

referring to SB8 and copycat laws (Torchinsky, 2022). This completely takes away privacy of people and it also poses serious threats in regards to their location being surveilled. This is dangerous and problematic for women who do not realize that their phone apps may be collecting data about their location. Modern technologies make the surveillance of women much easier, and it is of the utmost importance that contemporary feminists become aware of the different mechanisms of surveillance and how we lose our right to privacy as a result of being watched.

Surveillance of Doctor's Role in Abortion Care

In addition, doctors, clinicians, and hospital staff are another group of individuals who are subject to surveillance when it comes to women's reproductive health. Doctors and clinicians have experienced some of the toughest times in their careers, post-Dobbs, trying to balance the fact that women need abortion care, and their fear of being punished for helping (Ollstein and Messerly, 2024). Dr. Caitlin Gustafson, an OBGYN in Idaho explains that doctors have been hesitant and struggling to do their jobs well, since they are at risk of criminalization (Ollstein and Messerly, 2024). Alice Ollstein and Megan Messerly explain that doctors have been put in a very hard ethical situation, often being unclear of what the law allows for them to do. They state:

"Doctors say they fear that following their medical judgment could cost them their license or land them in jail. And they argue that broader exemptions and clearer guidelines would help but not fully solve the problem, as they believe any limit on abortion restricts their ability to make judgment calls in time-sensitive situations. Absent the freedom to make those decisions without fear of being second-guessed in court, many providers are waiting until patients are on the verge of death to perform abortions" (Ollstein and Messerly, 2024).

Doctors now have to fear being criminalized or fired when performing care because ever since the Dobbs decision, they have to constantly question what the law allows, rather than solely on what the patient needs (Ollstein and Messerly, 2024). They are so fearful of being reprimanded, that they actually wait until the patient is in a worse condition than they arrived, in order to treat (Ollstein and Messerly, 2024). This is so detrimental for women's health because it is stripping our ability to receive potentially life-saving care, right when we need it (Ollstein and Messerly, 2024). What these doctors are also experiencing is the anxiety and fear attached to being in a time where their jobs and workplaces are heavily surveilled. Their jobs are being scrutinized, and they have constant "watchers" who are looking to see what kinds of decisions they make, in the wake of the new laws surrounding their profession. For doctors in Alabama, if a clinician or doctor violates the state's abortion ban, then it,

"constitutes a Class A felony which carries a minimum prison sentence of ten years and a maximum sentence of 99 years. Class A felony is the most serious offense in Alabama, which places abortion in the same criminal category as murder and first-degree domestic violence" (Felix et al., 2025).

Considering that some states have such extreme laws to restrict abortions, it makes sense that doctors and clinicians are finding it very hard to make tough calls when providing abortion care. The state's purpose here is to make doctors feel like their environments are heavily surveilled and controlled right now, and the goal is to make them docile and compliant with the state laws with no resistance.

This is an example of an agenda to criminalize women that may be doubtful of pregnancy or not as outwardly excited as the traditional expecting mother. Women are not safe from surveillance even talking to their own physicians and this is becoming even more problematic post-Roe.

Another case of surveillance by hospital staff was the case of Brittney Watts in Ohio in 2023. Her story is an example of the agenda to criminalize mothers that have miscarriages. She went into the hospital, knowing she was miscarrying at 22 weeks (Duncan et al, 2024). She was bleeding in pain begging to be induced to speed up her miscarriage, but because of the post- Dobbs laws in her state, doctors and nurses had to wait until there was no more heartbeat in order to give her care (Duncan et al., 2024). She spent over 19 hours in the hospital over the span of two days, being refused any care, since the fetus still had a heartbeat even though doctors called Brittney's pregnancy non-viable (Duncan et al, 2024). Frustrated, Brittney left and went home—where she then fully miscarried and passed the fetus in her own bathroom (Duncan et al, 2024). She returned to the ER, telling them she had passed the fetus in her bathroom—she was distraught and a nurse comforted her and told her everything would be okay. That same nurse made a call to the police and told them that Brittney delivered a baby at home in the toilet of the bathroom, but did not want the baby, so she did not look to check on it, but instead left to the ER (Duncan et al., 2024). Brittney was charged with abuse of a corpse which is a felony in Iowa but these charges were eventually dropped (Duncan et al., 2024). Brittney says that she never said she did not want her baby, and she was devastated to have miscarried, but she wanted help from the doctors to end her pain and induce her (Duncan et al., 2024). Brittney is a black woman and she believes to have been racially discriminated against throughout her visits to the hospital,

and now she and her lawyers are suing that hospital for their negligence over her situation (Duncan et al, 2024). But this case shows us something much broader about the surveillance of pregnant women. Everyone is always listening, and someone is always watching. The concept of hierarchical observation is reality for women's lives in 2025 post-Dobbs, but in truth, it has been long before the overturning of Roe v. Wade. It is just so much more prominent in the contemporary day, and it poses a major threat to women's health and privacy. Being surveilled and constantly being watched by other people takes away a woman's standing as a free and equal citizen. These cases show just how dangerous the climate is for women, and why contemporary feminists must understand how the mechanism of surveillance is so prominent for women, and especially for women of color.

Conclusion

This chapter demonstrated some of the mechanisms of surveillance that get used against women and why this is problematic for their health and their privacy. The Handmaid's Tale was used as a guidebook in this chapter to reveal how surveillance can oppress women in a patriarchal theocracy like Gilead. With this understanding of religion and God as a "watcher" of women, I explained that this puts women's reproductive freedoms at risk and puts the importance of the unborn on the pedestal. While surveillance mechanisms have become a lot more intense and noticeable in America since the overturning of Roe v. Wade, Dorothy Roberts reveals that the government and state actors have always been involved in the surveillance of women of color's reproduction through assistance programs. She helps us understand how women of color are disproportionately affected by surveillance, government inspection, and observation. I found this to also be true in 2025, with evidence from doctors that say women of color have higher rates of miscarriage,

and this can make them more subject than white women to government inspection while pregnant. Overall, this chapter reveals that the mechanism of surveillance takes away the privacy and freedoms of women and ultimately threatens their ability to be free and equal citizens in America. This is why surveillance is a feminist issue and an issue that affects women, especially women of color, the most in society. It is important now, more than ever, that contemporary feminists fight for their right to privacy and for bodily autonomy. My next chapter will reveal how a reproductive justice framework is required in order to resist this loss of freedoms and what protections must be put in place in order ensure women have bodily autonomy.

Chapter 4:

How Contemporary Feminists May Resist Disciplinary Mechanisms of Control: What Can We Learn from The Handmaid's Tale

The previous chapter argued that surveillance is a mechanism that is used to control women, and this can be played out by different actors in various ways. I showed surveillance taking place in *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) through the oppressive government, Gilead, and all of the different people that surveil the Handmaids in order to control them and keep them docile. I also discussed how women of color were surveilled through the welfare program in *Killing the Black Body* by Dorothy Roberts. Finally, I revealed how women in our contemporary world are being surveilled through many different mechanisms such as technology and doctors' visits. Throughout the past three chapters, I have been exploring to what extent *The Handmaid's Tale* functions as an "ethnography of the present" (1996) by showing the different ways that disciplinary mechanisms are used to control women. This chapter argues what contemporary feminists might learn from the novel, and what the novel teaches us about resistance and specifically what women can do to resist the many mechanisms of control that are currently

taking place, as I have argued in the previous chapters. I will start with Michel Foucault's (1984) discussion of resistance and explain why this understanding is particularly helpful for contemporary feminists. Then I will show how three different women resisted reproductive oppression in varying ways in *The Handmaid's Tale* and reveal what can be learned from each of these character's forms of resistance. Next, I will use *Killing the Black Body* Dorothy Roberts to examine how we may begin to resist oppression in the modern day. Finally, I will end the chapter by returning to the Reproductive Justice Framework and argue why this framework is necessary for understanding resistance in a contemporary world.

