

Portrayal of New Women in Simon De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*

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Abstract

This paper is totally analyzing how the women is fundamentally oppressed by the men by characterizing them on every level as the other defined exclusively in opposition to men. Man occupies the role of the self or subject; woman is the object, the other. The Man is essential, absolute and transcendent. The Women is inessential, incomplete and mutilated. He extends out into the world to impose his will on it. Whereas women is doomed to immanence or inwardness. He creates, acts, invents; she waits for him to save her. This distinction is the basis of all De Beauvoir's later arguments. De Beauvoir states that while it is natural for humans to understand themselves in opposition to others, this process is flawed when applies to the genders. In defining woman exclusively as other, man is effectively denying her humanity.

Keywords: Oppression, object, humanity, mutilation, transcendent, inwardness, domination.

She is one of the founder for the modern feminist movement. Also an existentialist philosopher. "The second sex" which is considered a pioneering work of the modern feminism movement. She also lent her voices to various political causes and traveled the world extensively. she examines existential ideals, specifically the complexity of relationships and the issue of a person's conscience as related to the other. She was center on investigation of existence. In this work she critiques of patriarchy and the second rate status granted to women throughout the history. Now reckoned as one of the most important and earliest work of feminism. The first English language edition of The second sex was published in America, but it is generally considered to be a shadow of the original. She used her fame to lend her voice to various political causes as well. Her work brought her to the forefront of the feminist movement, to which she shared her intellect through lectures and essays as well as by participating in demonstrations for abortion rights and women's equality.

In *The Second Sex*, published in 1949, Simone downplayed her association with feminism as she then knew it. Like many of her associates, she believed that socialist development and class struggle were needed to solve society's problems not a women's movement. When 1960s feminists approached her, she did not rush to enthusiastically join their cause. As the resurgence and

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reinvention of feminism spread during the 1960s, she noted that socialist development had not left women better off in the USSR or in China than they were in capitalist countries. Soviet women had jobs and government positions but were still unfailingly the ones attending to the housework and children at the end of the workday. This she recognized, mirrored the problems being discussed by feminists in the United States about housewives and women's "roles".

In *The Second Sex*, De Beauvoir had famously stated, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman". Women are different from men because of what they have been taught and sociologized to do and be. It was dangerous, she said to imagine an eternal feminine nature, in which women were more in touch with the earth and the cycles of the moon. According to de Beauvoir, this was just another way for men to control women, by telling women they are better off in their comic, spiritual "eternal feminine," kept away from men's knowledge and left without all the men's concerns like work, careers and power.

The notion of a woman's nature struck de Beauvoir as further oppression. She called motherhood a way of turning women into slaves. It did not have to be that way but it usually ended up that way in society precisely because women were told to concern themselves with their divine nature. They were forced to focus on motherhood and femininity instead of politics, technology or anything else outside of home and family. This was a way of rendering women second class citizens: the second sex. The women's liberation movement helped her become more attuned to the day-to-day sexism women experienced. Yet, she did not think it was beneficial for women to refuse to do anything the man's ways or refuse to take on qualities deemed masculine.

Some radical feminist organizations rejected leadership hierarchy as a reflection of masculine authority and said no single person should be in charge. Some feminist artists declared they could never truly create unless they were completely separate from male dominated art. Simone de Beauvoir recognized that women's liberation had done some good, but she said feminists should not utterly reject being a part of the man's world, whether in organizational power or with their creative work. From de Beauvoir's point of view the work of feminism was to transform society and women's place in it.

Simon De Beauvoir begins by explaining that she chose to write a book about women because there is still a controversy over what it means to be a woman in the first place. Is "Femininity" biological, or defined by behaviors, or nonexistent in the first place. She begins to define the category of woman by considering the fact that she feels the need to define herself first and foremost as a woman, while men do not feel the need to identify with their masculinity. Woman is the other because man defines himself as essential to the world and sees himself as the subject by which woman is defined. She also gives women responsibility for changing this duality, however pointing out that woman must redefine herself as the subject in order to change her situation. She does explain that it is more difficult for women to change this dynamics than it

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would be for the proletariat, Jews, or African Americans to rebel against their oppression because women cannot simply overthrow their oppressor women do need men in order to survive. She points out that duality is difficult because men and women both have such strong

biases. To resolve this problem, she proposes the framework that we do not consider how to achieve happiness because this is not possible to measure but rather how to define and achieve women's freedom. In the first part of this work she considered three different perspectives on how to define women: Biological data, The Psychoanalytical point of view and the point of view of historical materialism.

