

# How to Enhance Female Self-Perception and Social Role Awareness in Adolescent Education Through *The Second Sex*

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doi:10.56397/JARE.2024.09.06

## Abstract

This paper explores how Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* can be utilized in adolescent education to enhance female self-perception and social role awareness. *The Second Sex* critically examines the socio-cultural construction of femininity, arguing that gender roles are not innate but socially imposed. By integrating Beauvoir's insights into the educational curriculum, young women are encouraged to critically analyze the external narratives shaping their identities and societal roles. The paper discusses key themes from *The Second Sex*, such as the myth of the "Eternal Feminine," the socialization of girls, and the critique of traditional gender expectations. It highlights classroom strategies, including reflective writing, media analysis, debates, and collaborative learning, which empower students to challenge conformity, build critical thinking skills, and redefine their roles in society. Through this approach, educators can foster a supportive environment that inspires young women to actively shape their identities and resist restrictive societal norms, ultimately contributing to a more equitable and self-aware generation.

**Keywords:** *The Second Sex*, adolescent education, female self-perception, social role awareness

## 1. Introduction

Adolescence represents a transformative stage in life, marked by the rapid development of personal identity, self-perception, and social role awareness. During these years, individuals begin to navigate their sense of self in relation to the world around them. For young women, this period can be particularly complex, as they grapple with societal expectations, ingrained gender norms, and the historical weight of subjugation that influences how they perceive themselves and their roles in society. The formative years of adolescence are crucial, not

just for the development of personal and social identities but also for challenging the stereotypes and limitations imposed by societal constructs. Simone de Beauvoir's seminal work, *The Second Sex*, provides a critical lens through which to examine the societal conditioning of women. Published in 1949, *The Second Sex* remains a cornerstone of feminist philosophy, dissecting the ways in which women have been historically constructed as the "Other" in a male-dominated world. Beauvoir's assertion that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" underscores the argument that femininity is not

an innate essence, but a societal creation molded through cultural norms and expectations. Her exploration of existential freedom—whereby individuals must actively define themselves rather than accept prescribed roles—resonates deeply in the context of adolescent education, offering a pathway for young women to reclaim their agency and redefine their identities beyond conventional boundaries. Incorporating the concepts of *The Second Sex* into educational curricula can profoundly impact young women's self-perception. By examining Beauvoir's insights, students can better understand how their perceptions of themselves are often influenced by external narratives rather than personal choice. This realization is vital for dismantling the internalized sexism that many young women face, which can limit their aspirations and self-worth. For instance, Beauvoir's discussion of the myths surrounding femininity—depicted through literature, religion, and popular culture—reveals how pervasive these narratives are in shaping societal expectations of women. Through critical analysis of these myths, adolescents can begin to question the authenticity of the roles they are expected to fulfill, fostering a self-perception grounded in individuality rather than societal pressures.

*The Second Sex* provides a framework for understanding the broader social roles that have historically defined and confined women. Beauvoir's detailed examination of women's positions in society—from the private sphere of home and family to the public realm of work and politics—illustrates the systemic nature of gender inequality. For adolescents, engaging with these ideas can spark a critical awareness of how societal roles are constructed and maintained, challenging them to envision alternative futures where their potential is not restricted by gendered expectations. By exploring chapters such as "The Woman in Love" and "The Independent Woman," young women can see both the historical struggles and the modern possibilities of defying traditional roles, inspiring them to advocate for their rights and autonomy. The integration of *The Second Sex* into adolescent education goes beyond mere academic study; it actively equips young women with the tools to resist conformity and embrace their full potential. Beauvoir's existential call to action—to take responsibility for one's own freedom and to reject the passive roles society

assigns—empowers students to engage in self-reflection and critique. It encourages them to build resilience against societal pressures, fostering a mindset of active self-creation. This philosophical grounding is particularly important in an educational setting, where the emphasis is often on conforming to predefined standards rather than exploring the complexities of one's identity. By creating a curriculum that incorporates Beauvoir's work, educators can cultivate a classroom environment that supports open dialogue and collaborative learning. This approach not only enhances students' understanding of the material but also builds a sense of solidarity among young women as they navigate similar challenges. Group discussions, reflective writing, and critical media analysis inspired by *The Second Sex* can help students connect Beauvoir's theories with their own experiences, making the abstract ideas of existentialism and feminism tangible and relevant. Ultimately, integrating *The Second Sex* into adolescent education offers a powerful strategy for enhancing female self-perception and social role awareness, guiding young women toward a more empowered and self-defined future.

