

SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR AND ROMANTIC LOVE

LOVE AND ANNIHILATION:
BEAUVOIR AND THE FUTURE OF ROMANTIC
LOVE

By

ALANDA D. THERIAULT, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

©Copyright by Alanda D. Theriault, September 2007.

MASTER OF ARTS

McMaster University

(Philosophy)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: Love and Annihilation: Beauvoir on the Future of Romantic Love

AUTHOR: Alanda D. Theriault, B.A. (Anthropology, York University)

SUPERVISOR: Dr. Diane Enns

NUMBER OF PAGES: xiv, 124

Abstract

My thesis contributes to the general area of scholarship that examines the intersection of contemporary radical feminist theory with our dominant ideologies of romantic love. To this end, the philosophical work of 20th century novelist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir informs my critical feminist perspective that love is for women the “dream of annihilation”. I argue that while our dominant ideologies of romantic love are far from being an ideal forum for the maintenance and development of women’s existential subjectivity, these ideologies can indeed be reconceived in a way that allow women to love in their strength and not in their weakness.

Acknowledgments

There are indeed many people who deserve my deepest gratitude for their support and assistance during the many months of me writing my thesis. I would first like to thank my supervisor Dr. Diane Enns for her unyielding encouragement, forthrightness, and critical vision. Thank you to the always cheerful and supportive faculty and staff in the Philosophy Department at McMaster University. A special thank you goes out to my many graduate colleagues and friends who have been there with their laughter and support at every step.

My deepest debt of gratitude is of course reserved for my parents and family who have through their actions, shown me what love is. Most importantly, thank you to Paul who continuously shows me just how delightful love can be.

Table of Contents

Introduction

vi-xiv

Chapter One: *Romancing the Philosophical Imaginary: Conceptualizing Beauvoir's
"dream of annihilation" in a History of Romantic Love*

1-37

Chapter Two: *To Love and Annihilate: Selfhood, Self-Help, and Existential Subjectivity*

38- 82

Chapter Three: *A Way to Love: Beauvoir, and Ethic of Eroticism, and the Political
Future of Romantic Love*

83- 120

Conclusion

121-124

Introduction

*The modern individual family is founded on the open or concealed slavery of the wife ...
Within the family he is the bourgeois and his wife represents the proletariat.*

*Friedrich Engels,
"The Origin of the Family", 1884.*

*... love represents in its most touching form the curse that lies heavily upon woman
confined in the feminine universe, woman mutilated, insufficient unto herself. The
innumerable martyrs to love bear witness against this injustice of a fate that offers a
sterile hell as ultimate salvation.*

*Simone de Beauvoir
"The Second Sex", 1952*

It is indeed surprising to many people, including myself, to hear Beauvoir call love the "dream of annihilation". Love, and in particular romantic love, conjures up in our minds only the sweetest of thoughts. To be embraced by romantic love, we are told, is to feel our soul fulfilled and completed by our mate; it is forming a unified existence of a 'we' in the face of our otherwise lonely and mundane existence; to find that one person who 'gets' us completely. For Simone de Beauvoir however, romantic love represents a broad and large-scale duping of women towards the fulfillment of patriarchal ends. This conception of romantic love and its entailment of marriage, she argues, annihilates women by limiting and discouraging them away from discovering and achieving their full subjectivity, and subordinates women to patriarchal values that deny her the means to transcend her limited roles as wife and mother. The existential danger with romantic love, as Beauvoir points out, is that it encourages women (and men too) to live in the falsehood of *bad faith*, for rather than taking on the task of transcending and achieving autonomy by

assuming their subjectivity for themselves, women are choosing to collapse their subjectivity into that of others – that is, sinking their transcendence passively into the lives and successes of their husbands and children. Such abdication of one’s subjectivity, Beauvoir argues, leads to a psychological ‘altruism’ which generally goes along with women’s oppressed conditions – namely passivity, victimization, excessive self-sacrifice and other-regard, dependence, fear, guilt, and low self-esteem.

This problem of women and romantic love confronted by Beauvoir in her groundbreaking feminist philosophical text *The Second Sex* (1942) is indeed a multi-faceted social, political, economic, emotional, psychological, sexual, and philosophical issue that is receiving growing academic attention from many different disciplines in recent years, primarily a result of the rise of academic feminism and radical feminist theory inspired in great part by Beauvoir’s expansive literary and philosophical works. My thesis shall contribute to the general area of scholarship that examines the philosophical challenge of contemporary radical feminist theory to one of our society’s most prized and pervasive of cultural norms – that is, that coupling (under the social institution of marriage) and procreation are necessary, natural, and therefore primary functions of human female sexuality. My argument seeks to dispute this central assumption by way of a critical analysis of its strongest form of persuasion: the fantasy of romantic love. Beginning with the feminist insights of 20th century French novelist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir on the dangers of women and romantic love and how this “dream of annihilation” manifests itself as a contemporary political concern, I argue

that our contemporary ideologies of romantic love can indeed be reconceived, albeit with significant difficulty due in large part to the pervasiveness of the myth of the romantic fantasy and our social reasoning surrounding the telic of female sexuality. I do, however, posit a way for the contemporary independent woman to think about love that does not demand abdication, but rather suggests that woman fully assume her subjectivity.

You may here ask why Beauvoir? Why romantic love? What makes the “dream of annihilation” philosophically significant to a discussion about female sexuality? I strongly hold that the philosophical works of Simone de Beauvoir – primarily *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (1944), *The Second Sex* (1949), *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), and *Coming of Age* (1970) are a most appropriate starting place for my challenge to romantic love particularly because of the impressive breadth, depth, and sophistication of her philosophical inquiry of the roots of social oppression and the quality of our existential ethical existence. Beauvoir’s lucidity, candidness, and intellectual clarity on human social relations reflect the traits of a careful and observant philosopher. Moreover, the influence of her feminist insights from *The Second Sex* have undoubtedly informed my interest in the subject, not to mention providing the theoretical underpinning and inspiration for the second-wave and radical feminist movement in Europe and most strongly in North America.

Why would I choose to write a philosophical monograph about romantic love? My motives are straightforward: as a student of feminist theory, I am deeply committed

to contributing my efforts in addressing, challenging, and responding to perceived social and political inequalities between men and women. As a student of feminist philosophy I am equally committed to confronting the highly abstract philosophical ideas that inform, conceptualize, and justify patriarchal forms of social and political organization. I believe Beauvoir is right when she suggests that romantic love is an egregious patriarchal conception, one designed to “keep women in their place” – that is, keeping women engaged exclusively with home-life, childcare, and support work rather than advancing in politics or managing the upper echelons of business leadership, or whatever projects that may be a passion. What is more, the pervasiveness of this heterosexual fantasy of romantic love is so convincingly and unyieldingly transmitted, little critical thought is expended upon the gendered political and ethical consequences of this form of human interrelationship. My interest in this topic of women and romantic love is piqued particularly when reflecting upon how universally and fundamentally significant love is to all human social life. All human beings benefit from giving and receiving love in some manner. Whether it is the dutiful love of a mother for her child, the passionate yearning of a lover for her beloved, the love and respect we have for our parents and elders, for our friends, or even the outpouring of love that we have for our Gods, love is both a necessary and fundamental part of all human social existence. It is, however, our particular desire for romantic affiliation that inclines us towards the excitement and mystery of eroticism and to the ambiguity of individual subjectivity that is the focus of my thesis. In acknowledging the fundamental political relationships forged under the bonds of romantic love, I believe we can improve our ideas and expectations of social

justice and personal autonomy in this deeply interpersonal exchange of desire and passion.

What, then, makes Beauvoir's assertion that romantic love for women is the "dream of annihilation" philosophically significant to contemporary discussions of female sexuality? Beauvoir's claim here first draws attention to the asymmetrical ontological relationality between males and females. Drawing upon Sartre's existential ontology and her own empiricism, Beauvoir vividly elucidates the conceptual influence of metaphysical notions such as transcendence and immanence, life and spirit, as well as 'the situation', and discusses how they bear upon why we tend to value and encourage male subjectivity more than female subjectivity. These philosophical conceptions, as we shall see in chapter one of my thesis, greatly shape our social and biological explanations about human behavior and particularly about human female sexuality. We may credit Beauvoir here with deeply influencing our critical suspicion that biological explanations are largely insufficient sources of explanation and insight into human social behavior. This belief holds that there are no essences, natures, or biologically inherent traits that determine the behavior of human beings, but rather, it is the social environment that moulds and shapes ideas about both social and biological human behaviors. Non-feminist explanations and inquiries into human female sexuality have been particularly plagued by socio-biological conclusions that attempt to maintain the characterizations of women as

passive, emotional, unstable, and best suited for reproductive, not productive labor.¹ If we are to accept Beauvoir's claim that portends 'woman is made and not born', it follows in my mind that we must then question and test the validity and intention of our social mechanisms – in my case, the social mechanism is how engagement in romantic love and marriage incurs the tacit demand that women ought to abandon their subjecthood for, as Beauvoir puts it, "the creation and maintenance of the species"². Romantic love – that is, the erotic form of love sought out, but not limited to, heterosexual couples – serves the social function of stimulating and legitimating reproduction and is thus directly implicated in the maintenance and control of female sexuality³. In relying upon social and biological explanations of human sexuality as imperatively reproductive, researchers and scholars will continue working with some unwarranted and overdetermined epistemological assumptions that do not reflect the complexity of human romantic interrelationships, but rather simply maintain a patriarchal justification for assuming the

¹ For an excellent article that traces the theoretical suppositions as well as the social development of the field of socio-biology see Ruth Hubbard's "Have Only Men Evolved?" in *Discovering Reality*, Sandra Harding and Merrill B Hintikka (eds). 1983: D. Reidel Publishing Co.; pp. 45-69.

² Beauvoir makes this statement about the female's primary role in childrearing in *Destiny: The Data of Biology*. She continues:

There the division of the two vital components – maintenance and creation – is realized definitively in the separation of the sexes. It is in this group that the mother sustains the closest relations – among vertebrates – with her offspring, and the father shows less interest in them. The female organism is wholly adapted for and subservient to maternity, while sexual initiation is the prerogative of the male. (SS, 20)

³ A study of homosexual romantic relationships would undoubtedly yield some very interesting implications about the social and political dynamics implicit in our ideologies of romance. However, a study of this would be beyond the scope of my particular interests in my thesis.

status quo⁴. What is more, to place trust in our current philosophical ideologies of romantic love results in blinding our social scientific and biological explanations to the political consequences that are implicit in the bonds of love.

My research on this topic, then, is guided by two central questions (1) are Beauvoir's thoughts on romantic love still relevant to the contemporary independent woman and, if so, (2) what can be done to address this "dream of annihilation" in our philosophical ideologies of romantic love? Chapter one of my thesis is titled *Romancing the Philosophical Imaginary: Conceptualizing Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation" in a History of Romantic Love*, where as my title succinctly suggests, I set out to first conceptualize Beauvoir's assertion that romantic love is for women the "dream of annihilation" within the wider conceptual history of the predominant Western philosophical ideologies of romantic love. What I find in my analysis of the *Platonic*, *Christian*, and the Darwinian-Freudian modernist account of what I call the *Bio-Teleological* ideologies of romance, there is indeed a curious void of women's voices and experience; a void that indicates a fundamentally flawed and acutely asymmetrical account of what is undoubtedly the most significant of all human desires – that is, the sharing of one's eroticism in a free exchange of passion and desire. Indeed, we shall see in these traditional ideologies of romantic love that women, as a class of subjects, have been largely constructed as both imagined and imaginary, no doubt reflective of women's

⁴ See Emily Martin's "The Egg and the Sperm: How science has constructed a romance based on stereotypical male-female roles" in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1991, vol. 16, no. 3; pp. 485-501. Also see Elizabeth A. Lloyd's "Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality" in *Philosophical Studies*, 1993, 69; pp. 139-153.

Chapter One:

Romancing the Philosophical Imaginary: Conceptualizing Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation" in a History of Romantic Love

In order to contextualize Beauvoir's audacious assertion that romantic love for women is the "dream of annihilation", it must first be said this 'problem of love' entails a broader concern with the conceptual tradition relating to philosophical conceptions of love. The primary reason for this concern is that women and their voices have been largely denied, ignored, or discredited throughout the western philosophical tradition. This is, of course, not to say that many women did not attempt meaningful contributions to discourses pertaining to romantic love. Sappho (c. 620-550 BCE) the Greek lyricist, devoted much of her poetry to the expression of erotic sentiments towards the other young women of her class on the isle of Lesbos. Her work challenged the conventional wisdom of the era that held that love was a dangerous mental disorder for women. Theano's (c. 6th century BCE) practical letters regarding marriage and fidelity discuss particular problems of love that women face in their married life – that is, what is appropriate behavior for a woman whose husband is unfaithful to her? Her advice by our contemporary standards is laughably outdated: she suggests that women draw upon their unique virtue of peaceful nurturance to treat their husbands with justice and moderation, even when they themselves have been treated unfairly. Even Freud's psychoanalytic theories that emphasized sexual instincts to the exclusivity of environmental and social factors faced apt feminist criticism by the distinguished psychoanalytic therapist and theorist Karen Horney (1885-1952). In her own psychoanalytic papers, Horney developed not only her

own account of the developmental neuroses of anxious infants, but also a thorough objection to Freud's account of femininity, as well as extensive papers focusing on romantic love and the self-destructive and obsessive desire of women for a love relationship¹.

Yet, in spite of such valuable contributions of women to discourses surrounding romantic love, the traditional philosophical ideologies of love – the Platonic, the Christian, and the Bio-Teleological - have been largely premised on justifying the actions, needs, and desires of males. In what follows, I shall briefly trace each of these traditional philosophical conceptions of love with the intention to illustrate how women's voices and experiences with romantic love have largely been ignored.

The Platonic Conception: The Power of Pederasty and the Gift of the Soul Mate

Beginning with Plato's *Symposium*, there is an unmistakably clear privileging of masculinity in the ancient Greek conception of love. Phaedrus opens the dialogue by noting that Love is one of the most ancient of gods whose descent is male, and offers young boys the greatest good by having an older, wiser male as a lover who offers the young man guidance in learning both pride and shame. Pausanias's speech adds greater

¹ See Karen Horney's paper titled "Love and Marriage" in *The Philosophy of Erotic Love*, Robert Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.), Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas; 1991. Pp. 190-201.

definition to this encomium on love by rendering a distinction between Common Love and Heavenly Love. Common Love, he states, is opportunistic, vulgar, attached to the bodies of women and young boys who are unintelligent and considered dishonorable. Heavenly Love, again whose descent is male, represents the love considerably older men have for young boys who, as he puts it, prefer to “find pleasure in what is by nature stronger and more intelligent”². It is customary, says Pausanias, that older men take on young lovers as a way to imbue the young with lessons about virtue and to separate out the weak from the strong. Aside from it being a way to impart knowledge about virtue and honorable character, love between men and boys was obviously sexual as well. The Greeks indeed made a distinction between having sex for reproductive purposes and having sex for pleasure. This latter type is made clear in Alcibiades’s drunken, frustrated speech about how Socrates denied him the pleasure of becoming his sexual master.

Women did, however, play a role in the Greek conception of romantic love, albeit a seemingly inessential one. In perhaps the most famous speech in *Symposium*, Socrates divulges to his friends his discussion with the muse Diotima that has come to represent the prevailing customs and ethos of Athenian erotic love. Love, Diotima says to Socrates, is neither beautiful nor good but rather, love is a lack that urges our desire to obtain Beauty and Goodness. As she points out, it is our human nature to be motivated to move towards beauty and perfection, and since we find this Goodness and Beauty and

² This and all of my quotes from Plato’s *Symposium* are from the Nehamas-Woodruff translation of *Symposium* found in *The Philosophy of Erotic Love*, Robert Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.), Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas; 1991. Pp. 13-32.

Perfection in others (and in things like animals, plants, etc.), it is, then, our true human nature to love others. Part of this human nature, continues Diotima to Socrates, is that humans desire to reproduce themselves through the birthing of offspring. This act of reproduction is, as Diotima insists, a symbol of the human desire for immortality in addition to the desire to possess the good forever. Yet when talking about pregnancy and reproduction, Diotima here too focuses exclusively upon the male experience and its moral supremacy and women are only superficially mentioned. Take for example this telling passage about pregnancy in Diotima's speech:

Now, some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and happiness, as they think, for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul because they surely are those who are even more pregnant in their soul than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative. But by far the greatest and most beautiful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and what is called moderation and justice. When someone has been pregnant with all of these in his soul from early youth, while he is still a virgin, and, having arrived at the proper stage, he desires to beget and give birth, he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget; for he will never beget anything ugly. Since he is pregnant, then, he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to those that are ugly; and if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue – the qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should engage; and so he tries to educate him. (*Symposium*: 24-5)

Barely a word is spoken here about the women who are actually reproducing the offspring to which wisdom and virtue are taught. Also, this Platonic philosophical conception of romantic love glosses over other and perhaps more significant

psychologically defining love and nurturing offered by the mother of the offspring. Many Platonists believed that women were not at all capable of love because of their perceived inferior nature. As is suggested by the passage above, love was not considered possible between superior and inferior beings primarily because the inferiors, driven only by their base desires and appetites, cannot free their love from their own self-interest in personal security, social status and advantage. Moreover, many Platonists believed that inferiors lacked the faculties to comprehend the nuance and power of love. The proper subject for love, as we can again detect in the above passage of Diotima's speech, is one's equal. Since mutuality is the essence of the Platonic conception of love, and the inferior cannot produce anything greater than itself, we can see how the ancients justified male-to-male love while ignoring the obvious sources of love and understanding from their *gyne*³.

While it is the case that much of the Platonic formalism has been left out of our more contemporary philosophical conceptions of romantic love, there is one theme that persists to this day and will be discussed again later in my thesis. The notion of the soul mate – that is, the idea that in the realm of romantic love there is but one person to whom one is most ideally suited – remains as a key Platonic element to the ideation of romance. Aristophanes's speech highlights the mythical origins of romantic love in a tale of how early humans, of which there were three kinds – males, females, and androgynous - come to be split apart by Zeus, who along with the other gods feeling threatened by the

³ To the Greeks, a woman – regardless of her age or marital status – was called a *gyne*. See Reay Tannahill's *Sex in History*, 1992; Scarborough House Publishers: p.95.

completely round-bodied, quadruple handed and footed, two faced, and powerfully quick cart-wheeling humans, condemned these humans to wander about until they found their soul mate. Zeus's first attempt to separate these rotund humans, as Aristophanes details, turns out to be quite a failure since, when upon reuniting with their soul mate, these humans died of hunger, thirst and general idleness resulting from their desire to weave themselves together completely with their beloved. Taking pity upon these humans, Zeus arrived at another plan to encourage reproduction by placing the genitals of these misshapen individuals at the front of their bodies, so that when they embraced, interior reproduction occurred. Under this Platonic notion again, females and femininity are degraded to an inferior status because they are formed of the halves of the "lecherous" androgynous humans. Aristophanes posits that the most appropriate and perfect soul mates are male:

People who are split from male are male oriented. While they are boys, because they are chips off the male block, they love men and enjoy lying with men and being embraced by men; those are the best boys and lads, because they are the most manly in their nature. Of course, some say such boys are shameless, but they're lying. It's not because they have no shame that such boys do this, you see, but because they are bold and brave and masculine, and they tend to cherish what is like themselves. (*Symposium*: 19-20)

This notion of the soul mate, although the negative feminine connotations are largely dropped, contemporaneously retains the sense that the soul of every lover longs for unity with another and to live and finish out one's days together. "Love", says Aristophanes, "is the name of our pursuit of wholeness, for our desire to be complete" (*Symposium*: 21).

The Christian Conception: Celibacy, Matrimony, and Tales of Courtly Love

The early Christian conception of love disparages women perhaps even more so than the Platonists, for not only is woman considered inferior by most men and the Church, she is also to be held culpable for the downfall of human virtue as well. Historian Reay

Tannahill wittily summarizes this conceptual injustice against women when she notes:

It is undoubtedly a tribute (if an ambiguous one) to such men as St. Jerome and St. Augustine that much of what the modern world still understands as “sin” stems not from the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, or from the tablets handed down from Sinai, but from the early sexual vicissitudes of a handful of men who lived in the twilight days of imperial Rome.⁴

In edifying celibacy and having disdain for matrimony, the early Church Fathers laid the conceptual foundation for the most pervasive ontological justification for the subjugation of women. As early as the 1st century A.D., Paul -after arguing himself into a corner in trying to reprove the small Christian community at Corinth for its secular attitude towards sex - asserts that celibacy is a better and more Christian condition since it imposes no other earthly obligations that might impede one’s devotion to the Lord. And while he recognizes that celibacy required a level of self-control that can be achieved by only a truly dedicated few, marriage then becomes an appropriate outlet for one’s burning erotic desires⁵. There was, of course, some intellectual spinning for the Church to do in order

⁴ From Reay Tannahill’s *Sex in History*, 1992; Scarborough House Publishers: p.138.

⁵ See I Cor. 7, 9 and 3-5 where Paul says: It is better to marry than to burn [with desire]”, and to be advised that “the husband should give his wife her conjugal rights, and likewise the wife to her husband ... Do not refuse one another except perhaps by agreement for a season, that you may devote yourselves to prayer; but then come together again, lest Satan tempt you through lack of

for it to hold that celibacy was better than matrimony, particularly when it was believed that God blessed the idea of marriage and was sanctified by Christ. Hence, aided by other philosophies such as Gnosticism and Manichaeism which held that the flesh was inherently evil, as well as by the Severian notion that the whole of woman and man from the waist down were creations of the devil⁶, the Church Fathers could still have plenty of legitimate offspring as converts through the affirmation of marriage, and hold that celibacy was spiritually more desirable.

It was, however, the candid writings of Augustine which best sum up this tension between the purity of the soul's devotion to God through celibacy, and the joys of the flesh in sexual affairs with women. After all, it was Augustine who confesses to praying constantly to God to assist him in avoiding the temptations of the flesh with the remark "God, give me chastity – but not yet" (*Epistles* XXII 7, and *Confessions* VIII 7 17). Yet, unlike Arnobius, Methodius, Jerome, and Ambrose who held variations on the idea that human sexual intercourse is unclean, filthy, shameful, and degrading and that God ought to have invented a more honorable way to reproduce, Augustine instead argued that the problem is not at all God's fault, but rather should be blamed upon Adam and Eve. He holds that reproduction in the Garden of Eden before the Fall simply followed its telic: there was no eroticism and no ecstasy, simply a utilization of the physical mechanisms

self control". Reprinted in Tannahill's *Sex in History*, 1992; Scarborough House Publishers: p.139.

