

## GENDER AS A SOCIAL CONSTRUCT IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S *ORYX AND CRAKE*

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### ABSTRACT

*The concept of gender came into common parlance during the early 1970's and is explained to be the feature of subjectivity. It explores that gender identity i.e. both masculinity and femininity is a product of social and cultural discourse which can be appropriated by the person of either gender, irrespective of their sexual identity. The arguments posed by eminent gender critics established that there are no behavioural patterns or traits that can be exclusively labeled as feminine or masculine. By uprooting the domain of gender from body gender theorists shook the very foundation of patriarchy and masculinity as superior and women as inferior.*

*Being a postmodern writer, Canadian author Margaret Atwood offers various ways, mediums, practices, patterns and norms of society and culture that lead to the conditioning of psyche of both men and women that result in the shaping and 'becoming' of feminine and masculine gender identities. It is according to the cultural expectations and scripts of femininity and masculinity that both man and woman internalize and mould themselves according to the stereotypes available of each gender identity. Atwood deconstructs the binary of gender/sex in her novel *Oryx and Crake* and proves that traits known to be masculine can be displayed by women and vice versa.*

*In this paper I'll unearth and show that how gender identities are unstable and are constructed socially and culturally. I will also explore through both male and female characters that how society and culture influence and mould the identities of men and women according to the constructed stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.*

**Keywords:** gender, performativity, discourse, construction, patriarchy

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The concept of gender came into common parlance during the early 1970's and is explained to be the feature of subjectivity. It refers to the "cultural understanding and representations of what it is to be a man or a woman" (Rachel Alsop et al, 2002, 3). It can be understood as a set of socially and culturally constructed personality, behaviour and attitude which are associated with one sex or another in any given society and is promoted through institutionalized gender symbolism and gender structure.

According to French thinker Michel Foucault (1926-1984) "subjects are historically specific productions of discourse with no transcendental continuity from one subject position to another"(Chris Barker 2000, 176). This leads to the idea that gender identities are not fixed rather fragmented and are discursively constructed in society therefore giving rise to multiplicity of discourse which enables our understanding of different types of masculinities and femininities which are unstable and vary within and outside culture. Gender critic Judith Butler's theory of performativity of gender in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity* (1990) formed 'the limit of social constructionist account of gender'(Rachel Alsop et al, 2002, 94). Her theory of gender deconstructs the binary of sex/gender where both sex and gender are established as constructed and are produced by repetitive performances of ourselves and others towards us. Hence our gender identities are merely performances which gain their authority through reiterative practices'.( Kristin M. Stelmok). She defined performativity as, 'that discursive practice which enacts or produce that which it names.'(Chris Barker, 2000, 245). Butler negated the existence of sex as a natural category, or 'a predescursive anatomical faculty'.(Rachel Alsop et al, 2002, 97) and argued that both sex and gender are products of discourse constructed by reiterative performances in culture and society. According to her the performance of our gendered identity is highly contextual and simultaneously dependent on other dimensions of our identity for e.g. culture, race, class, and ethnicity. Hence according to her it is gender that constructs our biological understanding of sex as male or female as what is perceived as natural is, 'an effect rather than cause of our gendered acts.'(Rachel Alsop et al., 2002, 99). She argues like Foucault she maintains that identities are constituted by doing certain acts i.e. there is, "no doer behind the deed. The doer becomes formed from the doing" (Rachel Alsop et al., 2002, 99). Hence it is through the reiterative performances of people from generations that the binary categories of masculinity and femininity have permeated in our culture and society as theoretical norms and standards. Thus the very reiterative and performative nature of the Law that encourages the construction of such biased norms also enables the disruption and opposition of that Law. By undermining the norms which are dominating and subordinating it becomes thinkable to subvert and destabilize 'the false stabilities of normative gender' and discover, 'the gender discontinuities that run rampant within heterosexual, bisexual and gay and lesbian contexts in which gender does not necessarily follow from sex and desire or sexuality generally, does not seem to follow from gender' (Rachel Alsop et al., 2002, 105).

