

Universidad Internacional de las Americas

Bachelor's degree in English

Analysis of the book A Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood using the
feminist approach

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Julio, 2023



Table of tables

Theories vs literary work:36
 Comparison characters' table36

 Comparative chart for feminist aspects39

Themes, Motifs, and Symbols:43
Theories vs Literary works.....49

Index

Chapter I	5
Problem Statement	7
1.1 Objectives of the Investigation	10
1.2 Antecedents	11
Chapter II	15
2.1 Literary Theories and Approaches	15
2.2 Themes, Symbols, Motifs	16
2.3 Author’s Biography	20
2.4 Plot	21
Chapter III	26
3.1 Research Approach	26
3.2 Research Design	27
3.3 Information Sources	28
3.4 Analysis Categories	29
3.5 Data collection Instruments	29
3.6 Collection data process and data analysis	31
Chapter IV	32
4.1 Approaches to the investigation:	32
4.2Theories vs literary work:	33
4.3 Themes, Motifs, and Symbols:	42
Chapter V	54
5.1 Purpose of the conclusion	54
5.2 Conclusions	56
5.3 Restatement of the research question	58
5.4 Unexpected results	60
5.5. Recommendations	63
References	¡Error! Marcador no definido.

Abstract

This research project aims to analyze the novel *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood, using a feminist approach. The study sought to explore the novel's themes, characters, and plotlines through the lens of the feminist theory in order to examine and critique the depiction of women and gender dynamics within the dystopian society presented in the book. Furthermore, the project will investigate the ways in which the author challenges and subverts traditional patriarchal power structures, highlighting the oppression and resilience of women within an oppressive regime. Through this feminist analysis, the research aims to contribute to understand Atwood's novel and shed light on the wider social and political issues addressed within its pages.

Chapter I

Introductory Framework

The following research will analyze the book *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood through the feminist approach. Moreover, it will be intended to demonstrate to people how feminism is important in our society, as well as the many issues that are present in society. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a well-known book that presents many issues from patriarchal control and traditional misogyny. Margaret Atwood's sixth book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, carries on her investigations of domestic politics, gender, and identity. *The Handmaid's Tale* has generated a lot of critical debate since its release in 1986. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian survival novel set at the end of the 20th century, just as gender equality was about to be achieved. Moreover, it depicted the breakdown of the United States and what Christopher Jones rightly labeled as a "revigorated hatred of women and the explosive growth of religious (patriarchal) fundamentalism." This animosity was manifested in the puritanical, militaristic, and reactionary Republic of Gilead, which was a colonizing force.

Following the publication of her book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, in 1985, Atwood earned her second Governor General's Award the following year. [2] Numerous languages have been used in the translation of this novel, which has sold millions of copies. It took place in a near-future society where totalitarian Christian theocracy governed, coupled with a new militaristic fanatical hierarchical system, and newly constructed social strata. It primarily tells stories of women who were oppressed and mistreated in a patriarchal culture and who were forbidden by law from

working, owning property, handling money, and reading, as well as the different ways these women tried to become independent and individualistic.

In Atwood's novel, women were completely under the control of male members of society. In fact, women were seen as a tool of production and under the direction of men, plainly demonstrating patriarchal rules and the power of husbands or dads in the home. Women were reduced to the stereotypically passive roles in *The Handmaid's Tale*. Atwood was concerned about the status of women in society and the prejudices they faced because of their sexual orientation. Therefore, the findings of this study will show that the patriarchal Republic of Gilead regime in *The Handmaid's Tale* oppressed the female characters in numerous ways, as for example by abolishing their rights as women and classifying them according to their social roles while denying them the freedom to speak, think, and act as they pleased.

Atwood's sixth book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, carried on her investigations on domestic politics, gender, and identity. *The Handmaid's Tale* has generated a lot of critical debate since its 1986 release. *The Handmaid's Tale* is a dystopian survival novel set at the end of the 20th century just as gender equality was about to be achieved, and it also depicted the breakdown of the United States and what Christopher Jones rightly labeled as a "revigorated hatred of women and the explosive growth of religious (patriarchal) fundamentalism" (4). This animosity was manifested in the puritanical, militaristic, and reactionary Republic of Gilead, which was a colonizing force.

The research attempts to create a feminist analysis of the book *The Handmaid's Tale* to demonstrate how female characters are portrayed, their relationships with other characters (both male and female), and how they interact with their surroundings. *The Handmaid's Tale* is not universally regarded as a feminist book, but this study aims to demonstrate that it does, as in fact it contains several of the concepts that have been developed by feminist literary criticism.

1.1 Problem Statement

Research question: How do religious, economic, and social factors affect women in 2023, and how can they be compared to the book?

This study looks at the imitation in Margaret Atwood a *The handmaid's Tale* as a starting point for alternate solutions to fundamental issues. Moreover, this research specifically addresses the following sub-problems.

1.1.1 Gender Inequality

To better grasp the issue of gender inequality, as it is presented in the story of *The handmaid's tale*, the researchers will apply the liberal feminist approach in this section. This kind of strategy needs to clarify that achieving gender equality entails releasing women from harmful gender roles. Liberal feminism paved the way for improvements in the fields of economics, opportunity disparity, civil rights, and self-fulfillment. In *The handmaid's tale* the word "gender performativity" referred to the behavior that certain genders exhibited to conform to the range of gender roles that society has established based on shared perceptions. This idea is portrayed in both the characters and the plot of *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the story, women are expected to behave differently (Stein, 57-73). Such an authoritarian social structure supports the idea that women lack independence in a patriarchal society.

1.1.2 Gender stereotyping

In this section, the researcher will apply the existentialist feminism approach which contends that women must develop into subjects which transcend definitions, labels, and essences to understand what gender stereotypes are being presented in Attwood's story. Again, the

researcher will provide each respondent with a highlighted quotation about gender stereotyping in the story to collect answers and interpretations from the respondents.

1.1.3 Loss of identity

Among the topics covered by postcolonial and feminist perspectives, there can be found identity concerns like crisis, loss, and disorientation. Women were oppressed in a similar manner by the patriarchy to how the colonized people were by the Western colonizer, who prevented them from establishing their identity. Dystopian settings are used in the dystopian tale *The Handmaid's Tale*. A post-apocalyptic dystopia with low birth rates is characterized by a past time that rendered most women infertile. Such a setup is comparable to Gilead, a totalitarian state established in a fictitious American past. In the story, the totalitarian society in the United States was centralized and ruled by a dictator. Women were ruled over in this situation because they were the targets of gender performativity in society.

A fundamentalist regime ruled Gilead society, subjecting women to objectification and treating them as the state's property, for their bodies. As a result, the country had a declining birth rate and environmental problems. The state referred to these women as "handmaids," that is women who were used by the state to bear children for prominent political figures and other individuals because of their fecundity. *The Handmaid's Tale's* narrative explores a number of issues that center on gender performativity and the socially prescribed gender norms. This is illustrated in this study through the understanding provided by the context issues of Gilead women, appearance and conduct, and identity loss in *The Handmaid's Tale*.

The audience empathizes with the victims and feels strongly against the oppressors because of the books and show's realistic portrayal of several causes of women's oppression. The goal of the program, according to Moss (as cited in Mulkerrins, 2017, n.d.), was to draw attention to pressing problems that affect women, such as forced surrogacy, rape, genital mutilation,

trafficking, and slavery. The fact that many "baby farms" (Mulkerrins, 2017, n.d.) have been reported throughout the developing world, even though these issues are mostly unfamiliar to the general public, shows how crucial it was for the show's creators to bring them to light.

Since many of the activities shown in the program and marked in the book, such as forced surrogacy, slavery, and rape, have actually occurred. This issue is also extremely timely for the present. Women only became aware when they started to be referred to as "hosts," as well (Glosswitch, 2017, n.d.). In addition, many cultures today misinterpret the Bible and degrade women under the name of religion, just like in Gilead. Hence, by emphasizing the oppressions endured by women, *The Handmaid's Tale* in a special way puts into perspective the atrocities that women must endure, which would otherwise be difficult for the typical person to experience, and thereby evokes feelings of sympathy for them.

Furthermore, albeit an exaggeration, the dystopian society is strikingly like the one we presently live in, as Stein (2007) pointed out. Women in Gilead were denied the right to free speech, activity, and even self-determination. When further examined, Gilead's principles are very comparable to the horrors that women today are forced to endure. Women were thus dehumanized, stereotyped, and objectified at various stages of their lives, even though many have chosen to ignore this fact. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Offred acted as a voice against all such anti-feminine acts.

The Handmaid's Tale portrayed patriarchy's issues and unwarranted male supremacy through Offred's point of view, despite the fact that it was-situated in a society where men predominated. In the show, men were shown to be the only ones in charge of Gilead, holding all positions of authority—from commander to soldier in the "Guardian" army—while women were relegated to much more domesticated and objectifying roles, such as "Marthas," "Handmaids," and "Wives," which reflected Gilead's view of women as subordinate to men.

Gilead's implicit belief that men were intellectually and physically superior to women is remarkably similar to what goes on in our own society. Although, if women's status has improved now, they are still perceived as less intelligent than males and, like in Gilead, as lacking in managerial and administrative abilities. Even if women are able to leave their homes and work environments, this "does not liberate women from male dominance." In fact, there are a lot of wealthy and well-paid professional women who continue to date guys who typically dominate them.

The program also highlighted the negative effects of having male-dominated decision-making bodies, which invariably led to the oppression and dehumanization of women. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the commanders were shown making judgments that were biased against Gilead's female population, such as utilizing fertile women as "concubines" (S1, E9). While promoting male superiority, this also emphasizes the serious effects it has for the female gender and cautions the female audience that their rights may be violated if they allow modern society to further male superiority.

