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EQUALITY AND DIFFERENCE FEMINISMS AND SIMONE DE BEAUVOIR'S *THE SECOND SEX*

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Abstract

This paper argues that Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* anticipates the impasse between equality feminism and difference feminism and their respective limits. This germinal text of second wave feminism reveals an aspect of equality feminism that relies upon masculine subjectivity, a subjectivity that inherently constitutes otherness. The reliance on masculine subjectivity Beauvoir aspires women to embody would be anathema to difference feminism because the otherness inherently constituted by such subjectivity simultaneously and paradoxically constitutes women's ongoing subordination. In assuming equality with men without examining the implications of masculine subjectivity upon which that equality is based, women are not immune to constituting other women *as other*. At the same time, difference strategies are limited because *The Second Sex* reveals they require an imagined freedom in order to identify the difference that would empower women. Such imagined freedom has not been actualized, but nonetheless it is vital to identify the difference that needs consideration. Given these limitations, one might expect equality and difference feminisms to have reached their limits as strategies for advancing women's equality. However, they have been and remain useful strategies not in spite of their limitations, but because of them, specifically having to do with lessons of domination in the case of equality feminism and the need for recognizing difference in the case of difference feminism. Thus, the tension between equality and difference feminisms need not be understood as an either-or proposition, but instead feminisms with limitations, each with productive potential and cautionary rejoinders.

Equality/Difference. Reading Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* sheds light on the theoretical and political limits of both feminist equality and difference approaches especially in a historical moment where the debate between them has often emphasized which approach is more efficacious. The debate between equality and difference feminism emerged in the 1970s at a time when equality feminism, also known as liberal feminism or egalitarian feminism, predominated. The rise of equality feminism occurred as women discovered, became conscious of, and took action to rectify their inequalities with men, especially their access to post-secondary education, pay equity, and entry into male-dominated occupations and elected office. Thinkers such as Simone de Beauvoir (1989 [1949]) and Betty Friedan (2001[1963]) provided women frameworks and language to express their economic, social, political, and sexual subordination to men. These thinkers became beacons of the second wave of feminism determined to fight for and achieve equality for women as a social class with men in western advanced industrial societies. Mainly middle class, white, heterosexual women became active in actions and organizations reported by mainstream media within the public sphere; they pressed for change on the basis that women and men were equal to one another as human beings, and thus, women should be equal with men in the workplace, in electoral institutions, and in the family.¹ Yet, at the same time, dissenting voices against this early strategy of equality feminism emerged within academic feminism and the feminist movement. Socialist feminists argued that equality strategies benefited middle class women without addressing the needs of working class and poor women. Unlike equality feminists who did not question capitalism as a system of oppression, socialist feminists could not exclude capitalism from its critique of patriarchy; they rejected the possibility of women's equality within existing capitalism without changing the structure of capitalism itself (Hartmann 1981). Women of color argued that the strategy of equality deployed primarily by white women not only ignored but also perpetuated racism and poverty that disproportionately affected visible minority women. Critical race theory feminists saw equality strategies so immersed in colonialism that they felt it largely impossible to bring about equality for visible minority women as long as western liberalism and colonial power remained insufficiently un-interrogated and intact (Mohanty 2003, 1991, Minh-Ha, 1989). Lesbian feminists felt marginalized and hostility from within a heteronormative movement. Queer feminism argued the need for equality feminism to interrogate its heterosexual assumptions in its conceptualization of gender equality (Wittig 1980, 1975, Butler 1999). In each their own ways, these feminisms argued that pursuing a strategy of equality meant the needs and interests of working class women, women of color, and lesbian women were largely subordinated to those of middle class, Eurocentric, and heterosexual women who were at the time central to feminist organizing on behalf of women *writ large*.

