

Deconstructing *La femme rompue* by Simone de Beauvoir using Psychological Theories of the  
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The gender stereotypes say that a woman is delicate and has tendencies to attach to others in a relationship. This view is supported by psychological theories that explore the behavior of women in stressful situations. *La femme rompue*, published in 1967 by Simone de Beauvoir follows the protagonist, Monique, as she deals with the stress of an unfaithful marriage. Instead of leaving him, she accepts her new reality of the double life her husband leads and tries to not be bothered by the rejection she is facing. Her husband, Maurice, becomes more involved with his mistress, Monique finds it harder to hide her true emotions of stress and depression and loses her sense of self. The intimate relationship between man and woman can be deconstructed by the utilization of developmental theories of the female orientation. A common term used today is “identity crisis”, which was coined by psychologist, Erik Erickson. Erickson explored the stages of life and explained the common behaviors that come with it. The psychological theories discussed will fall under this umbrella as de Beauvoir walks the reader through the identity crisis Monique experiences. Monique’s reaction to the infidelity is surprising to the average reader, but after the careful exploration of psychological theories of women in relationships, the behavior of the broken woman is not as perplexing as they seem.

There are theories that explain why a woman reacts differently than a man in emotionally intense situations. In paraphrasing the words of Dana Crowley Jack, the author of *Silencing the Self*, in the case of intimate relationships between man and woman, for the woman to feel confident in the relationship, she has needs that differ from those of a man. To start, a woman

looks for a consistent deep connection to her partner where as a man will try to oppose feminine actions in order to be more masculine. With a woman putting forth effort to become attached to a man, he will be inclined to distance himself from the woman to avoid entrapment and to appear more masculine. In contrary to a man who fears entrapment, a woman fears isolation. Compromises are necessary for an intimate relationship to succeed between man and woman after considering these theories.

The health and maternal instincts of a woman also play a role in the success of a relationship. Claire Douglas in *The Woman in the Mirror*, explains how it is natural for a mother to feel hopeless around fifty years old since this is the age that her children would typically be independent. She would feel as if her purpose has been met since her identity has been the dependent of her children for the majority of her life and consequently, it is easy for women to fall into a depression at this stage of their life. In relating these words to that of Steven Arnocky, Marlena Pearson, and Tracy Vaillancourt in the article “Health, Anticipated Partner Infidelity, and Jealousy in Men and Women”, in general, people prefer for their partner to demonstrate signs of good mental and physical health since it indicates healthy reproduction.

With these theories of the feminine in mind, it is clear that there is a difference in how woman and men handle personal aspects of their lives. A common attribute to the theories described is the role of self-confidence. For example, a woman seeks a deep connection with her partner in order to feel confident in the success of her relationship. The connection she seeks in the relationship feeds her confidence in the relationship and in turn dictates how worthy she feels about herself based on how she is able to satisfy her partner. In speaking to the theory that a man opposes the actions of a woman to feel more masculine, this can put the woman in a situation where she will be less confident due to the lack of connection. The separation will cause the

woman to desire the connection that is missing in her relationship and give her insecurities, in turn demonstrating poor mental health.

In looking at the story, there are several connections between Monique and the theories previously mentioned. In deconstructing these psychological theories of women, we see that self-confidence is something they have in common. The theories explain the actions of Monique when she is confronted with personal difficulties and help the reader understand why she decides to stay with her cheating husband- an option not chosen by many.

To begin, the story starts with Monique expressing how she is happy she finally gets to work on her marriage she feels has been neglected while her two daughters have been growing up “ Je veux vivre enfin un peu pour moi. Et profiter avec Maurice de cette solitude a deux don’t si longetemps nous avons ete privees” (123). (I want to finally live for myself. I want to profit my time with Maurice that for so long we’ve missed out on). It is clear that Monique feels a lack of connection with her husband and informs the reader that her marriage has not been particularly strong over the last little while; she is aware it is in need of attention. Already we see a case where the woman feels that her relationship is not strong due to lack of connection. Monique is searching for such connection because of the self-confidence she does not have. Another factor that plays into the lack of self-confidence is the fact her maternal nature. It is normal for a woman to feel a sense of loss once her children have grown up since her life has drastically changed and she may struggle with her identity as a mother. Not only is she yearning for her sense of identity, but also a connection with her husband. Maurice responds to Monique’s struggles with opposition because he is fearing the entrapment that may come with her trying to build a deeper connection in their marriage.

