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## DESTRUCTION OF FEMALE BODY BY FEMININITY: AN ANALYSIS ON DE BEAUVOIR, FOUCAULT, BORDO AND ATWOOD

*Kadın Vücudunun Kadınsılık ile Yıkımı: De Beauvoir, Foucault, Bordo ve  
Atwood Üzerine Bir Analiz*

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**ABSTRACT:** In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir problematizes the woman's position in the society by relying on sociological observations. In her famous statement, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (1997: 295), she argues the issue of gender as a social construct and questions the social power relations as a result of which women are turned into feminine creatures subordinate to men. On the contrary, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault conceptualizes sexuality and connects it to his theory of power by challenging the long-established traditions and beliefs on sexuality. Simone de Beauvoir's sociological analysis is extremely divergent from Foucault's conceptualizing methodology. Foucault accepts the existence of male and female realms and does not problematize the creation process of gender distinctions as de Beauvoir does. Furthermore, as a self-declared Foucauldian, Susan Bordo questions the woman's position within the society in terms of Foucault's theory of power, nonetheless, relies on a similar sociological analysis applied by de Beauvoir. Therefore, in this journal article, de Beauvoir's existentialist point of view in *The Second Sex* is contrasted to Michel Foucault's structuralist theory of power in *The History of Sexuality* and Susan Bordo's ideas are used as an intermediary between the two. Their deficiencies and contributions to the feminist literary studies are examined and their manifestations in literary representation is analysed through Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*.

**Keywords:** De Beauvoir, Foucault, Bordo, Atwood, Femininity

**ÖZ:** Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* isimli kitabında, kadının toplumdaki yerini sosyolojik gözlemlere dayandırarak açıklar. Kadınların erkeklere karşı ikincil pozisyona düşmesini "kimse kadın olarak doğmaz fakat kadına dönüşür" (1997: 295) sözleriyle dile getirir ve cinsiyetin toplumsal olarak üretilen bir olgu olduğuna dikkati çeker. Buna karşı

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olarak, *Cinselliğin Tarihi* isimli eserinde Michel Foucault cinselliği kuramsallaştırır ve bunu ileri sürdüğü güç teorisine bağlayarak cinsellik üzerine geleneksel olarak alışlagelmiş tartışmalara meydan okur. Simone de Beauvoir'ın sosyolojik analizi Foucault'nun kuramsallaştırışı metodolojisinden oldukça farklıdır. Foucault kadın ve erkeklerin toplum içinde farklı pozisyonlara sahip olduğunu kabul eder, ancak bu farklılıkları yaratan süreçleri De Beauvoir'ın yaptığı gibi problematize edip incelemeyi. Bunlara ek olarak, Susan Bordo, her ne kadar kendisinin Foucault ile aynı çizgide olduğunu iddia etse de kadının toplumdaki yerini Foucault'nun güç teorisinden açıklarken De Beauvoir tarzı sosyolojik bir analiz yapar. Bu sebepten bu makalede Bordo'nun teorileri Beauvoir'ın *The Second Sex* kitabındaki varoluşsal bakış açısı ve Foucault'nun yapısalcı güç teorisini arasında bir köprü vazifesi görür. Bu teorisyenlerin kadın çalışmaları alanına katkıları ve teorilerinin zaafları incelenirken, kadının toplumdaki yerinin edebiyat alanında nasıl temsil edildiği Margaret Atwood'un *The Edible Woman* romanı üzerinden incelenerek, feminist teori ve edebiyat eleştirisi alanları arasında bir bağ kurar.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** De Beauvoir, Foucault, Bordo, Atwood, Kadınsılık

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### Introduction

Michel Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* begins with the criticism of the Victorian regime during which sexuality was repressed. According to Foucault, a certain frankness was still common in the seventeenth century, "it was a time of direct gestures, shameless discourse, and open transgressions" (1990: 3). However, in the nineteenth century, Victorian bourgeoisie-imposed repressions on sexuality. As Foucault explains:

"Repression operated as a sentence, an affirmation of non-existence, and by implication, an admission that there was nothing to say about such things, nothing to see and nothing to know. Such was the hypocrisy of our bourgeoisie societies with its halting logic" (1990: 4).

