

From Reproductive Control to Reclamation in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*

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Abstract:

This study explores how Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* reconceptualizes reproductive control as a system of dispersed power that governs female bodies, identities and social relations. Moving beyond the common angles of nationalism, ecology, and psychological crisis, it highlights the novel's engagement with reproductive politics. Using a body politics framework informed by Michel Foucault, Sandra Lee Bartky, and Susan Bordo, the study undertakes a close reading of the narrative to examine the relationship between reproductive coercion and female subjectivity. The analysis reveals that reproductive control is exercised through interconnected legal, medical, cultural, and interpersonal practices that normalize bodily regulation while concealing coercion. These mechanisms leave the narrator physically violated, psychologically fragmented, and socially estranged, demonstrating that reproductive trauma extends outlasts the abortion itself. The novel, however, does not end with victimhood. Through the recovery of memory, bodily consciousness, and self-definition, the narrator gradually reconstructs her identity and resists the structures that once disciplined her. By foregrounding female embodied experience rather than ideological positions, *Surfacing* offers an alternative understanding of reproductive justice grounded in agency, voice, and autonomy. The study, therefore, reads the novel as a powerful critique of coercion, offering a vital warning against any system that reduces female bodies to sites of institutional control.

Keywords: Surfacing; reproductive control; body politics; reclamation; bodily autonomy; reproductive justice.

Introduction

To surface is to rise from what has kept one submerged. For the illustrator-narrator of Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, what lies beneath the surface is the history of reproductive

coercion that has dismantled her sense of self. The novel follows her return to her childhood home on a remote island in northern Quebec in search of her missing father. What begins as a physical journey gradually becomes a confrontation with a repressed past. The wilderness forces her to face the traumatic memory of a coerced abortion that has fractured her identity, distorted her memory and alienated her from her own body. Yet, this confrontation initiates the narrator's reclamation of agency and bodily autonomy. This study argues that *Surfacing* represents reproductive control as a form of disciplinary power that disciplines the female body through internalized self-regulation, producing docility, psychological fragmentation, and bodily alienation. As the narrator confronts her repressed trauma, she gradually recovers awareness, resists these disciplinary forces, and reclaims reproductive agency. It traces how reproductive control inflicts physiological, psychological and social damage on a personal level, while exposing its wider national consequences. Drawing on the concept of disciplinary power of Michel Foucault and its feminist expansions by Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo, this study examines how bodily control operates and how resistance emerges through the recovery of voice, memory and autonomy. In doing so, it advances a pro-voice conception of reproductive justice that privileges women's lived experiences beyond the pro life/pro-choice divide.

The female body has historically functioned as a central site for the exercise of political, legal, and ideological power. Rita Segato argues that "women's bodies have historically been transformed into a territory for the staging of patriarchal power" (57). This conception frames the body as a site upon which institutional dominance is inscribed, enacted and maintained through structural and symbolic practices. In contemporary reproductive debates, this regulation is often reduced to a polarized "pro-life" versus "pro-choice" framework, obscuring broader conditions of coercion, constraint, and embodied experience. Set against a backdrop of late-1960s Canadian nationalist anxieties "Canadian fears of cultural absorption by the United States" (Howells 39), *Surfacing* parallels the loss of national sovereignty with the violation of bodily autonomy. Within this setting, reproductive control is not represented as direct legal enforcement but as an indirect system mediated through institutional authority and ambiguity. This study reads the novel through a body politics framework to examine how reproductive autonomy is shaped through cultural, medical and ideological structures rather than explicit legal prohibition or permission.

Statement of the Problem

While reading Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*, it becomes evident that the narrator's coerced abortion is not merely a personal experience but a source of her psychological fragmentation and bodily alienation. Yet, most studies sideline this reproductive matrix and direct critical attention nationalism, ecology, identity crisis and so on. This study addresses this gap by examining *Surfacing* through the framework of body politics to explore how reproductive control operates and how the narrator's process of self-reclamation challenges such control. In doing so, it moves beyond the conventional pro-life/pro-choice binary and

advances a pro-voice understanding of reproductive justice grounded in bodily autonomy, lived experience, and narrative agency.