⁶ See Eusebius *Ecclesiastical History* IV 29. From Tannahill's *Sex in History*, 1992; Scarborough House Publishers: 2n, p. 140.

and organs for the purpose of procreation. But after the Fall, and after their first exposure to the feeling of shame at their naked bodies and to their selfish impulses of concupiscence (lust), Augustine interprets Adam and Eve as feeling guilt and shame about no longer having control over their physical impulses. This guilt and shame is transmitted by the inherited concupiscence of the descendants of Adam and Eve and persists in all humanity. This, according to Augustine's logic, explains why genitals are perverse and why carnality is considered an impulse, and why humans need to be ashamed of sexual intercourse. Integral elements of the doctrine of Original Sin rest upon lust and sex, and why every act of intercourse after the Fall was understood as a necessary evil and why every child born was then born into sin.

Marriage and procreation were, in the view of the Church, considered as a series of concessions to human weakness. No man really needed the companionship, sex, and children that having a wife provided him. Between the seventh and twelfth century, the Church, in opposing the necessity of coitus, entertained a discourse discussing what marriage actually was. Was marriage a moral contract between husband and wife, or was it confirmed within the act of intercourse? The final judgment on this issue affirmed that *nuptias non concubitus sed consensus facit* – that is, “consent, not coitus, makes marriage”.⁷ The role of marriage then was to confer the right to have sexual intercourse, whereas all other acts of intercourse were considered sinful and degrading.

⁷ See Ulpian Cod. *Just., Dig.* L xvii 30 in Tannahill's *Sex in History*, 1992; Scarborough House Publishers: p. 146.

The early Church preferred that the wife be silent and meek, and defer all things to the wisdom of men since they were the ones responsible for the transgression resulting in the Fall, and considered far too inferior of a creature to maintain the charge of being an active subject. Clement of Alexandria sums up the attitude of the early Church neatly when he said that woman was man's equal at everything, but that men were always better than women at everything (*Paidagogos* I 4, *Stromateis* IV 8).⁸ Yet, while in most areas of her life woman was taken as deficient, what Christianity did offer her was spiritual equality. This only meant however that the Church, all while keeping woman subservient as wives in private, could utilize her agricultural labor, charity, and evangelism in public.

Yet, throughout the period between the early twelfth and late sixteenth centuries, a monumental shift occurred for women which, although they were not any better off financially, legally, or physically, saw a notable turn in how woman was imaged and imagined. During the early years of the Church, woman was totally despised. With the development of the heroic and romantic tales of chivalry and Courtly Love however, woman garnered more respect and even admiration for simply being a woman. Historians still do not have a clear picture as to why Courtly Love developed under the particular social conditions as it did, although many theories point to the maturing experience of nobles with the Crusades, the reintroduction and rediscovery of Greek philosophy through the works of Muslim scholars, as well as with the male fixation on his own

⁸ See Tannahill's *Sex in History*, 1992; Scarborough House Publishers: p. 148.

salvation through virtuous thought and action. The Crusades called upon masses of men to leave their homes for long periods of time which, in the absence of some of the more intolerant social members, meant that the women were left with the necessity to take charge of matters such as estate administration, tithes, taxes, and even community politics. The result of this newly found necessity of women's labor combined with a curiously influential Byzantium attitude towards worship and devotion of the Virgin Mary converged to create a:

... class-conscious, escapist, soap-opera-sentimental, a kind of idealized affair between a high-born lady and a romantic squire, a pretty daydream to while away idle hours, but it introduced a new code of behavior that was to have a direct and potent effect on the status of women. (Tannahill; 1992, 259).

The result of these forces created a strange mask of virtue surrounding women that brought together the themes of love-desire and ennobling love that finally lifted the Church's stranglehold on debasing women. This social enforcement of virtue implied that beauty and rank alone were not sufficient justification for placing women on a pedestal, but that virtue was a strong prerequisite for ennobling love. It was thought that virtue was the attribute that, in elevating woman to some immaculate plane, cleansed love of all carnality and left the lover's desire free to exist in the spiritual plane. This use of virtue certainly pleased the Church as well as individual suitors who sought salvation, for it kept in line both the business contract of marriage (in which being in love had no bearing whatsoever), and the notion that holds that love is a gift freely given.

This desire for virtue so strongly emphasized in tales of Courtly Love had particular conceptual and social consequences for women that are still observable in our contemporary conception of romantic love, not to mention traditionally viewed as one of the defining features of femininity. During the highest peak in popularity of these romantic tales of adventure, the Church was engaged in increased discussions regarding *agape* – that is, one of the three central Greek philosophical conceptions (other than *eros* and *philia*) that stresses self-sacrifice and other-regard while out rightly condemning self-love. Largely Christian in conception, *agape* characterizes a form of love defined by the virtues of self-sacrifice and other-regard and as a norm is unambiguously prescribed only in private, not public, relationships⁹. Hence, the ennobling love and love-desire which exalts women also placed them in a precariously denigrating situation: to love as a ‘lady’, the virtues of personal sacrifice and other-regard were strictly demanded, even at the expense of one’s personal happiness, security, and well-being. That *agape* has been more associated with women is considered a conceptual, social, and later a socio-biological issue. Conceptually speaking, upholding virtues such as charity, self-sacrifice, and submission complements the virtues expected of males such as chivalry, honor, and sacrifice for the ideal. Socially speaking, *agape* can only be practiced within the private, not the public realm. The public world of government and politics cannot accommodate *agape* as a measure of public action since human social life is comprised of competing communities and not individuals who refuse to advocate on one’s own behalf. Socio-

⁹ See Barbara Hilbert Andolsen’s “Agape in Feminist Ethics” in *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2001; pp. 69-83.

biologically, it is argued that since women's experiences differ significantly from men's, and that women more passively resign themselves to accepting the roles of caretaker and nurturer at the cost of their personal ambitions, then *agape* fosters a "sloth which causes women to neglect their own development as persons" (Andolsen; 2001, 74). The role of *agape*, as we shall see throughout my thesis as well as in Beauvoir's discussion of romantic love in *The Second Sex*, remains as a characteristic that has unfortunately contributed to the social subjection of women. I shall return to this point and discuss its particular social and political implications later in this thesis.

The Bio-Teleological Conception: Darwin, Freud and the Acceptance of Sexuality and Subjectivity

Even as late as the nineteenth century, the Church still maintained its strict ideological control over the philosophical conceptions of romantic love that it had left unchanged since the middle to late medieval period. However, along with the eighteenth century's influence of the Enlightenment, as well as the rapid technological developments in the bio-medical sciences, the philosophical, legal, social, and moral domination that the Church had so long enjoyed was about to be challenged by two progressive theoretical incidents. First, with the gradual acceptance of Darwin's (ca. 1859) theories on evolution that disputed the origins of creation as well as the anthropocentrism that tried to ignore the inherent animal-like nature of human beings, the Church needed to contend with the powerful empirical notion that all humans, seen scientifically like all other creatures that exist as zoologically classified taxon, share the same fundamental purpose with all

creatures: all creatures exist for the sole purpose of reproducing their species. What makes Darwin's particular contributions to knowledge a challenge to the Church's insistence upon women's inferior moral status was that in rendering humans as these slowly evolving biological organisms existing in an organic world which operates on a complex organic mechanical dynamism, there was no longer a need to accept the consequences of the Church's incoherent moral views on romantic love and marriage. In Darwin's theories on natural selection, a great deal of agency is instead attributed to sex selection where certain individuals possess characteristics that, while they are unnecessary for survival, are more attractive to the opposite sex and result in a higher likelihood of reproduction. In his *The Descent of Man* (1871), Darwin insisted that reproduction is the most important human activity and that sex is natural and coheres to a set of scientific principles; sex is neither spiritual nor is it ordained by God. Instead, Darwin argued that males compete with other males for access to females whom they then allow access to their reproductive capacities. He observed that females have a great deal of agency when it comes to mate selection and will choose the most ornamental males as their mate. Males, Darwin theorized, select their female partner for their beauty and fertility. Taken in this way, reproduction is no longer a personal or moral matter but rather a communal one that concerns the entire success of the species.

The result of such empirical theories about human nature had profound effects upon the philosophical ideals held by the Church with which it still struggles today. Rather than having a transcendent teleology that presupposes the existence of a Creator,

Designer, or a God who has determined social function and moral order, Darwin's theory instead suggests an immanent telic determined by the pressures of biology and environment. It needs to be noted here that this immanent telic that details the constraints of function upon structure has indeed been a long-standing problem for theologians since Aristotle. For both Aristotle and Darwin, the purpose of human life is ultimately a matter of intrinsic finality – that is, a goal or a purpose realized by a natural tendency toward the perfection of its being or essence. The consequence of this belief, then, is that human beings seek to fulfill the purpose of their biology: to engage in successful reproduction. The Church on the other hand, posits their telic upon extrinsic finality – that is, a goal or purpose that is realized outside of that being for the utility or welfare of other beings. Here, one of the purposes of human beings is to 'be fruitful and multiply', but it is for the goal of pleasing God that humans exist. This gradual shift in teleological ideology has undoubtedly shaped the human social and moral landscape and has laid the groundwork for the second significant theoretical shift in our philosophical conception of love.

Freud's early twentieth century psychoanalytic theories progressively shaped the Victorian morality surrounding the psychology of human reproduction, and contributed the notion of the Ego to the philosophical conception of romantic love. His interest in neurological theories of human behavior eventually helped liberate discussions of sexuality from the prudish Victorian discourses touting the shamefulness and vulgarity of

sexual intercourse¹⁰. Moreover, with his primary understanding of the ‘Self’ as fundamentally sexual in nature, love no longer requires a Platonic ideation that is subject to a telic defined by extrinsic finality. Freud’s contribution to our contemporary ideologies of romantic love instead relies on a biological and Darwinian telic that centers upon the physical and psychological needs and desires of the individual. The result of Freud’s theories on the matter of love, as I shall discuss in what follows, sets the background for our contemporary philosophical ideologies of romantic love that requires an individual’s subjectivity to be foremost and present for there to be what we understand as a ‘loving relationship’ premised on eroticism.

Freud holds that from the earliest moments of life, human love is a function of human narcissism. Although she has yet to form her ego, an infant’s first act of love is the drive she has to fulfill her needs and desires through the act of suckling. Until she

¹⁰ Numerous historians report that Freud was repeatedly urged by friends not to use the word “sexuality” in talking about infantile sexuality. Freud consistently refused on the grounds that sexuality is nothing to be ashamed of, and that the scientists should be both candid and courageous:

Psycho-analysis gives these love instincts the name of sexual instincts, *a priori* and by reason of their origin. The majority of “educated” people have regarded this nomenclature as an insult, and have taken their revenge by retorting upon psycho-analysis with the reproach of “pansexualism”. Anyone who considers sex as something mortifying and humiliating to human nature is a liberty to make use of the more genteel expressions “Eros” and “erotic”. I might have done so myself from the first and thus have spared myself much opposition. But I did not want to, for I like to avoid concessions to faintheartedness. One can never tell where that road may lead one; one gives way first to words, and then little by little in substance too. I cannot see any merit in being ashamed of sex ... (SE; *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, vol.18: 91) in Morgan; 1964, 137.

forms her ego after perceiving herself as separate from the external world, this anaclitic love – that is, the direction of an “id’s” love toward an object that satisfies nonsexual needs – shall be her primary mode of love and self-love. For Freud, love begins with these *ego preservative instincts* that sustain the life of the organism and are later blended with the formed *sexual instincts* and the libido after many anxious and failed attempts by the organism to keep itself sated. This biologically informed formulation of love that underlies his broad and changing conception of love is based on his following observations:

Our justification lies in the fact that psycho-analytic research has taught us that all these tendencies are an expression of the same instinctual impulses; in relations between the sexes these impulses force their way towards sexual union, but in other circumstances they are diverted from this aim or are prevented from reaching it, though always preserving enough of their original nature to keep their identity recognizable (as in such features as the longing for proximity, and self-sacrifice) (SE; *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, vol.18: 90-91)¹¹.

This biological and impulsive formulation of love is, however, one of many multifaceted conceptions of love attributed to Freud throughout his long career. As philosopher Irving Singer points out, much of the scholarly confusion surrounding the perceived inconsistencies in his theory of love stems mostly from the fact that, although he maintained that he had founded a unified principle of human development, he referred to love in four different ways: (1) as a fusion of sexuality with affection or tenderness; (2) as libidinal energy -- both "aim-inhibited" (and thus available for culture-building tasks)

¹¹ “SE” refers to *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, edited by James Strachey, in collaboration with Anna Freud, Alix Strachey, and Alan Tyson, in 24 volumes.

and that which is directed towards its original aim of a love object; (3) as Eros (the life instinct driving all humanity) and (4) as the total life force comprising Eros plus an aggressive or Thanatos instinct (Singer; 1987, vol.3)¹². The result of such a broadly theoretical conception of love is, indeed, a great source of confusion for many scholars. What remains consistent however is that Freud believed that interpersonal and intimate relationships were subject to the power of biological impulses that often conflicted with human social customs through the primary relationships forged between Ego and Other(s).

To get at the fruit of his interpersonal theories about love, we must look to Freud's *Contributions to the Psychology of Love* which houses three of his most famous essays on the matter: "A Special Type of Choice of Object Made by Men" (1910); "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love" (1912); and "The Taboo of Virginity" (1918). In the first of these essays, Freud discusses men who are interested only in women over whose affections they must compete with other men, and speculates on why such men find the notion of a promiscuous woman intoxicating and desirable. Freud explains this behavior by reference to the Oedipus complex (a term he used for the first time in 1910). What is involved here he argues, is a jealous desire to steal the mother away from the father, or at least share her with him. The mother has first been compared to a prostitute when, at puberty, the boy was obliged to acknowledge, after his idealization of her throughout his childhood, that she too has had sexual relations and

¹² See Irving Singer's *The Nature of Love*, Vol. 3, "The Modern World". 1987, The University of Chicago Press.

must save her from further degradation. This pattern, Freud adds, is repetitive, since it can only end in frustrated, unrequited disappointment.

In "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love", Freud discusses the phenomenon of male impotence. This problem of impotence, he argues, arises largely from a perceived incestuous fixation on mother or sister. Here, Freud distinguishes two "currents" of energy which define human erotic life: the "affectionate" and the "sensual." The affectionate current is the older, anaclitic impulse that is directed towards the infant's earliest caretaker and in particular the primary object-choice represented by the mother. The sensual current reaches its prime during puberty. In conflict with the Oedipal prohibition, the sensual impulse instead turns to other objects while being primarily fixated to its first affectionate currency. Here, Freud argues that it is possible that the whole of a young man's sensuality can be caught up in unconscious and incestuous sexual fantasies resulting in physical impotence. Why, Freud wonders, is male impotence fairly uncommon? He suggests that for these impotent men, all sexual relations are simply unaccompanied by pleasure, an observation Freud takes to be inconsequential since for the two currents to combine and produce complete satisfaction is, he believes, unusual. He adds that it is no doubt in the very nature of the sexual instinct to remain ever unsatisfied in the choice of object. The gain, Freud thinks, is to be found in the processes of sublimation, which he takes as the motor of the development of civilization.

In the last of this set of three papers titled "The Taboo of Virginity", Freud returns to his ideas concerning women briefly referred to in "On the Universal Tendency to Debasement in the Sphere of Love". He cites a number of ethnologists who cite a peculiar ritual in certain primitive peoples that permits a person other than the husband the task of deflowering the fiancée. This social custom, reasons Freud, is followed in order to protect the husband from the psychological danger of attributing the bleeding that results from the loss of virginity with physical wounds and death. In these particular societies that adhere to such taboos, woman is feared because of the assumed loss of virility that occurs through physical contact with her, which according to Freud's theories, activates his fear of castration. These general considerations are, however, inadequate in Freud's view. He contends that an analysis of female frigidity leads us to consider other unconscious psychological factors such as the Electra complex, penis envy, and hostility towards any man who appears as a poor substitute for the true object of her sexual desire. Consequently, the husband who avoids deflowering his bride also avoids the consequences of awakening the insatiable devouring tendencies of human female desire.

From his description and analysis of human sexual relations in these three essays, it is clear that Freud's theories betray an astonishing amount of ignorance and naïveté regarding female sexuality. Of course, one cannot appreciate fully Freud's contributions here without recognizing that he is indeed a quintessential creature of his times and his culture. Typical in his Victorian prudishness that characterized women as either sweet,

untouchable guardians of morality or as frigid, neurotic, and devouring of man's time, energy, and sexuality, Freud's notion of love displays his paternalism and authoritarianism, not to mention the characteristic Victorian tendency to be obsessed with sex. Freud's views on female sexuality, I believe, did not stem from an intentional malicious misogyny on his part but rather, reflect a moral code along with the complementary social customs that dominated European Christian culture. To wit, the nineteenth century again saw a resurgence of the medieval tradition of Courtly Love to which women were all too eager to encourage:

[f]inding it pleasurable to be worshipped, cherished, deferred to, and flattering to be considered vulnerable, virginal, and remote; pure angels to whom a man might turn for respite from the rough, cruel world of business realities (Tannahill; 1992, 349).

The result of such a coddling paternalism is recorded discerningly in Mrs. Ellis's *The Women of England* (1842) complaint that: "the number of languid, listless, and inert young ladies who now recline upon our sofas, murmuring and repining at every claim upon their personal exertions, is to me truly a melancholy of spectacle".¹³ Exacerbating this situation of women further was the Victorian insistence upon "refining spirituality" through the disgust for and avoidance of all forms of sexual intercourse. Coupled with women's ignorance of their own physiology, many middle-class Victorian couples followed the Church's protocol of relegating sexual intercourse for the purposes of

¹³ See Tannahill's *Sex in History*, 1992; Scarborough House Publishers: p. 351.

reproduction¹⁴. The result of such disapproval of sexuality was an acute if not wholly neurotic awareness of the moral degeneracy surrounding sex for the Victorian wife. The Victorian husband however, was largely unaware of the social pressures that forced middle-class wives to curb their sexual instincts. Indeed, many husband felt they were doing their virtuous wives a favor by taking those instincts elsewhere to prostitutes and brothels. Consequently, this distaste for sex resulted in an explosive increase in prostitution, an epidemic spread of venereal disease, and a morbid taste for masochism.

While it is the case that Freud's theories of sexuality have come to be largely denounced as unscientific and unflatteringly value-laden, we may grant him positive credit for at least encouraging the discouraged to explore their internal problems. Indeed, if it wasn't for Freud's desire to treat the psychopathologies of hysterical patients, his unyielding interest in the development of human personality, as well as his courage to address the perversity of human sexuality during a period of rampant repression of our most natural of human urges, we would today perhaps not have an account of the human psyche that includes the biological necessity of sexuality in association with the notion of the individual subject. As we just saw under the Platonic and the Christian ideologies of romantic love, human sexuality is completely disassociated from the sentiment of love and of the 'self', marking love as ideal and sexuality as repugnant and inessential.

¹⁴ Few Victorians went as far as the American Dr. Alice Stockham, who in 1894 claimed that any husband who required marital intercourse except with the view toward procreation was making his wife into a personal prostitute on the grounds that it was inappropriate to impose their animal desires on their wives any more than was absolutely necessary – once a month for preference, once a week if the situation were desperate, and never during pregnancy or menstrual periods (Tannahill; 1992, 355).

Freud's contribution to the shifting of Western teleology from that of an *extrinsic finality* (i.e. Creator-based) to an *intrinsic finality* (i.e. Self-based) is, however, a significant step towards the recognition of women's subjectivity for two reasons: (1) Freud recognized that both men and women share the same cognitive structures of the mind – that is, they have a same cognitive abilities via the id, ego, and superego; and (2) both women and men are subject to similar biological drives which constitute the dynamics of individual subjective sexuality. Although we can see now how Freud's scientific theories were negatively embossed by his puritanical social values, we must not overlook the later significance that the combination of these two psychological developments hold for social psychological theorizing as well as for constructing a notion of the 'self'. Assuredly, with the incorporation and recognition of narcissism, self-inquiry, and the acknowledgement that sexuality is not an unnatural human drive, we can see how the later existential and phenomenological categories of *embodiment* and *subjectivity* have been initially conceived through and albeit negatively shaped by Freud's theory of the unconscious mind as well as his theory of sexuality.

Voices of the Imaginary: Conceptualizing Beauvoir's "Dream of Annihilation" and the rise Radical Feminism

Astonishingly, much of the twentieth century's conception of romantic love remained entirely stagnated in the bio-teleological ideologies of romantic love that, through the construction of a *scientia sexualis* based on the professionalization of medicine,

education, and the epistemological postulation of a general and diffuse causality inherent within sexuality¹⁵, kept the social and political order of Western societies divided by gender into economic categories of “productive” and “non-productive” labor. On the one hand, man was expected to take the on the arduous task of preparing himself to be active in the world; to be evaluating, discerning, inventing, creating, providing, and protecting his state, his property, and his family. Woman on the other hand, were to engage in complimentary tasks to those in the male world; she was expected to be idle, supportive, and to leave the hard task of evaluating, discerning, and inventing to men. It was considered unfeminine and decidedly very unladylike to endeavor into territory outside of the domestic sphere of life. However, the tides of romantic ideology and its social implications radically changed in the latter half of the century due in large part to Beauvoir’s audacious feminist challenge to the patriarchal ideologies of romantic love.

Radical Feminists Unite!

The passionate response to Beauvoir’s incitement to arms against the patriarchy in *The Second Sex* found its voice in the American second-wave radical feminist movement beginning in the 1960’s. Between the best-selling books of Germaine Greer and Betty Friedan not to mention the flurry of underground publications of later groups like the Redstockings, the traditional ideologies of romantic love faced an immense, if not outrightly hostile challenge from both liberal and radical feminists. Liberal feminists contend that by increasing employment opportunities, reorganizing social welfare

¹⁵ I am following here Foucault’s description of the construction of sexuality in his *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol 1*. 1978; N.Y.: Vintage Books, p. 65.

benefits, and redistributing domestic labor, romantic love and marriage can positively benefit families, the economy, and women's personal well being. Indeed, Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) follows this liberal feminist mandate that, while being critical of the institution of marriage, she never called on women to ban the institution. What she drew attention to however, was the widespread dissatisfaction of the educated middle-class women to their limited social roles as wives and mothers. As a housewife in America, women had the freedom to choose automobiles, clothes, interior decorations, appliances, and supermarkets. Yet even in this life of convenience, freedom, and complimentary footing to the world of men, the plight of the housewife exuded still a paradoxical anxiety, hopelessness, and a crisis of existence¹⁶.

Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970) and later *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility* (1984) take on a bold and passionate radical feminist mandate. Instead of offering a prescriptive for women to assert and integrate themselves equally into the public masculine realm, Greer blasts everything from female body image, marriage, psychology, literature, philosophy, and even the family for being the reason why women hate themselves enough to desire their subordination. In *The Female*

¹⁶ Friedan relates a powerful statement echoing Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation" about a mother of four who left college at nineteen to get married:

I've tried everything women are supposed to do – hobbies, gardening, pickling, canning, being very social with my neighbors, joining committees, running the PTA teas. I can do it all, and I like it, but it doesn't leave you with anything to think about – any feeling of how you are. I never had any career ambitions. All I wanted to do is get married and have four children. I love the kids and Bob and my home. There's no problem you can even put a name to. But I'm desperate. I begin to feel I have no personality. I am the server of food and the putter-on of pants and a bedmaker, somebody who can be called on when you want something. But who am I? (FM, 16-17).