In a 1972 interview with the German journalist and feminist Alice Schwarzer, she declared that she really was a feminist. She called her earlier rejection of women's movement a shortcoming of *The Second Sex*. She also said the most important thing woman can do in their lives is work, so they can be independent. Work was not perfect, nor it was a solution to all problems, but it was the first condition for women's independence, according to Simone De Beauvoir. She continued to read and examine the writings of prominent U.S feminist theorists such as Shulamith Firestone and Kate Millett. She also theorized that woman could not be truly liberated until the system of patriarchal society itself was overthrown. Women needed to be liberated individually but they also needed to fight in solidarity with the political left and the working classes. Her ideas were compatible with the belief that the personal is political.

The first perspective Biological data, she primarily considers two questions: "What does female represent in the animal kingdom? And what unique kind of female is realized in woman?". Actually she points out about the two sexes in division is not universally in nature. For example, one celled animals reproduce individually and hermaphroditic species do exist. She finalized that when considering evolutionary theory neither biological system can be called as Superior. She disputes the assumptions of philosophers like Plato and Hegel, who believe that division that division into two sexes is a natural state of being. She also points out that social theories that discriminate against women based on biology either make false assumptions or are too bold in their analogies, the relationship between gametes and gonads cannot be equated to the relationship between women and men. She cites several examples of different species in which the two sexes interact in very different ways with either male or female dominating the other. In humans, she points out that puberty is more like a crisis for women, which weakens them more than it does men.

For women, the body becomes something other than her in the sense that women must deal with childbirth and other functions that do damage to their own bodies, while men remain comfortable in their skin. Based on this, she points out that older women beyond reproductive age are sometimes considered a separate sex because reproductive capacity is so central to how we define females. She does concede that such biological facts about humans are important to consider

in order to understand the female condition overall. Weakness is only negative relative to humans seeking a particular kind of strength. Biology is not enough to define the human condition because humans living in society are not simply a species in nature, but rather a group that depends on economic and social factors to contextualize its values. Biological data in economic, social, and psychological contexts. Biology is not enough to explain why woman is the other in society.

This world has always belonged to males, she writes. Her central theme is that men have controlled women's narratives. This section reflects that fact as opposed to critiquing others. Once woman is dethroned by the advent of private property, her fate is linked to it for centuries. Now Simon indicates that the historical narrative and regarding how men have mythologized women. She explains her philosophical approach men are constantly trying to impose themselves on the world in order to prove their own sense of being but the highest state they can achieve is actually one in which they renounce this more active form of being in favor of more passive form of existence. She explains that about the conception of women varies by culture. In wealthier countries, women are idolized because men have no other struggles by which to give their lives meaning. However in socialist countries the Other is not a category and women are considered to be human beings. Nevertheless one constant in men's conceptions of woman is their ambivalence about them. Man connects woman with nature for him both represents life and death at the same time. Man thus projects his own mortality onto woman. This leads to men's disgust with menstruation, in particular because it represents feminine fertility which also reminds men of mortality.

Men are also caught between fear and desire of women. This ambivalence is reflected in their perspectives on virginity, in some cultures it is reviled because it represents women's separation from men, but in others it is prized because it represents their ability to belong only to one man. By possessing women, men also want to metaphorically subjugate nature which represents a similarly passive and unexpected resistance to men's advances. However the desire for possession involves inevitable failure since women remains other and cannot be fully possessed. De Beauvoir next discusses various mythical representations of women and demonstrates how these myths have imprinted human consciousness, often to the disservice of women. She hopes to debunk the persistent myth of the eternal feminine by showing that it arose from male discomfort with the fact of his own birth. Throughout history maternity has been both brings life and heralds death. These mysterious operations get projected onto the woman, who is transformed into the symbol of life and in the process is robbed of all individuality.

She insists on the impossibility of comparing the character of men and women without considering the immense difference in their situation. She traces female development through its formative stages: childhood, youth and sexual initiation. Her goal is to prove that women are not born "feminine" but shaped by a thousand external processes. She shows how at each stage of her

upbringing, a girl is conditioned into accepting passivity, dependence, repetition and inwardness. Every force in society conspires to deprive her of subjectivity and flatten her into an object. She denied the possibilities of independent work or creative fulfillment, the woman must accept a dissatisfying life of housework, childbearing and sexual slavishness. After the woman become an adulthood, their situations will change entirely critical and their inhabits. Their main performances and major functions are wife, mother and entertainer.

