Reproduction is the ultimate goal in the Republic of Gilead. Nothing else matters, except the increase of the birth rate. This goal is valued so deeply that it is the sole responsibility of the Handmaids. Since the Handmaids of the Republic of Gilead have recently been forced into this task, all of the control lies in the hands of the Eyes of God. These women have been stripped of the right to decided if they want a child and it has been drilled into their minds that menstruation is a sign of failure. Worst of all, once the child is born, the Handmaids can have no claim on the child, as it now belongs to the Commander’s Wife. The Republic of Gilead has taken away all the excitement and anticipation that comes with expecting a child. Handmaids have no other role but to be a method of transportation for a new being entering a new world.

In her endless spare time, Offred has acknowledged her lack of meaning to the world. She refers to her body as a “swamp, fenland, where only I know the footing” and recognizes the fact that her fertility is the only reason for her survival (Atwood, 73). As she depends solely on her fertility, she constantly listens and hopes for signs of pregnancy. “I become the earth I set my ear against, for rumors of the future,” Offred describes (73). Offred’s choice of the word “rumors” in this instance is key. She uses “rumors” because nothing is ever certain in the process of pregnancy. She could lose the baby at any time and even at the birth of the child, it might be deemed a “Shredder”. The word “rumor” has a negative and unsure connotation about it that clearly represents
the uneasiness and stresses the Handmaid’s go through during pregnancy. Offred not only listens for signs of success but also for signs of failure. “Each twinge, each murmur of slight pain, ripples of sloughed-off matter, swellings and diminishings of tissue, the droolings of the flesh, these are signs, these are the things I need to know about” (73). What Offred is describing is menstruation, however each description she provides has a negative connotation. “Each month I watch for blood, fearfully, for when it comes it means failure,” explains Offred. Again, Offred’s word choice comes into play. She states, “for when it comes it means failure” (73). From this, the assumption is that she knows it is coming because it has happened before. We know she has tried and failed previously to this attempt. This idea is reassured in Offred’s next words, “I have failed again to fulfill the expectations of others, which have become my own” (73). What we pick up from these words is that Offred is aware that these were not originally her own expectations. The Eyes of God have instilled these beliefs in her as we can assume when she states that these beliefs have become her own.

Offred had beliefs of her own before the time of the Republic of Gilead. She can easily recall what life used to be like, what she used to use her body for. “I used to think of my body as an instrument, of pleasure, or a means of transportation, or an implement for the accomplishment of my will,” Offred recollects (74). She used to have not only control over her body, but actual ownership. Now her body, and whatever child comes out of it, belongs to the Commander and the Commander’s Wife. Her body is all that matters. Actually, her uterus is all that matters. “I’m a cloud, congealed around a central
object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am and glows red within its translucent wrapping,” Offred describes herself (74). When Offred says “the shape of a pear” she is referring to her uterus. However, what is more interesting is her use of the word “red.” To the Handmaid’s red is the color of evil and of failure. Each month, when they see red, they acknowledge that they have failed. Yet, Offred chooses this color to describe her most valued organ. This could represent the self hatred that has set in on Offred. She has come to view the one body part she depends on most, as evil. Offred describes ovulating, “Every month there is a moon, gigantic, round, heavy, an omen. It transits, pauses, continues on and passes out of sight, and I see despair coming towards me like famine” (74). Offred chooses to describe her egg as an omen, which has neither a negative or positive connotation. This depicts her lack of longing to become pregnant. It is not her ultimate desire to be pregnant, in fact she appears almost indifferent to it. This separates Offred from the beliefs of the Republic of Gilead and portrays her as a “non-believer.” It is also apparent that she is somewhat of a pessimist, always expecting the worst. “To feel that empty again, again. I listen to my heart, wave upon wave, salty and red, continuing on and on, marking time” (74). Due to Offred’s repeated failure’s in the past, she has come to give up hope of being pregnant in the future. Also, despite her status as a non-believer, it is clear that she has bought into some of the ideals of the Republic of Gilead because she constantly has feelings of failure each time she is not pregnant.
When a Handmaid does become pregnant, there is a very extravagant birthing process. Many Handmaids from around the town gather around the pregnant Handmaid and engage in chants and breathing exercises to aid the Handmaid giving birth. However, the Commander’s Wife, the woman who will soon be the mother of the new born child, is present for minimal amounts of this process. Once the Handmaid is about to give birth, “The Commander’s Wife hurries in, in her ridiculous white cotton nightgown, her spindly legs sticking out beneath it,” describes Offred (125). From this phrase, we get a sense of the hierarchy and competitiveness of the Republic of Gilead when Offred uses the word “ridiculous” to describe the Commander’s Wife. Then, the Commander’s Wife “scrambles onto the Birthing Stool, sits on the seat behind and above Janine, so that Janine is framed by her: her skinny legs come down on either side, like the arms of an eccentric chair” (125). This sentence gives us an image of the exact positioning of the women. The Commander’s Wife is clearly struggling to become a part of a birth that she had no role in whatsoever. By framing Janine between her legs, she is attempting to put herself as close to the birth as possible so that it is somehow more acceptable that she becomes the mother of this new born child. However, the other Handmaids that are present clearly ignore this as Offred describes. “But we pay no attention to the Wife, we hardly even see her, our eyes are on Janine. In the dim light, in her white gown, she glows like a moon in cloud” (126). Offred has also used the description of a moon, when describing the egg that all Handmaids so desperately want to turn into a fetus. This portrays a similar desire of the Handmaids; to be in Janine’s
place. Janine is the epitome of success at this moment of time. Because all of the Handmaids clearly desire this success, it is evident that the Eyes of God have truly taken over.

What is common in each of these passages is the theme of control through reproduction. In each different scenario, different people hold the control and power. The Eyes of God have enough power to alter the thoughts of the Handmaids to convince them that each time they do not produce a child, not only that their bodies have failed, but also that they are evil. In the rare occurrence that a Handmaid achieves success and becomes pregnant, once it exits her womb it does not belong to her anymore. The people that do not hold any power or control in each of these situations are the Handmaids.