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## The Nexus of Social and Psychological Dimensions in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: A Life Space Analysis

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### Abstract

This research uses a life space analysis to examine the complex interactions between social and psychological elements in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*. It is based on Kurt Lewin's field theory and Emile Durkheim's functionalism. Through the use of sociological and psychological analysis, the research focusses on the characters' complex experiences of oppression and struggle within their dystopian setting. The research analyses the many psychological fields that impact the characters' responses to the societal pressures they face by looking at how their circumstances and psychological needs shape their behaviours and perceptions. The descriptive-analytical technique demonstrates how the dynamics within the characters' living spaces—including cognitive structures and external processes—determine how they interact with their physical and social environments. The analysis also shows that the characters' lives are defined by the intensity of their demands and the fluidity of their social settings, which drives them to continually navigate between conflicting influences. The ideas of social solidarity, integration, phenomenon, and cohesiveness are used to further analyse the social component of the characters' experiences and show how these elements are represented in the characters' actual experiences. In the end, the study emphasises how important it is to include sociological and psychological ideas into literary studies in order to improve our comprehension of the intricate relationships that exist between the person and society.

**Keywords:** Literature, Social Psychology, Field Theory, Functionalism, Margaret Atwood

### I. Introduction

Social psychologists, the writers of literary writings, are introduced to us by the sciences as we work to comprehend ourselves and because of their experience dealing with psychosocial problems. These writers provide different kinds of information than scientists and everyday people. Psychologists value this ability and often highlight the richness and depth displayed by poets and writers, who explore the psychic and relational aspects of life with remarkable familiarity, addressing profound themes such as hatred, love, death, suffering, and pain. Moreover, it is typical to underestimate human complexity as well as inherent simplicity. We choose and mould our own circumstances in life from a range of options and possibilities. Our internal views, circumstances, desires, and mood all have a significant impact on how happy

or unhappy we feel. Additionally, shifts in the social environment might affect how we perceive psychological events. However, when seen from a broader and more scientific perspective, an individual's psychological state has a major impact on the surrounding social environment. Understanding the challenges others encounter greatly affects our perceptions of them as well as their perceptions of us.

Many people consider Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* to be a potent examination of the terrifying possibilities of a society in which people's liberties are severely curtailed, especially for women. The novel's unsettling depiction of a theocratic government that enslaves women via strict social control provides a rich environment for delving into the intricate interactions between social and psychological aspects. The harsh theocratic government of Gilead, which controls every aspect of the lives of the people in *The Handmaid's Tale*, has a dramatic impact on their life spaces. For example, Offred's setting of confinement, where her identity, independence, and personal autonomy are continuously threatened, has a significant impact on her behaviour and psychological condition. Negative influences that control her living space include fear, monitoring, and social expectations. These forces restrict her freedom of choice and push her into a survival mode that values silence and conformity. The strict social roles and power dynamics imposed by Gilead's regulations also limit the lives of other characters, such as Serena Joy and the Commander. The urge to preserve their status in this hierarchical society has an impact on these characters' actions, demonstrating how their internal psychological wants and aspirations are always at odds with the outward societal demands placed on them. Thus, the novel demonstrates how people's lives, which are shaped by both external social influences and internal wants, have a substantial impact on how they act and perceive, which propels the story of resistance, compliance, and survival. Kurt Lewin's field theory and Emile Durkheim's functionalism, two theoretical frameworks that offer fundamental insights into how people interact with their environments and the wider social structures that impact their lives, are applied in this study to dive into these complex layers.

Kurt Lewin revolutionised psychology by presenting empirical evidence that external factors, such as personality traits or biological predispositions, do not solely control an individual's actions. Instead, he illustrated how a person's conduct is greatly influenced by their dynamic living environment. Field theory, whose formula is  $B = f(P, E)$ , was developed by Lewin and maintains that an individual's conduct depends on both their environment and them. This concept highlights how important it is to examine how people behave in their external social and physical environments. Lewin's work emphasises the connections between inner states like emotions, attitudes, and wants and outside influences like social interactions, cultural norms, and situational situations. This extensive approach provides a more nuanced explanation of why people act in particular ways by taking into account the complex and constantly changing structure of people's environment. Lewin's theories, which acknowledge the impact of the environment on behaviour, encourage us to take into account more significant social and environmental factors while treating psychiatric problems. Eventually, this may lead to support networks and therapies that are more effective. Kurt Lewin's field theory provides a dynamic perspective on how people in *The Handmaid's Tale* negotiate their repressive world by viewing behaviour as a consequence of the individual and their environment. Lewin's theory of "life space," which takes into account all the variables affecting a person's conduct at any one time, is especially pertinent for examining how Atwood's characters react to Gilead's harsh circumstances. These characters' lives are characterised by an ongoing struggle between the good and bad forces present in their surroundings, which in turn shapes their behaviours, viewpoints, and emotional states. This research uses field theory to map out the psychological fields that influence the behaviour of important characters, exposing the underlying needs and external influences that mould their experiences.