In this paper I'll unearth and show in the novel *Oryx and Crake* of Margaret Atwood that how gender is constructed socially and culturally. I will explore through both male and female characters that how society and culture influence and mould the identities of men and women according to the constructed stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

Margaret Atwood in *Oryx and Crake* highlights the artificiality and instability of both masculinity and femininity that leads to porous gender and sexual boundaries. Atwood negates essentialism in arguing that along with gender, “sex, skin, colour, height and every other detail known to be associated with nature and biology is in fact an artificial construct and therefore unstable. Atwood lays bare the impact of society and discourse on the psychology of men and women that fashion it according to the accepted norm and mould of masculinity and femininity.

Atwood explains through the character of Jimmy and Oryx how conditioning of psyche of child is done from their very childhood according to gender binary owing to their sex difference. Gender critic Kate Millet complements, “... the gender identity development which takes place through childhood is the sum total of the parents’, peers’, and the culture’s notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character interests, status, worth, gesture and expression. Every moment of the child’s life is a clue to how he or she must think and behave to attain or satisfy the demands which gender places upon one”(Kate Millet, 2000, 31). Jimmy is presented with constructed stereotype of masculinity through his father. Atwood expresses this as, “His father was always giving him tools, trying to make him more practical”(Oryx and Crake 41). Atwood brings about the fact that how being reasonable and practical is associated with masculinity while display of emotions and tears is demarcated as exclusively feminine trait. This is exemplified through Jimmy’s example at the departure of his mother. Despite the pain he suffers, he refrains from crying as, “He could have burst into tears” only, “If he’d been a girl” (Oryx and Crake 73).

The difference between masculine and feminine gender is reinforced when Jimmy’s father expresses his opinion, giving allusion to women’s temperament as similar to unstable weather conditions. Describing about his wife he says, “Women always get hot under the collar”... “women, and what went on under their collars, Hotness and coldness, coming and going in the strange musky flowery, variable country inside their clothes- mysterious, important, uncontrollable”. Thus women are stereotyped as mysterious and whimsical whereas men are believed to be firm and stable. Atwood expresses, “men’s body temperatures were never dealt with; they were never even mentioned, not when he[Jimmy] was little, except when his dad said, “chill out’. Jimmy questions, “Why weren’t they? Why nothing about the hot collars of men? These smooth sharp edged collars with their dark, sulphurous, bristling, bristling undersides. He could have used a few theories on that”(Oryx and Crake 19). At another instance Jimmy’s father again comments on gender of his lab technician, calling her as “his right- hand man(Joke he would say to Jimmy, to show that he knew Ramona wasn’t really a man. But Jimmy knew that anyway).(Oryx and Crake 59) The construction of masculinity as superior and ultimate in itself overlooks and exempts men from all sorts of weaknesses, and projects them as fully in command of their emotions and actions, practical and reasonable whereas women are seen as emotional and sentimental fools not capable of reasoning and logical approach.

Jimmy’s father and mother both worked at Organ Inc farms as a genographer and a microbiologist. His mother, finds the concept of genetic engineering as something against humanity and nature criticizing it as, “interfering with the building blocks of life” and “immoral and sacrilegious”(Oryx and Crake 64). Because of the same reason she leaves her job, home and family and joins the protesters group. Jimmy’s father despite knowing the cause of her wife’s departure accuses her of casting a slur upon his dignity and honour. According to him, “His wife had broken every rule in the book, she must’ve had a whole other life and he’d no idea. That sort of thing reflected badly on a man.”(Oryx and Crake 72). Jimmy’s father himself had illegal sexual relation with his lab technician Ramona, who later on moves into Jimmy’s house permanently. The ostentatious display of sexual intimacy of his father with Ramona that involved, “bouts of giggle, growly sex going on behind the doors that were closed but not sound proof” leave a very strong impact on Jimmy’s mind constructing him as sexual pervert, treating women as sexual entities and commodities(Oryx and Crake 74). He shows interest in things related to sex and women from his very childhood. He starts, “having sexy dreams and suffering from lassitude. He thought about girls a lot in the abstracts, as it were- girls without heads”(Oryx and Crake 67). Jimmy, influenced by the relation of his father and mother, that clearly exhibits masculine and

feminine sexual stereotyping, takes to imitating their roles among his friends in school. This performance of his clearly culls gender elements highlighting man as oppressor and woman as oppressed. It is represented by Atwood as,

"His right hand was Evil dad, his left hand was Righteous Mom. Evil Dad blustered and theorized and dished out pompous bullshit. Righteous Mom complained and accused. In Righteous Mom's cosmology, Evil dad was the sole source of hemorrhoids, kleptomania, global conflict, bad breath, tectonic-plate fault lines.... As well as every migraine headache and menstrual cramp Righteous Mom had ever suffered".

