

Productive and Non-Productive Work: Career and Motherhood in the Twenty-First Century

by

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Abstract

This two-part project explores the tension that many twenty-first century women experience between work and motherhood. My essay demonstrates this tension through Simone de Beauvoir's conceptions of transcendence and immanence described in *The Second Sex* and through contemporary debates in popular media—specifically *Lean In* by Sheryl Sandberg, and “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All” by Anne-Marie Slaughter. I provide historical context and an overview of twenty-first century societal norms and politics as they pertain to women, work, and motherhood. I conclude that women who are mothers feel a tension between career and motherhood because society views them as “naturally” mothers. At the same time, society values action and progress. In trying to conform to these two societal beliefs, women are torn. My novella, “A Life in Two Parts,” complements the essay, exploring the lived experience of a single mother seeking fulfillment amidst her life of non-productive work.

Keywords: transcendence; immanence; Simone de Beauvoir; motherhood; career; productive and non-productive work

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Preface

The following project consists of two companion pieces: a novella and an essay.

The novella, entitled *A Life in Two Parts*, is a fictional exploration of what happens when a woman juggles work and motherhood. It follows the life of a woman in her 40s named Rosemary Bergman and her 13-year-old daughter Jamie.

A Life in Two Parts fictionalizes transcendence and immanence, explores the quest for authenticity, and reflects on the nature of choice.

The essay is entitled “Simone de Beauvoir’s Transcendence and Immanence in the Twenty-First Century: the tension between career and motherhood.” It discusses the importance of *The Second Sex* and the transcendence/immanence argument, provides critical responses to Beauvoir’s philosophy by feminist, Marxist, and Freudian thinkers, explores motherhood and career in the twenty-first century, including social, economic, and political factors. Finally, it analyzes the writing of Sheryl Sandberg and Anne-Marie Slaughter, who exemplify two opposing modes of thought related to career and motherhood: Sandberg takes an individualistic point of view, and Slaughter takes a collective point of view.

Chapter 1.
A Life in Two Parts

A Novella by Jennifer Day

Sometimes, when the day was done, she wished she could rewrite her life.

Part One

The Interview

Good morning, and welcome to a special edition of Writer's World, a radio show where we celebrate writers from around the world. I'm Yvonne Barker. Today we will be talking with some of the distinguished winners from this year's Governor General's Award. First up, the winner in the lifetime achievement category, Rosemary Bergman. Bergman is a prolific writer, with a career spanning more than twenty years. It is unusual that someone only halfway through her writing life (she is only 45 years old) would win this award, but the quantity, quality, and influence of her work merit the distinction. At the age of 26, Rosemary Bergman published her first novel, winning the Giller Prize for fiction. Since then she has written many novels, short stories, and non-fiction books, enjoyed by thousands of Canadians. We are honoured to have her here with us today.

Welcome Rosemary, and congratulations on your win!

Thank you, and thanks for having me.

Before we get into the weighty questions, I'd like to set the mood for our listeners. Can you describe the room you are in now?

Ha! I wish I could describe my cozy living room at home, but in fact I'm in a hotel room in Toronto. It's quite a nice room though, with a beautiful view of lake Ontario and lots of light pouring in. I'm curled up on a comfy armchair.

And where were you when you heard you had won the Governor General's lifetime achievement award?

Unfortunately I must say that I was in another hotel room. I've been touring my latest book, Why Men Can Have it All, so I haven't been home in a while.

Where do you call home?

I live on Saltspring Island, an island in between Vancouver and Victoria in British Columbia. My home is on a small acreage in the forest. It's perfect for writing and decompressing from all the touring that I do. I also have a lot of speaking engagements around Canada, so it's wonderful to come home to peace and quiet, surrounded by green.

What did you think when you heard you had won the lifetime achievement award?

I was shocked. I thought, "have I reached the end of my career already!" But I am truly honoured and humbled to have received this award. I know that there are many other deserving writers out there.

You have been heralded as one of the great writers of our time. Where does your voice come from?

Initially, my voice came from my Bubbe. Her storytelling inspired me to create. I would reinvent her night time stories; reshape them into my own. I would do the same with books I enjoyed. Recently I was going through my old stories and found one that replicated Anne of Green Gables, character for character! Once I moved past imitation, I started getting praise for my writing, which of course is a great motivator. My grade 5 teacher, Mrs. Brown, a woman I greatly admired, was so impressed with a poem I wrote that she asked me to read it to the principal, Mr. Favreaux. It was a nerve-wracking experience, but the next thing I knew I was reading it at the weekly school assembly. The adult support I received was indispensable to my career path as a writer.

I can't emphasize enough the importance of other people's input. I may have an idea or a story I want to share, but if you are a good writer, it is everyone's story. I work alone at first, but the ideas are a product of my interactions, conversations, and experiences, which I then meld into a story. Also important is being part of everyday life, being with people who have nothing to do with writing. Otherwise my ideas would become too insular, not relevant to the general public. I don't believe in writing for a specific audience. Ideas and stories are for everyone and so should be accessible to everyone.

This is likely a product of my volunteer days at the library, where every day, people would look for books to ease the pain of their lives, to relax, or to seek information. When you work with people who struggle with literacy you really begin to understand how big or small a world becomes depending on what you know. So I want to make the whole world accessible to everyone.

Later, as I got older, and more established in my career, my writing became the unheard voices of the women in my childhood. Their lives couldn't help but come through in my stories, in my ideas. The fact that they couldn't fully express who they were made me want to express myself even more.

Tell me about your childhood.

When I think about growing up I think about books and volunteering, and how those two together led to my life as a writer and an activist. My Bubbe was an active volunteer in the Jewish community and she encouraged me to volunteer. She and I would volunteer at the local library, reading to the kids and helping those who struggled with literacy. I myself loved reading; it expanded my imagination and my worldview. I wanted to help other kids experience the same thing. When I was a teenager, my Bubbe and I went on a few volunteer trips to Central America to help build a library. I saw that the world outside North America was not the same as my own. The kids I was teaching to read in Montreal, where I grew up, primarily had learning disabilities or came from disadvantaged backgrounds. But in Guatemala, where we went, it was generally girls who couldn't read. It never occurred to me that there was a gender imbalance in education. Reading had changed me, even as a teenager. I wondered how the lives of these young girls would be different if they had access to a wide variety of books. Would their imaginations expand and their worlds grow? Would they be able to think of new possibilities for themselves? These girls shaped my desire to effect change, as did my Bubbe's enthusiasm for volunteering. In her day acceptable work for women included housework, childcare and community service. Judaism, her ancestral religion, taught that women's traditional role was the keeper of the home and the spiritual values of the family, but my Bubbe wasn't especially observant. She wanted to be out of the house, using her skills as she could, so she took on the work that was available to her:

volunteering. But because it was seen as women's work, it was valued less than paid work. It was an "extra" activity. An activity that was not necessary in the same way that paid work was. I know my Bubbe didn't feel like she had the same societal esteem as her husband, who made the money in the family. I had the impression that my Bubbe found this to be unjust. She was so intelligent, and put so much effort into her community. It was clear that she was changing people's lives.

My mother's life influenced me in a different way. She married into a traditional Jewish family who expected her to keep a Jewish home. Instead of going to university like my Bubbe had wanted, she became a wife and mother. I was raised by a woman whose life revolved around her house and her children. She dropped all her ambitions so that she could provide us with a strong spiritual background and a sense of duty to our ancestors. Her dedication to home, family and religion was oppressive, which led her children to be non-observant, and keenly interested in life outside the home.

The list of books you have written is long. People have great respect for what you have to say. Do you feel pressure to always have something important/meaningful to share?

I want to share my voice, my point of view. I try to be as honest as I can, so that as I review my work over the years, I can be proud of what I have done. Sometimes I will read something I wrote, say, ten years ago, and I see that I didn't get it quite right, but I'm okay with that because it is clear that I was speaking within the realm of my knowledge at the time. So to answer your question, no, I don't feel that pressure, but only because I put the pressure on myself to be authentic.

You are considered an innovative writer. How do you perceive your writing?

I appreciate that commendation; it is certainly high praise. On a personal level though, it is hard to see. I simply write what I write. Over the years I have become more in tune with how I write, so I think it's gotten better, and easier. But I haven't tried to be innovative. I've just written who I am.

What do you think the role of the author is in the transformation of culture?

Writing, and other art forms, reminds us that we are human. It feels for us and expresses what the average person cannot. A good piece of writing will vibrate through us. It roots us in our bodies and at the same time transports us.

An author's job is to be who they are and to express who they are, to be fully human. An author can only write what she knows, so she must be authentic in that expression and use her skill and talent as a writer to show how she sees the world or how she imagines it, or how she experiences it. If her ideas resonate, then they will permeate into the cultural fabric and become part of people's lives. That is how writers transform culture. But really, an author never knows how a work will be received, which is why she must be honest, and reflective of and on herself and the society she lives in. An author must at once take a bird's eye view of her subject, and at the same time step deeply into herself and the subject in order to get a true and clear view on her topic.

You have talked about the voices of your mother and grandmother, about sharing your voice, expressing who you are. It sounds like you have thought a lot about who you are as a person and as a writer.

Yes, I've given this a lot of thought over the years. I see myself in layers. I'm first and foremost a human being. On a certain level, I can relate to all humanity because of that simple commonality. Next I would say that I am from the Western world. I think we underestimate, or at least aren't always aware of, how much our environment, both physical and cultural, builds who we are. When I write, my point of view is clearly that of a person born and raised in the west. All the privilege I have stems from living here. Intertwined with that is being Caucasian. My ancestry and my history give me privileges that are not always afforded to other Canadians who are not Caucasian. My family came to Canada from eastern Germany in the late 1800s, so we are firmly entrenched in the west. My white privilege informs my writing. I want my writing to be as true as possible, so I try to be vigilant and aware of my place in the world. I was raised in a Jewish household, but I myself am not practicing. Nevertheless, coming from a Jewish family has affected me, if only by pushing me away from it. If I were ignorant of the effects of my ancestry, history, culture, location, religion, I would be giving a false picture of the world. My experience, although connected to many others, is still only my experience. I

want everyone to be able to relate to my work on some level, but that can only happen if they know I am not making assumptions about who *they* are.

I notice that being a woman is not at the top of your list.

For me as an individual, the most important part of who I am is being a woman, and yet I find it difficult to parse where my gender fits into the equation on a global scale. At one point I would have said my gender was more influential than where I was raised, because after being human, the next commonality that people have is their gender. The world is divided into male and female (which may be an incorrect division of gender, but that is how it is divided none-the-less). But if I look at my life in terms of effects, I would say my country of residence and my colour likely have had more influence on my possibilities than my gender. If the whole world were Caucasian, then gender would definitely play an even bigger role. But you are right. Gender has had a major influence on me, which is clear through my writing. Sex, gender and patriarchy are the issues that interest me, not so much race and ancestry, which is clearly reflective of being a white woman. I mention those to underscore their importance in the formation of the self. If I look at myself globally, I must acknowledge those other factors.

You have won so many awards over the years. How is this one different?

This award is different because it not only recognizes my writing, but also its influence. It isn't so much that I have written a good book, but that I have a whole body of work that has impacted my readers, and, I think, society as a whole. I have done something noteworthy.

Is that something that is important to you?

I think it is important to most people, and certainly to me. There is a natural human drive to have individual success, to push oneself. A feeling of individual progress is vital for a sense of well-being. In our capitalist world we have taken that need to the extreme, to a point where progress is no longer sustainable. But the kind of progress, of success, that I'm talking about, that feeds the soul and moves human consciousness forward, that is

sustainable. I push myself through my writing and derive a great feeling of accomplishment from my success.

Would you feel the same way if you had written just as much, but not received public acclaim?

I'm not sure. Public success and personal achievement are two separate things. I think I would have a certain level of fulfillment simply from writing and expressing myself. Expression is important, perhaps even essential. But I don't write simply for fulfillment. I also want to make meaningful change in the world. The awards are welcome and appreciated, but are not necessary for that sense of accomplishment. If my work didn't change my community, or my readers, and I still received an award, the acclaim would have little value for me. So it's not the acclaim itself that makes me feel successful, but the recognition of my work's impact.

You mentioned earlier that it was important to be essential. What do you mean by that?

When I talk about being essential I mean feeling needed and valued for who you are as an individual and for what you offer the world. In order to feel valued, a person's self and their actions must be valued. It is an "essential" human need, just like food and shelter. I'm particularly interested in if and how women are seen as essential. Historically, women were seen as essential, or necessary, through their reproductive abilities, that is, they were needed and valued for their ability to have children (although they did not have much control over getting pregnant). This form of being valued is only essential in the perpetuation of the species. It's not fulfilling for a woman because it doesn't require any unique ability or effort on her part. Their bodies were the important thing, not their minds or aptitudes. It's like being praised for something you had no part in. Men, on the other hand, were, and still are, valued for their economic and innovative contributions to the world. In other words, they were valued for their mental efforts. Men were able both to fulfill a human need for growth and fulfillment, and have it sanctioned by society. In my Bubbe's time, there were a limited number of avenues for a woman to seek fulfillment. It was believed that natural female fulfillment came through motherhood and homemaking. Thank goodness this is no longer the case, at least in the western world. Both women and men are valued for what they have to offer intellectually. In theory at least.

How does a person express their essentiality?

By their ability to act. A person must be able to use their unique aptitudes in the public sphere. Perhaps even more than this, they need to have the choice to use them and they need their choices to be valued. And not only valued philosophically. Society needs to demonstrate its support through programs and policies.

Can you give an example?

Specifically, women's choice to find fulfillment as they see fit, whether in the workforce, as mothers, or both, needs to be supported. School hours need to be designed around a typical family's work schedule, so that childcare and getting to work on time stop being a burden. Childcare needs to be an essential service available to all. Flexible work schedules need to be an option. The list could go on and on. The current work force and all our systems are still designed around a male employee. Women are workers being slotted into a workforce created and designed for men. Women can't simply be slotted into an existing system. The system needs to change to reflect the reality of both women's and men's lives. It's a complicated process. As it is, women cannot make life choices in total freedom. A man can determine his destiny with few barriers, a woman cannot. She was told that she could do anything, but until her contributions, whatever they may be, are valued, she can't win.

Rosemary Bergman, you are a prolific writer. Your early work often focused on social issues, like income inequality in There's Money in the Hills, colonization in The New West, and the environment in The Wind Farm. You have said in the past that dismantling patriarchy is your life's work, yet none of these books is specifically about patriarchy.

I disagree. Patriarchy is in everything. Patriarchy *is* our society. There is nothing in our society that is not an effect of patriarchy. Our whole economic system is based on it, so in discussing income inequality I am certainly talking about patriarchy. Colonization is a melding of economics and a belief in superiority, both intimately connected with patriarchy. The environment too. Environmental exploitation is the colonization of nature. So I would argue that those novels are directly about patriarchy.

Are you suggesting that all the ills of society are due to patriarchy?

I know it is a broad statement to make, but yes. Every centre of power for generations has been male-dominated. So we can say with confidence that men have created the problems of this world. We have lived under patriarchy for so long that everyone is affected and we don't even realize it. I feel uncomfortable saying that men have created all the world's problems; I don't want to divide men and women. But it is hard to look at it any other way. However, there may be a more nuanced approach. I'm paraphrasing Simone de Beauvoir when she proclaims that women are partially responsible. They have given up their agency because it is more convenient. It is easier than fighting. I think that there is some truth to this. How is it possible that there are 3 billion women in the world and we haven't been able to combat patriarchy? There are 3 billion different answers to this question. Some women are so ensconced in patriarchy that they cannot see that they are oppressed. Some women have enough freedom that they don't "need" any more. Some women think that men *are* superior. For other women, it is overwhelming to think about the work that needs to be done to free women from oppression, so they choose to ignore it, or just feel angry and take no action. I have chosen to feel angry and to take action through my writing and other initiatives.

You explore the possibility of different worlds in your early stories, which envision how modern life could be different if we had made or did make different choices. How do you envision life under matriarchy?

I don't envision it like that. My dream is not to live in a matriarchy, but in a society based on respect and love. Utopian, I know. But we have to strive for something. Communism is a utopian society that started as a theory and then was put into action. Not a successful experiment, but nonetheless, it was attempted.

What I am looking for is actual equality, not just in name and law. I don't want women to rule the world. I want women and men to govern together. I am only mildly optimistic on this point.

What is it about this element of fantasy that intrigues you?

When I write fiction, it allows me to imagine a different world. I can explore issues in a way that I think would lead to more productive solutions. It gives readers the opportunity to re-imagine life, to look at our world in a different way. Fiction based on the realities of life allows us to understand the world we live in. When I was in school I was profoundly influenced by Simone de Beauvoir's The Mandarins. It opened up my mind to possibilities of fiction. But I also think that our world has a lot of issues that are not going to be solved using the methods and philosophies that we currently have. So by imagining new futures and new histories, we open up even more possibilities. Just look at how science fiction influences and predicts technology. I'd like to think that my novels could have that same kind of effect, but with political ideas.

Your later work is focused more on non-fiction. Why the change in genre?

While I think that fiction can have personal transformative effects, it can only go so far. Writing fiction about global issues, about patriarchy, no longer felt like the best way to effect change. I still think fiction is powerful. But for me personally I wanted to take action in a different way. There is a more powerful bridge to action with non-fiction.

Fiction and non-fiction aren't mutually exclusive. I'm currently working on a new set of books that combine storytelling and non-fiction. In this way the reader and I can use our imaginations to envision a different future, engaging one part of our brains, and then from that imagination point we move into new possibilities where we can take action in our lives and communities. Kind of like taking a book club to the next level.

Sounds fascinating. Why is it so important to you to both write and take action in the community? Isn't writing itself an action?

