

A COLORFUL DYSTOPIA: AN ANALYSIS OF THE COLOR SCHEME IN HULU'S  
*THE HANDMAID'S TALE*

by

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis project focused on the color scheme featured in the first three seasons of Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*. The series is based upon Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel and was adapted into a Hulu original series in 2017. While the series' content is similar to that of the novel, the producers altered Atwood's color descriptions to cast a narrowed design aesthetic, resulting in a strong, seven-color scheme showcased through the costumes, set designs, and props. The color scheme then provides viewers with a blueprint for understanding Gilead through pattern recognition, creating metaphorical significance. This study examined *HMT*'s color scheme by assigning a metaphor to each color and illustrating the metaphor through the series' production elements. The colors were examined both individually and collectively to determine the color scheme's impact on the storyline. As a result, the study determined that color is a driving force of *HMT* that creates a deeper understanding of the storyline through the metaphors identified. In turn, *HMT*'s use of color creates a unique television experience for many viewers.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	14
Margaret Atwood & the 1985 Novel.....	14
Previous Adaptations of HMT .....	17
Success of the Hulu Series .....	23
Production Elements .....	43
III. THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDINGS .....	54
Media Ecology Theory.....	54
Metaphoric Criticism.....	58
Procedure.....	61
IV. ANALYSIS.....	67
Major Colors (Individually) .....	67
Black.....	68
Blue.....	77
Red.....	84
Minor Color Comparisons.....	94
Brown .....	94

White .....	107
Green .....	119
Grey .....	127
Example Storylines .....	138
Bible Proposal in “The Word” .....	139
Fred and Serena’s Arrest in “Liars” and “Sacrifice” .....	142
Winslow’s Death in “Liars” .....	149
V. DISCUSSION .....	155
REFERENCES .....	163
APPENDIX.....	173

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
Table 1 .....	63
Table 2 .....	156

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
Figure 1 .....	69
Figure 2 .....	71
Figure 3 .....	76
Figure 4 .....	79
Figure 5 .....	82
Figure 6 .....	86
Figure 7 .....	91
Figure 8 .....	92
Figure 9 .....	96
Figure 10 .....	102
Figure 11 .....	105
Figure 12 .....	109
Figure 13 .....	113
Figure 14 .....	115
Figure 15 .....	118
Figure 16 .....	121
Figure 17 .....	124
Figure 18 .....	126

Figure 19 .....	129
Figure 20 .....	131
Figure 21 .....	133
Figure 22 .....	137
Figure 23 .....	139
Figure 24 .....	141
Figure 25 .....	143
Figure 26 .....	145
Figure 27 .....	146
Figure 28 .....	148
Figure 29 .....	150
Figure 30 .....	151

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Television has drastically changed within the past decade. Streaming services have expanded the medium by combining both on-demand series and high-quality content (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). Streaming platforms like Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu have captivated viewers with high-dollar productions and powerful storytelling (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). Given this shift in the production and consumption of television, one potential area of interest for rhetorical scholars is an examination of television's storytelling ability through its production value. One prime example of this is Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* (Miller, 2017-present). Since its 2017 premiere, *The Handmaid's Tale* (*HMT*) has mesmerized audiences through its production elements, particularly its strong color palette. Color is an important part of *HMT* because it holds rhetorical significance in many areas of the series. Little research has been conducted to examine the relationship between television and its use of color. Therefore, Hulu's *HMT* is worthy of analysis. This chapter provides a synopsis of *HMT* and introduces how color is used within the series. The chapter also previews the project's theoretical groundings, which are based upon media ecology and metaphorical analyses, and introduces the research question.



## **Synopsis of *HMT***

Created by Bruce Miller and based upon Margaret Atwood's novel with the same title, *HMT* "is about life in what was once the United States [that] has become a sexually repressed existence in the Republic of Gilead, an intolerant theocracy founded by religious extremists" (Atwood, 1985, back cover). Hulu's adaptation is largely based on Atwood's 1985 novel, especially in its first season, setting the overall premise of the show. However, Miller made minor changes to Season 1's details and also expanded beyond the novel for the series' second and third seasons. Therefore, the following synopsis is a combination of both Atwood's novel (Atwood, 1985) and the Hulu series (Miller, 2017-present), unless otherwise noted.

Before Gilead, the United States was faced with a declining birthrate, which drastically affected the population. Because of the federal government's inability to solve this issue, the continental United States was overthrown by a totalitarian government called Gilead. Gilead operates under a radically religious society in which the Christian Bible determines all laws, expectations, and rituals. Against their will, citizens either convert to Gileadean rules, are executed, or are sent to the Colonies (a prison where residents must clean up toxic environmental waste). However, fertile women are faced with a different fate.

### ***Handmaids and the Ceremony***

In order to solve population issues, fertile women are enslaved as *Handmaids* and are tasked with giving birth to a new population. Handmaids are assigned to high-ranking male Commanders and their Wives, and the Handmaid is forced into routine-sex, called the *Ceremony*, with their Commander to become pregnant. The Ceremony occurs once a

month while the Handmaid is ovulating and is a procedure rather than an act of passion. The Commander and Handmaid must remain clothed, cannot touch, and do not make eye contact. The Commander's Wife is also made part of the Ceremony to prevent the act from becoming sexual. During the encounter, the Handmaid lies between the Wife's legs, and the Wife grips the Handmaid's wrists. The Handmaid and Wife touch to symbolize that the two women are one, and together, the Commander, Wife, and Handmaid complete the ritual in aim of impregnating the Handmaid. Once the Handmaid gives birth, the child is raised by the Commander's household, specifically a Martha (an older woman of Gilead who is a servant for a Commander's family), and the Handmaid is assigned to a new couple to continue her reproductive role in the district. *HMT* follows one of these Handmaids, June Osborne, as she navigates her way through Gilead.

### ***June Osborne***

Before Gilead, June was a 33-year-old book editor from Boston. She was married to Luke Bankole and had successfully given birth to their daughter, Hannah. The pilot's opening scene features June, Luke, and Hannah attempting to flee Gilead, but June is captured by Gileadean soldiers, known as Guardians, and stripped away from her family. Hannah is also captured by Guardians to be brought up as a Child of Gilead by another Commander (separate from June). After his wife and daughter are taken by Gilead, Luke's whereabouts are unbeknownst to June, who has no contact with the outside world, but later in Season 1, viewers discover that Luke successfully escaped Gilead and sought asylum in Canada. This family separation becomes a driving force in the series as June seeks to reunite with Luke and Hannah. Now as a Handmaid enslaved in Gilead, this goal is harder than she expects.

### ***The Red Center***

Upon arriving in Gilead, June undergoes basic Handmaid training led by Aunts (older, infertile women in Gilead who are the authoritative figures for Handmaids) at the Red Center. June is assigned to Aunt Lydia while at the Red Center, and Aunt Lydia teaches June and other prospective Handmaids the basic rules of Gilead. Gilead attempts to brainwash its residents by ridding them of rituals they find familiar. They incorporate new terms and phrases Handmaids and other residents must use, such as “Blessed be the fruit” and “May the Lord open” as the common greeting (Atwood, 1985, p. 19), or “Under his eye” when leaving someone, a reminder that Gilead is always watching (Atwood, 1985, p. 42). Aunt Lydia also teaches Handmaids Gilead’s rituals, especially surrounding the Ceremony. Handmaids even practice the Ceremony position with other Handmaids assuming the role of the Wife and Commander.

**Issued Handmaid Uniform.** In Gilead, Handmaids wear a specific uniform issued to them at the Red Center. The Handmaid uniform consists of a red floor-length gown, brown knee-high socks, brown military boots, and a white bonnet. The outfit is also accompanied by white *wings*, an oval-shaped visor (similar to horse blinders) that Handmaids must wear while outside. The Handmaid costume is designed to reflect the conservative, modest themes of Gilead in which women are not allowed to show their skin or any hint of sexuality. This is reflected largely by the Handmaids’ wings, which are meant to block a Handmaid’s view of the world and also prevent others from seeing her. All Handmaids wear this uniform, and the red garment prevents them from traveling anywhere unseen because Gilead is always watching.

**Introduced to Gilead Laws.** Along with dictating their speech and clothing, Gilead also restricts Handmaids' rights. Handmaids are not allowed to read, to earn income, or to address a man first. These laws also extend to other women in Gilead, including Commanders' Wives, Aunts, and Marthas, with the exception of Aunts being allowed to read. However, Handmaids are the most restricted ranking in Gilead and have very limited freedom. Gilead monitors every aspect of a Handmaid's life, including her whereabouts, diet, and menstrual cycle. Handmaids cannot even walk alone and must be accompanied by another Handmaid, known as their *walking partner*, anytime they are outside. Because their rights are limited, a Handmaid's primary duty in Gilead is to bear children, and they mostly remain in the home. The only privilege Handmaids receive outside of reproductivity is shopping at the grocery store for the household. However, the grocery store features only symbols rather than worded labels because Handmaids are prohibited from reading.

**Pressured to Convert.** Handmaids learn the laws of Gilead while at the Red Center to ensure their cooperation. With the help of Aunt Lydia, Gilead brainwashes Handmaids to believe in its principles and traditions. If a Handmaid attempts to resist during training, Aunts punish her through starvation, isolation, or brutal beatings. For example, in a scene featured at the Red Center, Handmaid-recruit Janine challenges Aunt Lydia, and Aunt Lydia forcibly plucks out Janine's right eye. This is just one example of the brutality experienced within the series and shows the pressure Handmaids feel to convert to Gileadean society as a means of survival. After successfully completing their training at the Red Center, Handmaids are assigned to a Commander and begin their reproductive role in Gilead.

### ***Waterford Household***

In the pilot episode, June is assigned to middle-aged Commander Fred Waterford and his Wife, Serena. The couple played a vital role in creating Gilead, with the Commander leading part of the revolution and Serena influencing the public as a motivational speaker and author (although she is no longer permitted to read or write). Before Gilead, the Waterfords were unable to produce children, and June is their second attempt at having a Handmaid. The Waterfords are cold to June and focus only on her fertility, and they require her to stay isolated in her room aside from grocery store runs and Ceremony nights.

June is renamed Offred upon arriving at the Waterford household to reflect the name of her Commander (Of-Fred). This renaming is the traditional practice for all Handmaids, with others renamed Ofglen, Ofwarren, Ofmatthew, and so on. Gilead changes the names of Handmaids to strip them of their identity and further assert that they are the Commander's property. Along with June, the Waterfords have other servants, including their Martha, Rita, whose main tasks are cooking and cleaning, and the Commander's driver, Nick, who lives above the Waterford's garage and serves the Commander only.

### ***The Resistance***

Throughout the series, June and other Handmaids attempt to resist the Gilead regime but are often met with intense brutality, including hangings, beatings by Aunts with cattle prods, and mutilation. While Gilead punishes resistance, it slowly unravels throughout each season of *HMT*. In the first season, June meets two important Handmaids that become her allies. First, she reunites with her former college roommate,

Moira, a fellow Handmaid at the Red Center, upon first arriving in Gilead. She also bonds with her walking partner, Emily (known as Ofglen in the first season). June learns from Moira and Emily of an underground network of Marthas designed to help women escape Gilead. Within the three seasons of *HMT*, both Moira and Emily eventually escape to Canada, a place of asylum for those in Gilead, leaving June behind.

Resistance against Gilead also occurs in the Waterford household in the first season. First, while he is charged with maintaining order in Gilead, Fred develops a complex fascination with June and allows her certain privileges in exchange for companionship and occasional goodnight kisses. Commanders are prohibited from having contact, especially physical, with Handmaids outside the Ceremony, but the Commander invites June to his private office, a room prohibited to women in Gilead, to read magazines and play Scrabble. They also begin a physical relationship during their *study sessions*, and the Commander even smuggles June to a private brothel exclusively for Commanders, called Jezebels, to be intimate. In doing this, the Commander becomes attached to June, allowing her to manipulate his status, which plays to her advantage in all three seasons. Secondly, afraid that her husband is sterile, Serena organizes a secret Ceremony between June and Nick, the Commander's driver. This sparks a secret romance between the pair that results in Nick impregnating June rather than the Commander impregnating her. These acts of resistance outline the major themes and storylines of *HMT* that affect all three seasons.

### ***Season Themes***

Season 1 of Hulu's *HMT* closely follows Atwood's novel. The second and third seasons, however, move beyond Atwood's words and further expand the story. Season 1

establishes the structure of Gilead, and it features small acts of resistance, like Nick impregnating June. Season 2 follows this same notion, but it focuses on a pregnant June escaping Gilead in order to protect her unborn child. Throughout the season, she attempts two separate escapes but is recaptured by Guardians, and as a result, she gives birth to a daughter in Gilead. In playing off the theme of escape, June and the network of Marthas smuggle her newborn, named Nicole, out of Gilead during Emily's escape to Canada in the Season 2 finale. Although she has a third escape opportunity, June stays in Gilead in hopes of reuniting with her first born, Hannah, who is still in Gilead living with another Commander.

Within the first two seasons, June only sees Hannah twice, first in a car from a distance as Serena's ploy to manipulate June, and again in person as a peace offering from Fred. These small interactions with Hannah fuel June's desire to reunite with her daughter, which feeds into Season 3. However, Gilead mysteriously moves Hannah in the beginning of the season to prevent June from finding her. After a brief rebellious streak in retaliation, June shifts to a bigger goal: getting other children out of Gilead.

In Season 3, after a falling out with the Waterfords, June has a new posting with Commander Joseph Lawrence and his Wife, Eleanor. Following Gilead's ritual, June is renamed Of Joseph as opposed to Offred to reflect her new household. However, Joseph is unlike other Gilead Commanders. Although he had a hand in creating the new world, Joseph does not participate in Gilead's rituals, meaning that he does not undergo the Ceremony with June. Joseph also treats the women of his household, including his Wife, two Marthas, and June, with respect and allows them to have a voice. Also going against his status, Joseph is part of Gilead's resistance, which plays to June's advantage as she

attempts to help children escape Gilead. Throughout Season 3, Joseph assists June in her defiant acts, and with his help and the Martha network, June smuggles over 50 children out of Gilead in the season finale. This is the largest act of resistance thus far in the series, and Season 3, along with the first two seasons, provides many interesting storylines worthy of analysis. Hulu finished airing *HMT*'s third season in August 2019, and the series has been renewed for a fourth season expected in Fall 2020 (Robinson & Opie, 2020).

### **Use of Color**

Along with its captivating storytelling, *HMT* enhances the series' quality through its production elements, including its costumes and set design. Paired with these elements, the series also incorporates a strong color scheme of seven colors: black, blue, red, brown, white, green, and grey (Miller, 2017-present). The series expresses the color scheme most apparently through its costume design.

### ***Costume Design***

Each character, depending on their Gilead ranking, wears a certain color to symbolize their status (Atwood, 1985). Handmaids wear red, Commanders' Wives blue, Aunts brown, Marthas green, and all men black (Atwood, 1985; Miller, 2017-present). Atwood establishes the ranking colors in her novel, but Miller capitalizes on the color scheme to create a strong design aesthetic. While the design elements vary, the costume colors are uniform, featuring a solid, subtle hue of each color per character ranking (Miller, 2017-present), showing the intentionality behind *HMT*'s use of color to create an appealing visual experience. The costumes are the most apparent use of color throughout



the series because they travel with each character in every scene. However, the color scheme does not apply only to the costumes.

### ***Other Colored Elements***

*HMT* extends the color palette to every production element of the series, including the set design, prop curation, and outdoor environment. Throughout the series, key sets and props are intentionally made a certain color as a means for metaphorical symbolism. For example, during one of June's escapes in Season 2, she flees to a red-brick house (Chang & Podeswa, 2018, "The Last Ceremony"). Because Handmaids wear red costumes, the viewer can draw comparisons between a Handmaid escaping Gilead and fleeing to a red safe house. Because of its interesting set design, *HMT* requires further examination into its use of color and the rhetorical symbolism behind the color scheme.

### ***Importance of Examining Color***

Color is a driving force of *HMT* because its symbolism further enhances the series' storyline. However, while it is widely apparent in this series, little research has been conducted to examine the utilization of color in television. Instead, most research has examined color from a marketing standpoint. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that color impacts "one's moods, emotions, feelings, sensations, and perception" (p. 199). Through this, color influences a consumer's purchasing decisions (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Singh and Srivastava (2011) stressed the importance of selecting appropriate colors in marketing because they "empower and contribute to the success of an advertising campaign" (p. 201). Color in television may have a similar effect. Just like consumers, television viewers respond positively and negatively to color schemes, and their reaction can affect their buy-in to a particular series. If *HMT*'s color scheme was not

visually appealing or utilized appropriately, the series would be less effective in its storytelling.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This project relies on media ecology theory to understand how color affects viewers' perceptions of a television series. Media ecology refers to the "multidisciplinary study of both environments as media and media as environments" (Anton, 2017, p. 225). In other words, the theory examines how media created by individuals evolves to control the individuals that created it. For example, humans invented clocks to keep better track of time. However, clocks have adapted overtime to now control humans' social calendars and everyday life. This illustrates the power media has over individuals. Media can also control the public through language or symbols to develop pattern recognition (Anton, 2017). *HMT*'s color scheme strongly relates to this theory by using color to develop the structure of Gilead. Chapter III dives further into media ecology and how it applies to this study.

This analysis also relies on metaphoric criticism to examine the meaning behind *HMT*'s color scheme and discuss how the colors work together within a particular storyline. *HMT*'s color palette provides viewers with a different television experience because each color plays a vital role in the series' storytelling and is packed with metaphoric significance. A metaphor is achieved by attaching the meaning of one object to another to create new meaning (Burke, 1969; Foss, 2018). By applying a strong color scheme to the various production elements within the series, *HMT* creates many significant metaphors. Therefore, this study focuses on the use of color in Hulu's *The*

*Handmaid's Tale, Seasons 1-3*, to determine its meaning and influence on the storyline.

The research question posed is:

RQ: How is color metaphorically used to create meaning in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*?

### Summary

This chapter provides a basic foundation in understanding this study. Because readers have varied familiarity with *HMT*'s storyline, it begins with a synopsis. In short, *HMT* features a near-future United States that has been faced with a declining birthrate. Because of the federal government's inability to solve this issue, the United States is overthrown by a totalitarian government called Gilead. To fix the fertility issue, Gilead enslaves fertile women as *Handmaids* tasked with giving birth to a new population. Handmaids are assigned to high-ranking male Commanders in Gilead and their Wives, and the Handmaid is forced into routine sex with the Commander in order to become pregnant. Once the Handmaid gives birth to a child, the child is raised by the Commander's household, and the Handmaid is assigned to a new *posting* separate from her newborn. *HMT* follows one of these Handmaids, June Osborne, as she navigates her complicated role in Gilead.

The Hulu series is based upon a 1985 novel by Margaret Atwood, and Hulu adapted the story into a television series beginning in 2017. Hulu had aired three seasons of *HMT* at the time of this project. In adapting the novel into a series, Bruce Miller, *HMT*'s creator, created a very strong design aesthetic by utilizing color. The series incorporates a strong color scheme of seven colors: black, blue, red, brown, white, green, and grey. This color scheme is incorporated into *HMT*'s entire production, including the

costumes, set design, and props, creating many interesting images and aiding in *HMT*'s powerful storytelling ability. The color scheme provides a focus for this analysis in determining its metaphorical significance throughout the subsequent chapters.

Chapter II gives a deeper look into Atwood's novel, *HMT*'s previous adaptations, and the success of the Hulu series. It also details color marketing research, applies the literature to television, and later explores *HMT*'s production elements. Chapter III covers the concepts of metaphoric criticism and also details the inner workings of media ecology theory. Chapter IV then presents a detailed analysis of *HMT*'s color scheme organized into three distinct steps. Lastly, Chapter V provides a brief review of the thesis, connects the analysis to color research, and details the project's limitations and areas for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Before discussing *The Handmaid's Tale's* (HMT) use of color, it is important to examine the origin of the storyline, its previous adaptations, and the significance of Hulu's adaptation. This chapter also discusses color research from a marketing standpoint and connects the literature to HMT's color scheme, as well as examines HMT's production elements.

#### **Margaret Atwood & the 1985 Novel**

Margaret Atwood is a Canadian author best known for writing *The Handmaid's Tale* novel. The following information was gathered from her website (*Margaret Atwood*, 2019a; *Margaret Atwood*, 2019b), unless otherwise noted. Born in 1939, Atwood has been a working author for over half a century. She received her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Toronto in 1961 and her master's from Harvard's Radcliffe College in 1967. While receiving her degrees, she published five poetry collections, but it was not until after her master's degree that she began writing fiction. She published her first novel entitled *The Edible Woman* in 1969 and authored four more books before writing HMT in 1985. Throughout her career, Atwood has published over 40 works, including novels, short fiction, non-fiction, and children's books, and she shows no sign of stopping. Her most recent works include a 2016 novel entitled *Hag-Seed* and a 2016 graphic novel

entitled *Angel Catbird*. Also, because of *HMT*'s ever-growing popularity, the 79-year-old Atwood released a sequel to *HMT* entitled *The Testaments* in September 2019 (Madani, 2018).

### ***Writing HMT***

Atwood drew inspiration from various sources when writing *HMT*, and she incorporated her environmental activism into the novel. Atwood is a vocal advocate for climate change and pollution, and her current Toronto office, O. W. Toad, uses only acid-free paper and does not use air conditioning or plastic water bottles (Field, 2018). In 1985, Atwood was just as passionate about the environment and incorporated the issue into how Gilead was formed. Before Gilead's reign, the United States was faced with a declining birthrate, and pollution and toxic chemicals caused the infertility (Atwood, 1985). When Gilead took over, the society improved the environment by utilizing clean energy and ridding of harmful factories (Atwood, 1985). Gilead aimed to both improve air quality and combat infertility for future generations (Atwood, 1985). Atwood used her passion for the environment to fuel *HMT*'s story, which contributes to the effectiveness of the novel.

Atwood also incorporated her personal experiences into *HMT*. Throughout her life, Atwood has extensively traveled the world, and when she began writing the novel, she was living in West Berlin during the Berlin Wall era (Atwood, 2012). Living in this environment gave Atwood first-hand insight into what a radical government felt like. In her article for *The New York Times*, Atwood (2017) explained, "I experienced the wariness, the feeling of being spied on, the silences, the changes of subject, the oblique ways in which people might convey information, and these had an influence on what I

was writing” (para. 2). Being in this environment provided Atwood’s initial inspiration for Gilead and how someone like June might operate within a radical government. While living in Berlin, Atwood explored world literature to find more examples of real-life dystopias. After leaving Berlin and returning to North America, she furthered her research into historical religious conflicts, conservatism underneath President Ronald Reagan, and totalitarian governments (Atwood, 2017).

Atwood extensively researched while writing *HMT*. In fact, every detail included in the novel is based upon historical fact (Atwood, 2012). Atwood (2012) explained that “nations never build apparently radical forms of government on foundations that aren’t there already” (para. 11). Atwood incorporated practices from many different cultures, including 17th-century Puritans and contemporary Afghanistan (Gilbert, 2017). She also referenced Romania’s Decree 770 that caused a decline in birthrates after the country outlawed contraception and abortion (Gilbert, 2017). The *HMT* novel is considered speculative fiction, which Armstrong (2018) described as “a work that imagines a future that could conceivably happen without any advances in technology from the present” (para. 3). In relying on history, Atwood created a dystopia that feels highly realistic to the reader. All of Gilead has historical precedence, including the concept of a Handmaid, the brutality experienced by citizens, and its radically conservative laws, which contributes to the realism of the story. Atwood’s research allowed her to create a well-constructed dystopia that incorporated her personal passions, first-hand experiences, and research background, making *HMT* a modern classic.

### ***Cultural Impact of Novel***

Upon its initial release, *HMT* received both positive and negative reviews from critics. Johnson (1986) congratulated the novel for having a strong heroine that drives the storyline, and Lehmann-Haupt (1986) described it as a “taut... psychological study” sprinkled with humor (para. 10). On the other hand, some reviewers were harsh, like McCarthy (1986) saying the novel lacks personality and is powerless to scare. Regardless of critics’ points-of-view, however, *HMT* has maintained its relevancy for over 30 years and has impacted individual readers.

Atwood (2012) explained that the 1985 novel has consistently been printed since its publication. Over the years, Atwood has received constant correspondence from fans, including photographs with quotes tattooed on their bodies (Atwood, 2012). While Atwood did not anticipate the novel’s followership (Atwood, 2012), she understands why the story impacts individuals because of its continued relevance. Because of the novel’s historical precedence and feminist appeal, many generations have connected with *HMT*, making the novel a must-read for over 30 years. In fact, it landed on several bestseller’s lists in 2017 (Field, 2018). Field (2018) explained that *HMT* was Amazon’s “most read fiction book on Kindle and Audible in 2017, beating ‘A Game of Thrones’ and all of the ‘Harry Potter’ books” (para. 2). This coincides with Hulu’s 2017 premiere and shows how the television series has increased the novel’s popularity by adapting Atwood’s dystopia into a screenplay.

### ***Previous Adaptations of HMT***

Since its publication, and prior to the Hulu series, Atwood’s novel has been adapted into several different works, including an opera and ballet (Atwood, 2017). The



most notable adaptation, however, is the 1990 film (Schlöndorff, 1990). Produced five years after the novel's release, the *HMT* film was the first attempt to translate *HMT*'s literary dystopia to the big screen. Atwood sold the story's rights to Producer Daniel Wilson in 1986, and Wilson recruited screenplay writer Henry Pinter and director Victor Schlöndorff alongside noteworthy actors like Natasha Richardson (named Kate rather than June), Faye Dunaway (Serena Waterford), and Robert Duvall (Commander Fred Waterford). Although the film featured a well-known cast and production team, it failed in the box office, grossing only \$5 million alongside its \$13 million budget (Gilbert, 2015). The film also received negative reviews from critics and has been relatively forgotten since its premiere in 1990 (Gilbert, 2015). In fact, the film has limited distribution and does not appear on any streaming platforms. Instead, it is only digitally available to purchase on Amazon Prime for \$9.99 (Gilbert, 2015), further stressing the film's unpopularity. Schlöndorff erases the novel's feminist appeal by making the story Hollywood-esque and failing to translate Atwood's descriptives to camera. Overall, it seems that Schlöndorff's adaptation lacks in two key areas: its point-of-view and color scheme.