He even went to the extent of enacting, "Righteous Mom weeping in the kitchen because her ovaries had burst" because of the "sex" with his, "evil dad falling upon it and tearing it apart with lust because Righteous Mom was sulking inside an empty Twinkies package and wouldn't come out"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 68). Jimmy's vision is tampered with amorous desire for Ramona as well as his school teacher, where "Jimmy tried not to look at her breasts"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 76).

Atwood brings out an important contributing factor in the construction of gender i.e. gender stereotyping propagated through media representation or media culture where the concept of stereotyping is defined as, "the reduction of persons to set of exaggerated, usually negative character traits. (Chris Barker, 2000, 248). Thus, 'stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes, and fixes "difference"(Hall, 1997c, 258). Jimmy, along with Crake in his teenage years, get addicted to porn movies that adds and complements the, "general demand that encourages the porn movie market to keep on supplying these movies"(Q. T Huisman, 2010 21). Thus media representation complements and promotes the image of women as 'body', a sexual commodity supposedly always available for the consumption of men and the image of men as consumers. It is through the porn sites that Jimmy first encounters Oryx in a child porn video. This sexual identity of Oryx as an object of sexual consumption remains the same throughout the novel. Jimmy traps women into using the pretence of love and affection exploiting his tone, "like a tool, a wedge, a key to open women".(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 132). He manipulates their emotions of being, "generous, caring, idealistic"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 222) by initially presenting himself as "tender hearted" applying "himself to them like a poultice. But soon the process would reverse and Jimmy would switch from bandager to bandagee. He let them, "labour away on him. It cheered them up, it made them feel useful. It was touching, the lengths to which they would go. Would this make him happy? Would this? Well then, how about this?"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 223). This pretence of emotions by Jimmy brings about the artificiality of emotions merely as performance. Jimmy reinforces sexual stereotyping of women as passive and inferior in an argument with Crake, "Men... don't want women who are ten times bigger than them"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 198). Following the same line of argument Jimmy is repelled by the perfection of genetically engineered Craker women. As he has been accustomed to seeing women as imperfect, weak, and vulnerable, is not seduced by their perfect appearance and beauty.

"Every time the woman appears Snowman is astonished ....They look like retouched fashion photos, or ads for a high- priced workout program. May be this is the reason that these woman arouse in Snowman not even the faintest stirrings of lust. It was the thumbprints of human imperfection that used to move him, the flaws in the design: the lopsided smile, the wart next to the naval, the mole, the bruise... After his indiscriminate adolescence he'd preferred sad women, delicate and breakable, women who had been messed up and who needed him. He's liked to comfort them. Make them happier, if only for a moment...But these women are neither lopsided nor sad: they're placid, like animated statues. They leave him chilled"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 115).

Oryx, the central woman character, is known to be a child porn star. She is sold during her childhood by her mother, along with her brother because of poverty. She suffers class, gender, and sexual as well as colonial exploitation. She becomes a sexual commodity passing from one man to another, with each one exploiting her sexually. She is acquainted with the job of women in society during her childhood itself. All the roles and duties of women revolve around her body, as she is seen only as a body. The village women make all effort to make her, "look pretty and healthy" as these were essential requisites for them to be purchased by rich people. Apart from this another destined role defined for

women is, “only (to) get married and make more children who would then have to be sold in their turn”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 135). Whereas for Jimmy and Crake marriage is not the ultimate goal rather they strive for education in reputed institute and then a secure future through a good job. Gender critic Simone de Beauvoir rightly remarks, “... no young man considers marriage as his fundamental project. Economic success is what will bring him adult standing ;”(1997, 451).

Margaret Atwood being a postmodern writer marks out the instability of gender categories, where both male and female characters transgress the gender boundaries which are believed to be naturally ordained. She clearly demonstrates through various instances how gender of both men and women are artificial and socially constructed under the patriarchal guidance and ideology. Since gender identity is all about performance learned through discourse, male and female characters exhibit both masculine and feminine identities irrespective of their sex. This is more prominently brought up in the novel through the characters of Oryx and Jimmy.

