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SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S POLITICS OF LOVE:  
Personal & Philosophical

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to explore the nuances and complexities of 20th century French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir in context to romance in her life as well her theories regarding existential understanding of Love as a concept. The paper primarily focuses on Beauvoir's categorizing of love and her infamous "morganatic marriage" with Jean Paul Sartre, both of whom have significant contributions to each other's personal as well as professional lives; the concept of The Other was first introduced in De Beauvoir's feminist literary work titled *The Second Sex* and was later quite distinguished in Sartre's work. The Paper starts off with the review of the chapter *Woman in Love* in *The Second Sex*, exploring the core of the definition of love and the fundamental difference between the genders while exercising it. It explores the intensity and societal (patriarchal) norm of marriage and the psychological analysis of the power dynamics of both the sexes participating in it. Beauvoir also explores the authenticity of love and how it is derived from the fundamental inequality between the sexes, categorizing it as 'authentic love' and 'inauthentic love'. Beauvoir's adherence to her own philosophy of love is questioned in the systematic study of her involvement in various romantic entanglements. The research is conducted by reviewing and analyzing secondary sources.

WOMAN IN LOVE

"The word has not at all the same meaning for both the sexes and this is a source of the grave misunderstandings that separate them" and this has "nothing to do with the laws of nature" says Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*. The word love for woman is defined as a "total abdication for the benefit of a master" with the man presiding over the role of the "master" although, Beauvoir doesn't completely negate the capacity of man for love but rather makes a clear distinction between the Man in love and the Woman in love, further saying that there cannot be defined a "man in love" due to the fundamental quality of him being the "sovereign object"; he would "integrate" her in his life but never "submerge" his existence into her. Thus love becomes a "religion" for her and because of that she is "condemned to dependance" because her only way to transcendence is "fusing with the sovereign subject"

According to Beauvoir, girls at all stages of their lives are "in love with man in general" , as adolescents they wish to identify with males but later discard this notion and wish to be loved by then.

Although the pursuit of love is only limited to men of the same class and same race as her, the "privilege of sex" only works within this framework for a daughter of a colonial officer, any man below that station is not a man. She looks for "male superiority" and "male worth" which includes culture, wealth, physical force, social standing, military uniform etc.

“Love holds less place in feminine life than is often believed.” ‘Womanly duties’ for the advancement of society like tending to one's husband, household, children and home take precedence over the feeling of love. She describes the “great women lovers” as women who didn't waste their time eluding the “traditional feminine destiny”. Even when fleeing from the traditional roles of femininity and being “allowed independence” is agonizing; taking responsibility of one's life, social station, etc. is arduous.

Beauvoir psychoanalysis the role of the father on the woman, “woman seeks her father's image in her love”, not because she wishes to romantically love her father but she feels the same for every man, for the father replicates the “magic” of a sheltered and safe upbringing and happy home life. She wishes to replicate the basic standard of her life, the love of her mother and father, a roof over her head among many things. The “childish dream” haunts many lovers; calling their lover “little girl” “little child” affectionately. To be called and treated like a child in a man's arm is one of the traits of the woman in love.

“Only in love can a woman harmoniously reconcile her eroticism and her narcissism”. Projecting herself as the “prey” and “carnal object” is inherently opposite of her “self-adoring” narcissism and it seems to her the act of love making “degrading” and “defiling” which in turn is a contradiction of eroticism. Such is the paradox of the woman involved in passionate and carnal (physical) love. Beauvoir deduces that “the love act requires a woman's profound alienation” she is lost, anonymous without the identity of the sovereign subject, she is merely “a conquered person, a prey, an object.”.

Beauvoir terms this whole philosophy of love as inauthentic. Inauthenticity is a byproduct of the inequality between the sexes which leads to one dominating the other into submission. Authentic love on the other hand is “founded on mutual recognition of two liberties”. The core concepts of authentic love are exploring the differences as well as the equality between the individuals. One of the conditions for a woman to experience authentic love is that her existence must be ‘pour-soi’, for herself. Traditional marriage is an example of inauthentic physical love. Authentic love is non submissive and non-possessive but a relation of equals. Beauvoir also talks about the phenomena of moral freedom in terms of authentic love, she says that for one to transcend to a certain level of authenticity then socio-cultural (predominantly patriarchal) barriers must be discarded. For instance, if same sex marriages are prohibited and access to appropriate healthcare and contraceptives is denied love will be deformed. If women are projected as naturally submissive and the men dominant it will be difficult to authentically love for there is no equality. (Kate Kirkpatrick)

Beauvoir then explores the concept of “we” in an authentic love relationship, she says that just because the couple forms a union it doesn't negate them of their own boundaries and self. What constituents of “we” include the common goals, ideals and values. The very nature of this “we” must be a democracy where both the parties involved maintain and forward the same standards of equality and that there is space for genuine care and support as well as disagreements.

## ROMANTIC RELATIONS

Being a woman in the intellectual sphere of the 20th century, oftentimes Beauvoir's unconventional romantic endeavors overshadowed her academic excellence. One of the most popular relationships of hers was with Jean Paul Sartre, the father of existentialism. They were in what is called an "open marriage". A "morganatic marriage" what Sartre used to tell his "contingent" affairs. A morganatic marriage by definition is a union of unequal's, which is entirely against Beauvoir's notion of authentic love. Although their notion of "open" marriage meant complete individual and moral freedom and agency and autonomy granted to each other without any ego traps, which in itself is an account for the "authentic" philosophy of love.