Emile Durkheim's functionalism compliments Lewin's psychological viewpoint by providing

a sociological lens for analysing the institutions and social structures of *The Handmaid's Tale*. Understanding Durkheim's theories on social cohesion, solidarity, and integration is crucial to comprehending how Gilead's society upholds its strict hierarchy and regulates its citizens. Viewed through the lens of fear and oppression, the novel's portrayal of social phenomena—such as the customs, rules, and conventions that uphold women's subordination—can be understood as social cohesiveness mechanisms that keep society bound together. This research attempts to investigate how Gilead's social order is upheld and how it impacts the characters' psychological health by including Durkheim's functionalism. An in-depth examination of *The Handmaid's Tale* that takes into account both the individual and collective aspects of human experience is made possible by this interdisciplinary approach, which blends functionalism with field theory. The study's emphasis on the psychological domains and social structures seen in the book draws attention to the ways in which Atwood's characters are torn between the demands of their surroundings and their inner desires. These individuals' lives are constantly affected by the conflict between their need for independence and the limitations placed on them by Gilead's totalitarian government. Understanding both the larger societal ramifications of the protagonists' hardships and how they negotiate their repressive environment depends on this tension. This research aims to clarify the relationship between social and psychological aspects in *The Handmaid's Tale*, providing an understanding of how Atwood's characters deal with the extreme demands of their dystopian society. The study highlights the need of incorporating psychological and sociological viewpoints in literary studies while also enhancing our understanding of Atwood's literary works by relying on the theoretical underpinnings of functionalism and field theory. The project seeks to further the conversation on how literature shapes and reflects our knowledge of social systems and human behaviour through the use of this multidisciplinary lens.

## II. Objectives

This study illuminated the life space and sufferings of three characters—Offred, Serena Joy and Aunt Lydia of the novel. The study specifically sought to accomplish the following goals:

- i. To explore the psychological dimensions of characters by describing -their psychological needs; and forces within their environments.
- ii. To analyse how social phenomena such as rituals, laws, and norms contribute to the cohesion and maintenance of the dystopian society of Gilead.
- iii. To examine how social factors affect their experiences and reactions.

## III. Methodology

This study's descriptive-analytical technique allows for a qualitative analysis of the novel's themes and characters. Through an examination of the psychological and sociological aspects of the characters via the glasses of Lewin and Durkheim, the research seeks to reveal the underlying processes that propel the story and to illuminate the wider ramifications of Atwood's dystopian vision. The psychological fields and living spaces of the characters are analysed using Lewin's field theory, while the social structures and their functions in preserving societal cohesiveness are examined using Durkheim's functionalism. It is anticipated that the results of this study will further our knowledge of the intricate relationships that exist between people and their surroundings, especially in situations when social control and oppression are severe. In order to pinpoint the psychological influences influencing important individuals like Offred, Serena Joy, and Aunt Lydia, their life spaces are also mapped. This entails investigating their mental models, the severity of their requirements, and the ways in which their social contexts impact them.

**Data Collection:** *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood served as the study's main source of data. There were four phases to the novel study, all of which were required for a complete

comprehension of the work:

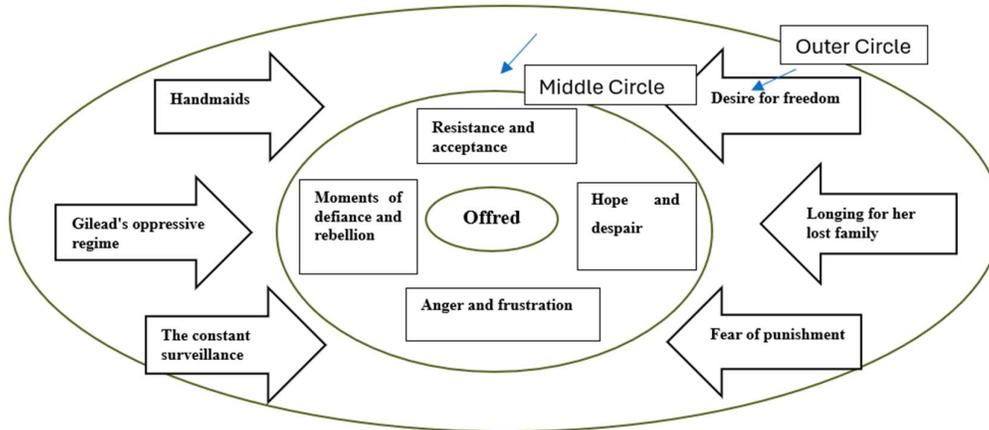
**Phase I: Textual analysis of the novel:** In this first stage, a comprehensive review of the pertinent literature was carried out, and then the novel was read in-depth for thorough analysis. This includes dialogue, internal monologues, descriptions of rituals, and interactions between characters. The final decision to use *The Handmaid's Tale* as the main subject of the research was made possible by this critical assessment. The novel was selected because it delves deeply into issues that are pertinent to the goals of the research, such as psychological experiences, societal dynamics, and the long-lasting effects of suffering on specific individuals.