Atwood explains that the gender construction endows all the power and authority in the hands of patriarchy. This gendered society segregates women from all the major spheres, subordinating and marginalizing them to the areas which are pre-labeled as feminine. This is beautifully expressed in the words of gender critic Kate Millet,

“As patriarchy enforces a temperamental imbalance of personality traits between the sexes, its educational institutions, segregated or co-educational, accepts a cultural programming towards the generally operative division between, “masculine” and “feminine” subject matter assigning the humanities and certain social sciences (at least in their lower and marginal branches) to the female – and science and technology, the professions, business and engineering to the male.... The humanities, because not exclusively male, suffer in prestige: the science, technologies and business, because they are nearly exclusively male reflect the deformation of the “masculine” personality.eg, a certain predatory or aggressive character”(2000, 435).

Therefore we see in the novel that science is associated and believed to represent masculine domain and intelligence, whereas art along with femininity is marginalized and suppressed.

Atwood proves both the gender categories of masculinity and femininity as unstable and constructed culturally in discourse. She shows this more exquisitely through the character of Jimmy, who despite being man, displays interest in arts, and defends it against masculine science represented by scientist friend Crake. Whereas Oryx, being a woman is described as an, “expert businesswoman” and Crake too trusted her “more perhaps than he trusted Jimmy”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 368). Gendered boundaries and spaces are shown to be transgressed by Jimmy and Oryx thereby establishing gendered identities not as real, rather constructed. Art and aesthetics, though coined as feminine areas are represented by Jimmy who argues against the artificially induced mating process by Crake among the Crakers. He argues that because of the “cyclical” mating process there would be no existence of, “Courtship behaviour” which would in turn result in loss of art. “Well, what about the art?” said Jimmy, a little desperately”. He further argues, “When any civilization is dust and ashes,” he said, “art is all that’s left over. Images, words, music. Imaginative structures. Meaning- human meaning, that is defined by them. You have to admit that”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 197).

Oryx being a woman is shown to be practical and reasonable in her approach as opposed to Jimmy who is displayed as emotional and sentimental. Jimmy is shown to be opposing Crake for all of his scientific endeavors, be it new inventions or genetically engineered organisms. On the contrary Oryx encouraged Crake’s scientific and practical efforts for the well being of humanity. She defends scientific ideas of Crake before Jimmy, “He lives in a world of ideas. He is doing important things. He has no time to play. Anyway Crake is my boss, you are for fun”. Oryx, “respected Crake, she really did, because he was a brilliant genius”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 369).

Jimmy’s helplessness and sadness at his mother’s absence when she goes away leaving him is quite apparent and can be compared to Atwood’s female protagonist Tony Fermont in *The Robber Bride*.

Like Tony he questions himself, "Didn't she trust him? Evidently not. He felt he'd disappointed her; he'd failed her in some crucial way. He'd never understood what was required of him. If only he could have one more chance to make her happy"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 77). Thus Jimmy incompetence, his helplessness and tendency to hold himself responsible for his mother's deserting him alone, can be compared to the insufficiency and incapability which Tony experiences during the same condition in her life. Thus Jimmy can be seen exhibiting another trait that is exclusively linked with femininity. Exhibiting sentimental and emotional approach towards life, he is amazed by the practical response of Crake at his mother's death. He felt, "how he could be so nil about it- it was horrible, the thought of Crake watching his own mother dissolve like that. He himself wouldn't have been able to do it"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 208). Whereas most of the women characters in the novel are described as word person, Jimmy too, is shown to be word person. He already knew he was not a "numbers person", as he was not practical and materialistic in his approach and view of world, instead he was sentimental, given to arts and aesthetics and finds solace in rediscovering forgotten words, "as if they were children abandoned in the woods and it was his duty to rescue them"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 250).