Hypothesis

This study argues that *Surfacing* represents reproductive control as a form of disciplinary power that extends beyond physical regulation to fracture individual psychology, destabilize intimate relationships, and expose broader failures of national sovereignty and institutional responsibility. It further contends that the narrator's journey of self-reclamation constitutes a form of embodied resistance that restores bodily and narrative agency, advancing a pro-voice conception of reproductive justice beyond the conventional pro life/pro-choice binary.

Literature Review

Since its publication in 1972, Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* has attracted sustained critical attention for its exploration of female subjectivity, psychological fragmentation, and national identity. Situated within second-wave feminist discourse and Canadian literary nationalism, the novel is widely read as a complex representation of identity formation shaped by trauma, memory, and the tension between civilization and wilderness. Critics consistently emphasize that the text resists singular interpretation, instead generating multiple and intersecting readings across feminist, psychoanalytic, ecological, and nationalist frameworks.

Ronald Granofsky reads the novel through Vladimir Propp's fairy-tale morphology to reveal its structural and ideological complexities. He argues that Atwood both adopts and subverts fairy-tale structures that contribute to what Gilbert and Gubar call "mirror madness." As Granofsky notes, while the novel "conforms surprisingly to fairy-tale morphology," it also "functions to subvert that form" (51). This subversion is evident when the narrator reverses the mirror in her father's cabin so that "it no longer traps me" (52). The act symbolizes her rejection of the distorted self-image imposed by patriarchal narratives and marks an important step toward self-awareness and autonomy. Through this inversion of fairy-tale conventions, Atwood challenges the cultural myths that confine women within restrictive identities.

While Granofsky examines how patriarchal narratives shape female self-image through fairy-tale structures, Latef S. N. Berzenji approaches *Surfacing* from a psychofeminist perspective, to focus on the protagonist's trauma and self-realization. He posits that the narrator overcomes her predicament only "through asserting her individuality" and eventually "becomes one with herself" after a near-drowning experience that enables her to recover repressed memories (84). For Berzenji, the novel foregrounds the psychic fragmentation produced by patriarchal society while emphasizing the possibility of healing through self-discovery and the reclamation of identity. This transformative experience allows the protagonist to reconcile her past and present, leading to a greater sense of wholeness and integration.

Extending the line of inquiry into self-discovery, Josie P. Campbell interprets the narrator's search for her missing father as a journey of self-discovery. Campbell adopts Joseph Campbell's theory of the hero's journey to portray the protagonist as a female hero whose "adventure of interiority" leads her "towards a consciousness of the self" and enables her "to confront heroically the ghosts of her psyche" (27–28). Campbell thus reconceives the traditional monomyth as an inward journey in which the heroine's triumph lies not in external conquest but in psychological transformation and self-realization.

Shifting the scholarly focus from psychological transformation to geopolitics, Kiley Kapuscinski examines the novel through the lens of Canadian national identity. In "Negotiating the Nation: The Reproduction and Reconstruction of the National Imaginary in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*," Kapuscinski argues that *Surfacing* reveals that the "vulnerability central to the Canadian identity is open to interrogation and re-interpretation" and presents the unnamed narrator as a "meaningful and revealing figure that forces a reconsideration of Canada's central mythologies" (96). By portraying the unnamed narrator as a marginal yet disruptive figure, Kapuscinski argues that Atwood challenges dominant Canadian myths and exposes the instability of a unified national identity. Despite the richness of existing scholarship on *Surfacing* across feminist, psychoanalytic, mythic, and nationalist frameworks, comparatively little attention has been paid to reproductive control, particularly the narrator's coerced abortion. Addressing this gap, the present study examines it as the central catalyst for the narrator's bodily alienation, psychological fragmentation, and eventual self-reclamation.

Theoretical Tool

This study employs feminist body politics as its theoretical framework to examine reproductive coercion in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing*. As Claudia Yaghoobi observes, body politics concerns "the struggle over autonomy and agency in the fight against heteronormative patriarchal power structures," (19) positioning the body as a site where institutional power is both exercised and contested. It draws from Foucault's concept of disciplinary power which holds that "the body is directly involved in a political field; power relations have an immediate hold upon it" (25). Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Bordo extend this framework to female bodies, emphasizing gendered discipline and self-surveillance. Together, these perspectives examine how reproductive coercion fractures the narrator's bodily autonomy and subjectivity, and how her recovery becomes an embodied act of resistance and self-reclamation.

