between them under the mutual loving influence. Though Beth gets recovered from the scarlet fever and has happy reunion with whole family. Her health is seriously damaged.

As Beth grows, she feels the approaching death, the quiet and considerate girl bears the burden herself, without telling others for sake of bringing no worries of family members. Beth's approaching death has much emotional impact on the family dynamic. Besides Beth herself, It is Jo in the family who first feels the painful truth that Beth will not be recovered this time. Jo and Beth both felt it, yet neither spoke of it, "Jo felt as if a veil had fallen between her heart and Beth's; but when he put out her hand to lift it up there seemed something sacred in the silence, and she waited for Beth to speak."(372) Also Jo is thankful that her parents do not seem to see what she saw. As Jo feels painful about the hard truth silently, it is Beth who speaks out first and even comforts Jo, "Jo, dear, I am glad you know it. I've tried to tell you, but I couldn't." (372) It seems the elder Jo was the weaker, and Beth tried to comfort and sustain Jo with her arms about her, and the soothing words she whispered in Jo's ear, "I have known it for a good while, dear, now I am used to it. It isn't hard to think of or to bear. Try to see it so, and don't be troubled about me, because it's best, indeed it is."(372) Beth' inner strength and courage to confront illness and death deeply moves Jo as well as readers. Jo feels the inner strength from Beth and with much empathy and care inquires Beth about what emotional journey she has undergone. Beth says that in the autumn she tried to think it was a sick fancy and would not let it trouble any one, and she frankly admits that "But when I saw you all so well, and strong, and full of happy plans, it was hard to feel that I could never be like you, and then I was miserable, Jo."(373) Beth's revelation of her vulnerability and her struggling to come to terms with her illness and death further enhances Joe's empathy toward Beth and she feels anxious that she fails to comfort and help Beth and "her heart ached to think the solitary struggle that must have gone on while Beth leant to say goodbye to health, love, and life, and take up her cross so cheerfully."(373) Beth through her acts rather than words reveals to Jo that it is the faith that gives her the courage and patience to confront he fate, which also empowers Jo emotionally and spiritually.

The family finally accepts that Beth will not live much longer and learn to come terms with Beth's approaching death with pains and try to bear it cheerfully, "helping one another by the increased affection which comes to bind households tenderly together in times of trouble. They put away their grief, and each did their part toward making that last year a happy one."(414) Thus the unfortunate fate of Beth teaches the family to become more affectionate and tender towards each other with empathy and care. They accompany Beth with empathic care in her final days. They make a special room for her, filled with all the things she loves best. Beth is never idle; she knits and sews things for the children who pass by on their way to and from school. "It was well for all that this peaceful time was given them as preparation for the sad hours to come…"(415) The family feel that though Beth fails in body Beth's soul is strong enough to be ready for her pilgrimage. Jo accompanies Beth and never leaves her

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for an hour since Beth says, "I feel stronger when you are here."(416) Through the precious and helpful hours, Jo's heart receive the teaching that it needed, lessons in patience, charity for all, loyalty to duty and sincere faith. Thus Jo develops her moral character in rendering her empathic care to Beth.

It seems that Beth is too good to survive in the real world. Her father and mother guides her tenderly "through the valley of the shadow and gave her up to God."(419) Nevertheless, Beth's final sickness has much spiritual meaning for the family, who all undergo emotional journey and learn to love each other more deeply with empathic care, particularly for Jo with much cultivation of her moral character who resolves to live her life with more empathy and care for others.