Writing is a very personal act. Any piece of writing could conceivably be a diary, in other words, be written for oneself. Diaries, in fact, are one of the major ways that women have expressed themselves throughout history. So yes, writing is an action, and depending on the context, quite powerful. However, the reason women wrote diaries instead of books was that it was much more difficult for women to be published. Also, they were locked in their domestic lives with no way to express whatever inner turmoil they were experiencing. Writing as an action was limited to the private sphere. The act of

writing is taken further when it is made public. Making one's ideas public involves another level of commitment. A commitment to oneself, self-assurance in one's ideas, and a commitment from the community at large to support all voices. I believe this is even more pronounced for women than it is for men. It is often the case that when a man is asked about his writing, that is all he is asked about. But all of a woman's life is open to questioning and comment, even her body. When a woman decides to speak, to put her ideas on record, she is committing herself to public scrutiny. Unlike private writing, public or professional writing usually involves public speaking, interviews and other community events. This action tends to be circular in that it is all about the writing. The final step is to put the content of the writing into action. Here you become a real change-maker. You can achieve fame and acclaim for your ideas and your writing, like many novelists, but your day-to-day life may have nothing of note in it. For me it is important not only to write about ideas, but to implement them, or participate in them. In my case I write about feminist issues, give talks, and am involved in a few organizations that are implementing some of my ideas.

What are some of those ideas?

One of the projects I'm involved in is setting up a flexible workspace for parents. A self-employed mother or father can rent space in this building. The building will have onsite, flexible, quality childcare. It is located on a street that has banking, supermarkets, a gym, all the daily amenities that a person needs. It is also near schools. This way a parent does not need to drive all over town to get everything done. We will be offering this service in a number of neighbourhoods so that parents will have to commute less.

Your latest non-fiction book, Why Men Can Have It All: The Changing Roles of Men and Women in the Western World, tackles patriarchy head on. Can you tell us about it?

Why Men Can Have It All counters the ubiquitous question "can women have it all?" and answers it by showing a different narrative. When we talk about women's lives, the struggles they have as women and mothers, we often ignore the struggles that men have as men and fathers. We assume the questions are different, when in reality we can only reach a solution by engaging both men and women. What enables a man to be

successful is exactly what makes it difficult for a woman to be successful. In the end both lose.

Some basic assumptions are made. First, that a successful work life is the definition of a successful life. Second, that it is possible and desirable to have both a successful work life and a successful family life. Third, that it is the woman who takes care of the family. What is this based on? As I mentioned earlier, the whole work force and economy are based on single-income families, where the primary wage earner is the man, and the primary homemaker is the woman. In this model a man can have it all because society and success have been designed for and defined by men – a society where they can work without having to worry about their physical or emotional needs. The contemporary woman struggles in the economy where she must (and wants to) work, and in the home where she must (and may want to) be.

The dialogue about work and family balance is a dialogue among women. There may be a cursory mention of the role of the male, but it is still viewed as a woman's problem. How strange, in a world that is usually centered on men, that women are the focus of the conversation? Notice how the conversation is about the home and family. Here lies the problem. Women are now an integral part of the workplace, and men need to be an integral part of the management of the home.

We need to look at this issue cooperatively, rather than merely assuming that “this is men's role, this is women's role and we can't bridge the gap.” Most people believe in equal rights, but it is hard to undo the cultural influence of millennia, especially when it is reinforced for economic purposes.

A woman can have her dream job, but she has to decide if she is willing to put it on hold for family. A man can have a family and a career with no question. A child may change a man's priorities, but not his possibilities. In today's world, a child makes it much more difficult for a woman to succeed in her profession. I wish society were set up in such a way that career success and motherhood weren't mutually opposed. To succeed in my career I chose not to have children, but that has meant that in a subtle and deep way I'm seen as a failure as a woman.

Part Two

Discovery

She hadn't meant to look at it, but she had seen her mother writing in that book so many times that when she saw it on the kitchen table she couldn't help but take a look. She wished she hadn't. Not because there were any dark secrets or anything especially personal, but because of how what she read made her feel. Tingly. Hot. Cold. Disoriented. This was another life she had glimpsed. Inside she read her mom's name, Rosemary, but the life described was not her mom's life. Her mom wasn't an author. She had never toured the country, written books, changed the world. This diary revealed an independent woman, not a dedicated mother. Why would she be writing like this? The life in her mother's diary sounded glamorous, worldly. Her mother's life was anything but.

She felt herself sinking. She wasn't old enough for this kind of revelation. How was a thirteen-year-old girl supposed to deal with her mother's secret life? If she hadn't read her mother's diary - that imaginary interview - she'd be the same Jamie, student council president nominee. The sinking was joined with spinning and she felt herself becoming detached from her body, viewing her life from a perspective that was most disquieting.

Jamie didn't want to see her mother as a woman, an individual. In fact, she had never even considered the possibility. Jamie knew her mom as a comforter, a provider, a caretaker. It was Jamie's life that mattered, her mom's a given. Jamie had always assumed that the child was the centre of a parent's life. All the mothers she knew woke their children up in the morning, prepared meals, got them to school on time. She knew they worked outside the home, but it was the family that defined them. Perhaps this was too narrow a view. Shifting the focus away from home and into the world made Jamie feel unsteady. If her mother had this other life – if only in her mind - what did it mean for Jamie? Until now, her world had consisted of family, friends and school. This was the perfect trinity of security, belonging and stimulation. Anything beyond these three, including the private life of her mother, took Jamie out of her place of knowing and into a confusing mental space that she would prefer to have remained hidden, at least for now.

But reading her mother's diary opened up another dimension to life. Was Jamie not the center of her mother's world?

It was the security of home that allowed Jamie to focus on her passion: leadership. That's why she was running for student council president. Her previous forays into school participation, the bake sales and food drives, the volleyball team, the school choir, were small steps that led her to take a grade 7 leadership workshop. It changed her life. The leader of the workshop, a young woman who had run for a seat in local government, had inspired her to run for student council. As an eighth grader, becoming president was unlikely, but she was determined to win. She campaigned hard. Every moment presented a new challenge. It was amazing to have a voice beyond her small circle. To have other people listen to her, to challenge her, gave her a confidence that was intoxicating. With the leadership workshop she found her true place. She was focused on *her* life, on *her* satisfaction and fulfillment. Quite honestly she had never given a thought to her mom's life, to her mom's voice. A new question arose. Where did her mother find the safety that Jamie took for granted? Was her mother able to express *herself*? Her mom didn't talk much about her personal life. Outside the normal chit chat of mother and daughter, most of their interactions centered on Jamie's comings and goings. Jamie wanted to remain the confident and passionate girl who was running for student council, but the emotions she was experiencing left her feeling insecure, unmoored from home, adrift in a world without boundaries. She had so many dreams and her mother's diary, placed next to her actual life, made her question what was possible.

Jamie spent most of her afternoons doing homework, but today she needed to get outside and ground herself. She put on her favourite purple coat, a gift from her Bubbe, then walked down the narrow stairway and across the street. Everyday she took this walk, leaving their modest yet comfortable apartment above the local coffee shop, crossing the street and walking the few blocks to school. Her old elementary school, the place where she had discovered her passion for leadership, was just up the street. A few blocks to the north and south, that was Jamie's life. What were the boundaries of her mother's life?

The street was full of afternoon light as Jamie walked in the direction she imagined her mother walking everyday. North to the main street, then onto the bus bound for the west side of the city. Where did Rosemary go from there? The mother she knew was contained within the walls of their apartment. They did go hiking and camping in the summer, and went on the occasional city outing, but for the most part, Jamie saw her mother at home. All Jamie knew about her mother's work was her job title: a mail carrier on the West Side. The sights and sounds of her mother's life were a mystery.

Her mother was all that Jamie had.

Jamie's Bubbe was alive, but she lived in Montreal, so was more of a visitor in her life, not one of its pillars of stability. Other than the occasional letter, her father was absent. He had invited her to Toronto for a visit last year, but she had been too nervous to visit a man she hadn't seen since she was a toddler. And so her world was her mother and the few blocks around their apartment. Upon reading her mother's diary, the narrow confines of her life had come to an end, and with it the security of her mother's presence. Home and family. These were the things that made the rest of Jamie's life possible. If she couldn't trust in that, she didn't know who she was.

Jamie stayed on the bus lost in thought until it looped around and brought her back to where her mother's day started. She mounted the stairs to their apartment and finished the homework she had left behind.

Confession

When Jamie's mother came home from work that night, they had their regular conversation. Today though, it felt flat.

"How was school today honey?" her mom asked as she chopped vegetables for dinner. "Can you get the onion out of the pantry?"

"School was fine," said Jamie as she walked to the other side of the kitchen to retrieve the onion.

“How did the student council elections go?”

“We don’t find out ‘til tomorrow.”

“Well, I’m sure you’ll make a wonderful president.”

“Thanks, mom.”

“Will you set the table, please?”

What was different? Updates on Jamie’s life, motherly encouragement. The words were the same, but now Jamie was looking at her mother from a different perspective. Did her mother even care about what was happening at school? What had seemed like genuine interest now felt like veiled boredom; like automatic responses. The view into Rosemary’s inner life changed the tenor of their conversation.

For Jamie, there was a direct correlation between her self and the actions she took in the world. She was how she acted. The disconnect between self and action she now saw in her mother’s life was disconcerting. Up until now, Jamie’s life had been so simple; she did what she enjoyed. She assumed this was true for others, especially adults. But clearly it wasn’t so for her mother. To find out why filled Jamie with a throbbing dread. Fear had never been a motivator for Jamie, but honesty was. She wanted to be honest with her mother and to receive honesty in return. She needed to know what was going on. Jamie decided to confront her mother head on. Deep breath.

“Mom?”

Without looking up from the cutting board Rosemary answered, “Yes?”

“Are you happy with your life?”

Rosemary’s eyes lifted, “What?”

Jamie repeated her question. “Are you happy with your life?”

Silence.

And finally, putting down the knife, “Where is that question coming from?” her mom said, sounding confused.

Seeing her mother’s reaction, Jamie momentarily regretted her decision. She almost said, “Oh nowhere, I was just wondering,” and let her mother continue to see her as simply her daughter. Instead, she said honestly:

“I read your diary.”

“Oh.”

More silence.

The silence continued through dinner and into the next day. When Rosemary came home from work Jamie wanted to tell her that she had won the student elections, the first time ever that an 8th grader had been elected president. But her honesty had created a rift in their domestic routine. The apartment felt different, her mother felt different

The silence surprised Jamie. Still seeing her mom as “the one who knows,” she had expected her to be disappointed in Jamie’s violation of privacy, but then to explain the diary. She had expected her mother to reassure her, to tell her that her life was what she thought it was. Moment after moment, the mother she knew was dissolving. Jamie longed for solid ground. With a few turned pages her past, present and future became suspect and she no longer knew where she stood.

Reflection 1: On Fulfillment

That night Rosemary sat at the kitchen table, in the apartment they had lived in for the past 10 years, listening to Writer’s World. Before starting her diary, it was the only time in her day, in her life, that Rosemary could connect to a part of herself that had been dormant since Jamie’s birth. Once an avid reader, for the past several years she hadn’t had the energy to pick up a book of any substance. Sitting and listening was all

she could muster. Listening to the interviewees, Rosemary would remember how she too had wanted to be a writer, spending her days at her desk, her boyfriend Richard beside her. She glanced through the kitchen door into the living room, where that desk stood piled with bills. Now, as she washed the dishes or swept the floor after dinner, she would enjoy a moment of intellectual respite from her otherwise monotonous day. Tonight, however, *Writer's World* provided the background noise to Rosemary's reflections on her daughter's unsettling revelation. When Jamie told her about reading the diary she had been taken off guard. Not knowing what to say, she had said nothing. She needed time to think, to get some clarity. Now that her diary, her imaginary life, was out in the open, she could no longer hide, from herself or her daughter, that she was dissatisfied with her life.

Some parents might feel fulfilled by family life, but not Rosemary. She had acted out of what she thought was necessity, but what was actually some prescribed notion of appropriate action. Growing up in Outremont, a Jewish neighbourhood in Montreal, it seemed to Rosemary that all the women in that area had children. Until their children left home, they themselves stayed home. There were duties to family and community, but no imperative for self-fulfillment. Rosemary saw how her mother filled her life with make-work in the home, unending social events, and an obtrusive interest in her children's lives. The interest was purely utilitarian. It provided for their material well-being, but not emotional support; her Bubbe had filled that role. Upon her Bubbe's death when Rosemary was 18, she was left with no one to lean on. Always one to do well in school and to be interested in books, Rosemary didn't want to live a life based on the day-to-day. But that was exactly what happened. Faced with an unexpected pregnancy, she felt both hopeless and responsible and slowly her dreams slipped away. She didn't have the strength to be creative, active, and fulfilled. But that inner need couldn't be entirely stifled and without a clear outlet her true self eventually burst through the monotony of daily life and damaged the one she loved.

Rosemary thought of her beautiful daughter, sleeping in the larger of two bedrooms, and reflected on the contents of her diary. Despite the cathartic nature of writing an alternate life, it still wasn't a real one. A real life would be figuring out how to live out her ambitions and raise her daughter at the same time. She wanted her daughter

to be a whole woman. She had given her safety and security and now she wanted to give her the freedom to choose the life she wanted. Rosemary wanted her daughter, unlike herself, to remain strong and centered when encountering adversity, making choices that would bring her and her loved ones happiness. Perhaps if her mother had been able to share her inner struggles and personal desires, at least in some general way, then Rosemary would have been able to stand her ground and give both herself and Jamie a meaningful life. Jamie wasn't yet a woman, but was on the threshold of becoming one. Looking back at the past year or two, Rosemary realized that just like her mental life, her relationship with her daughter had been at a stand still. Talking about their lives by explaining her diary could build the intimacy that Rosemary had lacked with her own mother, and make up for the time that Rosemary had been mentally absent.

The process of writing had, for the first time since Jamie's birth, made Rosemary question eschewing risk and personal fulfillment for the stability of family life. For her, responsibility had been putting her daughter's life before her own; a parent's job was to care for her child. Now, what was right didn't seem so clear. In choosing stability Rosemary ignored her own desires. It had felt natural to take a hiatus from her personal pursuits and to focus on the budding life and love before her, at least at the beginning of her child's life. But how long was this selflessness, this single pointed attention, to last? When Jamie was born, Rosemary's inner life did not end. Her needs, wants, and desires, in addition to those of her child, had to be fulfilled. Two lives were at stake. If Rosemary had had a partner, it would have been easier to find the time and mental energy to fill her intellectual and creative needs, but she didn't, and she was on her own.

The familiar chime of news hour music, the music that woke her up every morning and marked every half hour in the evening, brought Rosemary's attention back into the kitchen. She thought to herself: *by focusing only on Jamie's well being, I have inadvertently created a situation where I am present, but not present. A mother, but not a whole person.* Her daughter would not know what it was to be complete.

What if she had pursued her dreams of being a writer? What if she had found a partner who could share her life? Being a single parent was difficult, and losing the one she loved, just as she was about to become a parent, had thrown Rosemary off course,

a course she had never managed to correct. Without intention, Rosemary was blaming Jamie for her stagnant life.

Rosemary and Richard had been a couple since their undergraduate years, and continued on to complete their master's degree in literature together. They planned on spending their lives together reading, thinking, and writing. When Rosemary unexpectedly got pregnant, to Richard it had been a given that she would abort the baby. How could their life continue as planned with a child? Rosemary had never wanted to have children, but she couldn't bring herself to terminate the pregnancy. She loved Richard and this child was part of him. The intimacy of creating a life with another person, a person she loved, opened up new ways of seeing the world. With this experience, she could write with more feeling, more insight, more depth. Without the benefit of a life growing within him, without that physical experience, Richard could not agree with Rosemary's choice. A child, with all its responsibility, would inhibit their intellectual pursuits. After much debate and heartbreak, just a few months before their baby was born, Richard left. Richard was right. Once the baby was born and she was done school, Rosemary gave up her writing and research. Although she was able to complete her studies, as a single mom in her mid-twenties she needed, or thought she needed, to get a reliable, decent paying job. It was not a time for risks and personal fulfillment. As a result, she'd taken a job as a mail carrier, and with the stability of a union job she had raised her daughter.

One would think that a job as a mail carrier would afford plenty of time to think. However, despite its physicality, and the ability for her mind to roam, her job was numbing. It was so mechanical, so routine, that once her body conformed to it, it became just another nameless object in her life. The old character houses she passed everyday ceased to register, as her hands automatically withdrew the mail and placed it in each mailbox. Without a connection to her body, which she had felt so intensely when she was with Richard, her mind became suspended between action and inaction, roaming with no direction, and often just blank. She hadn't noticed the slow decline into nothingness. In the evenings she experienced a temporary revival as she tended to the needs of her daughter and listened to the radio, but the lack of concreteness, of a sense of being, during the day began to feel like non-existence.

This decline continued for over 10 years. Then a few months ago she had listened to an interview on *Writer's World* with an author who had recently published a new biography on Simone de Beauvoir. Rosemary had loved Beauvoir's fiction as a student in university and was curious about the life of this driven woman. She had sat, transfixed, staring out the window into the darkening night. Beauvoir's life of introspection, intellectual action, and continual striving both inspired Rosemary and left her feeling empty. She was filled with the fear of disappearing. Long after the interview, late into the night, Rosemary had stayed up, wandering from the all-too-familiar kitchen, to the small living room bathed in darkness, then to her bedroom, a place of dreamless sleep. So used to feeling nothing, she let the fear course through her as she moved from chair to couch to bed. It was almost a pleasure to feel something so intense. The last time Rosemary had felt the fullness of existence was when she was pregnant. Being pregnant and giving birth had brought her into her body in a completely new way. Maybe her mother had been right when she said that children make a woman. But once the euphoria of pregnancy and childbirth had worn off, her body became a care-giving machine. Similar to her work, where she walked street after street, her footsteps wearing grooves in the grass, creating her own personal sidewalk, domestic duties: laundry, diapers, feeding, playing, all became so repetitive that without noticing she forgot herself. The only place she had felt alive was in her master's program, where her mind could leave the immediacy of parenting and rest in a place of possibility. When she graduated, her mind had nowhere to go and life's possibilities receded into the four walls of her home; her entire life was devoted to supporting her daughter. With a job that offered no mental stimulation and a mundane home life, years went by and Rosemary, a once vibrant and curious woman, disappeared.