Since the seventeenth century a certain kind of muteness appeared on sexuality whose effects are still continuing on today's Western society. However, Foucault claims that this muteness was only in appearance, and the "repressive hypothesis" increased the talk on sexuality. Simone de Beauvoir talks about the same muteness; however, the outcome of her argument is different: She argues that this muteness is one of the main reasons behind women's ignorance on sexuality. But, if as Foucault claims, the repressive hypothesis increased the talk over sexuality, then, why did women grow up ignorant of sexuality even in the 1950's?

In *The Second Sex*, de Beauvoir problematizes the woman's position in the society by relying on sociological observations. In her famous statement, "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman (1997: 295)", she argues the issue of gender as a social construct and questions the social power relations as a result of which women are turned into feminine creatures subordinate to men. On the contrary, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault conceptualizes

sexuality and connects it to his theory of power by challenging the long-established traditions and beliefs on sexuality. Simone de Beauvoir's sociological analysis is extremely divergent from Foucault's conceptualizing methodology. Foucault accepts the existence of male and female realms and does not problematize the creation process of gender distinctions as de Beauvoir does. Furthermore, as a self-declared Foucauldian, Susan Bordo questions the woman's position within the society in terms of Foucault's theory of power, nonetheless, relies on a similar sociological analysis applied by de Beauvoir. Therefore, de Beauvoir's existentialist point of view in *The Second Sex* will be contrasted to Michel Foucault's structuralist theory of power in *The History of Sexuality* and Susan Bordo's ideas will be used as an intermediary between the two. Their deficiencies and contributions to the feminist literary studies will be analysed and their manifestations in literary representation will be examined through Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman*.

#### **Conceptualizing the Female Body through the Theories of Foucault, De Beauvoir and Bordo**

Foucault puts forward that the "idle" woman was the first to be "sexualized" and her existence depends on the family: "She inhabited the outer edge of the "world", in which she always had to appear as a value, and of the family, where she was assigned, a new destiny charged with conjugal and parental obligations" (1990: 121). Women's existence is diminished to marriage and doomed to the house. Her body is embodied by its conjugal obligations. Thus, there emerged the nervous woman or the woman afflicted with "vapors" and this figure become the centre of the hysterization of woman (1990: 121). Foucault, in *The History of Sexuality*, represents the woman merely as a body, not an individual being, in relation to her conjugal obligations. According to Foucault's theory of power, power is everywhere, and it comes from everything (1990: 92). Nonetheless, Foucault admits the woman's social position as subordinate to the man and the woman exists only in relation with her conjugal duties. Foucault does not question the means by which the woman is turned into a subordinate creature. Therefore, his theory of power is deficient in representing the woman's circumstances. On the contrary, de Beauvoir problematizes the subordinate position of the woman and analyzes it in terms of sociological and biological factors.

De Beauvoir explains in *The Second Sex* that female psychology is closely related with endocrine segregations and nervous regulation which are in reciprocal action. Therefore, she defines the woman's body and especially the young girls' as a "hysterical" body because there is no distance between

the psychic life and its physiological realization (1997: 356). She points out that, even the athletes or the woman doing heavy work accommodate themselves to the menstruation period and none of the works demand more effort than woman could afford (1997: 356). Nonetheless, the young girls are not allowed to grow up like the young boy, such as climbing to mountain tops, or going out for adventure (1997: 357). Therefore, it is the society which hystericizes woman's body. The woman is not biologically handicapped, but it is the society that represents it as a limitation.

De Beauvoir discusses that marriage seems to be ideal for a woman, as a "wife, mother, mistress of the home, woman finds in marriage at once energy for living and meaning for her life" (1997: 467). The house becomes the centre of the world for the housewife; it is her domain. However, as de Beauvoir argues, this ideal works out differently in reality: Woman forgets her own existence in this "somasochistic flight" (1997: 471). The occupation of the wife makes herself dependent upon her husband and children and even if she is respected, de Beauvoir defines her as "subordinate, secondary, parasitic" (1997: 475). The man is first of all a producer and secondly a husband. On the contrary, the primary reason for a woman's existence is to be a wife and a mother (1997: 476). De Beauvoir, in contrast to Foucault, problematizes the existence of the woman as a wife and questions the social circumstances which diminish her to conjugal duties and hystericizes her.

