Sexual Politics and Subversion: Feminist Utopia as Praxis

Jennifer Sue Boyers
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations

Part of the Comparative Literature Commons, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, and the Gender and Sexuality Commons

Recommended Citation
http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/dissertations/1544

This Dissertation-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact maira.bundza@wmich.edu.
SEXUAL POLITICS AND SUBVERSION:
FEMINIST UTOPIA AS PRAXIS

by

Jennifer Sue Boyers

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
Degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Sociology

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
December 1998
SEXUAL POLITICS AND SUBVERSION:  
FEMINIST UTOPIA AS PRAXIS

Jennifer Sue Boyers, Ph.D.
Western Michigan University, 1998

Literary studies meets up with sociology as feminist utopian fiction is examined for what sociologist Dorothy Smith (1990) labels normal narrative and counter-narrative articulations of gendered structures of power. The method of analytical induction is used both in the choosing of the four novels for study and the resulting textual analysis. Ursula Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), Marge Piercy's *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976), Suzy McKee Charnas's *Motherlines* (1978), and Sally Miller Gearhart's *The Wanderground* (1979) are examined for their constructions of dystopian normal narratives, as well as for their reconstructions of subversive utopian counter-narratives, both articulating gendered structures of power. Four key structural categories were found to be the fictional sites for articulations of gendered power relations: (1) sexuality, (2) gender, (3) reproduction and childrearing, and (4) violence. Collectively, these four structural categories can be classified as sexual politics.
INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6” x 9” black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First of all, I would like to thank my long-time advisor, Chair, and mentor--Dr. Gerald Markle. He has guided me through stormy seas and without his expert navigation, I would never have made it to dry land! Thank you for your wisdom and your support, Jerry.

I thank my committee members--Dr. Ronald Kramer, Dr. Paula Brush, and Dr. Gwen Raaberg--for being a part of my work. Their helpful comments and guidance are much appreciated. I especially want to thank Paula Brush for all of her theoretical help and support. I’m sure a couple of local restaurant establishments also thank Paula and me for all of the business they’ve received from our work sessions!

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to my beloved cousin, Dr. Ruth Ellsworth. She took me into her home and her heart and showed me what being an academic and a human being is really all about. Ruth is an inspiration to me and I will never forget all that she’s done for me throughout my graduate career.

My Grandma--Marguerite Traphagen--has given unfailing love and support to me during my entire academic career. She is a wonderful woman and part of my success I owe to her. My parents--Dale and Nancy Boyers--have also been there for me, always. I feel lucky and blessed to have such a loving, supportive family. They have been by my side every step of the way, as have my brother--Scott--and my
Acknowledgments--Continued

Grandmother--Jean Boyers.

And finally, I must thank all of my dear women friends who were the ones down in the trenches with me at close range--Dianna Cleaver, Dee Meinz, Aparna Thomas, Pam LaBelle, Deb Bartz, and Linda Rynbrandt. These were the people whose shoulders I cried on, and whose glasses were raised up high with mine in celebration. These are the people I will carry with me for the rest of my life. Thanks to you, Soul Sisters!

Jennifer Sue Boyers
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS .................................................................................. ii

CHAPTER

I. INTRODUCTION TO UTOPIA.......................................................... 1
   Discovering Feminist Fiction................................................................. 1
   So, What's the Problem?................................................................. 3

II. METHOD TO HER MADNESS.......................................................... 9
   Flashback: (Re)Covering Feminist Fiction...................................... 9

III. THINKING THEORETICALLY.......................................................... 16
   The Importance of Biography and History:
   A Sociology of Literature................................................................. 16
   Getting Personal............................................................................... 16
   Sign of the Times............................................................................ 23
   Sociological Subversion................................................................. 24
   Following in the Footsteps............................................................... 28
   Can Men Be Feminists?................................................................. 35

IV. ANALYSES/DISCUSSION................................................................. 38
   Introduction to Sexual Politics............................................................ 38
   The Structure of Sexuality: How Do You Do It?............................ 40
   The Two Dirty "M" Words: Marriage and Monogamy................. 41
   Homo, Hetero, or Bi?................................................................. 45
   The Structure of Gender: Performativity and
   Subversion Revisited................................................................. 51
   Skirts or Pants?............................................................................ 53
   The Presence of Patriarchy............................................................ 62
Table of Contents--continued

CHAPTER

The Structure of Reproduction and Childrearing: The Marriage and Divorce of Feminism and Technology............................................... 68

To Breed, or Not to Breed?................................. 70

Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary, How Does Your Child Grow?........................................ 85

The Structure of Violence: They Shall Not Harm?...... 96

V. CONCLUSIONS................................................................. 112

The Promise of Feminist Utopia............................... 112

APPENDICES

A. Thirteen Books Used to Achieve the Final Data Set........ 119

BIBLIOGRAPHY................................................................. 121
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION TO UTOPIA

Discovering Feminist Fiction

Without the ability to imagine alternatives we remain trapped in the structures that already exist, unable to see beyond the realities and possibilities mirrored in the images of the dominant culture. Moreover, as long as we accept these images as true we are forced to hide or disavow, sometimes in fear and often in shame, the needs and desires we cannot acknowledge because we have been told they should not exist. (Bammer, 1982, p. 10)

My friends threw me a graduation party after I received my master's degree in the spring of 1995. It was your usual party with food, drinks and lots of presents for the guest of honor. It was at this event that I received the book—the text that would lead me to become interested in feminist utopian fiction.

As her graduation gift to me, my best friend—Dianna—handed me Marge Piercy's Woman on the edge of time (1976). Since I received many books and other gifts that same evening, I didn’t pay much attention to it. I think it ended up sitting on my bookshelf for over a year, gathering dust, silently waiting for me to turn the pages and learn of the revelations within.

I believe it wasn’t until the autumn of 1996 that I finally picked up that book. I remember being bored and disillusioned with the dry sociological readings that were assigned in my classes. "Where is the social change?" I cried out. "What about the visions
of alternative worlds!" I vehemently raged. I couldn't articulate it at that time, but I wanted to do as Casciato (1996) did; I wanted "to study the spaces produced by speaking the impossible" (p. 1)!

My protests fell on deaf sociological ears.

As I read Piercy, I was confronted with the utopian world of Mattapoisett, in the year 2137 A. D. Here the villagers lived in harmony with nature, there seemed to be a balance between individualism and communalism, and--most importantly for me--women were not oppressed under a patriarchal social system, but lived in true equality with men and each other. This is a world I had been searching for in my sociological textbooks, a world that had eluded me throughout my master's studies! I had blindly been searching for an arena in which sociological theory was or could be united with praxis, but had not been successful.

Suddenly I discovered that I had been searching in the wrong places. An answer did not lie entirely in the realm of sociology, but along the shifting, ambiguous borderland between sociology and literary studies, where social structure meets literature. My mind began to race with the possibilities of this newfound knowledge. Perhaps one could consider the alternatively gendered worlds constructed in feminist utopian fiction as blueprints for real social change? Maybe the articulation of utopian social structures could indeed lead to new conceptions of power relations between women and men! I began thinking that perhaps the ideas in feminist utopian fiction could provide the foundations for thinking about, and per-
haps even enacting, these alternative visions. I was hooked! Hence, I began my journey into the foreign and unfamiliar world of feminist utopian fiction.

So, What's the Problem?

Literature is a medium and a praxis whereby we can start to question our oppression, not by escapism into the mythical past in sentimental lyricism reminiscent of other literary ages, but in dealing with the everyday problems. (Marcela Christine Lucero-Trujillo, quoted from a woman's day calendar, 1998).

Feminist utopian fiction is not a mere flight into fantasy, but "can be read as a feminist eros, speaking the long silenced language of female desires" (Bartkowski, 1982, p. 6). I contend that utopian fiction is one very significant site for articulating feminist discontent with social structures of gender inequality. As sociologist Dorothy Smith contends in *Texts, facts, and femininity* (1990), texts become the mediators between social actors and the power relations of the larger society.

The utopian novel is a medium which allows one to simultaneously critique existing hegemonic power relations and create alternative subversive visions. In particular, it has been a genre in which feminist authors have found a voice and a mass readership. This is a crucial point in relation to the discipline of sociology, because sociologists (feminist or not) tend to write only for other academic sociologists, which means their work does not reach an audience in popular culture. Feminist utopian fiction is a powerful site for sociological study because they identify and critique pat-
terns and structures of domination, as well as simultaneously articulate a discourse for reconstructing and recreating alternative structures.

Exploring this genre, I conduct a textual analysis of four feminist utopian novels written and published in the United States during the 1970s, the second wave of the feminist movement. In keeping with the work of Smith (1990), each novel used in the analysis is treated as an active text that serves as a mediator for gendered social relations. All four texts provide a critique of existing and potential patriarchal social relations, while they simultaneously construct and articulate feminist utopian alternatives that are meant to subvert hegemonic patriarchal discourses. Hence, utopian works are inherently political, as Hartman (1986) points out:

In a sense, all utopian fiction reveals political assumptions about language, for all utopias suppose at least two contrasting cultures. That is, the ideal society is seen as ideal only in relation to the writer's vision of contemporary society or to an even more degenerate situation. . . . only those features of the contemporary world that the writer finds unacceptable, those aspects that keep the world from being ideal, will be the features transformed and emphasized in a utopia. Nevertheless, those features left unchanged and unremarked on form part of the politics of the novel, for they are the aspects of contemporary life the writer has found satisfactory or has been unable to see as problematic. (pp. 5-6)

Most scholarly work on feminist utopian fiction has been done exclusively by academics in the fields of English and literary studies. I propose to bring feminist utopian fiction into the realm of sociology by treading in the muddy borderland between the two disciplines. I am not interested in the texts themselves, or in doing
comparisons of literary strategies employed by the four different authors, as literary analysts might be. Nor am I interested in the questions revolving around issues of authorial intent or reader response. What I am interested in as a sociologist and a feminist, is identifying the social structures—the repeated historical patterns and practices that govern daily life (Mills, 1959)—and the resulting gender relations of power present in both the dystopian and utopian worlds of four American feminist utopian novels of the 1970s.

By studying normal narrative or hegemonic articulations of gendered relations of power (Smith, 1990), I identify the social structures that are implicitly or explicitly critiqued in the dystopian worlds. And by analyzing counter-narrative or subversive articulations of gendered relations of power (Smith, 1990), I identify the reconstructions of social structure presented in the form of utopia.

Most importantly, I ask the question that makes this topic so relevant to sociological praxis: What can we learn from feminist utopian fiction that could potentially help us eliminate gender oppression in our real, lived world? It is my contention that alternative, non-oppressive gender relations can be achieved if we first imagine, then reconstruct, foundational social structures that are based in non-oppressive feminist discourses. Feminist utopian fiction can guide us in our endeavors by providing us with these much-needed subversive articulations of non-oppression.

As I near the conclusion of my introduction, I reflect upon the four novels I have chosen to examine in my study. Ursula K. Le
Guin's *The dispossessed: An ambiguous utopia* (1974) is bursting with structural examples that reflect both dystopian and utopian thinking concerning gendered relations of power. In this science fiction novel, the protagonist is Shevek, a man from the anarchist utopian planet called Anarres. The dystopian element in this work is another planet, Urras (suspiciously similar to the contemporary capitalist United States), from which the people of Anarres escaped many years ago in a revolution. In an attempt to reunite the people of both planets, Shevek travels to Urras, the first Anarresti to return to the oppressive mother planet. The reader is given a view of both worlds through the eyes of Shevek. An intensely interesting read, if I remember correctly.

Perhaps my favorite of the four—probably because it was the first feminist utopian novel I ever read—is Marge Piercy's *Woman on the edge of time*, published in 1976. This science fiction work contrasts the dystopian patriarchal present (the United States of the 1970s) with an egalitarian, utopian world of the distant future, called Mattapoisett. Connie—a poor Chicana woman living in dystopian New York City, who is labelled as mentally ill by patriarchal forces—is able to communicate telepathically with a woman of the future (Luciente) who shows her alternative ways of living and being. The two worlds are presented to the reader through the eyes of Connie.

While Le Guin's and Piercy's novels seek to reconcile relationships between women and men in their utopian counter-narratives,
the other two novels I have chosen articulate counter-narratives of lesbian separatism. Like Shugar (1991), I believe that though all four novels articulate counter-narratives of structural change, Charnas and Gearhart advocate much more radical structural changes.

... I feel these texts clearly had designs on their readers, but I argue that in the case of separatist discourse, those designs were intent on revolutionary change rather than the more-liberal project of ordering, maintaining, or making changes in an extant social system. (p. 3)

What I classify as a pastoral (rural with little technology) work, Suzy McKee Charnas's Motherlines (1978) has a similar premise to The wanderground (1979), the final novel I selected. In Motherlines we follow the experiences of one woman--Alldera--as she escapes from the patriarchal dystopian place called the Holdfast and flees to the grasslands, where she encounters the separatist female utopian world of the Motherline tribes--also known as the Riding Women. This community of nomadic horsewomen reproduces parthenogenetically, as do the women of The wanderground. The story is narrated primarily by Alldera, though we get some narration from another female character named Daya. Daya also escapes from the Holdfast, but ends up living with a different group of escaped women called the free fems, who emulate the dystopian social structure and patriarchal gender relations they learned in the Holdfast, and don't get along with the Motherline tribes.

Finally, there is Sally Miller Gearhart's The wanderground: Stories of the Hill Women (1979). I flip through my copy and again notice the beautifully drawn sketches that adorn the first page of
each chapter. This pastoral novel presents a separatist utopian world of women with extra-sensory powers who reproduce parthenogenetically. The stories in this novel are loosely based on real world "experiences with rural lesbian-separatist collectives" in the 1970's United States (Shugar, 1991, p. 13). Like the free fems of Charnas's Holdfast, these women of the Wanderground--the Hill Women--have also escaped from a patriarchal dystopian world known as the City. We are given glimpses into both of these worlds through the eyes of multiple narrators, all of them the women that live in the utopian Wanderground. Dobris (1989) calls this very popular feminist utopian fiction technique of narrating from several perspectives a "pluralist approach" (p. 17).

As a sociologist, I am interested in the differing solutions articulated by the egalitarian texts (Le Guin and Piercy) versus the separatist texts (Charnas and Gearhart). I also explore any differences that may be present between the science fiction utopian articulations of gender relations (again, Le Guin and Piercy) in contrast to the more pastoral utopian alternatives offered by Charnas and Gearhart.
CHAPTER II

METHOD TO HER MADNESS

Flashback: (Re)Covering Feminist Fiction

After finishing Piercy's *Woman on the edge of time*, I began my initial literature search for other feminist utopian novels in Western Michigan University's Waldo Library during the winter of 1997. I met with a knowledgeable librarian who suggested I begin with a computer search for a list of potential feminist utopian fiction authors and their novels. Using FirstSearch software, I poured over the databases in WorldCat, MLA (Modern Language Association), Dissertation Abstracts, as well as Western Michigan University's own database of available materials, known as Finder. These databases yielded not only some titles of feminist utopian novels, as well as works that were descriptions or critiques about feminist utopian novels, but also lists of authors who have been consistently labelled as feminist utopian fiction writers. I printed out pages and pages of data and set to work sifting through all of the information. My intention was to narrow this initial list down to a manageable number of novels I could potentially read and work with.

Because my initial computer search provided so many listings for the search category "utopias in literature and feminism" (N=51 entries in WorldCat; N=48 entries in MLA; N=42 entries in Dissertation Abstracts; Finder was not a significant source of informa-
tion), some of which were repeated in more than one database, I decided to set some criteria. I began limiting my data using the following logic:

1. I am interested in articulations of contemporary American gendered power relations. I am making connections between the second wave of feminist activism in the United States and the publishing of feminist utopian novels. Since the second wave is considered to have occurred between the mid 1960s and the late 1970s, I decided to limit my search to feminist utopian novels published after 1969. Some examples I found in my databases when I applied this criterion included: an article by Carol S. Pearson (1981b) entitled "The utopian novels of Dorothy Bryant, Mary Staton and Marge Piercy"; and a 1983 book chapter by Jewell Parker Rhodes entitled "Ursula Le Guin's "The left hand of darkness: Androgyny and the feminist utopia."

2. Since many prominent French feminists were also very active and producing many writings during this same second wave period in America, I decided to limit my search to novels written and published originally in English, by authors born, raised, and primarily working in the United States. This means that I eliminated any novels that have been translated and subsequently published in English, not because of the literary problem of losing much in the translation process, but primarily because, as a sociologist, I am arguing that the culture and social structure of the 1960s-1970s United States influenced the production of the feminist utopian novels I am studying. Obviously if an author was not operating
within this temporal/spatial world, then her or his work would be irrelevant to my particular study. For example, though they continually appeared in my listings of feminist utopian fiction authors, I eliminated all writings by Christiane Rochefort, Louky Bersianik, and Monique Wittig because they were French.

3. Because I am specifically interested in feminist writings, I eliminated any works which were not explicitly classified in the databases (whether by the authors themselves or other critics) as feminist. The best example here is Ernest Callenbach’s *Ecotopia* (1975). This book is authored by a man and focuses on a male protagonist. Though I read this book and initially included it in my data because I considered some of the implications potentially very useful for feminist projects, Callenbach is not known as a feminist writer, nor is his *Ecotopia* classified as a feminist utopian novel in any of the databases I searched. Consequently, he was eliminated.

Novels that received mixed reviews were initially included, and later either eliminated or retained, according to my own judgments. For example, three novels by Octavia Butler--collectively known as the *Xenogenesis trilogy* (1987; 1988; 1989)--are often mentioned in the feminist utopian fiction databases. However, there were several critiques of her work by prominent feminists who claimed that Butler’s could not and should not be appropriately labelled as feminist. After browsing several of the critiques and doing some investigating of my own, I tended to agree with those critiques. Consequently, Butler was eliminated.
4. In the process of collecting my initial data, I discovered that there is a very fine line between utopian and dystopian works. Inevitably, there are always elements of dystopia present in any utopian writings, as the utopian alternatives are usually dependent upon the dystopia that serves as a foil to constructions of an ideal world. But most novels tend to focus primarily on either the utopian or the dystopian elements; I am interested in those that focus primarily on utopia. Again, in my initial computer search I depended upon others' classification of novels as utopian. The best example here is Margaret Atwood's *The handmaid’s tale* (1985). This novel is widely mentioned in writings dealing with feminist utopian fiction. However, *The handmaid’s tale* is always classified as a dystopia, as it focuses not on an ideal society, but on its very opposite. Atwood's novel was eliminated on this basis (plus the fact that she is Canadian, which violates criterion #2).

5. Finally, I decided to limit my data to books of fiction (rather than articles or pamphlets)—novels, to be exact. In other words, I am interested specifically in the presentation of feminist utopianism in the form of fiction, as opposed to non-fiction. It is my contention that the genre of fiction mediates societal power relations in ways that differ from how non-fiction works serve to mediate those same relations.

Using the above criteria to guide me in a process of elimination, I was able to generate a comprehensive list (N=38) of potential authors and titles compiled from all of my database searches.
At this juncture, if I was unable to determine if a particular work met all of my criteria, I included it in my listing.