Jimmy, because of his passivity and interest in arts is chosen by Crake, along with Oryx to look after the Crakers. Both Jimmy and Oryx are entrusted with the task of looking after Crakers because Crake finds both similar in one way or the other. When Jimmy enquires why Crake chose him only for this job where he had many scientists as options saying "I couldn't head up a thing like this, I don't have the science". Crake replies, "These people are specialists," said Crake. "They wouldn't have the empathy to deal with the Paradise models, they wouldn't be any good at it, they'd get impatient. Even I couldn't do it. I couldn't begin to get onto their wavelength. But you are more of a generalist."(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 376). This reason is quite similar to why Crake appoints Oryx for the same task. She is appointed as the teacher for the Craker's as according to him she, "could communicate on their level. Simple concepts, no metaphysics." (Oryx and Crake, 2004,363). This shows that Crake being a scientist underestimates the aesthetic sense of both Jimmy and Oryx and assigns them inferior jobs. Likewise another job given to Jimmy is that of doing add campaign to sell the pills BlyssPluss to enhance sexual vigour and to prevent sexually transmitted diseases which proves to be fatal for humanity and destroys whole world. Oryx too is endowed with the responsibility of selling same pills in different countries. After worldwide catastrophe caused due to these pills it is Jimmy who is left at the end to look after the Crakers as Crake's "prophet"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 120).

Jimmy being a male exhibits many feminine traits like being emotional, sentimental, interested in arts and aesthetics as is seen as child like both by Oryx and Crake. Crake said, "Jimmy, grow up" Crake wasn't the first person who'd ever said that to Jimmy."(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 139). The same phrase is uttered by women whom he sexually dumps. Oryx too says, "Crake is right"... , "you do not have an elegant mind"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 166). Despite these feminine traits Jimmy is sexually more potent and dominant than Crake, who despite being more masculine than Jimmy, is sexually passive. As Jimmy describes, "Crake hadn't been what you'd call sexually active. Girls had found him intimidating"... and a "little creepy"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 126-27). Like the deviations exhibited in masculinity by men, Oryx too deviates from her femininity by being sexually adept and expert against the prevalent myth of women as sexually passive, inferior and even sexless. Where jimmy refrains in touching Oryx out of the respect for his friendship with Crake and believing Oryx to be his girlfriend Oryx does not refrain from, "seduce[ing] him". Jimmy describes, "She came to his suit on purpose, she marched right in, she had him out of his shell in two minutes flat. It made him feel about twelve. She was clearly a practiced hand at this, and so casual on that first occasion it took his breath away..."what about Crake?" he said after she'd cooked him that first time, landed left him gasping. "You are Crake's friend. He wouldn't want you to be unhappy"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 367).

The image of Oryx is described as sexual commodity who is sexually objectified and oppressed in patriarchal society owing to her femininity. She is harassed both on account of her sexuality and class and treated as "body" and object. Her femininity is constructed as object of sexual consumption. Owing to her poor class status she is sold by her family to rich man named Uncle En who uses her initially as a flower seller and then as a sex bait to trap sexual tourists for money. She is subjected to the reality of the use of women as body since her very childhood. She presents herself as docile and

“obedient” to the command of her masters and “did as she was told”. Her innocence and purity of childhood is tainted with the matters of sex and its demands by men, “She had a general idea of what else the man might want – the other children already knew about such things and discussed them freely”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 153). Thus Oryx is passed from one hand to another and sold into prostitution serving the desires of men. After Uncle En is murdered she is sold to a man who made porn movies. She is sexually used and exploited not only as a child porn star but also by the movie makers as well. She reveals to Jimmy that the camera man Jack, “wanted to do movie things with her when there were no movies”( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 165). Her last consumers are Crake and Jimmy, where she is purchased by Crake to use her beauty and sex for his personal and professional use. Crake exploits her beauty, simplicity and innocence for the advertisement and sale of his deadly pills. Not only Crake but Jimmy too sexually uses her though his relation is defined by love.

Atwood deconstructs the belief of masculinity as biologically superior and femininity as biologically inferior. She nullifies the essentialism associated with gender and sexual identities proving them to be the product of social and cultural construction. With this the myth of the superiority of white hegemonic masculinity too is destroyed where the traits believed to be exclusively belonging to white men are not exhibited by all white men in the novel. As described one of the critics, “Whenever ‘white’ men enter the scene, they lack any form of superiority or dominance, as Oryx’s description of these men, often bordering on ridicule indicates”(Q. T Huisman 2010, 19). Oryx as a child mocks and ridicules the penis of one the white sex tourist who tries to sexually seduce her, “A long white penis nose”, and after he is caught and blackmailed by Uncle En, “Oryx felt bad for him”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 154). Another white man is a camera man Jack, who too uses Oryx sexually and is described by her as, “a rope hair clownish giant with a cock like wrinkly old carrot. Oryx said she had many chances to see that old carrot up close, because Jack wanted to do movie things with her when there were no movies. Then he would be sad and tell her he was sorry”.(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 165).