He would often refer to her as 'THE BEAVER', and to that she said that he had decided she had "a double personality", and that occasionally the beaver would be replaced by an "irksome young lady called Mademoiselle de Beauvoir." Although de Beauvoir's relation to Jean Paul Sartre is widely popular she too had "contingent" affairs with other men and women throughout the course of her life. (American writers Nelson Algren, Bianca, Olga, Claude Lazman)

## JEAN PAUL SARTRE

Simone De Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre were together for 51 years from 1929 to 1980 till he died. Beauvoir chose never to marry and have children for she didn't want to continue being part of the bourgeois stimulation. She considered it hypocritical to participate in the societal and patriarchal notion of marriage where the woman is but a mere womb and object and the man is socially permitted to lie to his wife and engage in extra marital affairs. Her rejection and rebellion against the society made her alter her relationship with Sartre and reject his marriage proposal. The pair never shared a home in half a decade they've been together but would often meet in cafes and go over each other's work. Both of them have significant contributions to each other's work. Although Sartre doesn't publicly acknowledge Beauvoir's contribution to his work, it is evident in his writings.

In spite of "feminine" Sartrean description of sensuous lived experience in *Being and Nothingness*, and Beauvoir's "masculine" values in *The Second Sex*, both are writing from their different gendered experiences. Beauvoir's relationship with Sartre has been at the heart of much of her writing. Intimate social relationships form a major focus of contemporary feminist philosophy; and identity politics, especially the intersectionality of gender and patriarchy is one of the most relevant feminist issues today. Sartre didn't write about socialization and its roots in childhood until Beauvoir did in *The Second Sex*. Only in 1950 in his essay on Jean Genet did he explore the reality of childhood experiences.

Beauvoir also used psychoanalysis as a tool to understand the masculine bias and its social and psychological role in gender roles and differences. She then combined marxist and feminist insights to her existentialism. She saw family as the socialization tool at the center of patriarchal conditioning. Sartre also used a similar method to understand social and economic forces of

history but he uses existentialism and marxist tools rather than Beauvoir's feminist insights. Sartre's praxis in the Critique, in exchange for "being-for-itself" of Being and Nothingness, takes his concept of freedom rather than consciousness in Beauvoir's concept in *The Second Sex*.

In Sartre's *Being and Nothingness* he wrote that there are two types of things, things whose essence is 'being' that is they are subject to change and dynamic in nature, things that have consciousness like animals and human beings. And things that have 'nothingness' like inanimate objects like pens, tables etc, these things are subject to not change and stay static. His theory is that when a person of being is desired and looked at by the person they desire, they inadvertently turn themselves into an object and contradict their own nature. They aim to be someone the person they desire likes and looks at themselves from that lens. He says, we change our autonomy and individuality when this happens, changing the fundamental nature of our being and losing control of our destiny. He called this whole phenomena 'bad faith' and theorized that this is why most relationships fail.

While Beauvoir and Sartre had somewhat of a similar notion of love and relationships it is speculated that Beauvoir might've suffered emotionally and mentally from the complicated nature of their relationship as Sartre seemingly had a reputation of being a womanizer. Although she had her fair share of affairs with Sartre involved and with other men such as Nelson Algren who Beauvoir referred to as her "beloved husband" in her letters. The highlight of their relationship seems to have been reciprocity, that is, love shared equally. Beauvoir's idea of reciprocal love was "sharing individual lives" rather than one person being "all consuming". As an existentialist, Beauvoir says that as free subjects we have control and autonomy of what to do with our lives and who we are is subject to what to do, this is, our actions. In reciprocal love, the prospect of a future together can be a "joint project".

"Authenticity is not a status to be achieved, but a project – a joint project – to be pursued." (Kate Kirkpatrick) As hard as it is to find love, it is harder to maintain its authenticity because there is always a certainty that it will cease existing.

Beauvoir's relationship with women were actually exploitative in nature; and an entanglement with Natalie Sorokine, a 17-year-old student cost Beauvoir her teaching license. Her involvement with Bianca Bienenfeld was a messy and problematic affair. Beauvoir and Bienenfeld had a student teacher relationship until they got romantically involved and soon after Beauvoir involved Sartre and they were in a 'love triangle', after a which she told him to end it and he did. Neither Sartre nor Beauvoir try to reach Bienenfeld who was jewish an escaped the Nazi occupation in France, which could be perceived as an indicator of Bienenfelds value in their lives or rather lack of. Bienenfeld said about their affair, "Their perversity was carefully concealed beneath Sartre's meek and mild exterior and the Beaver's serious and austere appearance. In fact, they were acting out a commonplace version of 'Dangerous Liaisons.'" (Brown)

In this “morganatic marriage”, it looks like he was far more equal than she was. Because it was he with the womanizer reputation and the one who had numerous affairs outside of their relationship, she only got involved sometimes. From her literary work and her publications of their private letters it seems evidently clear that she suffered from jealousy. It is suggested that the man she was very much in love with was never sexually faithful to her and the whole pact of an open marriage was rather pointless because they didn’t have an equal footing.

## CONCLUSION

Exploring Beauvoir's life work and personal relationships, it seems fair to term her a hypocrite of her own life due to the fallacies between her postulated theories and implementation of her own philosophies in her life when it comes to love. However, it is too harsh to conclude and judge Beauvoir’s person based solely on her philosophy or solely on her womanhood, but rather take a compassionate and understanding stance. As a woman, Beauvoir is the subject of her writing even when she’s the one who proposes it, that makes her contingent to the ‘Woman in Love’. Her philosophizing of the concept of Love, does not liberate her from the personal realities of it as is evident in this paper. Even so, Beauvoir’s analysis of women in love are said to be dated. For one, women today have a greater access to education and other primary resources than women in 1949 which makes them less likely to make love a “religion” as there are other sectors of life which demand their devotion. Although inequalities within the institution do exist, relations between partners on equal footing have better chances of flourishing.

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