There were also feminisms that focused on sexual difference as key for understanding women's subordination. French feminism and maternal feminism insisted on privileging the feminine, but in different ways. French feminism focused on a specific feminine rationality that had been effaced by the phallogocentrism of masculine rationality. This feminine rationality could be recuperated through a specific feminine *écriture* (Cixous 1981, 1980), mimesis of masculine rationality to expose its excess (Irigaray 1992, 1985), and location and resistance of feminine abjection (Kristeva 1981). For French feminism, the difference between women and men was inherently phallogocentric, meaning that the very structure of thinking, i.e., rationality, was masculinist. Consequently, feminine expression was unable to manifest sufficiently and freely on its own terms within patriarchal institutions and language because they inherently

suppressed the feminine. Maternal feminism focused on the caring aspects of women's desire and experience (Chodorow 1978, Ruddick 1990). The 'ethics of care' took the moral differences found between girls and boys as a basis for feminist norms and practices (Gilligan, 1980). Feminisms of sexual difference inspired the thinking that for women to experience true equality, women would have to explore femininity distinct from existing male-created institutions, norms, and practices, often *without* men. The pursuit of women-exclusive spaces and institutions became a key hallmark of radical feminist practice inspired by French and maternal feminisms.

Difference feminism(s), then, comprised a wide-ranging group of feminisms that sometimes were in coalition together, sometimes in friction with one another especially when it came to issues of class, Eurocentric and heterosexual premises; common to them was their realization that formal equality-seeking was neither sufficient for the achievement of women's full participation in society nor substantive equality. Even though equality feminists would respond that women's equality would also change the meaning of equality as well as social, economic, and political structures and systems (Eisenstein 1981, Okin 1979), difference feminists were highly skeptical and critical of the possibility of both structural and attitudinal change from equality demands because existing power structures and attitudes were highly resistant to change. That is why a specific aspect of sexual difference had to be recognized that often intersected with class, race, and sexuality. As well, existing power often de-legitimated women's claims, not to mention the women making the claims themselves. There would always be a difference associated with women that would be used to justify, often tacitly, women's inequality either in comparisons made with men, and even with women. Equality feminism's conceit, from a difference feminist perspective, was that it often assumed universalism on the basis of a set of particular norms, often First world, middle class, heteronormative, and colonial in character, that in turn produced unacknowledged hierarchies where poor women, women of color, lesbian women, disabled women were excluded from the subject of equality. Difference feminists made enormous efforts to point out these exclusions circulated under the language of the universal, while equality feminism would respond by making painfully clear that universals were capable of incorporating difference under the right communicative and procedural conditions. Conversely, equality feminism's concern with difference feminism was that sexual difference could be used to reinforce domestic responsibilities for women and establish their natural difference from men, but difference feminism made clear that this was a familiar strategy of subordination and did not preclude the demand to recognize difference, indeed, the justification of inequality on the basis of difference was all the more reason to affirm difference.² According to difference feminisms, resistance had to go beyond closing gender gaps and attaining equal rights between women and men; they saw these strategies emblematic of the method 'add women and stir' and largely rejected them.

The main consequence of this impasse, since reached in the 1980s,³ is an agonistic relationship on two fronts between equality and difference feminisms. First, between equality feminists and difference feminists, disagreement continues over the approach that is more efficacious (See Anthias 2002, Armstrong 2002, Dietz 2003, Eisenberg 2003, Mansbridge 2002, Okin 1998, Scott 1999). Second, some feminists propose a synthesis between the two (Baum 2004). Instead of thinking a choice must be made or that the two should resolve into an amalgam of sorts, it is possible to shed further light on the conditions that produce the limits of each strategy beyond rights and sexual difference by understanding masculine subjectivity and the need for an imaginative realm for envisaging women's equality using Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*. In so doing, I would like to de-centre the debate on equality feminism versus difference

feminism by presenting other dimensions related to masculine subjectivity and the future of gender equality that help explain why equality feminism and difference feminism are in tension with one another.