Oryx, despite being subordinated and oppressed tries to gain power over her oppressors by refusing to identify herself as victim and oppressed. She refuses to accept the fact of her suffering and exploitation by denying revealing the details of her past life sufferings to Jimmy. It is well cited by Atwood through various references in the novel that Oryx declines and undermines all the efforts of Jimmy to be a bandager for her wounds and afflictions, thereby refusing any consolation that identified the weakness of Oryx before Jimmy. Atwood explores through one of the examples how Oryx prevents herself being treated as a consumable item for Jimmy, “She let him lick her fingers for her. He ran his tongue around the small ovals of her nails. This was the closest she could get to him without becoming food”( Oryx and Crake,2004, 371). Thus Oryx remains, “beyond the absolute control of male protagonist ... and beyond the grasp of scientific male control”( Q. T Huisman, 2010, 22). She has “always been evasive, you can never pin her down”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 128). Whenever Jimmy asked the details of her past life, the details of her sexual oppression, in order to sympathize with her and to show his dominance over her, she evaded saying, “I don’t know. I’ve forgotten” or “I don’t want to tell you that” or, “Jimmy you are so bad, its’ not your business”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 132). Thus she puts down all efforts and tactics of jimmy, which he used to trap women. Jimmy admired the neediness of women, their vulnerability, so that he could indebt them with gratefulness as according to his belief, “A grateful woman would go the extra mile” (Oryx and Crake, 2004, 115). Oryx, by refusing to present herself as oppressed and afflicted, doesn’t give Jimmy a superior position and refuses to be confined herself in the constructed gendered space. Jimmy used the incidence of his mother’s departure, quite successfully to evoke the sympathy of other women in order to trap them and use their emotions to his advantage. He used,

“that story- a hint here, a hesitation there. Soon the woman would be consoling him, and he would roll around in their sympathy, soak in it, massage himself with it. It was a whole spa experience in itself.” ... Only Oryx had not been impressed by this dire, feathered mother of his. So *Jimmy your mother went somewhere else? Too bad. May be she had some good reasons. You thought of that?* Oryx had neither pity for him nor self pity. She was not unfeeling: on the contrary. But she had refused to feel

what he wanted her to feel. Was that the hook- that he could never get from her what the others have given him so freely? Was that her secret?"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 224- 225).

Thus Oryx is shown to be more practical and reasonable than Jimmy who displays traits pre-coded as feminine by this gendered society. Where on the one side Oryx is calm and composed when she narrates her past life in bits and pieces without exhibiting any emotional or aggressive behaviour Jimmy gives vent to his pent up anger by abusing her exploiters. He is even shocked to listen "bad words"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 158) from Oryx, of which "she had a large supply". She even tried to conceal the acrid aspects of her life, "to protect him, from the image of herself in the past. She liked to keep only the bright side of herself turned towards him. She liked to shine"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 158).

Not only she outshines and overpowers Jimmy but also other oppressor who exploit her sexually and socially by pitying them and seeing them as more helpless than herself. Jimmy abuses uncle En for what he did with Oryx, she absolves him from the position of oppressor and tells Jimmy that she even, cried when she heard of his death, "I cried when I heard... too much"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 159). Similarly Oryx felt bad for those who were caught by Uncle En in a helpless position and were blackmailed for money to keep the secret of their sexual assault over her as a child. Atwood writes:

"She felt a little sorry for the men ...somewhat regretted her part. But at the same time she enjoyed it. It made her feel strong to know that the men thought she was helpless but she was not. It was they who were helpless, they who would soon have to stammer apologies in their silly accents"(Oryx and Crake , 2004, 155)

Oryx even tries to exercise her power over white camera man by using her sexuality as her strength and weapon by trading with him to teach her, "to speak English and to read English words". On Jimmy resentment she questions him, "Why do you think he is bad?"... "He never did anything with me that you don't do. Not nearly so many things!"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 166).

