

What do I gain from it? Find out one of the first works of modern feminism.

Simone de Beauvoir writes in this seminal work of modern feminism that “one is not born; however, instead becomes, a woman.” The notion that womanhood is an outcome of cultural forces, as opposed to an inborn feature, might look noticeable to a lot of people now; however, in the year 1949, when *The Second Sex* was published this was extremely controversial and argued claim. Although over the past 60 years, the condition for women has gotten better in a lot of areas of the world, de Beauvoir’s ideas stay as significant as ever.

In these book chapters, she goes back to the history of the duty of women in the human community— from olden days to her own era— and talks about how the idea of “woman” grew, destined women to passive lives, lived in the shadows of men.

Before talking about that, let’s take a glance at a few of the ideas vital to de Beauvoir’s claims.

The Other: Each thing, or thesis, as well as has an opposite, or antithesis; in the absence of an antithesis, there won’t be any thesis and the other way round. For instance, if there is no slave, there won’t be any master because he wouldn’t have anybody to control, and if there is no master, there won’t be any slave, because he would have nobody to rule over him. Slaves are the “others” that make masters possible. Likewise, a woman is the “other” to man.

If there is no woman for a man to dominate, there could be no man.

Immanence vs. transcendence: Immanence is used to talk about the area offered to women: an isolated realm where women are passive, still and submerged in themselves. Transcendence is the opposing realm of men: strong, creative, active, productive, powerful, and spreading outward into the external world.

So, now that we’ve examined these two vital concepts, let’s get started!

Chapter 1 - Across species, females are different from males; however, this needn’t signify a difference in status.

When you observe the majority of animal species, you'll see that males differ from females. This is definitely correct of humans, and a lot claim that the presence of such differences shows that males and females need to have a different status in society.

But, this claim doesn't hold up.

True, there are biological differences; however, these don't validate the subjugation of females to males.

Human men are usually stronger physically, with more muscle mass, more red blood cells as well as better lung capacity. However, these kinds of male features are just significant in a society where better physical capacity is appreciated more than any other thing. Some cultures prohibit violence, hence weakening any efforts for males to rule over females with their muscular power. Certainly, it's just when males are allowed to impose their physical strength that they can make other people believe the arbitrary assertion that males – and their muscles – ought to control the roost.

Additionally to biological claims, psychoanalytical descriptions for the inequality of males and females have been suggested as well. These are somewhat weak as well.

Freud puts the start of the progress of the difference between males and females at the genital stage, when the pubescent child begins to link pleasure with some else, usually a person of the opposite sex. The penis is still the organ of pleasure for the male, on the other hand, the female changes concentration from clitoral to vaginal pleasure, making the penis –as well as penetration – the object of her yearning. Also, Freud thought that women underwent penis envy– the sense of having had a penis one time, which makes females feel deprived and hurt, inferior to men.

However, Freud's theory has a vital error: it's based on a male model. The idea of penis envy can just be real if male genitalia is regarded as the norm, and female genitalia is regarded as not having something – as being the Other.

Therefore, if it's not psychology or biology that offers the foundation for the difference in status between females and males, what provides it then?

Chapter 2 - Humanity changed from a matriarchal to a patriarchal society that lay emphasis on a woman's duty as the Other.

The majority of the present societies are patriarchal – meaning, men are in charge of most of the stances of power. Also, it's usually thought that it was usually like that. However, that's not the situation.

As a matter of fact, women had more power than men one time. A lot of ancient societies were matriarchal. Mainly based on farming, these societies shared their belongings and considered children as a priceless asset: the way of continuing society.

Because women were the ones who have the ability to give birth, they were offered a nearly sacred status. Certainly, kids would frequently take the mother's family name –different from the present practice of taking the father's family name. The great significance put on women's fertility was represented more by the female gods worshipped by a lot of olden societies, such as Gaea, the Greek earth goddess and goddess Ishtar in Babylon.

During this time, the man was scared and respect the mystical and mysterious woman. This assisted man from the concept of woman as the Other.

Also, when patriarchy took over, this otherness worsened.