## **2. Understanding Self-Perception Through *The Second Sex***

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is a foundational text that deeply examines the socio-cultural construction of femininity and its impact on women's self-perception. In the book, Beauvoir systematically deconstructs how societal, historical, and cultural forces have defined women as the "Other" in relation to men, creating a pervasive perception that women are secondary, inferior, or incomplete. This "Othering" has profound implications on how women view themselves, often leading to internalized beliefs that limit their sense of self and potential. For young women in their formative years, these concepts are particularly crucial as they navigate a complex landscape of self-discovery and societal expectations. Beauvoir's argument that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" challenges the essentialist view of gender, emphasizing that femininity is not an inherent quality but a role that society imposes through cultural norms, education, and socialization. In adolescent education, this idea can serve as a powerful framework for helping young women understand that their self-perception is not fixed

or predetermined but shaped by external influences. This awareness can be liberating, allowing students to critically assess the forces that shape their identities and empowering them to redefine themselves on their own terms.

To deepen students' understanding, educators can draw from specific content in *The Second Sex*, such as the chapter "Myths," where Beauvoir explores how myths and stereotypes about women are perpetuated through literature, religion, and popular culture. For instance, she critiques how figures like the Virgin Mary, the femme fatale, and the idealized housewife serve to confine women within narrowly defined roles. These mythological figures are not just abstract symbols; they actively influence societal expectations and, in turn, affect how young women perceive themselves. Classroom discussions can encourage students to analyze these myths critically, asking them to identify similar stereotypes in contemporary media, such as the "perfect influencer" or the "career superwoman," and reflect on how these narratives impact their self-image.

Beauvoir's exploration of the concept of "The Eternal Feminine" further deepens the analysis of self-perception. This concept refers to the idea that women possess inherent qualities—such as being nurturing, passive, or emotional—that define their nature and roles. By interrogating the "Eternal Feminine," educators can guide students to see how these perceived qualities are not inherent traits but are socially imposed standards that shape women's behavior and self-perception. Students can be encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of feeling pressured to conform to certain "feminine" ideals, fostering discussions about the personal impact of these societal constructs. Incorporating reflective activities such as journaling or personal essays can help students connect Beauvoir's ideas to their own lives. For example, an assignment might ask students to write about a time when they felt compelled to behave in a way that conformed to traditional gender expectations, exploring how these pressures affected their sense of self. This exercise allows students to critically engage with the material on a personal level, making abstract philosophical concepts tangible and relevant to their daily experiences.

Beauvoir also delves into the ways that young girls are socialized into gender roles from an early age, a theme that is particularly relevant

for adolescent education. In her analysis of childhood, Beauvoir notes that girls are often encouraged to be compliant, nurturing, and appearance-focused, while boys are pushed towards independence, competition, and achievement. These early socialization patterns contribute significantly to the development of self-perception, as they teach young women to see themselves in limited ways. Classroom discussions can help students identify how these early influences continue to shape their self-image, even in subtle or unconscious ways. Educators can further enrich this exploration by incorporating multimedia elements, such as analyzing advertisements, films, and social media content that perpetuate specific images of femininity. By dissecting these portrayals, students can draw parallels between Beauvoir's critiques and modern-day examples, reinforcing the idea that the struggle against restrictive gender norms is ongoing. This approach helps students see that their self-perception is continuously molded by the world around them, and by recognizing this, they gain the agency to challenge and reshape those influences.

Beauvoir's work provides a critical tool for young women to reclaim their self-perception from societal constraints. Through discussions, reflective writing, and critical media analysis, students can deconstruct the myths and stereotypes that have historically defined women, paving the way for a more authentic and self-determined identity. By integrating *The Second Sex* into adolescent education, educators can empower young women to not only understand but also actively reshape their self-perception, fostering a generation that views itself through its own lens rather than the distorted mirror of societal expectations.