Eunuch, Greer follows the thread of Beauvoir's concern about the "dream of annihilation" by arguing further that because women have come to internalize the misogyny implicit in the traditional philosophical conceptions of love, women are thus incapable of erotic love since it is women who fundamentally hate themselves. Instead of couching her complaints in Beauvoir's lofty conceptual terms like 'transcendence' and 'immanence', Greer resorts to the allusion of woman as castrated eunuch. In a powerful passage employing Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation", Greer holds:

In any event, the man's real love remains centered in his male peers, although his sex may be his woman's prerogative. Male bonding can be explained by this simple principle of harmony between *similes inter pares*, that is, love. On the other hand, female castration results in concentration of her feelings upon her male companion, and that her impotence in confrontations with her own kind. Because all her love is guided by the search for security, if not for her offspring then for her crippled and fearful self, she cannot expect to find it in her own kind, whom she knows to be weak and unsuitable. Women cannot love because, owing to a defect in narcissism, they do not rejoice in seeing their own kind (Greer; 1970, 142).

However, whether through annihilation or castration, the dissatisfaction of women with their social roles in the family and in romantic relationships remained a source of festering political resentment.

In the late 1960s, a great wave of feminist political activism crashed upon the traditional institution of marriage. In 1969, radical feminist Marlene Dixon, a sociology professor at the University of Chicago, declared:

"The institution of marriage is the chief vehicle for the perpetuation of the oppression of women; it is through the role of wife that the subjugation of women

is maintained. In a very real way the role of wife has been the genesis of women's rebellion throughout history."¹⁷

Also in 1969, Kate Millett declared in her book *Sexual Politics* that in:

"contemporary patriarchies...[wives'] chattel status continues in their loss of name, their obligation to adopt the husband's domicile, and the general legal assumption that marriage involves an exchange of the female's domestic service and [sexual] consortium in return for financial support." (Millett; 1969, 34-5)

Millett also adds that the impetus of the sexual revolution had the potential to collapse antiquated patriarchal systems as well as the institution of marriage. In her view, a dismantled patriarchy, resulting from the destruction of traditional marriage, would indeed cause the downfall of the nuclear family, a goal she called "utopian" (Millett; 1969, 35). However, in leaving a way to compromise with those women who still insist on marriage, Millett suggests that: "marriage might be replaced by voluntary association, if such is desired" (Millett; 1969, 36). In either case, she holds that the complete destruction of marriage and the natural family is necessary to produce an ideal society.

In the 1970's, radical feminist activists continued to argue that the institution of marriage needed to be destroyed. In 1970, radical feminist intellectual Shulamith Firestone, co-founder of the radical feminist group The Redstockings, argues in *The Dialectic of Sex* that: "The institution [of marriage] consistently proves itself unsatisfactory--even rotten.... The family is...directly connected to--is even the cause of--

¹⁷ Marlene Dixon, "Why Women's Liberation? Racism and Male Supremacy," at edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/UHS/APUSH/2nd%20Sem/Articles%20Semester%202/8%20Dixon.htm-7k.

the ills of the larger society” (Firestone; 1970, 254) Sheila Cronan, also a member of The Redstockings, argued in her 1970 essay titled "Marriage," that: "It became increasingly clear to us that the institution of marriage ‘protects’ women in the same way that the institution of slavery was said to ‘protect’ blacks--that is, that the word ‘protection’ in this case is simply a euphemism for oppression".¹⁸ Cronan concluded that: "Since marriage constitutes slavery for women, it is clear that the Women's Movement must concentrate on attacking this institution. Freedom for women cannot be won without the abolition of marriage” (Cronan; 1970, 214). As well, in a highly influential book entitled *The Future of Marriage* (1972), sociologist Jessie Bernard of Pennsylvania State University wrote about the "destructive nature" of marriage for women, arguing that marriage seemed to generate "poor mental and emotional health" for women when compared to unmarried women or married men (Bernard; 1972, 12). "Being a housewife," Bernard holds, "makes women sick" (Bernard; 1972, 48) although she had difficulty explaining why housewives were in her opinion “sick” since, statistically speaking, married women reported they were happier than were unmarried women. To resolve this notable paradox, Bernard theorised that society as a whole has warped the minds of women:

To be happy in a relationship which imposes so many impediments on her, as traditional marriage does, women must be slightly mentally ill. Women accustomed to expressing themselves freely could not be happy in such a relationship.... [W]e therefore "deform" the minds of girls, as traditional Chinese used to deform their feet, in order to shape them for happiness in marriage. It may therefore be that married women say they are happy because they are sick (Bernard; 1972, 51).

¹⁸ Sheila Cronan, "Marriage," in Koedt, Levine, and Rapone, eds., *Radical Feminism*, p. 214.

Bernard also insists that raising children reduced adult happiness (Bernard; 1972, 51). She envisioned a future in which marriage would increasingly be childless and would involve an array of "free wheeling", transitory, and free sexual relationships (Bernard; 1972, 51).

In 1974, the outcry against patriarchal ideologies of marriage grew ever more hostile. Ti-Grace Atkinson, a member of The Feminists and author of *Amazon Odyssey* (1974), claimed that married women were "hostages."¹⁹ Atkinson concludes:

The price of clinging to the enemy [a man] is your life. To enter into a relationship with a man who has divested himself as completely and publicly from the male role as much as possible would still be a risk. But to relate to a man who has done any less is suicide.... I, personally, have taken the position that I will not appear with any man publicly, where it could possibly be interpreted that we were friends (Atkinson; 1974, 90-1).

In the 1980's and 90's, radical feminists continued to wage an attack upon both the notion of romantic love as well as the institution of marriage. In 1983, the influential feminist author Andrea Dworkin in *Letters from a Warzone* (1993) writes: "Like prostitution, marriage is an institution that is extremely oppressive and dangerous for women" (Dworkin; 1983, 146). Catherine MacKinnon, a professor of law at both the University of Michigan Law School and the University of Chicago Law School who worked closely with Dworkin on anti-pornography law adds, "Feminism stresses the indistinguishability of prostitution, marriage, and sexual harassment" (MacKinnon, 1987, 59).

¹⁹ See Alice Echols, *Daring to Be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. 1989. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press: p. 178.

In her 1996 book *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*, Judith Stacey, Professor of Gender Studies and Sociology at the University of Southern California, contends that "Inequity and coercion...always lay at the vortex of that supposedly voluntary 'compassionate marriage' of the traditional nuclear family", and welcomed the fact that traditional married-couple families (which she terms "The Family") are being replaced by single-mother families of which she coins as the "postmodern family of woman"(Stacey; 1996, 69). She argues:

Perhaps the postmodern "family of woman" will take the lead in burying The Family at long last. The [married nuclear] Family is a concept derived from faulty theoretical premises and an imperialistic logic, which even at its height never served the best interests of women, their children, or even many men.... The [nuclear married] family is dead. Long live our families! (Stacey; 1996, 51).

In order to support the rise of "the family of woman", Stacey urges policymakers to abandon their concern with restoring marital commitment between mothers and fathers and instead "move forward toward the postmodern family regime," characterized by single parenthood and transitory relationships (Stacey; 1996, 39).

Other radical feminists suggested that a culture encouraging women's self-sufficiency and high turnover in intimate relationships is the key to personal autonomy and independence, as well as protection from hostile domestic life. In a 1997 Harvard article ironically titled "A Celebration of Love and Commitment," activist Fran Peavey suggests that

Instead of getting married for life, men and women (in whatever combination suits their sexual orientation) should sign up for a seven-year hitch. If they want

to reenlist for another seven, they may, but after that, the marriage is over.
(Peavey; 1997, 18)

In the same vein as Peavey, journalist Barbara Ehrenreich, a former columnist with *Time* magazine who now writes for *The Nation*, celebrates single parenthood and disparages the traditional ideologies of marriage. She holds that divorce produces "no lasting psychological damage" for children. "What America needs", Ehrenreich argues, "is not fewer divorces but more good divorces".²⁰ She prescribes that policymakers should concentrate on improving the quality of divorce, as a way to strengthen marriage. Ehrenreich concludes her article "In Defense of Splitting Up" (1996) that single parenthood presents no problems that cannot be solved by much larger government subsidies to single parents. She also writes optimistically about efforts to move beyond the narrow limits of the nuclear married family toward what she and many other feminists take to be more rational forms of human relationship. While Ehrenreich recognizes that men and women are inevitably drawn to one another, she believes male-female relationships should be ad hoc, provisional, and transitory. She particularly dislikes the idea of long-term marital commitment between fathers and mothers. In the future, Ehrenreich hopes to see that children will be raised by communal groups of adults rather than the private nuclear family ("Will Women Still Need Men?" *Time*, February 21, 2000) . These children, she believes, will fare far better than those raised within the tight constraints of the nuclear married family with its deeply impacted political tensions of dominance and subordination.

²⁰ Barbara Ehrenreich, "In Defense of Splitting Up," *Time*, April 8, 1996.

Beauvoir and the “Dream of Annihilation”:

The recognition of women’s selfhood, individuality, and autonomy in philosophy as well as in the social and political organization of Western societies generally was not yet actualized by the time Beauvoir penned *The Second Sex* in 1949.²¹ Indeed, she begins the chapter “The Woman in Love” by noting that the idea of love does not mean the same thing to men and women. In agreement with both Byron and Nietzsche’s views about the frivolity of women in love, Beauvoir argues that the conception of love for both women and men depends greatly upon their respective historical situations. She describes the situation of men in love as one that permits his identification as a sovereign identity, and moreover as a subject inclined towards transcendence by his engagement with the world through activities and projects. The situation of women in love, contrastingly, requires that “she relinquish everything for the benefit of a master” (SS, 642). Beauvoir best describes the existential situation of women in love in this telling passage:

[An] inessential creature incapable of sensing the absolute at the heart of her subjectivity; a being doomed to immanence, she cannot find self-realization in acts. Shut up in the sphere of the relative, destined to the male from childhood, habituated to seeing him in a superb being whom she cannot possibly equal, the woman who has not repressed her claim to humanity will dream of transcending her being toward one of these superior beings, of amalgamating herself with the sovereign subject. There is no other way out for her than to lose herself, body and soul, in him who is represented to her as the absolute, as the essential (SS, 643).

²¹ The attitude that women’s natural place was in the home and far away from any notion of subjecthood was still a stubborn misogynist ideal pervasive in WWII Europe. In fact, Hitler propagandized this view of man as the Teutonic knight and woman as Gretchen at the spinning wheel by ensuring that the maternal type of woman was better treated by government, as well as striving to block the employment of career women (Tannahill; 1992, 349).

What is more, Beauvoir charges that women are too eager in desiring their implied enslavement in romantic love since, in trying to negotiate the boundaries of their own subjective experience, women must face the censure of being deemed inessential not for any other reason but being *a woman*. In order to avoid such demoralizing realizations, Beauvoir contends that women find it easier to avoid obtaining subjecthood through the struggle of self-sufficiency, but are instead “told that she has only to let herself slide and she will attain the paradises of enchantment” (SS, 645).

Beauvoir’s primary concern for the woman in love is also a call for women to avoid the self-abdication entailed in the ideology of love customarily demanded of woman. Of course, as she elaborately details throughout *The Second Sex*, the goal of self-sufficiency for women is an uphill battle since women have been subject to such an impoverished social, political, intellectual, and historical situation. The subject of Beauvoir’s attack on the fostering of women’s self-abdication in love stems from what she thinks is a largely erroneous course of psychoanalysis. Rather than suffering mere “penis envy” as Freud and his followers suggest, Beauvoir posits that women come to use romantic love and the prospect of marriage as a means to recreate the safety and protection of her home-life in which she is safe from the consequences of her own liberty (SS, 645). This particular phenomenon is what Beauvoir calls “the dream of annihilation” wherein the act of love is itself an existential danger for women. To realize this “dream of annihilation”, woman first desires to be of service to her lover as a way to feel necessary and integrated into his existence. Beauvoir contends here that when woman feels that she

is justified in sharing his existence, she then abdicates her own transcendence and subordinates her interests, tastes, plans, and desires to her lover as a means to both find and save herself (SS, 650). Beauvoir chillingly describes this “dream of annihilation” in the following passage:

The woman in love tries to see with his eyes; she reads the books he reads, prefers the pictures and music he prefers; she is interested only in the landscapes she sees with him, in the ideas that come from him; she adopts his friendships, his enmities, his opinions; when she questions herself, it is his reply she tries to hear; she wants to have in her lungs the air he has already breathed; the fruits and flowers that do not come from his hands have no taste and no fragrance. Her idea of location in space is even upset: the center of the world is no longer the place where she is, but that occupied by her lover; all roads lead to his home, and from it. She uses his words, mimics his gestures, acquires his eccentricities and his tics (SS, 653).

Beauvoir here captures the existential paradox of the disenfranchised situation of women that while patriarchal social customs do indeed invite woman’s subordination, it is woman who allows her “own world to collapse into contingency, for she really lives in his” (SS, 653).

In much of the same manner that her companion Sartre characterizes love as a tension between masochism and sadism, and moreover as a fundamental conflict between the self and the other²², Beauvoir too associates the concept of love with masochism. The desire for annihilation, she argues, is a form of masochism wherein a woman’s suffering

²² See Jean-Paul Sartre’s “First Attitude Toward Others: Love, Language, Masochism” in *Being and Nothingness*, 1956; 474-493.

in love “brings into harmonious union both her eroticism and her narcissism” (SS, 648). The act of love requires that woman abandon herself as well as to treat her self-abdication as a necessary condition since she is seldom reassured without male attention or affiliation. Beauvoir explains the necessity of abdication by pointing out that the only way for woman to accept her sexuality, and ultimately herself, is to “transmute her being into worth” through the gaze of the other (SS, 649). In other words, woman, by acting as the genteel, withering, and precious creature that is incapable of managing the harsh realities of public life instead gains her fractured subjecthood by being constructed by others. Moreover, the woman in love abandons herself to love in order to save herself from having to be responsible for her liberty and her life. Of course, as Beauvoir aptly points out, this masochism exists as a denial of the self in the end – woman in love gives up her own transcendence and subordinates her own liberty and places herself, body and soul, into the hands of an other. This masochism however makes of woman a voluntary victim – if a woman fails to engross her object of affection, all of her narcissism is transformed into self-disgust, humiliation, and self-hatred (SS, 652). Beauvoir here cautions us not to confuse woman’s desire to seek her own suffering with woman’s aim to affirm the power and liberty of her lover. The masochism of the woman in love perpetuates the presence of an ego in a “bruised and degraded condition”; love brings a forgetfulness of the self in favor of the essential object (SS, 652-3).

One striking feature of Beauvoir’s description of women in love as masochistic is the explicit connection that she makes between women’s self-abdication and the

Christian emphasis of deriving value from suffering as a means to salvation. Much like the way in which the adoration of God is combined with the devotees concern with personal salvation, so too woman gives herself completely to her idol in an effort to feel endowed with value (SS, 646). It is through love, Beauvoir argues, that woman is permitted to idolize herself through the love she inspires and thus, becomes an offering at the feet of her God. Beauvoir rightly characterizes this connection between woman's self-abdication and salvation as "idoltrous love" where absolute value is affixed to the loved one at the expense of the devotee (SS, 654). Yet, when woman begins to find flaw in her lover, she becomes frustrated and disillusioned. Beauvoir contends that woman here misunderstands freedom, and if a man can no longer exist as the object of woman's adoration, he must be trampled upon (SS, 655). Beauvoir observes that when woman no longer adores her object of affection, she holds him indirectly to task through disparaging disapproval; "woman denies him his liberty so that he may deserve to remain her master" (SS, 655). Woman dedicates every moment to her idol, yet he must remain present to her at all times. Thus, as Beauvoir points out, this idoltrous love reveals another falsity of love exposed to men – "while woman's love is presented as a gift, it really exists as a tyranny" (SS, 656). Beauvoir is quick to assert that while men in love can be equally tyrannical, he is usually satisfied when he obtains what he wants. Yet, when woman is in love and not getting what she desires, she becomes "an insatiable jailer" (SS, 657). Women in love largely permit themselves to be deluded in their idol worship, as they often want to ignore his lack and limitations. The consequence of this bad faith is, according to Beauvoir, "a totalizing delusion wherein woman must face the risk of

becoming a burden rather than his slave, and thus accepts her servitude without demanding the same from him in return” (SS, 661).

Beauvoir’s “dream of annihilation” paints both a desperate and unhappy portrait of women’s experiences under the ideology of romantic love, and certainly puts into context the arguments of radical feminists who later call for the demise of the nuclear family. However, what is of primary interest to me in my thesis is the particular reluctance of the woman in love to assume the goal of self-sufficiency, and moreover, her own subjectivity. I will speak more about this discordant relationship between romantic ideology and women’s subjectivity in the chapter that follows.

Chapter Two

To Love and Annihilate: Selfhood, Self-Help and Existential Subjectivity

Beauvoir's description of romantic love as personally annihilative to women brings to the foreground not only the conceptual inadequacies of our traditional philosophical conceptions of romantic love, but also the struggle many women face in assuming their subjectivity for and by themselves. To be a 'subject' is to deliberate, decide, act, evaluate, and to constitute meaning for oneself in the world. All of these qualities of subjecthood, as we have seen throughout the history of the philosophical conception of romantic love in chapter one, have largely been denied to woman, or at the very least assigned as a mere function of her sexuality. In this chapter, I explicate Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation" further to show how and why subjectivity represents an elusive feminine quality, and address how it remains a central existential concern to the contemporary independent woman through an analysis of women's self-help discourse. The aim of this chapter, then, is to show that even with the great advances in law, politics, and social custom that contemporary independent women have come to experience and enjoy, the notion of romantic love still demands of woman an abdication of her subjectivity in the service of stimulating and legitimating reproduction within patriarchal forms of social organization. The strategies women develop in order to avoid the trappings of romantic love, as we shall later see, is to forge a life of singleness and change the structure of the family towards a single-parented model.

Why Women Fail to Make Themselves Anything: Beauvoir on Female Subjectivity

Throughout *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir charges that a great many women “fail to make themselves anything” (SS, 258-9) because it is women who “fail to bring about this change” for themselves (SS, xxv). In making this bold political assertion that places part of the responsibility for women’s impoverished social situation upon women themselves, she also identifies the complex conceptual mechanisms that contribute to the ontological conditions that deny women their claim to subjecthood. Beauvoir’s analysis of the intersubjective dynamic of romantic love reveals three conceptual paradoxes that work against the attainment and development of women’s subjective potential and results in the broad social conditions of servility to the human species. These dualistic paradoxes she describes fall under the conceptual categories of: (1) Immanence versus Transcendence, (2) Life versus Spirit, and (3) Life Situations of Women and Men. I shall elucidate further upon Beauvoir’s response to each of these three paradoxes respectively.

Paradox 1: Immanence versus Transcendence

For Beauvoir, the philosophical distinction between transcendence and immanence details the underlying psychological structures of consciousness in relation to their metaphysical correlates in an existential ontology. She defines transcendence as a masculine process, and broadly as subjectivity where “each individual subject plays their part in the world specifically through their exploits or projects that serve as a mode of

transcendence” (SS, xxxiv). To be a subject then, according to Beauvoir, is to challenge those powers of immanence that serve to stagnate an individual into the *en-soi* – that is, the brutish life of subjugation to given conditions and prescribed categories (SS, xxxiv). A life directed toward transcendence, then, symbolizes a life that is open to the future; a life that is self-created and not based on pre-existing essences or identities. The transcendent subject acts, creates, invents, evaluates, decides, and makes choices. Metaphysically, the transcendent subject is oriented to the realm of the *possible* and not a fate to which one merely submits. Even from a tender age, as Beauvoir recounts in her section on early childhood, males are encouraged to seek independence from adults and “will please them by not appearing to seek to please them” (SS, 270). Moreover, young male children are persuaded that there is more demanded of them because they are superior. Beauvoir suggests that this demand is placed upon boys in order to give the young male courage for the difficult path he will no doubt follow in his life (SS, 271). The little one is told that “men don’t cry” or “a man doesn’t need to look at himself in mirrors” as a way to prepare the young boy to boldly assume an attitude of subjectivity by encouraging him to project himself through the concepts of autonomy, transcendence, and power (SS, 278).

Beauvoir’s notion of immanence stands in stark contrast to her description of transcendence. To exist in the plane of immanence, Beauvoir argues, is to live in stagnation and to allow one’s liberty to be subjugated by conditions of constraint and contingency (SS, xxxv). Immanence, she holds, implies the lived repetition of the *en-soi*

seen in the lives of women who fail to lay claim to their subjectivity. According to Beauvoir, the physical confinement and repetition in the lives of women represents materially their psychological confinement in which one thinks within predetermined limits, with pre-established conventions, and submission to identity-determining roles that are perceived as necessary and given. Rather than aiming for personal autonomy, transcendence, and power from these pre-determined conditions, those who exist in the plane of immanence find themselves convinced that they could do no more than to submit to the forces that determine one's destiny (Bergoffen; 1997, 146). Beauvoir relates the experience of women to immanence by observing that even though women are autonomous beings like all human creatures, it is women who nevertheless find themselves "living in a world where men compel her to assume the status of Other" (SS, xxxv). She holds that women are doomed to immanence since female transcendence is to be overshadowed and forever transcended by another ego that is essential and sovereign (SS, xxxv). In other words, women find themselves marked as the inessential other precisely because men exist and take up the position of the essential, transcending subject. Moreover, Beauvoir conceives of women's drama in the plane of immanence as one which "lies in the conflict between the fundamental aspirations of every subject (ego) – who always regards the self as essential – and the compulsions of a situation in which she is the inessential" (SS, xxxv).

Paradox 2: Life versus Spirit

Another dualism that Beauvoir addresses is the conceptual distinction drawn between life oriented towards Life, and a life that is oriented towards Spirit. To be oriented towards Life, one is engaged in processes that are life-giving and life-sustaining. Activities towards the sustaining of life such as giving birth, nursing a child, as well as food preparation all have their focus in the domain of the temporal and the ephemeral and have largely been designated as uncreative and unproductive. Beauvoir says it best when she describes this devaluation of women's life-giving labour thusly:

The woman who gave birth, therefore, did not know the pride of creation; she felt herself the plaything of obscure forces, and the painful ordeal of childbirth seemed a useless or even troublesome accident. But in any case giving birth and suckling are not *activities*, they are natural functions; no project is involved; and that is why woman found in them no reason for lofty affirmation of her existence – she submitted passively to her biologic fate. The domestic labours that fell to her lot because they were reconcilable with the cares of maternity imprisoned her in repetition and immanence; they were repeated from day to day in an identical form, which was perpetuated almost without change from century to century; they produced nothing new. (SS, 63)

To be oriented towards life, then, is a life that is characterized as being in common with other animals since its ultimate goal is the simple *replication* of life. No transcendent functions are assumed in life. Life is taken as a natural and necessary function of being a biological animal.