Textual Analysis

Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* unfolds in late-1960s Canada as a story of return and reckoning. Its narrator, an unnamed commercial illustrator in her late twenties, returns to a remote island in northern Quebec to search for her missing father. As the search progresses, she is compelled to confront a deeply repressed past, centered on the memory of a coerced abortion. Through this journey, the novel exposes how restrictive reproductive laws, medical

authority, and cultural silence operate together to regulate women's reproductive lives within a liberal democratic society, revealing how reproductive coercion persists even without overt state violence.

In *Surfacing*, reproductive control operates through legal ambiguity and institutional delegation rather than overt state force, stripping women of bodily sovereignty through dispersed mechanisms of authority. As Mugambi Jouet observes, 1969 Canadian abortion law created "a state of ambivalence" in which therapeutic abortion committees authorized some procedures, yet "the threat of criminal prosecution could dissuade doctors" from performing abortions until the law was struck down in 1988 (207). By incorporating this restrictive legal framework, Atwood highlights how the state evades direct responsibility for reproductive control by transferring regulating authority to medical institutions. As a result, female reproductive choices become subject to professional approval rather than personal autonomy. This institutional structure reflects Foucault's assertion that subjection is inflicted through a "political technology of the body" (28), whereby power controls bodies through institutions, expert knowledge, and everyday practices rather than direct violence.

The state-sanctioned legal ambivalence surrounding abortion does not only restrict reproductive access but also produces unsafe and clandestine conditions that harm bodies and lives. By treating abortion as a conditional exception rather than a fundamental right, the law transforms reproductive control into a lived experience of secrecy, fear, and bodily violation (142). The narrator recalls her experience of abortion in fragmented and sensory detail:

Not even a hospital, not even that sanction of legality, official procedures. A house it was, shabby front room ... vines and blossoms, the smell of lemon polish, furtive doors and whispers, they wanted you out fast. Pretense of the non-nurse, her armpits acid, face powdered with solicitude. Stumble along the hall, from flower to flower, her criminal hand on my elbow, other arm against the wall. (142-143)

The imagery of "furtive doors and whispers" emphasizes the secrecy and fear surrounding abortion under restrictive laws. The fractured syntax reflects the narrator's dissociation as she experiences the procedure through disconnected sensory impressions. Particularly significant is the phrase "criminal hand," which shifts guilt from the law itself to those forced to operate outside it. Atwood thus suggests that criminalizing abortion does not eliminate it, but pushes it into hidden spaces where women bear the physical and psychological consequences. Medical institutions function as sites of Foucauldian disciplinary power that reduce female body to an object of technical manipulation rather than care. The narrator conceptualizes this institutional violation by describing medical professionals as "technicians, mechanics, butchers, students clumsy or sniggering practising on your body" (74). The female body is transformed into a mechanical specimen to be dissected and mastered. It reflects what Susan Bordo identifies as the modern conception of

the body as a machine, a model that understands the body as a collection of functional parts available for inspection, regulation, and intervention (167). By portraying hospitals and medical professionals as agents of surveillance and intrusion, Atwood exposes how medical institutions participate in the regulation and dehumanization of women's bodies.

Medical authority in *Surfacing* exercises disciplinary power not only by regulating reproductive decisions but also by rendering the female body passive, silent, and compliant. The narrator captures this process of dehumanization in her description of obstetric practice: They shut you into a hospital, they shave the hair off you and tie your hands down and they don't let you see, they don't want you to understand, they want you to believe it's their power, not yours ... they take the baby out with a fork like a pickle out of a pickle jar. (80) The repeated pronoun "they" constructs medical authority as an anonymous collective force that strips women of bodily autonomy. Likewise, the simile of extracting a baby "like a pickle" highlights the complete mechanization of reproduction. This dehumanization is completed through anesthesia: "They stick needles into you so you won't hear anything, you might as well be a dead pig" (80). The porcine comparison reduces the woman to an inert body devoid of agency and consciousness, exposing the objectifying logic of institutional medicine.

Reproductive coercion in *Surfacing* infiltrates intimate relationships, transforming domestic sphere into sites of disciplinary power. This dynamic is embodied by the narrator's former lover, who assumes authority over both the decision and meaning of her pregnancy: He said I should do it, he made me do it; he talked about it as though it was legal, simple, like getting a wart removed. He said it wasn't a person, only an animal ... it bewildered him, he resented me for it, he expected gratitude because he arranged it for me, fixed me so I was as good as new. (143)

By framing pregnancy as a defect requiring technical correction, the lover reproduces the reductionist logic of legal and medical discipline. His expectation of gratitude perversely reframes coercion as paternalistic care, illustrating Foucault's premise that power functions by shaping how individuals internalize and accept their own subordination (98). Consequently, the narrator's reproductive autonomy is displaced by a patriarchal logic that presents domination as benevolence.

