"One Is Not Born a Woman; One Becomes One"
Perpetuating Gender Roles in the Dystopian Novels *Brave New World* and *The Giver*

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Introduction

“One is not born a woman; one becomes one.” These immortal words were written by the French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir to explain what she saw as fact, that women and men are conditioned into gender roles by cultural conventions. This idea of cultural conventions is of great interest to today’s educators as they try to fulfill the principles set forth in the Swedish national curriculum. These principles are: “the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable” (Skolverket 3). If one believes, as de Beauvoir did, that our gender is culturally constructed then, in order to fulfill the principles one must change, or at least modify, our culture. There are many different ways of doing this, but in a democratic society, it can be argued, cultural and social change is best achieved through debate. How then is debate achieved? In a didactic setting debate can often be achieved through presenting opposing viewpoints, or different world views, and one excellent way of presenting these differing viewpoints is through studying fictional literature. One literary genre that lends itself well to this is dystopian and utopian literature, since, as Susan Stewart points out, it is didactic in nature. By studying different dystopian novels one can contrast the novels to each other and to our current society, thus achieving a basis for debate. Currently teachers can also capitulate on a

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1 As the two novels discussed in this thesis lend themselves best to discussions with slightly older students the national curriculum referred to will be Curriculuim for the non-compulsory school system Lpf 94 (Lpf 94) which covers the three last years of secondary school in Sweden.

2 Culture in this essay will be used in the sense of the Merriam-Webster definition: “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also : the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time <popular culture> <southern culture> c : the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization <a corporate culture focused on the bottom line> d : the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic” (Merriam-Webster). Although no one can say that there is a uniform culture even within a country there are certain values on which many western countries rest upon and for the purpose of this essay these values will be seen as based on the shared history.
growing trend for dystopian novels present in the Young Adult (YA)\textsuperscript{3} market, as is evidenced by a recent article by Karen Springen. Although Springen highlights new books in this genre there are several older books that also fit the mould and that have been used in teaching. This essay will focus on two such novels that are commonly used within education (see e.g. Lundahl) – Aldous Huxley’s \textit{Brave New World} (1932) and Lois Lowry’s \textit{The Giver} (1993).

Both novels have been considered ground breaking in their representation of dystopian societies but few studies have been done regarding questions of gender in them. June Deery has conducted an interesting study regarding the representation of gender in \textit{Brave New World} on which this essay will partly rely as supportive evidence. Most other research, however, is more concerned with themes such as technology or class structures. With regards to \textit{The Giver} much research has gone into the concept of “sameness” that is present in the novel, that is, the lack of diversity. This lack of diversity, although distinct from questions of gender representations, does provide evidence that can be utilised when discussing the novel from a feminist perspective as it concerns constructions of the Other. Although previous research on these two novels has not centred around representations of gender as such, this essay will argue that they are useful for discussing issues regarding gender representation as they offer subtle clues to gender both in their dystopian societies and in ours. These types of subtle clues, feminist theorists have argued, keep patriarchal structures in place and perpetuate gender stereotypes, precisely the type of behaviour that the Swedish national curriculum is trying to avoid.

In order to enhance our understanding the novels from a feminist perspective the essay will first present a short discussion of current feminist theory and how it can be applied to novels in general. It will then go on to a short discussion of why dystopian and utopian novels are

\textsuperscript{3} Young adult is for the purpose of this essay assumed to be those aged between 12 and 18 as per Michael Cart’s White paper to the Young Adult Library Service Association (Cart n.p.) as this age group also covers the compulsory English A course within Lpf 94.
valuable to study in light of the national curriculum. Further, it will go into some more detail regarding previous research on these two novels to present a context in which this study provides additional information. Finally it will discuss how gender is represented in the two novels in regards to the following aspects: characterisation, relationships (family, friends, sexual), reproduction and work. These aspects are chosen as they answer questions such as, How is gender represented in the novels? and What do the novels say about women's equal opportunities? The essay will argue that the two dystopian novels, *Brave New World* and *The Giver*, although having the opportunity, through their genre, to explore and critique the status quo, ultimately fail to challenge traditional and conventional gender roles and representations, and to present possibilities for change. Therefore, a class discussion of these two novels must go beyond the confines of the purely fictional worlds depicted in the novels in order to make the students see their own world in a new light and make connections to the values put forth in Lpf94.

**Feminism**

Feminist theory can be seen as a collective term for widely differing theories regarding what feminist theory is, if there should be a feminist theory at all, and if so, how it should be applied with regards to gender and gender roles. Much of the disagreements within what would traditionally be called feminist theory are contained in the disagreements between the Anglo-American faction and the French faction⁴, but there is also significant disagreement within these theoretical schools. This essay will now discuss some of the aspects these approaches have in common as they apply to the ideas discussed in this essay.

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⁴ These factions are not exclusively along nation lines anymore but rather the countries signify where the movements started (Moi)
One aspect that most (if not all) feminist critics agree upon is that there has been a historical subjugation of women by patriarchal structures (Mill 1; Millett 25), and this in turn has led to the conclusion that “in feminist theory, the legitimacy of institutional authority demands that social and political institutions cease to reinforce the subordination of females by males” (Little 27). Further, feminist theorists have argued that this subjugation has come into force through the establishment of character traits that are considered feminine or masculine. These traits often line up in the following way: women are “irrational, nature, passive, bad, body, chaos, sickly, subordinate and incomplete” (Little 200) whereas male attributes are considered to be: “rational, human, active, good, mind, order, healthy, complete and dominant” (Little 200) with the male traits valued higher than the female ones (Millett 25-26; Moi 33). By delineating traits along gender lines critics have claimed that the patriarchal structures are maintained, keeping women from achieving their full potential. It is also often the case that jobs and tasks are divided according to these perceived notions of gender based identity. Feminist critics argue that this type of essentialism hinders society, as much as women, and is something they would prefer did not exist. Some feminist theorists argue that in order to change these structures a radical change must take place putting women completely in charge, while others assert that it is more effective to change within the system (Little 15-29, 38). Here utopian and dystopian literature has an opportunity to explore how these changes could look, were they to be implemented.

