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**De Beauvoir and *The Second Sex*: A Marxist
Interpretation**

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Angela Shepherd, BA (hons) Philosophy, MA Philosophy of Mind and
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ABSTRACT

The Second Sex is Simone de Beauvoir's seminal text. There have been numerous interpretations and critiques of this text since its inception in 1949. Most notable is the reading of her work as merely incorporating Sartrean existentialism and applying it to the social position of women. However recent theoretical discussion recognises her work as also an exploration of Marxism and this thesis follows that line of argument as, read in this context, the distinctiveness of her philosophical contribution can be made visible.

Chapter one, endorses Marx's historical materialism. Historically variable material conditions lead to historically variable human characteristics. De Beauvoir's focus is with regard to women. Chapter two introduces the One and Other as a feature of human consciousness and a feature of women's social oppression. Her account of why this structure explains women's oppression is inspired by Marx's historical materialism. Chapter three concerns the myths of femininity which also contribute to women's oppression and are ideological in the Marxist sense of the word. Myths are productive, yet distorting and false, with the aim being to promote the interests of the powerful at the expense of those who are powerless. Chapter four expresses de Beauvoir's views on the body insisting that the experience of biology as oppressive is a consequence of what culture makes of the body, again, utilising Marx's historical materialism. Chapter five describes women's lives as conditioned by historical, economic and material conditions structured by ideological myths which distort women's human potential. Chapter six suggests freedom for de Beauvoir differs from Sartre. The meaning and value which condition the lives of individuals are informed by social structures which humans create within an historical and discursive context. Freedom for de Beauvoir, incorporating Marxist insights, is only possible with structural, economic and ideological change.

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INTRODUCTION

I hesitated before writing a dissertation about Simone de Beauvoir. The subject is fascinating, especially for women; but it is not new. (De Beauvoir 1949: 3 first published as *Le Deuxième Sexe* 1949 translated by Borde, C & Malovany-Chevallier 2010. This translated version will be used throughout this thesis). What could I say about de Beauvoir that has not already been said? What could de Beauvoir possibly have said in 1949 that is still relevant today, over 65 years later? The aim of this thesis is to answer these questions with a re-exploration of de Beauvoir's work in the light of her engagement with Marx. Kruks (2012a: 10) states, "de Beauvoir's analysis in *The Second Sex* remains more informed by Marxism than is often noted." The goal of this thesis is to support this view and show that examining de Beauvoir's work in the light of Marx helps resolve some of the ambiguities of that work and clarify the distinctiveness of her own contribution, including her particularly complex account of freedom. De Beauvoir did not just apply Sartre's or Marx's theory to women. She developed a new synthesis of their work while modifying and extending it, adding quite original elements. She is in conversation with Sartre and Marx, as well as Descartes, Hegel, Husserl and Kojève (to name a few). Yet she develops these influences by introducing new perspectives. She adds a focus on gender and sexual difference to Marx and Sartre. She foregrounds the internalising of ideology (for her, patriarchal) from a phenomenological standpoint and discusses how social structures which *appear* as inevitable, inform subjectivity. She generalises the category of the Other from an individual to the social. She insists on an account of freedom which also recognises constraint and oppression and she then puts all of these concepts to work in ways neither Marx nor Sartre envisaged.

Only a small number of theorists have looked at de Beauvoir from a Marxist perspective and I propose to develop these previous insights. Kruks (2010 and 2012), acknowledges de Beauvoir's Marxism as present (demonstrated by the above quote), but her attention lies predominantly in de Beauvoir's later works and in particular de Beauvoir's discussion of *Old Age* (1970). I suggest however, that Marxist historical materialism was also the dominant strand of de Beauvoir's thinking in *The Second Sex*. Lundgren-Gothlin (1996), acknowledges the influence of Marx in this earlier

text, but I argue that this influence can be used to resolve criticisms which have been made of de Beauvoir's position, in ways Lundgren-Gothlin did not pursue. I will argue that de Beauvoir utilises Marx's historical materialism as a *method* in which to analyse the social position of women and in addition she develops this thought by integrating her phenomenological and existential contributions.

This introduction will consider the reception of de Beauvoir's work, particularly the *Second Sex* and also offer an overview of the subsequent chapters in which de Beauvoir's historical materialism is brought to bear on the salient topics found in *The Second Sex*.

The Reception of de Beauvoir

The Second Sex caused a wave of scandal throughout the world, particularly in France. Her work for the first time discussed taboo subjects such as lesbianism, prostitution, abortion and contraception. It also criticised the drudgery of wifehood and women's lot within the domestic sphere, as well as daring to suggest that motherhood is not the pinnacle of women's existence. De Beauvoir argued that the patriarchal ideology that provides our understanding of these issues serves the interests of men, at the expense of women, and positions them as dependent on men. McClintock (2007: 1) argues:

It is thus not difficult to fathom the festival of obscenity that greeted the publication in 1949 of *The Second Sex* (...) De Beauvoir was accused as a result of every infamy; frigid, priapic, neurotic, she had trampled underfoot everything that was good and beautiful in the world.

She goes on to acknowledge, "all this was extraordinarily radical, and still is, to which the fury of public response is sufficient testimony." (McClintock 2007: 24)

The traditional view of de Beauvoir places her as a staunch existentialist and disciple to Sartre. Andrew (2003: 31-2), argues that de Beauvoir is interpreted as merely applying Sartre's philosophy to women and as a result is often left out of philosophical textbooks. Read as merely incorporating Sartre (Lloyd, 1993; Changfoot, 2009) rather than as a philosophical thinker in her own right, Grimwood (2008: 205) argues that de Beauvoir herself is anchored within a patriarchal system

which, fails to acknowledge her as having an original philosophical contribution to make. The image of woman is rarely one that is imagined in the role of philosopher, as is indicated by the very small number of female philosophers before her:

Unlike the traditional model of philosophical authority, where the philosopher is cited as an authority over their text, the terms of reading de Beauvoir seem to be forcibly dictated by a context that does not allow for such authority. (Grimwood 2008: 205)

To some extent de Beauvoir appears to encourage this. For example, she often argued that she was not a philosopher, but that Sartre was; he was the author of philosophical systems, where she was not. (Andrew 2003: 32) She herself stipulates in her chapter 'Independent Woman,' how women artists and women writers, do not fall within the definition of genius, "There are women who are mad and there are women of talent: none of them has this madness in talent called genius." (De Beauvoir 1949: 762) De Beauvoir goes on to argue:

as Virginia Woolf shows, Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and George Elliot had to spend so much negative energy freeing themselves from external constraints that they arrived out of breath at the point where the major masculine writers were starting out. (De Beauvoir 1949: 762-3)

For her the notion of genius lies in the male domain where she includes names such as, Stendhal, Tolstoy and Dostoevsky.

De Beauvoir was presumed to be simply applying a masculinist existentialism due to her close, life long relationship with Sartre. Le Doeuff (1995: 63-4) accuses de Beauvoir of being grounded firmly in a masculine imaginary as the expression of her existentialism includes Sartre's language of freedom, transcendence and projects which Le Doeuff (1995), argues lies in tension with discussions of oppression. The foundations of existentialism as inescapable freedom and choice, appears incompatible with trying to discuss the limitations of women's lives. Moi (2008: 181) also suggests de Beauvoir has a misguided admiration of masculinity. Vitality and free movement are metaphors associated with masculinity and de Beauvoir utilises them throughout her work. Moi (2008: 182) goes on to argue, that this

masculinist position informs her notions and perceptions of women, their situation and how women are to respond. She fails to recognise the male orientated focus from which the foundations of her arguments originate, and how this relates to the way she conceives problems. It is not difficult to see why such accusations are generated and de Beauvoir's self-effacing attitude served to provoke frustration in subsequent feminist thinkers, due to her apparent lack of conviction in her own work as having a philosophical contribution to make. Kruks (2005: 288) argues that as a result of such masculinist accusations, de Beauvoir was read as derogatory towards women and the female body in general. From the 1960s onwards, *The Second Sex* became increasingly disparaged as contradictory and removed from the actual lives of real women. De Beauvoir's situation was regarded as being so far removed from that of womankind that her analysis and descriptions were not representative of how women really do experience the world; she was seen as distant. Bair (1990: 383) reports that women were, "outraged that Beauvoir described women as if she herself were not one." A shift in feminist thought toward a more gynocentric one celebrating difference, and an orientation that was grounded in discourse theory, cast her as old fashioned. (Kristeva, 1981; Irigaray, 1993) Kruks (2005: 289) suggests, de Beauvoir's feminism was critiqued as imperialistic and biased towards white, heterosexual, middle class women and this reduced the importance of *The Second Sex* to a designation of her personal idiosyncrasies and relationship with Sartre.

Gatens (2003: 278) however, offers a more sympathetic interpretation of de Beauvoir's use of such masculinist terms. As women have seen how men have occupied the positive domain which has resulted in patriarchy, and with men as the first reference point for humanity, then Gatens suggests, de Beauvoir is arguing that this is the only perspective women have to go on. So the values of creativity, activity and transcendence which have served men so well in society are the ones women presume are appropriate to them too. Kruks (2005: 292) argues, also sympathetically, that due to the close nature of their relationship it is just as likely, that de Beauvoir influenced Sartrean thought, rather than assuming it was the other way around. Fullbrook and Fullbrook (1995: 107) insist on this perspective; they suggest that all the evidence points to de Beauvoir influencing Sartre (on relations to the Other in particular), and it was her and not him, who was the originator of such issues. This debate runs on and on, but what is important for this thesis, is that arguments are now

beginning to emerge, that recognise de Beauvoir as differing significantly from Sartre. (Andrew 2003: 32) There is currently a renaissance in re-interpreting de Beauvoir's thought, as a move away from Sartre. (Simons, 1999; Kruks, 2005; Grimwood, 2008) One strand of this renaissance explores her reworking of Marxist ideas, including key modifications which she makes to those ideas. Kruks (2012a: 8) argues de Beauvoir is importantly influenced by Marx.

The Philosophical Influences of de Beauvoir

De Beauvoir's education involved many of the classic philosophical thinkers, from Descartes and Hegel through to Bergson and Nietzsche; influences which were to feature in her subsequent philosophical (and literary) works. The discovery of the work of Hegel (particularly in regards to the Other) and Marx (as explored in this thesis) were pivotal. De Beauvoir draws on Hegel in order to analyse the dialectic between subjects as necessary for identity, and also the objectifying effects of such intersubjective relationships. Marx however, features strongly. De Beauvoir recognizes that the explanation of Hegel, particularly when applied to women is not enough to explain their oppressed situation. By introducing a more Marxist perspective, she suggests that the intersubjective relation is itself a product of specific material circumstances. These material circumstances, which include social structures and practices, inform and perpetuate women's oppression. These aspects of Marxism often go undetected in de Beauvoir's work; but her explanations of oppression and freedom in particular are, "indebted to Marxism." (Kruks 2012a: 9)

I argue that the works of Marx are visible in de Beauvoir's thought. In this thesis I reference many of Marx's works, including: *Communist Manifesto* (1848); and *Preface. A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (1859) but I suggest the most influential in de Beauvoir's works are his earlier texts: *Early Writings* (1843); *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844); *Theses on Feuerbach* (1845); and *German Ideology* (1846). All were written around a relatively short period of time. A crucial influence is also Engels *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). These works reflect a concept of human characteristics as historically contingent, and argue that praxis (the active transformation of our material and social conditions) is integral to human nature. They provide an account of the relation between nature and culture and the social order which results. They focus

particularly on capitalism, which Marx argues is founded on oppressive structures and alienating practices and de Beauvoir, I argue, makes use of these concepts. According to Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 86), “Her [de Beauvoir] references to a Marxist view of human nature and philosophy of history are more subtle, which may account for their having been less noted.”

On the last page of the conclusion to *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir cites the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* (1844) as an endorsement of Marx’s vision, of a non-alienated society where humans (including women), have the possibility of exercising freedom and agency without oppressive circumstances, which can reduce their actions or labour to meaninglessness. (Kruks 2012b: 27) I suggest that de Beauvoir’s account develops Marx’s theory, alongside key existentialist concepts and, as a result, provides a particularly productive synthesis of women’s social status. She pays far greater attention than did Sartre, (and I am referring to his works written before *The Second Sex*) to the material dimension of human existents and the impact this has on agency and freedom. (Later Sartre did address these issues in the *Critique of Dialectical Reason* 1960) In the final chapter of this thesis I suggest her account of freedom is closer to that of Marx than to that of Sartre.

I will begin with a chronology of de Beauvoir’s life.

Chronology

Born in Paris on 9th January 1908, according to McClintock (2007: 1), “Simone de Beauvoir’s life was by all accounts a scandal. Her writing is doubly scandalous, since it is the stubborn celebration of a singular feminine life.” She was the first born child of Francoise Brasseur de Beauvoir and Georges Bertrand de Beauvoir, an upper bourgeois Catholic family, and she lived a relatively privileged life until the age of 6 years. The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 changed the fortunes of the family and they quickly became downwardly impoverished, “she had in effect fallen into a different class.” (McClintock 2007: 6) However, she was educated in a private and strict Catholic school, where according to McClintock (2007: 6), “her education was in every respect a limitation, differing markedly from that enjoyed by, say, a Sartre or an Andre Gide.” She was taught to be feminine and demure and that her lot in life was to become a wife and a mother.

However, she did pursue a higher education at university, Institut Catholique in 1925 (allowable only because then her father had no dowry for her and so a successful marriage within higher social circles was unlikely). Despite her reduced circumstances, and against her family's and school teachers' wishes, she herself became a teacher embarking on the life of an intellectual, a profession regarded at that time, as improper for a woman. The decision to become an intellectual, according to McClintock (2007: 8) was the beginning of a life-long denial of her, "femininity as difference," something that she resolutely stood by throughout her life and was reflected in her writing. Writing for her, became, "a radical project of self-creation and self-justification (...) it was also clearly a plea for social legitimacy." (McClintock 2007: 9) In 1925, she enrolled at, Institut Sainte-Marie in Neuilly and subsequently gained a degree in literature and philosophy. Following this, (as one of very few women), she studied at the Sorbonne and attended lectures at École Normale Supérieure, and in 1929 received the agrégation (the highest award possible for philosophy teaching). According to Moi (2008: 64), "Until well after World War II, to be an agrégée teacher of philosophy at a lycée in Paris was a highly respectable, even prestigious position for a French intellectual." It was at the École Normale Supérieure, that she met Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre, and her friendship with both became a huge influence on her life and work.

Literature initially was de Beauvoir's passion and whilst working as a teacher during the 1930s she wrote several novels, none of which were accepted for publication; however, philosophy also became increasingly important to her. At this period of de Beauvoir's life her relationship with Sartre also developed, but in a way that radically transgressed the traditions of (bourgeois) society. Monogamy was rejected by them and instead a relationship which they believed to be founded on freedom, honesty and independence was their aim. This open relationship allowed them to form fleeting or lasting relationships with other people, yet remain in a bond with each other. McClintock suggests:

this specifically privileged social circumstance they confused with an ontological sovereign freedom, which they identified as the fundamental condition of all human existence; those who genuflected

to circumstance were morally complicit with the forces that trammelled them. (McClintock 2007: 11)

The outbreak of the World War II in 1939 and the German Occupation of France in 1940 also contributed to her philosophical perspective; so it is not surprising given this social context that concepts of responsibility, authenticity, choice and freedom and relations with others were prominent themes of her writing. These themes saw de Beauvoir achieve literary success, as in 1943 her first literary/philosophical novel, *She Came to Stay* was published. Kruks (2012a: 6) suggests this novel, which features an erotic love triangle suffused with conflict is semi-autobiographical, (describing an episode in de Beauvoir's life where a former student of hers formed a passionate relationship with both her and Sartre). It is in this text that she first explores the conflict between self and Other a theme which continued to inform the writings of both her and Sartre.

Kruks (2010: 262) suggests however, that it was at this time de Beauvoir re-directed existentialism away from Sartre's by emphasising *situation*, not only on an individual level but also on a group level. This is particularly pertinent in her discussion of the Other. The Occupation also developed in de Beauvoir the importance of solidarity, despite her inclination toward independence and autonomy. She became more politically minded and morally outspoken and in 1944 *Pyrrhus and Cineas* was published, as an essay in moral philosophy. Card (2003: 13) suggests:

The Occupation and the French Resistance – not just the academic traditions of French and German philosophy – form the critical setting in which de Beauvoir began to think seriously about ethics and politics (...) De Beauvoir's responses began many lifelong political involvements and concerns.

For de Beauvoir, the notion of freedom developed to address material constraints upon freedom and an engagement with communism. However, the communism that was employed in Russia following World War II, which demanded discipline at the sacrifice of autonomy, was not accepted by de Beauvoir despite its support from the French Communist Party, whose members were predominantly part of the Resistance

during the War. This social context heralded the publication of *Les Temp Modernes*, a monthly journal founded by de Beauvoir and Sartre in 1945. In this journal, the editors attempted to create a socialism that was less orthodox than that of Russia at that time, while criticising the exploitative nature of capitalism that was developing across the world, particularly in America. (Kruks 2012a: 8) The editorial team were often involved in passionate disagreements concerning their relationships to the Communist Party and other left wing groups. This was also the time of her literary/philosophical works including: *Who Shall Die* (1945); and *The Blood of Others* (1945). In 1946, the book *All Men are Mortal* was published and 1947 saw the publication of *The Ethics of Ambiguity* which according to McClintock (2007: 18) was, “her [de Beauvoir] least satisfying book.” In it however, she begins to articulate and address practical material circumstances as impacting on possibilities for agency.

Also in this year de Beauvoir took time out to travel and deliver lectures in America, where she met Nelson Algren and embarked on a passionate relationship with him. According to Bair (1990: 385):

Nelson Algren had disturbed her rigidly defined, self-controlled world when he showed her that passion and reason could indeed be present with a single man and offered her the opportunity to be part of the traditional male-female couple she had always scorned.

Their correspondence continued until 1964, but despite Algren’s wish that they live together as man and wife (in Chicago), de Beauvoir as French first and foremost, knew she could not write her philosophy or literature anywhere else but France. On her return, de Beauvoir articulated her account of her travels with Algren as her guide in *America Day by Day*, published in 1948. This book appeared in journal form as a daily, first-hand account of, “how America revealed itself to one consciousness – mine.” (De Beauvoir 1948: xvii) Algren wanted de Beauvoir to see America not only in the stereotypical view where capitalism and excess was the driving force, but the flip side of America where inequality, crime, prostitution and drug taking was abundant. (Bair 1990: 385) Kruks (2012a: 10) argues that it was the tour around America, as witness to the racism and sexism of that time, which informed de

Beauvoir's writing of *The Second Sex* around the issue of women's oppression. She states:

The several hundred pages of *The Second Sex* are not only about women. They are also about the ambiguities that attend embodied human existence, about power and oppression and about the ways in which the oppressed may become complicit in their oppression so that responsibility for it is rarely clear cut. (Kruks 2012: 10)

Up to this point, de Beauvoir had been working for a number of years trying to formulate a book about women. According to Bair (1990: 386), "What the essay on women offered her, then, was a forum in which to analyse herself while creating a work suitable for publication." Finally in 1949 *The Second Sex* was published.

Moi (1999: 77) describes *The Second Sex*, "Here finally is a book that does not require women somehow to prove that they are real women, to prove that they can conform to someone else's criteria for what a woman should be like." Later Moi also insists, "Neglected by dominant political discourses, the subject of women's oppression was if anything, even more marginal in France than questions of colonialism and racism." (Moi 2008: 209) It is these themes of power and oppression on both an individual and social level that will be addressed in this thesis; with an exploration of the role and engagement with Marxism in the articulation of these ideas. However the thesis also recognises that de Beauvoir develops Marxism and supplements it with an existential, phenomenological position.

The Second Sex and later feminist thought

It is argued that *The Second Sex* influenced all future feminist thought. (Andrew, 2003; McClintock, 2007; Kruks, 2012)

Moi (2008: 204) suggests, "writing *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir often claimed turned her into a feminist." Nevertheless, de Beauvoir was sceptical of organisations including the strands of feminism that were emerging, as she viewed politically active parties as most often hierarchical and inflexible. (McClintock 2007: 26) Ultimately de Beauvoir's aim was to disrupt the social order and the political structures in place which served to perpetuate the status quo. In view of this *The Second Sex* did provide a foundation for subsequent strands of feminist thought, in

particular materialist feminism. I argue that de Beauvoir consistently grounds her thought in the material dimension and so it is interesting to briefly chart subsequent materialist theories given prominence in the Second Wave of feminism, and reveal de Beauvoir's relation to these frameworks.

Marxist Feminism

The focus of Marxist feminism was the analysis of social relations, using Marx's theory as a template. (Jaggar, 1983) Much of what de Beauvoir suggests regarding women's position in society is echoed and developed in this respect with particular regard for women's social status and possibilities.

De Beauvoir first drew attention to the denial that woman is a natural biological category. Gendered inequalities were addressed via the social practices in which individuals engage, with emphasis given to economic factors. For Marxist feminists, the social and material relationships between a man and woman and their relationship to the production of capital, was viewed as foundational to what it is to be a man or a woman. Paid labour organises society into a class system and Marxist feminists generally believe that women's domestic labour is the root of their exploitation and oppression, as it is underpaid and undervalued. (Marx and Engels largely ignored the private, domestic sphere as a mode of production in its own right). Those groups who are paid and valued more highly have their interests served within the ideological social order, and those who are low paid do not. It is from here that a woman gains a sense of self and a sense of her social role and position which, as located within a lower class due to her relation to capitalist production, is as inferior. Working class women are oppressed as workers and also within the home, where they reproduce the workforce for capitalism. Bourgeois women, all non-productive within capitalism and are controlled by their husbands to provide offspring to inherit wealth. Women, who are under-valued by society, have a position of lesser value and respect and their expectations and aspirations are lower. Aspects of de Beauvoir are evident here however, for her this is not the whole picture. De Beauvoir critiqued Marx and Engels for, as she suggests, humans are more than mere economic entities. There is too major a focus on capitalism as the root of oppression and it gives insufficient explanation as to why *women* are in lower paid work, whether in the home or in the workplace. (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon 2002: 69)

Radical Feminism

According to Brison (2003: 96), de Beauvoir came to define herself as a radical feminist. The key assumption of radical feminism is that, in addition to capitalism, there is an independent system of oppression, that of male domination of women (patriarchy). De Beauvoir had of course, argued exactly this point in *The Second Sex*. Male dominance was viewed as fundamental by radical feminists and the source of many social problems in addition to gender inequality such as class relations, racism, violence, war and environmental destruction. (Jaggar 1983: 63) The argument follows, that issues such as these will never be eradicated as long as women remain subordinated. The task of radical feminism, was to expose aspects of society as male dominated and insist on the positioning of women's experiences and values as central to social life. Jaggar (1983: 63), suggests that radical feminism is problematic due to the over simplification and universalisation of women's experiences of oppression (and man's experiences of domination). The notion of patriarchy was viewed by many radical feminists as a universal phenomenon, with essentially common features cross -culturally and across history. However, Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon (2002: 69), argue that utilising patriarchy as a fundamental structure in order to examine the category of woman, cannot explain adequately the diversity of women and their experiences. De Beauvoir, as we shall see took a different approach to patriarchy, for her it was contingent and anchored in particular socio-historical conditions.

Socialist Feminism

Socialist feminism is perhaps the later strand of feminist thought which is closest to that of de Beauvoir. This account also recognises that women are not just oppressed by the nature of their economic labour, but also by their gender. It therefore examined how patriarchy and capitalism (and later racism and homophobia), operated as oppressive structures intersecting in the positioning of men and women within the social and economic order. This is sometimes referred to as dual systems theory. (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon 2002: 70) In addition to this interweaving of capitalism and patriarchy, this strand of feminist thought shared other features with de Beauvoir's writing. Socialist feminism, also paid attention to the meanings and values attached to the concepts of women and linked this to the historical and material contexts in which women are placed.

The influence of de Beauvoir's account has therefore continued to be discernible in many areas of feminist thought. Psychoanalytic feminists such as Irigaray, and post-structural feminists such as Butler, also enter in to dialogue with de Beauvoir (all of whom do feature at some level, in this thesis), though she is often not discussed in any detail in the works articulating these different frameworks. Despite *The Second Sex* having been written in a very different social and historical context to that of modern day, many of the issues raised are still pertinent. Kruks (2012b: 2) insists that, "her [de Beauvoir] ideas still have a remarkable degree of currency."

My thesis is a testament to this claim. In the chapters that are to follow I focus on the principal areas of de Beauvoir's thought and interpret them through a Marxist lens.

Chapter One

This chapter makes the case for de Beauvoir's historical materialism. Here I argue that de Beauvoir generally endorses Marx's view of human nature and its relationship to culture and history. She follows Marx in accepting that productive work is a universal and necessary part of what it is to be human. She also accepts that material and social conditions lead to historically variable characteristics of human nature. Some conditions can be contrary to human flourishing and the promotion of our capacity for social transformation. The relationship between men and women is a mark of the current development of human nature, in comparison with its potential.

Her focus however, is with particular regard to the distinctive nature and position of women in society, utilising Marx's historical materialism as a *method*. The key point de Beauvoir adopts from Marx, is that women's position is a historically contingent one. Where she disagrees with him, is in seeing *capitalism* as the only significant structure in explaining this position. She introduces an additional structure of *patriarchy* to intersect with capitalism in the historical grounding of women's position. At this point in her thought, she links patriarchy to the working of the concepts of the One and the Other.

Chapter Two

Despite her historical materialism, de Beauvoir introduces what she regards at the point of writing *The Second Sex*, as a universal structure underlying social relations, the ontological concept of the One and Other. Appropriating Hegel, she views an

attempted division into the One (dominant) and the Other (dominated) as a constituting feature of consciousness. Utilising this framework de Beauvoir proposes that men are the One and women the Other, one of her most famous claims. The basis of this framework began in her earlier work *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) which will be introduced before moving on to explore her more in depth analysis in *The Second Sex*. Even while endorsing such universalism about the structures of consciousness, she uses her Marxist inspired historical materialism to explain *why* women occupy the position of Other, and also how this can be changed. While the structure of the One and the Other might be universal and inevitable, women being positioned as the Other is not. For her, how the division into the One and the Other becomes manifest is itself a product of specific material circumstances and for this she utilises not only Marx, but Alexander Kojève. De Beauvoir's argument therefore advocates the *historical contingency* of any given manifestation of the One and the Other.

However in her later work *Old Age* (1970), she revises her account of the universal nature of the structure of the One and the Other regarding this instead, as a product of historical circumstance. Reflecting on *The Second Sex* in *All Said and Done*, she says:

If I were to write it today I should provide a materialist, not an idealist theoretical foundation for the opposition between the Same and the Other. I should ground the rejection and oppression of the Other not on the antagonism of consciousness, but on the economic basis of scarcity. (De Beauvoir 1993: 448, translation altered from 1992 edition, cited in Kruks 2014: 89)

Chapter Three

One of the important contributions which de Beauvoir makes in her analysis of women's oppression concerns the myths of femininity and womanhood. This is the context of which men come to regard women and women try to make sense of themselves. In this chapter I explore her account of these myths and argue that de Beauvoir's views of myth are influenced by and anchored in Marxist views of ideology. Myths produce the *idea* of woman and femininity and in a society in which women lack power, are constituted from the male point of view. She accepts the

Marxist view that ideologies are distorting and promote images and illusions which serve those in power. She concurs with him that these can be countered by paying attention to truths which will undermine them.

De Beauvoir however makes an important addition to Marx's account of ideology by adding her notion of *internalisation*. Marx had not paid attention to subjectivity and the role which this played in reproducing ideology and the social structures which such ideology helps to maintain. De Beauvoir points out that, women internalise illusions and images which then inform their sense of self and what it is to be a woman, and this process is a key way in which ideologies are reproduced.

This chapter also compares de Beauvoir's account of myth with later accounts of imaginaries of the female discussed for example by Irigaray. Irigaray (1991: 32), openly influenced by de Beauvoir, accepts that dominant images have originated in and promote the interests of men. However, Irigaray (1991 and 1993), ultimately rejects de Beauvoir's (and Marx's) distinction between ideology and truth. For Irigaray, images cannot simply be dispensed with instead they should be re-imagined in more positive ways.

De Beauvoir stipulated that imaginings need *a material basis* as they are anchored in the material structures of power, a dimension not sufficiently addressed in Irigaray's work.

Chapter Four

This chapter explores de Beauvoir's extensive discussions of the body. De Beauvoir's historical materialism continues to play a central role with respect to the female reproductive body. She insists that we respect the material specificity of women's bodies; but she also claims that it is not simply biology that oppresses women, but what culture makes of biology. Existential influences are apparent from Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty but I argue that her account of embodiment is also centrally informed by Marxism, which emphasises *both* the constraints of biology (nature) *and* the way societies shape nature. Biological facts do not define woman, they are only significant because of the meanings that society attaches to them and consequently the way they are woven into social practices. De Beauvoir recognises that the body is lived differently for women and men. Woman interprets her body

firstly as an object whose meaning is defined primarily by men, and as not always subject to her will.

I also discuss the sex/gender distinction in this chapter as, although de Beauvoir is often charged with distinguishing sex from gender, it is not apparent that her distinctions match those of the contemporary discussion. Woman is neither sex nor gender since de Beauvoir's concepts do not fit into these binary categories. Biology and the meanings implied work together. This I suggest resonates with contemporary *New Materialism*. One of the aims of this work is to re-connect nature and culture, to acknowledge the meaning behind the socially constructed view of humans but to also give the materiality of the human body in particular, due recognition. De Beauvoir conceptualising the body as *situation* anticipated this, for her the biological body and the way the body is lived work together to produce and maintain woman's unequal situation.

Chapter Five

The second part of *The Second Sex* provides a phenomenological but critical analysis of women's lived experience. De Beauvoir here provides examples of women's lives at the time she was writing. Her insights show how the possibilities open to women reproduce the patterns of living which help retain the oppression, and inferiority of their position.

The lives she describes are conditioned by certain historical, economic, material conditions, and are structured by social myths and meanings which in Marxist terms are ideological. De Beauvoir articulates these as fantasies, distorting reality, however she recognises that they inform the sense women have made of their lives. Sexual difference is emphasised as a key feature of women's situations. Throughout her discussion de Beauvoir stresses how different are the lives of women and men, and how different the opportunities are for each. For de Beauvoir how a woman lives her condition is her choice, but the possibilities open to her are all unsatisfactory, as the majority of situations reinforce patriarchal ideas and values. In these circumstances freedom and agency seem very different for women and men.

Chapter Six

According to Moi (1999: viii), “freedom – not identity, difference or equality - is the fundamental concept in de Beauvoir’s feminism.” There are however, tensions and ambiguities which have been identified in the account which she offers of such freedom. While proclaiming her acceptance of the ontological freedom which everyone has, anchored in her existentialism she also shows how, “women’s historical, social, political, legal, psychological and economic situation renders them less able to take up their freedom than the situations of some men.” (Andrew 2003: 39) I suggest in this final chapter that if we read de Beauvoir’s account of freedom alongside Marx, we can resolve some of these tensions. I begin with a discussion of de Beauvoir’s freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) and I argue that it is here where she introduces her affinity for Marx and the notion that material constraints can impact on the opportunities for freedom and agency. Moving on to *The Second Sex* such points are expanded and we can see that de Beauvoir’s account of the lived experiences of a range of women (discussed in chapter five) makes clear that although women’s situation allows for some choices, very few of these are satisfactory. Moreover the range of possibilities open to them is different from, and more restricted than those of the majority of men. For de Beauvoir, the notion of freedom is gendered (one group benefits at the expense of another). She argues that freedom varies with circumstances and that women’s freedom in society is curtailed. She draws attention to bodies, social institutions and practices which impact on the possibilities for choice and the way in which the social position of the existent can produce a damaging situation of alienation and oppression. Marx himself stressed that in all circumstances some agency was possible, but *what* agency was possible was constrained by those circumstances. He was also concerned with what changes in material conditions would enable the proletariat to have possibilities which would reduce alienation and facilitate the expression of their human potential. De Beauvoir took up these points with regard to women. Women in society, de Beauvoir argues lack real emancipation, just as the proletarians in particular do in Marx’s account. She adds however, an important addition to Marx by paying close attention to the formation of the lived subjectivity of women and the way in which ideologies of femininity become *internalised* and serve to frame the possibilities which seem open to them. The distorting fantasies of femininity become those in which they set their own projects. In this final chapter, I stress that there is no neat distinction between

ontological freedom and practical freedom in de Beauvoir's account and that changes in circumstances can improve ontological freedom, which is not an all or nothing affair. The human conditions of ambiguity, of consciousness and of materiality *combined*, are intertwined in the account she offers of freedom and agency.

After The Second Sex

De Beauvoir continued writing philosophical and literary works long after the publication of *The Second Sex*. These include: *Must We Burn de Sade* (1951); *Les Mandarins* (1954); *The Long March* (1957); *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* (1958); *The Prime of Life* (1962); *Force of Circumstance*, (1963); *A Very Easy Death*, (1964); *Les Belles Images* (1966); *The Woman Destroyed*, (1967); *Old Age* (1970); *All Said and Done* (1972); *When Things of the Spirit Come First: Five Early Tales* (1979); and *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre* (1981). Many of which are made reference to in this thesis. Throughout this time she continued to write articles for *Les Temps Modernes*, as well as increasing her political activity. She was much encouraged by the formation of the women's movement in the 1960s and was happy to admit that her pessimistic attitude, which thought that women's relations with men would rule out collective consciousness, was wrong. She participated in the movement attending many demonstrations and advocating in particular the legalisation of abortion and contraception. "Beauvoir lived her philosophy." (Kruks 2012a : 3) Up until her death in April 1986, she never stopped working and writing, many of her books containing autobiographical accounts either openly or more discreetly. Her aim was always towards emancipation for the oppressed and in particular emphasising the experience of real women and scrutinising the society which posits them in positions of inferiority. In 1972 de Beauvoir remained true to her approach in *The Second Sex* stating, "All male ideologies are directed at justifying the oppression of women, and women are so conditioned by society that they consent to this oppression." (De Beauvoir 1972: 462)

De Beauvoir's philosophy has been subjected to a number of interpretations over the years, my Marxist route is one. However, it is one that I think makes some sense of the complexity within her work and gives it a more clear foundation. I argue that existential categories were transformed by her engagement with Marxism. Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 86) declares that:

The literature on de Beauvoir has paid little attention to the Marxist elements in *The Second Sex* whereas (...) her explicit criticism of Engels, is usually interpreted as a stand against Marxism and historical materialism. Her references to a Marxist view of human nature and philosophy of history are more subtle, which may account for their having been less noted.

This thesis aims to address these more subtle issues. De Beauvoir directly references Marx at the end of *The Second Sex* (1949: 782) and endorses, as a key feature, his views of human nature as developing alongside the material structure of society. She then goes on to suggest that, in a similar argument, women's position is an historically contingent one. This I argue shows that de Beauvoir does not reject historical materialism. History is what humans make but, for de Beauvoir, Marx's and Engels' emphasis on the ownership of private property was problematic only in that it was too limited a view. She was intolerant of the economic determinism that from some perceptions Marx and Engels were endorsing. De Beauvoir supplements a Marxist view with existential and phenomenological perspectives. What I hope to achieve is to demonstrate that in *The Second Sex* she has productively woven together Marxism, phenomenology and existentialism. Feminist theory is still discovering new strands of discussion in de Beauvoir's thought which demonstrates in itself the intricacy and far reaching content of her work. As Kruks (2012a: 2) argues:

As the renaissance of de Beauvoir scholarship demonstrates, many of the perplexities that de Beauvoir addresses in *The Second Sex* – starting with her blunt opening question, 'what is a woman?' – are in no way resolved, and much of what she says remains fertile ground for further reflection.

Chapter One - HISTORICAL MATERIALISM

The theory of historical materialism has brought to light some very important truths. Humanity is not an animal species: it is an historical reality (...) thus woman cannot simply be considered a sexed organism: among biological data, only those with concrete value in action have any importance; woman's consciousness of herself is not defined by her sexuality alone: it reflects a situation that depends on society's economic structure. (De Beauvoir 1949: 63)

Introduction

This chapter makes the case for de Beauvoir's historical materialism which plays a key role in women's social position. This is a strand of Marxist thinking that de Beauvoir largely shares. For Marx and Engels a woman's subordinate position in society is a result of the historical development of the capitalist economic structure. For de Beauvoir however, this offers only *part* of the explanation.

Fundamental to this chapter is my argument for the centrality of Marx to de Beauvoir's thought. It is necessary therefore to outline, Marx's and Engels' position in order to serve as a platform to explore and develop de Beauvoir's endorsement. I will outline an overview of the structure and function of society as Marx and Engels saw it, and as acknowledged by de Beauvoir. There are a number of significant issues raised; firstly, materialism and how the material circumstances of a society affect the existence of its members. I argue de Beauvoir echoes Marx's view of human nature and the relationship with culture and history. Secondly, the concepts of praxis and agency are also introduced as integral features to the explanation of the relation between nature and culture, which presents materialism as historical and leads to historically variable characteristics of human nature, this de Beauvoir also accepts. The resulting capitalism is a critical stage in the development of the social order, and alienation is a consequence. Capitalism cultivates a nature for humans, which is contrary to human flourishing (and the relationship between men and

women is an indicator of the development of human nature in comparison to its potential). Patriarchy also ensues, and for Marx is another effect of capitalism. Here however, de Beauvoir differs, for she regards patriarchy as a separate sphere with its own set of oppressive structures which intersect with capitalism, but cannot be viewed as merely a consequence of capitalism.

The issues identified above are the ones that have been the most influential. De Beauvoir's focus is with particular regard to the distinctive nature and position of women in society and she utilises Marx's historical materialism as a method. Clearly, there are areas in which de Beauvoir develops the explanation of women's oppression by presenting additional components. I will introduce these additional components here, but will analyse them in more depth in the relevant, subsequent chapters. (For now), the lack of an existential and phenomenological perspective remains for de Beauvoir, an oversight of Marx's and Engels' viewpoints and so for her, they present an incomplete picture. She argues that too much emphasis is placed on the ownership of private property as a result of the development of capitalism and crucial aspects of patriarchy as working independently of it, are missed.

I will begin by discussing Marx's and de Beauvoir's views regarding the nature of human beings.

Human Nature

In the conclusion to *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir quotes Marx:

The direct, natural and necessary relation of person to person is the relation of man to woman. From the character of this relationship follows how much man as a species-being, as a man has come to be himself and to comprehend himself; the relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of the human being to human being. It therefore reveals the extent to which the human essence in him has become human, or the extent to which the human essence in him has become a natural essence- the extent to which his human nature has come to be natural to him. (Marx 1844: 83-4 and cited in de Beauvoir 1949: 782)

De Beauvoir states of Marx's quote, "This could not be better said." (De Beauvoir 1949:782)

What does Marx mean by this paragraph, and why is this important to de Beauvoir? Jaggar (1983: 69) takes Marx's quotation as an endorsement of a normative heterosexuality. Jaggar (1983) is reading Marx, as assuming a given biological nature in man and woman as one of heterosexuality, this is the natural and necessary relation. This raises problems for Marx and Engels of biological determinism. If this passage is interpreted as their endorsement of normative heterosexuality, then the division of labour in the sexual act is already apparent, as a given. Heterosexuality, in this context implies the division of labour within the sexual act (as biological), which subsequently leads to the social division of labour where men have the responsibility for material welfare of any offspring, and women have the responsibility for nurturing. Jaggar (1983: 69), insists that procreative labour for Marx is natural and not historic, and is therefore of less value, so much so that it is unrecognised. As unrecognised, the subordination that occurs continues. This division of the sexual act as a biological given suggests that it will always be present, which itself implies, that social divisions resting on it, will always emerge. Jaggar (1983: 69) argues, that divisions such as these serve to constitute gender identity, to which Marx pays little attention. This leaves aspects of women's oppression invisible.

An endorsement of normative heterosexuality is one possible interpretation of these remarks that is not without credibility, but, in my view and this is central to my thesis, it is not how de Beauvoir interprets them. I think de Beauvoir endorses Marx's view of human nature and the relationship it has with culture and history, and she agrees with him that the relationship between men and women is a testament of this. Within this view however, nature is not simply a given with biology, as Jaggar (1983), earlier suggests. My claim is that Marx is arguing that from the relation between men and women we as human beings come to recognise and understand what stage we have reached as human beings, how near we are to what our human potential is. This involves understanding what our nature as human amounts to at any point. The 'natural' here is not something simply given. Nature is not given with our biology:

It therefore reveals the extent to which the human essence in him has become human or the extent to which the human essence in him has become a natural essence- the extent to which his human nature has come to be natural to him. (Marx 1844: 83-4)

Nature here does not mean biology, but rather, nature as it emerges in culture. It is a capacity for nature as transformed by culture that defines us. Human beings have the capacity to transform themselves and the environment, and this potential is reflected in the relationships that are shared between them. Humans are interdependent beings and reflecting on the relationship between man and woman as paradigmatic of a relation between human beings, demonstrates how near or how far we as humans are from maximising (or alienating), our human potential.

For Marx, capitalism creates a tension. Our needs and the relationships with other people under capitalism are, he claims, produced in such a way that is *false to our nature*, not a realisation of our potential. He argues, “man assumes as fact, in historical form what has to be explained.” (Marx 1844: 71) Man, (I am continuing Marx’s terminology here) is led to believe that he needs a job (which enforces the alienating structure of labour upon him), in order to earn money, in order to satisfy even those most basic of needs like food, shelter etc. However, Marx also claims that the transformation of the environment and subsequently our nature as humans is *historically variable*. There is a question, therefore; how are we to understand these claims about nature and needs in a way that is compatible with such claims of historical variability?

Soper (1981: 11) suggests Marx utilises both a scientific and an evaluative structure in his theory regarding human needs and nature. Needs, will always arise within the context of a society so become historical and specific. In capitalism, civilisation was the official goal, where science and technology can transform the environment in order to develop and improve the standard of living for human beings. Society is structured in such a way that the institutions within it serve to reinforce the idea of what it is that man needs, which, in turn, conditions a *particular nature* within him. For example, Marx insists capitalism creates a competitive nature in man; man is always in competition against other men rather than interacting collectively for a common good. Man is coerced into competition with other men believing he has to

earn a good living in order to satisfy his own needs, but it is society that has placed a value on the commodities that man believes he needs. Marx (1844: 87) states, “Private property is only the sensuous expression of the fact that man becomes objective for himself and at the same time becomes to himself a strange and inhuman object.” A capitalist society values money and ownership, therefore the institutions within that society instils in man a nature that will satisfy these values by being portrayed as needs. This is perpetuated and history is made. Human nature and needs comes from the outside, but the needs are not brute or value-free; they are based on judgements that society has already regarded are of value. Soper (1981: 11) argues, “to argue for or against certain conditions as needs (i.e. conditions of survival) we are already involved in judgements of what constitutes life or the good for human beings.” Within capitalism, needs are reflected historically in patterns of consumption. Whatever we consume, we assume we need. Society and the way it is structured, displays needs as fact. It is a fact, that one needs food and shelter, but the political structure in place that appears as objective and advocates labour, exploitation and private ownership in order to satisfy those needs is not factual, but, ideological; it serves the interests of some at the expense of others. Society places such a high value on economic considerations, that man’s nature is conditioned through this need to consume. The falsity continues in the progressive element of need, where, Marx (1844: 91) suggests that eventually what we consume may not be what we need and so gratification is lost, thereby perpetuating the experience of oppression and alienation (I will return to this later). However, there is another side to need. According to Marx (1844: 91), “In true human essence, need becomes an inner necessity not an outer objective one.”

Both Marx and de Beauvoir endorse the concept that history is what humans make. For de Beauvoir (1949: 767), “Moreover, humanity is something other than a species: it is an historical becoming; it is defined by the way it assumes natural facticity.”

Nature is always mediated. As Kruks (2010: 260) suggests, “History is naturalised and nature is historicised.” Human nature develops according to the way history is made. For Marx (1844: 90), “The nature which comes to be in human history – the genesis of human society – is man’s real nature.” As different periods in history, with

differing resources and levels of technology produce different needs, then different modes of production develop and construct the needs, the social relations and the characteristics of human beings, on both a physical and a psychological level.

(Jaggar 1983: 63) Here, Soper (1981: 11) argues, that Marx incorporates both a materialist and a contingent view of human nature.

It is becoming clear then that Marx particularly in his early writing, utilises several conceptions of human nature, some are universal and some are contingent. Marx therefore uses the concept of nature in at least 3 ways:

1. It is part of our nature to engage in praxis, active transformation of our material and social conditions. This seems to be a universal and necessary part of what it is to be human (this is nature as a universal given).
2. These transformations are constrained by the particular material and social conditions we are in and these lead to characteristics of human nature, which are contingent and historically variable (this is nature as manifest through culture).
3. Some of these historically constituted natures can be in conflict with the conditions needed for human flourishing, conditions which promote our capacities for expressive and transformative activity. (This seems to be the element Soper (1981: 11), suggests is evaluative in Marx's thought). This is the conception of nature which involves human flourishing.

In the quotation with which we began this section, I interpret Marx to be claiming that the relations between men and women are the test of the state of historically constituted human nature (2), in comparison to its potential (3). It is my view that de Beauvoir follows Marx on each of these points. Her ideas also attend to material and contingent features as constituting our natures, but with particular regard to the nature and position of women:

Woman is nature's creation; it must be repeated again that within the human collectivity nothing is natural, and woman, among others, is a product developed by civilisation; the intervention of others in her destiny is originary: if this process were driven in another way, it would produce very different results. (De Beauvoir 1949: 778)

This Marxist orientation I think is apparent in many areas of her thought and one which has often been neglected. De Beauvoir demonstrates that Marx's historical materialism is illuminating when used as an explanation of what she sees as a woman's unique situation in society.