The contrast of Beauvoir's life with her own, the nothing that was her life, caused an uncomfortable twitch in her body. In the weeks that followed she walked more quickly, her footsteps deviating from their track, forging a new path in the familiar grass. She was in her body once again. She noticed the petals fall from the cherry trees and the ripening of the lush red fruit. The energy of the sun gave her limbs new life. Her mind raced. She had been running on autopilot for so long that with the appearance of a strong emotion, fear, her body responded to it with more intensity than normal. Besides

physical exertion Rosemary needed an outlet for the energy that was consuming her, something that was her own, separate from her work and her daughter.

Gradually Rosemary started writing again. Writing connected her mind and body: the concreteness of the pen and her handwriting on paper, the movement from left to right, combined with new thoughts forming and then connecting to her hand. The realization of thought solidifying onto paper. Her thoughts and writing were random at first. She wrote at night when Jamie went to bed and all the housework was done. She would write about her day, what she'd seen as she delivered the mail. Everyday stuff. As her thoughts became clearer she started remembering her childhood, her Bubbe, and how she had come to inhabit her present life. Then one day she started writing an imaginary life, the life she wished she were leading. It was cathartic, she felt alive. She wrote of a childless woman who had fulfilled her dreams of being a writer. It was as if by writing, she was filling all the gaps that had been present in her life. She was reasserting her individuality. Her fictional life had made her into a real person.

Writing swept out the cobwebs in her brain and as she walked the tree lined streets delivering mail her mind had something to grab onto. A dream. A life raft. Her days brought her pleasure, she was grateful for the time she had to imagine, and to remember: writing her master's thesis, a paper on Canadian women writers, the late night talks with Richard. Writing her diary had filled a necessary space in Rosemary's life. Until Jamie read it.

With that second pair of eyes Rosemary saw that she had internalized, compartmentalized, her thoughts and her actions. She had moved from a singular and static life to two lives: her interior life, which had saved her sanity in many ways, and her exterior life, which on the surface remained much the same. Ironic considering how she had written about the importance of action. The thoughts in her mind, the writing on the page, simply hadn't translated into deeper change in her daily life.

It had been inevitable that Jamie would read her diary one day; Rosemary had just thought it would be when she was dead. Trusting Jamie, Rosemary hadn't thought twice about leaving her diary out on the kitchen table. In retrospect, that was unwise. What child wouldn't be curious about a parent's diary? A child's diary was full of the

immediacy of life, the going concern of the day. A cursory review of her own childhood musings revealed petty feuds with friends, the ups and downs of superficial love, and the inconveniences of family life. Jamie probably thought she would learn some juicy tidbits about Rosemary's social life, or maybe find out about some hidden boyfriend. How was a child to know the potential depth of their parent's thoughts, their inner and private life?

The news hour chime sounded again. A half hour had passed since Rosemary last noticed she was still sitting at the kitchen table. Turning off the radio, she looked out the window at the full August moon and decided to take advantage of the late evening light to walk and think.

It was pleasantly cool on the street as Rosemary thought about her daughter. Seeing her diary through Jamie's eyes it was clear that the fictional and the real were in conflict. The person Jamie knew as her mother was not real for Rosemary, but nor was the life in her diary. Clearly Rosemary had been able to keep up a façade of normalcy, since it wasn't until reading her diary that Jamie had picked up on the lie that was Rosemary's life. She felt guilty, writing her daughter out of existence. It wasn't as though she didn't *want* her daughter to exist; only she knew how different her life would be without her. Instead of living a fantasy life as a successful writer, as she was now, Rosemary could actually be trying to *be* one. She felt sick at the thought. Rosemary was blaming her daughter, or at least her existence, for her personal dissatisfaction. There were many successful writers who were mothers. Who better to know this than Rosemary, who had spent months researching the lives of Canadian women authors? Why was it that she, faced with single motherhood, had deserted a promising life? Why had she forgotten herself, and in the process, forgotten her daughter?

Back at the apartment, Rosemary leafed through the pages of her diary and the words that had given her so much freedom tumbled off their page and lay in meaningless disarray on the floor. The freedom was illusory. Real freedom could only come from confronting her anger at the choices she had made – the false choice between herself and her child. Faced with one or the other, she had chosen neither, which had left her in an amorphous place, incomplete. And then to be deceived into thinking that her diary offered her a new life, into thinking that simply by writing her

desires she could be fulfilled. Rosemary had felt such relief in writing that she had failed to notice its essential meaninglessness. Only making changes in how she acted, in how she actually lived, would make a lasting difference.

A car alarm on the street below woke Rosemary from her reverie. *Rosemary*, she said to herself, *you must deal with this. This is your opportunity to take make some real changes, and to reconnect with your daughter.* Quietly she got up, walked through the silent apartment, and approached Jamie's door. Opening it, she looked at Jamie while she slept. Sleep had released the tightness in her daughter's face, the result, Rosemary assumed, of reading the diary. *I caused this*, thought Rosemary of the daughter she loved. She didn't recognize the once familiar face. She saw Jamie for who she really was, the markings of experience, thoughts, and conversations stripped away. A young girl on the verge of womanhood. This must be how Jamie feels, Rosemary thought. It would be scary to see your mother, the familiar, without her maternal veneer. Who was Jamie without the patina of childhood? Rosemary wanted to be there for her as Jamie confronted her future. Perhaps she could help her avoid the mistakes she had made.

The question was, *was the inner life of a woman, the longing that led to the fantasy, the kind of thing that a mother shared with her daughter?* Should her explanation simplify her experience: *I was just having fun, writing a story, it's nothing to be concerned about.* Or should she go deeper? Surely Jamie deserved it. Yet it seemed unfair to share her heaviness, the weight of being a woman, with a girl who was just starting life. Rosemary was just beginning to understand it herself. Studying the lives of women, as she had, was different from living a life worthy of study. On the one hand, the act of writing had given her so much joy. There was something important to be said about personal expression. The joy was real, but was it enough? What was the difference between acting out desires in fantasy and not acting at all? She didn't want her daughter to think that contentment could only be found in dreams, nor did she want this for herself.

Rosemary's diary was personal, and yet she knew the subtext of her writing, the discontent of her daily life, would have an effect on her daughter's life as she matured. Indeed, it was happening now. How could Rosemary's own mother have known—

through her random comments and more overt judgments on womanhood—that she would influence, and unintentionally arrest, Rosemary’s development as a woman? In other words, that Rosemary would follow a path that dictated the dissolving of the parent into the child. Jamie had opened up a secret door that revealed a reality meant for older eyes. Jamie would be unaware that family and society often governed one’s path. This is what Jamie had known so far: Rosemary providing a regular evening meal, a tidy house, and the necessities of Jamie’s physical and emotional well-being. Now Jamie had been witness to another life; her mother’s fantasy of a life without a child, living out solely her intellectual and creative desires. The illusion of a simple life converging with the complex inner life of a woman.

Revealing

Early the next morning Jamie was dragged from a deep slumber by a knock on her bedroom door.

“Jamie?” Her mother, filled with trepidation, waited for Jamie to answer. “I want to talk with you.” Hearing nothing, she entered the brightening room. Jamie, newly awake, started crying when she saw her mom. She didn’t know why; maybe it was release, maybe it was fear, maybe it was wanting to be comforted like a child. With heavy arms she cleared a space for her mom at the foot of her pillow-covered bed, wiped her eyes and invited her in.

Instead of sitting down, Jamie’s mom lay down beside her, and, wrapping her arms around her said simply, “I’m sorry I left my diary out for you to see.”

She lay comforting her daughter until she could feel Jamie’s breathing settle and her heart return to its regular beat. Rosemary remembered holding Jamie like this in the first weeks of her life. Rosemary would lay awake in awe at the new love she felt for this child, while at the same time feeling a searing emptiness at the loss of the father. She had held Jamie until her own breath and heart settled to the regular rhythm of this extraordinary being. Through many pain-filled nights, Jamie unknowingly comforted Rosemary by simply having lungs that breathed and a heart that beat. Rosemary was so used to the closeness of Richard’s body, a body that was hers and yet not hers, a body

that filled all her needs and desires like the air that pumped the lungs of her daughter. Her need for that physical union was somehow transferred, and also transformed, in her daughter. At the breast Rosemary's body became her daughter's and as they each lay crying, the one from exhaustion and the other communicating in the only way a baby knows, Rosemary's understanding of love expanded. She felt sorry for the father of this child, who chose a life of the mind over the intimacy of parenthood. Rosemary soon disengaged her own need from her daughter and gave herself fully to her. She gave to Jamie when Jamie stumbled through her first steps, when she crashed into rocks and fell off her bike. She gave to her when she entered school, scared of leaving home, when she forgot the lyrics in a solo performance in the school choir, and when their first pet, a guinea pig named Jones, died. At first, giving without the need to receive had been the biggest act of love that Rosemary had ever experienced. Over time, she didn't notice the giving anymore, and she didn't notice the lack of reciprocity, from her daughter, or anyone else in her life. Once Rosemary returned to work, when Jamie was one year old, the whirl of love, exhaustion and monotony stabilized, and the life that she was still living twelve years later began.

Rosemary paused, and then began to speak, with a sureness she didn't feel. "I know I've been quiet these past few days, but it wasn't because I was upset that you read my diary. I've been trying to figure out the best way to explain it to you." Jamie remained silent. "Jamie? Are you OK?"

Jamie untangled herself from her mother's arms and sat up in bed. She picked up one of the numerous pillows, hugging it to her chest, smelling the comforting scent of the fabric softener that her mother used. The impending promise of intimacy scared Jamie. Now that all this was out in the open, she wanted it to go away. She had felt so lost, and with that hug from her mother, the sense of security she had missed the past couple of days returned. Her mother was her mother and she was her mother's daughter. The possible pain of seeing her mother grow, seeing her mother change, seeing her mother as vulnerable, made her head spin. She stalled.

"I don't really feel like talking about it right now, Mom." Letting go of the pillow she said, "but I do have something to tell you."

“What is it?”

“I won the student council election.”

Rosemary was quiet for a moment as she adjusted to the change in direction of their conversation. Then, “That’s wonderful! This will be such a great experience for you. Are you excited?” Once again, she saw Jamie as though for the first time: a girl becoming a woman. A leader. Rather than seeing the life she had cared for all these years, she saw Jamie the individual.

Jamie felt relieved to have the conversation turn back to her life, the life she knew.

“I’m super excited. I’ve got so many ideas. It’ll be a busy year.”

They lapsed into silence, each thinking their own thoughts. Rosemary stroked her daughter’s hair as Jamie fiddled with the corner of a pillowcase. They were processing the situation: the joy of Jamie’s news, the possibilities of connection through Rosemary’s diary, the fear of the unknown. Rosemary was reminded of the nights she had spent nursing Jamie to sleep. It was an erotic experience that was difficult to define. The closeness between them was physical and emotional, different from the closeness of two lovers, yet equally dear. Over the years that intimacy had been lost, and sharing this moment with Jamie, Rosemary hoped it could be rekindled.

Jamie, deciding it was time, broke the silence asking softly, “Mom, what are you writing about? Why did you make up that stuff about being a famous writer? I don’t get it.”

With Jamie’s question, Rosemary saw how she should approach their conversation: Jamie needed to take the lead, to ask the questions that were important to her. This way Rosemary wouldn’t share too much, burden her with information for which she wasn’t ready. Rosemary began, “I needed something in my life that was my own. I’ve been so focused on providing for us that I haven’t taken care of myself. When I was

younger I dreamed of being a writer, but life didn't turn out as I planned," her voice trailed off as she spoke these last words.

"But what's wrong with your life as it is?" This was the part that made Jamie's heart beat faster and her breath get stuck in her throat. Was her mother unhappy with *her*? Did she regret having her? Did she wish her life were different? She knew that her father hadn't been prepared to take on a parenting role, but she had never questioned, at least consciously, whether or not her mother had been. Jamie had assumed that she was wanted. Being omitted from her mother's made-up life, she now wondered if this were true. "Don't you want me?" Jamie whispered, barely able to get the words out.

Rosemary's heart broke for her daughter. How could she answer her question without making Jamie feel at fault? She took Jamie's face in her hands and said, "Jamie, I love you, and of course I want you. My diary isn't the literal truth of what I wish my life were. There is nothing wrong with my job, my apartment, with you. What's wrong is how I've chosen to live it." Rosemary repeated in a voice to convince herself and her daughter, "My life is my choice."

"Then why did you write me out of your life?"

"I didn't write you out, because what I wrote wasn't real, I just needed a break; I needed a place to go that was all my own, to figure out why my life didn't feel quite right. The diary is only one part of me. The thing about reading someone's personal diary is that you are reading thoughts that are meant to be private, you're seeing someone process ideas and feelings, but you certainly don't see the whole picture. When you write in your diary, what do you write most about? The happy moments or the hard ones?"

"I guess you're right. I usually write about things that make me mad, or when I'm feeling sad. It's a good place to get it all out there."

"Exactly. I know it must have been hard to tell me that you read my diary. You were really brave to tell me the truth, and I want to be as honest as I can with you."

Listening to her mother talk, Jamie felt calmer. It was easy to let thoughts spin out of control when you didn't know the whole story. She had already experienced misunderstandings when actions were taken out of context, like when Melissa hadn't invited her on the trip to the cabin like she always had. Jamie had felt excluded, not realizing that Melissa's parents were getting a divorce and Melissa's mom needed some quiet family time. Jamie's mother wasn't some mysterious unknown. She *did* know her, just not all of her. Rosemary had so much more life experience; it was natural that Jamie would only know one facet of her life. The question was, did she want to know more? If she were honest with herself, she would have to admit that she had sensed her mother's discontent for some time. Jamie had always had a drive to act, to be busy, to do well. Rosemary had been supportive of her efforts, but had never pushed her to be involved in school life. She had had a distinct "hands off" approach. After reading Rosemary's diary, Jamie wondered if there was a connection between her mother's actions and Jamie's striving nature. Was she trying to avoid Rosemary's unhappiness? Again, stepping away from herself as a child, moving into her life as a leader, Jamie thought she could learn something from her mother. She just needed to ask the right questions, to approach her mother as she would the student council, or the staff at school. Jamie got out of bed and looked out the window at the new day. She lengthened her spine, grounded her feet, and breathed deeply from her belly. She was strong.

"Why are you unhappy?" asked Jamie, turning away from the window to look at her mother. "Why did it take so long to start writing again?"

"Ah, the million dollar question," Rosemary sighed. "What I've discovered through my writing is that more than anything I'm a product of generations of women who have been told that taking care of the family is the ultimate fulfillment of womanhood. When I left home, I swore that I wouldn't follow in my mother's footsteps, that I would do what would make *me* happy, not just what would make my family happy. But it's hard to slough off the environment in which you were raised. Neither my mother nor my Bubbe were able to fully be themselves, and the same thing happened to me. It's hard to change your life path when you don't have many examples to follow." Rosemary struggled to explain what she meant. There was the personal aspect of her life, the personal choices she had made, and also the bigger picture, the journey of women

throughout history, who could not choose their life. Rather than explaining the worldwide plight of women, she tried a different tactic. “You joined the student council because you wanted to stop bullying, right?” Jamie nodded. “And there are school policies and culture that make that change difficult?” “Uh huh.” “My life, and a lot of women’s lives, is like that. We would like more options, more choices, more examples of a fulfilling and successful life, but the culture and attitudes of the society need to change before this can happen. Does that make any sense?”

“Like when you wrote about a workplace that has childcare and is near grocery stores?”

“Yes. Just like changes need to happen in your school for the students to be happier and more successful, changes need to happen in society for many women to be happier and more successful.”

“But what does that mean for you? And me? And what does it have to do with your diary?”

It was impossible to be delicate: “the sad reality is that it is more difficult for women who have children to get their personal needs met. It has nothing to do with our feelings for our children. And it doesn’t mean that we can’t find fulfillment, it just takes more effort. I was so exhausted from raising you by myself that I just did what I needed to survive. It took me years, your whole life, to realize that.” Rosemary felt her emotions rising. She forced herself to look straight at Jamie, “but I want something better for you. My mother was never able to show me any part of herself other than herself as a mother. As a result, when I became a parent I only knew how to take care of you, not of myself.”

Jamie looked down at the floor. Staying neutral was proving to be difficult. The door to her mother’s life, which Jamie had opened just a crack, was swinging wide open. She wanted to remain distant, to accept her mother’s words as though from an inspirational speaker. Jamie wanted to be close with her mother, but she could only process so much at once. She needed to step back from the personal nature of their

conversation. She generalized her questions. “Why is it more difficult for women? Couldn’t it just be different personalities? Or different families?”

“I’ve wondered about that myself. I see some women who are such go-getters and seem to be able to handle everything. And I’ve wondered if I had been raised in a family that was supportive of my needs, how I would be different. But even with the right personality and a supportive family, society has its own ideas about men and women, and different definitions of what it means to have a successful life. Your dad is a success because he is following a career path, and perhaps I would be viewed as a success because I put all my attention into raising you. But then what happens when a strong and driven woman isn’t following the norm? Or if a woman wants a different life? It’s hard to push past all the barriers and gender stereotypes that are out there. I have personally found it difficult to put in the extra effort while focusing on raising you.”