The often cited quote by Simone de Beauvoir: “One is not born a woman; one becomes one” is at the heart of the debate regarding traits that are often seen as essentially female or essentially male. De Beauvoir’s assertion is that the traits that had so long been considered masculine or feminine were mere constructs of our society, constructs that are perpetuated willingly or unwillingly (Millett 25, 42, 46; Moi 23). It is now generally accepted that gender is
at least in part a cultural construct, and, at least in Sweden, the societal will is that these perceived essential traits are at least considered equal (Skolverket) and that no trait is to be seen as better than another, something which Millett argues has been the case in the past (26). What one cannot argue against is that these traits often determine what is seen as “male” jobs and “female” jobs. One needs only to consider the job of nursing (which is in some shape or form featured in both novels discussed). In our society a nurse is taken to mean a female as a male is often (if not always) given the qualifier “male” nurse. This is of great significance when one studies the novels in this essay as it will be argued that they primarily keep these gender stereotypes intact.

The delineation of the male and female traits have been going on for centuries (Little 200) but through the work of Derrida and other theorists the deconstruction of binary oppositions has taken on a significant role in feminist theory through the analysis of the Other. Following the structuralism of linguistics Derrida maintained that words only gain significance when set against other words (Moi 96), which means that female is only female when compared to male. The two words in and of themselves have no inherent value attached to them; it is only through patriarchal culture and associations with other binary opposites as those previously outlined that the concept of female has come to signify the opposite of male. Some would even argue that female can be seen as not male, and thus the construction of the female as the Other has taken place. The female as the Other is of central importance in placing her in a lower role than the male and giving her less power both in society at large and in the smaller power structures, such as the family.

One of the aspects of patriarchal society that often comes under fire from feminist critics, one that is often changed in literature from the current status quo, is that of the family (Little 27;
Millett 33). Millett and others are of the opinion that the family is simply an extension of patriarchal structures in society at large and that this particular structure damages women in particular (Little 27; Millett 33). This aspect of feminist theory will be studied in conjunction with *Brave New World* and *The Giver* as the two novels take a radically different approach to families. As will be see, the representation of family is a dividing aspect in utopian and dystopian literature in general.

**Utopias and Dystopias**

Although this essay deals with two dystopian societies one cannot easily talk about dystopias without also considering what a utopia is. Plato’s *Republic* was perhaps the first utopia (Booker 5), but the term utopia was coined in Sir Thomas More’s novel *Utopia* (Little 13). The word utopia comes from the Greek words *ou* (no) and *topos* (place) meaning that utopia literally means no place. Little points out the irony in More naming his ideal place a no place, thus implying that a perfect place simply cannot exist (13). The word utopia has since come to symbolize not only the human longing “for a perfect world” (Gross 116) but also the question “given certain social conditions, how would human beings react, change, develop?” (Firchow, *Modern* 10). Essentially the utopian novel can be seen as an extended hypothesis.

Booker states that utopias and dystopias are not opposites of each other but rather “parts of the same project” (15). Dystopias, he goes on to argue, are merely the present day version of the utopias of Plato and More. In our postmodern society we are not posed to believe that a perfect society exists, but since “one man’s utopia is another man’s dystopia” (Booker 15) we would be unable to fully agree on what constitutes a utopian society anyway (Firchow, *Modern* 8).
What experts on dystopian literature most often agree upon is that dystopian (as well as utopian) novels all present some form of critique of the current society or where they see the current society heading. As such “they are often openly didactic” (Stewart 28). As dystopian novels are didactic in nature they are ideal to use within the classroom in order to fulfil the goals of Lpf94: “the inviolability of human life, individual freedom and integrity, the equal value of all people, equality between women and men, and solidarity with the weak and vulnerable” (Skolverket 3). By discussing how dystopian novels treat these issues students are be able to draw parallels to their own society, and to analyze how they critique current society.

The two central questions that dystopian novels ask, “(1) what constitutes the good life? (ethics); and (2) what is human nature really like? (biology and/or psychology)” (Firchow, Modern 8), open up ways for students to enter a profitable discussion. In addition these are also questions that feminist critiques must ask of a novel and, as Firchow points out, of any society. Since dystopian novels attempt to show what our society could become if we continue on the present course they are well suited to look at issues such as gender roles. In Utopia More perpetuates the idea of male superiority over female (Little 18) but feminist critics would argue that this does not have to be the case. If constructing a new fictional society, then why not change the gender roles?