### ***Point-of-View***

While the novel is praised for its feminist perspective, Schlöndorff erased Kate's story in the film and instead focus on Duvall's Commander Waterford. The Commander is the film's protagonist, and Schlöndorff centers the story around his role in Gilead. Because of this, both Kate's and Serena's storylines revolve around the mysterious, seductive Commander (Schlöndorff, 1990). Schlöndorff even frames Kate and Waterford's relationship as a love story, whereas the novel's storyline is far from it

(Atwood, 1985). Ceremony scenes are romantic, and Schlöndorff relies on Kate and Waterford's erotic, forbidden love to drive the storyline. In posing the Commander-Handmaid relationship as a love story, the film changes the overall premise of the novel and, in turn, erases the female point-of-view.

By focusing on Waterford, the 1990 film barely explores Kate's storyline. Like the Hulu series, the film's opening scene features Kate and her family fleeing Gilead, but in this adaptation, Luke is killed by Guardians (Schlöndorff, 1990). After being captured and separated from her family, Kate's grief and fear are never addressed in the film (Schlöndorff, 1990), creating a disconnect between her character and viewers.

Immediately after arriving in Gilead and being assigned to the Waterfords, Kate is ready for new love and explores her sexual relationships with both the Commander and Nick, the Commander's driver who eventually impregnates her (Atwood, 1985; Schlöndorff, 1990). Schlöndorff erases the powerful heroine Atwood created and presents Kate's story in an incoherent manner. He even changes the ending of the story to where Waterford is stabbed by the power-hungry, attention-seeking Kate, and the story focuses on the Commander's death versus the reasons why Kate, the meant-to-be protagonist, was driven to murder (Schlöndorff, 1990). Because her story features plot holes and an unrealistic portrayal of a woman operating in Gilead, the audience is unable to connect with Kate, therefore losing the feminist essence of the original storyline.

Along with making Commander Waterford the protagonist of the film, Schlöndorff presents the female characters through a male lens. Within the novel, Atwood is adamant about how women are perceived in Gilead. They are not allowed to show any form of sexuality, especially in their physical appearance (Atwood, 1985). In

the film, however, Kate and Serena are nothing but sexualized. Kate is shown naked several times while intimate with the Commander or Nick and even during the Ceremony (Schlöndorff, 1990), which is forbidden in the novel (Atwood, 1985). Serena (Faye Dunaway) is also depicted as the Commander's trophy wife. Her blue dress is rather short, showing off Dunaway's desirable legs, and her hair is tousled and voluminous, adding to her sexuality (Schlöndorff, 1990). This is in complete contrast to Serena's novel persona (Atwood, 1985) and shows how the female characters are seen from a male perspective. In the film, Schlöndorff depicts Kate and Serena as mere accessories to Commander Waterford's Gilead, taking away the powerful feminine perspective in Atwood's novel.

While the point-of-view is shifted in the 1990 film, it does reflect Hollywood at the time. In fact, the film barely made it to production, with studios remarking that a female-driven film had no place in Hollywood (Gilbert, 2015). This explains why the film focuses on Commander Waterford because Schlöndorff wanted to capitalize on Duvall's popularity and appeal to a wider audience. Also, in reflecting Hollywood, few women worked on the 1990 film in part because men dominated the entertainment industry (O'Brien, 2014). O'Brien (2014) described external factors that women face in the entertainment industry, including long hours, gender bias, and flat-out discrimination. This gives insight into why the *HMT* film was seen through a male lens because men dominated the authoritative roles (Schlöndorff, 1990), which consequently removed the female perspective apparent in the novel and replaced it with the male point-of-view, especially in regards to female sexuality.

### *Color Scheme*

While the 1990 film failed to capture the novel's feminist essence, it also failed to select the appropriate color scheme. In their article discussing color's role in marketing, Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained the impact color has on the consumer and the importance of selecting the correct color. Consumers examine colors using various categories, including hue and vibrancy, and depending on the shade, color combinations can be either pleasing or displeasing to the eye (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Production designer Thomas A. Walsh uses the basic colors established in Atwood's novel and follows a similar color scheme as the Hulu series (black, blue, red, brown, white, green, and grey) (Schlöndorff, 1990). While Walsh successfully utilized some of the colors throughout the film, his red and blue color selections contributed to the film's downfall. Because the story features Handmaids in red and Commander's Wives in blue (Atwood, 1985; Schlöndorff, 1990), Walsh needed to carefully consider the hue, vibrancy, and shade of the two colors and the effect they would have on screen. Unfortunately, he decided on two inappropriate colors: scarlet red and vibrant blue.

Walsh incorporated red and blue into both his costumes and set design (Schlöndorff, 1990), and the two vibrant colors distract the viewer throughout the film. For his costume design, Walsh fully dressed Kate in scarlet red attire. Kate is seen in nothing but red, and her veil, dress, and shoes are all the same shade and vibrancy (Schlöndorff, 1990). Serena is similarly dressed in a vibrant blue dress, while shorter than Kate's (Schlöndorff, 1990), and her bare skin and blonde hair provide only some relief from the vibrant shade. However, because Kate and Serena interact regularly throughout the film (Schlöndorff, 1990), their costumes compete with one another because the colors

are on opposite sides of the color wheel (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). This distracts the viewer from the dialogue because both costumes demand the viewer's attention.

While the costumes are distracting in themselves, Walsh's set design also presents challenges when utilizing red and blue. Some set designs, like the outdoor environment and the Waterford's living room, are effective because Walsh utilizes a neutral palette (Schlöndorff, 1990). However, when Walsh incorporates red and blue into the set, whether through a prop or the set itself, the set design is distracting. For example, in a pivotal scene in which Kate first visits Waterford's neutrally colored office, Walsh features a vibrant blue cot on the office floor (Schlöndorff, 1990). While the cot has no significance within the scene, its color distracts from the dialogue. This is just one example of the improper use of color within the film and illustrates how an *HMT* adaptation must consider the color scheme's effect on its overall design aesthetic.

### ***Significance of the Film Adaptation***

While the 1990 film was unsuccessful in its execution, it provides important insight into why Hulu's adaptation is successful. First, Atwood's novel is too complex to fit a film format. Schlöndorff attempts to establish Atwood's well-constructed Gilead in a mere 108 minutes. This time frame caused them to rush character developments and omit important storylines that erased the essence of Atwood's novel. Next, the film presents *HMT* from a male point-of-view because of their male-dominated production team. By not hiring women in dominant roles, they consequently removed the female perspective from the film and could not accurately portray the women of Gilead. Lastly, the film's color scheme distracted from the screenplay by incorporating improper tones. Walsh needed to carefully consider his color selections and how they would translate on camera.

These three instances contributed to the film's failure and prevented Schlöndorff from successfully adapting Atwood's novel on a visual platform. Luckily, the film's failures provided a blueprint for Miller and explains why Hulu's *HMT* is the most successful adaptation yet.

### **Success of the Hulu Series**

Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* (*HMT*) has consistently grown in popularity since its premiere in 2017. Created by Bruce Miller, the series has expanded Atwood's dystopia throughout three seasons (36 episodes) and has maintained viewership since its pilot. *HMT* has received numerous awards and nominations from the Television Academy. For its first two seasons, *HMT* received 44 Emmy nominations and 14 overall wins, including Outstanding Drama Series in 2017 (*Emmys*, n.d.). *HMT*'s Season 3 was ineligible for the 2019 Emmys because of its delayed premiere (Elber, 2019). The series has also received five Golden Globe nominations and two overall wins, including the 2018 Best Television Series--Drama (*Golden Globes*, n.d.). *HMT*'s award recognition gives insight into the series' popularity because it has attracted a strong viewership and elevated the storyline in a cinematic way. *HMT* has taken advantage of its streamed platform and transformed Atwood's novel into a must-watch series. Seemingly, Hulu's *HMT* thrives in four key areas: its streaming platform, feminist perspective, continued relevance, and color scheme.

### ***Streaming Platform***

Streamed media has dramatically shifted the television viewing experience away from a traditional broadcasting model, and many individuals have canceled their cable or satellite providers and opted to exclusively stream content (Tefertiller, 2018). Tefertiller

(2018) deems these individuals as “cord-cutters” to symbolize this shift to Internet-based television. Because of streamed media’s popularity, many streaming platforms have emerged, including Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu. Each of these outlets provide a subscription service, movies and television on demand, and their own original content. Hulu, however, has adopted its own unique business model for its subscribers, providing both on-demand content and weekly-scheduled programming.

**Hulu’s Background.** Launching in 2008, Hulu is the “leading premium streaming service offering live and on-demand TV and movies, with and without commercials, both in and outside the home” (*Hulu Press*, n.d., para. 1). Hulu combines various TV experiences, providing viewers with access to current episodes, on-demand series and movies, and its own original content (*Hulu Press*, n.d.). Hulu also has a live-TV option in which premium subscribers can get access to live TV and record programs (*Hulu Press*, n.d.). While Hulu is often an underestimated TV service, its streaming model provides major benefits and is worthy of consideration.

Sanson and Steirer (2019) explained that Hulu is a major competitor within the streaming service ecosystem for its ability to combine both a traditional television model with a streaming model (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). Hulu partners with broadcast networks, like *NBC* and *ABC*, to stream past series and their recent content (*Hulu Press*, n.d.). While the service streams entire series like *Seinfeld*, it also uploads new episodes for current shows one day after its premiere on the broadcast network (*Hulu Press*, n.d.). For example, *ABC*’s *The Bachelor* broadcasts Monday nights, and Hulu subscribers can watch the latest episode as early as Tuesday morning. This model grants subscribers access to current episodes while still remaining “cord-cutters” (Tefertiller, 2018).

Hulu adopts a similar streaming model for its original series (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). Rather than uploading full seasons, Hulu staggers release dates for shows like *The Path*, *Difficult People*, and *The Handmaid's Tale* (Hulu Press, n.d.) to create anticipation for future content (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). This promotes viewer engagement by sparking “water-cooler talk, fan-produced episode breakdowns and reviews, repeat viewing of previous weeks’ episodes, and ritualized communal viewing arrangements” (Sanson & Steirer, 2019, p. 9). Hulu is also strategic in its release dates for episodes and even produces “Inside the Episode” videos to give viewers a deeper understanding and behind-the-scenes look at the series (Hulu Press, n.d.). While it has fewer original series than Netflix and Amazon, Hulu has begun to rival both services (Sanson & Steirer, 2019), especially by streaming *HMT*.

**Why *HMT* Belongs on Hulu.** Hulu’s popularity greatly increased in 2017 when it issued a straight-to-series order for *HMT* (Hulu Press, 2016). In fact, Ziv (2018) explained that Hulu has increased its subscribers by 40 percent since April 2017, which coincides with *HMT*’s premiere, and *HMT* was one of the top three dramas subscribers viewed that same year. Also, *HMT* made history by being the first streamed series to win an Emmy for its overall production (Sanson & Steirer, 2019), which greatly boosted Hulu’s popularity. Currently, *HMT* is the most-watched series among Hulu’s original content (Hulu Press, n.d.). While Hulu benefits from the series’ popularity, *HMT* equally benefits from Hulu through its streaming model, mature rating, and series format.

**Streaming Model.** *HMT* is well-suited for a streaming platform and benefits from Hulu’s aesthetic. Miller creates high-quality content in a one-hour episode format, allowing him to show more content within fewer episodes. *HMT* limits its episode count,



releasing only 10 episodes for Season 1 and 13 episodes each for its second and third seasons. During an *HMT* season, Hulu releases one episode each Wednesday, relying on a traditional broadcasting model for its release dates (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). However, fewer episodes means a shortened airtime, and viewers often wait 10 months between seasons, which typically premiere in late April and end in mid-June or July, aside from Season 3's delayed premiere. To combat this long waiting period, *HMT* actually releases multiple episodes for a season premiere. Hulu released three episodes for its first season premiere, two for its second, and three for its third. This satisfies the viewers' anticipation leading up to each season by giving them more content upfront. After the first week, *HMT* resumes its traditional weekly schedule.

Staggering *HMT*'s release increases fan engagement as they anticipate next week's episode. *HMT* fans have created over nine podcasts devoted to recapping episodes and diving further into the series' production elements (*PlayerFM*, 2019). Fans are also active on social media discussing each episode and speculating on future seasons. This falls in line with the benefits Sanson and Steirer (2019) described that allow Hulu to compete with other streaming platforms. Staggering episode releases creates a familiar anticipation for viewers that increases their buy-in to the series.

***Mature Rating.*** *HMT* has a mature rating that allows Miller to fully encapsulate Atwood's Gilead. The themes of the show warrant a mature rating, as episodes often feature intense brutality, sexual assault, harsh language, and violence. Hulu allows its original series to feature mature content, flashing this warning before each episode: "The following is intended only for mature audiences. Viewer discretion advised."

While *HMT* has freedom to explore mature themes, Miller only includes content that enhances the storyline. Ceremony scenes are common in the series and feature sexual assaults that may be intense for viewers. However, Miller sets boundaries for these scenes by the actors remaining fully clothed. This helps express that the Ceremony is like a procedure and shows that Miller is intentional about utilizing mature content. Furthermore, because Gilead incorporates new language, such as “Blessed be the fruit,” and upholds strict guidelines for its Handmaids, swearing is uncommon in the series, but Miller effectively utilizes foul language in crucial scenes. For example, in the finale of Season 2, when Commander Waterford makes an unwanted sexual advance at June, she remarks, “Go fuck yourself, Fred” (Miller & Barker, 2018, “The Word,” 39:05). This phrase holds power in the scene because Handmaids are forbidden from verbally attacking Commanders, therefore enhancing the storyline through a simple swear word. These examples express the intentionality behind *HMT*’s mature rating; they strategize their sensitive material to advance the storyline rather than for mere amusement.

If *HMT* were broadcast on a platform that did not allow mature content, the series would be very different. Ceremony scenes would be implied through innuendos rather than the series showing the act. Brutality scenes would be simplified and restricted. June’s finale line attacking the Commander would change to, “Screw you, Fred,” or “I’ve had it!” In order to fully encapsulate Atwood’s Gilead, Miller needed the freedom to show the totalitarian government in its entirety. Miller limits viewers’ exposure to sensitive content but must utilize it when necessary.

***Series Format.*** *HMT*’s series format provides the viewer with a deeper, more complex look into Gilead and its residents because Miller can stretch content across

multiple episodes, expanding Atwood's work. The first season closely follows Atwood's novel, and the first words muttered by June in Gilead, "A chair, a table, a lamp," (Miller & Morano, 2017, "Offred," 4:50), are even lines directly quoted from Chapter 2 (Atwood, 1985, p. 7). Also, the novel and the first season both end on a major cliffhanger in which June is thrown into a black van (Atwood, 1985; Miller & Skogland, 2017, "Night"). Atwood's novel ends there, leaving readers with many unanswered questions, but Miller satisfies these questions by expanding the story into another season. This shows the benefit of *HMT*'s series format because it expands the story in new directions, creating a deeper, more complex Gilead.

Hulu's *HMT* has developed multi-dimensional individuals. Perhaps the most fascinating character arc of the series happens to be Serena. Throughout *HMT*'s three seasons, Serena has had many different roles and emotions within Gilead, especially after losing her "daughter," Nicole, to Canada (Miller, 2017-present). Serena actually plays a role in Nicole's escape by allowing June and the child to flee the Waterford residence (Miller & Skogland, 2017, "Night"). This decision creates an interesting, multi-layered Serena in Season 3, as she simultaneously accepts and regrets her decision to let Nicole go (Miller, 2017-present). Examining Serena's arc shows the complexity of Miller's characters, and by extending their storylines throughout multiple seasons, their stories become even more complicated.

Along with creating complex characters, Hulu's *HMT* also explores other storylines. In Atwood's novel, the reader only experiences Offred's point-of-view (Atwood, 1985), but by expanding the story to several seasons, Miller has created multiple storylines, even outside of Gilead. Within the novel, the reader never learns of

Luke's whereabouts (Atwood, 1985), but the series devotes a whole episode in Season 1 featuring Luke, June's husband, and his escape to Canada (Maxcy & Sigismondi, 2017, "The Other Side"). Throughout its three seasons, *HMT* sets many scenes in Canada that follow Luke and other Gilead refugees, like Moira, Emily, and baby Nicole (Miller, 2017-present). This provides a different perspective for *HMT* because these characters' main objective is protesting Gilead. This also gives the series a multi-dimensional look at Atwood's story and the ability to fully develop other *HMT* characters beyond June.

Along with exploring Canadian storylines, Hulu's *HMT* also features backstories of characters in Gilead, including June, the Waterfords, and Aunt Lydia (Miller, 2017-present). This provides the viewer with interesting insight into these characters and adds to their complexity. For example, Season 3 dives into Aunt Lydia's backstory to explain her motivation behind upholding Gilead's laws (Maxcy & Barker, 2019, "Unfit"). Before Gilead, Lydia was an elementary school teacher for many underprivileged children (Maxcy & Barker, 2019, "Unfit"). She became attached to one child in her class whose mother was not properly taking care of him, and Lydia was driven to call Child Protective Services on the mother (Maxcy & Barker, 2019, "Unfit"). This inspired Lydia to play an active role in children's upbringings in Gilead. In order to provide the best possible environment for Gilead's children, Lydia, as an Aunt, holds Handmaids to high standards to create a stable home environment (Miller, 2017-present). Diving into backstories like Aunt Lydia's is an interesting spin on *HMT*'s story and is another great advantage to a series format.

In sum, Hulu and *HMT* both benefit from their relationship. *HMT* has greatly boosted Hulu's viewership and allowed the streaming service to rival both Netflix and

Amazon Prime (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). In turn, Hulu benefits *HMT* by allowing Miller to fully explore sensitive content and expand on Atwood's novel. Hulu's business model also creates a strong viewership for the series by staggering its release dates to incorporate a traditional broadcast model (Sanson & Steirer, 2019). Through Hulu, Miller has enhanced Atwood's dystopia by adapting *HMT* into a series, diving deeper into Gilead's society, and expanding the story beyond June's journey. Because of its platform, *HMT* has reached a wide audience by capturing Atwood's essence in a way that benefits from a series format.

### ***Feminist Perspective***

*HMT* promotes a feminist perspective because it has maintained focus on its central heroine, June, capturing a strong female perspective. McCreesh (2017) described June as the feminist that the world needs and remarks, "If [she] can do it, then so can we" (para. 7). Others describe June as an ordinary person the audience can relate to (*PBS NewsHour*, 2017). To increase her relatability, Hulu even reveals her name to be June Osborne in the pilot episode (Miller & Morano, 2017, "Offred"), whereas Atwood (1985) never reveals Offred's real name. Identifying her as June allows the audience to connect with the series' main character in a deeper way than the novel could afford. This stresses how Miller and his team captured and expanded the feminist essence established in Atwood's novel. However, the series' feminism extends beyond the storyline and into Miller's overall approach to the series.

**Recruiting Females.** In first adapting *HMT* as a Hulu original series, Miller was afraid that he could not express a female perspective by being a man (Hill, 2017). In an interview with Hill (2017), Miller expressed, "There are aspects of that you just can't

understand being a boy” (para. 9). To combat his male condition, Miller recruited a female-dominated production team of writers, directors, producers, and designers. In fact, for *HMT*’s first season, seven of the 10 writers and four of the five directors were women (Brown, 2017; *PBS NewsHour*, 2017). Miller explained that he simply “hired the best person for each job” but that he wanted to represent both women and men “sensibly, accurately, and compassionately” throughout his production team (quoted in Hill, 2017, para. 12). This approach is in sharp contrast to the 1990 film in which the production team was predominantly men and the characters were presented through a male lens (Schlöndorff, 1990). Miller corrected this by making women the driving forces behind the series to ensure that the female perspective was present. In his first writers’ meeting, Miller even introduced himself by saying, “Hi, I’m Bruce Miller, and I’m the show-runner, and I have got one penis too many. But I’ve hired a lot of women” (quoted in Brown, 2017, para. 10).

Along with hiring women for the production team, Miller recruited accomplished actors for the series. Elisabeth Moss, most notably known for her roles in *Mad Men* and *Top of the Lake*, has received recognition for her portrayal of June, including a 2017 Emmy for Outstanding Lead Actress (*Emmys*, n.d.) and a 2018 Golden Globe in the same category (*Golden Globes*, n.d.). Moss also serves as an executive producer for *HMT* and was involved in several decisions regarding the series’ overall direction. Along with Moss, the series features a slew of strong female actors, including Yvonne Strahovski (Serena), Ann Dowd (Aunt Lydia), Samira Wiley (Moirra), Amanda Brugel (Rita), and Alexis Bledel (Emily). Like Moss, these women have received Emmy and Golden Globe recognition for their character portrayals, including Bledel’s 2017 Emmy for Outstanding

Guest Actress, Dowd's 2017 Emmy for Outstanding Supporting Actress, and Wiley's 2018 Emmy for Outstanding Guest Actress, among many other Emmy and Golden Globe nominations for these women (*Emmys*, n.d.; *Golden Globes*, n.d.). Miller also casted strong male actors, including Joseph Fiennes (Commander Fred Waterford), Max Minghella (Nick), O-T Fagbenle (Luke), and Bradley Whitford (Commander Joseph Lawrence).

**Series' Work Environment.** Alongside recruiting a strong cast for *HMT*, Miller created a supportive working environment that contributes to the series' feminism. In an interview with *The Hollywood Reporter* (2018), Moss said, "I work in a really incredibly collaborative environment and atmosphere on my show that I have never experienced" (1:56). This collaboration is achieved by giving women a voice on set.

Miller does not sexualize the female actresses and instead portrays the women of Gilead in a raw form. Moss actually films the series without makeup to allow her subtle acting cues to be captured on camera (Dockterman, 2017). In doing this, the audience experiences every emotion felt by June, including angry twitches, a flushed face, and paleness from fear (Dockterman, 2017). Along with filming without makeup, Moss has a nudity clause in her contract, meaning that she has 100% approval over any nude footage shown in the series and that she must approve every shot before it can be sent to editing (*The Hollywood Reporter*, 2018). This allows Moss freedom to omit footage with unflattering angles and prevent overexposure. It also allows her nudity within the series to be tasteful and a way to elevate the storyline rather than simply for a mature rating. Moss explained that this clause was something Miller and other executive producers provided her instead of her having to stipulate it in her contract (*The Hollywood*

*Reporter*, 2018). This shows how collaborative and supportive *HMT*'s workplace environment is, which extends its ability to capture the female perspective because the females working on the series have their voices heard.

### ***Continued Relevance***

Even 30 years after its first publication, *HMT* has maintained its relevancy within Western society, largely in part because of Atwood's extensive research. By incorporating historical events, the novel's storyline has applied to various political atmospheres and appealed to many generations of readers. In adapting the novel into a screenplay, Miller wanted to update the storyline to include modern inventions and more diversity, while also staying true to the story's political symmetry. Therefore, the Hulu series maintains *HMT*'s relevancy by both modernizing the storyline and mirroring American politics.

**Modernizing Storyline.** Hulu's *HMT* subtly updates Atwood's vision to make the story modern, fresh, and inclusive. One way Miller updates the series is through technology references. Atwood explained that while she was writing about the future in her 1985 novel, she could not predict advances in technology (quoted in Dockterman, 2017). "I wrote that thing on an old typewriter in Berlin. We didn't even have personal computers yet," Atwood mentioned (quoted in Dockterman, 2017, para. 18). To update the technology, Miller incorporates inventions like Uber, Tinder, and Craigslist into flashback scenes of June's life before Gilead. This update brings a fresh feel to the storyline and helps viewers connect with the story.

Another variation from the novel is the Waterfords' ages. In Atwood's novel, Fred and Serena are in their 50's, which is a large distance from 33-year-old Offred



(Atwood, 1985). For the series, Miller made the Waterfords younger, with Fred in his early 40s and Serena in her 30s alongside June. In an interview with Mulkerrins (2018), Yvonne Strahovski (Serena) explained that this change was to create more tension between her character and June. “Being the same age adds an extra layer of jealousy and a devastation. Here’s a woman who is my age, who can do the things that I want to do-- i.e. have children--but I can’t,” Strahovski explained (quoted in Mulkerrins, 2018, para. 13). This update has provided a complex narrative between June and Serena because there is constant tension. This feud extends to all three seasons as both characters navigate their complicated relationship (Miller, 2017-present).

The final major update to the storyline is the addition of diversity. Within Atwood (1985), African Americans, called the “Children of Ham,” are relocated to racially segregated settlements in the Midwest. Therefore, all men and women in Gilead are white, and little diversity is represented (Atwood, 1985). In adapting the novel into a Hulu series, diversity must be represented within *HMT* to maintain cultural relevance. Klein (2011) explained that television is an avenue that is used not only for viewer amusement but also as a way to present and negotiate contemporary social issues. *HMT* greatly follows this notion by featuring a more diverse cast. Moss explained, “We wanted the show to be very relatable. We wanted people to see themselves in it” (quoted in Dockterman, 2017). To achieve this, the series strategically casted minority individuals and gave them prominent roles in Gilead. In updating the storyline, the series features June in an interracial marriage with Luke, and they share an interracial child, Hannah (Miller, 2017-present). While this family makeup adds to *HMT*’s diversity, introducing

these social issues within television is often controversial (Klein, 2011), and *HMT* is no exception.