Historical Materialism

The materialist doctrine concerning the changing of circumstances and that, therefore men are products of changed circumstances and changed upbringing, forgets that it is men who change circumstances and that the educator must himself be educated. (Marx 1845: 3)

Marx believed that philosophy up to that point, had failed to recognise the fundamental role people play within the world and their capacity to transform that world, "the philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it." (Marx 1845: 11) This introduces and develops Marx's notion of materialism. Marx refers to the material world as sensuous, it has real sensible, tangible qualities; ones that can be touched, manipulated and transformed. Humans are active and creative and the world provides us with the objects on which such labour operates. Labour therefore cannot exist without this material dimension, and labour also forms part of what it is to be human. We as humans need physical sustenance and we labour in order to obtain it. (Wolff 2010: 9)

All actions, (including labour) are forms of praxes. Praxis is intentional action. It is the term utilised to define the human ability to transform the environment in order to satisfy needs and goals. The notion of praxis then allows for agency, whereby a human is not a passive being. The world in which Marx's (and de Beauvoir's) agents find themselves has a dialectical arrangement, whereby people's ideas bring about change in material circumstance and material circumstance brings about a change in people's ideas. (McLellan 1971: 31-2) From this fundamental historical materialism, Wood (2004: 51), argues that Marx's account of the structure of society has a hierarchical form and is anchored in economic relations. Society's constitution is determined by the development of the productive forces (resources and levels of technology). For him, productive labour forms part of the material base (productive forces). This base is fundamental to the historical direction in which society develops, as it creates the relationship between people (relations of production) in

society. This, in turn, provides the economic framework and as a consequence, introduces and perpetuates a division of labour and a class structure.

How we labour in order to gain the commodities needed for social development, informs our knowledge and beliefs which, in turn, informs the political ideas and structures that society has. This for Marx is the superstructure. The superstructure is the social framework and infrastructure which reinforces power and domination through the social institutions like, education, politics, law and media etc. It is also the realm of ideas, the conceptualisations in terms of which society consciously makes sense of itself. Power and economics go hand in hand. So, those with money and property have power which allows access to the powerful positions in society, which also ensures the class structure and the perpetuation of the superstructure, to their advantage:

The totality of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation, on which arises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material conditions the general process of social, political and intellectual life. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their existence, but their existence that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1859: 2)¹

In the time that Marx and Engels wrote, capitalism had become the primary mode of production within Europe (see Notes), and so became the focus of their attention. (Wolff 2010: 7)

Marx, the development of capitalism and its critique

According to Marx (1848: 13), “The history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggles.” Under capitalism, which requires a certain division of labour, a certain social class structure emerges. There are those who own property including the means of production, and those who sell their labour to work for them. Some men laboured to clear the land, other men owned the machinery required and therefore the means to employ other men. The proletariat are the working class whose labour is part of the productive forces, which also includes the raw materials required for commodity production. The bourgeoisie, own capital and the means of

production and therefore profit from this structure. In order for capitalism to function effectively, exploitation of the working class is a necessary consequence.

Exploitation in this sense has technical meaning for Marx. Wolff (2010: 7), points out that Marx is suggesting more value is extracted from the working class labourer, than is given back to them in the wages they earn. There is no equality in terms of value, what the worker produces is of more value than the worker themselves and this is reflected in their remuneration.

This capitalist system not only involves exploitation and power, but, also results in alienation (this notion is one of importance to de Beauvoir and I will explore her version later in this chapter). In general, alienation, for Marx is captured in the concept of separation which occurs on a number of levels. Man is alienated from his self, from society and from other men. (Marx 1844: 70) In Marx's *Early Writings* alienation is referred to as, "estranged labour." (Marx 1844: 70) Man is alienated from himself. His labour is not a realisation of his species-being which is to work creatively and expressively so that the end product is in some sense an expression of the self. When labour is alienated, humans cannot realise their potential. With the capitalist structure in place, the proletariat in particular are degraded as humans by being powerless and creating products which are dictated to them. These are not products of their own free activity. The product then has power over the producer:

The worker puts his life into the object but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object (...) The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. (Marx 1844: 72)

A further form of alienation is man as alienated from society. The way society is experienced, is as an inevitable structure which is organised in a way that has control over the individual, rather than the individual having control over society:

The social power, i.e. the multiplied productive force, which arises through the co-operation of different individuals as it is determined by

the division of labour, appears to these individuals, since their co-operation is not voluntary but has come about naturally, not as their united power, but as an alien force existing outside them. (Marx 1846: 54)

Marx (1846: 54) insists that within all societies people are interdependent; they require each other to fulfil their needs. However, under capitalism, this fact is obscured. An inevitable consequence of this alienation leads to another form, where individuals are alienated from other individuals. As discussed earlier, other people are regarded as competition. We compete for jobs, possessions and capital and in view of this competition, we need to be protected from other people who will want what we have and will try to acquire it by any means. This sets up in man a selfish, egoist nature, again a contingent nature. Here man's nature works against his universal potential as human. The capitalist structure and laws of private ownership within society, generate the appearance of others being a threat to us and to our property. (Wolff 2010: 15) Marx states:

Division of labour offers us the first example of how, as long as man remains in natural society, that is, as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long therefore as activity is not voluntary, but naturally, divided, man's own deed becomes an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. (Marx 1846:54)

Note here that "*natural*" as Marx expresses it is also contingent nature. (This also forms part of Marx's critique of liberalism, which is discussed in depth in chapter 6 sections, metaphysical freedom and political freedom). What it is important to note here is that Marx regards alienation as an objective feature of capitalism. However, despite capitalism developing as a consequence of human activity, it has an effect greater than the sum of the individuals within its structure, which then (as also mentioned earlier), informs and constrains individual's future behaviour and possibilities. (Wood 2004: 23) This raises the issue of liberation, in view of the objective nature of capitalism, is it even a possibility?

Is liberation achievable?

Marx insists that liberation from capitalism and the resulting alienation can be achieved by revolution. He argues that with the formation of the class structure there develops a class consciousness. This is particularly apparent in the working class who, due to their oppressed circumstances, are in a privileged position to see how things could be different. Change is within their interest, see chapter 3, section, 'Marx, myth as Ideology' for further discussion. However, class consciousness is not something that just appears, but is something that develops over time. People discover other people who are in similar situations, with similar requirements and interests and they unite. (Tong 1989: 43) It is collective agency and consciousness that allows man to realise that circumstances are changeable and motivates him to change his material circumstances. The proletariat are (ironically), privileged as they are a property-less class so they have nothing to lose:

The proletariat is in a unique position (...) if they are to assert themselves as individuals, they will have to abolish the very condition of their existence hitherto namely labour. Thus they find themselves directly opposed to the form in which, the individuals, of which society consists, have given them collective expansion, that is, the State (...) Only the proletarians of the present day, who are completely shut off from all self-activity, are in a position to achieve a complete self-activity, which consists in the appropriation of a totality of the productive forces (...) this appropriation can only be effected through union, which by the character of the proletariat itself can only be a universal one and through a revolution. (Marx 1846: 85 & 93)

Change is only accessible via collective agency and consciousness and is not possible by individuals alone. Working together to abolish class division abolishes the inequality of power relations and in turn, the experience of alienation. Marx (1846: 85 & 93) argues that without capitalism, man has possibilities for freedom which capitalism denies him. However, as society develops historically and so is contingent, future social structures, relationships and arrangements are unknown. Even after a communist revolution Marx insists, all that can be argued is that it abolishes the present. He states:

The fixation of social activity, this consolidation of what we ourselves produce into an objective power above us, growing out of our control, thwarting our expectations, bringing to nought our calculations, is one of the chief factors in historical development up till now. (Marx 1846: 54)

Despite Marx's pessimistic view here, Kruks (2012b: 27) suggests his earlier writings on nature suggest the possibility of a non-alienated existence (though only in a fully communist state). As capitalism alienates man from other men and from himself, this impacts on the way man treats woman. In a non-capitalist society, man's nature will change and so the relationship between man and woman also has the potential to change.

Marx and Engels on the position of women

The question of women and their oppression is addressed by Marx and Engels in regard to a capitalist society. A woman (as is a man) is to be understood by the activity they undertake and the social relations which then ensue. Engels, rather than Marx discussed the specific issue of women's oppression in *The Origin of the Family, private property and the State* (1884). He argued the class divide and the key material divisions between the sexes were the result of the private ownership of the means of production. Production became separated from the domestic sphere and into a domain dominated by men and, as a consequence, the tasks for both males and females began to shift and diversify:

The first division of labour is that between man and woman for child breeding (...) The first class antagonism which appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamy was a great historical advance, but at the same time it inaugurated, along with slavery and private wealth, that epoch, lasting until today, in which every advance is likewise a relative regression, in which the wellbeing and development of the one group are attained by the misery and repression of the other. (Engels 1884: 73)

Engels does suggest in this quote, that prior to capitalism, there existed a division of labour between men and women in order to reproduce and that this division resulted in men having power over women. However, he suggests patriarchy (structures of male power over women) only became entrenched as a result of the development of capitalism. He goes on to suggest as the ownership of private property was legitimised, the institution of marriage became legalised as one of monogamy, in order that an authentic heir to an estate could be produced. He then specifies this position for women, mirrors that of the position of the proletariat in a capitalist society, where exploitation is a necessary feature. Men were guaranteed (as much as is humanly possible) a legitimate heir to their commodities and wealth and women were exploited in the home environment, in order to produce such an heir. According to Engels (1884: 67) this, “was the world-historic defeat of the female sex.” Patriarchy took hold and heralded, “The overthrow of mother right.” (Engels 1844: 67) Engels (1844: 134) went on to critique economic dependence for women:

In both cases this marriage of convenience turns often into the crassest prostitution- sometimes both partners, but far more commonly of the woman, who only differs from the courtesan in that she does not let out her body on piecework as a wage worker, but sells it once and for all into slavery.

The heritage of a man’s heir must be prioritised. The family as a private economic unit is a key feature of capitalism and is one in which women and monogamy are central. (Engels 1884: 134)

Despite the insistence above that a woman’s social status is not biological in origin there is for Marx and Engels an original division of labour within the family. It presupposes a divide based on sexual difference with regard to reproductive work (we will see, de Beauvoir critiques this). Marx and Engels however, argue the social divisions which follow this, go beyond that of merely having sex or conceiving and crucially caring for children. For Marx and Engels (and de Beauvoir), it is not the biology of women that produces their subordination, but what culture does with that subsequently. Biological explanations take no account of history and suggest that inequality is determined and unchangeable, it is not unchangeable. Both Marx and Engels argue that the oppression women are subjected to is a result of patriarchy, as

developed by capitalism. In capitalism, with the division of labour now extended to the production of commodities, women in the private sphere were not in a position to gain capital and ownership. Therefore economic dependency became the root of women's oppression. (Jaggar 1983: 65-6)

Marx and Engels also argue that within capitalism, there develops a distinction between the women and men of differing classes and their material circumstances. Working class women and upper class women have very different material circumstances and possibilities, and therefore suffer different forms and levels of oppression (this de Beauvoir accepts). For the bourgeoisie, women became privatised in the home. For the proletariat, women and children became commodities as labourers in the new factories. What is common to all women however, is the labour that is undertaken in the home, is primarily the woman's domain and as it does not produce commodities which can be sold, is regarded as of lesser value and leads to economic dependence. This is how Marx and Engels suggest women are in a similar position to the proletariat; they both suffer exploitation and material oppression:

In the great majority of cases today, at least in the possessing classes, the husband is obliged to earn a living and support his family, and that in itself gives him a position of supremacy without the need for special legal titles and privileges. Within the family, he is the bourgeois and the wife represents the proletariat. (Engels 1884: 137)

As a source of reproduction rather than production, woman became increasingly viewed and valued as a commodity herself, useful for reproduction and exchange. In opposition, man had become increasingly wealthy as a source of production and this increased his status in the family. As a result society developed the idea of the patriarchal family, where the man is the head of the household. He is the bread winner and the one who ultimately holds all the wealth and power. As a wife, woman has little authority and she and her children are regarded as his property. As a consequence, the dominant ideas regarding men and women and their social roles and behaviour, developed accordingly, "The effect of the sole rule of the men that was now established is shown in the intermediate form of the family which now emerges, the patriarchal family." (Engels 1884: 67) Engels however, given the distinction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie, argues that the relationship

between a proletarian man and a proletarian woman is on a more equal footing. As the working class man has nothing of value for his children to inherit there is less basis for male domination, or for insistence on monogamy within the marriage relationship. Also many women within the working classes do work in the public realm and earn wages that are essential to the household, and so their subjugation is not so clear cut:

The division of labour between the two sexes is determined by causes entirely different from those that determine the status of women in society. Peoples whose women have to work much harder than we would consider proper have often far more real respect for women than our Europeans have for theirs. (Engels 1844: 61)

Nonetheless, in the working classes, women earned less. Their role in the family is not regarded as the most important, although she earns money she is not regarded as the bread winner. The proletariat were informed by the patriarchal social practices and ideas of the bourgeoisie, and men in society hold power and authority. For the proletarian women, their reproductive labour goes unrecognised as labour and therefore as having social value. (Engels 1844: 61)

Within capitalism in general, man views woman as a need, an object to be appropriated, rather than as an individual subject. (This point is also one de Beauvoir develops). Marx (1844: 83-4) states:

Appropriating woman for himself. This is a result of private property. The way man behaves towards women is paradigmatic of the relationship between men and nature. Self-estrangement, competition from other men, unfree.

For Marx, the way to change this situation was communism. This would return us as humans to social beings, which is closer to our true nature as ideal. The institution of private property should be transcended, as ownership for humans may bring power, but also results in alienation in all its forms:

Just as private property is only the sensuous expression of the fact that man becomes objective for himself and at the same time becomes to himself a strange and inhuman object. (Marx 1844: 87)

Communism, Marx suggests would abolish ownership which in turn would resolve the tension humans experience between their existence and their essence. The result would be self-confirmation, a more meaningful existence. Marx insists however that capitalism is a required step in order for communism to be at all possible. It is to be transcended rather than abolished. (Wolff 2010: 16) To present day, capitalism has not been transcended as Marx had believed it would. The structure has proved an enduring one, the revolution did not fathom as he anticipated and those communist societies which resulted, did not seem to achieve non-alienated labour. However, to discuss this further is outside the scope of this thesis, but what I will consider is how far de Beauvoir accepts and develops these Marxist ideas.

De Beauvoir as an endorsement and development of Marx and Engels

“A society is not a species: the species realises itself as existence in a society; it transcends itself towards the world and the future.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 48)

Generally, de Beauvoir endorses Marx’s historical materialism and analysis of the workings of capitalism. However, she develops and supplements this analysis further with insights from existentialism and phenomenology:

To demand for woman all the rights, all the possibilities of the human being in general does not mean one must be blind to her singular situation. To know this situation, it is necessary to go beyond historical materialism, which only sees man and woman as economic entities. (De Beauvoir 1949: 69)

De Beauvoir accepts Marx’s account regarding a universal element to human beings namely a capacity for praxis. However, de Beauvoir also employs existential frameworks with greater emphasis given to the human capacity for transcendence, than is found in Marx. The important difference with Marx here is that for her, the emphasis lies with *individual agency*, not collective consciousness. A human existent for de Beauvoir (and the existentialists) is measured by their individual actions. In order to lead an authentic existence, the transcending of current circumstances

towards future possibilities is always an option. Transcendence is an ontological category that involves the notion of rising above a given, of surpassing the possibilities that may appear to fix us in particular social positions. A human existent has freedom of choice; this is an inescapable feature of existence, forever projecting forward to reach future goals. A human existent always has the possibility of resisting obstacles that may present themselves as limiting agency. (Bergoffen 2003: 254) In this thesis I will be suggesting that this existential position is moderated by her Marxism, leading to an account of freedom which is different to that of early Sartre. (See chapter 6) Crucially, de Beauvoir accepts that material and social conditions impact on our capacity to exercise transcendence.

De Beauvoir accepts Marx's argument, that many aspects of human nature are a contingent product of a particular historical circumstance. Human nature is mediated and interpreted depending on the cultural and historical context and as produced, can aid or constrain human fulfilment as well as (in existential terms) the possibility of transcendence. She insists that the way women's nature is formed in contemporary society is particularly problematic. Under capitalism, the material and social circumstances in which human beings find themselves are constraining for many, but, for de Beauvoir they are particularly so for women. Although the notion of agency and experience are issues raised by Marx, *women's* agency and experience in particular are topics which, de Beauvoir argues, are largely ignored. Traditional philosophy in general (not just Marx and Engels) was guilty of this. Men were specified as the universal, as representative of the whole of humankind and this is a constant theme. Marx's description of human beings is anchored in men. (De Beauvoir, 1949) De Beauvoir argues that a woman's capacity for praxis and also for transcendence, are hindered to a much greater degree than a man's. Woman has little opportunity for action and creation or for the acquisition of material assets. As a sense of identity is formed through social relationships, a woman's sense of self in particular is informed primarily with her relation to men and children. This echoes Marx's claim, that it is our relation to production which gives us our social position and identity. Here however, de Beauvoir develops this to include relations to *reproduction*, as it is this labour in particular that has come to define women's role in society. Wife and mother are the roles in which woman identifies herself as a woman and ones in which she specifically engages. However for de Beauvoir, this kind of

labour is particularly limiting. De Beauvoir sees it as restricting women to bodily existence, to re-creation rather than creation and she sees this as constraining their capacities both to accumulate value in Marxist terms and to engage in transcendence in existentialist terms. (De Beauvoir, 1949)

Here, is an insight, highlighted by Marx and developed further by de Beauvoir. That humans' contingent nature is at odds with humans' universal nature and this for de Beauvoir, is in particular respect to women. Woman's nature is different to man's, but this is a state of being which is not determined, it is historically variable and a change of social values would bring about a change in both men's and women's natures which could make both productivity (in Marxist terms) and transcendence (in existential terms), a more achievable possibility for women. (De Beauvoir, 1949)

For de Beauvoir, lack of power and control over fertility disempowers women and denies them the choice of when or indeed whether to conceive a family. The material circumstances a woman finds herself in, such as poverty and deprivation for example, impacts on the experience of motherhood for both the mother and the child and so is experienced negatively. Reproduction is argued as always historicised, the experience of it is dependent upon the contingent, historical and social context. There is historical variability attached. (Ward, 1995: 238) De Beauvoir does recognise however, that with different social circumstances, motherhood can be experienced on a more positive level. De Beauvoir (1949: 63-4), states:

The burdens that come with maternity vary greatly depending on customs: they are overwhelming if numerous pregnancies are imposed on the woman and if she must feed and raise her children without help.

In this way, de Beauvoir historicises the story Engels had suggested regarding the origin of women's subordination. It was not inevitable that difference in reproductive roles led to women being under men's power. Nonetheless, she adopts some of this account as a causal one, of how these relations may have developed especially in a material context, where certain kinds of physical strength were of importance. She appears to endorse a picture in which, in early society women's child bearing activities explained their being engaged in labour within the domestic realm.

Machinery and tools were invented but, de Beauvoir adds here, they were tailored to suit man's capabilities and, as a consequence, man's capabilities were given a greater value in society:

Throughout human history, grasp on the world is not defined by the naked body: the hand (...) moves beyond itself towards instruments that increase its power; from prehistory's earliest documents, man is always seen as armed (...) if the instrument requires slightly more strength than the woman can muster, it is enough to make her seem radically powerless. (De Beauvoir 1949: 63)

However, physical strength and speed can no longer justify the social inequalities that exist as, with the development of science and technology, the difference between men and women is already less, "On the other hand, technical developments can cancel out the muscular inequality separating man and woman." (De Beauvoir 1949: 63)

Machines have been invented to undertake the actions and burdens for which greater degrees of physicality were previously required. Women can now just as easily perform such tasks, as all it takes is the flick of a switch. So why don't they?

De Beauvoir views economic independence for women as of great importance in order to gain a foothold within social equality. Capitalism, which Marx argues as foundational to this, is also just as foundational to de Beauvoir's view, and she accepts that this plays a part in women's oppression:

Her social oppression is the consequence of her economic oppression. Equality can only be re-established when both sexes have equal legal rights; but this enfranchisement demands that the whole of the feminine sex enter public industry. (De Beauvoir 1949: 65)

Although de Beauvoir insists this does not constitute the whole explanatory story, such features are an important part of it, "woman's consciousness cannot be defined by her sexuality alone: it reflects a situation that depends on society's economic structure." (De Beauvoir 1949: 63) Economic and material independence from men would aid in establishing women within the capitalist structure as a producer of

valued commodities and give them access to private property ownership. This will shape and transform women's circumstances as well as their sense of identity, "The system based on her dependence collapses as soon as she ceases to be a parasite; there is no longer need for a masculine mediator between her and the universe." (De Beauvoir 1949: 737) With greater access for women to the public realm, de Beauvoir also argues, the relationship of power will shift, as it will no longer be in the domain of men only. The dominant social positions will be more accessible to all. All women regardless of class or social position should have access to the public realm of active work and opportunity. In view of this, societies' legal, educational and economic infrastructures which regulate and limit women's possibilities must change, which in turn implies that women's roles of wife and mother will no longer be the only available options open. (Simons 1995: 247) De Beauvoir (1949: 65) states:

Women cannot be emancipated unless she takes part in production on a large social scale and is only incidentally bound to domestic work. And this has become possible only within a large modern industry that not only accepts women's work on a grand scale but formally requires it (...) Resistance put up by the old capitalist paternalism prevents this equality from being concretely achieved.

Thus far then, we have seen that de Beauvoir endorses the view that woman's position in society is one of oppression due to large scale capitalist structures which value productivity and profit. As woman lacks opportunity and often capability to be productive and generate profit, in the capitalist sense, then she is de-valued. (Later, the aged too are also implicated by de Beauvoir as an oppressed group in society due to their unproductive status.) Woman's position within capitalism, in which she is allocated primarily the responsibility within the domestic realm, produces a contingent and historical nature for her, which makes her ill-equipped to acquire power in economic terms or undertake projects which, in existential terms, promote transcendence. She does accept, along with Marx that differing material circumstances would produce differing natures. Currently, woman, for de Beauvoir is subjugated due to her lack of productivity. (Kruks 2012a: 10) However, being economically independent for de Beauvoir is a start but is not the only requirement

needed for woman to achieve liberation from oppression. There are other issues at stake that de Beauvoir draws attention to, which I will now explore.

Alienation

De Beauvoir's account of alienation and its application to the position of women utilises both Marxist, and existential elements. She integrates these positions demonstrating the importance of both in her account. Marx's idea of alienation, where one is alienated from the task that is performed as not expressive of the self, is applied to women's domestic labour in particular, which she refers to as, "the torment of Sisyphus." (De Beauvoir 1949: 487) She utilises the metaphor of Sisyphus as analogous to the domestic labour women perform. Sisyphus, in Greek Mythology, was condemned to perpetually roll a heavy boulder up a mountain, whereby, due to the weight of the boulder itself, it would inevitably fall back down. This was his lot for all eternity. This is regarded as emblematic of hopeless, futile and meaningless labour as it achieves and amounts to nothing. Domestic labour, de Beauvoir (controversially) argues is just as hopeless, futile and meaningless, as it also amounts to nothing. As soon as the house is clean, it becomes dirty again, "The housewife wears herself out running on the spot; she does nothing; she only perpetuates the present." (De Beauvoir 1949: 487) For her, domestic labour is alienated labour as much if not more than the labour of the worker in the factory.

De Beauvoir accepts the objective structures of patriarchy but also adds an existential view. For her patriarchy is also about men's power over women. To dominate and impose his individual will over hers in order to remain a sovereign, subjective consciousness. Man as creative rather than re-creative has this power and this provides his social privilege:

Had there not been in human consciousness both the original category of the Other and an original claim to domination over the Other, the discovery of the bronze tool could not have brought about woman's oppression. (De Beauvoir 1949: 67)

She argues that the effects (of alienation) are more profound for women than they are for men. This is again, due to the nature of their work specifically within the home. The argument suggests that men are engaged in a public arena where productive

labour is performed, and also have a separate private arena, the home. Men can often relieve a sense of alienation that productive labour brings, within the private arena and the relationships they have with women. Women however are primarily in the private sphere and as this is the source of their alienation have no release. The labour they perform and the relations with men and children are the root of their oppression and the source of their alienation. (Tong 1989: 45) (This argument however does rely on the notion that the private arena is *not* a source of alienation for men, something men might wish to dispute). However, de Beauvoir's significant insight here is that, alienation is experienced differently for men and women. The point is that for women, it is of a particular kind with particular significance which has not been acknowledged by former thinkers such as Marx. (Moi, 2008)

There is a further kind of alienation which de Beauvoir highlights and which derives not from Marxism, but from existentialism. Marxism had stressed how capitalism alienates us from others. Existentialism develops this concept by its discussion of objectification. The Other alienates us from ourselves as subjects, where the world has value and meaning, by objectifying us through a look. Objectification is, "the self as externalised in the form of an object." (Sandford 2006: 65) As an object, one's consciousness is not free to assert its own subjectivity. From the position as object, the world has no value or meaning instead we become an object of, or for the Other's projects rather than our own. (Crowell 2010: sections 2.1 & 2.2) I will return to the concept of the Other later. (Although distinct from the Marxist concept, this discussion of objectification is indebted to Marx's account of how, under capitalism, human beings become mere cogs in a machine producing surplus values, identified earlier in this chapter). For de Beauvoir, this sense of alienation is particularly significant for women. Woman is regarded as an object in herself and not a free subject. Moi (2008: 184) agrees, when she argues that woman accepts herself as an object and this exacerbates the sense of alienation a woman experiences. As an authentic human agent, she has a transcendent consciousness, but, as a woman in society, she is identified by a fixed, idealised image of herself that has been defined by the gaze of others; in this case man (these are central issues for de Beauvoir and are explored in chapters 3 and 4).

De Beauvoir then expands further this notion of alienation as objectification by re-introducing Marxism. Both the existentialist and Marxist conceptions of alienation are interwoven in de Beauvoir's account of women as commodities. Having been turned into an object, woman within capitalism becomes a commodity. Clothes, jewellery and make-up all add to the image of woman as an object and limit her ability both physically and psychologically to transcend towards authentic, freely chosen projects. High heels, tight skirts, fashionable body weight, structure the body and mind in such a way as to decrease its capability. As such a commodity, man appropriates her as a possession. (De Beauvoir 1949: 360-1)

Woman is not regarded by man as his equal and so he oppresses and objectifies her. However, both man and woman are alienated as a result. De Beauvoir accepts that as a reproducer of children women are useful in order to reproduce heirs to whom a man's heritage and wealth can be passed down or, alternatively, to reproduce workers in order to perpetuate the capitalist system. As women are not regarded as producers under capitalism but reproducers and consumers, their roles are de-valued as they lack capitalist productivity. Women continue to internalise feelings of lesser productivity and value and develop an alienated, inferior sense of self. This notion of alienation is an aspect that women have in common under patriarchy. (Moi 2008: 176) Wifedom and motherhood, de Beauvoir argues, are not experienced under these structures as freely chosen projects derived from women's own motives. De Beauvoir highlights women's bodies as the site of reproduction that reduces them to their biological function when valued under a capitalist structure, and results in women's relationship with their bodies as a route of alienation. I will re-visit this in chapter 4, section, 'Biological Data.' This is why, for de Beauvoir, wifedom and motherhood are both regarded as alienating labour.

Thus objectified, women also became commodities for trade. Woman as object is used commercially to endorse and sell numerous products as diverse as cars to beauty creams in order to increase consumerism. Also regarded as an object, woman can be literally bought and sold. She is regarded as the property of the male, be it initially her father and then subsequently her husband. By the possession of woman and denying her legal and economic opportunities, woman becomes a commodity for

exchange by which heirs/workers are produced and all man's heritage will remain his:

Woman is no longer passed from one clan to another through marriage: she is radically abducted from the group she is born into and annexed to her husband's; he buys her like a head of cattle or a slave, he imposes his domestic divinities on her: and the children she conceives belong to her spouse's family. (De Beauvoir 1949: 93)

Capitalism and Patriarchy

For Marx and Engels, it is the lack of ownership of capital and property that grounds women in subordinate social positions. Patriarchy, with its objective structures of family, work, property inheritance and public life which give men greater power than women, is a consequence of capitalism.

Marx and Engels discuss patriarchy and capitalism as one system, whereby patriarchy is an inevitable development of capitalism. De Beauvoir sees patriarchy and capitalism as two separate systems, which both serve to limit woman's individuality and freedom of choice. The needs of capitalism alone do not explain the social inequalities. (Simons 1995: 244) De Beauvoir suggests that capitalism and patriarchy intersect (as Marx does), but patriarchy is also a stand-alone system that has been around long before the capitalist system developed. Consequently, in the Soviet Union (as it was at that time) patriarchy remained apparent despite the overthrow of capitalism. Socialist states practice inequalities which are just as gender specific:

everyone knows how radically the USSR [former] has had to change its family policy to balance out production needs of the moment with the needs of repopulation; besides, eliminating the family does not necessarily liberate woman: the example of Sparta and that of the Nazi regime prove that notwithstanding her direct attachment to the state, she might still be no less oppressed by males. A truly socialist ethic – one that seeks justice without restraining liberty, one that imposes responsibilities on individuals but without abolishing freedom – will

find itself most uncomfortable with problems posed by woman's condition. (De Beauvoir 1949: 68)

Patriarchy has its own set of objective structures which position men and women and which are particularly oppressive towards women. De Beauvoir goes on to insist that there is no *necessary* connection between the ownership of private property and the oppression of women. Social institutions that have developed in the name of capitalism or patriarchy do not give a full account of the human situation. Historical materialism, as Marx and Engels saw it, takes for granted the division of labour between the sexes and then explores how it plays out within a capitalist structure:

Woman cannot in good faith be regarded only as a worker, her reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity, both in the social economy and in her personal life; there are periods in history when it is more useful to have children than till the soil. (De Beauvoir 1949: 67-8)

De Beauvoir, contrary to Marx and Engels, argues gender differences and class differences have to be thought of as independent categories. She accepts, "the advent of the patriarchal family founded on private property. In such a family woman is oppressed (...) social oppression is the consequence of her economic oppression." (De Beauvoir 1949: 64) However, man and woman de Beauvoir insists, are more than economic entities. Gender oppression has additional elements not accommodated purely by economic considerations.

Jaggar (1983: 63) endorses this argument, saying that there is a relationship at work here that goes beyond a purely economic basis and therefore the situation cannot be fully understood by such terms alone. There are other specific issues related to women's social oppression. Relationships between men and women are apparent other than those between a husband and wife, and employer and employee. Differing relationships often have a differing framework of reference. Marxism reduces most encounters to economics but there is a manifold of social, emotional, political and cultural relations which also produce a historical context.

The One and the Other

In order to explain the source of patriarchy as more than a consequence of capitalism, de Beauvoir introduces another universal psychological structure which manifests itself in all societies, in the form of the One and the Other. This universal feature of human nature is additional to that articulated by Marx and Engels and does not have a foundation in Marxist theory, but for de Beauvoir, does intersect with the workings of capitalism. Humans wish to reign sovereign over other consciousnesses and consequently, wish also to reign sovereign over the environment. Authority and power is exerted in order to achieve sovereignty. By owning property, authority and superiority is exerted over those who do not have the means of ownership, for example the proletariat and women; this Marx and Engels argued. Yet, also, by owning property and transforming the environment to suit social needs, a subjective sense of dominion is gained over others, which is given an independent, pivotal role in de Beauvoir's account. This was made clear from the earlier reference in the Alienation section. She goes on to state:

it is impossible to deduce woman's oppression from private property. Here again the shortcomings of Engels' point of view are obvious. While he clearly understood that woman's muscular weakness was a concrete inferiority only in relation to bronze and iron tools, he failed to see the limits to her work capacity constituted in themselves a concrete disadvantage only from a certain perspective. Because man is transcendence and ambition, he projects new demands with each new tool (...) if the original relation between man and his peers had been exclusively one of friendship, one could not account for any kind of enslavement: this phenomenon is a consequence of the imperialism of human consciousness. (De Beauvoir 1949: 67)

For de Beauvoir, the relation of the One/Other lies at the heart of the relationship between woman and man, and this is put to use to serve the interests of capitalism:

Underlying the personal emotional conflicts as well as the economic history of humanity there is an existential infrastructure that alone makes it possible to understand in its unity the unique form that is life. (De Beauvoir 1949: 69)

There is a lack of reciprocity in the man/ woman relationship which Marx elucidates and de Beauvoir endorses and develops. Man and woman's position in society de Beauvoir insists is reflective of the imperialism of the subject/object, One and Other dichotomy. This will then form the topic of the following chapter.

The contribution of phenomenology: meaning and lived experience

Another important addition which de Beauvoir makes to historical materialism is a phenomenological one. We cannot explain the position of women, she claims unless we grasp it as a *situation*. Situation, in this sense, is not simply an objective set of material, economic structures. It includes the *meaning* that is attached to the material base which informs the ideas and images we have of ourselves and other people and, how they fit within the social structure. (Moi, 2008) These meanings become *internalised*, or adopted in the lived experiences of those men and women living within the combined capitalist/patriarchal social order. This dimension of lived experience then becomes viewed as central to the way in which these structures are maintained and reproduced:

To discover woman, we will not reject certain contributions of biology, psychoanalysis or historical materialism: but we will consider that the body, sexual life and technology exists concretely for man insofar as he grasps them from the overall perspective of his existence. The value of muscular strength, the phallus and the tool can only be defined in a world of values: it is driven by the fundamental project of the existent transcending itself towards being. (De Beauvoir 1949: 69)

According to Kruks (2010: 260) de Beauvoir is working, "in and across the interstices between phenomenology and a Marxist-inflected and also culturally orientated structuralist materialism." What this means is that de Beauvoir recognises how society places value upon the distinct characteristics of men and women, which are unaccounted for in terms of the pure historical materialism of Marx and Engels. What society must pay attention to, de Beauvoir argues, is how men and women internalise these social values and that for women in particular, this process of internalisation, is a key part of the mechanism by which their unequal position is maintained. For women specifically, the meanings and values that are associated

with being a woman are negatively invested. De Beauvoir insists that such internalisation results in the development of subjectivity. Subjectivity develops from the social roles and the material circumstances and possibilities that are available, all of which currently serve as limiting possibilities of agency for women and dis-empowering them from seeking other projects (other than those that are socially validated). These aspects of de Beauvoir's account will be explored in chapters 4 and 5

Summary: Can liberation for women be achieved?

In general terms, because de Beauvoir sees oppression as a result of a contingent historical process, it is not inevitable and is open to change. What is less clear is how such change is to be brought about. Kruks (2012b: 7) insists de Beauvoir is providing a structural analysis of society which is the material base, plus additional sources of oppression and alienation. If read as an analysis of what is already there then solutions are not apparent. Historical materialism, by definition can only theorise what is past or present and both de Beauvoir and Marx stipulate that future societies and social relationships are unpredictable.

Marx believed a change in social structure is vital for liberation from oppression, that a communist state would be the basis for equality which abolishes private property ownership and all the alienating consequences that ensued. The impetus of a proletarian revolution in order to reach this state would be for the proletariat to cease to exist as a class. Women are not a class. Unlike Marx's proletariat who developed a class consciousness and as a result a revolution would ensue as the outcome, de Beauvoir suggested woman is unlikely to revolt against her oppressor; woman has no wish to cease as a sex:

For democratic socialism where classes would be abolished but not individuals, the question of individual destiny would still retain all its importance: sexual differentiation would retain all its importance. (De Beauvoir 1949: 69)

So, a parallel change cannot take place within the gender divide. It is not in her interests to separate herself from the world of man as these are our fathers, brothers,

sons as well as husbands and parents to our children. This renders it difficult to make common cause against him. (De Beauvoir, 1949)

De Beauvoir therefore, does not view Marx's communist revolution as the sole road to liberation as it does not address all the additional elements which she has argued are present. However, liberation can be a possibility, as noted earlier, the circumstances de Beauvoir adopts from Marx and those she adds are all historically contingent ones. It is the recognition of this in which her Marxist influence lies:

it is when the slavery of half of humanity is abolished and with it the whole hypocritical system it implies that the division of humanity will reveal its authentic meaning and the human couple will discover its true form. (De Beauvoir 1949: 782)

In the chapters that are to follow, the additional components with which de Beauvoir supplements the workings of capitalism will be explored in more depth. We will look in the next chapter at one of her additions which she sees as intersecting with capitalism, that is, the introduction of the concept of the One and the Other.

Chapter Two - THE OTHER

She determines and differentiates herself in relation to man, and he does not in relation to her; she is the inessential in front of the essential. He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other. (De Beauvoir 1949: 6)

Introduction

In the previous chapter I explored de Beauvoir's commitment to historical materialism and also her claims that in order to accommodate the position of women, we need to pay attention to aspects in addition to capitalism. She argues that capitalism intersected with patriarchy, but in giving her account of patriarchy, she introduced one of her most famous claims, namely that to understand the position of women we must acknowledge that woman is Other. To make this claim de Beauvoir summons the writings of not only Marx, but also Hegel, offering a synthesis between their two perspectives.

To begin, I will outline de Beauvoir's notion of woman as Other, which at the point of writing *The Second Sex*, she regarded as a universal structure that underlies social relations. I will then offer a genealogy from Hegel, to Marx, to Kojève of how the One and Other became fundamental for her (and the existentialists) as a constituting feature of consciousness. I examine how, de Beauvoir herself develops this notion as key to sexed difference, with her claim that woman is the, "absolute Other." (De Beauvoir 1949: 82) However I shall also argue that, even in her appropriation of Hegel, her historical materialism plays a crucial role. She invokes a historical materialist perspective to explain *why* women occupy the position of Other, and also to explore how this position is to be changed. The structures of the One and the Other may be universal, but women positioned as the Other is historically contingent. Here she utilises Marx and Kojève, to argue that who counts as the One and the Other is a product of specific material circumstances. Furthermore I highlight at the end of the chapter how, in her later essay *Old Age* (1970), she comes to regard what had been postulated as a universal existential necessity, the division into the One and the Other, as itself a product of specific material circumstances.

De Beauvoir and the Other

No subject posits itself spontaneously and at once as the inessential from the outset; it is not the Other who, defining itself as Other, defines the One; the Other is posited as Other by the One positing itself as One. But in order for the Other not to turn into the One, the Other has to submit to this foreign point of view. (De Beauvoir 1949: 7)

As de Beauvoir makes clear in the Introduction to *The Second Sex* woman is not the only category of Other in society, “The category of the Other is as original as consciousness itself.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 6-7) The Othering process is, at this point, regarded as a universal ontological structure, which necessarily asserts itself within social groups. For de Beauvoir the Othering process also takes place between groups differing as to class, race, age and gender:

Village people view anyone not belonging to the village as suspicious others. For the native of a country, inhabitants of other countries are viewed as foreigners; Jews are the others for anti-Semites, blacks for racist Americans, indigenous people for colonists, proletarians for the propertied classes (...) a fundamental hostility is found in consciousness itself; the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object. (De Beauvoir 1949: 7)

However, the questions for de Beauvoir are why, in this context, is woman *always* in the position of Other? Why are the dialectical shifts whereby which group counts as the One and which as the Other is not apparent for women and men? Why for de Beauvoir, did this imperialism take the form of patriarchy, where men became the One and women the Other? De Beauvoir (ibid) states, “Where does this submission in women come from?” Here according to de Beauvoir is another source of tension between existence as a historically contingent one, and essence as a universal structure. The universal structure of the One and the Other is itself mediated by historically contingent features. The positive element to this being that nothing is fixed and who counts as the One and who counts as the Other is open to change. Here, her own universal, historical materialist ideas resurface. As it stands, the

historical account emphasising capitalism and patriarchy cannot explain, even with the addition of the existential ontology of the One and the Other, why men are still the One and women are still the Other, “Insofar as woman is considered the absolute Other, that is – whatever magic powers she has – as the inessential, it is precisely impossible to regard her as another subject.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 82)

De Beauvoir and woman as Other

“The subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as the essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 7) As highlighted in chapter 1 section, ‘de Beauvoir as an endorsement and development of Marx and Engels,’ de Beauvoir argues that the social position of women is not fully accommodated in the account of the development of capitalism. The claims that Marx and Engels provided that are grounded in the division of labour, are insufficient to explain distinct features of a woman’s position. De Beauvoir supplements this account by making essential use of the concept of the ‘Other.’

The Second Sex begins by asking the question, “what is a woman?” (De Beauvoir 1949: 3) In response to this, de Beauvoir argues that woman is *Other*. To claim that woman is ‘Other’ is to claim that they are defined in relation to what they *are not*. Their position is in opposition to that of man, who here is positioned as *the One*, the norm. Woman however is Other, in a number of ways.

1. Cultural Representation

In terms of the meanings that are attached to being a woman within culture, we find that she is represented as distinct from and inferior to man. As we shall see in our discussion of myths, to gain an identity as a woman is to be feminine, and it is primarily femininity, sexuality and motherhood that places woman as man’s Other as a dependent being requiring male support. These images of woman originate from a man’s perspective not a woman’s which results in woman viewing her possibilities in terms of man’s protection and material provision. (Bergoffen, 2009) This places them as Other by creating a dependence on men that is unlike any other social relationship. Man, is the referential norm by which all of society is measured. He defines himself, with all the positive qualities and he then defines her, with all the negative qualities he does not admit to possessing. He is active, she is passive, he is culture, she is nature. The Other does not construct its own qualities, and they are

constructed in such a way as to emphasise negative qualities. De Beauvoir argues that it is man, who claims the position of the One, the Subject. He has the positive, aspirational characteristics and image, whereas woman is defined by what she is not, ie. Man, with negative connotations, “He is the Subject; he is the Absolute. She is the Other.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 6) De Beauvoir claims:

This comes from being considered not positively, as she is for herself: but negatively, such as she appears to man. Because if there are other Others than the woman, she is still always defined as Other. (De Beauvoir 1949: 167)

2. Existential Recognition

Following Hegel, and in line with Sartre, de Beauvoir accepts that a subject requires recognition by another consciousness to gain a sense of identity. But she points out that both individually and collectively *men* seek this recognition from *women*, without reciprocity. I will return to this later in this chapter.

3. Material and Social Structures.

De Beauvoir argues that society structures its whole organisational framework around the male norm. If, following Marx, we pay attention to labour and the organisation of society and the family we find all of these structures take the male as the norm, in whatever class people are positioned. To be successful in this social order is to be male, with economic independence and material assets, with the power to define and assert oneself.

4. Woman as Other to Herself

This projection of characteristics by man onto woman, results in woman internalising this view, such that she regards herself as ‘Other’ which informs how she experiences herself in society. I will return to each of these aspects after tracing the origins of the category of the Other in her thought. This begins with Hegel.

Hegel's conceptions of the Other: The Master/Slave dialectic

“Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when, and by the fact that, it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged.” (Hegel 1807: 111)

Hegel’s example of the Master and Slave or Bondsman is a metaphor for the struggle between two independent consciousnesses in an unequal relationship, struggling for reciprocal recognition and freedom. The achievement of self-awareness is only

possible by recognition of being a consciousness by another consciousness. In order to see yourself you require an Other, almost as a mirror, by which the possibility of seeing yourself comes to fruition. This de Beauvoir accepts. (Hutchings 2001: 22)

To become aware of oneself and one's own consciousness, Hegel argues is to become aware of being recognised by an Other:

Each sees the other do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both. (Hegel 1807: 112)

Initially, both consciousnesses begin on an equal footing and a struggle then ensues to gain subjectivity, one's sovereign state of existence:

Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come out of itself. This has a twofold significance: first it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an other being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self. (Hegel 1807: 111)

This leads to inevitable conflict, for each sees the other as a means to ensure recognition of the self. From this comes the structure of the master/slave dialectic as this conflictual, sovereign mode of human consciousness results in one consciousness enslaving the other. For fear of his life the slave gives up the struggle and becomes subservient to the master. The master then lives a seemingly privileged existence of leisure. He has achieved independence and therefore freedom to pursue his projects. The slave however is in a seemingly less privileged existence, dependent on the master and fixed within the immanent world of objects. (Sandford 2006: 63)

But unfortunately, for the master, his existence is not as privileged as it initially seems. His required recognition has only been achieved via an inessential consciousness, that of the slave. The slave is inessential because, following the struggle, he is not an independent, free consciousness and therefore the master's own superiority is not mirrored in the slave's recognition. To gain his identity as powerful

and dominant requires recognition from an equal, but the master's victory over the slave entails the slave's subordination. As subordinate, the slave is not the master's equal and so, the master's identity as the victor of the struggle is not adequately accomplished. (Sandford 2006: 63) The slave however, *is* mirrored in an independent consciousness, that of the master. The labour that the slave performs also becomes liberating, as he finds identity, value and meaning in his productive work and activity, which reinforces his sense of self. His independence becomes manifest in the objects that he produces which, give him a sense that his conscious being is separate from that of objects in the world. The labour becomes expressive of his-self and also transforms the environment. As a consequence of this, there is a shift in power:

Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he truly is (...) the bondsman realises that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own. (Hegel 1807: 118-119)

For Hegel, the dialectical process continues on. Neither master nor slave will reach true self-awareness until they recognise the Other and the necessity of the Other within their relationship. The master would not be master if there were no slave or bondsman. The slave would not find an identity or meaning for his existence, if it were not for the existence of a master and the productive work that he (the slave) undertakes. For Hegel, within this dialectic there is the possibility that a new and improved status will be reached, where each will understand the other and the nature of their reciprocal relationship better. This deeper insight and perspective will eventually progress to each consciousness recognising the other in a mutual existence and therefore true self-awareness will be acquired. All of this takes place at the level of consciousness. (Lundgren-Gothlin, 1996)

Marx and the material Other

Marx adapted Hegel's account of the master/slave relation, but gave it a historical materialist grounding, rather than seeing it as a metaphysical account of the possibility of consciousness. Marx's historical materialism suggests that man, like the slave, transforms his environment in order to satisfy his ever increasing requirements. Unlike Hegel, however, instead of occurring at the level of

consciousness, this takes place at the material and economic level. For Marx, the category of the One and the Other is not an essential aspect of human consciousness, the conflictual nature of the dialectic is due to the material and social circumstances in which man finds himself placed, “Freeman and slave, patrician and plebeian, lord and serf, guildmaster and journeyman in a word, oppressor and oppressed, stood in constant opposition to one another.” (Marx 1848: 13)

Like Hegel, Marx suggests that human essence or species being is inextricably linked with others, “The estrangement of man, and in fact every relationship in which man stands to himself, is first realised and expressed in the relationship in which a man stands to other men.” (Marx 1844: 77) Humans have a consciousness of being bound to a social collective, a collective consciousness and from this an awareness of an individual sense of self or self-consciousness develops. Self and others are interdependent and such a relationship is required for any sense of individual identity but, as discussed in chapter 1, section, ‘Human Nature,’ the social relations that develop, for Marx, create the type of characteristics that individuals display. One becomes aware of oneself as human in a context within a particular society and one’s position within that society. A conflictual relationship with others arises from specific social and economic situations.