The growth of slavery changed women more into the role of the Other. Because her labor was not needed anymore, the woman was driven out of the workforce. Also, as the man began to take charge of the workforce, he began to take charge of the world of ideas as well; ultimately, a childbearing woman stopped to be regarded as a mystical creator and was minimized to the passive receiver of the creative seed of man.

This concept was represented by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who thought that the prime mover – the existence that initiated the creation of the world – was the male principle of movement. So, this male principle acted upon the female principle of the passive matter that just gets and does not produce.

Patriarchy couldn't eradicate the female goddesses completely; however, it did demote them to passive gods of immanence. For instance, Gaea turned into the passive immanence, where male gods such as Zeus act out their superior will.

As man dominated the world, a woman's authority was gone and fell into immanence: static, interior, passive and submerged in herself. Meanwhile, a man started to rise into transcendence, dominating the world as he progressed.

Chapter 3 - Patriarchy has been fortified by structures such as marriage and inheritance all through history.

As males got to be regarded as the active force in producing life, the principles of society shifted to consolidate the power of the patriarchy as well.

One key change was the growth of private property and family inheritance.

This is different from olden societies, which normally held every property together. However, patriarchal societies and the cult of the male came to adore private property, letting the gathering of riches in just one family. Also, because man now transferred the family line – and its property – the woman was left out from any inheritance. Woman, excluded from getting property, turned into a kind of property herself, a “thing” rather than a human with the agency. This change from communal to the private, male-owned property didn't just separate women from man; it separated her from society at large.

One manner man retained control of the family inheritance was with the institution of marriage. The marriage didn't just control the inheritance; however, it went to dehumanized woman further, making her into yet another asset. For instance, young women were firmly controlled by maybe their father or the eldest family member; as soon as they got married, this control was given to the husband. Also, in some areas, the institution of marriage didn't give a woman the right to property if her husband passed away.

For instance, the olden Greek institution of epiklerate made it mandatory for women, if widowed, to marry the eldest male relative in the family of her husband, in order for the property to stay in

the possession of the patriarchal line. An even more extreme practice was noted in a Roman text as being prevalent in olden Brittany. A lot of men from a single-family would share wives as communal property; if one man passed away, the woman would not be able to possess any one man's riches.

However, all these cases are from olden eras. Definitely, things are different now, right? Let's read on to know.

Chapter 4 - In more current history, the role of women has gotten better; however, the woman is still dominated by men.

We usually consider history as a regular progression, a series of growths leading up to the happier days we see ourselves living in. However, is this the situation for women? Not really, though there are aspects where a woman's duty in society has gotten better.

Women started to take on a more leading role in cultural life at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Women's lives were still tremendously ruled by the institution of marriage; however, few women progressively discovered the means of gaining access to formerly male fields.

For instance, the women of France in the seventeenth-century began talking about literature, philosophy, art in literary salons. Also, in spite of not having any formal education – women weren't permitted to attend university – authors such as Marie de Gournay and Madame de La Fayette ultimately got more popular than their husbands.

Women entered politics as well. The Duchesse d'Aiguillon was famous for being a strong influence over Cardinal Richelieu, who, as King Louis XIII's chief minister, was considered by a lot of people as the de facto ruler of France. Other women took the top office of their nations, such as Elizabeth I, Queen of England and Ireland, and Christina, Queen of Sweden; by staying unmarried, they were not dominated by a husband's will and because their fathers were dead already, they were able to accomplish heights of freedom formerly kept for the strongest of men.

However, in spite of these growths, most women still stayed in a subjugated position.

Even as we get to the early nineteenth century, the stance of the woman stays inferior to that of man. For instance, in the United States during the year 1918, women received less than 50% of what men earned, and, during the exact same time, female miners in Germany received a quarter less than men, even when they gathered the same quantity of coal.

Also, women who, rather than becoming part of the workforce, gave birth to kids and managed the home, were also regarded as inferior –not capable of doing the jobs of their male counterparts. Also, since household labor is free, housewives stayed dependent on their husband's financial support. Certainly, a double bind.

Hence, although we may have improved in some aspects, women are not on an equal balance with men yet.

Chapter 5 - Religion plays a vital part in making women as the Other.