Atwood proves artificiality of both sex and gender through Crake's scientific inventions of humanoids or Crakers. Crake's construction of Crakers confirms the artificiality of, "Gender, sexual orientation, height, colour of skin and eyes- it's all on order, it can all be done or redone" (Oryx and Crake, 2004, 340). Crake genetically engineers Crakers according to his own choice eliminating undesirable traits as, "the ancient primate brain... the feature responsible for the world's current illnesses"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 340). Thus the Crakers are constructed as genderless and sexless in order to remove the ground which results in the inequality and exploitation of weaker by stronger. Crake explains to Jimmy, "for instance, racism... had been eliminated ... by switching bonding mechanism" so that the Paradise people simply did not register skin colour." Similarly hierarchy too is removed so that all are equal and there are no oppressors and oppressed, "Hierarchy could not exist among them, because they lacked the neural complexes that would have created it"(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 358). By manipulating the building blocks of these Crakers he arranges their reproduction and sexuality as well, "Their sexuality was not a constant torment to them, not a cloud of turbulent hormones: they came into heat at regular intervals, as did most mammals other than men"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 359). By doing so would result in, "No more prostitution, no sexual abuse of children, no haggling over the prize, no pimps, no sex slaves. No more rape"( Oryx and Crake, 2004, 194). He introduces the provision of , "standard quintuplet, four men and the women in heat"( Oryx and Crake 193) for which he equipped these women with ultra-strong vulvas- extra skin layers, extra muscles- so they can sustain these marathons"( Oryx and Crake 194-95). It is adeptly explored by Atwood that though Crake pre-designed the sexuality and gender, eliminating any concept of hierarchy, he couldn't anticipate the gendering and hierarchy imparted by their guide and caretaker Jimmy/Snowman and set among the Crakers. It is proved here, "they do not have any culturally preconceived notions of a gendered cultural order or prescribed norms of sexuality" (Reingard M. Nischik, 2009, 123) as gender is all about performance of ourselves and others towards us. As Butler defines,

"there is neither an "essence" that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender us not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender,



and without those acts, there would be no gender at all. Gender is, thus, a construction that regularly conceals its genesis; the tacit collective agreement to perform, produce, and sustain discrete and polar genders as cultural fictions”(1990, 140).

Hence there is, “no doer behind the deed. The doer becomes formed from the doing” therefore construction of subjectivity is, “ a process of submitting ourselves to socially constituted norms and practice”(Rachel Alsop et al., 2002, 99).

The Crakers are imparted the knowledge of sex and gender specific roles through Snowman. Crakers are described as, “Blank pages”(Oryx and Craje, 2004,407 ) not knowing reading or writing, imbibe what Snowman tells them. After the post apocalyptic destruction of the world by Crake, it is the task of Jimmy to lead Crakers to a safe place. While leading them Jimmy sets up the hierarchy among Crakers, “He would walk ahead- he said- with two of the men. He picked the tallest. Behind them would come the women and children, with a file of men to either side. The rest of the men would walk behind”.(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 409). This division of labour based on sex and gender is displayed by the Craker men when they offer to accompany Snowman on his trip to, “protect” him.(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 190). This clearly shows their understanding of themselves as stronger in comparison to women, thereby assuming the responsibility of protection. Despite being unaware of the art of cooking, it is women, who cook the fish caught by men as per Snowman’s instruction. The women are shown to be interested in children more than men. While the special piss for protection from wild animals is allotted to men only, women are given to the duty of a more passive job of child bearing”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 183). Craker women are shown to be emotional and sensitive in comparison to men. It is described that women sensed the discomfort of Snowman and “try to ease it”(Oryx and Crake, 2004 421). Last but not the least, following and imitating Snowman’s example of interaction with Crake, Craker’s make out, “a picture” of Snowman to help them, “send out” their voices to him. This clearly confirms their indulgence in art. “*Watch out for art*, Crake used to say. *As soon as they start doing an art, we’re in trouble* (Oryx and Crake, 2004, 419). Symbolic thinking of any kind would signal downfall, in Crake’s view. Next they would be inventing idols, and funerals, and grave goods, and the afterlife, and sin, and Linear B and kings, and then slavery and war.”(Oryx and Crake, 2004, 419-20).

Thus we see that gender is an artificial construct along with sexuality that is construction through cultural norms and social practices through discourse. Atwood confirms the social and cultural construction of gender through the character of Jimmy and Oryx and shows that gender boundaries are porous and unstable where both masculinity and femininity can be appropriated by the people of either sex. Therefore the characteristics of masculinity and femininity do not remain exclusively confined to jimmy and Oryx and they reflect overlapping of both gender identities.

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