The patriarchal control over reproduction extends beyond abortion to include contraceptive technology as another disciplinary mechanism. While the narrator's former lover enforces abortion as a "rational" solution, Anna's body is disciplined through the pill. Anna reveals that David insists she resume taking the contraceptive pill despite its potential dangers, minimizing its risks by claiming it is "no worse for you than aspirin," even as she admits that "next time it could be the heart or something" (85). By equating a high-risk hormonal drug with a common painkiller, David subordinates Anna's physical well-being to

his own sexual convenience. No explicit force is applied, yet the reproductive burden falls entirely on Anna's body, illustrating Bordo's view of disciplinary power as operating through practices that appear voluntary while functioning as control (165). This lack of coercion makes the power more effective, aligning with Foucault's argument that modern discipline works through subtle bodily management rather than overt force (28), rendering patriarchal authority largely invisible within intimate relationships.

Beyond explicit institutional coercion, societal expectations surrounding reproduction function as a internalized disciplinary force that regulates the female subject from within. When the narrator surveys her childhood home, she reflects, "perhaps they expected grandchildren, visiting here. He would have wanted a dynasty, like Paul's, houses and descendants proliferating around him. The fence is a reproach, it points to my failure" (34). The narrator has internalized the assumption that her value lies in producing descendants who extend the family lineage. By absorbing this imagined demand without any explicit confrontation, she transforms the fence into a material symbol of self-surveillance. This psychological internalization illustrates Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, where individuals regulate themselves according to socially imposed norms (25). It also aligns with Bartky's argument that women monitor themselves through a "generalized male witness" (39), and Bordo's claim that such self-surveillance produces feelings of bodily and social inadequacy (153).

The pregnancy of the narrator represents the culmination of what Foucault terms as "docile body," a state in which patriarchal discipline transforms the female body into a reproductive instrument. Even within a fabricated memory of a conventional marriage constructed to repress her trauma, she reveals the extent of this internalization. She articulates: "It was my husband's, he imposed it on me, all the time it was growing in me I felt like an incubator. He measured everything he would let me eat, he was feeding it on me, he wanted a replica of himself; after it was born I was no more use" (20). By adopting these objectifying metaphors, the narrator reveals how the surveillance moves inward and makes her construct a prison the inside her own consciousness. The narrator becomes her own disciplinarian, policing her body, her memory and her self-perception.

This internalized self-regulation extends beyond the narrator's self-perception to her moral identity. The coerced abortion does not remain a past event that she can separate from herself. Instead, it becomes a source of enduring self-judgment. She internalizes responsibility for the loss and experiences it as a moral and existential failure: "I should have seen that was no different, it was hiding in me as if in a burrow and instead of granting it sanctuary I let them catch it. I could have said no but I didn't; that made me one of them too, a killer" (145). The image of the fetus "hiding" within her suggests a trauma that remains buried yet continually shapes her consciousness. By calling herself "a killer," the narrator

transforms victimization into self-condemnation. Reproductive control thus persists not through external force but through internalized guilt and self-blame.

Reproductive coercion inscribes itself not only on the psychology but directly on the female body, confirming Bordo's argument that the body functions as a material site where social control leaves lasting physical effects (165). This embodied cost emerges when Anna reveals the health risks of contraceptive pills: "I got a blood clot in my leg, what did you get?" (80). In sharing her past experience of a blood clot as well as her anticipation of life threatening complications, Anna reveals the severe physical costs of reproductive regulation. Similarly, the abortion leaves a lasting mark on the narrator's body. She recalls synthetic fluid being pumped into her veins during the procedure, "After that they fill your veins up with red plastic, I saw it running down through the tube" (116). The image conveys acute blood loss, an immediate physical toll of medical intervention. The consequences persist long after the intervention. She later explains, "'I couldn't see,' I said. 'Things were blurry. They said it would clear up after a couple of months but it didn't'" (151). Her lasting visual impairment demonstrates that reproductive coercion extends beyond the reproductive event, leaving enduring bodily consequences that continue to shape her life.