Many individuals have criticized *HMT*, saying that the show erases the presence of racial bias within society (Phoenix, 2018). For example, *HMT* features many Handmaids of color, yet Gilead never addresses the concept of these Handmaids birthing an interracial child for a white couple (Miller, 2017-present). In reality, this might pose issues for a radically conservative government, yet it is never addressed in the series. Phoenix (2018) praised the series for featuring people of color as prominent figures but wishes *HMT* would explore issues of racism, particularly in regards to June and Luke's marriage. On the other hand, De Souza (2017) justified Miller's choice to not focus on racism to greater emphasize gender bias within Gilead. While the series may lack in its acknowledgement of racism, it has still opened a dialogue among viewers about the issue. Klein (2011) viewed this form of criticism as a compliment to producers who incorporate social issues into storylines, inspiring an open discussion from viewers rather than telling them what to think.

Along with representing racial minorities, *HMT* includes representations of the LGBT community. In Gilead, homosexuals are referred to as "gender-traitors" and are executed for their sexual orientation (Atwood, 1985; Miller, 2017-present). While Atwood coined this concept, the original storyline does not include any homosexual characters (Atwood, 1985). In updating the storyline, however, Miller (2017-present) includes two lesbian characters, Moira and Emily, in prominent roles as Handmaids. Before Gilead, Moira was in a same-sex relationship and had volunteered as a surrogate for a couple, which qualified her to be a Handmaid (Miller, 2017-present). Similarly,

Emily was in a same-sex marriage and had given birth to their son, Oliver (Miller, 2017-present). While in Gilead, both Moira and Emily keep their sexual orientations quiet in fear of being executed (Miller, 2017-present). Within the three seasons, both characters eventually escape Gilead (Miller, 2017-present), and Emily even reunites with her wife and son in Canada. Featuring these storylines contributes to the inclusivity of the *HMT* series and creates a fresh, modern feel for the storyline.

**Mirroring American Politics.** *HMT* has been relevant through various political atmospheres, largely in part to Atwood basing the novel off historical fact (Atwood, 2012). This makes the story relatively plausible, as the events have, in fact, happened before. While the 1985 novel was considered speculative fiction, Hulu's *HMT* entered a not-so-speculative arena after the 2016 Presidential Election. The series' mirroring of political events represents a trend in popular television, which Klein (2011) explained can improve a show's relevancy and impact on audiences. Klein (2011) even encouraged the notion, saying that entertainment platforms should incorporate informative elements into their storylines.

Armstrong (2018) explained that *HMT* mirrors "the United States' embrace of conservatism" (para. 4) through the presidencies of both Ronald Reagan and Donald Trump. While some view *HMT* to be a direct response to the Trump administration, Season 1 actually began filming before the election results (Dockterman, 2017). Moss explained that the team behind *HMT* was hesitant if the public would buy into the story but, on November 9, 2016, the day Trump won the 2016 election, the story became "a hell of a lot more plausible" (quoted in Dockterman, 2017, para. 15).

Marghuti and Johnson (2018) explained that *HMT* arrived as a symbol of caution and foreshadowing within the first 100 days of Trump's presidency. Coinciding with the United States' current political atmosphere, *HMT* has explored several news-related topics, including the attack on women's rights, the #MeToo movement, and family separation. In fact, the series' overall premise, like Gilead stripping away women's rights, Handmaids being forced into ceremonies, and Handmaids being separated from their children (Miller, 2017-present), makes it almost impossible to avoid these issues. Mirroring these political themes has both contributed to the relevance and popularity of the series and also inspired viewers, especially women, to take political action.

Marghuti and Johnson (2018) deemed *HMT* "the symbol of the new Anti-Trump/Pence feminist resistance" (p. 184). Many women have dressed up as Handmaids, wearing long red cloaks and make-shift "wings" during political protests. This outfit is largely inspired by the costume featured in the series, and these "Handmaids" have appeared at several recent protests, including protests for abortion rights in Texas (Gilbert, 2017), Vice President Mike Pence's Colorado rally (Lewis, 2019), and, most notably, outside the Supreme Court for Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing (Lewis, 2019). Handmaid protests have even appeared at women's rights rallies in Ireland and Argentina (Malkin, 2018). These protests were popularized because of the Hulu adaptation, as viewers of the series have connected to the plotline and taken political action. In doing this, viewers have incorporated *HMT*'s costume design into the real world. While the costume itself is recognizable, however, another element is also present during the protests: the color red.

### ***Color Scheme***

Hulu's *HMT* has strongly elevated the storyline through its use of color. Most research has examined color from a marketing standpoint to elevate a brand, product, or advertisement. Color may have a similar effect when utilized in television. Just like a consumer, television viewers respond positively and negatively to color schemes that affect their "moods, emotions, feelings, sensations, and perceptions" (Singh & Srivastava, 2011, p. 199), therefore impacting their buy-in to a particular series. The entertainment industry should pay special attention to the color schemes utilized in their content because they can be "employed as an effective communication tool [and have] clever and persuasive influence" (Singh & Srivastava, 2011, p. 200). Mohebbi (2014) described three functions of color: "voluntary or involuntary attention, aesthetics, and communication" (p. 98). In relating color marketing research to a television series, *HMT* effectively utilizes their seven-color scheme (black, blue, red, brown, white, green, and grey) throughout the series' production elements. Miller and the production team intentionally selected colors that would have a positive impact on viewers and enhance the storyline. *HMT*'s color scheme relates to the functions described by Mohebbi (2014) because it affects viewers' behavior, illustrates a certain aesthetic, and communicates information through metaphors.

**Viewer Behavior.** In Western culture, color plays a vital role in a consumer's daily life, and individuals respond to color often subconsciously (Mohebbi, 2014). Color strongly influences a person's psychological and physiological experiences by interconnecting them (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Color can appeal to a person's emotions, which releases hormones on a physiological level (Labrecque et al., 2013). For

example, advertising campaigns often incorporate red and blue to increase impulse buying (Mohebbi, 2014). The color red raises blood pressure and “excites the brain waves that contribute in stimulating people to make quick decisions” (Singh & Srivastava, 2011, p. 201), while blue lowers blood pressure and increases confidence in the consumer (Singh & Srivastava, 2011, p. 202). Advertisers can use both red and blue as a ying-yang effect to influence a consumer’s purchasing decisions. *HMT* also utilizes red and blue for the costumes of two important rankings in Gilead: Handmaids and Commander’s Wives (Miller, 2017-present). Featuring Handmaids in red and Wives in blue creates psychological and physiological experiences for the viewer, conveying the ever-present tension between the two rankings.

On a physiological level, colors also influence a consumer’s focus by either relaxing or irritating the eyes (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). A visually appealing color palette may relax the eye, while a displeasing palette irritates it. This is strongly illustrated by the 1990 film, which features a scarlet red and vibrant blue color palette (Schlöndorff, 1990). By utilizing an inappropriate color scheme, each film scene featuring red and blue irritates the viewer’s eyes, creating an unwanted physiological response and affecting his or her buy-in to the film. Hulu’s adaptation, however, utilizes appropriate colors that create positive responses in viewers, showing the intentionality Miller and the production team placed behind their color selections. The series’ use of color positively impacts viewers by relaxing the eye, which is achieved through the color scheme’s aesthetic.

**Aesthetic.** To positively influence viewers, producers should give careful consideration to the aesthetic of their color scheme. Singh and Srivastava (2011)

explained that consumers judge a color palette based upon hue, shade, and vibrancy. These categories contribute to the psychological and physiological behaviors of consumers that influence their purchasing decisions, and they have a similar effect on a series' color scheme.

In selecting its color palette, *HMT* gave careful consideration to hue, shade, and vibrancy. Reed Morano, who directed the first three episodes of Season 1, established the overall color scheme for *HMT* (Yuan, 2017). In an interview with Yuan (2017), Morano described that she wanted the series to feel like an “old photograph, where some colors just pop more than others” (para. 12). She diligently selected colors that would contribute to this aesthetic, beginning with red and blue. While she had many design inspirations, Morano based *HMT*'s red and blue from “a photo of red flowers against a blue background, the red--vibrant like lifeblood-- and the blue--bold and verging on peacock” (Morano quoted in Hill, 2017, para. 26). These two tones conveyed constant tension, which would add to the already-present tension between Handmaid June and Wife Serena, who would wear these colors (Hill, 2017). While they are highly noticeable colors, their intensities are subtle, allowing them to attract the viewer's attention without becoming displeasing to the eye.

Along with considering hue, shade, and vibrancy, producers should also evaluate the color palette's overall effect. Advertising campaigns, as well as television series, must strike a balance between hue, shade, and vibrancy to create a color scheme that is both complementary and visually appealing (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that in marketing, consumers respond more positively to color palettes when advertisements contain complementary colors. *HMT* capitalizes on this by carefully

considering each color within its palette. While red and blue are prominent colors with the series, they supplement the more neutral tones in the palette (black, white, green, brown, and grey). Within a scene, viewers focus on the red and blue colors because Handmaids and Wives are important figures in each scene. However, the colors also complement the other character rankings, like Commanders in black or Aunts in brown, leaving room for those colors to equally have an impact. Because of this, *HMT*'s color palette is visually appealing regardless of the color combination present in a scene, thus enhancing the effectiveness of the series.

Along with selecting the proper colors, *HMT* extends its color palette's aesthetic to every production element within the series. Atwood's novel establishes a general color scheme but incorporates other colors into Gilead, like yellow, orange, and purple (Atwood, 1985). Miller, however, utilizes the seven colors throughout *HMT*'s entire production, including the costumes, set design, and prop curation. The series rarely features other colors in Gilead and instead relies mainly on the seven colors. Every costume, set, and prop follows this color scheme, lending endless color combinations. In limiting their color palette, Morano created a strong aesthetic for *HMT* that enhances its storyline. In turn, color becomes a driving force within the series.

**Metaphorical Significance.** In following a seven-color scheme, *HMT* intentionally selected specific colors for its costumes, sets, and props. Therefore, Miller and the production team utilize color with a purpose. By using a limited color palette, the production elements become interconnected. Red objects become associated with Handmaids and blue with Wives, thus creating meaning within the series. In doing this,



*HMT*'s color palette is packed with metaphorical significance, which is consistent with marketing research.

Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that color can be a powerful subliminal influence by creating new meanings. Just like color physically influences a consumer, it also conveys certain messages. Each color can have individual meaning within a color palette (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). For example, red can convey danger, passion, power, or anger, whereas blue is often associated with trust, tranquility, or royalty (Singh & Srivastava, 2011). By including certain colors, advertisers can transmit subliminal messages to a consumer. *HMT* casts a similar effect on its viewers, most notably through its costume design. Labrecque et al. (2013) explained that “religious and governmental bodies use color to denote power and social roles” (p. 188). *Gilead* is similar, assigning Handmaids red, Wives blue, men black, newborns white, Marthas green, Aunts brown, and Econowives grey (Miller, 2017-present). By assigning a color to each ranking in *Gilead*, the color's meaning influences the characters. For example, within *Gilead*, Handmaids are most likely to resist the regime (Miller, 2017-present). Because red is metaphorically associated with danger and other similar adjectives, Handmaids as a whole are often associated with dangerous acts. Attaching color meanings to each character affects a viewer's perception of the character rankings, making the series' color scheme an influential element.

While each color implies its own metaphors, a color palette also conveys important messages. Combining certain colors within an advertisement can influence the overall message (Labrecque et al., 2013). For example, combining a dangerous red with a trustworthy blue can influence a consumer to make a risky decision (Mohebbi, 2014).

*HMT*'s color palette has a similar effect. Although they remain fairly separate in Gilead, Handmaid-Wife alliances are powerful forces within the series. The audience sees this in Season 2 when June and Serena become allies to help baby Nicole escape (Miller & Barker, 2018, "The Word"). As a Handmaid, June is known for her dangerous antics, but in combining forces with a trustworthy Wife, she is able to smuggle Nicole out of Gilead. This example shows how color associations work together within *HMT* and how a costume's color can influence the storyline. However, within *HMT*, color's metaphorical influence extends to every element of the series. Although the costume design is the most recognizable use of color, the set design and props are equally worthy of consideration.

*HMT*'s set design expresses metaphors in a powerful way. For example, during one of June's escapes in Season 2, she flees to a red brick house (Chang & Podeswa, 2018, "The Last Ceremony"). In associating red with danger, the audience is subliminally influenced to expect negative consequences at the house. Similar to set designs, the props are also packed with metaphors. For example, although reading is outlawed in Gilead, June uses a red pen to edit a speech, a dangerous act for a Handmaid (Maxcy & Skogland, 2018, "After"). These are just two of the many metaphors the production elements express within *HMT*, and they apply to just one of the seven available colors. This analysis utilizes color's metaphorical influence to examine how each color (black, blue, red, brown, white, green, and grey) impacts the storyline, specifically through the series' production elements.

### **Production Elements**

*HMT*'s color scheme is best understood through an examination of the series' production elements. To fully grasp the use of color, it is important to note the

intentionality and thoughtful-execution that went into creating the world of Gilead, particularly through its costume design, set design, and cinematography. All three elements are crucial to understanding this project because they visually express *HMT*'s color scheme and combine the colors in meaningful ways. This section discusses each element in terms of its recognition, execution, and color utilization. The following background information, in turn, sets a foundation for further understanding this project.

### ***Costume Design***

*HMT*'s costume design is well-noted among viewers for its seamless designs and interesting appeal. Ane Crabtree, the series' costume designer, intricately designed each ranking's costume to cast a certain aesthetic and utilize the color scheme. Crabtree has been recognized for her work on *HMT*, receiving both a 2017 and 2018 Emmy nomination for "Outstanding Sci-Fi Costumes" (*Emmys*, n.d.). After a successful run as costume designer, however, Crabtree left *HMT* after its second season (White & Gleaner, 2018) and handed her title to Natalie Bronfman. While Bronfman designed Season 3's costumes, Crabtree's aesthetic continues to drive the series, especially in regards to color.

**Costume Manufacturing.** Crabtree and her design team worked tirelessly to bring *HMT*'s costumes to life. In an interview with Wright and Soichet (2018), Crabtree explained that *HMT*'s costume department makes over 90 percent of the costumes in their Toronto studio. Working with a 20 person team, members divide their time between sewing, aging or dying material, knitting, constructing head wear, and tailoring (Collins, 2018). There is even one team devoted specifically to Elisabeth Moss's costumes (Collins, 2018). Because of a demanding film schedule, Crabtree focused on multiple

episodes in order to create cohesive designs (Collins, 2018). To achieve this, Crabtree established universal guidelines for *HMT*'s costumes.

In terms of the overall design, Crabtree and the production team established three design guidelines. First, the costumes could not have traditional hardware, like buttons or zippers, in an effort to make Gilead's uniforms unique. This guideline is very important to the series because it removes familiarity for the actors and the audience (Hill, 2017) . Second, the costumes needed to be weather-appropriate because of extreme weather in Toronto, which can range "from over 100 degrees in July to [negative] 30 in February" (Crabtree quoted in Collins, 2018, para. 44). To adapt the costumes to different temperatures, Crabtree and her team sewed a sporty Gortex inside different costumes to keep the actors warm and is then removable for the summer months (Wright & Soichet, 2018). Lastly, in brainstorming different designs, Crabtree "forced herself into the mindset of a man tasked with remaking the world in the way he saw fit" (Hill, 2017, para. 17) because the design concepts needed to reflect the ideas of the Commanders. Because Commanders created Gilead's society, the men were essentially responsible for creating each ranking's costume. By thinking like a Commander, rather than an accomplished costume designer, Crabtree casted a cohesive design aesthetic for the series.

**Uniformity.** Along with establishing guidelines for the costume manufacturing, Crabtree also ensured that the overall design of the costumes adhered to Gilead's strict rules, specifically in regards to female rankings. In Gilead, women are prohibited from appearing sexual and must remain covered while in public. While their tailoring and colors differ, all female rankings are dressed in a full-length garment with long sleeves

and a high neckline. This prevents women from showing too much skin in public, limiting their seductive power over the men in Gilead.

To pair with their full-length dresses, certain female rankings are given extra pieces to distinguish them from other women. For example, Handmaids must wear a head piece, known as “wings,” while in public to limit their peripheral vision and hide their face. This is specific to the Handmaid ranking, as Handmaids are prohibited from interacting with the public. Similarly, Marthas, the household servants in Gilead, are given an apron and bandana-like head piece to reflect their responsibilities of cooking and cleaning. This example shows the intentionality of the costumes and how Crabtree attempts to distinguish the female rankings despite their uniform. The most important distinction, however, is seen through Crabtree’s adoption of *HMT*’s color scheme.

**Utilizing Color.** Each ranking wears a specific color in Gilead. For example, Handmaids wear red, Wives blue, and Commanders black. Varying the colors serves a functional purpose for the series by helping the audience distinguish between different rankings. In incorporating the color scheme into her costume design, Crabtree followed Director Reed Morano’s guidelines to ensure the costumes’ colors were appealing on screen. However, the costume department manipulated the color scheme in two interesting ways.

First, to express the individuality of the rankings, Crabtree varied the color’s shading for specific rankings. For example, she played with the shade of blue for the Wives’ costumes. Sometimes Serena wears a very pale teal, and other times she is featured in a very dark navy (Miller, 2017-present). On the other hand, some rankings are uniform in their color, like Aunts who are featured in an all-brown suit. Playing with

different shades gives the costume design an added layer of individuality while also maintaining the color guidelines established by Morano, allowing the costume colors to maintain their visually appealing status.

Second, Crabtree combined multiple colors into some rankings' uniforms, most notably Handmaids and Commanders. Along with their red gown, Handmaids wear white bonnets, white wings, and brown boots (Miller, 2017-present). In addition to their black suit, Commanders are often featured wearing a white shirt or a grey vest (Miller, 2017-present). Combining multiple colors into these costumes distinguishes Handmaids and Commanders from other rankings and adds depth to the costume design. Overall, Crabtree effectively incorporates Morano's color scheme into the costume design, and when used effectively, it creates a strong metaphorical significance.

### ***Set Design***

While the color scheme is most notably featured in Crabtree's costume design, the set design also follows the color scheme established by Morano. Like the costume department, *HMT* has employed two different production designers. The first designer, responsible for setting the foundation for *HMT*'s set designs, was Julie Berghoff, who earned a 2017 Emmy for Outstanding Production Design (*Emmys*, n.d.). When Berghoff left the series' production team after Season 1, Elisabeth Williams became the production designer for the next two seasons, which earned her two Emmy wins in 2018 and 2019 (*Emmys*, n.d.). Aside from Williams' interpretations, Berghoff is essential to *HMT*'s production because she established the overall aesthetic and tone for the set design, which is equally important in understanding *HMT*'s complex color scheme. While costumes are attached to a specific character or ranking, sets must support multiple rankings and

storylines. They also transport the actors and viewer into *HMT*'s world. In creating the sets, Berghoff carefully designed the backdrops and utilized the color scheme.

**Set Construction and Aesthetic.** In designing the world of Gilead, Berghoff wanted to “take architecture and make it tell a story within itself” (quoted in Sisson, 2017, para. 2). To incorporate the set design into *HMT*'s production, Berghoff ensured that the design strategies used would complement the world of Gilead. For example, the production team used only real materials, like real hardwood and stone, to construct the sets (Gomes, n.d.). This allowed the sets to feel authentic and true to Gilead's standards. Berghoff also considered the other textiles and patterns within each set to ensure they complemented *HMT*'s overall feel (Gomes, n.d.). It was important for Berghoff to intentionally design the sets in order to contribute to *HMT*'s overall aesthetic. Along with constructing sets, however, scouting locations in Toronto was another major component to the set design.

Because the series films in Toronto, Berghoff was tasked with transforming the city into New England. In scouting locations, she wanted to “maintain enough worn-but-modern touches” to contribute to the overall feel of the series (Berghoff quoted in Sisson, 2017, para. 4). Because *HMT* exists in the near future, it is important to maintain modern touches within traditional Gilead to remind the characters and audience of life before Gilead. The outside locations within Toronto help strike this balance between new and old through the architecture and street amenities. The inside locations also contribute to this feeling, especially the Commanders' homes. One important set design is the Waterford household, which is actually a Victorian-style mansion in Hamilton, Ontario (Jacobs, 2018). The mansion provides an excellent backdrop to several storylines in

*HMT*, as its simplistic architecture and traditional interior design transports the viewer into the world of Gilead. However, because a family actually resides in the mansion, the production team later recreated several rooms in their Toronto filming studio (Jacobs, 2018). Berghoff explains that “set design is supposed to tell the story of the characters that inhabit the sets” (quoted in Jacobs, 2018, para. 11). These scouted locations in and near Toronto widely contribute to *HMT*’s storyline.

**Prop Curation.** In exploring *HMT*’s set design, it is also important to note the prop department’s work, which falls under the set-design umbrella. Props are an important part of *HMT* that both complement the set design and are used by the characters. In curating these props, Berghoff carefully selected items that contributed to the design aesthetic and fit within Gilead’s standards. For example, because women are not allowed to read in Gilead, no props or sets can feature text. When filming in the streets of Toronto, the production removed street signs and shop logos (Jacobs, 2018). Similarly, within Gilead’s grocery store, *Loaves and Fishes*, Berghoff and her team created a language of symbols to identify certain food products (Stamp, 2017). In this case, the props used within *Loaves and Fishes* enhanced the set design’s effectiveness. Seeing characters browse a grocery store with these unique labels helps the audience understand the strict rules of Gilead. Aside from the simple construction of these production elements, however, the set designs and props also incorporate *HMT*’s color scheme.

**Using Color in the Set Design.** Extending the color scheme to the set design was not mandated by the novel but was instead an artistic choice made by Berghoff, Miller, and Morano. Within the novel, Atwood (1985) mentioned several other colors, like



orange, yellow, or purple, in describing the setting. Within the Hulu adaptation, however, almost every set design sticks to the seven-color scheme established through the costumes. In designing the sets, Berghoff wanted to complement Crabtree's costume design, so she selected several tones within the color scheme to serve as backdrops for the characters (Stamp, 2017).

Most of the colors within the color scheme, like black, white, or grey, are neutral colors easy to use in set designs. The colors do not distract from the conflict in each scene and allow the costumes to stand out among the sets. Using red and blue, however, presented Berghoff with several challenges to neutralize these vibrant colors, and she intentionally colored sets or props red and blue to associate them with certain characters (Stamp, 2017), giving them a domain within certain spaces. For example, the sitting room in the Waterford household, a reserved room for Wife Serena, has rich blue walls to provide a clue for the audience that that room is Serena's domain (Miller, 2017-present). This room is also used for pre-Ceremony rituals, which gives Serena some influence during the act. Because each ranking is associated with a specific color, Berghoff intentionally used color within set designs or props to give characters agency in certain storylines. This, in turn, creates universal color metaphors through the costumes, set designs, and props that deepen the storylines featured in *HMT*.

### ***Cinematography***

In examining *HMT*'s use of color, it is important to also consider how these colors work together within a particular scene. While an abstract component to the series, cinematography strongly contributes to its success. Colin Watkinson, the Director of Cinematography for all three seasons, has been praised for his work on *HMT*, even

earning himself a 2017 Emmy for Outstanding Cinematography for a Single-Camera Series as well as a 2018 and 2019 Emmy nomination in the same category (*Emmys*, n.d.). Cinematography gives an interesting perspective to *HMT*'s color scheme because it combines color in interesting ways. Watkinson has elegantly captured Gilead with unique camera angles, followed the series' design aesthetic, and effectively represented the color scheme.

**Camera Movement/Angles.** In initially brainstorming *HMT*, Watkinson worked closely with Morano to establish how the series would be shot (Yuan, 2017). Morano did not want typical camera angles or movements in order to provide a unique perspective of Gilead (Yuan, 2017). Morano and Watkinson approached *HMT*'s cinematography in a technical way, utilizing appropriate equipment and capturing scenes eccentrically.

In an interview with Yuan (2017), Morano detailed that some scenes are symmetrical, while others are "Kubrick-inspired with frames just a bit off" (para. 10). To capture this perspective, Watkinson uses an Alexa Mini and vintage Canon K35 lenses to create depth and interesting camera angles (Desowitz, 2017). He also uses a handheld camera to capture moments up close (Desowitz, 2017). Using smaller camera equipment allows Watkinson to capture close-ups of the actors and have more control over the camera's movement. For example, several shots feature Moss up close and personal, seeming like the camera is directly in front of her face (Miller, 2017-present). Morano explained that the camera is often so close to Moss's face that she bumps into the camera with her white wings (Yuan, 2017). Filming the actors inches apart allows *HMT* to capture the subtlety of their acting, and the upfront nature of the camera angles gives the audience a deep insight into the characters' emotions and inner dialogues.

**Design Aesthetic.** Along with approaching *HMT*'s cinematography from a technical standpoint, Morano and Watkinson developed strategies to contribute to the series' design aesthetic. In crafting the camera movements and angles, Morano wanted scenes to feel romantic and whimsical but also in a way where the viewer is never quite comfortable (Yuan, 2017). Along with filming with certain lenses, Watkinson utilizes texture, like haze, to cast a mysterious mood during certain scenes (Grobbar, 2018). He also manipulates the use of lighting within certain sets. *HMT* balances between light and dark throughout several set designs to contribute to the uncertainty. Through Morano's initial guidance, Watkinson has greatly enhanced *HMT*'s production design through carefully crafted cinematography, and he represents the series' color scheme in an important way.

**Capturing Color.** *HMT*'s color scheme is made effective largely through Watkinson's cinematography. In utilizing camera angles and different lenses, he must always ensure that the color scheme is well-represented, as color is the driving force of the series. All colors must complement one another on screen, and any lens or texture must not alter the effectiveness of the costumes, set designs, or props. Therefore, Watkinson designed his cinematic approach around accurately representing the color scheme. For example, a scene in Season 3's "Household" features June in her red Handmaid costume in front of a white-winged statue (Fortenberry & Walsh, 2019, "Household," 17:47). This shot could have been captured in many ways, but Watkinson filmed Moss directly in front of the statue with its wings stretching on either side of her. This camera angle is symbolic in the series and casts a specific metaphor in which June is an angel, a saving grace for other Handmaids. Also, layering the red costume over a

white statue creates strong metaphorical significance within that scene, which is examined through this analysis. Cinematography, therefore, is important to consider in regards to *HMT*'s color scheme when combined with the costumes, set designs, and props, and it is a crucial component to answering the following research question:

RQ: How is color metaphorically used to create meaning in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*?