ii

How does *The Second Sex* contribute to understanding the tension between equality and difference feminisms? There are two locations of freedom in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* that shed light on equality and difference feminisms respectively. The first resides in a masculine subject who has propelled the development of western society through history-making activity. This is the role model subject that empowers equality feminism. The second occurs in a future not yet and in a subject conscious of differences that need to be reconciled into a relationship of equality for women. This is a subject conscious of differences and the power they produce, and how power in the existing context largely refuses to acknowledge and recognize the differences that could expand freedom for women. Each location of freedom produces two kinds of freedom that are in tension with one another. The first sense of freedom resonates with Jean-Paul Sartre's conception of freedom. This freedom reproduces the Cartesian *cogito* and locates it in the subject's potential and actual will regardless of her situation. This subject assumes that the *cogito* determines one's freedom. Even when an external force constrains the body, be it a law, regulation, convention, norm, or another body, the Sartrean subject can still posit freedom in and through her mind. Feminists have criticized Beauvoir, alleging that she uncritically appropriates the Sartrean subject as a workable model for women.⁴ The result of this appropriation assumes wrongly, according to Beauvoir's feminist critics, that women have the same desires as men and envisage freedom in the same ways as men. Feminists have also defended Beauvoir against such a Sartrean subject, claiming that this recognition results in a becoming of woman in resistance to existing subjugating conditions and thus distinct from being a merely constituted *other*. Supporters of this version of Beauvoir's subject counter that the female subject is cognizant of being produced by the oppressive processes of patriarchy.⁵ What these feminists neglect to say, however, is that the transformation suggested from this becoming is more incremental than a completed actualization of freedom in the present. Indeed, in the *Second Sex*, such a completed transformation cannot be actualized because the conditions of patriarchy present themselves as limits at the outset. This is why within *The Second Sex*, the location of women's (and men's) completed freedom takes place in the future where existing limits have been surmounted and where the recognition of differences can be resolved, indeed *fraternally* (Beauvoir's wording) sometimes with conflict, into freedom for both women and men. Gender equality, on the one hand, premised upon a rational woman equal and striving for equality with men, and on the other hand, upon differences *already recognized* by men in the future are both discernible in *The Second Sex*. Within the text, their coexistence occurs *outside* history.

The first position of masculine subjectivity emphasizes the kind of freedom Beauvoir wants for women that implicitly men already have. Just as men are conscious of their sovereignty and capacity to act in the world, so are women.

In claiming himself sovereign, he [man] comes up against [*rencontre*] the complicity of woman herself: because she is also an existent, she has the tendency for transcendence and her project is not repetition but transcendence toward a different future; in the heart of her being she finds the confirmation of masculine pretensions.⁶

Just as men are aware of themselves as sovereign subjects, women are too. Beauvoir suggests that women realize they have been consigned to “repetition,” or motherhood, in the past, but women have always sought to define themselves and their freedom through the creation and execution of their own projects via a rationality similar to men, yet, at the same time distinct from men and yet unknown. Men have made women subordinate and claimed power over them, but this does not mean that women do not want the power men already possess. In actual fact, Beauvoir says women do desire freedom, albeit a freedom that for her is manifest by the male body and masculine consciousness.

Beauvoir’s *The Ethics of Ambiguity* helps elucidate this conception of freedom as it relates to the idea of project. In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, freedom begins with the self-recognition of not being a free subject in the present and the desire to transcend one’s current situation by reaching toward the attainment of one’s truer potential through a willed action that involves creation and making one’s mark in and on one’s environment, i.e., history-making. When one acts in a willed and creative way, one is taking on projects that surpass one’s present existence. One surpasses oneself by expanding the will and knowledge of oneself, that is, creating and changing the landscape in one’s external surroundings. The kind of effort that would constitute such activity remains abstract in *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, but becomes more specific in the form of art, letters, and architecture in *The Second Sex*. There is also an ethical aspect to this endeavor because the attainment of freedom entails the expansion of the freedom of others: “the freedom of other men must be respected and they must be helped to free themselves.”⁷ “The man... whose end is the liberation of himself and others, who forces himself to respect this end through the means which he uses to attain it... is a genuinely free man.”⁸

In *The Ethics of Ambiguity*, Beauvoir speaks of women sparingly and when she does, she presents women, along with slaves, as “beings whose life slips by into an infantile world because, having been kept in a state of servitude and ignorance, they have no means of breaking the ceiling which is stretched over their heads.”⁹ However, in *The Second Sex* Beauvoir strongly suggests that because women have not been fully conscious of their subordinate status and constructed passivity, they have not rebelled against patriarchal circumstances. Beauvoir wants women to confront men to gain recognition and social change for their improved condition. This freedom premised upon the male body and masculine consciousness that together renders masculine subjectivity, however, becomes compromised because of the very constitution of masculine subjectivity.

