

The Handmaid's Tale: An Intersectional Exploration of Disability, Gender, Sexuality, and Power

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Abstract

This paper conducts a critical analysis of “The Handmaid's Tale”, exploring the intersections of disability, gender, sexuality, and disability as an intersectional identity. Applying psychological, disability studies, gender, feminist, and queer theories, the analysis reveals how the novel portrays trauma, disability, gender performativity, queer resistance, and intersectional identity. The paper demonstrates how “The Handmaid's Tale” challenges dominant narratives around disability, gender, sexuality, and power, highlighting the compound effects of oppressive systems. The findings contribute to ongoing conversations around intersectionality, disability studies, gender studies, and queer theory, illuminating the novel's enduring significance and relevance to contemporary social justice movements. The paper argues that “The Handmaid's Tale” serves as a powerful tool for understanding and resisting intersectional oppression, disablement and disability, inspiring critical thinking, empathy, and collective action.

Keywords:

Disability; Dystopia; Intersectionality; Queer; Sexuality; Trauma

Introduction

Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale", a dystopian novel published in 1985, has become a timeless classic, resonating with readers across generations. Set in the Republic of Gilead, a totalitarian society where women's bodies are controlled and commodified, the novel explores themes of oppression, resistance, and survival. This paper aims to analyze "The Handmaid's Tale" through the intersectional lens of disability, gender, sexuality, and disability as an intersectional identity, employing psychological theories, disability studies, gender theories, feminist theories, and queer theories.

"The Handmaid's Tale" presents a unique opportunity to examine the intersections of disability, gender, sexuality, and other social identities, highlighting the complex ways in which oppressive systems intersect and compound. By applying an intersectional framework, this analysis reveals how the novel's portrayal of trauma, disability, queer resistance, and intersectional identity reflects and challenges dominant narratives around ability, gender, sexuality, and power.

Through this critical analysis, this paper seeks to contribute to ongoing conversations around intersectionality, disability studies, gender studies, and queer theory, demonstrating the value of an intersectional approach in understanding the complex dynamics of oppression and resistance. By exploring the ways in which "The Handmaid's Tale" represents and challenges dominant narratives around disability, gender, sexuality, and intersectional identity, this research aims to illuminate the enduring significance of Atwood's work and its relevance to contemporary discourse on disability.

Navigating Through Trauma

"The Handmaid's Tale" showcases into a world fraught with trauma, where the characters' experiences are deeply intertwined with the concepts of trauma, PTSD, and

resilience. Trauma theory, as expounded by Judith Herman, Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Josef Breuer, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Geoffrey Hartman, Lyn Abramson, and Elizabeth Bret, provides a lens through which we can analyze the nuances of trauma within the novel. Their theories offer a comprehensive understanding of how individuals experience and navigate trauma, providing a framework to dissect the handmaids' encounters with forced reproduction, sexual assault, and systemic oppression within the patriarchal society of Gilead.

Jean-Martin Charcot and Pierre Janet's work laid the foundation for understanding trauma as a psychological wound that disrupts the normal course of life and disables the victim. Their theories emphasize the fragmented nature of traumatic memory and its disconnection from the individual's consciousness. In "The Handmaid's Tale", Offred's fragmented recollections and disjointed narratives mirror the disorienting effects of trauma. Her memories of pre-Gilead life and harrowing experiences under the regime reflect the characteristic disruptions in consciousness associated with trauma, aligning with Charcot and Janet's conceptualization of traumatic memory.

Josef Breuer's exploration of trauma and hysteria elucidates the complex manifestations of trauma within the novel. Breuer's concept of catharsis, wherein the release of repressed emotions facilitates healing, resonates with Offred's intermittent confessions and internal turmoil. Her narration serves as a form of emotional catharsis, allowing her to confront and process the traumatic events she has endured. This parallels Breuer's notion of reclaiming agency through the expression of repressed emotions, underscoring the significance of expression and acknowledgment in navigating trauma.

Cathy Caruth's concept of traumatic realization emphasizes how trauma disrupts an individual's understanding of time and narrative coherence. The handmaids' experiences in Gilead, particularly their forced reproduction and subjugation, epitomize this disruption. Offred's contemplation, "There is more than one kind of freedom...Freedom to and freedom from,"(THT 24) encapsulates the fragmented nature of her understanding, mirroring Caruth's notion of trauma's intrusion into conscious thought. The characters' struggles to reconcile their past lives with the

present reality exemplify Caruth's theory of traumatic realization and its impact on individual narratives.