To lead a meaningful life is for Marx bound up with human activity and production, similar to the slave’s position in Hegel’s metaphor. A sense of being is achieved through production and creation and this can either be actualised or repressed depending on the economic power relations and an individual’s material circumstance. (Wood 2004: 21) In Marx’s (1844: 78) own words, “If his own activity is to him an unfree activity, then he is treating it as an activity performed in the service, under the dominion, the coercion and the yoke of another man.” Marx is utilising Hegel’s master/slave dialectic but instead of the emphasis being placed on an individual consciousness, he interprets the dynamic relationship on a class basis. There is no original struggle for self-conscious recognition as Hegel suggests, because for Marx, history begins with productive labour. The importance of productive labour as essential to human existence however, is taken from Hegel. As a consequence of productive labour, history has developed its mode of production as a capitalist one, which, as we discussed in the previous chapter, produces alienation

for man, the class structure for society and unequal social division. The bourgeoisie become representative of the master, and the proletariat become representative of the slave. The proletariat are the ones in a position to recognise the inequality and exploitative nature of the situation as it stands, as they are the ones exploited. In order to be aware of inequality, inequality must be practiced and experienced, as this highlights the problems and alternative options. Capitalism becomes a requirement in order that a solution can become apparent. For Marx, the proletariat are privileged in this way and they as a group will, just as the slave did, find the strength and purpose to rise up against the bourgeoisie in a communist revolution. The re-appropriation of wealth and power will result and equal, reciprocal relationships with other individuals, is a greater possibility. Marx argues that a communist society will allow human beings to affirm their true species being as individuals as part of a collective, which is one of sharing and communal co-operation:

Communism differs from all previous movements in that it overturns the basis of all earlier relations of production and intercourse, and for the first time consciously treats all natural premises as the creatures of hitherto existing men, strips them of their natural character and subjugates them to the power of the united individuals (...) it turns existing conditions into conditions of unity. (Marx 1846: 86)

De Beauvoir, as we have seen accepts Marx's account of the division into classes and the resultant class struggle, but she sees this account as needing supplementing with Hegel's original claims regarding the recognition of two consciousnesses, as a requirement for a sense of self. De Beauvoir weaves her Hegelian existential concepts which focus on relations between consciousnesses, together with Marx's picture of material, social structures, and both aspects position women as Other existentially, materially and culturally. I will explore this later in the chapter, but before that I will examine Kojève's view of the master/slave which followed on from Marx and became very influential to the existentialists of de Beauvoir's era.

Kojève: a Marxist and Hegelian dialectic

The writings of both Hegel and Marx were re-interpreted and utilised by Alexander Kojève in a series of lectures presented in the 1930s, and it was these lectures, that proved hugely influential to the existentialists. It is not clear if de Beauvoir attended

these lectures but she was certainly aware of their contents. (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 59) Kojève used Marx's account of historical development to suggest that man and man's activity produces his being, his sense of self. However, he also insisted on the Hegelian notion that one consciousness needs another consciousness for its recognition. Kojève (1934: 185) states:

History is, if you please, a long 'discussion' between men. But this real discussion is something quite different from a philosophical dialogue or discussion. The discussion is carried out not with verbal arguments, but with clubs and swords or cannon on the one hand and with sickles and hammers or machines on the other.

This need for creation and production is founded on desire. The impetus for the struggle to satisfy man's needs and the struggle for recognition by an Other consciousness, is desire. However, Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 63) argues Kojève differentiates within the term, desire. The desire merely for survival is for Kojève an animal desire. Human desire however, is about being desired. It is not only basic survival that makes us human, but also our being desired by an Other and recognised as an individual. Humanity is about risking one's life in order to gain the required recognition, not merely transforming material conditions to survive or preserve life.

This results for Kojève in a different emphasis regarding the master/slave dialectic. Both the master and the slave desire recognition by the other consciousness, but the necessity of the unequal relationship is required from the outset. In the struggle for self-conscious recognition, one party must assume the position of master and the other party must assume the position of slave. The shift in this position is how history is made (this echoes Marx's class struggle). Both positions entail the importance of risking one's life. The master has risked his life in the struggle for subjectivity, and has reigned supreme. However, the master gains only a hollow victory, as the recognition he desires comes from a slave whom he considers unworthy of giving recognition. One can only achieve value and meaning from a being that one considers as having value and meaning in themselves. Conversely the slave is in a position to realise his freedom and to satisfy his desires as he, through his productive activity and labour, can transform his material conditions. He has an impetus, a desire to strive for a better situation. (Lundgren-Gothlin, 1996) The slave

can negate the world as it currently exists and realise the potential of a situation through the intentionality of action, through praxis:

Now work is a real negation of the given. Hence Being which exists as a World in which men work implies a negative or negating element (...) the negation of the given by Work is what transforms the error into truth; the truth therefore is necessarily dialectic in the sense that it results from the real dialectic work. (Kojève 1934: 189)

The result of this is that, it is the slave who transcends the immanent, transforms the environment, and achieves liberation as an individual. Kojève insists, like Hegel, that mutual recognition *is* a possibility but like Marx, he also argues this is grounded in history and material circumstances. Recognition requires a classless society, “This complete, absolutely free man, definitively and completely satisfied by what he is (...) will be the slave who has overcome his slavery.” (Kojève 1934: 25)

Existentialist conceptions of the Other

The existentialists, (as influenced by all the featured thinkers) focused on the categories of the One/Other as a fundamental aspect of their thought. In particular, de Beauvoir and Sartre accommodated Kojève’s Hegelian/ Marxist position, as a basis for their own accounts and subsequent attempts to reconcile both material and existential positions. Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) suggests the existentialists, and in particular de Beauvoir, differentiate between the Other as an individual and the Other as a social categorisation. For the purpose of clarification, I will also use these categories.

The Individual Other

Both de Beauvoir and Sartre argue that part of what it is to be human, is the relationship with other people. From their earliest writings they view this relationship with another consciousness as often one of conflict, “Hell is other people.” (Sartre 1944: 61) There is a constant struggle to assert oneself as Subject in order to establish superiority and reduce another to the position of Other and inferiority. A human existent is always seeking to become master of their own consciousness and own creative activity. In addition however, in order to affirm oneself as a real, objective existent, the perspective of another is required as this is what gives us, “the

self as externalised in the form of an object.” (Sandford 2006: 65) It gives us the objective features of ourselves. However, the viewpoint of the other person is also, unfortunately, a threatening one. With the presence of other people, comes the experience of the world as organised around them, rather than around oneself. As I am looking at another and seeing them as a point of view on the world, my world is now contaminated by them. (McCulloch 1994: 133) Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943: 254-5) states:

instead of a grouping towards me of the objects, there is now an orientation which flees me (...) Thus the appearance among the objects of my universe of an element of disintegration in that universe is what I mean by the appearance of a man in my universe.

As necessary as others are to provide my objective characteristics, these characteristics also fix me as a certain kind of object, and such fixing sits in conflict with my sense of self as a subject, who has the capability to transcend circumstances. De Beauvoir (1949: 7) writes:

if, following Hegel, a fundamental hostility to any other consciousness is found in consciousness itself; the subject posits itself only in opposition; it asserts itself as essential and sets up the other as inessential, as the object.

De Beauvoir illustrates this initially in her novel entitled *She Came to Stay* (1943), in which she presents the unequal relationship between two individual consciousnesses (Francoise and Pierre), and their struggle for recognition. This struggle is emphasised as an internal rather than external one and is a struggle to the death. According to Morris (2008: 45):

The notion of an internal relation is arguably the single most important one for understanding the writings of the phenomenologists (...) internally related, is to say neither would be what it is were it not for the other.

As a subject, one has a point of view on the world; the world is a world for you. That mode of consciousness can be suddenly shaken by a look from another person, and

one experiences a mode of consciousness whereby one becomes an object in another person's world, one that is orientated to their vantage point; this characterises an inter-subjective relation. According to Bjork (2010: 52):

The drama in which Francoise, Pierre and Xaviere, take part has been read in a Hegelian manner, and is an illustration of the struggle for recognition between two self-consciousnesses.

This is a key feature of de Beauvoir's analysis and one she then extends. The relationship between Francoise and Pierre the two central characters, begins to unravel with the introduction of a third, Xaviere. The binary division between 2 subjective consciousnesses will cause a third subject to experience their self as an object. Alternatively third, fourth or even indefinite numbers of new characters may cause the initial binary dynamic to dissolve, and one or both experience themselves as objects. De Beauvoir's insight then suggests the subject/object relation and the intersubjective relationship can go beyond that of just two individuals. (Fullbrook and Fullbrook 1998: 276) I will also return to this later in the chapter.

This notion of the look was also exemplified by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness* (1943). Through the look of an Other consciousness one becomes aware of oneself as an object, by seeing yourself through their eyes. The look fixes us as a *something*, an object. It is a mode of being that I take on as mine, through the *emotions* that ensue from being looked at and objectified. (Crowell 2010: sec 202) Sartre's argument follows that one becomes fully immersed in one's projects and as such cannot describe the action, or be aware of the action from the outside. I am my action and this is how I engage with the world and experience the value and meaning of it. However, when I become aware of being looked at by an Other, I am no longer in the position of subject, I am object. I take on a mode of being that is not my own choosing and one which rarely promotes my subjectivity. Sartre illustrates this concept of the look with his example of shame:

Let us imagine that I have glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. I am alone and on the level of a non-thetic self-consciousness (...) I am my acts and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification (...) My attitude has no 'outside,' it is a pure

process or relating the instrument (keyhole) to the end to be attained (the spectacle to be seen), a pure mode of losing myself in the world (...) This situation reflects to me at once both my facticity and my freedom; on the occasion of a certain structure of the world, it refers my freedom to me in the form of tasks to be freely done (...) But all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me (...) It means I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure (...) I see myself because somebody sees me (...) I do not reject it as a strange image, but it is present to me as a self which I am without knowing it, for I discover it in shame (...) It is shame or pride which reveals to me the Other's look and myself at the end of that look. (Sartre 1943: 259-60)

The consequence of the look is to struggle with the Other to regain a sense of self and reclaim one's subjectivity, to reclaim the position of subject with freely chosen goals and projects (which equates to a meaningful existence). This relationship is dynamic in nature as when one looks at an Other, one is objectifying them and they then resume the struggle to regain their subjectivity, they can return the look. The relationship flips back and forth continually. The example of shame in this description in particular, is a mode of being which can only be experienced when an Other's subjective consciousness is present. To feel shame is a revelation to your own consciousness that you are being viewed in a certain way, and objectified as such by an Other consciousness. Sartre (1943: 222) states, "By the mere appearance of the Other, I am put in the position of passing judgement on myself as an object (...) I recognise that I am as the Other sees me."

Also as noted by Hegel this relationship is a hierarchical one. Denying an Other's subjectivity is denying the very thing for which the affirmation of subjectivity is required. An identity is dependent upon the recognition by the Other, but by denying their subjectivity they are in no position to recognise mine. It is desire and the desire to live an authentic, meaningful existence as a subject, which forms the basis of the conflict with the Other. It is not only the desire to regain subjectivity and therefore meaning, but also the desire to *dominate* an Other's consciousness and become sovereign over them. (McCulloch 1994: 138) However, what is key here and

common to both de Beauvoir and Sartre, is the concept that the encounter with an Other consciousness is essential in order to gain a sense of self. We need recognition from an Other in order to recognise and understand ourselves, and our place in the world. However, what also remains as central is the element of domination. The relationship between the self and Other is most often a conflictual one, due to this universal orientation of humanity towards domination. For de Beauvoir and Sartre, identification is realised by experiencing and distinguishing oneself from what one is *and* is not. This is where the conflicting aspect of the relationship arises. As with Hegel, there is a dialectic to this conflict. The Other objectifies me and I in turn objectify them. Who is dominant in this conflict is something which shifts to and fro between them. Sartre insists, unlike Hegel, that we will never move beyond this conflict to a situation of mutual but non-hierarchical recognition. De Beauvoir, however, more loyal to Hegel's and Kojève's concepts, argues that this can be a possibility. (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 67)

For de Beauvoir, there is nothing in the ontology of humans that prevents the relationship becoming a reciprocal one. (Gatens 2003: 269) Humans can share, what de Beauvoir (1949: 47) terms, '*Mitsein*,' being with others:

Each one tries to accomplish itself by reducing the other to slavery. But in work and fear the slave experiences himself as essential, and by a dialectical reversal the master appears the inessential one. The conflict can be overcome by the free recognition of each individual in the other, each one positing itself and the other as object and as subject in a reciprocal movement. But friendship and generosity which accomplish this recognition of freedoms concretely are not easy virtues. (De Beauvoir 1949: 163)

This notion of '*Mitsein*' has echoes of Marx as it refers to humans as a collective. Pre-society, human beings experience themselves as part of a whole, a fellowship:

men do not define themselves first as individuals; men and women have never challenged each other in individual fights; the couple is an original *Mitsein*; and it is always a fixed or transitory element of a larger collectivity. (De Beauvoir 1949: 47)

Unlike Marx, however, de Beauvoir argues that human beings assert themselves as autonomous individual subjects by emerging from this whole. For this reason, the concept of *Mitsein* does not appear to present a tension with her existentialism as de Beauvoir argues that it is still up to an individual to realise their-selves as free subjects, and to reciprocate this recognition with an Other. Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) insists that de Beauvoir's view of humanity encompasses a dual aspect, that the existence of humans is always a social one. It always involves others, but that humanity itself is, like Hegel argued and de Beauvoir endorsed, marked by conflict. How else can oppression be explained?

However, according to Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 215), what was common to Hegel, Kojève and de Beauvoir was their engagement, "in considering reciprocal recognition possible at both the individual and societal levels."

The Social Other

Sartre and de Beauvoir, and importantly here, Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1968), saw the category of the Other as not only operating at the level of individual consciousness, but also as operating at the social level. The Other is outside of what society regards as the *norm*, for example, being male, white, young and/or economically successful. In discussing Sartre, Lennon (2015: 103) points out:

In *Anti-Semite and Jew* (1948), Sartre gives an account of the way in which (...) The Jew is imagined as Other; and attributed the characteristics which the dominant group wishes to dissociate from themselves. There is a double objectification involved in this. The normal gaze from another, attempting to fix our objective characteristics is, for Sartre reciprocal. We return the gaze to individual others in our turn. But in the case of the Jews, (and later black people), there is an additional level. A whole group is imagined in ways which ensure a social positionality, from which they have no power to cast an objectifying eye back on the dominant group.

Sartre (1948), in this later work does acknowledge how freedom can be problematic within social contexts that construct Othering and states:

the root of Jewish disquietude is the necessity imposed on the Jew of subjecting himself to endless self-examination and finally of assuming a phantom personality, at once strange and familiar, that haunts him and which is nothing but himself –himself as others see him. You may say that this is the lot of all, that each of us has a character familiar to those close to us which we ourselves do not see. No doubt: this is the expression of our fundamental relation to the Other, but the Jew has a personality like the rest of us, and on top of that he is Jewish. It amounts to a doubling of the fundamental relationship with the Other. (Sartre 1948: 78-9)

Frantz Fanon (1968), discusses his experience of his position as Other, as a black man in a white man's world. According to Moi (1999: 67) Fanon, "analyses race as a bodily situation, drawing on exactly the same concepts as de Beauvoir." Fanon (1968: 109) himself states, "through his movements, attitudes and gaze, the other fixes me." In a similar description to de Beauvoir's and Sartre's characterisation of the social Other, he suggests how groups, who are not the reference point in society, are subject to inferior treatment and possibilities. He experienced himself as black in a white world. He describes how it is to see yourself as others see and judge you through their eyes, without those eyes having any knowledge of you, as the subjective individual that you are:

There you have it, I am not the one who creates a meaning for myself, but the meaning was already there, pre-existing and waiting for me. It is not with my bad Negro wretchedness, my bad Negro teeth, my bad Negro hunger, that I will model a torch I can set on fire in order to burn down the world, but the torch was there already waiting for that turn of history. (Fanon 1968: 134)

Fanon (1968: 85) characterises this as the, "white gaze." The white man has the power and the black man has a secondary status which is always under scrutiny and judgement. He is constantly aware of himself as an object being fixed and burdened by the gaze of the white man who regards him as inferior, a position to which he has to constantly negotiate and to conform. Fanon is describing the Othering process on a cultural level whereby the characteristics, meanings, stereotypes are already in place

within a culture. But he also draws attention to a feature which de Beauvoir regarded as central. An individual is born into that culture and *internalises* the pre-existing concepts. So here, Fanon argues that a black man does not construct himself and his own definition and identity; it is constructed for him and already exists.

Moi (1999: 204) suggests that Fanon reveals, “that similar mechanisms of oppression are at work in the encounter between the raced and the sexed body and the Other.”

De Beauvoir anticipated this account.

Woman as Other

It is in the context of these discussions that de Beauvoir formulates her own claim, that what defines woman is her position as Other to man, in each of the ways spelt out at the beginning of this chapter. This begins in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947 translated from French by Frechtman B 1980 this edition will be used throughout) where de Beauvoir describes the concept ‘woman’ as representative of the ‘slave’. According to Broeck (2011: 178) de Beauvoir is:

giving woman a consciousness of the slavish who is in need of
being put next to freedom, thereby to become a resistant object to
a subject, and eventually, a subject herself.

This demonstrates the foundation of de Beauvoir’s interest in arguing that woman is regarded as an object and consequently socially inferior. She is implying that the suffering of women is analogous to the suffering of slaves due to the oppression woman is subjected to, which as a result, leads to the internalisation of her inferiority and so develops in her a subordinate subjectivity. Her notion of situation also begins to formulate as Broeck (2011: 173) suggests de Beauvoir’s rhetoric is, “characterising situations of oppression to the human spirit.” Broeck goes on to state:

Her [de Beauvoir] characterisation of oppression, which in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* always needs a human interaction, hinges on the way in which tyranny turns human beings into things, thereby robbing them of the possibility of achieving transcendence.
(Broeck 2011 : 173)

These ideas were extended in *The Second Sex*. De Beauvoir states:

But what singularity defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other. (De Beauvoir 1949: 17)

Women, like black people in Fanon's description, find their characteristics defined, pre-existing in culture, not ones they have created for themselves. Similarly but prior to Fanon, she argues that this concept of women is internalised by women, so that their *experience of themselves* is as Other, to men. They experience themselves as if under the gaze of men.² As with Sartre's account of the Jew this is an example of double Othering. The dynamic and dialectical reversals within relations between individual consciousnesses have an additional layer of the social; the position of one of the individuals within the relationship is socially Other. This also affects the power relations between individual men and women, the extent to which individual women are unable to resist the characteristics which individual men attach to them. De Beauvoir (1949: 82) states:

For men, the counterpart – or the other – who is also the same, with whom reciprocal relationships are established, is always another male individual (...) the mistake has come from confusing two forms of mutually exclusive alterity. Insofar as woman is considered the absolute Other – that is - whatever magic powers she has - as the inessential, it is precisely impossible to regard her as another subject. Women, have never thus constituted a separate group that posited itself for-itself before a male group.

What this means is that, where oppression has occurred with other groups of people in society, these groups have according to de Beauvoir, at some point revolted; she argues that women, however, have not. De Beauvoir also refers to this position as woman being the, "inessential." (De Beauvoir 1949: 17) The word inessential is important as women lack social recognition and also often accept their inferior position:

Woman's drama lies in this conflict between the fundamental claim of every subject, which always posits itself as essential, and the demands

of a situation that constitutes her as inessential. (De Beauvoir 1949: 17)

De Beauvoir argues that man creates this situation of otherness and confines woman to it. Men do this, de Beauvoir insists, by denying the human condition of ambiguity (ambiguity is created by human existence, it is a paradox between transcendence and immanence; see chapter 6, section, 'Tensions' for further discussion). One avenue of this denial is to define woman as Other. This definition entails images and meanings of femininity, implied by patriarchy and imposed on women in order to serve as sources of oppression. This produces and maintains for men, their positive definition and their position as superior, whilst at the same time, utilising sexual difference as a basis for producing and maintaining women's definition and position as inferior. The position of the superior is a precarious one and so requires patriarchal power, in order to sustain it. It is precarious as no human existent can be the superior subject all the time as they are, at the same time, an object. Man has limitations too, but these are denied. Yet the cost of such denial is at the expense of women, as their domination is required in order to maintain man as the socially dominant one. (Scarth 2004: 121) De Beauvoir (1949: 781) states:

The fact is that this sacrifice appears particularly heavy to men; few of them really wish in their hearts to see women accomplish themselves; those who scorn women do not see what they would have to gain, and those who cherish her see too well what they have to lose.

This (alienating feature) of woman's situation is contradictory. Nature's beauty is what is desired of woman and what she strives to reflect, as this is socially validating. Not so much for her however, but for him. She becomes a status symbol and a reflection of his manhood and success. In de Beauvoir's own words:

Woman's very being is opacity; she does not stand in front of man as a subject but as an object paradoxically endowed with subjectivity; she assumes herself as both self and other, which is a contradiction with disconcerting consequences. (De Beauvoir 1949: 771)

Marx's influence becomes apparent here as woman is regarded as an objectified need by man, in order to secure himself as male and satisfy his sexual appetite; she

becomes his possession. In Marxist terms, this is a consequence of the ownership that capitalism promotes, and in existentialist terms is a consequence of the superiority of the subject. De Beauvoir suggests, “for this she is so necessary to man’s joy and his triumph that if she did not exist, men would have had to invent her.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 209) This facilitates for man an authentic meaningful existence that can fulfil the existential principles of transcendence and freedom, while defining women as trapped in immanence:

But what singularity defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans an autonomous freedom she chooses and discovers herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other; an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence. (De Beauvoir 1949: 17)

However, de Beauvoir’s argument suggests that men deny women recognition of their subjectivity, yet wish their own subjectivity to be not only recognised by women, but also admired. Women internalise this position. These roles are the ones captured in the lived experience of both and as a result, women and men are living in bad faith, see p82 in this chapter and also chapter 6, section, ‘Bad Faith.’ Here, de Beauvoir proposes:

The fact is that men encounter more complicity in their woman companions than the oppressor usually finds in the oppressed; and in bad faith they use it as a pretext to declare that woman wanted the destiny they imposed on her. (De Beauvoir 1949: 773)

Woman, in her status as Other, is there to be conquered and dominated, yet she is also there as a mediator in order that man can be validated. She is outside the world of man, even though it is man who defines her. She does not actively take part in a man’s activities as do other men, so is in a position to reflect back and admire. Values such as courage, strength and virility are validated through a woman’s view. She watches rather than takes part. His success is established through his acquiring the values that he posits, but in turn that woman acknowledges. Such values are not ones that she herself possesses; she is instead his muse or idol. His individual merits

are what a woman is allowed to judge, but in her judgement he seeks generosity not necessarily accuracy. For de Beauvoir, man can then transcend:

A man is judged by his fellow men by what he does, objectively and according to general standards. But certain of his qualities and among others his vital qualities, can only interest woman; his virility, charm, seduction, tenderness and cruelty only pertain to her (...) For many men (...) instead of a truthful revelation, they seek a glowing image of admiration and gratitude, deified in the depths of a woman's two eyes. (De Beauvoir 1949: 208)

This privilege is, de Beauvoir notes, also a situation which has a material and economic dimension, as well as an existential one. For Marx, the Other is created as a result of class division. It is dependent on the economic infrastructure of society, and therefore the material circumstances of the groups within it. The categories of the Other are formed by the division of labour. For de Beauvoir this goes hand in hand with the universal existential practice of Othering, which marks all relations between both individuals and groups.

De Beauvoir also marks a difference between the way in which women are Other and other examples of social dominance. This One/Other relation between men and women, does not share the dynamic structure that the other examples of One/Other relations have. De Beauvoir argues woman is the prime example in society of the Other, but also stipulates that for the other social categories in which Othering is involved, there is the possibility of a dialectical reversal. Historically such reversals do occur:

But the other consciousness has an opposing reciprocal claim: travelling, a local is shocked to realise that in a neighbouring countries locals view him as a foreigner; between villages, clans, nations and classes there are wars, potlatches, agreements, treaties and struggles that remove the absolute meaning from the idea of the Other and bring out its relativity (...) how is it then, that between the sexes this reciprocity has not been put forward, that one of the terms has been asserted as the only essential one, denying any relativity in regard to

its correlative, defining the latter as pure alterity. (De Beauvoir 1949: 7)

The lack of reciprocity in the case of women leads to de Beauvoir claiming that woman is the, “absolute Other,” (de Beauvoir 1949: 82) the most extensive and most fundamental example of the Othering structure. To be the absolute Other implies that woman is not self-determining. De Beauvoir expresses it unequivocally, “Woman is lost (...) In the eyes of men – and of the legions of women who see through these eyes (...) the ‘real’ woman is one who accepts herself as Other.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 282) The absence of a dialectic also leads Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) to suggest that in relation to the master/slave dialectic, women are not in the position of the slave, but in stasis, outside of the struggle, and have remained there:

I am therefore claiming, in contrast to other scholars that while Beauvoir uses the Hegelian master/slave dialectic to explain the origins of oppression, she does not locate man as master and woman as slave in this dialectic. (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 72)

For Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) this is why women are the absolute Other and their first move must be to enter into this dialectical struggle for recognition.

Scarth (2004) and Kruks (2012) offer a different reading to that of Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) by suggesting that the master/slave metaphor is to some extent analogous to men and women respectively. They do both recognise, however that the dialectic gets, “stuck in time.” (Scarth 2004: 108) Kruks (2012b: 25) also points out that de Beauvoir does suggest that individual women on occasion, “do contest their position as Absolute Other (...) taken overall *The Second Sex* does not portray women as in such a static condition as Lungren-Gothlin claims.” I think what Kruks (2012) has highlighted here is that Lundgren-Gothlin appears to have blurred the categories (ones which she differentiated) between the individual women and the social category ‘woman.’ De Beauvoir’s chapter in *The Second Sex*, on the ‘Independent Woman’ for example, offers cases in which particular women have adopted positions which contest their status as Other. However, women as a social group had not, at the time she was writing, engaged in such a reversal.

Despite differing interpretations, the questions which such an analysis leads to for de Beauvoir are: why is the category woman unlike the other social categories that are also subject to Othering? The other categories, however difficult the situation, enter into the dynamic process of the relationship and so the possibility of reversal is in play. How have men and women come to such a situation that women are the Absolute Other? Why does woman consistently hold the position of the Other, with no reciprocity in play, and what would be needed to change this situation?

Why is woman the Absolute Other?

De Beauvoir's answer to this question employs the resources of historical materialism, which always remain in process alongside her modified Hegelianism. Kruks (2012b: 3) insists:

in *The Second Sex*, where she does indeed invoke a version of the Hegelian dialectic as intrinsic to women's oppression, she is well aware that it is not by itself sufficient to account for the situation of women. For this dialectic is sustained only through its symbiosis with large scale social structures, institutions, norms and practices, and de Beauvoir closely examines these.

As discussed in the previous chapter, she tells a story of a time in prehistory when women's lack of strength in societies would have put them at a disadvantage. This she sees as not only making them materially disadvantaged, but also gave men the chance to exercise transcendence while women remained, in her view, trapped in immanence. The historical situation was what also led, for her, to the existential opposition. Here, de Beauvoir appears to adopt the views of Hegel and his followers regarding the importance of certain kinds of activities in raising humans above mere animal existence. De Beauvoir echoes the idea, that humans assert themselves as human through productive work (praxis) and by risking their lives, rather than preserving it:

it is not the giving of life but in risking life that man is raised above the animal that is why superiority has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills. (De Beauvoir 1949: 76)

She argues men, had/have opportunities both socially as a category and individually, to risk their lives. As a group they went to war to fight for humanity, risking their own lives and experiencing the fear of death. Historically as individuals, men distanced themselves from the animal as they assume the position of master; they actively produce, create and transform the environment, gaining superiority over nature. Women, however, did not. She preserves life as burdened by her reproductive body and did not continually participate in productive work, or experience risking one's life. Women lack social opportunities in which they can assert themselves as risk takers. Lundgren-Gothlin (1996) argues that this life and death struggle is also Hegelian in origin and one which de Beauvoir appears to accept; struggles such as these are necessary in order to mark the transition from nature to culture. What marks men the One is their position in culture, transcendent from nature. In this way de Beauvoir points to historical material/economic conditions not only to explain material inequalities between men and women, but also to explain why in the development of the universal structuring of the One and the Other, women occupy the position of the Other. As was noted, de Beauvoir points out that we have long passed the moment when physical strength of this kind could be determining. So what now explains the continuing situation in which women occupy the role of the Other in all of the ways outlined at the beginning of this chapter? It is in her answer to this question that de Beauvoir makes an important contribution to the understanding of women's position; but it is a contribution which itself is marked by tension.

The answer to this question, de Beauvoir argues, is complicity. Women, on both an individual and social level, are in some way complicit in their situation. De Beauvoir even goes so far as to suggest that woman gains satisfaction in her role as Other, because life is easier. No economic risk, no decision making and therefore no anxiety, responsibility or stress:

Refusing to be Other, refusing complicity with man, would mean renouncing all the advantages an alliance with the superior caste confers on them (...) The man who sets the woman up as an Other will thus find in her a deep complicity. Hence woman makes no claim for herself as subject because she lacks the concrete means, because

she senses the necessary link connecting her to man without positing its reciprocity, and because she often derives satisfaction from her role as Other. (De Beauvoir 1949: 10)

However, although de Beauvoir does appear to be chastising women (and to some extent she is), she recognises how women lack this power to transcend, for a number of reasons. Firstly, woman has a lack of material and economic means (de Beauvoir retains her materialism here) and secondly woman has *internalised* her position as Other. Women are a different kind of category to that of a class, and cannot be judged in the same manner. In the previous chapter I discussed how de Beauvoir argues that women are not able to formulate themselves into a group, there is no 'we' with women as they have a unique bond with men. With seemingly no common ground in which women can relate to each other as women, they have not as a group demanded this recognition from men, the recognition that they too are subjects. They lack the material conditions to organise themselves into a collective. They have no actual places where they can come together:

They live dispersed among men, tied by homes, work, economic interests and social conditions (...) As bourgeois women they are in solidarity to bourgeois men not with women proletarians; as white women they are in solidarity with white men not with black women. The proletariat could plan to massacre the whole ruling class; a fanatic Jew or black could dream of seizing the secret of the atomic bomb and turning all of humanity Jewish or black: but woman could not even dream of exterminating males (...) The couple is a fundamental unit with two halves riveted to it (...) she is the Other at the heart of the whole whose two components are necessary to each other. (De Beauvoir 1949: 8-9)

Social institutions of marriage and motherhood, for example, are criticised by de Beauvoir as exploitative of women, yet are roles which women accept. Women accept the roles that are created for them, roles which are associated with an idea of femininity and roles that are resigned to the domestic sphere. Women, who align themselves with men, gain some sense of esteem as an individual and also value in society. The more powerful and materially successful the man, the more she will

gain some sense of satisfaction from her position. It is however, a vicarious existence. Her characteristics and possibilities are shaped, as are his.

However, in explaining such acceptance, de Beauvoir does not simply refer to women's material and structural position within society. She introduces the notion of internalisation; an important aspect of her view. She emphasises that women have become Other to themselves. The lack of prestige and value within society is internalised and reinforced at an individual and social level and woman's identity and sense of self develops from these foundations. The concept of internalisation has echoes of Marx and his view of alienation, and also that of false consciousness. We will return to this in chapter 3 section, 'Marx, myth as Ideology,' but, for now, his view was not given a phenomenological orientation. De Beauvoir, however, developed this notion in an importantly phenomenological way. She argues that the result of internalising a cultural Otherness is that women comport themselves in deference to men (see Notes). A position of subordination can affect *bodily* comportment and expression and so woman is trained to adopt the position of Other. Lack of social power translates in the individual into displays of behaviour and characteristics which then informs the way we understand ourselves as individuals and also, on a larger scale, how we understand ourselves as a social category and the possibilities that are available to us. Such embodied displays may feel like they are biological in origin but they are socially embedded. As men are in the positions of power, they are attributed characteristics of activity and transcendence. Women admire these attributes but at the same time, do not believe they have them, so internalise feelings of dis-empowerment. This affects them as embodied beings because sexual difference offers women the opposing characteristics of passivity and immanence. Women then scrutinise and comport themselves accordingly. James (2003: 152) suggests:

However, her [de Beauvoir] sophisticated analysis of the position in which woman finds herself (...) illuminates an aspect of oppression to which neither Hegel nor Sartre seem to do justice. In her arresting account, complicity is conceived as a condition of an embodied self whose abilities and therefore options have been formed by social circumstances.

Women, gain a training via culture which is like that of a bodily habit so that they comport themselves within society as the Other. I will re-visit this in chapter 4, 'Lived Body' section.

This sense of internalisation is where de Beauvoir became influential, as she recognises that such internalisation can make the path to an existential ideal of authentic existence, a difficult one (James, 2003) Nonetheless in a more existentialist vein she also argues that, woman, as an individual, should and could assert herself, and that a failure to do so is an exercise of bad faith. Existentially, woman is a human subject and therefore has the freedom to transcend and realise her goals and projects in the pursuit of an authentic existence. She is a human existent therefore the universal, imperialistic aspect of consciousness exists within her. She shows, from a phenomenological stance that her path is fraught with difficulty due to lack of means materially, socially, economically and emotionally. She is bound to man like no other group in society is bound to their oppressors. The opportunities afforded her are inescapably limited. Yet de Beauvoir also claims that, woman is ultimately in bad faith due to the complicity in her role as Other, "If woman discovers herself as the inessential, and never turns into the essential, it is because she does not bring about this transformation herself." (De Beauvoir 1949: 8) To be in bad faith is to deny the absolute freedom of choice and future possibilities and to deny the absolute responsibility for those choices which have resulted in one's situation. It is a form of self-deception. It may be understandable to deceive oneself in the face of such a difficult existence and to be complicit in it, but it is deception nevertheless and a failure to live authentically. Bad faith can manifest itself in different ways. It can be to deny the inevitable freedom and choices one has and also to regard oneself as an object, to be complicit in one's objectification, and therefore find a comfort in the relinquished responsibility. (McCulloch 1994: 52-6) Both these manifestations are present in women.

De Beauvoir seems to assert her existentialism by identifying transcendence as available to women and suggesting women live in bad faith by failing to do so. Nonetheless, her account of embodied complicity makes evident the problems with such existentialist claims. The tension arises between her insights into the process by which Othering is encultured, and her existentialist insistence that the individual can

transcend. The tension between these two perspectives is a recurring theme throughout the rest of this thesis.

Summary: Critical Reflections

There are a number of problematic aspects to de Beauvoir's account in addition to the tension outlined above. One which has been pointed out by feminists, such as Le Doeuff (1980); Moi (2008); Changfoot (2009); Direk (2011) is her apparent acceptance that characteristically male activities are markers of transcendence and active subjectivity, and female ones are markers of immanence, of being trapped in nature. (This masculinist charge was indicated in the Introduction to this thesis in the section, The Reception of de Beauvoir). Moi (2008) suggests that, de Beauvoir is critical of women in that they do not partake of transcendence when they should. Examples of motherhood and childbirth are offered by de Beauvoir as examples of immanence and, as women have never been exposed to transcendent activities such as conflict or war, they are less valued and less authentic as humans. These existential concepts, images and prose, Moi (2008) insists are deeply sexist. Why is the risk of death so significant? And why is this only to be experienced on the battle field? Many women risked their lives in childbirth and so would experience the fear of death, and therefore one would expect it to qualify as transcendent activity.

What is also an issue, given her categorisation of woman as the Absolute Other, is the lack of acknowledgement that women, particularly on an individual level, do Other, other women. Bergoffen (2003: 254-6) argues that regarding the One/Other as a universal category fails to acknowledge the diversity of individual women with diverse circumstances (and here again power can be argued as a central feature). De Beauvoir does not allude to this in *The Second Sex* and makes no mention that social categories of Otherness in addition to gender, can intersect and create a more complicated set of power relations. Issues of race for example, or class can intersect with gender; black women can be Othered by white women, working class women can be Othered by upper class women.

However, what remains consistent within de Beauvoir's argument is the *historical contingency* of the One/Other relationship. It is on this point that the influence of Marx is particularly evident. Even with the One and Other in place, there is the possibility for change on both an individual and a social level. Who holds the

position as the One is historically variable and therefore open to the possibility of change, who is the One and who is positioned as the Other is not fixed. Currently, social custom positions women as the Other and constructs their nature in such a way as to constrain their equality. The relationship between men and women only has such a structure due to the historical and social context. Here de Beauvoir combines Hegel with Marx in a way that is unique to her argument. As with Hegel, she insists it is the consciousness of man that, despite what the social conventions may state, will still wish to dominate and subjugate woman:

socialist ideologies which call for the assimilation of all human beings, reject the notion that any human category be object or idol, now and for the future: in the authentically democratic society that Marx described, there is no place for the Other. Few men, however, correspond exactly to the soldier or the militant that they have chosen to be; as long as these men remain individuals, woman retains a singular value in their eyes. (De Beauvoir 1949: 165)

Yet, despite this de Beauvoir claims, man as the One is not inevitable. If society was structured differently, whereby bodily difference was not tied to economic viability, then the structuring of the One and the Other would yield different outcomes. Here she argues that although a socialist revolution would not inevitably lead to a change in the relations between men and women, nonetheless the steps towards such change are the ones which Marx advocated, namely the entering of women into public economic relations; this would be the first step in their participating in the master/slave dialectic. For de Beauvoir, as it stands the unequal hierarchy within gender relations appears natural and inevitable, a biological categorisation of the sexes. As if it is woman's nature not to want to dominate, she lacks the imperialistic tendencies that man displays. De Beauvoir's argument is that it is appearance only, her nature is contingent. Society produces gender roles in such a way as to make them appear fixed and unavoidable.

The influence of Marxism on her work suggests that, on a social level, the patriarchy that currently exists, which gives power to men over women, makes change difficult as women cannot see the possibilities for their own recognition. Reciprocity under patriarchy is difficult to achieve; individually, woman internalises an identity that is

less, and in the material dimension, women are afforded fewer opportunities. De Beauvoir adds the notion of the One and the Other here as one source of patriarchy. Marx views patriarchy as a consequence of capitalism only, but for de Beauvoir, there is clearly more to women's social oppression than this. Men are able to dominate and have power over women due to imperial consciousness. It is not just about economics as Marx suggests, capitalism requires a supplementary One and Other structure in order to provide a more thorough explanation. De Beauvoir revisits Hegel here as the One/Other is fundamental to consciousness.

Alongside her claim that the structure of the One and the Other is ontological, a universal feature of consciousness, she also insists that reciprocity without conflict is possible both to imagine and to achieve, at both the individual and social level; (though the material conditions for achieving it are hard to bring about). This does present a tension; if humans are ontologically imperialistic, and women are constituted via an entrenched gender ideology, how can reciprocity be imagined, let alone achieved? We, (man or woman) have very few (if any), models in which to work from. Socialism, for de Beauvoir is a necessary condition here, as well as the entry of women into public life, but what is less clear at this point is what else she thought would be involved; she did not anticipate, as mentioned earlier, a collective women's movement.

De Beauvoir was later to recognise some of the shortcomings within her account at the time of writing *The Second Sex*. One was her lack of credit given to women as a collective. (Brison 1972 translated 2001: 196-198) Another was her insufficient emphasis on the material, social conditions. (De Beauvoir 1965: 202; 1993: 448) She redressed some of these issues in her later works, by utilising a more extensive Marxist framework.

De Beauvoir's later writings and the Category of the Other

The tension found in *The Second Sex* between an historical materialist perspective, which insists on the historical contingency of the One /Other relation, and the claim that such a structure was a universal feature of consciousness was recognised and resolved by de Beauvoir in her later writing. In *Force of Circumstance* (1965: 202) for example, de Beauvoir speaks critically of *The Second Sex*:

As for the content, I should take a more materialist position today in the first volume. I should base the notion of woman as Other (...) not on an idealistic and a priori struggle of consciences, but on the facts of supply and demand.

On reflection, in her account of *Old Age* (1970), de Beauvoir revises the concept of the One and the Other as a universal one, regarding it instead as a product of historical circumstance. Here she acknowledges the diversity of individuals and their lived experience of old age. Old age is a very different experience for those with material and economic resources in relation to those living in reduced circumstances. What is crucial and exemplified in the category of old age is her Marxist perspective, the link to material and social conditions, and to those in society who hold economic power. Here too, she suggests, in the current circumstance, reciprocity is not achieved and it is even more difficult for the aged to escape their oppressive circumstances, if not impossible. There is not the same tone to de Beauvoir's argument here as she does not chastise the aged for not taking responsibility for their position as Other, the responsibility for this has now shifted to a social level.

Kruks (2012b: 17), suggests that the source of the oppression of the aged is not one that is marked in the same way by the master/slave dialectic but is one marked by aversion. It is an aversion toward the physical decline, the dependency and also the socially de-valued existence of old age. Aversion is what is experienced by the young toward the old, as a refusal to acknowledge that they too will be old one day. The young see their own future in the old, yet a refusal to acknowledge this reduces the aged to the status of object, as Other. De Beauvoir (1970: 603) argues:

Old age exposes the failure of our entire civilisation. It is the whole man that must be re-made, it is the whole relationship between man and man that must be recast if we wish the old person's state to be acceptable.

With no recognition from the young there is little opportunity for the aged to enter into a reciprocal relationship. The aged are not in this position. Such is the intensity of the objectification of the aged that de Beauvoir argues it is irreversible. An individual comes to recognise themselves as old, by the way they are perceived by

other people. (Deutscher 1999: 7) Recognition is required in order for an identity to be gained but, for the aged, it is from the mode of being that is Other, which is manifest from the look (here women are in the same position). However, unlike women, de Beauvoir argues that for the aged, it is difficult to recognise oneself in the image that is portrayed; the image is one of physical decline and social de-valuation:

Old age is particularly difficult to assume because we have always regarded it as something alien, a foreign species: Can I have become a different being while I still remain myself? (...) people have said to me so long as you feel young you are young this shows a complete misunderstanding of the complex truth of old age. Within me it is the Other – that is to say the person I am for the outsider who is old: and that other is myself. (De Beauvoir 1970: 283)

The dominant framework of society is structured in such a way as to empower some and disempower others and the ultimate internalisation of this power structure produces profound effects on its subjects. Ultimately, this aversion is internalised by the aged population and informs their sense of self and their identity as old.

Here de Beauvoir's Marxism is apparent as she insists that the aged are regarded as unnecessary as they are no longer economically viable. They are unable to participate and contribute to the capitalist economy and are therefore viewed by society as useless. De Beauvoir argues that part of the oppression suffered by the aged is due to the lack of productivity in the capitalist structure, "Economists and legislators (...) deplore the burden that the non-active lay on the shoulders of the active population." (De Beauvoir 1970: 3)³ De Beauvoir weaves her existentialism with her Marxism by suggesting that the alienated labour in which the aged participated as younger adults leads to a lack of not only financial resources in old age but also existential ones, required in order that old age can be lived well. Resources such as freedom, choice and transcendence are not ones that present themselves as possibilities. To be able to transcend and envisage future projects as meaningful possibilities is significantly reduced particularly for the aged population; more so de Beauvoir insists than for women. The only way for this to be altered is by wide ranging social and economic changes, by a transformation in the whole order of society so that productivity in an economic sense is no longer the dominant value. Marx is again echoed here since for

him the test of a society was the conditions of its lowest class. For de Beauvoir the lowest condition is that of the aged.

De Beauvoir's argument insists that the values and meanings associated with the aged and with gender, integral to the formation of a sense of self, pre-exists in an entrenched ideology and is difficult to even recognise let alone change. In *The Second Sex* the meanings of gender relations in particular are analysed as embodied in culture and then internalised, as women become subjected to that culture. The details of these meanings are found in the ideological myths surrounding women, which I will explore next.

Chapter Three - MYTHS

It is always difficult to describe a myth; it does not lend itself to being grasped or defined; it haunts consciousnesses without ever being posited opposite them as a fixed object. The object fluctuates so much and is so contradictory that its unity is not at first discerned: Delilah and Judith, Aspasia and Lucretia, Pandora and Athena, woman is both Eve and the Virgin Mary. She is an idol, a servant, source of life, power of darkness; she is the elementary silence of truth, she is artifice, gossip and lies; she is the medicine woman and the witch (...) woman embodies nature as Mother, Spouse and Idea; these figures are sometimes confounded and sometimes in opposition, and each has a double face. (De Beauvoir 1949: 166-7)

Introduction

One of the important contributions de Beauvoir makes to her analysis of women's oppression concerns the myths of femininity and womanhood. In this chapter I argue de Beauvoir's views of myth are influenced by and anchored in Marxist views of ideology, so it will be necessary therefore to discuss his version of this.