While reproductive coercion leaves visible traces on the body, its deepest consequences emerge at the level of subjectivity. The narrator's unassimilated trauma manifests as a profound psychosomatic fracture that leaves her emotionally and physically numb. She admits, "I didn't feel much of anything, I hadn't for a long time ... At some point my neck must have closed over, pond freezing or a wound, shutting me into my head" (99). This metaphor of "closing over" suggests a psychic withdrawal from embodied experience, where the self becomes trapped within cognition while affect and bodily sensation are severed. The imagery of freezing further conveys emotional suspension, indicating that trauma does not simply remain a memory but reorganizes the narrator's entire mode of being, producing a divided subjectivity marked by dissociation and internal enclosure.

Reproductive coercion fractures the narrator's subjectivity by disrupting her capacity to experience a coherent sense of self and time. She experiences sudden cognitive blanks in which continuity collapses: "it fits, it's all there till the time I left. Then static, like a jumped track, for a moment I've lost it, wiped clean; my exact age even ... To have the past but not the present, that means you're going senile" (23). Such lapses indicate trauma-induced dissociation rather than natural cognitive decline. The reproductive violence disrupts her capacity to inhabit the present, producing a fractured temporality in which memory exists without stable connection to lived experience. As a result, her subjectivity becomes discontinuous, suspended between fragments of recall and moments of psychic absence. Reproductive trauma extends beyond fractured memory to emotional desensitization, severing the narrator's capacity to experience affective connections with her past. In her childhood village, she waits for a familiar rush of nostalgia that never arrives: "I'm in the village, walking through it, waiting for the nostalgia to hit, for the cluster of nondescript

buildings to be irradiated with inner light like a plug-in crèche, as it has been so often in memory; but nothing happens” (15). The metaphor of the “plug-in crèche” presents nostalgia as an automatic emotional response. Its failure to activate reveals that trauma has severed the connection between memory and affect, leaving the village emotionally empty.

The coercion-induced trauma fractures not only the narrator’s memory but also her capacity for relational intimacy. Although partnered with Joe, her attachment remains emotionally detached, a condition she mistakenly internalizes as an innate deficiency: “we are the ones that don’t know how to love, there is something essential missing in us, we were born that way” (131). By framing her incapacity as an innate lack, the narrator internalizes trauma as personal deficiency. This perceived deficiency is not innate but a psychological defense that recasts intimacy as a source of vulnerability. This emotional withdrawal becomes evident during physical closeness with Joe: “He kissed me; I stood on my side of the window. When his head drew away I said ‘I don’t love you,’ ... mouth on my shoulder, fingers at the clasp behind my back” (140). While Joe continues his physical advance, the narrator remains enclosed within a metaphorical distance, demonstrating how reproductive coercion has fractured her capacity for emotional intimacy.

To survive the unbearable reality of her coerced abortion, the narrator transforms memory into a site of “dismemory.” It is a defensive strategy that transforms the traumatic experience into coherent but fictional past: “I needed a different version ... A faked album, the memories fraudulent as passports; but a paper house was better than none and I could almost live in it” (141). By describing memory as a “faked album” and a “collage,” the narrator reveals that survival depends on rewriting lived experience. “Pasting over” the abortion and affair allows her to construct a fragile “paper house” sustained by fiction. This fabricated past extends beyond isolated memories to the invention of an entirely new personal history. She replaces the coerced abortion with a socially recognizable narrative of marriage, divorce, and an abandoned child, recalling: “they never forgave me, they didn’t understand the divorce; ... I did it, so suddenly, and then running off and leaving my husband and child ... Leaving my child, that was the unpardonable sin” (28). By rewriting reproductive coercion as failed marriage and child abandonment, she reshapes her experience into a culturally intelligible narrative. Fiction thus becomes a defensive reconstruction that conceals reproductive coercion while revealing how patriarchal ideology governs what can be remembered, narrated, and forgiven.

The consequences of reproductive control extend beyond the individual, fracturing familial relationships and social belonging.. Unable to reconcile the reality of her coerced abortion with the rigid moral framework of her upbringing, she chooses exile over the judgment of the domestic space: “I couldn’t go there, home... I sent them a postcard. They never knew, about that or why I left ... the reason I couldn’t tell them; perilous innocence ... They were from another age, prehistoric, when everyone got married and had a family” (25).