To be oriented towards the Spirit, however, raises one beyond the level of biological necessity. The life of the spirit is the life of creative adventure, experimentation, and even the risking of one's own life in the process. The life of spirit is

open to the future, free from the lull of biological necessity and open to self-creation. As Beauvoir puts it: “it is not in giving 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 life but to that which kills” (SS, 64). This spirit of risking places superlative value upon technology, inventions, symbols and ideologies that make permanent or transcend the perishable domain of biological life. The commitment to spirit is manifest in instances where an individual is willing to risk biological life for ideals of a higher abstract value such as the Nation, the Good, Peace, or Justice. Indeed, one of Beauvoir’s central tasks in *The Second Sex* is to argue for women’s full and equal participation in the life of the Spirit and to be “recognized as existents by the same right as men and not to subordinate existence to life, the human being to its animality” (SS, 65).

Paradox 3: Life Situations of Women and Men

In Book Two of *The Second Sex* titled “Woman’s Life Today”, Beauvoir dissects and studies the predominant social and psychological themes that determine the roles of women throughout their life span. From childhood to adolescence, married women, mothers, and aging widows, she posits that the acceptable roles for women stem largely from situations where the defining concerns are immediate, particular, and concrete. As she points out:

She [woman] has no sense of factual truth, for lack of effectiveness; she never comes to grips with anything but words and mental pictures, and that is why the most contradictory assertions give her no uneasiness; she takes little trouble to elucidate the mysteries of a sphere that is in every way beyond her reach. She is content, for her purposes, with extremely vague conceptions, confusing parties,

opinions, places, people, events; her head is filled with a strange jumble (SS, 599-600).

Women's "character", she continues, is drawn primarily from situations and conditions where the ideal of femininity is characterized in terms of dependence, vulnerability, submission, and sacrifice instead of the masculine traits that encourage independence, achievement, courage, assertiveness, and decisiveness. As Beauvoir puts it, woman's general situation is defined by a dependence in which men keep her, where her life "is not directed towards ends: she is absorbed in producing and caring for things that are never more than means, such as food, clothing, and shelter" (SS, 604).

Within this general framework of the 'situation', Beauvoir also holds that there are three overarching social and conceptual factors that encourage women to desire annihilation under the guise of romantic love: (1) impoverished social and economic circumstances, (2) avoidance of personal deliberative responsibility in the form of *mauvaise foi* – that is, *bad faith*), and (3) an ideology of romantic love that is inculcated in young girls and women.

(1) Social and Economic Circumstances: Romantic love, argues Beauvoir, serves as an escape as well as a form of salvation from the repetitive, low status labour afforded to the realm of domestic work. Reproductive labour is largely devalued since the predominant ideological context – which is contrasted with the productive labour of males – is viewed as pre-cultural, natural, and private. What is more, since women are affiliated with the

care of children, women's particular skills, talents, and accomplishments are viewed as similarly emotional, juvenile, and irrational. As a result of this misogynist perspective, argues Beauvoir, young girls and women are taught that their lives as women are destined to be lived for others. Having no independent social status outside of what is afforded to her by her father, brothers, or by her husband, women's social and economic situation is one of minimal public power. As she points out, women are "deprived of all possibility of concrete communication with others; she does not experience either the appeal or the benefits of solidarity, since she is consecrated entirely to her own family, in isolation" (SS, 605). Falling in love, then, at the very least affords woman with the ability to attach herself to a superior being through whom she can acquire both identity and social power.

(2) *Bad Faith*: Both Sartre and Beauvoir hold that *bad faith* represents a universal and primary form of motivation in human subjects that describes the desire for one to live authentically. To live authentically, according to both Sartre's and Beauvoir's use of the term, is to live and act in accordance with one's values and to take full responsibility for these actions, in addition to avoiding self-deception. Living authentically entails a sincerity¹ of one's relationship to oneself through consciousness, and to others through an honest disclosure of self. Bad faith, on the other hand, is a refusal to acknowledge the totality of one's freedom by feigning a conception of the self as a fixed essence or a determined object. As Sartre describes it, bad faith manifests as "playing at" being oneself, much like his example of the waiter who exaggerates his actions in order to

¹ Sartre notes that sincerity is the antithesis of bad faith in *Being and Nothingness*, p. 100.

realize the value of his position as a server in the café (BN, 102). The danger of living with bad faith, as both Sartre and Beauvoir repeat in their numerous works, is that it is a fundamental lie to oneself. Bad faith, Sartre says, is not the same as lying in general. The difference is that general lying does not affect the consciousness of the individual, but rather, “it aims only at the transcendent” (BN, 87). Bad faith, on the other hand, occurs when an individual’s consciousness seeks to appropriate a false notion of self. What is more, Sartre specifically holds that bad faith is not imposed by any external *situation* upon one’s consciousness, but rather, a willed act by the individual of accepting a situation as an immutable fact. Of course, there are certain societal demands that are placed on all individuals that can be said to be paramount in the shaping of their personalities, interests, vocations, and ultimately one’s situation. However, Sartre and Beauvoir both strongly assert that these cultural and societal demands can never be used to fully justify any modes of inauthentic behaviour since, as Sartre puts it, the individual always has the freedom to choose how she is to *be*.

In her chapter “The Woman in Love”, Beauvoir argues that there are at least four distinct ways in which woman can be tempted to live inauthentically in bad faith. First, bad faith may be lived through the belief that the received values that regulate one’s life are both necessary and absolute. In other words, the belief that women should be both nurturing and self-sacrificing is, according to Beauvoir, a primary example of living inauthentically. Similarly, self-deception also persists in the belief in identifying with a role that is *normatively* binding for an individual – that is, the belief that “As an X, I need

to do Y". A third form of bad faith stems from subordinating oneself to an object or instrument for the benefit of another individual. Finally, a fourth form of bad faith identified by Beauvoir consists of the belief of becoming a function of the identity of another individual. This final form, argues Beauvoir, is what tempts women the most under the banner of romantic love since, both socially and economically, women tend to seek their transcendence through being of service to others.

(3) *Ideology of Romantic Love*: It is Beauvoir's view that, in Western cultures in particular, women and young girls are subjected to an ideology of romantic love that has a patriarchal political agenda. Central to what she identifies as the 'myth of romantic love' are: (1) a set of assumptions and beliefs that define women's primary role and purpose through the activity of *loving*; (2) the belief that loving is what confirms her 'womanliness'; (3) the belief that the appropriate moral standpoint of women ought to be one of person-specific and unconditionally applied altruism. Of course, in order for women to come to internalize these beliefs, Beauvoir insists that two more convictions must be in place in the myth of romantic love. First, she sees it necessary that young girls be influenced by the assumption that being female implies a sort of *inessentialness* – that is, girls must operate with the belief that since she is female, she is necessarily less important and less valuable than a male. To this end, this conviction must also be presented to women as being normal and inevitable. Beauvoir describes this conviction as pervasive:

She [woman] chooses to desire her enslavement so ardently that it would seem to her the expression of her liberty; she will try to rise above her situation as

inessential object by fully accepting it; through her flesh, her feelings, her behavior, she will enthrone him as supreme value and reality; she will humble herself to nothingness before him. Love becomes for her a religion (SS, 643).

Moreover, this conviction of ‘inessentialness’ is, as Kathryn Pauly Morgan points out, what Beauvoir takes to be *the crucial assumption of male supremacy*.²

A second conviction that Beauvoir insists operates to encourage women towards romantic love is that it is crucial for women to believe that they are subjectively incomplete without an affiliation with a male lover. Indeed, woman’s life as seen in the myth of romantic love is largely incomplete or at least suspended until she finds a male lover who confers upon her a sense of achieved and privileged identity. Beauvoir argues that it is through romantic love that women come to reconcile their feminine eroticism and narcissism as primary characteristics of one’s subjective identity, and it is through love that women develop these traits as a means to “adapt herself to her sexual destiny” (SS, 648). I cannot relate this point to you more beautifully than did Beauvoir, so I shall defer to her when she says:

There is nothing more bitter to feel oneself but the flower, the perfume, the treasure, which is the object of no desire: what kind of wealth is it that does not enrich myself and the gift of which no one wants? Love is the developer that brings out in clear, positive detail the dim negative, otherwise as useless as a blank exposure. Through love, woman’s face, the curves of her body, her childhood memories, her former tears, her gowns, her accustomed ways, her universe, everything she is, all the things that belongs to her, escape contingency and become essential: she is a wondrous offering at the foot of the altar of her god (SS, 647).

² See Kathryn Pauly Morgan’s article “Romantic Love, Altruism, and Self-Respect: An Analysis of Beauvoir”, in *The Philosophy of (Erotic) Love*, Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds); University of Kansas Press, 1991, p. 396.

Thus, woman's subjective identity understood as most appropriate when it is 'developed' by the love of a man maintains what Beauvoir takes as *the crucial heterosexist assumption of asymmetric complementarity* (Morgan; 1991, 396).

With these two convictions taken together, a clear line of implication makes it easy to spot how the ideology of romantic love influences and motivates the choices of women to realize subjectivity only through the narrow contingencies that keep her subordinate to the desire of males. First, *women are motivated to fall in love in order to find her identity* since, as we saw cited earlier in the myth of romantic love, women believe that they have a lack or incomplete identity unless and until affiliated with a male lover. A second motive Beauvoir contends which drives women's desire for romantic affiliation is that in the process of loving and acquiring her identity, *a woman's past and present become validated and meaningful only in relation to the loved one*. This motivation, she argues, is founded in the desire to be a part of an essential identity that is denied to woman. Yet, past and present become justified for woman when "she is associated and identified with him, she shares his prestige and reigns with him over the rest of the world" (SS, 653). A third motive cited by Beauvoir as a reason why women seek to love is that through romantic love, *woman's sexuality is both legitimated and integrated within one's concepts of self-identity*. This integration of sexuality is of great importance to women's self-conceptualization since, under patriarchal forms of social organization, women's sexuality and erotic passion are under-valued and largely ignored.

In recognizing the humanistic significance of sexual pleasure in relation to women's subjectivity, Beauvoir contends that women can take greater part in developing their subjecthood in addition to experiencing sexual pleasure in a genuinely human way.³

The fourth and final motivation for love that Beauvoir asserts is that women are also motivated to love *as a means to acquire a locus of values*. Woman, she argues, looks to her male lover to be her *world*, and, as she points out, to identify completely with his values. Indeed, she says: “[t]he supreme goal of human love, as of mystical love, is identification with the loved one” (SS, 653). With all of these motivations taken together, what incites women to love, then, is that her lover becomes the person who is the source of both her identity and meaning in the world, the person who legitimates her erotic nature, and the locus of her ethical judgment.

We can see now why Beauvoir's critique of romantic love as the “dream of annihilation” is both scathing and relentless: the myth of romantic love perpetuates a dangerous form of inauthenticity, as well as represents a large-scale existential duping of women towards patriarchal ends. What makes this desire for personal annihilation all the more insidious is that both social custom and women's particular social and economic status are exploited so that woman remains subjected to the needs and desires of others. Whereas many women see love as a form of both their transcendence and freedom,

³ I would like to note here that this connection that Beauvoir makes between eroticism and female subjectivity is indeed an important one that I will pick up again in chapter three of my thesis since it plays a significant role in her ‘ethic of the erotic’; an alternative to our traditional conceptions of romantic love.

Beauvoir sees romantic love as a process that devalues women's subjectivity into abject servility that is antithetical to any form of self-respect. And yet, while it is the case that she chides women for not assuming greater responsibility for the task of carving out a subjective self-identity for themselves – or as she says, why women “don't make themselves anything” (SS, 258-9) – it is her derision towards romantic love that yields some insightful clues as to how the mechanisms of a patriarchal culture function to persuade women not to value their own subjectivity. In what follows I shall elucidate further Beauvoir's explanation of how patriarchal forms of justification are used to discourage women away from generating and owning their subjectivity.

Unlike the male existential subject who is encouraged to take the most arduous roads and to give his situation and world meaning through his autonomous action and self-created subjectivity, Beauvoir observes that females are neither encouraged to transcend the limitations of their situation, nor to seek to engage themselves in their own subjectivity. She argues that the reason for this failure of women to escape the *en-soi* is three-fold. First, women fail to escape the plane of immanence because women are ensnared in what Beauvoir calls the *Myth of the Eternal Feminine* (herein referred to as MEF). She charges that this patriarchal mechanism deliberately mystifies women so as to validate and endorse particular myths of engaging in the world that are fundamentally alienating to women. As a mythical system that works on both individual and political levels, Beauvoir convincingly asserts that the myths that patriarchy contrives are *anti-human*, meaning here that these myths suggest a meaning of human existence that is

abstract, imaginary, a-historical, and that also ignore Husserl's intentionality and Hegel's historicity (Bergoffen, 1997: 143). The functions of these myths, as Beauvoir assures, are just as conspiratorial as one might assume:

[T]he paternalism that claims woman for hearth and home defines her as sentiment, inwardness, immanence. In fact every existent is at once immanence and transcendence; when one offers the existent no aim, or prevents him from attaining any, or robs him of his victory, then his transcendence falls vainly into the past – that is to say, falls back into immanence. This is the lot assigned to woman in the patriarchy; but it is in no way a vocation, any more than slavery is the vocation of the slave ... To identify Woman with Altruism is to guarantee to man absolute rights in her devotion, it is to impose on women a categorical imperative (SS, 255).

She points out here that although all individuals are ensnared in myths and customs that guide their social conduct at an individual level, individual mythical thinking is also called into play and sustained by political institutions and social structures. Laws, customs, social organization, economic viability, and even a culture's conceptual and cosmological beliefs all come to bear down upon individual subjectivity living within its worldviews. Through her analysis of these mythical forces that shape and mould the individual, Beauvoir discovers that there is only one myth that shapes women – the MEF. The defining features of MEF she describes imagines woman as 'the sex' wrapped in a mysterious body and governed by mysterious forces, and serves to bar women from the domain of the subject. She summarizes the *Myth* in this way:

[W]e have seen woman as *flesh*; the flesh of the male is produced in the mother's body and re-created in the embraces of the women in love. Thus woman is related to *nature*, she incarnates it: vale of blood, open rose, siren, the curve of a hill, she represents to man the fertile soil, the sap, the material beauty and the soul of the world. She can hold the keys to *poetry*; she can be the *mediatrix* between this world and the beyond: grace or oracle, star or sorceress, she opens the door to the supernatural, the surreal. She is doomed to *immanence*; and through her passivity

she bestows peace and harmony – but if she declines this role, she is seen forthwith as a praying mantis, an ogress. In any case she appears as the *privileged Other*, through whom the subject fulfils himself; one of the measures of man, his counterbalance, his salvation, his adventure, his happiness (SS, 248).⁴

Beauvoir here holds that the myths and images that situate and prepare each individual for subjectivity – characteristics such as imposing, willing, creating, and challenging – are myths made for and by men and do not make any inclusion of feminine qualities such as generosity, nurturing, and sacrifice. The MEF is, as she charges, both an affirmation and betrayal of women’s subjectivity. Furthermore, she calls this an immoral betrayal because there is collusion between the promise of becoming a subject (she also calls this the “promise of adolescence” in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*)⁵ and the myth of the eternal feminine that bars women from their knowing themselves as subjects. In accordance with the MEF, the position of ‘existential subject’ belongs to man since the characteristics of subjectivity are clearly masculine, and it is this which leads many to believe that woman must give up her feminine identity in order to fully assert her identity as a subject.

A second mechanism Beauvoir observes in accounting for why many women fail to develop subjecthood is that some women *simply do not want to have to take responsibility for procuring their own liberty*, in addition to renouncing all the

⁴ All italics are from this passage are from the original H.M. Parshley translation of *The Second Sex*; Vintage Books, 1952.

⁵ Beauvoir holds that adolescence represents a significant period in an individual’s personal development since adolescence marks the on-set of the “moment of moral choice” (EA, 40).

advantages conferred upon them by their alliance with the patriarchal system (SS, xxvii).

She contends:

Indeed, along with the ethical urge of each individual to affirm his subjective existence, there is also the temptation to forgo liberty and become a thing. This is an inauspicious road, for he who takes it – passive, lost, ruined – becomes henceforth the creature of another’s will, frustrated in his transcendence and deprived of every value. But it is an easy road; on it one avoids the strain involved in undertaking an authentic existence. When man makes of woman the Other, he may, then, expect her to manifest deep-seated tendencies toward complicity. Thus, woman may fail to lay claim to the status of subject because she lacks definite resources, because she feels the necessary bond that ties her to man regardless of reciprocity, and because she is often very well pleased with her role as the Other. (SS, xxvii).

Beauvoir also reiterates this point in her section titled “Women’s Situation and Character” where she portrays the broad paradox of women’s ‘situation’ as one where they belong simultaneously to the male world where they exist for male ends, and shut up in their own world (SS, 597). The result of this paradox is “a creature whose distinguishing trait is resignation” (SS, 601). She suggests that this sense of resignation stems largely from the fact that woman’s horizon is closed since she is already deprived of all possibility of concrete communication with others by virtue of her situation as the ‘hearth of the home’ (SS, 5). Beauvoir frequently uses the phrase *ferme la dedans* – to be “shut up in” - to describe the situation of women who devote their entire existence to producing or caring for things that are never more than a mere means of biologic existence. What is more, the woman who is “shut up in” immanence, argues Beauvoir, will not experience the appeal or benefits of solidarity since she has been consecrated entirely to her own family in isolation and will “stay obstinately within the one realm that is familiar to her, where she can control things in the midst of which she enjoys a

precarious sovereignty” (SS, 605). It can be said too that women who fail to take responsibility for the development and creation of their subjectivity are, once again, largely blocked from doing so on account of a lack of social and economic stability deliberately upheld by a patriarchy.

Finally, using the notion of *embodiment*, Beauvoir points to a third social mechanism that discourages women away from discovering and creating their subjectivity for themselves. She argues here that both the affirmation of one’s transcendence and the struggle against immanence necessarily engage the body since it is the site of the subject’s possibilities of transcendence, and the place where the subject can be reduced to immanence. Beauvoir sticks close to Sartre’s conception of ‘*the look*’ – his primary description of *being-for-others* - wherein the body is the primary material thing that falls under the gaze of the other. The body of the other, according to Sartre, engages in *being seen* - that is, one’s body exists in relation to other bodies. Through engagement with others, each subject plays their part in a situation that reflects at once both the subject’s facticity and their freedom. What is more, *the look* from the other is the very thing that defines our subjectivity and which simultaneously renders one an object (Sartre, 1956: 348). Beauvoir too believes that the body is the instrument of one’s grasp on the world; the body is the way the subject enacts itself as a constituting activity (Bergoffen, 1997: 146). Yet, unlike Sartre, Beauvoir argues that the body is not the alienating other of the subject, but rather, needs to be understood as the ambiguity of

subjectivity⁶. Stated more clearly: it is the fundamental ambiguity of the body that through me, my body is made mine, yet it exists for others and can be rendered a subject-made-object which serves to alienate me from myself (Bergoffen, 1997: 147).

Throughout *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir describes the processes in which the female body has been reduced to an alienating immanence and depicts the means by which the male body has come to signify transcendence. Resting primarily upon the MEF, Beauvoir describes the process of alienating women from their bodies as one that relies on focusing attention on mystifying women's bodies by maintaining both erroneous and ignorant assumptions about its biological functions. The result, she argues, is that women feel resigned to life's secret laws because they are not encouraged to see the world as "an assemblage of instruments" intermediate between her will and her goals as Heidegger defines it; it is rather the view that the "world is something obstinately resistant, unconquerable, dominated by fatality and shot through with mysterious caprices" (SS, 598). Beauvoir puts it in this way:

This mystery of a bloody strawberry that inside the mother is transformed into a human being is one no mathematics can express in an equation, no machine can hasten or delay; she feels the strength of a continuity that the most ingenious

⁶ Beauvoir also challenges Sartre's political implications of 'the look' and its relationship to the formation of subjectivity. Sartre holds that both material and political inequalities between a dominant and a submissive are irrelevant to their relations as two absolute freedoms (*Being and Nothingness*, 673). Beauvoir however is in fundamental disagreement here with Sartre's assumption regarding the relation of otherness as merely conflictual relations between two *equal* freedoms. She reasons that freedom cannot be thought of as indestructible upsurge of a *being-for-itself* if freedoms are understood as separate from one's situation. In other words, she disagrees with his ontological supposition that all human beings are absolutely free. Rather, she holds that the situation of inequality shall always be a black mark against individual freedom; most particularly if you are slave, woman, or other.

instruments are unable to divide or to multiply; she feels it in her body, swayed by the lunar rhythm and first ripened, then corrupted by the years (SS, 598).

The result of such mystification permits the justification of making activities such as sport or labour available to and demanded of men, yet rendered inappropriate for women. Moreover, what Beauvoir ultimately argues in *The Second Sex* is that while both economic independence and the myths of patriarchy establish male bodies as privileged and valuable, these myths also degrade women and their experiences with their bodies so as to keep women at the whim of bodily processes that are both mysterious and alienating.