De Beauvoir applies Marx's view to the position of women by accepting that ideologies are distorting and promote images which serve the interests of those in power. In addition she makes central the ways in which myths become internalised, structuring subjectivities, in ways that Marx's account paid little attention. Raising awareness of the issues of images and subjecting them to reflective scrutiny, is fundamental to de Beauvoir's feminism and has anticipated and influenced future philosophical thought, including post-structuralist accounts. It also has close similarities to current work on the social imaginary.

Myths, for de Beauvoir are ideology in the Marxist sense. This is stipulated by Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 175):

In line with a Marxist theory of ideology, de Beauvoir emphasises the function of myth as a justification of the prevailing order, of the fact that man, particularly in the upper classes, has the power.

I will therefore discuss Marx first. This lays the ground work and makes it apparent which aspects are most influential to de Beauvoir. She stipulates that myths need a material basis, as they are anchored in the material structures of power, a dimension which, I will suggest, is not adequately addressed in later feminist thought. I will use Irigaray's theory as an example of this, who, did acknowledge that she was indebted to de Beauvoir's work, specifically on gender issues; even though, according to Tidd (2004: 1) it proceeded to develop, "in quite different directions."

Marx, myth as Ideology

For Marx, ideology was the set of ideas by which society made sense of and justified its organisation and structure. There are three key features of his thought which are echoed in the account de Beauvoir offers of myth. Firstly, ideological ideas are not universal, but a product of particular social and material conditions. Secondly, ideological ideas promote the interests of the most powerful class in society. Thirdly, such ideas are distortions; they act as mystifications obscuring the real workings of society from its members. Marx also discusses how such distortions are to be challenged and corrected.

Ideology is produced by human beings. Ideas such as those of capitalism, as we have seen in chapter 1, 'Historical Materialism' section, are a product of particular historical and social circumstances. Ideas are a result of and, can be changed by human praxis; even though it *appears* as if the ideas are inevitable and natural, that they are simply a reflection of how things are. (Caldwell 2014: 19) Marx (1846:42) insists that the production of ideas is a dynamic and progressive process grounded in practice:

The premises from which we begin (...) are real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity. These premises can thus be verified in a purely empirical way (...) The production of ideas, of conceptions, of consciousness, is at first directly interwoven with the material activity and the material intercourse of men (...) men are the producers of their conceptions, ideas etc.- real active men, as they are conditioned by a definite development of their productive forces and of the intercourse corresponding to these (...)

consciousness can never be anything else than conscious existence, and the existence of men is their actual life process (...) life is not determined by consciousness but consciousness by life. (Marx 1846: 42-7)

Here it is worth noting that in this quote Marx is using men to mean human (as was the linguistic convention right up until the 1980s); men are the universal. Within his account generally however (as discussed), he is gender blind but this is revealed in other ways (ways that de Beauvoir brings to our attention).

For Marx, individuals, living under capitalism believe that the infrastructure in place within society has evolved naturally. Social laws are experienced as if they were physical laws, as if unchangeable. Social laws therefore under this guise, seem to have the same constitution; the inequalities that arise in society are justified by laws, transcending those that are affected by them. This is an illusion which needs to be exposed. The ideological framework of capitalism promotes ideas with the function of upholding the hierarchical nature of society. They promote the interests of the economically powerful. The ideas are self-fulfilling as they perpetuate the class divide and are accepted as universal. This may appear as a naturally occurring process, but, in reality is a process of exploitation and power. (Frazer 1989: 117)

Marx re-iterates:

For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its common interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones. (Marx 1846: 65-6)

This, however, is often performed under the level of consciousness. The bourgeoisie do not necessarily set out to produce ideas to subordinate the lower classes as a result of conspiracy. The historical nature of ideology suggests it is a system which we are born into and accept, and as a result, it determines and informs our experience of the world. It conditions modes of thought and ideas. It is operative, and functions in such a way as to construct, explain and justify social arrangements. From the standpoint of the bourgeoisie, such ideas seem legitimate. (Frazer 1989: 118)

Marx insists that ideas enable the capitalist relations of production, within which exploitation is inevitable. Marx (1846: 64) states:

The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas, i.e. the class which is the ruling material force of society is at the same time its ruling intellectual force. The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production, so that thereby, generally speaking, the ideas of those who lack the means of mental production are subject to it.

Marx goes on to suggest that ideas supporting the legitimacy of exploitative relations are *distortions* and *mystifications*, they obscure the real relations in which people are placed and obscure the extent to which it is possible to bring about changes in social arrangements. Society creates *a false appearance* which appears real to individuals. Society is experienced and conceptualised by its members in a way that is misleading to them. What is experienced is real, but the way it is presented and described is false. (Keats and Urry 1975: 177)

Marx's account of ideology assumes an objectivist account of reality, including social reality. He assumes there are objective truths which can be uncovered. Ideology masks reality and offers a view of society that is a false appearance. It also creates for its members a belief system based on this, producing *false consciousness*. Marx utilises a metaphor here of a camera obscura. Just as a camera obscura produces a photograph that is inverted, nonetheless it is a depiction of reality and recognisable as such; so too ideology produces a distortion which presents itself as a picture of reality. The distortion is an inevitable result of the socio-historical situation, in which people are placed:

If in all ideology men and their circumstances appear upside down as in a camera obscura, this phenomenon arises just as much from their historical life-process as the inversion of objects on the retina does from their physical life-process. (Marx 1846: 47)

Illusions of this kind result in one of Marx's forms of alienation: man as alienated from society. This alienation results from a distorted view of the social and,

consequently results in an inability to see the possibilities for praxis. However, if ideology is distorting and mystifying yet an inevitable result of particular social relationships, then how is it to be dislodged?

For Marx, his answer favours proletarian revolution. Individually people are unable to see the mystifying effects of ideology, even when it does not make sense, nor serves their own interests. Collectively, however, when the proletariat come together (for example in a factory, or as part of a production line) the circumstances change. This collective is a necessary condition in order that the proletariat can think differently about the way society functions and whose interests are best served. This enables collective agency and the possibilities for change. This shift in consciousness is necessary for any revolution to begin. In Marx's view the class system was a dynamic yet self-destructing development. As social divisions separate the bourgeoisie from the proletariat, the proletariat will unite together to form a unit with shared interests which will eventually see the exploitative nature of capitalism. (Tong 1989: 43) This class will then rise up and overthrow the system that created them in the first place. When groups of people become conscious of themselves in this way they then become powerful and can employ and effect change, "Let the ruling classes tremble at a communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have the world to win. Working men of all countries, unite!" (Marx 1848: 48) This is where Marx's epistemology comes into play. Different positions in the social hierarchy yield different perspectives. For him the proletariat were in a privileged position to be able to see the ideological nature of the ruling ideas and to produce reliable, less distorted knowledge. The reason being, Marx (1848) suggests, is not only their marginalisation, but also their position as economically central for capitalist production.

As a result of the division of labour (which also divides the intellectual from the manual), the bourgeoisie hold intellectual power and so knowledge is produced from their perspective.

However, the proletariat, Marx suggests, has a distinctive perspective, due to the practical activities in which only they engage. The role of the proletariat is crucial in the economic production of the capitalist system, in order for it to function effectively; yet, its members are exploited by it. This position, whereby proletarian

interests are not served, implies that they as a group have no vested interest in its continuation as the dominant system. As they also hold a central position within the economic structure (that of labouring to supply the bourgeoisie with surplus value to accumulate), they gain access to the way such a structure works and the bias it implies. These aspects, gives them the advantage to see through the distorted ideologies and enables them to acquire a more accurate picture of the workings of society, and what is needed to bring about change:

Of all the classes that stand face to face with the bourgeoisie today, the proletariat alone is a really revolutionary class (...) The lower middle classes: the small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant all these fight against the bourgeoisie to save from extinction their existence as fractions of the middle class (...) If by chance they are revolutionary (...) they desert their own standpoint to place themselves at that of the proletariat. (Marx 1848: 22-3)

The proletarian material and social conditions, Marx argues, will illuminate the ideological, exploitative structure of bourgeois thought. Marx insists that these features will give rise to the revolution as discussed earlier, where ultimately communism will replace capitalism. For this to be achieved, proletarian consciousness must reject the false, distorting features of capitalist ideology.

Myths and what they do

De Beauvoir follows and develops Marx. With illustrations that show how (ideological) myths, condition our everyday existence, she asked, “what is its [myths] importance in everyday life?” (De Beauvoir 1949: 275) She argues myths are ideas that pervade society, conditioning people’s understanding of different positions within it. Unlike Marx, however, the focus of her attention is not class difference but the myths concerning the differences between men and women. The myths surrounding these differences are, for her, distortions and mystifications which affect both men and women, but serve the interests of men. For de Beauvoir, ideas about the characteristics of men and women, of masculinity and femininity, which may appear natural in origin, are constructed by means of myths. De Beauvoir’s focus remains on women and she suggests that there are numerous stories and symbols which surround notions of femininity. Due to the contradictory elements

and complexity of these symbols, the image of woman becomes a mystery to both men and women alike. Her identity then remains a source of ambiguity for all concerned, as she is everything and nothing all at the same time. De Beauvoir states:

This embodied dream is, precisely, woman; she is the perfect intermediary between nature that is foreign to man and the peer who is identical to him. She pits neither the hostile silence of nature nor the hard demand of a reciprocal recognition against him; by a unique privilege she is a consciousness and yet it seems possible to possess her in the flesh. (De Beauvoir 1949: 164)

Myths about women: content

De Beauvoir points out, that a notable feature of the myths attached to women, is their contradictory nature. An idealised image of woman as the Virgin Mary, as pure and passive is in juxtaposition with the opposing idea of woman as praying mantis, evil manipulator and wicked witch. Both idolised and loathed at the same time, images and metaphors of femininity and womanhood are both unrealisable and undeserved. None of them are descriptions of real women and their everyday existence, but all of them impact upon that existence. As soon as a woman has reached puberty and is able to procreate, the confusing myths begin in earnest. The power of fertility implies she is both sacred and impure. She is sacred because she has the power to create life and impure because her biology instils fear in men.

Woman, in one of many guises, is comparable with Nature. She is the earth upon which seeds are sown and in which life is produced. She is to be young, fresh and untouched like a flower or a precious gem. The possession of her instils feelings of value and richness. Such mythical metaphors, associated with woman, are anchored in a man's consciousness and his need to conquer. Mother Earth, Mother Nature, rocks, seas and mountains, all referred to as a she:

She is all the fauna, all the earthly flora: gazelle, doe, lilies and roses, downy peaches, fragrant raspberries; she is precious stones, mother-of-pearl, agate, silk, the blue of the sky, the freshness of the springs, air flame, earth and water (...) Man finds shining stars and the moody

moon, sunlight, and the darkness of caves on woman. (De Beauvoir 1949: 179-80)

She is creative because she gives life to human beings. However, she is not creative in the existential sense which is integral to a human being and their authentic existence. Nor is she creative in the material, economic sense and so her creativity is socially under-valued. This creativity that is acknowledged as hers is, for de Beauvoir, part of the mythical account of maternity upon which a patriarchal ideology, in particular, is so dependent. Women are portrayed as natural mothers and are valued on this assumption. The mother is associated as close to nature and, mythically mother and child always bond to form a harmonious relationship, the image here is of the Madonna and child. (Scarth 2004: 144) Kirkpatrick (2014: 7) agrees and suggests that de Beauvoir's argument remains relevant today, as such myths are still pervasive. As a result, even now, many women feel inadequate if motherhood is not experienced easily and will often not admit their feelings or seek assistance and so unwittingly perpetuate the myth.

As mother is the first object of association that a man encounters, this is the initial source of one set of mythical images. With myths surrounding motherhood, woman can appear as revered. As mother, she is often associated with more sacred images supplied by society, in order that she is not associated with flesh and desire. De Beauvoir goes on to suggest, that by distinguishing between mother and wife in this way man is in turmoil. He seeks to flee from the fear that his life is finite and out of his control which is instilled by woman as mother and yet, embrace and overcome the source of these fears, which is represented by woman as a wife:

while the little boy in early childhood remains sensually attached to the mother's flesh, when he grows up, when he is socialised and becomes aware of his individual existence, this flesh frightens him; he wants to ignore it and to see his mother as an institution only; if he wants to think of her as pure and chaste, it is less from amorous jealousy than from refusal to acknowledge her as a body. (De Beauvoir 1949: 169)

As mother she can be portrayed as warm and welcoming; she also embodies prohibition and morality. Through religion, as in Kirkpatrick's (2014: 7) example earlier, images of mother as saintly, possessing virtues beyond measure are prevalent. For de Beauvoir this is a process of mystification:

mystification begins when the religion of motherhood proclaims that all mothers are exemplary. For maternal devotion can be experienced in perfect authenticity; but in fact this is rarely the case. Ordinarily, maternity is a strange compromise of narcissism, altruism, dream, sincerity, bad faith, devotion and cynicism. (De Beauvoir 1949: 570)

De Beauvoir continues that inherent within woman as myth, is irony; the myths that initially portray woman as creative, subsequently blame her for human beings inevitable and imminent death. The finitude of human existence is laid at her door. She is at once both idolised for her fertility and ability to give life whilst, at the same time, is vilified for creating this consciousness in an embodied being with limitations and decrepitude, "the viscous glandular embryo opens the cycle that ends in the rotting death." (De Beauvoir 1949: 169)

As mentioned, man distinguishes woman between mother and wife and each distinction carries a whole host of various, symbolic meanings and characteristics:

In sexual release, man in his lover's embrace seeks to lose himself in the infinite mystery of the flesh. But it has already been seen that his normal sexuality, on the contrary, dissociates Mother from Wife. (De Beauvoir 1949: 176)

For a man, wife is the second point of mythical associations. As pointed out earlier, as wife, a woman is temptation, lust and desire, inciting carnal desire and conquest. De Beauvoir discusses the paradox that is in play here. As erotic object she is desirable to man, he then cultivates her into, "an artifice." (De Beauvoir 1949: 182) This is in order to distinguish between her role as mother and the animalistic function of reproduction, and nature that has been customised to man's idea of a desirable image of woman. Because she is regarded by man as necessary for his existence, he can shape her accordingly:

(...) the more the traits and proportions of a woman seemed contrived, the more she delighted the heart of man because she seemed to escape the metamorphosis of natural things. The result is a strange paradox that by desiring to grasp nature, but transfigured, in woman, man destines her to artifice. (De Beauvoir 1949: 183)

The duality is that he wants her as wife, yet he wants her as whore, he desires to penetrate her, yet fears her sexuality, he creates her image, yet requires protection from her fertility, “deceitful, evasive, misunderstood, duplicitous, it is thus that she best lends herself to men’s contradictory desires.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 216) Myths of woman as whore, de Beauvoir suggests, allow men to satisfy their vices however debauched. Here is a human upon which these can be satisfied.

Despite this, virginity is regarded as of utmost importance for the women who are married. Virginity is paramount in order that a man gains and feels possession of his wife, “nothing seems as desirable to man as what has never belonged to any other human: thus conquest is a unique and absolute event.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 178)

Woman first discovers herself in patriarchy as wife since the supreme creator is male (...) man does not merely seek in the sexual act subjective and ephemeral pleasure. He wants to conquer, take and possess; to have woman is to conquer her; he penetrates her as the ploughshare in the furrows; he makes her his as he makes his the earth he is working (...): these images are as old as writing. (De Beauvoir 1949: 176)

As one of its functions, patriarchy requires women to be at home, “it is (...) very important to compel woman to conform exactly to the role society devolves on her.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 212) Therefore myths of passivity and interiority are adopted and imposed on woman and are associated with the idea of woman. De Beauvoir stresses a wife (particularly in Western, patriarchal society) is economically and socially dependent and that a, “good wife, is man’s most precious treasure.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 198) She is useful in order that he can display his power and maintain his position as dominant in society, and as head of his own household. Myths then pervade of a wife as initially uneducated and servile, until her husband,

“puts his imprint on her (...), the ‘clay in his hands’ that passively lets itself be worked and shaped.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 199) De Beauvoir makes clear how, “History has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy’s earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep woman in a state of dependence.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 163)

Although the myths which de Beauvoir identifies as surrounding women are multiple and contradictory, there are certain over-arching themes:

(...) through the best and the worst of her, man learns happiness, suffering, vice and virtue, lust, renunciation, devotion and tyranny; and learns about himself (...) she is the triumph of victory, (...) she is (...) the fascination of damnation, of death (...) Here, then, is why woman has a double and deceptive image. (De Beauvoir 1949: 219)

Woman is mythologised as mystery, as an, “eternal feminine” (de Beauvoir 1949: 4) which can never quite be captured. Yet, within all the myths, she is Other, Other to the norm, which is man. See chapter 2, section, ‘woman as Other.’ The myths which produce the ideals of woman, present a notion of woman as constituted from the male point of view. Man defines himself, and he also defines woman:

Here then, is why woman has a double and deceptive image: she is everything he craves and everything he does not attain. She is the wise mediator between auspicious Nature and man; and she is the temptation of Nature, untamed against reason. She is the carnal embodiment of all moral values and their opposites, from good to bad; she is the stuff of action and its obstacle, man’s grasp on the world and his failure. (De Beauvoir 1949: 219)

It is, of course, not only women that are subject to myth. Myths of man contain just as many mysteries and contradictions. But for man, de Beauvoir insists, the mythical symbols or images are more positive. The images surrounding man are strong, successful, heroic images as well as the images of the roles he takes on, in relation to woman, heterosexual, husband, father etc. De Beauvoir argues that as these roles are ones in which man defines himself they function as more empowering images, which men internalise and thereby can use to develop a positive, more superior sense of

self. What is central for de Beauvoir is that *he has defined himself*, whereas woman has her definition provided for her by the male orientated ideas that pervade society. De Beauvoir insists that a man's experience of masculinity is in no way comparable to that of a woman's experience of femininity. She is suggesting that the articulation of 'women,' takes place between men. Woman sees herself as a man sees her, which is primarily, de Beauvoir suggests as his property, as object. Woman does not define herself and as a result, there are very few positive images to be found. The ones that are those of motherhood or the independent woman for example, also carry underlying associations of negativity. The image of man as he is the originator carries a more positive significance:

Any myth implies a Subject who posits its hopes and fears of a transcendent heaven. Not positing themselves as Subject, women have not created the virile myth that would reflect their projects; they have neither religion or poetry that belongs to them alone: they still dream through men's dream (...) woman is exclusively defined in relation to man. The asymmetry of the two categories male and female, can be seen in the unilateral constitution of sexual myths. Woman is sometimes designated as sex; it is she who is flesh, its delights and dangers. That for woman it is man who is sexed and carnal is a truth that has never been proclaimed because there is no one to proclaim it. The representation of the world as the world itself is the work of men. (De Beauvoir 1949: 166)

The productivity of myth

De Beauvoir describes the *productive* power of myths and images. They do not reflect women *per se*, but instead produce the *idea* of woman and femininity. However, they are not only productive of the idea of women – they are productive of women's subjectivity. She stresses that subjectivity is structured by myth and produce what woman is, and women view this as an accurate reflection of what it means to be a woman. (Bergoffen 2009: 21) The myths which are produced are internalised (a point she develops much further than Marx), conditioning and forming subjectivity and also conditioning the way women respond to other people and, are responded to in return. Individuals are born into these dominant myths and

they inform the development of gendered characteristics. Myths of femininity provide a normative framework for femininity, suggesting that to be a woman, one should act in a feminine way. These myths therefore, condition the choices women make and the possibilities they see as available for themselves. (Changfoot 2009: 399)

De Beauvoir's analysis of the topics she discusses in *The Second Sex* sees biological, historic, material and psychoanalytic narratives, as contributing to the multiple myths and contradictions that surround woman. De Beauvoir argues these mythical images serve to disguise the diversity of women. One pre-requisite for the freedom of women from oppression is the dis-mantling of such myths. De Beauvoir claims that currently if woman does not live up to the ideal or embody the notion of femininity, femininity as myth is not to blame; it is the individual woman herself who is considered at fault:

if the definition given is contradicted by the behaviour of real flesh and blood women, it is women that are wrong: it is said not that femininity is an entity but that women are not feminine. Experiential denials cannot do anything against myth. (De Beauvoir 1949: 275)

A consequence of the internalisation of these myths, de Beauvoir argues, results in women developing a sense of self that feels negative and inferior. There is no way they can live up to the definitions, illusions and expectations that are provided for them. As a result, woman feels inadequate and marginalised as she can never approximate to the idealised images (images that did not originate with her to begin with), "being all, she is never exactly *this* that she should be; she is everlasting disappointment." (De Beauvoir 1949: 220)

De Beauvoir goes on to argue that as femininity is myth and not reality, its design disguises the possibility of women transcending their situations; it disguises the possibility of women's agency. She makes clear that there are very few active, positive images of women. There is no space within the notion of femininity to be an independent woman, without renouncing being a woman, de Beauvoir insists. There is no alternative image available that portrays woman as anything other than feminine, which, for her, is negatively invested and equates to passivity, narcissism

and dependence on men. So she raises the question of how can we have an image of woman that accepts her as independent, without her having to renounce her womanhood? She states:

for a woman to accomplish her femininity she is required to be object and prey; that is she must renounce her claims to sovereign subject. This is the conflict that singularly characterises the situation of the emancipated woman. She refuses to confine herself to her role as female because she does not want to mutilate herself; but it would also be a mutilation to repudiate her sex. (De Beauvoir 1949: 739)

For further discussion, see chapter 5, section, ‘Lived Experience.’ As suggested by her discussion of the ‘Independent Woman,’ there are no positive images of women upon which we can project ourselves. Roles such as intellectual, activist or worker which she might want to adopt are mostly imagined publically as male. The only images available to women then involve renouncing all that is womanhood, which de Beauvoir describes as a, “*mutilation*.” (Ibid) Without images in which one can imagine oneself engaging in projects and activities, then what framework is going to facilitate this projection? Without an image to which to aspire, how are we to imagine a way to achieve more positive and valued positions as a woman? There are no solutions offered. Le Doeuff (2010: 99) argues this point, “one must not forget her [de Beauvoir] ascetic attitude with regards to images – she never offers a positive female heroine.”

In this way, de Beauvoir presents myths as ideological in the Marxist sense, as contradictory distortions, which promote the interests of those in power, in this case, men. The power wielded by myths suggests that inequalities appear and feel like they are biological, natural and inevitable and so continue unabated.

However, de Beauvoir also supplements the Marxist picture due to the way myths are internalised; it is not so simple for women to acknowledge that the current system makes no sense to them, as it is for the proletariat. As women are guided and structured by the internalising of ideological myth, then for some women, such myths do appear to make sense. The opportunities that are on offer are embraced as their female destiny. They make sense of their lives by conforming to the

stereotypical idea of woman, particularly wife and mother. This makes Marx's solution of a privileged standpoint problematic to de Beauvoir as, for her it is more difficult for woman to have a privileged standpoint which could dislodge the myth. What is not clear, however, is how she thinks such a state of affairs is to be countered. She is clear that such myths are damaging and need to be dismantled, but not clear on how this is to be achieved.

Can myths be dislodged?

For De Beauvoir, it is difficult to dislodge myths of femininity by pointing to what women in fact do, for they internalise the myths and construct their lives accordingly. Moreover, as is made clear in her discussion of the 'Independent Woman,' to act in a way that contradicts the myths requires woman to renounce all that is feminine and so, it appears, to renounce her womanhood. De Beauvoir goes on to argue that, if woman does renounce her femininity, she not only runs the risk in social circles of being labelled as bad or a femme fatale, but, also de Beauvoir claims is de-humanised. "Renouncing her femininity means renouncing part of her humanity." (De Beauvoir 1949: 739) She goes on to suggest:

By not conforming, a woman devalues herself sexually and consequently socially because society has incorporated sexual values (...) being an autonomous activity contradicts her femininity. (De Beauvoir 1949: 740-41)

Marx insists that ideology can be exposed. He endorsed the distinction between ideology and science. Scientific study moves us past the misleading appearances of society to reach an objective account of reality. This, for him, is also true of social science. When we gain a true account of the laws of social change, then the distorting ideologies that are commonly accepted as the way society functions, which serve to disguise and distort the truth, will be revealed. Marx held a realist view of science, and truth is there to be accessed by the use of science. But, as discussed earlier, particular kinds of conditions were needed to make these truths visible. It is only by adopting the collective perspective of the proletariat, that they do become available and this required the working class to group together, in order to expose ideological distortions. (Frazer 1989: 120)

De Beauvoir accepts Marx's conception of ideology and applies it to the relations between men and women. She postulates:

History has shown that men have always held all the concrete powers; from patriarchy's earliest times they have deemed it useful to keep women in a state of dependence (...) this condition served males' economic interests; but it also suited their ontological and moral ambitions. (De Beauvoir 1949: 163)

She accepts that the ideology of woman is distorted, false and mystifying, but she could not accept a similar route to that proposed by Marx for its exposure. De Beauvoir suggests that no collective consciousness is formed in women as a unit, in the way that Marx advocated for the proletariat:

Women - except in abstract gatherings such as conferences – do not use 'we;' men say 'women' and women adopt this word to refer to themselves (...) It is that they lack the concrete means to organise themselves into a unit that could posit itself in opposition. They have no means, no history, no religion of their own; and unlike the proletariat, they have no solidarity of labour or interests. (De Beauvoir 1949: 8)

Given her existentialism, there is no essential truth about women to be uncovered. The ideas of the eternal feminine, is itself, a myth. However, it is clear that, despite her lack of optimism regarding collectivity, de Beauvoir did think that the ideological character of myth could be exposed. She saw her own work as bringing to reflective consciousness, frameworks which otherwise worked implicitly and were unavailable to reflective scrutiny. Also, such reflections showed such myths to be unviable and to be full of contradictions. What becomes clear is that myths distort woman's human potential for transcendence. There is also, however, another strand in her writings. Attempting to conform to such myths made women unhappy, their experience of sex, motherhood and housework were empty and unfulfilling. The feelings that are experienced challenge the myths which prevent women from engaging in transcendent activities. What de Beauvoir does make clear, however, is that changes to the myths surrounding women will not come solely from such

reflective scrutiny. It will also require the dismantling of patriarchal power relations and a change in women's material and social conditions.

Social Imaginaries

De Beauvoir's account of myth has both similarities and differences from more recent feminist work on *the imaginary*. In this section I would like to explore some of these links.

Later writers (Irigaray 1991; Weiss 1999; Gatens 1996) make a move which distinguishes them from both Marx and de Beauvoir. For them, myths and images are a necessary part of our relation to reality, "this opposition between ideology and truth, or imaginary versus real conditions of existence is misleading and unhelpful." (Gatens 1996: 140) ⁴ For them, all of our relations are mediated by myth and the question to be asked is not how can we access reality behind the myth, but, how can we promote more empowering myths and images?

Irigaray engages most explicitly with de Beauvoir in this respect so I will focus on their dialogue. Irigaray appreciates de Beauvoir's analysis of the dominant masculine myths surrounding 'women,' but, suggests, women need a separate and different representation within the social imaginary, one which embraces and values their differences. (Whitford 1991: 3) Irigaray (1991: 31) agrees, "Women can only take up these [their] rights if they can find some value in being women and not simply mothers. That means rethinking transforming centuries of socio-cultural values." She goes on to state:

It is social justice, pure and simple, to balance out the power of one sex over the other by giving or restoring, cultural values to female sexuality. What is at stake is clearer today than it was when *The Second Sex* was written. (Irigaray 1991: 32)

Irigaray suggests that images are a fundamental aspect of experience and constituent of subjectivity. She echoes de Beauvoir in accepting that the current images available of and for women originate with men. Women are defined by men, as they currently have no power with which to define themselves. The challenge for Irigaray suggests Schutte (1997), is to de-construct the negative and damaging myths, which woman is

subjected to and constituted upon, in order to re-construct myths, which are more positive. Irigaray (1993: 193) states:

Social and cultural acceptance of sexual difference as imagined
against its masculine-centred objectifications has not been achieved
and this can be the only goal of a movement for women's liberation.

Schutte (1997), also suggests this can only be achieved by questioning the current structures, images and representation of women and their bodies and, offer alternatives that empower women and originate with women, rather than men. Society needs to embrace the difference between men and women rather than surpass it and, women in particular, need to provide a positive account of this difference. This is the way for women to aim toward liberation. Instead of competing on male terms, in a male orientated culture, the culture itself requires deconstructing and, a more positive imaginary, originating from women put in place. Irigaray (1993: 121) argues, "Apparently man wants woman only as mother and virgin, or sometimes, rather ambiguously as sister – but not as woman, as other gender." If new more positive ways of defining and re-imagining woman can be constructed, then a woman will develop a more positive sense of self. Lennon (2004a: 119) supports this view:

We cannot, (...) modify damaging representations of women simply
by claiming they are false. The way women are imagined, the
response of men to female bodies will not necessarily be changed (...)
responses can remain in an imaginary realm governed by social
imaginaries and individual histories.

There are then key differences between Irigaray and de Beauvoir. For Irigaray, images as such cannot be dispensed with. The central concern becomes how to re-imagine them in more positive forms. This is in order to replace the mutilating content that Irigaray acknowledges de Beauvoir drew to our attention. For de Beauvoir, the damaging ideologies must be challenged but she does not explicitly suggest that this process will involve one of constructing new images.

Le Doeuff (2010), has also highlighted problems of treating myths and images simply as ideology which can be exposed. Le Doeuff (2010: 91) argues this tension lies in distinguishing facts from myths:

So according to *The Second Sex* there are facts and there are myths, with the myths, which appear to be embroidered upon the facts, to be stripped away so as to reduce the facts of everyday life to what they are.

This distinction, she argues is not possible; images mediate our relations with reality and structure subjectivity. In order to engage in projects, we need to be able to imagine ourselves in some of the roles that de Beauvoir offers, such as intellectual or activist, but, also importantly as women. This is supported by Lennon (2004a: 120):

A world can only be a world for us by means of the operation of the imagination. There is no neutral world to which we can gain access. The images in terms of which our imagined worlds are constituted carry in an interdependent way both cognition and affects.

This implies that Irigaray's project is a necessary one.

However, de Beauvoir insists that some myths are distortions and mystifications. Yet, this is not a matter for her either of simply checking them against women's lives and finding them to be false; because women have shaped their lives in accordance with them. Nonetheless, as we saw earlier, for de Beauvoir this distorts their potential as human beings. The meaning and value that society places on women offers a mythical distorted picture of what it is to be a woman, which, in turn obscures the possibilities women see for themselves. They are both misleading and unhelpful, as they serve to perpetuate a woman's oppressive circumstance and inferior subjectivity. She also insists that imaginings need an anchorage. They cannot float free in consciousness with no material basis. These imaginings as de Beauvoir insists are anchored in material conditions and cannot be changed without a change in these conditions.

It is important to retain a notion of ideology as distortion, not only to challenge male images (which was Irigaray's main focus), but, also to maintain scrutiny of the

images which women themselves might come up with. De Beauvoir was clear on this and it is also important for women now. Even if women are originators, they are not immune from distortion. Who are the women that are offering alternative images? Who are the women that are doing the scrutinising? Women are diverse and do not have a common experience, context or modes of thought. If only certain women are in a position to re-conceptualise what woman is, then this inevitably privileges some and excludes many. The privileged few remain the powerful ones. This opens the possibility of constructing images that benefit some women at the expense of others and so oppressive ideology continues; privilege can go unrecognised. (Lennon 2004b: 1017)

Both Irigaray and de Beauvoir raise the issue that the dominant images have originated in and, promote the interests of men. Irigaray (1991 and 1993), insists that we devise an imaginary of woman which comes collectively from women themselves. This position leads us back to the notion of a collective standpoint accommodated in Marx's epistemology. As we have seen, de Beauvoir was pessimistic about such collectivity. However in later reflections, de Beauvoir came to recognise, following the development of the women's movement in the 1960s (over 20 years after writing *The Second Sex*) that such collectivity was possible. As discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, de Beauvoir became an active member of this movement; finally categorising herself as a feminist and encouraged by the political activism and unification of large numbers of women, in order to effect change. (De Beauvoir *All Said and Done* 1972: 462) However, where de Beauvoir differs from Irigaray is in recognising (as did Marx) that such a collective requires certain social and material conditions. Women need locations where they can come together as a group (like the workplace, of which more women were beginning to enter). Within the context of *The Second Sex*, "they [women] even lack their own space that makes communities of American blacks, or the Jews in ghettos, or the workers in Saint-Denis or Renault factories." (De Beauvoir 1949: 8)⁵

What I suggest is that we need the insights of both de Beauvoir and later feminist thought. We cannot simply check with reality in order to discern what truth is, as it is always mediated by imaginaries and other aspects of discourse. Nonetheless, discourses need to be examined for their ideological and distorting characteristics.

The possibility of such examination, however, requires women to be empowered materially. As de Beauvoir suggests, “Perhaps the myth of woman will be phased out one day: the more women assert themselves as human beings (...) But today it still exists in the hearts of all men.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 166) What she did not address directly, unfortunately, is the need for new myths to replace them.

To empower women materially, the damaging myths anchored in the ideas surrounding women’s bodies and in particular their reproductive bodies are important to address. The body is central to de Beauvoir’s account and this provides the exclusive focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Four - THE BODY

Woman is weaker than man (...) certainly these facts cannot be denied – but in themselves they have no significance. Once we adopt the human perspective, interpreting the body on a basis of existence, biology becomes an abstract science. (De Beauvoir 1949: 68)

Introduction

This chapter explores de Beauvoir's extensive discussions of the body. De Beauvoir's view is that a woman's body plays a key role in her oppression in society and one aspect of this is her reproductive capability. I argue that her historical materialism continues to play a central role in this discussion, and she adopts an historical materialist position with respect to the social consequences of the female reproductive body. However, the deeper insight at work here is de Beauvoir's claim, that it is not simply a matter of pure biology that oppresses woman, but the way that biology is interpreted. She favourably quotes Merleau-Ponty (1945: 170) who argues, "man is not a natural species: he is an historical idea." (Cited in de Beauvoir 1949: 46) For her, man in this case, includes 'woman.'

In this chapter, I show how Marx and materialism are central to de Beauvoir's account of the body, which emphasises both the constraints of nature and the way society shapes nature. I also show how this account is supplemented with phenomenological insights. To begin I will outline the influences informing de Beauvoir's account of the body; Marx, Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. She utilises elements of, but also develops, these positions and claims that the body is lived differently for men and women. Biological facts do not define woman and are only significant due to the meanings that society attaches to them and the way this is woven into social practices. Following on from this I discuss the sex/gender binary and argue that her distinctions do not match those of later feminist thought as de Beauvoir's concepts do not fit into the neat binary division. For her the concepts are interrelated.

I will also introduce the thinking of Iris Marion Young and Pierre Bourdieu and argue that de Beauvoir anticipates (and herself influences) both positions. Later still in this chapter, I will link her materialism and phenomenology with regard to the body to contemporary discussions of what is termed the 'New Materialism.' This perspective has analysed de Beauvoir's contributions and, interpreted through a Marxist perspective, has brought her position back into current theoretical discussion. This position is one which is endorsed by this thesis. Finally, I argue that de Beauvoir's account of the body as situation is representative of the way the biological body and lived body work together to maintain a woman's unequal status.

Marx's conceptions of the Body

Marx's discussion of the body is not extensive, but what he does describe is predictably in relation to labour and capitalism. He considers the body from the perspective of his overall historical materialism, "Body is the material, the object and the instrument of his life activity." (Marx 1844: 75) Biological facts are for Marx, a given. However, human biology and society are interrelated in a continuous dialectic; biology is always in a relation to the social and the cultural. Biology has made possible particular social practices and these practices also influence and develop our understanding of biology and how we can make use of it. Science has progressed and enhanced social possibilities. (For example, in the contemporary world IVF has become more common and as a result, increased biological possibilities that were previously unrealised. Society has developed practices to assimilate and incorporate such possibilities and has expanded accordingly). (Jaggar 1983: 55) When Marx and Engels apply this general view to the question of sexual difference, as we have seen in the chapter 1, section, 'Human Nature' they conclude that human nature is sexed; one is either born a man or born a woman. Male and female bodies bear different relations to reproduction. In their view, at certain points, this made women weaker than men; but only led to the unequal position of women in society because of historical and material conditions at certain moments in history. Inequality was not inevitable but contingent. Now (as mentioned earlier), for example, physical strength is much less important in the realm of production.

Marx's other discussion of the body was specifically in relation to capitalism. Here human bodies are used as cogs in a machine to keep the processes of capitalism

working. Identified as a universal feature of humanity, praxis is endorsed as necessary for human existence and progress. Within capitalism, as it has historically developed human needs are presented as facts. Man, therefore, needs to maintain himself physically, in order to work to earn a wage, “Labour appears merely as a means of satisfying a need – the need to maintain physical existence.” (Marx 1844: 75) He thus finds himself captured within a vicious circle. The particular labour that capitalism requires, argues Marx, is external, as it is not a part of man’s own projects and it subsequently alienates man from his body and does not promote human flourishing and potential. It does not allow him to express and develop his physical or psychological energies. Man has an organic material body which conditions the possibility of physical, creative activity. In a non-capitalist society humans would be in unity with nature in order to provide, not only their physical needs, but also to engage in self-directed projects. But under capitalism:

the fact that labour is external to the worker, i.e. it does not belong to his intrinsic nature; that in his work therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself (...) It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it (...) in his human functions he no longer feels himself to be anything but an animal. (Marx 1844: 74)

What Marx is drawing attention to here is that in these circumstances human beings are reduced to mere biological beings, their bodies put to work as purely physical things. The notion of alienation is revisited here. The terms Marx expresses, that of man’s experience of labour as an animal, implies that alienation from one’s physical body is a consequence. He does refer to man as an animal, and within the context of the quote above the term ‘animal’ is used negatively. It implies that man is removed from his species-being, for this involves culture and freedom. Nonetheless humans for Marx are not separate from nature; they are a part of it. It is part of our nature that we, though biological beings, are also capable of self-direction and the creation of culture and the changes which constitute history, “That man’s physical and spiritual

life is linked to nature means simply that nature is linked to itself, for man is a part of nature.” (Marx 1844: 75) I will return to this discussion of the alienation of the body later in this chapter.

Existential and Phenomenological accounts of the body

All existential phenomenologists, according to Toombs (1993: 51):

reveal a fundamental distinction between the lived body (the body as it is immediately experienced in a non-reflective or pre-reflective manner) and the objective or physiological body.

This is a key distinction; the body in these accounts is at the same time a thing in the world; a material object, and also a perspective on the world, experienced as living and active. This, following Husserl, is termed the body as lived:

The thoroughly intuitive unity presenting itself when we grasp a person as such (eg. When we, as persons, speak to them as persons or when we hear them speak, or work together with them, or watch their actions) is the unity of the expression and the expressed. (Husserl 1912: 248)

This quote introduces the concepts of the lived body as experienced from a phenomenological perspective. The lived body is a unified whole that expresses itself through the meaning that the world has for that individual. This aspect of the body and the expressions and meanings it carries cannot be separated and viewed as abstract. (Heinamaa 2003a: 66) As objective, the body is a physiological thing; it can be encountered as a material object among other material objects in the world. According to Burwood, Gilbert and Lennon (2003: 167) this aspect of the body is:

entirely objectified and understood exclusively and exhaustively in terms of the causal-mechanical laws governing all material things. This conception of the human body is so deeply suffused within our culture (...) that it has become almost unthinkable that there may be alternative models available.

For the existential phenomenologists, as influenced by Husserl, this aspect of the body is one which is the object of scientific investigation. However, it is not how we as humans encounter our bodies in our day-to-day existence. It is the lived body that is apprehended first, and most importantly allows us to then go on to investigate the body as a material, anatomical thing. The lived body according to Toombs (1993: 51):

is an existential rather than an objective relation. At the level of the lived body I do not have a body, I am my body (...) there is no perceived separation between the body and self.

What this also means is that subjectivity is always experienced as embodied. The objective body for existentialists is a part of our facticity, as situated beings. Without a body which has objective characteristics, there would be no way to experience the world. *Facticity* refers to givens, the aspects of our lives that we do not choose; our environment, our past history, and our biological bodies. Such facticity is something that we need to accommodate in the pursuit of our projects, but it does not determine them. A point that echoes Marx here: nature is a given, but it is what we make of nature that makes us what we are. Facticity (for Sartre 1943: 328 in particular), is not to be regarded as a constraint on our freedom; instead it is a circumstance which is there to be surpassed or transcended. Our bodies do not dictate our possibilities they are a condition for there being a world of possibilities and action. (Morris 2008: 45)

In the remainder of this section we will discuss firstly, Sartre's account of the body. He makes central the notion of the lived body, prioritising this over the objective anatomical body. The lived body is explored as three different modes of being, in which the individual experiences their body in relation to the world. Secondly, we will discuss Merleau-Ponty's account of the lived body, the body as expressive. All of these accounts are influential on de Beauvoir's development of the lived body, to a greater or lesser extent. The extent to which this influence stretches will be explored in depth in the section on de Beauvoir's conception of the body.

The Objective Body for Sartre

Morris (2008) argues Sartre refers to the objective body as the body-in-itself. For Sartre's theory, his point of orientation is always the existentialist distinction between the in-itself and the for-itself. An in-itself is an object, whose qualities or capacities are fixed. A being-for-itself, human reality is always directed towards future projects, which surpass the givens we find ourselves with. The body, as an in-itself is regarded as a thing, as inert. We do *have* a body in the material sense which can be perceived, utilised and made use of by ourselves and by other people; for instance, a body can be touched or examined. Also, as Marx (1844) pointed out, it can be put to use as physical energy in the capitalist machine. This aspect of the body is the way it is understood in the objective sense, where our bodies are merely flesh and blood. Patterns of response can be observed and studied and human bodies can be predicted and modified.

Sartre recognises that we can step back and look at ourselves in this objective way, as an anatomical abstraction which can be scientifically investigated and examined. In this way some aspects and correlations that our bodies display can be discovered and learned and the human body can be treated and regulated. However, this is not the usual way of experiencing our body. Sartre (1943: 324) states, "bodies, are lived not known." Our embodied existence cannot be understood from a purely factual, scientific perspective and this mode of being is not the initial way that we do encounter our bodies. It is a mistake, Sartre believes, to look at our bodies in this anonymous way as a first port of call, he states, "this is to put the corpse at the origin of the living body." (Sartre 1943: 344) In articulating the body as lived Sartre draws our attention to several aspects. The lived body has different modes of being and these are explained in the 3 subsequent sub-sections, the invisible body, the body for others and the body for the self as for others.

The Lived Body as Central

The invisible Body (the body for the self)

Morris (2008: 99) suggests for Sartre, the priority lies with the first person perspective. Sartre suggests that our bodies in our everyday dealings with the world are invisible, we are unaware of them. All actions are intentional and we do not consciously move or manipulate our bodies during intentional action. Using Sartrean

terminology, we transcend our bodies. What we are aware of is our action, not our bodies performing that action. For example, I pick up a glass of water when I want a drink and that is what I am aware of, not the movement of my arm or fingers extending and closing around the glass. This, insists Sartre, ensures the effortlessness of our actions and supports the unity between our bodies and their engagement with the world. Bodies are the centre of our actions, but during such an action our bodies are out of our field of attention and therefore are effectively invisible to us. We take our bodies and the ability to perform actions effortlessly and appropriately, for granted. Sartre (1943: 324) states, “The body for-itself, as the unperceived centre of the perceptual field and the unutilizable centre of the field of action is by its very nature invisible.” The body is central or core, it is the reference point which all other objects are orientated around and it is also the medium by which actions are made possible. It is my perspective; it is my point of view and also my point of departure, “is at once a point of view and a point of departure which I am and which at the same time I surpass toward what I have to be.” (Sartre 1943: 326) Our attention is not usually engaged with our bodies but with the world around us and the relationship with that world, we *are* our bodies, unperceived. The physical body as facticity is thus for Sartre never determining:

Even this disability from which I suffer I have assumed by the very fact that I live; I surpass it toward my own projects, I make it a necessary obstacle of my being and I cannot be crippled without choosing myself crippled. This means that I choose the way in which I constitute my disability (as unbearable, humiliating, to be hidden, to be revealed at all.) But this inapprehensible body is precisely the necessity that there be a choice, that I do not exist all at once. (Sartre 1943: 328)

For Sartre then, we both *are* our body and *have* a body. The body is subject and object. These are *independent* modes of being for Sartre and can never be experienced simultaneously. Our bodies can touch and they can be touched but we do not experience that as one and the same. (Morris 2008: 102)

Body for Others

As discussed in chapter 2, section, 'Existentialist conceptions of the Other' when we encounter other people, we do not experience other people's bodies as simply objects in the sense of mere things, which Sartre has spelt out. In a similar way to our own, we relate to another body not as an object among the other objects in the world, but as situated. The other body presents itself to us as having a point of reference. We perceive the other body as a centre of perception and action, just as we do our own, and the consciousness and actions that the other body performs is implicitly understood. The other body has a meaning that mere things in the world do not. Sartre (1943: 344) suggests, "It is immediately given as the centre of reference in a situation which is synthetically organised around it."