Foucault on Resistance

While Michel Foucault has a ton to say on disciplinary power, he does not have nearly as much to say about resistance. However, what he does say is a very interesting way to understand resistance and I believe that it is important for contemporary feminists to adopt this way of thinking about resistance. When discussing micro-powers Foucault says, "they define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risk of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations" (Foucault 1984, 174). Since disciplinary powers and micropowers are so diffused throughout society,

Foucault argues that there is a plethora of opportunities to resist these powers (Foucault, 1984, 174 & 260). While this is not much to go off, it is still an important lesson for contemporary feminists to realize because disciplinary power and positive power happen all over society, and the better we understand it, the closer we can become to resisting it. Foucault says that there will be many opportunities for resistance, but since Foucault does not go into detail about how this resistance may be manifested, I turn to *The Handmaid's Tale* which offers an example of multiple different kinds of resistance

but since Foucault does not go into detail about how this resistance may be manifested, I turn to *The Handmaid's Tale* which offers an example of multiple different kinds of resistance by different characters, thus reflecting the multiple forms of potential resistance implied by Foucault (Foucault, 1984, 174; Atwood, 1985).

Resistance in the Handmaid's Tale

Resistance in an oppressive theocracy like Gilead may seem impossible, but three crucial characters in Atwood's novel prove that resistance can take different shapes and forms (Atwood, 1985). Ofglen, Moira, and Offred are all women that resisted the oppression in Gilead in their own unique ways. What we know of Ofglen from the reading of the novel is that she is a handmaid involved in a secret, underground resistance group called Mayday. Even though Atwood does not give this underground operation much attention, Ofglen's character serves as a symbol for collective resistance that people in Gilead are partaking in (Atwood, 1985, 202). Moira's character is rebellious, defiant, and unruly; she represents individual outward and bold acts of resistance in Gilead (Atwood, 1985, 37). She did what she could to combat the new norms of Gilead and tried to resist conforming to a docile body like all the others (Atwood, 1985, 39). Offred is a handmaid woman whose acts of resistance are manifested internally, for the most part (Atwood, 1985, 8). Offred works internally to keep her sense of self in a world that wants to strip her identity and memories. She holds onto the life she had before Gilead, remembering her husband and daughter, and using her thoughts and memories as a way of internally disobeying the totalitarian regime of Gilead (Atwood, 1985, 285). Each of these characters' decisions manifest different endings for them. Nonetheless, each of these women did resist docility in their own way, and I will examine how each of these characters' demonstrations of resistance are helpful

for contemporary feminists, and what we can learn about resistance in the current age.

Ofglen's Resistance

Ofglen is a handmaid in Atwood's novel who reveals herself to be a part of an underground resistance network (Atwood, 1985, 202). Ofglen was Offred's walking partner; she appeared to be an obedient, rule-following woman (Atwood, 1985, 19). Offred recalls her first time meeting Ofglen recounting that,

"She walks demurely, head down, red-gloved hands clasped in front, with short little steps like a trained pig's, on its hind legs. During these walks she has never said anything that was not strictly orthodox, but then, neither have I. She may be a real believer, a handmaid in more than name" (Atwood, 1985, 19).

Gilead encourages the handmaids to accept their role with obedience and submission, and in this moment Offred wonders if Ofglen is a true believer of Gilead's agenda (Atwood, 1985, 19). At multiple points in their interactions, Ofglen seems to know more about the outside world than Offred and the other handmaids (Atwood, 1985, 19). Ofglen seems to know information, and Offred is curious how she would have access to this knowledge, since handmaids are mostly cut off from receiving any information (Atwood, 1985, 20).

After multiple interactions with her, Ofglen tries to signal to Offred that she was a part of a resistance group, by saying the word "Mayday" on one of their walks (Atwood, 1985, 43). Offred ponders on the phrase but does not realize that Ofglen is trying to signal something to her (Atwood, 1985, 44). Ofglen eventually tells her that "Mayday" is a password for the underground network that is resisting the powers of Gilead to know who is and isn't a part of the resistance (Atwood, 1985, 202). Ofglen's involvement in Mayday shows that while she may be compliant to what Gilead wants her to do on the outside, internally she is resisting the

docility that Gilead wants her to take on. Not only is she resisting docility internally, but she is one of the handmaids who is secretly taking action by gathering and spreading information. Ofglen also encourages Offred to gather any information she can about her Commander, since he is higher up and likely knows about the plans and agendas of Gilead (Atwood, 1985, 223). Ofglen says "find out and tell us... Anything you can" (Atwood, 1985, 223). Not only is Ofglen gathering and spreading information herself, but she encourages others to do as well, as she tried to recruit Offred to join the collective resistance (Atwood, 1985, 223).

During a ceremonial event called the Salvaging, all the women gather to watch the public execution and punishment of someone who has disobeyed the rules of Gilead (Atwood, 1985, 274). The Salvaging fosters an environment of docile bodies because all of the women are required to sit and watch, but also participate in the death of an individual by holding onto the rope that ultimately kills someone (Atwood, 1985, 275). This event also included a Particicution, which allows for the women to actively participate in the killing of a person by doing anything they want to the individual (Atwood, 1985, 279). Aunt Lydia revealed that the man who was to be killed was a rapist, and that he was sentenced to be killed (Atwood, 1985, 279). Once the women had the green light to rush toward this man, Offred recalls,

"Ofglen is shoving through the women in front of us, propelling herself with her elbow, left, right, and running towards him. She pushes him down, sideways, then kicks his head viciously, one, two, three times, sharp painful jabs with the foot, well aimed" (Atwood, 1985, 280).

While Ofglen's act seemed hate-fueled, she actually knew this man and told Offred "don't be stupid. He wasn't a rapist at all, he was political. He was one of ours. I knocked him out. Put him out of his misery" (Atwood, 1985, 279).

She explains to Offred that this man was not guilty of rape, but instead was opposing the structures of Gilead, and therefore got killed because of it (Atwood, 1985, 279). This act done by Ofglen to help the political during the Salvaging was noticed by the guardians and put Ofglen in an endangered position (Atwood, 1985, 279).

Ofglen's resistance is evident in the novel up until her death (Atwood, 1985, 285). Soon after the Particicution, Offred learns that Ofglen has been replaced by a new handmaid, also called Ofglen (Atwood, 1985, 285). The new handmaid says "she hanged herself... after the Salvaging. She saw the can coming for her. It was better" (Atwood, 1985, 285). In a sad and shocking revelation, Offred finds out that her friend's final act of resistance was taking her own life, once she saw the guards coming for her (Atwood, 1985, 285). Ofglen likely knew that she would get killed or be sent to the Colonies to eventually die. If she got into that van, she also would be forced to talk and share information about the Mayday network, possibly threatening the resistance. With these options, she committed suicide to avoid any ending that she could not control (Atwood, 1985, 285). What we know is that Mayday was eventually successful in defeating Gilead (Atwood, 1985). In my opinion, this was a bold and brave move by Ofglen, showing her agency even when she had few options. She did not allow Gilead full control of how her life ended, but made the decision to end her own life—hoping that the others in the Mayday operation remain secret. This final act signified her role as a powerful character who was secretly working against the regime all along and resisting docility until her death.