**Phase II: Consideration of secondary resources:** Relevant scholarly articles, books, and critiques on *The Handmaid's Tale*, field theory, and functionalism is consulted to support and enrich the analysis.

**Phase III: Thematic coding:** The coding procedure aided in the methodical classification of the narrative's occurrences of functionalism and field theory. The study's last section investigated the intricate relationships between the social environment and the psychological states of the characters depicted in *The Handmaid's Tale* using Kurt Lewin's field theory. The links between power, control, and resistance in the dystopian society that the novel portrays are clarified in significant ways by this theoretical framework.

**Phase IV: Analysis:** The analysis of the methodically developed novel involved several phases, each aimed at providing a comprehensive understanding of its psychological, social, and thematic intricacies. Initially, a psychological field was developed for each character, exploring their motivations, ideas, feelings, and behavioural patterns to gain insight into their complex inner lives. Following this, the life spaces of the characters were mapped using field theory to visualize the psychological forces at play, identifying both positive and negative influences within their environments and how these shaped their actions and perceptions. Special attention was paid to identifying moments of suffering, examining the various traumas and hardships experienced by the characters to understand their impact on individual experiences. A thorough evaluation of social influences was also conducted, analysing how power dynamics, cultural norms, and social structures affected the characters' lives. This examination aimed to clarify the ways external factors shape psychological states and actions. Durkheim's functionalism was utilized to analyse social institutions and rituals, particularly how these structures maintain social order and control, impacting the characters' psychological well-being. The interplay between psychological needs and social pressures was explored, highlighting instances where characters faced choices or conflicts that revealed tensions between their internal desires and external constraints. The findings from these psychological and sociological analyses were synthesized to offer a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between individual behaviour and social structures in the novel. This synthesis interpreted how Atwood's depiction of a dystopian society reflects broader themes of human behavior and societal organization. The study concluded by summarizing the key insights, discussing the implications for literary studies through an interdisciplinary lens, and suggesting potential avenues for further research.

**Results and Discussion:** The study produced these psychological fields:



**Figure 1.** Offred's Psychological Field in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Figure 1 shows the complex links between Offred's surroundings, psychological requirements, and emotional experiences, as well as the interrelated aspects that shape her personality in *The Handmaid's Tale*. The handmaids' responsibilities and the ongoing monitoring create a pervasive environment of dread and control in the outer circle, which is represented by the left arrows, which stand for Gilead's harsh dictatorship. Offred's psychological demands, which are shown by the right arrow and include her dread of punishment, longing for her lost family, and desire for freedom, are greatly impacted by her surroundings. The complex emotional states of rage and frustration, resistance and acceptance, optimism and despair, and times of defiance and rebellion are examples of how these psychological demands then appear in the middle circle. Offred's psychological needs are shaped by the repressive atmosphere of Gilead, as indicated by the opposing arrows in the outside circle, and the arrows linking the outer circle to the middle circle illustrate how these needs manifest in her emotional experiences. Arrows connecting different aspects show dynamic and reciprocal relationships, emphasising how Offred's emotional and psychological states are always influencing and being impacted by her surroundings.

Offred's life space is also a dynamic sphere with constant interactions between positive and negative influences. The overwhelming negative societal elements that attempt to impose conformity and limit her psychological freedom include dread, identity loss, and continual monitoring. These elements foster an atmosphere in which conformity and quiet are essential for survival. Positive influences, on the other hand, such as memory, and acts of defiance, provide pockets of psychological resistance that allow Offred to continue being somewhat like the person she once was. These factors give her the inner fortitude to endure living in difficult circumstances and save her identity from being completely erased. Two significant negative influences in Offred's life are the continual state of monitoring and the possibility of punishment. Gilead's secret police, the Eyes, stand in for the widespread authority over all facets of the Handmaids' existence. Offred's capacity to trust others and behave freely is hampered by her feelings of fear and paranoia brought on by this surveillance. For example, Offred emphasises the pervasiveness of monitoring in Gilead when she says, "The Eyes of God run over all the earth" (Atwood 21). She feels as though she is being watched all the time, which limits her expressions and encourages her to follow the norms set out by the regime. Offred's forced assimilation into the Handmaid community and the erasure of her history are also powerfully detrimental factors. Her identity and uniqueness are intended to be eradicated by these actions.