Her parents' "innocence" becomes "perilous" because it depends on ignorance of sexual violation, abortion, and female suffering. Unable to speak her experience within this moral framework, the narrator is forced into silence and estrangement. Reproductive coercion thus extends beyond the regulation of the female body to fracture familial belonging and social identity.

Surfacing also frames reproductive control as a national failure by exposing how Canadian law and culture displace violence into secrecy while sustaining a façade of civility. Restrictive abortion laws force women into private, unsafe spaces where harm becomes invisible and deniable. The narrator notes the abortion was "all done so legally, or so it said in the papers" (140), showing how legality enables ethical evasion through bureaucracy. Reproductive violence is thus transformed into public injustice. By denying reproductive autonomy, the nation weakens its capacity for care and ethical self-definition, reducing both citizens and state to sites of exploitation. This produces alienated subjects marked by emotional numbness and historical amnesia, described as a "disease" spreading "like a virus" until citizens "can't tell the difference" between themselves and their colonizers (129). David's image of a "split beaver" instead of a maple leaf (113) symbolizes national fragmentation. Atwood suggests reproductive injustice corrodes national identity while preserving an illusion of stability.

The father's death and the narrator's dive into the lake mark a turning point in her recovery, initiating a shift from passive internalization to critical embodied awareness. By entering the lake, she moves beyond any institutional authority to confront her repressed experience. As the mind-body split begins to heal, she reflects, "feeling was beginning to seep back into me, I tingled like a foot that's been asleep" (140). The simile captures the painful return of sensation, suggesting that recovery begins not through forgetting but through re-inhabiting the body and recognizing the effects of reproductive coercion. This reawakening marks a critical shift in the narrator's self-understanding. As Bartky argues, feminist consciousness emerges when women recognize suffering as structurally produced rather than individually inherent, becoming "both consciousness of weakness and consciousness of strength" (427). The narrator's renewed bodily awareness thus becomes the foundation of agency, transforming the body from an object of reproductive control into the site from which resistance begins.

The return of somatic sensation disrupts the narrator's defensive narratives, marking a shift in which embodied awareness begins to unsettle the structures of "dismemory." She is compelled to abandon the fabricated story of marriage, divorce, and an abandoned child and confront the reality of her affair. She recalls the painful imbalance of the relationship: For him I could have been anyone but for me he was unique ... I kept the scraps of his handwriting like saints' relics, ... He didn't want our relationship to influence anything; it was to be kept separate from life ... It was the night I locked myself in and turned on the water in the bathtub and he cried on the other side of the door. When I gave up and came

out he showed me snapshots of his wife and children, his reasons, his stuffed and mounted family, they had names, he said I should be mature. (148)

Her fetishization of his handwriting as “saints’ relics” reveals a desperate attempt to sacralize an attachment he kept detached and transactional. Conversely, his “stuffed and mounted family” exposes a commodified domesticity used to justify her rejection under the demand to “be mature.” By exposing this imbalance, the narrator begins to dismantle the structures of “dismemory,” shifting from passive absorption of imposed narratives toward a more self-aware understanding of her own history.

The narrator moves from reproductive control and internalized docility toward embodied awareness and, ultimately, resistance. This shift emerges when her internalized discipline breaks down, prompting a rejection of patriarchal structures. This break is marked by the ritual destruction of her wedding ring: “I slip the ring from my left hand, non-husband, he is the next thing I must discard finally, and drop it into the fire, altar, it may not melt but it will at least be purified, the blood will burn off” (171). By casting the ring into the fire, the narrator rejects the patriarchal identity it represents and begins reclaiming her body and subjectivity. Rather than symbolizing closure alone, the act transforms internalized discipline into resistance, illustrating Bordo’s argument that “where there is power ... there is also resistance,” and even docility can generate transformative possibilities (192). Resistance begins not with external liberation but with the moment the narrator recognizes the structures that have governed her body and reclaims it as the ground of her own subjectivity.