The same librarian who suggested pathways for me to follow for my initial computer search also recommended that I use another source as a database. Literary critics often use a source called Contemporary authors, which is a tremendous collection of volumes that list all of the works of every author who has been published in a given time period, including a biography of the author, and a short synopsis of each work. I thought this would be helpful to me, as some of my computer listings occasionally failed to give me information on all of the criteria I had set (e.g., a book title, national origins of the author, or a publication date). So, I took my N of 38 and went to the Contemporary authors resource and printed out descriptions of each author and their works.

After collecting the Contemporary authors data, I read through all of the information and was able to eliminate more sources based on my above criteria. Following this process, I ended up with an N of 13 books that looked like they fully met all of my criteria (see Appendix A). At this point I bought or photocopied 12 of these books to read for my study. The thirteenth book, Joan Slonczewski's A door into ocean (1987), was out of print and unavailable in all of the venues I checked. I decided not to pursue obtaining this book, not only because it was an inconvenience, but also because one of her other works was among the 12 books I had been able to obtain for my study, Still forms on Foxfield (1980). Now the real work of
achieving my final data set was to begin!

After reading all 12 books, I was able to further eliminate six of them for violating one or more of the above criteria. For example, I absolutely loved Gerd Brantenberg’s *Egalia’s daughters* (1985). However, her book chronicles the lives of women and men (respectively called wim and menwim by Brantenberg!) under an extremely oppressive matriarchal society, which essentially is an exact reversal of our current patriarchal system. For example, wim control all of the institutions, menwim are consistently worried about their appearance (ideally menwim are to be short, fat, and have no body hair, and of course they are judged by the size of their penises—the smaller, the better!), are often sexually assaulted by brutish wim (most wim are actually physically stronger than most menwim because menwim are not encouraged to do physical labor), and are confronted with a sexist language that does not include them—e.g., humans are called huwoms! So, in good conscience (and because some of my best friends are menwim, uh . . . I mean, men), I had to eliminate this book because I believe it would be better classified as a dystopia (at least from the perspective of menwim!).

This process left me with six books to choose from. Because I decided that two of the six novels—Joanna Russ’s *The female man* (1975), and Dorothy Bryant’s *The kin of Ata are waiting for you* (1971)—really did not provide detailed enough descriptions of the social structures that influenced gender relations (Russ’s book), or
did not adequately focus on gender relations (Bryant’s work), I finally narrowed it down to the four books I contend provide the best examples of alternative gender arrangements, along with detailed descriptions of the social structures that make them possible.

For purposes of analysis, I often pair Piercy’s and Le Guin’s novels—which are studies in science fiction that seek to reconcile relations between men and women by advocating egalitarian gender arrangements—and similarly pair the novels of Gearhart and Charnas—which are non-science fiction and seek to subvert patriarchal gender relations by advocating women’s separatism.
Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1998), along with several other authors, advocate using biographies "to allow the reader to locate [writers] in history and society" (p. 18). Biography and history can be viewed from a sociology of literature perspective. In general, the sociology of literature is concerned with the relation of authors to their specific socio-historical circumstances.

As Abrams (1988) claims, sociology of literature is interested in the ways authors are affected by such circumstances of their time and place as their class status, gender, and in conditions of the writer's profession and of the publication and distribution of books, and the social class, conceptions, and values of the audience to which writers address themselves. (p. 174)

Since I am very interested in the context of the 1970s American feminist movement and how it influenced the publication of feminist utopian novels, using a sociology of literature perspective to briefly delve into the lives of Le Guin, Piercy, Charnas, and Gearhart is a necessary side trip we must take.

**Getting Personal**

Ursula Kroeber Le Guin was born on October 21, 1929, in Berkeley, California (Chapman & Dear, 1996). Chapman's and Dear's (1996)
biographical information on Le Guin is very extensive, which points to the wonderful success she's found as a writer. Through her parents and her future husband, Le Guin was exposed to history, anthropology and religion, as well as being well-versed in literature and Renaissance history, both of which she studied at Radcliffe College and Columbia University. She has spent her career working as a writer and as an instructor from the mid 1950s through the mid 1970s. She has been intensely socially active as a member of various organizations, and she has received numerous awards for her writing skills, including recognition in the mid 1970s for the 1974 novel used in this study, The Dispossessed.

Le Guin is a prolific writer, producing not only science fiction pieces, for which she has become famous, but also children’s books, novellas, short stories, poems, lectures and critical essays (pp. 266-268). Her production in several different literary arenas points to the fact that Le Guin is not one to be pigeon-holed into any one genre. In fact, as Chapman and Dear point out, "[c]ritics have often found it difficult to classify Ursula K. Le Guin" (p. 268). Le Guin is quoted as classifying her fiction variously as 'science fiction,' 'fantasy,' 'realist,' and even 'magical realism' (p. 268). Le Guin has been described as providing a voice for creating 'a modern conscience' particularly through her science fiction works (quoted in Chapman & Dear, 1996, p. 269).

Le Guin explores alternative worlds in much of her science fiction work. In describing her work in The Dispossessed (1974), Le
Guin is quoted as claiming it is a novel based on ‘social science, psychology, anthropology [and] history’ (Chapman & Dear, 1996).

In The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia, another character is an alien in a strange culture; the physicist Shevek, however, is also at odds with his home planet’s values. He is devoted to the spread of knowledge, but the development of his theories will inevitably bring his isolated colonial planet and its mother-planet into contact, although the two cultures bitterly oppose one another. (p. 270)

Many critics claims that The dispossessed is Le Guin’s most fully developed novel both socially and politically (Chapman & Dear, 1996, p. 270). Chapman and Dear claim that Le Guin is very adept at constructing utopian novels which have very human characters, with all of their flaws and imperfections (1996, p. 270). About her utopian writing, Le Guin (quoted in Casciato, 1996) has written:

Utopia has been euclidean, it has been European, and it has been masculine. I am trying to suggest, in an evasive, distrustful, untrustworthy fashion, and as obscurely as I can, that our final loss of faith in that radiant sandcastle may enable our eyes to adjust to a dimmer light and in it perceive another kind of utopia. (p. 1)

Sally Miller Gearhart is a self-defined lesbian-feminist, born April 15, 1931, in Virginia (Fadool, 1976, p. 222). She was educated in the 1950s at Sweet Briar College, Bowling Green State University, and the University of Illinois (p. 222). She taught speech and drama at the college level from the late 1950s until the early 1970s (p. 223). She has been very active in the communities where she has lived, and she also belongs to several social service and professional organizations (p. 223).

Biographical information available on Sally Miller Gearhart is sparse. In fact, the only information I was able to find was in
Contemporary authors (Fadool, 1976), and was published three years before The wanderground was published. However, there is a wonderful reflexive quote from Gearhart (quoted in Fadool, 1976) concerning her opinion of her work:

My love of myself as a woman and my love of other women motivates all my writing (and my creative existence). In a society that hates women and the womanly, woman-love is a miracle and therefore a hefty motivation. (p. 222)

Marge Piercy was born poor in a predominantly black part of Detroit, Michigan on March 31, 1936 (Trosky, 1994, p. 359). Perhaps being brought up in this environment made her more aware of racial as well as class issues. Piercy is the only one of the authors I use who explicitly focuses on both class and racial oppression as they intersect with gender oppression.

The first person in her family to attend college, Piercy was educated in the 1950s at the University of Michigan and Northwestern University (pp. 359, 361). Piercy has spent her career as a writer and a teacher, holding several instructor, professor and lectureship positions spanning the 1960s through the 1980s (p. 359). This Jewish scholar also has been extremely active in political organizations from the late 1960s on into the 1990s (p. 359). More so than the other three women, Piercy is portrayed as a radical activist (p. 360). Piercy has also won several honors and awards during her very distinguished career as a writer (p. 360).

A highly prolific feminist writer, Piercy has produced plays, novels, poetry, as well as critical essays (p. 360). Trosky contends that Piercy's work has been "represented in over 100 anthologies"
as well as being "translated into many foreign languages" (1994, p. 360). Marge Piercy has been described as writing "about the oppression of individuals she sees in our society, infusing her works with political statements, autobiographical elements, and realist and utopian perspectives" (Trosky, 1994, p. 360). Of course, for the purposes of my study, I am interested in her 1976 novel, *Woman on the edge of time*.

Trosky points out that Piercy's *Woman on the edge of time* received "a cool reception by critics" (1994, p. 362). She has received much criticism for her tendency to center her work on women. Many claim that her work is too full of politics and rhetoric (Trosky, 1994, p. 362). Piercy passionately refutes this argument: "A novel which makes assumptions about men and women is just as political if they're patriarchal assumptions as if they're feminist assumptions. Both have a political dimension" (quoted in Trosky, 1994, p. 362). In reference to what in feminist circles has become one of her most popular works, *Woman on the edge of time* (1976), Piercy contends that her intent was simply to create a good, just, non-sexist, non-racist society--the "result of a full feminist revolution" (Piercy, quoted in Trosky, 1994, p. 362).

Like Gearhart, there is not much information available on the life of Suzy McKee Chamas, though she has published a significant number of writings. She was born October 22, 1939, in New York (Trosky, 1992, p. 66). Educated at Barnard College and New York University in the 1960s, Charnas has worked in the U. S. Peace Corps
as well as served as teacher and lecturer in several educational institutions (p. 66). This work was all done in the 1960s and there is no information available chronicling her career after 1969. However, all of her listed publications came out during the 1970s and 1980s, which leads one to believe she seriously dedicated herself to writing during this period (pp. 66-67). Like Piercy, Charnas is also Jewish (Trosky, 1992, p. 66).

*Motherlines* (1978) is the second novel of a trilogy (p. 66). Charnas describes these three books as a "life work," claiming the three novels span the course of 25 years of her career (quoted in Trosky, 1992, p. 67). Of the three books, *Motherlines* is the only one that can be classified as utopian. The first book in the trilogy, *Walk to the end of the world* (1974), chronicled the highly dystopian patriarchal world of a group of slave women, ending with the main character's escape. *Motherlines* (1978) tells of the utopian world of the outlaw tribal women who help the escaped slave (from the first novel) and teach her what it's like to live freely among women. The last novel in the trilogy, *The furies*, is about the free women going back to the patriarchal society of men and waging war on them. Talking about finishing the third book in the trilogy in the wake of the conservative 1980s, Charnas (quoted in Trosky, 1992) gives a very powerful statement about the meaning of the whole project:

So here I am finishing a book about the anger of women; the justified anger of women, the price of the justified anger of women as exacted (in my fiction though rarely in life) by victorious women from vanquished men, and as exacted by
the workings of human nature and the human soul from victorious women by the impact of their own actions. (p. 67)

Speaking specifically about the process of writing Motherlines, Charnas contends that "if you want to know what it felt like to do it, read George Sheehan on running a marathon" (Charnas, 1981, p. 106). She admits that her solution to the sexism presented in the first novel was to advocate for women’s separatism in Motherlines.

... the heart of the book is the all-woman culture of the Riding Women. Some reader will call the Riding Women monsters, since many people find monstrous the idea of women living good, full lives without men. I do not, though separatism is not my blueprint for Paradise and not the only answer to sexism that I hope to explore in fiction. (p. 106)

Charnas admits that she had trouble publishing this second novel in the trilogy, though the first had done very well and had gotten her recognition. One editor even commented to her: "You know, if this book was all about men it would be a terrific story" (Charnas, 1981, p. 107).

So, we can see how the personal lives of these four women intersect with the culture and politics of the 1970’s United States. All of them came of age into an intensely political environment of the 1960s and 1970s. They are all white, have achieved middle to upper middle class status, and they are all highly educated women. There is no question that the utopian novels were written in the context of, and in response to, the social environment in which these women lived and worked.
Can we see our reality for what it really is without losing sight of our dream of what we would hope it to be? My answer is not only that we can, but that we must. The question, of course, is how? The question of how to be a realist and at the same time be a dreamer, when a radical practice requires that we be both, is the challenge faced by utopianists and feminists alike. (Bammer, 1982, p. vii)

Russ (1981) argues that not only are the feminist utopian novels of the 1970s "contemporaneous with the modern feminist movement," but they are "made possible by it" (p. 72). As Dobris (1989) quotes, "utopian literature is more a reflection of 'the times in which they were written,' rather than blueprints for or predictions about, the future" (p. 11). According to Bartkowski (1982), "[u]topian thinking is crucial to feminism, a movement produced and challenged by a patriarchal world" (p. 9).

All four novels were published in the mid to late 1970s--in the midst of what has been labelled the New Social Movements (NSMs) era in the United States (Seidman, 1992). These NSMs represented local political struggles of women, blacks and homosexuals (among others) to eradicate oppression. Feminist utopian fiction is one such site for the articulation of counter-narratives to oppression. As Bartkowski (1982) writes:

Feminist fiction and feminist theory are fundamentally utopian in that they declare and demand that which is not-yet as the basis for a feminist practice, textual, political or otherwise . . . . Given the gap between feminist theory and everyday struggle the utopian mode is both useful and logical for writers who self-consciously place themselves within a feminist (i.e. partisan) literary practice. (pp. 10-12)

As Shugar (1991) suggests, it is not that these feminist uto-
plan fiction texts "have some inherent worth as literary 'masterpieces' but because at a specific historical moment they provided their readers with means both to envision and attain goals defined by the community from which the texts came" (p. 14). In his work, Moylan (1981) contends that as part of a 1970's American discourse, the works I have chosen to explore articulate "part of the capitalist dream and the opposition to the limits of that dream" (p. ii). Specifically, all four of my novels "are, in short, expressive of the non-dogmatic, multi-tendency, socialist-feminist, libertarian consensus that developed in the US in the 1970s" (Moylan, 1981, p. 77).

Sociological Subversion

So, now that some background information has been covered in terms of the sociology of literature, what exactly is it that makes my project theoretically sociological? Though the subject matter, as explained above in the Chapter I, is usually reserved exclusively for those in the areas of English and literary studies, I turn a unique sociological lens on utopian fiction by applying a theoretical framework woven out of the works of gender theorist Judith Butler and sociologist Dorothy Smith. Butler's work deals with the topic of subversion, and Smith's looks at the construction of normal and counter-narratives in texts.

Judith Butler's view on gender subversion is taken from her article, "Performative acts and gender constitution" (1988), and
from her book, *Gender trouble* (1990). Her ideas are based in the work of Michel Foucault and his notion of juridical systems of power (the name he gives to hegemonic decision-making bodies in any society). Foucault claims that people take certain notions or concepts as foundational (non-reducible, basic) categories—as reality—when in fact they are merely representations created and perpetuated by juridical systems of power. In other words, those in power create and perpetuate hegemonic discourses that dictate what reality is. What people or groups take to be reality is really socially constructed by those people or groups in power. Butler takes this idea from Foucault and uses it as a framework to deconstruct the foundational categories Woman and sex.

For example, feminists tend to use the category Woman as foundational (a non-reducible fact, a reality), hence it becomes the battle cry for uniting women everywhere under a commonality. We tend to believe that this foundational category is real; we believe that Woman really exists. But according to Butler, Woman is really a representation, a socially constructed phenomenon created and perpetuated by our current patriarchal juridical system of power. Butler would say that Woman (and Man for that matter) does not exist apart from these power structures and the mediating, hegemonic discourses. In other words, there is no prediscursive reality (there is no reality apart from power structures and the discourses they create and perpetuate). Therefore, the category sex (the belief in a foundational, biological reality that makes males and females fun-
damentally different) is socially constructed, just as gender is, and just as Woman is.

Both Foucault and Butler claim that we cannot hope to get out of or around juridical systems of power. But, according to Butler, we can become conscious of these power systems and perform counter-hegemonic acts of gender. In other words, for Butler, gender is performative (we act out our expected gender roles) rather than inherent (biological) or natural. We do gender. So, if we can’t get out of these power systems, then how can we have subversion?

Butler claims that subversion is consciously performing counter-hegemonic acts of gender. Subversion benefits those who are not part of the juridical power systems--specifically those who are oppressed. In order to be subversive, according to Butler, one must first become aware (conscious) of the operating juridical power system. In other words, what is the hegemonic discourse that is being created and perpetuated concerning gender roles? Then one must consciously perform her or his gender in opposition to what the hegemonic system dictates. Hence, subversion, in Butler’s view, is a conscious tactic whereby particularly the oppressed can use their agency to fight back against an oppressive social structure. This is the case with feminist utopian novels. The authors are consciously critiquing existing hegemonic constructions of gender and power, as well as articulating subversive alternatives in the form of utopian discourse.

I theoretically borrow also from sociologist Dorothy Smith by
adopting and adapting her method of textual analysis (borrowed from literary criticism) used in her collection of essays entitled *Texts, facts, and femininity* (1990). Smith combines sociology and literary criticism by treating texts as active constructions which mediate social relations of power in the larger society. "The text is analyzed for its characteristically textual form of participation in social relations" (Smith, 1990, p. 4). As a feminist, I can appreciate Smith because her methods "explore the social from the site of women's experience" (Smith, 1990, p. 1). She writes that

the power relations which come thus into view from the standpoint of an experience situated in the everyday world are abstracted from local and particular settings and relationships. These forms of communication and action are distinctively mediated by texts. The textual mediation of its forms of organization are fundamental to its characteristic abstracted, extra-local forms, and its curious capacity to reproduce its order in the same way in an indefinite variety of actual local contexts. (p. 2)

In doing a textual analysis, Smith (1990) identifies the normal narrative--the hegemonic structure--in the work she is studying. Then she contrasts this with examples that go against hegemony--counter-narratives--in the text. In this way Smith is able to identify the interplay between hegemony and counter-hegemony in any text. In other words, the social construction of the relations of power, as mediated by the texts, are laid bare through her method of textual analysis.

I am particularly interested in Smith's focus on the construction of counter-narratives, which fits in nicely with Butler's theory on subversion. I apply Smith's theory to my work with feminist uto-
pian fiction. The author articulates a normal narrative (in the case of feminist utopian fiction, this would be patriarchal dystopian discourse) and then constructs a counter-narrative (a feminist utopian world) that is contrary to the normal narrative. We can bring Butler’s view on subversion into Smith’s work here, and view these articulations of counter-narratives as purposeful tactics of subversion. In relation to my work, the construction of utopian counter-narratives provides a site for the articulation of subversion. That is, the counter-narratives are non-hegemonic, rendering them subversive in comparison to the dystopian normal narratives. Sociologically, I am interested in the content of both the normal narrative and the counter-narrative articulations of power relations.

Following in the Footsteps

The three operative terms then are feminist, utopian, and fiction—feminist in that everyday life is made an exercise of willful imagination, demanding revolutionary transformation; utopian in that longing and desire, anger and despair are made into hope; fiction through a narrative practice and patterning of these desires and transformations as if a potential future had erupted into the reading’s present. (Bartkowski, 1982, p. 6)

A brief theoretical explanation of some terminology is needed before we can proceed with the analyses. Not only must we understand what utopia and dystopia mean, but also some background on the terms fiction and science fiction is needed.

The term “utopia” has come to be associated with “literature in which an ideal society is depicted” (Beckson & Ganz, 1961, p.
The first work to be explicitly labelled utopian was a book called *Utopia* (1516) by Sir Thomas More (Beckson & Ganz, 1961, p. 224), in which More named his "imaginary republic Utopia" (Cuddon, 1991, p. 1016). This work became a classic of the utopian genre and initiated a discussion about utopian literature as models for social change. Though, as Cuddon (1991) points out, More was not the first to deal with the theme of the ideal world. "The idea of a place where all is well is of great antiquity," dates back to the second millennium B.C. (p. 1016). And elements of utopia can be found in such classic canonized works as Plato's *Republic* and Homer's *Odyssey*.