In light of Beauvoir's thorough explication of the existential complications that lead many women down the path of love only to find personal disenfranchisement, alienation, and a sense of inessentialness, it is easy to see now why she calls romantic love the "dream of annihilation". For her, romantic love exists in a complex conceptual, social, historical, and phenomenological matrix that, as we have just seen, conspires to keep women both alienated from their own subjectivity as well as socially and politically isolated. To wit, it is an entire system, from its very lofty philosophical sentiments of transcendence and immanence to the most mundane aspects of daily life that block most avenues towards self-creation and subjectivity for women. This is, of course, not a naïve position that takes all women as equally subject to the MEF and to the forces of male supremacy in the same way. However, as Beauvoir rightly points out: "[i]f the definition provided for this concept is contradicted by the behaviour of flesh-and-blood women, it is

the latter who are wrong: we are told not that Femininity is a false identity, but that the women concerned are not feminine” (SS, 253). What is perhaps the most unfortunate part of the “dream of annihilation”, and the part which obviously perturbs Beauvoir greatly, is that it is women themselves who seek out and desire this form of romantic affiliation. With this in mind, then, a question that can be posed for contemporary independent women now becomes an empirical one, and one that is of central interest to my thesis here. The question that will shape the next section of this chapter asks: is Beauvoir’s “dream of annihilation” still relevant to the concerns of the contemporary independent woman? In order to entertain an answer to this question, however, I would first do well to note why my inquiry takes us slightly away from our focus on the philosophical conceptualizations of romantic love and instead into the realm of contemporary self-help discourse. As we saw in chapter one of my thesis, the problem with the traditional philosophical conceptions of romantic love is that they broadly ignore and devalue the needs, wants, and desires of women. Under the *Platonic*, *Christian*, and the *Bio-Teleological* conceptions, women as a class of human beings were treated as both imagined and imaginary, meaning that they were largely treated as inessential and secondary players within the drama of romantic affiliation. It was not until a few but strong female voices like Beauvoir’s and the later American feminists that called out this conceptual asymmetry between the lofty philosophical sentiments of romantic love that edifies woman upon poetic and ornate pedestals, and the social and political realities that had been left unarticulated and taken as inevitable under a patriarchy. What an analysis of contemporary women’s self help literature helps me to do is to locate and identify the

“dream of annihilation” within the personal and psychological dynamics that underlie women’s subjective decision-making processes in contemporary interpersonal romantic relationships, rather than rely on a top-down and asymmetrical philosophical conception. The answer to the question of whether Beauvoir’s “dream of annihilation” is relevant to the lives of contemporary independent women is, as I will argue, a “yes”, although greater numbers of women are breaking with the tradition by choosing to remain single and by electing to be become single mothers. But before I discuss how her criticism of romantic love connects us to contemporary women’s self-help literature, I would like to make a few brief introductory remarks about the genre of self-help in general, and submit a particular study of women’s reading behaviour so as to ground my philosophical analysis in some recent empirical research on the matter.

*Desperately Seeking “The Dream” : Contemporary Women’s Self-Help
Discourse and the Existential Subject*

The genre of self-help books, manuals, and pamphlets is distinctively an American phenomenon that grew out of seventeenth-century Puritan notions of self-improvement, Christian goodness, and the rewards gained in the afterlife through a hard-working Calvinist ethic (Simonds; 1992, 4).⁷ In his 1848 treatise on American morality, Alexis de

⁷ See Wendy Simonds, *Women and Self-Help Culture: Reading Between the Lines*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992.

Tocqueville outlines the personal qualities of Americans that lead to the formation of the democratic spirit of self-improvement:

The inhabitant of the United States experiences all the wants and all the desires to which a high civilization can give rise, but ... he does not find himself part of a society expertly organized to satisfy them; consequently he often has to provide for himself the various things that education and habit have made necessary for him ... In his mind the idea of newness is closely linked with that of improvement. Nowhere does he see any limit placed by nature to human endeavor (Tocqueville; 1848, 403-4).⁸

It is in this spirit of self-improvement, self-involvement, and self-creation that a long history of publications were designed to fuel this distinctive acquisitiveness and self-reliance of the American subject, as well as to stimulate consumer sales under a capitalist regime.

However, it wasn't until the twentieth century that a rejuvenation of the Horatio Alger type 'rags-to-riches' self-improvement discourse met the more psychologically therapeutic styles that synthesized the cause-effect relationship between the personal exertion of one's energy with the more relationship-oriented advice manuals that are so popular today. Extending the readership to include both women and men, the synthesis of these two sets of discourse is what sociologist Wendy Simonds coins as the "quest for individualism" – that is, the therapeutically inspired pursuit of selfhood. This "quest for selfhood" involves "more than selfhood for women because selfhood itself, for women, remains bound up with others (and perhaps ought not be reduced to the word

⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*. Trans. By George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Meyer. Garden City: Doubleday Books, 1848 (rpt. 1969).

“selfhood”)” (Simonds; 1992, 5). Self-involvement is, after all, not the same activity for men as it is for women. Certainly the historical situation of males and females and their involvement in their respective public and private spheres marks this difference in conceptualizing the notion of ‘selfhood’. As a result of this difference in situation, women are caught up in a curious double-binding ideology where the strategies concerning the procurement of selfhood are used against them. As Simonds notes: “we [women] are labelled narcissistic for employing strategies (such as lavishing attention upon physical appearance) we have learned can lead to success in a society that prescribes specific versions of heterosexuality and femininity – a system in which women lack power to begin with” (Simonds; 1992, 6). In a tacit recognition of Beauvoir’s *myth of the eternal feminine*, Simonds too acknowledges that women are taught to nurture and to connect emotionally with others, as well as to help carry the emotional baggage of men and to not expect reciprocity for these efforts.

Reading the Particular: Women’s Responses to Self-Help Literature

The majority of the readership of contemporary self-help books and manuals are, according to Simonds’s 1992 study titled *Women and Self-Help Culture: Reading Between the Lines*, white middle class, middle-income women who hail from a predominantly Judeo-Christian background (Simonds; 1992, 15-16). These women tend to be highly educated, work outside the home, and most are or had been married. Simonds reports that women who read self-help books regularly tend to be between the

ages of 23- 59 with a mean age of 37 and a median age of 36 (Simonds; 1992, 15). She notes that it is social class and not age that is a better indicator of reading behaviour since, as sociologist Pierre Bourdieu points out, tastes are formulated and specific to class identity.⁹ To this end, the Gallop poll Simonds cites in her study shows some interesting differences in reading behaviour depending on the five most reported sub-topic areas within the self-help genre (that is, not counting the category of “other”). People between the ages of 18-34 were more likely to read books on relationships than those 35 and over. Also, people with incomes under \$30,000 were more likely than those with higher incomes to read books on motivation. Women who worked outside of the home (“employed”) were more likely than those who were not (“not employed”) to read books about “self-improvement”, “motivation”, and “love and relationships” – whereas women who were not working outside the home were more likely to read books on “weight loss” (Wood; 1988, 33).¹⁰

Of the primary participants of her interview-based studies (of which there were thirty), Simonds reports that women read self-help books with the intention of seeking validation, inspiration, comfort, and explanations to situations not understood (Simonds; 1992, 7). Although the Gallop poll statistics report only a six percent difference in male

⁹ See Pierre Bourdieu’s *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Trans. R. Nice. Cambridge Mass.; Harvard University Press, 1984.

¹⁰ See Leonard Wood’s “The Gallop Survey: Self-Help Buying Trends” in *Publishers Weekly*, 234 (October 14) 1988 in Simonds’s *Women and Self-Help Culture: Reading Between the Lines*. New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992, p. 24.

and female readership of self-help material, most of Simonds's participants recognize the genre as existing specifically for women, even with books that are not overtly marketed towards a female audience. She observes that her participants perceive women either as uniquely equipped with positive abilities that enable them to use such books, or as particularly disadvantaged or incompetent in a society that discriminates against women (Simonds; 1992, 34). Most participants in Simonds's study describe certain concrete problems, or areas in which they sought information for personal reasons. Their generalized explanations also point to particular social conditions and relationships that are viewed as problematic. Some participants described their reading as primarily focused on themselves such as certain characteristics that they believed needing amending such as becoming more organized and more assertive. Others reported reading self-help materials in order to attain self-understanding and to validate information on psychological matters in general. Invariably, this self-work was connected to problems with other people in which self-assertion becomes a key theme of a psychological disability to be overcome.

Of Simonds's interview-based participants, she reports that most women read self-help books concerning relationships with men because they were dissatisfied with the ones they had; because they wanted to understand a particular problem in their specific relationship; or because the relationship they were in had just ended and they didn't understand why. These women said that it was their feelings of depression and dissatisfaction, as well as feelings of introspective examination that compelled them to employ the advice of self-help books. One participant under the pseudonym Evelyn said

that she read relationship-based self-help literature to soothe herself and contemplate why she felt she had some unhealthy relationship patterns:

If I understand things, I feel a little bit better about them; I don't feel so overwhelmed and so helpless. Because I've been very, very hurt, and very confused and very despairing in my relationships with women, and with others – meaning [my] children – too, you know, but nothing like – it's not the same. It's the depth, intensity, the confusion, the craziness. I could always kind of figure out what's happening with myself and women friends, children – but not with men. I've always felt victimized ... and this has been helpful, so that maybe I could explain it to myself a little bit (Simonds; 1992, 36).

Evelyn reports that while the reading and advice were unsatisfactory for her needs, she did feel less isolated in her depression and took comfort knowing that other women were experiencing similar scenarios.

Other women in the group felt self-help books gave them encouragement and strategies to defend the integrity of one's views by aligning them with one's actions.

Sandy holds that self-help books helped her become more tolerant of the differences between her husband and herself and, in turn, has encouraged her willingness to compromise with him. She states:

In my marriage, we come from two different ideologies, I think, and you have to find a middle ground ... He's very willing to compromise, to see things other people see ... he's come a long way ... from doing all the bills, and doing everything for me, to being more of a partner. And I think its learned behaviour for a lot of men – it was learned behaviour for him ... I'm not sure what the different effect would be, but reading someone who says – like [Leo] Buscaglia says – “You have to be very accepting of another person but not let that modify your behaviour”, I guess, [helped me] just be more accepting of the way [my husband] is. Because I am very judgemental of what he does ... [Reading has made me more] accepting that *he* has a choice to make. It's not *my* choice to make (Simonds; 1992, 37).

A number of the women in Simonds's study report that they started reading self-help literature after their own divorce in an effort to examine not only what events and behaviours led to the separation, but also to feel better about personal subjective issues such as self-confidence, self-image, and positive attitude. In fact, regardless of marital status, all the women in the study describe their reading of self-help materials as greatly encouraging them to strengthen, grow, and to develop a better understanding of their own emotional and intuitive subjectivity in relation to men's perceived lack of emotionality. But while all these participants agreed that women both currently and historically tended to have more experience with the emotional aspects of personal and social relationships, some participants felt that self-help books were evidence of women's emotional deficiencies as compared with men. Participants Sarah and Mona explain why they think women have a predilection to read self-help books:

SARAH: [Reading self-help books] is a passive kind of thing; it's not an active kind of thing. You just kind of sit back and the books tells you what to do ... I think men would tend more to, like, go out and do something and not tend to just sit and be passive and have somebody feeding them stuff (Simonds; 1992, 41).

MONA: Some women feel they have more to deal with than men, more emotional problems to deal with than men, because what you would take seriously, most men might just, oh, they brush it off and say "that's not important." ... Like some women feel they're stuck in a rut. They're not working. They're housewives ... they just do the same thing over and over and they get so tired of themselves. They're looking for an escape, something else to do. So they figure, "Where an I going from here? What can I do to heal myself?" In that way, they may just look for a self-help book or something like that (Simonds; 1992, 41).

Other participants in the study attributed women's more frequent use of self-help materials to more specific factors that isolate women and create a need for comfort.

Sandy, a twenty-six year old self-described feminist says:

I think it's harder to be a woman ... I think our roles right now are very complex ... It's kind of embarrassing almost, to talk about it. Especially, I have a hard time because all of the women I work with are much older than I am, and their experiences are different. I mean, they even have had a harder time being women. And yet, they had an easier time, because the women that are older than thirty-five, they came at the height of the women's movement, where it was good to be a feminist, and we're kind of at the tail end ... where it's "what are you bellyaching about? Everything's wonderful now." ... I just think that there's no place to go for advice. You certainly don't go to your clergy, because they'll yell at you ... The impression I get is that there aren't as many women's groups as there used to be ... My impression of the sixties and early seventies is that it was much easier to network. And now, because we're supposed to be assimilated already, I think it's much harder (Simonds; 1992, 42).

Sandy views self-help reading as providing women with outlets for their discouragement that were once satisfied by organized religion or by engagement with feminist networks.

Simonds hypothesizes that since the close class and race-based friendships between women of the past has undergone diminishment now women have entered the paid labour force in greater numbers, these trends may have helped professionalize advice-giving for upper and middle-class women. Conversely, this professionalization of advice-giving may also have been made obsolete certain therapeutic exchanges that formerly characterized women's friendship. What is clear to Simonds is that women's reliance on distanced professional authors can be seen as an example of the increasing "institutionalization and packaging of areas of women's experience – once considered to be simply a part of everyday life – into services that can be mass-produced for purchase" (Simonds; 1992, 43).

While my treatment of Simonds's study on female readership and self-help literature here is only a brief and discrete glimpse into the complex personal and social issues that shape women's experiences, relationships, and subjectivity, I do think we can sufficiently detect two of the forces comprising Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation". For one, it is clear that the life situations of women and men – specifically the social and economic disenfranchisement of women – still presents a problematic obstacle for women wanting to develop and maintain their subjectivity and independence all while taking part in both personal and public relationships. While it is the case that many of the women who turn to self-help are highly educated, accomplished, and gainfully employed, the Gallop poll cited in Simonds's study indicates that it was these women who actually read the most quantitatively on topics pertaining to "motivation", "self-improvement", and "love and relationships" (Wood; 1988, 33). One theory I have as to why these women in particular are reading the most self-help books as a demographic is simply that they are dissatisfied with certain concrete issues arising in their lives and turn to self-help as a way to comfort, defend, and develop strategies for dealing with those pressures. As the participants in Simonds's study indicated, most women turn to self-help in order to find support and general answers to specific personal inter-relational issues, predominantly focused on men in romantic affiliation. The specific life situations of women, then, gives us cause to think that the pressures of living and working in the public sphere may be conflicting with certain responsibilities, expectations, and activities in women's private spheres. What is more, the key themes of isolation, depression, and

dissatisfaction that Beauvoir describes as primary characteristics of women's life situations as inessential 'Others' are, as we have seen, also prevalent in the accounts given by Simonds's interview participants. Thus, I think we may safely assert here that, although contemporary women have much more options and freedom to become independent subjects, remnants of patriarchal institutionalized beliefs contribute greatly to the distinctive isolated experience of women's situation.

Perhaps the most striking element of Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation" is that it is still seen in contemporary women's readership of self-help materials and represent the stubborn effects of *the Myth of the Eternal Feminine*. As we saw from the accounts of the interview participants in Simonds's study, the repeated theme of women's greater emotionality presented itself as being of definite concern to the women taking part in the study. While some of the participants believed that women's greater emotionality was a hindrance and others a certain advantage, the fact that it was so broadly and frequently discussed indicates, in my view, the relevance of this female characteristic to notions of personal subjectivity. Recall that under the MEF, Beauvoir describes women's primary phenomenological experience as ambiguous, alienating, and isolating on account of the particular customs and codes of behaviour expected to be performed by women. Women under the MEF are to be nurturing, loving, emotional, other-regarding, and altruistic in order to be considered truly feminine. Here too in Simonds's study we see contemporary women struggling with this characterization of being perceived as overly invested in the

emotions as a way to confirm one's 'womanliness'. Nancy, one of the participants in Simonds's study expresses this tension of emotionality as adversarial and historical:

They say it's a man's world out there, right? And women let themselves be manipulated all the time – and I'm not saying *all* women, but a certain type – I don't know. It just comes I guess from centuries, you know, where women always ... were manipulated by them. And some men feel so superior. Women have a tendency to love too much, and they go by their emotions, and they let everything get carried away (Simonds; 1992, 41).

Val, however, takes an opposite view and holds that women's greater emotionality is a desirable skill needed to deal effectively with others in daily life:

I think we're emotionally more secure than a man could even begin to want, need, or desire [to be] ... Emotionally we're able to deal with every situation, whereas men have trouble just emotionally, with a lot of things that come across. That's what I think. And I don't think any self-help book is going to change that for a man. You know, they just don't have the same makeup women do. Emotionally, we're just totally opposite (Simonds; 1992, 38-9).

While there are competing views as to the perceived advantages or disadvantages to women's greater emotionality, what remains clear is that the performative function of emotion remains relegated to the domain of the feminine and not of particular concern to the masculine.

Reading the Genre: Pink Think, Self-Help, and Existential Subjectivity

In order to gain a more comprehensive view of the relevance and persistence of Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation" in contemporary popular discourses on romantic love, I think it is best to broaden our focus from the particular responses of women in

Simonds's study to a wider survey of the genre of women's self-help as a movement located in popular culture. There is, however, a cautionary note that we must consider before proceeding to my survey, and that is to recognize that self-help and other popular advice both mirrors cultural values as well as participating in the creation of such values. Indeed, the relationship between self-help texts and the concrete changes in women's situation can be said to have no clear relation of cause and effect. The feminist movement, the "sexual revolution", and the changing structure of the family unit created an atmosphere ripe for women's concerns of self-improvement, self-involvement, and for subjecthood. Conversely, one can also argue that the proliferation of self-help materials largely enabled these developments to flourish by mobilizing and disseminating information to a public hungry for social change. While it is beyond the scope of my thesis to theorize what exactly the causal relationship is between the popularity of women's self-help readership and changes in women's situation, I do think it an important point to keep in mind in my examination of how women's engagement with self-help materials affects the quality and the access to notions of independent subjecthood for women in particular. While contemporary women's self-help literature can be used to fuel the desires of women who wish to better know and inspire themselves, it may also be the case that this same literature can be taken to reflect the psychologically dynamic desires of women who struggle in knowing their own subjective natures.

The genre of women's popular self-help literature is, according to many feminist archivists, divided into two general phases: the pre and post-Friedanian contexts. In the period before Betty Friedan's controversial best-seller *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), and coincidentally while Beauvoir was penning her feminist classic *The Second Sex* in 1949, women's self-help books, manuals, articles, and pamphlets broadly encouraged women to "think pink" which meant conforming to a standard of femininity that demanded woman's complete abdication of her own interests and subjectivity in exchange for the security of romantic affiliation with a male mate. To wit, according to the many self-proclaimed "experts" whose books and magazine articles promised to give readers the tools and strategies for true feminine success, the primary goal of heterosexual social interaction was indeed the procurement of a foothold into marriage. As one article titled "The Secret of Being Feminine" touts: "you can and should pursue your own interests and always do your best, but not to the disadvantage of that boy in your life, whether he be your date, your steady, or someday ... your husband" (*For Teens Only*, February 1963)¹¹. What is more, it is in this pre-Friedanian context where we find Beauvoir's "dream of annihilation" most strongly articulated, since it was the exact cultural milieu which she was so radically challenging. The feminine ideal being popularly marketed to women from 1940 to 1970 was one tied up so completely in romantic love, that it left little time for woman to accomplish anything else.¹² Popular

¹¹ See Lynn Peril's *Pink Think: Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons*. N.Y.: W.W. Norton & Co.; 2002.

¹² Indeed, chapter ten of Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* is titled "Housewifery Expands to Fill the Time Available".

self-help advice of this period routinely prescribed that the truly feminine woman should be primarily concerned with fulfilling her role as wife and mother. Experts told women how to catch a man and keep him, how to breastfeed children and to handle their toilet training, how to cope with adolescent rebellion; how to buy a dishwasher, car, or dryer, how to bake bread, how to cook gourmet meals with nothing but beef-a-roni and spinach; how to dress, look, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting; how to keep their husbands from dying young and their sons from growing into juvenile delinquents. They were taught to pity the neurotic, unhappy, and unfeminine women who wanted to transcend beyond the feminine realm to be poets, physicists, or astronauts. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, or even political rights. A thousand expert voices applauded their femininity and adjustment to the female roles of wives and mothers. All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing his children.¹³

With the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (FM) that sought to give nomenclature to the unspoken "problem with no name", women's self-help materials were torn between advising women to graciously accept their roles as wives and mothers and articulating the wide spread dissatisfaction with these same roles that contributed to "the problem". If a woman felt displeasure in her role as wife and mother in the 1950's and 1960's, she knew that something must be wrong with her marriage, or with herself. As Friedan reports, many women "were so ashamed to admit their

¹³ See Linda K. Kerber and Jane Sherron De Hart's *Women's America. 4th ed.* New York: Oxford; 1995, pp.512-516.

dissatisfaction that she never knew how many other women shared it” (FM, 14). If a woman tried to tell her husband of her innermost feelings regarding this problem, he didn't understand what she was talking about, and moreover, she did not really understand it herself. This “problem”, symptomatically described in words and phrases uttered by masses of housewives such as loneliness, emptiness, dissatisfaction, shame, desperation, frustration, anxiety, and yearning were perceived by medical professionals, psychiatrists, and husbands as merely psychological blocks to a healthy adjustment to the feminine roles as wife and mother (FM, 16). The standard medical response to this problem of the disaffection of American housewives was to offer them a buffet of pharmaceuticals including tranquilizers and anti-psychotics, and to dispense education and advice from armies of marriage and child-guidance counsellors, psychoanalysts, and armchair psychologists (FM, 21). The socio-political response, culled from newspaper, magazine, and later televised sources brought no relief to “the problem” either. As Friedan reports:

In the television commercials the pretty housewives still beamed over their foaming dishpans and *Time's* cover story on “The Suburban Housewife, An American Phenomenon” protested: “Having too good a time ... to believe that they should be unhappy.” (FM, 17).

Other media responses to ‘the problem with no name’ were sympathetic to the plight of the desperate housewife (particularly the educated ones), and yet still found ways to superficially dismiss its gravity. Attributed to incompetent appliance repairmen (*New York Times*), or to the distance that children must be shuttled around in the suburbs to get to school and to other activities (*Time*), or too much PTA (*Redbook*), many young and

educated housewives simply felt stifled in their homes and in their roles as wives and mothers (FM, 18).

Friedan's advice to America's desperate housewives was to get top-notch educations, to seek rewarding and remunerative careers, and to spend less time at home serving their husbands and children in their "comfortable concentration camps" (FM, 271). In other words, Friedan, like Beauvoir before her, urges women to emulate upwardly mobile men as a means of transcending the boredom, ennui, and dissatisfaction of a life lived in immanence and oriented toward life-giving. And again, like Beauvoir who also recognizes that patriarchy as an over-arching and omni-present system that holds women's social and political success back, Friedan too assured her readers that men would really prefer that women liberate themselves and become more like men. Women, in both Beauvoir's and Friedan's views, would be more intellectually stimulating companions for their men, and in doing so, would transcend beyond the realm of the drab housewife who is overly-involved with her family and uninvolved in the world. The result of such advice to women resulted in a storm of affirmative publications, advice, consciousness-raising groups, and feminist "grass-roots" activism that sought to raise educated women above the occupation of "housewife".

The next craze in women's self-help and advice publications began with Robin Norwood's *Women Who Love Too Much* (1985). In *Women Who Love Too Much* (WWL2M), she advises that women are "man-addicted" and hence are dissatisfied and

unhappy because of their reliance on men (primarily the wrong ones) as a means to procure personal fulfilment. As she puts it:

Loving too much doesn't mean loving too many men, or falling in love too often, or having too great of depth of genuine love for another. It means, in truth, obsessing about a man and calling that obsession love, allowing it to control your emotions and much of your behaviour, realizing that it negatively influences your health and well-being, and yet finding yourself unable to let go. It means measuring the degree of your love by the depth of your torment (WWL2M, 5).