1.2 Objectives of the Investigation

1.2.1 General Objective

To identify which feminist trials are presented in the characters of the book *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- To analyze the relationship between women's oppression and its resistance in Margaret Atwood's book with the types of feminism
- To compare feminist aspects presented in the book with modern society in some countries

- To defend how women's rights are important to have a better society

1.3 Justification of the Study

In 2022, many issues and problems mentioned in the book *The Handmaid's Tale* are still extant. This examination aims to demonstrate how many social circumstances that are presented in the book can still be found in some countries. Feminism calls for the full integration of women into society by demanding that they have the same rights, privileges, and opportunities as males in the economic, social, and political spheres. It also calls for them to be treated equally in both public and private relationships.

This study aims to show that some problems presented in the book are problems that we face as a society. The application of the Feminist approach also emphasizes the importance of women's consciousness and expression. This examination covers all the various difficulties that society faces and continues to face. Even though, the world has changed over the years, some women in different countries are still facing the problems presented in the book. Therefore, this investigation will benefit future generations to make a change in the world and eradicate these problems.

1.4 Antecedents

This analysis will be done by using the feminist approach, some of the research that was used are the following ones. In order to fully understand the dynamics of power and oppression in the fictional society of Gilead, it is necessary to study the historical background in which the novel is based. Atwood was inspired by various events and social movements that occurred in the past to build her dystopian world. These include the totalitarian regime of Nazi Germany, in which an exhaustive control over society was carried out and unimaginable atrocities were

perpetrated. References can also be found in the Inquisition and the oppression of women in different cultures and periods of history. Furthermore, it is relevant to consider the current context in which the literary analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* takes place from a feminist perspective. Despite advances in women's rights, there are still gender inequalities and discrimination in many areas of society. Contemporary feminism seeks to denounce and combat these problems, promoting gender equality, diversity, and inclusion.

This specific research article by Jennifer Keishen Armstrong was helpful to understand the real-life politics that are presented and the topic of women's reproductive rights. This article was carried out on April 25th of 2018, to demonstrate the impact that this book has on society. Keishen Armstrong stated that this book shows us the demonstration of reproductive rights. Moreover, she stated that American puritanism is one of the main topics that this book can show us, and that Atwood drew connections between what it was happening in the US during 1980s and the original Puritan colonists in 17th Century New England. "Nations never build apparently radical forms of government on foundations that aren't there already" (Keishin Armstrong April 25, 2018).

Moreover, this research done by Frederick Petterson from the university of Linnaeus helped the researcher to analyze better that Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* is a thought-provoking novel about the domination and governing of women by men. In addition, Shirin Kalantarian (2016) in her research, she spoke about women's oppression and disfigured life, as Margaret Atwood's book presented many feminist issues such as loss of identity, subordination of women in a male-dominated society, and women's exploitation. She concluded that Atwood argued that women were as a group placed in the second status in society. Moreover, women's marginalization was mainly because of their capacity to reproduce. In their works, they showed

that men are the prime measure by which the world and particularly women are judged, theoretically and in the novel. Both represent the problem of women's otherness and attempt to discover how women overcome this secondary status. They asserted that the social construction creates a generalized idea of women that all females must obey.

Furthermore, Barbara F. Prince (2022) made an analysis on the sociology of gender presented in *The handmaids tale*, in which it is explained the social issues we are still facing due to discrimination and what people think the roles of society are. Moreover, she made this research by showing the students the movie. She concluded by saying that she gathered the information for this study by doing a content analysis of 108 students' journals from a small liberal arts college's sociology of gender course. *The Handmaid's Tale* was rated overall and journal entries were examined for the recognition and application of lesson ideas. 58 different class themes were effectively discovered and linked by the students to the book. Gender stereotypes, gender, and patriarchy were the three notions that students perceived as being the most prevalent. Students praised the book and loved it as well, she said.

Furthermore, Muhammad Arham Khan (2019) explained why feminism is so important and what is his perspective about this. He concluded that *The Handmaid's Tale* indirectly is a feminist book because it rejects anti-feminine attitudes like female objectification, oppression, and male superiority by depicting a real dystopian society based on these values, even though it shows women in a very dehumanized way. However, there are several situations that undermine the show's claim to be a feminist program and should have been addressed.

1.5 Scope

The researcher found some of the issues with Margaret Atwood's book *The Handmaid's Tale* after reading it:

1. A patriarchal government is emerging, with its laws and institutions supported by religion and the conventional roles of men and women.
2. In Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, the main character experiences an existential crisis.
3. The female characters in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* experience oppression.
4. The female characters in the book show resistance.

Chapter II

Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, different aspects of the book, the characters, and the author will be explained to get familiar with the book, *The Handmaid's Tale*. Moreover, it is considered the different themes and symbols that reflect feminism and other problems presented in the book.

2.1 Literary Theories and Approaches

The term literature can be simply defined as any form of written work. It is supported by the statement of Klarer (2004, p.1), who mentioned that Literature is referred to as the entirety of written expression, with the restriction that not every written document can be categorized as literature in the more exact sense of the word. Moreover, Wellek and Warren (1963, p. 22) argued that literature is produced by the imagination of the author. Literature is not just a document of facts, but the collection of real events though they may happen in real life. Literature can create its own world as a product of unlimited imagination. Based on the definition that has been stated so far, the researcher concludes that literature is not merely a written work of one's imagination, but it also can be defined as an imaginative work that represents the society that humans encounter every day.

Atwood recounted a tale of a dystopian society that replaced the usual hierarchy of inhabitants with one in which a male Commander is in command and all women served in subordinate roles. According to feminist analysis, women were shown as oppressed, and according to Marxist analysis, the Handmaids are explicitly seen as unpaid sex workers. The feminist approach, according to Spivak Gayatri in his essay about feminist literary criticism, looks at literature assuming its production from a male-dominated perspective. It re-examines

canonical works to show how gender stereotypes are involved in their functioning, as well as works by women for a possible alternative voice. A study of the social suppression and minimalization of women's literature becomes necessary.

According to an article written by Cole Salao, Feminist criticism uses the principles and ideals of feminism to critique literature. It suggests that civilization is largely patriarchal, and that history and literature are largely written and studied through the male point of view. In doing so, it aims to uncover the implicit and explicit misogyny that may be contained in writing about women, the exclusion of women in the literary canon, and other types of marginalization. Common feminist criticisms in literature are weak female characters, idealized female representations written by male writers, and female characters in positions that are always beneath males. In resorting to these stereotypes, writers fail to present the true complexity of the female gender.

2.2 Themes, Symbols, Motifs

2.2.1 Themes

According to Grammarly.com, a story theme is what the story is about, it is like the universal message the story communicates. Women's bodies as political instruments are a very important theme, because Gilead was formed in response to the crisis caused by dramatically decreased birthrates. Moreover, the state's entire structure, with its religious trappings and rigid political hierarchy, was built around a single goal: control of reproduction. By taking complete control of women's bodies through their political enslavement, the state attacked the issue head-on. Women were not allowed to vote, own property, or hold jobs, read, or engage in any other

activities that would make them more independent or rebellious and endanger their husbands or the government.

Moreover, the causes of complacency are present in the book. According to Atwood, in a totalitarian society, individuals will put up with oppression, if it means having even a sliver of freedom or power. It is "really remarkable, what individuals can get used to, as long as there are a few compensations," Offred recalled her mother remarking. Offred's laziness when she started dating Nick demonstrated the validity of this understanding. Her current circumstances severely limited her in comparison to the freedom she had in her past life, but her friendship with Nick gave her the smallest chance to recapture some of that independence.

Reproduction and fertility are both important themes. Offred's imprisonment and the source of her power are all related to fertility, which is also Gilead's biggest failing and its best hope for the future. Gilead residents cited a variety of causes, including the sexual revolution and birth control, pollution, and sexually transmitted illnesses, for the society's difficulties in producing viable progeny. The book also raises other more subdued issues. For example, how could anyone become pregnant in a culture that severely restricted women and viewed them as precious commodities, inconvenient machines, and causes of shame akin to prostitutes? Similar to this, even though Offred was aware that her life depended on giving birth successfully, the intense pressure and dread that surrounded her could serve as a more effective motivator than the hope, joy, and freedom that marked life with her first daughter and Luke.

2.2.2 Motifs

Different motifs were presented in the book. According to Webster's dictionary, a motif is a word, sound, or symbol that comes back again and again within a particular story, as for

example Rape and Sexual Violence. *The Handmaid's Tale* is rife with sexual violence, especially towards women. The founders believed that the prevalence of rape and obscenity in the pre-Gilead era supported the formation of the new system. The Commander and the aunts asserted that Gilead offered better protection for women, treated them with respect, and kept them secure from harm. The official punishment for rape was undoubtedly terrible: in one scene, the Handmaids violently dismembered a purported rapist with only their bare hands (a member of the resistance). Gilead, however, institutionalized sexual assault despite her claims to the contrary.

Religious terms are used for political purposes, In Gilead, there was no distinction between state and religion because it was a theocracy, and biblical allusions and religious terms were part of the language used in official documents. The local police were referred to as "Guardians of the Faith," soldiers were referred to as "Angels," and the Commanders were formally known as "Commanders of the Faithful." Domestic maids were referred to as "Marthas" in honor of a domestic figure from the New Testament. The names of each store were taken from the Bible: Milk and Honey, Loaves and Fishes, and All Flesh. Even, the vehicles had names from the Bible, such as Behemoth, Whirlwind, and Chariot. Using religious terms to describe persons, positions, and companies helped to cover up political scheming with devout words. It served as a constant reminder that Gilead's founders insisted its members to act in accordance with the Bible's own authority. In Gilead, the phrase "God is a National Resource" was is widely used, and politics and religion coexisted in the same bed.

Similarities between reactionary and feminist ideologies. Although, Atwood occasionally drew parallels between the designers of Gilead and radical feminists like Offred's mother, *The Handmaid's Tale* delivered an uniquely feminist critique of the conservative views toward women that prevailed in Gilead. Both organizations demonstrated a willingness to impose

restrictions on free speech in order to advance their respective objectives of defending women against sexual assault. Offred remembered a scene where feminists, including her mother, burned pornographic magazines. These feminists prohibited some forms of sexual expression, just like the creators of Gilead. Gilead also benefited from the feminist discourse of female "sisterhood" and solidarity.