In another strategic unity, "the pedagogization of children's sex", Foucault explains that the sexual tendencies of children are regarded as a "physical and moral, individual and collective dangers" (1990: 104). Therefore, parents, families, educators, doctors and psychologists take necessary precautions to suppress this sexual potential. In Atwood's *The Edible Woman*, the owner of the house is extremely cautious about protecting her child from the idea of sexuality. Marian and Ainsley's boyfriends could create the idea of sexuality in the mind of the child and therefore the idea of sexuality could corrupt her. De Beauvoir explains that young girls experience menstruation in ignorance and even the mothers are incapable of educating them. As exemplified in *The Edible Woman*, the muteness on sexuality turns out to be the main reason of woman's ignorance of her body and sexuality.

In "a socialization of procreative behaviour", Foucault explains the social and fiscal measures put on the married couple. Reproduction is their responsibility with respect to the social body. Also, medical socialization

brings the birth-control practices into social realm. De Beauvoir claims that women should have the right to have abortion even though it seems against to her procreative behaviour in the society. De Beauvoir discusses that “enforced maternity brings into the world wretched infants” (1997: 502). She criticizes the French society for being too much concerned with the rights of the embryo rather than the born child. She condemns the society as “it prosecutes the abortionists instead of undertaking to reform that scandalous institution known as ‘public assistance’” (1997: 503). The “public assistance” that de Beauvoir criticizes of is defined by Foucault under one of his strategic unities that relate knowledge and power to sex: “a socialization of procreative behaviour”. The procreative behaviour of the married couple is under the public’s surveillance. Abortion is against the married couple’s duty for the society; therefore, “public assistance” tries to prohibit it. De Beauvoir analyzes the limitations of the public assistance in terms of women’s rights to determine their procreative behaviour. Foucault, on the contrary, regards the married couple as a social institution and analyzes the socialization of “procreative behaviour” in connection with different power relations between the married couple and the society. Foucault’s theory is deficient in the way that it does not differentiate the woman as an individual being from the married couple. Foucault represents woman only with her body and in relation to her procreative behaviour.

During the times when the abortion was illegal, de Beauvoir explains the young girl’s situation as “finding herself driven to a ‘criminal’ act in order to undo a ‘mistake’ that her group considers unpardonable” (1997: 505). Even though she is inclined to bear the child, because of the social limitations, she is unable to do so. The young girl does not have the right to decide on her body as her sexuality is under the control and the constraints of the society. In *The Edible Woman*, Ainsley’s wish to become pregnant appears as a rebellion to the society as she wants to bear an ‘illegitimate’ child: “Birth is legitimate, isn’t it? You’re a prude, Marian, and that’s what wrong with this whole society” (1980: 42). She questions the illegitimacy of children and social limitations on women. The social pressure exerted on her by the owner of the house does not even allow her to have a relationship with a man, thus an illegitimate child is out of discussion. Furthermore, doctors and psychologists that try to take sexuality under control makes emphasis on the “father figure” and forces her to be married by the thread of having a pervert, homosexual child. Ainsley’s final decision to marry Fischer shows the power mechanisms of the society on woman.