In the late nineteenth century, according to John L. Thomas, there were two different predominant conceptions of utopia (1967, p. 41). The first concept is the classical formulation of utopia, exemplified by Sir Thomas More in *Utopia* (1516). This model of utopia is simultaneously what the Greeks called "eutopia" or the "good place" and also "utopia" or "no place" (Abrams, 1988, p. 195). In other words, "a nonhistorical or transhistorical fiction to be contemplated but never realized" (Thomas, 1967, p. 41). Thomas asserts that the usual form this model takes is that a traveler from our own time discovers an ideal, utopian society. Bringing back his (and the protagonist is always a male in this classical form) newfound knowledge to his own time, he finds that he fails miserably at applying utopian principles to his contemporary society. "In similar fashion the reader returns from his imaginary voyage with the disturbing sense of the disjunction of the real and the ideal" (Thomas,
In the wake of the French and Industrial Revolutions of the eighteenth century, people began believing that perhaps indeed utopia was achievable, that "some form of earthly paradise was attainable" (Cuddon, 1991, p. 1018). This second model of utopia is utopia as blueprint for social change (Thomas, 1967, p. 42). "In the post-Enlightenment utopia contemplation gives way to action, the descriptive becomes the prescriptive, and the classical observer turns actor" (Thomas, 1967, p. 42). This second type of utopia was borne out in varying manners in social movements, such as Marxist proletarian revolutions and communitarian experimentation (Thomas, 1967, p. 42). Though as Abrams (1988) asserts, "utopia has come to signify the class of fiction which represents an ideal, nonexistent political state and way of life" (p. 195), more in the sense of the first model.

My foray into utopian models takes the second conception of utopia to heart—utopia as a blueprint for praxis. Specifically, I view feminist utopian fiction as a sociological site for the articulation of counter-narrative structures of sexual politics, as we will see in the analyses. Utopia is "an aesthetically organized and politically motivated daydream" (Bartkowski, 1982, p. 7). According to Moylan (1981), the utopian genre was and still is a very important site for the articulation of counter-narratives because of the focus on envisioning alternative worlds (p. 77). In other words, "a collective solution and/or a radical change in the social structure.
is not possible in mainstream realist fiction" (Moylan, 1981, p. 78). So, if utopia is a site for the articulation of counter-narrative structures, dystopia is a contrasting site for the articulation of hegemonic and oppressive normal narrative structures.

Meaning "bad place" (Abrams, 1988, p. 196), the term dystopia is a foil for utopia. The importance of understanding this term is that the line between utopia and dystopia is very blurred and mutable. All of the utopian novels I have read make use of dystopian elements or worlds that are used in contrast to constructions of utopia. For example, Le Guin's *The Dispossessed* (1974), has been classified as not only a utopia, but also a dystopia (e.g., see Abrams, 1988, p. 196). Cuddon (1991) asserts that work on dystopia has been produced in response to failed, real life attempts at creating utopia (p. 1018).

In the literary field, the term fiction is defined as "any literary narrative, whether in prose or verse, which is feigned or invented, and does not purport to be historical truth" (Abrams, 1988, p. 62). Today, we refer to fiction as primarily being in the form of novels or short stories (Abrams, 1988, p. 62). There is much debate as to just how much fictional texts "are subject to the criterion of truth or falsity" (Abrams, 1988, p. 62).

The fairly recent new literary forms movement originated in British discourse analysis studies and sociology of scientific knowledge work (e.g., see Ashmore, 1989). This group of social scientists advocates using reflexive, alternative narrative forms to pre-
sent their work—including plays, parodies and fiction—in order to deconstruct the hegemony of the language and method of science (Ashmore, 1989, p. 66). I tend to support the position of new literary forms writers on the issue of fiction. They claim (Mulkay, 1985)

that people generally associate fiction with nonserious falsities, when in fact there is no necessary, or even close, connection between the use of a fictional form, such as imaginary dialogue, and the endorsement of false statements about the world. [One can] extract certain facts from supposedly fictional texts. (p. 11)

But more importantly, this new literary forms viewpoint points out the social constructedness of all texts, and the power relations involved in the processes of writing and reading. This leads us into a whole new world where "facts and fictions are interpretive creations" and "neither has a privileged relationship to the world in which we are interested" (Mulkay, 1985, pp. 11-12). As Thomas Campell said:
"Fiction in Poetry is not the reverse of truth, but her soft and enchanting resemblance" (quoted in Cuddon, 1991, p. 839).

Viewing fiction not as falsity, but as containing potential kernels of truth and insight, fits in nicely with my view of utopian fiction as a model—a blueprint—for actual social change. In exploring and examining the four novels I have chosen to use for this study, I have uncovered and presented key themes and potential social structures for feminists to focus on in their quest to end women's oppression.

According to Abrams (1988) utopian science fiction works are a specific sub-genre of both utopian fiction and science fiction. It is interesting that "the key work" in science fiction was written by
a woman--Mary Shelley's Frankenstein in 1818 (Cuddon, 1991, p. 841). This work led to a proliferation of science fiction novels in the 19th century, which has continued on into the 20th century, becoming particularly strong in 1950s America with the invention of the paperback (Cuddon, 1991, pp. 842, 846). Pamela Annas (quoted in Moylan, 1981) writes:

SF [science fiction] as a genre is more useful than mainstream fiction for exploring possibilities for social change precisely because it allows idea to become flesh, abstraction to become concrete, imaginative extrapolation to become aesthetic reality. It allows the writer to create and the reader to experience and recreate a new or transformed world based on a set of assumptions different from those we usually accept. It allows the reader, for a while, to be reborn into a reborn world. And, through working out in concrete terms philosophical and political assumptions, it allows the reader to take back into her or his own life new possibilities. (p. 78)

In terms of utopian science fiction novels, Cuddon (1991) asserts that this was a popular sub-genre of science fiction up until about the 1920s, when dystopian science fiction works began to become more fashionable (p. 844). It has since made a comeback in the 1960s and 1970s.

What distinguishes science fiction from the more general, satirical utopian forays into the future, is that science fiction explicitly "explores the marvels of discovery and achievement that may result from future developments in science and technology" (p. 195). As Beckson and Ganz (1961) contend, science fiction--a term first coined in 1851 and widely used by the late 1920s (Cuddon, 1991, pp. 839-840)--is usually speculative and is most commonly demonstrated by having the characters venture to other planets (p. 188). Cuddon
(1991) asserts that science fiction tends to be concerned with "alienation in various ways" (p. 839).

Cuddon (1991) contends that American authors came to dominate the science fiction scene in the 1950s and a "new wave" was ushered in during the mid-1960s (pp. 847-848). Ursula Le Guin and Marge Piercy are products of this American science fiction boom, and its influence is reflected in their works. Cuddon (1991, p. 847) contends that "many more women writers" were doing science fiction work in the 1970s (for an excellent comprehensive bibliography of science fiction written by women through 1979, see Schlobin, 1981). And as Barr (1981) writes, "science fiction is especially suited for speculation about women's future roles" (p. 1). But Russ (1981) contends that up until the 1970s, "American science fiction . . . has in general ignored both woman's estate and the problems of social structure with which feminism deals" (p. 72).

In an article entitled, "Gender, power, and conflict resolution," Farah Mendlesohn (1994) offers a critique of feminist science fiction criticism. Some problems faced by the critics include: dealing with the stereotyping of women characters in the novels (pp. 120-121), judging stories that may not agree with the critic's own politics (p. 122), and not being attentive enough to male characters in science fiction work (p. 123). She writes:

Ultimately, feminist criticism of feminist texts, while interesting and illuminating, is a self-congratulatory circle neither reaching beyond the feminist sf [science fiction] community nor acknowledging and learning from the profound changes in the genre as a whole, instanced by the absence of major critical assessments of the gendered male in science fiction.
Both Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* (1974) and Piercy’s *Woman on the Edge of Time* (1976) can be classified under the heading of feminist utopian science fiction and are analyzed as such in my study. In comparison, Charnas’s and Gearhart’s novels are also feminist and utopian, but are not science fiction—-they can be better classified as pastoral fiction.

**Can Men Be Feminists?**

Whether or not men can be feminists, or whether or not at best they can merely articulate pro-feminist positions, is a hotly debated issue within feminist circles. Generally, it is agreed that feminists of a more liberal theoretical persuasion are willing to categorize men using the label feminist, while more theoretically radical feminists will claim that men cannot be feminists because they lack the experience of oppression that characterizes the everyday lives of women (e.g., see Stanley & Wise, 1993). I must admit that I have struggled with this issue in my personal and my academic life, particularly in deciding whether or not to include Le Guin’s *The Dispossessed* in my study.

Though written by a woman who has been identified as a feminist in feminist circles, the protagonist—Shevek—from *The Dispossessed* is a man, and Le Guin has long been criticized for her use of primarily male protagonists (e.g., see Bartkowski, 1982, p. 16; Hartman, 1986, p. 27; Moylan, 1981, p. 110). Therefore, some argue that
the entire novel is narrated from the perspective of a man, using what is known as a male gaze. After reading the critiques of Le Guin's use of a male protagonist as well as reading the novel for myself, I decided that the perspectives articulated through the voice of Shevek, though he is male, were written by a woman widely known as a feminist. And more importantly, the implications of Le Guin's utopian world are very applicable to a feminist project that seeks to liberate women from oppression; her counter-narrative articulations can definitely be read as feminist. Therefore, despite some controversy, I decided to include Le Guin's *The dispossessed* in my study as a feminist work.

Joanna Russ (1981) supports my contention that Le Guin's *The dispossessed* is in fact feminist despite its reliance on a male protagonist. Russ contends that though Le Guin seems to primarily support a vision of communitarian anarchism, nevertheless what makes it feminist and what makes other utopian fiction feminist, is that "these fictions present societies... which [are] conceived by the author as better in explicitly feminist terms and for explicitly feminist reasons" (1981, p. 71).

In a review of four feminist utopian novels, Carol Pearson contends that utopian works written by feminists "tend to emphasize forces which most directly oppress women" (1981a, p. 63). For example, she points out that many feminist utopian novels emphasize, validate and even elevate what has traditionally been defined as "women's work" (1981a, pp. 63-64). She also asserts that "[v]io-
lence, coupled with a desire to master others, is antithetical to a feminist utopian vision" (1981a, p. 64). Feminist utopias also tend to negate and refuse to perpetuate the socially constructed distinction between public and private. In fact, Pearson contends that many of these novels in fact pattern the entire society "after the principles which (ideally) govern the home" (1981a, p. 65). Feminist utopian novels also tend to give much respect to not only community, but also the individual (Pearson, 1981a, p. 67), as well as blatantly reject dualistic thinking (Pearson, 1981a, p. 68). In terms of religion, Pearson (1981a) asserts that many feminist utopian novels do not worship a god, but they tend to put forth "a vision of an earth mother goddess" who "personifies the philosophical vision underlying a feminist utopia" (p. 69). This vision is connected with nature and rejects the patriarchal need to control the natural environment. Pearson (1981a) writes, "the mother goddess represents life in all its fluidity and contradictions. The goddess personifies a vision which is consistent with female experience" (p. 69).

So, while I am not willing to agree that men can be feminists, I do believe that they certainly can articulate feminist discourses and aid in the struggle to free women from patriarchal oppression. While Le Guin’s Shevek is a controversial character, feminist discourses are articulated through him. Therefore the novel is useful for my purposes.
CHAPTER IV

ANALYSES/DISCUSSION

Introduction to Sexual Politics

I sat on my livingroom floor, transferring the computer-generated outlines of my four books onto 3x5 notecards, reverting back to a tried and true 19th century method rather than relying solely on 20th century software. I struggled to discover some themes among the novels I had chosen for my study. I searched for patterns that emerged from the data--analytical induction. Another card in this pile, one in that pile. Sexuality . . . childrearing . . . work. As I continued categorizing, four themes appeared before my eyes. These four themes, or structures, are common to all four novels, there are examples to demonstrate these patterns in both the dystopian and utopian communities of each novel, and they can all be lumped together under one convenient category heading: sexual politics.

Popular use of the term sexual politics can be traced back to Kate Millet's groundbreaking 1969 book of the same name. In this classic feminist text, Millet theoretically defines sexual politics, not only in terms of the sex act itself, but also in terms of social constructions and articulations of the category sex. This is what Judith Butler (1988; 1990) would refer to as a foundational category. Sexual politics is about the intersection of gender and pow-
er. In other words, gender is political. Millet (1969) writes: "The term 'politics' shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another . . . sex is a status category with political implications" (pp. 43-44). Millet also characterizes the American social system, as well as the entire history of civilization as we know it, as a patriarchy when she writes: "What goes largely unexamined, often even unacknowledged (yet is institutionalized nonetheless) in our social order, is the birthright priority whereby males rule females" (p. 45).

For purposes of my study, I divide the larger category—sexual politics—into four subcategories for discussion: (1) sexuality, (2) gender, (3) reproduction and childrearing, and (4) violence. These four themes revealed themselves to be integral to understanding the gendered power relations articulated in each novel, both in the dystopian and utopian worlds. In fact, it is within these four structural categories that all four authors articulate their normal and counter-narrative positions concerning gender and power.

Dorothy Smith's (1990) theoretical framework (discussed in detail in Chapter III) greatly aids in interpreting these novels and their sexual politics from a sociological point of view. To reiterate, each presentation of dystopian structures will be considered to be what Smith refers to as the articulation of a normal narrative, while the subsequent presentation of subversive utopian structures exemplifies what Smith calls the articulation of a counter-narrative.
tive. Appropriating Smith’s theoretical language makes it easy to see how normal narratives are always hegemonic, in this case dystopian. While counter-narratives, in this case utopian, provide a site for the articulation of subversive structures which challenge, critique, as well as change, the normal narratives. Following in Judith Butler’s theoretical footsteps, considering these counter-narratives as subversive also helps us understand the interplay between dystopia, utopia, articulation and praxis.

The Structure of Sexuality: How Do You Do It?

How are intimate as well as sexual relations structured and articulated in dystopia and in utopia? How does changing the structure of sexuality change the power structure between men and women? Studying the presentation of dystopian normal narratives concerning sexuality, we can see that each novel presents a sexuality structure that is particularly oppressive for women. As a young girl, I remember playing with my Barbie doll and preparing her always for her wedding day. The standard props were in order: white gown, veil, bouquet, and of course the lucky bridegroom, Ken. By articulating counter-narrative utopian structures of sexuality, all four novels in my study implicitly--sometimes explicitly--critique the dystopian structure of sexuality, particularly as it is manifested in arrangements of marriage and monogamy.
Le Guin (1969) and Piercy (1976) are the most explicit critics of monogamy and marital arrangements, and in both of their dystopias the normal narrative concerning sexuality is articulated through these two institutions. On Le Guin’s dystopian planet of Urras, two institutions are critiqued by the revolutionary female Anarresti leader, Odo, founder of the utopian Anarresti society—marriage and prostitution. As the utopian protagonist, Shevek, points out, "Odo had condemned them both" (p. 18). LeGuin (1969) points out that Shevek knew from Odo’s writings that two hundred years ago the main Urrasti sexual institutions had been marriage, a partnership authorized and enforced by legal and economic sanctions, and prostitution, which seemed merely to be a wider term, copulation in the economic mode. (p. 18)

As Shevek discovers, these two institutions still predominate on Urras in the present time of the novel.

In its Westernized form, when marriage is institutionalized so too is monogamous sexuality. In theory, monogamy follows in the wake of marriage. Marriage serves as an institution that controls sexuality and places it within the confines of heterosexual monogamy, and this is exactly the structure we find when Shevek travels to the dystopian planet, Urras. What is ironic and worth mentioning, is that in the dystopian novels where marriage is a preferred institution, prostitution is also rampant, as is the case in both The dispossessed and Woman on the edge of time.

Le Guin’s (1969) utopian Anarres provides a site for the articulation of an explicit counter-narrative which condemns both mar-
riage and institutionalized monogamy. Nobody marries on Anarres, and monogamy is not the preferred arrangement at all. In fact, monogamous partnering is "really against the Odonian ethic" upon which the entire society is built (p. 50). The Odonian or utopian view on sexuality followed by the Anarresti is really quite functional. According to Le Guin (1969),

an Odonian undertook monogamy just as he [sic] might undertake a joint enterprise in production, a ballet or a soap works. Partnership was a voluntarily constituted federation like any other. So long as it worked, it worked, and if it didn't work it stopped being. It was not an institution but a function. It had no sanction but that of private conscience. (p. 244)

So, in Le Guin's utopia, we have a variety of arrangements, none of which is institutionalized like marriage and monogamy have been in the dystopian world of Urras.

In Piercy's dystopia--New York City of the 1970s--marriage is the norm and is highly desired. Again we have the same ideological connection between marriage and monogamy, as well as an explicit storyline dealing with the existence of prostitution in the world of the dystopian protagonist, Connie. Connie's favorite niece, Dolly, is a prostitute whose boyfriend serves as her pimp.

However, Piercy's (1976) utopian world of Mattapoissett is an experiment in non-monogamy, where marriage is an arrangement that is unheard of. The key to Piercy's utopian counter-narrative structure of sexuality is her treatment of reproduction (which is discussed at length in a future section). According to Piercy, patriarchal reproductive practices are perhaps the key to women's oppression. For purposes of my current argument, we simply need to know
that sexuality in the utopian Mattapoissett is not linked to reproduction in any way, hence eliminating the need for the control of sexuality (marriage) and the need for partnered dyads (monogamy). As Luciente--the utopian protagonist--explains to Connie, sex is not for reproduction, but for "love, for pleasure, for relief, out of habit, out of curiosity and lust" (p. 64). And, like on Le Guin's (1969) Anarres, monogamy is actually frowned upon and is not a desired arrangement in Mattapoissett (p. 72). Luciente and her people find monogamy and lifetime partnering to be oppressive and dangerous. As she explains to Connie: "Unstable dyads, fierce and greedy, trying to body [imitate] the original mother-child bonding. It looks tragic and blind" (p. 125)!

The novels of Gearhart and Charnas are not as explicit about marriage and monogamy. One of the reasons for this is because both of these dystopian worlds, in contrast to the dystopias created by Le Guin and Piercy, are only minimally based (especially Charnas's Holdfast) on the real social world of the American 1970s, when the novels were written. Gearhart's City, and particularly Charnas's Holdfast, are examples of normal narrative environments that articulate the existence of horribly oppressive conditions, where women are routinely endangered, killed and/or enslaved. In Gearhart's novel, marriage explicitly becomes institutionalized as part of the process of women's oppression, while we don't know if marriage occurs in Charnas's Holdfast. However, as I will show, marital arrangements are indeed implicitly critiqued in both novels by the
presentation of the utopian structures of sexuality.