Under the heading of “what constitutes the good life” (Firchow, Modern 8) the question of social order can be placed. How are individuals cared for? What is the power structure? These questions are of significance for feminist critics as all feminist schools of thought agree that the traditional patriarchal structure is damaging to women. How this should be changed however is a point on which they disagree. The traditional way of organising the care of an individual is through the family unit. The opposite way is through the state. There are of course points in
between. When one looks at the forefathers of utopian literature, Plato and More, one is faced with the fact that these two individuals wanted to organise societies at the extreme ends of this spectrum. Plato believed that traditional family structures should be abolished and decisions should be made for the good of the state (Little 5). More, however, believed that the traditional family structures should be kept (More and Morely n.p.). These differences are of note because in utopian and dystopian novels they both lead to the same order, a loss of individual control in favour of control by a hierarchical structure\(^5\), often patriarchal in order. However, as will be seen, Plato’s order creates a society that is quite different from our own whereas More’s vision creates a society that is similar; this difference can therefore be of importance when discussing these issues in a school setting. These are the aspects of dystopian and utopian novels that are of significance for this essay. The essay will now consider the previous research on the two novels.

**Previous Research on Brave New World**

Much of the previous research on Huxley’s *Brave New World* has centred around the dangers of a consumerist society (signified by the worship of “Our Ford”), the dangers in the ideas of Freud (aptly signified in the worship of “Our Freud”) and as an extension of the ideas of Freud, a society where today’s pleasure rules over history as history shows different ways of living life, thus destabilizing the status quo (Firchow, *Modern* 69) as well as around the view of women and families presented in the novel (Deery 107). These ideas roughly fall into three categories which are of significance to this essay: sexuality, work, and power structures. These ideas are of interest to feminist critics as it is often argued that in these areas women are at a disadvantage.

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5 Hierarchical structure is the ordering of aspects according to rank and power. In a patriarchal structure a father figure is at the top of this structure.
The inclusion of Freud in *Brave New World* is interesting when discussing the work in conjunction with feminist theory. As Firchow points out, it is likely that Freud was included in the book due to Huxley’s own bias against the family unit, quoting a letter to Huxley’s father as evidence of this. In the letter Huxley blames “complexes” on the family (Firchow, *The End* 47). That the distrust of the family unit that is displayed in *Brave New World* is linked to Freud is further emphasised by Booker when he argues that the World Controllers fear “genuine intersubjective attachments” (55). The idea of Freud as one of the deities in the dystopian society is of interest to feminist theorists as it can be argued that Freudian beliefs are directly antithetical to many of the beliefs of feminism. Freud would argue that women are the weaker sex and that they lack the rationality that was considered one of the main characteristics of the male mind. Although some feminist theorists have disputed this interpretation (Moi 96-97) it is not inconceivable that Huxley himself considered this interpretation of Freud, especially if one considers the fact that much of the evidence against this interpretation came after *Brave New World* was written.

When it comes to sexuality and the sexual relations between individuals much has been written regarding the heterosexual male as the norm in *Brave New World* (Deery 106). In addition to this it is also the norm that a man pursues a woman and not vice versa. As Deery points out this might not have been the case but as no evidence of the contrary is shown it has to be assumed that this is meant to be true (107).

Much has been made of the free love aspect of *Brave New World*. Deery states that “it is possible to argue that in some areas, despite its being a dystopia, *Brave New World* offers women a better deal than contemporary British society of the 1930s. There is no housework, no wifely subjugation, no need to balance children and a career” (105). In addition to this, Huxley, through
his main character Bernard Marx, clearly criticises the view of women as meat (Huxley 40); “for women, it seems, ‘free love’ means always having to say yes” (Deery 106). Although “everyone belongs to everyone else” (Huxley 38) it would seem that women belong more to men. This power imbalance in the relations between men and women points to a bias in Huxley’s writing towards men as “if we compare [women’s] position to that of men in Brave New World, women are less well off” (Deery 105).

Directly linked to the fact that men are the instigators of sexual relations is the power relationship within these sexual relations and also the power relationships within the work place. Out of all of the different professions that are encountered only one female is in a position of power, that is the headmistress of Eaton, although “her superior is a male provost” (Deery 107). It can be argued that this is further evidence of a certain bias against women, whether or not this bias is Huxley’s own or his society’s is not known.

Huxley is often lauded for his foresight when it comes to such technological advancements such as the birth control pill and IVF (Firchow, The End 39-40; Deery 109) and it is without doubt that these advances changed the life for women both in our society and perhaps in Brave New World. However, as Deery points out, although the majority of women are Freemartins, and do not have to concern themselves with protecting themselves from reproduction, the minority do, yet no such imperative is placed upon the males of the species. Reproduction has always been a source of difference between men and women. Men have claimed to be the “active creator with woman only a passive container” (Deery 108-109). Who should have the power over reproduction is a central issue often debated by feminist theories (Little 38), and in addition, a subject often discussed in schools under the auspice of biology and ethics.
In conclusion, much of the research regarding females in *Brave New World* has centred on reproduction. Few studies have studied women in a broader context, and this research has primarily been done by June Deery. Since there has been little research apart from Deery’s further research into the issues of gender roles in this novel is of value, both in general and from a didactic perspective in particular.

**Previous Research on *The Giver***

Previous research on *The Giver* can loosely be divided into three categories, which are in some ways connected but also distinctly different. The first category focuses on the concept of “sameness” that is present in the book. The second category studies the enforcement of the western cultural values of the author rather than the critique of them that one might expect from a dystopian novel. The third category of research of the novel centres on the theme of the individual vs. the collective. In addition to these three distinct categories some other aspects are mentioned in studies of *The Giver* which are of interest to this essay. As will be see, all of these aspects are also linked to Lpf94 and to feminism in different ways.