The strong resemblance between the symptoms of Friedan's "problem with no name" and Norwood's "man-addiction" certainly indicates that women's dependence on males as the locus of their values and identity was still a considerable concern for the many middle-class Friedanian daughters who worked towards creating and managing their subjecthood to include other social roles than wives and mothers. Norwood urges women to treat their disappointment in these heterosexual relationship issues as they would an illness: seek out therapy in groups of women with similar issues, to place faith in a higher power, and to evaluate and perhaps end relationships with the man with whom they are involved. Indeed, that Norwood's experience as a family and child therapist focused on issues of co-dependency is clear in WWL2M as she presents a sympathetic and comprehensive 10-step recovery plan for women who are addicted to the wrong men for the wrong reasons. Among the vital lessons readers of WWL2M receive are: How the search for the love you never got from your parents can become a crushing obsession in adulthood; how to change from loving someone so much it hurts, to loving yourself

enough to stop the pain; as well as how to free yourself from destructive loving patterns and build a healthy, meaningful relationship.¹⁴

Many of the men described by Norwood in WWL2M are, baldly put, brutish jerks. She describes scenarios from her practice that dramatize a wide range of spectacularly poor male behaviour from the merely insensitive to the outright physically abusive, and largely characterizes men as both sexually aggressive and emotionally repressed. Yet, like Friedan and Beauvoir before her, she too implicates women as passive corroborators in maintaining men's psychological and emotional inadequacies.

With over three million copies in print as well as two other books published as follow-up¹⁵, WWL2M sparked a flurry of publications seeking to advise and comfort women who were dissatisfied in their relationships with men. With best-selling titles such as *Smart Women, Foolish Choices: Finding the Right Men and Avoiding the Wrong Ones* (1986) by Conell Cowen; *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself* (1986) by Melody Beattie; *When Am I Going to Be Happy?: How to Break the Emotional Bad Habits That Make You Miserable* (1997) by Penelope Russianoff; and the most recent title in this sub-topic *How to Break Your Addiction to a*

¹⁴ This is the book description on an out of print edition of *Women Who Love Too Much*. See <http://www.amazon.com/Women-Who-Love-Too-Much/dp/0671733419> for more publication details.

¹⁵ There's *Letters from Women Who Love Too Much* (1988) and *Daily Meditations for Women Who Love Too Much* (1997).

Person (2003) by Howard Halpern, we may have cause to think here that either these self-help texts are being written because there is a demand made by women for such literature, or as a means of patriarchal culture in conjunction with the MEF to continue to persuade women that managing relationships is primarily a ‘feminine’ and emotional issue that is theirs to struggle with. A satisfactory answer to this puzzle, I think, can be seen in a further survey of contemporary self-help titles in light of my inquiry of the development of female subjectivity.

Yet, in spite of the many therapeutic self-help texts cautioning women to not love too much, there exists a wide range of contemporary titles that promise to help and heal women’s singleness. Titles such as *Why You Are Still Single: Things Your Friends Would Tell You if You Promised Not to Get Mad* by Evan Marc Katz and Linda Holmes (2006); *Man Catching Made Easy: Finding Mr. Right Right Now!* By E. Jean Carroll (2004); *If I’m So Wonderful, Why Am I Still Single?: Ten Strategies That Will Change Your Love Life Forever* by Susan Page (2002) and my personal favourite by Harvard business school graduate Rachel Greenwald titled *Find a Husband After 35: (Using What I Learned at Harvard Business School)* (2003). Greenwald’s aggressive and obviously neurotic fear of spinsterdom seeks to give women the competitive edge on selling themselves to the prospects of wealthy bachelors as if they were shiny products and tired of waiting for their big break. To see why I am taking a rather facetious tone in my description of Greenwald’s book, let’s take a look at her table of contents:

- Step 1: Marketing Focus
- Step 2: Marketing Support

- Step 3: Packaging
- Step 4: Market Expansion
- Step 5: Branding
- Step 6: Advertising
- Step 7: Online Marketing
- Step 8: Guerrilla Marketing
- Step 9: Niche Marketing
- Step 10: Telemarketing
- Step 11: Mass Marketing
- Step 12: Event Marketing
- Step 13: Product Life Cycle
- Step 14: Quality Performance Review
- Step 15: Exit Strategy (Greenwald; 2003)

While her style and organization are as clear as a Harvard textbook, the obvious and unwarranted assumption that Greenwald makes throughout her book is that all smart and successful women really want deep down is to find a man and to be taken care of (in effect giving up on all that one has earned by putting herself through business school!).

While it is the case that there are a number of self-help books seeking to help women avoid the stigma of spinsterhood by making themselves desirable to eligible bachelors in an effort to partake in the romantic fantasy, there are, happily, quantitatively more titles suggesting women take full advantage of the single life as well as the particular joys (and struggles) of single motherhood. Titles such as Jerusha Stewart's *The Single Girl's Manifesta: Living in a Stupendously Superior Single State of Mind* (2005); *Single: The Art of Being Satisfied, Fulfilled and Independent* by Judy Ford (2004); *Revelations of a Single Woman: Loving the Life I Didn't Expect* by Connally Gilliam (2006); *Living Single One Day at a Time: An Honest Look at the Single Woman's Daily Battles* by Jane Wilder (2007); *Even God Is Single, So Stop Giving Me A Hard Time* by

Karen Salmansohn (2000); *QuirkyAlone: A Manifesto for Uncompromising Romantics* by Sasha Cager (2004); *Surviving Single Motherhood: A Story of Hope, Courage, Passion and Dreams* by Nicole Franklin (2006); *With or Without a Man: Single Women Taking Control of Their Lives* by Karen Lewis (2004); *Single Mothers by Choice: A Guidebook for Single Women Who Are Considering or Have Chosen Motherhood* by Jane Mattes (1994); *Single by Chance, Mothers by Choice: How Women are Choosing Parenthood without Marriage and Creating the New American Family* by Rosanna Hertz (2006); and finally *The New Single Woman* by E. Kay Trimberger (2005). This sub-topic is perhaps the most dynamic of the women's self-help genre since some books view singleness as a somewhat undesirable but not insufferable circumstance (and therefore seek comfort by reaching out to readers), while others exalt the liberty and adventure afforded to those who are not tied down in romantic or familial obligations. However, it is E. Kay Trimberger's *The New Single Woman* (2005) that I think most succinctly and intelligently discusses both the pleasures and perils of being a largely invisible minority of women who assume the single life. This 'new single woman' (NSW), argues Trimberger, is one quite distinct from the traditional spinster or the vivacious single girl in her twenties, and is content and happy with the prospect of remaining single. The NSW is also satisfied with her accomplishments, relationships, and most importantly, her identity. Trimberger finds that successful NSW, that is, women who report being greatly satisfied by eschewing traditional romantic forms of relationships, are those who build and maintain their personal identity not as a function of the needs and desire of others, but primarily for themselves. The NSW has a home that nurtures her; has satisfying work that provides

her with economic autonomy and a psychological identity that integrates well into other aspects of her life; is satisfied with her sexuality and doesn't restrict her sex life to a soul mate; enjoys some connection to the next generation, whether her own children, or nieces and nephews, or protégées; and finds intimacy with a network of friends or family who provide companionship and support in times of trouble. Hence, the NSW does not limit herself to only the roles of wife, mother, and employee, but rather opens herself to a large community of friendships networks made in diverse organizational settings such as school, work, college, church, and politics.

Trimberger finds that it is the pervasiveness of the romantic ideal of the soul mate that drives both women and men towards romantic affiliation. The soul mate ideal - that is, someone with whom one can combine love, fidelity, emotional intimacy, and togetherness – is a contemporary reinterpretation of romantic love, and has replaced other reasons for long-term partnerships and marriage (Trimberger; 2005, 1). The problem that this belief in the soul mate incurs for single women, as she sees it, is primarily an ideological one that is a “difficult and contradictory legacy” (Trimberger; 2005, 4). The contemporary reinterpretation of the soul mate ideal grew out from the idealism and egalitarianism of second-wave feminism, however, it reinforces the idea that only through coupled love can one be truly fulfilled. As Trimberger notes, for some women at certain stages in their loves, the search for a soul mate – and not just settling for one – provides rationale for their current singleness. The real problem with the notion of the soul mate is then that such justification does not envision support for long-term single life

(Trimberger; 2005, 4). She urges women to challenge this ideal of the soul mate by recognizing that coupling has “many negative consequences and that romance can be redefined” (Trimberger; 2005, 254).

As we can see here in my analysis of contemporary titles and trends in women’s self-help publications, the romantic fantasy does indeed still pose some significant concerns for women’s personal and existential subjectivity. Key themes such as co-dependency, addiction, emotional mastery, and low self-esteem are, I think, indicative of what Beauvoir takes to be the consequences of a romantic ideology that demands of woman her complete and altruistic unconditional sacrifice to others. We can also see here too that the implicit convictions of women’s inessentialness and incompleteness without a male partner that Beauvoir notes as necessary conditions to the legacy of romantic love are still largely operative. The plethora of self-help materials pertaining to self-esteem and assertiveness can certainly be taken as evidence of these convictions. However, what can be said about contemporary ideologies of romantic love is that they are in transition and opening up to a future where economic independence does, as Beauvoir hoped, liberate women from the sole vocation of *loving*. Of course, rearticulating a fresh ideal of romantic love will not be without significant difficulty, as I show in chapter three of my thesis. Indeed, the struggle that women must now engage themselves shall be to re-envision a feminine ideal of woman who loves in all her strengths, and not in her weakness. This task is however, not an easy one since re-articulation of any ideals

requires both the radical persistence of those who seek political change, and a social environment that adapts to the desired effect. I, like Beauvoir am hopefully optimistic for such changes, but recognize that most of my social institutions, customs, and indeed philosophical conceptions are slow to want to support the struggles of the contemporary independent woman who chooses her self-respect over her complete abdication in love. What is more, because of the lack of a causal association between self-help discourse and concrete changes in women's situations, it is difficult to tell how receptive North American culture really is to a shift in its romantic conceptions and its consequences. Trimberger recounts her experience with one senior editor's assessment and subsequent rejection of her book *The New Single Woman* to this large publisher's catalogue:

... after characterizing my "analysis of the emergence of this new breed of more self-assured, generally satisfied single women" as "both impressive and heartening," rejected my book proposal because it would not reach a large enough market. In her assessment, "the readership for books on relationships for women is powerfully dominated by those promising to help single women – or unhappy married women – find satisfying relationships" ... "The message that they may well not need to do so and will still be able to create happy fulfilling life seems to be one that cuts too deeply against the grain" (Trimberger; 2005, 255-6).

Assuredly, there are some viable alternatives to the stubbornly patriarchal ideologies of romantic love that shall be explored in the next chapter.

Chapter Three

A Way To Love: Beauvoir, an Ethics of Eroticism, and the Political Future of Romantic Love

In my thesis so far I have traced how the historical philosophical conceptions of romantic love have constructed the woman in love as imaginary and inessential, explicated Beauvoir's feminist criticism of the ideology of romantic love, as well as identified her concerns about the "dream of annihilation" within contemporary women's popular self-help discourse. The result of my study have indeed indicated that, although these ideological structures and conceptions are currently in transition with more and more women choosing to be satisfied as single women on their own terms, many women who engage in traditional forms of romantic love still continue to struggle with issues of personal subjectivity in light of their changing social roles as wives, mothers, and lovers. The aim of this final chapter is, then, to address the second central question guiding my thesis: that is, what can be done to attend to this stubborn asymmetry in our philosophical conception of romantic love that demands of woman complete abdication of her dreams and interests as well as her subjectivity? A more succinct question we can ask here is: what is required to have a more beneficial conception of romantic love? Of course, solutions to such theoretical and empirical problems are seldom straightforward, owing in large part to the ambiguity of individual subjectivity and the unpredictability of social dynamics. As I will argue however, to continue to challenge these problematic ideologies of love we must no longer view love as strictly a personal and moral issue, but additionally as a political one fused with an existential concern for personal subjectivity.

In what follows, I first explicate Beauvoir's proposal for a mutually beneficial ideology of romantic love that makes an interesting and crucial distinction between the patriarchal ideology of romantic love and the interpersonal and phenomenological experience of eroticism. For Beauvoir, since the body is the site of one's subjectivity and one's ambiguity, the proper place of resistance to romantic love's ideology is the domain of personal embodiment and subsequent moral action. While her proposal of an 'ethic of the erotic' is certainly a more beneficial way in which women may recast their part in the ideology of romantic love, it is, as I will show, not without significant difficulty for the contemporary independent woman. What I propose in addition to Beauvoir's moral and embodied 'ethic of the erotic' is that women must also seek to treat this asymmetrical romantic ideology politically – that is, continue to promote, agitate, and demand from their political establishments the social and economic support sufficient to allow for legitimating a wider range of possible alternative conceptions to the basic reproductive unit of the romantically involved couple. Indeed, the choice of whom to love, when, and whether to love is, of course, up to the individual subject herself and is at best ambiguous. But by releasing woman from the social and economic pressures of assuming a primarily heterosexual and patriarchal ideology of romantic love that demands she altruistically abdicate and subject herself to the service of others by being classified as a *being-for-others*, women can forge for themselves and on their own terms romantic affiliations that strengthen and uplift who they are as individuals.

Beauvoir on An Ethic of the Erotic: Generosity, Risk, and the Independent Woman

In her philosophical and political writing, Beauvoir provides us with an existential and phenomenological approach that grounds her conception of romantic love in the embodied ambiguity of the individual subject. For her, love represents a uniquely human phenomenon that is both an experience and expression of our transcendence as fleshed and erotic ambiguity. The challenge of a truly humanistic love, she holds, is to save this expression of fleshed love and desire from the totalizing effects of ‘the look’ where one’s subjectivity is subsumed, objectified, and incorporated into the perception of another. She finds that romantic love and marriage has largely betrayed what she takes to be the mutual and generous essence of love, and through the antagonism of ‘the look’ undermines the fleshed transcendent desires of love by rendering the erotic event as justification of a set of obligations and duties. As Beauvoir points out:

These duties placed upon woman by society are regarded as a *service* rendered to her spouse: in return he is supposed to give her presents, or a marriage settlement, and to support her. Through him as intermediary, society discharges its debt to the women it turns over to him. The rights obtained by the wife in fulfilling her duties are represented in obligations that the male must assume. He cannot break the conjugal bond at his pleasure; he can repudiate or divorce his wife only when the public authorities so decide, and even then the husband sometimes owes her compensation in money ... (SS, 427).

This betrayal of women’s subjectivity situates the act of romantic love as a *service* rendered to the man where he is permitted to take his pleasure and in return, owes her some payment. Thus, women’s fleshed transcendence through her body is “something that he buys; to her he represents capital she is authorized to exploit” (SS, 431). Under

traditional conceptions of morality, woman has the right to accept this financial support and is systematically encouraged by this relatively easy way since many occupations open to women are often discordant with her roles as wife and mother, in addition to being poorly paid. What is more, she argues that marriage is seldom founded upon a genuine notion of love, but rather, is a socially legitimated institution that seeks to make the economic and sexual union of man and woman serve the interest of society and not to ensure the personal happiness of either participant. The result of such an institutionalized view of romantic love strips the individual away from their subjectivity that makes love not based on individual feeling, but rather on an abstract universal bound to a categorical imperative. This abstraction of romantic love poses a particular problem for women because it discourages them from establishing individual relations with a chosen mate and forces women to “carry on the feminine functions in their generality; she is to have sex pleasure only in a specified form and not individuated” (SS, 435).

To reconcile marriage with her vision of a fleshed transcendent love, Beauvoir makes an interesting and crucial move to distinguish between romantic love and erotic love. Throughout *The Second Sex*, she details at great length how romantic love and marriage serves the needs of the patriarchy as conception that views women as mere reproductive bodies and as immanent creatures forever bound in a perceived necessary relation with her biological destiny. The romantic fantasies that precariously edify her as a life-giving creature also strengthen the force of the prevailing social myths of femininity that, in Beauvoir’s view, sexuality exploits women. Romantic love and its

entailment of marriage, she says, sets woman up in a doubly-binding and deeply betraying relationship of promise and alienation with one's sexuality. On the one hand, women are encouraged to be 'the sex' and to express their carnal desires through their sexuality, and are promised their sexual awakening through the intimacy and security of a marital relationship. Woman's erotic fate is, however, tied up in a misogynist ideal that also denies her the right to any sexual activity apart from marriage. The result of this denial, Beauvoir argues, is an institutionalization of sexual intercourse where "desire and gratification are subordinated to the interest of society for both sexes" (SS, 435). Thus, the erotic promise of romantic love and marriage prevent women from fully assuming ownership of one's sexuality and most importantly, of one's sexual pleasure. Indeed, under this romantic ideology reproductive function becomes disassociated from erotic pleasure that further alienates woman away from her embodied subjectivity. Patriarchy relies on the myth of the romantic fantasy to cover up their slight of hand by which women's desire for transcendent and independent action is figured into their collapsing of women's subjectivity as a *being-for-others*.

Conversely, Beauvoir believes that erotic love is a far more beneficial conception that combines women's desire for transcendence with moral action. There is, she argues, a particular generosity to the intimate gift of abandoning one's flesh to another's in the erotic, and is a defining moment of being human. For Beauvoir, sexuality is not reduced to animalistic or biological necessity, but rather:

... an intentionality that the body experiences, lives through, an intentionality that exists in relation to other bodies and that conforms to the general rhythm of life. It

takes form in relation to a world which it provides with an erotic dimension (CoA, 472)

It is, then, the event of erotic and carnal love that is the revealing form of the drama of reciprocity and generosity between romantic partners. Erotic love as an intention, she argues, preserves the integrity of the subject by validating the free assumption of their pleasure and desire. What is more, the erotic transforms the world into a world of desire and not of obligation and duty to certain perceived social functions. Such a transformation is tied to a person's integrity and to their subjectivity. As she puts it:

... the delight the lovers give and take in mutual recognition of their freedom is what lends strength and dignity to physical passion; under these circumstances nothing they do is degrading, since nothing is a matter of submission, everything a matter of willing generosity. Marriage is obscene in principle in so far as it transforms into rights and duties those mutual relations which should be founded on a spontaneous urge; it gives an instrumental and therefore degrading character to the two bodies dooming them to know each other in their general aspect as bodies, but not as persons (SS, 444).

This understanding of eroticism as linked with individual subjectivity and integrity is a theme Beauvoir repeats in a number of her writings. In *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (1943), *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947), *The Coming of Age* (1970), and *The Second Sex*, she describes the erotic in ways that evoke ideas of openness, joy, generosity, and gift, and the risk of vulnerability. Yet while she is highly critical of marriage, romantic love, and sadism, Beauvoir refuses to allow the category of the erotic love to fall into her critique. For her, erotic love is a unique expression of the embodied subject's foremost intention and natural human desires. Sadism, she says, perverts the generosity of the

erotic and betrays the intimacy of the flesh. Moreover, libertine bondage represents the pursuit of autonomous pleasure rather than an embodied eroticism of generosity and gift. Likewise, Beauvoir argues that romance exploits women's sexuality by supporting patriarchy's project of subordination and submission, in addition to representing a scripted patriarchal love rather than the spontaneous erotic generosity. The history of romance teaches us that erotic domination is not confined to the excesses of libertines, but rather, is maliciously codified in law and custom. Erotic love on the other hand, when acknowledged as a passionate intentionality, speaks to our ambiguous embodiment. As a movement towards an Other, eroticism too speaks to our transcendence. Moreover, recognizing the erotic as that which creates the couple speaks to our desire to sustain meaning from the erotic event. This aspect of coupling is crucial to Beauvoir's notion of eroticism because it captures the spontaneity, openness, vulnerability, and unpredictability of passion that, in her view, speaks to the generosity – that is, the quality of being kind and generous - of each individual player in the drama of romantic affiliation.

Drawing from her belief that eroticism can open a space for women to transcend both societal and intersubjective limitations, Beauvoir views the future of marriage as one that is in transition and open to a number of new possibilities of arrangement. Her optimism about the future of the romantic couple relies on her particular definition of subjectivity and ambiguity found in the following passage:

... every human existence involves immanence and transcendence at the same time; to go forward each existence must be maintained, for it to expand into the

future it must integrate the past while intercommunicating with others it should find self-confirmation. These two elements – maintenance and progression – are implied in any human activity and for man marriage permits precisely a happy synthesis of the two. (SS, 430)

Indeed, both husband and wife ideally must maintain and progress through their individual projects and activities that are integrated with other communities and with society. Freedom for both husband and wife does not necessarily preclude separation from each other, but rather upon acknowledgement that through their distinct interests they can come together to support each other's individual subjectivity. As she puts it:

The couple should not be regarded as a unit, a closed cell; rather each individual should be integrated as such in society at large, where each (whether male or female) could flourish without aid; then attachments could be formed in pure generosity with another individual equally adapted to the group, attachments that would be founded upon acknowledgement that both are free (SS, 479).

Moreover, because of the intersubjective and ambiguous potential that erotic love offers both males and females, she insists that only the sharing of the intimate gift of the flesh and generosity can truly sustain a couple.

Beauvoir's discussions of eroticism and intersubjectivity bring to the foreground two important sites of resistance that women can employ against the patriarchal conception of romantic love: (1) women must reconsider the deeply held assumption that they can only find their transcendence by *being-for-others*; (2) women must posit for themselves an ethic of the erotic that entails a paradigm of recognition for the generous gift of intimacy that emphasizes our desire of and interconnection to each other. I shall discuss these two strategies in turn.

(1) Reconsidering Being-for-Others:

According to Beauvoir, the fundamental error that women who pursue romantic love and marriage primarily make is that woman looks to another to justify her life instead of assuming the task for herself. By collapsing her subjectivity into that of others, woman appears to be living in *bad faith*. However, Beauvoir suggests that this condemnation of bad faith is largely unwarranted because of the dynamics of ‘the look’¹. Although the dreams of the woman in love seem to reflect the bad faith of a subject who refuses her freedom (as Sartre thought), Beauvoir instead suggests that women’s legitimate human desire for romance reflects the betrayed desires of an erotic subject. Women assume the roles as a loving *being-for-others* as a way to dignify oneself under the humiliation of being subordinate and inessential creature under patriarchal norms; “love is the supreme effort to survive by accepting the dependence to which she is condemned” (SS, 668).

¹ The primary issue that Beauvoir has against Sartre’s ‘look’ is that he assumes that the freedoms in such conflicts are of equal worth. In these situations of “looking”, Beauvoir felt there was reason to hold that all human beings are anything but equal. Even if the victim of torture “looks” at his torturer as Sartre suggests, she thinks that there is no reason to assume that there are two equal freedoms in this scenario since only the torturer has the power of physical domination over the victim. In a similar fashion, Sartre also holds that both material and political inequalities between a dominant and a submissive are irrelevant to their relations as two absolute freedoms (BN, 673). Beauvoir however disagrees with Sartre’s assumption about the relation of otherness as primarily adversarial relations between two *equal* freedoms. She reasons that freedom cannot be thought of as indestructible upsurge of a *being-for-itself* if freedoms are understood as separate from one’s situation. In other words, Beauvoir disagrees with Sartre’s ontological supposition that all human beings are absolutely free. Rather, she holds that the situation of inequality shall always be a black mark against individual freedom; most particularly if you are slave, woman, or other. See Sonia Kruks’s “Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom”; 1987.