Because of the connection between marriage and monogamy, when one of these institutions is destroyed or redefined, a mutation in the other inevitably follows. For example, during the time of The Purges in Gearhart's (1979) dystopian City, mandatory marriage for women became institutionalized as a way to control them. However, this state of affairs quickly escalated to the institutionalization of polygyny and, by definition, the abolition of monogamy for men only. "When I left, state laws were being revised to require every woman to be married. Polygyny was even being sanctioned in some areas so men could have several wives" (p. 152). Marriage is not mentioned at all in Charnas's (1978) dystopian Holdfast, where male-to-male homosexuality is the preferred form of sexuality, and women are completely enslaved.

Because monogamy is not institutionalized nor preferred by the utopian societies of Gearhart and Charnas, it logically follows that marriage is rendered a moot point. Monogamy is not the preferred arrangement for the utopian Hill Women of Gearhart's The wander-ground. And though it is not denied by the Riding Women of Charnas's utopian, it is not preferred. As the Riding Woman, Nenisi, tells the escaped Holdfast fem slave, Alldera: "It's a sickness to fix on only one person and keep everyone else out. It's as if to say, only I and my lover are true women, the rest of you are false and worthless" (p. 84).

The escaped fems that coexist with the Riding Women on the
Plains—known as the free fems—closely emulate the dystopian structure of sexuality that is institutionalized in the dystopian worlds created by Le Guin and Piercy. We are told that the fems prefer monogamy. But as is the case in the two dystopian societies that purportedly hold an ideology of institutionalized monogamy, (as well as in the real world), this is not necessarily what occurs in practice (as is evidenced by the existence of prostitution). The fems permit their leader, Elnoa, to be sexually promiscuous with her inferiors. In this case, as is true in the other three dystopian societies as well, sexuality and the sex act itself are tied to power. We are told that the fems, particularly the physically weaker ones, often chose their bedmates by snaring a stronger woman, protector (p. 122).

Also, both of the utopian worlds constructed by Gearhart and Charnas present lesbian separatism as the specific form of sexuality that is articulated as a counter-narrative to the institutionalized marriage and monogamy of dystopia. Since marriage is and has been primarily a heterosexist institution, these particular utopian arrangements are also implicit critiques of the marital institution itself. This leads me into my next topic for discussion—the form of sexuality itself.

Homo, Hetero, or Bi?

I am reminded of the uproar that spread like wildfire through American cities when actress, Ellen De Generes, came out as a les-
bian and actually had the gall to work her sexual preference into her popular television sitcom, *Ellen*. There is no denying that institutionalized compulsory heterosexuality is the norm—as Smith would say, the normal narrative—in the United States of the 1990s, as it was during the time my four authors were writing and publishing feminist utopian fiction. Does the form of sexuality influence the power relations between men and women? My answer is a resounding yes! Again, I argue that sexuality and its expression is one of the primary structures effecting gender relations of power, definitely in the four novels I examine, and perhaps also in the real world.

In discussing sexuality, I again pair Le Guin’s and Piercy’s works, as in their utopian worlds they both ultimately articulate counter-narratives that advocate for egalitarian social-sexual relations between men and women. In both *The Dispossessed* and *Woman on the Edge of Time*, the dystopian worlds are normatively heterosexist, which ties in nicely with the institutionalization of marriage and monogamy in New York City and on planet Urras. Also present in both dystopias are undertones of homophobia. This is best exemplified by Connie and her stereotyping of Luciente when they first meet. Because Connie has labelled Luciente a man (because of his physical strength and overall masculine appearance, by 1970’s New York City standards), she assumes he is homosexual—Mariquita (meaning ladybug in Spanish; slang for gay)—because underneath the masculine exterior lurks a girlishness. But then when Luciente reveals her-
self to be female, Connie again labels her a homosexual, this time honing in on Luciente's unusually masculine appearance (again, by the standards of Connie's world). Connie thinks Luciente is a dyke and is disgusted. Another clear example of dystopian homophobia in Piercy's New York City is when one of the male mental patients on Connie's ward--Skip--is chosen for an experimental amygdaletomy to cure him of his homosexuality. After the operation, Connie reflects on what has been done to her friend (Piercy, 1976):

Connie brooded over what he had said about Skip. It was true, Skip had changed. He parroted back whatever they [the doctors] said to him; he told them he was grateful. When they took him out and tested him with homosexual photographs, he had no what they called negative reactions. Meaning he didn't get a hard-on. He told her he felt dead inside. They were pleased with him; they were going to write him up for a medical journal. (p. 270)

In contrast to the heterosexist confines of the dystopian worlds of Le Guin and Piercy, their utopian counter-narrative reconstructions of sexuality are very open and free-flowing. On Le Guin's Anarres, any expression of sexuality--heterosexual, bisexual, homosexual, or even celibacy--is tolerated and celebrated, except for rape and child molestation. Anarresti children are encouraged to experiment sexually with partners of both sexes, as are the children of Piercy's utopian Mattapoissett. When Connie expresses her disapproval to Luciente over this issue (Piercy, 1976), she is told: "Our notions of evil center around power and greed--taking from other people . . . . We don't find coupling bad unless it involves pain or is not invited" (p. 139). Though both authors admit there are still problems of jealousy and possessiveness associated with
intense dyadic coupling (hence the tendency to prefer non-monogamy),
for the most part no one expression of utopian sexuality is pre-
ferred nor institutionalized as normative. This releases women and
men from the oppressive power relations that seem to result (both in
the world of fiction and in the real world) from the institutional-
ization of compulsory heterosexuality.

On the other hand, Gearhart and Charnas present alternative
utopian worlds that articulate counter-narratives of exclusive les-
bian sexuality. However, within the confines of their utopian
worlds, structuring sexuality in this way is intensely liberating
for women escaping from patriarchal slavery, persecution, and even
murder. And at the same time, it is not oppressive to men, which
means though different in form, lesbian separatism ends up eliminat-
ing oppressive gender relations just as the egalitarian open sexual-
ity advocated by Le Guin and Piercy does. As I will discuss later,
both the utopian Hill Women and the Riding Women do not believe re-
lations between men and women can ever be repaired, tolerated, or
endorsed. Therefore utopian freedom for these women necessitates
non-monogamous lesbian sexuality. In this case, sexuality itself
is structured by the necessity of the women's separatism from men.

Gearhart's (1979) dystopian City is normatively heterosexist.
We discover in the texts of one of the Hill Women's stories that in
the City, back in the time known as The Purges, homosexuals--par-
ticularly lesbians--were considered deviant and were hunted down.
Pelagine (formerly named Kate), an old Hill Women who lived during
The Purges, remembers her friend telling her: "Kate, they're true. The stories are true. About how they're hunting women" (p. 83).

As lesbians, Kate and her friends faced persecution, imprisonment and even death because they did not fit the mold of compulsory heterosexuality. The specific acts of violence done to these women are discussed in a later section.

In the dystopian Holdfast of Charnas (1978), we have a different situation. Again, this is the one of the four novels in which the dystopian world is particularly not recognizable as being similar to 1970s America. In this world of patriarchal enslavement of women and children, the preferred expression of sexuality is male homosexuality. The enslaved women are essentially breeders and used for ornamentation purposes. The escaped free fem, Daya, tells of her master's sexual preference: "He was a man, after all, with a man's natural interest in his own sex and a proper male lover named Charkin" (p. 54). Daya also admits that clever women (particularly those who resembled boys in appearance) were able to use their sexuality to manipulate the men. So we see that there was not a complete absence of women's agency, even in such an intensely oppressive situation as enslavement.

Lesbianism among the enslaved fems in the Holdfast is mentioned. Most of the women remember these encounters as quick and secretive, more a release than a true expression of intimacy. In fact, we see that even when the free fems escape from the Holdfast, they still emulate a dystopian and quite patriarchal expression of...
sexuality, unlike the utopian non-monogamous lesbianism of the Riding Women. Daya is used to and prefers penetration and dominance/submissive games when she has sex with her fellow free fems. And when some of the Riding Women befriend the free fems and eventually engage in sexual intercourse with them, an explicit comment is made about the free fems' preferred expression of their sexuality: "She [Daya] makes you think she's helpless, as if you're somehow taking her by force. And you do, in a way" (Charnas, 1978, p. 207). So, though the free fems and the Riding Women are all lesbians, the ways in which their lesbian sexuality is expressed are very different. Indeed it is the difference between dystopia and utopia, oppression and non-oppression.

So we can see how the structure of sexuality in both the dystopian and the utopian worlds is key to guiding and effecting the power relations as well as the intimate relations between men and women. All four novels present dystopian worlds that articulate normal narratives of one form of institutionalized patriarchal sexuality—compulsory heterosexuality in the works of Le Guin, Piercy, and Gearhart, and male homosexuality in the work of Charnas. Critiquing these dystopian structures of sexuality, all of the authors then articulate utopian counter-narratives that negate and subvert the patriarchal power relations between men and women in the dystopias. Whether utopian sexuality is expressed as non-institutionalized hetero-, bi-, and/or homosexuality, or as institutionalized lesbianism, all of these forms articulate a structure of gender re-
lations that is free from oppression. In the cases of Anarres and Mattapoisett, we have egalitarian harmony between men and women. For the Riding Women and the Hill Women, there is female separatist harmony free from the terrors and treacheries imposed by men in the dystopian worlds.

The Structure of Gender: Performativity and Subversion Revisited

Lengermann and Niebrugge-Brantley (1998) claim that famous feminist author and sociologist, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, recognized that "life experience was crucially shaped by gender, a fact that she had the prescience to see, not as a personal dilemma, but as the social structure determining and distorting the shape of society and individual lives" (p. 106). Gender as a categorical social construction is something that we all take for granted. Dividing people up according to so-called feminine and masculine characteristics is one cultural convention that seems as natural as walking and breathing.

It is only when confronted by counter-narrative gender constructs, such as this next example from Marge Piercy's (1976) utopian Mattapoisett, that we begin to question our own normative assumptions about gender. Luciente explains to Connie how categorizing people by gender as well as by sexuality is not something they do in her world: "That's not a useful set of categories. We tend to divvy up people by what they're good at and bad at, strengths and weaknesses, gifts and failings" (p. 214). Even though Luciente's
utopian people have indeed constructed their own categories within which to place people, we find that gender—as well as sex and sexuality—is not one of them.

I would like to return to Judith Butler’s (1988; 1990) notion of gender as performative. This reminds me of one of many incidents I experienced concerning gender performativity as I was growing up. I believe I was about thirteen, maybe fourteen years of age. I was on my school’s volleyball team and was not half-bad at it. I had a crush on a boy named David, who also happened to be a good friend. My way of showing him how much I liked him was to challenge him and some of his male friends to a volleyball match with me and some female classmates—boys against the girls, so to speak. In the process of our play, I tried my hardest to impress David by spiking the ball viciously and trying to smash it down on the boys’ side of the court. I was often reminded, during time-outs with my team members, that I was not being lady-like at all! I was told if I wanted to catch a boy, I should act demure, passive, and giggle a lot. Let him show his strength and physical prowess. In other words, I was performing my gender incorrectly and my friends negatively sanctioned me for it.

Butler’s insight into gender as performative is very important, but so is her notion that performing one’s gender in counter-hegemonic ways (according to Smith, this is an articulation of a counter-narrative) is being subversive. This is exactly what the four authors do when constructing their utopian worlds—they present charac-
ters as well as entire social structures that represent subversive, non-hegemonic (in relation to the dystopian worlds) gender performativity. For example, Luciente’s people, in comparison to Connie and the inhabitants of her world, perform gender subversively by not using it as a category for the classification of people at all!

In all four novels, the social structure of gender is a crucial site for the articulation of normal and counter-narratives concerning relations of power between men and women. I will discuss the dystopian normal constructions and the utopian counter reconstructions of gender as they are manifested in two differing though related arenas: clothing, appearance and bodies; and the presence of patriarchy.

Skirts or Pants?

Some may argue that one’s clothing does not make one powerful or oppressed. I beg to differ. I contend that what clothing one chooses to wear on one’s body—or is forced to wear on one’s body—is part of gender performativity. Clothing and the appearance of the body is one area where gender can be performed subversively. We can see across all four novels that the normal narrative for women in dystopian situations generally requires them (either by institutionalized law or unwritten normative sanctioning) to wear traditional, restrictive, feminine gender-typed clothing. However, the Riding Women, Hill Women, Luciente’s people, as well as the Anarresti women wear comfortable, gender-neutral clothing—what we would
today identify as unisex apparel. All four authors explicitly deal with this issue in both their constructions of dystopia and their reconstructions of utopia.

Piercy (1976) deals the most explicitly with the issue of clothing and appearance, though the other three authors do not make it a minor issue. It is clear that in the dystopian world of 1970s New York City, gendered clothing norms, as well as the presentation of bodies in general, is very much as it is in the real world of America in the late 1990s—men are considered to be physically stronger and are bodies in action, as is evidenced by clothing that is both functional, comfortable, and allows mobility (save for those damn ties!). Though women do wear pants and flat shoes, they are also expected and encouraged to wear dresses, nylons, make-up, jewelry and high-heeled shoes that restrict mobility and balance (not to mention harm the feet!). Piercy (1976) makes very clear what the norms of Connie’s time are regarding clothing when she presents Connie as a woman who believes Luciente at first to be a man, all because of his appearance of being muscular, strong, having calloused hand, and especially because of his clothing. Luciente appears in boots, pants, a plain shirt and a jacket, as do all the utopian people of her time. Connie, as well as the other dystopian women described in the novel (e.g., Dolly and Mrs. Polcari the social worker), mostly appear in stereotypical feminine dress as it is described above. In fact, we discover later on in the novel that Connie does not measure up to the image of an attractive woman—her body is too
fat, her hair too gray. She is unable to dye it in the mental institution: "It was her secret vice, dyeing her hair, but also it was a small act of self-affirmation" (p. 89). Such are the tactics of dystopian women who are trying to meet the image of body beautiful, feminine style.

This changes in Luciente’s utopian world. In Piercy’s (1976) counter-narrative articulation, all bodies are beautiful—male and female, young and old, thin and fat. Luciente describes some of the members of her community to Connie: "Jackrabbit is thin beautiful. Bee is big beautiful. Dawn is small beautiful. Tillia is creamy orange beautiful" (p. 97). (This last orange being is in fact a cat, while all the others are humans. This also exemplifies Piercy’s utopian people’s reverence for nature.) More importantly in Piercy’s utopia, Connie has trouble distinguishing men from women, based not only on emotional display, but primarily because they all dress and move in non-gendered ways (p. 74). This is first noticed by Connie when she observes the ease with which Luciente uses her body.

Luciente spoke, she moved with that air of brisk unselfconscious authority Connie associated with men. Luciente sat down, taking up more space than women ever did. She squatted, she sprawled, she strolled, never thinking about how her body was displayed. (p. 67)

So, not only is Piercy’s utopian clothing functional, comfortable and mutable (it is all adjustable so any one piece of clothing easily fits every body type and size), but utopian bodies are not gender-typed in the way they move about and take up space. These important
points are similarly taken up by Le Guin, Gearhart, and Charnas.

Le Guin presents her dystopian Urrasti people as normatively greatly concerned with body hair as well as clothing. Most men and women—at least those of the upper classes that Le Guin’s protagonist, Shevek, is allowed to interact with—are devoid of any body hair. They shave their heads as well as their bodies (yes, even the women!). The clothing for both men and women is extremely frilly, ostentatious, and not at all functional. Here we do not see the gender split between men’s and women’s clothing as much as we do in Piercy’s dystopia. However, in addition to shaving all body hair and wearing such extravagant clothing, Urrasti upper class women also bare their chests for most formal occasions. So, we have the case where upper class women are expected to appear half-nude in indoor public places for the pleasure of the male gaze (remember, normative sexuality on Urras is compulsory heterosexuality).

Shevek finds Urrasti women to be far inferior to Urrasti men, not only because of the gender gap in displaying the body in public, but more importantly, because Urrasti women are not encouraged to be physically strong nor to exercise at all. Shevek tries to take a walk with Vea, one such woman, and is annoyed when she insists on stopping every few minutes to rest. "It was a very little walk: a slow ten-minute stroll over the grass, and then Vea collapsed gracefully in the shade of a high bank of shrubs, all bright with golden flowers" (Le Guin, 1969, p. 212). However, when he confronts Vea about the difference in power between Urrasti men and women, Vea
gives Shevek the age-old argument that women are really in control because of their sexuality. Le Guin (1969) continues:

> It seems that everything your society does is done by men. The industry, arts, management, government, decisions. And all your life you bear your father's name and the husband's name. The men go to school and you don't go to school; they are all the teachers, and judges, and police, and government, aren't they? Why do you let them control everything? Why don't you do what you like?

> But we do. Women do exactly as they like. And they don't have to get their hands dirty, or wear brass helmets, or stand about shouting in the Directorate, to do it. (p. 215)

Vea contends that Urrasti women indeed run the men with their bare chests and their weak, passive bodies. Shevek does not buy this argument, nor does Le Guin, if we consider the utopian articulation of bodies and clothing exemplified by the Anarresti people.

Men and women on Le Guin's utopian planet of Anarres wear very functional, comfortable clothing, much like Piercy's Mattapoisett residents. For the most part, everyone wears pants, plain shirts and work boots or sandals. Anarresti men and women are encouraged to wear their hair any way they wish. We discover that most men and women prefer to keep their hair natural and long, wearing it tied back or in a queue (braid). And, unlike the Urrasti fascination with eliminating all body hair, Anarresti women do not shave at all.

So, in the cases of the utopian counter-narratives which seek to eliminate power distinctions between men and women, this is done in part by eliminating gender differences based on clothing, body image, and even bodily strength. The utopian women of Piercy and Le Guin do manual labor just as the men do, and are generally not
considered to be physically weaker than men. And though the utopian counter-narratives of Gearhart and Charnas are devoid of men, we still see similar messages appearing concerning the wearing of comfortable, functional clothing as being liberating. We also see the same emphasis on women being just as physical, active and strong as men. In these two novels, the utopian women are compared to dystopian characters who either embody or emulate patriarchal, dystopian forms of dressing and constructing body image and appearance.

Gearhart (1979) presents a normal narrative dystopian vision of gendered clothing norms when she has one of her characters describe the era known as The Purges in the City. Again, this was a time in the history of the Hill Women when deviant women, in particular, were purged from the City by way of institutionalization or even murder. One of the first sanctions against women to go into effect during this time was the imposing of formal dress codes. "Any woman caught wearing pants went to a behavior modification unit: she emerged wearing a dress and a very scary vacant smile" (p. 152). Women were required to wear dresses and/or skirts, as well as pantyhose. It was well known that lesbian women preferred more comfortable pants to dresses and skirts, so this was one way in which gendered clothing norms were used by the men in power to identify and control women who presented political and ideological problems. Some women were even killed because they could be identified politically according what kind of clothing they chose to wear. A group of frightened women during The Purges (Gearhart, 1979) talk:
And do you know who the women were, Cissy? They were politi-
cos. Like Nancy. Like your own sister, Deborah. The lib-
bbers. All of them in pants, no men with them. They'd all
come out of some meeting and the police just opened fire.
Right in the middle of a residential district, Cissy! Without
any warning to anybody! (p. 147)

During the present time in Gearhart's (1979) story, dystopian
City women are still required (though not by formal sanction) to ap-
pear looking a certain way--makeup, high heels, tight clothing, jew-
elry, stockings, etc. Ijeme, one of the Hill Women stationed in the
City as a spy, describes a typical City woman:

. . . Ijeme knew that she was in the presence of a woman. . .
. This was the city edition, the man's edition, the only edi-
tion acceptable to men, streamlined to his exact specifica-
tions, her body guaranteed to be limited, dependent, and con-
stantly available. (p. 63)

In contrast, the utopian Hill Women articulate a counter-nar-
rative by adopting clothing that is similar to Piercy's Mattapoissett
dwellers and to Le Guin's Anarresti. They wear boots, trousers and
functional shirts. And, they are so physically strong--more so than
the dystopian City women--that many of them can pass as men in the
City as spies, and do. Again, we don't have a recognizable gender
difference in clothing, physical appearance, or even physical
strength in utopia, even in the lesbian separatist novels.