However, I can and do look at the other body as an object, in that it becomes an object of my visual gaze, positioned in space and time. Such bodies are not inanimate objects but ones that I can nonetheless attribute with determinate and objective qualities. We try to fix people by classifying them. On the basis of their bodily characteristics they become objects of certain types. The flip side to this of course is that they can do the same to me. This is the One/Other dialectic. As an object, in this sense, subjectivity is lost. The experience that this mode of being leaves us with is that we are no longer the centre point of which our own aims, actions and projects are orientated around. By being looked at by another body there arises the experience of a point of view being taken of ourselves that is not one that we ourselves can in fact take:

My body is there not only as the point of view which I am but again as a point of view on which are actually brought to bear points of view which I could never take; my body escapes me on all sides (...) My body as alienated escapes me toward a being-a-tool-among tools (...) and this is accompanied by an alienating destruction and a concrete collapse of my world which flows toward the Other and which the Other will reapprehend in his world. (Sartre 1943: 352)

My body as viewed by others is, for Sartre, an alienated body because it is no longer a body from the first person perspective. Nonetheless recognising the existence of

such external perspectives on our bodies is *essential* for us to have a sense of ourselves *as having objective existence*, as objects in the world alongside others.

Body for Self as for Others

The third dimension of the lived experience of the body, for Sartre, involves something like the internalisation of the perspective of others into our own sense of our bodies. (Morris 2008: 102) Sartre provides a phenomenological description of the lived body as it is experienced by being looked at, and the feelings and meanings that are invoked from this look. One loses one's sense of self as a subject with aims and hopes and future projects and becomes aware of oneself as under the gaze of Others. This look is unsettling as it introduces experiences that would not arise in other circumstances. It is the sense where we experience ourselves as others see us. Sartre's description of this mode of being relates to a shy man:

To feel oneself blushing, to feel oneself sweating, are inaccurate descriptions which the shy person uses to describe his state; what he really means is that he is vividly and constantly conscious of his body not as it is for him but as it is for the Other (...) We often say that the shy man is embarrassed by his own body. Actually this expression is incorrect; I cannot be embarrassed by my own body as I exist. It is my body as it is for the Other which may embarrass me (...) I seek to reach it, to master it in order to give it the form and the attitude which are appropriate. But it is on principle out of reach. (Sartre 1943: 353)

For Sartre, there is a dialectic at play between the Self and Other. We retain our subjectivity by objectifying the Other in return. Where de Beauvoir differs from Sartre, is her recognition that in the case of women, there is no dialectic in play. A woman is objectified and struggles to regain any sense of self, for herself. We saw the impact of this in chapter 2, section, 'Woman as Other.' The most important of Sartre's distinctions for de Beauvoir then, is the body for the self as for others. The notion of internalisation is fundamental to her account and the awareness of the social gaze as formative of a woman's mode of experiencing her body. These issues will be revisited later, in the lived body section.

Merleau-Ponty and the Lived Body

Merleau-Ponty agrees with Sartre in prioritising the lived body but, Merleau-Ponty does not make the strict distinction between the body for itself and the body for others, which informs Sartre's account. The body for Merleau-Ponty is *expressive* of the self, rather than an instrument of our will. The body as expressive is where de Beauvoir is in agreement with Merleau-Ponty. Bodies and for her in particular women's bodies are not experienced as instrumental, nor are they always subject to their individual will.

As key to such expressiveness, Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of body image or body schema, as one aspect of the lived body. This is the awareness we have of the shape or form of our body and its spatiality. Such awareness is not of an objective anatomical thing, but an awareness of the body's shape or form in relation to its actions or tasks, of the position it occupies in relation to the surrounding environment, and its potential impact on others. Our bodies are the point at which intentional action can operate; but the body needs a scene, a background setting in which it can operate and relate to the significance of the objects in that setting. This is a description of phenomenal space rather than actual geographical (objective) space. Phenomenal space is about the body as the centre of the surrounding environment. For Merleau-Ponty (1945: 137) we are aware of our bodies as an, "*I can*" relationship with the world; that by which tasks are achieved, but achieved immediately and pre-reflectively.

Bullington (2013: 29-30) insists that for Merleau-Ponty the way we perceive and relate to the world is through bodily perception; this is how a human exists in the world. There is a unity between a subject's body and the world as it is perceived by them, as it is valued and significant. As Merleau-Ponty (1945: 144) states, "To understand is to experience the harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance." The pre-reflective, lived body enables habitual actions; it provides the subject with implicit bodily knowledge that co-exists between their body and the surrounding environment. This is the most fundamental level of experience of the lived body. Merleau-Ponty (1945: 130) argues:

My flat is for me, not a set of closely associated images. It remains a familiar domain round me only as long as I still have in my hands or

in my legs the main distances and directions involved, as long as from my body intentional threads run out towards it.

One does not have to think or calculate distances or how to negotiate around objects in an environment where one is already familiar. It is intentional, purposeful action that is already pre-supposed by the body; there is a unity in what it is we are desiring or aiming for, and the presentation of the world around us. Movements such as these give the world its meaning for that particular subject. This according to Langer (2003: 103):

provides a continual dialectic of corporeal intentionality and worldly solicitation. The bodily senses are themselves inseparably intertwined, forming an intentional arc that projects an anticipated world; and the world simultaneously draws forth this bodily intentionality.

Meaning in the world then is not all about reflective, conscious thought processes. There is an understanding of the world that comes before this, that allows for, and provides situations and opportunities that are meaningful. Merleau-Ponty utilises examples of playing musical instruments to illustrate the point. A musical instrument becomes part of the spatiality of the body schema, it becomes like an extension of the body that we accommodate. An instrument, “is to be transplanted into them, or conversely, to incorporate them into the bulk of the body itself (...) the body is essentially an expressive space.” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 143-6) Whilst playing an instrument (accomplished playing that is), one is not constantly thinking about where to place hands or feet, it becomes a fluid activity. The way the world appears and is perceived through the body is as a selection of possibilities that coincide with aims and projects. However, for Merleau-Ponty, it is not only the actions or gestures that one portrays that are expressive of subjectivity; those of other people are experienced in the same way. Their actions too have meaning which is intermingled not only within the gesture but with the person and the social world as a whole, “we do not see the eyes of a familiar face, but simply its look and its expression.” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 325) We experience the bodies of others as having shapes and forms which express their own subjectivity in the world, in a way that mirrors our own. Heinamaa (2003a: 79), suggests this is distinctive of Merleau-Ponty’s thought, as bodies can be described and experienced not only as an individual but also in a

dialectical relation with other bodies. A body is both separate and inter-dependent with other bodies. It is these aspects of Merleau-Ponty's thought, the contextual anchorage of the body in relation to itself and other bodies, and the awareness of the values and meanings that are implied, that de Beauvoir endorses and develops.

We will see in the following section that de Beauvoir also prioritises the lived body and how the body for self as for others is particularly useful to her account. However her account also echoes Merleau-Ponty in that our bodily images or schema, and the bodily habits into which we are culturally initiated are also central to her account.

De Beauvoir's conceptions of the body

"One is not born, but rather becomes, woman. No biological, psychical or economic destiny defines the figure that the human female takes on in society." (De Beauvoir 1949: 293) This is probably de Beauvoir's most famous remark in *The Second Sex*, and it might be interpreted as undermining the importance of embodiment in the account of becoming a woman. But embodiment is a central feature of de Beauvoir's theory, bound irrevocably with concepts of sexual difference. I am suggesting that in addition to the commonalities with both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, her account of embodiment is centrally informed by Marxism, which emphasises *both* the constraints of biology *and* the way societies shape what nature can become, in ways to which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty did not pay attention. She develops this Marxist foundation with phenomenological insights, which stress the way in which biology becomes inscribed with meaning and how this bears consequences for lived experience. These insights are then woven into her historical materialism, for the lived experience becomes part of the foundation by which sexual differences are maintained; however, as previously mentioned, these experiences are contingent within particular historical and social settings.

This section is divided into two parts. The first part addresses de Beauvoir's view of the biological body. This is important for de Beauvoir as the material body is of particular significance for a woman and her relation to the world. This material dimension of her account illuminates her Marxist perspective. The second part of the section addresses the lived body. Here she supplements all the thinkers discussed in the previous sections. She emphasises and develops Marx's concept of woman's biology as not determinative of her current subordinate social position, and develops

both Sartre's and Merleau-Ponty's view of the lived body by her gender orientation, which stresses that male and female bodies are lived differently.

Biological data

De Beauvoir offers us biological data with regard to differences between male and female bodies. She also stresses that different biological bodies will experience the world in different ways and so our biology is a fundamental part of our existence. For de Beauvoir, it cannot be denied that woman is:

weaker than man, she has less muscular strength, fewer red blood cells, a lesser respiratory capacity, she runs less quickly, lifts less heavy weights – there is practically no sport in which she can compete with him; she cannot enter into a fight with the male. Added to this are the instability, lack of control and fragility: these are facts. (De Beauvoir 1949: 46)

As de Beauvoir (1949: 29) explains, "It would be rash to deduce from such observation that woman's place is in the home: but there are rash people." These are facts which we are more likely to challenge today, and even as she wrote them she is aware of the way in which, what we count as fact, is itself influenced by culture, "It is only through existence that the facts are manifest." (De Beauvoir 1949: 390) What she is offering then is the facts of biology as they appear at the time of her writings. She shows herself aware of the way in which images describing biological processes are laden with cultural meaning, in a way that parallels discussion in current feminist interrogations of biology. For example:

Take the egg and the sperm. It is remarkable how femininely the egg behaves and how masculinely the sperm. The egg is seen as large and passive. It does not move or journey but passively is transported, is swept or even drifts along the fallopian tubes. In utter contrast, sperm are small, streamlined and invariably active. (Martin 1996: 106)

Our understanding of biology, de Beauvoir also recognises, is always mediated. She insists that biological facts have been described to effectively equate activity and passivity with man and woman. Men acquire the active role due to the frenzy of

movement of the sperm towards the egg and women acquire the passive role as the egg sits and awaits its fate.

De Beauvoir argues that actually within the sexual act and subsequent reproduction, both male and female play an equally important and inter-dependent role.

Nonetheless de Beauvoir insists that woman has a relationship with her biological body that is difficult to ignore. This biological body is marked particularly by its role in reproduction, "Males and females are two types of individuals who are differentiated within one species for the purposes of reproduction." (De Beauvoir 1949: 21) Yet in her discussion of the reproductive role of the female body, de Beauvoir herself provides an account which apparently sees the role which females play in reproduction as tying them into their biological being more than men. A woman's body time and again throughout her life makes its presence felt, "woman is her body as man is his but her body is something other than her." (De Beauvoir 1949: 42) The development of the female body into the maternal body is described as a crisis, "It is worth noting that this event has all the characteristics of a crisis." (De Beauvoir 1949: 40) Puberty is experienced as a, "fight" (ibid) and pregnancy as, "an invasion" (ibid) and then, "From puberty to menopause she is the principal site of a story that takes place in her and does not concern her personally." (De Beauvoir 1949: 40) The descriptions offered, portray a biology that is out of an individual woman's control. Heinamaa (2003a: 80) suggests de Beauvoir:

clearly rejects the view according to which the body appears to us merely or primarily as an instrument (...) she aims to show that this instrumentalist notion is inadequate in describing feminine experiences (...) This is true (...) the menstruating, impregnated and lactating body does not appear to a woman as an instrument for her projects.

It is a struggle for woman to maintain her subjectivity and for de Beauvoir, the strength of alienation of woman from her body is felt most strenuously:

she is the most alienated of all female mammals and she is the one that refuses this alienation the most violently; in no other is the subordination of the organism to the reproductive function more

imperious nor accepted with greater difficulty. (De Beauvoir 1949: 44)

The invocation of alienation here links this discussion of maternity, both to Sartre's account of alienation from an objective body and, importantly, back to Marx's account of the labourer's relation to their body under capitalism; capitalism reducing them to a purely biological nature. Here it is the labour of reproduction which threatens to reduce women to a purely biological nature.

For many writers these descriptions have been problematic. Scarth (2004: 140) highlights this:

Beauvoir's language is excessive, in the sense that many women would probably not recognise themselves and their experience of maternity in it; it is unfamiliar, strange and disturbing.

However, Scarth (2004: 140) does go on to suggest that such negative rhetoric actually serves a function; its purpose is to draw attention to the way a woman's biology is lived under oppressive circumstances, and the difficulty in maintaining any sense of self within that. Whatever the arguments for and against such negativity, what de Beauvoir is doing in this chapter is to argue *against* biological determinism. Biological facts, she goes on to argue, are only significant because of the meanings that society attaches to them. Woman's position as prey to the species, which leads on to motherhood, is portrayed and experienced as her destiny, but for de Beauvoir this is not the case. As with Marx's account of the alienation of the labourer, the reducing of women to a biological function is a consequence of particular organisations of society. This materiality of the body, as well as the materiality of social structures and the effects they have on individuals and their possibilities is crucial to de Beauvoir, and the importance of both should not be under-estimated. Arp (1995: 174) agrees she states:

I think that Beauvoir's concept of bodily alienation is one that could be fruitfully extended in a more materialist or Marxist-inspired analysis of the continuation of patriarchy. Such an analysis might be able to account for some of the ways the social construction of the

female body has changed in the almost fifty years since *The Second Sex* was written.

Metaphors that endorse motherhood as a destiny are abundant while working as ideology. This theme was highlighted in chapter 3, section, myths and what they do. De Beauvoir's point is that biology is always mediated. Biological facts are interpreted by the underlying social structures which are invested with meaning. According to Scarth, de Beauvoir is drawing attention to the patriarchal ideology as the source of such a portrayal of woman's situation:

Beauvoir shows in her analysis and her imagery, what it is like for women to experience maternity when it has been constructed as a destiny and as a submission to species demands that is not animated by human intention. (Scarth 2004: 138)

Tidd (2004: 56) concurs, "women do not choose how they exist their bodies because their embodiment has been pre-defined by patriarchal society." Arp (1995) also agrees, she suggests that a woman's body is experienced as alien due to its being mediated by culture. De Beauvoir herself makes this clear when she states:

The balance of productive and reproductive forces is different depending on the different economic moments of human history and they condition the relation of the male and the female to children and later among them. (De Beauvoir 1949: 48)

More over de Beauvoir, in her discussion of biology, suggests that throughout nature it is clear that reproduction does not necessarily even dictate the binary two sex division. She offers the example of hermaphroditism (intersex in human beings) as commonplace within many species and poses no obstacle to successful reproduction of that species as a whole. What de Beauvoir is drawing our attention to with her example is the notion that there are alternatives to the way in which we organise reproduction. There are many examples of species within the animal kingdom where both male and female counterparts perform the care and nurturing of the young. Sexual differentiation as binary is not a necessary or natural component within reproduction or nurturing of the next generation and this includes the human species. De Beauvoir argues, "in purely biological terms it would not be possible to posit the

primacy of one sex concerning the role it plays in perpetuating the species.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 48) She goes on to state, “It is clear that if a woman’s biological situation constitutes a handicap for her, it is because of the perspective from which it is grasped.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 356)

Within this section de Beauvoir has made a number of claims:

1. Biology is fundamental. This is particularly relevant to a woman’s biology as she experiences biological constraints. She is prey to the species.
2. Biology cannot define a woman. Biology only becomes fundamental within a cultural context.
3. The body for a woman is experienced as alien as it is viewed as a biological function.
4. Our understanding of biology is mediated.
5. Our understanding of reproduction is also mediated and socially arranged to prioritise heterosexuality.

In this way, she is demonstrating in a Marxist way that biology does not explain the subordination of women. De Beauvoir is addressing these claims in relation to Marx with the insistence that the material body and the material social structures have effects on individuals and their subjectivity. What she develops from Marx is the particular relevance to women, as society values their bodies negatively and society is organised in such a way as to limit a woman’s choices and make it appear like this is her destiny. It is nature as expressed through culture that shapes a woman’s subjectivity and her situation.

Lived Body

“If the body is not a thing, it is a situation: it is our grasp upon the world and the outline of our projects.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 46) At the end of the previous section I introduced the concept of a woman’s situation. This concept is fundamental for de Beauvoir. Moi (1999: 74) defines the body as situation as, “The body as a situation is the concrete body as meaningful, and socially and historically situated.” This links de Beauvoir’s account of the biological body with the lived body; the material dimension with the level of meaning and value. I will revisit this concept of situation in more depth later, in a separate section entitled, ‘the body as situation.’

In this section, however, I will show how de Beauvoir supplements the work of Marx, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty with a phenomenology that recognises sexual difference and the impact this has on women's existence. For her, Marx emphasises the importance of the material body. She then utilises and develops Sartre's categories of the body for others and the body for self as others in ways that Sartre does not, by emphasising the objectification of women and their internalisation of the negativity that such objectification implies. She expands Merleau-Ponty's notion of habitual action, by suggesting that for women due to their social objectification by men, their intentional engagement with the world is interrupted. This begins early in a woman's life and so becomes difficult to recognise, as this mode of being feels like a biological destiny.

For de Beauvoir (as for Sartre), biological facts give a facticity to our existence which must be accommodated but do not determine its character. Facts alone cannot explain the experience of bodies as lived. De Beauvoir insists that fertility and reproduction are fundamental to woman's social exclusion. Like Marx she highlights the biological status of woman and, like Marx, argues that the position of woman in society is not determined by that biology. The characteristics and roles that a woman displays are not biological in origin. Unlike Marx, however, she brings into play the way in which modes of embodiment constitute the subjectivity of women, and that the way such embodiment is experienced itself plays a key role in maintaining them in their subordinate role.

Heinamaa (2003b) argues as an existential, phenomenologist, de Beauvoir would insist that the body is experienced primarily in the mode of the lived body. Heinamaa (1999:117) also points out that for de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*:

the basic concepts of her [de Beauvoir] work – the concepts of body and sexuality – are taken from the phenomenological tradition of thinking. She emphasises repeatedly that her discussion of sexual difference is based on the concept of the living body.

She shares with both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty reference to the body as our possibility of engaging with the world. She also shares the view that the body is pre-reflectively laden with significance and meaning which is understood by the self and

those at whom it is aimed. The meaning and significance affects the way the body and self as a whole engages with the world. She, however, brings to her account of the lived body something which is absent in both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, namely a recognition that the body is lived differently for women and men. Philosophy, de Beauvoir argues, has failed to address the lived experience of women in particular and thus, large areas of human experience, namely those of women, are omitted. According to Heinamaa (1999: 119):

The Second Sex gives us a rich description of the living sexual body, its bodily and spiritual aspects, and its relations to other bodies and to the world as a whole. Thus it implies the fundamental question of the sexuality of philosophy itself.

Also Moi (1999: 94) argues that:

de Beauvoir is claiming that because she is a woman and not a man everything she says, asserts or claims in *The Second Sex* is going to be related to the fact that she has a female body.

She insists that the values and meanings that are implied as a consequence of a woman's situation within society impact on an individual woman's actions and her sense of her embodied self, how she values herself and what it means to her to be a woman. Embodiment is inextricably linked to our subjectivity. Therefore if our embodied selves are experienced negatively then we develop a negative sense of identity. Subjectivity, therefore, is sexed. Here, de Beauvoir is critical of both Sartre and Merleau-Ponty for their failure to recognise sexed difference as a key aspect of embodiment. Men and women experience their bodies differently, and these different experiences are central to the inequalities of position.

For de Beauvoir difference in the way the body is experienced begins in childhood but becomes marked most crucially when a girl reaches the stage of puberty. She comes to experience her body as a source of horror and shame. Up until that point boys and girls experiences are similar, but de Beauvoir argues, at puberty there are far greater changes to a girl's body than there are to a boy's. The girl's body becomes experienced as something other or something alien. She feels as if she is trapped in a series of bodily processes which are outside her control. She begins menstruation

which will then go on to reoccur every month. Every month she will experience her body as it swells and oozes, cramps and discharges. The cycles are connected to the development and tenderness of the breasts as well as to other less obvious physiological changes and so, de Beauvoir claims woman experiences her body on a passive level, as an originator of processes that are out of her control, and must be endured from the start to the finish:

the feminine sex organ is mysterious to the woman herself, hidden, tormented, mucous and humid (...) there is humiliation since the body then is no longer an organism (...) commanded by the brain and expressing the conscious subject, but a vase, a receptacle made of inert matter and the plaything of mechanical processes (...) a decomposition process that horrifies. Feminine heat is the flaccid palpitation of a shellfish (...) she like a carnivorous plant, waits for and watches the swamp where insects and children bog down; she is sucking, suction, sniffer (...) viscous. (De Beauvoir 1949: 409)

Consequently having previously competed in physical games on the same level with boys, she feels as if:

physically and morally she has become inferior to boys and incapable of competing with them: forsaking hopeless competition, she entrusts the assurance of her happiness to a member of the superior caste. (De Beauvoir 1949: 353)

Although boys also experience bodily changes at puberty these are not as problematic and entail more positive experiences:

Granted boys too at puberty feel their body as an embarrassing presence, but because they have been proud of their virility from childhood, it is towards this virility that they proudly transcend (...) they accede to the dignified status of male with joy (...) Just as the penis gets its privileged value from the social context, the social context makes menstruation a malediction. (De Beauvoir 1949: 340)

For de Beauvoir, a woman's body and the experiences that are involved imply she already has a physiological destiny, one that can and only will be achieved through motherhood. De Beauvoir states, "that is her "natural" vocation, since her whole organism is directed towards the perpetuation of the species." (De Beauvoir 1949: 537), "she does not really make the child: it is made in her; her flesh only engenders flesh" (De Beauvoir 1949: 553) Her experience of this is also that of being taken over by a body in the face of which she is passive. (Scarth 2004: 138) Pregnancy, childbirth, breastfeeding and menopause are processes whereby woman is, for de Beauvoir:

snared by nature, she is plant and animal, a collection of colloids, an incubator, an egg; she frightens children who are concerned with their own bodies and provokes sniggers from young men because she is a human being, consciousness and freedom, who has become a passive instrument of life. (De Beauvoir 1949: 552)

These very negative descriptions of female bodily experience have been much challenged in later writings which make female fertility and sensuality a source of pride and celebration. (Young 1984; Irigaray 1991; Schutte 1997) Many women have experiences of puberty which are very different from those de Beauvoir describes, see discussion in the section, 'Commentary and critique of the Lived Body.' But this of course reinforces her central point, namely that these experiences result from the meanings interwoven into biology in particular historical, social and cultural settings, and the consequences attached to these biological facts impact negatively on women's material and economic position, "In fact, her humility does not stem from a given inferiority (...) its source is in the adolescent girl's past, in the society around her and precisely in this future that is proposed to her." (De Beauvoir 1949: 353) Motherhood perpetuates a woman's inferior position in society as she is viewed as limited to repeating existence, rather than creating new ways of existing. Human beings create themselves and their society by the choices made, but creating children is something of a hollow creation as it is viewed as happening to women, rather than as something women do. Man's prerogative involves creative activities in the public arena and is viewed both individually and widely as having greater social value. A woman's possibilities are a result of the way she views herself and the possibilities

she feels are available to her, due to the biological burden of her body as it is lived. The negativity however, is a result of the way society interprets her body. (De Beauvoir 1949: 353)

In explaining how women's experiences of embodiment are shaped by their social situation de Beauvoir invokes Sartre's third category of the way in which we experience our bodies, namely *the body for self as it is for others*. The girl, on entering adolescence, becomes painfully aware of her body as an object of another's gaze in a way that, for de Beauvoir, is a different experience from such self-consciousness in most boys:

Her breasts show through her sweater or blouse, and this body that the little girl identified with self appears to her as flesh; it is an object that others look at and see (...) the little girl feels that her body is escaping her, that it is no longer an expression of her individuality; it becomes foreign to her; and at the same moment, she is grasped by others as a thing: on the street, eyes follow her. (De Beauvoir 1949: 331-2)

De Beauvoir is suggesting that the body for both woman and man is divided between the body as subject, a possibility of our intentional actions and the body as object, an object of another's gaze with fixed, determinate qualities. However, for man he interprets his body primarily as subject, active and creative, engaged in intentional action with the ability to transcend the meanings and value in terms of which others view him. For woman however, the division occurs on a more fundamental and what de Beauvoir believes as a more destructive level.⁶ Woman interprets her body firstly as an object whose meaning is defined by others. This is woman experiencing her body as a Body for Others. There is a point of view that is taken of her body by the other that is outside her own vantage point. Her world is always orientated around the other perspective (usually a man's), and her body and world are no longer the centre of her own projects, but the object of their gaze. A woman's experience of her body results from the internalisation of that gaze. For Sartre such an objectification takes place primarily between individual subjects whose process of objectification and refusal of objectification is a dynamic, moving to and fro between them. De Beauvoir, however, sees the objectification as being a consequence of society's view of women's bodies in general. They become objects of the social gaze and women

themselves internalise this objectifying gaze in relation to their own bodies. Her argument places this aspect as central, how women live the experience of objectivity, the look of another that is loaded with meaning and the internalisation of such meaning is at the centre of her account. De Beauvoir (1949: 355) argues:

This lack of physical power expresses itself as a more general timidity: she does not believe in a force she has not felt in her body, she does not dare to be enterprising, to revolt, to invent: doomed to docility, to resignation, she can only accept a place that society has already made for her.

Arp (1995: 171) re-iterates this point:

A living body can only become a thing under the gaze of another. Without this step, the initial objectification of the body by others, the process of alienation the young woman undergoes (...) could never occur.

De Beauvoir (1949: 360) goes on to state:

She becomes an object; and she grasps herself as an object; she is surprised to discover this new aspect of her being: it seems to her that she has been doubled; instead of coinciding exactly with herself, here she is existing outside of her-self.

This objectification of women is something which has remained a constant theme within feminist writings and remains relevant in contemporary society. The image of a woman comes from the outside, not from a definition or sense of her own self, and impacts on the way women experience the world they live in. One consequence of this insight is that today, a woman's body has become a commodity of consumerism. According to Arp (1995: 173-4):

Today, everywhere one looks one is confronted by images of the female body. They are used to sell every product imaginable. Any person living in a modernised society is deluged with them (...) Is it

any wonder that young women growing up in Western industrialised societies manifest a great deal of anxiety about their bodies?

For de Beauvoir the way in which women experience themselves as bodies-for others, so that their biology is experienced as a burden and an obstacle to self-fulfilment, impacts on the pre-reflective habitual engagement between bodies and their world which is described by Merleau-Ponty. As Heinamaa (1999: 118) points out, “For her, [de Beauvoir] Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenological description of the body, its spatiality, movement, sensations, speech and sexuality are a rich and convincing source.” She does however modify Merleau-Ponty’s account to show that whereas the norm he describes is of an embodied subject encountering the world as an, “*I can*” (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 137) for girls and women this experience is commonly one of an, *I cannot*. De Beauvoir (1949: 42) argues that this occurs at puberty:

This is when she feels most acutely that her body is an alienated opaque thing; it is the prey of a stubborn and foreign life that makes and unmakes a crib in her every month; every month a child is prepared to be born and is aborted in the flow of the crimson tide; woman is her body as man is his, but her body is something other than herself.

Women do not open their bodies in everyday movement but instead there is a self-imposed *I cannot*:

for the woman there is, from the start, a conflict between her autonomous existence and her being-other; she is taught that to please, she must try to please, must make herself object; she must therefore renounce her autonomy. She is treated like a living doll and freedom is denied her; thus a vicious circle is closed; for the less she exercises her freedom to understand, grasp and discover the world around her, the less she will find resources, and the less she will dare to affirm herself as subject. (De Beauvoir 1949: 305)

The unity that the lived body has with the world is lost. Women only use part of their bodies whilst performing a task, setting themselves up for limitations or failure

before they have even begun. These every day experiences constitute and inform women's sense of self and also the sense that others have regarding their bodies:

posture is imposed on her: stand up straight, don't (sic) walk like a duck; to be graceful she has to repress spontaneous movements, she is told not to look like a tomboy, strenuous exercise is banned, she is forbidden to fight; in short, she is committed to becoming, like her elders, a servant and an idol. (De Beauvoir 1949: 306)

In the introduction to this chapter, I announced de Beauvoir's account as influential and prophetic, specifically with regard to the work of Iris Marion Young (1980) and Pierre Bourdieu (1990) both of which demonstrate the endurance of de Beauvoir's claims, showing ways in which her argument remains current today. Iris Marion Young (1980) articulates that if the unity between the body and world, that Merleau-Ponty describes were impaired (or curtailed) in some way, then actions become less fluid and more stilted and subsequently, difficult to undertake. According to Young (1980: 147)

For any lived body, moreover, the world also appears as populated with opacities and resistances correlative to its own limits and frustrations. For any bodily existence, that is, an I cannot may appear to set limits to the I can.

It is not just about a world that has opportunities for intentional action, in this quote Young draws our attention to the world that also posits limitations and curtails intentional action.⁷ Particularly relevant is Young's paper entitled, 'Throwing like a girl.' (Young 1980) She focuses on women and their everyday experience of embodiment and suggests that for women, the intentionality of action is interrupted. Merleau-Ponty (and also Sartre), stress the lived body as a pre-reflexive intentionality. The body is the source from which the world is reached and a relationship with the world is made possible. This Young (1980) argues is a problem for female embodiment and as a result of situation, which is one of de Beauvoir's claims, women will experience their bodies as this burden; an obstacle to intentional engagement with the world.⁸ A woman learns to use her body, not to its full physical

capacity, but to a reduced possibility in order to fit with the feminine ideals that feature in society. Young (1980: 143) states:

Not only is there a typical style of throwing like a girl, but there is a more or less typical style of running like a girl, climbing like a girl, swinging like a girl, hitting like a girl. They have in common first (...) the motion is concentrated to one body part; and second, that the woman's motion tends not to reach, extend, stretch and follow through in the direction of her intention.

These patterns of bodily responses inhibit rather than enhance women's engagement in the world.

Merleau-Ponty's account of embodied habits is also central here. Habits are patterns of behaviour which, as Alcoff (2006: 108) argues, "produce bodily mannerisms that feel natural and become unconscious after long use; they are thus difficult to change." Such bodily comportment becomes habitual so that it both appears and feels biological in origin. Such bodily habits are learnt by girls on growing up, which then condition their way of responding to the world, and of which they are frequently not consciously aware of. These are habits which reflect a sense of bodily inferiority or bodily Otherness, as we discussed in chapter 2, section, 'Why is woman the Absolute Other?' Women out of habit, rather than nature, perform actions which perpetuate her social validation. She adopts weakness, passivity and fragility as her mode of existence, as if it were her biology that limits her projects.

In highlighting the way in which women's habitual comportment in the world reinforces their position of inferiority de Beauvoir is also anticipating the work of a later theorist who weaves together Marxism and phenomenology, Pierre Bourdieu. It is helpful to think about Bourdieu's work in characterising the nature of de Beauvoir's contributions. According to Gilbert & Lennon (2005: 124):

Bourdieu felt, that the phenomenological tradition had not paid sufficient attention to material and social structures as the context in which constituting practices took place. He introduced his key term *habitus* as a way of bringing together social institutions and the experiences and practices of the agents who make them up.

Habitus is the socialisation of an individual which results in generating an individual's perception, actions and bodily comportment; such experiences are not determined nor are they performed at the conscious level. Such actions or habitus are a consequence of the internalisation of patterns of behaviour that are common to a social group, for example class relations or gender relations. Bourdieu (1990: 4) states, "the relation to what is possible is a relation to power." Habitus pre-disposes individuals to perform particular everyday actions depending on the appropriateness of those actions in society, and as a member of a particular group. Behaviour becomes part of the process by which those norms are reproduced. Only some actions are selected; ones that are internalised as successful or appropriate for that group, and so the perpetuation of society and the social positions and structures continues. Different social positions produce a different habitus. (Swartz 2002: 64) Therefore, the actions and gestures that I perform reflect my upbringing, my historical position and my social status. Such actions feel like they are biological and natural in origin, performed without conscious thought. These actions perpetuate the structures and institutions from which they derive. Habitus is learnt through imitation and initiation usually at an early age; where actions from social groups are imitated from within that group as appropriate to their social positioning, the social divisions and relationships are thereby re-enforced. Bourdieu (1990: 87) states:

children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures (...) a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and using implements (...) bodily hexis is a political mythology, embodied, turned into a permanent disposition.

Such descriptions correspond with de Beauvoir in the way the social structures become embodied and are perpetuated in particular bodily practices, and the subjectivity of an individual becomes structured in accordance with that experience. De Beauvoir insists that such an engagement with the world, for a woman in particular, can result in a mode of embodied engagement which reinforces her social inferiority.

As for Bourdieu, he did not in the first instance express a particular interest in gender; however, later he did devote a number of publications which resulted in the book, *La Domination Masculine* (1998) to this area. A gendered habitus for Bourdieu

is a result of social power and processes which legitimise male domination and women's subordination. Women's oppression becomes self-fulfilling as they conform to their destiny as it appears, but is actually produced for them. They regard it as their choice, but it is in fact an implicit conforming to social pressure. Moi (1999: 282) states that Bourdieu is suggesting that:

As such, the traditional relationship between the sexes is structured by a habitus which makes male power appear legitimate even to women (...) For Bourdieu, an important aspect of this process is the inscription of social power relations on the body: our habitus is at once produced and expressed through our movements, gestures, facial expressions, manners, ways of walking and ways of looking at the world.

As noted earlier this begins in childhood whereby we teach our children how to dress and how to behave in ways that reinforce the social structures and power relations of (in this case), gender. The body becomes the site upon which such structures are displayed. This perspective is one which de Beauvoir had clearly anticipated yet, according to Moi (1999: 283), "he [Bourdieu] completely fails to acknowledge that his own analysis of patriarchal domination echoes that of Simone de Beauvoir." (His own habitus is constructed in a male dominated arena and so it may not occur to him that a female has any intellectual input to offer. This is certainly the view of Moi, 1999).⁹

Social change, Bourdieu admits, is difficult to effect as this behaviour is below the level of conscious thought and is treated as natural. Moi (1999: 284) points out:

It is striking – and somewhat surprising – to notice how close Bourdieu's analysis on this point comes to that of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. Like Bourdieu, de Beauvoir sees male domination as a universally existing social phenomenon, and as such particularly likely to be mistaken for nature.

As de Beauvoir (1949: 8) proposes:

as far back as history can be traced, they [women] have always been subordinate to men; their dependence is not the consequence of an event or a becoming, it did not happen. Alterity here appears to be an absolute, partly because it falls outside the accidental nature of historical fact.

Bourdieu's emphasis on the internalised habitus resulting from material and social positioning can prove problematic for the notion of agency of an individual, something which de Beauvoir views as of paramount importance. McNay (2000: 38) suggests that Bourdieu does deal with agency, which counters any criticism of social determinism. He deals with this, McNay (2000) claims, with the insistence that habitus is generative and dynamic. There are an infinite number of potential habitus that can be displayed within a particular social group or social position. So although such behaviour has boundaries (boundaries of appropriateness), any of that number can be selected by the individual as appropriate. McNay (2000: 38) states, "The generative nature of the habitus is grounded in (...) relation between individual habitus and the social circumstances from which it emerges." This makes actions, behaviour etc. unpredictable but at the same time, typical; there is a cyclical arrangement in play:

the body is a dynamic, mutable frontier. It is the threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is incorporated and realised and as such is neither pure object nor pure subject. (McNay 2000: 33)

What conception of freedom is possible in the light of such embodied practices? This will be a central concern of discussion within the Freedom chapter.

De Beauvoir's unique insight then is making the following claims: a) embodiment is lived differently for men and women; b) biological facts are interwoven with meaning and value that are socially and historically contingent; c) woman's biology is invested with negative meaning which is internalised and negatively informs woman's subjectivity; d) a woman's body is defined by men and is objectified and experienced as object; e) this is internalised and curtails intentional activities, although performance of these activities feels natural in origin; f) this reinforces

woman's economic, material and social position; g) social position is not a reflection of biological facts. To make use of Bourdieu here is, according to Moi (1999: 267), "to show that a Bourdieusian approach enables us to reconceptualise gender as a social category in a way which undercuts the traditional essentialist/non-essentialist divide. This as we shall see in the 'Summary, Body as Situation' section, also resonates with de Beauvoir. The biological body and the lived body, for de Beauvoir work together in ways that are inextricable; to prioritise one over the other is to undermine the importance of each. She demonstrates how the biological body and the lived body work together to produce and perpetuate social inequality.

Sex and Gender

For some writers (Butler 1986; Ward 1995) the distinction which de Beauvoir makes between the data of biology and the lived body suggests that she endorses the sex/gender distinction. In this distinction as often used sex is regarded as biology, the features that constitute a female or male anatomical body, and gender is regarded as the patterns of behaviour and psychological responses, which constitute masculinity or femininity. This distinction was first introduced by Ann Oakely (1985: 16) she writes:

Sex is a word that refers to the biological differences between Male and Female: the visible difference in genitalia, the related difference in procreative function. Gender, however, is a matter of culture: it refers to the social classification into masculine and feminine.

For de Beauvoir such categorisation is not so clear cut. De Beauvoir argues that biological features or facts are fixed, whereas the meaning of such features is socially constructed and therefore subject to change. It is not apparent, however, that her distinctions match those of the contemporary discussion. Gatens (2003: 267) suggests that to map de Beauvoir's account on to contemporary categories is mistaken. Moi (1999: 73) further suggests that there are deeper insights at work here and de Beauvoir's argument cannot be reduced neatly to the binary concepts of the contemporary debate:

Anyone who tries to read *The Second Sex* through the lens of the sex/gender distinction is bound to misunderstand de Beauvoir (...)

From a Beauvoirian perspective, the trouble with the sex/gender distinction is that it upholds the objective view of the body as the ground on which gender is developed. To consider the body as a situation, on the other hand, is to refuse to break it down into an objective and a subjective component: we don't first consider it scientifically and then add cultural experience. (Moi 1999: 73)

To consider the body as a situation (...) is to consider the fact of having a specific kind of body and the meaning that concrete body has for the situated individual. This is not the equivalent of either sex or gender (...) In short, de Beauvoir's concepts are capable of drawing more nuanced and precise distinctions than the sex/gender distinction can provide. (Moi 1999: 81)

Gatens (2003: 277-8) agrees:

It is femininity, not woman, that is the proper locus of gender and the target of de Beauvoir's barbs (...) There are then, at least three terms at work in *The Second Sex*: the female human being, femininity and woman and de Beauvoir says some surprising things about the connections between these terms – things that challenge the neat sex/gender divide.

Woman for de Beauvoir is neither sex nor gender, "Woman is defined neither by her hormones nor by her mysterious instincts but by the way she grasps, through foreign consciousness, her body and her relation to the world" (De Beauvoir 1949: 776-7) This body and its relation to the world is the lived body, anchored in biology but lived through its socially mediated framework of meanings.

Commentary and critique of the Lived Body

De Beauvoir persistently draws our attention to our embodied identity, but maintains that, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman." (ibid) In this she is following Marxism, which respects the facts of biology, in so far as we can ascertain them, but does not see them as determining what socially we make of nature. De Beauvoir supplements this Marxist starting point with attention to the phenomenology of

embodiment, as central to a subjectivity whose formation is a crucial way in which inequality is maintained. Here she uses insights from Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, but argues that their phenomenological accounts neglect to describe a whole section of human experience, namely that of women.

As mentioned earlier, subsequent feminist thinkers, (Young 1984; Irigaray 1991) have been critical of de Beauvoir's negative descriptions surrounding the female body, particularly regarding maternity and the negative effects this has on the development of a woman's sense of self. Young (1984: 51) for example, despite her affirmation of de Beauvoir, does criticise her on this issue and suggests that there are aspects of the maternal body, particularly during pregnancy that can be experienced on a more positive basis. She insists that during pregnancy the immanence/transcendence dichotomy that de Beauvoir argues is present in a human's mode of being does not exist for women in the same way. The categories merge and are not experienced as exclusive to one another. One can feel the materiality of the body during pregnancy, but yet it is not experienced as an object or a burden in which impediment of aims and projects occur. There is not necessarily an experience of alienation from one's body as a result of this. The argument follows that a pregnant woman is not looked at as an object of desire and is therefore not objectified by the social gaze, but instead viewed with respect as she is accepting and re-iterating her social value and position. From this there is the possibility that a woman can experience a more positive sense of self. However in her later reflections Young (2005: 51), reveals her haste in criticising de Beauvoir's negativity and suggests that even today following discussions with girls and women, the onset of menstruation in particular is met with anxiety and stress. The feelings of shame and alienation which de Beauvoir describes are still experienced by women, who are taught from the onset to hide the fact that they are menstruating and require discreet tampons and scented pads in order to disguise their status. The lack of facilities for women in public places to allow them to accommodate their menstrual cycle is another testament to the devalued position that a woman's biology endures and the practicalities that a woman has to negotiate, all of which reinforce the notion of shame and the necessity to conceal a normal biological function.

Yet even where there are changes in bodily experiences this does not undermine de Beauvoir's basic position. Biology, de Beauvoir insists, is always subject to interpretation, and it is these interpretations that ground women in immanence and subordination. Her basic point is that descriptions are always mediated by the dominant social values and meanings and women internalise these. Where those values change so will her experiences:

its customs cannot be deduced from biology; individuals are never left to their nature; they obey this second nature, that is, customs in which the desires and fears that express their ontological attitude are reflected. It is not as a body but as a body subjected to taboos and laws that the subject gains consciousness of and accomplishes himself. (De Beauvoir 1949: 48)

The body in old age

The attention to the body which is found in *The Second Sex* has parallels in de Beauvoir's later work entitled, *Old Age* (1970). Here again we find a distinction made between the biological facts, and the experience of the body as lived mediated through social meaning. According to de Beauvoir, bodies are not only sexed but they are also aged, and the physiological changes associated with ageing, are also given negative meanings and value. Just as society imposes limitations on a woman's possibilities due to her body, so it is with the aged. The ways in which our bodies are viewed and judged are specifically categorised, in order to fit the assumed capabilities and characteristics that are socially assigned. De Beauvoir (1949: 637) states, "The boundary between the imaginary and the real is even less distinct in this troubled period than during puberty." By which she means that the images and meanings that are attached to the ageing body, fix the way that our own ageing bodies and those of others are experienced, "The dangerous age is characterised by certain organic troubles, but the symbolic values they embody gives them their importance." (De Beauvoir 1949: 633)

However, Kirkpatrick (2014: 8) suggests that de Beauvoir also argues that in this context, as our bodies are that by which we undertake projects and direct ourselves toward future ones, there can be real biological limitations for the aged. De Beauvoir states:

even if the elderly person bears his ailments with resignation, they come between him and the world (...) stairs are harder to climb, distances longer to travel (...) parcels heavier to carry. (De Beauvoir 1970: 304)

In her work *Old Age* as mentioned in chapter 2, section, ‘later writings and the Category of the Other,’ de Beauvoir does acknowledge that there is a diversity of experience for individuals, both psychologically and biologically. Chronological age is not the same for everyone and although it does not necessarily equate to decline and decrepitude, the changes in bodily and mental capacities are a facticity which must be accommodated. The body *is* often confronted as an, *I cannot*. It is not just internalised as such, as is the case for women, but is a biological reality for the aged individual. The body is weaker and more vulnerable and constrains projects, for present or future.

Nonetheless the way the body is experienced in old age is still very much mediated through social meaning. De Beauvoir (1970: 15) states:

in his old age as at every other period of his life his status is imposed upon him by society. This situation also affects his physical organism and the converse applies, he experiences his relationship with time differently according to whether his body is more or less impaired.

What the quote above suggests is that de Beauvoir here, in common with *The Second Sex*, argues that biology can never be viewed in isolation, it is always located in social and cultural contexts, [old age] “can only be understood as a whole: it is not only a biological, but also a cultural fact.” (De Beauvoir 1970: 20) Kruks (2012b: 20), argues the social disparagement of such biological factors are meanings that society imposes on the aged and their bodies, and produces in the aged a feeling of disgust for their own bodies, a sense that their bodies have let them down, have become unreliable, and this inhibits their sense of possibilities for engaging in projects in the world.

The claims made in this later work emphasise even more the importance of the material body. However, de Beauvoir’s account never loses sight of the impact that

social mediation has on an individual and the development of the sense of self and subsequent lived experience.

De Beauvoir and the New Materialism

The earlier negative feminist response to de Beauvoir's account of lived embodiment has been changed recently as some feminists (Kruks, 2010 to give one example) supporting, what is termed, the 'New Materialism,' turn back to her account and recognise it as satisfying their criteria. New Materialism is a current strand of thinking that suggests that matter and meaning cannot be disentangled in the accounts which we offer of sexual difference. One of the aims here, the one which is particularly relevant to de Beauvoir, is to not only acknowledge the socially constructed nature of sexual difference, but also to give the materiality of the human body, in particular, due recognition. (Coole and Frost 2010: 19)

The new materialists suggest that the attention given in contemporary thought, especially post-structuralism, to the linguistically constructed and linguistically mediated structure of the social world has resulted in material dimensions not being given the priority they deserve, and this, "has had serious consequences for feminist theory and practice. Defining materiality, the body, and nature as products of discourse has skewed discussions of these topics." (Alaimo and Hekman 2008: 3) New materialism aims to redress the balance and finding ways to discuss the body as material, as well as subject to discourse and the realm of meaning and interpretation. The realm of discourse stresses the role of social construction in the formation of subjectivity and identity. New materialists argue, however, that focusing on representations *only* is problematic and requires grounding in the material forms of human existence. According to Grosz (2010: 150):

the material universe is the very source of regularity, predictability and determination that enables a perceiving being to perform habitual actions with a measure of some guarantee of efficacy.

There are parallels here with de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty and their views that embodied agency cannot be separated from the material dimension; the material provides the grounding for habitual action. For Grosz (2010: 149), "Consciousness is the projection onto materiality of the possibility of a choice, a decision whose

outcome is not given in advance.” Her notion is that the way for women to struggle against the limitations of society is by activity and this activity is seen as reliant on the material; the material possibilities to transform the environment and women’s relationship with it. Material bodies interact with other bodies within a material environment. This affects the systems of power, politics and economics in society which impacts on human life, the consequence of which offers opportunities for some and not for others. Coole and Frost (2010: 25) state:

From the materialist point of view, it is ideological naiveté to believe that significant social change can be engendered solely by re-constructing subjectivities, discourses, ethics and identities – that is without altering their socioeconomic conditions or tracing crucial aspects of their reproduction to the economic interests they unwittingly serve.