Beauvoir also disagrees with Freud's assertion that being other-regarding is a significant part of the female psyche. She challenges that it is rather the prerogative of patriarchy to ensure the fantasy of love and the MEF both emphasize and inflate women's experience as a *being-for-others* so that there is only a partial subjectivity encouraged for women. This notion of *being-for-others*, for women in particular, extends far beyond Sartre's adversarial and conflictual definition of the term. To be a *being-for-others*, Beauvoir notes, relies on acknowledging the interconnectedness and contingency of one's freedoms to the freedoms of others. Indeed, as she says in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*: "only the freedom of the other is able to give necessity to my being" (PC, 95-6). She expresses this point best however in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*:

Man can find a justification of how his own existence only in the existence of other men. Now, he needs such a justification; there is no escaping it. Moral anxiety does not come to man from without; he finds within himself the anxious question, "What's the use?" Or, to put it better, he himself is this urgent interrogation... I concern others and they concern me. There we have an irreducible truth. The me-others relationship is as indissoluble as the subject-object relationship (EA, 72).

This interdependence of one's *being-for-others*, then, is constitutive of the freedom of others as well as the possibility of a future. To this end, Beauvoir hopes that by discovering this patriarchal ploy of recognizing only the partial subjectivity of the female subject, women can overcome the contradictions presented between *being-for-herself* and *being-for-others* and how these affect her subjectivity.

(2) *An Ethic of the Erotic*

Within Beauvoir's thought, the erotic as a philosophical category is imbued with moral currency since the erotic event is the primary site where the desire and intentionality of personal freedom and happiness intersect. It is in her particular chapter on "The Married Woman" in *The Second Sex* that she links up the existential demands of eroticism with the ethical implications of humanism. She says:

A humanist morality would require that all life experience have a human meaning, that it be infused with liberty; in a genuinely moral erotic relation there is free assumption of desire and pleasure, or at least a moving struggle to regain liberty in the midst of sexuality; but this is possible only when the other is recognized *as an individual*, in love or in desire (SS, 440).

Under the existential and humanistic ethical standpoint, freedom is a necessary condition for both personal happiness and satisfaction with one's sexuality. What is more, under an existential ontology, freedom is also the necessary condition for the possibility of moral action. An 'ethic of the erotic', then, stands as the paradigmatic moral act wherein the gift of passion, intention, and intimacy are revealed to ourselves and to each other in our acts of reciprocity, joy, intimacy, vulnerability, generosity, risk, and of course our subjectivity.

Interestingly, the element of *risk* - that is, engagement in a situation involving exposure to danger or discomfort - plays a central role in Beauvoir's construction of an ethic of the erotic. But rather than viewing risk as adversarial, conflictual, and violent, she asks us to instead dismiss the valorization of risk as violence that patriarchy uses to

characterize transcendence. In rejecting this reading of transcendence as necessarily adversarial and violent, we can restore the existential meaning of transcendence to its original context of risking (SS, 692). Recall that for Beauvoir, being a transcendent subject means to risk oneself “through actions, intentions, and the affirmation of freedom that individual subjects not only derive meaning for themselves, but also achieve liberty through a continual reaching out toward other liberties” (SS, xxxiv). In turning to the philosophical category of the erotic, the ethical implications of risking provides a paradigm of recognition where the generosity of the intimate gift rather than violence constitutes the manner in which we find our desires and our interrelatedness with others in free exchange.

There are, however, two general injunctions I see here at work in Beauvoir’s conceptualization of an ethic of the erotic. First, individuals enjoined with another must be willing to assume the risk of their own subjectivity. That is, both members of the couple must be individually responsible for the maintenance and progression of their own freedom. To have moral freedom in Beauvoir’s view however, involves more than simply being free from oppressive structures, institutions, and oppressors, but also a sense of *willing oneself free*. She does indeed recognize the internal contradiction of this ontological statement: “What meaning can there be in the words to *will oneself free*, since at the beginning we *are free*” (EA, 24). As a result of this contradiction, she posits that there are two distinct levels of freedom: *ontological freedom* and *moral freedom*. *Ontological freedom*, if you can call to mind, is the type of freedom that Sartre is

primarily concerned with in *Being and Nothingness* and is the freedom exposed in anguish and fled from in bad faith. On the other level, there is *moral freedom* in light of the fact that there are different ways to respond and acknowledge one's ontological freedom. Although it is impossible to will oneself *not* to be free since freedom in this sense is an ontological 'given', one can certainly *fail to choose to will oneself free*. Since one is always free to make choices, one is also free to take on an attitude towards freedom. One can, argues Beauvoir, persist in the vain pursuit to exist and yet not will freedom for oneself. An individual also has the freedom to choose for themselves to be free by acknowledging and actively making oneself a lack (a "negation" as Sartre uses the phrase) of being. As she puts it: "To exist is to *make oneself* a lack of being; it is to cast oneself into the world" (EA, 42). It is through choosing this latter option of freedom – that is, of being a lack - that a person can achieve legitimate moral freedom. The risk of assuming moral responsibility of one's freedom, then, also extends accountability to accepting the risks of one's ambiguity. It is, as Beauvoir repeatedly suggests, our ambiguity that affords us the freedom to risk as well as define ourselves through our projects.

A second injunction of Beauvoir's ethic of the erotic holds that one enjoined to another shall not violate or exploit another's vulnerability. Vulnerability is indeed a significant aspect of the erotic experience because the intimate interrelation between two autonomous subjects relies on the integrity of both the body and being of each subject involved. It is through this vulnerability of autonomous agents that we discover the route

to the other – that is, we learn of our own limitations through recognition of the vulnerabilities of the other. What is more, it is through erotic experience that agents discover their exposure to “the lie of autonomy” (Bergoffen; 1997, 204). Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* summarizes succinctly this “lie of autonomy” when she charges that:

Many women in love permit themselves to be deluded; they would like to ignore the fact that the general is involved in the particular, and that man furthers the illusion because he shares it at first; his desire often has a fire that seems to defy time; at the moment he wants that woman, he wants her passionately, he wants her only. And, to be sure, that moment is an absolute – but a momentary absolute ... Most often she clutches at the straw of falsehood. She fancies that the man’s love is the exact counterpart of the love she brings to him; in bad faith she takes desire for love, erection for desire, love for a religion (SS, 659).

The role of erotic vulnerability in Beauvoir’s ethical thought is certainly a significant one: the idea of erotic relationality fully exposes one’s flaws, shortcomings, and vulnerability to another. To exploit or violate this vulnerability is to betray the autonomy, agency, and the flesh of the other.

I will argue here that Beauvoir’s emphasis on erotic vulnerability belies her broader project of defining and shaping a notion of an existential ethical standpoint in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. When free from violation and exploitation, individuals are free to offer erotic gifts that are neither dominated by Hegelian categories of the master-slave dialectic, nor ruled by the adversarial relations of Sartre’s self-other dichotomy. The existential ethical standpoint of Beauvoir’s erotic relationality instead rests on a transformative spontaneity that challenges the patriarchal, sado-masochistic, romantic, and transgressive images of human sexual desire. It is through the erotic experience of

immanence and not the struggle of transcendence that provides agents the means to assume their subjectivity, their freedom, and their ambiguity. This notion of vulnerability, I think, appears to inform her wider ethical project in existentialism since, according to her, ethics is not something that is infinite, abstract, transcendental, or universal, but rather something that is to be practiced individually, immanently, and subjectively and on a case-by-case basis (EA, 134). As she points out at the end of *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, ethics is to be experienced in the “truth of life” (EA, 159). The act of risking that renders each agent vulnerable to another, ethics then becomes concerned with the interconnected and intersubjective willing of freedom for the ends of all others.

An Ethic of the Erotic and the Independent Woman

I think it can be said here with a very high degree of certainty that Beauvoir’s proposal of an ‘ethic of the erotic’ is most definitely a more beneficial conception of love compared to all of the other conceptions I’ve presented to you thus far in my thesis. I am measuring ‘beneficial’ here by the degree to which the woman in love assumes her existential subjectivity – that is, how willing (freedom) and able (power) she is to deliberate, will, act, create, invent, evaluate, decide, and make choices. Indeed, under the Platonic, Christian, and Bio-Teleological ideologies of love, woman was not afforded the task of either conceptualizing or of assuming her subjectivity. Beauvoir’s proposal for an ethic of the erotic however, does redress this historical and conceptual asymmetry that the woman in love endured in the past. As an ethical code, existential humanism and Beauvoir’s concern for the erotic embodied subject appears to present a viable feminist alternative to

the standard romantic conception of love that subjugates women by demanding abdication of their individual subjectivity. Yet while we can recognize that an ethic of the erotic is most definitely a more beneficial ideology, I argue that there are some significant difficulties when we consider the broader context of the contemporary independent woman. But before I discuss these difficulties with Beauvoir's 'ethic of the erotic', I would first do well to make note of what traits constitute the contemporary independent woman.

The contemporary independent woman is, in both Beauvoir's view and mine, an emancipated woman. This emancipated woman wants to be active, take risks, and refuse passivity. She wants to pride herself on thinking, taking action, working, inventing, and creating. The independent woman wishes to live and to love on equal footing with men. Beauvoir herself puts women's emancipatory desires best when she declares:

Let them be provided with living strength of their own, let them have the means to attack the world and wrest from it their own subsistence, and their dependence will be abolished – that of man also (SS, 724).

Indeed, this notion of "wresting" from the world one's subsistence is the driving force behind all feminist emancipatory desires that equate women's emancipation with their economic independence from men. Having the ability to provide financially for oneself releases woman from burdening others, as well as gives her opportunity to be productive, active, and concretely affirming her status as a subject. By finding gainful employment that engrosses her particular skills, talents, training, and achievements, the independent

woman no longer finds herself under obligation to serve others as a *being-for-others*, but rather, finds herself in the position of *being-for-herself*.

This emancipatory spirit of *being-for-herself*, however, involves a number of injunctions that demand women's attention and vigilance if they wish to retain their status as subject. The independent woman must (1) *recognize the emphasis society places on her femininity and upon her sexuality*. The contemporary independent woman is indeed faced with a number of competing demands and assumptions about her femininity and sexuality. She fights against the betrayal of her erotic subjectivity and the unscrupulous demands of her femininity that demand that she appear as both object and prey (SS, 682). Costumes restrict her movements, her appearance is scrutinized, and if she does not conform to the dictates of fashion and custom, she is repudiated and devalued as an erotic object. The independent woman, then, must reject the trappings of femininity that haunt her – what is gained in the naturalness and simplicity of women's appearance instead of the contrivances of toiletries, as Beauvoir asserts, “allow women to find themselves again without taking so much pains, since, after all, that is what they are” (SS, 686).

A second injunction placed upon the independent woman is that in romantic love (2) *she must avoid the temptation of masochism and of sadism*. Although woman faces sharp censure when she fails to measure up to the standard patriarchal conception of femininity promulgated by the MEF, women must abandon seeking pleasure in either

suffering before the ideal as a masochist, or making others suffer as a sadist. When the adversarial ideas of violence, victory, and defeat are removed from intersubjective relations, the act of love then becomes a free exchange between two moral subjects. Moreover, by eliminating the desire to suffer or to make others suffer, both partners in a romantic coupling can recognize the vulnerability and generosity of the other.

(3) Women need to acknowledge and resist the societal demand that women must bear the cost of domestic harmony. This injunction is of importance to the contemporary independent woman since, as a being who is also busy creating, inventing, and working, the expectation that she also assume the primary charge of domestic harmony is a betrayal of her promise of subjectivity. Women must resist this pressure stemming from the presumption that she, as *woman*, is not to be exempted from the duties of her personal life. Instead, women must be willing to demand and agitate for a more reasonable distribution of domestic labor.

Another injunction entrusted to the independent woman is that *(4) she must learn to love differently.* As we have seen throughout my thesis, in order to be justified as a transcendent subject, woman must first adopt an attitude of loving that does not edify man above her own subjectivity. As Beauvoir puts it:

... for women to love as a man does – that is to say, in liberty, without putting her very being in question – she must believe herself his equal and be so in concrete fact; she must engage in her enterprises with the same decisiveness (SS, 696).

Hence, women must avoid the idolatrous form of love that constitutes the “dream of annihilation” because of its expectation of women’s abdication of their attitude of subjectivity.

The independent woman is also prompted to: *(5) recognize that her independent status will give her an inferiority complex.* Indeed, the contemporary independent woman is torn between the demands of her professional interests and her sex life. With the competing demands of femininity that render her as passive, unstable, and unassertive as well as a societal pressure to be a sex object, many women find it difficult to strike a balance between one’s independent ambition and her sexuality. Nonetheless, the ensuing consequence of this pressure is what Beauvoir means by an inferiority complex. In having to constantly reaffirm her intention as a subject, many women find that their chances of finding personal success fade because of a lack of confidence. Not wanting to outshine her romantic partner, the independent woman sacrifices her ambition to make good in prescribed ways that condemn her to mediocrity and immanence.

Finally, the independent woman must also: *(6) be aware of her own forms of self-sabotage.* This injunction, I think, is perhaps the most important for the contemporary independent woman because it speaks directly to the heart of her subjectivity. This self-sabotage is indeed related to woman’s inferiority complex, and presents many women with significant existential difficulty. The resignation and passivity of many women to their perceived ontological fate as inessential, secondary, and contingent creatures leads

one not to the path of subjecthood, but down the denigrating path of mediocrity. Indeed, self-sabotage occurs when woman abnegates herself instead of asserting herself (SS, 713). The independent woman, then, must be willing to resist and reject the constraints rather than seek to devalue her labor in developing a free existence. As Beauvoir puts it: “As long as she still has to struggle to become a human being, she cannot become a creator” (SS, 714).

As we can see from my discussion of what constitutes the notion of the ‘independent woman’, the multi-faceted social demands placed upon her are many and difficult to subjectively navigate as a *being-for-herself*. Caught between her ambition to ‘be’ (freedom) and to ‘do’ (power) in the world and the temptation to take the easy route by assuming the roles prescribed to her by society and the MEF, the contemporary independent woman is certainly faced with some difficult existential choices. Likewise can be said of women’s moral freedom but with one additional consequence: since the particular ethical standpoint of women has been shaped by conditions of disadvantage, inessentialness, and lack, the contemporary independent woman’s moral disposition is inextricably bound up with a sense of inferiority. As always, Beauvoir expresses it best when she says: “Man obeys an imperious necessity; woman must constantly reaffirm her intention. She goes forward not with her eyes fixed straight ahead on a goal, but with her glance wandering out her in every direction; and her gait is also timid and uncertain.” (SS, 699). This inferiority complex is, I think, the central culprit undermining women’s full emancipation as existential subjects and is undoubtedly one of the most evasive

forms of women's subjugation. The failure to *will for herself* her own freedom and power of choice is itself a moral failure; it is a flight from freedom. Women's emancipation necessarily must be one that refuses to confine her to the relations she represents to men as essential existents. To be free subjects, woman must assume her existence as independent from man that requires that she bear the responsibility for her flesh and for her conscious liberty. If one makes her moral calculations from a standpoint of inferiority, the struggle to assume one's subjectivity shall be an uncertain and timid struggle indeed.

While Beauvoir's proposed 'ethic of the erotic' appears to offer the independent woman some recourse in avoiding the trappings of romantic love and the "dream of annihilation", there are some significant difficulties in its practice and application. I must say here that it is not the particular intersubjective and interrelational aspects of eroticism that I see as problematic for the future of women in love; as a way to share, explore, and develop one's subjectivity with another, I think an 'ethic of the erotic' certainly does stand as a viable theoretical alternative to the ideologies of romantic love that implicitly and specifically demand women's sacrifice for the broader goals of the patriarchy and of society. The difficulty I see with Beauvoir's 'ethic of the erotic' is, however, in its practice within the wider social context. It is one thing to acknowledge the individual freedom and power to choose for oneself how to negotiate, share, and partake in the mutual exchange of erotic and ambiguous subjectivity. Indeed, both existential and humanistic ideologies promote the ideologies of absolute freedom and choice by rejecting

absolutist moral doctrines and schematics. However, to be willing and able to practice such an intersubjective exchange of desire and passion, we must acknowledge the degree to which societal forces and institutions and the mythologies both shape and structure the creation of individuated subjects. Beauvoir herself certainly did not shy away from recognizing this practical implication. As she puts it:

Society in general – beginning with her [woman’s] respected parents – lies to her by praising the lofty values of love, devotion, the gift of herself, and then concealing from her the fact that neither lover nor husband nor yet her children will be inclined to accept the burdensome charge of all that. She cheerfully believes these lies because they invite her to follow the easy slope: in this others commit their worst crime against her; throughout her life from childhood on, they damage and corrupt her by designating as her true vocation this submission, which is the temptation of every existent in the anxiety of liberty ... yet this is how woman is brought up, without ever being impressed with the necessity of taking charge of her own existence (SS, 721).

We saw from my analysis of contemporary women’s self-help discourse in chapter two of my thesis as well that this tension between one’s individual subjectivity and the demands of service to society still restricts and invites many women away from maintaining and progressing in the act of taking charge of their own existence. I think it is a combination of the strictness of gender roles and custom as well as the institutionalized rewards of heterosexual romantic affiliation that are pulling women in many directions and make for great difficulty in assuming an ethic of the erotic.

I will here return again to the second central question guiding my thesis: what can be done to attend to this stubborn asymmetry in our philosophical conception of romantic love that demands of woman complete abdication of her dreams and interests as well as

her subjectivity? More succinctly put: what is required to have a more beneficial conception of romantic love? To address these questions, I think it is necessary to recognize that romantic love has one more dimension than just the intersubjective and moral. Indeed, in the same way that Kate Millett claimed that the “personal is political”, love too is political. The drama of romance is not separate from our abstract political rights, but rather is formidably shaped by them. Women’s anxiety in the face of liberation and desire for personal annihilation in the bonds of the romantic fantasy is a sentiment gainfully appropriated by the remnants of contemporary patriarchal institutions: being paid less for their labor, having less opportunities for high achievement by bearing most of the costs of domestic and reproductive tasks, having restrictions imposed on her sexuality by inaccessible means to abortion and contraception all collude to keep woman firmly engulfed in the sphere of immanence. For there to be a future of love and liberty for woman, she must reconcile her dreams of being a subject – that is, to will, create, invent, think, and act – with her political aspirations of emancipation and conscious liberty. To this end, my final section of this chapter will address how the contemporary independent woman can continue to *will for herself* a more mutually beneficial ideology of romantic love through political action.

Opening Towards the Future: The Erotic, the Lived, and the Biopolitics of Romantic Ideology

I am in complete agreement with Beauvoir when she says that we must not suppose “the mere combination of the right to vote and a job constitutes a complete emancipation” (SS, 680). Naturally, emancipation is complete when all members of an oppressed class are in the position to *will themselves free*. However, being *willing* and being *able* speaks to our freedom and power, both of which are often contingent upon the politics of human action. Being *willing* but not *able*, or *able* and not *willing* both have definite political implications for not only the individual herself, but also for one’s community and society at large. As we have seen with the traditional ideologies of romantic love that I presented earlier in my thesis, the denial of subjectivity for women greatly affected their political and their social status. As wives, sisters, mothers, and daughters, their roles as women shaped them in such a way as to presume their lives were to be destined for the male and for the task of reproduction. And yet while they had at some times considerable say in what their destiny was to be, women under the traditional ideologies of love were not invited to assume their individual subjectivity as men were accustomed to doing. Not able to think or act independently from the male; given the promise of transcendence and then betrayed with immanence, women themselves took on the ‘processes of subjectification’ and internalized the *en-soi* – that is, the brutish life of subjugation, inessentialness, and immanence. Consequently, in not being deemed an independent subject, women lacked the social and political solidarity for action sufficient to ensure themselves the status of even being considered a “person” to which rights and freedoms are afforded by a

sovereign power. It is, however, through provocative and persistent political action of the suffragettes and later the women's and civil rights movements that we are able to now attend to the task of re-conceptualizing contemporary ideologies of romantic love as one with a dynamic political potential that is open to the future. Indeed, we owe a great debt of gratitude to our foremothers for procuring for us the juridico-political title of "person" and the privileges that follow from it. However, it is now up to contemporary independent women and those others who support women's emancipation to continue to press for the title of "independent subject" and the privileges that follow from it too.

To this end, I suggest that a future for romantic love must necessarily engage women's emancipatory aspirations and confront the asymmetrical ideologies of romantic love on three distinct political fronts: (1) *the politics of the erotic*; (2) *lifestyle politics*; and (3) *biopolitical*. I shall discuss each of these political fronts and what is required of the contemporary independent woman's political activity and engagement respectively.

The Politics of the Erotic:

In this micro-political front, the free exchange of mutual pleasure, desire, and passion takes place between two lovers engaged in a romantic relationship. Beauvoir's proposal for an 'ethic of the erotic', while not characterized as explicitly political, does indeed have political currency on the grounds that she holds the belief that ethical choice implies political choice (EA, 148). The needs and desires of each individual making up the couple require a fair and equitable negotiation to ensure their respective needs are met.

Yet, unlike our general understanding of ‘politics’ that typically yields accounts of dominance and subordination, and accompanied with violence, the politics of the erotic are instead premised on pure sentiment of generosity and the gift of the flesh.

As we saw from the injunctions placed upon Beauvoir’s proposal of an ethic of the erotic, there are then only two main political requirements for individuals that are at root also subjective moral choices. First, each individual in the couple must be responsible for assuming their own subjectivity. In other words, one must not will one’s own annihilation in love, but rather must be accountable for the maintenance and progression of their identity, subsistence, and pleasure in the coupling. The willingness towards annihilation is, as Beauvoir says, a form of moral failure. In clinging to the identity and values of one’s partner, one has unnecessarily burdened them, which in turn develops a characteristically parasitical form of relations that are antithetical to genuine love. Genuine love means wanting to share the gift of intimacy in a relationship with an equal, not a subordinate.

A second strategy as you may recall from Beauvoir’s ‘ethic of the erotic’, is her call to not violate or exploit the vulnerability of the other. To exploit or violate the generous trust reciprocated between individual lovers, one has according to her, also sullied the integrity and dignity as well as the subjectivity and ambiguity of the other. What is more, to violate the particular vulnerabilities of the other also belies a violation of one’s own subjectivity since it is through the other that we come to recognize our own subjectivity. Indeed, in viewing love as a battleground where dominance, submission, and

violence are defined and acted out rather than as a mutual exchange by free subjects, love is made political in its most derogatory sense. However, by making moral choices that uplift the other and recognize vulnerability as a shared element of the human condition, lovers shall avoid building relationships on diminishing political grounds.