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Susan Bordo explains that “some of the most resilient inequalities in our [USA] legal and social treatment of women lie in the domain of reproductive control” (1993: 71). Some women are treated only as bodies, regardless of their wishes and religious beliefs, for the benefit of the foetus. Women, especially the ones with different racial and ethnic origins, are forced by juridical order to have caesarean sections, sterilization and intrauterine transfusions (1993: 76). Furthermore, the woman is regarded as a maternal “fleshy incubator” (1993: 84). They are blamed by the society or judged by the laws even for trivial deeds with the suspicion of endangering the foetus. A woman who was a week overdue was treated like a child abuser when she ordered a drink with her dinner (1993: 83). On the other hand, the husband’s or the society’s influence on the foetus’ development is never taken into consideration. The father’s “drug habits, smoking, alcoholism, reckless driving, and psychological and physical treatment” of his pregnant wife are never taken into consideration (Bordo, 1993: 83). According to Bordo, woman’s subjectivity is ignored. The foetus, similar to de Beauvoir’s argument belongs to society. Both de Beauvoir and Bordo argue on the woman’s inability to control her procreative behaviour, it is under the surveillance of the society. On the contrary, Foucault does not give voice to the woman and perceives her to exist only as a part of the married life without any individual rights.

According to Foucault, “the psychatrization of perverse pleasure” is an attempt to take the perverse sexual pleasures, such as extramarital sex and homosexuality, under the control of clinical analysis. It is an attempt of normalization or pathologization with respect to all behaviour (Foucault, 1990: 105). In Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, Marian is dubious about marriage and experiences a sexual intercourse with Duncan, out of her relationship with her fiancé. She is not *normal* according to social expectations and when she suggests going to a psychiatrist Duncan rejects the idea by saying that: “Oh, no don’t do that. They’d only want to adjust you” and Marian replies “But, I want to be adjusted, that’s just it. I won’t see any point in being unstable” (263). In the novel, the psychiatrist has the role of taking Marian’s sexual life, perverse pleasures, and other troubles under control by normalizing her.

Foucault creates four hypotheses against the theme that sexuality is repressed by the modern forms of society. Firstly, “sexuality is tied to recent devices of power” (1990: 107). Therefore, it is a part of a network exercised by innumerable directions, so it is impossible to claim that power could only be exerted on sexuality by the society. On the other hand, de Beauvoir

emphasizes the influence of the society in the creation of the woman as a feminine figure. In her famous statement, she asserts that: “One is not born rather becomes a woman. No biological, psychological, or economic fate determines the figure that the human female represents in the society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature” (1997: 295). De Beauvoir argues that neither boys nor girls know that they are sexually differentiated. As children they are born equally and go through similar phases; however, they are like dough shaped in the hands of the society.

De Beauvoir explains that the boy does experience “pride in his sex by the attitude of the group around him. Mothers and nurses” equate the idea of maleness and phallus, and approach it with reverence”; the “boy seeks himself in the penis as an autonomous subject (1997: 308). On the other hand, the girl is given a doll as its substitute. The doll represents the whole body and also it is a passive subject. De Beauvoir explains that “the little girl cuddles her doll and dresses her up as she dreams of being cuddled and dressed up herself” (1997: 308). She identifies herself with the doll. Furthermore, she is “treated like a live doll and is refused liberty” (1997: 308).

According to de Beauvoir, the girl learns that in order to be happy she must love and to be loved she should wait her lover’s coming. Therefore, she has a passive role. The ideal woman is represented by the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella and Snow White. Those characters are passive and have no control in determining their lives. They are all rescued by a lover. The male and female roles in the society are reflected in those stories and the children are exposed to the society’s ideal woman at an early age. At the period of puberty, moreover, boys make emphasis on their manhood and welcome their adolescence in pride. They are proud of hair growing on their legs and the sex organ is an object of challenge. On the other hand, girls experience the first menstruation by fear and shame, without enough guidance from their mothers or public institutions.

Customs exert another limit on the independence of woman. They must be on alert even when they are walking on the streets, which diminish their pleasure and turn them into inferior human beings secondary to the man. De Beauvoir describes that “to walk with long strides, sing, talk or laugh loudly, or eat an apple, is to give provocation” (1997: 358). The young girl should be self-controlled which kills gaiety and spontaneity. De Beauvoir says that “to be feminine is to appear weak, futile, docile” (1997: 359). The young girl should repress her spontaneity and replace it with “studied grace and charm”

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(De Beauvoir, 1997: 359). The young girl should minimize themselves to certain codes of behaviour. De Beauvoir explains that the girl though with some resistance accepts her femininity. She begins to give importance to her appearance tries different make-ups, hair styles and shows off her breasts. The young girl accepts her femininity and learns to appreciate her body according to society's expectancies. The young girl is doomed to passivity however she wants to have power. The young girl believes that her body involves magic by means of which she could take the man under control.