d) Amy's Growth Journey as a Genuine Lady

Amy is the youngest sister and pet baby of the family, aged 12 when the story begins. Amy is an artistic beauty, described as a "regular snow-maiden" with curly golden hair and blue eyes, and always carrying herself like a proper young lady. She has a talent for drawing, and dreams of becoming an artist. Petted by the family, Amy can behave in a vain and self-centered way. Under Marmee's empathic parenting she learns to overcome her conceit after her experience of valley of the humiliation at school. Amy desires to imitate and join the girls whose favors she hopes to repay by bringing the pickled limes to school, which causes her punishment and humiliation before her classmates by the teacher Mr. Davis. Amy experienced such negative emotions as fear, despair, shame, anger, indignation and humiliation. The 12 year old girl suffers the great blow for the first time and goes back home in a sad state. Marmee and sisters are responsive to Amy's sufferings with empathic care, "Mrs. march did not say much, but looked disturbed, and comforted her afflicted little daughter in her tenderest manner. Meg bathed the insulted hand with glycerin and tears; Beth felt that even her beloved kittens would fail as a balm for griefs like this, and Jo wrathfully proposed that Mr. Davis be arrested without delay…"(p.70) Marmee tells Amy that she does not approve of corporal punishment, dislike Mr. Davis' manner of teaching, which makes Amy feel supported. Marmee then tells Amy that she doesn't "think the girls you associate with are doing you any good"(70), and thinks Amy should be responsible for her punishment for breaking the rule at school. Though as a adolescent girl, Amy desires to fit in with the peers with higher social status. Marmee's words remind her of the misbehavior of those girls. Thus Marmee's empathic parenting does not mean her failure to teach girls lessons when they make mistakes. She teaches Amy that "You are getting to be altogether too conceited and important, my dear, and it is quite time you set about correcting it."(70) With Marmee's guidance, Amy learns lessons of modesty from the event of humiliation, and becomes clear about the class distinction she desires to possess does not do her good, which exerts positive influence on her character development. The support and empathic care from Marmee and sisters heal Amy's injured feelings and also nurture her moral character development. Just as Footes argues, "Mrs March's interest is in trying to relocate the source of class distinction to the proper performance of gender."(Foote 76) Under Marmee' empathic parenting, Amy together with sisters are on the journey of having proper gender performance in the mid 19th century New England.

As Amy is growing older, she seems always clear about her goal to become a genuine lady in the best society. But she is not sure what the best really is. "Money, position, fashionable accomplishments and elegant manners are most desirable things in her eyes, but has yet to learn that money can not buy refinement of nature, rank does not always confer nobility, and that true breeding makes itself felt in spite of external drawbacks."(257) Amy's growth involves her development of the view about what qualities a genuine lady may possess and how to making the right choice in her life. Though uncertain about some life values Amy is sensible to take advantage of resources available to her to grow and enrich herself on her journey of becoming a genuine lady. Different from Jo's blunt manners, Amy knows how to speak and behave with empathy in an appropriate way to please others. Rewarded by her appropriate behaviors during the social calls Amy is invited by her aunt to travel in Europe as a companion, where Amy broadens her horizon. In Europe, Amy encounters "Laurie" and his grandfather. She manages to help Laurie correct himself when she believes he is wasting his life on pleasurable activities. Amy also explores her feelings for Laurie and refuses a very rich English boy Fred's proposal of marriage, which indicates Amy is gradually mature to have her independent view about marriage and make her own choice overcoming the temptations of money. Amy and Laurie fall in love and get married happily in Europe.

Amy's morality develops throughout her adolescence and early adulthood. She has been working very hard to gain what she wants in life. Amy and Laurie, inherited rich property from Laruie's grandfather, a rich business man. The young couple agree to found and endow an institution to help young women with artistic interests. Through charity with much empathic care for others Amy and Laurie are more closely knit together. They enjoy happy life with a baby girl, and motherly Amy does not give up her artistic pursuit. Thus under Marmee's empathic parenting Amy in the end really gets what she aims to pursue, grows to be a genuine lady with noble and generous heart.

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III. Mrs. March's Influence and Limitations

March sisters Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy with different personalities and weaknesses, undergo various challenges and troubles to pursue their happiness and goodness in their coming of age journeys. Meanwhile, Mrs. March's parenting with empathy and care has great impact on her daughters. Marmee' empathic parenting with patient listening, encouragement and support for daughters never fail, whenever daughters turn to her for help. Also under the influence of Transcendentalists' trust on individuals' potentiality and self-reliance, Mrs. March stresses daughters' growth through their own experiences and respect their differently unique personalities. Chapter11 entitled "Experiments" demonstrates how Marmee helps daughters through the experiment to realize that "how the comfort of all depends on each doing their share faithfully...what happens when every one thinks only of herself. 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 or forbear, that home may be comfortable and lovely to us all?"(117) Thus through their own experience March girls have learned the domestic democracy and come to admit that "work is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money and fashion."(117-118) Moreover Mrs. March herself as a social worker always sets a good example of virtue for daughters to practice empathetic care not only at home but also in the social world beyond home by taking care of those poor families in the neighborhood.

As some critics argue that Mrs. March is a moderate feminist in the mid-19th century New England when American suffragism is flourishing in which Alcott herself is actively involved. While Mr. March is away home on the front as a chaplain during the American Civil War, Mrs. March stays at home to manage household assuming full responsibility for raising four daughters, cultivating the daughters to develop character of honesty, kindness, industry, self esteem, self-reliance, self-discipline, forgiveness, generosity, etc. through their growing up experiences particularly with her empathetic guidance to help daughters handle their negative emotions appropriately in the domestical world related to class distinction and gender performance. To some degree Mrs. March also encourages daughters to pursue their artistic interests bravely to develop their individual talents.