Unacknowledged by Beauvoir is the domination that undergirds the masculine subjectivity she advocates. Instead, she focuses on the strong agency of the masculine subject to the point where she views this subject as having succeeded in carving out the definitive path toward freedom. However, while purporting to result in a progressive mode of freedom-producing outcomes, this subject does not do so. Hegel’s master-slave dialectic helps to explain the failure for men and women when domination underlies subjectivity. Passing references to the master-slave dialectic in *The Second Sex* have been the subject of feminist analysis. I highlight three main interpretations of Beauvoir’s use of Hegel’s master-slave dialectic in feminist scholarship as follows. First, woman is positioned analogous to the slave and man to the master (Mussett 2006, Sandford 2006, Haddock 1985, Jaggar and McBride, 1985). Second, woman is not positioned in the dialectic: woman does not enter into a struggle to the death with man because she is absolutely *othered* (Hutchings 2003, Gauthier 1997, Bergoffen 1997, Lundgren-Gothlin 1996).¹⁰ Third, Hegel’s master-slave dialectic facilitates the goal of reciprocal recognition between the sexes (Bauer 2001), but not necessarily gender equality. In addition to

these interpretations, *The Second Sex* lends itself to reveal an inadvertent acknowledgement that masculine subjectivity is unworkable for women, (and men), because such subjectivity, like Hegel's master, remains blind to the paradox that domination does not bring about freedom.

In Hegel's master-slave parable, the subject's consciousness of its power over (an)other is made possible by the slave's submission in exchange for his (the slave's) life after the struggle to the death. However, the victory is also pyrrhic because the master's dominance, according to Hegel, requires recognition by another equal to himself. At the outset, the confrontation between two subjects is that of potentially two masters, but the fight to the death renders one a slave and in Hegel's view, the slave was always destined to be subjugated, especially given that Hegel was narrating a story of the development of subjectivity from a perspective of power. The slave's recognition of the master's dominance renders a reversal of power for the master. The master requires recognition by an equal but he does not achieve this by virtue of his victory over the slave, thus he does not gain what he desired, a complete sense of self as victor. There is a missing element of what he thought he could be as a subject, thus there is continued domination over the slave to reinitiate the moment of victory that ironically also repeats the failure of a completed self. *The Second Sex* contains this aspect of Hegel's master-slave dialectic. Woman is made Other and becomes Other, analogous to the slave, but ironically, man does not achieve the freedom he claims because his putative freedom is not recognized by an equal and it comes at the expense of an(Other). Thus, this cannot be a genuine freedom on Beauvoir's terms.¹¹ Yet, this failure remains implicit, *unspoken* within *The Second Sex*. By speaking this failure, the implications of women taking on the subject position of masculine subjectivity can also be spoken. Below, I provide a reading of gender relations in *The Second Sex* that follows the subjectivity of the master in Hegel's master-slave dialectic.

In *The Second Sex*, women are subordinated by men in the very constitution of women's subjectivity as a consciousness not completely their own. Early in the text, Beauvoir alludes to men creating the consciousness of women as inferior and subordinate without legitimate justification. Really, men hold no unique claim to the processes attendant to survival, according to Beauvoir, they have made such a false claim, and in so doing, declared that maternity is woman's purview and has tried to keep her bound to that task:

In truth women have never set up female values in opposition to male values; it is men who, desirous of maintaining masculine prerogatives, have invented that divergence. Men have pretended to create a feminine domain-the principle of life, of immanence-only in order to lock up women therein.¹²

Men have created a false sense of their own identity through femininity they have produced and devalued. When men look to women for their own affirmation, they will only see an inessential consciousness or a consciousness *of their own creation* that is unable to provide the basis for their self-certainty for freedom, precisely because from such a subject position of "the one who creates" they have reduced women to a conception of other, made them into dependent and subordinate subjects. Men have been able to create the differences between the sexes that imprison women in the name of sexual difference. Yet, men become dependent upon women's recognition, a recognition that will always fail because he has made women's identity incapable of the recognition he needs. This is the operation of masculine consciousness especially present in Beauvoir's Chapter IX entitled *Dreams, Fears, Idols*. Man sees woman as the incarnation of *his* dream, yet masculine self-consciousness must reach out to this other in order to complete his sense of self.¹³ Ironically, man's individual need for recognition cannot be

met by an(other), who is already subject to his will. In the quotation below, Beauvoir describes man attempting to impose his will upon “Nature” as woman. He can bend and mold her to his will, but there is a fundamental opposition that leads to failure.