No matter how illustrious the woman's household may be these roles inevitably lead to immanence, incompleteness, and profound frustration. When a woman loses her primary purpose and therefore her identity. In the final chapter of this section "Woman's situation and character", she reiterates the controversial claim that woman situation is not a result of her character. Rather her character is a result of her situation. Her mediocrity, complacency, lack of accomplishment, laziness, passivity- all these qualities are the consequences of her subordination, but this is not a cause. She also studies about the justifications of the ways that women reinforce their own dependency. Narcissists, women in love and mystics all embrace their immanence by drowning selfhood in an external object- whether it be the mirror, a lover or God. Throughout the book, she mentions such instances females being complicit in their otherness, particularly with regard to marriage. The difficulty of breaking free from "femininity" of sacrificing security and comfort for some ill-conceived notion of "equality"- indicates many women to accept the usual unfulfilling roles of wife and mother. From the very beginning of her discussion, she identifies the economic underpinnings of female subordination and the economic roots of woman's liberation. Only in work can she achieve autonomy. If woman can support herself. She can also achieve a form of liberation. At last she discusses the logical hurdles woman faces in pursuing this goal.

Generally for existentialists, one is not born anything: everything we are is the result of our choices as we built ourselves out of our own resources and those which society gives us. In *The Second Sex* her most famous work, de Beauvoir sketches a kind of existential history of woman's life: a story of how a woman's attitude towards her body and bodily functions changes over the years and of how society influences this attitude. Here de Beauvoir raises the core question of female embodiment: are the supposed disadvantages which exist objectively in all societies, or they merely judged to be disadvantages by our societies. De Beauvoir points out that pre-adolescent boys and girls are really not very different: they have the same interests and the same pleasures (*The Second Sex*, p295, Translation and Ed, H.M. Parshley, vintage, 1997). The female is totally considered as "the flesh and the feminine". This does not have to be a bad thing; but unfortunately young girls are often forced to become flesh against their will: "The young girl feels that her body is getting away from her.... On the street men follow her with their eyes and comment on her anatomy. She would like to be invisible; it frightens her to become flesh and to show flesh" (p333).

There are many more such incidents in a growing girl's life which reinforce the belief that is bad luck to be born with a female body. The female body is such a nuisance, a pain, an embarrassment, a problem to deal with ugly, awkward and so on. Even if a girl tries to forget that she has a female body, society will soon remind her. De gives several examples of this: the mother who frequently criticizes her daughter's body and posture thus making her feel self conscious; the man on the street who makes a sexual comment about the young girl's body making her feel ashamed and a girl's embarrassment as male relatives make jokes about her menstruation. She also gives the positive examples of having a female body. She shows the situation in which young women can be comfortable in their bodies indeed not only comfortable but joyous and proud. Consider a girl who enjoys walking in the fields and woods, feeling a profound connection to nature. She has a great sense of happiness and freedom in her body which she doesn't feel in a social environment. In nature world forever there are no males to gaze upon her, there are no mothers to criticize her. She no longer sees herself through others' eyes and thus is finally free to define her body for herself. But she cannot escape to the natural world forever. As part of belonging to the patriarchal society she must eventually undergo a further traumatic event- initiation into sexual intercourse. Intercourse is physically more traumatic for girls because it involves penetration and usually some corresponding pain. Culturally it is more traumatic because girls are kept in a greater state of ignorance than boys and are often ill prepared for what is to come. She points out that the girl's sexual education tends to be mainly of the romantic sort which emphasizes the courtship period and the pleasure of gentle caresses, but never the penetration. Thus finally when sex happens it seems a world away from the romantic fantasies a girl has grown up with. She observes that for the shocked young woman "love assumes the aspect of a surgical operation" (p404)

At last Simone concludes by mentioning about the intertwined of body and mind helps explaining women's oppression. Women do not choose to think about their bodies and bodily process negatively, rather they are forced to do so as a result of being embedded in a hostile patriarchal society. On this view the body is not just the thing we can prod and poke, it is shaped by a plethora of perceptions, if we feel bad about it becomes a bad thing, if we feel good about it , it is not a matter of free choice unless we live in a society which gives space for that freedom. Her aims to do is to open up a space for that freedom to flourish.

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