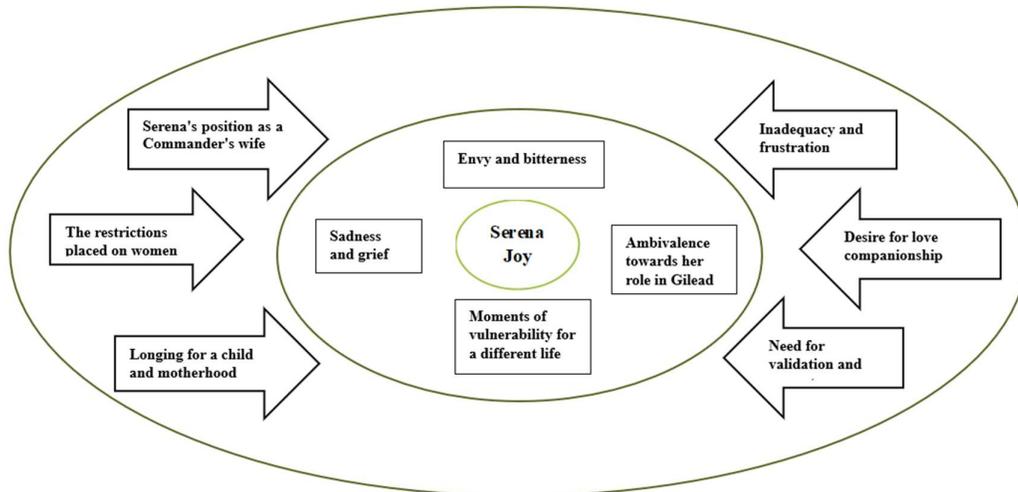
Offred reflects on this loss when she says, "My name isn't Offred, I have another name, which nobody uses now because it's forbidden" (Atwood 94). This erasure of personal history and identity leaves Offred in a state of psychological disorientation, where her sense of self is

suppressed under the imposed identity of being merely a vessel for reproduction. The threat of physical punishment and violence is a constant presence in Offred's life. Public executions, called "Salvagings," and the Wall where bodies of dissenters are displayed, serve as stark reminders of the consequences of disobedience. Offred describes her fear, saying, "I would like to believe this is a story I'm telling. I need to believe it. Those who can believe that such stories are only stories have a better chance" (Atwood 39). This fear is a constraining force, pushing her to conform outwardly while suppressing her inner resistance.

Despite the harsh realities of Gilead, Offred's memories of her past life and her ability to imagine a different future serve as positive psychological forces. They provide her with a mental escape from the oppressive present and a sense of hope. Offred often retreats into her memories of her husband, Luke, and her daughter, saying, "I try to conjure, to raise my spirits. I want to steal something" (Atwood 38). These memories act as a form of psychological resistance, preserving her sense of identity and personal history. Offred's small acts of defiance, such as her illicit meetings with the Commander and her relationship with Nick, represent positive forces within her life space. These acts give her a sense of agency, albeit limited, and help to reclaim some control over her own body and choices. Offred reflects on this rebellion, saying, "Nolite te bastardec carborundorum" (Atwood 101), a phrase she finds carved in her room, which becomes a symbol of resistance and solidarity. These small acts of rebellion provide her with the strength to endure the psychological and physical constraints imposed by Gilead.

The life space analysis of Offred reveals that even in the most repressive environments, individuals retain the capacity for resistance, albeit in subtle and often hidden ways. This resilience is rooted in the internal psychological fields that sustain hope, identity, and the desire for freedom. Offred's behaviour her compliance combined with inner defiance—demonstrates how the life space is not static but constantly reshaped by the interaction of internal desires and external pressures. The novel illustrates that while the totalitarian regime of Gilead seeks to control every aspect of its citizens' lives, the human spirit's capacity for resistance and hope can never be entirely extinguished. The psychological field of Offred in *The Handmaid's Tale* showcases the profound impact of social and environmental forces on individual behavior. Offred's life space, heavily influenced by the negative forces of fear, control, and loss of identity, reveals the psychological toll of living in a repressive society. However, the positive forces of memory, imagination, and subtle rebellion highlight the potential for psychological resistance, offering insight into how individuals navigate and endure extreme social conditions. This model revealed that how systemic oppression affects individual psychological resilience, showing that despite severe external control, the human spirit's longing for freedom and connection can foster moments of defiance and hope, even in the darkest circumstances.