The society in *The Giver* celebrates “sameness,” and inherent in this concept is the fact that there must be an Other that presumably is not the “same.” Susan Lea in her article “Seeing Beyond Sameness: Using *The Giver* to Challenge Colorblind Ideology” discusses the Other in *The Giver*. She asserts that the fear of the Other is central to the control of the society, that through the concept of “sameness” harmony is supposed to be achieved. Further it is argued that by in effect ignoring the differences in colour that exist in the world in which *The Giver* is set, Lowry creates an illusion of equality that causes more harm than good. This view is enforced by the arguments of Susan Stewart who argues that “the community [in *The Giver*] attempts to erase
differences, to make the Other invisible, but difference reappears in the form of two males, both of whom have light skin and pale eyes” (Stewart 28). This shows that there are differences even in the “sameness” and that these differences serve to create the Other. Stewart notes that Jonas and the Giver both have pale eyes whereas most of the rest of the community have dark eyes, a fact that at first does not seem important. However, as is then pointed out “Lowry ultimately creates a saviour of Jonas, who is light skinned and pale eyed” (Stewart 29). Why is this important when discussing the Other and feminism? As the previously stated quote suggests, the hero is a light skinned, pale eyed male, the epitome of the patriarchal culture.

The fact that Jonas, in his light skinned, male form, is the hero of The Giver is one of the cornerstones in Stewart’s argument regarding the enforcement of Lowry’s own cultural values as a norm. One of these cultural norms is the aforementioned white male hero. These cultural norms are what feminist theorists criticise, as can be seen by Little’s assertion that “liberalism perpetuates at least one patriarchal institution, the family” (27). Stewart is supported on this idea by Don Latham who also discusses control in The Giver. However, whereas Stewart sees the negative in keeping the cultural values (23), Latham also sees positive aspects in keeping these values (150). Stewart asserts that “The Giver only reinforces many of our cultural values. True, many of those values are worthy of reinforcement, but I do not believe we should accept those values without question, especially considering the world in which we now participate” (23). This assertion stands in contrast to Latham’s idea that “the novel thus serves to reintegrate readers into the power structures of our own society while at the same time empowering them as potential agents of positive social change” (135). These ideas are important when discussing feminism in the novels as has previously been stated, feminist critics often feel that women are done a disservice by the current power structures in society. Although Stewart does not specify
that women are specifically disadvantaged, it is interesting to note that she is the one who comments on the fact that the hero of the book is a white male (29).

Lowry is a white American female, and as previously stated, Stewart argues that Lowry’s cultural norms show in the book. One of the aspects of culture most often associated with American culture is the struggle between the individual and the collective (Latham 147). Lehman and Crook argue that *The Giver* portrays an extended childhood where the individual is chosen to do what is best for the collective, not for the individual her- or himself (72-73). Although men and women are equally infantilised in this society, the previously stated fact that Jonas, the novels hero, is a white male presents an interesting perspective on the collective vs. the individual. In the early parts of the novel the collective exerts power over the individuals (Latham 134; Lehman 72-73; Stewart 22) but this power balance shifts to where in the end it is Jonas as an individual who exerts power over the collective when he releases the memories while escaping (Stewart 25). Jonas, the individual, is now making decisions about the good of the collective. Discussions of power and power structures are of interest to feminist critics and therefore these observations are important in the overall discussion, as it relates to the relationships between men and women.

In addition to these overarching themes some studies have mentioned other aspects of the family and family construction besides its role in reproduction. However, these issues are often only mentioned in passing and thus warrant further study. Some of these issues will now be explored further under the headings characterisation, relationships, reproduction and work.
Characterisation

The characterisation of the main character of any novel is of importance when studying a novel. It is often through this character that the reader sees the fictional world inhabited by the protagonist. It is through their learning that the reader also learns. In a dystopian novel the main characters often take centre stage as the reader learns of their world. Because of this, the main characters (and sometimes the supporting characters) of a dystopian novel can be seen as pivotal to the argument the author wants to make. However, these characters do not act in isolation: they are supported by a cast of characters that can support or contradict the points the author is trying to make. The essay will therefore now discuss how the characters in Brave New World and The Giver impact on our understanding of the world in which they live and how the role of women is perceived.

The main character in Brave New World is Bernard Marx. He is painted as an outcast, a misfit in a society in which he had been designed to fit perfectly (29, 39, 41, 58), the derisive comments about him being, “so ugly!” and “so small,” are just two examples of Bernard not fitting in with society at large (41). It is through Bernard we see a slightly different view of women from that of his fellows in Brave New World. Initially he is not interested in seeing them as meat (40). Huxley, through the choice of someone who is seen by his society as an Other, argues against the view in his society. However, it should be noted that the main character is still an Alpha-Plus male, the highest of the high (39). The main character may be an Other but this Other is still very much part of the patriarchal structure that has been formalized in this society. The view of women as the ultimate Other is emphasised when one of more important supporting characters, Lenina Crowne is considered. Lenina is by the society in Brave New World considered a perfect specimen, described by another character as a “splendid girl. Wonderfully
pneumatic” (39). She is sought after by all (39). However, it is interesting to note that Lenina is given an opportunity to leave the dystopian society. She is allowed to fall in love (Huxley 169-170) as argued by Firchow (The End 22). Feminist critics would nevertheless consider the fact that it is the woman who is changed by a man and not vice versa well within the patriarchal structures as she can only change through a man. She, unlike Bernard, is not strong enough to see the problems of society and change; she must have a man to change her.