After learning that Maurice has been cheating on her, Monique justifies the infidelity because the mistress, Noellie, is “jolie, brillante, aguicheuse. Le type de l’aventure sans consequence et qui flatte un homme” (131). (Beautiful, brilliant, sharp. An adventure without consequences that flatters a man). Noellie represents a woman of confidence, which is what Maurice looks for in a partner. She seems to be in good health mentally and physically according to Monique’s description. Noellie supports the theory that people pursue partners who display qualities of good health. Monique consults her friend who gives her advice to be understanding: “soit comprensive, sois gaie. Avant tout sois amicale” (135). (Be understanding, be happy. Before all else, be amicable). Monique is trying to masque the reality of her broken marriage, admitting to a problem with her relationship would be admitting to a problem with herself. It is difficult for both men and women to think of not being enough for a partner, let alone an insecure woman who would have a hard time realizing this and in turn, search for ways to protect themselves from the rejection. Up to this point, Monique has demonstrated two sides of the psychological theories which describes how a woman needs an intimate connection to feel secure in a relationship. Upon reflecting, she remembers times when she felt happy in her marriage. Times when she was also confident in her identity. Relating confidence with self-identity is recognized by psychologists and elaborated on in *Silencing the Self*: “Interpersonal intimacy is the profound organizer of female experience and the key to understanding women’s ‘different voice’”. The different voice is represented by the close connection to a partner. When a woman does not have her needs met in a relationship, she becomes desperate and doesn’t seem like herself. Simone de Beauvoir demonstrates these theories strongly through Monique’s character.

Jealousy is an indicator of lack of self-confidence. It is a mechanism that people subconsciously use to feel better about themselves when they cannot receive that happiness from

within. A stereotype of women is jealousy towards other women. This stereotype can be explained using the theory that a woman needs a constant connection with their partner. If their partner shows affection towards another woman, it is this affection that she desires for herself. She starts comparing herself, wondering what the other woman has that she does not. Monique shows jealousy towards Noellie: “Tout ce que je dirai contre Noellie, Maurice y verra l’effet de ma jalousie” (157). (Maurice will notice the effect of my jealousy with everything I would say against Noellie). For Monique, the jealousy she is feeling is an indication of insecurity. She cannot feel good about herself because the man that affirms her identity is concentrating his energy on another woman. Quoted from the novel, jealousy is not a desirable trait and the true thoughts that propel this emotion are often hidden. Monique wants to hide this unattractive side of herself to avoid Maurice distancing himself even more.

Simone de Beauvoir writes the novel in the form of journal entries by Monique. An intimate tone is set when writing in this fashion since it allows the reader to be exposed directly to raw emotions of the protagonist. Even though Monique’s story does not end happily, it was successfully shown how man and woman manage stress in intimate relationships. Although a story that provokes sadness to the reader considering Monique’s state, de Beauvoir manages to free Maurice of some of the guilt of being unfaithful. With Monique’s willingness to avoid conflict, Maurice feels as if his actions are justified. In following an example mentioned previously from the novel, Monique watches how she reacts around Maurice in fear of him catching on to her jealousy. This is an example of how Maurice has the upperhand in the situation which has given him confidence that is projected towards Monique. Feeling as if she does not have control makes her extremely vulnerable and only adds to her tall order of emotional stress. Every year, Monique and Maurice spend holidays together skiing. Things were

different this time when Maurice tells Monique that he will be spending half of his vacation with Noellie and half with Monique. Maurice gained the confidence to make such a bold decision because of the confrontational actions of Monique. His unfaithfulness was something he hid for eight years, and once he knows that his wife is not going to leave him, he has no issues making Monique aware that he enjoys the time of another woman over her. Now that his secret is in the open, he does not feel as much guilt or completely consider the emotions of his wife. Simone de Beauvoir has successfully used the psychological theories of the sexes with Maurice as well as Monique, showing both sides of the coin. In both cases of the man or woman, the reader is still led with the tone of sadness and sympathy for Monique.

Being married to an unfaithful partner has let Monique experience sadness and confusion that come with betrayal. Maurice illustrated how men can feel entrapment in a relationship which can cause them to distance themselves from women. This causes a woman to fight for a deeper connection to feel more secure, which was shown through Monique. A balance needs to be met through compromise and common order for a successful relationship. The relationship between Maurice and his mistress show how people typically look for qualities of good health in their partners with Noellie described as beautiful and intelligent. Most importantly, Monique is an indicator of the need for an identity of self to have confidence. Confidence is related to security in a relationship which is essential for a woman in a relationship. Monique lost her identity as mother and married woman and has to find a new identity as an independent woman – a task that has a large emotional toll. Confidence is gained as a new identity becomes more familiar. Simone de Beauvoir shows how Monique, a broken woman, chooses to find her new identity while demonstrating psychological theories of women and relationships.