

# Gender inequality in the handmaid's tale



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Inequality is an occurring problem and Margaret Atwood is describing what she feels our country will turn into. Every time there is a step forward for equality to take two steps back. In Gilead, women's obligation is obedience after transitioning from a time of extreme liberalism to radical religion.

Women being cut off from their resources, freedom, and their sole purpose was for their wombs. During this time of radical religion, Gilead decided it was it was a good time to come together and make changes to the for the greater good that would impact everyone immensely. The futuristic novel, "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood, concentrates on the unequal relationship between men and women: women are exploited for their biological functions and government-sponsored religion reinforces female servitude.

Offred feeling exploited for her biological function felt nothing more of herself than her as a womb. Even in Offred's dreams, she affirms her feeling, "I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a mean of transportation, or an implement of the accomplishment of my will... Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping (Atwood 73). With Gilead trying to come back from the alarming shortage of children women that are healthy and being forced to bear the children of the Commander's, if their wives are not able to do so. Offred's body had so much meaning to her life before her life of being a handmaid that all she dreams of the day she could feel like that again. Her body previously used for pleasure and freedom but now her whole existence revolves around a single body part. Offred's feeling about her body

is the way the entire society of Gilead looks at all the women of that generation.

With sex being readily available through prostitution and the strong equality of women men began to feel demoralized. Wendy Perkins, an Assistant Professor of English at Prince George's Community College in Maryland, explains her thought on why the Commander believe the way Gilead is governed is for the best. Perkins points out the Commander , We've given women more than we have taken away. This way all they get a man, are protected can full fill their biological destinies in peace. He is trying to prove the reason for constructing Gilead into what it is today. Commander Fred is suggesting that the over sexualization of the country made men lose their interesting in seeking woman. Women having equal rights made men not want to seek a marriage or sexual relationship. Men feeling demoralized by strong women made them rethink their thoughts on sex, marriage, and life.

Offred after spending forbidden time with Commander Fred begins to think differently of him. She began to see him less as her boss and more of her equal which brought a shift in the novel. After remembering she watched a Nazi movie as a child Offred begins to think back and sympathize with the woman of the movie that was the girlfriend/lover of the one the leaders. During a scene in the movie the Nazi girlfriend states, He is not a monster, to her. Probably he had some endearing trait he whistled off key, in the shower, he had a yen for truffles, he called his dog Liebchen and made him sit up for a little piece of raw steak. How easy it is to invent humanity for anyone at all. What an available temptation. (Atwood 145-146). After spending the intimate time with the Commander Offred begins to see him in <https://assignbuster.com/gender-inequality-in-the-handmaids-tale/>

a different light: friendly, kind, and caring. He is still part of the problem. His job as a Commander makes him an oppressive figure in society but his private life he wants his handmaid's smart and expressive. The Commander is in a sense dangling the steak in front of Offred like the a dog because he is giving her small bits of her old life back by playing scrabble and letting her express herself privately to him. Although Offred enjoys the time with the Commander she knows that if anyone found out about these times she would be facing death. He is providing her more of a life than just a handmaid but is still a huge part of the problem by this only being a secret in his life.

The government of Gilead are claiming to base their belief of how to repopulate the community from The Bible. In Genesis Rachel is unable to bare Jacob's children and uses her maid, Bilhah, as a surrogate mother. The Bible states, Now when Rachel saw she bore Jacob no children...she said to Jacob, Give me children or else I die!...So she said, Here is my maid Bilhah; go in to her and she will bear a child on my knees that I also may have children by her. (Genesis 30: 1-3, 26). Women being used for their wombs after the absence of children because so many being born with deformities from the pollution. The government using Genesis 30: 1-3 as a point of reference is a misinterpretation of what I feel it is stating. Bilhah was the maid of Rachel but it did not say she was being subjected to all the torment that these ladies seem to have been to have a child. I believe that she was being used as more of a surrogate. In an article by Sophia Lee she states her interpretation of the scene in the novel and television series where the handmaid is being used by the husband and the handmaids are between the

legs of the wife during what they hope is conception is are from Genesis 30:

3. My interpretation of she will bear a child on my knees that I also have a child by her (The Bible, Genesis 30: 3, 26) means that Rachel would be in the room during the delivery like many of the modern mothers are in today's day and time. Men would never be called out as sterile even though we know this can be true. After the trial of infertility a new handmaid would be sent to them to try again. Even though the government is using the Bible as part of their philosophy for running Gilead twisting words to make them to your way of living doesn't make them true. Amin Malak said it best in his assessment of the novel, Theory claims to be founded on Christian principles, yet in practice miserably lacks spirituality and benevolence (9-16).

The government of Gilead was only taking select quotes from the Bible and twisting it to how they needed to use it as their governing practices. During the Women's Prayvaganze, group wedding, the men recite, Let the women learn in silence with all subjection? All? But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence. For Adam was first formed, then Eve (221)? This passage is letting the women know it is their job to continue to be silent and follow the men. Women biblically should follow the example of their husbands but in retrospect the husbands need to be the ones setting good examples for the wife. The women are being manipulated and made to think that they will be rewarded for all the do and suffer in silence.

The smallest things have been changed and manipulated by the government. People and shops names have been changed to sound more Biblical. Clothing shops are now called Lilies Mathew 6: 28 states, So why do  
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you worry about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin;... (The Bible 852). Even the phrases that the handmaids are only allowed to use are pulled from the Bible such as Praise be, Blessed be the Fruit, and May the Lord open. Even though the people of Gilead are only allowed to say things of these sort of phrases and the shops are called different names people will still be who they are and feel how they feel. You can try and control people anyway you want false teachings of the Bible or through your own beliefs but people will always find a way to believe how they want to. Reading was forbidden so even if Offred or any of the handmaid's felt that the teachings were incorrect it couldn't be questioned. Such as Offred saying the scripture she is forced to say but in her mind having the meaning as a her troubles rather than the word bread she is actually saying.

Human nature is something that is hard to exactly nail down. There were a few bright spots in the novel but for the most part it was about the suppression and control of women by men that should have been protecting them. The use of the Bible for control women and forecable women to reproduce for the Commander's make a hard reality for them. The biblically set laws make it so hard for any of the citizens to even come close to being perfect that they all pretend and just have hopes of not being caught. They could strive to be the best version of their self everyday and it still not be enough. The futuristic novel, "The Handmaid's Tale" by Margaret Atwood, concentrates on the unequal relationship between men and women: women are exploited for their biological functions and government-sponsored religion reinforces female servitude.