### **Summary**

This chapter gives a deeper look into *HMT* by exploring its background, previous adaptations, and the aspects that make the television series successful. It begins by detailing Margaret Atwood's inspiration for Gilead and the novel's ever-growing popularity. The chapter then provides an analysis of the 1990 *HMT* film and the aspects that made the film unsuccessful in its production. Lastly, the chapter explains why the Hulu series is successful through four key areas: its streaming platform, feminist perspective, continued relevance, and color scheme. This section gives an overview of color research as it applies to marketing and connects the literature to *HMT*'s color scheme. In short, the Hulu series is successful because of the intentionality behind the series' production. Because Atwood's feminist essence is captured and the storyline is tastefully shown, the series has greatly enhanced the original story and taken it to new levels. This intentionality can be narrowed down to *HMT*'s color scheme, which is a driving force behind the series' success shown through its different production elements, and it provides the focus for this research. Chapter III gives further details into this study's research design by detailing the theoretical groundings and methodology that guide the research, and it also explains the procedure followed for the analysis.

## CHAPTER III

### THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FOUNDINGS

In examining *HMT*'s color scheme, this study relies on two theoretical frameworks, including media ecology theory and metaphoric criticism. This chapter establishes an understanding of media ecology and applies it to *HMT*'s color scheme, details the theorists behind the concept of metaphors, explains the criticisms on which the analysis is based, and details the structure of Chapter IV.

#### **Media Ecology Theory**

The concept of media ecology existed far before the term was coined. In fact, “Plato’s Phaedrus is generally considered to contain the first media ecological commentary” (Strate, 2017, p. 241). The term “media ecology” was sparked from a 1967 discussion by Marshall McLuhan and Neil Postman, who are described as the “key thinkers” behind the theory (Anton, 2017, p. 229). McLuhan examined media ecology through literature, language, and symbols to understand how these ideals operate within society (Strate, 2017). McLuhan first introduced the concept in *Understanding Media* in 1964, and Postman, inspired by McLuhan’s writing, first coined the term “media ecology” at a national teacher meeting in 1968 (Strate, 2017). Since then, media ecology has become a staple within the communication field and draws upon many other areas, including anthropology, economics, education, history, and psychology (Anton, 2017).

Media ecology refers to the “multidisciplinary study of both environments as media and media as environments” (Anton, 2017, p. 225). In other words, the theory examines how media created by individuals evolves to affect the individuals that created it. Anton (2017) explained media ecology through an analogy of a clock. Although time existed beforehand, human beings created clocks to keep better track of it. Even though humans invented clocks, a clock now controls all human interaction. It affects “the tempo of life, the meaning of work, the orchestration of social action, and the sense of reality” (Anton, 2017, p. 225). Clocks have changed individuals’ lives by affecting the environment in which they operate. Anton (2017) also used birth control to illustrate media ecology. Like a clock, birth control is an invention that has drastically changed society by altering family dynamics and controlling reproduction. Clocks and birth control are both inventions that impact the individuals that created them. While these examples pertain to practical items, media ecology also examines different media, including television.

Television is currently the most utilized entertainment medium, and its popularity grew with the creation of streaming platforms (Erickson et al., 2019). Streaming services like Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu have allowed viewers to watch any content at any time. Although this invention has benefited the television medium, it has also affected viewers through binge watching. Erickson et al. (2019) explained that binge watching involves watching multiple episodes of television continuously. Binge watching is a popular phenomenon within Western society that surfaced from streamed media. Television has, therefore, impacted viewers by affecting their viewing behavior. This relates to media

ecology theory because streamed media impacts the individuals that created the technology.

Along with affecting its environment, media ecology also illustrates how technology affects human perception, feeling, and emotion (Strate, 2017). Media ecology examines how media and technology reconfigure human patterns. For example, the clock changed the pace of life and everyday routines (Anton, 2017). Strate (2017) explained that through media ecology, “we create the conditions that in turn condition us” (p. 244). In regards to media, many of these conditions are created through certain languages and symbols (Anton, 2017), and “language, symbolic communication, and meaning-making are the defining characteristics of the human species” (Strate, 2017, p. 252). Through language and symbols, media affects individuals on a psychological level (Anton, 2017). The more time someone interacts with a medium or technology, the more conditioned he or she becomes (Strate, 2017). Anton (2017) also explained that pattern recognition within media ecological thought is key in meaning-making. This highly relates to *HMT* through one important pattern: its color scheme.

*HMT* incorporates a strong color scheme most commonly seen through its costume design. In watching the pilot episode, the viewer begins to make connections between a costume’s color and the character’s role in Gilead. In recognizing this connection, the viewer then understands the basic color scheme in Gilead (Handmaids wear red, Wives blue, men black, etc.). This represents a consistent pattern and shows how the television series utilizes media ecology through the color scheme. As the series progresses, the viewer establishes a strong understanding of Gilead’s structure through the color scheme, and soon he or she can identify a ranking in Gilead through the

costume color alone. For example, if an unknown woman wearing red walks into a room, the viewer automatically knows she is a Handmaid based upon her costume's color. This is consistent with every character ranking, and this pattern recognition is crucial for an *HMT* viewer. However, because the color scheme applies to other production elements within the series, this pattern recognition also applies elsewhere.

*HMT* extends its color scheme to its set design and props. While watching the series, viewers may consciously or subconsciously identify sets and props that feature a certain color. Because the color pattern is so innate for them (Handmaids red, Wives blue, etc.), viewers might also associate the colored object with that particular character ranking. This greatly aids in the transferal of metaphors throughout the series. If color takes on metaphorical significance for each ranking, like Handmaids being tied to resistance, then that theme also extends to the set design or prop.

Media ecology and pattern recognition also plays a role when the pattern is disrupted. For example, in a pivotal scene in Season 3, June is featured out of her traditional red Handmaid attire and is instead in a black dress (Chang & Erguven, 2019, "Liars"). At this point in the series, June is strongly associated with the color red because of her Handmaid status, and her black costume disrupts the viewer's conditioning. Because of this, the viewer takes notice of the black costume because the production has manipulated the color scheme in a new way. This example shows how vital pattern recognition is to *HMT*'s color scheme and also showcases the important role media ecology theory plays in the context of this study.



## **Metaphoric Criticism**

To analyze *HMT*'s use of color, this study relies on the findings of both Kenneth Burke and I.A. Richards to examine the television series through metaphors. Burke is a well-known theorist within the field of communication and has examined metaphors from a unique perspective. In *A Grammar of Motives*, Burke (1969) described metaphors as “a device for seeing something in terms of something else” (p. 503). In other words, metaphors combine two concepts to create new meaning. Much of this is gathered through perspective and transmitting one concept over to another (Burke, 1969). Burke (1969) even asserted that one could replace the word “metaphor” with “perspective” altogether. A new perspective greatly impacts meaning. In building upon Burke’s research, I.A. Richards studied this concept through his theory of meaning in which he examined both how words derive meaning and how meaning mediates communication (Ogden & Richards, 1923). This theory led Richards into studying metaphors, which he defined as “borrowing part of a context of another in an abstract form” (Ogden & Richards, 1923, p. 343). Therefore, to engage in a metaphor, the rhetor must transmit characteristics from one object to a second object in order to influence the first object (Foss, 2018).

### ***Understanding Metaphors***

Metaphors involve two elements: the *tenor* and the *vehicle* (Foss, 2018; Ogden & Richards, 1923). Foss (2018) described the tenor as “the topic or subject that is being explained” and the vehicle as “the mechanism or lens through which the topic is viewed” (p. 285). In simpler terms, the tenor is the main subject or concept within the metaphor, and the vehicle affects the meaning of the tenor through comparisons. For example, in

describing a romantic relationship as a “bumpy road” (Foss, 2018, p. 285), the concept of a bumpy road (vehicle) changes the way romantic relationships (tenor) are perceived. In this case, romantic relationships are complicated, painful, and unpredictable. In contrast, if someone were to describe their relationship as a dream, the meaning of romantic relationships takes on a different concept. This example represents the powerful influence metaphors have both in meaning and in creating reality (Foss, 2018). However, metaphors are not restricted to written language; they also exist visually.

### ***Visual Metaphors***

This analysis combines the concepts described by Burke and Richards with visual rhetoric in order to examine the visual influence of *HMT*’s color scheme. Foss (2018) explained that there are three types of visual metaphors: substitution (substituting the tenor or vehicle for the other), fusion (integrating the tenor and vehicle), and juxtaposition (tenor and vehicle are compared but remain separate). In discussing *HMT*’s use of visual metaphors, the series utilizes a fusion approach in integrating both the tenor and vehicle through its color scheme. By limiting the color palette to only seven colors, color is a driving force behind *HMT*, and it helps the viewer navigate Gilead. Because each color has its own meaning (i.e. red means danger and blue means trust), the color’s meaning influences the viewer’s perception of characters or objects that incorporate these colors. By allowing color to influence every aspect of *HMT*, Miller fuses the tenor (character or object) with the vehicle (color), therefore creating an instinctive metaphorical comparison in the audience.

### ***Metaphoric Criticism Steps***

In analyzing the metaphors within *HMT*'s color palette, this project relies on metaphoric criticism while incorporating a visual rhetoric lens. In traditional metaphoric criticism, a rhetorical critic must complete four steps within the analysis: (1) examine the artifact as a whole, (2) isolate the metaphors, (3) sort the metaphors, and (4) discover an explanation of the artifact (Foss, 2018). The first step, examining the artifact, involves familiarizing oneself with the text and many elements of the artifact, specifically context (Foss, 2018). Context can be gathered in many ways, including a "review of rhetoric contemporaneous with the artifact, the audience's reactions to the artifact, and historical treatments of the context" (Foss, 2018, p. 290). The second step, isolating the metaphors, involves identifying the different metaphors within the artifact (Foss, 2018). Metaphors within the artifact may be written or spoken words or visual representations. In analyzing language, the rhetorical critic must ensure that the metaphors are comparisons of two concepts rather than simple adjectives (Foss, 2018). Within the second step, the rhetorical critic may isolate the metaphors to include only linguistic or visual examples, or the critic may combine the concepts to deepen his or her analysis. The third step, sometimes combined with isolating the metaphors, involves arranging the metaphors into groups to examine patterns. The rhetorical critic should group the metaphors by tenor or vehicle, depending on the research interest. In the fourth step, explaining the artifact, the groups of metaphors are examined as a means to explain the artifact. The explanation can result from the frequency or intensity of the metaphors in analyzing the rhetor's metaphoric choices. The artifact may have various explanations, but the rhetorical critic should identify the concepts that most relate to the research question.

## **Procedure**

In utilizing metaphoric criticism, this project involved several steps in prepping the analysis. Careful consideration was given to the best method for analyzing *HMT*'s color scheme, specifically in deciding which content to present. To make the project more manageable and focused, the analysis references only a select number of episodes. At the time of this thesis, *HMT* had released three seasons, consisting of 36 episodes total (Miller, 2017-present). Twelve episodes, which represents one-third of *HMT*'s content, were carefully selected as a subset of the content available. In determining which to select, all 36 episodes were viewed and annotated. The episodes were then selected using two basic criteria.

### ***Selecting Episodes***

First, the episode needed to feature events that contribute to *HMT*'s overall storyline. For example, some episodes focus on only one character, like Luke's story in Season 1's "The Other Side" (Maxcy & Sigismondi, 2017, "The Other Side") or Aunt Lydia's backstory in Season 3's "Unfit" (Maxcy & Barker, 2019, "Unfit"). Because these stories do not relate to the series' overarching storyline or center around main characters, episodes like these were omitted.

Second, from the episodes that met the first criterion, the selected episodes needed to accurately represent the color scheme. Some episodes were selected because they feature an important color combination. For example, *The Colonies*, the internment camp where residents must clean up toxic environmental waste (Miller, 2017-present), features an important color combination of brown and blue, which is needed for the analysis. However, *The Colonies* is only featured in two episodes, "Unwomen" (Miller & Barker,

2018, “Unwomen”) and “Seeds” (Snyder & Barker, 2018, “Seeds”). Because “Unwomen” focuses mainly on Emily’s backstory, a minor storyline for the series (Miller & Barker, 2018, “Unwomen”), “Seeds” was chosen for the analysis to represent The Colonies. Several episodes were selected in this manner because they feature color in an important way. The remaining episodes were then chosen strategically to round out the color representation. Table 1 lists the 12 episodes used in this analysis and the in-text citation associated with each episode.

### *Analyzing Episodes*

Once the 12 episodes were selected, each episode was thoroughly analyzed in order to prepare the analysis. First, the metaphor for each color was determined. Some color metaphors were easily identified, like the metaphors for black and red, while other colors were more challenging to assign a metaphor, like blue and white. The metaphors were largely inspired by the rankings associated with the colors and the important roles they play in Gilead. In using the 12 episodes, all seven colors were assigned a metaphor that can be applied universally among the sample content.

The second step for preparing the analysis was to identify the production elements, specifically the costumes, set designs, and props, that express these metaphors. Images were pulled from each episode to serve as both a reference point in organizing the metaphors and also to be included in the analysis itself. Once all 12 episodes were screencapped, the images were organized into the different colors and then narrowed into a select number of images for each color. These images then determined an outline for the analysis chapter.

**Table 1***Episodes used in analysis*

<b>Episode</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>In-text Citation</b>
Season 1, Episode 1	“Offred”	(Miller & Morano, 2017)
Season 1, Episode 3	“Late”	(Miller & Morano, 2017)
Season 1, Episode 8	“Jezebels”	(Snyder & Dennis, 2017)
Season 1, Episode 10	“Night”	(Miller & Skogland, 2017)
Season 2, Episode 1	“June”	(Miller & Barker, 2018)
Season 2, Episode 5	“Seeds”	(Snyder & Barker, 2018)
Season 2, Episode 10	“The Last Ceremony”	(Chang & Podeswa, 2018)
Season 2, Episode 12	“Postpartum”	(Tuchman & Reid, 2018)
Season 2, Episode 13	“The Word”	(Miller & Barker, 2018)
Season 3, Episode 6	“Household”	(Fortenberry & Walsh, 2019)
Season 3, Episode 11	“Liars”	(Chang & Erguven, 2019)
Season 3, Episode 12	“Sacrifice”	(Tuchman & Erguven, 2019)

### *Analysis Structure*

This analysis utilizes metaphoric criticism but alters the four steps identified by Foss (2018) to better examine *HMT*'s color scheme. Because Chapter II gives a thorough analysis into *HMT*, Foss's (2018) first step (examine the artifact as a whole) is omitted from the analysis. The next two steps (isolate and sort the metaphors) are combined and expanded to discuss the color scheme effectively by organizing the colors into two distinct groups: the majors colors and minor colors. The major colors, consisting of black, blue, and red, were grouped together because they are associated with the most prominent rankings in Gilead (Commanders, Wives, and Handmaids, respectively). These colors express strong metaphors that greatly impact the series, and they also express meaning on their own. The minor colors, brown, white, green, and grey, are not as prominent within the series and instead provide support for the major colors. Because of this, the minor colors do not necessarily express meaning on their own but influence the storyline when paired with the major colors. Foss's (2018) final step (explain the artifact) is altered to give a deeper look into the *HMT*'s color scheme as a whole. In adapting Foss's (2018) method, the analysis was structured into three distinct steps.

**Step 1: Major Color Analyses.** The first step discusses the major colors (black, blue, and red) individually to show how their metaphor is expressed through the costumes, set designs, and props. The color order was inspired by the metaphors assigned to each color. The metaphor behind black sets a foundation for understanding Gilead's structure, which is appropriate to open the section. Red, the third color discussed, goes against Gilead's structure, which is appropriate to end with. Blue is then situated somewhere in the middle of maintaining structure and defying Gilead. Each color is

treated individually and thoroughly discussed in terms of the production elements associated with that color. Each major color also includes an “in-action” section where the color is examined in the context of a full storyline or event.

**Step 2: Minor Color Analyses and Comparisons.** The second step builds upon the first step but is slightly altered to effectively discuss the remaining colors. Each minor color (brown, white, green, and grey) is discussed individually but then compared to the major colors. The order of the minor colors was also determined by the metaphor behind each color, as brown sets a universal foundation, while grey applies to very specific instances. Each minor color is first treated individually and viewed in the context of its colored production elements. After discussing the color individually, the color is then compared to each major color, creating interesting color combinations. For example, brown has some significance on its own but begins to influence storylines once it is combined with black, blue, or red. Each of these color combinations (brown-black, brown-blue, and brown-red) are discussed through the production elements that combine these colors. The structure of brown is also applied to the remaining three minor colors.

**Step 3: Scene Breakdowns.** The final step of the analysis examines the color scheme as a whole. Although the colors have individual influence or can be organized into pairs, the colors possess the most influence when working together. To understand how each metaphor can influence particular storylines, this step examines three storylines featured in *HMT* to show how the colors work together to affect the meaning of the events. The three storylines are all resolved within one or two episodes to make the section focused and easy to understand. These scene breakdowns apply the color



metaphors to different contexts to show how the color scheme as a whole affects meaning within the series.

### **Summary**

This chapter gives an overview of media ecology theory, which provides the theoretical grounding for this study. It also details background information for metaphoric criticism and how the method is incorporated into the analysis. The chapter also previews the analysis structure found within Chapter IV, which examines the colors both individually and as a collective whole. The next chapter, Chapter IV, is organized into these steps and houses an in-depth analysis of *HMT*'s color scheme.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

This chapter thoroughly analyzes the color scheme featured in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* (HMT) both individually and through interesting color comparisons. Each color is first examined through a traditional advertising context and then assigned a metaphor that either relates to or contrasts its usual archetype. The color metaphors are then examined through the series' production elements, including the costumes, set designs, and props. To analyze HMT's use of color, the chapter is broken into three distinct steps that involve examining the major colors (black, blue, and red), examining the minor colors (brown, white, green, and grey) and how they relate to the major colors, and then exploring three sample storylines within the series for their utilization of the color scheme. The chapter also includes images from the 12 episodes utilized in the analysis to illustrate the series' use of color in some key areas.

#### **Major Colors (Individually)**

While all seven colors are equally important within the series, they can be organized into major colors and minor colors. The major colors include black, blue, and red because their corresponding rankings (Commanders, Wives, and Handmaids, respectively) are the center of storylines and conflict. Because of their prominence within the series, black, blue, and red have great metaphorical significance individually. This

section dives deeper into the metaphor behind each major color and explains how that metaphor is expressed through the production elements.

### ***Black***

The color black is a powerful color that absorbs all other colors. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that in advertising, black is commonly used to signify darkness, evil, or power. Black has a very similar effect in Gilead as it is most commonly associated with two rankings: Commanders, men responsible for creating Gilead; and Guardians, soldiers who enforce the law. Within Gilead's totalitarian society, Commanders and Guardians hold the majority of the power. Therefore, the metaphor attached to black is power, expressed through various black production elements inspired by the rankings to which black is attached.

**Commanders.** Commanders are Gilead's highest ranking and are responsible for creating the new society. When the United States experienced a declining birthrate, a group of men nicknamed the Sons of Jacob overthrew the government to solve the issue. Once Gilead came into power, men who were part of the revolution were ranked as Commanders, responsible for creating Gilead's structure and laws. Much of their laws limit the rights of women and instead increase the rights of men, thus giving Commanders supreme power. The Christian Bible provides a foundation for Gilead's laws, but Commanders manipulate scripture to influence their agenda. For example, during a flashback in "Jezebels," three Commanders negotiated how to incorporate Wives into the Ceremony, saying there is scriptural precedent for Wives being present for the act, and another replying "Sounds good. Nice and godly. The Wives will eat that shit up" (Snyder & Dennis, 2017, "Jezebels," 18:22). This interaction illustrates how

Commanders create laws with their best interest in mind and as a way to manipulate other rankings, giving them complete power in Gilead.

Commander Fred Waterford plays a prominent role within *HMT*, and the viewer learns of a Commander's power through Fred's experiences, as he is one of the highest-ranking Commanders within his Gileadean district. While some scenes feature Fred at work, his storyline centers around his role within the home, particularly in conflict with his Wife, Serena, or his Handmaid, June (or "Offred"). Fred expresses power over the women in various ways, as seen through many black production elements.

**Figure 1**

*Fred Waterford featured in "The Word"*



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***Commanders' Costumes.*** Black's metaphor of power is largely expressed through a Commander's costume, which features a black suit. The garment usually consists of black slacks, a white collared shirt, and a black suit jacket. Figure 1 features Fred in this traditional uniform. Because of their high status, Commanders may also incorporate additional pieces to their suit, like a vest, ascot, or suspenders. Having the option to customize their wardrobe is a luxury for Commanders because other rankings are issued a standard uniform. Regardless of their variation, black suits often symbolize formal situations and someone of high-status, and a Commander's costume heightens his sense of power. Commanders wear their suit both in public and in private, and they even wear it during the Ceremony ritual. A Commander's black suit expresses power throughout Gilead and thus influences the storylines following Commanders.

***Commanders' Domains.*** Because of their powerful status, Commanders are not bound by Gilead's laws and instead have several privileges above other rankings. One privilege is that Commanders are given a certain domain for which they have supreme power, symbolized by two important set designs. The first set design is the Commander's court. Several Commanders, including Fred, form the Commander's council to both create laws and punish residents. For example, in Figure 2, Commander Putnam appears on trial in the Commander's court for having sexual relations with a Handmaid outside the Ceremony. The council ultimately punishes Putnam, despite his status as a Commander, and rules that he must lose his right hand. Commanders are rarely punished in Gilead, but Putnam's punishment gives important insight into the power of the Commander's court. This set design, therefore, gives Commanders supreme power over other residents in Gilead.

**Figure 2**

*Commander Putnam visits the Commander's court in "Night"*



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The Commander's court resembles a traditional courtroom mixed with the layout of a stadium. The space consists of high ceilings and a grand theatrical arch. To utilize the color scheme, *HMT* incorporates black into the set to associate the space with a Commander's power, specifically through dark lighting. The Commander's court is quite dark, lit only by table lamps and two spotlights. The rest of the grand space is unlit, casting a dark, powerful tone to the space. The dark lighting creates a powerful, intimidating feel that further associates the space with a Commander's power within this particular domain. This represents a strong trend within the series' lighting choices, as the production team uses dark lighting to associate sets with power. Because Commanders

are associated with black, most sets that are considered a Commander's domain are dimly lit to incorporate this color.

Another Commander domain that incorporates black is a private home office. Commanders are issued private offices within their homes that are unmonitored and exclusive to Commanders. Fred's private office is frequently featured in *HMT*, and it casts a similar feel as the Commander's court. Its dim lighting expresses power and dominance within the space, and the walls of the office are also colored black to create an even darker feel. Much of Fred's office is filled with items like books or alcohol that align with his privilege and are forbidden to other rankings. Having access to these materials within his private office helps express his power within the space. Fred also exercises his power by inviting the women of his household into his private office, although the space is forbidden to women. Throughout the series, Fred invites June to his office on several occasions to show how he can manipulate the law and tempt June with paraphernalia, like books or alcohol. On some occasions, Fred even allows June to read or drink and battles her in a game of Scrabble. This shows how Fred dominates the set design and uses the space to express his power and manipulate the female rankings.

***Commanders' Privileges.*** Along with the set designs, a Commander's power is also expressed through certain black props. First, technology, like computers or phones, is colored black to associate the privilege with Commanders. These items are accessible to only Commanders, while women are cut off from all technology, thus limiting their ability to communicate. Black technology then symbolizes a Commander's power to access information and connect with the outside world. Second, text is another black prop that relates to a Commander's power. While text is traditionally black, its color is

symbolic within the series. Commanders are one of the few rankings allowed to read and write. In fact, all women, with the exception of Aunts, are prohibited from interacting with text. Because Gilead is shown from a female perspective, text is rarely shown in *HMT*. When it is shown, however, the words are associated with a Commander's privilege, further symbolizing black as power.

***Black in Action.*** In order to fully understand *HMT*'s use of black, it is important to examine how the metaphor influences certain storylines. A great example of black as power occurs in "Jezebels" when Fred treats June to a night out. The storyline begins with Fred visiting June's room dressed in an all-black suit. Handmaids like June are prohibited from interacting with Commanders outside the Ceremony, but Fred manipulates the law and takes June to a private nightclub called Jezebels. Because of Fred's power, June has no choice but to accompany him, and Fred dresses her in a short cocktail dress and helps her apply makeup as a disguise from her Handmaid persona. This is another example of how Fred uses his power to manipulate other rankings in Gilead.

Jezebels is a private nightclub exclusive to Commanders where the men can negotiate business, drink alcohol, smoke cigars, and, most importantly, have sex with Jezebels, rebellious women that serve as prostitutes in Gilead. Similar to a Commander's other domains, Jezebels is quite dark in its set design, creating a serious, intimidating environment in which a Commander thrives. Dark lighting associates Jezebels with a Commander's power and also influences how June operates within the nightclub. After having drinks, Fred escorts June to a hotel room above Jezebels where he forces her into having sex. In mirroring the lighting strategy, the hotel room is also quite dark to further



express Fred's power in the situation, rendering June powerless while at Jezebels. Later in the episode, after returning from the nightclub, June expresses to Nick, Fred's driver, "You know I had to go with him last night, right? You know I didn't have a choice. I don't have any choice" (Snyder & Dennis, 2017, "Jezebels," 42:28). Because of Fred's power as a Commander, June was powerless during this storyline. Fred dressed in all black and the dark set design then further contributes to the power Fred possesses during this episode.

**Guardians.** The next ranking associated with black is a Guardian. Guardians are male enforcers who are part of Gilead's army. Because Gilead functions as a totalitarian government, Guardians play a major role within each Gilead district by monitoring areas like Commanders' driveways or public spaces to keep residents in line. Guardians then have full power over female residents, specifically Handmaids, and can punish them as the men see fit, ranging anywhere from a stern warning to a brutal beating. Guardians express their power largely through their costume design and specific props reserved for their use.