Since the time that religion has been in existence, it has impacted the manner humans think and behave. It's had a massive influence on the manner we see women as well.

Certainly, a lot of religions place women underneath men right from the start.

Just consider Judaism and Christianity's creation story: Adam and Eve. As we understand, Adam is made to relish the Garden of Eden easily. However, Adam becomes lonely by being on his own; therefore, God makes a partner for Adam, by taking from his ribs and creating a woman, Eve.

Afterward, Eve persuades Adam to eat from the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge and is held responsible for convincing him to eat. It is Eve who is blamable for the fall of man and his dismissal from Eden.

This is a vital message where the woman is shaped into the other. Different to man – the free, creative spirit – the woman is degraded to flesh and sin. According to Christianity, this sinful flesh is what reproduces original sin, making all newborns guilty even before given birth to.

However, this sinful perspective of female flesh is not restricted to Christianity only.

In the Roman Empire, for instance, it was an abomination for soldiers to sleep with their wives before going into battle.

Romans assumed that the power of soldiers would be exhausted and consumed by the female flesh. But, this perspective of female flesh is not about women generally. Prepubescent girls, as well as old women who have passed their childbearing times – non-sexual women, meaning– aren't seen like this.

Chapter 6 - Myths surrounding women have fortified their duty as the Other.

Hence, is religion the only root for our notions about women? Definitely not – there are non-religious myths too.

For instance, there are a lot of myths regarding menstruation, which is a thing only females go through. Even as late as the 1940s in the south of France, a lot of people assumed that, if salted by a woman that is menstruating, pork being cured for ham or bacon could become bad.

Although, nowadays this might look ridiculous to us, that kind of thinking is continued by words such as, "Well, it's her time of the month," which means that menstruation has a kind of mystical influence over women that they cannot control their own action anymore.

Apparently benevolent myths about women really usually aid to slightly increase female Otherness.

Consider the female muses of Greek mythology. They symbolize the notion that women are beings that motivate, instead of produce, works of genius. The woman is passive, a being of immanence who occurs to motivate the transcendent will of man.

Also, the motivating muse is usually regarded to possess a mysterious, incomprehensible trait that hinders men from knowing real-life women, and helps to make them even more Other. This can take the apparently positive kind of the holy Madonna, the virgin mother of Christ; however, as well as negative forms, such as the praying mantis, which consumes her male mate after sex.

This kind of oversimplified archetypes assists men to ignore the actual, human difficulties of women. The man may basically dismiss a woman's rage and anger on the basis that women are basically incomprehensible beings, rather than attempting to know what men might have done to upset women.

Chapter 7 - The process of turning into a "woman" begins in childhood.

Therefore, if a woman is a thing that is defined by myths, religion, and history, how does one turn into a woman presently?

The process starts immediately after birth. When children are born, their minds are exactly the same. However, when society separates them into girls and boys, it forms two really different manners of being in the world.

As babies, boys and girls are handled the same: they suck their mother's breasts, use diapers and sleep too much. But, immediately the child stops breastfeeding, things begin to transform. Boys are being told to "be a man," to be independent and powerful, whereas girls carry on to be handled like babies for a longer period of time. They're let to the laps of their parents, who spoil them and give them pet names.

This separation is intensified when children know their sexual organs. Boys are permitted – and even allowed– to play with themselves, and their ability to pee while standing up offers them a

sense of agency. Whereas girls, need to sit or squat, and are usually asked to be careful when peeing. This makes them think that their sexual organ is an abomination, which makes their feeling embarrassed about their body.

This separation extends all through childhood, forcing the female more and more into a passive position.

For instance, although the boy has his penis to play with, the girl doesn't have anything and hence is given a doll in its place. This understanding of a girl like a mutilated boy is especially obvious in the French language, where poupée can signify both "band-aid" and "doll" – the toy is basically a dressing for a psychic injury. Having a doll at a tender age emphasizes the message that the girl's duty in life is to imitate her mother by getting ready to cater for future children.

However, this is only how the process starts.

Chapter 8 - As girls become adolescence, they become more "woman," changing more into the Other.

Therefore, what occurs as the girls become older?