Charnas (1978), like Piercy, spends much time tackling the is-
sue of clothing and bodies in her Motherlines. As mentioned before,
in the dystopian Holdfast the beauty ideal for women is a boyish
slenderness, based on the preferred mode of sexual expression for
Holdfast men--male homosexuality (p. 54). This carries over into
the dystopian community of the escaped free fems, as they also hold
women’s bodies and female beauty to these Holdfast standards. By Riding Women’s standards, most of the free fems are not considered physically attractive, as the following excerpt demonstrates. The Riding Women are describing the escaped fem, Alldera, after they find her pregnant, nearly dead, and wandering aimlessly in the wilderness. Alldera is

a plate-faced creature, the bridge of her nose flattened so that there was no strong feature to balance her wide, heavy-lipped mouth; eyes a nondescript green-brown, wide-set below a broad band of forehead and above the sweep of the cheeks; brown hair too fine to add height to the wide skull. For the rest, she was all bone and belly, with a blunt, square frame.

For the Riding Women, beauty is strength, both physically and mentally. Eventually, as Alldera proves herself to the tribal women, they begin to accept her as beautiful. There is no one standard of beauty that the Riding Women adhere to. In fact, much space is devoted to describing how each of the Motherline tribes possesses differing physical and personality traits, none considered more beautiful than any other.

But more importantly in Charnas’s (1978) novel is the issue of dress. Like the other three authors, Charnas stresses how the free fems’ clothing is not functional, especially for the dry, arid, tough environment of the Plains. The fems emulate the style of dress they were required to wear in the Holdfast, a style that was defined and enforced by men. This included skirts, hats, smocks and heavy sandals. After spending time with the Riding Women, Alldera views the femmish attire in a new way, no longer wishing to don the fem cloth-
ing that she herself had sported for most of her life. "To Alldera
they [the fems] looked coarse and graceless, out of place here," in
comparison to the Riding Women (p. 67).

In contrast (Charnas, 1978), the Riding Women sport the by now
all-too-familiar pants and plain shirt, though some wear scarves
around their breasts to bind them for riding purposes, and others
wear scarves tied around their heads to protect themselves from the
hot sun. Unlike the fems, the Riding Women are quite fond of going
barefooted. Their clothing is highly functional in the environment
in which they live. And, similar to the novels of Piercy and Gear­
hart, the utopian women are at first taken to be men because of
their mode of dress. Alldera is no exception, as she studies the
Riding Women after their first encounter:

Their bodies were long, slung horizontally on two pairs of
legs. Two trunks rose from their backs, one human-shaped with
arms, the other smooth and topped with a head like a log of
wood stuck on at an angle, and a sweep of hair hung from the
back end, like one lock from the top of a shaven scalp. They
were terrible to look at, but they were her only chance to
live. (p. 21)

As mentioned above, Alldera slowly comes to see the Riding Women as
free and beautiful, while she views the free fems--her own kind--as
oppressed and stuck in the dystopian ways of the Holdfast masters.

So, we can see how clothing and bodies play an important role
in the articulation and structuring of power relations between men
and women, even in the novels where men are not a part of the uto­
pian communities. Being able to dress in comfortable, functional
clothing that is unrelated to and not defined by one’s gender, is one
step in the liberation process for women. In all four utopian communities, women's bodies have been redefined as strong, physical and mobile, and their clothing supports this change.

The Presence of Patriarchy

All four novels articulate the normative presence of patriarchy in the dystopian worlds, as well as gender ideologies that support its existence. In fact, in all four novels, the institution that structures dystopian gender relations across the board is patriarchy. But what do I mean by patriarchy? Good question. My favorite definition, because of its sociological focus, in the one proposed by Gerda Lerner in her book entitled The creation of patriarchy (1986). She defines patriarchy as

the manifestation and institutionalization of male dominance over women and children in the family and the extension of male dominance over women in society in general. It implies that men hold power in all the important institutions of society and that women are deprived of access to such power. It does not imply that women are either totally powerless or totally deprived of rights, influence, and other resources. (p. 239)

All four dystopian communities--Piercy's New York City, Le Guin's Urras, Gearhart's City, and Charnas's Holdfast--are patriarchally structured.

Piercy (1976) demonstrates patriarchy primarily in Connie's interactions with the medical establishment. It is Connie's brother, Lewis (his given name is Luis, but he has Anglicized it, much to Connie's disappointment), who has her permanently committed to a mental institution and signs the papers for her to participate in
mind control experiments. Connie realizes, "a bargain had been
struck. Some truce had been negotiated between the two men over
the bodies of their women" (p. 31). Even when Connie was brought
into the asylum initially—after saving Dolly from an unwanted, il-
legal abortion by Geraldo and his butcher of a doctor—no one lis-
tened to her. She was bloody and badly beaten by Geraldo, and still
it was Geraldo’s statement that was taken. It is Connie who is
institutionalized.

Geraldo was almost demure. He had a good manner with author-
ity, as any proper pimp should, respectful but confident. Man
to man, pimp and doctor discussed her condition while Dolly
sobbed. The doctor asked her only her name and the date.
(p. 19)

We are also given glimpses into the patriarchal structure of
Connie’s world through the secondary stories of Dolly, as well as
Connie’s sister, mother, and sister-in-law. Not only do we learn
about how women are constructed under patriarchy, but also how
patriarchal men are to perform their gender. Connie explains to
Luciente (Piercy, 1976), and in the process, provides an example
of the gender ideology that supports the patriarchal structure of
1970’s New York City:

. . . a man is supposed to be . . . strong, hold his liquor,
attractive to women, able to beat out other men, lucky, hard,
tough, macho we call it, muy hombre . . . not to be a fool .
. . not to get too involved . . . to look out for number one .
. . to make good money. Well, to get ahead you step on peo-
ple, like my brother Luis. You knuckle under to the big guys
and you walk over the people underneath. (p. 120)

Le Guin (1969) also makes a very explicit statement about the
normative existence of patriarchy in her dystopian world of Urras.
It begins when the protagonist, Shevek, asks his male Urrasti hosts where the women are (p. 73). He is told that if he wants a prostitute, that can be arranged, but the wives of the University men will not be found in this intellectual arena--they are at home. We further learn that Urrasti women are not allowed to be college-educated, they are only allowed to be teachers in an all-girls elementary school environment, and that extremely intelligent women are rare and undesirable because they tend to display "vaginal atrophy" (p. 74). (In other words, intelligent women are sexually frigid.) When Shevek displays disbelief and disapproval concerning Urrasti gender ideology, he is promptly told by the Urrasti university men that women ":[c]an't do the math; no head for abstract thought; don't belong. You know how it is, what women call thinking is done with the uterus" (p. 73)!

In Gearhart's (1979) novel, we learn of the patriarchal past of the City by way of what the Hill Women call the "remember rooms" (p. 2). Here, all the collective memories of the Hill Women have been compiled and each and every child and adult can enter these rooms and know the experiences of dystopian patriarchy. Since several Hill Women are secretly stationed (masquerading as men, of course) in the City to monitor men and to protect their wilderness dwelling, we also get some descriptions of the present dystopian City, which continues to be patriarchal.

As mentioned before, the City--particularly during the time of The Purges--is a horrible place for women and any man who doesn't
fit into a very narrow articulation of what is normative. The Hill Women construct and articulate a very elaborate counter-narrative ideology supporting their condemnation of the patriarchal City and the existence of their separatist way of life. The main Hill Woman creed is this: "It is too simple to condemn them all [men] or to praise all of us [women]. But for the sake of the earth and all she holds, that simplicity must be our creed" (Gearhart, 1979, p. 2).

The intensely eco-feminist Hill Women are primarily concerned with the rape of the earth by City men, and their critique of patriarchy rests on this ideology. For the Hill Women, the way in which men oppress and rape women is a logical and necessary extension of their disregard for the earth herself. Another Hill Woman creed: "It is not in his [man’s] nature not to rape. It is not in my [woman’s] nature to be raped. We do not co-exist" (p. 24). In other words, men—even the gay City men known to the Hill Women as the gentles—cannot be saved from their inherently violent tendencies, which manifest themselves in violence against nature and against women. Hence, we have an essentialist, separatist ideology to combat the oppression of patriarchy.

Of course, Charnas’s (1978) Holdfast is a tragically oppressive place for all women and children, and even some men. We are told that many of the younger males are kept hungry and used for labor by the older, more powerful men (p. 55). This dystopian place articulates a normal narrative that is for and about men. Here, women who are considered beautiful—known as pets—are sold to
the highest male bidder for ornamentation and breeding purposes. Each master has elaborate breeding rooms for the impregnation of his pets (p. 54). Other women are known as labor fems and are forced to do manual labor for their masters. Even female children are kept in pits and are socialized into this slave society. The Riding Women cannot tolerate the free fems because these escaped slaves model their supposedly free society after the patriarchal Holdfast. They emulate the master-slave relationship, which is all they’ve ever known until meeting the Riding Women. As one Riding Woman observes: "They [the fems] themselves are the prisoners not of us, but of the way things are" (p. 71).

Patriarchy is non-existent in all four utopian counter-narratives. As mentioned above, Piercy’s and Le Guin’s utopias are much concerned with egalitarian relations between men and women, with eliminating power differences based on gender so that men and women can live together in harmony. The non-patriarchal structure advocated by Piercy in her Mattapoissett resembles a Marxist commune, a kibbutz. There is no hierarchy, decisions are made collectively and consensually by a rotating governmental structure, there is no private property, and work is rotated on a voluntary basis. Le Guin’s utopian non-patriarchal structure is similar to Piercy’s, though the Anarresti people take it one step further than Mattapoissett’s Marxism. The Odonians have created a complete communist anarchy—no rules, no government whatsoever. The only difference between the Anarresti and the Mattapoissett political economy, is that the Anar-
resti do not have any form of structured government, while the people of Mattapoissett have a fairly elaborate (though non-hierarchical) decision-making process.

For Charnas’s (1978) Riding Women and Gearhart’s Hill Women, eliminating patriarchy necessitates having all-female, separatist communities. As was mentioned above, the Hill Women believe that men cannot be saved from their inherently violent nature. As for the Riding Women, their female ancestors were once slaves in the Holdfast as were Alldera and her free fems. However, these women fought the men and ended up escaping to the wilderness, while the women that came to be known as the fems stayed and ended up being enslaved (pp. 27-28). Taking their hatred of men one step further than the Hill Women, the Riding Women actually seek out men wandering in the countryside and kill them. After one such killing, one Riding Woman—who had never before seen a man—inspects the body she has downed. "His sexual organs had seemed a ludicrous, dangling nuisance and hardly capable of the brutalities [i.e., rape] recounted by escaped femmish slaves" (p. 17). For these two groups of women—Gearhart’s Hill Women and Charnas’s Riding Women—communal, egalitarian, separatist, all-female spaces are the only alternative to a patriarchal structure. Alldera sums it up best when she looks at the Riding Women’s rustic, dirty camp in the middle of the brutal, arid Plains; she calls this utopian place beautiful. "There are no men at all . . . . None. You’re safe" (p. 36).

So, all four utopian novels present counter-narratives to
patriarchal normal narrative gender constructions, whether they manifest themselves in the treatment of bodies, the wearing of clothing, or the structure of patriarchally gendered actions and ideologies. Essentially, we can say that gender is effectively eliminated as a category of contention for both the utopian societies of Mattapoisett and Anarres. For the Hill Women and the Riding Women, gender has been made the most salient category, and the way to eliminate women's oppression is to completely separate from men, even to the point of killing them off. Though they differ in their strategies for eliminating women's oppression, all four novels achieve the same goal—women in the utopian worlds are no longer oppressed by men.

The Structure of Reproduction and Childrearing: The Marriage and Divorce of Feminism and Technology

Questions surrounding the issues of reproduction and childrearing occupy a prominent place in all four novels. I will show how technology plays a large role in the utopian counter-narrative articulations of reproduction in Piercy, Gearhart and Charnas. At times this technology allows utopian peoples to bring their biology more in line with their cultural practices, thereby further blurring the ambiguous line between nature and nurture.

As I argue in my classroom when I teach about gender inequality, perhaps where childrearing was concerned historically, a gendered division of labor was a necessity when breastfeeding infants was the only means of nourishing them. Perhaps hunting and gather-
ing women did stay in the camp and feed/nurture their young while the men hunted. What is important to point out here, is that though we think that hunting and gathering peoples had a gendered division of labor, some theorists (e.g., see Lerner, 1986) argue that though primitive men and women performed different tasks, there was not the corresponding social inequalities based on gender that we see today. Particularly because of contemporary advances in reproductive technology--e.g., surrogate pregnancies, breast pumps--no longer can we justify the continuance of an unequal gendered division of labor based on ideologies tied to proscribed roles for men and women where reproduction and childrearing are concerned.

For example, American women are generally still the primary caregivers to infants, often times leaving the workforce to nurse and care for their young. As mentioned above, breastfeeding is no longer the only option available to new parents, but there is a big ideological push for women to continue this trend--it is still a part of the normal narrative. Consequently, we then justify women's lower wages in a capitalist economy by pointing to the fact that many leave for a time to care for children. When we structure reproductive and childrearing functions in this hierachical, gendered way, it becomes a basis for an unequal balance of power between men and women, with women again facing oppression--in my example, economic oppression.

What wounds me deeply as a feminist and as a woman is to hear young, educated, heterosexual American women talk about how differ-
ent their lives are going to be compared to their mothers' generation. Many of them believe that they will get a college degree, begin a career, find a mate who is willing to contribute equally to the marriage, and have children without missing a step in the workforce. As a sociologist, I contend that the current patriarchal capitalist structure of reproduction as well as childrearing in the American 1990s makes it impossible for these optimistic women to achieve their goals. Variations on this same patriarchal capitalist structure--virtually unchanged in the 20 years since the four authors I examine penned their utopian novels--are articulated in the dystopian normal narratives and effectively challenged in the utopian counter-narratives by Piercy, Le Guin, Gearhart, and Charnas.

What I find to be particularly fascinating in two of the novels I review--Gearhart's (1979) The wanderground and Charnas's (1978) Motherlines--is that technology has evolved to the point where men are no longer needed for the reproductive process; an example of technology blurring the line between nature and nurture. This opens up a whole new proverbial can of worms concerning issues of power between men and women. Exploring these and other questions in this section, I examine the articulations of structures of reproduction and childrearing in both dystopia and utopia.

To Breed, or Not to Breed?

Reproduction is given the most prominent position in Piercy's
(1976) Women on the edge of time. In dystopian New York City, Piercy articulates the normal narrative by using Connie's niece--Dolly--as an example. In this world, women have very little control over reproduction, and some have little control over their own bodies. Kemeny (1993) calls this "phallogocentric" and suggests that the body--particularly women's bodies--are a "watershed site for the inscription and exercise of power" (pp. 13, 17).

In the opening scene of Woman on the edge of time, we discover that Dolly is a whore and purposely quits taking her birth control pills so that she gets pregnant by her pimp--Geraldo--hoping this will convince him to let her stop whoring. When Geraldo discovers Dolly is pregnant, he is enraged and brings a backstreet butcher to perform an illegal abortion (remember, this is the 1970s before Roe v. Wade made abortion legal). This key scene sets up the entire storyline and explains how Connie gets to the mental institution; she whacks Geraldo over the head with a bottle to protect her niece from the male hands of the so-called baby butcher.

Later on in Piercy's (1976) story, we discover that an almost constantly stoned Dolly agrees to an abortion to get Geraldo to marry her so she can stop whoring for him. "Listen, Connie--if I have the operation, Geraldo promises I can quit. He'll marry me. We'll have a real wedding next month, soon as I'm better from the operation. So you see, things are working out okay" (p. 24). It is of no importance that Dolly really wants to have this baby. Again, we have a dystopian situation where marriage is such a de-
sired institution that women are willing to do almost anything—even abort a wanted baby—in order to secure a husband and a stable economic future. When Connie brings up the point that Geraldo consistently beats her, Dolly gives the only reply that need be uttered in dystopia: "He is my man, . . . What can I do" (p. 24)?

In the utopian future of Mattapoisett, things are very different. I argue that Piercy’s (1976) utopia is primarily based on her articulation of a counter-narrative of power relations between men and women through the medium of reproduction. In Woman on the edge of time, Piercy articulates a well-known radical feminist position on reproduction (e.g., see Tong, 1989, pp. 71-94). From this perspective, one of the primary reasons women are oppressed is because they are the sole biological bearers of children, which then provides the normative justification for women as primary caregivers, which then leads to women staying out of the workforce, which justifies women getting paid less money, etc., etc. According to this view, we can say that women’s oppression is based on her unique biology, or the ability to gestate and bear children. So, for Piercy and other proponents of this perspective, the first step towards women’s liberation is advocacy for reproductive technologies that will allow women to reappropriate control over their bodies, that is, take power away from the predominantly male medical establishment by technological advancement. To then equalize the role of men and women in reproduction, women must no longer gestate and birth babies, nor must women remain the sole caregivers to infants and
Piercy (1976) demonstrates this counter-narrative ideology in action in her articulation of reproductive technology in Mattapoissett. Women no longer gestate or birth babies. Humans are grown in what is called a brooder for over nine months and then allowed to come into the world to be mothered by both men and women. No baby is connected to one man (as donor of sperm) or a birth mother because genetically, no one is sure where the baby’s genes comes from. This is done purposefully and effectively breaks down the nuclear family structure as well as gendered ideologies about who is to care for children, as will be discussed later on in this section. Connie, as representative of dystopian ways, is absolutely horrified by this development and screams at Luciente: "How can men be mothers! How can some kid who isn’t related to you be your child" (p. 105)? In her explanation, Luciente eloquently sums up Piercy’s (1976) view on constructing reproduction to break down power differences and hierarchies between men and women:

It was part of women’s long revolution. When we were breaking all the old hierarchies. Finally there was that one thing we had to give up too, the only power we ever had, in return for no more power for anyone. The original production: The power to give birth. Cause as long as we were biologically enchained we’d never be equal. And males never would be humanized to be loving and tender. So we all became mothers. Every child has three. To break the nuclear bonding. (p. 105)

There you have it: a radical feminist view on reproduction put into practice in the fictional utopia of Mattapoissett. This view puts women and men on par with each other and allows no one sex or gender to dominate the other. Interestingly, Le Guin also presents a u-
pian radical feminist counter-narrative articulation of reproduction, but she takes a decidedly opposite view to Piercy.