Alaimo and Hekman (2008: 7) agree, “Material feminists explore the interaction of culture, history, discourse, technology, biology and the environment without privileging any one of these elements.” Kruks (2010: 260) insists these are aspects which de Beauvoir anticipated and this makes her relevant to contemporary study.

Some new materialists, however, (particularly Grosz) have themselves been criticised for privileging a biological account of matter, “Grosz produces an account that is ultimately dominated by one side: nature.” (Jagger 2015: 335) This does not strictly speaking conform to the remit of New Materialism, as central to most writers who identify themselves in this way is the claim that no priority is to be given to either the biological or the discursive level of meaning; both are interconnected. What New Materialism is advocating is the requirement for new ways of conceptualising the notion of the material, rather than regarding it as something inert. According to Jagger (2015: 321):

A concern with the agency of matter is thus a key feature of the new materialism, in relation not just to body, sex and gender but all aspects of the material world (...) the aim is to find a way of theorising the inter-implication of the discursive and the material, the natural and the cultural, the body and its social construction.

Nature is, “agentic – it acts and those actions have consequences for both the human and nonhuman world.” (Alaimo and Hekman 2008: 5) This reiterates the view that what is natural and what is socially constructed is not to be defined as polar opposites. Materiality and meaning are inextricable and also irreducible. This, Kruks (2012), argues is the key to de Beauvoir’s approach in *The Second Sex*. Kruks (2010: 268) also argues that de Beauvoir:

integrates existential phenomenology (with its emphasis on individual lived experience, freedom, and responsibility) with a Marxist-inflected structural analysis of the material sources of alienation and social oppression.

For de Beauvoir (1949: 49):

the woman’s body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world. But her body is not enough to define her; it has a lived reality only as taken on by consciousness through actions and within a society.

It is de Beauvoir’s, “culturally orientated structural materialism” (Kruks 2010: 260) that demonstrates her indebtedness to Marx. The materiality of the body, and the objective material structures of society, de Beauvoir recognises (as did Marx), produce constraints upon individual freedom, which appear to operate independently of individuals. For women in particular de Beauvoir argues that these structures need to be taken into account when examining women’s situation. Socially contingent structures imply particular social relations, and as Kruks (2010: 266) argues they are ones that:

one has not chosen and yet which one still participates in perpetuating (...) right from the introduction, [*The Second Sex*] de Beauvoir introduces her claim that exterior social realities ineluctably suffuse individual women’s lives.

Thus Marxism is extended by de Beauvoir to address the individual and the effect of their lived experience. The biological body and the lived body work together here to produce and maintain a woman’s unequal situation.

Summary: The Body as Situation

The body as the data of biology and the body as lived, together become de Beauvoir's notion of the body as situation. Our bodies ground our experience of ourselves and our place in the world. (Moi 1999: 63) Biology is important, it cannot be ignored and women in particular, cannot simply transcend their biology as if it is some unimportant feature that bears no relevance to their lives, "These biological data are of extreme importance: they play an all important role and are an essential element in a woman's situation." (De Beauvoir 1949: 44)

Despite the importance of recognising that biology is a fundamental aspect of a situation, it is still not a destiny. De Beauvoir argues that we choose how to live our bodies by the projects that we embark on, and by the experiences these offer, give meaning to our lives. For her, our lived experiences, though anchored in biological being, are not determined by it. There are also social values and meanings that are attached to our bodies which inform our lived experience of our bodies and the possibilities that we as individuals see as options for ourselves.

De Beauvoir (and Merleau-Ponty whose account here is close to her own), claim that the body and the culture in which it is situated, are interconnected in ways that cannot be picked apart. Merleau-Ponty (1945: 189) says, "Everything is both manufactured and natural in man." De Beauvoir (1949: 49) endorses this:

biology alone cannot provide an answer to the question that concerns us: why woman is Other? The question is how, in her, nature has been taken on in the course of history; the question is what humanity has made of the human female.

Even the scientific account of the body has traces of prior human conscious thought and experience. Merleau-Ponty (1945: viii-ix) insists:

All my knowledge of the world, even my scientific knowledge, is gained from my own particular point of view, or from some experience of the world without which the symbols of science would be meaningless.

One must engage with the world first in order to understand and exist in the world as it presents itself to you, as the individual that you are; and we saw echoes of this in de Beauvoir's recognition that science itself was influenced by culture. What the body means, how it is lived and which projects are chosen as significant, involves both individual and cultural perspectives. Moi (1999: 67) states:

When de Beauvoir writes that the body is not a thing, but a situation, she means that the body-in-the-world that we are, is an embodied intentional relationship to the world. Understood as a situation in its own right, the body places us in the middle of many other situations.

For de Beauvoir a woman's body is interconnected not only with her choices but with the possibilities that society offers, and with the choices that she views as possibilities. These possibilities are often limited and often viewed as women's destiny. Importantly however, de Beauvoir replaces that concept of destiny with the concept of situation. In the following chapter, I will continue with this theme and explore how the body as situation interacts with other situations within which it is placed, to create women's lived experience of her world.

Chapter Five - BECOMING WOMAN

What I will try to describe is how woman is taught to assume her condition, how she experiences this, what universe she finds herself enclosed in and what escape mechanisms are permitted her. Only then can we understand what problems women – heirs to a weighty past, striving to forge a new future – are faced with. (De Beauvoir 1949: 289)

Introduction

Book II of *The Second Sex*, is devoted entirely to a discussion of the lived experience of women. Here, de Beauvoir begins this enterprise with her most famous quote, “One is not born, but rather becomes, woman.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 293) In these chapters de Beauvoir spells out the process by which women *become* women, how, from being the bearers of female bodies they come to assume the position of woman, how their subjectivity and life choices become formed in a context in which sexed difference is a primary category of individuation. In the words of Moi, “a woman defines herself (...) through the way in which she makes something of what the world makes of her.” (Moi 1999: 72)

De Beauvoir provides a phenomenological and critical discussion of what the roles for women are in society. She questions what are the options available to them and how do they make sense of their lives within the context of the situation in which they are placed? De Beauvoir draws attention to the lived experience of the daily existence of women at the time of writing *The Second Sex*. She argues that attending to such lived experience highlights what people see as possibilities for themselves and how they reproduce the patterns of living, which help retain the oppression and inferiority of their position. It displays how power and oppression are justified, perpetuated and lived. Her attention to phenomenology and to the formation of subjectivity differentiates her account from Marx, who did not recognise this as a key site whereby inequality was reproduced. Nonetheless Marx’s historical and materialist thought remains explicit within de Beauvoir’s argument. The lives which she describes are shown as conditioned by two key features. Firstly, they are

anchored in certain historical, economic, material conditions. According to Moi (1999: 83), “*The Second Sex* lays the groundwork for a thoroughly historical understanding.” We can make this clear by considering which of her descriptions are applicable today, and which are not, as a result of changes in historical conditions. Secondly, experience is structured by social myths and meanings which are, in Marxist terms, ideological. They are what she terms fantasies, distorting reality. Moi (1999: 8) suggests, “[myth] has strong family resemblances to the Marxist concept of ideology.” Internalising such ideology frames and informs lived experience. For Marx, a distorted ideology is made apparent as such, because it does not make sense of people’s lives see discussion in chapter 3, section, ‘Marx, as myth as Ideology.’ In a more complex move de Beauvoir recognises that women have made sense of their lives, however distorted the ideology may be, due to the internalisation which yields their sense of self, and informs their daily lives. For Moi (1999: 83), “By stressing the oppressive functions of sexual ideology and social norms, *The Second Sex* develops a devastating critique of sexism.”

As we saw in the discussion of the body, de Beauvoir accepts that there are biological differences between women and men, particularly in relation to reproduction. But it is not these differences which dictate the experience of *living* as a woman. Being female, being woman and being feminine are in no way the same or reducible to each other; this is because, as a human, woman is also a product of historical development. (Gatens 2003: 267) Moi (1999: 65), suggests the body, as we have explored in the Summary in chapter 4, is both a situation (a materiality and a bearer of historical meaning), and it places human existents in a number of situations. She states, “The body both is a situation and is placed within other situations.” (Moi 1999:65) Bergoffen (2009: 26) reiterates that a woman’s situation for de Beauvoir is historical and not natural. De Beauvoir insists that although the body is the basis from which a woman makes sense of herself in relation to how the world views her, this is not determinative but is contingent, it is mediated by culture. Biology is claimed to justify social inequality and so is accepted as natural. However, de Beauvoir (1949: 770) says, “The battle of the sexes is not immediately implied by the anatomy of man and woman.” For de Beauvoir, Moi (1999: 82) suggests, “the relationship between one’s body and one’s subjectivity is neither necessary nor arbitrary, but contingent.” What this means is that subjectivity for de

Beauvoir is woven from the situation in which an individual is positioned, and in which material circumstances and meaning cannot be extracted and viewed in isolation. An individual experiences their world from an embodied, situational perspective; a perspective which encompasses a variety of situations which are pre-given with cultural meaning and value. These situations are ones in which, historically, sexual difference has been picked out as a substantial feature of social identity. Women's situations are ones which de Beauvoir argues, are always primarily defined by sexed difference:

And the truth is that anyone can clearly see that humanity is split into two categories of individuals with manifestly different clothes, faces, bodies, smiles movements, interests, occupations; these differences are perhaps superficial; perhaps they are destined to disappear. What is certain that for the moment they exist in a strikingly obvious way. (De Beauvoir 1949: 4)

Certainly woman like man is a human being; but such an assertion is abstract; the fact is that every concrete human being is always uniquely situated. Rejecting the notions of the eternal feminine, the black soul or the Jewish character is not to deny that there are today Jews, blacks or women: this denial is not a liberation for those concerned, but an inauthentic flight. Clearly no woman can claim without bad faith to be situated beyond her sex. (De Beauvoir 1949: 4)

Her aim then was to provide a characterisation of what it was like to live one's life as a woman, to 'take stock' as she says:

how will the fact of being a woman have affected our lives? What precise opportunities have been given us and which ones have been denied? What destiny awaits our younger sisters, and in which direction should we point them? It is striking that most feminine literature is driven today by an attempt at lucidity more than by a will to make demands; coming out of an era of muddled controversy, this

book is one attempt among others to take stock of the current state.
(De Beauvoir 1949: 16)

In taking stock she pays attention to concrete examples of the way women have lived their lives in the society she saw around her, and from these draws more general observations concerning women's position. According to Moi (1999: 76), "de Beauvoir considers that only the study of concrete cases – of lived experience – will tell us exactly what it means to be a woman in a given context." But even so, "There is no question of expressing eternal truths here, but of describing common ground from which all singular feminine existence stems." (De Beauvoir 1949: 289) The notion of the, "eternal feminine" is itself a myth. (De Beauvoir 1949: 4)

What is to follow in this chapter is a discussion regarding how women experience themselves and their lives through the roles and institutions that society offers them. I will look in detail at the majority of roles de Beauvoir offers as examples of a woman's lived experience; from childhood and adolescence, to sexual initiation, to living as a lesbian, married woman, mother, prostitute and through to maturity and old age. De Beauvoir also offers discussions regarding a woman's situation and character, woman in love and the independent woman all to which I have devoted separate sections. (Woman's social life, the Narcissist and Mystic also receive their own discussions in *The Second Sex*, see Notes). The purpose of these phenomenological descriptions is to draw attention to what possibilities women encounter concerning their social definition and role, in the context of patriarchal, social institutions. (This insight, in itself became influential to future feminist accounts, in particular, Judith Butler and I will examine her discursive theory and the ways she compares and contrasts with de Beauvoir later in this chapter). The majority of these possibilities outlined, de Beauvoir argues, sustain patriarchal values and so the outcome of their life choices, are unsatisfactory for women. In these circumstances, freedom and agency appear different for women and men. She recognises that to extend the choices and improve the lived experience of women, social and economic change is crucial, as well as, changes at the level of meaning. In this way, as I explore in the 'Summary: The Importance of the Account of Lived experience' later, oppression is exerted from the inside and the outside. This phenomenological position, I argue, is enhanced by paying attention to the effects of

social institutions and practices. The examples that are to follow are ones which she sees as illuminating the general everyday situation of women. I will examine each one in turn, in the order they are presented in *The Second Sex*.

Lived Experience

Childhood and Adolescence

For de Beauvoir, the lived experience of woman is about grasping her as an embodied being participating in a social structure that oppresses her and, how she experiences herself in such an environment. (Kruks 2005: 296) As discussed in the previous chapter, woman is taught to assume her condition in society from early childhood; chapters 1 and 2 of Book II *The Second Sex*, specifically address this period, making use of anecdotal illustrations. De Beauvoir argues that up until puberty girls and boys experiences are generally the same. She argues that it is not a biological origin that differentiates girls' behaviour from boys' behaviour:

During the first three or four years of life, there is no difference between the girls' and boys' attitudes; they all try to perpetuate the happy state preceding weaning; both boys and girls show the same behaviour of seduction and display. (De Beauvoir 1949: 295)

Tidd (2004: 65) suggests that:

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir describes how girls and boys are rewarded or punished explicitly or implicitly according to how successfully they conform to the desired models of heterosexual masculinity and femininity which perpetuate patriarchy.

Some girls, even before puberty, display signs of specific sexed identity and this is due to social pressure:

If well before puberty and sometimes even starting from early childhood she already appears sexually specified, it is not because mysterious instincts immediately destine her to passivity, coquetry or motherhood but because the intervention of others in the infant's life is almost originary, and her vocation is imperiously breathed into her from the first years of her life. (De Beauvoir 1949: 293)

However, it is the way a girl's body is viewed and the perpetuation of social institutions that very often under the level of conscious thought, which instil in girls via their mother, grandmother, teachers and so on, characteristics of femininity which result in feelings of inferiority and shame. In childhood, sexual difference is recognised as significant even at this early stage, as children begin to discover their anatomical differences. For a girl, her body (specifically her reproductive organs) are hidden and so the experience of the body and the feelings and sensations which emanate from it are more of a mystery to her:

She has a deep concern about everything happening inside her; from the start, she is far more opaque to herself and more profoundly inhabited by the worrying mystery of life than the male. (De Beauvoir 1949: 303)

For a boy, she suggests his anatomy is clear to see and to handle, and his penis can become an instrument upon which to project an alter ego. De Beauvoir argues that because a girl does not have an alter ego (in the form of a penis) she is given dolls to play with as an alternative. This doll (usually a female representation) is experienced as passive and this doll becomes the girl's alter ego. She learns through play and images that this is what it is to be feminine; to be pretty and smiley and validated through appearance and passivity:

Through compliments and admonishments, through images and words, she discovers the meaning of the words pretty and ugly; she soon knows that to be pleased is to be pretty as a picture; she tries to resemble an image, she disguises herself, she looks at herself in the mirror, she compares herself to princesses and fairies from tales. (De Beauvoir 1949: 304)

The materiality of anatomy and the images of culture are intertwining, here, to build the differences between them. Tidd (2004: 66) points out that girls are discouraged away from many physical activities and, "appropriating space in the world, whereas boys are encouraged." When a girl reaches puberty and menstruation begins, then her fate is sealed and her feminine destiny is set. Her body becomes a site of uncontrollable occurrences that mark her passage into womanhood, wifhood and

motherhood. It is not only the physical changes discussed in chapter 4, section, 'Biological Data' that mark this passage. Particular expectations, meanings and values from the social structure begin to have a remarkable impact. At this time the girl not only begins to recognise the physical differences but also the germination of social prestige that having a penis rather than a vagina instils. The culture is internalised and affects subjectivity, so a girl is groomed for marriage and motherhood. The characteristics which develop as a result produce a nature of modesty and subordination that becomes definitive of femininity. This view of woman as *feminine* is the source of the girl's future oppressed social status. Her femininity as defined, (not by her but by a patriarchal society), then orientates her toward the roles of wife and mother. A girl child and adolescent is given more responsibility in the house than is her male counterpart, and she learns how to partake in housework and nurturing and learns that this is what a woman is and does. It is regarded as natural. All aspects of a girl's life reinforce her lack of prestige in society and reinforce the superiority of the male, "Everything helps to confirm this hierarchy in the little girl's eyes. Her historical and literary culture, the songs and legends she is raised on, are an exaltation of the man." (De Beauvoir 1949: 313) This is where in de Beauvoir's view an adolescent girl loses ground academically as well as in sporting activities, areas in which independence and autonomy are important features. Instead she learns to comply with social expectations; she learns dependence and insecurity, she learns submissiveness.

These views (at first glance) appear contextual, as it can be argued that society has changed enormously since de Beauvoir's time of writing. De Beauvoir was interested in the lives of women globally, but was inspired to write *The Second Sex* following her tour of the United States in 1947. See the Introduction chapter. Her focus in Book II describes the plight of women predominantly in France and the USA and so, in the interests of continuity the more recent statistics I supply in support of this chapter also originate from there. To begin, UNESCO (un.unesco.org 2015) present global figures which suggest approximately 757 million people are illiterate; 63% of those are women (in some countries the data is unavailable and this would suggest the percentage could be even higher). These figures are more glaring in Developing Countries and The Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova (un.unesco.org 2015) proposes that with improved levels of education for girls then freedom of choice and

the freedom to shape their own future becomes a possibility. This is what de Beauvoir advocated. However, in a study published by Missouri University in 2015, despite the figures highlighted by UNESCO it is suggested that, globally girls are now outperforming boys academically in most key areas of education. This success was reported as regardless of the political, economic, social, or gender issues which structured the particular country studied, and the gap between boys and girls is said to be increasing. (Sossman 2015:1) Having said that, Hazareesingh (2015: 4), suggests women still struggle to achieve equality, particularly in political positions of power. In France today (more than any other leading industrialised country), women he states, “struggle to assume leading positions in politics and when they do break through the glass ceiling, female politicians face an exceptional barrage of hostility.” (Hazareesingh 2015:4) Sexual discrimination remains resilient and de Beauvoir’s account appears not so outdated. In sporting achievements, the current data is not so positive from the outset and still resonates with de Beauvoir’s claims. Nine out of ten girls currently fail to meet official guidelines for desirable levels of physical activity and 65% of women do not take enough physical exercise. Areas identified as key for enabling women to take part in sport are: more positive images surrounding women and physical activity, more information, and more financial investment. (European Commission, 2003) This emphasis on image and material circumstance reflects de Beauvoir’s own analysis. What is also crucial, de Beauvoir argues, is that girls learn to become object under the gaze of others, in which her ultimate concerns are her attractiveness to men, she says, “This is why adolescence is such a difficult and decisive moment for a woman.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 359)

Even more so in present day there is an anxiety and preoccupation predominantly found in adolescent girls regarding their appearance. Arp states, “This anxiety is reflected in the record-high incidence of eating disorders among adolescent females and is fed on and exploited by advertising in turn.” (Arp 1995: 174) What de Beauvoir articulated in 1949 is evidently still relevant today.

Sexual Initiation

Sexual initiation is part of the process of woman assuming her condition and is again often experienced negatively. It marks the passage into adulthood and for de Beauvoir is another example of an experience which differs for men and women,

“The situation is profoundly different here for man and woman from the biological, social and psychological points of view.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 394) Custom (which promotes sexual difference as biological), implies that woman is passive and man is aggressive, so for a woman to initiate sex is regarded as unfeminine, “Both anatomy and customs confer the role of initiator on the man.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 402) Men see women as passive and self-sacrificing, and as this is perpetuated throughout the social institutions then this is also how women see themselves; this is then reflected in their behaviour. Such behaviour is a result of an upbringing under a patriarchal ideology and, de Beauvoir suggests, offers a damaging picture for women by implying subordination and disempowerment:

Patriarchal civilisation condemned women to chastity; the right of man to relieve his sexual desires is more or less openly recognised, whereas woman is confined within marriage: for her the act of the flesh, if not sanctified by the code, by a sacrament, is a fault, a fall, a defeat, a weakness. (De Beauvoir 1949: 397)

She argues that, according to social norms, sex is limited for a woman to within the institution of marriage. Outside of this she is regarded as a whore, an object to have sex with, whenever the man is aroused; her own pleasure in the sexual act is not a priority. Consequently, when faced with sexual initiation, she is ill-prepared:

it is not enough for the young girl to let it happen; if she is docile, languid or removed, she satisfies neither her partner nor herself. She must participate actively in an adventure that neither her virgin body nor her consciousness – laden with taboos, prohibitions, prejudices and exigencies – desire positively. (De Beauvoir 1949: 402)

As an individual, sex is encountered as a moment where, as an already gendered being, one brings to the encounter desires and hopes as well as fears. This impacts on the experience of the encounter and renders it either pleasurable or not pleasurable. On a more general level in society, the encounter is laden with social customs and norms that condition men and women, for example, as aggressive and passive respectively. It is in view of the social practices and values associated with sex that sexuality has meaning:

In any case, however deferential and courteous a man might be, the first penetration is always a violation. While she desires caresses on her lips and breasts and perhaps yearns for a familiar or anticipated orgasm, here is a male organ tearing the girl and introducing itself into regions where it was not invited. (De Beauvoir 1949: 406)

The way the sexual act is viewed and experienced, de Beauvoir argues, is not one of reciprocity. She goes on to claim, “He takes his pleasure with her; he gives her pleasure; the words themselves do not imply reciprocity.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 408) “Even if woman accommodates herself more or less exactly to her passive role, she is still frustrated as an active individual.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 427) Women also learn to fear and avoid sex as the social consequences for unmarried women embarking on such behaviour are severe. Sexual initiation brings the ever present possibility of pregnancy and unmarried mothers in society are met with harsh social consequences:

An illegitimate child in most civilisations is such a social and economic handicap for the unmarried woman that one sees young girls committing suicide when they know they are pregnant (...) such a risk constitutes a quite powerful sexual brake, making many young girls observe the prenuptial chastity prescribed by customs. (De Beauvoir 1949: 409-10)

Fear of such consequences instils caution and the undertaking of actions and precautions to avoid sex and pregnancy that can dampen any erotic ardour from the woman’s behalf. (Such precautions are not necessarily at the disposal of all women either and this leaves those women helpless and disempowered.) For de Beauvoir, women’s experience of sex is a product of a number of material and cultural factors. Firstly, women’s bodies and reproductive capabilities put them in a different situation from men; they can get pregnant. Secondly, there are the economic consequences of having children to raise and thirdly, the values society attaches to all of this. This all runs hand in hand with myths and images of women as virgins or whores. Moi (1999: 195) states:

For de Beauvoir, ontological, social and biological factors all converge in human sexual activity; under patriarchy, sexuality

therefore becomes the arena where the general conflicts of women's lives are most acutely felt.

Control for women of their own reproduction, is, therefore, vital in order for women's experiences of sex to change, "The existence of surer more convenient contraceptive devices is helping woman's sexual freedom a great deal." (De Beauvoir 1949: 410) "The conditions under which woman's sexual life unfolds depend on these facts but also on her whole social and economic situation." (De Beauvoir 1949: 427)

More control over their reproduction for women is an area in which there has been a huge change since de Beauvoir's time. These changes appear to support de Beauvoir's materialist claims that a fundamental material change in circumstance can drive changes in the lived experience for women. Abortion is now legal in many countries (though still not all), and contraception takes a variety of forms which makes it more readily available and accessible for most (though again not all). In many Western societies, female sexuality is less of a taboo subject and the huge increase in single mothers within that society is a testament to the changes in attitude, as well as in material circumstances. As de Beauvoir (1949: 770) states, "sexuality moreover, has never seemed to define a destiny or to provide in itself the key to human behaviour, but to express the totality of a situation it helps define."

Social and technological advances have now made IVF available to some in the West. This can offer more choice and control for women over their reproductive status. It also offers same-sex couples the chance to become parents. Greater acceptance of sexuality, beyond heterosexuality is growing in current Western society, and figures from the US LGBT Parenting website (2013) show that there are 111,000 same sex couples now raising children, who are either biological, step, or adopted children. However, the process is a very expensive one, making it still inaccessible to many.

In many Developing countries, these changes in attitude and economic circumstances have not been achieved and women remain impoverished with less control over their own bodies, sexuality and reproductive status. UNESCO (un.unesco.org 2015) argues that factors which lead to discrimination against women include poverty,

early marriage and pregnancy with very often multiple pregnancies to follow. These factors exclude many girls and women from gaining an education and exercising their freedom of choice. The importance of a woman's economic situation remains a key factor in promoting sexual and reproductive freedom which serves to underline de Beauvoir's crucial insight.

The Lesbian

De Beauvoir discusses what happens when some women choose a different path to that of heterosexuality. She herself had many lesbian relationships, but did not regard what we now think of as sexual orientation as a distinct identity.¹⁰ It was rather one way in which one might live one's sexuality, "Anatomy and hormones never define anything but a situation and do not posit the object towards which the situation will be transcended." (De Beauvoir 1949: 430) "Homosexuality for woman is an attempt among others to reconcile her autonomy with the passivity of flesh." (De Beauvoir 1949: 431) Moi (2008: 218), points out that de Beauvoir suggests lesbianism is a way for women to undermine their contradictory condition and become more independent. Tidd (2004) concurs that de Beauvoir offers a positive alternative to heterosexuality with her account of lesbianism. De Beauvoir (1949: 448) states, "It is an attitude that is chosen in situation; it is both motivated and freely adopted." She goes on to argue:

In truth, there is never only one determining factor; it is always a question of choice made from a complex whole, contingent on a free decision; no sexual destiny governs an individual's life. (De Beauvoir 1949: 442)

Lesbianism for de Beauvoir is regarded as an escape from the patriarchal practice that turns women into objects of male desire. De Beauvoir is arguing here that sexual desire and eroticism are part of what it is to be human, but women under the constraints of patriarchy are denied the freedom to express and explore such characteristics. Lesbian eroticism is viewed more positively than heterosexual relations between men and women, as the (sexual) relations between two women start from a more equal footing, reciprocity is a greater possibility, as one is not

subjugated to the other, as is characteristic of the man/woman relationship.¹¹(Moi 2008: 218) De Beauvoir (1949: 441) states:

Between women, love is contemplation; caresses are meant less to appropriate the other than to re-create oneself slowly through her; separation is eliminated, there is neither fight nor victory nor defeat; each one is both subject and object, sovereign and slave in exact reciprocity; this duality is complicity.

In de Beauvoir's view, patriarchal myths surrounding femininity have less impact and significance for the lesbian woman. However this positivity for de Beauvoir is dependent on how one chooses to live the lesbian existence. Being a lesbian is an attitude for de Beauvoir, a style of being, but the lesbian woman is still subjected to social norms of womanhood which include heterosexuality. As a result, this style of being is very often (though not always), one which involves renouncing womanhood. Lesbian women, de Beauvoir argues, were often regarded as 'not really women,' with many of them overtly adopting male personas. But for de Beauvoir adopting such a specific lesbian identity merely imposed a different limitation to their existence. This style of being de Beauvoir suggests becomes self-defeating as it accepts the view of lesbians in a society that already views them as not real women and these relationships as wrong. It therefore does not help shift the possibilities for women's sexuality in general. (De Beauvoir 1949: 447)

The discussion here is remarkably prophetic concerning later accounts of the importance of lesbianism in the liberation of women. Monique Wittig (1992: 159) suggested in a notorious statement, "lesbians are not women." What Wittig means by this is that women are socially constructed as such through the institutions of heterosexuality and marriage. Lesbians step outside of these markers, she states, "For a lesbian this goes further than the refusal of the role woman. It is the refusal of the economic, ideological and political power of men." (Wittig 1992: 159) The material practices in which heterosexual men and women engage need to change in order for gender relations to equalise. Judith Butler (1993) drew on the work of Wittig by arguing that the binary division of sex serves to endorse a social system whereby heterosexuality is regarded as compulsory, and is central to the construction of gender categories. For Butler (1993), however, lesbianism is regarded as

performative which can de-stabilise the meaning of the heterosexual gender binaries. I will return to a discussion of Butler in a later section. For de Beauvoir lesbianism offers a possibility for exercising agency, but at the time is not one most women could consider. What this does show, is that for her, there is some leeway in the way women negotiate the circumstances in which they find themselves placed.

In modern day, changes have taken place here in regards to attitudes to bisexuality and same sex relationships. In some parts of the world, it is socially more acceptable and in legal terms, here in the UK for example, marriage of same sex couples came into force in 2014.

The Married Woman

Marriage is regarded by de Beauvoir as the option endorsed by society for women:

A girl's free choice was always restricted (...) marriage was her only means of survival and the only justification of her existence (...) for girls marriage is the only way to be integrated into the group, and if they are "rejects" they are social waste. (De Beauvoir 1949: 453)

Marriage for a woman becomes the only route toward social acceptance; if unmarried, women are regarded as socially incomplete and do not earn as much respect. There is a social stigma if a woman is unmarried and a social pressure to get married, which women internalise. It is not class dependent, whether working class or bourgeois, women experience few alternatives. But the option of marriage is not simply one with social endorsements. It is also dictated by economic conditions. De Beauvoir argues that for women a career of her own is limited to certain occupations which are difficult to find and poorly paid, as well as socially under-valued:

It is understandable that she is tempted by this easy solution, especially as women's professions are so unrewarding and badly paid; marriage is a more beneficial career than many others. (De Beauvoir 1949: 456)

Marriage is very different for men and women; de Beauvoir states:

Marriage has always been presented in radically different ways for men and for women. The two sexes are necessary for each other, but

this necessity has never fostered reciprocity; women have never constituted a caste establishing exchanges and contracts on an equal footing with men. (De Beauvoir 1949: 451-2)

Marriage as lived for women is a place of oppression and limitation; once within the marriage contract she becomes dependent, legally and economically on her husband. Laws, customs and economic need operate to enforce women into wifedom and then, de Beauvoir argues, abandons them, leaving women feeling disempowered and living daily lives over which they do not have control.

For both men and women, de Beauvoir admits, marriage in its current form poses limitations. Marriage manifests in rights and duties rather than choices. She states:

But the principle of marriage is obscene because it transforms an exchange that should be founded on a spontaneous impulse into rights and duties; it gives bodies an instrumental, thus degrading, side by side, dooming them to grasp themselves in their generality; the husband is often frozen by the idea that he is accomplishing a duty, and the wife is ashamed to feel delivered to someone who exercises a right over her. (De Beauvoir 1949: 478)

Both men and women very often marry for convenience as a consequence of the social pressure to conform. Marriage as an institution bound by such laws and customs is often experienced as incompatible with love, despite the promises from society that love and marriage go hand in hand. As marriage is not a free choice for a woman (or very often for a man) then love does not always enter into the equation, "Reconciling marriage and love is such a feat that at the very least divine intervention is necessary." (De Beauvoir 1949: 467) De Beauvoir insists, however, that a woman's position within the institution of marriage is experienced as more oppressive than the position of a man. The domestic work undertaken within the marriage institution leaves woman as housewife working for very little:

But what makes the lot of the wife-servant ungratifying is the division of labour that dooms her wholly to the general and inessential; home and food are useful for life but do not confer any meaning on it. (De Beauvoir 1949: 494)

Her point here is not only that women do large amounts of unpaid domestic labour and are thus exploited (a point which fits in with her Marxism), but also that such labour, because of the kind it is, positions her in immanence. There is something problematic about this, which we will return to in the discussion of motherhood. For it appears to endorse a kind of elitism in which certain kinds of pursuits make us more truly human than others. Here we need to remember that the meaning attached to activities is itself historically and socially located, and here de Beauvoir is displaying her own location as a bourgeois intellectual.

In the current social structure some changes regarding marriage have taken place, changes in both attitude and economics. Women, particularly in the West, are now more economically independent and are a fundamental part of the workforce. In Developing Countries however, unfpa.org (2015), show how the lack of power and economic means for women ensures marriage is still one of very few available options. Here 1:3 of the female population are under the age of 18 and 1:9 are under the age of 15 when they marry.

There is a different picture in the West where divorce rates have soared. Statistics formulated in 2005 (unstats.un.org) show in the US that 53% of all marriages end in divorce and in France that number increases to 55%. This makes France the 9th highest country in the world in terms of its divorce rate. There are a number of contributory factors but an important one is economic independence for women. Many women (particularly in the West as opposed to Developing Countries), now have a choice and no longer need to stay within the institution of marriage or enter into it in the first place. Single parent families are increasing and, for example, in the US statistics show that 12 million families are single parent and 83% of those are headed by mothers, with 49% of those never having married. 73% of single mothers are in paid employment and so contribute to a thriving economy. In France, the numbers are 16 million single parent households, with 86% headed by the mother. (2014 singlemotherguide.com) This number is possibly a reflection of the higher divorce rates. Along with the legalisation of gay marriages all these examples demonstrate how legal and economic structures interweave and change social attitudes. (All of these changes have not undermined capitalism but arguably have contributed to its development).

Marriage in de Beauvoir's time was designed to give woman's life a meaning (a situation, more so in the West, that is no longer as relevant today) but it is a meaning provided by men. De Beauvoir suggests, "a girl's choice is often limited: it would be truly free only if she felt free enough not to marry." (De Beauvoir 1949: 459) That freedom would require a modification of both economic conditions and social norms (issues which have gradually become apparent in modern day). Once married the next stage destined for women is motherhood.

Mother

Motherhood, de Beauvoir argues, is not a biological destiny, but it is a destiny that is imposed upon women by society. She questions the notion of women as natural mothers possessing a natural maternal instinct. For her such things are dependent on the situation of the mother and child. As a mother, a woman's experience is that her biological body has endowed her with a social value, a valued capability that gives her a status as a human being which is supposed to make her different to, but equal with, man. This, however, as was noted in chapter 3, section, 'Myths about Women: content' is an illusion, "It is a mystification to maintain that woman becomes man's equal through motherhood." (De Beauvoir 1949: 583) De Beauvoir is not denying that motherhood could be a positive experience; what she is arguing is that it is not universal. For some women, motherhood can be experienced positively, yet for others it can be experienced negatively and this is often dependent on the *material conditions* in which maternity is lived. Motherhood is not an overwhelming source of happiness for all women, nor are all children overwhelmingly happy in only their mother's nurturing embrace. (Ward 1995: 236) De Beauvoir argues, "Pregnancy and motherhood are experienced in very different ways depending on whether they take place in revolt, resignation, satisfaction or enthusiasm." (De Beauvoir 1949: 546)

Motherhood comes with its own responsibilities, ones for which often women are not equipped. However, due to the biological myths of natural womanhood, these responsibilities are supposed to be naturally imbibed. A mother because she is a woman is supposed to innately and immediately know how to take care of a child, what their needs are and how they can be met:

there is no such thing as maternal instinct; the word does not in any case apply to the human species. The mother's attitude is defined by her total situation and by the way she accepts it. It is as we have seen, extremely variable. (De Beauvoir 1949: 567)

This is the fundamental issue for mothers. Social pressure, poverty, ill-health to name a few, can all negatively impact on the experience of the mother and child relationship and this is something to which de Beauvoir draws attention. Kirkpatrick (2014: 6), suggests today (although again more predominantly in the West), the situation for mothers is to some extent different, particularly due to the legalisation of contraception. Women do have a choice regarding motherhood, yet given the choice the majority still choose it; being a parent is regarded as having a central role in human life. However, Kirkpatrick (2014:6) also suggests, "misconceptions about motherhood still affect women – from within and without." Women today have access to large amounts of information conveying the biological changes within the maternal body and the importance of successful mothering behaviour, but information portraying the difficulties and apprehensions surrounding motherhood are still under-represented. Motherhood even today is regarded as a natural vocation for women, masking the situation of women who struggle to adapt to the changes in their role as well as their circumstances. Maushart (1999: 22) states motherhood is, "the most powerful of all biological capacities, and among the most disempowering of all social experiences." These notions are strikingly close to de Beauvoir's, illustrating the resilience and pertinence of her insights. De Beauvoir does not deny that the capacity to have and nurture children is a capacity which women's bodies commonly have, but as human beings nature does not dictate our behaviour:

It is through motherhood that woman fully achieves her physiological destiny; that is her "natural" vocation, since her whole organism is directed towards the perpetuation of the species. But we have already shown that human society is never left to nature. And in particular, for about a century, the reproductive function has no longer been controlled by biological chance alone but by design. (De Beauvoir 1949: 537)

Consequently, a woman's destiny and fulfilment is not to be found only in motherhood, "such an obligation is not at all natural." (De Beauvoir 1949: 580) Moreover, a child can be happy and fulfilled and this state is not only reserved for its mother's arms.

In de Beauvoir's era, women had little choice whether to become mothers. Abortion was illegal and viewed as a crime on a number of levels; it was viewed as a judicial crime against society, and a biological crime against women's destiny. This had both practical and material consequences. Doctors willing to perform an abortion were difficult to find, expensive, and abortions themselves involved great medical risks. Moreover the ideology surrounding its illegitimacy produced shame and distress for the women undertaking it:

But many women are intimidated by a morality that maintains its prestige in their eyes, even though their behaviour cannot conform to it; inwardly they respect the law they are breaking, and suffer from committing a crime (...) She is divided inside herself. It might be that her spontaneous desire is to keep this child whose birth she is preventing; even if she does not positively want this motherhood. (De Beauvoir 1949: 544)

The illegal status of abortion at that time was for de Beauvoir paradigmatic of the hypocrisy inherent within a patriarchal society, she states, "Men universally forbid abortion; but they accept it individually as a convenient solution." (De Beauvoir 1949: 545)

De Beauvoir publically supported the legalisation of abortion. Bair (1990: 547) conveys how de Beauvoir signed a statement in 1971 along with 343 other women from all social backgrounds, admitting to having undergone an abortion; something that was still illegal in France at that time. This statement was published in a national newspaper and caused uproar particularly aimed at de Beauvoir, who was an eminent literary figure. What was not known at the time, something that was to emerge years later, was that de Beauvoir had never had an abortion; she had never been pregnant. (In France, contraception was illegal up until 1967 and abortion only became legalised as late as 1974. Moi 2008: 206) De Beauvoir saw her role as one of

political activist and to create a forum for other women in which to raise awareness of issues concerning their lived experiences; ones which up to that point had been largely ignored. Brison (2003: 206) argues that de Beauvoir, particularly in the latter part of her life, devoted herself to taking part in political activity. De Beauvoir's response was always, "a call to action." (Brison 2003: 206)

In some of de Beauvoir's remarks concerning motherhood, however, we find traces of the intellectual elitism which we noted earlier with regard to housework. She appears to argue that it is impossible for a woman to fulfil an intellectual, meaningful life whilst also being a mother, so it appears one has to make a choice of mind or body; we cannot have both. If one chooses the biological body over the intellectual mind then a woman is limiting herself to a life in which she fails to rise above the status of the animal world. We discussed this in chapter 2, section, 'why is woman the Absolute Other,' as deriving from an Hegelian move which elevates some activities as important to human existence and others as not. These views led to criticism from later feminist writers (Le Doeuff 1980; Moi 2008; Changfoot 2009; Direk 2011). However, de Beauvoir herself is clear that consequences of motherhood inhibiting intellectual activity result from the material and social conditions in which motherhood is undertaken:

If too often a woman today has a hard time reconciling the interests of her children with a profession that demands long hours away from home and all her strength, it is because, on the one hand, woman's work is still too often a kind of slavery; on the other hand, no effort is made to assure children's health, care and education outside of the home. This is social neglect. (De Beauvoir 1949: 583)

Motherhood, for de Beauvoir, undermines a woman's potential for development as a human being. However, this is a consequence of society and the position in which it places women when they become mothers. Once a mother, this invades every dimension of a woman's life and constitutes her entire social being and social life.¹² Kirkpatrick (2014: 9) insists there is a gap between the external image of motherhood and the internal experience of it. This is a product of patriarchy that offers visions of motherhood that are unrecognisable in the reality of everyday life. This reiterates de Beauvoir's picture in which, for women, image and reality are

separate yet require negotiation within the lived experience. What would be needed for marriage and motherhood not to be the oppressive situations which de Beauvoir paints? She states:

marriage would be based on a free engagement that the spouses could break when they wanted to; motherhood would be freely chosen – that is, birth control and abortion would be allowed – and in return all mothers and children would be given the same rights; maternity leave would be paid for by the society that would have responsibility for the children, which does not mean that they would be taken from their parents but that they would not be abandoned to them. (De Beauvoir 1949: 776-7)

What we notice here is that these are material and economic changes, as well as legal ones. Some of them have been achieved and in so far as they have, both marriage and motherhood have changed. But the absence of social responsibility for childcare means that for many women the choice between a professional career and motherhood remains the challenge that de Beauvoir describes.

Currently, 47% of the US Workforce are women with less than 40% in professional and management occupations. UNESCO in 2015 (un.unesco.org) suggests there is still a pay gap of 12% between that of men and women. One reason for this was the suggestion that women are predominant in lower paying occupations. 58% of unpaid work is undertaken by women, which includes household chores and childcare.

The Prostitute

There are however alternative ways de Beauvoir suggests to negotiate women's situation, rather than becoming a wife or mother. Prostitution is one such option, "From the economic point of view, her [the prostitute] situation is symmetrical to the married woman." (De Beauvoir 1949: 613) There are similarities, de Beauvoir argues, between the circumstances of the prostitute and the married woman, particularly in terms of economics. Both are economically dependent on men. Sex is regarded as a service and the only difference is the length of the contract in which the woman is maintained (the marriage contract lasts a lot longer). The position of the prostitute is very much a consequence of society for de Beauvoir; a society that gives

power to men over women, punishes women for having sex prior to marriage, admonishes unmarried mothers and provides little opportunity for women's economic independence:

It is true that in many cases a prostitute could earn a living in a different way: that the living she has chosen does not seem the worst to her does not prove she has vice in her blood; rather, it condemns a society where this profession is still one that seems the least repellent to many women. (De Beauvoir 1949: 614)

De Beauvoir argues that it is the material situation in which they find themselves that make this life either bearable or unbearable. Nonetheless, although it is a choice which makes sense given some of the situations in which women find themselves, it remains problematic.

More successful prostitutes (hetaeras as de Beauvoir refers to them), fare better as their material circumstances are better. Hetaeras are a particular type of courtesan, predominant in Ancient Greece, who were distinctive in view of their highly educated and cultivated status. (*The Concise English Dictionary*, 1976) In this instance, for de Beauvoir a hetaera encapsulates her whole existence within self-adoration and fools herself into believing this is enough for her self-fulfilment. On a positive note, she does achieve a certain amount of independence as she is more economically independent and this gives her more freedom than her poorer colleagues. Women here, de Beauvoir argues, in contrast to the lesbian for example, exploit their femininity. Men pay for her services and she gives them rather than have him take them from her. However, she does fool herself if she believes that she is doing women in general a service:

Her person belongs to her like a treasure whose mere existence is a gift: so much so that in being dedicated to herself, she will claim to serve the group (...) she who exploits the male fulfils herself in the cult of self-adoration. (De Beauvoir 1949: 632)

De Beauvoir is suggesting here, that prostitutes (successful ones) feel like they are not oppressed by men, but, instead they are the ones who are administering exploitative practices. But this is false. She may be more economically independent

(particularly when compared to married women) but she is merely making a choice of her objectification, because her options are so limited. This position of vicarious prestige, for the hetaera is doomed to a limited life span as it is reliant on a woman's appearance. Once her beauty and desirability begin to fade then her position will also decline, "beauty is a worry, a fragile treasure; the hetaerae is totally dependent on her body, which time pitilessly degrades; the fight against ageing is most dramatic for her." (De Beauvoir 1949: 628)

Prostitution can take a number of forms as de Beauvoir suggests, but this account bears little resemblance to the lived experience of prostitution particularly in modern day. Although legal in France figures show (prostitution.procon.org , 2015), there are between 20 000 and 40 000 prostitutes in France with 90% of those not of French origin, but victims of sex trafficking. This lacks the element of choice that de Beauvoir is suggesting women have in these circumstances and is paradigmatic of the exploitation of women. There is little option for women to exploit men as de Beauvoir suggests, as this is less about femininity and more about power; power that men have over women.

From Maturity to Old Age

The theme of ageing is approached in a separate chapter in *The Second Sex* and, as pointed out previously, was to become of central importance in her later works. De Beauvoir introduces the concept of ageing here as somewhat synonymous with the social position of women. For de Beauvoir ageing in society is also associated symbolically with devaluation, as she argues is the case for women, but she also introduces the concept of women's decline:

Every period of woman's life is fixed and monotonous: but the passages from one stage to another are dangerously abrupt; they reveal themselves in far more decisive crises than those of the male: puberty, sexual initiation, menopause (...) still young she loses sexual attraction and fertility; from which, in society's and her own eyes, she derives the justification of her existence and her chances of happiness. (De Beauvoir 1949: 633)

This loss of her womanhood is referred to here as a, “mutilation.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 739) Woman is reliant on her youth, her looks and her fertility in society. As we have seen in the preceding sections these validate her existence, so when these are lost, her sense of self is shaken. This notion of mutilation is a recurring theme throughout *The Second Sex*. Loss of womanhood, in whichever form it takes, is a mutilation. The way a woman experiences the world cannot be divorced from the fact of being a human female, but this often entails the requirement to accept social definitions and positions in which she is disadvantaged. This, de Beauvoir describes, as a mutilation of the self as a human and as a female. Initially, post menopause, there is an experience of liberation from the burden of menstruation and childcare but this is soon replaced by despair, as she has no other resources or capabilities to draw upon:

Unfortunately every woman’s history repeats the fact we have observed throughout the history of woman: she discovers this freedom when she can find nothing more to do with it. (De Beauvoir 1949: 641)

As for the younger woman, the source of this situation for the ageing woman is patriarchy, as it offers definitions and roles which are built on youth, beauty and reproduction. The loss of her own sense of self leaves little choice but to live through their now adult children, however, “Living by proxy is always a precarious expedient.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 643) This is the only way she has now to justify her life. Whatever activity she undertakes is only in order to relieve boredom, it is not active or will achieve any objective ends, “As long as woman remains a parasite, she cannot effectively participate in the building of a better world.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 651)

What is important here, and a point which we made earlier and will return to, is that women’s situations offer them some choices, but given the lack of material, economic and psychological resources, each of these choices has problematic consequences for them. Women old and young live a life that in many cases is dependent on others, or are faced with entering in to a relationship that is unequal. Even with a degree of independence the general inequality of power in society between men and women, leaves them in positions of inferiority.