2.2.3 Symbols

According to Webster's dictionary, a literary symbol is an object, a person, a situation, or an action that has a literal meaning in a story but suggests or represents other meanings. Red, the narrative frequently featured the color red. The Handmaids' uniforms were red, a color that conjured up images of humiliation (think of *The Scarlet Letter*), ripeness, and fertility. Offred increased the color's metaphorical meaning by describing blood in terms of both the life force that flowed through her body and a sign of violence and death, such as the blood on hanged criminals.

The novel is covered in eyes, which stand in for important topics like paranoia, surveillance, and Gilead's power. The scary, violent, and covert enforcers of Gilead's laws were known as The Eyes. Offred saw eyes everywhere, from a tour guide's badge to her own ankle tattoo, and she worried that everyone she met, from the doctor to Ofglen, might be an Eye. The plastered-over light socket in Offred's chamber, which Offred imagined as a blinded eye, was the most intricate eye in the novel. Later, she found out that the previous Handmaid committed herself by hanging herself from the old light fixture, so the blindfolded eye now represented both freedom and death.

Makeup. There are numerous contrasts in makeup that deal with power and sexuality. It represents femininity, the past, and Offred's lost ability to choose how she looked. However, other people, like the Commander, believed that women were now freer, since they were not required to utilize their appearances as a form of dating competition. Even so, the Commander enjoyed going to Jezebel's, where all the women dressed up to get customers. In particular, handmaids shouldn't try to seem pretty because that would make things more difficult for the Wives and Commanders they were meant to serve. Even in a home without mirrors, Offred tried her best to keep her look, meticulously preserving her butter as a moisturizing lotion.

2.3 Authors' Biography

In this space, Margaret Atwood's biography will be explained.

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian poet, writer, literary critic, essayist, teacher, environmentalist, and inventor. Margaret Eleanor Atwood was born on November 18, 1939. In addition to several small press editions of both poetry and fiction, she has released 18 books of poetry, 18 novels, 11 works of non-fiction, 9 collections of short stories, 8 children's books, 2 graphic novels, and 18 books of short stories, since 1961. Two Booker Prizes, the Arthur C. Clarke Award, the Governor General's Award, the Franz Kafka Prize, the Princess of Asturias Awards, the National Book Critics and PEN Center USA Lifetime Achievement Awards, among many others, have been given to Atwood for her writing. Many of her books have been made into film and television adaptations. Atwood's works encompass a variety of themes including gender and identity, religion and myth, the power of language, climate change, and "power politics. Many of her poems are inspired by myths and tales which interested her from a very early age.

2.4 Plot

Offred **was** a Handmaid in the totalitarian, theocratic Republic of Gilead, which had **had** taken the place of the United States of America. Handmaids were responsible for bearing children for affluent couples with problems conceiving due to dangerously low reproduction rates. Offred worked for the Commander and his wife Serena Joy, a proponent of "traditional values" and a former gospel singer. Since the Handmaid's names were made from the word "of" and the name of the Handmaid's Commander, Offred was not the narrator's real name. Offred must have ritualized intercourse with the Commander every month when she was at the appropriate stage of her menstrual cycle, with Serena sitting behind her and holding her hands. Like all women, Offred's freedom was totally constrained. She was limited to leaving the house.

Offred told the story of her daily life activities, so that the reader could piece together the events leading up to the novel's start. Before Gilead, Offred had an affair with a married man named Luke in the ancient world. Luke married Offred after divorcing his wife, and the two of them had a child. Offred's mother was a feminist activist and a single mother. Moira, Offred's best friend, had a strong sense of independence. When pornography, prostitution, and violence against women were easily accessible and fertility rates were falling because of pollution and chemical spills, the architects of Gilead first rose to prominence.

All women were assigned to various classes: the chaste childless Wives of the Commanders; the housekeeping Marthas; and the reproductive Handmaids, who turned their offspring over to the Wives and were called by the names of their assigned Commanders. Once Offred was assigned to the Commander's house, her life settled into a restrictive routine. She took shopping trips with Ofglen, another Handmaid, and they visited the Wall outside what used to be Harvard University, where the bodies of rebels hung. She must visit the doctor frequently to

be checked for disease and other complications, and she must endure the “Ceremony,” in which the Commander read to the household from the Bible, then went to the bedroom, where Serena and Offred waited for him, and had sex with Offred.

Offred had been trying to get pregnant for a while, so Serena proposed that she had sex with Nick in private and passed the baby off as the Commanders. If Offred slept with Nick, Serena would bring her a picture of her daughter. Offred was horrified to learn that Serena had always known where her daughter was. Offred was supposed to sleep with Nick that same night, but the Commander sneakily brought her to a bar called Jezebel's, where the Commander mixed with prostitutes. Offred noticed Moira there at work. When the two ladies crossed paths in a restroom, Offred discovered that Moira was arrested shortly before crossing the border and refused to go to the Colonies, where most political prisoners and others who were threat to Gilead were transferred, preferring instead to live in Jezebel's. Offred claimed that Moira was never seen by her again after that evening at Jezebel's. After a while, the Commander led Offred upstairs, where they engaged in sexual activity in what was once a hotel room. She tried to project emotion.

Shortly thereafter, Offred went out shopping, and a new Ofglen met her. This new woman was not part of Mayday, and she told Offred that the old Ofglen hanged herself when she saw the secret police coming for her. At home, Serena had found out about Offred's trip to Jezebel's, and she sent her to her room, promising punishment. Offred waited there, and she saw a black van from the Eyes approach. Then Nick told her that the Eyes Were Mayday members who had come to save her. Offred left with them, over the Commander's futile objections, on her way to prison or freedom—she did not know which.

The novel closed with an epilogue from 2195, after Gilead had fallen, written in the form of a lecture given by Professor Pieixoto. He explained the formation and customs of Gilead in objective, analytical language. He discussed the significance of Offred's story, which had been found on cassette tapes in Bangor, Maine. Pieixoto suggested that Nick arranged Offred's escape but that her fate after that was unknown. She could have escaped to Canada or England, or she could have been recaptured.

Characters:

Offred The novel's protagonist and first-person narrator, Handmaid of the Commander and Serena Joy, former wife of Luke, and lover of Nick. Offred, who was represented by the phrase "Of Fred," her Commander, was never given her real name, and we know very nothing about her appearance. She was 33 years old, had brown hair, and was about five feet seven. She married Luke at around age 25, and they had a daughter before Gilead. Her college closest friend Moira had a tumultuous relationship with her radical, eccentric mother. Offred appeared stolid and devout to outsiders, doing her best to abide by Gilead's laws, despite having rebellious, even violent, impulses and being filled with intense memories.

The commander is the husband of Serena Joy and the master of the family where Offred worked as a handmaid. The Commander had gray hair, is dressed in a black suit, and had the appearance of a bank president from the Midwest. Despite being a high-ranking official of Gilead who may have contributed significantly to its development, he violated various laws, such as visiting Jezebel's (and at least once hiring Moira) and spending time with Offred. Despite attributing a lot of his sexist traits to "Nature," he cared about Offred's welfare and frequently sought her input on hot-button issues.

Serena Joy is also referred to as the Commander's Wife and needed Offred's assistance because she was unable to bear children. She was a musician before Gilead, and her emotive Christian music helped her to become well-known on television. She also frequently spoke on the importance of being a housewife. Despite her arthritis, she spent her time gardening with Nick's assistance and making intricate scarves for soldiers. She resentfully ignored Offred for a large portion of the book, but near the conclusion, she pushed Offred to try to get pregnant by having sex with Nick.

Nick as the driver for the Commander, Serena Joy's Garden assistant, and Offred's boyfriend. Nick's formal title was Guardian, and because he had not been given a female partner, he appeared to be a low-ranking individual. He roguishly defied some of Gilead's rules right away (by pulling up his uniform sleeves, for instance), but the Commander and Serena Joy believed in him and enlisted his assistance for their own wrongdoings. Even during their romantic relationship, he was careful and secretive, and Offred had a hard time understanding what he was thinking.

Moira, a fearless, outspoken feminist lesbian who was Offred's best friend in college. Offred ran into her again at the Rachel and Leah Center. She managed to leave the Center after one failed effort and traveled along the Underground Femaleroad, but the Eyes caught her and tormented her. As opposed to going to the Colonies, she chose to work as a prostitute (the Colonies are essentially a death sentence). Offred noticed Moira at Jezebel's, and it appeared that the authorities had succeeded in breaking her spirit.

Minor Characters

Offred's Mother

A radical feminist before Gilead. She marched at abortion rights and anti-rape protests and burnt pornography. Offred used to resent her showy, fanatical behavior, but now she regretted their difficult relationship. She ended up cleaning toxic waste in the Colonies. We never learned her real name.

Offred's Daughter

Offred's daughter with Luke was five during their failed escape attempt, when Gileadean authorities removed her to place with another family. During the time of the novel, she would be about eight. Like Offred's mother, we never learned her name.

Aunt Lydia

The Aunt in charge at the Rachel and Leah Center and the Woman's Salvaging. Her opinions and sayings constantly ran through Offred's head, evidence of effective brainwashing.

Ofglen

Offred's shopping partner and a member of the Mayday Resistance who suddenly disappeared.

Janine

Also known as Ofwarren, a Handmaid from Offred's class at the Rachel and Leah Center. She got hysterical easily. She's criticized and broken down at the Center, but Offred had no sympathy for her.

Chapter III

Methodological Framework

The Handmaid's Tale, written by Margaret Atwood, is a gripping dystopian novel that tells the story of a woman living in a totalitarian regime, in which women are stripped of their rights and are used solely for reproductive purposes. This research project will analyze Atwood's novel using a methodological framework that will critically examine the social and political commentary presented within the text. The methodological framework used in this analysis will be grounded in feminist theory, which focuses on the political, economic, and social equality of individuals regardless of their gender. By utilizing this perspective, we can uncover how *The Handmaid's Tale* showcases the impact of patriarchal power structures on women and their oppression in an authoritarian society. Furthermore, this research project will employ a literary analysis approach to analyze the novel's narrative structure, symbolism, and themes that addressed issues such as gender roles, power dynamics, and societal values.