Lifestyle Politics:

A second political front to which the contemporary independent woman must engage exists in the realm of the immanent and *lived*. Indeed, these ‘lifestyle politics’ – that is, the deliberate political strategies used to attend to the inequalities created by gender, class, race, and ethnicity in access to opportunity for the maintenance and progression of human life in liberal democratic societies – are a definite requirement as a site for feminist political action for those challenging the traditional conventions and ideologies of heteronormative romantic affiliation. Issues such as access to primary health care, affordable housing, education and training, employment, as well as access to safe abortion and contraception are indeed priorities for a political feminist agenda. In challenging the traditional and patriarchal ideologies of romantic love through political action, the contemporary independent woman must seek to resist the trappings of being economically dependent on her male partner and must demand from her government access to opportunity that reflect her unique biological capability of reproduction.

There are a number of political strategies that have been and continue to be utilized by many contemporary independent women who challenge the social and

political implications of an asymmetrical and gendered ideology of romantic love. I shall list and briefly discuss these strategies in turn.

(1) Anti-Sexist Living Arrangements: Under this general political strategy, those concerned with women's liberation lobby their government for greater support in developing and maintaining the social and political networks sufficient to ensure that women are not being unduly exploited in their choice of living arrangements. Being free from domestic violence and abuse in the home, access to affordable or subsidized housing as a single woman or single mother, independent financial management, and immigration laws that do not subsume a wife's identity under her husband's are all strategies that are used to protect women from traditional forms of domination and encourage them into maintaining relationships that are fair and equitable for both partners, but especially beneficial for herself. In forging these anti-sexist living arrangements, the contemporary independent woman is motivated to no longer see herself as fully identified with or subsumed under the contingencies of others, but rather as a full subject herself. As a full subject, the contemporary independent woman is free to make choices about where she would like to live and with whom she would like to live, rather than having this prescribed for her by her father or husband. Indeed, the future of anti-sexist living arrangements shall continue to maintain and develop strategies for sharing domestic responsibility whether it be between the romantic couple or in a larger supportive residential community.

(2) Refusing to Be a Wife: For some contemporary independent women, the refusal to take on the role and identity of wife is a particularly effective form of political action; a sentiment that has been central to women's oppression. In choosing to remain legally single, the independent woman is free from a great deal of cultural baggage that precludes women from being subjects. This refusal to be a wife can take on a number of forms. Some women may wish to remain unattached to men by establishing residence on their own. Some may choose to cohabit, but not take on the legal status of wife through marriage. Others may indeed choose to marry but refuse to take on the husband's surname (a traditional symbol of the subordination of women). Generally speaking, those independent women who eschew the roles and identity of wife also reject the status of 'head of household' (VanEvery; 1995, 121).

The rejection of the traditional role and identity of wife is however constrained in many ways. Immigration policies restrict the mobility of couples whose members are from different countries and in effect force them to marry in order to live and work in another country. Also, many social and legal customs further promote marriage as necessary, natural, and a desirable consequence of romantic affiliation. Indeed, the identity of wife is a pervasive and central aspect of not only women's subjecthood, but also to her status and position in society.

Nevertheless, a rejection of the role of wife does improve the subjective circumstances of the contemporary independent woman. A refusal to take on the identity

and role of wife addresses the unpaid appropriation of women's domestic and reproductive labor, namely housework and child rearing. In rejecting the traditional wifely duties, contemporary independent women are engaging the general strategy of increasing the amount of housework for which members of a living arrangement are independently responsible. Domestic duties pertaining to laundry, food preparation, the cleaning of individual spaces (i.e. bedrooms), maintenance of appliances, cars, and yard work continue to be reorganized and redistributed to members of a household. What is more, individual responsibility has also been increased through a social reevaluation of the capabilities of young children who are often encouraged to do more things by themselves (VanEvery; 1995, 121). Additionally, a refusal of accepting the role and identity of wife has many economic benefits for the contemporary independent woman. Independent financial management – that is, having individual discretion over one's financial contribution to the expenses of the couple – foster an ideology of partnership rather than dependence on the full contribution of one individual and can be understood as a rejection to the appropriation of women's unpaid labor.

(3) Refusing to Be a Mother: Another site of political resistance for the contemporary independent woman is in the refusal to accept the limited traditional roles that accompany the identity of mother. However, a distinction is necessary here in identifying the difference between having the choice of being a mother, and the practice of mothering. Indeed, the negative choice of refusing to have children requires access to safe medical abortions as well as to forms of contraception. In the case of the practice of mothering,

appropriate access to educational information regarding reproduction is also necessary. Pre and post-natal education, breast-feeding clinics, as well as access to child care facilities and education are all pressing concerns for the contemporary independent woman and necessary for mothering in a future of romantic love.

For those in heterosexual relationships with children, strategies attempting to change the conditions in which mothering takes place is a key site of resistance to the traditional ideologies of motherhood and the way in which it has characteristically been taken-for-granted by policy makers. In particular, the negotiation of a balance between productive labor and reproductive labor is indicative of the changing demands of women as mothers in that it is no longer a primary obligation of femininity. Many males have reevaluated their roles as fathers to include activities once held exclusively by mothers and are spending more time playing, educating, and nurturing their children. Indeed, mothering has taken on a political character in that parents are impressing upon their children anti-sexist childcare practices by being role models for their children.

However, there are some constraints upon the strategy of rejecting the traditional ideologies of motherhood. Many men are unwilling to accept women's choices shaping the changing roles of mothers. In some cases of single women and lesbian mothers, men are not willing to biologically father a child without assuming the authority of the father over the woman and her children. Some contemporary independent women who reject the traditional ideologies of motherhood may also find themselves constrained by access

to safe abortions and to contraception. Finally, many independent woman, particularly single mothers, lesbian mothers and working mothers often find their general and personal choices under political attack which also feeds into personal anxieties about whether they are doing the best for their children (VanEvery; 1995, 123).

(4) Refusing to be Exploited as a Worker: A final political strategy that resists the asymmetrical trappings for romantic ideologies stems from a rejection of inflexible employment conditions. Many contemporary independent women seek flexibility in employment opportunities in order to accommodate their domestic responsibilities that may also include caring for ill or elderly family members. Indeed, access to childcare facilities and more flexible hours of work so that domestic and other non-domestic activities can be enjoyed are also important to the contemporary independent woman.

There are, however, a number of constraints that limit the success of these political strategies. Employers may not offer to women (or sometimes men) any maternity leave compensation or may restrict the hours to part-time status in order to avoid having to pay out benefits. Also, many careers for independent women pay her less money, are part time, and offer her less opportunity for advancement because they are inflexible to the needs of one with other obligations. Indeed, single people can only be workers to the extent that their personal needs are not so great that they interfere with the job (VanEvery; 1995, 93). Flexibility, then, is of prime importance to both independent women and single mothers.

Lifestyle politics as a political strategy has been largely successful in procuring social and political conditions that are amenable to the life and choices of the contemporary independent woman and her challenge to the traditional ideologies of romantic love. Through this political front, women are able to continue forward and forge the future conditions under liberal democracy necessary for full emancipation as well as for assuming their existential subjectivity. We should, I think, have confidence in what the future has in store for the contemporary independent woman politically, socially, and economically, although I hasten to add that I don't think that the struggle is over quite yet. The future of women's emancipation, as I shall discuss in what follows, has one final political front that requires both our vigilance and the commitment of our political activity.

Biopolitics:

The final front of political action that the contemporary independent woman must engage exists in the realm of the macro-political. Biopolitics – that is, the regulation of reproduction on the global scale – is a transcendent strategy that, although it is on an elusively broad scale, it nonetheless affects the subjectivity of individual persons.

Biopolitics is best described by Michel Foucault who characterizes it as not just measure of self-discipline regarding reproduction, but rather, its regulation on a global scale. The source of biopolitical discourse is, in his view, the Sovereign who is made up of all

members of a society. Under contemporary democratic forms of social and political organization, it is the Sovereign who reserves the exclusive right to “the power to make live; [p]ower won’t make die”². There is however, considerable dissention about what constitutes the force of biopower. Foucault on the one hand, holds that biopower is fully constituted by the immanent forces naturally present in the field of life, and stem of the processes of subjectification wherein each individual governs their actions and beliefs through self-discipline and regulation. Foucault explains this disciplinary control in this way:

*A socialization of procreative behaviour: an economic socialization via all the incitements and restrictions, the “social” and fiscal measures brought to bear on the fertility of couples; a political socialization achieved through the “responsibilitization” of couples with regard to the social body as a whole (which has to be limited or on the contrary reinvigorated), and the medical socialization carried out by attributing a pathogenic value – for the individual and the species – to control birth practices.*³

In his view, the force of legitimacy of biopower comes from its ability to control the forces of life that are most naturally present in our biological functions. Biopower here pursues knowledge, pleasure, and mastery through the processes of subjectification that require no transcendent order or locus of control. On the other hand, in his book titled *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (1995), Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben instead argues that biopower’s constituent force assumes a transcendent form of political power which acts upon the individual’s process of subjectification. He claims that it is through the politicization of “bare life” – that is, the survivability of the living

² See Giorgio Agamben’s *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, 1995; p. 119.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

being through biological necessity (also known as *zoe*) – that constitutes the force of biopower. This politicization of bare life in bourgeois society, he warns, leads to “a primacy of the private over the public and of individual liberties over collective obligations and yet becomes, in totalitarian states, the decisive political criterion and the exemplary realm of sovereign decisions” (Agamben; 1995, 122).

In either way one parses out what constituent force is the driving mechanism behind biopolitics, curiously there is yet to be any feminist discussion of how women – those creatures who actually endure the process of reproduction - are affected by biopolitics and biopower. While it would be well beyond the scope of my thesis to address this theoretical deficiency here, I shall instead suggest some precursory concerns that the contemporary independent woman may have with this newly emerging and highly elusive political front.

The common point of agreement between Foucault’s and Agamben’s description of biopolitics is, however, the ‘process of subjectification’ where it is the individual who governs, disciplines, and regulates one’s beliefs and actions correspondingly to gain access to the paradigms of knowledge, power, and pleasure. Indeed, one’s control over the forces of reproduction is a function of this complex subjectifying process. One’s beliefs and actions regarding sexuality as well as what one epistemically knows about both sexuality and reproduction inform the subject of how she is to regulate, police, and discipline herself as an erotic subject.

It is easy for us to detect how the processes of subjectification have influenced women's roles under the traditional ideologies of love. Both the patriarchal fantasies of romantic ideation as well as the myth of the eternal feminine have, as I have already discussed in many parts of my thesis, been the social mechanisms that definitely shape women's access to knowledge, power, and pleasure and don't really need to be elaborated upon any further here. But the area to which I think contemporary independent women need to be greatly concerned with in the future is how a biopolitical agenda may affect both their reproductive and their erotic subjectivity.

To this end, I hold that the contemporary independent woman must engage the future of romantic ideology and biopolitics in the following ways. First, the contemporary independent woman must be aware and be critical of her own process of subjectification. Assuredly, this is an insurmountable task for most individuals to undertake alone and can only be accomplished with particular access to paradigms of knowledge and power. It is, nonetheless, an extremely important task if one wishes to forge any resistance to biopolitical forces seeking to hinder individual subjectivity. In being aware and critical of the processes that mould and shape one as a subject as well as the types of ideologies and mythologies that beckon her to romantic affiliation, the contemporary independent woman can resist arbitrary forces of self-regulation, self-discipline, and self-policing as she sees fit. Additionally, she can also address and overturn particular knowledge-power-pleasure paradigms that have created what Nancy Tuana coins as "epistemologies of

ignorance” which censor, mystify, and muddle access to fact and truth.⁴ While knowledge of the processes of subjectification and the power to be questioning and critical are not enough to exempt her completely from the mechanism of subjectification, it will however increase her freedom and power to act politically and make choices as an individual subject.

Second, the contemporary independent woman must be aware of the politicization of her reproductive capabilities. This politicization can take on many forms. Policies to either limit or encourage reproduction, will indeed affect the freedom and power of the contemporary independent woman as both an individual and erotic subject. Although it may appear as a far-fetched assertion in an industrial liberal-democratic society, policies may, under some exceptional circumstances in the interest of biopolitics (i.e. war, natural disaster, etc.), also seek to reduce women’s non-domestic engagements in an effort to support some particular religious or ethical ideology (perhaps in a similar way to the Taliban’s recent attempts to suspend secular legal codes in Afghanistan). In either case, the contemporary independent woman must keep herself informed and vigilant of the policies that seek to shape her as a subject.

Finally, but not completely distinct from the last issue, the contemporary independent woman must be willing to assume her subjectivity and not flee it. By this I mean that the contemporary independent woman must be willing to be self-sufficient and

⁴ See Nancy Tuana’s “Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance” in *Hypatia*, vol. 19, (Winter 2004): pp. 194-232.

be willing to engage in political resistance when it is required for the freedoms of others. This, I do recognize, is indeed a high demand in light of the elusive forces of biopolitics as well as a great demand on the time and effort of the independent woman. I am, however, following Beauvoir's assertion that one's ethical and political choices follow from each other; hence, willing freedom and self-sufficiency for oneself means willing it for others. This willingness, I think, implies a necessity of political action which shall be the real endurance test of women who wish to engage in future biopolitical struggles.

Conclusion

We have seen throughout my thesis that the ideologies of romantic love, from its ancient to its contemporary forms, belies a number of pressing existential, social, historical, and political concerns for the independent woman. Indeed, Beauvoir's controversial view that love is for women the "dream of annihilation" draws attention to the complexities of women's social oppression, as well as a call to question the ethics and politics of one of our society's most sentimental of values. What we find under Beauvoir's observant and candid existential critique of romantic love is instead that our sentiments, our passions, our desire to share our innermost world with another, and certainly our highest ideations of the form love are deceptively skewed to the advantage of the male subject. We are told that to be a woman in love is to necessarily relinquish and abdicate one's goals, dreams, and interests; to unconditionally and altruistically subordinate oneself to another, and all the better if the other has been cruel hearted, for it is in suffering that one believes they have found true sentiment and strength. But this is not love. Loving, as Beauvoir indicates, is rather a mutual exchange of one's free existence; it is the pure and generous gift of oneself and of one's flesh to another who shares in this bond.

We learned in chapter one of the deeply rooted perversity of the misogynist and paternal ideation of males as the essential subject, and females as the inessential. We saw the troubling extent to which women's experiences in love draws them in with the

promise of an identity, security, and bliss only to betray them later with stinging disappointment, alienation, and disenfranchisement. Indeed, we see from my analysis of the traditional ideologies of romantic love that the task of characterizing woman as a subject leaves us at a loss; for she is elusive and “shut up” in a world of her own, isolated from her own. Her identity as a subject – that is, one who wills, creates, acts, invents, deliberates, decides, and constitutes meaning for herself – is one conceptually constrained by lack, inessentialness, and immanence. She is instead offered an identity that supports others deemed essential to her, and her only salvation is through her continued service to others. She is alienated from her body by devaluing and degrading discourses that see reproduction as natural and therefore inessential.

In chapter two we saw the stubborn persistence of Beauvoir’s “dream of annihilation” within contemporary women’s self-help discourse. Indeed, the particular difficulty of obtaining one’s subjectivity as woman is indicative of both the social pressures she faces and which bear upon her interpersonal relationships, as well as the reluctant relationship that woman has with herself. Since the philosophical ideologies of romantic love offers women no solace or solidarity, self-help materials are sought to resolve the concrete issues of existential subjectivity. Learning how to be self-assured, self-supported as well as being reflexive of her particular gifts as woman place her on the path to assuming her subjectivity. We also learned here that although many women are choosing their self-respect over their abdication in love, there remains a subversive pull towards annihilation; it is in my view and likewise in Beauvoir’s a call to moral failure:

for it is easier to let someone else call the shots rather than assume responsibility for the freedom of choice.

We learned in chapter three that there is indeed a way to love that does not require women's subordination as a *being-for-others*. This way to love, however, requires women to follow an arduous path of becoming self-assuming, self-sufficient, and have a willingness to open a future through their political engagement. Additionally, Beauvoir urges an ideology of romantic love that utilizes an ethics of the erotic that is an undoubted improvement over the traditional ideologies that call for abandonment and alienation from one's most honest source of subjectivity. To view romantic love as stemming from one's eroticism as well as their ambiguous subjectivity does indeed open all individuals to a future of romance that neither negates the beauty of the ambiguous subject, nor does it alienate one from their most natural of human desire to seek a mutually generous exchange of freedom.

For the contemporary independent woman, the future of romantic love and the construction of its ideologies are indeed open; that is, so as long as she is willing to assume the responsibility for its creation. It is my hope that this discussion of Beauvoir's alternative vision of romance as well as my call for political action can help forge further research into this intriguing issue. Indeed, I am optimistic about the future of romantic love for the contemporary independent woman as she is in a particularly advantageous place in human history: she has many freedoms and choice available to her, as well as the

power to assume them. Yet her greatest mark on history now shall be how far she assumes her right to subjectivity, and how she opens the future to others to obtain their freedoms.

Bibliography

- Agamben, Giorgio. 1995. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Andolsen, Barbara Hickert. "Agape in Feminist Ethics". *The Journal of Religious Ethics*, 2001; pp. 69-83.
- Atkinson, Ti-Grace. 1974. *Amazon Odyssey*. New York: Links Books.
- Beauvoir, Simone de.
1944. *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Paris: Gallimard.
1948. *The Ethics of Ambiguity*. New York: Kensington Publishing Corp.
1952. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, Random House Inc.
1972. *The Coming of Age*. New York: Putnam.
- Bergoffen, Debra B. 1997. *The Philosophy of Simone de Beauvoir: Gendered Phenomenologies, Erotic Generosities*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Bernard, Jessie. 1972. *The Future of Marriage*. Toronto: Bantam.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. Trans. R. Nice. Cambridge Mass.; Harvard University Press..
- The Complete Works of Charles Darwin [online resource]*. <http://darwin-online.org.uk/>
- Dixon, Marlene. "Why Liberation? Racism and Male Supremacy".
edweb.tusd.k12.az.us/UHS/APUSH/2nd%20Sem/Articles%20Semester%202/8%20Dixon.htm - 7k.
- Dworkin, Andrea. 1993. *Letters from a War Zone*. New York: Lawrence Hill Books.
- Echols, Alice. 1989. *Daring to be Bad: Radical Feminism in America 1967-1975*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Ehrenreich, Barbara.
1996. "In Defense of Splitting Up," *Time Magazine*, April 8.

1994. "Oh, Those Family Values". *Time Magazine*, July 18.
2000. "Will Women Still Need Men?" *Time Magazine*, February 21.
- Firestone, Shulamith. 1970. *The Dialectic of Sex: A Case for Feminist Revolution*. New York: Morrow.
- Foucault, Michel. 1978. *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. 1*. New York: Random House.
- Freidan, Betty. 1963. *The Feminine Mystique*. New York: Dell Publishing.
- Greenwald, Rachel. 2003. *Find a Husband After 35: (Using What I Learned From Harvard Business School)*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- Greer, Germaine.
1970. *The Female Eunuch*. London: Paladin Books.
1984. *Sex and Destiny: The Politics of Human Fertility*. Toronto: Stoddart Publishing.
- Horney, Karen. "Love and Marriage". *The Philosophy of Erotic Love*. Robert Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.). 1991. Lawrence, K.S.; University of Kansas Press, pp. 190-201.
- Hubbard, Ruth. "Have Only Men Evolved?" in *Discovering Reality*, Sandra Harding and Merrill B Hintikka (eds). 1983: D. Reidel Publishing Co.; pp. 45-69.
- Kerber, Linda K, and de Hart, Jane Sherron (eds.). 1995. *Women's America. 4th ed*. New York: Oxford Books.
- Koedt, Levine, Rapone (eds.). 1973. *Radical Feminsm*. New York: Quadrangle Books.
- Kruks, Sonia. 1987. "Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits to Freedom". *Social Text, No. 17*. (Autumn, 1987), pp. 111-122.
- Lloyd. Elizabeth A. "Pre-Theoretical Assumptions in Evolutionary Explanations of Female Sexuality". *Philosophical Studies*, 1993, 69; pp. 139-153.
- MacKinnon, Catherine. 1987. *Feminism Unmodified: Discourses on Life and Law*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987.

- Martin, Emily. "The Egg and the Sperm: How science constructed romance based on stereotypical male-female roles". *Signs: Journal of Women and Culture in Society*, 1991, vol 16, no. 3; pp 485-501.
- Millett, Kate. 1969. *Sexual Politics*. New York: Avon Books.
- Morgan, Douglas N. 1964. *Love: Plato, The Bible and Freud*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc.
- Morgan, Kathryn Pauly. "Romantic Love, Altruism, and Self-Respect: An Analysis of Beauvoir". *The Philosophy of Erotic Love*. Robert Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.). 1991. Lawrence, K.S.; University of Kansas Press.
- Norwood, Robin.
1985. *Women Who Love Too Much*. New York: Pocket Books.
1988. *Letters from Women Who Love Too Much*. New York: Pocket Books.
1997. *Daily Meditations for Women Who Love Too Much*. New York: Pocket Books.
- Peavey, Fran. "A Celebration of Love and Commitment," *Radcliffe Quarterly*, Winter 1997, p. 18.
- Peril, Lynn. 2002. *Pink Think: Becoming a Woman in Many Uneasy Lessons*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.
- Plato. "Symposium". *The Philosophy of Erotic Love*. Robert Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins (eds.). 1991. Lawrence, K.S.; University of Kansas Press, pp. 13-32.
- Rieff, Philip (ed.). 1963. *Sigmund Freud: Collected Papers*. New York: Collier Press.
- Russell, Bertrand. 1957. *Why I am not a Christian*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness: The Principal Text of Modern Existentialism*. 1956. New York: Washington Square Press.
- Simonds, Wendy. 1992. *Women and Self-Help Culture: Reading Between the Lines*. New Jersey, Rutgers University Press.
- Singer, Irvine. 1987. *The Nature of Love, Vol.3. "The Modern World"*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

- Stacey, Judith. 1996. *In the Name of the Family: Rethinking Family Values in the Postmodern Age*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Strachey, James (ed.). 1957. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. London: Hogarth Press.
- Tannahill, Reay. 1992. *Sex in History*. New York: Scarborough House Publishers.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. 1848. *Democracy in America*. Trans. By George Lawrence, ed. J.P. Meyer. Garden City: Doubleday Books.
- Trimberger, E. Kay. 2005. *The New Single Woman*. Boston: Beacon Press.
- Tuana, Nancy. "Coming to Understand: Orgasm and the Epistemology of Ignorance". *Hypatia Vol. 19*, Winter 2004; pp. 194-232.
- Van Every, Jo. 1995. *Heterosexual Women Changing the Family: Refusing to be a 'Wife'!* London: Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Wood, Leonard. 1988. "The Gallop Survey: Self-Help Buying Trends" in *Publishers Weekly*, 234 (October 14).