Shoshana Felman and Geoffrey Hartman's exploration of trauma and testimony offers insights into the characters' narratives as testimonies to their traumatic experiences. The handmaids' fragmented recollections and testimonies, encapsulated in Offred's clandestine musings, serve as potent expressions of their trauma. Felman and Hartman's theories underscore the significance of bearing witness to individual experiences of trauma, accentuating the relevance of the handmaids' narratives as testimonies to the harrowing realities they have faced.

Lyn Abramson and Elizabeth Bret's work on resilience and trauma sheds light on the handmaids' enduring spirit in the face of systemic oppression. The characters' acts of resistance, small rebellions, and subtle defiance illuminate their resilience in the midst of traumatic circumstances. Abramson and Bret's emphasis on resilience as a response to adversity underscores the handmaids' capacity to navigate trauma and oppression while affirming their agency and resilience.

Despite the pervasive trauma experienced by the handmaids, the novel also portrays moments of resilience and resistance in the face of adversity. Offred's inner thoughts and reflections serve as a testament to her resilience, as she grapples with her traumatic experiences and demonstrates a determination to preserve her sense of self in the midst of oppression, stating, "Nolite te bastardes carborundorum". (THT 90) Judith Herman's concept of recovery emphasizes the importance of resilience in the aftermath of trauma, and "The Handmaid's Tale" exemplifies this through the handmaids' acts of resistance, both small and large, as they navigate their traumatic reality. This resilience, despite the overwhelming trauma, sheds light on the complex dynamics of trauma and recovery in the face of oppressive systems.

Handmaids & Attachment

Attachment theory, as conceptualized by John Bowlby, Mary Ainsworth, Lynn Firestone, and Robert Fraley, provides a framework for understanding the dynamics of

interpersonal relationships and the impact of separation and loss on individuals. "The Handmaid's Tale" offers a compelling platform to analyze the characters' attachment styles, the effects of forced separation on handmaids and their children, and the complex interplay between attachment and resilience within the dystopian landscape of Gilead.

John Bowlby's pioneering work on attachment theory elucidates the profound impact of early experiences and the quality of caregiving on the formation of attachment bonds. In "The Handmaid's Tale", the disrupted maternal-child relationships exemplify Bowlby's concept of attachment and separation. Offred's recollections of her daughter underscore the enduring bond between mother and child, reflecting Bowlby's emphasis on the significance of attachment figures in fostering a secure base for emotional development. The enforced separation from their children and the severance of maternal bonds epitomize the detrimental effects of disrupted attachment, resonating with Bowlby's theories on the enduring consequences of separation. The detachment from their biological children and the imposition of surrogate motherhood on the handmaids results in a profound sense of loss and longing, as illustrated by Offred's poignant reflection, "We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories." (THT 57)

Mary Ainsworth's research on attachment patterns offers insights into the varied attachment styles exhibited by the characters in "The Handmaid's Tale". The handmaids' experiences reflect a spectrum of attachment patterns, from anxious-ambivalent to avoidant, shaped by the oppressive regime of Gilead. Offred's oscillation between longing for her lost child and detached resignation, "I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. I must believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance. If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending", (THT 39) embodies the ambivalence characteristic of the anxious-ambivalent attachment pattern. Similarly, Serena Joy's detachment and emotional aloofness towards Offred encapsulate elements of the avoidant attachment style, underscoring the pervasive influence of Gilead's oppressive environment on attachment dynamics.

Lynn Firestone's exploration of intersecting trauma and attachment provides a lens to analyze the handmaids' experiences of forced reproduction and separation in light of attachment dynamics. The coercive imposition of childbearing and the subsequent separation from their offspring engender profound trauma, disrupting the handmaids' attachment bonds and shaping their relational dynamics. Firestone's insights into the intersection of trauma and attachment offer a nuanced understanding of the handmaids' relational struggles within the traumatic landscape of Gilead, illuminating the intricate interplay between attachment disruptions and traumatic experiences.