As the division between boys and girls gets more obvious, girls feel more and more stuck in their condition. Initially, they believe that giving birth children would be a good thing since they notice the positive impact a mother's care has on a young kid. However, as they become older, and get less dependent on their mothers, girls start to regard being restricted to the home as unpleasant.

Rather, they begin to yearn for the father's role, which is full of possibility and agency. This yearning is shown in a surprising statistic: Havelock Ellis, the English physician revealed that although just 1% of boys wished to be girls, more than 75% of girls wished to be boys.

This yearning to not be female becomes worse as the girl's body begins to transform into the physical signs of the woman.

For instance, when her breasts begin to form, a girl starts to be seen as an object, as nothing than a flesh. Now, she has obvious physical indications that differentiate her from boys, which plunges her deeper into Otherness.

Also, with menstruation, this change gets even more noticeable.

A girl's first menstruation, usually something that is painful and it is made worse by the atmosphere of embarrassment and taboo that has surrounded female genitalia from early childhood. Also, it enforces upon the girl the understanding that her destiny is associated with that of her mother: she is now a prospective child-bearer and needs to bear the burden of the risks and repercussions of having sex.

Chapter 9 - Sexuality, as well as sexual initiation, are the last phases of entering the role of the woman.

For men and women alike, the loss of virginity signifies the start into the world of adulthood. However, for women, this incident is just one sign of the painful way to mature sexuality.

Firstly, the up-and-coming woman has a bad understanding: she will engage in sex with men, and this notion fills her with revulsion. The reason is that the things the male stare consumes – her flesh, her hips, her breasts, her hips, – are the real indications that make her a woman under enemy control of male power. A lot of girls show this revulsion by hurting themselves, which lets them to both punish as well as take charge of the flesh. By doing this, a girl can form a feeling of agency by reforming herself as the active man who causes harm to the passive woman.

The active man, the passive woman: these roles are ingrained in the usual ideas of sexuality. Male sexuality is usually displayed in active and militaristic names. Man dominated woman, “releases” his semen, “pulls” the girl to the bed and so forth. The passive woman, after being figuratively penetrated by the male look, is then basically entered by the male sexual organ.

However, different from what a lot of people believe, a lot of women don't relish the act of penetration, and for some women, it's even painful. Although women themselves have a tendency to concentrate on clitoral pleasures, the vaginal part of sexuality comes into emphasis

just when a man conquers women. This additionally highlights women's flesh as immanence that can just feel pleasure with the transcendence of man's activity.

Chapter 10 - Motherhood ends the girl's change to "woman," however, can be emancipating as well.

All of us understand what occurs when a man and a woman love one another so much: babies. Also for female humans, this marks the last conversion to turning into a woman.

Pregnancy represents man's transcendent energy to plant a child in the immanent, female flesh In a patriarchal society.

However, pregnancy as well as heightens the woman's immanence by subordinating what she needs to that of her kid. Even before the child is given birth to, the needs of the fetus take charge, and any first feelings of creation and transcendence that the woman might have experienced are immediately changed with cravings, vomiting, and painful breasts. Wilhelm Stekel, a psychologist has gone really far as to explain morning sickness as a sign of a woman's unconscious will to force out the fetus like a badly eaten food.

With that being said, a lot of women experience a sense of togetherness with their child while they are pregnant. But, when the baby is given birth to, this can cause an increased sense of isolation. The new mother instantly understands that the baby doesn't belong to her like it formerly was; rather, she belongs to it. She needs to give in to its needs, to use her entire time caring and feeding it.

But, turning into a mother can as well free a woman from the burden of being a sexual object for men.

This is obviously represented by how the typical value of the breast changes. Although it formerly used to be a sexual symbol, the breast now turns into a symbol of care, food, and comfort. Because the breast is no longer an object of male desire anymore, women don't need to feel embarrassed about their bodies while breastfeeding their kids in public.

Chapter 11 - The tradition of marriage continues to exist and provides women economic security while at the same time keeping them locked up.

We've understood how marriage has played a vital part in the history of women's subjugation; however, how have women been impacted by marriage in more current eras?

In brief, little has transformed.