Man encounters Nature; he has some hold upon her, he endeavors to mold her to his desire. But she cannot fill his needs. Either she appears simply as a purely impersonal opposition, she is an obstacle and remains a stranger; or she submits passively to man’s will and permits assimilation, so that he takes possession of her only through consuming her--that is, through destroying her. In both cases he remains alone; he is alone when he touches a stone, alone when he devours a fruit.¹⁴

Beauvoir does not elaborate upon what she means when she says that man “remains alone” in the attempt to possess woman as he has influenced her subjectivity and as woman has been produced through his power. “Remaining alone” suggests that the masculine subject does not attain the freedom assumed to be within his grasp. An isolated and solitary existence is not the freedom that Beauvoir celebrates and affirms at the beginning of *The Second Sex*. And, unlike the freedom that produces the other’s freedom, following what she says of freedom in the *Ethics of Ambiguity*, men have failed because they consciously subordinate women. This collective subordination does not bring about a ‘fraternity’ between women and men; instead men remain individually alone and incapable of releasing themselves from such a deficient situation. Men do not secure the recognition they seek and depend upon from women. Instead, masculine consciousness produces only a solitary self that is not what he claimed to be – neither history-maker, nor free subject among other free subjects.¹⁵ Beauvoir does not acknowledge this reversal, but the solitary and incomplete life men create reflects this reversal when she states men make women the other and when women as the other remain a stranger or disappear as individuals within men’s presence.

That Beauvoir does not ruminate upon this unacknowledged critical reversal indicates an attachment to the masculine subject as the role model for freedom. Even though her vision of freedom does not aim to repeat the power relation of domination, it would seem that true equality would be at best remotely possible because masculine subjectivity requires domination over an other for its very being. Even if such subjectivity were capable of admitting to its inherently oppressive impulses, its need to subordinate an(other) for self-preservation takes precedence. She elides the need for this admission at the end of *The Second Sex*, when she writes “it is for man to establish the reign of liberty in the midst of the world of the given,”¹⁶ perhaps because she either recognizes or is unaware that, according to her view, men will not have any incentive to apprentice women or train them in freedom. Beauvoir needs to maintain that men have the “power” to attain their own freedom so that they, as freedom-producing beings, can share their knowledge with women. Beauvoir cannot concede that men are incapable of attaining freedom, otherwise she would need to question masculine subjectivity she assumes to produce freedom. In contrast, my focus on the failure of the masculine subject in *The Second Sex* to manifest freedom anticipates that women will be unable to secure their freedom on the basis of masculine subjectivity proposed and maintained in the text.¹⁷ They too, will embody these same limits because women will be blind to the subordinating power relations created by masculine subjectivity itself.

Implications for equality feminism. Beauvoir's narrative of masculine subjectivity suggests significant limitations for equality feminism, but for reasons different than those identified by feminists that take umbrage against her attachment to the male body and consciousness (e.g. Chanter 1995, Léon 1995, Lloyd 1993, Okely 1986). These feminist critics argued that the male body was an unacceptable standard for defining women's equality, but they did not identify the critical reversal in masculine subjectivity that casts doubt on the putative freedom achieved by men. Reading men's freedom through this critical reversal, such freedom is an illusion because it depends upon making women Other, a consequence that preempts the achievement of freedom since one's freedom must also produce the freedom of others. In Beauvoir's outline of masculine subjectivity, she clearly shows that the pursuit of men's freedom comes at women's expense, however, she does not explore the implication that this means men's freedom remains truly unrealized. Further, she remains committed to the history-making activity and the subjectivity that creates it as a path of freedom for women. Implicitly, in adhering to masculine subjectivity Beauvoir consigns women to continued subordination by men, and ironically, the possibility of women subordinating others given her view that women need to adopt this subjectivity. What would make women immune from the same dynamic of domination when adopting masculinist subjectivity? As discussed above, women who have been *othered* within feminism have made their exclusions known: women of color, poor women, lesbian women have criticized demands for equality made by women embodying and acting from Eurocentric cultural norms. *The Second Sex* anticipates this kind of othering because the masculine subjectivity that underlies equality-seeking inherently produces domination.

For equality feminism, women need to fight to seek equality with men, but do not consider the implicit, darker consequences having to do with the very subjectivity of equality-seeking. Indeed, Beauvoir says women need to enter into a struggle with men for this purpose and they need to develop the kind of consciousness and institutional power to do so. Given masculine subjectivity, however, my reading of Beauvoir anticipates the possibility of pyrrhic victories for women. Equality won for women, while substantive in the moment, could be short-lived especially in the context where masculine subjectivity predominates and its inherent constitutive dynamic predicts a relentless dynamic that "others" women. For women to adopt the kind of subjectivity Beauvoir would have them embody suggests the trap where women are up against power that will reassert itself through the othering process. This resonates with moments where women have fought hard and won equality with men only to realize that the victory was insufficient for substantive equality (e.g. the vote, equality rights). This does not mean to say that the victory itself is meaningless, but rather that masculine subjectivity restores itself to dominance very quickly and resists the extension and sharing of power in ways, like Beauvoir, women had hoped.

