

## THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL OPPRESSION TOWARDS WOMEN'S EQUALITY IN THE NOVEL ANNE OF GREEN GABLES BY L.M. MONTGOMERY

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Abstract	Article Information
<p><i>This research analyses the effects of social oppression towards women's equality in the novel Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery. The objectives of this study are (1) To find out the forms of social oppression found in the novel Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery and (2) To analyze the effect of social oppression towards women's equality in the novel Anne of Green Gables by L.M. Montgomery. The researcher uses Patricia Hill Collins' theory of social oppression to classify three main forms of oppression: social class oppression, gender roles oppression, and stereotypes oppression. To analyze how these forms affect women's equality, Rosemarie Tong's theory of women's equality is applied, which includes three forms of women's equality: equal education, equal rights, equal liberty. The method used in this research is descriptive qualitative. The analysis focuses on how these forms of social oppression affect women's access to equal education, equal rights, and equal liberty. As a result, social oppression in the forms of social class oppression, gender roles oppression, and stereotypes oppression are found in the novel, all affecting women's equality, with gender roles appearing most dominant and impacting equal rights the most.</i></p> <p><b>Keywords:</b> Social; Oppression; Women; Equality; Novel</p>	<p>Received: 03/09/2025</p> <p>Revised: 05/09/2025</p> <p>Accepted: 13/09/2025</p>

### INTRODUCTION

Social means the systems, rules, and relationships in society, while oppression is unfair treatment that comes from these systems, often targeting people based on gender, race, class, or other identities. Podgórecki cited in Lewak (2024) stated, "Social oppression refers to oppression which is inflicted through social measures, and which also has a social dimension, affecting entire categories of people" (p. 127). The researcher emphasizes it is

not just unfair treatment but a system that takes away rights, limits opportunities, and silences voices.

The effects of social oppression are serious because it reinforces inferiority, destroys confidence, and limits success. Collins (2000, p. 4) explained that oppression restricts material opportunities and shapes self-perception, reinforcing feelings of inferiority. Oppression therefore affects not only external conditions but also weakens internal self-worth. Women especially endure injustices, facing discrimination embedded in societal structures, where restriction and resistance shape the struggle for equality. Tong (2009, p. 2) stated that equality requires more than giving women the same rights, it needs addressing power imbalances and societal norms that disadvantage them. This means ensuring that both men and women have access to education, economic independence, political representation, and the freedom to make decisions about their own lives.

When women are empowered, they can challenge oppressive norms, reshape societal perceptions, and create a more inclusive world where discrimination no longer determines one's worth or opportunities. However, true equality requires not only policy changes but also a shift in societal attitudes that have long justified oppression. Without these changes, women continue to struggle against systemic barriers that prevent them from reaching their full potential.

This research limits its scope to using Patricia Hill Collins' theory of social oppression, focusing on social class oppression, gender roles oppression, and stereotypes oppression. It also applies Rosemarie Tong's theory of equality, which encompasses equal education, equal rights, and equal liberty, to present the effect of social oppression towards women's equality. The analysis examines how *Anne of Green Gables* illustrates these forms of oppression through the character of Anne Shirley, who faces unfair treatment because of her social class, gender, and stereotypes. As an orphan, she is considered less valuable by society, and as a girl, she is expected to be quiet, obedient, and focused only on domestic roles.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Social Oppression by Patricia Hill Collins**

Social oppression is a system of unfair treatment, control, or discrimination against certain groups of people, often supported by societal norms, laws, or institutions. It happens when power is used to dominate or oppress others, limiting their rights, opportunities, and freedoms. According to Collins (2000), "Oppression describes any unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society" (p. 4). This means oppression is not only about individual acts of bias but also about sustained, institutionalized practices that create long-term inequality. The researcher emphasizes that this situation makes oppressed group tell their experience in a way that fits what society expects, which takes away the truth of their voices and helps keep unfair ideas in power. Oppression is not just an issue but a complex system where multiple forms of discrimination overlap, making it even more difficult for oppressed groups to challenge and overcome social barriers. Furthermore, Collins (2000, p.11), stated that

oppressed groups are often only heard when they express their ideas in ways that align with the dominant group's language and perspective. This dynamic not only distorts the true meaning of their ideas but also reinforces the superiority of the dominant group's worldview. Social oppression is divided into three forms:

### **1. Social Class Oppression**

Social class oppression refers to the discrimination and unequal treatment people experience based on their socioeconomic status. It creates systemic barriers that prevent individuals from lower classes from accessing the same opportunities, rights, and resources as those in higher classes. As stated by Collins (2000), "Depending on their social class backgrounds, these women followed different routes to acquiring a focused education" (p. 214). This shows that social class affects not only educational opportunities but also broader aspects of life, such as career choices, economic stability, and social mobility. Those from privileged backgrounds often have easier access to quality education and professional opportunities, while individuals from lower social classes face greater barriers that extend beyond, influencing their long-term prospects and overall quality of life. Examples form of social class oppressions include economic hardship, where individuals are forced to give up education due to financial pressure, and low social status, where poor children are seen as unworthy of care or treated only as labor.