***Guardians' Costumes.*** Depending on their role in the district, a Guardian's black attire can somewhat vary in design. A traditional Guardian uniform is similar to that of a police officer, consisting of a black long-sleeve shirt, black pants, a bullet proof vest, and a belt for accessories like weapons and radios. Other Guardians like Nick, Fred's driver, wear more casual black attire to express their higher status. However, regardless of their position, all Guardians wear black to send a strong message to others in Gilead. A Guardian's black attire adds tension to certain scenes because the other rankings, like Handmaids and Marthas, often change their behavior around a Guardian in fear of

punishment. For example, while shopping in Loaves and Fishes, Gilead's grocery store, Handmaids are prohibited from socializing, yet they secretly converse with other women when Guardians are distant. When a Guardian is near, however, the women halt their conversation to uphold Gilead's expectations. This example illustrates the power of a Guardian's costume in dominating certain scenes.

***Guardians' Privileges.*** A Guardian's power is not expressed through certain domains, like a private office or nightclub. Instead, Guardians utilize certain black props, like weapons and industrial vans, to exert their power. First, Guardians are the only ranking, aside from Aunts, that are permitted to carry weapons. Because of this, all weapons are colored black to further this association. Because of their rarity, having a weapon in Gilead leads to great power. Weapons symbolize power over other individuals because they have the ability to inflict harm. Paired with their costume design, a Guardian's weapon also contributes to the tension within each scene. Because Gilead is a totalitarian government, women constantly fear violence, and this power is symbolized by the weapon's coloring.

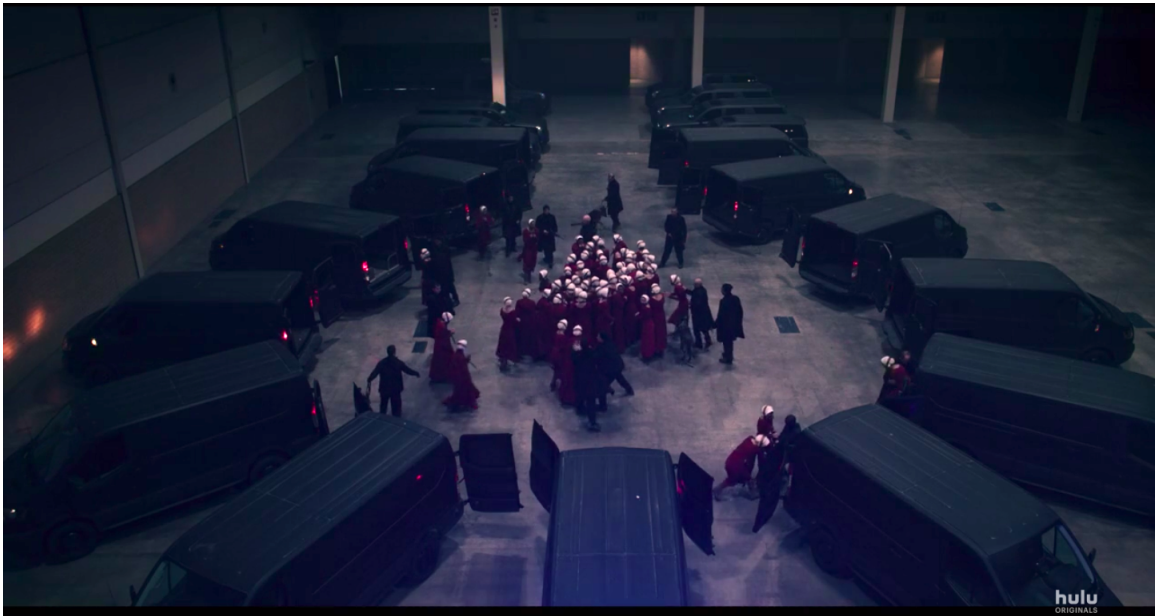
Second, black vans are strongly associated with a Guardian's power. Most vehicles in Gilead are colored black, and they are a threatening prop within each district. Just like they fear violence, women also fear being taken by Guardians in a black van. In the Season 1 finale entitled "Night," Guardians mysteriously load June into a van, exerting their power over her. In the episode, while entering the vehicle, June narrates, "Whether this is my end or a new beginning, I have no way of knowing. I have given myself over into the hands of strangers. I have no choice. It can't be helped" (Miller & Skogland, 2017, "Night," 57:45). This shows the power Guardians have in punishing

residents and the literal vehicle they use to express this power. Black vans are threatening in the series and help give Guardians agency to express their totalitarian ways.

***Black in Action.*** A great example that illustrates a Guardian's relationship with black is found in the opening sequence of "June." In punishment for rebelling, Guardians kidnap and transport Handmaids to a large stadium previously known as Fenway Park. Upon arrival, Guardians forcefully remove Handmaids from the vehicles and herd the women together. Guardians then lead the Handmaids into the stadium through yelling and brutal force. Figure 3 strongly illustrates the power of the black vans in facilitating this movement, as they prohibit any escape.

**Figure 3**

*Black vans swarm Handmaids in "June"*



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Once in Fenway Park, Guardians force the women atop of a gallows and place nooses around the Handmaids' necks. Once Handmaids are organized on the hanging structure, one Guardian with a black bag over his head pulls a lever to release the trapdoor, but it jams, revealing that this hanging is mere propaganda to teach Handmaids a lesson. The role of Guardians in this brutality greatly expresses the power issued to them by Gilead, facilitated through the color black, and shows how they use fear to motivate resistance.

Black is largely associated with Commanders and Guardians, and it symbolizes their powerful stance in Gilead. Along with the rankings' costume designs, power is strongly represented through key sets and props. Commanders and Guardians are the only male rankings within Gilead, so associating both rankings with black greatly expresses the power Gilead grants them and sets a foundation for understanding *HMT*'s color scheme. Black is used in the series as an archetype, symbolizing the evil misuse of power.

### ***Blue***

Blue is the second major color within *HMT* and is largely associated with Commanders' Wives. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that blue is a color often used to symbolize royalty, especially in a religious context. This strongly relates to *HMT*'s use of blue through a Wife's prominent position in Gilead. Because they are married to a Gilead Commander, Wives and their husbands symbolize Gilead's upper class. However, while both important rankings, a Wife's role is quite different from that of her husband because she both benefits from and is subjected to Gilead law. Despite their high status, Wives are still bound by strict laws that prohibit them from reading or

writing and confine them to the home, limited to activities like knitting or gardening. Because of the restrictions placed upon them, Wives do not have power under Gilead's structure. Instead, a Wife is given the ability to control others in Gilead. While their husbands have full power, Wives take a more hands-on approach to controlling others and manipulate situations strategically and on a smaller scale, allowing them to play an important role in everyday life in Gilead. Because of their association with blue, the color moves beyond its advertising archetype described by Singh and Srivastava (2011) and assumes the metaphor of control, especially surrounding a Wife's experience with motherhood.

Because of the fertility issues plaguing the region, most Wives are said to be barren because Gilead always blames women for infertility rather than men. In creating Gilead, Commanders designed the society around their Wives becoming mothers via Handmaid. At first, Wives were opposed to the idea of Handmaids or the Ceremony, but Commanders adapted law to give the women a greater sense of control. Wives are now incorporated into the Ceremony to make the ritual less of a violation. Handmaids lie between the Wife's legs, and the Wife holds the Handmaid's wrists during the intercourse. This position is meant to unite Wives and Handmaids as one during the Ceremony, but it also gives Wives control by applying pressure to Handmaids' wrists and locking eyes with their adulterous husbands. Being incorporated into the Ceremony gives Wives greater security within Gilead that allows them to control their experience with motherhood and fully embrace Gilead's untraditional customs.

Serena Waterford, Wife of Commander Fred Waterford, is a prominent Wife throughout the series, and like her husband, the viewer learns about the Wife ranking

through Serena's experiences. Serena's character arc throughout all three seasons follows her journey to motherhood, as she goes to great lengths to ensure her Gilead-given right to a child. Serena controls every aspect of the experience, from orchestrating a secret Ceremony between June and Nick, which results in June becoming pregnant, to allowing her newborn child, Nicole, to escape Gilead to then later regretting the decision and campaigning for Nicole's return. Serena's complicated journey in *HMT* greatly influences blue's metaphor of control, symbolized by her costume and two important set designs associated with her domain.

**Figure 4**

*Serena Waterford featured in "Offred"*



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**Wives' Costumes.** The Wives' costumes include several details that incorporate both Gilead's clothing standards and some stylistic privileges. Gilead mandates that women must dress modestly to prevent them from being seen as sexual beings and to limit their physical influence over men. In following the standard, a Wife's costume consists of a floor-length, long sleeve dress that limits the amount of displayed skin. Wives are dressed in an all-blue garment, even including blue shoes. Serena is shown wearing this garment in Figure 4. While Wives must follow the clothing mandate established by Gilead, they have some clothing privileges over other rankings because of their royal status. Wives' costumes are higher quality than other costumes with customized tailoring to both fit their figures and personalize each Wife's style. This privilege is similar to their husbands' varying attire, symbolizing their high status in Gilead. This variation allows Wives to express individuality and distinguish them from the lower classes in Gilead. Along with the variation, the clothing's color is also significant to distinguish Wives from others.

A Wife's blue costume casts a similar effect as a Commander's costume in that when present in a scene, other rankings adjust their behavior in line with the Wife's expectations. The Wives' costumes also visually demand the scene through its striking color. Blue attracts the viewer's eye and allows the focus to remain on Wives within a scene rather than the neutral costumes of other rankings. Through color and the costume design, Wives' are granted control in every setting. This is the first color within the color scheme that demands the viewer's attention, which is highly symbolic in expressing the metaphor of control.

**Wives' Domains.** Wives do not have specific blue props associated with their control but are given two domains within the home that express the metaphor, both surrounding the Ceremony. As mentioned earlier, Commanders chose to incorporate Wives into the Ceremony in order to give the women control during the ritual. This control is expressed both before and during the Ceremony, which aligns with two blue set designs. The first blue set is the Waterford's sitting room where the household gathers before the Ceremony. The set is like a normal living room and features blue walls to associate the space as a Wife's domain. In the daytime, Serena has some control of the room, reserving the spacing for painting or entertaining other Wives. On Ceremony nights, Serena's jurisdiction over the sitting room changes. As part of the pre-Ceremony ritual, each member of the household enters the sitting room separately in order of Handmaid, Martha, driver, and then Wife. The Handmaid kneels on a pillow with the Martha and driver standing behind her, and the Wife sits in a corner. The Commander then knocks at the door, and the Wife invites him into the room to read scripture before the Ceremony. In "Offred," June explains, "The knock is prescribed because tonight this room is her domain" (Miller & Morano, 2017, "Offred," 29:17). This shows how Serena has control over the blue set by controlling the Ceremony proceedings. Even though the Commander has the power to enter the room, he allows his Wife control over when to begin the ritual, giving her agency within the space.

The Waterford's bedroom is also colored blue to symbolize Serena's control during the Ceremony. All Ceremonies take place in the Commander and Wife's bedroom, and coloring it blue gives Wives control by making the bedroom their domain. Several aspects of the Waterford's bedroom are blue, including the walls, curtains, rugs, and



comforter. This coloring casts an overwhelming blue tone, which is highly significant during the Ceremony to express Serena's control. Even though she does not play an active role in the ritual, a Wife is present during the Ceremony along with the Commander and Handmaid to make the act less sexual and more procedural. Coloring the bedroom blue gives Serena agency within the space, reserving her right to be present during the intercourse. The blue accents envelop the characters, making Serena a focal point during the Ceremony rather than Fred or June. This allows Serena to feel confident about her role in impregnating June and to control the Ceremony ritual and her husband's act of infidelity.

### **Figure 5**

*Pregnancy test featured in "Night"*



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**Blue in Action.** While Gilead grants all Wives control over their journey to motherhood, Serena enacts individual control that goes beyond her Gilead-given rights. A great example of this occurs in “Night” as Serena forces June to take a pregnancy test. Pregnancy tests are not custom in Gilead because a doctor must confirm a pregnancy, but Serena exercises her control by acquiring a test through the black market. After June urinates on the pregnancy test, Serena locks June in the bathroom and then kneels on June’s bedroom floor to pray for a positive result. Later in the scene, Serena reveals a blue plus sign, shown in Figure 5, signifying that June is pregnant. This is an example of a blue prop that further asserts a Wife’s control. Although small, the blue plus sign serves as a symbol of Serena’s claim to June’s pregnancy, showing that this is a positive event for Serena, although not the same for June. Serena now has even more control over June, as the pair are bound together by their expected child. This blue prop further illustrates the control Serena possesses in this moment, as she bends Gilead law to unveil June’s pregnancy.

The color blue is highly significant in this analysis because it is the first color that demands the viewer’s attention. This symbolizes the feminist perspective captured by the series, as much of *HMT* focuses on the female rankings rather than Commanders or Guardians. Blue is strongly associated with Wives and emphasizes their control, which is expressed through both their blue costume and the sets that are deemed their domain. Together the production elements symbolize control throughout Serena’s storyline, and June’s positive pregnancy test marks only the beginning of Serena’s ability to control.

## ***Red***

The color red is the series' most-featured color because of its association with Handmaids, the series' most prominent ranking. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that red is usually incorporated into intense situations involving danger, passion, and revolution. This archetype strongly relates to Handmaids through their position in Gilead. Handmaids are fertile women enslaved by Gilead tasked with giving birth to a new population. The women are assigned to a Commander's household and forced into Ceremonies with the Commander and Wife in aim of becoming pregnant. Once the Handmaid becomes pregnant and gives birth, her child is raised by the Commander's household, and she is assigned to a new posting away from her newborn. This process repeats for as long as the Handmaid remains fertile. Some Handmaids fail to reproduce altogether, which is punishable by Gilead law, while others have given birth to multiple children in Gilead.

*HMT* centers around Handmaid June Osborne and her experiences in Gilead, which emphasizes the role red plays in the series. June embarks on a complicated journey throughout the three seasons as she navigates her role as a Handmaid. Her story begins while posted in the Waterford household where she diligently follows her Gilead duties. Later in the season, both Fred and Serena force June to break Gilead law by visiting Jezebels and arranging secret Ceremonies with Nick. Throughout the first season, June is consumed by the power and control exerted by the Waterfords, but once she becomes pregnant in Season 2, her outlook on Gilead changes as she makes several attempts to escape. Amidst failure, June gives birth to her daughter while still in Gilead, but in the Season 2 finale, she arranges her newborn daughter's escape to Canada. After this

success, June is removed from the Waterford household and reassigned to the Lawrence household where she continues her acts of rebellion, which gradually pick up steam, and Season 3 concludes with June smuggling over 50 children out of Gilead. June's storyline evolves from submitting to the Waterford's power and control to then mirroring the metaphor surrounding the color red: resistance.

A Handmaid's role is quite different when compared to a Commander or Wife. While Commanders and Wives make up Gilead's upper class, Handmaids are enslaved in Gilead and forced into its customs, making them susceptible to resistance. Handmaid resistance drives several storylines throughout the series and is facilitated by their color association. Red is connected with resistant acts through several production elements, including the costumes, set designs, and props. However, the color red has two layers within *HMT* that are unique to the Handmaid ranking: (1) Gilead's intentions for red and (2) how red evolves to facilitate the resistance.

**Gilead's Idea of Red.** When creating the world of Gilead, Commanders assigned Handmaids the color red in aim of squashing the resistance. Their association with the vibrant color prohibits Handmaids from traveling anywhere unseen and prevents their escape. Handmaids are bound by strict laws in Gilead that limit their individual freedom. Along with not being able to read or write, Handmaids cannot travel anywhere alone and are limited to certain locations, like the doctor's office or grocery store. Because of their limited freedom within Gilead, items reserved for Handmaids are colored red to further their association. Gilead's intention behind its use of red is seen through the Handmaid's costume, props assigned to Handmaids, and the use of blood throughout the series.

**Figure 6**

*Handmaids' costumes featured in "Offred"*



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***Handmaids' Costumes.*** A Handmaid's costume follows the same standards as a Wife's costume, as it is floor-length, long-sleeved, and high-collared, featured in Figure 6. The abundance of material prohibits Handmaids from being seen as sexual within Gilead. In contrast to the costume design for Commanders and Wives, all Handmaids have the same regimented attire to express their servant role in Gilead. The material is low quality and poorly fits each woman's figure to symbolize their low status. Their universal red appearance also makes Handmaids recognizable in public, an important goal for Gilead.

In designing the Handmaid costume, Gilead rightfully recognized a Handmaid's tendency to resist their customs. To combat this tendency, Gilead dresses Handmaids in red to take away their anonymity. No matter where a Handmaid goes within their district, she is seen by other rankings and is strictly monitored by Aunts and Guardians. In fear of being punished, Handmaids are pressured to act appropriately in line with Gilead's expectations. Their red costume prohibits Handmaids from resisting or escaping because they are always in the public eye. Therefore, the red costume benefits Gilead by discouraging Handmaid resistance.

***Handmaids' Assigned Props.*** Along with assigning Handmaids a vibrant uniform, Gilead also assigns Handmaids designated spots. Gilead restricts Handmaids to certain areas in each district to limit their freedom, which are colored red to mark a Handmaid's territory. A great example of a designated spot is seen through the Salvaging ritual, also featured in Figure 6. In a further attempt to squash the resistance, Gilead allows Handmaids to work through their frustrations through a Salvaging. Handmaids gather in an open field in an orderly fashion, and once a whistle is blown, the women must beat a Gilead resident to death as his or her punishment for breaking the law. In "Offred," Handmaids brutally beat a Guardian because he had illegally raped a Handmaid. Before the Salvaging begins, Handmaids walk two-by-two to their assigned spot on the grass. In this scene, their assigned spot is a red pillow atop a red cloth. Rather than limiting where they can travel like in "Household," this use of red requires Handmaids to maintain order during the Salvaging ritual. The Salvaging shown in "Offred" is an example of how Gilead uses certain props in an attempt to prevent

Handmaids from resisting. While they allow them to become violent through the ritual, Handmaids must maintain their order and composure.

***Blood.*** Blood is another red prop used to discourage Handmaids from resisting. While blood is naturally red, its presence throughout *HMT* expresses the metaphor of resistance. When a Gilead resident resists, they are often met with intense brutality in the form of beatings, burnings, and sometimes mutilation. Because Handmaids are prone to resisting Gilead, they are often the victim of this brutality. For example, in “Night,” Handmaid Lily is hit by a Guardian when she refuses to participate in a Salvaging. The presence of blood within this scene illustrates the resistance metaphor as it pertains to Gilead. Because Lily resisted a Gilead ritual, she was met with blood. A constant fear of brutality strongly discourages Handmaids from resisting, and Gilead’s totalitarian ways further assert its embrace of the color red to squash Handmaid resistance.

**Red Facilitating Resistance.** Despite Gilead’s intentions for red, the color evolves throughout the series into a symbol of defying Gilead. The same costumes and props that were designed to limit Handmaid resistance are manipulated by Handmaids to facilitate it. Much of the series centers around Handmaids resisting Gilead’s customs both on an individual level, like a Handmaid challenging a Commander, and as a collective whole. United by their common experiences in Gilead, Handmaids use their costume to facilitate their resistance and also utilize blood to their advantage. Therefore, the same red production elements benefit both Gilead and Handmaids but in different ways.

***Handmaids’ Costumes.*** Gilead intended for the red costume to prohibit Handmaids from escaping, but instead, the vibrant color unites Handmaids as allies. In “Night,” June remarks, “They should have never given us a uniform if they didn’t want

us to be an army” (Miller & Skogland, 2017, “Night,” 6:09). Just like a viewer can identify a ranking based upon color, Gilead residents can also identify a stranger as an ally or enemy based upon the same pattern. Therefore, Handmaids are united simply by the color of their costume. Although their interactions with one another are limited, Handmaids unite through their red uniform. This shows how Gilead’s choice of red costume backfires and instead becomes an easy facilitator of the resistance. Just like their common experiences, the Handmaid’s costume creates a bond between the women and allows them to easily identify their allies.

Similar to the Wife’s costume, the Handmaid’s costume has a psychological effect on the viewer. When a Handmaid is present in a scene, she becomes a focal point, drawing attention away from the other characters. While the vibrant red could be distracting in some scenes, it allows the series to capture the Handmaid point-of-view. Because the story centers around June’s experiences, she must draw attention within each scene. When multiple Handmaids are featured in a scene, the metaphor of resistance gains even more influence by demanding attention, lessening the influence of the other colors. The vibrant choice of red also symbolizes the feminist perspective of the series, as Handmaids remain a focal point during each scene.

***Blood.*** Along with their red costume, Handmaids utilize blood to facilitate their resistance. In several instances within the series, Handmaids become violent against another ranking, like an Aunt or Commander, during their resistant acts. Aside from violence, however, a Handmaid’s association with blood is largely symbolized through menstruation. Given its reproductive themes, menstruation plays an important role within the series. Handmaids’ cycles are regularly monitored to ensure both reproductive health



and also track early signs of pregnancy. Handmaids engage in the Ceremony during ovulation, where fertilization is most probable, and after the Ceremony, the household patiently waits for a Handmaid to ask for sanitary napkins. Because of this, menstruation is commonly discussed throughout *HMT* because it pertains to Gilead's objectives. When a Handmaid starts her period, however, the occurrence is her ultimate form of resistance.

While pregnancy is positive for Gilead, the experience is quite negative for a Handmaid because it means she will be separated from her newborn child, who is meant to be raised by the Commander and Wife. Anytime a Handmaid starts her period, she resists Gilead's main objective by failing to fulfill her reproductive duty. While often labeled a "curse" in Western culture, menstruation symbolizes a hopeful upturn for the Handmaid because her body refuses to align with Gilead's customs. The episode entitled "Late" focuses on June's delayed cycle. Throughout the episode, Serena is convinced that June is pregnant, which terrifies June, but towards the end of the episode, June discovers blood on her underwear. June sighs with relief and welcomes the blood stain, symbolizing her failure to become pregnant and her resistance towards Gilead's structure. Therefore, menstruation is important within the series, as the use of red blood symbolizes the metaphor of resistance.

**Red Set Designs.** When Gilead assigned Handmaids the color red, they did not specify any set designs with the color. Because Handmaids are enslaved, they are not given their own domain. In viewing red through a resistant lens, however, *HMT*'s production team incorporates red into specific set designs associated with resistance. A great example of this is the Waterford's household exterior, featured in Figure 7. As Season 1 unfolds, the Waterfords defy many of Gilead's customs. While their resistance

**Figure 7**

*Waterford household featured in “The Last Ceremony”*



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occurs privately in the home, the red brick exterior associates the house with resistance. This association plays a major role throughout the series by labeling some Commanders' homes as part of the resistance, a signal for the viewer and unbeknownst to Gilead's residents. This trend is seen further in Season 2 as the viewer is introduced to the Lawrence household.

After repeatedly resisting Gilead, Handmaid Emily, a minor character in *HMT*, receives a new posting in the Lawrence household, consisting of Commander Joseph Lawrence and his Wife Eleanor, and the house is colored red in a similar fashion as the Waterford's house exterior. Joseph is a prominent figure in Gilead who is responsible for

creating the Colonies, an internment camp from which Emily just returned. Based upon Joseph's role in Gilead and his initial attitude towards her, Emily expects only negative experiences within the Lawrence household. However, in "The Word," Joseph actually facilitates Emily's escape to Canada, revealing that he is an ally to the resistance. Before learning of Joseph's resistant role, the red exterior gives a subtle clue to the resistance within the Lawrence household when compared to the Waterford's exterior. This color association within red set designs greatly expresses the metaphor of resistance by labeling the houses that are prone to resist. While a red brick house is a common exterior, it becomes significant within the context of *HMT*.

### **Figure 8**

*June finds a key in "June"*



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**Red in Action.** Paired with their fight for the resistance, Handmaids also attempt to escape Gilead on several occasions. June herself attempts three separate escapes in Season 2. These escapes incorporate several red production elements that help facilitate the act. A great example is June's first escape attempt in the Season 2 premiere entitled "June." After a doctor's appointment confirming she is pregnant, June dresses privately in the room. As she begins to put on her boots, June discovers a brass key with a small red tag on it, featured in Figure 8. Searching the room, June finds that the key corresponds with a locked door, also featuring a red tag, that leads to a stairwell. Once unlocking the door, June embarks on her escape through the building. As June descends several flights of stairs, she continues to follow red tags. Each time she is unsure of her path, she is led by more red tags highlighting the route she should take. After being led down a dark tunnel, June climbs into the back of a meat truck that then drives her to an abandoned building. It is here that June would spend several months in hiding until her escape could be further arranged.

While in hiding, June must disguise herself to prevent others from recognizing her. She immediately strips off her red Handmaid uniform and burns it to detach herself from the color red. She also physically alters her appearance by cutting her hair and cutting out her red ear tag. When a Handmaid first enters Gilead, she is tagged like cattle with a red ear cuff featuring her Handmaid identification number. This tag is designed to prevent Handmaids from escaping by further labeling them as Gilead's property. Because of her pending escape, June decides to cut out her ear tag with a pair of rather-dull scissors. After several attempts and drawing much of her own blood, June succeeds in

removing the ear tag. This is an example of how a Handmaid uses blood, in this case her own, to further her resistance.

June's first escape features several red production elements that facilitate her resistance, beginning with the red tags that marked her escape route and ending with June removing her red ear cuff. While the red tags directly facilitate June's escape, the burning of the uniform and removal of the ear cuff are also symbolic. Gilead prohibits Handmaids from escaping by dressing them in vibrant clothing and tagging them like cattle. By June burning her uniform and removing her ear tag, she removes Gilead's hold on her, freeing her to escape the society. While June is eventually recaptured by Guardians and taken back to her Gilead district, this example sets groundwork for the metaphoric use of red, solidifying the color's association with resistance throughout the series.