Having rejected the patriarchal structures that governed her body, the narrator moves beyond resistance toward reclamation by asserting reproductive agency. A childhood drawing of a pregnant woman with a “round moon stomach” (152) awakens her desire for a pregnancy free from patriarchal authority, medical surveillance, and institutional regulation. Choosing conception on her own terms reverses the passivity imposed by the coerced abortion and restores reproductive choice as an act of self-determination. She also directs the sexual encounter according to her own will: “I pull him down, ... his beard and hair fall over me like ferns ... but I’m impatient ... I guide him into me, let’s do this fast ... he’s only a vehicle, we are the creators now, in the dark, the room where the machines haven’t reached yet” (162– 163). The encounter is not framed as romance but as a deliberate assertion of control over reproduction. Through this reappropriation of reproductive capacity, the narrator shifts from object of coercion to an active subject who defines the terms of her reproductive experience.

The narrator retreats into the wilderness as an act of withdrawal from the social, legal, and medical systems that have shaped her as a docile reproductive body. The island becomes a space outside institutional surveillance, where she begins to unlearn imposed scripts of femininity, reproduction, and obedience. In this setting, she reimagines reproduction as an instinctive process shaped by choice rather than control:

This time I will do it myself, squatting, on old newspapers in a corner alone; or on leaves, dry leaves, a heap of them, that's cleaner. The baby will slip out easily as an egg, a kitten and I'll lick it off and bite the cord, the blood returning to the ground where it belongs; the moon will be full, pulling. (156)

This vision reflects how institutional control has made medical and legal spaces feel unsafe, producing a counter-desire for isolation as a form of autonomy. By reclaiming reproduction as an embodied, self-directed act, she rejects the disciplinary structures that once governed her body and affirms reproductive autonomy on her own terms.

The narrator recognizes that the nation, through restrictive laws and coercive institutions, creates conditions in which women are forced to choose between institutional violence and physical survival. Her admission that "withdrawing is no longer possible and the alternative is death" (185) marks a moment of critical recognition. This does not signal a return to submission but an acknowledgment of the need for social connection and collective support. Choosing to leave with Joe, she reflects, "he isn't anything, he is only half-formed, and for that reason I can trust him. To trust is to let go. I tense forward" (185). Her cautious willingness to trust suggests that recovery culminates not in escape from society but in re-entering it on her own terms. This transformation culminates in her declaration: "This above all, to refuse to be a victim. Unless I can do that I can do nothing..." (185). By rejecting the identity imposed through reproductive coercion, she reclaims agency and embraces a future defined by autonomy rather than submission.

Hence, *Surfacing* exposes reproductive coercion not as an isolated personal tragedy but as a structural mode of governance that fractures bodies, subjectivity, intimate relationships, and the nation itself. Through the narrator's coerced abortion, psychological fragmentation, and gradual reclamation of agency, the novel demonstrates how legal ambiguity, medical authority, patriarchal power, and cultural silence discipline the female body. At the same time, the narrator's recovery of bodily awareness, voice, and reproductive agency challenges these structures and advances a pro-voice conception of reproductive justice beyond the pro-life/pro-choice divide.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that reproductive control in Margaret Atwood's *Surfacing* operates not merely as a policy of biological regulation but as a pervasive disciplinary mechanism that silences the female body, fragments subjectivity, and restructures social relations. Through close textual analysis, it has shown that the narrator's coerced abortion produces emotional numbness, dissociation, distorted memory, fractured relationships, and broader national consequences that extend far beyond the physical event.

At the same time, the study traces the narrator's gradual reclamation of agency as she confronts her repressed past, recovers bodily awareness, and rejects the internalized patriarchal discipline that once governed her self-perception. Ultimately, *Surfacing* presents reproductive autonomy as fundamental to female subjectivity, freedom, and human dignity, exposing how legal, medical, and cultural institutions normalize control over women's bodies while advancing a pro-voice conception of reproductive justice that moves beyond the pro life/pro-choice divide.

Further Contribution of the Study

Beyond its immediate findings, this study contributes to feminist literary criticism and reproductive justice scholarship by advancing a pro-voice conception of reproductive justice that foregrounds lived experience, embodied testimony, and narrative agency beyond the pro life/pro-choice binary. It also repositions *Surfacing* within Atwood scholarship as a novel in which reproductive coercion is a foundational rather than peripheral concern. This framework may be extended to comparative studies of *The Handmaid's Tale*, *The Testaments*, and other feminist texts to examine how reproductive control and resistance operate across different political, legal, and cultural contexts. Moreover, as reproductive rights continue to face global contestation, the body politics framework developed in this study offers a valuable critical lens for examining contemporary literary and cultural representations of reproductive coercion and bodily autonomy.

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