According to Foucault's theory of power, if there is a power, there is a resistance. According to de Beauvoir, the woman resists against the power exerted on her by the society, by using her body as the source of her power. De Beauvoir argues that the magic, the feminine features that the female body possess, involves the idea of passive force (1997: 364). Even though the woman reacts against the social power by using her body, her power is passive. In order to gain power, the woman changes her physical appearance in a harmony with the demands of the society and her body is exposed to public gaze. As a result, she is submissive of social power in the hope of rejecting it. De Beauvoir is aware of the passivity of the power that the female body possess in terms of resistance. On the contrary, Foucault argues that power comes from below and is not imposed on the deprived by the dominant force (1997: 95). Nonetheless, Foucault's theory of power excludes the female experiences and appeals mainly to the masculine world. It is deficient of explaining the power relations between the woman and the society.

Susan Bordo applies Foucauldian methodology to analyze the woman's status within the society; nevertheless, depends on a sociological approach similar to de Beauvoir. She seems to be an intermediary between the two philosophers. Bordo explains that the female body suffering from a disorder is deeply inscribed with an ideological construction of femininity which is representative of the periods in question: the appearance of neurasthenia and hysteria in the second half of the nineteenth century; agoraphobia, anorexia nervosa and bulimia in the second half of the twentieth century are directly related with the century's demands on the feminine body (1990: 16). Bordo argues that in the contemporary culture, the rules of femininity are culturally transmitted by television and movies through the deployment of standardized visual images (1990: 17). The contemporary woman learns the codes of behaviour and the required physical appearance through visual images. According to Bordo, in the 1950s and early 1960s when agoraphobia first began to rise among women, it represented a reassertion of domesticity and

dependency as the feminine ideal (1990: 17). The woman was stereotypically doomed to her house and her relations to her husband and children. Thus, agoraphobia is highly attached to her destiny.

Bordo investigates a steady issue in feminist literature which regards hysteria, agoraphobia, and anorexia as an unconscious protest without an effective voice and politics (1990: 20). Through embodied demonstration, the anorexic reflected the destructive potential of those ideals for all to see (1990: 21). In Foucault's terms, this protest could be perceived as a resistance against social power. On the contrary, Bordo claims that the same gesture that represents protest can also signal retreat (1990: 21). She discusses the "counterproductive", "tragically self-defeating" nature of that protest (1990: 21). The outcomes of these disease debilitate and isolate the sufferer, and her body becomes the utmost important element of her life. Furthermore, the muteness of the hysterics could not only be interpreted as a protest but also submission of the patriarchal values as the silent uncomplaining woman is the ideal of patriarchal culture (1990: 21).

Anorexia appears as the woman's control and power over her own body. The woman defeats her crave for eating and discovers a new realm: "an ethic and aesthetic of self-mastery and self-transcendence, expertise and power over others through the example of superior will and control" (Bordo, 1990: 23). Therefore, Bordo claims that it is not only the society's repression over woman that creates anorexia but also the woman's subjective power that she exerts on her body as a kind of self-control. As she steadily loses weight its feminine appearance, its curves, breast and hips diminish, and she feels and looks like "a spare, lanky male body" (Bordo, 1990: 23). She feels untouchable, out of reach of hurt (1990: 23). On the other hand, Bordo defeats this theory by defining anorexics power as "deeply and dangerously illusory" (1990: 24). Bordo argues that reshaping one's body into a male body is not gaining male power and privilege; on the contrary, reshaping one's body by engendering their bodily health is serving, not transforming to the social power (1990: 24). Bordo applies Foucault's theory of power to her sociological observations of the woman in the society. She is aware of the limitations of Foucauldian methodology on woman, and she gives the account of both possibilities: anorexia could be a protest, however, it is hard to support as anorexics are mostly unconscious of that protest, and 15% of anorexics die each year (Bordo, 1990: 25).