The second most important character of the novel is Serena Joy. Her psychological field is depicted as follows:



**Figure 2.** Serena Joy's Psychological Field in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Figure 2: This psychological field provides a visual representation of Serena Joy's life space in the novel. Serena Joy is a complex character whose psychological field is shaped by the conflicting realities of her past and present roles within the theocratic society of Gilead. As a Wife of a high-ranking Commander, Serena Joy enjoys a privileged status, yet she also faces profound emotional and psychological challenges due to the rigid social structures she helped to create. In the outer circle on the left side, Serena's position as a Commander's wife, the restrictions placed on women, and her longing for a child and motherhood create a complex and oppressive backdrop. These environmental influences significantly impact her psychological needs in the middle circle, where her need for validation and respect within the patriarchal society, feelings of inadequacy and frustration, and desire for companionship and intimacy are prominent. These needs manifest in the inner circle as emotional states such as envy and bitterness towards the handmaids who can bear children, sadness and grief over her inability to conceive, ambivalence towards her role in Gilead's society, and moments of vulnerability and longing for a different life. The arrows connecting the outer circle to the middle circle demonstrate how Serena's environmental influences shape her psychological needs, while the arrows connecting the middle circle to the inner circle show how these needs translate into her emotional experiences. This complex interactions and feedback loops, such as how Serena's frustration with her environment exacerbate her emotional distress, leading to further dissatisfaction and resentment. This highlights how oppressive social structures contribute to the psychological and emotional struggles of individuals, illustrating that even those in positions of relative power, such as Serena Joy, experience profound inner turmoil and dissatisfaction due to the restrictive and dehumanising nature of their environment.

One of the dominant negative forces in Serena Joy's life space is jealousy, primarily directed toward Offred and the other Handmaids. The role of the Wife in Gilead, which forbids her from bearing children, has left Serena in a state of emotional barrenness and deep-seated resentment. This is evident when Serena confronts Offred about the Commander, saying, "As for you, she said to me, you'll just have to learn to put up with it" (Atwood 33). Her bitterness is a reaction to the loss of the traditional power she once held as a public figure advocating for the very theocratic society that now constrains her. The jealousy Serena feels contributes to her cold, hostile behaviour towards Offred, whom she sees as a reminder of her own failings and lack of reproductive power. In the pre-Gilead world, Serena Joy was a public figure, a televangelist and singer advocating for traditional family values. However, the societal shift to Gilead has confined her to the domestic sphere, robbing her of the public platform that gave her life meaning. This transition leads to a loss of personal identity and purpose, which manifests in her behaviour as bitterness and cruelty. Serena expresses this loss indirectly through her actions

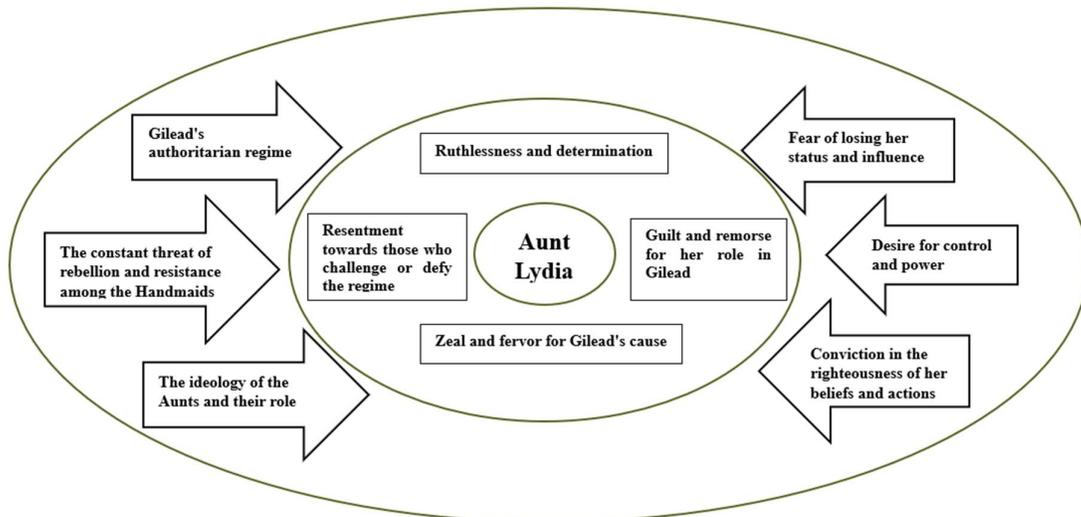
and interactions, such as when she harshly orders Offred to stay out of sight, saying, “Get out of my sight. Go to your room” (Atwood 25). Her frustrations stem from the discrepancy between the power she expected to wield and the reality of her restricted, cloistered life.