### **2. Gender Roles Oppression**

Gender roles oppression refers to the unequal treatment and expectations imposed on individuals based on their gender. It reinforces societal norms that dictate how men and women should behave, limiting their freedom to express themselves and pursue their goals. According to Collins (2000), "Heterosexuality itself is constructed via binary thinking that juxtaposes male and female sexuality, with male and female gender roles pivoting on perceptions of appropriate male and female sexual expression. Men are active, and women should be passive" (p.83). The researcher emphasizes that gender binaries are deeply embedded in social systems, shaping and restricting the behaviors and opportunities available to individuals according to their gender. For example, this oppression can take the women freedoms and opportunities in areas like education, leadership, and personal expression. Ultimately, heterosexuality, as constructed through binary thinking, becomes a central mechanism that maintains traditional gender roles, limiting individual expression and strengthening patriarchal systems.

### **3. Stereotypes Oppression**

Stereotype oppression refers to the unfair judgment and treatment individuals experience due to generalized assumptions about their identity. These stereotypes reinforce societal biases, shaping how people are perceived and limiting their opportunities. Collins (2000) argued, "While some women reject all of the stereotypes, they see no way of avoiding them. Some feel that they must choose between being seen as asexual mothers or hypersexual whores" (p. 156). The researcher emphasizes that stereotypes create a limiting system in which women must live, often forcing them to choose between roles that are both damaging and unjust. These stereotypes extend beyond sexual identity, encompassing judgments about

behavior, appearance, and race, whether they are perceived as too loud or too quiet, too ambitious or too submissive. For example, labeling often occurs when people are judged based solely on superficial traits, such as assuming someone is incompetent because of their gender or appearance.

### **Women's Equality by Rosemarie Tong**

Women's equality emphasizes that true equality involves more than simply treating everyone the same. As stated by Tong (2009), "if society is to achieve sexual equality, or gender justice, then society must provide women with the same political rights and economic opportunities as well as the same education that men enjoy" (p. 17). This shows that gender justice is not achieved simply by granting basic freedoms, but by actively ensuring that women receive the same level of opportunities and support as men. Women advocate for equal treatment under the law, demand fair wages, and seek greater representation in decision-making positions as part of this movement. According to Tong (2009, p. 18), women cannot truly be free unless the conditions that oppress them are completely eliminated. The researcher emphasizes that the struggle for equality is not just about gaining more opportunities within the existing system, but about reshaping the structures that support oppression. There are three forms of women's equality such as:

#### **1. Equal Education**

Equal education functions as a crucial foundation in dismantling gender disparities by providing women with the knowledge and skills necessary to challenge societal norms and participate fully in economic and political spheres. As stated by Tong (2009), "society owes girls the same education that it owes boys, simply because all human beings deserve an equal chance to develop their rational and moral capacities so they can achieve full personhood" (p. 15). The researcher highlights that education should be recognized as a basic human right, essential for developing a person's full potential regardless of gender, and should not reinforce gender expectations. Unequal education is often seen through resource disparity, educational exclusion, and prejudice privation. For example, when girls are forced to leave school to care for siblings while boys continue their studies.

#### **2. Equal Rights**

Equal rights encompass the legal and social entitlements that ensure women are treated equally to men in all aspects of life. As Tong (1990) stated, "In order to be fully liberated, women need economic opportunities and sexual freedoms as well as civil liberties" (p. 23). The researcher highlights that achieving equal rights involves more than creating anti-discrimination laws, it demands confronting the deeper systemic structures that maintain gender inequality. This shows that achieving genuine equality requires both legal recognition and the active transformation of societal conditions. Unequal rights can appear in the form of rights deprivation, disenfranchisement, women devaluation, and social exclusion. For example, when women are denied leadership roles despite equal qualifications, or when laws fail to protect them from gender-based violence.