3.1 Research Approach

According to the website Qualitative pro, A research technique known as qualitative research focuses on gathering information through conversational and open-ended dialogue. This approach focuses on "what" and "why" people believe the way they do. Qualitative research methods are designed in a manner that help to reveal the behavior and perception of a target audience with reference to a particular topic. One of the most popular techniques for conducting qualitative research is conducting in-depth interviews. Therefore, this method will be used in this research. One respondent is interviewed one-on-one in a personal setting. This approach is entirely conversational and provides chances to probe the respondent for specific information. This will help to collect detailed information about people's beliefs and motivations, since asking

the proper questions can aid in the collection of relevant data. The researcher will ask follow-up questions that would assist in gathering more information if it is needed.

According to Jim Frost, Qualitative research uses non-numerical data, such as text, audio, and visual records, to understand concepts, experiences, and views. Language, actions, and social structures are the main points of emphasis. To develop narrative accounts that employ natural language and present real experiences, qualitative researchers aim to produce meaningful responses to their research questions. Instead, focusing on numbers, qualitative research emphasizes descriptions, opinions, and experiences. Interviews, journals, focus groups, records, artifacts, and direct observations are all common methods for gathering data.

Moreover, this approach refers to the way someone comes closer to something. Since this research belongs to literature, the approach refers to the researcher's view of the literary work. Feminist criticism, according to Websters' dictionary, highlights the various ways women in particular have been oppressed, suppressed, and repressed, aspects that will be used to conduct the research. In the past, feminist literary criticism has attempted to reexamine classic works from the canon of literature. The development and rediscovery of female writing traditions, the rediscovery of old texts, the interpretation of the symbolism of women's writing so that it will not be lost or ignored by the male point of view, and the resistance to the inherent sexism in most of the mainstream literature are all specific objectives of feminist criticism.

3.2 Research Design

The method that will be used for this research to find the answers to the research question: **“How do religious, economic, and social factors affect women in 2023, and how can they be compared to the book?”** is the qualitative method which aims to collect deep information about

the topic suggested and what are respondents' thoughts about the feminist problems presented, nowadays. First, some questions will be developed regarding the book, such as: Have you read the book or watched the movie? Do you know what social problems affect women? Do you know something about a specific religion that discriminates against women's needs and rights? If you are a woman, have you ever experienced any kind of social, religious, or political discrimination? And some more questions will be used to gather all the information needed. All these questions are meant to gather information on how feminism is presented in our society and why it is important. In addition, all the information and answers will be gathered in 2 days, one day the questions and the meetings for women will be asked and the other the question for men. The research is for both men and women because men also have to know What problems women face and to be informed about their issues.

3.3 Information Sources

The respondents will be a group of adults between the ages 20- 38. It consists of 5 women and 5 men. The researcher will have one meeting with each of them to gather all the information and to tell if they are informed on feminism and similar issues. Furthermore, the researcher guarantees the collection of responses, both the researcher and the research's participants must read and comprehend the narrative's storyline, which is described below. This will enable the participants to get a quick summary of the story and emphasize the topics. All the interviewees are 18+ and agreed to respond all the questions and even allowed to be recorded if it is needed. The researcher will take notes of each of the interviews and will add all their names and their thoughts about the topic.

3.4 Analysis Categories

Content analysis is a useful method for reviewing and interpreting texts, original works, or secondary data. It is a useful approach for detecting patterns and themes within a text and providing insight into the intended message. In this research paper, content analysis was employed to analyze *The Handmaid's Tale*, a novel by Margaret Atwood. Through a qualitative based analysis of the content, themes such as sexism, power dynamics, and dystopian society, were detected through the use of techniques such as coding. The study shed light on the author's intention to question and challenge perceptions of patriarchal societies, generating insights into the meaning and significance of the text in discussions on gender relations. The addition to the content analysis, the research methodology provided robust and meaningful insights that could not be attained through purely quantitative methods.

3.5 Data collection Instruments

A survey is an important tool for collecting data for this research project about *The Handmaid's Tale* because it can provide insights into readers' perceptions regarding the novel. The survey can be designed to gather information on readers' backgrounds, their reading experiences, and their interpretations of the book. The survey will be used to collect data on specific topics related to the novel, such as the role of religion, power dynamics, and gender issues. By collecting data through a survey, the researcher can analyze and interpret the responses to identify patterns and trends among readers. This information can then be used to further understand the themes and messages in the novel, and to draw conclusions about its cultural significance. Overall, a survey is an effective way to collect data for a research project on *The Handmaid's Tale*, as it allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of readers' perspectives and experiences with the novel.

Moreover, different charts were done, in order to compare characteristics of the characters, motifs, symbols, and themes presented in the book, and then to compare feminist aspects presented in the book with modern society. Comparative tables are important for a research project for a number of reasons: Organization of information: Comparative tables help to organize and present clearly and concisely the information gathered during the research. They allow the comparison of different variables, characteristics or relevant aspects of the subjects studied. Visualization of patterns and trends: Comparative tables make it possible to identify patterns and trends by displaying information in an orderly and structured manner. This facilitates the interpretation of results and the identification of relationships between variables or study groups.

Comparative tables are very useful instruments in a research project, since they allow the information gathered during the research process to be organized and presented in a clear and systematic manner. These tables are an effective tool for comparing variables, characteristics, or relevant aspects of the different subjects under study. Moreover, this facilitates the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships among them. In addition, comparative tables help to synthesize and summarize the results obtained, which simplifies their interpretation by researchers and readers, who can quickly and concisely access relevant information of the study. Likewise, these instruments are valuable for informed decision making, as they allow a visual and structured comparison of relevant data and characteristics. This facilitates the evaluation of different options and the selection of the most appropriate one. It is important to emphasize that comparative tables avoid duplication of information in the research project by grouping and presenting results in an orderly manner, thus avoiding repetition of data in different parts of the study.

3.6 Collection data process and data analysis

The collection data process and data analysis are essential components of any research study. This process enables researchers to gather and analyze data systematically; thereby, making it possible to make meaningful conclusions and inferences. In this part of the research, it is explored the collection data process and data analysis of a research study using the feminist approach in the *Handmaid's Tale* book. The first step in the collection data process is the research design. In this case, the research design involved conducting a literary analysis of the *Handmaid's Tale* book to explore themes related to feminist theory. The researcher used approaches such as close reading and content analysis to identify key themes, concepts, and issues related to women's oppression and power dynamics in the book.

The second step involved data collection. The researcher used various sources of data, including primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data included *the Handmaid's Tale* book itself, interviews, and surveys. Secondary sources included academic articles and books related to the feminist theory and *the Handmaid's Tale* book. The researcher looked for themes and patterns that emerged from the data collected from these sources. The third step involved data analysis. The researcher used feminist theory as the lens through which to analyze the data collected. The researcher examined the themes and patterns identified during the data collection phase using the feminist approach, making inferences, and drawing conclusions based on this analysis. The researcher considered the social and historical context of the book, which helped to provide additional insight into the themes and issues explored.

The fourth and final step involved the presentation and interpretation of the data. The researcher presented and interpreted the data in a way that was meaningful and relevant to the research question. The researcher used various tools such as figures , charts, and tables to present

the data in a clear and concise manner. The researcher then used the data to make conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

Chapter IV

Data Analysis

The Handmaid's Tale by Margaret Atwood is a speculative fiction novel that has received worldwide acclaim and has been adapted into a television series. The book is set in the fictional Republic of Gilead, where a totalitarian government has taken over the United States. The novel explores issues of gender, power, and oppression, and its themes are still relevant in today's society. In this research paper, it will be performed a data analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* to examine the representation of power and oppression in Gilead society. The purpose of the paper is to provide a thorough analysis of the book and its impact on contemporary society, with a focus on the themes of gender, power, and oppression. The researcher will pay special attention to the data collected in this analysis to develop a more comprehensive understanding of these themes and their relevance to today's society.

4.1 Approaches to the investigation

A feminist approach explores how gender shapes the experiences of individuals and groups, specifically women, and aims to address gender-based inequalities. In the book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, the author Margaret Atwood employed a feminist approach by portraying women as victims of a patriarchal society. Through the character of Offred, Atwood highlighted

how the oppression of women in the fictional Republic of Gilead was the result of sexism. The novel is a representation of the author's own feminist ideology, and her concern for women's rights in society. Atwood's portrayal of a misogynistic and oppressive society prompts readers to consider the experiences of real-life women who are subjected to such gender-based inequalities. The feminist approach adopted in *The Handmaid's Tale* makes a powerful statement on the need to address gender inequalities and fight against patriarchal systems of power that deny women their rights.

4.2 Theories vs literary work

Comparison characters' table

Character	Role in society	Character traits	Motivations	Relationship to Offred
Offred/June	Handmaid, forced to bear children for the upper class.	Resilience, passivity	Survival, reunification with her daughter.	-
Serena Joy	A former televangelist and wife of a high-ranking man.	Manipulation Complacency	Desire for a child, frustration with her role in society.	Authority figure
Commander Waterford	High ranking official in the oppressive regime.	Intelligence, Callousness	Lust for Offred, desire for power.	Master/Owner
Aunt Lydia	Oversaw the training of the handmaids	Ruthless, ideological	True believer of Gilead's ideology and its mission.	Teacher/enforcer

Moira	Friend of Offred's. She rebelled and escaped.	Bravery, impulsivity	Fought against injustice, protection of herself.	Friend/Confidante
Nick	Nick's position allowed him to observe and collect useful information.	Mysterious, protective	Protected himself and those close to him	Lover/protector
Ofglen/Emily	Handmaid, fought for equality, homosexual.	Determination, courageousness	Got back to her family.	Risky friendship/Alliance against Gilead

The book dives into the lives of a number of characters, each of them **stood** for a distinct set of ideals, drives, and consequences in this harsh environment. With a focus on their relevance, growth, and interactions within the story, the major characters are examined in-depth in this comparative chart.