The institution of marriage continues women's passive duty in society. In the past, men are still normally regarded as the head of the household, whereby the wife embraces her husband's name as well as religion. As late as 1942, surprisingly, France still had laws that required women to obey their husbands. Also, although this has changed in a lot of nations, there are still areas in the world where women need to follow the total authority of the husband.

Also, in liberal societies as well where marriage has less influence, the household carries on to stuck women in a cage of passivity.

Certainly, a woman is still required to do – and certainly still does – the most of the house chores. In 1947, a report revealed that women used 30 hours each week on household chores. The condition has gotten better; however, women are still the ones who do the majority of this free labor, which is one likely reason for the gender wage difference: women receive less since they have a smaller amount of time to commit to the workplace. Also, because they receive less, women are encouraged to remain with a man that can give them economic security.

A woman lives a life of immanence trapped in this cage. She doesn't get the time to make anything for herself and rather needs to care for her husband and kids. She is secluded from the whole society, and from work as well the outside world. Caring for her family may give her some satisfaction; however, when she finds out that her husband, as well as children, are able to live without her, the woman gets overwhelmed with feelings of rejection and loneliness.

Chapter 12 - The dressing of women is a kind of subjugation that lasts until the woman is released by old age.

Subjugation isn't usually about money. It shows itself in other forms as well.

For instance, a woman is compelled to dress in a manner that satisfies the male stare— even when that kind of dressing is not comfortable. Short skirts permit less freedom of movement than trousers, and high heels immediately result in blisters. Revealing lingerie doesn't work for any useful purpose, whereas corsets make it hard to breathe. However, the male stare is really strong that a lot of women believe that dressing “well” makes them feel good when as a matter of fact it's making them feel wanted by the stare that is driving them to be desirable in the first instance.

As a woman becomes older, this pressure gets stronger as she attempts to hold on to her vanishing desirability.

On the contrary to the male ideals of manliness, virility, and agency that persist or even grow as men become older, female ideals such as youth and fertility that signify their desirability to men diminish as women grow older. A lot of women fight this destiny by attempting to regain their youth. This is actually a kind of regression: old women dressing as though they were young in an effort to highlight the desirable part they played on time. This fight carried on until the day they pass away except a woman lets herself to give in to the aging effects of time.

If a woman does allow herself to become old, she can release herself from the male stare.

This is likely since older women aren't usually seen as sexual objects, neither are they required to look after their children or husbands. Therefore, if she embraces her old age, and doesn't attempt to fight the course of time, the woman can take hold of the opportunity to release herself from the burden of being “woman.” Unluckily, this comes really late in life that the majority of the women don't have time to relish the liberty.

Chapter 13 - Prostitution legitimates marriage; however, it is only another kind of female bondage.

Thus, marriage and motherhood change girls into women; however, what of women that are not married? Aren't they free from the trappings of a culture dominated by a male?

Not at all.

A lot of females who appear liberated are really wearing shackles that are not visible. Consider the women who sell themselves via prostitution. A lot of people assume that prostitutes represent a kind of sexual freedom. However, prostitution is really another kind of bondage based on female sexual exploitation.

As a matter of fact, prostitution is a manner of separating women in order for them to be very easy to defeat. Women who need to make use of their bodies as exploitable capital are belittled and referred to as loose, which allows a monogamous marriage to look more desirable. Also, although some people believe sex workers pick their profession, the reality is that it's usually a kind of desperation and oppression.

It's what occurs to people who are poor who are ready to do anything to live. In the year 1836, Parent-Duchâtelet a French doctor wrote about this in *Prostitution in the City of Paris*: "Of all the causes of prostitution, none is more active than not having a job and the suffering that is the unavoidable outcome of insufficient salaries." In spite of his study being nearly 200 years old, poverty is still a key factor behind prostitution up till now.

During the author's era, a lot of women who turned into prostitutes were servants for the upper classes and middle class. However, when having servants wasn't common anymore, thousands of women saw themselves on the street without jobs. During the last nineteenth century, 50% of all women who were forced to resort to prostitution had formerly worked as maids or servants.

Chapter 14 - The condition of women makes it more difficult for women to revolt.

If the condition of women is really terrible, why can't they just revolt?