Moira's Resistance

Moira is introduced in the novel as the best friend of Offred in the times before Gilead, before the two of them meet again post the regime takeover (Atwood, 1985, 37).

Moira is portrayed by Atwood as a defiant and rebellious woman, contrasting the behaviors of the women (Atwood, 1985, 90). One of the first instances of Moira's outward and bold resistance is when she pretends to get sick while she is at the Red Center, so that she can leave and be taken somewhere else (Atwood, 1985, 90). While being lectured by Aunt Lydia, Offred and Moira plan to meet in the bathroom together, where Moira says "I've got to get out of here, I'm going bats... I'll fake sick. They'll send an ambulance, I've seen it" (Atwood, 1985, 89). When she tells this to Offred, who does not like to make outward statements of resistance, Offred is concerned and asks her not to go, to which Moira responds, "At least it'll be a change. I won't have to listen to that old bitch" (Atwood, 1985, 89). Moira follows through with her plan, to fake sick and be taken by the ambulance, where she also offered sex to one of the ambulance men to help her escape (Atwood, 1985, 90). However, Moira's effort to escape is discovered, which led to her being severely reprimanded. Offred recalls seeing her friend's feet, after having been beaten to the point they were unrecognizable, as Offred says "her feet did not look like feet. They looked like drowned feet, swollen and boneless" (Atwood, 1985, 91). While this attempt of escape was not successful for Moira and left her punished and in pain, she was still willing to take the risk, to resist being a docile body for Gilead. She was willing to take her chances of being caught and punished, rather than conform to the reproductive machine that Gilead was pushing her to become (Atwood, 1985, 91). Even though she faced harsh and severe punishment the first time, this was not the last time that Moira resisted and rebelled against the structure of Gilead in a bold way. Moira's outward and dramatic forms of resistance contrast with Ofglen's resistance which were secretive and underground while she acted as a docile handmaid in society. Moira wants everyone to know that she is resisting, and that is why her resistance was manifested

through bold acts and public displays of her disapproval of Gilead. Another major way that Moira resists in a showstopping way is when she escapes the Red Center by tying up one of the Aunts and disguising herself by impersonating them to escape (Atwood, 1985, 133). This brave act of resistance began with Moira messing with the toilets, forcing one of the Aunts to tend to the mess (Atwood, 1985, 130). While Aunt Elizabeth is doing so, she feels something sharp pressed up on her back, when Moira threatens the Aunt to comply with her or else she will harm her (Atwood, 1985, 130). Once she had full compliance from Aunt Elizabeth, Moira then took her clothes, changed into them, and impersonated her in order to escape (Atwood, 1985, 133). While it is revealed that Moira is later captured, her bravery and courage to attempt to escape was remarkable to the Handmaid women (Atwood, 1985, 133). Offred says,

"Nevertheless Moira was our fantasy. We hugged her to us, she was with us in secret, a giggle; she was lava beneath the crust of daily life. In the light of Moira, the Aunts were less fearsome and more absurd. Their power had a flaw to it. They could be shanghaied in toilets. The audacity was what we liked" (Atwood, 1985, 133).

Offred is reflecting on the fact that Moira gave herself and the other Handmaids hope. She rebelled and took risks in a way that no one else did, and this was inspiring to the other woman, that freedom was possible if you resisted. Offred recalls feeling awestruck by Moira's action, saying "Moira was out there somewhere. What would she do?...Moira had power now, she'd been set loose, she'd let herself loose. She was now a loose woman" (Atwood, 1985, 133). Moira's escape gave the others, especially Offred, hope that resistance was possible and there was life that could be lived outside of Gilead, if they could just be as bold and brave as Moira.

By the end of the novel, Moira's current position is revealed to be at Jezebels, a brothel in Gilead where women are forced to provide sexual services to men (Atwood, 1985, 249). When Offred visits Jezebels with her Commander, she and Moira make eye contact and signal to meet in the bathroom, where Offred learns what fate had in store for Moira after her escape from the Red Center (Atwood, 1985, 245). While Moira was so close to escaping Gilead for good, she was caught by the Eyes and returned the hands of the regime but had been deemed as too defiant to return to the Red Center (Atwood, 1985, 250). This is when Moira was given the option of the Colonies or working at Jezebels, which she chose Jezebels because she says there are drinks, drugs, and even face cream, in addition to the fact that life expectancy is really low in the Colonies (Atwood, 1985, 250). Being at Jezebels also gives Moira the freedom to be sexually active with women, as a lesbian woman, and we know that would not be possible as a handmaid (Atwood, 1985, 251). Although Offred and many readers were off put by the fact that Moira seems okay with her decision and indifferent to her new role in Gilead, I believe that Moira's decision to be a Jezebel rather than go to the Colonies, reflects her agency and decision-making power when deciding her fate. That is a decision she likely would have never had, if she hadn't rebelled and escaped in the first place. While Moira's neutral position toward being a Jezebel may mean loss of hope in herself, I still think that Moira's escape and resistance opened more options for her than she once had. While she may have conformed to her new role in Gilead toward the end of the novel, her conformity could also be a mechanism of survival in hopes of making it out someday.

Moira's character differentiates from Ofglen in that her resistance was outward and unconcealed. I believe that ending that Atwood chose for Moira still leaves room for Moira to continue to resist in the future,

since she chose to work at Jezebels where she has access to powerful men in Gilead in vulnerable positions (Atwood, 1985, 249). Instead of choosing to work at the Colonies where she likely would work until she eventually died from the unhealthy conditions, she chose to be at Jezebels where she is still connected to opportunities for her to resist in the future, but allows her to focus on surviving (Atwood, 1985, 248). While Moira may have become a docile body by the end of the novel, she took big risks that could have gotten her killed, yet she is still alive and may still set an example to the other women that resistance may take time and multiple attempts before you are successful.

Offred's Resistance

Offred's resistance is presented differently than Ofglen and Moira. The majority of her resistance manifests internally, through her inner thoughts. As I have mentioned in previous chapters, Gilead's agenda is to use women's bodies for the state's interest, but in order to do this, the other part of the agenda is to diminish their personhood, make them forget their previous lives and families, and for women to adopt their new reality without questions (Atwood, 1985). On the outside, Offred appears to be a docile body, fully controlled by Gilead, and conformed to this new reality. However, what we learn from reading the novel is that Offred does resist docility in her own way, and that her internal resistance leads to her story getting told (Atwood, 1985, 301). What we know from the Historical Notes section of the novel, is that Offred's story and recollections of events in Gilead was found taped on cassettes to eventually be transcribed and ordered to create *The Handmaid's Tale* (Atwood, 1985, 301). So, although most of Offred's resistant acts take place internally in her mind, we do know that an ultimate physical act of resistance that Offred committed throughout her time in Gilead, was taping her story hoping that one day it would get told and heard (Atwood, 1985, 301).

Offred's acts of resistance were innumerable in the way Foucault described it, because she was constantly combatting feelings of hopelessness as a way to stay alive (Atwood, 1985, 8). This survival technique Offred employs may have worked out for her given that her story is the one that ends up getting told, and she may have been one of the only women that escaped Gilead (Foucault, 1984, 174).