Serena Joy’s elevated status as the Commander’s Wife isolates her emotionally, as genuine relationships are stifled by the strict social hierarchy and lack of trust in Gilead. This isolation leads to profound loneliness, exacerbated by her inability to fulfill the societal and personal expectations of motherhood. Her loneliness is subtly conveyed when she sits alone in her garden, smoking a cigarette in secret, a small act of rebellion against the restrictive norms of Gilead (Atwood 14). This isolation drives her to lash out at those around her, including Offred, as a way of coping with her own emotional pain. Despite her emotional struggles, Serena Joy’s life space is also shaped by the privileges afforded to her by her status as a Wife. She has power over the household and, to some extent, over Offred and the other Handmaids. This authority provides Serena with a sense of control and stability within the limited confines of her role. She exercises this power by enforcing strict rules on Offred, asserting her dominance, and maintaining her social status within Gilead’s hierarchy. This privilege, though limited in scope compared to her past influence, serves as a coping mechanism, allowing Serena to hold on to some semblance of control. Serena Joy’s ability to manipulate situations to achieve her own ends acts as a positive force within her life space. For instance, when she conspires with Offred to conceive a child through Nick, she demonstrates her capability to navigate the system to fulfill her own desires, saying, “Maybe you should try another man... Maybe you should try another man... for your own good” (Atwood 205). This act of manipulation reveals Serena’s agency and willingness to bend the rules of Gilead to serve her personal needs, showcasing her adaptability within the constraints imposed on her. Serena Joy’s involvement in her garden serves as a positive force in her life space, offering her a limited form of creative expression and control. The act of tending to her garden becomes a symbolic way for her to exert influence over her environment, in contrast to the larger societal forces she cannot control. Offred observes Serena in the garden, noting, “She was snipping off the seedpods with a pair of shears” (Atwood 15). This action reflects Serena’s attempt to manage her emotions and frustrations by controlling the small aspect of her life that she can—the growth and appearance of her garden.

Further, Serena Joy’s life space is characterized by the tension between her elevated social status and the emotional and psychological constraints imposed by Gilead’s society. The negative forces of jealousy, loss of purpose, and emotional isolation contribute to her feelings of bitterness and resentment, driving her antagonistic behaviour towards Offred and others in her household. These negative emotions are intensified by the contradiction between her role as a powerful advocate for Gilead’s creation and the restrictive, unsatisfying life she now leads. However, positive forces such as her social status, manipulative agency, and her small acts of control through gardening provide Serena with some sense of purpose and power. These elements allow her to navigate her life space, albeit in a limited and often morally ambiguous manner. Her interactions with Offred, characterized by both cruelty and moments of collusion, illustrate the complexity of her life space—caught between the desire to maintain her social status and the underlying dissatisfaction with her life’s trajectory.

Serena Joy’s psychological field and life space in *The Handmaid’s Tale* highlight the nuanced interplay between power and frustration in Gilead’s hierarchical society. Her behavior is shaped by the negative forces of jealousy, loss of identity, and emotional isolation, which drive her to assert control over others as a way of coping with her own dissatisfaction. Simultaneously, positive factors such as her privilege, ability to manipulate situations, and gardening offer her limited means of asserting control and expressing herself. Serena Joy’s life space analysis reveals the inherent contradictions faced by those who help build oppressive systems, only to find themselves constrained by the very structures they advocated for, underscoring the themes of power, control, and the human cost of authoritarianism that Atwood masterfully explores in

the novel.



**Figure 3.** Aunt Lydia's Psychological Field in *The Handmaid's Tale*

Further, the handmaids were trained and guarded by aunts of Gilead. Aunt Lydia is one of the most significant enforcers of the Gilead regime, tasked with indoctrinating and controlling the Handmaids. Her psychological field is shaped by a combination of ideological commitment, a desire for power, and personal beliefs about morality and social order. The above figure 3. representation a visual framework for understanding the factors influencing Aunt Lydia's psyche in *The Handmaid's Tale*. In the outer circle, Gilead's authoritarian regime, the ideology of the aunts and their role in society, and the constant threat of rebellion and resistance among the Handmaids create a pervasive atmosphere of control and ideological enforcement. These environmental influences shape Aunt Lydia's psychological needs in the middle circle, where her desire for control and power, conviction in the righteousness of her beliefs and actions, and fear of losing her status and influence are prominent. These psychological needs manifest in the inner circle as emotional states such as ruthlessness and determination, zeal and fervor for Gilead's cause, resentment towards those who challenge or defy the regime, and guilt and remorse for her role in Gilead. The arrows connecting the outer circle to the middle circle illustrate how these environmental influences shape Aunt Lydia's psychological needs, while the arrows connecting the middle circle to the inner circle depict how these needs translate into her emotional experiences. The analysis also represents how Aunt Lydia's desire for control may exacerbate her feelings of guilt and insecurity, while her fervor for Gilead's cause reinforces her determination and ruthlessness. A research outcome from studying this model could reveal how authoritarian systems foster psychological and emotional complexities in enforcers of the regime, showing that individuals such as Aunt Lydia, despite their power and conviction, experience significant inner conflict and moral ambiguity due to their roles in maintaining oppressive structures.