Foucault does not differentiate the married couple as male and female even though their role within the family is extremely divergent whereas de

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Beauvoir defines marriage as a destiny imposed on the woman for two reasons. Firstly, her reproductive function is necessary for the continuation of the society. If she is not wanted as a wife, she is regarded as “wastage” (1997: 447). Being unmarried could be interpreted as wastage as the woman would not actualize her reproductive potential and she would waste her bodily potential. The girl’s will to marry arises from the girl’s will to have a normal existence as wife and mother (1997: 453). This shows the power of the society on women for de Beauvoir. To justify her existence, she should yield to the demands of the society and actualize her bodily potential which is her responsibility for the society. In terms of marriage, de Beauvoir regards society’s power over the woman as single-sided; it is imposed by the society. This is against Foucault’s theory of power which conceptualizes the power as comes from everywhere and at all levels (1997: 95). Therefore, this power cannot be exerted only by the society.

Nevertheless, Foucault’s theory of power ignores the subordinate status of woman to man and develops his theory only for the masculine world excluding the feminine. The second reason is that the girl should satisfy her husband’s sexual needs and take care of the household (Foucault, 1997: 447). Foucault theorizes this situation as the intermingling of the deployment of sexuality and the deployment of alliance within the family cell. On the contrary, de Beauvoir claims that sexual pleasure, especially for the girl, is not available even within the family cell. De Beauvoir discusses that marriage does not take place in terms of love most of the time. Men seek for a wife to have a family and posterity while woman decides *universally* to get a husband, not individually; suitor’s health and position are more important than love (1997: 454). De Beauvoir claims that woman is “to have sex pleasure only in a specific form and not individualized” (1997: 454). Firstly, she has no right to have sex out of marriage; therefore, her sex is institutionalized (1997: 455). Secondly during the reproduction process due to her biological difference, “reproductive function is very often dissociated from erotic pleasure” (1997: 455). According to de Beauvoir, women’s reproductive function and conjugal responsibilities are dominant than her sexual pleasures.

In Foucault’s terms, the deployment of alliance is more important for women than the deployment of sexuality. Even though the marriage institution appears as the combination of the deployment of alliance and the deployment of sexuality for the husband, the wife needs to satisfy her duties for the deployment of alliance. As de Beauvoir argues, marriages take place out of love therefore sexual satisfaction is less dominant in marriages.

Foucault claims, contemporary society allows the deployment of sexuality within the marriage, on the contrary de Beauvoir discusses that sexual pleasures, especially for the woman, is limited even within the family cell. Nevertheless, Foucault does not differentiate the married couple as male and female and his argument is deficient of representing the woman's unequal position within the marriage which is problematized by de Beauvoir. The woman is missing from Foucault's theory, and he conceptualizes the masculine realm ignoring the feminine.

Foucault relates sexuality "with an intensification of the body - with its exploitation as an object of knowledge and an element in relations of power" (1990: 107). The family has become the obligatory source of "affects, feelings and love" since the eighteenth century and "parents and relatives became the chief agents of deployment of sexuality" (1990: 108). However, sexuality corrupts the sacred family with its "abnormal sexuality" and those combined with the figures of alliance that gone bad to create "the nervous woman, the frigid wife, the indifferent mother, - or worse, the mother beset by murderous obsessions" (110). Therefore, Foucault claims that the family in the hope of reconciling the conflicts created by sexuality and alliance opens up itself to doctors, educators, psychiatrists and priests. It seems that the family, "the keystone of alliance was the germ of all the misfortunes of sex" (1990: 111). De Beauvoir explains that wife rebels against her husband's superior figure on sexual level; she takes revenge by refusing her husband's embraces or by her frigidity. This revolt, also, finds its counterpart in Atwood's *The Edible Woman*: Marian's sexual rebellion against Peter occurs by her sexual intercourse with Duncan (Atwood, 1980: 247). This is what Foucault detects as the corruption of the institution of family by the deployment of sexuality.