### **Minor Color Comparisons**

While the major colors (black, blue, and red) strongly influence meaning within the series, the minor colors (brown, white, green, and grey) are of equal importance. While the minor colors have some significance individually, much of their meaning is derived from being combined with black, blue, and red to influence meaning in different storylines. This section discusses this concept by detailing the minor colors and how they obtain meaning from different production elements. It then compares each minor color to the major colors to combine the metaphors in interesting ways.

#### ***Brown***

The color brown is an influential color within *HMT*. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that brown is a foundational color often signifying tradition, richness, and simplicity. Routed in its tradition archetype, *HMT*'s use of brown sets a strong foundation

for understanding Gilead, specifically surrounding the role of Aunts. Aunts are older, infertile women devoted to Gilead's teachings and are tasked with maintaining order among Handmaids. To achieve this, Aunts supervise Handmaids by orienting them into Gilead's customs, assigning them to their household postings, and even delivering their children. Aunts are also responsible for punishing Handmaids when they resist.

Aunt Lydia is the most prominent Aunt in *HMT* and supervises June and other Handmaids in her district. Aunt Lydia is a complicated character within the series, serving as both a support system for and punisher of Handmaids. She particularly struggles with managing June throughout June's many resistant acts. Throughout the series, Aunt Lydia has punished June in several ways, including whipping her feet, chaining her to beds, and making her watch other Handmaids be tortured as a result of her actions. Through this brutality, Aunt Lydia's goal is to provide negative reinforcement to motivate June and other Handmaids to act in line with Gilead's expectations. She never harms Handmaids in a way that will damage their fertility, but she also wants the punishment to fit the crime. Throughout Aunt Lydia's character arc, the viewer learns of an Aunt's role in Gilead as she is tasked with maintaining order. Therefore, the metaphor associated with the color brown is order. This metaphor is individually seen through the Aunt's costume and the Red Center.

**Aunts' Costumes.** All Aunts wear a standard brown uniform within Gilead designed in a military-like fashion. The garment, featured in Figure 9, consists of a brown dress, brown blazer, and a belt at the waist. The uniform aligns with Gilead's standards for women, which mandates that all women must remain covered. In line with its military



**Figure 9**

*Aunt Lydia featured in “Offred”*



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style, an Aunt's costume features several tailored elements to help the Aunts appear formal and serious, helping them express the metaphor of order. This tailoring mimics the idea behind the Wives' costume, which is also tailored, to associate Aunts as an authoritative figure within Gilead. Unlike the Wives' costumes, however, the Aunts' costumes are the first uniform designed to be neutral in the background.

Brown is the first color explored within this analysis that does not demand the viewer's attention. Unlike blue or red, brown is a neutral color that does not attract the eye and instead allows its production elements to remain in the background. This design is important within *HMT*, as the focus must remain on Wives or Handmaids during a

particular scene. An Aunt's brown costume, therefore, allows Aunts to remain in the background and not overshadow the more prominent rankings within the series. While Aunts serve an important purpose in *HMT* and are involved in several storylines, the series revolves around the experiences of Wives and Handmaids. Therefore, dressing Aunts in all-brown attire allows the ranking to remain in the background to help advance the storylines of characters like Serena and June. This neutrality helps express brown's metaphor, as Aunts are tasked with simply maintaining order within Gilead rather than serving a more prominent role.

**Red Center.** Gilead grants Aunts jurisdiction over the Red Center, an old gymnasium where a Handmaid's orientation into Gilead takes place. The goal of this training is to both outline Gilead's expectations and also brainwash Handmaids into believing in Gilead's customs. Red is incorporated into the title to associate the space with the orientation, but Aunts are given agency within this domain. Aunts facilitate a Handmaid's orientation by introducing the women to Gilead's laws, traditions, and rituals, and they even practice the position of the Ceremony. Handmaids spend several months in the Red Center learning Gilead's customs until they are ready to receive a posting. If a Handmaid fails to conform to Gilead's rules, Aunt Lydia and other Aunts punish her until she submits. The Red Center's main purpose is for the Aunts to establish order among Handmaids before they fully enter Gilead.

Like the domains of other rankings, the Red Center is colored brown to associate the set design with Aunts. Figure 9 also showcases these subtle brown elements to create a neutral set design. Incorporating brown into the set grants Aunts agency within the space, allowing them to maintain order during Handmaid orientation. Like the Aunt's



costume, however, the color of the Red Center blends into the background, allowing the viewer's focus to remain on the Handmaids' experiences at the Red Center rather than featuring the perspective of Aunts. This represents the role in which brown plays within *HMT* as it greatly influences meaning when combined with the major colors.

**Brown-Black.** When comparing brown (order) and black (power), the metaphors are easily interconnected. Having power and maintaining order have similar objectives within the society, and together they create Gilead's foundation. When comparing an Aunt to a Commander or Guardian, the rankings are actually quite similar, despite having different functions in Gilead. Brown and black are often combined throughout different production elements to express this interconnectivity.

***How Aunts Have Power.*** While an Aunt's jurisdiction applies only to Handmaids, their privilege in Gilead is quite similar to Commanders and Guardians. First, Aunts are allowed to read and write in order to better monitor Handmaids. Aunts read Handmaids' files when assigning postings, and they also write notes to monitor a Handmaid's progress during pregnancy. In "Seeds," Aunt Lydia gives June a pregnancy check-up and writes her notes in a brown notebook. When Serena comments on her writing, Aunt Lydia remarks, "Special dispensation for Aunts. Really a burden more than anything" (Snyder & Barker, 2018, "Seeds," 4:46). Allowing Aunts to read and write serves a functional purpose in monitoring Handmaids, but Gilead also trusts Aunts to have this privilege because of their devotion to Gilead's teachings. The ability to read and write situates Aunts above other female rankings, and having access to black text gives Aunts special power in Gilead that allows them to further maintain order.

Aunts are also the only female ranking permitted to carry a weapon. In order to punish Handmaids, Aunts are issued cattle prods to zap them into cooperating. An Aunt's weapon gives important insight into how Gilead views Handmaids--they are property similar to a herd of cattle. The weapon's color is also of equal importance. While other accessories, like their notebook, are colored brown, their cattle prod is colored black to represent the power that Aunts have in wielding their weapon. Throughout the series, Aunt Lydia uses her weapon against June and other Handmaids on several occasions when the women attempt to resist. Sometimes Aunt Lydia even zaps Handmaids out of spite just to express the power she is granted through her weapon. An Aunt's cattle prod symbolizes the connection between power and order. Other women never have access to a weapon, but Gilead gives Aunts special privileges to situate them above other rankings. Because of her privilege, Aunt Lydia is as authoritative in Gilead as any Guardian, and she is not as succumb to a Commander's power because of black and brown's interconnectivity.

***Set Designs.*** On a similar level to an Aunt's granted power, several sets associated with Commanders also incorporate brown. Along with the Commander's court, which features mostly black, Gilead has another courtroom that handles more minor cases. This courtroom is featured in "Late" when Handmaid Emily is put on trial for her same-sex romance with a Martha. Gilead outlaws homosexuality, and residents must hide their sexual orientation in order to escape punishment. Because Emily's sexuality was exposed, her trial is held in a smaller courtroom because her and her partner's punishments are already predetermined under Gilead law. The Martha is sentenced to death, but Emily is spared because of her fertility as a Handmaid and is

reposted to a household. When comparing this courtroom to the Commander's court, the coloring of the two sets becomes significant in expressing the metaphors of order and power.

Both courtrooms are colored differently to express the objectives of each court. The smaller courtroom is colored brown because the court is tasked with simply maintaining order within Gilead. All cases that appear in this smaller court have predetermined punishments that make the process simple and orderly. The courtroom is colored brown to symbolize this court's objective. On the other hand, cases held in the Commander's court, like when Commander Putnam was put on trial, are not predetermined and require Commanders to exert their power. The Commander's council has the power to decide the punishment, symbolized by the black coloring of the space. Therefore, this brown courtroom is important to the metaphor of order because it expresses the objectives of the space to follow the guidelines already established by Gilead law.

Brown and black's interconnectivity is also seen within a Commander's public office. "Postpartum" gives a first look at Fred's public workspace, which showcases a different color scheme than his private office. This set features brown walls, which symbolizes Fred's public image within Gilead. While he has the ability to exert power in his private study, Fred must maintain a public image focused on creating the structure of Gilead and following Gilead law. The brown office helps Fred express his public image by utilizing the metaphor of order, even though he and other Commanders often manipulate the law in their favor. This set design further illustrates the interconnectedness between brown (order) and black (power) represented between these

different production elements. Together, the two colors help create the structure of Gilead and greatly influence its foundation.

**Brown-Blue.** Brown (order) and blue (control) are an interesting pairing within *HMT*, and the color combination is strongly represented in the Colonies. The Colonies are a region in the Midwest acting as an internment camp for the rebellious population. The Colonies are a punishment for female rankings, most commonly Handmaids and Marthas, that have broken Gileadean law or failed to assimilate to the new society. When a woman is sentenced to the Colonies, she is assigned a new ranking as an Unwoman. While serving their sentence in the Colonies, Unwomen must clean up hazardous, toxic waste for the purpose of cleaning the environment. However, most women meet their demise during the process, and because of this, being sent to the Colonies is known as a death sentence.

***The Colonies' Use of Brown.*** Brown is incorporated into the Colonies in two specific ways. First, lower-ranking Aunts monitor Unwomen to maintain order within the Colonies. This involves much negative reinforcement to motivate Unwomen to shovel toxic waste despite exhaustion and illness. To protect them from hazardous conditions, Aunts are given gas masks and other protective gear to maintain their health. While these Aunts' jurisdiction is in an unsafe environment, they still are granted the same rights and privileges as other Aunts, including the ability to read and write and the issuance of a cattle prod, and their brown costume within the Colonies further expresses the order they maintain.

The second representation of brown is through the landscape of the Colonies featured in Figure 10. The Colonies are a dry, abandoned region of Gilead filled with dirt

and toxic waste, and the metaphor of order is represented through the Unwomen's task of cleaning the landscape. Through this task, Gilead's intention is not to improve the environment but instead punish Unwomen by sentencing them to a slow, painful death. Unlike Aunts, Unwomen are not given any protective gear and instead become sicker day-by-day from overexposure. The Colonies are a standard death sentence for rebellious women in Gilead, and the threat of it discourages resistance among Handmaids and Marthas out of fear of being punished. Therefore, the Colonies' brown landscape both maintains order within regular Gilead and also provides a routine solution for any rebellion.

**Figure 10**

*Unwomen costumes featured in "Seeds"*



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*The Colonies' Use of Blue.* Blue is represented in the Colonies exclusively through the Unwomen's costume design. Along with the landscape, Figure 10 features an Unwoman in a floor-length, long-sleeve jacket paired with a dark blue head scarf and dark blue gloves. The design elements can vary from costume to costume, but rather than this symbolizing high status, as in the case of Commanders and Wives, the variation most likely represents a scarcity in material for this low ranking. Dressing Unwomen in blue can be a confusing choice for the *HMT* viewer, as blue symbolizes control throughout the series. Unwomen are brought to the Colonies against their will and are essentially sentenced to death. However, in examining the Unwomen ranking closely, they actually have some control over their time in the Colonies.

First, Unwomen have access to some medical supplies like gauze for blistered hands and expired antibiotics smuggled through Gilead's black market. While not substantial, having access to these supplies allows Unwomen to have some control over their health. While it may only prolong their inevitable death, Unwomen can grant themselves and others medical care to help ease their suffering and give them a feeling of control during their sentence. Next, although monitored by Aunts, Unwomen often go unsupervised in the Colonies and no longer fear punishment because they are already serving Gilead's ultimate sentence. Their time in the Colonies, therefore, allows them to regain control of their agency. A great example of this occurs within "Seeds" when two Unwomen, Fiona and Kit, are wed in their living quarters. Same-sex marriage is outlawed within regular Gilead, but because Unwomen are not strictly monitored, the women were able to officiate a same-sex marriage without fear of being punished. This represents a strong level of control that allows Fiona and Kit to express their love despite Gilead law.

This example provides insight into Unwomen's level of control while in the Colonies because they have freedom over the time they have left.

In analyzing how Unwomen have some level of control, it is reasonable for *HMT*'s production team to dress Unwomen in blue, which symbolizes that control. Unwomen are bound by some guidelines and have a duty to fulfill, which is symbolized by the use of brown in the set design as well as the Aunts stationed in the Colonies, yet they are able to control their experience through access to some medical care and unsupervised activities. The brown-blue color scheme is then very suitable for the Colonies because it represents a balance between maintaining order yet having some control. Although rarely shown throughout the series, the Colonies is a great representation for the powerful significance *HMT*'s color scheme possesses to influence the storyline.

**Brown-Red.** Brown (order) and red (resistance) do not necessarily work together within the series. Instead, they represent conflicting ideas that spark violence when combined. Order and resistance cannot work together in harmony because they represent different agendas within Gilead. In turn, the color combination symbolizes great conflict between Aunts and Handmaids. As a result, brown and red are incorporated into several acts of violence throughout the series, including brutality inflicted by both Aunts and Handmaids against one another.

***Aunt Violence.*** When Handmaids resist Gilead law, Aunts are responsible for their punishment. Unlike Guardians who simply inflict power over Handmaids, Aunts punish Handmaids with intention and strategy. This is seen through both small-scale and large-scale props. For smaller props, Aunts often punish Handmaids by taking away their

**Figure 11**

*Brown muzzle featured in “Late”*



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ability to speak. In Figure 11, Emily is featured wearing a brown muzzle as she awaits her trial in “Late.” This prop limits Emily’s freedom, and she must remain silent in punishment for her transgressions. In expanding on the brown muzzle, Aunts silence Handmaids even further in Washington, D.C., by inserting brass-colored rings in Handmaids’ lips as a permanent silencing. This represents extreme violence enacted by Aunts that strips Handmaids of any freedom they maintain during their reproductive role. The brown muzzle and brass-colored rings give insight into the strategies of Aunts to reestablish order on an individual level.



Brown is also incorporated into large-scale punishments, specifically hangings. Hangings are a common occurrence in Gilead and incorporate brown to represent the structured punishment. In “June,” Guardians force Handmaids upon a wooden gallows and place brown nooses around their necks. Incorporating brown into the hanging equipment symbolizes how Gilead attempts to establish order among resistant residents. In this case, the hanging was mere propaganda designed by Aunt Lydia to punish Handmaids for resisting. Having brown present within this brutality further asserts Aunt Lydia’s role in violence and how she combats resistance by establishing order. However, when Aunt Lydia engages in cruel brutality, she should expect to receive some in return.

***Handmaid Violence.*** As the resistance gains traction, Handmaids also inflict brutality on Aunts as an act of revenge. A great example involves Handmaid Emily stabbing Aunt Lydia in “The Word.” Before this episode, Emily and Aunt Lydia had previously been at odds because Aunt Lydia had inflicted cruel brutality on Emily. During an argument with Aunt Lydia in “The Word,” Emily has a chance to enact her revenge. Emily stabs Aunt Lydia in the back with a knife she stole from the kitchen, sending Aunt Lydia tumbling down several flights of stairs. At the bottom of the stairs, Aunt Lydia looks up at Emily in agony and disbelief. Although Aunt Lydia recovers from the incident, Emily’s violence against her is significant in understanding the dichotomy between brown (order) and red (resistance). Because Aunts and Handmaids are associated with these colors, great conflict occurs between them. This color combination cannot work in harmony and instead always results in violence from either Aunts or Handmaids. This pairing, therefore, represents the interesting color combination of brown

and red throughout the series. In turn, brown sets a strong foundation for understanding the role of the minor colors throughout *HMT*.

### ***White***

White is a highly significant color within *HMT* because of its application to a variety of contexts. Unlike the other colors, white is not attached to a specific ranking in Gilead but is instead incorporated into a variety of costume designs. Also, white is made part of several set designs and props, making it a prominent color among the production elements. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that white often symbolizes purity and peace of the body and mind. While white is attached to production elements that traditionally represent this archetype, *HMT*'s use of white moves beyond its usual symbolism to instead signify the metaphor of ownership, specifically Gilead owning its residents. Therefore, instead of representing a positive aspect of Gilead society, the color white falls in line with Gilead's agenda that negatively affects many citizens. This ownership is expressed through multiple ways, including the costumes of newborns and brides, the coloring of medical facilities, and medical supplies throughout the series. All these production elements work together to symbolize Gilead's ownership over its citizens.

**Costume Designs.** Because white is not associated with a specific ranking, residents often wear white temporarily. The most common rankings to wear all white are newborn children and brides. First, Gilead dresses newborns in all white, a common practice in Western culture to express an infant's purity. However, this costume greatly signifies Gilead's ownership over the children. The color in this context labels children as Gilead's property. Infants are viewed essentially as currency within Gilead by serving as

proof that Gilead's customs work. Their conception was forced through the Ceremony, and they were stripped from their biological mother upon birth, but after those occurrences, the child is assimilated into Gilead to be happily raised by a Wife and Martha. Eventually, as the child grows older, he or she will be accustomed to Gilead's traditions and not know a world beyond them. Gilead parades infants around to prove to the outside world that while unconventional, their society's structure is a solution to plaguing infertility. By viewing children in this way, Gilead treats newborns as property that furthers their reproductive agenda. Therefore, dressing the newborns in white helps express Gilead's ownership over these children, both through their conception and after birth.

As the children of Gilead grow older, they are dressed in blue or pink according to their gender. However, once a daughter reaches 15 years of age, she is dressed in white again and is forced into an arranged marriage with a Guardian for the sole purpose of reproducing. Eventually, Gilead's aim is to eliminate the need for Handmaids by increasing the fertility of young women through healthy food and clean air. Once a daughter becomes fertile, she is immediately married to take advantage of her reproductive years. By forcing these young girls into marriage, Gilead enacts its ownership over the children, further symbolized by their white wedding dresses.

In "Seeds," 15-year-old Eden marries Nick, Fred Waterford's driver. Through Nick and Eden's wedding, the viewer understands the power of white in symbolizing ownership. In the beginning of the ritual, a thick, white veil is draped over Eden's face. While once used to signify a bride's purity, this veil is symbolic to Gilead's view of these young women as property. As the ritual proceeds, each Guardian lifts the white veil to

reveal his young bride. This imagery is shocking to the viewer as the camera reveals the faces of many young girls. The interaction between Eden and Nick, in particular, is haunting as the pair acknowledges their age difference. The use of white during this wedding ceremony symbolizes Gilead's ownership over the child brides and how all women in Gilead, not just Handmaids, are viewed as fertility machines.

**Set Designs.** Aside from varying costumes, white set designs are more permanent within the series, specifically in regards to medical facilities. While common for hospitals or doctor's offices to be colored white to express a sterile environment, these particular sets take on a different context when referencing the metaphor of ownership, especially a

## **Figure 12**

*June's first pregnancy check up featured in "June"*



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doctor's office. Throughout the series, Handmaids regularly visit a doctor to monitor their fertility levels or obtain a pregnancy check up, and the exams are made impersonal and very routine. The exam rooms are also made overwhelmingly white to express Gilead's ownership over a Handmaid's body and her overall experience with pregnancy.

Figure 12 features June in an exam room for her first pregnancy check-up. During the exam, the focus is taken away from June and instead surrounds the Waterfords as they view a sonogram of the expected child. June must remain fully clothed as she lies on the exam table, and a white curtain drapes over her midsection to separate her upper and lower halves. This position disconnects June from her reproductive organs, which symbolizes Gilead's ownership over her body. In this instance, June is not an expectant mother but instead a vessel being used to produce the Waterford's child. During the exam, the doctor talks only to the Waterfords, completely ignoring June. He points to the sonogram and even refers to the fetus as Serena's baby. In doing this, the exams are made very impersonal, stripping Handmaids of any involvement.

When doctor's appointments are showcased with *HMT*, they serve as a reminder to the viewer that Handmaids are merely Gilead's property who only serve a reproductive role. Gilead's ownership of these women is symbolized by the elements of this set design. It is impossible to ignore the white elements of the doctor's office, and while the other colors pop amongst the blank backdrop, white is a focus of the scene and shows how June is owned by Gilead. She does not consent to her pregnancy or the exam, but Gilead's ownership is dominant within the set. The white interior of the exam room helps express how Gilead owns Handmaids and essentially hijacks their experience with pregnancy.

**Props.** Similar to the set designs, white props align with medical issues, specifically injuries. When a resident resists Gilead, they are violently punished and may lose an eye or finger or suffer from a slew of other injuries. To recover from their punishment, the impacted area is wrapped in a white bandage. Like other white production elements, bandages are often white to express sterility, but given the metaphor of ownership, these bandages are designed to remind the resident of their transgressions. This shows that Gilead is above them and has the ability to inflict misery on its residents, symbolized by the white bandages.

A great example of a white bandage expressing ownership occurs in “Late.” In punishment for her same-sex romance with a Martha, Emily is not sentenced to death but instead undergoes genital mutilation in which her clitoris is removed surgically. After awaking in a hospital unaware of her procedure, she simply finds a white bandage around her privates. Later on in the scene, Aunt Lydia enters the hospital room and remarks, “I know this is a shock for you, Emily. You can still have children, of course. But things will be so much easier for you now. You won't want what you cannot have” (Miller & Morano, 2017, “Late,” 50:07). Aunt Lydia’s involvement in Emily’s surgery is the conflict that inspires Emily to stab Aunt Lydia in “The Word.” This bandage is a prime example of Gilead’s ownership over resistant residents. Emily had no choice over her procedure, and Gilead took away her ability to experience sexual desire without blinking an eye, showing how Gilead owns her body. White sends several strong messages like this within *HMT* as it is combined through several production elements to express Gilead’s ownership over its residents. However, while white expresses a powerful

metaphor on its own, the color gains even more influence when combined with the major colors.

**White-Black.** The metaphors behind white (ownership) and black (power) seem quite similar in theory but operate very differently within Gilead. A Commander's power must undergo constant maintenance because of resistance from other rankings.

Ownership, on the other hand, is a continuous power over Gilead's residents granted to Commanders. Commanders acquire both power and ownership within Gilead's structure, highly symbolized by their costume design. While a Commander's uniform is predominantly black, white is incorporated into the costume through a white button-down shirt. In specific instances throughout the series, Commanders remove their black blazer to reveal the white shirt often in times of great confidence. For example, Commanders often display their white shirts during the Ceremony for both comfort and to showcase a more relaxed demeanor. Revealing their white shirt then contributes to the confidence level needed to perform during the Ceremony. The white shirt also expresses the ownership Commanders feel over Handmaids during the ritual. A Commander's costume, therefore, creates an interesting pairing between white and black in terms of a Commander's confidence level, which is seen through both the addition of white and absence of the color.

**Using White.** A great example of a Commander's confidence level seen through their attire occurs in "Household" in which Fred meets Commander Winslow, a high-ranking Commander in Washington, D.C. Commanders of a higher status like Winslow often display their white shirt in an effort to showcase the confidence they feel within

**Figure 13**

*High Commander Winslow featured in “Household”*



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Gilead. The higher their ranking, the more ownership they acquire under Gilead's structure, and because of their comfortable position in Gilead, high Commanders feel comfortable dressing relaxed and do not feel the need to exert constant power. Figure 13 features Winslow in a white shirt, black tie, and black suspenders.

During this scene in “Household,” Winslow appears very relaxed and informal when interacting with Fred, whereas Fred, who remains in his regular Commander attire, is quite tense during the interaction. This represents a difference in confidence levels between Winslow and Fred. Winslow is confident in his high-ranking position and his sense of ownership in Gilead, whereas Fred feels the need to exert his power over other



residents. In this case, however, Fred does not have any power over Winslow and instead becomes utterly fascinated with the Commander's demeanor and personal style, so much so that in the next scene, Fred mimics Winslow's attire in an attempt to embody his confidence. This gives insight into how white's metaphor of ownership is combined with black's power to contribute to a Commander's confidence, utilized by several male characters in the series.

**Omitting White.** While the white shirt is a staple in a Commander's uniform, sometimes the piece is omitted in times when he must exert great power over another individual. This is similar to a Guardian's costume that does not incorporate any white. Commanders utilize this all-black color scheme when they feel their power is being challenged. For example, in "The Last Ceremony," June tests her limits with the Waterfords, and as punishment, Serena and Fred sexually assault her outside of a traditional Ceremony ritual. Fred hesitates in executing his wife's plan, so he dresses in all black to express his supreme power over the situation. His attire represents his lack of confidence in his Wife's decision and his need to exert full power over June. The absence of white in this scene gives insight into the importance of the white-black color combination in understanding Gilead from a Commander's perspective and their fluctuating confidence levels under the society's structure.

**White-Blue.** The relationship between white (ownership) and blue (control) is represented through a Wife's connection with the children of Gilead. Because Wives are said to be barren, the women become mothers in a nontraditional way via a Handmaid. To overcompensate for the infertility, Wives are incorporated into several aspects of a Handmaid's pregnancy, including the Ceremony, doctor's appointments, and even labor,

as a way to give them a sense of control. When combining Wives' need for control with the metaphor of ownership, however, their connection with becoming a mother takes on a different context because Wives feel entitled to a child in Gilead and have ownership over a Handmaid's entire pregnancy. The white-blue color combination is most prominent during Gilead's birthing ritual, which is structured to make the Wife the center of the experience.

"The Last Ceremony" features Serena and June's birthing ritual and outlines its unique structure as Gilead attempts to combine the experiences of Wives and Handmaids during the birthing process. First, the Wife and Handmaid change out of the traditional

#### **Figure 14**

*Serena relaxes during birthing ritual in "The Last Ceremony"*



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blue or red uniform into a similar white garment. By matching the Handmaid's attire during labor, the Wife expresses her ownership over the experience while also maintaining her sense of control. While the Handmaid actually endures contractions in the Commander and Wife's bedroom, the Wife lies in the living room surrounded by other Wives and fakes contractions, clenching her stomach and breathing deeply, featured in Figure 14. Once the Handmaid is ready to push, the Wife then enters the bedroom to push alongside the Handmaid. The Wife climbs onto a two-tiered stool, above the Handmaid and straddles her. This further connects the Handmaid and Wife and expresses the Wife's control over the entire process. Once the Handmaid gives birth, the Wife climbs into bed to receive her newborn child. An Aunt delivers the child to the Wife without any acknowledgement of the Handmaid, which symbolizes the ownership a Wife feels over the newborn. White and blue are made the focus of the birthing ritual, rather than red, to express the ownership and control exerted by a Wife during the process.