Nevertheless, from our contemporary feminist perspective, Mrs. March's views about gender roles and gender performance of women are limited in the mid 19th century. For example, she believes, "to be loved and chosen by a good man is the best and sweetest thing which can happen to women." In her view about marriage, girls are passive ones to be chosen and loved by men and to get married is the best and most happy for women. We understand that in the patriarchal world of the mid-19th century in America, to get married may be the only way for most women to change their fates. However, In our contemporary world of 21st century no matter in the US or in China, with broad access to education and employment, women now embrace more and more possibilities to develop their selves and experience different types of happiness no longer confined to the gender role of being a wife or a mother. Nevertheless, home is the important space in which individuals are emotionally and morally nurtured. To some degree home is a testing ground of emotions the family members respond to the social word in terms of class and gender. Thus as head of the female community at home during Mr. March's absence, Mrs. March's values about gender roles and gender performance in relation to individual emotions directly exerts influence on March girls. Perhaps this is why Jo, once a tomboy and ardent writing lover ever since her childhood grows up to choose the career of running a home like boarding school for boys with the support of her husband rather than bravely and happily realize her individual aspiration of becoming a professional writer regardless of getting married or not, which finds expression in Alcott herself, as a well-known professional writer, not getting married.

Moreover as a moderate feminist though Mrs. March pays much attention to the cultivation of daughters' spirit of self-reliance, she herself has to make sacrifice concerning her own individual values in the social world for the sake of fulfilling domestic duties at home while Mr. March is free to leave home to assume his social responsibility. From her sharing with Jo about her anger in her life, It seems that her anger derives from the injustice she views or experiences in the domestic world or beyond, "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."(79) However, concerning negative emotion like anger when confronting the injustice or injuries on her in the patriarchal world Mrs. March just learns not to show it, even hopes to learn not to feel it. Mrs. March does not have the courage to protest emotionally or take actions to redress the situation rationally. Instead she chooses to tolerate the injustice and injuries. For active feminists, "anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification … Anger is loaded with information and energy." (Lorde 1984: 127) Different from such active feminists who are angry about the patriarchal world and would take action to strive for a liberating world for women, Mrs. March instead turns to her husband to help her control her anger, without intention to explore the patriarchally structural causes or to take effective action to redress the world around her.

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It's no wonder under her parenting all March sisters grow up to adjust themselves appropriately in the institutionalized patriarchal family system.

IV. Conclusion

In conclusion, Mrs. March's parenting approach of empathy and care plays a pivotal role in shaping the March girls' growth and development. Despite the limitations of gender roles and expectations in the mid-19th century, Mrs. March serves as a moderate feminist, drawing inspiration from transcendental thoughts of individualism. Through her nurturing, the March household becomes a place of warmth and intimacy, where the girls navigate the challenges of growing up with various emotions and individual personalities.

Under Marmee's empathic guidance, the girls learn to practice empathy and care towards each other and extend it to others beyond their family. Meg transforms from a girl with materialistic desires into a wise and loving wife and mother, finding contentment in domestic happiness. Jo, once a tomboy, learns to balance her career aspirations with domestic responsibilities, while also extending empathy and care to the boys in her boarding school. Beth's selflessness and considerate nature deeply impact the family, leading them to cherish each other more profoundly. Her final sickness and approach to death bring the family closer together, with Jo resolved to live her life with more empathy and care for others. Amy, once vain and self-centered, grows into a genuine lady with a noble and generous heart, supporting other young artistic women through her and her husband's institution.

Through Mrs. March's empathic parenting, the March girls confront negative emotions, redefine gender performance, and challenge class distinctions, developing healthier and more moral selves. While the limitations of the era persist, it is hoped that the next generation, the new little women, "who are allowed to be angry, study art, marry and create simultaneously, embrace spinsterhood"(Auerbach 73) will embrace the freedom to be themselves fully-allowing them to be angry, pursue art, marry, create, or even embrace spinsterhood, leading to a more creative, vibrant, and genuinely fulfilled sense of self. Overall, Mrs. March's parenting with empathy and care leaves a lasting impact on her daughters, empowering them to navigate the complexities of their world in the mid-19th century New England and embrace their true selves with strength, compassion, and love.

Acknowledgments

This article is supported by the Project of Humanities and Social Sciences Fund of Ministry of Education in China (21YJA752006) and the project of China Scholarship Council (202208320170).

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