### **Objectification of Sexuality Through Medication and Fashion**

Foucault defines a new technology of sex at the end of eighteenth century which is more secular. He explains that "[t]hrough pedagogy, medicine, and economics, it made sex not only a secular concern but a concern of the state as well; to be more exact, sex became a matter that required the social body as a whole, and virtually all of its individuals, to place themselves under surveillance" (1990: 116). It expanded along three axes: pedagogy investigated the sexuality of children; medicine analyzed sexual physiology of women, and demography's concern was the regulation of birth (1990: 116). Foucault argues that this new technology is a break from the Christian taboos with the emergence of medicalization. Therefore, the question of death and punishment in religion is replaced by the problem of life and death

in medicine, and the “flesh was brought down to the level of organism” (1990: 117). Society increased its concern on body by medicalization and putting it onto the level of scientific knowledge. Therefore, by means of the body, the discourse on sexuality is increased, not suppressed.

With the medicalization of sexuality, Foucault discusses “perpetual spiral of power and pleasure” (1990: 44). The sexual body needs to be detected and the symptoms should be diagnosed either in the depths of the body or on the surface. In this medicalization process, the body of the observed is the object of the observer’s gaze. As Foucault explains, “the power which took charge of sexuality set about contradicting bodies, caressing them with its eyes, intensifying areas, electrifying surfaces, dramatizing troubled moments. It wrapped the sexual body in its embrace” (1990: 44). According to Foucault, the observed and the observer exerts power on each other and gain mutual pleasure. The observer exercises power on the observed body by his questions, examination and detections, and the observed body exerts its power by showing off her body and as a result both gain a mutual pleasure. Simone de Beauvoir’s explanation that three-quarter of the men pursued by over-erotic women are doctors and unveiling the body in the presence of a man gives women a great exhibitionistic pleasure, approves Foucault’s theory (560-1). According to Stekel’s reports, some frigid woman experience orgasm only during the medical examinations and this also reflects the pleasure obtained by the observed (De Beauvoir, 1997: 561). Nonetheless, de Beauvoir’s argument is a satire of the society as the sexually unsatisfied woman feels orgasm only during the medical examination. On the other hand, Foucault’s argument is based on the mutual power and pleasure possessed by the observer and the observed. The social limitations on the sexuality of the woman and the reasons creating the sexually unsatisfied wives are not analyzed by Foucault. In *The History of Sexuality* (vol.1), the woman appears merely as bodies and in relation with conjugal life. Therefore, Foucault does not problematize their subordinate existence to man but rather accepts it.

De Beauvoir discusses that society requires the women to make herself an erotic object (1997: 543). Fashion does not represent her as an independent individual but as a “prey to male desires” (1997: 543). Women are doomed to wear skirts, high-heeled shoes, fragile hats and stockings which are impractical and limit their behaviour and manners. Dresses aim at putting the body on display. The woman uses her body to attract attention of a masculine figure by using perfumes or accessorizes. De Beauvoir explains that “beneath her jewels, flounces, spangles, flowers, feathers, and false hair,

a woman is changed into a doll of flesh. Even this flesh is on show; like open, blooming flowers, women display their shoulders, backs and bosoms” (1997: 546). In her evening dress, the wife displays her feminine body to give credit to her husband who is the owner of that body. The woman using make-up, hair dye, and dresses to display her body, creates an imaginary figure and gets away from her own self and “she represents a character that she is not” (1997: 548). In *The Edible Woman*, Marian constructs herself for the male gaze attending the final party. She neither likes her dress nor her hair style but they are appreciated by her fiancé and her social circle. She buys a “short, red, and sequined” dress that the *saleslady* thinks it is for her (Atwood, 1980: 208). She goes to a hairdresser where “they treated your head like a cake: something carefully iced and ornamented” (Atwood, 1980: 208). She finds her hair style as extreme and describes that it made her look like a “callgirl” (Atwood, 1980: 208). After her make-up is finished, she turns into “a person she has never seen before” and Ainsley tells to her to *smile* which transforms her to a happy - in appearance - and a passive image (221-2).