Just as masculine subjectivity has a blind spot to its power relation of domination, equality feminism also has a blind spot in its power relation over women it *others* in the process of making equality claims. Beauvoir's outline of masculine subjectivity as the model for equality-seeking claims for women foreshadows the criticism made by women who note the exclusions of equality demands. The othering process inherent in masculine subjectivity occurs when women adopt it because such subjectivity involves domination, even if unconsciously. Thus, the limits of equality feminism occur at two moments: first, when othered-women disagree with the political demands made on the basis of equality by groups of women who take on the representative voice to speak for women more broadly. Such a moment cannot be avoided,

following Beauvoir, because subjectivity inherently assumes a power relation between self and other. The second moment occurs when masculine subjectivity embodied in and deployed by patriarchal institutions dismisses or de-legitimizes women's equality claims.

Differences and the Imagination. Masculine subjectivity, along the lines Beauvoir describes, suggests that neither women nor men can attain freedom. In the absence of freedom in the present, Beauvoir introduces in the conclusion of *The Second Sex* a world where women and men are equal and capable of living a fulfilled freedom, however, the arrival of this time is unspecified. The *free woman* can appear only when the economic, moral, social, cultural and other conditions enable her to appear. A paradox appears: women have not been free and they will not be free until they are. In Beauvoir's words, "this explains why the woman of today is torn between the past and the future."¹⁸ What is the nature of this being torn? Women are living in the past of unfreedom, a place of discomfort and suffering, acknowledging that the understanding of woman remains intimately constituted within patriarchal society and by myths of femininity. Women also live in the future knowing the possibility of freedom. Yet, the possibility of being an emancipated woman remains unrealized because wherever one is a woman or defined a woman there will be a present conditioned by patriarchal power in varying degrees as a constitutive power. There is consciousness that one is not free, that one's project defined as one's freedom, in fact, becomes assimilated to an otherness which one thought could be transcended or transformed in the very doing of the project. And now, this knowledge is inflected with tacit failure. Beauvoir writes:

She appears most often as a 'true woman' disguised as a man, and she feels herself as ill at ease in her flesh as in masculine garb. She must shed her old skin and cut her own new clothes. This she could do only through a social evolution. No single educator could fashion a *female human being* today who would be the exact homologue of the *male human being*; if she is raised like a boy, the young girl feels she is an oddity and thereby she is given a new kind of sex specification.¹⁹

The newness of each sense of womanhood fashioned by a woman herself is not a completed freedom, whether it is as a woman who has become equal with a man in a professional role or a girl who feels at odds with herself in relation to other girls because she has not had the same kind of upbringing. The resulting change is ambiguous because "woman" and "girl," in Beauvoir's examples, are becoming something other than what the past definitions of femininity prescribed and produced. Even the new 'becomings' embody patriarchal norms of masculinity through the experience of a female body and still feminine mind that is not independent of male consciousness, hence, the freedom remains ill-fitting. To the extent that it is uncomfortable and not completely defined by women and girls themselves, it is not wholly freedom-producing, the very freedom Beauvoir wants for women. The masculine model of freedom she adopts as the model for women to copy remains contained within the paradoxical production of freedom and subordination. But, the difference between the unsatisfactory present and emancipated future is that the latter remains a place of possibility. In the existing context, masculine subjectivity and patriarchy constrain and contain emancipatory efforts: this is the limit for equality feminism. The starting point for change will always be within patriarchal conditions and masculine subjectivity will assimilate and circumscribe transformative acts and action to such conditions. There needs to be another space for imagining freedom. This is the world of the future where freedom is already achieved in the imagination so it can be read into the present. In

this future present, oppressions produced by masculine subjectivity will have stopped because masculine subjectivity either disappears or becomes something else; it becomes a different kind of subjectivity, one that is amenable to difference, specifically gender differences. This is at once the possibility and limitations of difference feminisms.