### 3. Promoting Social Role Awareness

Social role awareness is a crucial aspect of adolescent education, particularly for young women, as it involves understanding how societal structures define and enforce gender roles. In *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir meticulously analyzes the various social roles assigned to women, such as mother, wife, and caretaker, and critiques how these roles have historically been used to confine women's identities and limit their potential. By incorporating these discussions into education, educators can help students grasp the historical and cultural forces that shape their lives, empowering them to challenge traditional roles

and imagine new possibilities for their futures.

Beauvoir's examination of the socially constructed roles of women is rooted in the concept of "immanence" versus "transcendence," where she argues that women have been historically confined to roles of immanence—being and existing within the boundaries set by men and society—while men are allowed to pursue transcendence—acting, creating, and defining themselves independently. This dichotomy underpins much of the social conditioning that young women face, as they are often encouraged to prioritize caregiving, emotional labor, and domestic responsibilities over personal ambition and self-actualization. Integrating this concept into classroom discussions can provide students with a critical framework to understand why certain roles feel imposed upon them and encourage them to strive for transcendence in their own lives.

Educators can delve into specific chapters of *The Second Sex*, such as "The Married Woman" and "The Mother," where Beauvoir explores how societal expectations shape women's experiences in these roles. For instance, in "The Married Woman," Beauvoir critiques the institution of marriage as a tool of patriarchal control that often limits women's independence and enforces a subordinate role. By analyzing these texts, students can explore how these roles have evolved and question the extent to which they remain relevant or oppressive today. Role-playing activities based on these scenarios can be particularly effective, allowing students to step into different perspectives and understand the historical pressures that have shaped women's roles.

For example, students can participate in debates that juxtapose traditional views of marriage and motherhood against modern feminist interpretations that advocate for equality and shared responsibilities. This approach not only encourages critical thinking but also allows students to articulate their own beliefs and challenge conventional wisdom. By engaging with Beauvoir's arguments, students can better understand how societal norms are not static but are constructed, maintained, and, importantly, can be dismantled. This realization fosters a sense of agency, empowering young women to envision alternative roles for themselves that defy traditional limitations.

In addition to classroom activities, educators can

contextualize Beauvoir's critiques by examining contemporary examples of women breaking free from traditional roles. Sections such as "The Independent Woman" highlight women who seek to define themselves outside of marriage, motherhood, or subservient positions. This can be linked to modern-day figures such as women in leadership, politics, or non-traditional careers, illustrating how the struggle for autonomy continues. Discussions can focus on how societal expectations still attempt to pull independent women back into traditional roles, often through media portrayals that emphasize their relationship status, appearance, or maternal instincts over their professional achievements.

Students can analyze current media, films, and advertisements that continue to reinforce or challenge traditional roles. For instance, examining how female leaders are depicted in news outlets compared to their male counterparts can reveal persistent biases that suggest women should prioritize family over career or adhere to certain behavioral norms. This critical engagement helps students identify ongoing societal barriers and recognize the importance of advocating for a broader range of acceptable roles for women.

Moreover, examining Beauvoir's treatment of economic independence as a key factor in breaking free from traditional roles provides a concrete basis for discussions on the importance of financial autonomy. *The Second Sex* argues that economic dependence on men is a primary factor that keeps women tethered to roles that limit their freedom. Educators can use this argument to introduce practical discussions about career choices, financial literacy, and the value of economic independence for young women. Classroom exercises might include budgeting workshops, career planning, or guest speakers from diverse professions who can provide real-world insights into achieving independence.

By engaging with these themes, students not only gain historical perspective but also practical tools to navigate their own futures. They learn to question the validity of societal expectations and to seek roles that align with their personal values and ambitions rather than simply conforming to traditional norms. This approach nurtures a mindset of possibility, where young women feel empowered to define their own paths and contribute to reshaping societal roles.



In conclusion, *The Second Sex* serves as a powerful tool in promoting social role awareness among young women. By critically examining the roles that have historically confined women, Beauvoir's work encourages students to question, challenge, and redefine what it means to be a woman in today's world. Through role-playing, debates, and the analysis of contemporary examples, educators can create a learning environment that fosters not only awareness but also active resistance to restrictive societal norms. This educational approach equips young women with the confidence and critical insight to navigate their roles in society with agency and ambition, paving the way for a future where their potential is not defined by gender but by their own choices.