De Beauvoir explains that woman’s interest in her appearance is understandable because it is the way to secure her position: “smart appearance is a weapon, a flag, a defence, a letter of recommendation” (1997: 548). In *The Edible Woman*, the dressing habits of the “office virgins” exemplifies this condition: they are well dressed in satins and perfect make up and supposedly their appearance will help them to find a husband. De Beauvoir explains that the woman can control “her body through sports, gymnastics, baths, massage, and health diets; she decides what her weight, her figure, and the colour of her skin shall be” (1997: 549). However, de Beauvoir argues that even though the woman seems to have control over her body, it turns out to be dependence.

De Beauvoir describes the woman magazines which are full of advice to the housewife on preserving her sexual attractiveness while doing housework, to be well-dressed during pregnancy and reconciling coquetry, maternity, and economy (1997: 541). Furthermore, the women who are interested in pleasing men by their bodily beauty and as being erotic objects “are distressed to see themselves deformed, disfigured, incapable of arousing desire” (1997: 529). Pregnancy is regarded as an attack to woman’s bodily beauty. De Beauvoir describes a breast-feeding mother as follows: “She is apprehensive of ruining her bosom; she resents feeling her nipples cracked, the glands painful; suckling the baby hurts; the infant seems to her to be

sucking out her strength, her life, her happiness” (1997: 524). The suckling baby is an attack to the integrity of the female body.

The perceptions of the female body have been changed since 1970. Bordo explains that female bodies that were once fit are regarded as loose and flabby. Today, the body is not only expected to be thinner but also tighter, smoother, and more “contained” (Bordo, 1990: 88). Bordo gives an example of a typical advertisement: “get rid of those embarrassing bumps, bulges, large stomach, flabby breasts, and buttocks [...] have a nice shape with no tummy” (1990: 90). The advertisements impose on woman the ideal feminine body by their discourse and visual images. In Atwood’s *The Edible Woman*, food symbolizes the woman in the society and the feminine ideal. Therefore, Peter, ordering food for Marian (Atwood, 1980: 147), symbolizes the domination of the female by the male. Her rebellion against the feminine image imposed on her by her fiancé, takes the form of the rejection of the food. Marian believes that women have right to exist, therefore, could not consume food any longer. The cake in the shape of a feminine figure with its delicate dress and make-up is offered to the consumption of Peter (Atwood, 1980: 271). The cake symbolizes Peter’s masculine and dominating power on the passive, feminine Marian. Her rejection of food could be perceived as her rebellion against the passive feminine image imposed on her by her fiancé.

### **Conclusion**

Simone de Beauvoir’s main argument is that women are not biologically inferior to man, therefore, the woman as a feminine figure subordinate to man, is the construct of the society. De Beauvoir problematizes the woman’s inferior position within the society and relying on her sociological observations analyzes the reasons behind her subordination. On the other hand, Foucault conceptualizes the history of sexuality by challenging the long-established traditions on sexuality by relating them to his theory of power. Nonetheless, the woman merely appears as a body in relation to her conjugal obligations. Foucault admits the gender distinctions between the male and the female, however, he does not question their creation process as de Beauvoir does. On the one hand, Foucault argues that power is not a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, rather it comes from below (1990: 92). Nevertheless, by making the woman invisible in his history of sexuality, he contradicts his theory. Susan Bordo applies Foucault’s theory of power to female eating disorders and tries to engender Foucault’s theory of power by using a sociological methodology similar to de Beauvoir. She analyzes the anorexic’s refusal to eat as a protest against

the feminine ideal of the society; as Foucault argues, if there is power, there is resistance. Nevertheless, she is aware of Foucault's problematics with the representation of woman. The anorexics are unconscious of that protest and destroy their health, therefore Bordo questions the validity of Foucault's theory in terms of woman. In my point of view, as the 15% of anorexics die each year and mostly unconscious of the protest, it is hard to engender Foucault's theory. As this paper suggests, the woman is repressed under the power of the society or by the counter power she is trying to exert and diminished into a feminine figure consumed by the society.

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