Even as Rosemary spoke, this last thought sifted through her experience and into the life of her mother. Something clicked and Rosemary felt compassion for her mother. She had always had a certain distaste for the way her mother chose to live her life, even blamed her mother for raising her in a way that made it hard for Rosemary to choose her own path. But this woman had married into a religious family, bore children, and did the best she could. Rosemary had never looked at her family from a political point of view, or thought about whether or not the women in it were affected by the global oppression of women. She was too personally involved. What seemed like individual decisions were actually decisions influenced by mothers, grandmothers, and by all the messages that like so much lint stick onto the fabric of who we are. *Seeing oneself from outside is always difficult, even impossible for some people*, thought Rosemary. She felt grateful that, despite her own shortcomings, her daughter seemed like one of the lucky people who could. Talking with Jamie, Rosemary felt a new, different sense of freedom. She felt less confined by her past. Two worlds, the inner and outer, were merging. She felt the beginning of the wholeness she had longed for – for herself and her daughter. Rosemary was revealing herself to her daughter. The diary was meant to be private, but now Rosemary was being seen. She had missed it, longed for it. To be known.

“What do you think about going to visit your Bubbe?” asked Rosemary in a moment of inspiration.

“In Montreal?” said Jamie with surprise.

“Yes! We don’t have to go for long, and anyway, I can’t take much time off work. But we’ve been planning to go camping at the end of the month, so we could go to Montreal instead. Bubbe said that if we ever wanted to go visit, she would buy our plane tickets.”

“I haven’t seen Bubbe since I was 7 years old.”

“I know. It would be nice for the three of us to spend some time together. Talking to you about my life makes me realize that I need to reconnect with her. And this would give you and me some time together away from our daily routine.” Rosemary looked at her watch. “My god, its eight o’clock! We’ve got to get going. So what do you think? Shall we go to Montreal?”

“Yes, let’s do it.”

“Jamie,” said Rosemary, as she got up from the bed, “I love you very much and I’m so happy to have you in my life. We’ll talk more later.”

“Thanks, Mom, I love you too.”

When Rosemary left the room, Jamie didn’t know what to do with herself, *a trip to Montreal!* she said aloud. The fall was turning out to be the most eventful of her life: winning the student council presidency, going to Montreal, and developing the connection with her mother that she now realized she had always wanted. Taking the risk and confronting her mother about the diary had been the right decision.

Reflection 2: On Being

Rosemary’s thoughts were full as she walked her usual route delivering the mail. Up and down hills, weaving through leafy West Side neighbourhoods, she thought about

the conversation with her daughter. Jamie seemed to respond well to their talk. Rosemary hoped these new insights into her life would affect Jamie's development into womanhood, but she also realized that Jamie was young and might not think through all the details.

Rosemary thought back to when she was thirteen, when it was her own body, not an encounter with her mother's interior life that confronted her with womanhood. She could remember clearly when her body was first noticed. She was just a little older than Jamie when her mother began telling her that she couldn't wear those tight jeans she had bought with her own money. Rosemary was surprised at her mother's commands; her dress had never attracted attention before. On her walk to school one day, as she disobeyed her mother's wishes and wore the forbidden clothing, she got catcalls from random men driving by. It was so strange. Just weeks before she had simply been Rosemary, playing with her friends, reading books, volunteering at the library, writing. And now her body defined her. The shift in how others viewed her was perplexing. She didn't want to be looked at in that peculiar way by her family and strangers alike. Soon after, Rosemary got her period. Now she was a woman, her mother explained, because she could have children. Children! She was only thirteen. She had never given motherhood a thought. Being a woman seemed to be exclusively about her body. This hadn't seemed right to her. Her body (like her diary now) was only one part of her. How did the mind of a girl become the mind of a woman? The emotional transformation into womanhood remained hidden. It occurred to Rosemary, as she delivered a large bundle of mail to her favourite house on her route, a house that stood out from the rest in its modern architecture, with large, revealing windows, and simple cement slab walls, that within the general Canadian population there were no public events celebrating a girl's entrance to womanhood. Yet physically, a girl's body became a woman's body before everyone's eyes. This outer unfolding, one that is strongly dictated and commented on by those near and far alike, is such a superficial aspect of development and accessible to all.

The maturation of Rosemary's body coincided with the typical age at which a Jewish girl would have her *bat mitzvah*: thirteen. Rosemary refused to have one. She loved her mother the way children do: automatically, without question. But even at

thirteen, Rosemary knew she didn't want to live her mother's life. Her mother's dedication to the family and her faith was irritating, so she avoided her mother as much as possible. Performing the *bat mitzvah* meant accepting a way of being that repulsed her. She would not be boxed in. Rosemary's refusal of the bat mitzvah devastated her parents and her father's family. They didn't talk to her for months. The familial silence was the beginning of a deeper silence that spread over Rosemary like a fog. Rosemary wanted to be her own self, accepted as the young woman she was becoming, without having to follow the rituals of her ancestors. She rejected the physical and social definitions of womanhood. Her Bubbe saw through Rosemary's behaviour, knowing that she wasn't dismissing her Jewish heritage, but was trying to assert herself as an individual. The rest of her family's reaction caused Rosemary to withdraw from the family even more. It was a defining moment. She was a girl without support, without a history, able to move forward and create her own life.

The summer after the doomed bat mitzvah Rosemary's Bubbe suggested they go to Guatemala to build a library with a volunteer group. On the plane Rosemary confided to her Bubbe that she felt stuck in an amorphous place where she was neither mind nor body, neither woman nor girl. She didn't know who she was, where she belonged in the world. She got glimpses of womanhood through her mother, from her expectations of her and the portrayals of women she saw on TV. None of these images related to her sense of self and she felt lost. *When I was your age*, said Bubbe, in her strong yet compassionate way, *girls didn't have to perform the bat mitzvah. We were taught young our duties and our importance in the Jewish family. I didn't have the possibility to choose how I wanted to live my life, it was already chosen for me. Life held no mystery. Then during the war I started to volunteer, I got to see women from all backgrounds join together to help their community. I discovered that there was a way to thrive within the boundaries of my life. I had hoped that you wouldn't have to live within any boundaries. But if you choose a non-traditional life you will face many challenges. I think you should choose the path that you want, but don't let go of people you can lean on.*

It was partially this memory that made Rosemary think of going to Montreal. At the time, going on a trip with her Bubbe had been a better introduction to her future life

as an adult than a ritual that tied her forever to a form of womanhood with which she did not agree. But Rosemary had not forged a new path, and she did let go of many of the people she loved. Throughout the rest of her teenage years Rosemary struggled to find herself in her mind and body. She worked hard in school and focused on volunteer work in her free time. Going to Central America with her Bubbe had been one of the highlights of her adolescence. While her relationship with her Bubbe was strengthened by their travels, the one with the rest of her family never recovered from what ultimately became her complete renunciation of Judaism. Despite the renunciation she had internalized a way of being that she had outwardly rejected. Although she didn't consciously subscribe to so-called feminine norms, her life path had led her into the patterns of traditional womanhood: mother, housekeeper, cook. As a single mother providing for her child, Rosemary had no time, or so she thought, to be a new woman. She did not thrive within the confines of her life.

As Rosemary delivered the mail to the last few houses on her route, soaked in the light of a mature sun, she wondered if she would be able to talk to her mother. She had never tried. Even though Rosemary had not been as present as she would have liked with her own daughter, at least Jamie had felt confident enough to talk with her about her concerns. A trip to Montreal would be a way for Jamie to connect Rosemary's life with her own; to make the connection between the woman on the page and the mother in her home; a way to make a space for her daughter's mind and body to discover what it meant to be a woman.

Preparation

Jamie and Rosemary had had little chance to speak since their early morning tête-à-tête; Jamie had been busy with the student council, spending every night working with Cody, the vice president, making sure they were taking all the right steps to implement their anti-bullying initiative. Tonight though, Rosemary had invited Jamie for tea at the coffee shop below their apartment. Surprisingly, this was their first time going on a date. Usually they spent their evenings in the apartment. Going out with her mother, doing an adult activity brought a thrill to Jamie's heart. Until now, Jamie's relationship with her mother had been merely as parent and child rather than equals. Rosemary's

willingness to talk to her about the contents of her diary showed Jamie that her mom didn't think of her as a little girl, but as a person who could handle big truths. Some of her friend's mothers didn't tell them anything. They refused to answer personal questions and got upset by any revelations about their daughters' private lives. Her best girlfriend, Melissa, made a point of talking to her mother as little as possible. Jamie was beginning to realize that she and her mother had a unique relationship and she wanted it to grow.

After finishing her homework, Jamie ran down the stairs from their apartment and into the coffee shop where Rosemary was sitting with two teas and a plate of chocolate cookies. The familiarity of the location and the excitement she felt about their upcoming trip made for a pleasant sensation as Jamie sat down.

"Ready for our trip?" asked Rosemary, looking at her daughter with a renewed sense of hope.

"Yup," replied Jamie. "I can't wait to practice some French!"

"How was your first week as student council president?"

"It was awesome. It feels so good to be working on an actual plan to address bullying in our school. We're going to be testing out some of our ideas at the city wide student council training tomorrow."

"That's great! I look forward to hearing more about it."

The difference between this conversation and the one they had had days earlier, where the air was flat and her mother's questions and responses were on autopilot, was palpable. Rosemary was truly looking at her and speaking to her. Jamie's cheeks flushed and she momentarily felt shy. But no, she was a leader, and more importantly, a person. She deserved her mother's attention.

After a few moments of companionable silence Rosemary said, "I've been thinking a lot about a particular moment in my childhood these past couple of days. Have we ever talked about bat mitzvahs?"

"I know what they are, but we haven't talked about them."

"Well, I never had mine..."

"Wait," interrupted Jamie, "you want me to have a bat mitzvah?"

"No, no, that's not what I'm getting at. I'm just noticing how the period around my bat mitzvah was similar to what is happening with us right now. We are, or speaking for myself, I am, going through a period of transition. I feel like this whole experience, both the writing of my diary and your reading it, is a kind of rite of passage, a way to find meaning and understanding.

"I don't really know what a rite of passage is," said Jamie, not fully comprehending her mother's thinking.

"Well, typically a rite of passage happens in stages: a person first leaves their old self behind, then begins to learn about and becomes their new self, and finally integrates into society as that new person. It seems to me that I am in the first and second phases. I'm hoping that by going back to Montreal and reconnecting with my mother, it will help me enter the final phase."

"I can see that," responded Jamie. "There are a lot of changes happening."

"You are much more mature than I was at your age. I don't know how you managed it with me as your mother." The lightness of their conversation began to dissipate as an unexpected heaviness fell on Rosemary's shoulders.

"I think I've been unfair to you," said Rosemary, as for what felt like the hundredth time this week she saw Jamie through a different lens. This time Jamie was her little girl, needing protection from the world. "I shouldn't have burdened you with what's been going on with me." Rosemary looked around the coffee shop at all the people relaxing

after a long day at work. Not one of them was there with their teenage child. What had she been thinking? How could she submit her daughter to the emotional turmoil they had been experiencing over the last week? Her Bubbe's face floated across her mind's eye and she became the confused thirteen-year-old girl on the plane to Guatemala.

"Mom? Mom!" Jamie snapped her fingers in front of Rosemary's face. "Mom, you're being too hard on yourself. I'm serious. You don't have to feel bad. You did the best you could."

Rosemary felt exhausted. "I just don't want you to end up like me," said Rosemary, trying to keep her voice calm.

"Mom, come on! Can't you see that I'm different from you? That you are different from your mother?"

Rosemary gathered in the stray emotions that were reaching out like raw nerve endings. Jamie's face morphed back into a young woman's. This was why they needed to go to Montreal: she needed to approach her mother with the strength with which Jamie had approached her. The journey was clearly hers, not Jamie's. She couldn't orchestrate Jamie's maturation, or place Jamie's experience into an academic description of a rite of passage. All she had to do was show Jamie that she was taking care of her own needs while taking care of Jamie's.

Rosemary let out a deep breath. She bent down and out of her purse she took a small package and placed it on the table. "I've got a gift for you."

"Really? What is it?"

"Given what I've just said, I'm not sure that I should be doing this, but go ahead, open it."

Rosemary handed Jamie the package. Jamie gasped. "Your diary!"

“I’d like you to have it. You don’t need to read it again, and quite honestly, I’m probably giving it to you more for me than for you. But I think it will be a nice keepsake for the future. A reminder to stay focused on what you love.”

Jamie held the diary with a sense of honour and discomfort. Their coffee shop date hadn’t been quite what she had envisioned. Instead of being her mother’s equal, Jamie felt as though she were mothering her mother. Unlike her mother, Jamie had a strong sense of who she was, which she articulated clearly in her school life. But like her mother, if she let down her professional guard, her layer of protection, she was still a little girl.

Entering the Unknown

Jamie and Rosemary left early for Montreal; it was a five-hour flight with two stopovers – Rosemary’s mother had bought last minute tickets.

The flights were uneventful. Jamie slept while Rosemary listened to the in-flight classical station through the cheap ear buds provided by the flight attendant. Lulled into the contemplative bliss that good music tends to create, Rosemary slowly detached her attention from her daily life and let her mind flow along its own path. And so went her thoughts, into the unknown that was parenthood, womanhood, that was life. In the past week, as she was thinking about the choices that had led her to where she was today, she had looked up her ex, Richard, online. She had not communicated with him in at least a year. He was now a professor of Literature at the University of Toronto, and had published several books. Would that have been my life, Rosemary wondered? She was pleased that seeing his success hadn’t caused disappointment or regret. In fact, it reminded her that she had chosen to have Jamie. Rosemary felt selfishly grateful that Jamie had read her diary. Now she was ready make the changes she had been longing for. Writing for herself was one step, now she needed to “go public” as it were. Maybe she would take a writing course, or start on the novel she had always wanted to write. Maybe she would simply be more present. All that Jamie really needed was a strong connection with her mother. Rosemary’s Bubbe had taught her that a woman needed a certain inner strength to be her true self, and Rosemary hoped that the changes she was making would somehow make her daughter’s life easier.

Rosemary looked out of the airplane window into the vast white below. Her mind skipped back a few thoughts to the relative ease of Richard's success compared with the difficulty of her own life. She kept referring to the choices that she made: the choice to have a child, the choice to stop writing, the choice to take a stable job. As though she would have made those same choices under the most perfect circumstances. In truth, she had not chosen to get pregnant (a faulty condom had chosen her fate), and being raised in a traditional Jewish family, abortion was not an option in her case (despite not being observant, there were certain values that stuck with her). And what about her livelihood? She didn't know what to think about this one. It felt like some defect on her part that she hadn't pursued a career in writing. Rosemary saw herself as weak, incapable. Surely her decision to provide security for her child was commendable?

As the plane neared Montreal, Jamie awoke. Yawning, she said, "I was just having a dream that I was at my bat mitzvah. I was giving a speech to all my friends and family and I was so nervous. I had no idea what to say. I was thinking to myself 'What does a girl say at her coming of age party?' I ended up walking off the stage and saying nothing. But everyone applauded like I had given the best speech ever. It was so weird."

"Huh," Rosemary replied, refocusing her attention on her daughter.

"It might have to do with something that happened at the city wide student council training the other day."

"What happened?"

"I'm don't know if it was my imagination, but it felt like when we presented our platforms to the group the students paid more attention to Cody, the VP, than to me. I know I did a great job. I felt confident, in charge. When it was Cody's turn I looked out at the audience and it bothered me how the other students seemed to naturally turn to him as he talked. Why did the students respond more to Cody than to me?" Jamie sounded rattled as she spoke. Leadership was her talent, something she knew she was good at. As the newly-elected president, Jamie thought that students should be drawn to her, not Cody.

“It sounds like you did everything right. We can’t always control how others perceive us,” responded Rosemary.

“Something else happened too,” Jamie continued. “I was walking down the hall behind Mr. Zalowski, that really annoying teacher who has been at the school since the dark ages. He didn’t know I was there. He was talking to one of the other teachers and he said how surprised he was that such a young girl had won the election. Then he laughed and said that maybe I would be the next female prime minister. The laugh was weird. What was he laughing *about*? Was it the possibility of *me* being the prime minister? Why did he say female prime minister?” As Jamie spoke her problem-solving brain started picking out pieces from her conversations with her mom, and placing them alongside her experiences at the training. It occurred to Jamie that she was a girl, and that that mattered. Had there been other times when she was treated differently and hadn’t noticed? Jamie blurted out “It’s because I’m a girl, isn’t it?!”

How does a mother respond to her daughter’s social and political awakening? Give a short lesson on patriarchy? List gender stereotypes? Explain workplace inequality? Angrily defend her daughter against an old man’s behaviour? Rosemary was struck at how their experiences were coinciding. She hadn’t been able to extract herself from familial and social norms, but she could do something for Jamie.

“I’ve been sitting here thinking about why I stopped writing, and why I didn’t try and get a more intellectually fulfilling job. It’s exactly as you say. It’s because I’m a woman.”

“It’s totally unfair!”

“Well, I don’t want to completely abdicate responsibility, or simply blame social and political structures. Each of those plays a role. The world we live in just wasn’t created for women. And I don’t mean by God or by nature. I mean by human beings.”

“So I should go lightly on Mr. Zalowski?” said Jamie incredulously.

“Not quite. Your teacher was laughing at your success partly because he’s an idiot, but also because he comes from a generation that views women’s potential differently. He’s just a bit younger than my parents, who also thought that a woman’s main place was at home. Getting an education was fine. Having a career was fine, as long as neither interfered with the family. Fortunately my generation has largely moved away from that kind of thinking, but social ideals have long and sticky threads that are hard to pull off. So even though your classmates take it for granted that girls and boys have equal opportunities, that cultural residue is still there. They look at boys and men as naturally authoritative.”