It could be argued that Bernard is not a strong male and does not fit into the patriarchal mode as he fails to adequately rebel against his society. But if of the other important supporting characters in the book is considered, we do see a male who fits the model of the rebel who stands up to society and fights against injustices he sees, John the Savage. He is a man who has been brought up on the Indian reservation by a woman, Linda, separate from the technological world inhabited by Bernard and Lenina. John the Savage, who is the catalyst for Lenina’s change, does not essentially change himself. He continues to live outside of the societal norms, even in his suicide at the novel’s conclusion. John is the ultimate rebel, choosing death rather than to live in a society which he considers abhorrent. Although it could be argued that choosing one’s own death is a cowardly way to end one’s life, it cannot be denied that there is something brave in John’s actions. John is the only one who dares to stand up to society’s rules, and he is male. Consequently, a man is presented as the ultimate hero of the book.

Similarly, the main character in The Giver, Jonas, is also a light skinned male, keeping with the status quo of putting males at the top of societal structures. In addition to this, Jonas, like Bernard is described as being very intelligent. However, in difference to Brave New World, Jonas sees nothing wrong with his society. He sees it as perfectly ordered as is exemplified in the discussion between Jonas and the Giver:
‘We don’t dare let people make choices of their own.’

‘Not safe?’ The Giver suggested.

‘Definitely not safe,’ Jonas said with certainty. ‘What if they were allowed to choose their own mate? And chose wrong? 

‘Or what if,’ he went on, almost laughing at the absurdity, ‘they chose their own jobs?’

‘Frightening, isn’t it?’ The Giver said.

Jonas chuckled, ‘Very frightening. I can’t even imagine it. We really have to protect people from wrong choices.’

‘It’s safer.’


In time however, Jonas does start to see the problems in his society, and apart from the male Giver, he is the only one to do so. No one else is in society changes; they all stay the same. By only allowing the two males, Jonas and the Giver, to change, the status quo is allowed to continue. This is done despite the fact that we are actually introduced to at least two intelligent females in the novel: Fiona and Jonas’s mother. Neither of these two individuals question the way their society is ordered. Of course it could be argued that neither do any of the other male characters, but it is still interesting from a feminist perspective that the only people who are strong enough to stand up against the status quo are the two males. This reading is further emphasised by the fact that the individual who had been training to be the Receiver prior to Jonas had been a female, Rosemary, and she had not been able to bear it all and “ask[s] to be released” (143). The contrasts between the stronger, male, Jonas and the weaker, female, are
further evidence that Lowry is keeping the status quo in keeping females as the more emotional, relatively weaker sex.

Both novels, although initially attempting to present characters that do not conform to the status quo with regards to gender roles, perhaps unwittingly, continue to perpetuate conventional gender roles. Both novels present men as heroes. Both novels fail to show women as those who take action, even going so far as showing women who are too weak to take action. Both Lenina and Rosemary are given the opportunities that John and Jonas take, but the women fail to act on them. Thus both novels, it can be argued, uphold the patriarchal status quo.

**Relationships**

The two novels present social relationships as a central feature of peoples’ existence. These social relationships are constructed in ways to control the individuals in the different societies presented in the novels. In both novels rules for social behaviour continue to enforce the patriarchal structure of the societies. The essay will now discuss how these patriarchal structures and roles can be seen in three different types of relationships: family, friends and sexual.

As previously mentioned, Plato and More had differing views on how the family should be constructed. Most feminist critics agree with Plato’s assessment of families being a trap, but they would not go as far as to agree with Freud regarding the destructive nature of families. In fact, there is a large body of research that now questions Freud’s argument that the power structure of the family is destructive to women (Moi 96-97). Families and their construction are essential when studying the question of gender in novels as, by tradition, families often have a patriarchal structure.
Brave New World does not include families, therefore dispensing with what feminist critics see as the trap of family life. However, it has kept a control structure somewhat similar to the family, the Solidarity Service group. This group which meets fortnightly is the same every meeting (70) and through their accountability it is similar to a family in its permanence. The reader is only shown one such group, the one Bernard belongs to, and in this group the leader is male (73), much like the head of a household in a patriarchal structure is male (Millett 33). This could suggest that, although Huxley was by some considered anti-family, he still felt that a familial unit was needed in order to control the individuals, and by placing a male as President of the group indicating that the head has to be male.

In modern western culture, of which Lowry is a part, the traditional image of the perfect family is one that consists of a mother and a father and two children, preferably one male and one female, and this is the family that she presents in The Giver (12). This perfect image is, however, really a smokescreen; few families actually look like this. Essentially, the Elders in the dystopian society have chosen More’s view of the ideal situation for raising children, keeping the familial structure, but placing the patriarchal headship outside of the family, with the Elders. Men and women are both subjected to someone else deciding about their family in that they are “given spouses” (8) and rewarded children “two children—one male, one female—to each family unit. It was written very clearly in the rules” (8). With regards to family it could be argued that the family unit itself does not follow the traditional patriarchal structure. Here The Giver, like Brave New World, uses a proxy family, but the patriarchal structure of the family unit is still present in some way.

When it comes to friendships, friends are often seen as somewhat of a substitute family, and friendships in novels can often be indicative of the author’s view on gender differences. Are
men and women friends with each other? Or do the characters only have friends of the same gender? The second alternative seems to be the case in *Brave New World* where two different friendships are presented; one between Bernard Marx and Helmholtz Watson (60) and one between Lenina Crowne and Fanny Crowne (32). It is interesting to note the differences in these friendships as they show a clear delineation along the gender lines. Bernard and Helmholtz appear to be friends based on sharing similar intellectual interests, “the knowledge that they were individuals” (60), whereas the friendship between the girls is based on proximity as can be seen from the following quotation:

'Hullo, Fanny,’ said Lenina to the young woman who had the pegs and locker next to hers.