#### **4. Building Critical Thinking and Resistance to Conformity**

Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* is not only a critique of the societal structures that confine women but also a call to action for individuals to reclaim their freedom and authenticity. Central to Beauvoir's philosophy is the concept of existential freedom, which challenges the idea that individuals, particularly women, must accept predefined roles imposed by society. Instead, Beauvoir argues that every person has the agency to shape their own identity, an idea that can be particularly transformative for adolescents navigating the pressures of conformity. By incorporating these existential themes into education, educators can foster critical thinking and empower young women to resist the passive roles that society often assigns them. Beauvoir's declaration that "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" encapsulates the process by which gender is socially constructed rather than biologically determined. This idea is crucial in developing critical thinking among young women, as it encourages them to reflect on how their identities are influenced by societal expectations rather than personal choice. Educators can integrate this concept into the classroom through reflective writing assignments and discussions that challenge students to analyze their own experiences. For example, students can be prompted to write about moments when they felt pressured to conform to traditional gender roles and how these experiences impacted their self-perception. This exercise not only fosters self-awareness but also helps students recognize the external forces shaping

their identities, prompting them to question and resist these pressures.

To deepen this exploration, educators can draw on specific sections of *The Second Sex*, such as the chapter "The Girl," where Beauvoir discusses the socialization of young girls and the subtle ways they are conditioned to embody feminine roles. Beauvoir critiques the ways in which girls are taught to be passive, modest, and nurturing from a young age, often at the expense of their independence and self-expression. By analyzing these themes, students can better understand how societal conditioning operates and begin to question the validity of these norms. Classroom discussions can be structured around critical questions like, "How does society define femininity, and how does this definition limit women's choices?" or "In what ways have you been encouraged to conform to specific gender roles, and how have you responded?" Engaging students in debates and role-playing activities that simulate scenarios where they must navigate societal pressures can further enhance their critical thinking skills. For example, students can debate topics such as "Should women be expected to prioritize family over career?" or "Is beauty a requirement for women's success in society?" These debates encourage students to articulate their thoughts, challenge prevailing narratives, and consider alternative perspectives. By defending their positions, students practice resisting conformity and develop the confidence to advocate for their beliefs, reinforcing Beauvoir's message of existential freedom.

Beauvoir's exploration of the concept of bad faith—where individuals deceive themselves into accepting societal roles to avoid the anxiety of freedom—can also be a powerful tool in the classroom. Students can be introduced to the idea of bad faith through case studies or literature that depict characters who conform to societal norms at the expense of their true desires. For instance, analyzing characters from novels or films who struggle with gender expectations allows students to see how internalizing societal pressures can lead to personal dissatisfaction. Reflective questions such as "Have you ever made a choice because it was expected of you rather than what you truly wanted?" can prompt students to consider the impact of bad faith on their own lives and encourage them to make more authentic choices. Integrating media analysis into the curriculum

can help students critically assess how conformity is perpetuated in popular culture. Beauvoir's critique of the "eternal feminine" can be linked to modern media portrayals that continue to uphold traditional gender roles. Assignments that involve analyzing advertisements, social media influencers, or television shows can reveal how contemporary culture still pressures women to conform to specific images and behaviors. For example, students can dissect how beauty standards are enforced through advertising or how female characters are often depicted in supporting rather than leading roles. This critical engagement teaches students to view media with a discerning eye, recognizing the subtle ways in which conformity is encouraged.

Beauvoir's emphasis on creating one's essence also aligns with the pedagogical approach of encouraging students to explore diverse career paths and life choices. Educators can introduce projects where students research women who have defied traditional roles, such as female scientists, entrepreneurs, or activists. By studying the lives of women who have broken barriers, students gain tangible examples of how resisting conformity can lead to significant achievements. These role models provide powerful counter-narratives to the limiting societal expectations that students may encounter, reinforcing the idea that they are not confined to any predefined path. Through the integration of Beauvoir's existential philosophy, educators can create a classroom environment that not only promotes critical thinking but also fosters resilience against societal pressures. By encouraging young women to critically assess the influences on their identity and empowering them to define themselves on their own terms, education becomes a transformative tool in the fight against conformity. Beauvoir's work serves as a reminder that while society may impose expectations, each individual has the freedom—and the responsibility—to actively shape their own destiny. This message is invaluable in adolescent education, where the development of a strong, independent sense of self can lay the foundation for a lifetime of authenticity and resistance to conformity.

