

Sisterhood in Gilead

In *The Handmaid's Tale*, by Margaret Atwood, the Handmaids are dehumanized. They are only seen as objects that give birth, while the men in power control everything. The men gain control of all women in Gilead, but specifically, they control the Handmaids by stripping their rights to their bodies and their sense of individuality. Sisterhood is present in the novel among the women. All the women in Gilead are living in extreme oppression, regardless of their titles or duties. None are free. Oppression is a common issue that unites women. Offred longs for that feeling of connection.

Throughout the novel, Offred often reminisces about her and her best friend, Moira during the pre-Gilead times. Offred has been missing some type of sisterhood ever since she entered Gilead. In chapter 7, Offred remembers a time with Moira, in college before Gilead, “but the night is my time out. Where should I go? Somewhere good. Moira, sitting on the edge of my bed...”(37) When Offred asks herself where should she go and responds with somewhere good, Moira is her happy place. She thinks about the good memories she has with Moira to soothe her. In the memory, it's the two of them enjoying their lives as young women in college. Offred longs for that feeling again. The feeling of sisterhood she had and then lost with Moira when she escaped.

In chapter 25, Offred falls asleep on her bedroom floor, and a Martha, Cora, finds her on the ground in the morning. Cora drops the breakfast tray on the floor and everything shatters. She immediately starts cleaning up. Offred says, “By this time I was sitting in the chair she was kneeling on the floor, picking up the pieces of broken glass and egg, gathering them onto the tray.” (152) Cora is responsible for cleaning and cooking for the Handmaids since she is a Martha. She had to clean it right away. Offred understood that. Their duties are different, the Handmaids produce babies and the Marthas clean. They share one thing in common, they are being abused and controlled by the government. As Cora is cleaning up, Offred makes her promise not to tell anyone and Cora agrees. Offred did not want anyone to know she fainted. Offred says, “It pleased me that she was willing to lie for me, even in such a small thing, even for her own advantage. It was a link between us. I smiled at her.” (152). This interaction shows a rare link of sisterhood and understanding. Regardless of their roles, Cora saw Offred struggling because of the abuse she was enduring. Offred had felt seen. It made her feel valued, which was rare to feel in Gilead.

In today's world, sisterhood is very important to women. It is the only way we can feel seen or heard. Men are very different from women, no matter who they are, men and women are never the same. Although I was friends with a girl, we never truly connected until we spent time alone together. We talked for hours about everything. I got comfortable with her quickly because

it was just the two of us. We realized how much we had in common at that moment. That was when I felt the same kind of “link” Offred felt with Cora. I had not felt this link in a long time, it made me feel appreciated. I was happy I made a new friend. We are two completely different people who were able to give support like Offred had Cora, even if it was just a small thing.

I relate to Offred when she said she felt pleased Cora was helping her and there was a link between them. The link was sisterhood. In Gilead, it is rare for that kind of relationship or bonding to happen because society portrays them as worthless. I had never hung out with my friend alone before. I felt appreciated when a girl understood how I was feeling. In Gilead, women are all going through difficult struggles and their only foundation of support is each other. They have similar pains that the men don't have. I feel this way too because I often feel unsafe when I am just with men. In both societies, the women have each other to make each other feel safe. That is the most important part of sisterhood.