Offred exemplified resiliency, self-reflection, and vulnerability. She was previously married and had a daughter. Importance: by reading Offred's account, readers can better understand the constraints, feelings, and evolving power dynamics of the handmaid' system. She resolved to maintain her individuality and to fight for a better future, so this made her a convincing protagonist.

The commander's Description: The Regiment's rules must be followed; hence, the commander was a high-ranking official in Gilead. He represented the hypocrisy and conflicts among the prevailing class. Important: The interactions between the commander and Offred highlighted the flaws in Gilead's power structure. He became a catalyst for Offred's transformation and served as a nuanced example of the corrupting nature of power. Development:

Throughout the novel, the Commander's clandestine actions, attempts at intimacy, and eventual unraveling led to a deeper understanding of his desperate need for connection and meaning beyond his position.

Serena Joy is the Comandante's wife, an early televangelist, and a symbol of Galad's subjugation of women. She emitted a complex brew of hopelessness, resentment, and anger. -
Meaning: Despite becoming system's victims, Serena Joy's character stood for internalized misogyny and the extreme measures some women took to maintain their closeness to power. Serena Joy, despite first coming out as the antagonist, developed throughout the book, going from a strict upholder of Gilead's beliefs to someone pining for a different existence. Readers are presented with contradictions worth contemplating by her vulnerability and unanticipated gestures of generosity.

Moira, her tenacity, wit, and inventiveness represent resistance to Gilead's rule. -
Importance: Moira's persona served as an inspiration for Offred and other women who were oppressed by the system by standing for rebellion with optimism. She illustrated how even in the most hopeless situations, transformation was possible. Her experiences served as a sobering reminder of the serious hazards associated with opposing Gilead.

Comparisons between the characters

Power Dynamics

The interactions between the individuals made clear the power disparities that existed in Gilead between genders, classes, and roles. The different ways people reacted to tyranny were depicted in Offred's navigating of her subordinate position, the Commander's abuse of authority, Serena Joy's lack of autonomy, and Moira's disobedience.

Identity and Resistance

The central theme is each character's struggle to maintain his or her identity while keeping up with Gilead's expectations. Offred's secret rebellion, the secret meeting between the Commander and Offred, Selina Joy's hidden talents, and Moira's determination to recover her Freedom reflected the complexities of resistance and self-preservation.

Emotional Depth

The characters' emotional states changed throughout the novel, revealing their vulnerabilities, fears, and desires. Offred's longing for her deceased family, the Commander's desire for companionship, Selina Joy's yearning for motherhood, and Moira's unwavering hope, offered glimpses of the complexity of human emotions even in regimented situations.

Comparative chart for feminist aspects

The handmaids tale book	Modern society
Women rights with their bodies Women's bodies were commodified and politicized and they had no control over their reproductive rights.	Women rights with their bodies Women today have many reproductive rights; however, these rights have been under attack in some countries with antiabortion laws or restrictions.
Gender roles Women were strictly confined to their roles as wives, handmaids, Martha's or	Gender roles The traditional gender roles in society are still prevalent, but women are breaking many stereotypes. Moreover, there is still a gender

aunts. They did not have freedom to choose their professions or lifestyles.	wage gap and women are more likely to face discrimination.
Sexual Violence Women were subjected to assault and rape, which was justified by the religious doctrine.	Sexual Violence Sexual violence is a day-to-day topic, many women have faced these challenges, and some countries believe in forced marriages even with women underage.
Religious fundamentalism The Gileadean regime was based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Christianity, which was used to justify their oppressive practices.	Religious fundamentalism Although, it is less severe than the book, religious fundamentalism still poses a threat to women's freedoms in some parts of the world.

Comparing the feminist dimension represented in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* with contemporary society, provides an opportunity to critically assess progress in gender equality, while recognizing current challenges. This comparative analysis aims to focus on the major feminist themes addressed in the novels and to examine their relevance in the contemporary world. By weighing the fictional Gilead against modern society, we can gain insight into the ongoing struggle for gender equality and identify areas in need of the Feminist side

Gender inequality in political representation and leadership.

In Gilead, women were completely removed from power and leadership positions, strengthening male dominance and perpetuating patriarchy.

- Modern Society

Despite progress in increasing women's political representation, gender inequalities persist in many countries. Women remain underrepresented in top positions in politics and various industries, reflecting persistent structural barriers and societal biases.

Feminist Side: Crossness and Multiple Alienation

The novel pointed to the intersectionality of female oppression in Gilead as characters of various races, classes, and sexual orientations experience more social marginalization.

- Modern society

Intersectionality remains central to the feminist discourse. Contemporary feminism recognizes that gender equality cannot be fully achieved without addressing the overlapping effects of power relations influenced by race, class, sexual orientation, disability, and other marginalized identities. The ongoing struggle against racial injustice, economic inequality, and discrimination highlights how multiple systems of oppression intersect and calls for a more inclusive and intersectional approach to feminist activism of more.

Feminist side: social and cultural social and cultural expectations

The novel depicted rigid gender roles and societal expectations that were imposed on women and limit their opportunities for self-expression and self-fulfillment.

- Modern Society

While great strides have been made in challenging traditional gender norms, societal expectations, and stereotypes remain. Women continue to be pressured to conform to unrealistic

beauty standards and gender expectations that affect their self-esteem and limit their choices and opportunities.

Feminist side: Resistance and unity

The novel highlighted the Power of resistance, resilience, and unity for women in the face of oppression.

Modern society:

Women's movements and feminist activism are gaining momentum around the world, addressing issues such as sexual harassment, unequal pay, and violence against women. Collective efforts, cross-cutting alliances, and social media platforms provide opportunities for women to raise their voices and challenge oppressive structures and build solidarity. However, resistance is often met with backlash and requires ongoing engagement and recognition of diverse experiences and perspectives.

Comparison:

-Advance and Rebound

Comparing the feminist dimension of *The Handmaid's Tale* to contemporary society highlights both progress and ongoing challenges. While progress has been made, it is not universal, women's rights continue to face setbacks, and more must be done to ensure and expand gender equality.

-Transversality and Diversity

Given the experiences of women from different backgrounds and identities, recognizing intersectionality has become more important in today's feminist activism. This perspective allows for a more inclusive movement that addresses a wide range of issues facing women.

Comparing the feminist aspects of *The Handmaid's Tale* with contemporary society allows us to critically consider progress and ongoing challenges in the pursuit of gender equality. Although, some progress has been made, the analysis shows that issues such as reproductive rights, political representation, social expectations, and intersectionality, remain. It is important to recognize the progress made, while remaining vigilant and proactive in addressing inequalities that still exist. Margaret Atwood's novels continue to be powerful reminders of the need for sustained action, collective solidarity, and fighting.

Theories

Feminist Theory

The Handmaid's Tale is often studied through the lens of feminist theory. Atwood presented a patriarchal society called Gilead, where women were oppressed, reduced to specific roles, and stripped of their autonomy. The novel critiqued the subjugation of women and highlighted the importance of female solidarity and resistance against oppressive systems.

Marxist Theory

A Marxist analysis of the novel focuses on the power dynamics and class struggle depicted in Gilead. The ruling class, comprising the Commanders, held significant power and wealth, while the Handmaids represented an oppressed working class, commodified for their reproductive abilities. The novel explored themes of exploitation, inequality, and resistance against an authoritarian regime.

Postcolonial Theory

The Handmaid's Tale can be examined from a postcolonial perspective, highlighting the themes of cultural imperialism and colonialism. Gilead imposed strict rules and suppressed cultural diversity, erasing individual identities. Atwood critiqued the homogenization of society, drawing parallels to historical colonial practices.

Ecofeminist Theory

This theory explores the intersection of environmental concerns and feminism. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, the environmental degradation and decline in fertility are linked. The loss of reproductive rights for women reflected the exploitation of nature and the consequences of a patriarchal society's disregard for the environment.

Psychological Theory

Atwood's novel delved into the psychological impact of oppressive systems on individuals. The protagonist, Offred, experienced trauma, fear, and internal conflict. Psychological theories such as trauma theory, psychoanalysis, and cognitive dissonance can be applied to analyze the characters' experiences and the effects of a repressive society on their mental well-being.

Structuralized Theory

A structuralized reading of the novel focuses on the underlying binary oppositions and structures in the narrative. For instance, the dichotomy of power and powerlessness, freedom and constraint, and language and silence, can be analyzed within the context of Gilead's social structure.

Queer Theory

The Handmaid's Tale also invites examination through the lens of queer theory. The novel portrays rigid gender roles and the suppression of non-heteronormative identities. LGBTQ+ characters, such as gender-nonconforming Moira, offer insight into the resistance against heteronormative standards and the exploration of diverse sexual identities.

These are just a few literary theories that can be applied to analyze *The Handmaid's Tale*. The novel's multifaceted nature and rich symbolism provide fertile ground for further exploration and interpretation, making it a compelling piece for literary analysis and discussion.

4.3 Themes, Motifs, and Symbols

This table presents a collection of patterns, signs, and themes from the book *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood. It is not an exhaustive list, and there may be other elements to explore in the text.

Motifs	Symbols	Themes
Surveillance	Red color	Oppression and Control
Identity	The Handmaid's clothing	Gender and Power
Memory	Eyes	Reproductive Rights
Language	Offred's name	Resistance and Rebellion
Religion	The Commander's study	Loss of Freedom
Control	The Ceremony	Dehumanization
Rebellion	The Wall	Dystopia and Totalitarianism
Power	The Eyes of God	Feminism and Patriarchy

Technology	The Salvaging	Individual agency and autonomy
Freedom	The Underground Mayday	Loss of Identity

Patterns, signs, and themes play a vital role in shaping the story of *The Handmaid's Tale* by influencing its narrative, characters, and overall atmosphere. Here is how they impact the story.

1. Observation: The pattern of observation underscores the constant surveillance and control imposed by the oppressive regime. It creates a sense of fear and tension, influencing the characters' actions, and their ability to challenge authority.