## **5. Creating a Collaborative Learning Environment**

Incorporating Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* into adolescent education requires more than just individual study; it necessitates a

collaborative learning environment where students can explore, debate, and support each other in questioning societal norms. A collaborative approach fosters a safe space for young women to express their thoughts, share personal experiences, and critically examine the social constructs that influence their identities. Through group work, peer discussions, and shared analysis of Beauvoir's text, students can build a sense of solidarity and mutual understanding, recognizing that their challenges with identity and social roles are not unique but are part of a broader societal issue. To create this environment, educators can design group projects that directly engage students with the key themes of *The Second Sex*. For instance, Beauvoir's analysis of gender roles and societal expectations can be explored through collaborative media analysis projects. Students can work in teams to investigate how gender is portrayed in different forms of media, such as advertising, movies, television shows, and social media. By applying Beauvoir's framework to these analyses, students can critically assess how contemporary media either reinforces or challenges traditional female roles. For example, groups might examine how advertisements often depict women in domestic or sexualized roles, perpetuating outdated stereotypes that Beauvoir critiqued, or how some modern media has begun to depict women in more empowered, independent positions.

Through collaborative presentations or multimedia projects, students can showcase their findings, highlighting specific examples that reflect Beauvoir's critiques of gender representation. These projects can involve creating video essays, digital collages, or interactive media displays that juxtapose traditional depictions of women with more progressive portrayals. This process not only deepens their understanding of the material but also empowers them to contribute actively to reshaping societal narratives about gender. By working together, students can see firsthand how their collective voice can challenge and redefine the messages that society sends about what it means to be a woman. Peer discussions are another vital component of a collaborative learning environment. Facilitating open, structured discussions around the themes in *The Second Sex* allows students to share their interpretations and connect Beauvoir's ideas with their personal experiences. For instance,

educators can initiate discussions on chapters such as “The Woman in Love” or “The Independent Woman,” where students can reflect on how societal expectations of relationships and independence impact their own lives. These discussions can be guided by questions like, “How do societal expectations shape your views on love and independence?” or “Can you identify moments when you felt pressured to conform to gender norms, and how did you navigate those situations?” To further deepen these discussions, educators can employ techniques like the Socratic Seminar, where students take turns leading the conversation, posing questions, and responding to their peers’ insights. This method encourages active listening, critical thinking, and the respectful exchange of diverse viewpoints. By collaboratively unpacking complex themes, students gain a more nuanced understanding of how societal structures impact their perceptions and decisions, fostering a deeper awareness of the collective nature of their struggles.

Collaborative reading and analysis of *The Second Sex* can also play a crucial role in building a supportive learning community. Students can work in small groups to read and analyze specific passages, discussing the relevance of Beauvoir’s arguments to their own experiences. For instance, they can dissect Beauvoir’s critique of the “Eternal Feminine” and relate it to modern-day pressures to adhere to certain beauty standards or behavioral norms. Group members can share how these societal expectations have manifested in their lives, creating a space for mutual support and shared learning. Educators can also incorporate peer feedback sessions, where students present their interpretations of Beauvoir’s work and receive constructive input from their classmates. This approach not only fosters collaboration but also enhances students’ ability to articulate their ideas and engage in critical dialogue. Peer feedback sessions can be structured to emphasize positive reinforcement and constructive criticism, helping students refine their arguments and develop greater confidence in expressing their thoughts.

Beyond academic activities, creating a collaborative learning environment involves cultivating a classroom culture of respect, inclusivity, and openness. Educators should encourage students to voice their perspectives without fear of judgment, emphasizing that

there are no right or wrong answers when exploring complex issues like gender and identity. This supportive atmosphere helps students feel more comfortable engaging with challenging content and sharing their personal reflections, knowing that their contributions are valued. Educators can also integrate collaborative service-learning projects that connect Beauvoir’s philosophical insights to real-world action. For example, students might partner with local organizations that focus on women’s rights, gender equality, or empowerment initiatives. These projects can involve conducting workshops, creating awareness campaigns, or participating in community outreach programs that address the themes discussed in *The Second Sex*. By working together on these projects, students can apply their learning in meaningful ways, fostering a sense of agency and collective impact.