“So what should I do?” asked Jamie.

“Who knows? Anything I would say would sound like a self-help answer: ‘follow your passion!’ or ‘blast through all obstacles!’ Your public speaking might give you some clues though: stand strong and breathe.” Rosemary felt a momentary desire to live through her daughter. If her daughter could avoid her mistakes, maybe it would all be worthwhile. And she wouldn’t have to do anything but talk. She laughed at herself. Of course this wasn’t an option. The obstacle in front of Rosemary was more of a question. What to do next? She was going to figure out what on this trip, and blast through it.

The airplane made its final descent to the Montreal-Trudeau airport through a large patch of clouds, causing some momentary turbulence. Once on the ground, Jamie and Rosemary caught a cab into town. Little fluttering wings began teasing Rosemary’s stomach the closer they got to her childhood home, a place she hadn’t visited since her Bubbe’s funeral. The streets felt so familiar in the September heat. She wasn’t used to the mugginess of the eastern provinces and it felt like a welcome home embrace. Strange that she called Montreal home, a city she had left with such enthusiasm. But her history was here. And for what it was worth, her family. She squeezed Jamie’s hand. Rosemary closed her eyes and let herself sink into the seat. She imagined being part of a sea of women leaving their past, their inhibitions, on a distant and unreachable shore: a misspoken word, an impression, or an imprint of ink. It was the accumulation of these small things, the subtle hints that made a woman who she was. What was she going to leave behind? A whole life. She remembered all the little moments that, in their entirety,

were a hammer banging her into the ground. Her daughter's honesty was the swift and steady wrench that she needed to be pulled from the rock-hard earth in which she was wedged. She would leave behind the woman who needed to give up herself in order to achieve security. She would integrate her individual self and her parent self. She would break through the expectation that she had to choose her life from a set menu.

For her part, Jamie contemplated what she knew of her mother's life. The small bits she had been exposed to seemed so complicated: her mother's work life, her family life, her creative life, her internal life. All the pieces fit together to make her mother the woman she was. Work, family, self-expression, mind. The stuff a woman is made of. What a woman needs. These past few weeks had shown Jamie how rich and confusing and difficult life was. Until now, Jamie hadn't thought a rite of passage applied to her. She was too young to be letting anything go. And she wasn't letting go of anything exactly. Her childhood self was morphing into the woman she was becoming. As a child she simply was and did. The simplicity and innocence she had known were replaced by a consciousness of something more: a girl's place in the world was affected by those around her, and by so much that was out of her control.

"Mom, what advice would you give to yourself at my age? So that your life up until now would have been more fulfilling?"

Rosemary pondered her daughter's question. She answered carefully, "I would tell myself not to react to the people and impressions around me, but to react to and from myself. Simple things, like dressing for myself and not for others. It is these small alterations, and the reactions to how people perceive us, that derail us from who we really are."

Jamie experienced a certain sadness feeling herself grow up, and a joy at entering womanhood. An image formed in her mind: a strong woman, standing in front of a crowd, commanding attention. She sat with this, allowing her body to absorb the feeling of space, strength, and pride. In her mind's eye, she grew taller and strode across the stage with a bounce in her step. She shared the image with her mother who envisaged the same woman, and Rosemary laughed as she felt the desire to run and jump. The taxi came to a stop in front of the brick house that had contained Rosemary

as she transitioned painfully from childhood to womanhood. Jamie and Rosemary giggled as they approached the door. There was such joy in being free and light with their bodies and their voices. A sense of childlike fun made all the more potent because of its lack of innocence. Women using their bodies as instruments of personal strength and power, and what's more, play. They both felt like they just "were." Looking at her daughter and smiling, Rosemary rang the doorbell.

Chapter 2.

Simone de Beauvoir's Transcendence and Immanence in the Twenty-First Century: the tension between career and motherhood

Novelist and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote her magnum opus, *The Second Sex* (SS), in 1947. Her work marked a major shift in women's consciousness at the time. It analyzed the situation of women from biological, historical, mythological, psychological, and sociological perspectives. Beauvoir shows how women's position in the world is created by society, and that women can choose their destiny. It was arguably the first book to take a philosophical look at the oppression of women, and it laid the groundwork for the Second Wave of feminism. Although women's lives in the west have changed dramatically since *The Second Sex* was published, its central argument and guiding philosophy remain relevant today.

In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir argues that the world women live in is defined by and centered on men. Man is Subject, Woman¹ is Object and Other. Man is essential, Woman is inessential. In other words, men are active, extending out into the world and into the future, while women are passive, inward, keepers of the home and family. Men create, women maintain. Beauvoir discusses these oppositions through the concepts of transcendence and immanence. She defines transcendence as active, creative, projecting forward into the future, and immanence as passive, internal, and centered on the maintenance of the species. Social norms grant men transcendence and place women in positions of constant immanence. However, both transcendence and immanence are necessary for every human being, as Beauvoir argues: "In truth, all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go beyond itself, it must maintain itself; to thrust itself toward the future, it must integrate the past into itself" (SS 443).

Today in the western world, although women are subjects in their own right, they are still very much Other or Object. This is clearly demonstrated in the "sex sells" philosophy and the portrayal of women as sex objects in popular culture. Women are able to be creative and project themselves into the world, as seen in the predominance of female students in higher education and their relatively equal numbers in the

¹ In *The Second Sex* Beauvoir refers to the universal "woman." Feminists have taken issue with the universalizing of the word "woman," since not all women are the same. In this essay I will use "woman" when referring to Beauvoir's work, but in all other instances I will use "women."

workforce. Despite their newfound place in the public world, the private world, the world of the home, remains in their domain. Lia Macko and Kerry Rubin, in *Midlife Crisis at 30*, note that when a heterosexual couple both work outside the home, the woman still does the majority of the housework. When a couple has a child, it is usually the woman who takes leave from work, although this dynamic is slowly changing. Men are able to focus on their active lives outside of the home, whereas women must focus on both. Beauvoir's argument is still valid today—men remain transcendent and women are caught between transcendence and immanence.

The following essay uses Beauvoir's concepts of transcendence and immanence and the popular non-fiction works *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead* (2013) by Sheryl Sandberg, and "Why Women Still Can't Have it All" (2012) by Anne-Marie Slaughter, to discuss the tension between career and motherhood that western, educated, middle-class women in the twenty-first century experience.² Sandberg and Slaughter address the workplace and social context of both men and women today. They have reignited the debate over the choices that western (and often privileged) women must make in their lives concerning work and family. They show that despite all the progress that women have made in the workplace, there are still structural practices and societal beliefs that make it difficult for them to succeed fully in and out of the workplace. Slaughter and Sandberg also show that men do not face the same challenges. Incidentally, although this essay focuses on contemporary western women's relationship to transcendence and immanence, men are also affected by it. Men, like women, are not monolithic groups that encounter the world in the same way. Depending on their personalities and life circumstances, men may prefer activities that are considered immanent or may struggle with achieving transcendence. Simone de Beauvoir's description and treatment of transcendence as masculine, active, creative, public and forward-looking, and immanence as feminine, passive, internal, private gives current readers insight into Sandberg's and Slaughter's arguments and the societal structures and beliefs from which they stem.

² I do not directly explore the implication of transcendence and immanence on women who have "jobs" instead of "careers."

Part One explores the importance of the transcendence/immanence argument and examines critical responses to Beauvoir's philosophy by feminist, Marxist, and Freudian thinkers. Part Two discusses motherhood in the twenty-first century, including social, economic, and political factors. Part Three analyzes contemporary iterations of transcendence and immanence through Sandberg's and Slaughter's work. The conclusion connects the essay to the novella, *A Life in Two Parts*, showing the role that transcendence and immanence play in the protagonist's life and placing the protagonist in the twenty-first century socio-economic context.

Part One

In *A Life in Two Parts* Rosemary is caught between her life as a mother and provider, and her fantasy life, a life of satisfying personal and professional work. Many women today feel a similar divide between personal and familial fulfillment. Simone de Beauvoir, in her discussion of transcendence and immanence, captures beautifully the reasons behind this tension.

Beauvoir's discussion of transcendence and immanence shows the difficulty that women experience in being and acting in the world. Using existentialism and the Hegelian master/slave dialectic as a theoretical foundation, Beauvoir helps the reader understand current power structures and how and why certain actions—meaningful work in the public sphere as opposed to meaningful work in the home, for example—have more value than others. She also uses these two philosophies as guides to achieving freedom from oppression.

Transcendence and immanence permeate all aspects of existence. While much has been written on the topic, especially how they relate to Sartre's metaphysics³, this essay focuses on their relationship to work and motherhood. I begin by discussing transcendence and immanence in *The Second Sex*, including contextual information

³ See, for instance, Andrea Veltman, Sonia Kruks, Kate Fullbrook, or Michele Le Doeuff's "Operative Philosophy: Simone de Beauvoir and Existentialism."

regarding Beauvoir's personal life and philosophy, alternative ideas of transcendence and immanence, and critiques of her dualistic philosophy.

The notions of transcendence and immanence are sprinkled throughout *The Second Sex*. No specific definitions are given; the reader must interpret the meaning through the descriptions, examples of lived experience and historical realities that Beauvoir describes. In doing so, readers soon realize that Beauvoir understood transcendence as modes of action that are future-oriented, and immanence as actions that are repetitive and cyclical. Andrea Veltman, professor of ethical and political philosophy, describes Beauvoir's conception of transcendence as "constructive activities that situate and engage the individual with other human freedoms" and immanence as "the negative labor necessary to maintain human life or perpetuate the status quo" (115).

It becomes clear as one reads *The Second Sex* that when Beauvoir talks about immanence, she is generally talking about women and the lives they lead. She uses the words "gloomy den...womb and tomb," domestic labor, locked, flesh, fringe, mother, sister, escape, maintenance, sleep, alienation, sensation, make-believe, reduction, confinement, wallowing, enclosing, waiting, limbo, night, darkness, the absurd, doomed. Her vocabulary is not exactly inspiring and reflects "the passive submission to biological fate and the largely uncreative labor necessary to maintain life" (Simons, *Philosophy* 5) that, in Beauvoir's opinion, is immanence. One imagines a dark house, with blinds drawn and the doors locked, the women of the family toiling in the kitchen, running after the children, dimly aware that there is a life outside, whereas their husbands, fathers and brothers spend their days in sunlight. Alternatively, one could imagine a woman, groomed to the height of femininity, poised elegantly in her chair, waiting for her husband to come home and fulfill her dreams. Whatever the scenario, the woman is engaged in activities that maintain the species—cooking, cleaning, childbearing and childrearing, homemaking, keeping an appearance of femininity—and these activities allow transcendent activities to proceed unhindered. A woman's options and dreams are limited to ones that maintain the home and family, to career options that are dictated to her (such as secretary, nurse, teacher). She remains static, in a never-ending cycle of childbearing, childrearing, cleaning, and preening.

In contrast, Beauvoir's diction in relation to transcendence, generally referring to men, includes the words virility, strength, agility, flexibility, power, accomplishment, soaring, hero, reaching, phallus, God, erection, producer, open, future, construction, male beauty, grasping, emerging, light. Transcendent activities move the individual and the population as a whole into the future: philosophy, writing, politics, social activism, economics.

Society uses women's bodies—their biology—to justify for their role as maintainers and keepers of the species and has deemed women's "physiological destiny" to be motherhood, "her whole organism...directed toward the perpetuation of the species" (SS 524). The animal and cyclical nature of menstruation and childbearing puts women's biological function into the category of immanence: "On a biological level, a species maintains itself only by re-creating itself; but this creation is nothing but a repetition of the same life in different form" (SS 74). Women's body is the incarnation of immanence. One may argue that all biology is immanent, in that it is time-bound and tied to the necessities of life, but it is women's generative ability that ties them to their bodies in a way that men's bodies do not.

While biology is an important factor in understanding women's place in society, Beauvoir dismisses biology as having any significant effects on her ability to live in freedom: "[T]he woman's body is one of the essential elements of the situation she occupies in this world. But her body is not enough to define her" (SS 48). It is culture that places value on the female body: "[P]hysiology cannot ground values: rather, biological data take on those values the existent confers on them" (SS 47).

Beauvoir describes how western children's parents teach them their role in the world from a young age. She explains the lived experience of men and women developmentally, from childhood to old age, and shows that boys are raised to be independent, take their power, and fulfill their ambitions. They are singled out to be independent, to be part of the public world. Girls, initially on par with boys, are soon taught the ways of the home – homemaking and care giving. They are encouraged to flirt and be sly, to catch a man. Girls are to prepare themselves for marriage and childrearing, for the private world of home and family.

Beauvoir asserts that an individual requires a balance of transcendence and immanence: "In truth, all human existence is transcendence and immanence at the same time; to go beyond itself, it must maintain itself; to thrust itself toward the future, it must integrate the past into itself" (SS 443). Yet she places greater value on transcendence: "There is no other justification for present existence than its expansion toward an indefinitely open future" (SS 16). She continues with a negative portrayal of immanence: "Every time transcendence lapses into immanence, there is a degradation of existence into 'in-itself', of freedom into facticity" (SS 16). Further, she writes that moving from transcendence to immanence is an "absolute evil" (SS 16), whether it is self-inflicted or inflicted by society.

It is clear that transcendence is the victor over immanence. Male is the victor over female. Beauvoir is obviously aligning herself with transcendence. But why? Existentialism, as articulated by her life partner Jean-Paul Sartre, gives part of the answer. In the introduction to *The Second Sex* Beauvoir states: "The perspective we have adopted is one of existentialist morality" (16). Briefly, existentialism is the belief that the existent exists only through one's actions and the meaning one gives to one's existence. The existent must be able to create in freedom. Not to do so would be to live an inauthentic life. Action, therefore, is essential to a meaningful and productive life. For Beauvoir, freedom and action trump all other modes of being. It is in this light that transcendence and immanence are to be viewed in *The Second Sex*. A person only becomes a person by taking action, by creating her or his own life. In the terminology of bell hooks, in an online article entitled "Dig Deep: Beyond Lean In," it is man in an "imperialist white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" that is subject and creates his own projects. In this same society, woman is the object because by the very structure of society she cannot lead an authentic life. In reality, in existentialist vocabulary, women are autonomous freedoms, and yet society still posits them as other. Therefore, women struggle between subjectivity and objectivity.

In existentialism, the Subject, the existentialist being, is free and authentic; he can dream a future and create it. He projects himself into the world through projects of his choosing. Being able to act, to choose, to create one's life in freedom is the existentialist foundation of transcendence. Its opposite, repetitious and cyclical action, is

a life of immanence. If action, creating one's life, is what Beauvoir values, then it makes sense that she would value transcendence over immanence.

Although transcendence, used in the existentialist sense, is first discussed in Sartre's book *Being and Nothingness* (1943), Beauvoir does not simply parrot Sartre's ideas. Sartre's conception of transcendence is metaphysical, whereas Beauvoir's transcendence refers to constructive action. Rather than immanence, Sartre talks about facticity and "en-soi": objects in the world that simply "are". They are neither active nor passive, nor have any potential for transcendence. For Beauvoir, the state of immanence does involve action (cooking and cleaning, for example) and some possibility of transcendence, depending on who is creating the meaning and in what context. She moves immanence into a mode of action rather than simply the facts of existence.

Beauvoir suggests that how one is able to act in the world is not simply a matter of choice, but is affected by one's body and situation. A significant difference between Sartre and Beauvoir's use and description of transcendence and immanence is that Sartre does not distinguish between masculine and feminine, whereas Beauvoir does. For Sartre, a "being" is not gendered; the principles of existentialism apply equally to women and men. However, according to Toril Moi, both "cast the transcendent project as violent, penetrative and phallic" (Moi 131). These metaphors limit the possibilities of transcendent action. Sartre does not see the influence of patriarchy on a woman's life, but Beauvoir does. In this way she moves away from Sartrean ontology to sociology and politics. Transcendence and immanence may ideally be neutral, non-gendered terms, but within a patriarchal world, women's ability to achieve transcendence and be respected for their immanence, their ability to choose either or both aspects of themselves in freedom, is severely limited. Transcendence and immanence may in themselves be neutral terms but they lose their neutrality under patriarchy. In a world where men hold the power, the actions of those men will be valued more than the actions of those who are subservient to them. Therefore, transcendence trumps immanence.

Beauvoir's understanding of patriarchy is influenced by the master/slave dialectic in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), which she refers to many times in *The Second Sex*. According to this dialectic, two consciousnesses confront each other. Both see themselves as the Subject. In order to be Subject, a consciousness must be seen by another consciousness. But each consciousness wants to be the only subject. They want to battle to the death, but if the Other dies, then the Subject cannot be seen, so they come to an agreement. One consciousness agrees to be the other's slave in order that he or she may live. Now there is one Subject and one Object. However, the Subject is not truly happy because his or her Subjecthood is recognized only by one who is inferior to him or her. In addition, as the slave works on behalf of the master, the slave becomes aware of his or her consciousness as distinct from the master's. It is at this point that he or she can either choose to continue being a slave, or fight for his or her full freedom.

Beauvoir explains women's situation under patriarchy by incorporating the Hegelian master/slave dialectic into her understanding of the Subject/Object relationship. In order for both men and women to be seen, in Hegelian terms, they set up a relationship of dominance by which men control and women submit. Under patriarchy, man is the Subject while woman is the Other. The concept of personal responsibility in accepting the subordinate position is also existentialist. While Beauvoir believes that a woman must take some responsibility for her situation, she also thinks that women need to take collective action in order for the lives of women and men to improve. Hegel, among others, also influenced Sartre. In the master/slave dialectic and in existentialism, if people are aware of their situation but do nothing to change it, then they are complicit in their Otherness (SS 34).