### **3. Equal Liberty**

Equal liberty, as explained by Tong, refers to the right of every individual regardless of gender to enjoy the same freedoms, opportunities, and protections under the law. Tong (1990) stated, “Society must provide women with the same political rights and economic opportunities as well as the same education that men enjoy” (p. 16). The researcher highlights that equal liberty is essential for achieving true gender equality. In this theory, achieving equal liberty requires systemic change, through legal reforms, inclusive public policies, and the removal of institutional barriers that limit women’s autonomy. This includes access to reproductive freedom, workplace equality, and protection from gender-based violence. For example, the introduction of women-focused leadership development programs in global corporations, designed to mentor and promote women into executive roles, reflects an effort to support equal liberty by empowering women to lead and make independent decisions within the workplace.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method to present data as it is, focusing on words, sentences, and meanings without adding personal interpretation. The method is suitable for exploring complex social issues, such as how social oppression affects women’s equality. The primary data is the novel *Anne of Green Gables*, while secondary data includes theses, journals, literary theory books, and online articles that support the analysis. Data collection involves reading and analyzing the novel, identifying themes and character development, and classifying important quotes and references, while secondary sources are cross-checked for accuracy. The analysis process includes identifying relevant ideas, classifying data under the chosen theories, and interpreting findings with support from both primary and secondary sources. To ensure validity, the research applies triangulation, specifically theory triangulation, by combining Patricia Hill Collins’ social oppression theory and Rosemarie Tong’s equality theory, providing a stronger and multi-perspective understanding of women’s oppression in the novel.

## **FINDINGS**

### **The Forms of Social Oppression**

The researcher identifies three forms of social oppression: social class oppression, gender roles oppression, and stereotypes oppression. These forms of oppression are used to limit the female character’s position in society and shape how others treat them. Among these, the researcher found gender roles oppression emerges as the most dominant form, comprising half of the total findings with thirty-two (32) excerpts. In total, fifty-eight (58) excerpts related to these three forms of oppression were identified and analyzed in the novel.

### **The Effect of Social Oppression Towards Women’s Equality**

The findings reveal that social oppression in *Anne of Green Gables* manifests through social class, gender roles, and stereotypes, each limiting women's education, rights, and liberty. The results emphasize that gender roles oppression affecting equal rights emerges as the most dominant with seventeen (17) excerpts, showing how deeply entrenched expectations subordinate women and highlight the urgent need for equality.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **The Forms of Social Oppression**

The forms of social oppression explained in the previous are divided into three categories, social class oppression, gender roles oppression, and stereotypes oppression. Each category shows how women face unfair treatment that limits their opportunities, freedom, and equality.

#### **1. Social Class Oppression**

Social class oppression in *Anne of Green Gables* functions as a system where the upper class enforces norms and expectations that create unfair treatment based on background and status.

There is never enough to go around in an asylum, so things are always skimpy - at least in a poor asylum like ours. (Montgomery, p.34)

Anne recalls her life in the asylum, where basic necessities were rarely available. The phrase "skimpy – at least in a poor asylum like ours" reflects social class oppression, as it exposes how low-income institutions offer poor living conditions, especially for orphans from marginalized backgrounds. This context shows the severe lack of resources and emotional care provided to children in poverty, which deeply affected Anne's sense of security and self-worth growing up. Children in poverty grow up lacking care and support, showing how economic hardship creates an unfair and unequal start in life. Over time, poverty becomes a normal condition for them, and this silently teaches children that their value is less simply because they are poor, shaping how they view themselves.

#### **2. Gender Roles Oppression**

Gender roles are oppression shown as social expectations that define how women and men should behave.

"Mrs Lynde says pride goes before a fall and she doesn't believe in the higher education of women at all; she says it unfits them for woman's true sphere." (Montgomery, p.370)

Mrs. Lynde says higher education "unfits them for woman's true sphere," reflecting gender roles oppression that discourages women from academic growth. It limits female ambition by reinforcing the belief that women belong only in domestic roles. This shows how women were taught to believe that education was unnecessary for them, and that their value was measured only by their ability to manage household duties. Such ideas prevent women

from seeking equality in knowledge and personal development, keeping them dependent on men for both status and survival.

### **3. Stereotypes Oppression**

Stereotypes oppression are fixed ideas about someone based on age, background, or status, without seeing their true character.