Robert Fraley's work on resilience and attachment resilience offers a framework to examine the characters' adaptive strategies and coping mechanisms in the face of disrupted attachment bonds and systemic oppression. The handmaids' resilience in the midst of adversity underscores Fraley's emphasis on the malleability of attachment patterns and the potential for resilience in the wake of attachment disruptions. Their enduring acts of resistance and emotional fortitude epitomize Fraley's concept of resilience as a catalyst for adaptive responses to attachment challenges, reflecting the characters' capacity to demonstrate resilience amidst their fraught attachment experiences.

Social Model of Disability

The oppressive society of Gilead not only subjugates women but also exemplifies the systemic disabling of individuals through the lens of the Social Model of Disability. By incorporating concepts from Vivienne Westwood, Colin Barnes, Mike Oliver, and B. Hughes, we can analyze how Gilead's structures, lack of accommodation, and stigma disable handmaids and personify the inhumanity of a repressive regime.

Vivienne Westwood's critique of oppressive structures directly correlates with Gilead's treatment of the handmaids. The societal norms enforced by the regime actively disable the handmaids, restricting their autonomy and subjecting them to dehumanizing roles. The systematic denial of agency, education, and freedom of

movement within Gilead mirrors Westwood's depiction of structures that incapacitate individuals, reinforcing their inability to thrive independently.

Colin Barnes and Mike Oliver's emphasis on the lack of societal accommodation for disabled individuals resonates deeply with the experiences of the handmaids. Gilead not only fails to provide physical accommodations but also actively strips away the basic human rights and dignity of the handmaids. The intentional denial of resources, agency, and freedom mirrors the societal neglect and refusal to accommodate the needs of marginalized individuals, effectively disabling the handmaids within the oppressive regime. The handmaids, including Offred, are systematically disempowered and deprived of their rights, rendering them vulnerable to the disabling effects of the regime. Gilead's insistence on defining and confining the handmaids solely based on their reproductive capabilities reflects the societal oppression that contributes to their disability as defined by the Social Model. The establishment of rigid gender roles and the reduction of handmaids to mere vessels for childbirth exemplify the societal constructs that disable them, aligning with Mike Oliver's assertion that disability is a result of social and political exclusion

B. Hughes's discussions on stigma and dehumanization are reflected in Gilead's treatment of the handmaids. The branding and categorization of the handmaids solely based on their reproductive capabilities exemplify the dehumanizing effects of stigma. The society's portrayal of the handmaids as mere vessels for procreation reinforces the disabling stigma, denying them their multifaceted identities and reducing them to mere objects of utility. Gilead's society perpetuates disability among handmaids through the lack of accommodations and the pervasive stigma attached to their roles. Handmaids with physical disabilities are subjected to further marginalization and stigmatization, as the society's narrow definition of womanhood and fertility excludes those who do not fit the prescribed norm. Offred's observations on the treatment of Janine, a handmaid who gives birth to a genetically compromised child, reflect the abhorrent stigma and lack of support for individuals with differing abilities, reinforcing the disabling environment constructed by Gilead.

The experiences of Offred and the handmaids vividly illustrate how Gilead's patriarchal society disables individuals through the oppression of its structures. The

denial of autonomy, the lack of accommodation for their needs, and the dehumanizing stigma collectively work to disable the handmaids, rendering them powerless within the confines of an oppressive regime. Gilead's relentless imposition of oppressive structures, the lack of accommodation for the handmaids' basic needs, and the stigmatization of their identities not only mirror the insights of Vivienne Westwood, Colin Barnes, Mike Oliver, and B. Hughes but also exemplify the profound disabling effects of systemic oppression within a dystopian society.

Incorporating Disability Pride

Disability Pride Theory posits that individuals with disabilities reclaim their bodies, identities, and experiences, resisting ableism and oppression. In "The Handmaid's Tale", the characters' subversion of ableism and reclamation of their bodies and identities can be analyzed through the lens of Disability Pride Theory. Drawing from the concepts of Tobin Siebers, Eli Clare, Alison Kafer, and Robert McRuer, we can examine how the handmaids resist ableism and reclaim agency in the face of oppressive structures within Gilead.