Overall, fostering a collaborative learning environment grounded in the study of *The Second Sex* enables young women to not only understand but also actively engage with the societal forces that shape their lives. By working together, students learn that they are not alone in their experiences and that through dialogue, mutual support, and collective action, they can challenge and redefine the norms that have historically constrained them. This approach not only deepens their academic engagement with Beauvoir’s work but also equips them with the confidence and critical skills necessary to navigate and transform their social roles in a complex and evolving world.

## 6. Conclusion

Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* remains a groundbreaking work that dissects the cultural, historical, and existential factors shaping women’s lives, providing an essential framework for adolescent education. By integrating Beauvoir’s critical insights into the classroom, educators can significantly enhance female self-perception and social role awareness among young women, empowering them to confront and redefine the societal constructs that often confine them. This approach equips students with the tools to critically evaluate the narratives that shape their identities and encourages them to develop a self-perception grounded in personal authenticity rather than societal dictates. Beauvoir’s argument that femininity is not an inherent essence but a socially constructed identity offers a

transformative perspective for young women. Through exploring themes such as the myth of the “Eternal Feminine,” the socialization of girls, and the critique of traditional gender roles, students can gain a deeper understanding of how societal expectations have historically limited women’s potential. Classroom activities that engage students in reflective writing, media analysis, and group discussions based on *The Second Sex* allow them to connect these abstract philosophical ideas with their own lived experiences, fostering a sense of agency and self-awareness. This process of critical reflection helps students recognize the pervasive impact of cultural norms on their self-perception and empowers them to actively shape their identities.

Beauvoir’s exploration of social roles—such as wife, mother, and the independent woman—provides a historical lens through which students can examine the evolution and persistence of gender norms. By understanding how these roles have been used to confine women, students are encouraged to challenge the status quo and imagine new possibilities for themselves. This awareness fosters a proactive mindset, motivating young women to pursue paths that align with their ambitions rather than conforming to traditional expectations. Role-playing exercises, debates, and collaborative projects enable students to engage with these themes in a dynamic and participatory way, enhancing their ability to critically assess and resist societal pressures.

Building critical thinking skills is central to fostering resistance to conformity, and Beauvoir’s existential philosophy serves as a powerful tool in this regard. By emphasizing the importance of existential freedom and the responsibility each individual has to define their own essence, *The Second Sex* inspires students to question the passive acceptance of societal roles. Through activities that promote critical engagement—such as analyzing the concept of bad faith, reflecting on personal experiences of conformity, and examining media portrayals of gender—students learn to challenge the external influences that shape their decisions. This approach nurtures a sense of resilience and empowers young women to resist societal pressures, advocating for their autonomy and authentic self-expression.

Creating a collaborative learning environment further amplifies the impact of Beauvoir’s work

in adolescent education. By fostering a space where students can openly discuss, debate, and reflect on the themes of *The Second Sex*, educators cultivate a sense of solidarity and mutual support among young women. Collaborative projects, peer feedback sessions, and group discussions enable students to learn from one another’s perspectives, reinforcing the idea that their struggles with identity and societal expectations are not isolated but part of a shared experience. This collective approach not only deepens students’ engagement with the material but also builds a supportive community where young women feel empowered to voice their ideas and advocate for change.

Ultimately, integrating *The Second Sex* into adolescent education provides young women with a critical framework to navigate their identities and social roles with greater awareness, confidence, and agency. Beauvoir’s insights challenge students to see beyond the constraints of traditional gender norms and to envision a future where their potential is not limited by societal expectations. By equipping young women with the skills to critically assess, question, and redefine the narratives that shape their lives, educators play a crucial role in fostering a generation of individuals who are empowered to embrace their full potential as independent, active participants in society. This educational approach, rooted in the themes of *The Second Sex*, not only enriches students’ understanding of their historical context but also inspires them to take charge of their own narratives, reshaping the world around them in the process.

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