2. Crimson color: The crimson sign, present in the maids' attire, represents fertility, sexuality, and danger. It reminds the characters of their roles as reproductive vessels, reinforcing their subjugation and contributing to the theme of women's oppression.

3. Individuality: The pattern of individuality explores the erasure of personal identities in a dystopian society. The characters struggle to maintain their sense of self, leading to internal conflicts and acts of resistance.

4. Speech: It serves as a template that highlights the manipulation and control of communication. Key words and phrases such as "under his observation," shape characters' worldviews and limit their expression, further reinforcing themes of oppression and power imbalance.

5. Faith: Religious symbolism permeates the story as characters use religious doctrine to justify their oppressive practices. It examines the misuse of faith for political gain and delves into the themes of fanaticism and totalitarianism.

6. Domination: The pattern of domination is shown through various mechanisms, such as Ceremony and strict regulations. This symbolizes how power-hungry individuals assert their control over others, suppressing their freedoms and autonomy.

7. Defiance: The pattern of defiance illuminates the characters' resistance against their oppressive circumstances. It demonstrates the courage to stand against authority, emphasizing the themes of hope and the pursuit of freedom.

8. Authority: power dynamics, reflected through signs such as the Eyes of God observing the characters' actions. This reinforces the overarching themes of gender inequality, feminism, and patriarchal dominance.

9. Advancement: The pattern of advancement reveals how oppressive regimes use progress to enhance control. For example, surveillance devices and advances in reproductive technology enabled and manipulated characters, deepening issues of loss of privacy and reproductive rights.

10. Freedom: The theme of freedom is intricately woven throughout the story, symbolized by the Underground.

How can the symbols, themes and motifs affect the characters?

Red: The red motif appears throughout the book, symbolizing a variety of ideas like fertility, violence, and female power. However, when they demanded the hue, it also became a symbol of rebellion and brotherhood, demonstrating a challenge to the oppressive regime.

Symbol: The maids' uniform: which consisted of a red vest and white boots, served as a striking symbol of their oppression and commercialization. Character Impact: The handmaids'

individuality was stripped away by the uniform, which reduced them to nothing more than sexual objects.

The subject of control highlighted Gilead's harsh culture and the systemic oppression of women. Character Impact: The concept of control had an impact on individuals like Offred, who at first gave in to the system and lacked agency, until eventually realizing her own resistance. Characters like Moira, who persistently questioned and resisted Gilead's authority, encouraged others to do the same, that is to embody the idea of resistance.

The motif of eyes and surveillance emphasized the constant observation and watchfulness in Gilead, highlighting the lack of privacy, fear, and control. Impact on characters: The protagonists had sentiments of paranoia and self-censorship as a result of the motif. The motif emphasized issues of secrecy, trust, and the characters' capacity for resistance under nearly continual observation.

Theme: Self-awareness and identity. It investigated the conflict between personal ambitions and societal expectations. Offred fought to hold onto her memories, feelings. She was against the system's efforts to take them away as she struggled with her shifting identity. Characters struggled against the erasure of selfhood while also engaging in revolt and resistance in search of independence and personal satisfaction.

The following table relates some theories and literary works relevant to a research on the book *The Handmaid's Tale*.

Theories

Literary Works

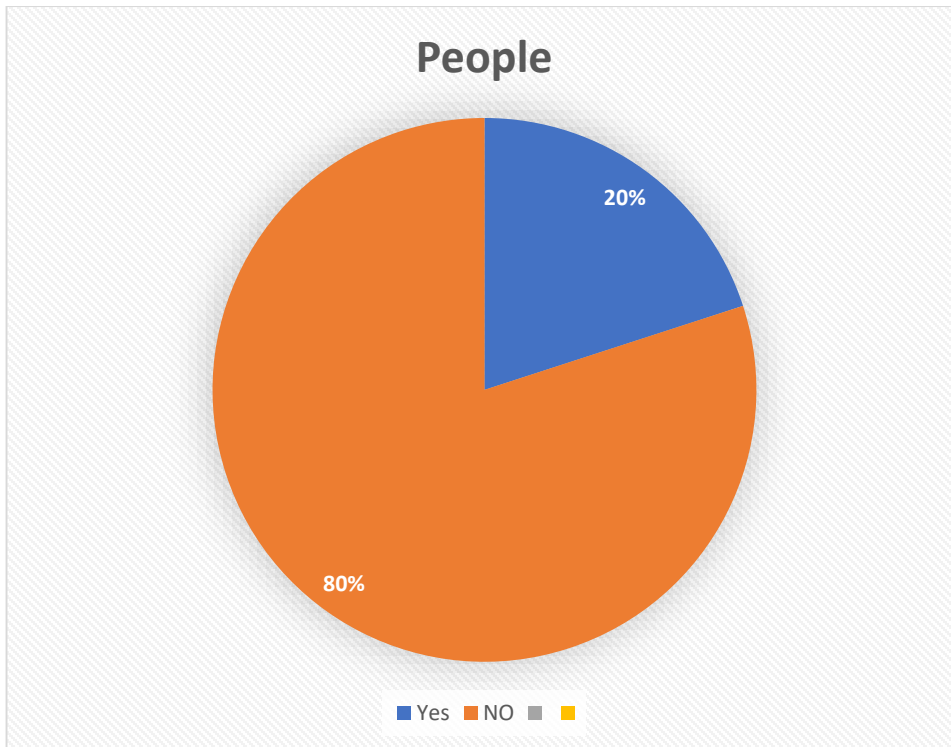
Second wave feminism	Simone de Beauvoirs´s “The second sex”
Feminist Literary theory	The madwoman in the Attic by Sandra Gilbert
Theory of patriarchy	The origin of the family by Friedrich Engels
Queer theory	Gender trouble by Judith butler
Intersectional feminism	by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa

These theories and literary works can be useful to analyze *The Handmaid's Tale* from different critical perspectives, such as feminism, patriarchy, gender identity, power relations, and female resistance. By studying these theories and intertwining them with the novel, one can deepen the understanding of the issues addressed by Margaret Atwood and enrich the analysis of the work from different theoretical approaches.

Survey

A survey was made to 10 people, four boys and six girls in order to retrieve data for the research. According to the survey that was made by the researcher these were the results.

1. Have you ever read or watch *The handmaid's tale*?

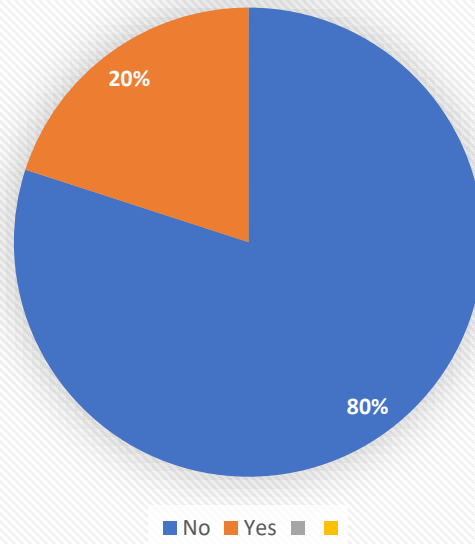


2. Write with your own words what you think feminism is:

- A union created to give equality to society.
- Movement that fights for women's rights.
- Movement to defend women.
- Women's power against men.
- It is a movement that looks for equality no matter the gender.

3. Do you think that men and women are treated equally around the world in terms of culture, politics, and religion?

Do you think that men and women have the same rights around the world?



Culture, politics, and religion are all relevant when discussing gender equality all around the world because they significantly shape societal norms, values, and power structures. Here is why each of these factors is relevant.

1. Culture: Culture encompasses a society's shared beliefs, practices, and customs. It influences attitudes towards gender roles, expectations, and stereotypes. Cultural norms can either reinforce traditional gender hierarchies or promote equality. Understanding cultural influences is crucial in addressing gender equality, as it helps to identify and challenge discriminatory practices deeply embedded in society.

2. Politics: Political systems and policies play a vital role in shaping gender equality. Laws, regulations, and government initiatives can either uphold or challenge gender disparities. Political structures determine access to resources, decision-making power, and legal protection for

individuals. It is important to examine the political landscape for identifying systemic barriers to gender equality and advocating for policy changes that promote equal rights and opportunities.

3. Religion: Religion often holds a significant influence over societal values and norms. Different religious beliefs and interpretations may impact gender roles, expectations, and women's rights. Some religions may reinforce patriarchal structures, while others may promote gender equality. Understanding the intersections of religion and gender is essential for engaging with diverse communities and addressing religiously based barriers to achieve gender equality.

In summary, culture, politics, and religion are relevant when discussing gender equality because they shape societal norms, policies, and beliefs that can either reinforce or challenge gender disparities. Examining these factors helps to identify systemic barriers, develop inclusive strategies, and foster meaningful dialogue towards achieving gender equality.

4. In your opinion, what are the most important gender issues to be addressed in your country?

- Work and Sexual education
- Equality
- Femicide
- Salary
- Work relations

Addressing gender issues is crucial in every country for a variety of reasons. The following explanation outlines the importance of addressing gender issues.

Human Rights and Equality: Gender equality is a fundamental human right enshrined in international agreements such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. It is essential to ensure that individuals, regardless of their gender, have equal access to opportunities, resources,

and rights. Addressing gender issues helps to uphold the principles of equality, fairness, and dignity for all individuals.

Social Justice and Equity: Gender-based discrimination and inequality have detrimental effects on individuals and society as a whole. By addressing gender issues, societies can strive towards social justice and equity. Equal opportunities and treatment benefit not only women and girls, but also men and boys, as they can challenge restrictive gender norms and enjoy a more inclusive and balanced society.

Economic Development and Prosperity: Gender equality is closely linked to economic development and prosperity. When women have equal access to education, employment, and economic resources, it benefits societies by expanding the talent pool, boosting productivity, and driving innovation. Closing gender gaps in labor force participation and entrepreneurship, can contribute significantly to economic growth and poverty reduction.