Indeed, a different kind of subjectivity is required, one that does not harbor an inherent drive of domination over an(other) and one that produces the freedom of others as it does for oneself. “But if we imagine, on the contrary, a society in which the equality of the sexes would be concretely realized, this equality would find new expression in each individual.”²⁰ A whole new world of gender relations would open up revealing new possibilities as well as transforming certain patriarchal myths. Beauvoir invites her reader to visualize a time when subjectivity is not inherently focused on domination over an(other). Subjectivity would not be constitutively masculine inflected with domination; it would be unburdened of this need to subordinate an(other). What a new subjectivity would require and offer is a capacity to recognize the incompleteness of oneself in either the male or female body. Instead of having to fulfill oneself by dominating an(other), Beauvoir suggests that individuals would be able to accept their respective incompleteness and in so doing also accept that this is sufficient for recognizing oneself and the other in mutual reciprocity. Hegel’s master-slave dialectic would require transformation into a dialectic of difference where difference requires, on the one hand, honoring what is deficient in oneself to become a complete subject, as well as on the other hand, honoring the other in their inability to provide such completeness. Confrontations between women and men would continue to occur, however, the patriarchal dimension of domination would be diffused because domination would be rendered unnecessary for one’s sense of freedom, one that would be false at the outset, and meaningless among women and men who understand their respective lack as itself the moment of subjectivity’s completion. Both women and men would be able to give one another the recognition needed to fulfill their respective desires without the creation of an Other.

In those combats where they think they confront one another, it is really against the self that each one struggles, projecting into the partner that part of the self which is repudiated; instead of living out the ambiguities of their situation, each tries to make the other bear the abjection and tries to reserve the honor for the self. If, however, both should assume the ambiguity with a clear-sighted modesty, correlative of an authentic pride, they would see each other as equals and would live out their erotic drama in amity.²¹

The Second Sex shows that differences need to be acknowledged since difference is the basis of both unfreedom and emancipation. The subordinating effects of inequality hinge upon the repression of difference; its recognition assumes the possibility of an emancipatory effect. This anticipates feminisms that focus on difference such as cultural feminism, maternal feminism, French feminism, post-colonial feminism, black feminism, mestizo feminism, and queer feminism. All concentrate on aspects of difference insisted upon within a context that privileges patriarchal, White-Eurocentric, middle-class, heteronormative, and able-bodied norms to argue for the revaluation and incorporation of ideas and practices into the body politic for meaningful social and political systems and participation. The cautionary for feminisms of difference is that imagined difference, while it facilitates a fully realized freedom, is a freedom nonetheless that remains in the realm of the imagination. As well, in the very attempt to recognize differences socially and politically, any specific difference can be used to justify

women's subordination based on so-called natural differences between women and men. This is the concern of equality feminism. The actual work and extraordinary energy and effort involved in changing present conditions of gender inequality do not lessen the importance of the work or goals at the outset. But, as *The Second Sex* shows, where subjectivity is no longer masculine, the freedom imagined is distinct from the masculine subjectivity that tends to predominate in the present. Thus, difference feminism remains torn between the present and the future. The present represses difference and the future recognizes difference.

iv

Conclusion. *The Second Sex* allows us to look at equality and difference feminisms from the perspective of subjectivity each presumes. Equality feminism resonates with masculine subjectivity, aspects of which were avowed by Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, i.e., a subject whose freedom was expressed in history-making activities that produced arts, letters, architecture, and nation building. The text encourages the idea of women fighting for equality on the basis of men's existing political and socio-economic power and the possibility of women's own history-making production. Yet, *The Second Sex* demonstrates problems associated with reliance on masculine subjectivity as a primary model for either men's or women's freedom. Men do not realize freedom because such subjectivity inherently constitutes relations of domination. Similarly, women empowered by such subjectivity will fall short of freedom because such subjectivity is inherently oppressive and it does not realize the freedom of others. This limitation helps explain why freedom, following a close reading of *The Second Sex*, occurs only outside the experience of embodied subjects in an imagined space where the very problem of masculine subjectivity can be transcended through its transmutation into a freedom-producing agent. In the end, freedom exists outside of lived experience in the mind of one who yearns for an existence no longer produced by relations of dominance. Nonetheless, what makes this freedom promising is the focus on differences and different socio-economic conditions required to make possible such an imagined future.