In chapter one, Offred makes clear that she intends to survive Gilead, and wants to do what it takes to come out of this alive (Atwood, 1985, 8). She says "I try not to think too much. Like other things now, thought must be rationed. Thinking can hurt your chances, and I intend to last (Atwood, 1985, 8). From this moment, Offred is declaring that her actions moving forward are intended to help her survive this regime. A few moments earlier, Offred says "we yearned for the future" resisting the idea that Gilead is the only future and forcing herself to feel hopeful that this totalitarian regime cannot last forever—even though that is what Gilead wants you to believe (Atwood, 1985, 3). Offred is constantly reminding herself that "normal times" were not long ago, and that some things have stayed the same (Atwood, 1985, 48). In this oppressive regime, the agenda is to tear down the handmaid's memories of the past and their hopes of the future, so that they conform to their new role and be submissive (Atwood, 1985). However, Offred will not give up her hope, even when the smallest thing may happen, she tries to see possibility in it (Atwood, 1985, 48). For example, Offred sees a dish towel in the kitchen and realizes that it looks the same as they always have; she says "sometimes these flashes of normality come at me from the side, like ambushes. The ordinary, the usual, a reminder, like a kick. I see the dish towel, out of context and I catch my breath. For some, in some ways, things haven't changed that much (Atwood, 1985, 48). This flashback is eye opening for Offred because she realizes that if dish towels look the same, then maybe it hasn't been that long, or maybe

Gilead is not as cut off from the world as they make it out to be. Similarly, in a small act of hope, Offred sees the Commander's wife smoking cigarettes, and wonders where they came from (Atwood, 1985, 14). She says "the cigarettes must have come from the black market, I thought, and this gave me hope. Even now there is no real money anymore, there's still a black market" (Atwood, 1985, 14). This gives Offred a slight glimpse of hope, realizing that there are some things that have remained the same even since Gilead was created. Even in this slight way, Offred is resisting the part of Gilead that wants her to not make any connections, wonder, or think about the outside world. In this way, Offred's thoughts are disobeying Gilead and serving as resistance to mental docility.

One of the main ways that Offred resists the mental state that Gilead wants her to have, is her usage of language as a tool to create her own reality (Atwood, 1985, 37). Even though in Gilead, Offred does not have answers about what happened to her family, she chooses to remember them and chooses to keep them alive in her head, thus creating her own reality for them (Atwood, 1985, 37). When she sees a man who's been killed for being a doctor, Offred shares "what I feel is partly relief, because none of these men is Luke. Luke wasn't a doctor. Isn't." (Atwood, 1985, 33). This slight change in tense when referring to Luke, is Offred's way of creating her own reality for Luke and for herself—also a way of holding out hope instead of assuming he is dead (Atwood, 1985, 33). This belief in Luke being alive keeps Offred alive throughout the novel, hoping that once this regime ends, she has a husband and a daughter to return to (Atwood, 1985, 33). In this way, Offred is pushing against the hopeless and demoralizing attitudes that Gilead wants the handmaids to have, so that they accept their role and ask no questions (Atwood, 1985). Another way that Offred uses language to resist and create her own reality is when she is sitting in her room and reflecting on herself. She says

"The night is mine, my own time, to do with as I will, as long as I am quiet. As long as I don't move. As long as I lie still. The difference between lie and lay. Lay is always passive... I lie then, inside the room..." (Atwood, 1985, 37).

In this moment Offred makes the distinction between lay and lie, saying that lay is passive, and choosing to use lie to describe herself. Offred naming herself as active rather than passive is another internal act of resistance, claiming agency over her situation rather than being submissive to Gilead's agenda (Atwood, 1985, 37).

Storytelling is another powerful act of resistance that Offred takes on throughout her time in Gilead. One night she is remembering her old life, thinking of Moira, her mother, and her daughter (Atwood, 1985, 39). Offred copes with this situation of not knowing the fate of her family by storytelling to create her own reality for them. Storytelling is one of the survival techniques that Offred uses to remain hopeful and to have agency in Gilead without being reprimanded for physical acts of resistance. Offred says,

"If it's a story I'm telling, then I have control over the ending. Then there will be an ending to the story, and real life will come after it. I can pick up where I left off ... Tell rather than write, because I have nothing to write with and writing is in any case forbidden. But if it's a story, even in my head, I must be telling it to someone. You don't tell a story only to yourself. There is always someone else. Even when there is no one" (Atwood, 1985, 39-40).

Even though storytelling differs from the kind of bold resistance that Offred and Moira were involved in, storytelling gives Offred the opportunity to write her own story and to create the reality, or the "ending" that she wants for people, and for herself. This is resisting what Gilead wants from her, because the regime aims to diminish all agency and all hope, but Offred demonstrates that even though she

may be physically complying with the regime, she is mentally resisting (Atwood, 1985, 40).

Storytelling allows Offred to think of the ending of Gilead, and to be able to picture a future that is not Gilead. In this telling of her story, Offred explains that her recollections of Gilead are fragmented:

"This is a reconstruction. All of it is a construction. It's a reconstruction now, in my head, as I lie flat on my bed... If I ever get out of here—Let's stop there. I intend to get out of here. It can't last forever.... When I get out of here, If I'm ever able to set this down, in any form, even in the form of one voice to another, it will be a reconstruction" (Atwood, 1985, 134).

What Offred means by this idea of her story being a reconstruction, is her acknowledging that she does not remember the stories perfectly, likely because many of them are very traumatic, but that she needs to record it and tell the story even if it is not a perfect recounting of it (Atwood, 1985, 134). In this quote Offred is using optimistic and positive language about surviving Gilead, furthering her resistance by having hope that her life will not end here.

Since her memories are reconstructions, Offred often remembers her experiences through multiple dimensions (Atwood, 1985, 143). She resists a binary approach and instead leans into the idea that her memories are reconstructions, and thus she may have multiple perspectives on what happened (Atwood, 1985, 143). Offred explains by saying "What I need is perspective. The illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangement of shapes on a flat surface. Perspective is necessary. Otherwise there are only two dimensions... Otherwise you live in the moment, which is not where I want to be" (Atwood, 1985, 143). Offred is realizing that in order to have a clear mind, given everything that has happened to her, she needs perspective and needs to think strategically, or else she will not be helping herself.

Even though some readers may have been underwhelmed with Offred's form of resistance in comparison to Moira or Ofglen, Offred's belief in future and hope made her internal thoughts a powerful strategy for resisting Gilead. Although she had to remain compliant and submissive to her role in society, her thoughts may have kept her alive, which was her goal since the first chapter (Atwood, 1985, 8). While we do not know exactly what Offred's ending was, we do know that eventually the Eyes come for her, but Nick tells her to go with them because they are actually a part of Mayday and will help her (Atwood, 1985, 293). Without knowing what her fate would have in store for her, she went, and accepted the unknown (Atwood, 1985, 293). If Offred survived and escaped Gilead through Mayday, then her internal acts of resistance were enough to keep her alive in Gilead, and to get her story out. If she did not survive, and was instead captured and killed by the Eyes, then her story was still heard and found. Regardless of the ending that Offred was met with, her resistance through recollections of her past, through hope, and through her storytelling was a powerful way that Offred resisted the demoralization that docile bodies are meant to have. In chapter 41, shortly before she is discovered by the Eyes, Offred says "By telling you anything at all I'm at least believing in you, I believe you're there, I believe you into being. Because I'm telling you this story I will your existence. I tell, therefore, you are" (Atwood, 1985, 268). This goes back to what Offred said earlier about a story always having a listener, and this view allowed her to create her own reality and to make her storytelling powerful, even if she was not sure where it would end up. I argue that this resistance is what kept Offred alive and helped her resist docility throughout her time in Gilead.