“I thought Marilla Cuthbert was an old fool when I heard she'd adopted a girl out of an orphan asylum,” (Montgomery, p.300)

The speaker says, “Marilla was an old fool... for adopting a girl out of an orphan asylum,” showing stereotype oppression through social judgment. The term “old fool” and the way “orphan asylum” is used suggests that adopting a girl from such a place is seen as foolish and risky. This excerpt shows social judgment against both Anne and Marilla. People believe that children from orphanages are not worth adopting, and that raising them is a mistake. These harmful beliefs make it harder for Anne to gain respect or feel valued in her new home and community.

#### **The Effect of Social Oppression Towards Women's Equality**

The researcher found various forms of social oppression present in the novel, each of which directly affects women's equality.

##### **1. The Effect of Social Oppression Towards Equal Education**

Social oppression has a strong effect on women's access to equal education because it creates barriers that prevent them from fully developing their knowledge and abilities. Women are often discouraged from pursuing higher education and are guided to believe that academic study is unnecessary for their role in society.

“I don't believe in girls going to college with the men and cramming their heads full of Latin and Greek and all that nonsense” (Montgomery, p.388)

Mrs. Lynde says, “I don't believe in girls going to college with the men and cramming their heads full of Latin and Greek,” which shows a strict gender role belief that girls should not pursue the same education as boys. This outdated mindset shows that some people think girls don't need serious education and should not learn the same things as boys. It clearly reflects how society sets unfair limits on girls' learning based only on their gender.

Mrs. Lynde claiming that advanced subjects are nonsense for girls, society teaches them that education is not part of their future. This belief leads to educational exclusion, where girls are kept out of learning environments simply because they are expected to stay within domestic boundaries.

##### **2. The Effect of Social Oppression Towards Equal Rights**

Social oppression denies women equal rights by controlling their decisions and narrowing the choices available to them. Women are often placed under strict rules that define what they should and should not do, creating boundaries that limit their freedom.

“Mrs Lynde says Canada is going to the dogs the way things are being run at Ottawa, and that it's an awful warning to the electors. She says if women were allowed to vote we would soon see a blessed change.” (Montgomery, p.179)

Mrs. Lynde remarks, “if women were allowed to vote we would soon see a blessed change,” highlighting that women did not have the right to vote due to strict gender roles that saw politics as a man’s domain. This shows that women at the time did not have the right to vote because of gender roles that saw politics as a man’s area. Society denied women the right to vote, reflecting how deeply gender roles shaped public power.

Although Mrs. Lynde believes women could improve political conditions, they are still denied the right to vote. This reflects disenfranchisement, where women are excluded from participating in decision-making processes because politics is viewed as a male sphere. Their voices are silenced in national matters, reinforcing the belief that women are unfit for public power.

### **3. The Effect of Social Oppression Towards Equal Liberty**

Social oppression limits women’s equal liberty by reducing their freedom of choice and placing them under constant control. Women are often expected to live within boundaries set by family, community, or society, which restrict their ability to decide for themselves.

“Becoming fiddlesticks! It was putting flowers on your hat at all, no matter what colour they were, that was ridiculous. You are the most aggravating child!' 'I don't see why it's any more ridiculous to wear flowers on your hat than on your dress,” protested Anne. “Lots of rich little girls there had bouquets pinned on their dresses. What was the difference?” (Montgomery, p.106)

Anne questions why rich girls can wear flowers freely while she is criticized for doing the same. Her social class restricts her ability to express herself, even in small choices. The short phrase “lots of rich little girls” shows that wealth allows more freedom, while girls like Anne are expected to follow different rules. While the wealthy enjoy freedom without limitation, poor girls like Anne are told what’s proper based on social expectations alone.

Anne experiences social mobility restriction as her freedom to express herself through fashion is judged unfairly due to her class. While rich girls can wear flowers without criticism, Anne is scolded. This double standard shows that poor children are socially confined and monitored in ways the wealthy are not, preventing them from expressing individuality or being treated equally.

## **CONCLUSION**

The researcher concludes that in *Anne of Green Gables*, women’s access to equality is restricted by social class, gender roles, and stereotypes. Gender roles emerge as the most dominant form, dictating how women should behave and limiting their rights and opportunities. Stereotypes reinforce harmful assumptions about women’s worth and abilities,

while social class determines access to education and opportunities, particularly disadvantaging women from lower backgrounds. These oppressions directly shape the characters' choices, dreams, and futures, showing that inequality is not just a backdrop but a driving force in their lives. Overall, the novel reflects broader societal issues, emphasizing how literature can mirror real struggles for women's equality and inspire readers to question unfair norms.

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