

# Does “Little Women” Get the Marriage Concept Wrong?

It may seem surprising, but until a few months ago, I had never seen the famous 1994 film “Little Women” with Christian Bale and Winona Ryder. Perhaps it was because I was viewing the film with fresh eyes that one little line jumped out and startled me.

The line came near the end of the film when Amy comes home married to Laurie. Amy kneels down beside Jo and says,

*“Jo, you must tell me the truth, as a sister, which is a relation stronger than marriage. Do you mind at all?”*

Now the fact that Amy married Laurie was not what startled me, nor was the fact that Amy was concerned about Jo’s response. It was the fact that Amy claimed sisterhood as a bond stronger than marriage.

Is that really the case?

History and the wisdom of philosophers suggest otherwise. In the first century A.D., [Plutarch noted](#) that a husband should “show no greater respect for anybody than for his wife.” Augustine affirmed this view several hundred years later when [he wrote](#):

*“Forasmuch as each man is a part of the human race, and human nature is something social, and has for a great and natural good, the power also of friendship; on this account God willed to create all men out of one, in order that they might be held in their society not only by likeness of kind, but also by bond of kindred. **Therefore the first natural bond of human society is man and wife.**”*

According to John Locke's [Second Treatise of Civil Government](#), this view was still held over a millennium later:

*“The first society was between man and wife, which gave beginning to that between parents and children; to which, in time, that between master and servant came to be added...”*

While it's wonderful that Amy viewed her sister in such a positive light – and certainly many families would probably benefit from strengthening the bonds between siblings, parents, and other family members – could the attitude that sisterhood is stronger than marriage do damage to the marriage bond? And if, as the ancients testified, marriage is truly the first bond of human society, can setting sisterhood above it unwittingly destroy the facets of society which are built upon the foundation of marriage?