In Le Guin's (1969) *The dispossessed*, we don't get much information about how the dystopian Urrasti conduct themselves where reproduction is concerned. From the brief glimpse we get into one of the Urrasti university men’s life, all we know is that his wife seems to have responsibility for caring for the children. There is no mention of childbirth or rearing beyond the allusion to the fact that since generally women are not allowed in the workforce, they most likely are home taking care of the children (p. 73).

Where we do find reproduction discussed is in Le Guin’s utopia, Anarres. Shevek goes against the Odonian principles of not forming sexually monogamous, lifetime dyads, and pairs up with a woman named Takver. She becomes pregnant and we get a firsthand view of reproductive techniques as well as ideologies held by the utopian Anarresti. Though technology is very much advanced (Anarres is a futuristic, science fiction planet), we find Odonian women gestating and birthing babies just as their centuries-past ancestors did. This is an example of a second radical feminist view on reproduction that is in contrast to Piercy’s articulation in *Woman on the edge of time*.

Whereas Piercy (1976) articulates a utopian society where power differences between men and women in the reproductive arena are eliminated by developing technology that will allow women to transcend their biology and be liberated by not having to gestate or
birth babies (also known as the reproduction as oppression view), Le Guin articulates another radical perspective (the reproduction as liberation view) positing that women can be empowered by their reproductive uniqueness without technological intervention (see Kemeny, 1993, pp. 21-23; Tong, 1989, pp. 71-94). In this view, technology does not equalize reproductive power between men and women, but inverts it and allows fearful and jealous men to enter into women’s sacred realm and appropriate the only arena that women may be said to have power over. In this view, what is needed to liberate women is for women to have sole control over all aspects of reproduction—from birth control, to pregnancy, to childbirth—period. But unlike Piercy’s (1976) view, men are not ever brought into the picture and women do not correspondingly give up any power they have in the reproductive process. This is exemplified on Anarres by Takver’s pregnancy and delivery. While the male partners—in this case, Shevek—are there when the infant is born, it is women who control the entire process. Babies are delivered by female midwives in the privacy of the woman’s own dorm room. All women are trained in birthing techniques and prefer to give birth in a squatting position.

She had cleared the bed platform except for a clean sheet, and she was at work bearing a child. She did not howl or scream, as she was not in pain, but when each contraction came she managed it by muscle and breath control, and then let out a great houff of breath, like one who makes a terrific effort to lift a heavy weight. Shevek had never seen any work that so used all the strength of the body. (p. 242)

It is clear that Anarresi men do not have this esoteric knowledge
of childbirth reserved only for women.

So, we see that though Piercy and Le Guin both use technology and the role of men in reproduction in different ways, we see that they both articulate radical feminist ideologies that seek to liberate women from patriarchal reproductive structures. In Piercy’s utopia, men and women are essentially equal in the roles they play in the reproductive process. Whereas in Le Guin’s utopia, women have reappropriated control over their own bodies and reproductive acts. However, the questions beg to be answered: Doesn’t Le Guin’s solution in turn oppress men by creating a structure that does not provide men with opportunities to participate in reproduction beyond the act of insemination and being present at the birth? Doesn’t this perpetuate an unfair biological advantage women have over men? Is it merely a matriarchal flip-flopping of the real world structure of reproduction in the United States of the 1970s?

Good questions. It seems to me that the problem with dystopian structures of reproduction (both in the novels and the real world), is not necessarily biological differences between men and women (as Piercy’s essentialist solution would suggest). The more crucial issue is the fact that women’s differential biological capabilities often provide the basis for constructing ideologies and hierarchies of inequality, usually manifested in patriarchal power relations where women end up getting structurally oppressed. It is my contention that though on the surface Le Guin’s utopian solution may seem to turn the tables and oppress men, this is not the case.
Because biological differences between men and women have not been institutionalized into a structure of inequality for the Anarresti people, I contend that the fact that Anarresti women gestate and give birth, as well as control this reproductive process, does not in any way oppress men. It has a different meaning in Le Guin's utopia because Anarres is not a capitalist patriarchy, but is a communist anarchy.

Both Gearhart and Charnas deal more implicitly with the question of men's position in the reproductive process. Since both of these novels articulate counter-narrative utopian worlds of lesbian separatism, it is only logical that, in part, the radical feminist view of reproduction advocated by Piercy is again invoked, in part, by the Hill Women and the Riding Women. That is, reproductive technology is highly liberating for women. But there is one major difference: Whereas Piercy uses technology to simultaneously liberate women and reconcile gendered power relations between men and women, Gearhart and Charnas both develop reproductive technology to the point where men's sperm is no longer needed for fertilization!

Though the question of reproduction is crucial to the existence of Gearhart's Hill Women society, we are not given much information concerning the details of how it is structured in either the dystopian City or the utopian wanderground. Children are not present in recollections of the past or present City. However, we can infer what normal narrative Gearhart was critiquing in her dystopia by the way she articulates counter-narrative utopian methods.
for and ideologies about reproduction. By focusing on her utopian world, we can easily and confidently infer that reproduction in the City was most probably controlled by men. We know that women were and continue to be raped in the City (e.g., the story of Margaret, an escaped City woman who has been brutally raped, that opens the novel, as well as recollections from the remember rooms), suggesting women are not fully in control of their own bodies and reproductive capacities. And most importantly, we know that the City was and still is a normatively patriarchal environment. We have no reason to think that perhaps City women have control over reproductive processes.

There is one chapter in Gearhart’s (1979) collection of Hill Women stories (Chapter 7) that very ambiguously describes the Hill Women’s reproductive ritual. Though the details are sparse at best, what is important to my discussion and is easily discovered is that the Hill Women’s fertility and the way they structure reproduction is intimately tied to Mother Earth. Gearhart’s utopia articulates an eco-feminist position that primarily focuses on women’s connection to nature and the Earth. The Hill Women’s ultimate goal is to learn to harness women’s collective power to "direct it, and to confront whatever murderous violence threatened the earth" (p. 123). There is some mentioning of herbal concoctions (p. 44), implantation, and egg-merging in relation to certain rituals that are performed in the bowels of the Earth—known by the Hill Women as "the Deep Cellā:” "Actually the deep cella is a wondrous place, ancient
and sober. I wish you well in the implantment, in the egg-merging, and in the bearing of new life" (p. 44). We know that this female connection to the Earth was not allowed in the dystopian, patriarchal City, and we also learn that men have been rendered mysteriously impotent (by the forces of Mother Earth) outside the boundaries of the City. This time is referred to by the Hill Women as the "Revolt of the Earth" (p. 130). Not only were men impotent outside the City, but their machines did not function properly, and animals would not behave for them. Some examples (Gearhart, 1979) follow:

But the horses were having none of it. They bucked and reared and wouldn't let the men back on. Sylvia was laughing now. Some of the women dismounted and got the horses calmed down. But every time a man tried to climb aboard a horse it would go wild all over again. . . . Logging trucks falling off the sides of mountains, car wrecks, airplane crashes. . . . Then I saw field after field of grain and in every one of them there was a big rusty farm tractor or combine, looking like it hadn't been used in years. (p. 159)

Again, we are told that this revolt was in response to men's raping and pillaging of the Earth as well as women.

Perhaps most importantly, we know that the Hill Women reproduce parthenogenetically, without men's sperm. But unlike Charnas, Gearhart does not go into detail about how this advance in reproductive technology occurs, leaving the scales tipping more towards the mystery side than that of technology in explaining this phenomenon. We do know that all the Hill Women's children are female and that they are gestated and birthed in the old fashioned way—vaginally, with midwives doing the delivering (p. 44).

Charnas's (1978) articulation of counter-narrative reproduci-
tive structures is much more thorough and interesting than Gearhart's. The first mentioning of this topic in its normal narrative dystopian form is in the opening scene of the book, when the escaped fem slave--Alldera--is wandering pregnant and alone in the wilderness. We discover she only has negative feelings concerning the unborn child she is carrying. "In her mind she cursed the fetus for a rape-cub, unwanted seed of the masters whom she had escaped" (p. 12).

As was aforementioned in an earlier chapter, in the dystopian Holdfast, women--pets--are kept by their masters and are impregnated in the "breeding rooms" (p. 54). The children are then taken by the male masters and trained to be slaves (if female), or perhaps bred to be future masters and sometimes slaves (if male).

She remembered the cold table to which the Hospital men, masked and gowned and stinking with terror of femmish evil, had strapped her when she had had each of her two cubs--both fems [female]. Each cub had stayed with her till weaning and had then been sent down into the kit pits to live as best it might with its peers, until it was grown enough to be trained by men to work and to serve. (p. 18)

In this passage we can also see indications that the birthing process as well as the impregnation are controlled completely by men. The fems are raped and are in the most oppressive situation in comparison to the women in the other three dystopian novels. Charnas also hints at the fact that the dystopian men find the women's reproductive capabilities evil and even disgusting.

Though the free fems, after escaping from the Holdfast, do have control over their own sexuality and reproductive processes, they can still be viewed as being in a distinctly dystopian situa-
tion. Because the free fems do not have sperm to impregnate themselves with, none of them can conceive. They do not have the reproductive technology of the Riding Women and their kind will soon die out. But this does not stop the free fems from making fertility douches, comprised of herbs and other natural extracts, hoping to stumble upon a concoction that will give them the secret to parthenogenesis—reproduction without, in this case, men's sperm. In vain, the free fems conduct regular fertility rituals, known as Generation Feasts (Charnas, 1978), where they put their fertility potions to use.

We gather tonight, fems, she said, to try once more to find a starter that will make life in us. The Mares [a femmish derogatory term used to refer to the Riding Women] conceive without men, and so will we . . . . All of you remember old fems [in the Holdfast] so torn from cubbings that they went raw-legged and stinking because they couldn't hold their piss. I myself have wondered, if cubs don't come to us in the course of things, why run after all that pain again? . . . If Moonwoman [a Goddess worshipped by the fems] wills it, nothing will be left to show that men ever lived in the world, but our cubs will be there to show that we did. (p. 142)

The free fems need children to continue their kind, as well as to build up an army for their plan to go back to the Holdfast, kill off all the men, and rescue the remaining women and children.

So, how is it that the Riding Women can reproduce without men? It is quite a complicated story, tied up in the unexplainable workings of technology as well shrouded in the seemingly unexplainable realm of mystery. We must go back in the Riding Women's history to understand this phenomenon. Earlier it was mentioned that the Riding Women's female ancestors were escaped fem slaves, just like All-
dera and her free fems, during a time known as the Wasting. Much laboratory experimentation by the ruling men was going on at this time. Using slave women as their subjects, the men ended up creating the potential for reproduction without using men's sperm. Char- nas (1978) goes on to say that

the lab men didn't want to have to work with all the traits of both a male and a female parent, so they fixed the women to make seed with a double set of traits. That way their offspring were daughters just like their mothers, and fertile. (p. 72)

Remember, the preferred form of sexuality in the Holdfast was male homosexuality. So, if the ruling men could discover a way to breed more female slaves without having to perform intercourse with the women, it would benefit their structure of sexuality and reproduction.

When the first generation of daughters--known as the Ancients--was born with the parthenogenetic traits, they eventually seized the technology from the men and were able to escape with it to the wilderness. Therefore, all Riding Women are descendants of these first Ancients and are all born fertile with the capability to reproduce female children. Hence, we have the beginnings and the continuance of an all-woman society.

But this is not the most interesting part of the story! We come to the explanation for why the free fems refer to the Riding Women as Mares: the Riding Women mate with horses to get their semen, which is needed for the parthenogenesis! Now, don't misunderstand, the offspring of the Riding Women are not half-horse genetic-
ally. However, though each Riding Woman is born fertile (Charnas, 1978), she must get a dose of a special fluid that serves as a catalyst for the growth of the fetus.

They [the Ancients] perfected the changes the labs had bred into them so that no men were needed. Our seed, when ripe, will start growing without merging with male seed because it already has its full load of traits from the mother. The lab men used a certain fluid to start this growth. So do we. (p. 74)

That fluid is the semen of horses. The escaped Ancients needed a readily available fluid that could be appropriated even in the wilderness. So, they experimented with some horses left behind by the lab men and abracadabra . . . instant and easily obtainable fluid catalyst for parthenogenesis!

However, there is one catch (Charnas, 1978):

The Riding Women must physically mate with stallions in order to secure the semen. This is our way; it was worked out for us by the first daughters. They saw that after the Wasting there wouldn't be any places like the lab, and we would need some way to breed simpler than the lab way. So these lab-changed women designed their daughters' reproduction to be set off by the seed of a stallion. (p. 101)

This mating is done in a yearly ritual known as the Gather, where young women who have come of age are very carefully provided with a stallion to mate with to get the semen to spur the growth of their daughters. It is a very serious and somber occasion, as the ritual is potentially very dangerous to the young woman because of the great size of the stallion.

After much ritual dancing and celebration, the young fertile woman is led into a circle of gathered Riding Women and lays down in a sturdily constructed box left open at the top, and containing a
"carefully padded superstructure" on top, "to take the weight of the stallion and the grip of his forelegs" (Charnas, 1978, p. 173). The horses are sacred animals and the Riding Women bond intimately with them. Remembering back to her own mating, an older Riding Women thinks to herself how "both she and the stud embodied the dependence of all beings on each other and the kinship of creatures. That was the mystery of the mating, its beauty and necessity" (p. 175). Finally, the trained stud is led into the circle, is rubbed to the point of arousal, and is gently guided into the young woman for the mating. Though the following quote is extensive, I feel that only the full text here will convey the mood and importance of this ritual.

The handlers rubbed the neck and chest of the little stallion. They stroked his face and nostrils with pads that had been run under the tails of mares in season. He began to throw his head and snort, and within a few moments they had him erect. Under the touch of hands well known to him he reared high and clamped his forelegs on the padded support frame. He gripped the leather roll at the chute's head and rattled it with his teeth. Standing outside the chute, the handlers stroked his sweating neck and shoulders and bent to guide him.

Suddenly he thrust forward against the wooden braces which prevented him from entering fully. He oscillated his rump, snorting loudly, and his tail jerked, marking the rhythm of his ejaculation. Within seconds, it seemed, he pulled back and stood dark with sweat, droop-headed, quiet. (p. 176)

If all goes well, the young woman's seed is spurred to grow because of the stallion's seminal fluid.

The Riding Women's birthing ritual is very primitive, yet highly communal and natural. Much singing and celebrating goes on, the birth mother is massaged continuously with herbs, and other Rid-
ing Women help with the delivery as well as symbolically participate in the birth mother's pain and struggling. Another generation of Riding Women has begun without the presence or aid of men, thereby liberating the Riding Women from their oppressive patriarchal past.

So, we can see that whether the utopian counter-narratives employ technology to equalize the roles of men and women in reproduction, or to eliminate the necessity of men in the reproductive act, all four utopias liberate women from the confines of patriarchal oppression.

Mary, Mary, Quite Contrary, How Does Your Child Grow?

Across all four novels, how to raise and care for the children after they are born is a key issue. However, none of the four authors explicitly articulate dystopian normal narratives detailing how children are raised; again, it is only through their articulation of counter-narrative utopian childrearing practices that we get an implicit critique of dystopian methods of raising children.

Only Le Guin and Piercy hint at how children are normatively reared in dystopia. Again, these two novels get paired often throughout my analyses, particularly because they both articulate dystopian worlds that are very much based in the real world capitalist America of the 1970s. We can infer from the little evidence available that Le Guin's planet Urras, as well as Connie's New York City, have patriarchal nuclear family structures. There is also evidence that the women are primary caregivers to children, remaining out of the work-
force to do this, which results in economic inequalities between men in women in both capitalist economies (such as Urras and New York City have). Le Guin exemplifies this in a subtle way, by showing Shevek—the utopian protagonist—a slice of Urrasti life.

Shevek is invited to one of his university colleague’s houses for dinner. Because this Urrasti family is comfortably upper middle class, they employ cooks, servants, and even nursemaids. But it is clear that the woman of the house, the wife, is in charge of these domestic duties—and supervises them for free—while her husband works at the university. The nursemaids are undoubtedly female, retaining women’s central role in caring for children across economic stratification layers in a capitalist economy. Shevek finds this arrangement somewhat distasteful and distinctly anti-Anarresti. "It seemed to Shevek a very small range of freedom, a very narrow family . . . " (Le Guin, 1969, p. 147).

In Woman on the edge of time, Piercy (1976) relates an extremely poignant scene between a young Connie and her mother, giving a much more passionate description of women’s role, and subsequent oppression, in a patriarchal nuclear family structure. Connie’s adolescent wish was to never grow up to be her mother, taking care of children and keeping house.

I won’t grow up like you Mama! To suffer and serve. Never to live my own life! I won’t!

You’ll do what women do. You’ll pay your debt to your family for your blood. May you love your children as much as I love mine.

You don’t love us girls the way you love the boys! It’s
everything for Luis and nothing for me, it's always been that way.

Never raise your voice to me. I'll tell your family. You sound like the daughters of the gangsters here.

I'm good in school. I'm going to college. You'll see!

The books made you sick! College? Not even Luis can go there.

I can! I'm going to get a scholarship. I'm not going to lie down and be buried in the rut of family, family, family! I'm so sick of that word, Mama! Nothing in life but having babies and cooking and keeping the house. Mamacita, believe me--oi-game, Mama--I love you! But I'm going to travel. I'm going to be someone!

There's nothing for a woman to see but troubles. (p. 47)

Not only does Connie pick up on the gender inequalities in the ways girls and boys are treated in a patriarchal family, but she also provides a passionate critique of the nuclear family structure and women's role in it. Unfortunately, Connie, as well as her sister and her niece, end up replicating a patriarchal nuclear family structure in various ways, and experiencing both joys and oppressions similar to what Connie's mother went through a generation earlier.

Contrary to their minimal descriptions of dystopian family life, both Le Guin and Piercy go into great detail describing child-rearing practices in their utopian worlds. Several pages of Le Guin's (1969) *The Dispossessed* are dedicated to chronicling Shevek's childhood experiences. We discover that there is no institutionalized nuclear family structure on Anarres, and after weaning, most children are given over to communal children's dormitories and learning centers to be raised together and watched over by "matrons" (p.
26). Though Le Guin steps away from women raising children inside a nuclear family structure, she does not step too far away from making women responsible, still, for infant care in the dormitories. However, since Anarres is a communist anarchy, the nursery matrons are not ghettoized into low-paying women's work. The gendered division of labor does not result in gender oppression.

Interestingly, however, the continuance of women being primarily caregivers in the communal dormitories is contrasted with Shevek's personal experience of having his father present, not his mother, during his childhood. Palat (Shevek's father) keeps in touch with Shevek in the dormitory, but we learn that Rulag (Shevek's mother) is a brilliant engineer who has been posted in a far away city, never to see her son. Palat explains to the nursery matron: "It's the Central Institute of Engineering that wants her, see. I'm not that good. Rulag has great work to do" (Le Guin, 1969, p. 27).

Though children are primarily raised communally in Le Guin's utopia, they still know who the biological parents are, which makes it harder to break the mindset of a nuclear family. It is clear that Le Guin's (1969) Anarresti childrearing practices articulate a critique of women's role as primary caregiver in the patriarchal nuclear family, but she does not step too far away from this ideal. In fact, when Shevek and Takver have a child, they decide--really against Odonian common practice--to keep her with them in their dormitory room for a long period of time, which is frowned upon.
For example, even when their daughter, Sadik, is ten years old (well past the age where she should be permanently residing in a children’s communal learning center), she still stays overnight with her parents at times.