Beauvoir asserts that the women of her time were being complicit with their situation as Other. Women who recognize their servitude and yet choose to continue living with it do not rate high on her list of humans to be admired. Beauvoir believes in the existentialist concept of authenticity, in living in good faith: according to this concept, if a woman recognizes her inferior situation and does not work to change it, she is living in bad faith. Lisa Appignanesi, in *Simone de Beauvoir*, states, "[t]o reject this struggle for oneself, to flee from the anguish of choice and to fall back into a subjection to given

conditions is to lapse into bad faith—the cardinal sin in the existentialist universe” (77). At the same time, I suggest that it is difficult to judge if a woman is living in good or bad faith because not all women are the same: some recognize and struggle for their freedom, others do not see their oppression, and still others are happy to live in the so-called security of their husband’s home.

Yet another factor in understanding Beauvoir’s preference for transcendence is her personal history. Here I draw on Beauvoir’s autobiography *Memoir’s of a Dutiful Daughter* and Lisa Appignanesi’s biography *Simone de Beauvoir* for insight. Originally from a wealthy French bourgeois background, in the late 1910s the family experienced lean times and had to make their home in a waterless and virtually heatless apartment. The images she provides for her familial home in Paris are initially of womb-like warmth: “I used to creep into the knee-hole under the desk and envelop myself in its dusty glooms; it was dark and warm...safely ensconced, I watched, I touched, I took stock of the world” (Beauvoir, *Memoirs* 5). Later, the images are of a barren coldness she wished to escape. Beauvoir strove not to be like her mother—who found the transition to a life of poverty difficult: “she did not complain, but she hated housework and poverty was hard for her to bear” (Beauvoir, *Memoirs* 98). Beauvoir continues, writing about her future, “this servitude seemed to me so burdensome that I decided I wouldn’t have any children; the important thing for me was to be able to form minds and mould characters” (Beauvoir, *Memoirs* 56). Beauvoir strove to impress her father, who Beauvoir admired greatly: “I couldn’t imagine a more intelligent man than my father” (Beauvoir, *Memoirs* 106). Here I see the beginnings of her aversion to things associated with the home: her mother’s unhappiness and the discomfort of poverty. In contrast, in her father she saw strength, intelligence, and a world outside. She longed for an experience of the world that her parents and her class would not allow her. Simone de Beauvoir was a naturally intelligent and driven woman whose faith in God initially gave purpose to her life; but once she lost faith she found meaning through learning and study. With no knowledge of the concepts of transcendence or immanence, Beauvoir, as I interpret it, was already creating her own hierarchy of experience, placing the home beneath the world beyond. When I look at the words she uses to describe transcendence and immanence, I see a correlation with her familial experience. I believe she felt confined, enclosed, locked up;

that she waited for her future and felt her life to be in limbo, and that she longed to emerge, grasp, be open to the future.

When Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex* in 1940s France—only two years after the end of the Second World War and three years after the liberation of Paris from the Nazis—women’s lives were mostly dictated by their socio-political realities. France was a highly stratified society in which social norms dictated one’s mate and vocation. Women of Beauvoir’s bourgeois class generally did not work outside the home; they married and had children. Abortion and contraception were illegal. Women were not accorded many rights. Life for women in 1940s France was extremely limiting. Beauvoir was aware of the constraints of her class and culture, but while she saw the inequities, she did not relate them to herself. In *Memoirs of a Dutiful Daughter* she writes, “my upbringing had convinced me of my sex’s intellectual inferiority...[however] the future was as wide open to me as it was to [men]: [men] had no advantage over me...from the start, men were my comrades, not my enemies” (295). She saw herself as a person, not merely a woman. Beauvoir dedicated herself to her studies and graduated from university second in her class. (Sartre graduated in first place after taking the philosophical examinations a second time—Simone Weil came first in general philosophy.) She assumed she would get married and have children, but this was likely force of habit, the effects of a patriarchal world. Once she left home and met her intellectual soul-mate, Jean-Paul Sartre, the traditional female life was out of the question. She knew that she wanted the life available to the men of her time: freedom, independence, life experience, intellectual stimulation, and above all, the ability to create through writing.

Initial critiques of *The Second Sex* were typical products of their time. The book received criticism for brazenly addressing female sexuality, which caused the Roman Catholic Church to put it on its Index of Prohibited Books. In addition, although Beauvoir was a socialist and sympathized generally with Marxism, staunch Marxists did not receive *The Second Sex* well. Beauvoir argues that class struggle could not properly explain women’s oppression, nor could it free women. She writes that women are more likely to identify with their economic class than with their class as women. Later feminist critics contest Beauvoir’s analysis. For example, Audre Lorde, writing in 1984, believes white middle class feminists ignore the impact of class on a woman’s life (Lorde 2).

When *The Second Sex* was released, Beauvoir was verbally attacked. In *Force of Circumstance* she describes being called—by “some very active members of the First Sex”—“Unsatisfied, cold, priapic, nymphomaniac, lesbian, a hundred times aborted, I was everything, even an unmarried mother. People offered to cure me of my frigidity or to satisfy my ghoulish appetites” (197). Critics did not engage with the content of Beauvoir’s book, but rather with her personality and intellect, what Toril Moi calls the “personality topos” (78). Beauvoir was called “too serious” and “[lacking] humour” (Marks 3). Feminists in the 1980s and 1990s also comment on Beauvoir’s personality and intellect. They called her too rational and accused her of being dishonest about her emotional experiences and her responses to those experiences, which, the critics asserted, left her blind to the effects of a person’s emotional/non-rational life on his or her actions, and led to a failure in her intellectual work (Evans 174). Further, as Elaine Marks states in *Critical Essays on Simone de Beauvoir* (1987), some of the essays “present Simone de Beauvoir as a slightly ridiculous figure, naïve in her passions, sloppy in her scholarship, inaccurate in her documentation, generally out of her depth and inferior as a writer” (2).

When the content of Beauvoir’s work was addressed by early readers, it was not critiqued on its own terms; instead her work was compared to Jean-Paul Sartre’s. Critics judged her work as either too similar to Sartre’s (not original), or conversely, too different. In all these criticisms, “their aim [was] clearly to discredit her as a speaker, not to enter into debate with her” (Moi 75). Overall, though, the book was well received by women, and was read as a popular rather than a philosophical text.

Mary Evans notes that some feminists, because of their admiration for Beauvoir’s work and her contribution to feminism, do not want to criticize any of her ideas (Marks 1). Others, like Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva, do not acknowledge her at all, considering her philosophy to be masculinist and a relic of the past. Hélène Cixous asserts that Beauvoir’s work is an example of an “out-of-date theoretical and political approach to questions of sexual difference” (Marks 4). Toril Moi, writing of the responses of these theorists, states, “Indeed [they] always considered her a phallic woman, complicit with the dominant forms of masculine power” (77). She continues later, “[i]f the ostensibly genderless free subject of existentialism is in fact marked as masculine in

Sartre's and Beauvoir's discourse, any attempt to cast women as free subjects must have the effect of marking them as somewhat masculine as well" (143).

Despite seeming masculinist in her writing, Beauvoir critiques others for the very same thing. She contends that Freud took the superiority of the male, of virility, for granted, without accounting for its origin: "Even Freud accepts that the prestige of the penis is explained by the father's sovereignty, and he admits that he does not know the source of male supremacy" (SS 58). Beauvoir believes male superiority to be social in origin, the phallus being a symbol of transcendence, not original transcendence. Beauvoir's own descriptors of transcendence, however, contain phallic imagery. For example, "virile beauty is the body's adaptation to active functions such as strength, agility, flexibility, and the manifestations of a transcendence animating a flesh that must never collapse into itself" (SS 176). Despite Beauvoir's deconstruction of Freud's masculinist approach, the prevalence of phallic language in her work has led some feminist historians to assert that Beauvoir was firmly ensconced in patriarchal society and did not question it. For instance, Gerda Lerner comments, "her willingness to accept the findings of this man-made, man-centred system of knowledge uncritically and to accept as absolute truths the cultural myths about the past of women is highly significant" (156).

Beauvoir's clear preference for so-called "masculine" qualities bothers many feminine difference theorists. Throughout *The Second Sex* Beauvoir denigrates female biological functions, such as menstruation, pregnancy, and childbirth, and disdains activities related to the home. On the other hand, she elevates the activities that are possible for men. Supporters of feminine difference say that Beauvoir hates the female body, glorifies maleness, lacks any sympathy or understanding of traditional female pursuits, including marriage and motherhood (Moi 181). Beauvoir acknowledges, and in fact emphasizes, that women's identity is socially constructed, yet disparages those very activities that women have no control over, either biologically or socially. Mary Evans believes that Beauvoir was close to saying, "Why can't a woman be more like a man?" (176). I find merit in defending and embracing activities labeled as feminine, but this position is reminiscent of Freud's determinism: our biology makes us who we are. For Beauvoir, a woman is not her sex. A woman's destiny is not her body; her destiny is

socially constructed. Determined by her sex, women are passive; determined by society, they have the potential for choice (although not in a patriarchal society). In the twenty-first century men are still viewed as the universal, unsexed being and women are still defined through their sex, which is why women are associated with immanence and men with transcendence.

Toril Moi counters the feminine difference argument, writing that Beauvoir's political project was not based on a theory of female identity, and that this fact causes many feminists to misread her (184). For Beauvoir, consciousness is free and is not sexually defined. She is concerned with power, not identity and difference. Beauvoir values freedom, and believes that in patriarchal society women are not able to choose the life they want. Immanent activities in themselves are neither good nor bad. The problem lies in women's inability to choose them freely.

In writing *Gender Trouble* (1990), Judith Butler takes Beauvoir's concept of socially-constructed femininity even further, positing that there is no specific female identity, either in terms of sex or of gender. She also argues that Beauvoir maintains the mind-masculine/body-feminine distinction of which readers need to be critical (16). Based on Butler's questioning of the binary concepts of masculine and feminine, male and female, I believe readers of *The Second Sex* can disentangle notions of gender from transcendence and immanence.

Another common criticism of Beauvoir is that she writes of women as though they are a monolithic or homogeneous group. Audre Lorde claims that white feminists ignore the idea of difference, although difference, especially as it relates to race, is an important part of a person's identity (2). However, if we look closely at Beauvoir's philosophy we can see that Beauvoir does not, at least consciously, treat women as a monolithic group. For example, in the context of Beauvoir's critique of Marxism, Beauvoir herself describes Marxism as treating women as though they were one group, when in reality they are many different groups relating to each other in different ways. In addition, she is keenly aware of the race struggle in the United States—freedom is of paramount importance for Beauvoir, and that means freedom for all people. Further, she does not believe that their bodies should define women—or any person. A person's true self is in

her consciousness and in her actions. One could easily argue that because she was a white European woman, part of the dominant race, she could not fully understand the impact of the “othered” race on one’s identity. Indeed, in my interpretation of Beauvoir, she would likely say that race does effect identity, but her concern was with power. Writing in the twenty-first century, as a western, educated, white middle class woman myself, I disagree to some extent with the critique that women are not a monolithic group. Women experience similar restrictions and similar treatment due to their sex. Women of colour, women with disabilities, non-gender conforming women, and lesbian women experience additional oppression. What is important is acknowledging and respecting each individual’s existence—which has not often been the case for women.

In the twenty-first century, through my work with live-in-caregivers, I have witnessed the intersection of race, power and feminism when a privileged, and often white, woman, in seeking her own transcendence, relies on women of colour to do the maintenance work of the home. Here, race, gender, and economics converge. Because women are still, by and large, expected to take care of the home and raise the children, when a woman decides to work outside the home she may hire another woman to do the cleaning and childrearing. Shifting perspective away from the western world, women in countries like the Philippines and Peru, seeking to move their own families into the future, take jobs abroad as housekeepers and nannies. I suggest that Beauvoir and feminist women of colour are describing different aspects of the same reality. Both women of privilege and women from disadvantaged backgrounds are stuck in the patriarchal system that dictates how and what is possible.

Although Toril Moi asserts that some feminists misread Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, she does contest Beauvoir’s presentation of transcendence and immanence. She discusses two important points. First, in Beauvoir’s description of transcendence and immanence, immanence will always be less esteemed than transcendence. Moi states, “to launch concrete projects in the world becomes a case of ‘throwing oneself forward’ into the future; on this logic only linear projects count. Repetitive, circular, cyclical, erratic or random modes of activity, ranging from flirtation to housework, can never hope to be classified as authentically transcendent” (152). Even though Beauvoir asserts the issue is women’s inability to choose her work in freedom, Moi believes that even if chosen in

freedom, cooking and cleaning would never be valued as highly as writing or activism. Calling transcendence constructive activity, as Veltman does, automatically begs the question, what is considered constructive activity? It implies that there are activities that are not constructive. But who decides? Under a patriarchal and capitalist society, men do. Beauvoir places a value judgment on what actions, not what ways of being, belong in the transcendent category.

Moi's second point suggests that transcendence and immanence need not be described as they are. She writes that transcendence need not be violent or phallic and that immanence need not be all darkness and imprisonment. Immanence can equally be "rest, recollection and tranquility" (154). I offer that instead of using the language of penetration and conquest, we could use language of welcoming, enfolding, and hugging. Through her language Beauvoir restricts transcendence to certain kinds of activities and expands what is contained in immanence "beyond rational limits" (Moi 154).

These critiques of Beauvoir's position—the critique based on feminine difference and Toril Moi's critique of transcendence and immanence—are the most relevant to the tension that many women today feel between career and motherhood. The activities that have been traditionally associated with women, the activities that feminine difference theorists want acknowledged and valued equally to the activities traditionally deemed male, are not necessarily female activities—men also keep clean houses, enjoy cooking and want to spend time with their children.

Beauvoir may have been correct in describing consciousness as non-gendered, but men and women do have different bodies and this difference has a real effect on each of their lives. We still tend to see women as object rather than as subject because the reality of their bodies is still on the whole not factored into the functioning of public life. Similarly, Beauvoir's naming and limiting of transcendence and immanence are equally damaging. On the other hand, Beauvoir's grand vision of equality and reciprocity as two genderless freedoms is also valuable. When she privileges transcendent activities she is acknowledging the deep human need for personal fulfillment and growth, which is not associated with a specific gender.

Although Beauvoir did not escape a gendered view of transcendence and immanence, she also showed that under patriarchy women have more difficulty achieving transcendence.

Part Two

Part One set up the theoretical foundations for the essay. Because men place women as object to their subject, women are threatened by immanence. Men, however, can achieve success in the world through transcendence. As Moi observes, the “effect is to produce women as subjects painfully torn between freedom and alienation, transcendence and immanence, subject being and object being” (155). Part Two explores how placing higher value on transcendence effects the careers and home lives of women from a social, economic, and political perspective, both historically and in the twenty-first century.

Much has changed for middle-class women since *The Second Sex* was written, and indeed, over the last several hundred years. In the western world, before the industrial revolution, women were caregivers and producers—of clothing, food, soap, for example. Not only did they parent (servants and other family members also assisted with parenting), they served an important economic function in the family as well. The advent of the industrial revolution, the related development of the nuclear family, and the rise of capitalism, together led to a major shift in how the average woman spent her time. Production left the home, as did most of its inhabitants. Only the mother, father, and children remained. In working class families, women continued to work outside the home, in factories or in domestic service. On farms, changes in family structure happened slowly, if at all. In most middle-class, urban families, however, women no longer played a productive or an economic role. Their role was reduced to wife and mother. In such families, women’s activities were limited to the maintenance of the home and family. Nancy Chodorow, in her book *Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), states, “as production has moved out of the home, reproduction has become even more immediately defining and circumscribing of women’s life activities and of women themselves” (13).

In Europe and North America women entered the workforce during World War II to an even greater extent than they had in World War I, but in the 1950s and 1960s the myth of the feminine resurfaced and many women, especially middle-class women, stayed home. Women's "natural" place was once again deemed to be in the home, childrearing and homemaking held up as the ultimate modes of feminine fulfillment. Women's education was severely compromised. Because women were being told that marriage was their ultimate goal, college education became less important: "Two out of three girls who entered college were dropping out before they even finished" (Friedan 228). In order to keep women interested and at college, educators became more "sex-directed" (Friedan 235). If a middle-class woman worked outside the home, it was for a little extra spending money for herself or her children, or to help her husband through school so that he could attain his "natural" place in the public world. Domestic life did not bring them satisfaction, and women were increasingly depressed. Betty Friedan, in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), describes the feeling as "the problem that has no name" (63). In the 1970s, second wave feminists, encouraged by Friedan's writing, fought hard to (re)enter the work force, for equal work for equal pay, and for control over their reproductive functions—when the birth control pill became legal in the United States in 1962, within 2 years 1.2 million American women were on the pill. One year later, the number had doubled (Nikolchev). The ability to control pregnancy was a game-changer for women's freedom, and the number of women who had access to the transcendent world grew. The possibility for meaningful action became a reality.

In 2014, western women are once again caregivers and producers. They play an essential economic role in the family and the community. They have access to the public world in unprecedented numbers and ways. Women are now in the workplace in numbers equal to men and there is almost no gap between men and women when it comes to health and education. Women are able to choose when and if they get married and if or when to have children. Marriage is no longer, as it once was, an economic strategy, a phenomenon on which Charlotte Perkins Gilman comments in *Women and Economics* (1898). The fact that divorce is so prevalent⁴ has contributed to changes in

⁴ Divorce rates in Canada have increased nearly 200% since the 1960s when new divorce laws were introduced (Eichler)

women's views on marriage and has made paid work an important part of women's lives. Lia Macko and Kerry Rubin, writing in *Midlife Crisis at 30* (2004), argue in chapter one that because today's women saw their parents or their friend's parents divorce and the subsequent struggles their mothers went through, they see education and self-realization as a priority, even a necessity, before marriage.

