



Ball State Philosophy Outreach Project Lesson Plan

Topic: Feminism and The Second Sex

Time: 50-60 Minutes

Source: de Beauvoir, Simone. *The Second Sex*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011

Lesson Objectives:

1. Students will develop their opinions and observations about what it means to be a woman.
2. Students will develop their understanding of Beauvoir's text *The Second Sex*.
3. Students will consider the difference between sex and gender.

Activity (10-15 minutes):

- Ask the students, "What do you think of when you hear the word 'woman'? Write down as many things that come into your head." Give students two minutes to answer.
- Ask students to share responses to the first question. Facilitator should make a list.
- Instruct the students to write down the answer to the question, "What makes a woman a woman?" Give students 1 minute to answer the question.
- Ask, "Does what you think of when you think of 'woman' match with what you wrote down for what makes a woman a woman? If not, what differences do you see between your answers? Why do you think your answers were different in that way?"
 - Ask students to share. They may share their responses to the second question. Facilitator should make a list.
 - Some students may base their definition on physical things or biology.
 - Some students may also base their definition on a list of social, personality, or identity traits that are associated with being a woman.

Discussion: (20-30 minutes):

- According to Simone de Beauvoir, "One is not born but becomes a woman."
 - What do you think Beauvoir means? How does one become a woman? Ask students to share answers.
 - Have the students think back to the list of key words and phrases they used to answer the "what makes a woman a woman?" question. Discuss the list items that are learned behaviors. Where do women learn these behaviors? Why do they learn them? Do they have to learn these behaviors or develop these traits in order to be considered a woman?
- Share the following quote from *The Second Sex* with students: "A man would never set out to write a book on the peculiar situation of the human male. But if I wish to define myself, I must first of all say: 'I am a woman'; on this truth must be based all

further discussion. A man never begins by presenting himself as an individual of a certain sex; it goes without saying that he is a man. The terms *masculine* and *feminine* are used symmetrically only as a matter of form, as on legal papers. In actuality the relation of the two sexes is not quite like that of two electrical poles, for man represents both the positive and the neutral, as is indicated by the common use of *man* to designate human beings in general; whereas woman represents only the negative, defined by limiting criteria, without reciprocity."

- What do you think Beauvoir means? In what ways are women defined in relation to men? Ask students to share answers.
- Do any of the concepts that came up earlier fit here?

Conclusion: (10 minutes):

- Ask students to write their own definition of woman based on the discussion of Beauvoir and the different list items.
- Discuss with students if A) they agree with Beauvoir or not and B) if their agreement/ disagreement with Beauvoir has changed their view on what constitutes a woman.

