

+ HER COVER STORY

# ALYSIA REINER

## Succeeding in Motherhood, Women's Rights and Environmental Protection

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BROOKE ALLEN

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**A**s a mother, activist, actress and producer, it's amazing how Alysia Reiner finds time in the day to accomplish everything on her to-do list. The 48-year-old is best known for her role as Natalie "Fig" Figueroa in the Netflix series "Orange is the New Black." Her strong opinions on women's rights heavily influence her projects and roles.

Reiner acts and produces in her new film "Egg," which touches on the complex issues women,

especially mothers, face. While attending a workshop for "Egg," Reiner was "exploring her own relationship with motherhood" at the time. When she first read the script, she didn't even know if she wanted to be a mother at that point.

Although Reiner was hesitant to leap into motherhood earlier in life, she eventually became pregnant with a daughter. At 38 years old, Reiner gave birth to her one and only child, Livia.

In the film "Egg," first featured at the Tribeca Film Festival in 2018, Reiner plays the character Tina, an artist living in New York who chooses





Alysia Reiner (left) and Christina Hendricks in Reiner's new film "Egg" that explores the complexities of motherhood and surrogacy.

surrogacy as her living art. "She is exploring her own relationship of what it means to be a mother — and, additionally, she's exploring what that means as an art — and exploring it in her art," Reiner says.

With "Egg" coming to theaters Jan. 18, Reiner is excited for people to understand the true meaning of the film — how mothers perceive themselves. According to Reiner, the film is not just about her relationship with women and surrogate mothers. The movie explores "what it means to be a mother and what it means to be a surrogate — what the roles that we play are as women...and what we think of as a mother and what society has taught us about what a mother is and how we can sort of recreate that for ourselves — if we allow ourselves to," she explains.

Reiner also wants viewers to understand the feminist messages within the film. "Feel empowered in all of your choices. There is no wrong choice as a woman — your ownership and choices around your body — your life and your art and your relationships."

In "Egg," Tina quarrels with an old rival from art school, Karen, who comes back into her life as an adult. Karen is eight months pregnant when they meet again, and both women have vastly differing views of motherhood. Their feud plays on the idea of women being against each other, which is another message Reiner wishes viewers to understand. "It is so important for women to listen to each other and support each other, even if they're making different choices."

She believes women need to unite without judgement. "I

can make whatever choice I want and create this space for my sisters in the world, [so they can] make whatever choice they want to make — without needing to judge them or feel competitive or feel that their choice threatens my choice."

Not only is Reiner an advocate for women's rights, she also owns a zero waste women's clothing brand titled Livari, which focuses on ethical, sustainable and eco-friendly designs.

"We created a T-shirt and a portion of the proceeds went to Cool Effects, [an organization] which helps carbon offset and reduces the carbon in our environment. Our most recent collaboration, which just launched, is Simply Straws, [the glass straws] help people not use plastic [straws]."

Simply Straws has been a great success for Reiner. "We've sold hundreds of straws already and I love that every time you're buying it, not only are you making the pledge not to use plastic, but you're also contributing to a loan which helps actually physically get the plastic out of the ocean."

It wasn't hard to find the inspiration and motivation for Livari when Reiner began speaking with her future Livari partners, Claudine DeSola and Tabitha St. Bernard-Jacobs. "We were just going to have a little chat about fashion and Claudine was introducing me to Tabitha, who's the designer. We sat there and we talked about all the things we want to change in fashion, and it was right after the Women's March, and Tabitha is the Women's March organizer, and we talked about waste and we talked about the environmental impact of it all and how many millions of pounds of clothes are thrown away and burned."

With her array of accomplishments in her advocacy



(Left to right) Gbenga Akinragbe, Anna Camp, Christina Hendricks, David Alan Basche, and Alysia Reiner

work, the well-being of women and the environment have always been Reiner's number one goals. Her beliefs bleed into not only her real life, but also her fictional life in film. "It's really beautiful to go back to the roots of human connection and storytelling," she explains. "And that's a big piece of Livari — and why I founded Livari was to have this way to tell stories — to tell good stories, to tell exciting stories — of how we can help make change. Similar to why I'm a storyteller as an artist and why I made 'Egg.'"

After playing Fig on "Orange is the New Black," Reiner discovered she also wanted to improve the criminal justice system. Fig's character forced her to become aware of the harsh conditions inmates must survive in. She originally found comfort within her ignorance because a part of her "didn't know how bad it was."

As it relates to women, she wants the bail system transformed. According to Reiner, when women are solely accused of a crime, they often go to jail while awaiting trial. Because these women are sitting in jail, they run the risk of losing their children and families since "they cannot be home with their children." As a result,

"Child Protective Services many times has to come in."

Reiner's success surrounding women's rights, environmental rights and inmates rights has allowed her to stretch her voice into other charities and organizations as well, including The Cancer Support Community, Actors for Autism, The Young Women's Leadership Network, Amnesty International, PEN International, SAY: The Stuttering Association for the Young, Bent on Learning, and Safe Kids Worldwide.

Like "Egg," Reiner demonstrates the need for women to unite and empower themselves and each other. "That is my deepest hope — that women see this movie and feel both empowered in their own choices, and open and loving to every other woman and their choices."



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