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### Abuse of Power

As stated in the Reinforcing Reproductive Rights Conference, “Choice can never be free under unfree conditions.” All throughout history, women have experienced oppressive and controlling behavior originating from men, forming a culture of submissive behavior from the “inferior” gender. The historical dynamic between men and women has greatly impacted women’s rights, in which at some point a popular consensus that men should be the decision makers of women’s rights emerged. The result of this power gap has essentially created an unjust environment, posing a threat to women’s autonomy. Moreover, dystopian novels often aim to critique these patriarchal attempts to control female reproduction. A dystopia is a world in which its inhabitants live an oppressive, harmful, fearful, and unideal world. Dystopian societies are disguised mirrors that reflect cautionary warnings for our own society. Many times, authors of dystopian novels use exaggerated scenarios in order to bring awareness to an issue. Overall, gender roles and reproductive rights manifest in dystopian societies and give insight on societal attitudes by exploring the illusion created by men in order to use women as tools for their own convenience.

The control over women's bodies and reproductive rights becomes an example of the power men have grasped and taken advantage of throughout history. Many dystopian societies explore themes of reproductive manipulation, forced pregnancies, and control on family

planning. Margaret Atwood, the author of *The Handmaid's Tale*, suggests that biological essentialism is too often used as a way to maintain dominant power structures. As stated by Nicole Cooke, “Atwood recognizes the paralleled plights of both women and nature at the hands of men. Like ripe flowers, flourishing women in their prime are still found and removed from society— their progress cut short because others wish to use and commodify their bodies” (8). Cooke describes women as "ripe flowers" or symbols of vitality and beauty, suggesting that women in their prime are often targeted and exploited by men. Atwood explores these themes in her works, like *The Handmaid's Tale*, highlighting the ways in which women are used and discarded by society. Furthermore, many dystopian authors take inspiration from relevant information as tools of inspiration for their stories. As stated by Moira Weigel, “Atwood recounted saving articles about falling birth rates, repressive policies on contraception and abortion...” (4). These dystopian scenarios draw attention to the real-world challenges women face in asserting control over their reproductive choices. Along with that, they suffer the controlling grip men have on them in order to satisfy their needs.

Additionally, reproductive rights, a crucial aspect of gender dynamics, are frequently subjected to heightened scrutiny and control in dystopian settings. Most societies are built off of patriarchal ideals. As stated by Anyangwe and Mahtani, “Derived from the Greek word patriarkhes, patriarchy literally means “the rule of the father” and is used to refer to a social system where men control a disproportionately large share of social, economic, political and religious power, and inheritance usually passed down the male line” (2). Men usually hold large and unrealistic expectations on women when it comes to their offspring. While this was more prominent in past generations it is still seen today and many dystopian societies shed light on

these scenarios. When men's reproductive systems feel threatened, women are used as tools to accommodate them. One example of this can be seen in *The Handmaids Tale*. As stated by Nicole Cooke, "Women capable of having healthy children are forced to... bear a Commander's shield or clean... wastelands decimated by toxic waste its habitants with a 3 year life span" (5). Another example of this can be seen in *The Giver*. As stated by Emily Temple, "In *The Giver*, citizens begin taking pills to quell their ex drives as soon as puberty begins— except for a few girls who were chosen at age 12 to become Birthmothers" (6). Both of these scenarios give insight to what women go through in two different dystopian worlds. Women in both worlds are forced against their will to participate in these sexual activities in order to aid the men in them, creating an unspoken and invisible power grip of women on men.

In dystopian societies, men often subject women to objectification and dehumanization, reducing them to mere commodities for their convenience, stripping away their individuality and autonomy. Like a chess game, women in these settings are frequently positioned as pawns in power struggles, manipulated and exploited by men as tools to secure or maintain dominance, further emphasizing on the inequalities shown in dystopian environments. Men may experience a sense of power and control, feeding their toxic behaviors and helping build a cycle of oppression. Meanwhile, women face profound societal oppression, enduring physical and emotional harm, and having their basic human rights stripped away. Not only is this seen in dystopian societies like *The Giver* and *The Handmaids Tale*, it can also be tied into the real world. Moira Weigel mentions this when she says, "... the producers must have imagined that a story of strong women under assault would appeal to supporters of a President Hillary Clinton. Instead, now that there are men in power who speak the language of overt misogyny, and use religious concerns to

justify restrictions in the lives of women, fans are invoking the story as a symbol of protest” (5). Many individuals took these ideals imbedded and showcased in dystopian societies as a wake up call for our society. It helps shine light on the relationship created between both genders and also highlight the behavior of men towards women and how they have taken the job of dictating their rights. The deterioration of genuine relationships is a direct outcome of the toxic exploitation of women in dystopian societies. As trust and mutual respect vanish, relationships become oblivious of authentic connection, contributing to the overall breakdown of social bonds and the creation of a hostile and unsustainable societal structure.

The exploration of gender roles and reproductive rights in dystopian societies sheds light on the intricate web of societal attitudes, specifically on the ideals crafted by men to exploit women as tools for their own benefit. This dynamic helps emphasize the dehumanization of women, positioning them as pawns in power struggles that perpetuate a toxic and unsustainable societal structure. By examining these elements within dystopian narratives, we gain valuable insights into the profound societal repercussions that arise when men wield gender roles and reproductive rights as instruments to assert dominance, ultimately emphasizing the urgent need for the dismantling of such oppressive frameworks in our real-world societies.

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