Resistance May Look Different for Everyone

As I have demonstrated through the three characters in *The Handmaid's Tale*, Ofglen, Moira, and Offred, resistance may look different for everyone.

Each of these women resisted the pressures of Gilead in some way, and it gave their life importance and power. Even though we know for sure Ofglen died, she had the power of taking her own life, not allowing anyone from Gilead to torture her or force answers out of her (Atwood, 1985, 285). While this was a sad end to a resistant character, it shows that even through death, a person can be resisting an oppressive regime, by not allowing them to continue using her. I argue that this act by Ofglen was a powerful testament to her refusal to give up other members of Mayday and her refusal to keep allowing Gilead to use her body. Moira's end is a bit harder to examine, given that throughout the whole novel, we'd hoped that she'd escaped Gilead. However, I argue that Moira's bold and rebellious acts of resistance also showed her refusal to be used by Gilead in a way that she didn't want. Although she does end up at Jezebels, arguably as a docile body in a different form, Moira would not have even ended up there, had she not escaped the Red Center. I think that if Moira is indifferent to her position at Jezebels, it is understandable that she may feel defeated—while still acknowledging that she could have ended up at the Colonies, which she considered to be much worse (Atwood, 1985, 250). While her position at Jezebels is still within the Eye of Gilead, she still has more freedom and access to information than the other women do, and I think it is reasonable for her to be okay with her decision.

Offred's resistance may not have been as rebellious as the others, though it was successful because it resulted in her story being told (Atwood, 1985, 301). Whether or not she survived, the recollections of her experiences were shared and we know this from the Historical Notes at the end of the novel (Atwood, 1985, 300). Offred needed to comply with the standards of being a handmaid in order to survive, but at no point in the novel had she completely given up hope. She continued taping her experiences and believing that someone would find them, and Gilead would come to an end someday.

Resistance evidently takes different shapes and forms, and therefore, there is no “one way” to resist. As I will explore for the rest of the chapter, there are so many ways that women can be resistant to reproductive oppression in their lives. Of course, for some women, this resistance may come less easily or be less attainable, and I have argued through Dorothy Roberts that women of color are harmed the most by reproductive oppressions. However, what we have learned from *The Handmaid’s Tale* about resistance is that everyone can do it, everyone can play a part, and resistance will look different for all people. Throughout the rest of this chapter, I will examine the ways that contemporary feminists may resist the oppressions we currently face, and what options there are for resistance in a modern world.

Dorothy Roberts on Countering Oppression

Dorothy Roberts’ research highlights the oppression that women of color have faced in American history. In *Killing the Black Body*, Roberts showed how black women have been subject to the mechanisms of control I have highlighted in this thesis: objectification and surveillance (Roberts, 1997, 23). Now that I have used Roberts to show that disciplinary power is an oppressive force and is deeply rooted in the history of our nation, this section will discuss what Roberts suggests we must do to counter this oppression.

In the final chapter of the book, Roberts speaks to what needs to be done in order to ensure justice for black women, and ultimately all people (Roberts, 1997, 295). Roberts argues that activists, scholars, and lawmakers need to redefine and rethink the meaning of liberty (Roberts, 1997, 23). She argues,

“The dominant view of liberty reserves most of its protection only for the most privileged members of society. This approach superimposes on an already unjust social structure, which it seeks to preserve against unwarranted government interference. Liberty protects all citizen’s choices from the most direct and egregious abuses of government power, but it does nothing to dismantle social arrangements that make it impossible for some people to make a choice in the first place. Liberty guards against government intrusion: it does not guarantee social justice” (Roberts, 1997, 294).

Roberts is arguing that the way that we understand liberty is not sufficient to address the social issues that our women of color in our society face. Our current view of liberty does nothing to address the social inequities that women of color face in comparison to white women (Roberts, 1997, 295). As I have used evidence to show in the previous chapters, women of color and immigrant women are more likely to be harmed by the effects of objectification and surveillance. Roberts explains with this quote, that our current understanding of liberty does nothing to address this fact, and it ignores it all together (Roberts, 1997, 295). In addition, Roberts highlights that one of the core principles of liberty is “choice”, but it does not take into account the fact that choice is distributed differently in society, and black women do not have the same ability to make free choices as white women do (Roberts, 1997, 296). If we do not start from a place that recognizes that choice and opportunity are not the same for all people, then our view of liberty will not address those concerns either. This is why Roberts argues that we must completely rethink our dominant view of liberty, and consider how liberty for a white man or white woman, is not the same liberty that black or brown women would have (Roberts, 1997, 297). We must reframe our concept of liberty so that it equally protects all people.

Liberty as Protection from Tangible Harm

Another area that our current view of liberty does not address is types of harm that are not “tangible” (Roberts, 1997, 295). Roberts points out that the government only takes issue with acts that cause physical or tangible harm, but not non-physical or non-tangible harm. Because of this, she states,

“The government need not be concerned with the social practices that create such vague injuries such as the devaluation of Black mothers. By this logic, the claim that a practice may adversely impact the social status of all women or reinforce the subordination of Black people is less than important than the claim of personal loss to an individual citizen” (Roberts, 1997, 295).

In this passage, Roberts explains that the government’s current view of liberty only recognizes harm as tangible; even though she, and multiple other women of color scholars have demonstrated that harm caused to black women has largely been non-tangible (Roberts, 1997, 295). This harm has included the devaluing of their role as mothers, and thus devaluing their children. This non-tangible harm has also allowed for government surveillance in their homes, since black women were first seen as unfit, dependable, drug addicts (Roberts, 1997, 106). Racist name calling, stereotyping, and making false claims about an entire group of people is absolutely harmful to them and threatens their ability to be free and equal citizens in this country (Roberts, 1997, 227). However, Roberts calls out the fact that the dominant view of liberty does not take this into account, and thus ignores how non-tangible practices have largely been a part of the harm caused to Black women (Roberts, 1997, 296).

The fact that liberty does not protect from non-tangible harms is problematic to say the least, since my two last chapters have demonstrated how women of color have been in danger and have even died as a result of non-tangible harm (Roberts, 1997, 296).

In Chapter two, I argued that the objectification of women has resulted in their treatment as literal objects, and their lives and bodies being devalued as a result of that (Presser and Surana, 2024). I have demonstrated that objectification is a disciplinary mechanism intended on making women docile bodies. Objectification is also a non-tangible harm that has serious implications on women’s lives and women’s health (Roberts, 1997, 297). Being treated as a literal object, devalues women so much that it has led to them not receiving life saving care when they needed it, and allowing them to die, as seen with the case of Porshia Ngumezi, an African American woman from Texas, who’s tragic death I discussed in detail in chapter two (Presser and Surana, 2024). This is an example, not only of the interlocking of oppressions, but also how black women are severely impacted by non-tangible acts of violence. Porshia Ngumezi’s life was treated as an object, and as a result she was not medically treated for her miscarriage, and this led to her death (Presser and Surana, 2024). Because of the Dobbs decision, women have had serious troubles getting access to reproductive care when they need it, and this is a result of a non-tangible harm that devalues women, and manifests through objectification. Until we rethink what liberty should address, women will continue to be harmed both physically and in non-tangible ways, most especially in our contemporary setting without the protections of Roe v. Wade.