. . . Shevek left her sitting on the front step of the dormitory, and went in to tell the vigilkeeper that she would be staying with the parents this night. The vigilkeeper spoke coldly to him. Adults who worked in children’s dormitories had a natural tendency to disapprove of overnight dorm visits, finding them disruptive. (p. 371)

Because there is still vaginal birth and breastfeeding by Anarresti women, it is still primarily women—the biological mothers—who take care of newborn infants, though the biological fathers participate much more than in traditional patriarchal nuclear family arrangements. For example, when Shevek and Takver get posted at different work locations that are thousands of miles apart, during an emergency time of drought and famine, Takver takes the child with her, primarily because she is still breastfeeding. Though Le Guin (1969) critiques a patriarchal gendered division of labor based on biology, she seems to suggest that where childrearing is concerned, a gendered division of labor itself—based on biological necessity—is perhaps a necessary and inevitable state of affairs. Takver explains:

Pregnant women have no ethics. Only the most primitive kind of sacrifice impulse. To hell with the book, and the partnership, and the truth, if they threaten the precious fetus! It’s a racial preservation drive, but it can work right against community; it’s biological, not social . . . . I think that’s why the old archisms used women as property. Why did the women let them? Because they were pregnant all the time—because they were already possessed, enslaved! (pp. 331-332)
So, while Le Guin's utopian counter-narrative keeps biological reproductive differences intact, even to the point of having women be primary caregivers to young infants in terms of breastfeeding, she still provides a critique of a normative patriarchal family structure where women suffer social oppression (e.g., economic) because of their biological differences. It seems clear that Le Guin is critiquing the nuclear family structure, as well as a gendered division of labor where childrearing is concerned, only in its patriarchal form. Because Le Guin's Anarres is a communist anarchy, the different childrearing tasks performed by men and women—indeed, necessitated by biology—do not translate into further social hierarchies or oppressions like they do on the patriarchal capitalist planet of Urras (and also in Piercy’s dystopian New York City).

The above analysis of childrearing practices on Anarres also fits in logically with my labelling of Le Guin’s perspective on reproduction as articulating a radical feminist notion of reproduction as liberation. In other words, it is not women’s biology that is the cause of their oppression, but the social structure of patriarchy—in the case of Urras, capitalist patriarchy—that is the primary cause of women’s oppression. So, if one structures political economy subversively in utopia—e.g., changing a capitalist patriarchy to a communist anarchy—biological differences between men and women can remain intact where childrearing (and reproduction) are concerned, and gender egalitarianism can still reign.

Piercy (1976) would most likely disagree. As her entire uto-
pian counter-narrative articulation of reproduction focuses on liberating women from their biological difference (which translates into social oppression), so does her discussion of childrearing practices eliminate women's role as primary caregiver. Again, technology serves Piercy well in this capacity. Whereas Le Guin's female protagonist, Takver, had to take the baby with her because of her biological breastfeeding capabilities, Luciente’s Mattapoissett residents have devised a way to make men biologically capable of breastfeeding infants! Connie is outraged! "She felt angry. Yes, how dare any man share that pleasure. These women thought they had won, but they had abandoned to men the last refuge of women" (p. 134).

Exactly! This is the key to Piercy's whole subversive utopian view, not only concerning reproduction, but also continuing on to childrearing. Luciente responds to Connie's passionate criticism by telling her about breastfeeding's integral role in intimacy and mothering. "We suspect loving and sensual enjoyment are rooted in being held and sucking and cuddling" (p. 135). Connie changes her mind and comes a bit closer to accepting the utopian view on men breastfeeding when she is allowed to observe a man--big, burly Barbarossa--breastfeed his infant.

He had breasts. Not large ones. Small breasts, like a flat-chested woman temporarily swollen with milk. Then with his red beard, his face of a sunburnt forty-five-year-old man, stern-visaged, long-nosed, thin-lipped, he began to nurse. The baby stopped wailing and begun to suck greedily. An expression of serene enjoyment spread over Barbarossa's intellectual schoolmaster’s face. He let go of the room, of everything, and floated. (p. 134)

In Piercy's (1976) utopia, not only is it crucial that men
participate in breastfeeding children, but it is integral to the maintenance of equality between men and women that the nuclear family be abolished. Le Guin's utopia insists on the abolition of the patriarchal nuclear family, but not necessarily the nuclear family structure itself. For in an anarchy (as opposed to a patriarchy), nothing--no one family structure--is institutionalized (except for the ideology that nothing should be institutionalized!). In contrast, Piercy's (1976) utopia calls for an outright elimination of the nuclear family structure itself. Luciente informs Connie: "Everyone raises the kids, haven't you noticed? Romance, sex, birth, children--that's what you fasten on. Yet that isn't women's business anymore. It's everybody's" (p. 251). Therefore, Mattapoissett residents apply in groups of three to comother children. Not only are there more than the traditional (nuclear family) two parents, but no child knows who his or her biological parents are. In addition, the three volunteer mothers--who can be men and/or women--are not genetically linked to the child they are mothering. And similar to Le Guin's utopia, children are raised communally in a separate children's house, where, for example, Connie observed Barbarossa breastfeeding his child. Though in Mattapoissett, unlike on Anarres, children remain in the children's house from birth until adulthood, and are not monitored by matrons running the house, but are raised by the entire community. All of these elements add up to a powerful articulation of counter-narrative childrearing practices that effectively smash the nuclear family unit, as well as
eliminate not only a patriarchal gendered division of labor (as does Le Guin's utopia), but a gendered division of labor itself where childrearing is concerned.

There is little mention at all of dystopian childrearing practices in Gearhart's City or in Charnas's Holdfast (save for the aforementioned taking away of the newborn infants after weaning and throwing them in the kit pits to be raised as slaves). However, from the utopian descriptions of childrearing we get from the communities of Hill Women and Riding Women, we can infer that patriarchal, as well as nuclear, family structures are being critiqued in these two counter-narratives.

Like the utopias of Le Guin and Piercy, key to the Hill Women and the Riding Women is an emphasis on communal childrearing. For example, the Hill Women structure their childrearing practices around a group called the "sevensisters" (Gearhart, 1979, p. 44). Each child—and all Hill Women children are female, remember—is mothered by seven women, one of which is the actual birth mother, referred to as the bearer or the "flesh mother" (p. 44). Like in all the utopias, this duty is on a volunteer basis, and if one does not want to mother, one can at least help the community educate and socialize the child. One Hill Woman reveals her desire not to mother:

It's children. They're not my favorite people. I need lots of distance from them still. I'm glad you're willing to take one on and I'll do my turns at the learnings but don't even hint that I be a sevensister much less a bearer . . . . (p. 44)

The Riding Women (Charnas, 1976) have a similar structure to
their childrearing, each child--again, all children are female--having five mothers; one bloodmother who carries and births the child, and four sharemothers who are the primary caregivers. One of the Riding Women remembers back to the connection she had with her favorite mother, known as her Heartmother:

Imagine, being so easy and happy with a grown woman who had suckled you and with whom your relations stretched back through your entire life! It was wonderful to bask on the edge of the ease the women had with each other, the rich connectedness. (p. 62)

Here, again, we see the institutionalization of communal mothering and childrearing. For the Riding Women--again with the aid of technology--all five mothers biologically lactate and share in the breastfeeding of young infants. Alldera (Charnas, 1978) is puzzled by this:

Though Baravan seemed to have no nursing cub of her own she did have milk, as indeed they all did. The sharemothers passed the cub around for a suckle at each one's breast before unrolling their bedding for the night. Milk, they said, came easily to them, and nursing was something Alldera would seldom have to do. She was relieved, for to her it was simply a boring, immobilizing job. (pp. 41-42)

In this case, Alldera is the bloodmother and the Riding Women are breastfeeding the baby born of a fem in order to hopefully transmit the parthenogenetic capability to Alldera's child. Coming from a dystopian place, Alldera finds the necessary task of breastfeeding boring and immobilizing--something a woman, a mother, has to do.

Because the utopian Hill and Riding Women live in lesbian separatist communities, they articulate a critique of patriarchal social structure by their very existence; this is implicit. By their
childrearing practices, it is evident that, again, the nuclear family is the childrearing institution being explicitly critiqued by the counter-narratives of Gearhart and Charnas. And because men are altogether absent from these two utopian communities, women are not oppressed—based on a gendered hierarchy—in their childrearing responsibilities. And whereas Le Guin’s utopian construction of women as primary caregivers out of biological necessity—though under a communist anarchy—is still somewhat problematic (because it presents a gendered division of labor where women have sole control of reproduction) this is not the case for Gearhart and Charnas, since men are wholly unpresent in their utopias.

So, all four utopias succeed—to varying degrees—in articulating structures that liberate women from the oppressive conditions of childrearing, as it is primarily manifested in the dystopian structure of the patriarchal nuclear family. This oppression is countered by constructing childrearing as a communal practice that holds men and women—in the cases of Le Guin and Piercy—or several women—in the cases of Gearhart and Charnas—responsible for the young. For Le Guin and Piercy, this equalizes the realm of childrearing for men and women in terms of power relations, thereby liberating women from the situation they face in the dystopian communities. Gearhart and Charnas also liberate women, not by equalizing the power relations between the sexes, but by separating women completely from their male counterparts into all-woman spaces.
The Structure of Violence: They Shall Not Harm?

All four authors make very explicit statements about dystopian violence, particularly as it is manifested in patriarchal systems of institutionalized inequalities. Across the writings of Piercy, Le Guin, Gearhart and Charnas, the brutal acts men commit against women and against each other in dystopia are part of the normal narrative articulations. And in all four cases it is men who are committing the crimes and controlling the institutions that serve to sanction dystopian violence. In light of this evidence of dystopian institutionalized violence, one would presume that all four utopian worlds would be free of violence, not only against women, but against anybody. Surprisingly, this is not the case, as I will show in the following analysis.

All four authors seem to suggest in the structures of their utopias that some violence is inevitable and should be tolerated in mild forms. The difference between the dystopian and utopian structures of violence, is that in the utopias violence is not institutionalized based on a system of inequality, gender or otherwise. That is, violence occurs predominantly as individual against individual (in the cases of Piercy and Le Guin), or as specifically woman against man (in the works of Gearhart and Charnas).

The dystopian examples of violence in Piercy's (1976) *Woman on the edge of time* are numerous. The most striking pattern is the horrible violence done to women, exemplified specifically in the life of Connie. Connie experiences violence at the hands of her
father when young, by her second husband, and also gets savagely
beaten by Dolly's pimp, Geraldo, in the opening scene of the novel.

Geraldo was her father, who had beaten her every week of her
childhood. Her second husband, who had sent her into emergency
with blood running down her legs. He was El Muro, who had
raped her and then beaten her because she would not lie to say
she had enjoyed it. (pp. 14-15)

Throughout the novel, she also experiences flashbacks of other epi-
sodes of violence done to her by men. For example, in her youth,
Connie was raped by an Anglo boy, which sent her running into the
hands of her first husband--Martin--for comfort. "From the cruelty
of the Anglo boy who had got her pregnant and then run in fright,
saying she could prove nothing, Martin had healed her" (Piercy,
1976, p. 214). After he is killed in a knife fight, Connie remar-
rries a man named Eddie who proceeds to beat the living daylights out
of her. When Connie learns from Luciente that she has special pow-
ers to connect with people from the future, her knowledge of this
extrasensory gift is mixed with remembrances of how Eddie had beaten
her.

Often when Eddie was about to strike her, she knew it and cow-
ered before he drew back his hand for a blow. If this was a
gift, she could not see what good it had ever done her. When
Eddie was going to hit her, he hit her anyhow. Maybe she had
a moment to raise an arm to protect her face, but if he knock-
ed her down it hurt as much. Her bruises were as sore and
shameful. Her tears were as bitter. (p. 44)

Knowing only a life of violence, Connie repeats the pattern
and ends up striking her own daughter. After Connie's most recent
lover, Claud, dies of complications from a syphilis experiment he
has been coerced into participating in while in jail, Connie goes
into a drug--and alcohol--induced stupor of grief. While in this state her daughter, Angelina, misbehaves and Connie strikes her. She is subsequently taken away from Connie and Connie is institutionalized for the first time. This brings up the issue of institutionalized discrimination and how it interacts with violence.

Piercy's (1976) novel explicitly deals with not only violence in relation to gender issues, but also the relation of violence to class and race inequalities. The example of the violence done to Claud--who is a poor, Black, blind man, thrown into jail for pickpocketing--is most definitely an example of institutionalized violence based on class as well as race. In this case, it is violence done by the medical establishment in cahoots with the legal system, causing not only Claud's death, but the death of several other inmates who happened to be primarily lower class men of color. Connie's violence against her daughter and subsequent experience with the social services system is also an example of how definitions and interpretations of violence are dependent upon institutionalized inequalities, in this case, based again on class and race. Connie--a poor, Chicana woman--is well aware of this and articulates it beautifully.

The social worker was giving her that human-to-cockroach look. Most people hit kids. But if you were on welfare and on probation and the whole social pigeon-holing establishment had the right to trek through your kitchen looking in the closets and under the bed, counting the bedbugs and your shoes, you had better not hit your kid once. (p. 26)

Perhaps the most significant example of institutionalized violence in Piercy's dystopia is the horrible experimentation done on
mental patients. Here we see the intersection of classism, racism (the only one of the four novels that explicitly deals with both of these issues) and sexism teaming up with a powerful medical establishment. Believing they can control episodic violence in mental patients--and eventually in prisoners, as well as in all populations deemed to be deviant--male scientists use Connie and her wardmates as guinea pigs. Electronic implants that are filled with psychotropic drugs are drilled into the patients' skulls, allowing the doctors to control various areas of the brain. Connie watches in horror as the doctors play with their first patient, a very sassy, vivacious Black woman named Alice (Piercy, 1976).

Tell us what you're experiencing, Alice.

I like you baby. Come here. Come close to Alice. That feel so good. You good to me now.


I mean hold her. I mean carefully! Redding barked.

A moment later Alice's face broke into a snarl and she jerked upright and lashed out at Fats [an attendant]. The nurse had to pile on to wrestle her.

Now once again let her go.

Doctor! We can't.

But Alice collapsed and began to giggle.

You see, we can electrically trigger almost every mood and emotion--the fight-or-flight reaction, euphoria, clam, pleasure, pain, terror . . . . (p. 204)

Eventually, the violence in dystopia escalates to the point where Connie believes she has no way out but to fight back with vio-
ence. In the conclusion of the novel, Connie very intentionally plots to kill the entire medical staff of doctors and assistants working on the brain control experiment. She does this by poisoning their coffee, without regret or remorse, for she is at war. Piercy (1976) goes on stating that

she washed her hands in the bathroom, she washed them again and again. I just killed six people, she said to the mirror, but she washed her hands because she was terrified of the poison. I murdered them dead. Because they are violence-prone. Theirs is the money and the power, theirs the poisons that slow the mind and dull the heart. Theirs are the powers of life and death. I killed them. Because it is war. (p. 375)

Piercy's utopian Mattapoissett is a place at war with dystopian forces. Futuristic cyborgs and machines fight with utopian residents for control of the world. All Mattapoissett residents are trained in self-defense techniques, weapons and machinery, and military service is rotated on a voluntary basis. Piercy's utopia is not violence-free. However, though these violent forces are present in utopia, they are not a part of the utopian philosophies or practices that structure how Luciente and her people think of violence, or how they conduct themselves within their utopian system.

Because violence and crime are virtually non-existent in Mattapoissett, there is no formal law enforcement, no police, and no legal institution. However, in this tightly-knit Gemeinschaft community, violence is not much tolerated. Rape is unheard of, though assaults and sometimes murders do occur. Connie is told that one who commits violence towards another may be forgiven once and may do penance by giving presents, going through healing rituals, being
exiled, or doing remote labor. But in this society that doesn’t even have a judicial system, a person who commits a second violent offense is immediately executed by the people of the community. "Second time someone uses violence, we give up. We don’t want to watch each other or to imprison each other. We aren’t willing to live with people who choose to use violence. We execute them" (Piercy, 1976, p. 209). So, in Piercy’s utopia, the threat of ultimate violence—death by execution—is the price the society must pay in order to have a generally low level of violence. So in this case, not only are sanctions against violence not gendered in utopia, they also are not based in racial and/or class inequalities.

There is also a war raging on Le Guin’s dystopian planet Urras. From the first moment Shevek arrives on the planet, he gets the distinct feeling that he is not being told the whole story. He is only allowed to associate with the upper class Urrasti, is kept almost exclusively in the company of university men, and is told he must not leave the city of A-Io. Through talks with his manservant, Shevek learns that there is an entire class of people he has not been informed about—the lower class. These people are revolutionaries and consider themselves to be brothers to the Anarresti Odonians, who had initially come from the lower class of the planet Urras. A revolutionary group in the Urrasti city of Benbili are trying to overthrow a dictatorship there, and Shevek learns of this war at the same time he discovers he has been duped as to the existence of a highly stratified class system on Urras.
Eventually Shevek finds his people--revolutionary Odonians--in a neighboring city to A-Io and decides he might help them in their cause against the current oppressive government. The Anarresti are a peaceful people, and Shevek never imagines the Urrasti government will respond to the protestors with violence. A horrible bloodbath ensues at a non-violent rally in the streets. Shevek finds himself running, literally, for dear life amidst a sea of wounded and dead Urrasti bodies. According to Le Guin (1969),

the helicopter fire centered on the people who stood on or nearest the steps of the Directorate. The columned portico of the building offered immediate refuge to those on the steps, and within moments it was jammed solid. The noise of the crowd, as people pressed in panic toward the eight streets that led out of Capitol Square, rose up into a wailing like a great wind. The helicopters were close overhead, but there was no telling whether they had ceased firing or were still firing; the dead and wounded in the crowd were too close pressed to fall. (p. 301)

Like in Piercy's New York City, we again have the institutionalization of violence, this time in the guise of the military/governmental system. In this case it is class-based and is used as a means to control the revolution of an economically oppressed group.

Unlike in Piercy's Mattapoisett, where individual violence against another is only tolerated once and is rare, everyday violence in mild form is a part of Anarresti life. "They were neither offended nor attracted by simple violence. Shevek did not call for help, so it was nobody's business but his own" (Le Guin, 1969, p. 51). In this utopian anarchy, individual violence is considered a matter between individuals and is not a matter for community intervention unless one of the parties involved explicitly asks for
help. In this example, Shevek scuffles with a man while on a very demanding work assignment. Both are minimally hurt and are allowed to duke it out, so to speak, and that is the end of it.

We also infer that a somewhat rare practice of what we could call mass violence is tolerated, sometimes occurring when differing factions just can’t seem to see eye to eye on an issue. Since in an anarchy there are essentially no rules and no government, one of the ways in which the utopian people express community disapproval and anger over an individual’s actions, is to beat him or her up! For example, when Shevek decides he will travel to the dystopian mother planet of Urras, several community members strongly believe Anarres should remain isolationist. So, they turn up at the launch pad to send Shevek off with a beating (Le Guin, 1969).