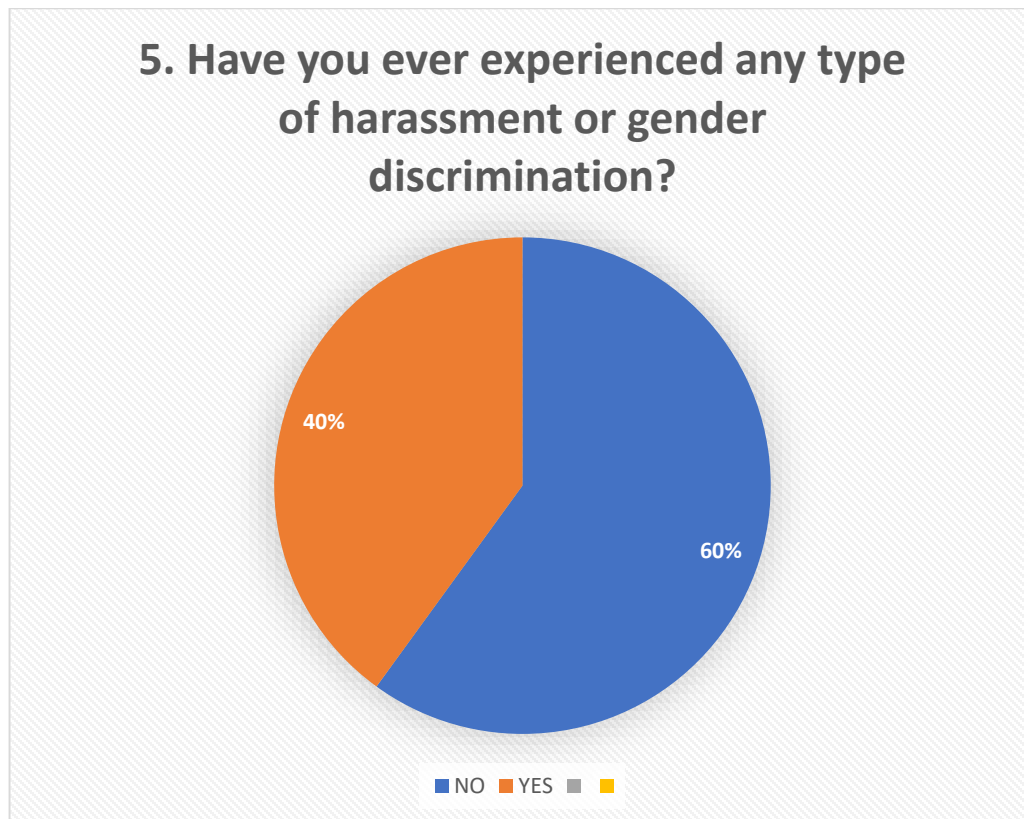
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): The United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals explicitly recognize gender equality as a standalone goal (SDG 5) and also emphasize their integration across all other goals. By addressing gender issues, countries can work towards achieving the SDGs, such as eradicating poverty and hunger, ensuring quality education, promoting good health and well-being, and fostering peaceful and inclusive societies.

Health and Well-being: Gender issues profoundly affect health outcomes and well-being. Addressing gender disparities in healthcare, including access to reproductive health services, reduces maternal mortality, improves children's health, and enhances overall well-being. By recognizing and addressing gender-specific health needs, countries can achieve better health outcomes for their entire population.

Social Cohesion and Stability: Gender inequality can contribute to social tensions, conflicts, and instability. By promoting gender equality, countries can foster social cohesion, reduce inequalities, and mitigate conflicts arising from gender-based discrimination. Gender equality promotes inclusive decision-making processes and ensures that all voices are heard, leading to more stable and harmonious societies.

Future Generations: Addressing gender issues is vital for shaping a better future for generations to come. By challenging gender stereotypes, promoting equal opportunities in education, and empowering girls and women, societies can create an environment where all individuals can reach their full potential. This paves the way for a more inclusive, equal, and prosperous society for future generations. Addressing gender issues in each country is crucial for upholding human rights, promoting social justice, fostering economic development, achieving sustainable goals, improving health outcomes, enhancing social cohesion, and building a better future for all. By working towards gender equality, countries can create fairer, more inclusive, and thriving societies that benefit everyone.

5. Have you ever experienced any type of harassment or gender discrimination?



6. How do you think religion and culture affect attitudes towards feminism?

- There are people who continue with the same concept that a woman is only good for being a housewife and they never manage to broaden their perspective.
- Machismo is written in religion in a biblical way, the most powerful book in the world.
- Much of it is based on long-held beliefs.
- The country's culture still leans heavily on the power of men who believe they are superior to women.

- Religion, in many cases, creates a barrier between morality and politics creating in many cases inequality.

The question, How do you think religion and culture affect attitudes towards feminism? is crucial in the development of a research project analyzing *The Handmaid's Tale* using a feminist approach, because it explores the intersectionality between religion, culture, and feminism. By understanding how these factors interact, researchers can gain insights into how religious and cultural beliefs shape attitudes towards feminism, and in turn, impact the interpretation and reception of the book. This question allows for a comprehensive examination of the various influences on attitudes towards feminism, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of the book's themes and implications.

Investigating Relevance: Participants' familiarity with feminist problems and their opinions on the themes' importance in contemporary society can be explored using survey questions. This knowledge is helpful in placing reactions to *The Handmaid's Tale's* themes and implications into a larger social and cultural framework.

Chapter V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Purpose of the conclusion

The purpose of the conclusion is to summarize the findings. The conclusion has to briefly restate the major discoveries and learnings from the study, discuss the research's significance, and consequences in the context of feminist discourse. Moreover, it is going to be described how the representation of issues like patriarchal oppression, gender inequality, and reproductive rights in the book, supports or contradicts current feminism.

Highlight Novel's Contribution: Draw attention to how *The Handmaid's Tale* has contributed uniquely to feminist literature and discourse, so it is considered of current relevance regarding how the themes in *The Handmaid's Tale* relate to current feminism movements, problems, and difficulties. Moreover, it shows how the novel continues to be relevant in shedding light on the continuing battles for gender equality in contemporary society.

Recognize any gaps or restrictions discovered throughout the study process and suggest suitable directions for further investigation. Give a summary of the key findings of the study and underline how important it is to the advancement of feminist discourse in the conclusion statement. This might entail underlining the value of ongoing reading of feminist literature, praising the persistence of feminist groups, or urging action in response to the themes and problems the work raises.

In 2023, cultural, political, and religious areas continue to have a significant impact on women's lives. Despite advances in gender equality, inequalities and discrimination still persist in these spheres. By comparing this reality with the book, *The Handmaid's Tale*, it can be seen that

the work portrays a dystopian society in which women are subjected to totalitarian control through religion and politics, depriving them of their rights and subordinating them to men.

Culturally, the norms and values established in a society can perpetuate gender stereotypes and limit women's opportunities. These cultural patterns can restrict their autonomy, limit their professional and personal choices, and foster unequal power dynamics. Similarly, in *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is shown how the culture in Gilead promoted the view of women as property and objects of reproduction, denying them any possibility of choice and self-determination.

In the political arena, decisions and laws can have a direct impact on women's lives. The lack of female representation in political decision-making spaces and the lack of policies that address women's needs and rights can perpetuate gender inequality. In the book, Gilead's political regime uses religion and political institutions to repress and control women, denying them any form of political participation and maintaining their oppression.

Religion, for its part, can have both a positive and negative impact on women. While some religious practices can empower and promote gender equality, in other cases, religion is used as a tool for control and oppression of women. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, religion is used to justify the subjugation of women and limit their autonomy, making them victims of a patriarchal and theocratic system.

In conclusion, cultural, political, and religious areas continue to influence women's lives in 2023. Through the comparison with the book *The Handmaid's Tale*, it is evident how these aspects can limit women's autonomy and rights, perpetuating gender inequalities and subjecting them to unequal power dynamics. It is essential to continue working on the transformation of

these spheres, by promoting gender equality, diversity, and inclusion. Only in this way, we will be able to build more just and equitable societies for all people, regardless of gender. In summary, the conclusion synthesizes the study, links the findings to a broader feminist conversation, and generates insights that help us.

5.2 Conclusions

5.2.1 This study delved into the intricate interplay of feminism in *The Handmaid's Tale*, revealing the novel's multilayered examination of women's autonomy, agency, and resistance. By weaving together themes of reproductive rights, patriarchal control, and gender oppression, Margaret Atwood crafted a dystopian narrative that serves as a cautionary tale and a call for action. The findings underscore the complexity of feminist discourse within the novel, urging readers to engage critically with the text and explore the nuanced ways gender inequality intersects with power dynamics in society.

5.2.2 The research project analysis on *The Handmaid's Tale* through the feminist approach highlights the oppressive and patriarchal nature of the society depicted in the book. It sheds light on the unequal power dynamics and the devaluation of women's autonomy and agency.

5.2.3. The analysis emphasizes the importance of reproductive rights and freedom, which are central themes in the novel. It reveals how the control of women's bodies and reproductive capacities serves as a tool for societal control and oppression, resonating with ongoing feminist struggles for bodily autonomy.

5.2.4. The research project analysis reveals the significance of sisterhood and solidarity among women in the face of systemic oppression. It underscores the need for women to come

together, support each other, and resist oppressive structures, drawing parallels with movements such as #MeToo and feminist collective action.

5.2.5. By examining the novel through a feminist lens, the analysis brings attention to the myriad ways in which women's voices, experiences, and stories are silenced or erased. It underscores the importance of amplifying marginalized voices and promoting diverse narratives as a means to challenge dominant power structures.

5.2.6 The analysis highlights the necessity of intersectional feminism in understanding the complexities of oppression and privilege. It demonstrates how the experiences of women in *The Handmaid's Tale* are shaped not only by their gender, but also by their race, class, and other intersecting identities. This intersectional approach calls for inclusive and holistic feminist praxis to address systemic inequalities effectively.