The birthing ritual is quite unique to *HMT* and is filled with much delusion and acting. However, it gives important insight into the meanings behind white and blue. Because children are owned within Gilead, they are viewed as the property of the Wife and Commander, giving reason as to why the newborn is separated from the Handmaid immediately after birth. While the Wife has no biological tie to the child, she forcefully inserts herself into his or her life, symbolizing her sense of ownership. Because she cannot give birth herself, the Wife wants to control every aspect of labor, faking contractions and even pushing alongside the Handmaid. The white and blue coloring of the birthing ritual allows the focus to remain on the Wife as she legally, rather than physically, enters motherhood.

**White-Red.** Like the color red, the combination of white (ownership) and red (resistance) works on two important levels within Gilead. First, Gilead dresses Handmaids in white, specifically through their head gear, to express their ownership over the women. Handmaids must always cover their hair with a white bonnet to cast a modest appearance, and anytime they are outside, they must wear wings, oval-shaped visors similar to horse blinders. The purpose of the wings is to both block the women's peripheral vision and prevent others from seeing them. By limiting their vision, the wings express white's metaphor by owning Handmaids' interactions with the public. The placement of the wings atop the Handmaids' heads also symbolizes ownership as Gilead attempts to own Handmaid's thoughts. As part of their brainwashing, Handmaids are taught to fear other Handmaids as a way to limit the organized resistance. During her initial interactions with Emily, June limits the conversation to topics like the weather out of fear that Emily will report any resistant thoughts back to Gilead. Once June learns of Emily's involvement in the resistance network, however, the two form a relationship despite their restricted vision. Therefore, although Gilead restricts Handmaids' interactions with one another, the resistance is more powerful than any of Gilead's claims to ownership.

While Gilead strategically uses white in an attempt to own Handmaids, Handmaids use the color to facilitate their own resistant agendas both individually and collectively. Individually, menstruation is associated with a Handmaid's white undergarments. Like wings, a Handmaid's undergarments are colored white to express Gilead's ownership over her body as she is forced into sexual servitude. However, when a Handmaid starts her period, her blood stains the white underwear, which represents an

interesting pairing of resistance and ownership. The episode entitled “Seeds” takes menstrual blood a step further as June hides her miscarriage from the Waterfords out of fear of being punished. June discovers blood on her underwear several months into her pregnancy but chooses to ignore it. June avoiding her medical complication helps illustrate the power of white and red when working in the Handmaid’s favor. When Handmaids’ resistance overcomes Gilead’s ownership over them, Handmaids have the ability to exercise free will. They overcome Gilead’s claim to their reproductivity and make their own decisions. This free will is further illustrated when Handmaids resist collectively.

**Figure 15**

*June featured with wings in “Household”*



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Because of her many attempts to defy Gilead, June becomes well-known by other characters in the series and evolves to become a leader of the resistance. June's influence is featured in "Household" when she and the Waterfords visit Washington, D.C. Throughout the episode, June is exposed to the severe brutality of Handmaids in the Capitol, like having brass rings around their lips to permanently silence them. As a visitor, June is the only Handmaid able to speak in Gilead, placing her in a position of power. During one of Fred's organized campaigns to retrieve baby Nicole from Canada, June is situated in front of a white statue while other Handmaids gather in a semi-circle around her. Figure 15 features June at an angle in which she appears to have white wings. The use of white in this image helps express the pairing of white and red in the form of free will as June becomes a leader of the other Handmaids. Because Gilead is a radically religious society, the use of wings is significant within *HMT* by giving June agency to resist. In the Christian Bible, specifically Revelations, winged creatures represent the ability to move, and when paired with June in this instance, the winged statue grants her agency, specifically in her decision to become the leader of the resistance. Figure 15 then represents a turning point for June's storyline, largely facilitated by the white-red color combination.

### ***Green***

*HMT*'s choice of green provides an excellent example of the intentionality behind the color scheme. Its light shading allows the color to be noticed by the viewer while still remaining in the background. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that green often symbolizes a balanced lifestyle in terms of youth, health, and stability. *HMT* utilizes the color green in a similar way through the metaphor of support. Marthas are the ranking

most associated with green and serve a functional role within Gilead. Marthas are barren women who possess useful homemaking skills, and their primary duties involve cooking, cleaning, and raising Gilead's children. Rita, the Waterford's Martha, is the most prominent Martha throughout *HMT*'s three seasons. Like Handmaids, Marthas are enslaved in Gilead and forced into servitude in the Commander's home. While they are not directly involved in Gilead's main goal of increasing the population, like Commanders, Wives, or Handmaids, they provide a great amount of support to keep Gilead functioning behind the scenes. This metaphor of support is symbolized by the Marthas' costumes and their specific domains like the kitchen or nursery.

**Marthas' Costumes.** The Martha's costume design is tailored to reflect a Martha's duties and features several components. Like other rankings, Marthas dress in modest attire to prevent the women from expressing any sexuality. Along with their full-length dresses, Marthas wear aprons and bandanas made from terry-cloth fabric. Rita's full Martha ensemble is featured in Figure 16. Although a Martha has other duties besides cooking, this uniform is worn throughout various settings, both inside and outside the Commander's home. A Martha's costume helps fulfill her supportive duties through comfortability and practicality. The design reflects the attire of a servant and expresses green's metaphor, as their garment helps them provide basic support to Gilead.

The costume's coloring is also significant within the series because it incorporates several shades of green. For example, Rita's apron and bandana are lighter than her dress. This design element provides dimension to the costume design to help the individual pieces stand out, drawing attention to the apron and bandana. Like the Unwomen's costumes, this variation might also represent a scarcity in material for this lower ranking.

**Figure 16**

*Waterford kitchen featured in “Offred”*



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Green's shading through the Martha's costume is subtle but still allows Marthas to remain in the background of a scene. The costume's color is vital in this instance to not draw attention to the Martha but instead allow her to function in the background as she provides support for Gilead's other rankings.

**Martha's Domain.** To fulfill her homemaking duties in Gilead, a Martha is given certain domains within the Commander's home. Rita possesses two domains throughout the series: the Waterford's kitchen and baby Nicole's nursery. First, although used by every member of the Waterford household, the kitchen is primarily Rita's domain as she regularly cooks for the family and servants. Like other domains throughout the series, the



kitchen, also featured in Figure 16, is colored green to associate the space with Rita. However, the set design itself, apart from its association with the Martha, expresses green's metaphor by supporting Gilead's mission. To increase the health of the population, Gilead rid of all prepackaged, manufactured food and returned to a traditional style of cooking. This burden falls upon the Marthas that must cook every food item from scratch and use real ingredients, which is often limited. Several scenes feature Rita in the kitchen making bread from scratch or preparing a meal for the Waterfords. In "Offred," June remarks, "It's the kind of thing they like the Marthas to do--a return to traditional values. That's what they fought for" (Miller & Morano, 2017, "Offred," 8:52). Therefore, Marthas provide support to Gilead's customs through the kitchen, and the space is colored green to express support for this agenda.

Second, Rita, like other Marthas, has agency within the Waterford's nursery. This green set serves a similar purpose as the kitchen by supporting one of Gilead's customs. Because children are valued like currency in Gilead, their nurseries are colored green to provide them with support. However, the nursery is also specifically designed as a Martha's territory. Along with cooking and cleaning, Marthas are responsible for the upbringing of Gilead's children similar to a nanny. While other members of the household may participate, Marthas are the children's primary care providers. Although enslaved in Gilead, many Marthas eagerly care for a Commander's child because of the scarcity of children in the region. They anticipate a newborn just as much as a Wife and are fulfilled by playing an active role in the child's life. Therefore, the nursery's green coloring represents the relationship between Marthas and children, as Marthas provide them with much needed support.

**Green-Black.** Green (support) and black (power) are rarely combined in *HMT*, as Marthas and Commanders hardly interact. However, in examining green as support and black as power, the color green is often utilized to support a Commander's agenda within Gilead, specifically by symbolizing a thriving economy. Before Gilead's reign, the United States was faced with many environmental issues that changed the landscape of the region. Much of the United States' land was filled with toxic soil like in The Colonies. When Gilead came into power, they made several environmental changes, like solar energy and traditional-farming practices, to boost their new society's appeal. Soon after these changes, much of the soil regained its fertility, symbolized by several sets that incorporate plants and open land.

A great representation of how fertile soil relates to a Commander's power is seen in "Liars." While on a road trip to Canada, Fred and Serena admire the open landscape that is gradually turning green. Serena asks, "Do you remember what this used to look like out here? Rusted-out factories" (Chang & Erguven, 2019, "Liars," 13:30), and Fred remarks, "Dirty air. Dirty water" (Chang & Erguven, 2019, "Liars," 13:36). The couple then admires their society because it "returned the world to its natural state" (Chang & Erguven, 2019, "Liars," 13:40). This conversation gives insight into the mindset of high-ranking members in Gilead. The fertile, green landscape justifies Gilead's existence by providing an example of the benefits to Gilead's laws and traditions. Gilead has made gradual improvements to the environment, which in turn contributes to Gilead's thriving economy. This provides a strong public image that showcases to other countries the benefits of Gilead's customs. These green set designs give Commanders more power in

Gilead because in some aspects, their new society is working, providing justification for their cruel actions.

**Green-Blue.** Green (support) supports blue (control) on a similar level as black. However, rather than supporting the whole economy, green is paired with blue on a more personal level, particularly when it comes to gardening. As a woman in Gilead, a Wife is restricted to a few activities, like knitting or gardening, throughout her daily life. While Serena admits that she despises knitting, she gravitates towards gardening. Several instances throughout *HMT* feature Serena trimming bushes, picking flowers, and landscaping her garden. She even maintains a large greenhouse in her backyard.

**Figure 17**

*Serena and Fred talk in “The Last Ceremony”*



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Gardening, which is associated with the color green through plants and nature, is symbolic for Serena and supports her through many emotional times as she uses her garden to escape her complicated life. For example, after June's contractions are ruled false labor, Serena immediately flees to her greenhouse and hastily pots succulent plants, as seen in Figure 17. Although minor compared to other color combinations, green and blue are important in describing Serena's character arc and emotional state, as the green garden provides her with emotional support throughout her complicated role in Gilead.

**Green-Red.** The Martha and Handmaid rankings are similar because they are both enslaved in Gilead and forced to serve the Commander's household. Because of their common characteristics, Marthas are just as likely as Handmaids to resist.

Throughout *HMT*'s first two seasons, Handmaids and Marthas engage in resistance separately. Marthas created a secret underground network known as Mayday designed to help Gilead residents escape. Because Marthas have more freedom in Gilead, like the ability to navigate public streets unsupervised, their resistant efforts are often undetected by others, allowing them to smuggle several residents out of Gilead. Marthas are more strategic in their resistant acts than Handmaids and even formed a Martha council to oversee Mayday's efforts. In the beginning of the series, Marthas have some success in resisting Gilead, but Mayday gains further traction when Handmaids and Marthas combine their resistant efforts.

Mayday is represented by a combination of green (support) and red (resistance) because Marthas support Handmaids during their resistance, and Handmaids help fuel the resistance enacted by Marthas. Before their alliance, Handmaid resistance had always gone punished, and Marthas' escape efforts had little success. When combining green and

red's metaphors, however, the resistance becomes more powerful. Marthas support Handmaids in their efforts by having more freedom in Gilead, allowing their acts to remain undetected. Handmaids then fuel the resistance network through their association with red. Therefore, the relationship between red and green is significant within the series by advancing the influence of Mayday.

A great example of a successful Mayday mission is found in “The Word” when June and Marthas smuggle baby Nicole out of Gilead. While in the Waterford’s nursery, Rita informs June that the Marthas can help her and Nicole escape. Rita motions to a window where Marthas had set a nearby house on fire to preoccupy Gilead authorities.

**Figure 18**

*Martha helps June and Nicole escape in “The Word”*



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June quickly dresses in her heavy cloak, gathers some supplies for Nicole, and sneaks into the Waterford's backyard where she discovers a Martha waiting for her. While holding Nicole, June follows the Martha to the next checkpoint where she is met by another Martha, and June follows a relay of Marthas through several backyards connected by holes in the fences. Figure 18 features June and a Martha at the last checkpoint of the journey. From there, June is led to a wheat field next to an underpass to wait for further instructions. While in hiding, June makes the bold decision to remain in Gilead in an effort to reunite with her first-born daughter, Hannah, who is living with a Commander somewhere in June's district. After deciding to stay, June encounters Handmaid Emily at the underpass and allows Nicole to escape with Emily, leaving June behind. While initially designed to also help June flee Gilead, Mayday's efforts to help Nicole escape were successful, facilitated by the passion of Handmaids and support from several Marthas. This example illustrates the importance of the green-red color combination in facilitating resistance throughout the series and illustrates the significance of green's support.

### ***Grey***

Like green, the color grey is a background color that subtly influences *HMT*'s storyline. Singh and Srivastava (2011) explained that grey is used as a neutral color in advertisements to express themes of wisdom, dullness, and even boredom. *HMT* utilizes grey's neutral effect to categorize production elements that symbolize life before Gilead. In other words, grey expresses the metaphor of normalcy because the color is often attached to objects that were once normal for the characters. Grey's normalcy is a driving force that affects many characters and storylines, and the metaphor is individually

represented through the Econowife ranking and specific props that help illustrate the metaphor of normalcy.

**Econowives.** Econowives are rarely featured within *HMT* because they are not active components of Gilead's rituals. Econowives are privileged women within Gilead that operate relatively normally within the society. To become an Econowife, women must meet two categories: (1) they must be devoted to Gilead's teachings, and (2) they must be in their first marriage. To understand why some women are labeled as Econowives, it is easier to examine why other women are not this ranking. For example, although in her first marriage and devoted to Gilead, Serena is married to a Gilead Commander, thus labeling her a Wife. June was in her first marriage, but because her husband Luke had previously been married, and largely because June and Luke had had an affair, June was stripped from her family and ranked as a Handmaid. Econowives are seen as pure in the eyes of Gilead and are allowed to remain with their husband and children as long as they remain devoted to the society. The family must follow the teachings of the Christian Bible, attend church regularly, and uphold Gilead's laws. If Econowives and their families remain faithful to Gilead, they are able to live together normally within their district separate from Gilead's main structure.

***Econowives' Costumes.*** Because of their relatively normal lives, Econowives are rightfully associated with the color grey. Figure 19 features an Econowife and illustrates the specifics of this ranking's costume. Her costume consists of several shades of grey, providing some interesting dimensions to the designs. Her clothing is also a combination of both elite styles and servant uniforms. Econowives have varying pieces for which they can mix and match, and the clothes are slightly more tailored than others. However, while



they have some privilege with their clothing, their attire is always modest and rather plain to allow them to remain in the background. Their grey ensemble thus reflects a more normal style of dress, although monotone.

***Eden's Love Story.*** Some women are ranked an Econowife when they marry within Gilead. Figure 19 features 15-year-old Eden who married Nick, the Waterford's driver. Once married, Eden was ranked an Econowife because she is in her first marriage and is devoted to Gilead. Her main objective is to now reproduce with Nick, the only example of a husband-wife sexual arrangement in Gilead. While she is devoted to Gilead's cause, Eden and Nick's marriage proves quite difficult, largely because of their

#### **Figure 19**

*Eden and Isaac flirt in "The Last Ceremony"*



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age difference and Nick being in love with June. In the midst of heartbreak, Eden's storyline then takes a turn as she falls in love with another Guardian named Isaac.

Eden and Isaac's romance is the most-normal representation of a relationship within *HMT*, as the circumstances of their courtship are quite normal. Gilead law prohibits individuals from romantic relationships by limiting the contact between men and women and dressing women modestly to prevent temptation. Even married couples like Commanders and Wives often sleep in different bedrooms. Eden and Isaac's relationship develops slowly to remain undetected by others in Gilead. Eden meets Isaac while he oversees the Waterford household, and they interact playfully on several occasions. Figure 19 features Eden and Isaac flirting in the grocery store. Her interest in Isaac develops slowly and comes to fruition when they share a kiss in the Waterford's backyard. Their forbidden love then inspires the young couple to escape Gilead together, which proves unsuccessful. Once they are recaptured by Gilead, Eden and Isaac face the death penalty unless they confess their sins. However, the pair refuses to renounce their love, and they are drowned in a pool alongside one another, ending their romantic journey in a tragic spin.

Eden's love story is perhaps the most-normal representation of romantic relationships within *HMT*, providing insight into how grey expresses normalcy. Although Eden's storyline came to a dramatic end, her love for Isaac was pure and motivated by love instead of manipulation. When compared to other relationships featured in *HMT*, Eden's romance was rather simple and was not as affected by Gilead's customs. Therefore, Eden's storyline helps express the metaphor of normalcy by reminding the viewer of how relationships functioned before Gilead.

**Figure 20**

*Altered Lincoln Monument featured in “Household”*



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**Grey Set Designs.** Econowives do not have a specific domain within Gilead.

Therefore, grey set designs often vary to express the metaphor of normalcy within specific contexts. One great example is showcased in “Household” while the characters visit Washington, D.C. Figure 20 features June at the Lincoln Memorial, which has partially been destroyed. Gilead demolished Lincoln's upper body and the words written above him. Applying the grey statue in the context of Gilead helps express the metaphor of normalcy by reminding June of the former United States and the stance it took on slavery. Now as a Handmaid enslaved in Gilead, seeing Lincoln is especially symbolic to June by representing a piece of her former life. The grey Lincoln Memorial is part of a

trend employed by *HMT* to symbolize what was once familiar to the characters before Gilead's reign. Grey is also often combined with the major colors to apply a layer of normalcy to many situations.

**Grey-Black.** Grey (normalcy) and black (power) are often combined in a similar fashion as white and black. However, while white (ownership) boosts a Commander's confidence, grey has an opposite effect by neutralizing a Commander's power. Because Commanders have full reign in Gilead, they have sole power within their household, allowing them to command women, have private spaces, and have several privileges above other rankings. Much of a Commander's power is then granted to them through their black costume. When Commanders incorporate grey into their attire, their power is neutralized, and they are more equal to the women of their household.

Commander Joseph Lawrence is a great example of a Commander's neutralized power. Joseph is first introduced towards the end of Season 2 when Handmaid Emily is posted in his household. While rather suspicious, he actually arranges for Emily to escape Gilead in "The Word." As the story progresses into Season 3, June is later posted in the Lawrence household where she furthers Mayday's resistant acts with the help of the Commander. Joseph's role within *HMT* is facilitated through his costume design, as he wears grey almost exclusively, neutralizing his power. Figure 21 features Joseph in his grey attire.

Throughout *HMT*, Joseph is not a typical Commander and instead defies the Commander role in two important ways. First, he treats the women of his household with respect and grants them a voice in decision making. The women of Lawrence's household consist of his Wife, Eleanor; his Marthas, Beth and Sienna; and his

**Figure 21**

*Joseph Lawrence featured in “Sacrifice”*



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Handmaid, June. Joseph is loving to his Wife, who suffers from mental illness, and he is also known for taking in Marthas or Handmaids that are known for their rebellion, like June. Second, Joseph refuses to engage in Gilead's rituals like the Ceremony. In “The Word,” while Emily is posted in the Lawrence household, she kneels on her red pillow in preparation for the pre-Ceremony ritual. She waits patiently for the other household members, but when Joseph enters the sitting room, he responds, “No. Get up. I’m not going to do that with you” (Miller & Barker, 2018, “The Word,” 23:09). By not engaging in Gilead's rituals, Joseph further defies his Commander role and instead surrenders his power over the women of his household. His neutralized power is then represented by his

grey attire, as he gives the women a somewhat normal life despite Gilead's power structure or rituals.

**Grey-Blue.** When blue (control) is paired with grey (normalcy), a Wife's control is also neutralized. As mentioned earlier, Gilead grants Wives ownership over the children of Gilead, and the society is structured around the Commander-Wife-child unit. However, a Wife's tie to her child is threatened when applied to normal society. Underneath Gilead's structure, a Wife is legally a child's mother, forcing herself to be part of the child's upbringing despite any biological tie. While this arrangement is practiced in Gilead, other countries like Canada do not honor the same Wife-child relationship. Therefore, when a Wife and child interact outside of Gilead, the Wife's control and ownership over the child becomes neutralized, facilitated by the grey-blue color combination. While this combination is rare within the series, a great example occurs in "Sacrifice" when Serena interacts with baby Nicole in Canada.

After Nicole was smuggled out of Gilead, Serena made several attempts to reunite with her daughter in Canada. In an act of desperation, Serena manipulates her husband Fred into crossing into Canada illegally, which results in the Waterfords being arrested. Serena knowingly sacrificed her husband in exchange for interactions with Nicole. However, once Serena exited Gilead, her control over Nicole was erased, and the Wife-child relationship was subjected to a layer of normalcy while in Canada. This grey-blue color combination is represented in Serena and Nicole's first interaction at the Canadian Embassy, as Serena realizes her control over Nicole has been neutralized outside of Gilead.

Before interacting with Serena, Nicole arrives at the Embassy wearing a grey jacket. Her costume represents her return to normalcy, as the infant has been living in Canada for several months. Although born in Gilead, Nicole will grow up normally away from the society's structure and will not be bound by any of its laws or customs. Similarly, Serena has also changed out of her traditional Wife costume into more modern clothing. However, while Nicole is no longer bound by Gilead, Serena cannot escape Gilead's customs simply by changing her attire. While in Canada, Serena still represents blue's metaphor of control because she relies on Gilead's structure to maintain a relationship with Nicole. Serena no longer has legal ownership over the child, but she attempts to still control Nicole by negotiating their interactions in exchange for information on Gilead. However, while desperate to hold onto motherhood, Serena and Nicole's relationship faces challenges under a normal societal structure.

When Nicole arrives at Serena's room, the child is accompanied by a social worker who must stay in the room during Nicole and Serena's interaction. Consumed with excitement, Serena picks up Nicole, yet the child is not as receptive to Serena. The social worker comments, "Just a little stranger anxiety" (Tuchman & Erguven, 2019, "Sacrifice," 23:04), which disturbs Serena because she does not think of herself as a stranger. Serena continues to console Nicole, saying, "It's okay. It's your mama. Hey, Nicole" (Tuchman & Erguven, 2019, "Sacrifice," 23:11), in an attempt to trigger the child's memory of her. However, the social worker explains that Serena cannot use that terminology because it will confuse the child. Serena then begins to understand that her connection with Nicole in Canada is not the same as it was in Gilead. While she was once legally the child's mother, Serena now has no relationship with Nicole beyond Gilead's

structure. While Serena still attempts to control Nicole, she is subjected to grey's normalcy that eliminates her hold on the child. While rare within the series, this grey-blue color combination greatly affects Serena's storyline moving forward. Because her control is neutralized, Serena's relationship with Nicole, a tie she went to great lengths to maintain, is proven nonexistent.

**Grey-Red.** While Commanders and Wives are negatively affected by grey's normalcy, Handmaids use the color to fuel their resistance. The metaphor of normalcy reminds Handmaids of their previous life and inspires them to defy Gilead. Handmaids yearn to return to normal society because they entered Gilead unwillingly, whereas Commanders and Wives fear a return to normal. Grey (normalcy) is then paired with red (resistance) in a symbolic way when Handmaids experience an element of normal life and are motivated to resist Gilead. The Season 1 finale entitled "Night" provides two strong examples of this grey-red color combination.

First, after several years in Gilead, June sees her daughter, Hannah, for the first time. After learning of June's pregnancy, Serena arranges a visit with Hannah to manipulate June into protecting the unborn child. Once arriving at Hannah's school, Serena exits the car but leaves June locked inside to watch the interaction from afar. Serena sits with Hannah on the school steps, leaving June to simply watch from a distance. When she notices Hannah, June frantically tries to unlock the door and presses herself against the car window to watch through pleated, grey curtains, featured in Figure 22. While subtle, the use of grey in this scene is largely important as June strives to reunite with Hannah but is confined to the car. Beyond the grey curtains represents her normal life, a daughter she has been separated from and longs to reunite with. After

**Figure 22**

*June reacts to seeing Hannah in “Night”*



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several moments, Serena returns to the car and says, “As long as my baby is safe, so is yours” (Miller & Skogland, 2017, “Night,” 25:40). This statement shows that Serena dangled June’s previous life in front of her in motivation to protect the unborn child. However, seeing Hannah only motivates June to further defy Gilead.

Later in “Night,” June and other Handmaids resist during the Salvaging ritual. In a previous episode, a fellow Handmaid Janine endangered the life of an infant, which Gilead chose to punish through a stoning by other Handmaids. Before learning of their victim, Handmaids form a circle holding grey stones. Once Guardians revealed Janine as the victim, Handmaids hesitate and refuse to follow Aunt Lydia’s commands. Aunt Lydia



then enters the circle of Handmaids, and June drops the grey stone at Aunt Lydia's feet. This inspires other Handmaids to also drop their stones, failing to fulfill their brutal duty. In another episode, during the aftermath of this resistance, June remarks, "Friends don't stone their friends to death" (Miller & Barker, 2018, "June," 21:28). This statement represents a layer of normalcy June felt in the situation, facilitated by the grey stones.

While a minor part of the scene, the grey stones facilitate this Handmaid resistance by reminding the Handmaids of what is normal. Once Janine is revealed as the Salvaging's victim, the Gilead ritual becomes less routine and causes Handmaids to second guess their brutal duty. The grey stones serve as the vehicle for which Janine would be put to death. Because of this, the dropping of the stone then symbolizes the Handmaids' resistance because of the abnormal instance of stoning one of their own. This Salvaging scene gives deeper insight into the power of grey as it reminds Handmaids of their normal life and motivates them to defy Gilead's expectations.