As Beauvoir states, the public world, moving oneself forward (through action: education, meaningful career, self-realization), are two important aspects of transcendence. Despite the fact that women have ever-increasing access to the public work and self-realization, they face some unique challenges in the areas of work and parenting. Equal levels of education for men and women has not led to economic parity, particularly when it comes to wages. The higher women get in their careers, the bigger the wage gap (McInturff 3). There is a disproportionate number of men (2:1) in senior positions, which affects economic parity. In her 2014 online article in *The Atlantic* Olga Khazan suggests that the more alarming wage gap might be between mothers and childless women: one recent paper found that women with children make roughly 7-14 percent less than women without them. The rate of change is glacially slow, with parity in these areas estimated to occur in 70 to 350 years (McInturff 2-3).

Transcendent careers (careers that seek to change the world or their specified industry) have traditionally been linear and upward moving, with no breaks or pauses. The first ten years of any person's career is spent building, growing, and getting promoted. A typical career then peaks between the ages of 45 and 55. Today, for women who first get their education (Statcan reports that in 2009 sixty two percent of Canadian women had a university degree), enter their careers, and then marry, a classic linear trajectory usually does not work. The average woman has her first child in her early 30s, which means that she must take a break or a pause in her career. She must do this because it is still the woman—in a heterosexual relationship—who is the primary caregiver to a couple's children. Maternity leave in Canada is approximately one year, with paid parental leave at 55% of pay, or alternatively, some fathers are able to take paternity leave. Organizations do not make it easy for a person to take time away from work and still achieve the same amount of success as someone who does not. This is due, in part, to the idea that one must work long hours in order to merit promotions, and

that one must work in the office, not at home. A woman who takes maternity leave or an extended absence to raise children is penalized by not being offered promotions or being given less compensation.

When it comes to parenting, western societies, even in 2014, assume that women's natural place is in the home with the children. The reasoning remains biological. Because a woman bears and births the child, then in the infant months lactates, people assume that a woman must naturally "be a mother." Nancy Chodorow, writing in *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978), looks at what being a mother entails. There is the biological aspect, which only a woman can do. Then there is the care-giving aspect, both physical and psychological, which either a man or woman can do. I believe that separating the various aspects of "mothering" can help twenty-first century women distance themselves from the social concept of woman as naturally mother. Beauvoir provides additional insight, showing clearly that there is no biological reason why a woman should be the one to parent or to stay at home. She remains adamant that a woman should not be defined by her ability to have children.

Nancy Chodorow dismisses three common preconceptions about women's natural role as mother:

1) Functional/bio-evolutionary arguments: these arguments regard the division of labour as simply necessary for survival. She claims that this argument was good for hunter-gatherer societies, but is no longer necessary. Women acting primarily as mothers make sense for certain types of social organization, but not for the west in the twenty-first century. A woman as mother is not a static concept; as society and women change, so must our conception of mothers (19).

2) Maternal instinct: hormones play a role in a woman's desire to mother. Chodorow's research shows that hormones are neither necessary nor sufficient to explain maternal behaviour. It may be that women seem more nurturing because of their exposure to babies. She writes, "mothering capacities in any individual higher primate presupposes particular developmental experiences" (28). Although Chodorow does not mention Beauvoir in her work, Beauvoir herself discusses the ambivalent feelings that women experience during and after pregnancy, and shows that the experience of

motherhood is not the same for every woman. This variability is proof that there is no maternal instinct (SS 533).

3) Role training: girls are taught to mother and told they ought to, as Beauvoir argues. However, role training requires individual intention by the parent. Parenting is not simply a set of behaviours. Mothering cannot be taught or imitated or be decided—in other words, if a woman gives birth to a child, she will always be its biological mother, but may choose to abdicate her parenting role. Women cannot be forced to mother, specifically, to provide adequate parenting. Chodorow writes, a woman “*to some degree and on some unconscious or conscious level*, has the capacity and sense of self as maternal” (33, Chodorow’s emphasis). In her opinion, using her interpretation of the Oedipal complex, women mother because they are psychologically conditioned to do so through their own mother’s position as primary caregiver⁵.

Not only must women battle the ingrained notion that they are naturally mothers, they must also contend with an unequal division of domestic labour. McInturff writes of Canadian society in 2013, “Women’s share of unpaid work, including childcare, remains nearly double that of men” (5). Today most western women expect the father to be part of caring for the child, although women on the whole do more housework and childcare than their male partners. However, there is more to housework and childcare than its execution. Women, not men, occupy the mental and emotional space required for maintaining a home and family: “Women... have maintained the emotional responsibility for home and family: a point that is perhaps best exemplified by the familiar refrains of a man ‘helping’ around the house or being a good dad when ‘babysitting’ the kids” (Stevenson and Wolfers 2). Chodorow explores how this notion is reflected in how people are reproduced—physically and psychological. Women reproduce people through housework, childcare, and emotional support. Women also reproduce themselves and do not receive emotional support or reconstitution, nor do they receive support in dealing with and managing their emotions (37). Chodorow notes that women used to help each other: “in previous periods, and still in some stable working class and ethnic

⁵ In the 1999 preface to the second edition of *The Reproduction of Mothering*, Chodorow acknowledges that there are many different family structures – heterosexual, homosexual, single-parent families etc., which will affect the kind of “mothering” children receive (xi).

communities, women did support themselves emotionally by supporting and reconstituting *one another*" (37). I suggest it is more difficult in an industrial capitalist nuclear family society. In more traditional families, the extended family lives in the same household, so the work of parenting and housekeeping is divided among a number of women – the mother, sister, grandmother. Today, in most westernized families at least, it is only the mother, father, and children who live at home, and both parents work. As a working mother and graduate student I have observed that many women find it more difficult to help each other because they are both working and taking care of their own homes. Add to this the prevalence of divorce and single mothers and it is nearly impossible to offer support to other women.

The mental space component of parenthood can also be demonstrated in the different ways that men and women use and view time. In a 2014 online article in the *Wall Street Journal*, author Jennifer Senior talks about how women must "search for wormholes in the time-space continuum simply to accomplish all the things that they need to do." This is because mothers tend to do more time-sensitive tasks like preparing lunch and getting kids ready, which creates a sense of urgency in their marking of time. Senior continues, "being compelled to divide and subdivide your time doesn't just compromise your productivity and lead to garden-variety discombobulation. It also creates a feeling of urgency—a sense that no matter how tranquil the moment, no matter how unpressured the circumstances, there's always a pot somewhere that's about to boil over." In a world that is set up to be constantly moving forward, the daily tasks of life maintenance are clogging the flow—and creating a lot of stress. This is reflected in women's declining happiness, as discussed by Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers in their 2009 paper "Declining Female Happiness." Stevenson and Wolfers do not come to concrete conclusions as to why this trend is occurring, but offer several possibilities: women may have been "particularly hurt by declines in family life, rises in inequality, or reductions in social cohesion" (5); women may also expect more of themselves and have others expect more—to both work and take care of the family; women's lives may have become more diverse and complicated and so the women are measuring their happiness against more variables than in the past (Stevenson and Wolfers 5).

Interestingly, Stevenson and Wolfers document that there is little difference in happiness among women who are employed or unemployed, or for women who are

juggling children and career (17). The issue in this paper, however, is not happiness, but a tension that is experienced by women more than men. Stevenson and Wolfers speculate that a working mother may have the same subjective happiness level as a stay-at-home mom, but feels the multiple stresses of life more acutely. Conversely, stay-at-home mothers may feel more pressure to return to work, due to economic need and the higher value placed on paid and transcendent labour. I suggest that this is an example of the lived experience of women experiencing tension between transcendence and immanence.

Parenting today has become an industry. Because women are still the primary caregivers, this industry is directed at them. In *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) Betty Friedan reports that magazines and advertising were two of the major influences that shaped the lives of women in the 1950s and 1960s. Magazines told women that they were happiest at home and advertisers provided them with products to buy to fulfill their destiny (Friedan 301). Today there are countless books and blogs on how to parent, and by “parent,” the author of the book/blog usually infers “mother.” The authors (the Sears family, for example) follow an ethic similar to that which prevailed in Friedan’s time: It is the mother’s job to raise a well-adjusted child. In the 1970s Ruth Bloch coined the term “moral mother” to describe this role (“American Feminine Ideals in Transition: The Rise of the Moral Mother, 1785-1815”). Chodorow’s 1978 work bears out this concept when she asserts that a mother’s primary role in an industrial capitalist society is to be a reproducer of human beings, physically and psychologically (37). The moral mother has, in 2014, become the “intensive mother”—a term first coined by Sheryl Hays—(Rippeyoung 1), a role that requires the mother to be with the infant at all times or risk forever damaging her child. In this model, according to a more recent scholar, Phyllis Rippeyoung (2013), the “locus of responsibility for children remains firmly with mothers” (8). Women bear the brunt of this method. Rippeyoung examines the impact of the Sears family—a family whose entire business is based on the philosophy of intensive mothering. Rippeyoung writes of the Sears family, “by focusing on encouraging mothers to make individual sacrifices to improve the wellbeing of their children, the individual costs to mothers are minimized” (5). Intensive mothering is highly immanent, whereas authoritative parenting—often performed by the father—has transcendent qualities, such as power, control, authority, and discipline. The twenty-first century parenting industry

perpetuates the view that women are “naturally” mothers and continues to place them in an immanent role.

Together, the belief that a woman must both stay with her infant and be part of the workforce has led women into what has been termed “the mommy wars,” the so-called fight between the working mom and the stay-at-home mom, and who has made the “better” choice. The judgments are based on what mothers think is best for children and what is best for them. Inherent in “the mommy wars” are the societal beliefs that transcendent activities are more valuable and at the same time that a woman is naturally the primary caregiver. Catherine Deveny demonstrates society’s support for the stay-at-home mom in a 2013 online article in *The Guardian*: “the more hours of drudgery you endure the more of a mother you are and, therefore, the more important your job is. The more you outsource domestic labour and childcare to participate in the workforce, the less of a mother you are.” To be a true woman, to be a good mother, a mother must give parenting her “all,” an ethic that may have transferred over from the corporate world. To be successful, a person is expected to put all their effort into their work. The same is now true in some parenting circles. Being totally focused on work was possible when there was one parent at home and one at work, but in the present economy this is no longer the case. Working mothers are following society’s value of the economic, whereas stay-at-home mothers are following society’s value of women as mothers. In both cases women cannot win. Either they are not being true women, or they are not following what society values most: money and progress.

Despite the fact that today’s women still live in a society in which it is considered natural for them to mother, 70 percent of mothers with children under 6 are working outside the home. “Further,” as McInturff notes, “according to Beaupré and Cloutier (2006), nearly 15% of Canadian mothers returned to work before their children were 6 months old in 2006 and only about half of mothers take a 12 month or longer leave. Most of the parents who did not make full use of their EI leaves did so because they could not afford it” (5).

As I have asserted, women are still seen in their biological function as mothers. However, this is not taken into account by employers when a mother works. For

example, women are not paid for breastfeeding breaks, which is an immanent activity. Additionally, milk production can decline from a variety of causes related to the need to work. For example, stress and the use of formula, (McInturff 5).

The twenty-first century's political and economic climate affects the lives of working mothers. I offer two examples of how politics and the economy affect women in Canada. In Canada, the Stephen Harper government is aggressively promoting the oil sands (De Souza) and Christy Clark's BC Liberals are promoting natural gas and the trades (BC Jobs Plan). Each of these sectors provides employment, but primarily for men—women make up fifteen percent of the mining labour force and fewer than five percent in the trades (Mining Industry Resources Council 15; McMullen). In contrast, Tara Camran, writing for the Vancouver Sun, notes that jobs that have traditionally been held by women, like teaching, health care, and hospitality, are being underfunded. Although Christy Clark's motto is "families first," in reality, her actions demonstrate economy first. There is conflation of family and economy. In a report entitled "B.C.'s Skills for Jobs Blueprint" Clark writes, "Our Blueprint for government, industry, labour and Aboriginal partnerships is also our commitment—a commitment to deliver the skilled workforce B.C.'s growing LNG and other sectors need, and create the opportunity for long-term, well-paying jobs that strengthen our families and communities" (3). While publicly saying that families are her priority, she demonstrates that priority by promoting private business and fighting social institutions, such as unions, which typically advocate for family-friendly work policies. (B.C. Federation of Labour president, Jim Sinclair, in an interview on CBC's On the Coast, said that Christy Clark was trying to break the BC Teacher's Union. It should be noted that unions are being challenged across the western world, including in Canada.) Clark equates a thriving economy with a thriving family. The Families First website states, "The Families First Agenda is built on government's commitment to a balanced budget and to prudent fiscal management." To break it down even further, the equation is the following: employment and money = healthy families. If we look at what this means in practical terms, we see fathers being employed in oil or natural gas fields, which are inevitably far away from home. This leaves the mother at home, alone with the children, either working outside or inside the home. There is money in the bank, but there is a mother who is struggling to "do it all" and a father who is missing the daily development of his child. This hardly looks like a "families first" policy.

The focus on the economy over family exemplifies how society as a whole, and our institutions in specific, value transcendence over immanence.

One might think that more women in government and in positions of power could make a difference, as currently only 20 percent of elected officials in Canada are women. However, this assumes that all women have the same opinions. McInturff asserts that “women in leadership positions cannot make their institutions more responsive on their own. It also requires robust civil society organizations working to the same end” (5). There needs to be societal will to make change, and government and private funding to support it.

All these factors lead many middle-class women to the conclusion that it is simply too difficult to maintain a career. Rubin and Macko, in the first chapter of their book, write, “[t]he 2000 [American] census reported that 30 to 35 year old college-educated women have sparked the largest exodus of working mothers from the workplace since 1976.” It simply makes economic sense for a woman to downgrade her career aspirations, but it also has long-term repercussions: “Women who took three years or longer leave, earned approximately 30% less at age 40 than their childless peers” (McInturff 6).

The Second Sex, a book that changed so many women’s lives in the 1950s, still offers women in 2014 clear insight into their lives as career women and mothers. Beauvoir states, “The woman embarks on a career in the context of a highly problematic situation, subjugated still by the burdens traditionally implied by her femininity” (SS 736). In order to succeed, women must fit into a workplace that does not accommodate their socially and biologically imposed role as mothers. Women want and need real freedom to choose whatever combination of transcendence and immanence they desire. Beauvoir agrees that a woman’s “reproductive function is as important as her productive capacity, both in the social economy and in her personal life” (SS 66).

The linear aspect of transcendence that Toril Moi describes can make it difficult for women to succeed, for indeed, society is still structured in a linear manner. Rubin and Macko, in *Midlife Crisis at 30*, and Anne-Marie Slaughter in “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All,” describe the linear expectation of women’s lives: a career that is continually

rising, a life program that consists of education, career, marriage, and children (in that order). If society and the workplace expect this particular trajectory, then women, who in the current configuration of society, take on the care of children, can barely hope to succeed.

Women are torn because they know the value of immanence but, in existentialist language, need to posit their own essential project. In the west in 2014, women's personhood has advanced to such a degree that they expect access to the transcendent world—they project themselves into the future, into their projects. But it is also difficult to do when the immanent aspects of life remain in their domain; it is the mother who spends her time on parenting forums, reading parenting magazines, deciding on the healthiest meals for the family, and keeping the home free from dirt. Many women struggle because they do want to do both. They love their family and want their careers. Beauvoir writes: “[s]he wants to live both like a man and like a woman; her workload and her fatigue are multiplied as a result” (SS 725). By living “like a man,” Beauvoir means living in the public world, earning a living, experiencing success based on one's efforts, and “like a woman,” by taking care of those duties prescribed to her by history. Men are not usually torn between career and home because as essential subjects they are living their true projects. They don't see their own place in immanence, nor has society removed women from the position of object.

Part Three

This section looks at two examples from the twenty-first century that exemplify how transcendence and immanence affect women and mothers today.

Both Sheryl Sandberg, author of *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*, and Anne-Marie Slaughter, author of “Why Women Still Can't Have it All,” illustrate the tension that twenty-first century women—particularly mothers or mothers-to-be—feel between transcendence and immanence, between career and motherhood. Sandberg's book and Slaughter's article reignited the debate over the choices privileged, western women must make between career and family. In addition, they offer solutions that point to how society values transcendence and immanence.

In 2013 Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook and the sixth most powerful woman in the world (Howard), wrote the best selling book *Lean In*. It sold 150,000 copies in its first week. In it, she explores why young women cut back their career ambitions, and what they need to do to succeed, which to her means attaining positions of leadership and power. Sandberg observes that rather than taking chances and pushing forward in their careers, women tend to “lean back” because of the potential conflict between career and family. While acknowledging the structural problems in women’s quest for equality in the workplace, Sandberg’s premise is that women need to look internally, and change themselves to fit into a male-centered workforce in order to achieve success. Women must “lean in” to their work, they must push forward regardless of whether they are pregnant or may get pregnant in the future.

Sandberg demonstrates, both through her description of men and women in corporate culture and through the neo-liberal lens through which she writes, how transcendence and immanence permeate western culture. The corporate world values progress and all the attributes historically attributed to men: ambition, confidence, outspokenness, aggressiveness, risk-taking. These are the traits necessary for success. Sandberg advises women to take on these characteristics. If they do not, and instead display traits perceived as appropriately feminine and immanent—friendliness, communal mindedness, accommodation—they will be looked down upon. The stereotype of the working woman is not usually flattering. If a woman both works and parents she is portrayed as “harried” and “guilt ridden” (Sandberg 22). Beauvoir tells a similar story: “Misogynists have often reproached intellectual women for ‘letting themselves go’; but they also preach to them; if you want to be our equals, stop wearing makeup and polishing your nails” (723). Women are receiving mixed messages. Real success, tied to power and leadership, means prioritizing work over family, but a “real” woman should always put family above work. It is striking that two women, from such different times, are making similar observations. Two natural drives—transcendence and immanence—are in competition with each other. Beauvoir continues, “The woman who is herself also subject and activity has to fit into a world that has doomed her to passivity” (SS 724).