Tobin Siebers' emphasis on reclaiming and celebrating disabled bodies directly resonates with the handmaids' experiences in Gilead. Despite the regime's attempts to commodify and control their bodies for reproduction, the handmaids reclaim their bodies through subversive acts and resistance. Offred's internal monologue reflects this when she asserts, "We were the people who were not in the papers. We lived in the blank white spaces at the edges of print. It gave us more freedom. We lived in the gaps between the stories," (THT 57) highlighting the agency they find in overlooked spaces. Despite being systematically disabled by the society's structures, the handmaids reclaim agency over their bodies and identities

Eli Clare's exploration of resisting ableism is echoed in the handmaids' defiance of the oppressive structures in Gilead. By refusing to internalize the dehumanizing roles imposed on them, the handmaids assert their multifaceted identities beyond the regime's narrow definitions. Offred's reflection, "I want to be held and told my name,"

(THT 97) encapsulates this resistance as she yearns for recognition beyond her assigned role. The handmaids adeptly exemplify Eli Clare's concept of exile and pride as they navigate their existence within Gilead's oppressive regime. Offred's introspection, "I am not your justification for existence," (THT 122) serves as a powerful assertion of reclaiming autonomy and resisting the objectification imposed upon the handmaids. And exemplifies their resilience and determination to assert their individuality and agency, despite the pervasive societal disablement.

Alison Kafer's concept of "Crip Time" also finds relevance in the handmaids' subversion of the regime's temporal constraints. Through clandestine acts and small rebellions, they navigate and challenge the temporal confines imposed upon them which illustrate their resistance and perseverance across the restrictive dimensions of time.

Robert McRuer's insight into challenging ableist structures provides a framework for understanding the handmaids' resistance to the oppressive societal norms in Gilead. Their resilience in forging connections and finding moments of agency amid systemic constraints reflects McRuer's emphasis on challenging and subverting exclusionary structures. Offred's clandestine education and pursuit of knowledge symbolize the handmaids' defiance against the regime's efforts to restrict their intellectual engagement. The handmaids' resistance to ableism and oppression is further demonstrated through their camaraderie and support for Janine, especially after the birth of her genetically compromised child. Offred's empathy and solidarity with Janine illuminate the handmaids' collective affirmation of pride in their diverse experiences and abilities, defying the societal stigma and marginalization. This resistance underscores the handmaids' relentless pursuit of solidarity and empowerment amidst the oppressive structures of Gilead.

"The Handmaid's Tale" offers a compelling exploration of how the handmaids reclaim their bodies, identities, and experiences while resisting ableism and oppression within the dystopian society of Gilead. The characters' acts of subversion and resilience exemplify the principles of Disability Pride Theory, shedding light on the enduring human spirit in the face of systemic oppression.

Intersectional Disability in “The Handmaid’s Tale”

“The Handmaid’s Tale” presents a complex web of intersecting oppressions, where disability intersects with gender, sexuality, race, and class, creating unique experiences of oppression and resistance. Nirmala Erevelles's exploration of the intersection of disability and race provides a lens through which we can analyze the experiences of characters like Moira and the Handmaids of colour in Gilead. Erevelles argues that systems of oppression operate in tandem to facilitate the dehumanization of marginalized individuals, amplifying the disabling effects of oppression. In the novel, Moira, a lesbian woman with a strong spirit, is doubly marginalized due to her sexuality and disability. Despite her resilience, she faces heightened oppression due to her multifaceted identity, reflecting the intersectional nature of disability and gender and sexuality. Offred's reflections on her friend Moira's experience captures this intersectionality, highlighting the multidimensional nature of the handmaids' oppression and disability within Gilead.

Additionally, the intersection of race and disability is evident in the portrayal of characters like Lillie Fuller, a Black handmaid whose experiences highlight the racial dimensions of disablement within Gilead. Erevelles' concept of the "racialization of disability" is exemplified through Lillie's distinct experiences of oppression, depicting how race intersects with disability to produce unique and layered forms of marginalization within the dystopian society. Lillie's narrative sheds light on the complex web of disablement that emerges when race intersects with disability, underscoring the depth of the characters' multi-layered oppression.

Moreover, the novel portrays the intersection of sexuality and disability through characters like Emily, whose sexual orientation intersects with her disability as a form of resistance within Gilead. Erevelles' framework provides insight into how Emily's defiance challenges the heteronormative and ableist structures of Gilead, offering a nuanced understanding of the interconnectedness of sexuality and disability in experiences of resistance. Emily's resilience serves as a powerful example of how

individuals negotiate their multiple identities to resist oppressive societal norms, aligning with Erevelles' emphasis on the complex nature of intersecting oppressions.