Women's Situation and Character

De Beauvoir devotes a separate chapter to women's situation giving weight to the importance of situation within her account, and how this informs a woman's character. Here she reiterates the paradoxical situation in which a woman experiences the world as a woman, but one who has to negotiate patriarchal institutions and practices:

they belong both to the male world and to a sphere, in which this world is challenged; enclosed in this sphere, involved in the male world they cannot peacefully establish themselves anywhere. (De Beauvoir 1949: 653)

Women are consistently defined in relation to men and their lived experience is one that is lived in relation to a masculine existence. The duties that are assigned to her, housework, cooking, reproduction give her the characteristics associated with femininity.¹³ De Beauvoir suggests characteristics such as emotional outbursts, meanness, jealousy, are also associated with woman, and these she develops as a protest to the situation in which she is positioned. Such displays of behaviour are the only means by which she can register her protest,¹⁴ "It is clear that woman's whole character – her convictions, values, wisdom, morality, tastes and behaviour is explained by her situation." (De Beauvoir 1949: 677) Again this conveys the notion that women have choices to make, but ones within a situation that constricts them and moulds them into the roles that patriarchy offers as available. As a consequence women develop certain characteristics in order to negotiate their situation, but characteristics which de Beauvoir argues are unsatisfactory, as they serve to perpetuate their own oppressive situation.

The Woman in Love

One of the key ways in which women internalise the sources of their own oppression is, for de Beauvoir by buying into the myth of romantic love. Such a myth disguises from them the physical and economic power which men have over them, "the word love has not at all the same meaning for both sexes and this is a source of the grave misunderstandings that separate them." (De Beauvoir 1949: 699) Men in love, she suggests, remain as subjects within the relationship and so are not objectified, they keep their sense of self and individuality. Alternatively, women give themselves and

become object, losing all sense of self in the process; for de Beauvoir this is also a source of mutilation, “having only a mutilated existence.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 719) The world offers love as another of woman’s destinies and again it is one not lived reciprocally. Woman tries to live her life through the man she loves rather than existing for herself and her own projects; the woman in love does not strive for independence, “the woman in love is a total abdication for the benefit of the master.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 699) This, for de Beauvoir, is again a result of situation. Due to her childhood initiation into a patriarchal society, being in love is a renunciation of the self as having any projects or desires that are independent. It can appear as if a path to freedom.

In chapter 2, section, ‘Woman as Other,’ we examined de Beauvoir’s argument that woman is Other. She revisits this here as for her a love relationship with men will always be a non-reciprocal relation and therefore will not lead to freedom for women:

the woman knows herself only as other: her for-others merges with her very being; love is not for her an intermediary between self and self, because she does not find herself in her subjective existence; she remains engulfed in this loving woman that man has not only revealed but also created. (De Beauvoir 1949: 724)

De Beauvoir is specifying that men have no interest in reciprocity. What he offers a woman within a relationship is not something that he himself would want to accept; what he is offering instead is economic dependence, objectification and subordination. To be at the hands of someone else is a particularly vulnerable state:

For the time being, love epitomises in its most moving form the curse that weighs on woman, incapable of being self-sufficient. Innumerable martyrs to love attest to the injustice of a destiny that offers them as ultimate salvation a sterile hell. (De Beauvoir 1949: 725)

Love is an important issue for de Beauvoir and is one which constantly emerges throughout her philosophical and literary works. She demonstrates how the myth of romantic love is structuring the experience, but the myth has its source in economic dependency and legal and social structures of male dominance. De Beauvoir states:

The supreme necessity for woman is to charm a masculine heart; this is the recompense all heroines aspire to, even if they are intrepid, adventuresome and only their beauty is asked of them in most cases. It is thus understandable that attention to her physical appearance can become a real obsession for the little girl. (De Beauvoir 1949: 316)

There is one role available that de Beauvoir describes as offering the possibility of liberation for women that is to be an independent woman.

The Independent woman

As she characterises the experiences of women in different aspects of their lives de Beauvoir has stressed the role which economic dependency has played; it plays a key role in explaining women's choices and the fantasies they internalise. For de Beauvoir, therefore, the economically independent woman is the only role that can offer any opportunities for liberation, "It is through work that woman has been able, to a large extent, to close the gap separating her from the male; work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom." (De Beauvoir 1949: 737)

However, this position also faces limitations. Woman in her inferior social position still struggles to achieve full economic status:

her wages are minimal for the very high standard of living society demands of her; if she settles for what she earns, she will be no more than a pariah: without decent living accommodation or clothes, all amusement and even love will be refused her (...) so she will accept help: her employer cynically counts on this when he pays her a pittance. (De Beauvoir 1949: 738)

This position of inferiority is as a result of the objective material conditions in which a woman is situated. Many women who are in paid employment end up undertaking the majority of the household chores and the child care too, so work a double shift. (Moi 2008: 216) De Beauvoir points out, "Most working women do not escape the traditional feminine world." (De Beauvoir 1949: 738) Moreover there is no publically available image of an independent woman, which does not present her as somehow compromising her femininity (as indeed with the lesbian). De Beauvoir states:

By not conforming, a woman devalues herself sexually and consequently socially because society has incorporated sexual values. Rejecting feminine attributes does not mean acquiring virile ones. (De Beauvoir 1949: 740)

It is often presented and assumed as if it does. As an independent woman, she may be more aware of these contradictions but nevertheless remain limited by them, “this is the conflict that singularly characterises the situation of the emancipated woman. She refuses to confine herself to her role as female.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 739) This circumstance for de Beauvoir is emblematic of the circular effects of oppression. Within an oppressive situation, whatever one chooses to do will operate within the context of that oppression and so confirms it. (Kruks 2012b: 23) The independent woman, for example, resists her complicity within patriarchal institutions of economic dependence, but at the same time, she must remain woman and therefore feminine as dictated by a patriarchal institution. She wants to retain her fact of existence as a woman, but not reduce herself to the limits that patriarchy dictates; currently, however, there is no framework on offer which provides her with the tools to achieve this. De Beauvoir states, “The woman embarks on a career in the context of a highly problematic situation, subjugated still by the burdens traditionally implied by her femininity.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 753)

In the situation she was describing, there were very few independent women. This suggests that de Beauvoir’s argument is that the oppression of women is an historic one, which features external material forces, myths and meaning all of which structure subjective experience. Today, women are more economically independent, however, as highlighted earlier inequality of pay and opportunity in society persists, suggesting de Beauvoir’s insight still has a degree of relevancy. But for her, “the historical past cannot be considered as defining an eternal truth; it merely translates a situation that is showing itself to be historical precisely in that it is in the process of changing.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 767) The frameworks of the lives just described, are not inevitable, but instead historically variable. The lives of women, and indeed the meaning of ‘woman’ is open to change. According to Gatens (2003: 281), “In the context of *The Second Sex* ‘woman’ is a concept that entails a becoming.” In

characterising this process of becoming as she does, de Beauvoir also signals its lack of determinacy. According to Grimwood (2008: 210):

De Beauvoir's iconic statement, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" is not so much exoteric but aporiatic: becoming is the constitutively unstable process that both confirms the position of woman as man's constructed other and also questions the determinacy of this position.

Woman is still becoming, de Beauvoir argues; what a woman is now in society is not what a woman *can* be. This issue of perplexity surrounding the meaning of woman which de Beauvoir drew attention to, became influential for post structuralist thinkers and in particular, Judith Butler who, from this, constructed her own (at the time), radically new theory.

Becoming Woman in de Beauvoir and Butler

Judith Butler, in developing her performative account of gender identity, cites Simone de Beauvoir as an important source, but also as someone with whom she disagrees. So it is instructive to consider the similarities and differences in their accounts, "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman – Simone de Beauvoir (...) suggests that gender is an aspect of identity gradually acquired." (Butler 1986: 35) Butler, (along with de Beauvoir), argues against naturalising accounts of both 'woman' and 'man'. For them we become women through the way we act and the way others act towards us, this includes sculpting and stylising the body. See Merleau-Ponty and de Beauvoir in chapter 4, sections, 'Merleau-Ponty and the Lived Body' and 'de Beauvoir's conceptions of the Lived Body.' Butler states:

When Simone de Beauvoir claims, "One is not born, but rather becomes, woman" she is appropriating and reinterpreting this doctrine of constituting acts from the phenomenological tradition. In this sense gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts. Further, gender is instituted through the stylization of the body and hence must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily

gestures, movements and enactments of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self. (Butler 1988: 519)

For Butler the actions become habitualised and ingrained through repetition, the repetition of not only performing such actions but of having actions performed and aimed towards you. To become a man or woman implies repetition and perpetuation of a dynamic not a natural, biological essence. (Heinamaa 2003b: 41) For Butler, then, we become men and women by *performing* as men and women, and in these performances we follow a normative *script*, formed by society's ideals of masculinity and femininity (this corresponds with de Beauvoir's idea of myths). These ideals are multiple and contradictory within a society and across cultures and historical periods (again like de Beauvoir's idea of myths). Butler is influenced by Foucault and within her theory individuals are not agents of their own design, but objects of social and discursive constitution. The discourses which are dominant and which provide the scripts from which we act, reflect and produce power relationships between society's members. Such discourses constitute the distinctions between men and women. (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon, 2002) Individuals regulate themselves in order to conform to the hegemonic norms. So the differences between men and women are recognised as styles of acting and being acted upon, which in turn affects the sense we have of ourselves and others, as embodied beings. To be a man or a woman is something that is changeable. It is not tied up within a biological property but in the actions that one performs and how one relates to the world. According to Heinamaa:

In this framework, the differences between human and animal, normal and abnormal, feminine and masculine are not studied as differences of fixed structures or functions. They are understood as differences in the manners of acting and being acted upon. (Heinamaa 2003b: 41)

Butler (1990: 1) argues that an individual gains a sense of identity within society as it is regulated, by means of a gendered discourse. It is via bodily actions, movements, deportment and gestures which are laden with meaning and significance that the concepts of 'man' and 'woman' and 'masculine' and 'feminine' are produced. The constant repetition of such actions reinforces and creates a gendered identity in terms of which we make ourselves and others.

Clearly there is much in this account which echoes de Beauvoir; but there are major differences and I shall suggest these differences are ones where de Beauvoir's account is to be preferred. In two of the three differences I discuss, the differences are anchored in de Beauvoir's adherence to Marxism. Firstly, Butler departs from the phenomenological emphasis that de Beauvoir endorses. The category of experience is problematic if experience is taken to be foundational, a given which cannot be challenged. For Butler such a use would ignore the way in which experience is discursively constructed. A unified, coherent term which would represent 'woman' is an illusion. (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 2002: 106) This unity for Butler would give boundaries to identity and therefore exclude individuals who did not fit within them. Butler argues this would deny:

the internal complexity and indeterminacy of the term [identity]
and constitutes itself only through the exclusion of some part of the
constituency that it simultaneously seeks to represent. (Butler
1990: 14)

But de Beauvoir does not use experience in this way. As we have illustrated in this chapter she shows how experience is structured by dominant myths of masculinity and femininity. Moreover attention to such experience is important if we are to 'take stock,' unpick what is involved in being a woman at certain times and places. Marx was also interested in the conditions in which individuals found themselves, but he, as we have noted, did not pay attention to phenomenology, to the way these conditions were actually experienced. This concept of experience de Beauvoir addresses was mediated through structures of meaning. Although meaning was accounted for in Butler's theory, the lived conditions and experience of what it was like to live as a particular woman in a particular context did not receive the same significance.

The second major difference between Butler and de Beauvoir, concerns the status of the body. Butler sees de Beauvoir as endorsing a sex/gender distinction which she herself challenges; with sex as a biological given and gender as the social meaning attached to it. (Gatens 2003: 276) Butler (1993: 1) regards biology as culturally mediated. She argues that 'nature' does not dictate a binary sexual differentiation. Instead, society creates and reinforces this binary by privileging heterosexuality.

Biology, as a cultural practice, in this sense actually produces the subjects that it is presented as simply reflecting. The argument follows that biological difference, is and can only be understood in terms of the discourse in which it becomes apparent and is practiced, and therefore as part of the regulatory power of this discourse. She states:

Sexual difference is never simply a function of material differences which are not in some way marked and formed by discursive practices (...) The category sex is, from the start normative; it is what Foucault has called a regulatory ideal. In this sense then sex not only functions as a norm, but is part of a regulatory practice that produces the body it governs, that is, whose regulatory force is made clear as a kind of productive power, the power to produce, demarcate, circulate, differentiate – the bodies it controls. (Butler 1993:1)

sex is a regulatory ideal construct which is forcibly materialized through time. It is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize 'sex' and achieve this materialization through a forcible reiteration of those norms. (Butler 1993: 1)

We have seen in chapter 4, section, 'Sex and Gender' that it is not possible to view de Beauvoir as working with the sex/gender distinction, as it was found in feminist theory from the 1970s onwards. Firstly, she recognised the role of culture in the account which biology gives of the body. Secondly, the category 'woman' which she explores is not simply a gendered category, in the sense of gender which informed later theory, i.e. a category detached from particular forms of embodiment. We have noted in de Beauvoir's work a respect for the materiality of the body, not as determining what counts as a woman, but as one of the factors in consideration. The notion of situation is one in which the material body, as well as the material structures and practices in place in society, are given their due recognition.

What has been found problematic with Butler's account (at least with the works we are examining in this section), is the absence of the materiality of the body as playing a role in constraining what our discursive practices can be, "When Butler conceives

of gender as a category that does not include the body, she loses touch with de Beauvoir's category of lived experience." (Moi 1999: 74) "Butler's concept of gender does not encompass the concrete, historical and experiencing body." (Moi 1999: 75) What de Beauvoir maintains, Gatens (2003: 273) argues is the notion that a woman's body and her lived experience is linked. There is something about a woman's body that gives it specific capabilities, which impact on the way womanhood is lived. De Beauvoir (1949: 782) states:

certain differences between men and women will always exist (...) her relation to her body, to the male body and to the child will never be the same as those man has with his body, with the female body and with the child, those who talk so much about equality in difference would be hard put not to grant me that there are differences in equality.

Gatens (2003: 273) suggests Butler misses de Beauvoir's insight of lived experience as inextricably linked to embodiment, although the way a woman lives the capacities of her body is informed by history and culture. In her insistence on the need to accommodate the materiality of the body and indeed the other aspects of materiality, in addition to the dimension of discursive construction, de Beauvoir is in line with the concerns of contemporary 'new' materialists. As we noted in the chapter 4, section, 'New Materialism' such a respect for materiality has its source, in both cases, in the writings of Marx.

The third major difference between Butler and de Beauvoir, concerns the question of agency and freedom. Butler was concerned that her theory allowed identity to be transient and open to transformation. However, Lennon (2002: 108) points out:

One of the concerns which has been expressed in relation to Butler's work is the extent to which she leaves space for personal and political agency. When *Gender Trouble* [1990] was first being read she was accused of seeing gender as in some sense voluntary – something which people could choose to put on or change, rather like clothes. This, however, was clearly a misreading. As was clear in *Gender Trouble* and in her texts since, there is no question of choice here, for

it is only through performative practices that we are subjects at all.

This can, however, provoke the opposite anxiety, namely that the social norms are so constraining that change at both the personal and political level becomes impossible. (Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon 2002: 108)

Alsop, Fitzsimons and Lennon (2002), go on to suggest that Butler's response was that the performative repetition of dominant norms never established stability of meaning:

For although we can repeat the term we do so in different contexts and circumstances and these affect the meaning which is to be derived from it, rendering it indeterminate and not always predictable. (Alsop, Fitzsimons & Lennon 2002: 103)

This openness of meaning is central to Butler's understanding of gender and to the politics which accompanies her account. Lois McNay (2000: 57) argues however that, "the theoretical space which Butler provides is insufficient to allow for effective political agency." Although the meaning of 'man' and 'woman' may be unstable and change over time, we cannot predict this change or exercise choices that can promote it.

In contrast, what we have seen in the account offered by de Beauvoir is that ultimately how a woman chooses to live her condition is her choice, even if the consequences of these choices are not always ones over which she has control. In this chapter we have seen that de Beauvoir offers us a number of options for ways in which women in society can live their condition. In the following chapter we will explore further exactly what kind of freedom and choice women have. It is, however, worth noting here that by insisting that although our choices are constrained by our conditions, nonetheless there is always something which we can choose to do to modify those circumstances, de Beauvoir is again following Marx. De Beauvoir (1949: 779) postulates:

Woman is the victim of no mysterious fate; the singularities that make her different derive their importance from the meaning applied to

them; they can be overcome as soon as they are grasped from new perspectives.

However, she also recognises that the possibility of social change requires acknowledgement of the impact of the material conditions and economic position of those involved, not just a reconstruction of their identity at the level of meaning. (Coole and Frost 2010: 27) De Beauvoir (1949: 780) adds:

women need only pursue their rise and the success they obtain encourages them; it seems most certain that they will sooner or later attain perfect economic and social equality, which will bring about an inner metamorphosis.

What all of these sections have demonstrated is the importance of lived experience, an aspect which originated as an issue with de Beauvoir. An issue which, until that point had been ignored.

Summary: The Importance of the Account of Lived Experience

According to Moi (2008: 210), “contrasting the fixed essence of mythical femininity with the diversity of women’s actual lives, de Beauvoir seeks to expose the fictionality of patriarchal thought.” Heinamaa (2003a: 80) suggests de Beauvoir should be read from a *purely* phenomenological perspective as this highlights the importance of lived experience. For Heinamaa (2003a: 80), de Beauvoir’s aim was to provide descriptions and concepts of sexual difference that are not primarily instrumental. There is no way in de Beauvoir’s view in which to adequately describe women’s lived experience; the only available framework of reference for any description is anchored in an androcentric, patriarchal perspective. Women therefore from this perspective are viewed in comparison to men and in terms of male values, and as a result, fall short. New ways of describing women’s situation, utilising a framework that captures their abilities, situation, embodiment and values would provide conceptions that would enable the equalising of sexual difference and therefore improve the lives of women, on both an individual and a social level.

However, Kruks (2005: 302) argues that the account of lived experience if read purely phenomenologically omits important dimensions of de Beauvoir’s thought.

De Beauvoir explores oppression and oppressive practices from the outside as well as from the inside; from the general as well as the particular. There is more to de Beauvoir's view than a purely phenomenological description. She explores the social institutions and structures that serve to limit women's possibilities, and structure that phenomenology. This is where Marx's influence becomes apparent. The general domain contains the oppressive structures within society that limit women as a whole. Prohibition of contraception and abortion, for example reduces women to the role of mother, which in 1949 also entailed the role of wife (or to remain celibate was also an option). Circumstances such as these influence the meanings given to the roles of wife and mother. The lived experience may be particular, but nevertheless occurs within general practices which serve as constraints. Kruks (2005: 302) suggests, "In *The Second Sex*, women's oppression (...) is examined as a dialectic of objective processes and subjective lived experiences." This is an important issue. De Beauvoir's project described lived experience from an individual point of view, but in so doing, she also provided an account of women's *general* experience. There are external social structures and realities that individual women have to negotiate, which in turn have a deep impact on them individually as well as on women in general as they affect their life chances and sense of identity. (Kruks 1995: 87) These external structures appear as if they are givens, as if they are facts. The structures of gender, for example, do not define fundamental attributes of identity; feminine characteristics do not give us everything we are. What they do, de Beauvoir suggests, is to provide material and social practices that women must accommodate; what they do is reinforce patriarchal ideas and values. These structures and practices are how oppression is perpetuated as they are present in the framework of every social institution. External structures and internal subjectivity are interdependent and cannot be disentangled in a neat orderly fashion. (Kruks 2010: 276)

In view of these discussions I will move to explore, in the next chapter, how freedom can be maintained, and agency exercised in an environment that poses such deeply entrenched external and internal limitations, particularly for women. Freedom and agency, it appears, are experienced differently for men and women in society.

Chapter Six - FREEDOM

At the moment that women are beginning to share in the making of the world, this world still belongs to men: men have no doubt about this; and women barely doubt it. Refusing to be the Other, refusing complicity with man, would mean renouncing all the advantages an allegiance with the superior caste confers on them. Lord-man will materially protect liege-woman and will be in charge of justifying her existence: along with the economic risk, she eludes the metaphysical risk of freedom that must invent its goals without help. (De Beauvoir 1949: 10)

Introduction

Moi (1999: viii) suggests, “freedom – not identity, difference or equality - is the fundamental concept in de Beauvoir’s feminism.” De Beauvoir insists that women and men are free human beings capable of independent, creative action. However as we have recognised in previous chapters, women’s situation, historically, economically, biologically and psychologically conspire to render them as inferior beings made into objects. Moi (1999: 81) states:

To analyse lived experience is to take as one’s starting point the experiencing subject, understood as always situated, always embodied but also as always having a dimension of freedom. Subjectivity is neither a thing nor an inner, emotional world; it is rather our way of being in the world.

The basis of this chapter is to explore freedom and agency for women, and how their freedom in society is curtailed. I will begin this discussion with a look at de Beauvoir’s view of freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* as a precursor to the ideas that were then developed and extended in *The Second Sex*. According to Moi (1999: 83) it is *The Second Sex* that “provides a brilliant starting point for future feminist investigations of the body, agency and freedom.” Woman’s oppression occurs on multiple levels which interact to leave a woman’s road to liberation a difficult and

complicated issue. I will argue the complexity of her account is informed by her acceptance, alongside her existentialism, of Marxism.

De Beauvoir identifies herself as an existentialist and shares the insistence on humans as for-themselves defined in terms of ontological freedom:

Every subject posits itself as a transcendence concretely, through projects; it accomplishes its freedom only by perpetual surpassing towards other freedoms; there is no justification for present existence than its expansion towards an indefinitely open future. (De Beauvoir 1949:17)

Existential freedom is often described as having two different aspects: (McCulloch, 1994)

1. Ontological freedom is the freedom which makes us human. The responsibility of choice and the consequence of such a choice lay entirely with the existent. There are no excuses or conditions that determine or require any decision to be made. A person is the sum of their freely chosen actions. This is the freedom as transcendence referred to in the previous quote, freedom in this sense is usually regarded as an all or nothing matter.
2. Practical freedom refers to one's situation, a condition of our freedom, that which the subject asserts itself against. One always finds oneself in a situation in relation to which freedom to make choices is conceivable. I choose future actions from the range of possible options this particular situation affords. Practical freedom admits of degrees.

I shall suggest, however, that de Beauvoir's account complicates this distinction. De Beauvoir argues that woman's existence operates differently to that of man's, as hers sets limitations on what projects are possible for her, in a way men's do not. For her, the notion of freedom is gendered. Moi (1999: 65-6) states that de Beauvoir's view of women is, "our freedom is not absolute, but situated." Choices are to be understood as reactions to situations and, in the case of woman, her situation is experienced as oppressive, and constricts her from engagement in projects. However, what she makes of that situation is nonetheless not fixed. Choices, for de Beauvoir

are possible, but they may each be problematic in some way. For her, this situation impacts on a woman's ontological freedom, on her capacity for transcendence.

Kruks (2012: 33) suggests that for de Beauvoir "oppression" is an obstacle to autonomy. Oppression is produced by objectifying woman, restricting social roles and making woman the non-reciprocal Other. As pointed out throughout chapter 2, life is experienced by women (more so than men), as a conflict; a conflict between their human existence and the societal demands of womanhood. How we engage and make sense of the world as human is bound up with the fact that we are women. As previously discussed chapter 3, section, 'Myths and what they do' and chapter 5, section, 'from Maturity to Old Age' for women to deny they are women is not the way for women to promote their freedom. However, what is offered to them, as women, severely restricts their autonomy. De Beauvoir discusses how patriarchal ideology and practice require woman to choose between embracing her womanhood, or rejecting femininity and therefore womanhood altogether, in order to embrace her humanity and freedom. Some subsequent feminist critiques of *The Second Sex* have suggested de Beauvoir advocated the second option. (Le Doeuff 1980; Irigaray 1991) Moi, however, states:

In a sexist society women often find themselves in situations where they are obliged to make a choice between being imprisoned in their femininity or having to disavow it altogether (...) The amount of time feminists have spent worrying about equality or difference is a symptom of the success of this ideological trap. A genuinely feminist position would refuse either option, and insist rather, that women should not have to choose between calling themselves women and calling themselves writers, or intellectuals. (Moi 1999: 206)

For Moi (1999: 206) de Beauvoir held, "a genuinely feminist position."

De Beauvoir is making a number of claims: firstly, from an existential perspective woman is a human existent and therefore a free subject. Secondly, from a phenomenological perspective, woman is produced and defined by men rather than by herself, and the definition is reliant on patriarchal ideology. Thirdly, the contradictions that exist for woman, as a consequence of patriarchal ideology, serve

to promote her oppressed status and therefore inhibit her freedom. These claims raise concerns surrounding de Beauvoir's consistency. She is in effect claiming, that from a phenomenological point of view, there are limits to a woman's ontological freedom which, as an existentialist she embraces. Similarly a woman's possibilities are limited as her body is *experienced* as a potential obstacle, a burden to the exercise of freedom. However, she stipulates that woman is still free to transcend her practical situation. Persisting with her existentialism appears to be at odds with her phenomenology. I suggest, however, that her argument, although displaying tensions is not incoherent. Women have to make some sense of their lives and they do this by choosing from the roles offered those set out in chapter 5, section 'Lived Experience.' Many of the options, as we explored are not satisfactory, they are limited due to the roles a patriarchal society makes available and consequently the possibilities that women envisage for themselves are reduced. This limitation of choice within a framework that emphasises freedom and agency may seem contradictory. However, de Beauvoir views the human condition as one of ambiguity. Consciousness and materiality, freedom and constraint are *combined*, as fundamental within the lived experience of an embodied subject. De Beauvoir accepts ambiguity, the contradictory element of existence, and I will return to this discussion later, in 'Tensions' section. Crucially, however, she recognises the importance of the material and ideological dimensions of existence, and suggests that we need to make changes to these dimensions of existence, if our potential for freedom is to be extended and improved. Differing contexts produce differing social relationships and significances and these impact on degrees of freedom. Her historical materialism is central. For de Beauvoir, what becomes apparent is that there is no neat distinction between ontological freedom and practical freedom; her account is more complex than this neat categorisation allows. We can therefore make sense of the complexity of her thought by drawing parallels not only with Sartre (which has been the customary view), but also with Marx. By drawing on Marx, I argue that some of the apparent tensions can be resolved.

This view has the support of a number of writers. McClintock (2007: 21) states in her discussion of *The Second Sex*:

At once the formal Sartrean categories of freedom, the autonomous individual, and the other are flooded with history and capsize, and the existentialism that quickens *The Second Sex* slowly begins to subvert itself. The fundamental question of *The Second Sex* is historical.

McClintock (2007: 18) goes on to argue:

It might be said that the great arc of de Beauvoir's thinking describes a veering away from this Sartrean vision to a much more sombre recognition of the dense historical limits to freedom.

According to Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 177) *The Second Sex* emphasises that:

Men have always had more opportunity for action, i.e. greater positive freedom, and thus their situation has been a privileged one when compared to women, who have always had less concrete potential for using their freedom. In de Beauvoir's opinion (...) in contrast to Sartre, some situations are thus more privileged, some less.

Lundgren-Gothlin (1996), further argues that this signals a Marxist orientation to de Beauvoir's position. She stipulates:

A recurrent theme in *The Second Sex* is the necessity to distinguish between abstract freedom according to the law and concrete freedom i.e. the ability actually to undertake positive action in society. This aligns de Beauvoir with a Marxist concept of freedom. (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 177)

Pilardi (1995: 38), also points out that de Beauvoir's model of freedom in *The Second Sex* is grounded in material conditions. This position reiterates her historical materialism as the foundation of her account and grounds her firmly within Marxism.

Kruks (2012: 8) agrees:

as de Beauvoir further developed her thinking she also began to increasingly attend to the practical material constraints on freedom, and in doing so, to incorporate elements of a non-reductionist Marxism within her analysis.

I will argue in this chapter that de Beauvoir's account of freedom therefore can only be fully appreciated in relation to Marx. We will see her existentialism is refracted through Marxism, so that she becomes primarily concerned not only with the metaphysical possibility of freedom, which characterises the human condition as such, but, more concretely with the material and social conditions which make the meaningful exercise of freedom possible. To understand her we need to see the interweaving of these two strands. It has often been said that in her later writing, there was a move away from traditional existential values towards more materialist ones. (Deutscher, 1999 & 2003 and Kruks, 2010 & 2012) In her work *Old Age* (1970), for example her views on embodiment acknowledged the physical effects of ageing and the material conditions of the old as objective impediments to freedom. However, my argument here is that Marx was present in her account as early as *The Second Sex*, in an important and fundamental way.

I will begin with a discussion of the existential concept of freedom which focuses on Sartrean thought primarily described in *Being and Nothingness* (1943) but also in *Existentialism and Humanism* (1948). I will then move on to Marx and his concept of freedom and how this was influential to de Beauvoir. Women in society lack emancipation (just as the proletarians do in Marx's account), and this was apparent as early as *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. I will then argue that it is in *The Second Sex* where de Beauvoir expands this concept and echoes Marx's view that changes in material circumstances have the potential to reduce alienation and promote human flourishing.

The Existential Conception of Freedom

Freedom is integral to existentialism as, according to Macquarrie (1978: 16):

It is the exercise of freedom and the ability to shape the future that distinguishes man from all the other beings that we know on earth. It is through free and responsible decisions that man becomes authentically himself.

For the existentialists, the world is divided into two categories, the for-itself and the in-itself. An in-itself is an object, it has no consciousness, it cannot realise other possibilities; it just is what it is, a tree or a table, for example. A being-for-itself has

consciousness and this is us, as human beings and we are unlike other objects in the world. We are both object and subject and so can view the world as having future, as yet unrealised possibilities. (McCulloch 1994: 58)

For Sartre, a for-itself views the world as a nothingness. We experience the world as a world of unrealised possibilities. As nothing is pre-determined for Sartre, we can negate the world and the self as it is, and create ourselves and our possibilities anew. This, Sartre (1948: 26) suggests, is human reality. “Existence precedes essence.” (Sartre 1948: 26) We exist and then we create ourselves. However, from this viewpoint, there is no objective, independent point of reference; neither determinism nor God exists:

He discovers forthwith, that he is without excuse. For if indeed existence precedes essence, one will never be able to explain one's actions by reference to a given and specific human nature; in other words there is no determinism – man is freedom. Nor are we provided with any values or commands that could legitimise our behaviour. We are left alone without excuse. (Sartre 1948: 34)

A for-itself is a being which experiences the world as it is and also experiences the world as it is not, as a nothingness. It encounters a situation in which it finds itself, and from here is able to negate the present and envisage other possibilities and opportunities related to that situation. To act is inescapable and the responsibility for such actions is also inescapable:

abortive attempts to stifle freedom under the weight of being (...) show sufficiently that freedom in its foundation coincides with the nothingness which is at the heart of man. Human-reality is free because it is not enough. It is free because it is perpetually wrenched away from itself and because it has been separated by a nothingness from what it is and from what it will be. (...) Freedom is precisely the nothingness which is made-to-be at the heart of man and which forces human-reality to make itself instead of to be. (Sartre 1943: 440)

There are particular facts or situations that a for-itself has to encounter. Embodiment, material status, historical status and economic status, all contribute to a situation, out

of which freedom asserts itself. Freedom therefore is only realised in response to a situation. For there to be freedom there must be a context in which one acts, a context which can be surpassed or transcended. One cannot be free to choose an action or direction if there were no options. If one was not embodied or situated in a contextual world with a range of options available then one cannot be said to be free. There would be no choices to make therefore no freedom of choice. (Morris 2008: 156)

Sartre acknowledges that there is a facticity within a situation that one did not choose. Facticity refers to these factual conditions of our existence, conditions not of our choosing. Facticity is often regarded as constraints that are posed by our environment, or current status, but Sartre regarded them as actual possibilities for the exercise of freedom. Facticity is a necessary condition out of which transcendence occurs. Without facticity, transcendence is unattainable, there is no point of reference or range of possibilities; yet without transcendence, facticity and the human experience is reduced to the in-itself, no more than an object.

Sartre and Absolute freedom

Sartre's notion of freedom makes us free in all aspects of our mode of being in the world. We are free to choose what is of value and significance to us as the people that we are, and in respect of the projects that we choose to engage in. Sartre uses the example of a person, who in his terms is referred to as the cripple. Evidently being born a cripple is not a choice one can make, that is a facticity. How one chooses to deal with this facticity by choosing to be the type of person one is, and who one will become, is entirely one's own choice and responsibility. How one chooses to live in the world is a free choice. Sartre (1943: 328) states, "I cannot be crippled without choosing myself to be crippled (...) I choose the way in which I constitute my disability." The world is a world for that existent and they experience and grasp the world through their facticity and situation. The choice of *how* to live in the world is a result of the freedom which we as humans encounter; it is inescapable. The meaning that an individual places on their facticity has a bearing on the situation they find themselves in, but the meanings and values that are employed, are entirely of their own choosing. There are no excuses for how an individual lives their life or how they conduct themselves in the face of their facticity. Human existents are the sum of their

actions, but are not fixed by their past. They are free to be and to live their situation, however they choose:

man is condemned to be free. Condemned because he did not create himself, yet is nevertheless at liberty, and from the moment that he is thrown into this world he is responsible for everything he does. (Sartre 1948: 34)

Transcendence and Immanence

Consequently, transcendence is an ontological human feature. Fully human existence has the freedom to expand into an undefined future, a future not fixed by a past, “Every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences his existence as an indefinite need to transcend himself.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 17) Immanence is the opposite, where the projection into future projects and liberties is either denied or refused. To live in immanence, an individual is not living an authentic existence as a subject, in the existential sense, but in accordance with the world of givens, the immediate. (Bergoffen 2003: 254)

According to McClintock (2007: 21), “For de Beauvoir, all humans, women and men, harbour within themselves a primitive conflict between immanence and transcendence.” This is something Sartre also accepts. However, transcendence and immanence have a gender orientation for de Beauvoir, since she points out that transcendence has been aligned with the male and immanence with the female, “the male is still the only incarnation of transcendence.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 85) Of woman de Beauvoir insists, “she lives condemned to immanence; she incarnates only the static aspect of society.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 85)

According to Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 233), “immanence has been historically characteristic of the situation of women.” Moi (2008) argues that de Beauvoir’s concept of immanence is a fundamental feature within *The Second Sex*. Moi (2008:174) states:

Most precisely defined as non-transcendence, immanence in *The Second Sex* would seem to include everything from the state of thing-like facticity sought by the for-itself to bad faith and various kinds of unfree activity. Running all the way through (...) metaphors of

immanence leave an indelible mark on her analysis of women's condition.

Moi (2008) here is suggesting (in a similar argument to Lundgren-Gothlin above) that de Beauvoir is recognising that within patriarchal society, transcendence and immanence as gendered categories. They are gendered in two ways. Firstly, the concept 'man' is defined to include transcendence and the concept 'woman' to include immanence. De Beauvoir (1949: 61) states, "From man's point of view (...) behaviour of alienation is considered feminine, and behaviour where the subject posits his transcendence is considered masculine." Secondly, the situation of men and women make transcendence possible for men and difficult for women. In the historical situation in which she is placed a woman's body is not simply an instrument of her will, and a woman's activities in general are not easily viewed as transcendent.

Suggesting that transcendent activity is male and immanence is female seems to leave de Beauvoir open to critique. (Moi, 2008) Critics, such as Le Doeuff (1980) and Moi (2008) in this instance, have charged de Beauvoir with adopting masculinist values. To differentiate between transcendence and immanence as gendered categories, implies that male activities which are linked to transcendence are of a higher quality and therefore ones which women should also pursue. Women's activities are viewed as immanent.

The point I would like to make here, is that both notions of transcendence and immanence are necessary to activity, and the concept of freedom is not reducible to either. Scarth (2004: 111-2) argues a similar line as she insists that for de Beauvoir, transcendence and immanence are irreducible aspects of human existence. Transcendence as ontological freedom involves creativity and an undefined future however, it is only as embodied beings that we can live this transcendence. Embodiment, in general, represents the opposite to transcendence as it implies immersion in a species subject to mortality, in a history subject to time and space, and in a society subject to interdependency; this is immanence. (Scarth 2004: 111-2)

Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 230), points out that transcendence and immanence are confusing concepts in de Beauvoir's account; I think this much is true. De Beauvoir

(in patriarchal society), appears to regard male activities as transcendent and female ones as immanent. Lundgren-Gothlin (1996: 230), argues that she adds to the confusion by using the terms both as descriptions and at times, prescriptions. We noted the critique of this position in chapter 2, where we saw that de Beauvoir's account appears to elevate male activity above female activity. However she is reflecting on the historically situated, gendered subject, whose activities take on the dominant values of the society in which they are positioned. De Beauvoir's position on transcendence is therefore a complex one, and I think the claim that she has adopted masculinist values is misplaced. She accepts, along with Sartre that freedom as transcendence is of high value. Such freedom has been traditionally associated with men and she is asserting it also for women. But unlike Sartre, she views the opportunities for transcendence as tied with the material and social conditions and pictures women as having been in (patriarchal) situations which restrict the possibility of transcendence for them.

Bad Faith

Anguish is a result of the conscious awareness of the freedom we consistently encounter and for which we have complete responsibility. It is also in response to the notion that the projects I choose in the present are to be fulfilled in the future, which is as yet unknown and therefore I do not have complete control. Such constant anxiety creates a tendency for humans to live in bad faith. The failure to recognise the possibility of free action is simply what Sartre calls, bad faith. (Morris 2008: 156) He gives the example of a waiter. He is taking the role of a waiter. In this sense, his *being* is not one of a waiter but he can *be* a waiter. Such activities, however, will be an example of bad faith if he deceives himself that he is a waiter. He would be reducing himself and his existence to that of an object, with no choice but to be a waiter. He does have choices, however, he can choose to transcend rather than sustain this existence, "even though that meant getting fired." (Sartre 1943: 60) Working as a waiter or any trade or occupation also brings with it facticity. There are obligations that come with the job (any job), "the obligation of getting up at 5 o'clock, of sweeping the floor before the restaurant opens, of starting the coffee pot going." (Sartre 1943: 60) Rather than admit that one has chosen such obligations and routines it can be easier to deny that one does in fact have a choice. It is easier to suggest that this is part of what it is to be a waiter, for example, and as such it

requires one to accept certain obligations and limitations, and to take on a certain way of behaving. (McCulloch 1994: 58)

Sartre also uses an example of a woman meeting with a man in the early days of a relationship. For Sartre, she denies her desires for intimacy, yet seeks intimacy nevertheless:

She is profoundly aware of the desire which she inspires, but the desire cruel and naked would humiliate and horrify her. Yet she would find no charm at all in a respect which would be only respect. (Sartre 1943: 55)

These are abstract issues until the man takes her hand in his. She is then in the moment and has to decide whether to leave her hand there, or remove it. She leaves it there and for Sartre, this encounter is bad faith on the woman's behalf. By not removing her hand she is not reciprocating the desire, but is enjoying it without having to acknowledge this to the man or to herself. She is exhibiting bad faith also by regarding her hand as an object, something passive, with no possible options, but something upon which events and actions just happen.

A problem for Sartre's account, however, is the lack of recognition that the way we do experience the world can constrain what choices are visible and available to us. Circumstances can and do impose limitations. There is no acknowledgement that society and circumstance can impact on an individual and impact upon their decision making, or in fact limit choices. To refer back to the example of the woman on a first date, she may not have removed her hand because she was in a public place and did not wish to draw attention to the situation. She may have feared the judgement of others. Would she have the choices that Sartre suggests she does? Can she feel empowered enough in certain circumstances, to either remove her hand or reciprocate his advances? As a woman her, choice here seems circumscribed in a very different way from the man making the advances. Moi (2008) agrees here. Using the same example she states:

In this scene, the freedom to choose whatever project one likes is sorely circumscribed in one case and not in the other. The lack of reciprocity in this situation flies in the face of the existentialist belief

in the necessity of respecting the fundamental freedom of every consciousness. (Moi 2008: 153)

What Moi (2008), is suggesting here is that because the man grabbed the woman's hand, he made a move on her. Whatever she decides to do, the woman's situation now is one that has been forced on her by the man; she will be acting on his terms, rather than her own. This is symptomatic of patriarchal social power; he has the upper hand (as it were), as he has the power to make a move in the first place. This turns a pleasant moment into a possibly uncomfortable one. Sartre's account lacked this perspective. He did not see how the different social positions of men and women impacted on their possibilities. The way society and subsequently woman views herself and her situation does not enable her to believe she does in fact have a choice to either resist, or to freely express her own desires.

Without choice there would be no freedom and vice versa. A characteristic of choice implies selection, and depending on the project that is chosen, some actions are selected while others are eliminated. (Morris 2008: 152) De Beauvoir recognised that options do not present themselves in a snap shot manner, whereby we can picture the array of them all in front of us in order to pick one or another. Choices are made within circumstances in which certain possibilities come into view and others do not. What comes into view is a consequence of one's past and present situation and these possibilities are very different for men and women. In the next section, I will discuss Marx's conceptions of freedom in order to highlight the concepts that de Beauvoir follows and reinforce my argument that her notion of freedom is grounded in Marxism, and differs from that of Sartre.

Marx's Conceptions of Freedom

Marx discusses freedom in several ways, most importantly in his early writing, and there are some important parallels between the discussions here and the conceptions of freedom found in existential thought. True freedom is only possible for Marx under communist forms of social organisation. This position I argue positions de Beauvoir closer to Marx than to Sartre. Although she does not advocate communism, (as Marx did) she does ground her account of freedom in material, social, economic and ideological conditions.

Metaphysical Freedom

As discussed in chapter 1, section, 'Historical Materialism' a key feature of human nature, for Marx, is praxis, our ability to actively transform the social and material conditions of our existence, in terms of goals we have set ourselves. However, as society develops in a particular way, so too our nature as human beings develops in particular ways, which can either promote or constrain the human potential for praxis. Some freedom of action is always possible for Marx, as through praxis, humans are intentional beings with the possibility of agency. However, such agency is exercised in conditions not of our choosing. As Western society developed towards a stage of what Marx (and Engels) terms as 'civilisation,' capitalism became the ruling mode of production. (Engels 1884: 44) Individual and social freedom, then become issues.

For Marx, it is not possible for man to fully exercise his metaphysical freedom within a capitalist structure, as he is unable to realise his species being. His historically contingent nature is at odds with his human potential. Marx (1846: 54) states:

as long as a cleavage exists between the particular and the common interest, as long therefore, as activity is not voluntary, but naturally divided, man's own deeds become an alien power opposed to him, which enslaves him instead of being controlled by him. For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape.

A division becomes whereby man is divided into a public self and a private self, Marx (1846: 83-4) states:

But in the course of historical evolution (...) there appears a division within the life of each individual, insofar as it is personal and insofar as it is determined by some branch of labour and the conditions pertaining to it.

The material and social circumstances of capitalism divides labour in a hierarchical way and as a result, man's activity becomes fixed as a *something* that is not a result

of his own decision making process. For Marx the position of the working class within capitalism is an exploited one and their freedom is constrained. Yet, however fixed a position may appear there is always some possibility of resisting, there is always the possibility of some agency. (Wolff 2010: 1) Something can always be done to bring about change, but what change this is, is constrained by circumstances and in some circumstances the changes are very small. Marx was therefore interested in exploring what combination of circumstances would enable major social change in ways that would promote genuine human emancipation and the maximisation of the human capacity for praxis.

Political Freedom

Marx (1844: 6) argued that genuine human emancipation could not be found within the political/economic system of liberal capitalism. Although the fully liberal state would claim equal freedom for all and formal equalities for all, freedom remained formal and had little bearing on everyday life. At its best, liberalism makes us all citizens subject to its laws, but, in everyday life we have different amounts of freedom. Marx insists that liberalism assumes egoism as fundamental to human nature. The laws of society are conceived as a means to protect us, as individuals, from other individuals, whom we regard as in competition with us. Under capitalism the supposed equalities and freedom attached to us politically as citizens, are undermined by the conditions of everyday life:

The perfect political state is, by its nature, man's species-life, as opposed to his material life. All the preconditions of this egoistic life continue to exist as civil society outside the sphere of the state, but as qualities of civil society. Where the political state has attained its true development, man – not only in thought, in consciousness, but in reality, in life – leads a twofold life (...) in which he considers himself a communal being, and life in civil society, in which he acts as a private individual, regards other men as a means, degrades himself into a means and becomes the play thing of alien forces. (Marx 1844: 6)

Consequently the liberal/ capitalist state produces alienation in the forms described by Marx (1844), see chapter 1, section, 'Marx, the development of capitalism and its

critique.' Man is alienated from society (as it appears to be structured in a way that is inevitable), other individuals (as we are in competition with them), and he is also alienated from his self, (as projects in which he is engaged do not originate in himself):

The individual liberty and its application form the basis of civil society. It makes every man see in other men not the realisation of his own freedom, but the barrier to it (...) The concept of security does not raise civil society above its egoism. On the contrary, security is the insurance of egoism. (Marx 1844: 12-13)

Under capitalism, the labour that has developed is not of man's own free activity and as a consequence the proletariat, whose labour produces products that have no value or meaning for them, is alienated labour:

All these consequences are contained in the definition that the worker is related to the product of his labour as to an alien object (...) The worker puts his life into the object but now his life no longer belongs to him but to the object (...) The alienation of the worker in his product means not only that his labour becomes an object, an external existence, but that it exists outside him, independently, as something alien to him, and that it becomes a power of its own confronting him; it means that the life which he has conferred on the object confronts him as something hostile and alien. (Marx 1844: 72)

Marx describes this as alienated labour as it is something alien to man. The activity and the product produced are regarded as something that is imposed and therefore contrary, to the exercise of freedom. He therefore insists that man cannot fully exercise freedom under capitalism. Moreover capitalist ideology serves to disguise the possibilities for freedom; the notion that agency and change is actually a possibility is obscured. Ideological change is therefore a requirement. A society without a collective consciousness removes freedom and control from individuals and places it in the hands of one group of society, at the expense of another.