Roberts’ Reproductive Liberty

Roberts’ suggests that in order to counter the oppression women of color have faced, we must expand the understanding of reproductive rights and liberty, and work towards reproductive freedom (Roberts, 1997, 298). She believes this to be strongly tied to the concepts of positive and negative liberty (Roberts, 1997,). Roberts believes that reproductive liberty must include negative liberty which is freedom from state intervention, as well as positive liberty which is having the right to resources and opportunities

necessary in order to have children or not have children (Roberts, 1997, 296). As autonomous individuals, we must have a negative liberty, which gives us freedom from the government being able to do anything to our bodies; but we also must have positive liberty which is the freedom to make our own choices about our bodies, and having the right of government facilitation of resources and services required to make these decisions (Roberts, 1997, 296). In order to have reproductive liberty, we need positive liberty because having the "choice" to make decisions about your body means nothing if people cannot afford or get access to the services they need, to make the choices they want to make about their bodies (Roberts, 1997, 296). In addition, reproductive liberty "includes not only the negative proscription against government coercion, but also the affirmative duty of government to protect the individual's personhood from degradation and to facilitate the process of choice and self-determination. This approach shifts the focus of liberty theory from state nonintervention to an affirmative guarantee of personhood and autonomy (Roberts, 1997, 309). Once liberty is recognized as requiring both positive and negative protections, all people will equally have freedom from government coercion as well as the freedom to actually make the choices they wish to make, knowing that they will have access and a guarantee of providing services necessary. For these reasons, positive and negative liberty together, are a cornerstone of reproductive freedom for Roberts.

Roberts also argues that reproductive freedom is too narrowly focused just on the right to an abortion (Roberts, 1997, 300). She explains that this is not shocking, since the right to an abortion has been the main focus of white men and white women's concerns when discussing reproductive freedom (Roberts, 1997, 300). However, when adopting an intersectional approach of looking at reproductive freedom, we must acknowledge that there are so many other components to having reproductive

freedom that do not have to do with receiving an abortion (Roberts, 1997, 300). Black women have encountered the plethora of issues attached to not having reproductive freedom. Roberts states,

"Black women, on the other hand, especially those who are poor, must deal with a whole range of forces that impair their choices. Their reproductive freedom, for example, is not limited only by the denial of access to safe abortions, but also the lack of resources necessary for a healthy pregnancy and parenting relationship. Their choices are limited not only by direct government interference in their decisions, but also by government's failure to facilitate them (Roberts, 1997, 300).

This quote reinforces the need for positive liberty to address the multiple factors that black women have to deal with. But, it also highlights the narrow focus of reproductive freedom that is held in society, since most discussions surrounding reproductive freedom center the right to an abortion. Roberts calls this out as being inattentive to the way black women are affected by a multitude of issues that are related to their race, class, and gender (Roberts, 1997, 300). For this reason, she explains that we must expand our understanding of reproductive freedom, to account for all of the issues that women encounter, not just the ones that white women encounter.

Centering Social Justice Approach

Finally, what we learn from Dorothy Roberts in *Killing The Black Body*, is that we must center social justice when approaching reproductive liberty and freedom (Roberts, 1997, 312). She explains that reproductive freedom and social justice cannot be separated (Roberts, 1997, 311). When women do not have reproductive freedom, that means that they are not being treated as free and equal citizens, and when black women are especially affected by issues within reproductive health, then this reveals that our society is not just (Roberts, 1997, 312).

Centering the lack of reproductive freedom as a social justice issue, will reveal how unjust our laws are toward certain groups of people, and can bring us closer to racial and gender equality. Roberts states,

“The main effect of a social justice approach is promoting liberty rather than restricting it. My objective is not to deny wealthy people’s options because others do not have them. Rather my vision of liberty seeks to ensure that dispossessed and disempowered groups share the means to be self-determining and valued members of society...A vision of liberty that respects the reproductive integrity of black women is a critical step toward a just society for everyone” (Roberts, 1997, 312).

Discussing reproductive freedom and social justice in the same conversation is absolutely essential to ensuring justice for black women and what they have endured throughout history. If there are groups of people in our society who have less opportunities, options, and access than others, that is a social justice issue (Roberts 1997, 311). Women having significantly less rights over their bodies than men do, is a social justice issue. When black women have less options in pregnancy and procreation than white women do, that is also a social justice issue (Roberts, 1997, 310). Once we view reproductive freedom from a social justice approach, we will be looking at how liberty and equality is distributed in society, and how we can work on making those distributions more just. Ensuring reproductive freedom for black women is essential in order to have a just society, and to reiterate what Roberts said, once we respect the lives and integrity of black women, we are certainly taking a step in the right direction for the betterment of society, and we will get closer to treating all people equally (Roberts, 1997, 311). In order to resist the reproductive oppression that is a reality to so many women, we can take the advice of Dorothy Roberts by expanding our notion of liberty,

widening our understanding of reproductive freedom, and making reproductive justice a social justice issue.

An Intersectional Reproductive Justice Framework as Resistance

Throughout this thesis, I have reflected on disciplinary mechanisms that control women and especially control their reproduction. I have centered an Intersectional Reproductive Justice Framework to expose and become aware of the oppressions that women, especially women of color face in regard to their reproduction. The reproductive justice framework inherently includes intersectionality in its practice and focuses on the multiple injustices that women encounter in regards to their reproduction, but also in regard to other social issues (Ross and Solinger, 2017, 10). For the rest of this chapter, I will explore the ways that we can use the Reproductive Justice Framework, crafted by reproductive justice scholars, in order to resist and combat the injustices that women are facing in the contemporary, post-Dobbs world.

As a reminder from Chapter one, according to Lorretta Ross and Rickie Solinger, reproductive justice “is a contemporary framework for activism and for thinking about the experience of reproduction” (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Ross and Solinger say that reproductive justice “is also a political movement that splices reproductive rights with social justice to achieve reproductive justice” (Ross and Solinger, 2017). This is exactly what Dorothy Roberts was suggesting when she said that reproductive freedom needs to be handled within a social justice approach (Roberts, 1997, 312). Furthermore, reproductive justice goes further than the pro-life and pro-choice debate, and it seeks to address wider problems within reproduction (Ross and Solinger, 2017). This framework is based on three core principles which are: the right to not have a child, the right to have a child, and the right to parent children in a safe and healthy environment, as well as sexual autonomy and gender freedom for all (Ross and Solinger, 2017).

Each of these principles directly impact women and pregnant people and they are the primary focuses of the framework.

Ross and Solinger highlight the reproductive justice framework as a human rights framework (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Meaning, that is a human right to have reproductive freedom, and this must be manifested through a reproductive justice framework. According to Ross and Solinger, reproductive justice is meant to

“draw attention to– and resist– laws and public and corporate politics based on racial, gender and class prejudices. These laws and politics deny people the right to control their own bodies, interfere with reproductive decision making, and ultimately, prevent many people from being able to live with dignity in safe and healthy communities” (Ross and Solinger, 2017).

In this quote, we see that this is a framework that is intended to help us resist reproductive oppression. This also points out that intersectionality is inherently a part of reproductive justice, as the framework looks to address and resist multiple prejudices and oppressions that are at all at play, and how one person can be each of those factors at once. What we have seen in 2025 is that women have been stripped of their decision-making power, and pregnancy and reproduction are both completely undignified for many women in a post-Roe world, especially low income women and women of color (Presser and Surana, 2024). It is imperative now more than ever, for contemporary feminists to adopt a reproductive justice framework that fights issues with a holistic view when demanding reproductive freedom. Women in 2025 have lost their lives as a result of the overturning of Roe v. Wade, and more lives will be lost if more people do not start participating in active movements to resist these oppressions.

