

REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE FROM A QUEER WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVE

For decades, people with uteri have been fighting for the right to control their bodies with grace and dignity, including the right to have an abortion. What does this mean for queer women?

BY RIA LOWENSCHUSS

I am a queer woman. I am in a relationship with a person who cannot get me pregnant and who is unlikely to give me STIs. I will not need to access abortion care, nor do I need hormonal birth control to prevent unintended pregnancy. I have never been to Planned Parenthood. But reproductive justice will always be my first and foremost fight.

Recently, I started watching “The Handmaid’s Tale,” a dystopian show based on Margaret Atwood’s novel of the same name. This story

takes place in a world that forces fertile women to carry children for high-up men. In the second episode of the show, one of the main characters is brutally assaulted and subjected to female genital mutilation because she is a “gender traitor” — a lesbian.

I could barely watch this scene through my tears. This woman, already oppressed simply because she has the ability to carry children, was forced to watch her lover murdered and her ability for pleasure

taken away. However, female genital mutilation is not uncommon. Both western countries like the United States, Canada and Britain, and eastern and African countries subject women to genital mutilation, which usually takes away people’s ability to experience pleasure. According to Equality Now, an organization dedicated to ensuring the rights and safety of women and girls throughout the world, about 513,000 women and girls have undergone or are at risk for female

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genital mutilation in the United States in 2022 alone. More than 200 million living women have been subjected to female genital mutilation, according to the World Health Organization.

Reproductive control does not end there. Legal access to abortion is slowly being stripped away throughout the United States, with the Supreme Court upholding medieval laws like Texas’ ban on abortions after a heartbeat is identified. Laws like these are popping up across the country, and more like them already exist in state and local constitutions, although they are not in effect currently. If *Roe v. Wade*, the historic Supreme Court case that allowed access to abortion, is overturned, these laws could become policy yet again. A world in which women are controlled for their reproductive capacity will always bring with it a world in which sexuality is taboo.

I cannot help but think of “The Handmaid’s Tale” when I am watching these events unfold in the news. Reproductive justice extends beyond abortion. It is defined by

three human rights: the right to not have children, the right to have children and the right to parent with respect in a safe environment. This affects all people, queer women especially.

I have experienced reproductive control related to my queerness since I was in fourth grade, when I was diagnosed with ruptured ovarian cysts. I had a flare-up when I was twelve years old, after I had come out as gay, and the doctor asked my mother if we had considered birth control. My mother said no, and the doctor informed her not to worry, that the birth control would only be to control my hormones, and in fact, we could refer to it as hormone therapy instead of contraception.

My mother and I looked at each other and burst out laughing. Neither of us were worried about me using contraceptives to prevent pregnancy — I was not having sex, and even if I was, I was in a relationship with a woman. There was no possible way for me to get pregnant.

Even as a young person, I have

experienced being reduced to my reproductive capacities. I am only thought of as having the opportunity to have children — it is self-evident, a plot line waiting to happen. My sexuality is irrelevant when it comes to my body’s ability to reproduce.

As a queer woman, though, I still want to have children. A key part of the definition of reproductive justice is the ability to choose when to have children, and to parent with dignity. I deserve the right to grow my family and have agency over my body, and to do so, I must fight for both reproductive and queer justice.

Living in the world as it is today, it is more important than ever to continue the fight for reproductive justice in the United States and around the world. And it is not a solitary fight. The only way we can preserve reproductive justice — our right to decide when and how our bodies function, our right to parent with respect and with dignity — is if we fight hand-in-hand. Queer women should be just as dedicated to this fight as anyone else.