In conclusion, developing comparative tables was beneficial for a deeper understanding of the book *The Handmaid's Tale*. Through these tables, a direct connection was established between relevant theoretical ideas and other literary works that address similar themes. This allowed for a more complete and enriching analysis of Margaret Atwood's novel. The comparative tables provided us with a panoramic, organized, and structured view of different theories and literary works that relate to *The Handmaid's Tale*. By making a side-by-side comparison, similarities, differences, and possible influences were evident, which helped us generate new perspectives and approaches to interpreting the work.

In addition, these tables provided a solid conceptual framework for analyzing the central themes of the book, such as feminism, patriarchy, female resistance, and power relations. By

examining literary theories and works from different perspectives, a broader and more critical understanding of the plot, characters, and underlying messages in *The Handmaid's Tale* was achieved. In summary, the comparative tables proved to be a valuable tool to deepen our understanding of the book *The Handmaid's Tale* by allowing us to relate it to relevant theories and literary works. They provided a clear and organized map of key ideas, facilitating a more detailed analysis of the work and its context. Thus, the comparative tables enriched our understanding of the novel, creating new perspectives and shedding light on its deeper meaning.

5.3 Restatement of the research question

In conclusion, this research project has deepened our understanding of the ways in which religious, economic, and social factors impact the lives of women in 2023, while drawing insightful comparisons with the dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. By exploring the multifaceted influences of these factors on women's experiences, we have been able to highlight several significant findings and recommendations for the promotion of gender equality and women's empowerment in the near future. Religious factors play a crucial role in shaping women's lives in 2023. The research has demonstrated that restrictive religious practices can significantly impact women's reproductive rights and autonomy, influencing their decisions regarding family planning, health care, and bodily autonomy. By comparing these findings with the world depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale*, we can observe the alarming consequences of a society that prioritizes religious ideologies over women's agency and self-determination. Our analysis urges policymakers to protect and expand women's reproductive rights, ensuring the full realization of their autonomy and freedoms.

Economic factors also exert a profound influence on women's lives in the year 2023. The gender pay gap remains a persistent issue, limiting women's economic independence and

perpetuating gender inequalities. Our research findings highlight the urgency of implementing economic policies that bridge this gap and provide equal opportunities for women in the workforce. By examining the discrepancies between the real-world experiences of women and the economic limitations faced by characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the research underlines the dire consequences of economic inequality and the urgent need for transformative change.

Beyond religious and economic factors, social factors have a significant impact on women's lives in 2023. Gender norms, stereotypes, and discrimination impede women's progress and agency, reinforcing patriarchal power dynamics within society. The research illuminates the importance of challenging these gender norms and dismantling systemic barriers to promote women's equal participation and representation. By comparing these social dynamics with the profoundly oppressive environment in *The Handmaid's Tale*, the research emphasizes the critical role of societal transformation in combating gender-based oppression and fostering gender equality.

The comparative analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale*, has proven to be a valuable tool in understanding the potential consequences of neglecting these issues. The similarities between the dystopian world depicted in the novel and our contemporary reality serve as a wake-up call, urging society to address the underlying issues that perpetuate gender inequalities. The research underscores the importance of actively engaging with literature and fictional narratives to gain valuable insights into the real-world implications of religious, economic, and social factors on women's lives.

In light of these findings, our research offers several key recommendations for policy reform. Firstly, we urge policymakers to protect and expand women's reproductive rights,

ensuring access to comprehensive healthcare services and family planning options. Secondly, measures must be taken to bridge the gender pay gap, including the implementation of fair pay practices and policies that promote women's economic empowerment. Additionally, social interventions are necessary to challenge prevailing gender norms and stereotypes and promote a more inclusive and gender-equal society.

In conclusion, this research firmly establishes the significant influences of religious, economic, and social factors on women's lives in 2023 and draws insightful comparisons with *The Handmaid's Tale*. Through a comprehensive analysis of the impact of these factors, we have identified critical areas for improvement, emphasizing the urgency of addressing reproductive rights, bridging the gender pay gap, and challenging societal norms. By utilizing literature to explore potential dystopian scenarios, we have shed light on the potential consequences of inaction. Moving forward, it is crucial to implement the recommended policy reforms and continue advocating for gender equality, ensuring a brighter and more equitable future for all women.

5.4 Unexpected results

1. Intersectionality and Inclusivity

Contrary to initial expectations, the research revealed that the narrative of *The Handmaid's Tale* book and its comparison with present-day feminism have highlighted the need for a more intersectional and inclusive approach to feminist activism. The analysis of the novel prompts a realization that the experiences of women are not homogenous; they are shaped by a multitude of intersecting factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability. The

unexpected result suggests that embracing intersectionality in feminist movements is crucial for addressing the diverse challenges faced by women across different social identities.

2. Male Involvement and Allyship

While *The Handmaid's Tale* book predominantly focuses on women's experiences within a patriarchal society, the research project has brought to light an unexpected result relating to male involvement and allyship in feminism. Contrary to assumptions that men may be depicted solely as oppressors in the novel, there were instances where male characters showed acts of resistance and solidarity with women. This finding challenges the notion that all men are inherently oppressive, highlighting the importance of engaging men as allies in feminist movements and promoting healthy gender dynamics.

3. Nuances in Feminist Ideologies

The research project uncovers unexpected nuances in feminist ideologies when comparing *The Handmaid's Tale* to contemporary feminism. While the novel portrays a dystopian society where women's rights have regressed drastically, contemporary feminism reveals a diverse range of ideologies and strategies. Some unexpected findings indicate varying perspectives on issues such as sex work, pornography, and the role of transgender women in feminist spaces. These divergent viewpoints highlight the complexity of feminist discourse and challenge the notion of a monolithic feminist movement.

4. Socio-political Activism

Drawing parallels between *The Handmaid's Tale* and present-day feminism, have unexpectedly highlighted the role of socio-political activism in promoting social change.

Contrary to the bleak and desperate environment depicted in the novel, contemporary feminist movements demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and effectiveness in mobilizing collective action. The research underscores the power of grassroots activism, online organizing, and global solidarity movements in addressing gender-based oppression.

5. The Role of Literature in Activism

An unanticipated result of the research project is the recognition of the significant role of literature, such as *The Handmaid's Tale*, in feminist activism. The novel's portrayal of a dystopian society serves as a powerful catalyst for raising awareness, sparking conversations, and inspiring collective action. Unexpectedly, it is found that by integrating literature into feminist discourse can effectively amplify feminist messaging and broaden the movement's reach beyond academic and activist circles.

These unexpected results lead to important implications for contemporary feminism. They call for a more inclusive and intersectional approach, highlight the potential for positive male involvement, emphasize the need to acknowledge the complexities within feminist ideologies, affirm the power of socio-political activism, and recognize the value of literature as a catalyst for social change. By acknowledging these unexpected findings, researchers, activists, and policymakers can refine their strategies and work toward an even more inclusive and impactful feminist movement.

5.5. Recommendations

Based on the analysis of *The Handmaid's Tale* book from a feminist perspective, the following recommendations are provided for further exploration and future research

Comparative Analysis with Other Feminist Dystopian Literature: Extend the analysis beyond *The Handmaid's Tale* and include other dystopian novels that explore feminist themes. To compare multiple works will provide a broader and more comprehensive understanding of the varying ways in which feminist issues are depicted and addressed in literature. This could include novels like "1984" by George Orwell or "Parable of the Sower" by Octavia Butler.

Intersectionality and Inclusivity in Feminist Analysis: Deepen the research's examination of intersectionality and inclusivity within feminist analysis of the book. Explore how different social identities such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability, intersect with women's experiences in both, the novel and contemporary society. This can help to uncover additional layers of oppression and privilege, enriching the understanding of feminist struggles.

Male Perspectives and Allies in Feminist Exploration: Investigate further the role of male characters and potential male allies within the narrative. Analyze the motivations, actions, and agency of male characters in relation to feminist issues depicted in the novel. Expand the analysis to explore relevant contemporary examples, such as male feminist activists, organizations, or initiatives, to understand the potential for male involvement and allyship in feminist movements.

Complexity and Nuances in Feminist Ideologies: delve deeper into the complexities and nuances of feminist ideologies as portrayed in the book. Analyze the multiple feminist perspectives and divergent viewpoints presented by various characters. Explore how these perspectives relate to real-world feminist debates, such as differing positions on sex work,

pornography, transgender rights, or the relationship between feminism and other social justice movements.

Activism and Resistance Strategies: Investigate the forms of feminist activism and resistance depicted in the novel and compare them to contemporary feminist movements. Examine how organizing methods, online activism, collective action, and moments of resistance portrayed in the book, align with, or differ from real-life feminist movements today. This analysis can provide insights into the effectiveness of various strategies and their potential for creating lasting change.

Impact of Literature on Feminist Discourse and Activism: Explore the role of literature, particularly dystopian novels like *The Handmaid's Tale*, in shaping feminist discourse and activism. Examine how the themes and narratives of such literature resonate with feminist audiences and contribute to the broader movement. Explore the ways in which literature can inspire feminist consciousness, raise awareness, and mobilize action, both within academic circles and among the general public.

By pursuing these research recommendations, scholars can further develop a nuanced understanding of feminist themes in *The Handmaid's Tale* and its implications for contemporary feminist discourse and activism. This will contribute to the ongoing conversations around gender, power, and social justice, helping to shape future efforts towards achieving gender equality and promoting feminist ideals in society.

I highly recommend conducting a research project on feminism as it is an important and significant social issue that has garnered much attention in recent years. Exploring feminism not only provides a deeper understanding of the historical and ongoing struggles for gender equality,

but also sheds light on the various feminist theories, movements, and activism that have shaped the world we live in today. This research project offers the opportunity to critically analyze the complexities and nuances of feminism, from intersectional feminism to ecofeminism, and examine the impact of feminism on different aspects of society such as politics, culture, and economics. By engaging in such research, one can contribute to the broader academic discussion on feminism and potentially discover new insights and perspectives that challenge the existing narratives. Additionally, this research project will also foster empathy and awareness towards the societal challenges faced by women, and provide a platform for advocating for positive change. Overall, conducting a research project on feminism will not only expand one's knowledge on a significant social movement but also contribute to the broader efforts towards achieving gender equality.

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