During the time that the author was writing, women's rights were not a mass movement yet. Also, even at the moment, in spite of a lot of fighting for their rights, most women are still regularly dominated, which removes any feeling of accountability for their conditions, and makes them think that they do not have the power to alter it.

They think is true since, from a tender age, women are instructed that they can't choose their own life, that its path has to be directed by external forces. For instance, women require men to make them glad; hence how can they be in charge of their own sadness?

This point that man is active and woman passive ultimately turns into women's daily reality. Also, in spite of its apparent unfairness to western sensibilities, there are still a lot of nations where women have restricted voting privileges or are barred from managing a business.

Women's economic status is also another factor that hinders women from emancipating themselves. Because they depend on their husbands, they can't revolt against them without putting the source of their income at risk.

This is the reason why women have to concentrate on the economic condition of every woman. Just joint action, and not individual freedom, will let women free their bonds and liberate themselves. Few women believe that they can evade the essential struggle by taking on traditionally male duties and growing in the ranks of politics and business. Even though they accomplish this, though, these women will still stay in a world dominated men.

Chapter 15 - Narcissism and love are means women vindicate being dominated by men.

How many rom-coms have you noticed where the woman vindicates her relationship with some schmuck by stating, "But I love him!"

What is their reason for doing that?

Love is a strong force that lets women vindicate their subjugation.

When the girl understands she is different from boys, and can never reach their respected position, she starts to long for what looks to her like the next best thing: to be loved by the boys. Also, she immediately realizes that achieving any of the set duties of womanhood –such as a wife or a mother – is just possible if she can get a man. Without any other likelihood in view, a woman makes use of the strong emotion of love to persuade herself that her cage is worth all the pain.

However, when women change themselves into a thing of man's desire, things can become awfully wrong.

At times women turn out to be narcissistic, vindicating their subjugation by objectifying themselves. Internalizing the male stare really completely that she can just view herself as a thing of desire, the woman basically falls in love with herself, rejoicing in her own flesh and beauty.

For instance, Marie Bashkirtseff who was the Ukrainian sculptor was really in love with herself that she desired to immortalize her beauty in statues that were created from the finest marble. Also, Bashkirtseff reveals how this narcissistic mentality can make the woman to be stuck with men: for her to be able to pay for the marble and free time needed to create her sculptures, she needed to get married to a rich man.

Chapter 16 - The two sexes will never be equal until they both consider one another as peers.

Now, we have noticed the several forces that change the female into a woman – a grim process. However, what of the future? Is equality approaching?

In order to be a really equal man and woman have to consider one another as peers, and that will need mutual acknowledgment of the subjectivity of both man and woman. This entails that neither of both sexes may objectify the other sex. For instance, consider an underwear commercial where the body of the body is turned into flesh for women's pleasure. This reversal of power may seem pleasant to women, however, actually, it just spreads antagonism between the sexes.

Also, a woman will have to learn to free her immanence for her to discover her transcendence. Few women wish to retain the security that comes along with being passive; however, if the woman wished to transcend her lot as the Other, she has to free certainty and embrace a new, courageous, active view.

Most significantly, both women, as well as society, have to know that a woman is a social construct.

As we have realized, the woman is not an inborn identity; however, something you turn into. If we ever want to accomplish equality, the woman has to know and transcend the social construct of her passivity and immanence. For her to do that, she has to demand of herself the exact courage and work ethic that's demanded of the man.

However, the woman can't change things by herself. The entire society has to change as well in order to make female liberation become a reality. This entails that the law has to defend the rights of women, offering them legal access to birth control and if required, abortions; a woman's body belongs to her, and she is the only one that understands what is best for her body. Likewise, childcare that is free as well as paid parental leave has to be available in order for the women who do choose to have kids aren't doomed to working toward the biological continuation of society for free.

Basically, in order for society to achieve gender equality, both men and women need to uphold their brother- and sisterhood.

The Second Sex by Simone de Beauvoir Book Review

Nobody is born a woman – it's something you turn into. Instead of a biological group, it's a creation of myths, religion, and history, which are regularly reproduced by social forces dominated by males. In order for the female to become liberated, all of us have to know that woman is nothing than just a social construct.

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