The Second Sex, thus also anticipates difference feminism in that Beauvoir acknowledges differences among women that need to be addressed by men and women in order for a truer equality to manifest. The space of difference is one where difference can be identified and reconciled in an untroubled imaginary. This suggests that a complete emancipation is always in the future and emancipation requires freedom constituted by a freedom-producing subjectivity. Through *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir implicitly shows feminism that emancipation is an ongoing endeavor, one that cannot be completed as a project in the present. Contrary to this being a cynical or depressing moment, Beauvoir's turn to focus on difference at the end of *The Second Sex* continues the possibility of the feminist goal of women's equality even when both equality and difference feminism predictably will experience the limits of power under current conditions.

¹ For accounts of second wave feminism in North America, see Susan Brownmiller, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution* (New York: The Dial Press, 1999), Flora Davis, *Moving the Mountain* (New York; Simon and Schuster, 1991), and Judy Rebick, *Ten Thousand Roses: The Making of a Feminist Revolution* (Toronto: Penguin, 2005).

² Valerie Bryson, *Feminist Political Theory: An Introduction* (New York: Palgrave), 149.

³ Mary G. Dietz, “Current Controversies in Feminist Theory,” in *Annual Review of Political Science* (2003), v. 6, 417.

⁴ See Tina Chanter, “The Legacy of Simone de Beauvoir,” in *Ethics of Eros: Irigaray’s Rewriting of the Philosophers* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 47-79; Céline T. Léon, “Beauvoir’s Woman: Eunuch or Male?,” in *Feminist Interpretations of Simone de Beauvoir*, edited by Margaret A. Simons (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 137-160; Genevieve Lloyd, “The Struggle for Transcendence,” in *The Man of Reason: ‘Male’ and ‘Female’* (London: Methuen, 1993 2nd Edition), 86-102; and Judith Okely, *Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: Virago, 1986). For readings that argue Beauvoir was more independent of Sartre than conventionally thought, see Joseph Mahon, *Existentialism, Feminism and Simone de Beauvoir* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), Toril Moi, *The Making of an Intellectual Woman* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1994), Margaret A. Simons, “Beauvoir and Sartre: The Philosophical Relationship,” *Yale French Studies* no. 72 (1986), 165-197, and Linda Singer, “Interpretation and Retrieval: Rereading Beauvoir” in *Hypatia Reborn*, edited by M. A. Simons and A. Y. al-Hibri (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), 323-335.

⁵ Yet, even though the subject is produced by patriarchal power, she still has personal agency to resist the normalizing processes of femininity “as a daily act of reconstitution and interpretation.” Recent readings of Beauvoir by Butler (1986, 1989), Kruks (1992, 1995, 2001), and Zerilli (1992) emphasize the role of personal agency within a context of constraint and oppression, still nonetheless produced within patriarchal conditions.

⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 64.

⁷ Simone de Beauvoir, *Ethics of Ambiguity* (Secaucus, NJ: Citadel Press, 1997), 60.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 60-61.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁰ Susan James (2003) argues that complicity and slavery in *The Second Sex* is closer to seventeenth century philosopher Malebranche than Hegel.

¹¹ Beauvoir writes in *Ethics of Ambiguity*: “The man... whose end is the liberation of himself and others, who forces himself to respect this end through the means which he uses to attain it... is a genuinely free man” (1997, 60-61).

¹² *Ibid.*, 65 TA.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 140.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 141 my italics. Judith Butler sees another reversal, along Hegelian lines, in Beauvoir. If freedom for man is defined by the masculine project of disembodiment, then Beauvoir shows that this project is impossible. In defining woman as other and corporeal, man is projecting his alienated self with the aim of distinguishing himself as the autonomous self and unrestrained by the body. However, in disposing of his body and by making himself other than his body, man alienates himself from his own body and becomes something other than himself. Thus, the autonomy and disembodiment thought to be gained is rendered its opposite because the autonomy and disembodiment actually becomes other to himself. “The masculine pursuit of disembodiment,” Butler writes, “is necessarily deceived because the body can never really be denied; its denial becomes the condition for its emergence in alien form.” Judith Butler, “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*, (1986), 43-44.

¹⁶ Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 732.

¹⁷ Feminist scholarship overwhelmingly does not focus on man's failed transcendence in *The Second Sex*.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 725.

²⁰ *Ibid.* 726.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 728.

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