Genuine Emancipation

For Marx the conditions required for genuine human emancipation, for humans to be able to exercise their capacity for praxis which is expressive of themselves, requires communism. For Marx the possibility of exercising our freedom by engaging in freely chosen projects is linked to material and social circumstances. What Marx is suggesting, according to Wood (2004: 51) is:

If social relations are human products, then people cannot be accounted free until they create these relations with full consciousness of what they are doing. Human freedom requires not only that people should not be subject to the arbitrary will of others; it requires also that the social relations in which they stand should be products of their own will.

Real human freedom, is found within co-operative and inter dependent relationships. It is also found in the opportunities individuals have to choose their own actions and the product of their labour. This, for Marx, is only possible within a communist structure in which each recognises that their own freedom requires the freedom of others:

Within communist society, the only society in which the original and free development of individuals ceases to be a mere phrase, this development is determined precisely by the connection of individuals, a connection which consists partly in the economic prerequisites and partly in the necessary solidarity of the free development of all, and, finally, in the universal character of the activity of individuals on the basis of the existing productive forces. (Marx 1846: 118)

What Marx is advocating in order to reach freedom in its true sense is a freedom *to* form relationships with other people in a communal enterprise, which adopts concepts of co-operation, rather than separation and alienation. However, according to Wolff (2010: 3), “Marx never tells us what human emancipation is, although it is clear that it is closely related to the idea of non-alienated labour.” Marx’s alienation as a concept is described by Caldwell (2014: 19) as, “proto-existentialist.” Non-alienated labour has clear echoes in Sartre’s account of freedom as requiring self-

directed projects originating, not in external conditions, but in the for-itself. However, unlike Sartre, Marx saw change of economic and material conditions alongside change at the level of ideology, as the only way that such emancipation is humanly possible. It is this position that I am arguing de Beauvoir follows. Changes in legal, ideological, social and economic conditions for women are required to enable the exercise of meaningful freedom.

De Beauvoir's Freedom in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*

It is in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947) that de Beauvoir first begins to recognise that material constraints have an apparent effect on the possibilities for individual freedom and agency. Despite de Beauvoir's frustration with this text which she later declares as a, "frivolous and insignificant thing not worthy of attention" (de Beauvoir 1965: 75), *The Ethics of Ambiguity* does introduce Marx and the notion of situation to de Beauvoir's thought and so is worthy of some attention.

Kruks (2012a: 9) argues that in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* de Beauvoir begins by criticising 'Marxism.' However, the Marxism she is referring to is a deterministic interpretation that the Communist party of that time adhered to. De Beauvoir points out that, "the very notion of action would lose all meaning if history were a mechanical unrolling in which man appears only as a passive conductor of outside forces." (De Beauvoir 1947: 20) Nonetheless Kruks (2012a: 9) suggests that even in this text for de Beauvoir, "we are in a world where objectification takes practical material forms." De Beauvoir's discussion of oppression therefore begins in this text and addresses the material dimension of society, in ways which are influenced by Marx. De Beauvoir's message Kruks proposes is that:

the materiality of the human condition is what both enables us to engage in free, creative action in the world and constrains and delimits what we do. This ambiguous mixture of freedom and constraints also suffuses human relations. We are separate individuated existences yet our actions may acquire their meaning only through the presence of others. At the same time (...) our projects will conflict (...) we will encounter others as impediments or threats. (Kruks 2012a: 4)

Freedom for de Beauvoir concerns other people and this resonates with Marx's notion of freedom involving collaboration and interdependence. De Beauvoir is advocating that value and significance arises from freedom but only if there are other people there to recognise your freedom. We need other people in order to comprehend the meaning in the projects we undertake. Each other's freedom is required in order that others can recognise the significance that an individual places on their projects. Their recognition is only valuable if they too are free. (Andrew 2003: 35) Hence, just as it is bad faith to deny one's own freedom, so it is to deny the freedom of others.

According to Andrew (2003: 32), de Beauvoir's account of freedom first signaled a difference from Sartre's in this earlier text. Here de Beauvoir began to explore a more socially orientated philosophy, and to suggest that freedom is only possible by means of reciprocity. De Beauvoir states, "It is this interdependence of freedoms which explains why oppression is possible and why it is hateful." (De Beauvoir 1947: 82) For de Beauvoir freedom is situated, it is dependent on the historical and social circumstances in which subjects are placed. She articulates that there might be situations of oppression where Sartre's absolute freedom is not possible. It is this perspective that Andrew (2003: 33) claims, "begins in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and is fully developed in *The Second Sex*." It is this perspective that I argue resonates with Marx.

De Beauvoir suggests that capitalism as a system whereby alienated labour is practiced implies that as a consequence freedom is unrealised for all in society. She contends, "All men are interested in this elimination, the oppressor and the oppressed, as Marx himself said, for each one needs to have all men free." (De Beauvoir 1947: 85) De Beauvoir recognises that oppressed social positions result in freedom being curtailed for those who are in powerless positions. She states:

The negro slave of the eighteenth century, the Mohammedan woman enclosed in a harem have no instrument, be it thought or by astonishment or anger, which permits them to attack the civilisation which oppresses them. (De Beauvoir 1947: 38)

For those in more powerful positions, the impetus to change the status quo and make freedom more available for all is not so obvious or immediate:

For if it is true that the cause of freedom is the cause of each one, it is also true that the urgency of liberation is not the same for all; Marx has rightly said that it is only to the oppressed that it appears as immediately necessary. (De Beauvoir 1947: 87)

De Beauvoir refers to Marx and utilises the bourgeoisie and the proletariat as examples of the oppressor and the oppressed, each afforded differing social positions and differing possibilities for freedom. She initiates the idea that this can also be articulated within social groups other than those based on class. Here is where she begins to explore the view that the relationship between men and women is symptomatic of that between the oppressor and the oppressed respectively. She contends:

There are beings whose life slips by in an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads. (...) they can exercise their freedom, but only within the universe which has been set up before them. (...) This is also the situation of women in many civilisations; they can only submit to the laws, the gods, the customs and the truths created by males. (De Beauvoir 1947: 37)

De Beauvoir develops this gender orientation more explicitly in *The Second Sex*.

Material, social oppression impacts on our potential as human beings to be creative and active; it impacts on our subjectivity and our human condition as one of freedom and of ambiguity, “ambiguity is foreclosed through the treatment of persons as if they were merely physical resources, treatment that does not acknowledge that they are embodied subjectivities.” (Kruks 2012: 9) This echoes Marx’s account of alienation (discussed in chapter 1) which is sanctioned by de Beauvoir. I argue that she introduces these ideas in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and then develops them to a greater extent in *The Second Sex*. Her later essay *Old Age* was more candid still. I will return to the concept of ambiguity later in the chapter.

Freedom in *The Second Sex*

According to McClintock (2007: 20), “The enabling idea of *The Second Sex* is existentialist freedom.” As we have seen, de Beauvoir as an existentialist makes use of concepts and vocabulary that echo Sartre. However, I argue that her use of existential categories, are mediated by Marxist ones. De Beauvoir argues the situation for men and women is not the same in society, one group benefits at the expense of another:

If these same situations are compared, it is obvious that the man’s is infinitely preferable, that is to say he has far more concrete opportunities to project his freedom in the world. (De Beauvoir 1949: 679)

Her detailed discussion of lived experiences of women demonstrated that she believed choices for them were possible and that choices were inescapable, this she accepts from Sartre. These choices, however, are limited because of women’s situation. In order to promote their capacities to exercise freedom there needed to be changes in these circumstances. De Beauvoir (1949: 781) points out:

it cannot be denied that feminine dependence, inferiority and misfortune give women their unique character; assuredly women’s autonomy, even if it spares men a good number of problems will also deny them many conveniences.

De Beauvoir (1949: 741) acknowledges that a woman engaging in, “autonomous activity contradicts her femininity.” Men will not willingly give up the position they have as the autonomous subject and as it stands, women develop characters which make them ill-equipped to assert their autonomy. In these circumstances therefore most choices women have available result in an unsatisfactory outcome. This de Beauvoir argues is how, for women, freedom is curtailed and how oppression occurs. To project forward to future intentional projects requires freedom. To struggle with another consciousness in order to assume the position of the Subject requires freedom. For de Beauvoir, unlike Sartre and Hegel, as pointed out in chapter 2, section, ‘Critical Reflections’ woman does not begin as a free subject. De Beauvoir (1962: 346) states, “not every situation was equally valid: what sort of transcendence

could a woman shut up in a harem achieve?” As Murphy (1995: 280) points out, “Beauvoir presents a more concrete view of freedom than Sartre’s. She understood the severe political and social limitations on individual freedom.”

In all the previous chapters I have spelt out the ways in which, for de Beauvoir a woman’s freedom is constrained. In chapter 1, section, ‘de Beauvoir as an endorsement and development of Marx and Engels’ I described her view that such institutions (marriage for example), serve to reinforce the notion that inequality is a natural (biological) state. For her, however, such institutions are human creations, and so historically variable and therefore changeable. She recognised, as did Marx that for freedom to be a possibility, the organisation of production and reproduction must change. According to Kruks (1995: 85), “for the institution of marriage in all its aspects – legal, economic, sexual, cultural and so on – has formed in advance for the protagonists their own relation of inequality.” The odds are already stacked in favour of the men. If one party is already privileged, materially and socially, even physically, then reciprocal relations disappear. Women in society, de Beauvoir argues, lack real emancipation. I moved on in chapter 2, section, ‘Critical Reflections’ to discuss how for de Beauvoir, the male and female relationship has a different dimension to that of two individuals *per se*. If two individuals struggle from the outset for recognition and freedom, the outcome regarding who would emerge the Subject from that encounter could not be easily predicted. If a man and a woman (and in particular a husband and wife), enter the struggle the outcome would be easily predictable. Woman is always the absolute Other, never in a position to challenge the primacy of man.

In chapter 3, section, ‘Myths about women: content’ I signalled the way she places great emphasis on the role played, by what, in Marx’s terms are ideological views, myths about women’s positions and women’s bodies; myths about wives, mothers, mistresses and whores. What de Beauvoir adds to Marx here, is the concept of internalisation. Social myths become internalised and constrain the possibilities that society offers and the possibilities that women see for themselves.

In chapter 4, we saw how an embodied perspective gives rise to differences between de Beauvoir and Sartre. She argues that a woman’s body is a situation and woman acts in response. Moi (2008: 192) suggests:

in some way or other, women will always be up against their anatomy. Even in a free society there will always be a subtle non-coincidence between women and their anatomy (...) Sexual difference, perceived as an aspect of materiality of the body, proves to be fundamental to Beauvoir's analysis of women's fate under patriarchy: for her, women and men will never simply be the same.

The consequences of the situation of women described in chapters 1 to 4 are then illustrated in chapter 5. In part II of *The Second Sex* de Beauvoir shows concretely how limited the choices available to women really are.

Tensions

I have therefore shown throughout this thesis that for de Beauvoir, social structures and institutions have a real material impact on a woman's existence. This is where de Beauvoir's debt to Marx is clear, and her difference from the Sartre of *Being and Nothingness* is marked. She recognises that within these circumstances, a woman's ability to exercise transcendence is limited.

A tension appears, however, as she also argues that woman can transcend her situation and it is her responsibility as a human existent to do so. Yet, rather than view this as a simple assertion of Sartre's position, I think we can also relate it to Marx. Marx had claimed that it is always possible for us to exercise praxis of *some kind*; we can always exercise some kind of choice. Circumstances, however, can ensure that whatever choice we exercise, we are not able to fulfil our human potential. De Beauvoir also showed, in her discussion of the options open to women, that women could exercise choice, but whichever option they chose, within patriarchal society and within the circumstances in which she was writing, led to unsatisfactory outcomes.

Kruks (1987: 115), argues that what de Beauvoir is trying to do is to propose that woman lies in an intermediate position between a for-itself and an in-itself. At times de Beauvoir appears to treat the objectification of woman, the limitation of her freedom, as a reduction to the inert world of things. Of course she recognised that woman has a consciousness, which is a necessary requirement in order that any sense of self is achieved. However Kruks (1987) suggests that this notion of woman as,

“degradation of existence into in-itself,” (De Beauvoir 1949: 17) is not to be taken literally, it is more of a descriptive metaphor:

Within Sartre’s usage of the terms the degradation of an existence into the in-itself would have to mean that oppressed woman has actually ceased to be human – which is not at all what de Beauvoir wants to say (...) De Beauvoir, however, is trying to describe an intermediate condition. She is trying to say something which, strictly speaking, cannot be said within the framework of Sartrean ontology. For what she wants to say is that woman is a human existent whose humanity is effectively denied. (Kruks 1987: 115)

De Beauvoir is in effect subverting Sartre’s concept of freedom by insisting that woman cannot live her situation as a free choice, but she is also arguing here, that if a woman’s circumstance were to change, then transcendence would become achievable. Such transcendence however, requires a different society. De Beauvoir (1949: 13) argues:

Yes, women in general are today inferior to men; that is, their situation provides them with fewer possibilities: the question is whether this state of affairs must be perpetuated (...) Many men wish it would be: not all men have yet laid down their arms.

Kruks (1987) suggests that de Beauvoir is reinforcing the point, that woman exists in a world that is *man*-made. Her situation is largely externally rather than internally created. De Beauvoir (1949: 746) insists, “In any case, it is out of the question to think of her as simply free.”

However, de Beauvoir’s position here also reflects the fact that in her account of freedom, she insists that we must respect the ambiguities of existence. For de Beauvoir part of what it is to be human is to exist in a state of ambiguity, which is relevant for both men and women. As mentioned earlier, I will begin the discussion of ambiguity with reference to *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. In that text de Beauvoir claims, “to say that existence is ambiguous is to assert that its meaning is never fixed, that it must be constantly won.” (De Beauvoir 1947: 129) Moi (2008: 169) suggests that it is the notion of ambiguity addressed in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* that

is most significant, “her [de Beauvoir] initial analysis of the fundamental ambiguity of human existence nevertheless remains crucial to an understanding of *The Second Sex*.” According to Moi:

we have to live the contradiction between the negativity of being and the positivity of existence precisely as a contradiction, as an ever present conflict producing the paradoxical ambiguity of our lives. Moi (2008: 297)

True human existence creates ambiguity; it creates a paradox, whereby bodies are required in order to exist and therefore transcend, yet bodies as integral to a human being are also part of the objective dimension of our lives, they are immanence. There is a dialectic at work here, “that if the body is not a thing it is a situation: it is our grasp on the world and the outline of our projects.” (De Beauvoir 1949: 46) The ambiguities of subjectivity/embodiment play out in a number of ways that condition the lived experience for both men and women. The binaries of subject/object, one/other, interdependence/conflict, separation/relation (to name a few) are inescapable yet unresolvable and are at the core of social relationships. (Scarth 2004: 112) According to Bjork (2010: 42):

Freedom, de Beauvoir suggests comes with limitations and requirements, with accepting the interdependent binaries that entails human existence and to accept these concepts, as part of the ambiguous human condition.

De Beauvoir argues this ambiguous position is representative of both men and women:

In fact, man is like woman, a flesh, thus a passivity, the plaything of his hormones and the species, uneasy prey to his desire; and she like him, in the heart of carnal fever is consent, voluntary gift and activity; each of them lives the strange ambiguity of existence made body in his or her own way. (De Beauvoir 1949: 779)

The male body is just as ambiguous and subject to finite existence as is the female body, however, men, de Beauvoir argues, try to evade this recognition. Men (as a

social category), view their bodies as something transcended in pursuit of their chosen projects. Both men and women therefore need to accept the ambiguities which inhabit freedom, accept the interplay of transcendence and immanence. With this recognition, de Beauvoir is arguing not only that freedom as transcendence requires certain conditions to be realised. She is also insisting that a transcendence unconstrained by immanence is not an achievable state for anyone.

Freedom and *Old Age*

De Beauvoir's account of freedom is re-addressed in her work *Old Age* (1970). In this work, she also makes explicit that bodily change and material and social conditions impair the possible exercise of ontological freedom. According to Deutscher (2003: 299), "she [de Beauvoir] suggests that we need to emphasise a concept of freedom as crucially grounded in our interest in the world and in our energy for imagining it otherwise." Deutscher (2003: 289) goes on to argue:

Many of de Beauvoir's themes from her earlier theoretical work, (*The Second Sex*) return twenty years later. (*Old Age*) In both works she asks how we should understand the nexus of ontological freedom and social marginalisation. What moral responsibilities ensue from that nexus (...) She considered the marginalisation of women and the aged identifiable in demeaning representations, economic inequality and exclusion from employment.

The aged are (just like women), entrenched in social institutions and structures which view them as inferior. Also poignant for the aged is the realisation that their physical decline becomes an obstacle to their future projects. Kruks (2010: 273) suggests:

Each isolated and each the same, the elderly are passively unified by the social institutions and practices that serialise them in the collective of the aged. Powerlessness is thus their common hallmark.

Denied the public realm of productive work (as just one aspect), they are regarded as superfluous and experience poverty and degradation as a result. De Beauvoir (1970: 443) states:

For man living means self-transcendence. A consequence of biological decay is the impossibility of surpassing oneself and of becoming passionately concerned about anything. It kills projects.

For de Beauvoir these objective facts about the body therefore impact on the extent to which the aged can engage in projects. But their effects are crucially reinforced by the material and economic conditions in which many older people have to live, and by the way they are thought about within society as a whole. Physical decline is combined with objectification, economic poverty and social superfluity. De Beauvoir (1970: 13) argues:

The economy is founded upon profit; and in actual fact the entire civilisation is ruled by profit. The human working stock is of interest only insofar as it is profitable. When it is no longer profitable it is tossed aside.

If one lives in material poverty then freedom is limited. Here, in the discussion of the aged de Beauvoir again acknowledges that the social structures and institutions are at fault. Kruks (2012: 23) states:

Irrespective of which particular modes and dynamics are at play, what always makes a situation one of oppression is that it curtails the ambiguities of an embodied subject and forecloses freedom.

Deutscher (2003: 297) also suggests:

For Beauvoir, since physical facts do not exist in abstraction from social, historical, subjective and economic factors, it is the combination of all of these that produced the state analysed somewhat pessimistically.

De Beauvoir makes clear also that the position of the aged is the test for society as a whole. They cannot be given respect and opportunities in a society in which profit and productivity is the driving force. For the aged to be given freedom would require a socialist revolution of the kind Marx described. De Beauvoir (1970: 603) argues,

“what should a society be, so that in his last years a man might still be a man? The answer is simple: he would always have to have been treated like a man.”

Summary: Can Liberation be achieved?

De Beauvoir did not, however, think that a socialist revolution would be sufficient to bring about the liberation of women. She states:

One must certainly not think that modifying her economic situation is enough to transform woman: this factor has been and remains the primordial factor of her development, but until it brings about moral, social and cultural consequences it heralds and requires, the new woman cannot appear; as of now, these consequences have been realised nowhere: in the USSR no more than in France or the United States; and this is why today's [new] woman (...) appears as a real woman disguised as a man, and she feels awkward in her woman's body as in her masculine garb. She has to shed her old skin and cut her own clothes. She will only be able to do this if there is collective change. (De Beauvoir 1949: 777)

In the (now former) USSR that de Beauvoir makes reference to in the above quotation, a form of socialism was practiced. However de Beauvoir makes it clear that women were still suffering oppression. Changes in social and economic organisation are necessary but also crucially, ideological changes in men were needed if women were to be able to exercise the freedom, which was constitutive of their humanity:

When finally it is possible for every human being to place his pride above sexual differences in the difficult glory of his free existence, only then will woman be able to make her history, her problems, her doubts and her hopes those of humanity. (De Beauvoir 1949: 767)

De Beauvoir argues, for women, transcendence only becomes achievable through raising awareness of the current exploitative (for her patriarchal) social, economic and ideological conditions. This raising awareness for both men and women is what *The Second Sex* is trying to achieve. What de Beauvoir is stressing in this book is

that woman's situation is contingent; woman's situation is created largely by man rather than by woman herself:

Men always held woman's lot in their hands; and they did not decide on it based on her interest; it is their own projects, fears and needs that counted (...)The doctrines that call for the advent of woman as flesh, life, immanence, or the Other are masculine ideologies that do not express feminine claims. (De Beauvoir 1949: 151)

The central aim de Beauvoir sets out to achieve within *The Second Sex* is a greater sense of clarity for women, that sexual difference does not justify cultural stereotypes and socially accepted norms that myths of femininity do not determine what we are. Clearly an important step for her in bringing about change is to achieve such clarity, so that we can become aware of what is forming us, reflect on it rationally and make choices, as she did, which resist dominant ideologies of femininity. However, liberation was not simply a matter of such rational clarity and self-determining choices. For, as she made clear in her discussion of the independent woman chapter 3, section, 'Myths and what they do' and chapter 5, section 'Lived Experience' women are very limited in what such self-determining choices can achieve. Liberation for women is not therefore achieved by individuals acting in good faith. Moi (2008: 213) argues:

Any act can be carried out in good or bad faith: only a more general interpretation of the situation in which they are performed will tell us the meanings such acts acquire in individual contexts. If there is one point ceaselessly repeated in *The Second Sex*, it is the fact that under oppressive social constraints, women are never truly free to choose: Beauvoir's utopia consists in the vision of a society where no choice would be unfairly constrained by social conditions.

The way for women to begin to achieve a positive, concrete freedom is within the public realm of work:

To achieve not only economic independence, but also the opportunities to work creatively and productively; which for her (and Marx), is a marker for human self-realisation: the freedom *to do*

something, to act in a way that originates from a woman's own projects and choices. (Lundgren-Gothlin 1996: 179-180)

To make productive work possible she must have choices about her reproductive role. De Beauvoir (1949: 142) argues that, "Relieved of a great number of reproductive servitudes, she can take on the economic roles open to her, roles that would assure her control over her own person." The sexual division of labour, as it has historically developed, limits a woman to alienated labour and in particular to domestic labour, which is outside the remit of creativity, in the sense that de Beauvoir wishes to argue. More control over their biological bodies will create more roles within society as viable options, roles other than those of wife or mother. But to achieve this she places emphasis on society rather than the individual. In a move that is more Marxist than existentialist, she insists society must create such opportunities.

For de Beauvoir then, it is not just about enlightening women with regards to the current exploitative ideology, it is also about changing the material and economic dimensions of society. Deutscher (2003: 298) claims that:

Beauvoir's concern was with the social change that could increase the possibilities for ethical freedom of all subjects and allow a qualitatively improved relationship to the anticipation of one's future.

This is supported by Kruks (1987: 116) who suggests, "Woman's situation must be altered before she can effectively struggle for her own freedom." This is the central most important point. Freedom for women requires social and material change. Productive labour within the public realm would also give women the opportunity to unite as a collective, in order to become a greater, politically active voice. Change for de Beauvoir also involved changing relations with men. To achieve liberation two transcendent consciousnesses must meet as equal. The only way for women (and men) to live authentically is to achieve an interdependent existence with each other. This has echoes of Sartre *and* early Marx and his view of human nature as co-operative and interdependent. De Beauvoir claims, "men and women must, among other things and above and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood." (De Beauvoir 1949: 782) Murphy (1995: 281) imparts that:

subjectivity is more intersubjective for de Beauvoir (...) The significance of this difference on subjectivity cannot be underestimated (...) Beauvoir's view of freedom has a better grasp of being in oppressive situations and our connections with others.

Bergoffen (2009: 25) endorses this point, "To understand what de Beauvoir means by oppression, we need to focus on this idea of freedom as necessarily entailing appealing to and engaging others." What de Beauvoir argues is that to realise true human potential is to acknowledge and allow both subjects the freedom to be transcendent, this is the only way to authenticity; freedom is paradoxically about interdependency:

To emancipate woman is to refuse to enclose her in the relations she sustains with man, but not to deny them; while she posits herself for herself, she will nonetheless continue to exist for him as well; recognising each other as subject, each will remain an other for the other; reciprocity in their relations will not do away with the miracles that the division of human beings into two separate categories engenders. (De Beauvoir 1949: 782)

De Beauvoir's account, as Moi suggests opens up the possibility, "that greater freedom will produce new ways of being a woman, new ways of experiencing the possibilities of a woman's body." (Moi 1999: 66) As Grosz (2010: 151) argues:

the question for women (...) is never simply a question of expanding the range of available options so much as it is about transforming the quality and activity of the subjects who choose and who make themselves through how and what they do.

But for freedom, structural and material changes are required. This recalls one quotation by Marx (1845) with which we began this thesis and one in which I think de Beauvoir endorses throughout her writing, "the philosophers have only interpreted the world; the point is to change it." (Marx 1845: 11) For de Beauvoir the human conditions of ambiguity, consciousness and materiality *combined* are inter-connected and cannot be viewed in isolation in the account she offers of freedom and agency.

CONCLUSION

The fact is that neither men nor women are satisfied with each other today. But the question is whether it is an original curse that condemns them to tear each other apart or whether the conflicts that pit them against each other express a transitory moment in history. (De Beauvoir 1949: 769)

Since its publication in 1949 *The Second Sex* has featured, to a greater or lesser degree within feminist thought. According to Moi (1999: 199) and Kruks (2012a: 2) contemporary theorists have generally relegated de Beauvoir to the book shelf, as a relic of old fashioned ideas and contradictions that do not relate to women today. I have argued in this thesis for a rejuvenated account of de Beauvoir's thought claiming it can still be applied to theoretical discussion, and remains relevant in modern day society. I have argued that de Beauvoir's critique in *The Second Sex* of historical materialism has often been regarded as a rejection of Marxism and historical materialism. In contrast I have argued for de Beauvoir's application of Marx's historical materialism as a method of analysis regarding women's social position. McClintock (2007: 22) argues, "the reasons for the widely contradictory interpretations of *The Second Sex* is the intricacies of its tone. It is deeply ironic, an often satirical, dramatic tissue of many voices." This quotation, I think, captures de Beauvoir's project well; *The Second Sex* is both a complex and challenging read.

De Beauvoir's commitment is to freedom for women however; her commitment is based on acknowledging the historical and social contexts which shape women's situation and subjectivity. She consistently quotes Marx, particularly his early texts, throughout *The Second Sex*. Marx argues that the possibility of exercising our freedom by engaging in freely chosen projects is linked to the material and social circumstances and this I argue de Beauvoir recognised and endorsed. Human action has created social institutions which serve as limitations she discusses, to women's freedom and it is these institutional aspects of a woman's situation that de Beauvoir argues require change. Moi claims:

De Beauvoir's fundamental understanding of subjectivity is based on the assumption that we continuously make something of what the world makes of us. The background she is describing in *The Second Sex* tells us what the world wants to make of women (Moi 1999: 199)

The significance of the material dimension of human existence is something to which de Beauvoir consistently attends. The material conditions, practices and institutions of society (which includes the economic, labour and political structures and the materiality of the body), cohere in ways which are oppressive to women; they limit women's freedom. Women themselves respond in such a way that augments their oppressed status, as they comply with the positions and characteristics that surround them as models of a woman's role and character:

Because the body is the instrument of our hold on the world, the world appears different to us depending on how it is grasped, which explains why we have studied these [biological] data so deeply; they are one of the keys to enable us to understand woman. But we refuse the idea that it forms a fixed destiny for her (...) they do not condemn her for ever after to this subjugated role. (De Beauvoir 1949: 45)

The way society constitutes what a woman is as being primarily related to her reproductive body, de Beauvoir points out, is an indication of the power relations that derive from the positions in which people are placed, and the effects these have on their nature. Society serves one group at the expense of another. This, I argue, is a Marxist insight; and I have suggested that contrary to the traditional view (Lloyd, 1993; Gatens, 1996; Deutscher 1997; Changfoot, 2009) of de Beauvoir, as simply working with Sartrean concepts, that these categories were transformed by her engagement with Marxism. De Beauvoir examines power and oppression and the effects this has on agency and freedom, not only for an individual but also on a general, social level. The multiple influences apparent in her thought from Descartes and Hegel, via Kojève and to Marx, inform the existential and phenomenological principles she makes use of and she productively puts them to work. Crucially, she showed the way in which sexual difference implicates each of the sources she uses. Such diverse influences did lead to tensions; however, read within a Marxist framework I have argued that many of these tensions can be accommodated into a

coherent overall framework. As Kruks (2010: 260) proposes, “de Beauvoir’s self-proclaimed affinity with Marx should make us pause.”

Final Summary

Chapter one, endorses Marx’s historical materialism. Historically variable material conditions lead to historically variable human characteristics. De Beauvoir’s focus is with regard to women. Women’s natures are historically formed in ways that restrict their potential for human emancipation. Rather than de Beauvoir’s main focus being economics as Marx saw it, she argues that people are more than economic entities and their lives entail a number of structures that cannot be adequately accounted for by economics. Patriarchy is one such structure. De Beauvoir views this as a separate oppressive structure. If historically, economics was the source of patriarchy, this does not adequately explain why men hold, and continue to hold, positions of power over women, even in non-capitalist societies. The ontology of the One and Other for de Beauvoir underlies such patriarchy and is added to the argument. Chapter two introduces the One and Other as a feature of human consciousness and a feature of women’s social oppression. De Beauvoir argues that the relationship between men and women is mediated by the universal dialectic which takes place between the One and Other. However, the relationship is not as simple as that which occurs between two consciousnesses, it has a social dimension which prevents reversal. This oppression has an historical explanation however, in which she utilises a Marxist perspective and consequently, can be changed. While the structure of the One and the Other might be universal and inevitable, women being positioned as the absolute Other is not. Chapter three concerns the myths of femininity which also contribute to women’s oppression and are ideological in the Marxist sense of the word. Myths are productive yet distorting and false, with the aim being, to promote the interests of men by producing roles and images of woman that are unrealistic to most women, but legitimate the dominant roles of men. She adds here however, a very important dimension to Marx’s account. Women internalise the roles and images that are produced for them and despite the contradictions, attempt to comply with them. In this way, their subordinated existence is maintained. This raises the difficulty of how such myths are to be displaced. Chapter four expresses de Beauvoir’s views on the body insisting that biology is not oppressive only what culture makes of the body. De Beauvoir views a woman’s body not only as a biological facticity, but also as a

situation infused with meaning. She discusses how women's bodies inform the experiences and opportunities that they are afforded by society, and crucially the views they have of themselves and what they are capable of. This way of connecting nature and culture echoes Marx's account of the way in which, what we regard as nature emerges through culture. Chapter five describes women's lives as conditioned by her material embodiment, the meaning and myths attached to that embodiment by the economic and legal structure in which she is placed, and by technological and other conditions which enable/disable control of fertility. Women give meaning to their lives through the institutional options that society deems appropriate. This is de Beauvoir's phenomenological contribution. Nonetheless Marx's historical materialism remains explicit. The examples which she describes are anchored in certain historical, economic and material conditions, and experience is structured by social myths and meanings which are, in Marxist terms, ideological. Her aim was to provide a characterisation of what it was like to live one's life as a woman, the central observation being that living as a woman curtailed human freedom. Chapter six suggests freedom as a complex issue where consciousness and materiality combine. The meaning and value which condition the lives of individuals are informed by social structures which humans create within an historical and discursive context. De Beauvoir argues that woman's mode of existence operates differently to that of a man's as human action has created social institutions which serve as limitations to women's freedom. I argue that her exploration of existentialist freedom is mediated by her acceptance of Marxist accounts of the conditions required for genuine human emancipation. For Marx the possibility of exercising our freedom by engaging in freely chosen projects is linked to the material and social circumstances and this I argue de Beauvoir recognised and endorsed. Freedom for de Beauvoir is only possible through the Marxist insight of structural and economic change.

Thesis Contribution

I argue that de Beauvoir does not reject Marx's historical materialism, but, on the contrary, utilises and endorses this Marxist orientation and uses it to transform existential categories. As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis and earlier here, previous interpretations have raised tensions within de Beauvoir's account due to her

apparent application of Sartrean existentialism to the position of women. Grimwood proposes:

The Second Sex's philosophical value is questionable initially because Beauvoir [sic] seems to utilise inappropriate conceptual frameworks – most notably, Jean Paul Sartre's existentialism – that are ill-equipped to deal with the problems she is attempting to pose. (Grimwood 2008: 198)

However, it is worth noting that since the discrepancies with the original translation of *The Second Sex*, first published in 1997 have now been exposed, the derivative views taken by feminists from that translation are now recognised as an unreliable source of de Beauvoir's philosophy. (Grimwood 2008: 205)

However, I maintain that up to this point de Beauvoir's Marxism although recognised has not been adequately addressed and the aim of this thesis was to bring that orientation to theoretical discussion. Lundgren-Gothlin (1996), acknowledges Marx's influence within *The Second Sex*. I progress this argument by suggesting that Marxism can be used as a method within *The Second Sex* and in so doing can resolve some of the tensions that have been highlighted in de Beauvoir's philosophy. This was not a move that Lundgren-Gothlin makes. As pointed out Lundgren-Gothlin would have been limited due to the confines of the original translation she was using. Kruks (2010 and 2012), also argued that Marx was present in de Beauvoir's early works. De Beauvoir discussed the material aspects of oppression in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* and adapted and extended this in *The Second Sex* in ways that Kruks (2012: 9) suggests, "are indebted to Marxism." However, the argument Kruks (2010 and 2012) develops, is advanced predominantly with regard to de Beauvoir's later work *Old Age*. My argument emphasised de Beauvoir's Marxist inspired historical materialism and illustrated how this became an analytic tool in which to explain the social oppression of women. My argument also contributed to current theoretical discussion regarding de Beauvoir and I support (Kruks 2010: 260) with the notion that de Beauvoir is not working exclusively within an existential, phenomenological framework. I also argued that de Beauvoir anticipates New Materialism, a current strand of thinking that suggests that matter and meaning cannot be disentangled; both interact with and condition each other.

New Materialism

As examined in chapter 4, this view emerged in reaction to what was taken to be an overly constructionist and discursive account of the self that neglected aspects of materiality. De Beauvoir's view of embodied agency as inseparable from the material dimension, while also being saturated with meaning, resonates with these contemporary views, as well as that of Marx. There are material structures of constraint which are independent of individuals yet impact on the social position of individuals and the way they experience the world. Structures which include economics, gender and sexuality for example and these are ones which de Beauvoir brought to attention and scrutinised in *The Second Sex*. Constraints such as these are fundamental to how alienation and oppression are maintained. Kruks (2010: 276) states, "theoretical approaches that reductively privilege one aspect of materiality over others will not be adequate to the tasks of social critique." De Beauvoir's account is an example of a non-reductionist view of material dimensions that implicate individual subjectivity and this provides a framework for future research and development.

This thesis is concerned primarily with *The Second Sex*. In discussing these issues I also make reference to a number of de Beauvoir's other works in order to substantiate the claims made. Her work entitled, *Old Age* (1970), however, features most prominently. I argue that in her discussion of older people the views she introduced when examining the position of women in society are more developed. She became more aware of the impact of society on an individual and the great difficulty some individuals face in attempting to change their circumstances. Responsibility explicitly shifts in that text, from an individual, reflectively rejecting ideological claims, to the level of the social. Society must change for the situation of the old to change. However, my argument in this thesis is that this position was also present in *The Second Sex*. Her Marxist historical materialism, which in *Old Age* applies even to the dialectic of self and Other, was a dominant strand of thinking in the earlier text. My argument is that de Beauvoir employs a Marxist perspective and is less traditionally existential than previous interpretations imply. Her philosophical contribution weaves together Marxism, phenomenology and existentialism to produce new insights regarding freedom and agency and how these specifically relate to the position of women.

NOTES

Notes Chapter One

¹ Marx and Engels (1884), give examples of how these relations between material resources and social practices, lead to historical change and different historical periods.

Early social practices were organised around horticulture and agriculture. People stopped migrating and formed settlements. This introduced the keeping of livestock and most importantly land. Food supplies became more abundant as ways to cultivate the land, breed animals and grow crops became more successful. Societies required co-operative labour in order to survive, as the food grown needed to be stored and animals needed protecting from disease and natural predators. Technology began to shift in order to accommodate such change, “Barbarism, the period in which knowledge of cattle breeding and land cultivation was acquired, in which methods of increasing the productivity of nature through human activity was learnt.” (Engels 1884:43/44)

This heralded the introduction of privately owned possessions to use as commodities for legitimate exchange purposes. For Marx, this period is termed as feudalism.

The population increased and people began to inhabit in towns, which were separated from people inhabiting the country. The legitimisation of private property ownership emerged as land and premises increased in value for the purpose of commodity exchange. Labour and produce were no longer communal but individual and specialised, and human nature began to change accordingly, society was developing towards a period of, in Engels terms (1884:44), “Civilisation (...) in which knowledge of the further working up of natural products of industry proper and of art was acquired.” This period heralded the development of capitalism.

Notes Chapter Two

² In more recent times, this argument has been developed and described as the male gaze. Laura Mulvey, raised this notion, arguing that the operation of looking is rarely a neutral process. To look, involves a certain degree of power. It has the power to objectify due to the amount of scrutiny implied within the gaze and as a result the subject is dehumanised. The male actively seeks and posits himself as the position of looker therefore he holds the power and control; whereas woman is objectified with no power or control over how she is viewed or judged. Mulvey, developed the look within relation to films and their audience. Characters within a film are viewed from a heterosexual male context and perspective. Position and angles of a camera are presented and narratives expressed in such a way as to reduce women to the status of object. As a consequence of this, women conform to this constant surveillance and continuously check and modify their behaviour and appearance accordingly. Self-surveillance becomes a form of social control and perpetuates women’s feelings of inferiority and subordination to a patriarchal ideal. (Mulvey 2009)

³ It is important to note here this view was prior to the economic boom in the 1980s and so does not consider those who benefited, who are now (in the 21st century) pensioners. As a consequence of the 80’s economic climate many pensioners are now enjoying an increase of political power. They are viewed as a powerful voting demographic and as they are living longer and are more economically viable, the aged remain positively engaged in consumerism also increasing their economic and political power.

Notes Chapter Three

⁴ Such views are echoed in writings by Weiss (1999) and Gatens (1996). Gatens (1996), also incorporates diversity of imaginaries which not only construct individual consciousness and subjectivity by affect but also social institutions, which in a cyclic arrangement inform subjectivity. Images are not individually experienced as an isolated being but are socially experienced as an intentional being in the world. We respond to our world and to ourselves not causally but responsively by the way we feel, by what is of significance and value. The meaning and value are a consequence of society and culture as these are also informative. This opens up the imaginary and the images that one may possess and makes them public rather than private. Everything lies in the realm of imagination.

Weiss (1999) uses the idea of Disneyland to explore this notion. Disneyland as the epitome of fantasy and imagination is used as a tool in which to separate the spheres of what is real and what is not. Because we don't live in Disneyland which is characteristic of fantasy we believe that where we do live in the world outside is characteristic of reality. She quotes Baudrillard who stipulates that, "It is no longer a question of a false representation of reality (ideology), but of concealing the fact that the real is no longer real." (Baudrillard 1983:25) At least Disneyland accepts that it is fantasy lodged within the imagination whereas reality has no such clarity. Baudrillard and Weiss are arguing here that the imaginary in which we are all placed gives us our world and sense of being in the world. The world is not neutral nor is it separate.

⁵ In an interview recorded in 1976, de Beauvoir directly addresses the issue of power and makes reference to the power relations between women of differing circumstances. To abolish power and hierarchy altogether, was viewed by the feminist movement of that time as vital. Power and domination were regarded as male attributes. However de Beauvoir (1976:198) states:

everything is disorganised and, for that reason it turns back on itself, it's not a real democracy, because those who speak the loudest, or with the greatest ease, talk all the time, and others can't make themselves heard....it ends up being the same ones who are the leaders...then of course it reproduces masculine patterns to the very extent that they have tried to avoid them. (De Beauvoir, interview with Brison, S. 2001 cited in 2003:198)

Notes Chapter Four

⁶ Such views however, have pre-empted subsequent philosophers who have expanded these notions. Women in society are subject to disciplinary practices which as a consequence of gendered ideals, check, modify and sculpt their bodies in order to conform. By adopting practices of dieting, restricting movements (similar argument made by Young, 1980), wearing jewellery and make up, constantly monitoring their weight and checking what they eat, "women themselves practice this discipline on and against their own bodies...a self-policing subject, a self-committed to relentless self-surveillance. This self-surveillance is a form of obedience to patriarchy." (Bartky 1990:80) This also fits with de Beauvoir and her specification of the body. The aspect of the body that she suggests is a woman's lived experience is the body for self as for others, where woman is looked at and feels she is constantly looked at and fixed as an object. Such a model can wield its power on two levels. The internalisation of norms can influence the way an individual feels and corrupt a perspective by instilling and informing particular value judgements of what it means to be a man or a woman. Its power can also influence an individual's physical self by attributing to the self the features of an object which can comply with scrutiny and correction.

⁷ This notion has also been extended to include the disabled body. Nancy Mairs discusses the importance of the material body and how it can; particularly in the disabled body, present limitations to the way the body in general can be viewed and articulated. A disabled body neither fits within a patriarchal conception of a body nor within the scientific articulation of a natural body. There are limits in society as to how a body can be conceptualised as no framework of reference is available to accommodate the disabled body. (Mairs, 1997)

⁸ Is de Beauvoir's basic point exclusive to women? Tidd (2004) argues not, and that de Beauvoir was also insisting on the social construction of masculinity, an ideal heterosexual type of man that a patriarchal society serves to perpetuate, anticipating subsequent academic thought surrounding masculinity.

Ihde (2002), for example, believes that male embodiment is also socially embedded. There is a correlation, he argues between male body size and athletic prowess, the implication of which is internalised by men and informs their sense of self. Insecurities and low self-esteem are just as likely to be experienced by men as by women as a social reality, as a lack of stature for men is related to a lack of agility. Men who are regarded as lacking in stature compensate for this apparent deficiency by creating a social identity that achieves in other ways, for example music or comedy. Ihde (2002), is arguing that male embodiment is experienced just as acutely and is implicitly laden with value and meaning, the consequence of which is internalised and can have just as negative an impact to forming a sense of self for men, as it can for women. His arguments are more of a response to Young (1980),

as featured, than to de Beauvoir, but highlight the experience of men as subject to social pressures and internalisation of social values.

⁹ Bourdieu (1998), does acknowledge that the effects of social habitus can be just as unpleasant for men as they can be for women, even though men are in socially superior positions. Men enter into practices and institutions where the emphasis is on intense and serious actions and behaviour, which results in pompous, self-important characteristics. This also serves to re-enforce the power relations and typical social status of men and women as superior and inferior respectively. Women who don't behave in pompous, self-important ways are often disregarded as frivolous and not taken seriously in higher ranking positions.

¹⁰ In a biography entitled, *Penelope Fitzgerald, a life* (2013), Fitzgerald encounters the lesbian poet Charlotte Mews. Fitzgerald openly criticises de Beauvoir and her view that sexuality is a choice. Fitzgerald suggests that for Mews it is an ingrained part of her life, "an essential element of her nature." (Fitzgerald 2013:296)

Notes Chapter Five

¹¹ De Beauvoir engaged in sexual relations with both men and women. Moi (2008), argues her lesbian activity was revealed posthumously in *Letters to Sartre* (1993). Despite prominent lesbian activity in the 30s and 40s she never considered herself a lesbian. Moi (2008), suggests this could be due to not being able to accept the label, displaying her own insecurities which endorses the deeply entrenched notion of normative heterosexuality that affects us all.

¹² De Beauvoir discusses woman's social life as a separate chapter within the lived experience; but for her a woman's social life is only possible through marriage. Friends and lovers however do make the constraints of marriage more bearable but they are only inauthentic escape mechanisms. Narcissist and Mystic are also given separate chapters, "It has sometimes been asserted that narcissism is the fundamental attitude of all women." (De Beauvoir 1949:683) The Narcissist objectifies and loses herself as subject, in her whole body. She is complimented and validated by being a passive recipient of social expectations, which are marked by the way she looks and the way she behaves. Narcissism deprives women of their agency and any sense of actually having agency. (Moi, 2008) As mystic, woman gives herself entirely to God instead of herself (or man) and lives (vicariously) through him. This for de Beauvoir is just as unreal as the woman in love fixing herself to a man, or a narcissist fixing herself to an image of herself she has created.

¹³ Virginia Woolf (1931), (whom de Beauvoir approvingly references in *The Second Sex* 1949) exemplifies the notion femininity in her essay. She states:

If there is a chicken she takes a leg. If there is a draught she sits in it (...) She is so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own but preferred to sympathise always with the mind and wishes of others. Above all she was pure – purity was supposed to be her chief beauty – her great grace. In those days every house had an angel. (Woolf 1931:170)

This passage is making reference to a poem entitled *The Angel in the House*, by Coventry Patmore in (1862). The poem offers an ideal of femininity that Woolf satirises.

¹⁴ *The Woman Destroyed* (1967), is a book comprising 3 short stories by de Beauvoir, each chronicling the complexity of the situation of particular women (young and old) and how their characters begin to unravel when they discover their situation leaves them in oppressive positions with very few choices.

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