Participating in Active Movements as Resistance

SisterSong is a Reproductive Justice Activist group that organizes and facilitates activist movements (sistersong.net). According to their official website, they focus on fighting and resisting the structures that currently oppress women, while also working with politicians and lawmakers, trying to dismantle systems of oppression that are still alive today. They focus on educating young men and women who want to participate in activism, as well as centering the most marginalized group which is low income women and women of color, in addition to transgender people. Sistersong is one of the many reproductive justice centered groups that are currently working hard to create opportunities for resistance, for active movements, and to participate in collective resistance. Ross and Solinger explain that collective resistance and coalition building is essential to the resistance aspect of the framework (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Quoting Sistersong, Ross and Solinger say that collective power is necessary in order to fight reproductive injustice, because you are “doing collectively what we cannot do individually” (Ross and Solinger, 2017). They also emphasize forming coalitions that are “broad-based” so that we can get a better understanding of all of the oppressions that exist, and how they may be intersected and intertwined (Ross and Solinger, 2017). They say, “it takes all of our differences to make our movement whole; differences become barriers that break us into fragments only if we let them” (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Centering the experiences of women of color is a crucial part of Sistersong’s message in their activism, not because they are the only people who have experienced reproductive oppression, but because their experiences largely represent some of the worst in society. Participating in groups like Sistersong, who are committed to dismantling systems of oppression that affect reproduction, are essential to resistance,

and it is one of the many ways people can participate in active movement and knowledge production on these issues.

*Resisting Disciplinary Mechanisms:
Objectification and Surveillance*

Resisting the disciplinary mechanisms of objectification and surveillance may be harder to tackle given that we may not notice it happening right away. However, what we learn from both Foucault and *The Handmaid's Tale* characters, is that there are an infinite amount of ways you may resist oppression. Offred demonstrated that even internal resistance is powerful and takes bravery (Foucault, 1984, 174); Atwood, 1985). In 2025, it may be really hard for women to remain hopeful and optimistic in a world that is showing her that her future is frightening. However, we learn from Offred, even in a totalitarian oppressive regime, that holding onto our personhood, thinking of the good, and hoping for change, is also a form of resistance (Atwood, 1985). While I argue that we do need to do more than hope—we need to demand and call out the forces that oppress us—I also recognize from reading *The Handmaid's Tale* that hope is a powerful mechanism of resistance. While the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision reinforces (and allows) the literal objectification of women that has resulted in the deaths of numerous women and counting), we still must keep our sense of self—like Offred did (Atwood, 1985). She struggled deeply with feeling objectified, as Gilead treated her body as a fetal container, but even so, she claimed her agency and reminded herself of her identity, remembering her life, and remembering that she is more than just a body for the government's agenda (Atwood, 1985, 40). While this internal resistance may not be as fulfilling as the resistance of Moira or Ofglen, Offred resisted being a docile body by her thoughts, and it is a powerful lesson for contemporary feminists to relay. As the saying goes, all battles are first won or lost, in the mind. Offred's mental strength to keep fighting throughout an oppressive regime where all she knew was objectification and surveillance, is

something that contemporary women can learn from, and put into practice in these challenging times.

Other than in the mind, there are other ways to resist disciplinary mechanisms in 2025. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, government surveillance of women has spiked since the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*. As a result, women have become the spotlight of the public eye, and their decisions regarding their bodies have seemingly become a public issue. Now that we know this, we must respond by doing as much as we can to keep our personal information private. Apps such as social media and period tracking apps are currently being surveilled by the government regularly, and can be used to punish women by tracking their location or by collecting information about their reproductive health (Torchinsky, 2022). This constant monitoring of our lives is something we must be very aware of and keen on. I encourage women to completely remove period tracking apps from their phones, and return to more traditional ways of tracking period cycles. While it is unfortunate that women have to pivot in this way, it is very necessary given that we have studies that show that those apps may be used to harm us in the future (Torchinsky, 2022). I also encourage women to share less personal information on social media, and to reduce or limit who they allow to follow them. With bounty hunting laws like the ones I described in the previous chapter, your friends, family, and colleagues may be incentivized by a financial reward to go to authorities with personal information regarding your reproductive health. It may sound outlandish to assume anyone in your inner circle would do that to you, but financial rewards are very powerful and can put people in places they would have never expected themselves to be in. In 2025, the criminalization and policing of women is happening frequently, and it is better to share as little information as possible on social media, but I encourage young women to refuse to use it at all. In this way, we can ensure that we are protecting our privacy by not oversharing, and resisting any kind of unnecessary

surveillance from our peers or family members.

Doctors and Nurses: People in Positions to Resist

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapters, doctors and nurses have played a large role in the surveillance and objectification of women in *The Handmaid's Tale*, in *Killing the Black Body*, and in our contemporary world. While doctors and nurses are not always intended to surveil or objectify, we have seen that it does happen in practice. We saw this occur in *The Handmaid's Tale* with Offred's regular doctors check up where he would examine the condition of her body (Atwood, 1985, 60). The doctor sectioned off her body so the only examined part was the reproductive organs, treating her as an object while also surveilling her body and behaviors (Atwood, 1985, 60). We also saw doctors playing a role in surveillance and objectification in *Killing the Black Body*, when doctors would deem certain mothers as drug addicts or deem black people as feebleminded, or participate in eugenics research, or allow for welfare workers to invade their home uninvited (Roberts, 1997, 70-153). Finally, we see this occurring post-Dobbs world, where doctors and nurses wait for hours or days to treat women who are in need of care, and in some cases letting them die, thus treating them as literal objects (Presser and Surana, 2024). Doctors and nurses today also surveil women, shown through Brittney Watts' story when a nurse called the cops after she miscarried (Duncan et al., 2024). All of these examples show doctors and nurses playing an active role in the disciplinary mechanism that controls women.

Since doctors and nurses do play such an active role in surveilling and objectifying women, they can also play a reverse role in honoring the privacy and health concerns of women. To do this, they would have to perform life saving care when it is needed, doing everything they can to prevent death, and not treating women as objects to be disregarded.

In addition, they would have to honor women's privacy, not calling the cops when a woman has suffered a tragedy, like in Brittney Watts' case (Duncan et al., 2024). They would have to respect women's decisions and honor them by providing whatever is necessary in order to make that decision happen. Doctors and nurses are invited into such a sensitive and vulnerable part of a woman's life, which is the story of her reproduction. What they do with their role in her story, can either comfort her, or destroy her. While there are plenty of doctors and nurses who have done courageous acts in these scary times to help women, far too many have chosen to let women suffer. These healthcare professionals are in a powerful position to resist disciplinary power. They can help women by supporting their reproductive decisions while honoring their privacy as a healthcare professional. If more doctors helped women when they needed it by providing them with lifesaving care by not letting them die, many more women would be alive today (Presser and Surana, 2024). If more nurses resisted the urge to tell officials when women have made certain decisions about their bodies, then women would currently be living a different reality (Duncan et al., 2024). These people are in empowered positions to help women in this fight for bodily autonomy, and I encourage them to consider how transformative their resistance could be.

Storytelling as Resistance

One of the foundational concepts of resistance within the Reproductive Justice framework is the power of listening to others' experiences through storytelling (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Ross and Solinger state,

“We begin with a story because we want to show how storytelling is an act of subversion and resistance. Stories help us understand how others think and make decisions. They help us understand how our human rights—and the human rights of others—are protected or violated” (Ross and Solinger, 2017).