Aunt Lydia's life space is dominated by her commitment to the ideology of Gilead. Her belief in the righteousness of the regime's moral code serves as a guiding force in her actions. This zealotry is driven by both genuine belief and fear of falling out of favor with the regime's higher authorities. Her fear of retribution and desire to maintain her position compel her to enforce Gilead's rules with strict discipline. Aunt Lydia's dedication is evident when she tells the Handmaids, "Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to. This may not seem ordinary to you now, but after a time it will. It will become ordinary" (Atwood 33). This statement illustrates how she uses ideological manipulation to normalize the oppressive practices of Gilead. Although Aunt Lydia occasionally shows signs of a more nuanced understanding of the Handmaids' suffering, these moments are quickly suppressed by the necessity to maintain

order and obedience. The social pressures to enforce Gilead's rules and to appear unwavering in her commitment leave little room for empathy. For example, Aunt Lydia says, "To be seen-to be seen-is to be... her voice trembled—is to be... penetrated" (Atwood 72). Her teaching tactics are rooted in instilling fear and shame, showcasing how compassion is overridden by the imperative to enforce control.

The environment of Gilead fosters an atmosphere of constant surveillance and distrust. Aunt Lydia's role as an enforcer makes her particularly susceptible to paranoia, as she must constantly monitor the Handmaids for signs of disobedience. This paranoia is a negative force that isolates her emotionally from the Handmaids and others around her, preventing genuine human connection. Her interactions are defined by suspicion, as she continually watches for any potential threats to Gilead's order. Her distrust is evident when she warns Offred, "There is more than one kind of freedom... Freedom to and freedom from. In the days of anarchy, it was freedom to. Now you are being given freedom from" (Atwood 24). Aunt Lydia's framing of freedom serves as a justification for the suppression of personal liberties, reflecting her internalization of Gilead's paranoia.

Furthermore, Aunt Lydia derives a strong sense of purpose from her role within Gilead. Her position as an Aunt grants her a measure of power and authority over the Handmaids, giving her life a clear direction and meaning. This sense of purpose is a positive force in her life space, reinforcing her commitment to her duties and providing her with a sense of identity within the structured hierarchy of Gilead. She sees herself as a protector of societal morals and frequently asserts her authority by saying, "You are a transitional generation. It is the hardest for you. We know the sacrifices you are being expected to make... for the good of the world" (Atwood 127). This statement highlights how she views her role as one of moral and societal importance. Aunt Lydia's actions are guided by her belief in the moral righteousness of Gilead's principles. This belief acts as a positive force, providing her with internal justification for the harsh measures she enacts. She sees herself not as a villain but as a custodian of values, believing that her actions are ultimately for the greater good. This self-righteousness enables her to distance herself from the suffering she causes, as she views the pain inflicted as necessary for the preservation of order and morality. Aunt Lydia's insistence on moral purity is reflected when she says, "Gilead knows no bounds. Gilead is within you" (Atwood, p. 59). This phrase encapsulates her belief that the Handmaids must internalize Gilead's values to ensure societal stability. Aunt Lydia's ability to manipulate and control the Handmaids showcases her political acumen within the Gileadean system. Her skill in using language, psychological tactics, and fear to maintain obedience reflects her understanding of power dynamics. This manipulative skill is a positive force that allows her to navigate the complex social and political landscape of Gilead, securing her own position while enforcing the regime's ideologies. For example, Aunt Lydia frequently manipulates religious and moral rhetoric to justify the control of women's bodies, saying, "Blessed are the meek, blessed are the silent. I pray for her." (Atwood 217). Her use of scripture and religious language serves to legitimize her authority and suppress dissent.

Aunt Lydia's life space is defined by a blend of negative and positive forces that interact to shape her behaviour and identity. The negative forces—ideological zealotry, suppression of empathy, and paranoia—create a psychological environment where harshness and control are necessary for survival and perceived righteousness. These forces align with the authoritarian structure of Gilead, reinforcing Aunt Lydia's role as an enforcer of its laws. Conversely, positive forces such as a sense of purpose, moral righteousness, and manipulative skills provide Aunt Lydia with psychological stability and self-justification. Her belief in the moral superiority of Gilead's values allows her to rationalize her actions, insulating her from the moral consequences of her cruelty. This combination of purpose and righteousness enables her to maintain authority and power within a system built on fear and oppression. Thus, Aunt