Sandberg’s mission is to empower individual women to work the system, balancing male and female stereotypes in order to get what they want and thereby

change the system. Susan Faludi, a Pulitzer prize-winning journalist, critiques this mission in a *Baffler* online article entitled “Facebook Feminism. Like it or Not.” She points out that *Lean In* is firmly set within a neo-liberal capitalist framework. In the same article, Faludi describes how capitalism, which at the beginning brought women together to fight for their rights in the workplace, eventually led to women’s isolation from each other. Marketing turned women’s desire for fulfillment into a product and individualized the experience of freedom. The article argues that Sandberg’s message addresses the individual, not the collective—Sandberg acknowledges the social inequities women face, but exhorts individual women to make changes in how they act and perform at work. The rise of the individual, according to Friedrich Engels in chapter three of *The Origin of the Family*, also gives rise to patriarchy. Early human society, he explains, was communal and conducive to female power. Now, the communal mind attributed to women is deemed a negative characteristic in the corporate world, or at the very least one that does not breed success. Looking at this dynamic through the lens of the master/slave dialectic, the reader can see how the oppressor (man), does not want the slave to be free. And the slave (woman), who through work knows her own value, must choose to fight in order to break her chains. As an individual this is difficult, and because women align more with their economic class than their gender, they tend not to unify. Many women, according to Beauvoir, act in bad faith, meaning they do not fight for their freedom but instead choose to live in slavery, to remain the Other.

Lean In exists in the realm of patriarchy and demonstrates how strongly the world of capitalism, progress, and transcendence dominates twenty-first century lives. Sandberg values transcendent and masculine traits and ways of thinking. Our current capitalist system does not provide the social supports necessary for women to choose a life of transcendent work without sacrificing the world of the home. In chapter nine of *The Origin of the Family* Engels writes that the “emancipation of women becomes feasible only then when women are enabled to take part extensively in social production, and when domestic duties require their attention in a minor degree.” Beauvoir continues this thought writing: “if she procreates as she wishes and if society helps her during her pregnancies and provides child care, maternal duties are lighter and can be easily compensated for in the realm of work” (SS 63).

Anne-Marie Slaughter examines the idea of structural support for women and men. In 2012 Slaughter, a contributing editor at *The Atlantic* and professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University, wrote an article for *The Atlantic* entitled “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All.” One million people read it online. Her article outlines the structural obstacles to women’s full and balanced participation in society. She suggests that given a workplace designed for men and a home life designed for women, twenty-first century women in the west are hard pressed to do well in both.

Slaughter points to society’s integration of the women’s movement as part of the reason why contemporary women are struggling. Consistent with Beauvoir’s assertion “work alone can guarantee her concrete freedom” (SS 721), second wave feminists in the 1960s and 1970s fought for greater access to and equality in the workplace. They succeeded. However, deeply held beliefs about women’s natural place did not change and women continued to take care of the home, alongside their newfound place in the workforce. Women are discovering what Beauvoir wrote sixty-five years ago: “the individual is not free to shape the idea of femininity at will” (SS 724). It is important to note that Beauvoir qualifies her comment on work as freedom to say that work will only free women within a socialist system. Socialist or not, some collective will is necessary, as Rippeyoung points out in “Governing Motherhood.”

Slaughter disagrees with Sandberg and other neo-liberal capitalists who claim that having it all is “a function of personal determination.” Slaughter mentions several reasons people give to explain women’s struggle to succeed, all of which comprise personal decisions: (1) lack of commitment, (2) wrong choice of partner, and (3) failure to sequence life decisions in the right order. I suggest, in regards to the first, that women must make decisions about career, marriage, and children that men do not. As such, they cannot focus solely on their career. Beauvoir writes, “the woman must constantly renew her decision [about career]; she goes forward, not with her eye fixed on a goal directly in front of her, but letting her attention wander all around her; thus her progress is timid and uncertain” (SS 737). The last two focus on the immediate, on love and family, which exemplify immanent qualities. A woman must take these into account in a way that a man does not need to do.

Men and women can have it all, writes Slaughter, but given the current economy and social structures, she suggests different policy solutions and a rethinking of social values. These include flexible workspaces (such as working from home, no fixed start and end time), encouraging both men and women to take advantage of family-friendly policies (like taking parental leave), redefining a successful career path from a linear progression to more of a zigzag, and looking at the role that happiness plays in work and family life. In addition, rather than women shaping their personalities to fit into a male-centered workplace, Slaughter suggests the workplace must be shaped to women's needs as well as men's. Our current corporate culture penalizes prioritizing family over work, whereas Slaughter's suggestions focus on valuing family at least as much as work. The focus is on the positive aspects of immanent activities/modes of life. The former values progress over that which is cyclical and repetitious, and the latter views family—the cyclical and repetitious—as equally valuable.

Lean In and “Why Women Still Can’t Have it All” are important examples of how western society values work and family and women’s role in each. Hundreds of thousands of women were inspired by Sandberg’s book, and many created or joined a “Lean In Circle,”⁶ which suggests to me that the value attributed to progress and Sandberg’s message of personal responsibility, has been internalized. Critics of Sandberg say that she is speaking to a minority of women, namely those who are educated, middle/upper class, western, and often white. Such women can afford to make choices and take risks—while not questioning the system they were raised in. On the opposite end of the spectrum, over a million people read Slaughter’s article, showing that a segment of western society is dissatisfied with current corporate, organizational, and societal structures and the individual’s role within them.

⁶ After writing [Lean In](#), Sheryl Sandberg and Rachel Thomas created LeanIn.org, an organization that is “committed to offering women the ongoing inspiration and support to help them achieve their goals” (leanin.org). One method of doing this is the “Lean In Circle,” “small groups who meet regularly to learn and grow together” (leanin.org).

Conclusion

The first three parts of this essay could be regarded as the social, political, and philosophical backdrop to my novella *A Life in Two Parts*. The conclusion examines the novella, referencing each of the three parts above. In addition, I will show how the novella relates to my own life.

Writers, when interviewed about their work, are often asked how their real life is reflected in the fictional lives of the characters they create. And so I ask myself, where does my life intersect with the lives of Rosemary, Jamie, and the two Bubbes? There are some obvious parallels. I was in the middle of my master's program when I had my first child. I struggled between the daily work of caretaking and my academic work; I much preferred the latter. My mother was a single mother, raised three children on her own, and did what she needed to do to survive. These are the details. Rosemary's inner life, her thoughts and discoveries, reflect generally what I have experienced as a woman struggling between authentic action and maintenance work.

Rosemary's character is the conduit through which to explore a person's—and in this case a woman's—need to be involved in productive (transcendent and authentic) work as contrasted with the necessity of reproductive work. The issues that Rosemary deals with are personal, but they exist because of larger societal beliefs about the value of certain kinds of work and who does that work.

Meaningful action, and the ability to define what action is meaningful, is truly what are at stake here. A person's history clearly impacts her or his views on life and the actions she or he takes in the world. Part of that history is unconscious. As Nancy Chodorow discusses, mothers raise their daughters to be mothers and raise their sons to perpetuate patriarchal culture. This is done through subtle and unconscious psychological conditioning, which can be undone or avoided by having both mother and father provide equal parenting (218). Rosemary's mother and grandmother raised their daughters to be mothers, and it is yet to be seen whether Rosemary's parenting will have that same effect on Jamie. As it stands, Jamie's personality is much more driven, in part, she wonders, because of an unconscious understanding that her mother is unhappy with her life.

There is a point, though, where a person must take responsibility for her or his actions within the life that he or she is given. Rosemary did not start out as a passive woman. By leaving Montreal and moving to Vancouver, by getting an education, she was choosing her life. The life of a writer and an intellectual. When she unexpectedly got pregnant, the social and familial forces that so dominate our individual lives came into effect. Despite trying to escape the culture she was raised in, her upbringing reinforced the belief that children came first. She fulfilled her biological destiny while Richard, Jamie's father, fulfilled his male destiny by becoming a professor at a university. However, as Beauvoir makes clear, having a child does not give a reason for a woman's life; she needs something constructive, something that would move her into the future: "Her misfortune is to have been biologically destined to repeat Life, while in her own eyes Life in itself does not provide her reasons for being, and these reasons are more important than life itself" (SS 74). Erin McCarthy, in "From Beauvoir to Irigaray," writes, "Confined to a mere reproductive role, Irigaray contends along with Beauvoir that women cannot find their own creativity; their own power and very subjectivity is denied them" (191). Put differently, "power is something that women abjure once they perceive the great difference between the lives possible to men and to women" (Heilbrun 16).

Rosemary gives up the life she wants when she has her child. She believes that what she wants, the intellectual life, is not possible for her as a single mother. Indeed it would require great fortitude for her to pursue her dreams while at the same time taking care of an infant. But Richard, the child's father, can decide to have no part in his child's life. He wanted an intellectual life with Rosemary, but when she chose family over the intellect, he abandoned her. My intent was to imply that Richard, as a man, has a "right" to an intellectual life. As bell hooks notes in her essay "True Philosophers," women who are intellectuals are suspect and must fight for their right to be identified with their minds, not their bodies (235). Conversely, men can pursue their intellect with complete freedom. However, women are so identified as being "naturally mother" and men as breadwinners that when a man enters the domain of stay-at-home father he must justify himself and his decisions.

In *A Life in Two Parts*, Rosemary is primarily engaged in activities of immanence: she raises her daughter, keeps the home, and works in a repetitive job. What she

desires, and what she expresses in her diary, is action that will take her into the future (transcendence). Rosemary senses the essential meaninglessness of her life because of her inability to take meaningful action. She is, in the words of Carolyn Heilbrun, “trapped in a script [she] did not write but [is] slowly beginning to analyze, [as she] look[s] about [her] for a way out, a way on to a different life” (42). She knows that for her sanity, like so many women before her, she needs the transcendent part of herself. Such famous feminists as Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft suffered from paralyzing depression, the result of not being able to fulfill their potential (*Feminism: A Short Introduction*). Rosemary finally decides that she needs to take some sort of action and she begins to write a diary.

Before writing her diary, Rosemary was not consciously aware that she was not living an authentic life. She was simply surviving. Once she begins to awaken from her “domestic stupor,” she realizes that she needs to take authentic action in order to live a meaningful life. The notion of authenticity is central to Beauvoir’s existentialist ethic, and Rosemary is on the edge of living in bad faith. Living in “good” or “bad” faith is not as simple as Beauvoir might suggest. Richard could be said to be living in good faith because he is living the life he wants. But it is easy for him because his good faith coincides with his “natural” role as a man. Rosemary’s does not. She has aspirations for personal fulfillment, for transcendence, through dedicated time to writing, not simply for personal interest but as a career move—something that will move her and the world forward into the future. Her desires are thwarted by corporate and societal beliefs and policies that make it difficult for a single mother to succeed. She lives in a world that values individual success—and success that has one trajectory: up. She works in the most forgiving of environments, a union, which offers her stability, but also stagnation. How is she to reconcile the need for growth, societal expectations of success, the realities of raising a child on her own, and the belief that she is living out her destiny as a mother? Living in good faith is that much more difficult for a woman in her position.

Rosemary handles her alienation from herself through writing a diary, a common way for women to express themselves. Diaries are private and personal. They are safe. There is no need to step out into the public and to take the risk of action that will have a real effect on the world. On the other hand, if the diarist receives the fulfillment she

needs through this kind of writing, then it has value in itself. Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, acknowledges the value of a woman's diary by using it as a proof of women's experience. Rosemary takes the diary even further and creates an alternate life for herself, something Carolyn Heilbrun describes doing in her Amanda Cross series: "I also sought another identity, another role. I sought to create an individual whose destiny offered more possibility than I could comfortably imagine for myself" (114). In fact, the inspiration for the interview portion of the novella came from a personal desire and fantasy to be interviewed for some great piece of work that I had not yet written. In lieu of actually doing anything, I imagined being interviewed as though I were already a famous writer. I could be doubly inactive: I could imagine being a writer and I could imagine being interviewed. Fortunately, both Rosemary and I did end up taking meaningful action.

When I first read Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, her description of transcendence and immanence seemed to describe perfectly women's situation in the twenty-first century. I understood on a personal level challenges that I faced as a mother and as an individual. Transcendence explained my own need for fulfillment and helped me understand why I was the main caregiver and homemaker in my household. But more than that, *The Second Sex* showed me how society as a whole is deeply affected by these two notions. Men remain defined by their actions and women by their bodies. This is demonstrated time and again in popular culture. Gwen Stefani, singer, entrepreneur, and judge/mentor on the reality television show *The Voice*, describes her contribution to the show and its contestants in active terms, referring to her years of experience in the music industry and to her success as an entrepreneur. In contrast, the other judges (three men), blatantly suggest that the contestants would want to work with her solely because of her attractiveness (*The Voice*). Stefani confidently emphasizes her skills and knowledge, and her very success in the world of business shows how far women have come since the 1950s when Beauvoir wrote *The Second Sex*. On the other hand, according to the male judges, Stefani's looks are her main asset. To Stefani's credit, she does not respond to the other judge's comments on her looks. The judges in this situation are not intentionally trying to disregard her business knowledge, rather, they are products of a society that continues to define women by their bodies. For

Stefani, it is likely just “another day at the office,” where as a woman, she must fight to be seen as a transcendent colleague.

At the same time that Gwen Stefani is being defined by her body, many strong and confident women today believe that feminism is no longer necessary. They do not question their agency or their ability to succeed in a world that values individual tenacity and infinite progress—and indeed, Stefani shows what kind of success is possible for a woman. These are lucky young women, but they are in a dangerous position. They do not realize that they are experiencing second wave feminism in the cage of patriarchy. True freedom can occur only when transcendence and immanence free themselves from patriarchy; when the duality is not associated with gender; when Beauvoir’s definition of transcendence expands to include activities that may be cyclical rather than linear; when immanence is viewed as a necessary period of rejuvenation and growth.

The combination of capitalism and patriarchy is detrimental to a woman’s ability to work and parent. The first requires a workplace that is incompatible with the needs of an egalitarian family, an individualist approach that makes it hard to parent. The second values women only according to their bodily and functional aspects, and views qualities associated with men as superior. By gendering transcendence and immanence, we confine men and women to certain roles and limit their possibilities.

For the last one hundred and fifty years western women have sought and fought for access to the transcendent world, but because transcendence remains associated with the masculine and immanence remains associated with the feminine—the former valued more highly than the latter—women remain torn between two essential aspects of life, something they often do not become aware of until they reach mid-career and may want children. Erin McCarthy, summarizing Luce Irigaray, argues that the “dualism of mind and body that has so permeated Western philosophy renders impossible an adequate view of...female subjectivity” (197). Women need to create a definition of self that is not in opposition to or in comparison with notions of transcendence and immanence or subject and object as they have been defined under patriarchy.

The importance of transcendence and immanence goes beyond defining gender roles. By placing higher value on transcendence, society supports actions of perpetual

forward motion, unlimited growth, individual fulfillment, and the people who embody these values, namely, men. By devaluing immanence, society places less importance on the home, family, sustainable methods of economic growth, and on those people who are considered immanent, namely, women. This value system has resulted in financial catastrophes, growing wealth gaps, environmental degradation, violence against women, and much more. New emphasis needs to be placed on immanence in order for a rebalancing to occur. It will require a major mental shift for both men and women. As Sheryl Sandberg and Simone de Beauvoir assert, women must own their actions and not accept the role society has given them. On the other hand, as Anne-Marie Slaughter—and Beauvoir—suggests, the structures of society must change before men and women are able to partake equally in work and family life. Once these changes occur, we will see even bigger changes in the functioning of the world. Beauvoir ends her magnum opus with the following words: “Within the given world, it is up to man to make the reign of freedom triumph; to carry off this supreme victory, men and women must, among other things and beyond their natural differentiations, unequivocally affirm their brotherhood” (SS 766).

Carolyn Heilbrun takes the idea of brotherhood between men and women and puts it into concrete terms. In her book *Writing a Woman's Life*, she describes a revolutionary or exceptional marriage. Her description suggests a useful way in which women and men could view their lives, both in and out of a marriage. A revolutionary marriage is “one in which both partners have work at the center of their lives and must find a delicate balance that can support both together and each individually. This means of course that the man or the exceptional woman in [a woman]-woman relationship, must be equally, probably more, nurturing and supportive than the usual ‘husband’” (81). In this description work is still given the highest priority, which I think reflects the need of all human beings for fulfillment. Work, in its myriad forms, is central to our lives, and as humans we need to feel nurtured both in our work and in our private lives. Beauvoir comments on working women: “It is understandable that since they do not receive the moral and social benefits they could legitimately expect in exchange for their work, they simply resign themselves to its constraints” (SS 722). The important point to be made is that men and women need to support each other equally. Humans need a balance of transcendence and immanence. Heilbrun quotes the version of this balance that Stanley

Cavell provides in *The Pursuit of Happiness*: “[The romance of remarriage] poses a structure in which we are permanently in doubt who the hero is, that is, whether it is the male or the female who is the active partner, which of them is in quest, who is following whom” (94). Ultimately, transcendence and immanence describe necessary and intertwined elements of human existence: the drive to create, by creating one’s own world and the world in which one lives, and creating a family and a home.

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