Fanny worked in the Bottling Room, and her surname was also Crowne. But as the two thousand million inhabitants of the planet had only ten thousand names between them, the coincidence was not particularly surprising (32).

This could be indicative of Huxley’s lack of understanding of women, a cultural bias that states that women are superficial and shallow and make friends based on geographical proximity, while men need friends to whom they can speak as men do, to use a clichéd phrase. It could also be argued that Lenina and Fanny’s friendship is utilised to show the general superficiality of the society *Brave New World warns against*. Bernard is considered the Other and to give him only the superficial friendships that are the norm in the society would have taken away some of this “Otherness”. However, one cannot disregard the fact that a male friendship has been chosen to be the less superficial one. What is also significant is the lack of friendships across gender lines in *Brave New World*. Neither Bernard nor Lenina has friends that are of a different gender from
themselves. What they (or at least Lenina) have are sexual conquests, not friends. So it can be concluded that the status quo has clearly been kept; men are still the more intelligent and aware even in friendships, and no one is friends across gender lines.

*The Giver* presents a different view on friendships from that in *Brave New World*. In the world of *The Giver* Jonas has two good friends, Asher and Fiona. At a first glance it seems that Lowry has not fallen into the trap that Huxley does; she has presented the reader with cross-gender friendships. In addition, these friendships seem to be meaningful, unlike the superficial friendships in *Brave New World*, at least for women. Friendships are presented in such a way that the reader understands that Jonas, Asher and Fiona enjoy spending time with each other (28) and that if they wanted they could have other friends as can be seen by Jonas choice not to be friends with the fussy Pierre “whom Jonas didn’t like very much” (51). However, it could also be argued that Jonas and Fiona’s friendship is merely a tool to introduce the concept of “stirrings” (37), sexual feelings that are forbidden under rules in this world, as it is through his dream of Fiona that Jonas first experiences this concept (Lowry 37). In addition to this, although Jonas and Fiona are very good friends, it is made clear that Asher, the male, is Jonas’s “best friend” (Lowry 3).

Lowry, it would seem, falls into the same trap as Huxley, and presents the most meaningful relationship in the book as being that between two males, thus, keeping with the status quo.

The final relationship that is considered in this essay is the sexual one. Both novels present heterosexual relationships as the norm. According to June Deery, men are the ones who pursue women in *Brave New World* (106). However, it could be argued that this assessment is not entirely correct. Lenina actively pursues Bernard (51). Still, Deery’s assertions that men pursue women do appear to be mostly accurate. By keeping men as the primary, active, pursuers of sexual relationships Huxley has kept the status quo. In addition to this, the reader is only ever
presented with men pursuing women (or rarely women pursuing men), never are we presented with men pursuing other men, or women pursuing other women, which, if one believes the slogan “everyone belongs to everyone else” (38), could be interpreted as meaning that homosexual relationships were not only permitted, but even encouraged.

Although sexual feelings, let alone sexual relationships, are forbidden in *The Giver* by the command “THAT STIRRINGS MUST BE REPORTED IN ORDER FOR TREATMENT TO TAKE PLACE” [capitalisation in original] (37) some conclusions can be drawn regarding the sexual relationships that are being repressed. As with *Brave New World* everything shown or told indicates that heterosexuality is the norm, the only individual whose “stirrings” we witness is Jonas, and they are for a female, Fiona. It could of course be argued that the reader is merely shown this one type of stirring and that there is nothing to say that homosexual stirrings do not occur. However, one can also argue that this is proof by omission. As we are not told differently, and we are only shown heterosexual stirrings, we must assume that these are the only ones that take place in this fictional world. *The Giver* also mimics *Brave New World* in that the pursuers, or those lusting, are males after females. Jonas, a male, is the only one, as far as we know, who chooses to keep the stirrings alive, and these stirrings are for a female. The only woman who discusses the stirrings are Jonas’s mother and she states that “it becomes routine; after a while you won’t even pay attention to it” (38). In addition to this it can be argued that it is indicated that males are more likely to experience the stirrings. As Jonas’s mother explains, “many of your groupmates probably do. The males, at least” (38). Although she goes on to state that the females will also have stirrings, the inference one can make is that it is stronger for males. Men are more sexual than women. Many feminist critics would argue that this is merely a cultural norm. It would not be true for all women just as it would not be true for all men.
In conclusion, both *Brave New World* and *The Giver* present a view of the sexual relationships that indicate that men are above women. They are the pursuers of any sexual relationship. Men are simply more sexual creatures than women. This is keeping within the cultural norms of our society.

**Reproduction**

The ultimate biological goal of sexual relations is the creation of offspring. Biologically speaking, the pleasure that is celebrated in *Brave New World* and forbidden in *The Giver* is a side effect of the process required to produce this offspring. However, in both *Brave New World* and *The Giver* the powers in society have dispensed with the traditional form of free reproduction. In *The Giver*, where mothers and fathers are not the abhorred entities that they are in *Brave New World* (Huxley 33; Lowry 8), society has still managed to stigmatise the process of giving birth (Lowry 21). It is not clear how birthmothers in *The Giver* become pregnant, only that there is “very little honor in that assignment” (21) and that they are not allowed to care for their children after giving birth; instead this job is done by Nurturers, and the only Nurturer presented is a male one, Jonas’s father. *Brave New World*, on the other hand, has through the male director of hatcheries in effect managed to change it so that men are entirely in charge of the reproductive process with women still doing much of the caring for the foetuses. Both Lenina and Linda work with the bottles, essentially it is their job to nourish and protect the foetuses, even though they are no longer in their bodies. So, although the process of childbearing has been removed from the female body, essentially it is still very much a female concern. There are of course men who work in this process, but the place where we meet such a person is within the fertilization room
where a Mr Foster is “working on a wonderful Delta-Minus ovary” (6). Men are still “the active creator and [women] only [the] passive container” (Deery 108).