Lydia's psychological field and life space in *The Handmaid's Tale* reveal the complexities of power and morality within an authoritarian regime. Her behaviour, driven by a mix of ideological commitment, paranoia, and a desire for control, reflects the broader mechanisms of oppression at work in Gilead. By enforcing the regime's laws with unwavering dedication, Aunt Lydia embodies the internal contradictions of those who uphold totalitarian systems: she is both a victim and an enforcer, shaped by the very structures she helps to maintain. Her life space analysis underscores the theme that the machinery of oppression relies on individuals who, convinced of their own righteousness, perpetuate systems of control and dehumanization.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The analysis of characters in *The Handmaid's Tale* through Kurt Lewin's concept of life space and psychological field theory offers a nuanced understanding of how social and psychological factors interact to shape individual behaviour within the oppressive regime of Gilead. By examining the life spaces of Offred, Serena Joy, and Aunt Lydia, this study reveals the complex ways in which power, fear, resistance, and identity play out within the totalitarian society depicted by Margaret Atwood. Offred's life space is dominated by negative forces such as fear, surveillance, and loss of identity, which severely restrict her actions and thoughts. However, positive forces like memory, imagination, and small acts of rebellion act as sources of psychological resistance, allowing her to maintain a sense of self and hope. This interplay illustrates that even in highly controlled environments, individuals possess the capacity for inner defiance. Offred's psychological field highlights the dual reality faced by individuals under authoritarian rule: outward compliance coupled with internal rebellion. The study shows that personal memories and connections to the past serve as powerful tools of resistance, providing strength to endure oppressive circumstances. Further, Serena Joy's life space is marked by a tension between her privileged status as a Wife and her emotional dissatisfaction due to her inability to fulfill societal expectations of motherhood and her loss of identity from her former life. Her behaviour—characterized by jealousy, resentment, and occasional manipulation—stems from this internal conflict. Serena's sense of power and control over the Handmaids provides her with some stability, but it also isolates her emotionally, making her bitter and cruel. The garden, which she tends meticulously, becomes a symbol of the limited control she has over her own environment. Her manipulation of Offred to conceive a child through Nick reveals her desperate attempt to assert control over her life. This finding highlights how even those in privileged positions within a repressive system can feel trapped and constrained by the very rules they enforce, leading to actions that further entrench their own emotional isolation. Serena Joy's internal conflict reveals the impact of societal roles on personal identity and behaviour. Her emotional turmoil is rooted in the disparity between her past public persona and her current confined domestic role. This finding underscores how enforced social roles can lead to identity crises and psychological suffering, even among those who hold power within the system. It highlights that the imposition of rigid social roles not only dehumanizes the oppressed but can also lead to profound dissatisfaction and conflict for the oppressors. Furthermore, Aunt Lydia's life space is heavily influenced by her ideological commitment to the values of Gilead, which she uses to justify her role as an enforcer of the regime's harsh policies. Her sense of moral righteousness and purpose provides her with psychological stability, allowing her to rationalize the cruelty she inflicts. Aunt Lydia's actions are not just about obedience but are driven by a genuine belief in the moral superiority of Gilead's system. Her ability to manipulate religious and moral rhetoric to maintain control demonstrates how ideologies can be internalized to the point where they override natural empathy and compassion. This finding suggests that the internalization of ideology is crucial for the maintenance of authoritarian regimes, as it turns individuals into willing enforcers of oppressive policies. Aunt Lydia illustrates how ideological indoctrination is not only a tool for

control but also a personal coping mechanism for those who enforce the rules. Her belief in Gilead's moral framework allows her to distance herself from the ethical implications of her actions, revealing how belief systems are essential for the maintenance of totalitarian societies. The analysis also demonstrates that survival under an authoritarian regime involves complex psychological navigation. Offred's use of memory and small rebellions highlights the importance of psychological resilience and adaptability. The characters' different responses to Gilead's oppression—Offred's internal resistance, Serena Joy's outward control but internal dissatisfaction, and Aunt Lydia's strict adherence to ideological beliefs—show that psychological survival strategies vary greatly based on individual backgrounds, roles, and personal beliefs. This insight expands the understanding of how people cope with oppressive systems, emphasizing the role of internal psychological fields in mediating the effects of external control. These insights have broader implications for understanding the dynamics of power and control in real-world authoritarian systems. They suggest that psychological resilience and the capacity for internal resistance are essential for personal survival under oppressive conditions. Additionally, the role of ideological indoctrination in maintaining social order underscores the importance of critical thinking and personal autonomy as tools for resisting authoritarian control. These dynamics can inform both literary interpretations of dystopian narratives and real-world strategies for fostering psychological resilience and resistance in the face of oppression.

Additionally, the main protagonists are tormented, frustrated, and distressed to differing degrees, as they are stuck between competing positive and negative forces that are all exerting tremendous pressure. Despite their opposing directions, these forces are frequently of similar strength, which results in a dynamic tension that molds the experiences of the characters. Moreover, the condition of these characters' wants has a significant impact on their life spaces, with consequences depending on how strong those needs are and how fluid the related places are inside their life space. The narrative's depiction of suffering and coping methods is enriched by their dynamic interplay, which highlights the complexity of the human experience. It is recommended that facets of living in areas of war and sufferings that are not covered by the current study can be explored. Through the analysis of narratives derived from a variety of sociopolitical situations, scholars can acquire a significant understanding of the universal themes of human pain and resilience. This method works especially well with works that show characters enduring severe hardships or challenges.

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