Some of them had come there to kill a traitor. Others had come to prevent him from leaving, or to yell insults at him, or just to look at him; and all these others obstructed the sheer brief path of the assassins. None of them had firearms, though a couple had knives. Assault to them meant bodily assault; they wanted to take the traitor into their own hands. (p. 4)

This situation was far worse than any the Anarresti had dealt with before. As it turns out, some pursue Shevek to the spaceship and begin throwing rocks at him. One of the crew members actually gets killed. We infer that this violence goes unpunished and no one seems greatly upset by it. In other words, Le Guin seems to be saying that a certain amount of violence against individuals is to be expected as well as tolerated, even in utopia.

Gearhart and Charnas are much more focused on institutional-
ized violence against women in their dystopian societies. Gearhart's (1979) novel opens with the Hill Women finding a City woman, Margaret, wandering around in the wilderness wearing a suit of armor. She has been raped by some City men.

Two men. She was taken by two men. In the short hills far east of the City. Then they dressed her in that armor as a joke. Took it out of some school museum and set her loose laughing and throwing rocks at her as she scrambled away from them through the brush. (p. 21)

The most horrific examples of institutionalized violence against women are during the time of the The Purges in the City, a not-so-long-ago period in the Hill Women's dystopian past. Deviant women, particularly lesbian women, were systematically purged from the City. I've already mentioned the initiation of these purges—the curfews, the marriage rules, and the clothing restrictions. However, these sanctions eventually escalated into full-fledged violence against groups of deviant women. Women were gassed, burned, tortured and shot (Gearhart, 1979).

Machine guns, Cissy! That's a bullet wound! Melva jerked back the covers from the small sleeping woman and pointed to her thigh. Blood in the streets, real live honest-to-god blood running all over the sidewalks and cars. I'm paying my goddam taxes to have them spill women's blood! (p. 147)

There are even mentionings of a new sport invented by the City men, known as Cunt Hunts. This occurred before the Earth revolted against the violence men were committing against Her and the population of women, after several City women had escaped to the wilderness.

Gearhart (1979) goes on:

Cunt Hunts they were called: small bands of men, usually three or four at most, packed up what gear they would need and set
out for the day or the weekend to see what womanflesh they
could find in the hills. Sometimes they got permission from
the owners of the land who—with a quiet wife hovering in the
background—usually granted it for a price. Other times they
roamed the back roads indiscriminately, night and day, with
spotlights and 'scope rifles, often drunk, often loud, always
together, and always dangerous. Eileen had described for them
all an encounter with such men. She had been raped again and
again, beaten, teased, tortured and disfigured, then left
alive only because the men had passed out long enough for her
to crawl away. Most others who were caught weren’t that lucky.
(p. 160)

As mentioned before, Gearhart’s (1979) novel can be classified
as demonstrating an eco-feminist perspective, concentrating not just
on women’s oppression, but articulating a link between pillaging the
Earth and harming women. It is not just women who are raped and op­
pressed by men in the City, but it is also the Earth and her ani­
mals. For example, along with Margaret, the Hill Women also find a
buck that had been shot to death for sport, presumably by City men.

We found a woodland buck in the outland scree. It had been
shot-killed. Shot and left? asked Alaka. Yes. Not even the
taken? No. They want only does. Alaka stopped suddenly
dizzy. She eased herself to the ground with an audible cry.
(p. 15)

A similar reaction occurs when one of the Hill Women’s beloved dogs
steps into a steel trap that had been laid out by the City men. In­
deed, the Hill Women mourn just as strongly for animals as they do
for women. Women and nature are connected in their minds. In keep­
ing with their essentialist philosophy about men’s inherently vio­
lent nature, the Hill Women live by a very important credo: "Women
and men cannot yet, may not ever, love one another without violence;
they are no longer of the same species" (Gearhart, 1979, p. 115).

The utopian Hill Women do not tolerate any violence against
one another, similar to Piercy’s Mattapoisett residents. The women are free to harm themselves, but never, ever to harm another woman. However, violence against City men is considered to be a necessary way of life, a righteous act of liberating both women and the Earth from the murderous power of men. Gearhart (1979) states that

Seja was a warrior—strong, righteous, brave, committed. She rode bare-breasted under a brilliant helm of crescent horns and flanked by bold and bright-clad sisters. Stonefaced, powerful, beautiful, highly-trained and self-disciplined, she was the virgin, the one- unto-herself, the spirit of the untrodden snow, whose massive hands were as unflinching in battle as they were gentle in love. And her sword rang on the shields of men who dared to violate the sanctity of womankind. Here was no passive damsel, here none of the forgiveness of the soft supine woman. He who rapes must die. A simple maxim by which to live your life, by which to die yourself if that is necessary. (p. 25)

Seja is a typical Hill Woman defending her wilderness and her sisters against the forces of City men. However, when confronted with an armed female intruder in the wilderness, Seja’s warrior-like fierceness dissipates into a mutual respect for other women. Two other Hill Women—Jacqua and Diana—observe this act of faith (Gearhart, 1979).

Jacqua gasped. Diana held her and with shortstretch urged her to silence. Now Seja was lying on the ground on her back. She forced a piece of an old log beneath her head. Jacqua was incredulous. She must be crazy, she whispered. Seja, in the face of danger and even death, was lying down as if to sleep. In silence Seja looked at the woman with weapons, then with deliberate calm she closed her eyes and pushed her head back over the wood so that her neck was fully exposed. (p. 5)

The woman drops her weapons and is welcomed into the Hill Woman camp. Such is the gendered structure of utopian violence in Gearhart.
Like Gearhart's City, Charnas's (1978) Holdfast is filled with examples of institutionalized violence, sometimes against men, but mostly against women. "In the bloody confusion of fighting there--men killing other men and their femmish slaves over food--she [Alldera] had made her lone escape" (p. 11). I've already covered the sexual violence done to the Holdfast slave women, the rapes and the constant_birthings of more children to fill the masters' slave ranks. It was not uncommon for a master to beat his fem pet to keep her in line. Daya--a free fem who has escaped from the Holdfast--tells her story.

He let out a roar, Merika [another fem] shrieked and bolted, and I was left standing there too startled to move. Charkin snatched up a broiling spit that he'd just eaten clean. He lunged and drove it through my face from one side to the other! I_ felt it tear my cheeks and smash two teeth, and my mouth filled up with blood. (p. 55)

The dystopian Holdfast (Charnas, 1978) structure of violence against women follows the free fems out onto the Plains. Their society is free of men, but some of the stronger free fems take it upon themselves to keep others in line by using physical violence. At one point, Alldera decides to leave the Riding Women and try to live with the free fems--her own kind. When she gets in a disagreement with their leader, Elnoa, and blatantly disobeys her, several of the women who used to be labor fems beat her severely.

The sentries turned Alldera over and carried her away by shoulders and ankles. Daya saw the dirt and blood streaked over her face and chest. Her head hung back, eyes closed, in that horrible, loose way Daya remembered from the days when the men of the Holdfast used to bring in captured runaway fems and give them over to be hunted through the holiday streets to their deaths. (p. 135)
Ironically enough, when Elnoa discovers Alldera had been beaten, she reprimands the offenders saying: "We do not use the master’s ways here" (p. 135). However, it is clear that they do.

The free fems have a great plan—to return to the Holdfast (Charnas, 1978), capture and/or kill all the men, and free the rest of the women (and presumably the children).

It was Elnoa’s idea. According to her, the free fems would one day slip past the Mares’ [Riding Women] patrols and return to the Holdfast, where they would infiltrate the population and take over, capturing the men and freeing the fems enslaved there. (p. 113)

This is a society of women struggling to escape the violent ways of the Holdfast, the only way of life they have ever known. But, they continually emulate the violent power relations of the Holdfast men, seemingly not able to get away from dystopian ways. In fact, the third novel in Charnas’s trilogy--The furies (1994)--opens with a quote by Elizabeth Cady Stanton that sets the tone for the violence that will occur in the course of enacting their great plan:

When I think of all the wrongs that have been helped upon womankind, I am ashamed that I am not forever in a condition of chronic wrath, stark mad, skin and bone, my eyes a fountain of tears, my lips overflowing with curses, and my hand against every man and brother! (p. 10)

The utopian Riding Women, like Gearhart’s Hill Women, are a violent group of women. Also like the Hill Women, killing men is considered a necessity by the Riding Women, though it rarely occurs. The most renowned man-killer, Sheel, "had killed a total of seven men during a dozen patrols in her lifetime" (Charnas, 1978, p. 16). And like the Hill Women, the Riding Women consider it to be man’s
nature to be violent. In describing men, the Riding Women contend that

they were truly the sons’ sons of those world killers, the desert makers of Ancient times; torturers and thieves by nature, wherever they went they left scars. The borderlands were disfigured by the stumps of the trees they cut, the pits they dug and left heaped all around with cast-up earth, the scattered charcoal of the huge and dangerous fires they lit to ease their fears of the dark. (p. 17)

The Riding Women’s ideological justification for killing men?

"Everyone knows we should kill men because men are dangerous and crazy" (p. 28). The Riding Women are living a secret existence out on the Plains. They do not want men wandering in the wilderness, discovering a society of free women, and going back to the Holdfast to tell other men. The killing of men is a survival strategy, just as it is for the Hill Women.

Interestingly, however, the Riding Women also stage mock violence against one another—something the Mattapoisett residents, the Anarresti, and the Hill Women do not do. For example, they organize raids to steal material goods and even hostages from neighboring camps, as well as play incredibly violent games in which women can be and often are injured. These practices allow for the distribution of scarce resources (food as well as people) to the scattered Riding Women camps, as well as provide an outlet for energies. Sheel realizes that she needs the cathartic effect produced by the games playing they do: "Sheel craved the cleansing power of violence, the release. A good, rough game of pillo gave that" (Charnas, 1978, p. 215).
But even in the face of all of this apparent violence, the Riding Women do not consider themselves a violent people. Killing a woman of a Motherline tribe, or even a fem, is the only act of violence considered to be a very dangerous offense, punishable by the giving of horses for penance, or even death. For example, one of the fiercest Riding Women--Sheel--is negligent in her patrol and almost causes the death of a pregnant and starving Alldera in the course of her escape from the Holdfast. This is a very serious offense and Sheel is heavily fined for her mistake. Sheel thinks she will be fined in the traditional way--by the giving of horses to the injured party, in this case, Alldera. This is not to be. "Nenisi answered, 'the fem has no use for your horses. But there is her child. You must forfeit half your home herd to the child of the fem Alldera'" (Charnas, 1978, p. 29). For a nomadic community that lives on their horses, this is the harshest of punishments, second only to death.

What's important to remember when comparing the articulations of structures of violence between the dystopian and the utopian worlds, is to look for the institutionalization of violence based on a hierarchy of inequality. This kind of structure appears as the normal narrative in all four dystopian worlds, though it is manifested in different ways. Piercy's and Le Guin's dystopian violence structures are institutionalized based primarily on class inequalities, with Piercy's also demonstrating institutionalization practices based on race and gender. Gearhart's and Charnas's dystopian
violence structures are heavily based on institutionalized violence against women.

Though we can safely say that violence is still present in utopia, it is in no way articulated as being institutionalized based on a system of inequality in any of the four novels, primarily because all four utopian counter-narratives have a political economy and a resulting social structure based on equality. For example, one might argue that the violence the Hill Women and the Riding Women commit against men is institutionalized—built into the very structures of their communities. However, because both of these utopian communities are all-woman separatist societies, the violence is no longer based on power inequities. The egalitarian Hill and Riding Women are issuing violence from a basis of equality, as they are no longer a part of the patriarchal dystopian communities of the City or the Holdfast. And I would argue that though both the Hill Women and the Riding Women articulate essentialist gender ideologies—that is, they believe men are inherently violent and irredeemable—they do not stage war or even mass violence against men. They simply use violence—primarily against individual men—only to defend the new utopian spaces they have created for themselves. In contrast, the dystopian men actively purge (in Gearhart’s example) or enslave (in Charnas’s novel) women, as a group. In all four utopian counter-narratives, women—as a group—are freed from the confines of institutionalized patriarchal violence.
CONCLUSIONS

The Promise of Feminist Utopia

... how do feminist utopian discourses which effect in various ways the construction of hope and the naming of desire, inform and/or transform the production of power? ... To read these signs, I locate moments of impossibility spoken into possibility. (Casciato, 1996, p. 5)

My goal for this study was to identify the social structures and resulting gender relations of power articulated through the medium of feminist utopian fiction written and published in America during the 1970s. Through the construction of dystopian normal narratives and the reconstruction of utopian counter-narratives, each novel succeeded in equalizing or eliminating the power relations between women and men by articulating a discourse of gender subversion in the arena of sexual politics, though their strategies for accomplishing this task varied.

Some reflection on the strategic use of science fiction versus pastoral landscapes, as well as gender egalitarianism versus separatism, is needed. We can view Piercy and Le Guin as utilizing the utopian sub-genre of science fiction as a medium for the articulation of counter-narratives that provide a basis for reconstructing egalitarian worlds where women and men share power and live together in harmony with technology. Both Piercy and Le Guin view technology and science as potentially liberating forces for oppressed people.
They also both indicate that it is not technology itself that is oppressive, but it becomes so when one group has power over its application, as is the case in both Piercy's and Le Guin's dystopias. Liberation for these two authors is the equalizing of sexual politics through the egalitarian sharing of technology and the non-hierarchical application of science.

In their more pastoral utopias, Gearhart and Chamas articulate counter-narratives of women's separatism that effectively liberate women from the oppression done to them by men under patriarchy. In contrast to Piercy and Le Guin, gendered power relations are eliminated not by destroying hierarchies based on gender, but by taking men out of the equation altogether. For these two authors, men are intolerable and technology itself is primarily patriarchal by definition. Though, we know (in Chamas's text) or can infer (in Gearhart's text) that in part science and technology are responsible for the Hill Women's and the Riding Women's parthenogenesis. But apart from the acquisition and application of reproductive technology, the utopian women in both novels reject any further contact with technology. Therefore, both Gearhart and Chamas articulate utopian environments that are free from men and technology, desiring to reiterate the mythical connection between women and nature in women-only spaces.

So, what are we now to do with the information gathered and presented in the analyses and discussion sections? What have we learned regarding feminist utopian fiction and its relation to soc-
sociology? I believe the answer lies in the relationship between feminist utopia and praxis.

The term praxis is often bantered about in sociological conversations. However, its meaning is ambiguous and often not fully understood. I was surprised to find a couple of primary though competing definitions of praxis used in the discipline. And, I was wholly chagrined to discover that out of the dozen or so sociological encyclopedias and dictionaries I leafed through, an entry for praxis could be found in only two of them!

Jacobs (1974) gives the first definition of praxis as: "application or use, as distinguished from theory" (p. 220). In this sense praxis is synonymous with action or practice and is intellectually separate from thinking or theory. This creates an epistemological dichotomy that artificially divorces the realm of conceptualizing from the realm of doing. However, we can still apply this definition to feminist utopia and evaluate its usefulness.

Written texts can be viewed as mediators of power relations in a literate society (Smith, 1990). Feminist utopias in particular are sociological sites for the articulation of subversive discourses that undermine hegemonic power relations. If we take the first definition of praxis and apply it to feminist utopia, we see that the utopian counter-narratives can be viewed as theoretical--as blueprints for potential action in the future. In this context, the significance of feminist utopia lies in the power the novels have as a mediating force, as a site for the creation and articulation of
subversive discourses. In order to effectively construct and critique a dystopian world, an author must have consciousness and knowledge of the hegemonic forces at work in the larger society; this is articulated in the dystopian normal narratives. In the subversive possibilities offered in the utopian worlds, a promise of alternative structures and ways of being is articulated. Once articulated, a subversive discourse is now available to any reader of the novel. These counter-narrative discourses—whether they be about sexual politics, political economy, or the division of labor—can now provide the basis for action—for praxis—in the real world. In this case the promise of feminist utopian fiction is not only the theoretical promise of hope, but the promise of potential future change.

The above is one way of relating feminist utopia to sociological praxis, though I believe a second definition of praxis is much more useful and helpful. The second and by far the most popular usage of the concept of praxis is Marxist in origin. Karl Marx envisioned a dialectical relationship between theory and practice, a unity of thought and action (Jacobs, 1974, p. 220; Kilminster, 1979, p. 8). This is in contrast to the first definition's focus on a dichotomous, oppositional relationship between theory and practice.

Marx (quoted in Kitching, 1988) wrote:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst of architects from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his [sic] structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour process we get a result that al-
ready existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realises a purpose of his own. (p. 27)

As humans we are not only thinkers or only doers—we are both, and the processes involved in the two realms are interrelated in a reciprocal relationship. As Jacobs (1974) writes, theory "not only gives rise to and is tested by praxis; it also is developed by praxis, for theory accompanies the praxis at all times" (p. 221).

Applying this Marxist definition of praxis to feminist utopia, we see that not only does its significance lie in the theoretical realm—through the articulation of discourses of gender subversion—but also in the action realm. Through the writing and reading processes involved in the creation and experience of feminist utopia, active transformations are occurring. No longer is feminist utopia equivalent to static theory that provides a guide to potential future action, but feminist utopia becomes praxis itself—theoretically informed action. In the production and consumption of feminist utopian novels lies not just the hope for potential change, but the promise of transformative action, for in the Marxist sense, praxis contributes "to the humanizing of [women] by transforming existing reality in the direction of overcoming alienation" (Jacobs, 1974, p. 220).

Not only can we view feminist utopia as praxis, but as feminist praxis. Feminist utopia (as mentioned before) is a politically charged site, as all feminist projects are. There is one ultimate goal in mind: to eliminate women's oppression. The novels of
Piercy, Le Guin, Gearhart, and Charnas articulate four feminist solutions that each author believes could liberate women. As Stanley (1990) writes:

[Feminist praxis] is rather an indication of a continuing shared feminist commitment to a political position in which knowledge is not simply defined as knowledge what but also as knowledge for. Succinctly the point is to change the world, not only to study it. (p. 15).

So, it is my contention that it is useful to view feminist utopia as praxis in the Marxist sense of the word—as theoretically informed, revolutionary action. In the case of this study, the praxis revolves around articulating solutions to women's oppression in the arena of sexual politics. These articulations and resulting discourses can by viewed as transformative actions, guided by feminist theories, that aim for revolutionary change, the goal being the elimination of women's oppression. And as Bammer (1982) so eloquently points out for us, revolutionary change necessitates a utopian imagination that dialectically and reflexively cycles within the unity of theory and action.

Revolutionary thinking must believe in the possibility of the impossible; it must be bold and it must be visionary. A utopian consciousness, therefore, is fundamental to a truly radical theory. Indeed, to the degree that such a consciousness embodies an essentially transformative moment, it changes the traditional concept of theory itself. For as radical thought, theory can no longer be seen as separate from practice. In the process of acting upon us, such theory itself becomes important practice. (pp. 11-12)

Feminist utopian fiction is just one site for praxis, for revolutionary changes to occur that will liberate oppressed peoples—in this case, women. Though the audience reached by feminist uto-
pia is small, the subversive seeds planted by the discourses in the books written by Piercy, Le Guin, Gearhart, and Charnas and others like them may someday germinate into a large scale social revolution. This is the ultimate promise of feminist utopia.
Appendix A

Thirteen Books Used to Achieve the Final Data Set
Thirteen Books Used to Achieve the Final Data Set


BIBLIOGRAPHY


121