With regards to reproduction there are many similarities between the two novels, as birthmothers in *The Giver* are also merely “passive containers” (Deery 108). Although it is less clear who has the power in making these decisions in *The Giver* it is clear that individual women do not have the power to decide their fate with regards to childbearing (21, 53). Thus the status quo of woman’s loss of power over her own reproductive rights is still upheld in *The Giver*. Although in theory, women in *Brave New World* never have to suffer the fate of giving birth, Huxley, through Linda, shows what happens when one does give birth. Linda is the mother of John the Savage, who was conceived while she was on a trip to the reservation with the Director when they were both young. The Director, a man, is also shown to suffer for his part in the creation of a child. He loses his standing in society (136-138). Linda however is put in the galloping senility ward at the hospital for the dying and used as a teaching tool for children to learn about death (180-184). Thus Linda is the one whose suffering is prolonged; she is the one who is put on display for children who “have never seen a face like hers before—had never seen a face that was not youthful and taut-skinned, a body that had ceased to be slim and upright” (183). The fact that the man is not allowed to suffer would in some respect redeem the novel in the eyes of feminist critics, since men and women are to a certain extent treated equally here, although one could argue that they are not. The Director merely disappears, whereas Linda is shown as an overweight addict (135, 139). Linda’s fate is in our world as well as hers, slightly worse. Although the fictional worlds of the two novels differ from our world in that both look down on some aspects of motherhood, whereas in ours generally motherhood is celebrated, both
novels do follow our society in that women who give birth are in some ways punished. It can therefore be argued that the status quo is kept.

**Work**

In both *Brave New World* and *The Giver* individuals’ professions are determined by the needs of society. The individual has nothing to say in determining what job he or she can get. The consequences this has for women will now be presented.

As has been remarked upon, women in *Brave New World* are still very much in “the sort of jobs their contemporaries were in fact given in Huxley’s society” (Deery 108). Of the four women we meet by name: Lenina, Linda, Fanny and Miss Keats all have or have had occupations where they were under the auspice of men; Lenina and Fanny both work under the male Director of Hatcherries (13, 32). The identity of Linda’s boss is uncertain but we do know that she did not know much about the other jobs in her production line, as she tells John regarding the chemicals used:

“Well I don’t know. You get them out of bottles. And when the bottles are empty, you send up to the Chemical Store for more. It’s the Chemical Store people who make them, I suppose. Or else they send to the factory for them. I don’t know. I never did any chemistry. My job was with the embryos” (118).

This lack of knowledge of the processes involved in the making of babies is in stark contrast to the lecture that is being given by the Director at the start of the book to the new students. He clearly has a great deal of knowledge of the whole process. As was pointed out above in the section on previous research on *Brave New World*, with Miss Keats, Huxley has kept the status
quo from his own time with regards to the hierarchical structure. Although Miss Keats is the headmistress she is overseen by the male provost (Deery 107). Most of the men we meet are men in power or in important positions. There is the male World Controller (29), the male Director of Hatcheries (2), the male Assistant Director of Predestination (29), and the male Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury (149). All of these males have one thing in common: they are in a position of relative power. One can quite clearly see that in *Brave New World* the division of labour is still very much along the lines of the traditional structures.

This is, however, not the case in *The Giver* where Lowry has very much tried to step away from traditional roles within work, at least at first glance. Jonas’s mother is a Judge (8), his father is a Nurturer (what in our society would be a nurse or perhaps an early childhood educator) (7), and the Chief Elder is a female (51). Here Lowry has very much stepped away from the traditional roles found in *Brave New World*. However, if one studies the roles that Jonas and his friends are given, another picture emerges. We are told the gender and work assignment of seven individuals before Jonas loses track of assignments. Out of these seven, four are females and three are males. The first female, Madeline, is assigned as a Fish Hatchery Attendant, and it is remarked that this is an important occupation as it “provide[s] nourishment for the whole community” (52). It could be argued that the choice of the word nourishment rather than the word food indicates a female aspect of the profession. Men are traditionally hunters whereas women provide nourishment. However, it could also be argued that this is a male profession, as fishery is a traditionally male occupation. Conversely it can be said that a Fish Hatchery Attendant is not a traditional fisherman but rather through the use of the word attendant the occupation is more nurturing and less adventurous. On balance it can be concluded that this job does not break gender stereotypes. The second female who is given a job is Inger, who is
assigned as a birthmother (53), a job that Jonas, upon reflection, points out he could not do anyway (53), as in this world, in contrast to *Brave New World*, women are still physically needed in order to produce humans. Birthmothers are considered “an important job, if lacking in prestige” (53). So far the assignments given to Jonas’s peers are occupations following the traditional structure of labour divisions. The next individual is a male named Isaac, who is given the job of “Instructors of Sixes” (53), essentially a Kindergarten teacher. Here *The Giver* goes against gender roles as most teachers of early years tend to be female. A male doctor (56) (traditional, although changing) and a female engineer (56) (one of the jobs that Millet classifies as traditionally male (Millet 42)) are also presented. These two individuals are bookended by Jonas’s two friends, Asher and Fiona. Asher, the class clown, is given the profession of Assistant Director of Recreation (56), whereas Fiona is given the profession of Caretaker of the Elder (56).