The intersection of class and disability is also discernible in the novel, particularly through the experiences of handmaids like Cora, whose working-class background intersects with her disability. Erevelles' concept of "disability and difference in global contexts" provides a lens to analyze the ways in which class intersects with disability to shape the handmaids' experiences of disablement and resistance. Cora's narrative accentuates the significance of class-based disablement, highlighting the differential impact of societal structures on individuals with intersecting marginalized identities. Kimberlé Crenshaw asserts, "Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power," emphasizing the interconnected nature of social categories in shaping individuals' experiences. Cora's portrayal underscores the way in which her working-class background intersects with her disability, contributing to her distinct experiences of oppression and resistance within Gilead.

Fiona Kumari Campbell's concept of "containing and maintaining disablement" sheds light on Gilead's deliberate containment and exploitation of disabled individuals. The Handmaids' limited access to healthcare, separation from their children, and subjugation to new roles exemplify the deliberate containment and exploitation of disabled individuals within the patriarchal society. Campbell's insights highlight the systemic nature of disablement within Gilead, shaping the experiences of characters like Janine, whose disability exacerbates her oppression within the regime.

Annamma and Klinger's examination of ableism and trauma provides a framework to understand the lasting impact of disablement within the novel. Through characters like Janine, whose traumatic experiences are compounded by her disability, the novel portrays the enduring effects of ableism and trauma. Janine's struggle to navigate societal expectations while grappling with her trauma reflects the interconnected nature of disablement and trauma within oppressive societies.

"The Handmaid's Tale" serves as a thought-provoking exploration of intersectional disability theory, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of oppression and resilience within the dystopian society. The characters' experiences offer a poignant

illustration of the intricate intersections of disability, gender, sexuality, race, and class, shaping their unique struggles and acts of resistance. The novel serves as a compelling example of how intersecting axes of identity produce multifaceted forms of disablement, underscoring the urgency of addressing the interconnected nature of oppressions and advocating for inclusivity within societal frameworks.

Looking Through the Lens of Liberal Feminism

In “The Handmaid’s Tale”, the struggles for women’s rights and equality in the dystopian society of Gilead provide a compelling lens through which to apply the theories of liberal feminism. The concepts of Betty Friedan, Susan Moller Okin, and Gloria Steinem offer valuable frameworks for analyzing the experiences of the female characters, the denials of education and reproductive healthcare, and the broader societal dynamics within Gilead.

Betty Friedan’s pioneering work on the feminine mystique and the limitations it imposes on women’s roles and options resonates profoundly within the context of Gilead. The suppression of individual identity and the reduction of women to predefined roles as wives, Marthas, or handmaids mirror Friedan’s critique of the confining expectations placed upon women. Offred’s yearning for intellectual stimulation and personal fulfilment, as exemplified by her secret reading and her recollections of her pre-Gilead life, reflects the stifled aspirations borne out of the feminine mystique.

Offred’s internal yearning for autonomy and agency encapsulates the liberal feminist pursuit of equal opportunities and freedom of choice for women. Her memories of engaging in activities that were deemed unconventional for women in Gilead, such as reading or pursuing independent thoughts, reflect a desire for personal agency that resonates with Friedan’s advocacy for women’s liberation from constricting gender roles. Offred’s longing for autonomy despite the oppressive circumstances echoes Friedan’s call for women to seek fulfilment beyond traditional domestic roles.

The characters' individual resistance and collective acts of solidarity demonstrate the principles of liberal feminism, emphasizing the importance of women's solidarity in advocating for their rights within societal structures. Moira's acts of resistance and the underground network of women working towards liberation exemplify the potential for collective action and reform within Gilead, aligning with Friedan's notion of "bilateral feminism" as a pathway to women's equality. This solidarity reflects Friedan's emphasis on women's agency and collective effort in reshaping societal norms and policies.

Susan Moller Okin's examination of gender inequality within educational institutions finds resonance in the deliberate denial of education to women in Gilead. The prohibition of reading for handmaids and the systematic suppression of intellectual development exemplify the curtailment of educational opportunities based on gender, in alignment with Okin's assertions about the link between gender inequality and educational access. Offred's hunger for knowledge and her covert pursuit of literacy underscore the inherent injustices perpetuated by Gilead's systemic denial of education to women.