Storytelling is a way of resistance because it gives people the opportunity to share their lived experience, giving others the chance to listen and learn. Ross and Solinger say that storytelling helps us to understand our human rights because once we better understand the human mind, we can become aware of its needs and what should be protected (Ross and Solinger, 2024). Storytelling has been a powerful tool of resistance for the spreading of information and for highlighting the experiences of others (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Storytelling was used in the 1970s during the women’s movement to understand what all women had been through “to interrupt cycles of gendered silencing and oppression” and this was called consciousness raising (Ross and Solinger, 2017). During slavery people also used storytelling to share experiences with one another as a way to cope with that they’d been through, but also to expose the reality and truth of slavery (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Storytelling has been a powerful form of resistance that we see occurring throughout history, but also in *The Handmaid’s Tale*. The whole novel is a story of Gilead, through the description of a woman who fully experienced all of it (Atwood, 1985, 301). This story would not have been as powerful or moving, had it not been told by Offred, since she directly experienced and lived the horrors of Gilead (Atwood, 1985, 309). Another way that contemporary feminists can learn from this novel is that we may see the importance of telling our stories and the stories of others, to not only draw attention to issues but also to reflect on the moment. Much of what we understand about major moments in history such as slavery or the Holocaust is because

people wrote about it, and reflected on what they were experiencing.

In this day and age, it is imperative to participate in storytelling and consciousness raising (Ross and Solinger, 2017). Contemporary feminists must understand the importance of collecting and reflecting on their own experiences, while also bringing light to the stories of others. While the result of the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision is still unfolding, as a woman in my twenties watching this play out, I have been given an incredible opportunity to tell the story of what is happening, through my lens. The most important lesson I learned from Atwood’s writing of *The Handmaid’s Tale*, is that it can be used as a guidebook to understand not only disciplinary power, but also resistance (1985). What we learn from the novel is that everyone is in a position to resist disciplinary power, and that every person’s resistance may look different. In this chapter I discussed some of the ways that women in the contemporary can actively participate in resisting disciplinary powers that are meant to keep us docile bodies. One of the most powerful ways that we can use the Reproductive Justice framework to resist oppression is by drawing attention to it. Through this framework, anyone can be in an empowered position to tell their story. We must also tell the stories that are being silenced—the women who have died as a result of our nation’s oppressive laws, or the women whose lives have been severely impacted because of being wrongfully accused of ending their pregnancies (Duncan et al., 2024) (Baldwin, 2022). By highlighting these stories, by telling them, we are resisting the structures that want us to remain silent. Through the Reproductive Justice Framework, we can find a multitude of ways to resist the current power structures that are aimed at making women docile bodies and we realize that anyone can be involved in this fight for restoring and creating reproductive freedom and liberty for all.

Conclusion

As I conclude, I want to reflect on the question that governed this thesis project. I explored to what extent Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* still functions, in Balsamo's words, as an "ethnography of the present" (1996)? And I asked if it does still function in this way, what might contemporary feminists learn from the book in relation to making sense of and resisting reproductive oppression? In my thesis, I argued that *The Handmaid's Tale* can be used as a guidebook for looking at and understanding the mechanisms used to control women today; with this I revealed that a reproductive justice framework anchored in intersectionality and Foucauldian concepts of power is required in order to resist the loss of women's freedoms that are currently under attack.

In proving my thesis statement, I centered intersectional feminism, Foucauldian understanding of disciplinary power and reproductive justice. This was the primary framework that I used in chapters 2-4 of my thesis to analyze disciplinary mechanisms, and to resist reproductive oppression. I knew I needed to center intersectional feminism to center women of color in my research, but I also wanted my analytical framework to include and be informed by Foucault's concepts of disciplinary powers and docile bodies. And I knew that reproductive justice would ultimately be the cornerstone of my framework, in order to resist reproductive oppression. That is how I developed this analytical lens that I used to analyze my political artifacts and prove my thesis statement.

Throughout my thesis, I used three primary political artifacts. The first one was *The Handmaid's Tale*, where I pulled examples from the book to analyze reproductive oppression and the disciplinary mechanisms that were taking place to control women in this totalitarian regime. Atwood's novel gave many demonstrations of disciplinary mechanisms and the government using women as docile bodies. For objectification, I showed various examples where Offred and the

and the other handmaids experience objectification, where Gilead is actively stripping them of their identity as a human and instead treating them as a fetal container. One of these examples is through the renaming of the handmaids after their Commander and banning the usage of their real names. Atwood's novel also displays surveillance as a disciplinary mechanism, through the constant watching of the Eyes and through the religious precedent of the regime. While Atwood's novel demonstrates extremely well how reproductive oppression plays out in totalitarian theocracy, she does not center on the fact that women of color are most affected by disciplinary power and reproductive oppression. While she is attentive to the fact that racist and classist ideologies that formed Gilead, she still does not center women of color in her novel. For that reason, *Killing the Black Body* became central to my research as a woman of color feminist who wanted to highlight the fact that women of color are the most impacted by reproductive oppression.

Through Roberts' book we learned that reproductive oppression for black women started during slavery, and while it looks different in a modern world, it is still present. Robert's book was helpful for learning more about the ways that black women have been objectified and surveilled throughout American history. Dorothy Roberts' book allowed me to critically analyze how disciplinary mechanisms have been used against women of color, and what the consequences have been for them. For the disciplinary mechanism of objectification, I learned that in bondage, black women were forced to reproduce more slaves and this resulted in their objectification and treatment as less than human, since they were being used as a reproductive machine, similar to *The Handmaid's Tale*. The abuse and rape of a black slave woman was also not regarded as a crime, which really reinforced men's ability to abuse and use these women for their own agenda, free of any punishment.

This threatened and took away their ability to be free and equal citizens in society because they were not even legally regarded as human.

In addition, I demonstrated that the disciplinary mechanism of surveillance also primarily affected black women that were seeking welfare benefits. When welfare was only available to white women, there was no surveillance used to police or to invade the privacy of these women. However, through Roberts' book we learn that once welfare benefits got extended to black women, that is the mechanism of surveillance came into play. This is a true demonstration of the state's agenda to police black families in order to create stereotypes about them and surveil their behaviors. Black mothers on welfare were subject to searches of their home even when they gave no consent, or even sharing intimate details of their personal lives if they wanted to receive a check to provide for their families. This was a powerful way that women of color have been especially affected by government surveillance.

The most powerful analysis that I did in this research was the contemporary analysis of 2025. I learned how disciplinary mechanisms of objectification and surveillance are still occurring in our present day. I showed through the *Dobbs v. Jackson* decision that the contemporary climate for women is becoming very dangerous and how the rise of Christian nationalism is making this fight harder for women. As women become objectified, treatment allows for their surveillance since they are not viewed as equal citizens. I argued and revealed that women are objects of surveillance in the present day, and this is carried out through multiple ways such as through social media, through law enforcement, and through doctors and nurses. All of this was to show how important it is to turn to the reproductive justice framework to call out injustices and resist oppression. The long-term goal is to have unconditional reproductive freedom, bodily autonomy, and liberty, and for that reason we must learn from women of color feminists

about collective resistance and centering the stories of marginalized groups.

Finally, to conclude, it is important to note that the path to reproductive freedom will not be an easy one. But we learn from intersectional feminists, Foucault, Roberts, and Atwood, is that resistance is necessary and that this can be done in numerous ways. Reproductive justice is a human right that we must continue to advocate for. It is more important, now more than ever, for contemporary feminists to learn from the past, to not get compliant, and to never give up the fight for bodily autonomy and complete reproductive freedom.

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