It can be argued that these two jobs follow the traditional gender roles. Asher is the ever energetic camp counsellor, a man’s man, happiest when he is active in the outdoors, whereas calm and caring Fiona is given the traditional nurse role. On balance, *The Giver* seems to keep the traditional gender roles. In addition to the giving of traditional gender roles much is made of the fact that Jonas’s father is a nurturer and all the qualities he inhabits for this job (7, 14-16). At the same time, Jonas’s mother, who has been given a traditional male profession of judge, worries about her decisions in a way that one could consider as traditionally female, she too, wishes to nurture the criminals, to make them better (8-9).

Although *The Giver* is better at apportioning jobs not according to gender stereotypes than *Brave New World*, it can be concluded that both novels fail to consistently break stereotypes. Feminist critics would argue that this is further evidence of the cultural bias present in our society, where division of labour is done according to gender rather than according to
ability. As for upholding the goals set forward in Lpf94, both novels lend themselves to discussing “equality between women and men” (3) as they present a view of division of labour that is familiar to students while still being different from ours. The fact that in both fictional worlds professions are assigned provides an excellent starting point for discussing what characteristics are needed for a certain professions and how these characteristics are presented in a person.

**Conclusion**

The two novels *Brave New World* and *The Giver* provide ample discussion material regarding gender roles, despite the fact that neither overtly sets out to do so. This makes them suitable novels to discuss in relation to “equality between women and men” (Skolverket 3). Through investigations of certain aspects of the novels, namely: characterisation, relationships, work and reproduction, it has been possible do draw certain conclusions regarding how gender roles are portrayed in the two novels, and how this portrayal is related to both their respective times of publication and our own social and cultural context.

The essay argues that through the choice of male main characters the novels perpetuate the gender stereotype that women are not capable of marshalling change, or at least not allowed to by the prevailing culture. In *Brave New World* Lenina is given the opportunity to change society by giving in to love; however she fails to do so. In *The Giver*, although we are presented with intelligent and capable women, they too fail to create change. In addition to this, in *The Giver*, we are shown a woman, who when given the opportunity to create change fails to do so, primarily because she gives in to the traditionally female characteristics of emotion and
weakness. Thus the novels both perpetuate the gender stereotype of the man as the hero and that of women as the weaker vessel.

A similar conclusion can be drawn with regards to relationships. Both novels, in some form perpetuate the notion of the family with a male headship, which some feminist critics argue is simply a manifestation of the patriarchal structure on a smaller scale. Although *Brave New World* does not reproduce the family as we know it, the family has been replaced with the Solidarity Group, which fulfils a similar function. The family function of control is also in part taken up by the roles of friendships. With regards to friendships the two novels also continue to perpetuate gender stereotypes with both novels implicitly lauding the male friendships as the most important ones. Further, both novels show a preference for the male pursuing the female in any sexual relationships. Although sexual relationships have been abolished in *The Giver*, it is only Jonas who we see actually experiencing stirrings, and these are for a female. He is also the only one who chooses to continue the stirrings. In *Brave New World* the opposite notion regarding sexual relations exist; here they are encouraged. However, it is still primarily the man who does the pursuing, in consistence with the patriarchal ideal. This leads to the conclusion that the patriarchal status quo is upheld in both novels with regards to relationships.

The same definite conclusions cannot be drawn with regards to keeping traditional gender roles when it comes to work as could be drawn from previous categories. In *Brave New World* the gender roles are certainly kept with regards to work; we never see a female who does not have a male above her in the hierarchy, or really one who works in a traditional male sphere. In *The Giver*, however, jobs are assigned more according to character traits than gender. Despite this, the essay has shown that there is a slight bias towards the traditional gender roles, at least in the main character and those closest to him. The conclusion must be that although the gender
stereotypes are kept only slightly they are indications that they are influenced by the cultural norms of the author.

The final category analysed in the essay, reproduction, has shown the strongest bias towards keeping the cultural gender norms. In both novels childbirth is seen as something in which “there’s very little honor” (Lowry 21) or even considered dirty. In *Brave New World* the task of reproduction still falls on women, as they are the ones the reader primarily sees working with embryos. Despite this the headship of the process falls on a man. This is in keeping with the patriarchal structure of man being the active creator while women are the passive vessel. We do not know which part men play in the reproductive process in *The Giver*; all we have to go on is the above mentioned quote regarding the honour of the job. From this we can conclude that women have again been relegated to a lower position. We hear of no job afforded to men that lacks in honour. The patriarchal structures once again remain unchallenged.

The overall conclusion of the essay must therefore be that the two novels *Brave New World* and *The Giver* perpetuate the patriarchal structures that feminist critics argue are embedded in our culture. Despite the opportunity to foresee change embedded in the genre of the two novels, they ultimately fail to substantially challenge traditional and conventional gender roles.

Therefore, when studied in a classroom setting, these novels must be seen as part of that same patriarchal culture and society which they also are a reaction to. Studying these novels can thus help young adults to become more aware of social structures that often are taken for granted and thus aid in fulfilling the principles of Lpf94: “equality between women and men” (Skolverket 3).
Works Cited