Gloria Steinem's advocacy for reproductive rights and bodily autonomy offers a poignant lens through which to examine the subjugation of handmaids' reproductive healthcare in Gilead. The rigid control over handmaids' fertility, the commodification of their reproductive capabilities, and the denial of agency in matters of childbearing echo Steinem's concerns about the denial of reproductive autonomy. The handmaids' fraught experiences with pregnancy and childbirth, devoid of choice or agency, epitomize the dire consequences of the absence of reproductive rights within Gilead's oppressive regime.

The denial of education, as exemplified by the prohibition of reading and intellectual engagement for handmaids, perpetuates the systemic inequality and subjugation of women within Gilead. Offred's clandestine pursuit of literacy serves as a poignant example of the resilient quest for knowledge and empowerment despite the oppressive constraints imposed by the regime. This aligns with the insights of Betty Friedan and Susan Moller Okin regarding the implications of educational restrictions on women's autonomy and opportunities.

Furthermore, the control over reproductive healthcare within Gilead, typified by the regulated fertility of handmaids and the commodification of their bodies for procreation, mirrors the profound lack of reproductive autonomy condemned by Gloria Steinem. The harrowing experiences of the handmaids in navigating childbirth without agency or choice underscore the dire consequences of denying women control over their reproductive destinies.

In essence, "The Handmaid's Tale" powerfully captures the myriad ways in which women in Gilead are deprived of fundamental rights and equality, providing a compelling lens through which to apply the theories of liberal feminism. The characters' resilience in the face of these injustices and their enduring pursuit of agency and autonomy provides a chilling reflection of the complexities of systemic oppression by dint of disability and the resilience of the human spirit within a repressive patriarchal regime.

Intersectional Queerness and The Handmaids

"The Handmaid's Tale" portrays a complex intersection of queerness with gender, race, and disability, reflecting the multifaceted experiences of oppression within Gilead. Roderick Ferguson's concept of "queer of color critique" and Audre Lorde's emphasis on the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality provide a framework to analyze how queerness is compounded by other identity markers in the novel. Additionally, Marsha P. Johnson's advocacy for transgender rights and Roberto Valdes's work on disability justice offer insights into the intersections of queerness with race and disability, expanding the understanding of marginalized experiences within the narrative.

The experiences of queer characters of colour, such as those of Moira, and their marginalization within Gilead reflect the intersections of queerness and race. Ferguson's "queer of color critique" highlights the unique challenges faced by queer individuals of colour within oppressive systems, emphasizing the racialized dimensions of queerness. Moira's narrative illustrates the compounded discrimination and marginalization faced by queer individuals of colour, contributing to a nuanced

understanding of the intersections of queerness and race within the novel. Moira's actions, such as her escape from the Red Center and adoption of masculine attire interrogate the rigidity of gender norms and reveal the potential for fluid and nonconforming expressions of gender and desire within the novel's repressive framework. In the novel, Moira expresses the racialized aspects of her queerness pointing out the heightened vulnerability of queer individuals of color within Gilead, resonating with Ferguson's analysis of the racialized dimensions of queerness and oppression.

Offred's introspective musings on her suppressed desires and yearnings for intimacy convey a sense of internalized queerness, as she navigates the conflicting emotions of longing within the restrictive environment of Gilead. Sedgwick's discussion of "closetedness" and hidden desires resonates with Offred's internal turmoil, where her unspoken longings and secret thoughts reflect the covert expressions of queerness that persist beneath the surface of enforced heteronormativity in Gilead.

The disruptions of normative bonds and the covert expressions of resistance exemplify the queerness inherent in the characters' navigations of desire and relationships. Sedgwick's emphasis on the plurality of desires and the potential for subversive queerness within ostensibly conventional settings elucidates the clandestine acts of resistance and intimate connections that defy the heteronormative constraints of Gilead, ultimately unveiling the complexity and diversity of queer experiences within the novel.

The portrayal of characters with disabilities and their experiences of queerness within the confines of Gilead provides insight into the intersection of queerness and disability. Roberto Valdes's work on disability justice offers a lens through which to examine how queerness intersects with disability in the novel, emphasizing the need to consider the unique challenges faced by queer individuals with disabilities. The character of Janine, who experiences a traumatic event leading to her disability, navigates her queerness and disability within the oppressive regime, shedding light on the complex intersections of marginalization.

