
Simone De Beauvoir: One Is Not Born A Woman But Becomes One

Simone de Beauvoir is portraying the state of being a woman as not something one is born into but rather what someone transforms into. There are various ways in which this can be interpreted and this quote is even used today in many discussions regarding gender and politics. This quote can be taken literally with regards to one's biological sex, however this is not a common interpretation. Another interpretation is that being a woman is a social construct, one created throughout centuries or even longer, which places barriers on what one identifies as a woman can consist of. De Beauvoir's idea of a woman may also be in relation to defining it via comparison to what it means to be a man. Throughout this essay I'll explore different interpretations of this quote, to what extent it holds true whilst also observing the effect this has had on our modern social and political climate.

De Beauvoir has stated that one is not born a woman but one transforms into a woman. One way in which this can be interpreted is regarding the literal biological characteristics which make up one's sex. I do not believe this is what De Beauvoir was referring to when discussing the becoming of a woman as in the vast majority of scenarios it is not difficult to identify the biological sex of a newborn. One's transformation, whether it be their state of mind or a physical one, can not lead them to be a different biological sex. Their chromosomes will remain the same and nothing changes the sex in which they were born with. I do not however believe that this is what De Beauvoir was referring to when observing what it means for one to be or become a woman.

Another interpretation is to understand what it means to be a woman as a social construct. To be a woman is to fit into many stereotypes and categories. There are norms for what a woman does or how a woman speaks and there will always be members of society whom don't fall into these norms. The quote can be interpreted as saying that these gender roles which have been assigned to being a woman is not something natural that emerges from the birth of a child but rather as a society we assign people into these gender roles and turn them into what is the norm which is what we have come to accept. This interpretation does hold true to some extent. We've become more accepting as a society and being part of the younger generation I am socially aware that the importance of not placing barriers nor marginalising groups or defining others identities via stereotypes or norms. However, there are still these barriers which many individuals face today. Many women in the work place aren't taken as seriously as their male counterparts and this is largely due to the way women were portrayed by western society for a long period of time. People were often taught that women were caretakers and had to dress or speak a certain way and only have certain interests or hobbies when in reality people and their personalities are a lot more diverse than that and this can be seen when there are women whom don't fall into these categories. There are in some circumstances still these expectations of women to conduct themselves in a certain way and De Beauvoir stating that one becomes a woman if interpreted in this context does hold true.

To become a woman can be interpreted in relation to what it means to become a man. It's no secret that women were oppressed throughout history and by men most of the time. This could lead one to question what being a woman was truly defined as. Could being a woman be

defined as simply not being a man? Negation of what believed to be masculine characteristics could have been in many circumstances what resulted in very stubborn beliefs regarding the state of mind of a woman. How can one whom identifies as a man define what a woman is to be? This way of thinking isn't uncommon when it comes to many concepts. As humans we identify and define via comparisons and opposites. We know what light is because we understand darkness. If there was never any darkness how would one interpret being able to perceive everything? Is that just a given or is it because of a cause and effect relationship? Humans were able to begin to understand light due to its obvious differentiation from darkness however this was only the beginning of understanding the true nature of light. When man didn't know any better would it be surprising if women were understood and defined via their differentiation from men? And when this differentiation took place of categorising these two groups how did each group obtain it's certain set of characteristics. For a long time it was the belief that these characteristics are biological but it's not that simplistic. Environmental factors and specific circumstances, the countless factors for which would be near impossible to make a list for, resulted in different beliefs and perspectives on what it means to be a woman. So simply being a woman isn't a state of ones biological sex (which is something one can't change) however when discussing what it means to be a woman in regard to one's gender identity it is clear that this is a social and abstract construct which has been formed over many generations through different civilisations and time periods with different influences shaping what society as created as this idea of a woman. This idea may have in many scenarios been in relation to what it means to be a man as the masculine and feminine have been taught to be opposites and key characteristics of what it means to be man and woman. And when a child is born they are not automatically this idea of what makes a woman but rather subject to the transformation into what creates what we have been lead to believe is a woman. Taking this viewpoint into account it isn't too surprising that Simone de Beauvoir believed that one isn't brought into this world a woman but rather being a woman is something that one becomes.

Simone De Beauvoir raises a lot of questions when stating that a woman is not born but is created. Although I disagree with interpreting this as referring to the biological sex of a human being I do understand and appreciate the value it brings in identifying the societal constructs created around the definition of woman. To be a woman says so much more than ones biological sex as we've been taught there are certain ways to be a woman and also specific ways to be a man, as though one cannot be like the other and is bound by birth to such identity and way of being. These ideas that De Beauvoir discussed in her time have had a huge influence in todays social and political atmosphere as it has allowed many people to truly understand how to identify themselves without the societal boundaries which were once much more strictly put in place. From this quote it can be seen that identify is something much more diverse than what one is born with and rather these ideas we have of how people are meant to be or whom they are suppose to be are nothing more than ideas rather than a metaphysical reality. Simone de Beauvoir was right to observe this as to be a woman implies something more than one's biological sex but rather societal roles which are consequential to the being which should have nothing to do with whom one decides to be.

References:

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