### **Example Storylines**

So far, this analysis has examined each of the seven colors within *HMT* individually and introduced some interesting color dyads. While these individual analyses and comparisons hold great metaphorical meaning, the colors do not fully express their metaphors when examined this way. Instead, the metaphor behind each color gains its influence when the color scheme is combined as a whole. Therefore, in order to fully understand the significance of *HMT*'s color scheme, the final step in this analysis explores three separate storylines featured in *HMT* to understand how the color scheme works together to give deeper meaning to the storyline.

### ***Bible Proposal in “The Word”***

In the Season 2 finale entitled “The Word,” Serena proposes an amendment to Gilead law that would allow women to read the Christian Bible. The storyline begins with June discovering a grey Bible hidden in Eden’s belongings. While Eden, as an Econowife, is associated with the color grey, the Bible in this instance represents an element of normalcy. Because women are prohibited from reading, books are rarely shown within the series, and when featured, they are normally colored black to associate the privilege with Commanders. When June discovers the grey Bible, this is the first time

### **Figure 23**

*June and Serena browse Bible in “The Word”*



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she has held a book since entering Gilead. The Bible then represents June's previous life when reading was allowed, and the coloring of the book motivates June to take action in an attempt to return to normal life.

Clutching the book closely, June visits the greenhouse to show Serena the Bible. Hidden from others, June flips through the book's many pages revealing black text, featured in Figure 23. The two women possess a great amount of power in this moment by having access to written word. Because reading is reserved for men and the occasional Aunt, text is colored black to associate reading with power. By reading, June and Serena assume a powerful role, inspiring the pair to change the reading laws in Gilead. Because Gilead is a radically religious society, June and Serena believe that women should be allowed to read the Bible they base their life upon. This collaboration represents an interesting pairing of red and blue as June and Serena join forces. However, because red (resistance) and blue (control) are at constant odds, largely by both colors demanding the viewer's attention, Handmaid-Wife alliances are rarely successful in the series, foreshadowing what will come in this storyline.

Because of their prominent position in Gilead, Serena and other Wives propose their ideas to their husbands in the Commander's court. This is the first time in the series that women are featured within the dark space because it is a Commander's domain. However, in harnessing their ability to control others, Wives attempt to use their influence through the color blue to affect positive change for women in Gilead. Serena is the first to enter the courtroom followed by several other Wives, featured in Figure 24, which makes a strong statement of blue within the space. With an army of Wives behind her, Serena pitches the amendment to the Commanders, and when the men do not take

**Figure 24**

*Wives visit the Commander's court in "The Word"*



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her proposal seriously, Serena takes a more radical approach by revealing Eden's Bible to the Commanders. Serena then opens the Bible and reads a verse, which creates an interesting power dynamic within the Commander's court. Serena reading black text challenges the power Commanders possess, and although she attempted to influence the men's decision through accessing their privilege, a Wife moving beyond her means of control has severe consequences in Gilead. Upon exiting the courtroom after her failed proposal, Serena is whisked away by Guardians in punishment for her transgressions.

After Serena returns home, June is curious about the proposal's success. June visits Serena's bedroom and encounters a distraught Serena with a bandaged hand. The

punishment for a woman reading in Gilead is to lose a finger, and while Serena and other Wives often feel immune to Gilead retribution, Serena is punished like any other female resident. The white bandage serves as a reminder to Serena that while she is given some privilege in Gilead, she is still owned by the society. Despite her connection to the Commander, Serena is still bound by Gilead law and subjected to punishment. Before losing her finger, Serena had pushed the limits on her control on several occasions, repeatedly breaking Gilead law to serve her own agenda. This instance is the first time her rebellion has been punished, and the white bandage represents Serena beginning to understand her place in Gilead. Despite her status as a Wife, Serena, much like June, is owned by Gilead and has little ability to affect change. A Wife of Serena's status has never been punished at this point in the series, so this instance, supported by the color scheme, represents a turning point in Serena's storyline.

### ***Fred and Serena's Arrest in "Liars" and "Sacrifice"***

The final few episodes of Season 3, specifically "Liars" and "Sacrifice," feature Fred and Serena Waterford arrested in Canada. While a surprise to Fred, the arrest was actually a plan devised by Serena and an American Ambassador named Mark Tuello who Serena had met during a previous trip to Canada. Serena essentially chose to sacrifice her husband in exchange for interactions with Nicole. While the previous example of the Bible proposal illustrates the limits of Serena's control, that experience allowed Serena to sharpen her control measures to manipulate Fred into traveling to Canada. This example, therefore, poses an interesting combination of blue (control) and black (power) through Serena and Fred's interactions, while also incorporating several minor colors.

**Figure 25**

*Fred and Serena featured in “Liars”*



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The storyline begins in “Liars” as Fred and Serena embark on a road trip. After several attempts to retrieve Nicole from Canada, Serena organizes a secret meeting with Mark Tuello near the Canadian border to arrange for her daughter's return, or so she led Fred to believe. Because their meeting must be kept secret, Fred and Serena decide to drive themselves to the border in a black vehicle. Black cars are commonly associated with Commanders and represent the power the Waterfords have in traveling outside their district. Figure 25 features Fred and Serena during the road trip. The most important elements of this image are the characters' costumes. Serena remains in her blue Wife attire, symbolizing that she remains in control during the road trip. Fred, on the other

hand, changes out of his traditional black suit into a grey ensemble. When Commanders dress in grey, they are subjected to the metaphor of normalcy and neutralize their power as a consequence. In this instance, Fred most likely dressed in grey to apply a layer of normalcy to he and Serena traveling alone, as this resembles some of life before Gilead. Because of Serena's underlying intentions of the trip, however, Fred surrendering his power allows Serena to gain even more control over the situation.

Figure 25 also features Fred removing his grey suit jacket to reveal his white shirt. Commanders often display their white shirt in times of great confidence when they feel secure in their position in Gilead. In this image, Fred pulls the car over and allows Serena to drive, a privilege deprived from women in Gilead. The white shirt gives insight into how Fred feels confident during the road trip and comfortable letting his guard down. However, because of Serena's underlying motives for the trip, Fred would soon regret not exerting power when he had the chance.

Later in "Liars," Fred and Serena arrive at the Canadian border to meet Mark Tuello. In this scene, Fred changes into his traditional black uniform for the meeting in order to exert his powerful status to the Ambassador. However, because of the plans already in place, the black suit does not express its normal metaphor within the scene. Mark then arrives in a grey vehicle, which expresses normalcy in two ways. First, while the Waterfords traveled throughout Gilead, Mark traveled from Canada, which has a normal societal structure. By arriving in a grey vehicle, he symbolizes the society he represents, which is in great contrast to the Waterford's black sports car. Second, in utilizing the metaphor of normalcy, the grey vehicle neutralizes Mark as a threat to the Waterfords. When first meeting with Mark, Fred is unsure of the Ambassador's



intentions but is reassured by Serena that he can be trusted. Later in the scene when Mark asks Fred and Serena to follow him to a more private meeting location, the grey vehicle helps Mark's request seem innocent, allowing him to manipulate grey's effect within the scene.

Fred and Serena follow Mark to the new meeting location for over one minute of content, which showcase the long journey Mark led them on. In their black sports car, Fred becomes skeptical of Mark, but Serena remains quiet during the whole drive. Mark eventually stops on a dirt road in the middle of a forest, featured in Figure 26. It is here that Fred and Serena are arrested. As soon as Fred exits his car, Mark informs the

**Figure 26**

*Mark's meeting location featured in "Liars"*



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Commander that he has been led across the Canadian border, subjecting him to an arrest for treason against the United States. While protected in Gilead, Fred no longer has any power or privilege once in Canada. The most significant color usage within Figure 26 is the green forest acting as a support system for the Waterford's arrests. Much like red is used in Gilead, Mark utilizes the green landscape to prohibit Fred's escape. Several military personnel then emerge from the trees and bushes to arrest the couple. This shows how green is incorporated into the set design to provide Mark and the Canadian officials with support. Surrounded by the forest, both Fred and Serena are arrested and escorted

**Figure 27**

*Fred's holding cell featured in "Sacrifice"*



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into separate vehicles. While Fred's arrest is valid, Serena's arrest is more of a protective measure to rescue her from Gilead. Fred would soon discover that while he will remain powerless in Canada, Serena will gain even more control and privilege.

The next episode entitled "Sacrifice" features Fred and Serena's first moments in Canada, and their contrasting experiences represent an interesting use of *HMT*'s color scheme. Figure 27 and Figure 28 feature Fred and Serena in their separate holding cells, and while similar, the set designs utilize the color scheme in different ways. In Figure 27, Fred is featured in a dimly lit holding cell with neutral furniture. The darkness is a play on the lighting technique often used for Commanders' domains to express their power within the space. While in confinement, however, Fred remains powerless within his cell and is instead subjected to new power dynamics while in Canada. Figure 28, which features Serena's holding cell, is similar in design but utilizes a different color palette to express the comfort Serena feels within the space. The cell incorporates natural light and also includes blue chairs similar to the shade of blue often worn by Serena. While she has changed out of her Gilead uniform, the chairs are a nod to the control she still maintains while in Canada, as she has traded her husband's freedom for access to Nicole. Another element of Serena's holding cell is the addition of a small botanical garden outside her window. Because Serena's green garden has provided her with much emotional support throughout the series, the garden in her holding cell also provides her with support to keep her feeling comfortable while in captivity. Therefore, while similar in their overall designs, the two holding cells effectively utilize *HMT*'s color scheme to express Fred's and Serena's new status in Canada.

**Figure 28**

*Serena's holding cell featured in "Sacrifice"*



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The dynamic between black (power) and blue (control) is interesting within this storyline as the power balance within Fred and Serena's relationship shifts. Fred felt too comfortable during the road trip, which caused him to surrender much of his power, and in turn, Serena gained more control that allowed her to rise above her husband. Once the couple is granted a visit with one another while at the Canadian Embassy, Serena reveals her role in her husband's arrest, and Fred becomes angry, even slightly choking her. However, Serena exerts her newfound status over her husband by replying, "I will pray for you, Fred" (Tuchman & Erguven, 2019, "Sacrifice," 15:01). This statement symbolizes Serena relinquishing her connection to her husband to begin her new life in

Canada. The differing experiences of Fred and Serena during this storyline is largely facilitated by the color scheme because it clues the viewer into the couple's varying mental states and their newfound punishment or privilege.

### ***Winslow's Death in "Liars"***

During another storyline in "Liars," June returns to the Jezebels nightclub on a mission from Mayday, but her visit takes a drastic turn when she murders high Commander Winslow, who was first introduced in "Household." This violence creates an interesting pairing between red (resistance) and black (power) as June utilizes both colors during the episode. The storyline begins with June convincing her Commander, Joseph, to drive her to Jezebels. Because Joseph often wears grey, he essentially surrenders his power within his household, allowing June to complete many acts of resistance under his watch. While Joseph does not eagerly agree to take June to Jezebels, he allows June to go as long as she enters the nightclub alone. As a Handmaid restricted in Gilead, June must then disguise herself as a Jezebel to remain undetected during her mission.

Upon arriving at Jezebels, June's outfit is different from her traditional red uniform. Instead, she dresses in all black, featured in Figure 29, which symbolizes the power she possesses while alone at Jezebels. June's black dress represents a disruption in the pattern recognition relied on by *HMT* viewers to identify certain rankings. However, although she is dresses in black during this scene, she still represents the metaphor of resistance through her motivation in visiting Jezebels. This combination of power and resistance is critical as June meets with a Jezebels bartender to fulfill her Mayday mission. Because her attire mimics that of a Commander, June now has agency within Jezebels and possesses the power necessary to operate confidently within the space. Upon

exiting the nightclub, however, she catches the eye of high Commander Winslow, who recognizes June from her trip with the Waterfords to Washington, D.C. Knowing that a Handmaid should not be in the nightclub alone, Winslow propositions June in exchange for her not being punished. Although June holds some power within the scene, she agrees to Winslow's proposal and follows the Commander to his hotel room.

Figure 29 showcases June in Winslow's hotel room, which features a red lighting. Rooms rarely incorporate red in *HMT* because Handmaids are not granted a domain in Gilead. However, when red is present in set designs, it strongly symbolizes an area involving resistance. Much like the red exteriors of the Waterford and Lawrence

### **Figure 29**

*June in hotel room in "Liars"*



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households, Winslow's red hotel room suggests that resistance will happen within the space. As both characters are dressed in black attire, the viewer can expect an interesting power balance between Winslow and June, and the red interior gives a subtle clue that the situation might work out in June's favor.

Quickly after entering the hotel room, Winslow instructs June to lie on the bed and gives her several specific commands. While watching June undress, Winslow removes his black blazer and suspenders, revealing his white shirt. This displays the confidence Winslow feels in the situation as he prepares to sexually dominate June. Familiar with her reproductive role in Gilead, June follows Winslow's demands, but once

**Figure 30**

*June stabs Winslow in "Liars"*



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he begins to touch her, June remembers her newfound power sparked by her black attire. Building upon the energy she received from completing her Mayday mission, June decides not to submit to Winslow but instead, through a combination of power and resistance, is going to fight back. Because Winslow was too confident in his ownership of June, he then surrenders his power and is subjected to June's violence.

When June resists Winslow's sexual assault, the Handmaid and Commander enter a brutal fight, slapping, hitting, and scratching one another as June struggles to get away. Once on the floor, June grabs a black pen from Winslow's pocket and stabs him in the chest repeatedly, featured in Figure 30. The black pen represents a weapon, while unconventional, that June uses to inflict brutality on Winslow. While once colored to associate writing with a Commander's privilege, June uses the black prop to further facilitate her resistance. Later, after puncturing Winslow's lung, June scrambles away from him, grabs a black statue from the dresser (another powerful weapon), and strikes the Commander across the head, killing him instantly. By harnessing both power and resistance, June defeats the Commander and wardens off her sexual assault, a feat never achieved at this point in the series.

The aftermath of Winslow's death also utilizes the color scheme through two important ways. First, a Martha later enters the hotel room to find a dead Commander and a distraught June. After helping June escape safely, a team of Marthas cleans the hotel room to hide all evidence of Winslow's murder. They begin by reordering the room and then move quickly into shampooing the carpet to rid of the blood stain. Later on, they even dispose of Winslow's body by burning him in a furnace. The role the Marthas play in covering up June's act of rebellion provides a great example of the support the women

offer, specifically in facilitating the resistance. Because they possess the means necessary to rid of all evidence, the Marthas play an important role during this storyline. Because of their support, June can remain unpunished for murdering Winslow, a major advancement for the resistance.

Next, after returning home from Jezebels, June changes back into her red uniform. She takes off her black dress and slowly, piece-by-piece, puts on her Handmaid attire, making sure to hide any evidence of bruising or other injuries from the fight. This scene is the first time the series has shown a character dressing in full detail, and this moment changes the viewer's perception of June. Rather than always associating her with a red costume, the viewer now sees June independently from her Handmaid ranking because of the power she acquires in "Liars." Showing June putting on her red attire is symbolic in the series because June is no longer a Handmaid but instead a woman playing this role while in Gilead. Because of her achievements at Jezebels, June will continue her resistant momentum throughout the series and always possess an element of power within Gilead. While she appears as a Handmaid on the outside, on the inside, June is a powerful, important woman in Gilead who is crucial to the resistance and will inevitably, one day, take Gilead down.

### **Summary**

This chapter provides a thorough look into *HMT*'s use of color by examining each color individually and the color scheme as a collective whole. The analysis organizes the colors into two groups (major colors and minor colors) to better detail each color's metaphor. The major colors (black, blue, and red) express their metaphors individually, whereas the minor colors (brown, white, green, and grey) gain their metaphoric influence



when combined with the major colors, creating many interesting dyads. The first two steps of the analysis detail the metaphor behind each color through examining the series' production elements. Once each color metaphor was established, the final step of the analysis explores three storylines within *HMT* to examine how color is incorporated into specific scenes to influence meaning. As a whole, the analysis gives thorough insight into *HMT*'s use of color to understand how the color scheme is used metaphorically to impact a viewer's perception of the series. Chapter V, the final chapter, provides a summary of the project and details its limitations and implications for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This thesis project gave a comprehensive look into the color scheme featured in Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale* (*HMT*) to decipher how color is metaphorically used within the series to influence the storyline. The color scheme consists of seven colors: black, blue, red, brown, white, green, and grey. In adapting Margaret Atwood's novel into a television series, Creator Bruce Miller and the production team were intentional in utilizing the color scheme established by Atwood. Unlike the 1990 film, Hulu's *HMT* uses the appropriate hue and shade of each color in order to manipulate the viewer's focus and allow the color scheme to play an active role in the storyline. In turn, color is a driving force of *HMT* that, when focused upon, changes a viewer's perception of the series.

To examine *HMT*'s use of color, this analysis assigned a metaphor to each of the seven colors, shown in Table 2. Many of the metaphors relate to the color's traditional archetype in advertising, like black representing an evil force and red being incorporated into dangerous acts. Other metaphors contrasted the color's advertising archetype, like white symbolizing ownership rather than purity or goodness. While based in advertising, the metaphor behind each color was inspired from *HMT*'s content, specifically the rankings associated with it. For example, Commanders possess power among Gilead's

structure, and Handmaids are the ranking most likely to resist. In turn, the series creates its own unique use of color that facilitates the meaning of the storyline rather than following the color's traditional use.

**Table 2**

*Colors and metaphors*

<b>Color (Metaphor)</b>	<b>Significant Production Elements</b>
Black (Power)	Commander uniform (costume), Fred's private office (set), text (prop)
Blue (Control)	Wife uniform (costume), Unwoman uniform (costume), Waterford bedroom (set)
Red (Resistance)	Handmaid uniform (costume), designated spot (prop), blood (prop)
Brown (Order)	Aunt uniform (costume), Red Center (set), The Colonies (set), hanging equipment (prop)
White (Ownership)	Commander white shirt (costume), Handmaid wings (costume), medical facilities (set), bandages (prop)
Green (Support)	Martha uniform (costume), Waterford kitchen (set), Serena's greenhouse (set)
Grey (Normalcy)	Econowife uniform (costume), Joseph Lawrence suit (costume), Lincoln Memorial (set)

In utilizing color, *HMT* created its overall aesthetic through its production elements, including the costumes, set designs, and props. Because several of these elements are unique to Gilead, like the Handmaids' wings or the birthing stool, they also help the series express its unique representation of color. Almost every production element featured within the series incorporates one or more of the seven colors, which helps the colors express their specific metaphors. By connecting the color strategies used in the costume design with the colors utilized in the sets or props, each ranking's characteristics are translated into every production element. Therefore, when a house is colored red, the viewer connects the house with the characteristics of a Handmaid, thus allowing the house's exterior to symbolize resistance. The connection between the rankings and production elements elevates *HMT*'s color scheme, and when recognized by the viewer, the color scheme creates a completely unique television experience.

This project aimed to shed light on *HMT*'s color scheme to change viewers' perceptions of the series through the color metaphors. When a viewer pays attention to the color scheme, their perception of each storyline changes. While most viewers will never explore the color scheme as deeply as this project, they can reference *HMT*'s use of color through pattern recognition. These patterns are largely facilitated by media ecology theory, which explains that the more someone interacts with a medium, the more conditioned they become to it (Strate, 2017). As a viewer watches each episode of *HMT*, they must clue into the color associated with each ranking in order to understand Gilead's structure. However, in order to fully experience *HMT*, the viewer must move beyond simple pattern recognition and examine the use of color throughout the series' production elements. When watching *HMT* through this colorful lens, the viewer can acquire a

deeper understanding of and appreciation for its use of color and the many storylines within the series. *HMT*'s color scheme often foreshadows events and gives insight into the characters' mental states. When focused on *HMT*'s use of color, the viewer experiences a richer Gilead. Although *HMT* is labeled Hulu's most popular series (*Hulu Press*, n.d.) and is watched by many, most viewers have not even scratched the surface of their viewing experiences.

### **Limitations**

Like all academic studies, this thesis project is not without limitations. First, the color metaphors identified within the analysis are specific to *HMT*. This project did not attempt to change the traditional archetype of each color but instead identified metaphors to help the viewer understand the use of color in Gilead specifically. For example, while white symbolizes ownership within *HMT*, it traditionally represents purity or goodness in other situations. Furthermore, white and black work together within the series to further a Commander's agenda, whereas the colors are normally juxtaposed. Instead of challenging color's use in advertising, this project utilized advertising's color principles to examine *HMT*'s use of color. Because each color's usage is unique to *HMT*, however, the metaphors cannot be applied outside the context of Gilead.

Next, in analyzing *HMT*'s use of color, the project only utilized a sample of the content available. The analysis referenced only 12 of the 36 episodes in order to provide a more focused look into the series. However, the remaining 24 episodes utilize color in a similar way as the episodes used within this analysis. Furthermore, among the 12 episodes utilized, the analysis only referenced content within the context of Gilead. *HMT* regularly features flashbacks of the characters' lives before Gilead and also features

scenes in Canada. To provide contrast to Gilead's color usage, the production team does not utilize the color scheme in the same way as it does within Gilead. Before the characters entered Gilead or after a resident escapes, like Emily, they are no longer bound by Gilead's specific color scheme. Because of this, Miller (2017-present) often dresses the characters in various colors to express the freedom of their wardrobe. The set designs and props also vary in color to provide a similar effect. In some instances, Miller (2017-present) even incorporates colors beyond *HMT*'s traditional color scheme, like orange or purple, to further contrast Gilead. Because the color usage varies, the analysis did not include any scenes outside of Gilead, aside from Fred and Serena's arrest. However, because they are in confinement and not assimilated into Canadian society, they are still bound by Gilead's same color scheme within this storyline.

Lastly, among the content represented, the color metaphors do not apply in every instance within *HMT*. Sometimes a color is used within the series as simply a background color to help the other colors pop on screen. A great example is Loaves and Fishes, Gilead's grocery store. The set design of Loaves and Fishes is overwhelmingly white (Miller, 2017-present), but rather than expressing Gilead's ownership of its residents, the set provides a neutral color to help the focus remain on the Handmaids while shopping. Although restricted in public, Handmaids often use their shopping time to interact with other Handmaids and even organize their resistant efforts as the series progresses. However, rather than this creating a pairing between the white and red metaphors, the white background helps the viewer maintain focus on the Handmaids. Therefore, the color metaphors do not apply in every instance, but the metaphors create an overall color guideline for the series.

## Implications for Future Research

This analysis focused specifically on *HMT*'s color usage, but the project may also inspire future research both in Gilead and beyond. First, while the color metaphors identified are specific to *HMT*, the series can provide a starting point for color research in television. *HMT* provides an interesting example of color research because color is at the forefront of its content. By assigning a color to each ranking, *HMT*'s color usage is quite unique and represents a bold use of color, seen through the production elements. While *HMT*'s color usage is easily recognizable, other television series may also utilize color in a similar way. Although other series do not have designated rankings like Handmaids or Commanders, the production may utilize color to appeal to the psychology of the viewer. For example, in a storyline contrasting good and evil, the series may dress the protagonist in lighter colors and the antagonist in dark. Similarly, the antagonist's domains may also be darkly colored to grant the character agency within the space. Therefore, while *HMT*'s color scheme is unique to Gilead, future research may examine other series for their use of color regarding the production elements.

Secondly, it is important to mention other research areas regarding *HMT* itself. Because the series is so prevalent in pop culture, the color scheme has moved beyond Gilead into several protests in the real world. Much of the series comments on political topics that viewers have passionately connected with several world issues. An activist group known as the Handmaid Coalition has organized several protests outside many notable events, like Justice Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation hearing outside the Supreme Court (Lewis, 2019), to protest women's rights. At each of these events, the women dress in the Handmaids' red uniforms, which allows *HMT*'s use of the color red to expand

beyond Gilead into real world issues. By utilizing the costume featured in *HMT*, the Handmaid Coalition transmits red's metaphor of resistance against Gilead into resistance against the present United States. Future research may examine the use of red within these protests and the political impact *HMT*'s color scheme has beyond a fictional television series.

### **Conclusion**

Both Margaret Atwood and Bruce Miller introduce us to the world of Gilead through three objects: "A chair, a table, a lamp" (Atwood, 1985, p. 7; Miller & Morano, 2017, "Offred," 4:50). While once ordinary objects within a room, these items become significant in Gilead because the society strips its residents from things that are normal. Within *HMT*, a chair, table, or lamp could represent a character's privilege with the ability to lounge, write at a desk, or work at night. Miller (2017-present) builds upon Atwood's (1985) imagery in the novel through intentionally designing the costumes, sets, and props to tell a story in Gilead, making the production elements as important as the script. While these elements express meaning on their own, designing them in line with the series' color scheme gives richer meaning to these ordinary objects, allowing them to symbolize a Commander's power or facilitate a Handmaid's resistance. Miller (2017-present) thus takes ordinary, everyday objects and turns them into significant elements of the storyline, creating a colorful dystopia inspired by Atwood's imagination. In the novel, Atwood (1985) sets a foundation for understanding Gilead through strong descriptions and imagery, and Miller (2017-present) utilizes her scene depictions in adapting the novel into a television series, particularly through the production elements.



### **Author Note**

All images from *The Handmaid's Tale* were approved by the leasing department at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios, Inc. MGM approved the limited use of 30 images in this thesis project as long as the manuscript remains unpublished. A copy of this approval form has been included in the Appendix.

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## APPENDIX



March 27, 2020

Kelsey Knight  
Graduate Student  
West Texas A&M University

RE: "THE HANDMAID'S TALE (TV series)" ("Picture")

To Whom It May Concern:

Subject to receipt of this document signed by you (User) and in compliance with the terms and conditions set forth herein, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios ("MGM") has no objection to Kelsey Knight's use of no more than thirty (30) stills from the above-referenced Picture ("Still(s)") in conjunction with the education thesis publication entitled "A Colorful Dystopia: An Analysis of the Color Scheme in MGM & Hulu's *The Handmaid's Tale*." ("Publication"). No other rights are granted.

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