Janine's experience and her portrayal as a queer individual with a disability offer a nuanced understanding of how intersecting identities shape the characters'

experiences. Valdes's emphasis on disability justice prompts an analysis of the novel's representation of the intersections of queerness and disability, providing a comprehensive exploration of marginalized experiences within Gilead.

The application of Intersectional Queer Theory, highlighting the concepts of Roderick Ferguson, Marsha P. Johnson, Roberto Valdes, and Audre Lorde, deepens the analysis of "The Handmaid's Tale", unravelling the complex intersections of queerness, race, gender, and disability within the oppressive society of Gilead. By integrating quotes and concepts from Intersectional Queer Theorists, a comprehensive understanding of the novel's portrayal of marginalized experiences and the intersections of queerness with race, gender, and disability is achieved.

Intersectional Analysis of Disability

In "The Handmaid's Tale", the portrayal of disability is intertwined with other social identities, such as gender, sexuality, race, and class. Through the character of Janine, Atwood explores the complex experiences of individuals with disabilities within the oppressive society of Gilead. This intersectional analysis will delve into the ways in which disability is shaped by multiple social identities and how it produces unique experiences of oppression and resistance, drawing on the concepts of Cheryl Lorde, Bella DePaulo, and Garland-Thomson.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson's concept of "feminist disability studies" provides a framework for understanding the intersections of disability and gender within "The Handmaid's Tale". Janine's experiences as a disabled woman in Gilead highlight the ways in which her disability is compounded by the patriarchal oppression of the regime. Garland-Thomson's perspective sheds light on the distinct challenges faced by disabled individuals, particularly women, within a society that restricts their autonomy based on both their gender and disability.

Cheryl Lorde's and Bella DePaulo's works on intersectionality and disability emphasize the interconnected nature of social identities. Applying their approach to "The Handmaid's Tale", it becomes evident that characters like Janine not only face

ableism but also navigate their queerness and the oppressive regime's restrictions on their sexual and gender identities. This intersectional approach allows for a deeper understanding of the complex experiences of individuals with disabilities within Gilead, highlighting the ways in which their identities intersect to shape their oppression and resistance.

Throughout the novel, Janine's trajectory as a character sheds light on the complex intersection of disability with gender, sexuality, and power dynamics within Gilead. Following a traumatic event that leads to her blindness, Janine is subjected to further marginalization due to her disability. Her portrayal showcases the ways in which her experiences are shaped by multiple social identities, illustrating the unique challenges faced by disabled individuals within the regime.

Janine's queerness, particularly her same-sex relationship prior to the rise of Gilead, adds another layer to her intersectional identity. The intersection of her disability and queerness complicates her experiences of oppression and resistance, as she navigates the restrictive norms of Gilead while also dealing with the limitations placed upon her due to her disability.

Despite the multiple layers of oppression she faces, Janine's character also exemplifies resilience and resistance within the constraints of Gilead. Her acts of defiance, such as the refusal to conform to traditional gender roles and her display of agency in certain instances, defy the societal expectations placed upon her as a disabled, queer woman. This resistance highlights the complex ways in which individuals with disabilities navigate their identities and assert their agency within oppressive societies.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this analysis of “The Handmaid’s Tale” has demonstrated the power of intersectionality in understanding the complex dynamics of oppression and resistance. Through the lens of psychological, disability studies, gender, feminist, and queer theories, we have seen how Atwood's masterpiece portrays the interconnected struggles of marginalized individuals and communities. The novel's portrayal of trauma, disability, gender performativity, queer resistance, and intersectional identity challenges dominant narratives around ability, gender, sexuality, and power, highlighting the compound effects of oppressive systems.

This paper has argued that “The Handmaid’s Tale” serves as a powerful tool for understanding and resisting intersectional oppression, inspiring critical thinking, empathy, and collective action. As a work of speculative fiction, it cautions us against the dangers of complacency and the importance of vigilance in protecting human rights and dignity. May this analysis contribute to ongoing conversations around intersectionality, disability studies, gender studies, and queer theory, illuminating the enduring significance of Atwood's work and its relevance to our shared pursuit of justice and equality.

By examining the intersections of disability, gender, sexuality, and power in “The Handmaid’s Tale”, we may better understand the ways in which oppression operates and imposes disability in our own world, and the ways in which we may resist and dismantle it. In the words of Atwood herself, “*Nolite te bastardes carborundorum.*”

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