

between the two sexes. If we look back in history, women have always been seen as second class humans. Although this thought is slowly changing, it is hard to change a collective consciousness that has been with humans in all the history of humanity. Simone DeBeauvoir in her writing Women as Other, does an amazing job explaining how men and women are different and why oppression occurs. And similarly, Charlotte Perkins Gilman in The Yellow Wallpaper provides us with a perfect example of gender roles in an oppressive time.

“Humanity is male, and man defines woman,” DeBeauvoir makes the distinction between men and women very clear in the first pages of her writing. At some point, she explains the duality between the Self and the Other, and how for many centuries, men have been the Subject, while women have been placed as the Other. But this duality is not something women can just snap out of it. Unlike racial minority groups, women are part of half the human population. So why not speak up and claim their place? Because this is a special type of oppression, where both parts are essential for human biology. Gilman provides us with the perfect example of the Self and the Other duality, where our female character’s name is not even mentioned throughout the reading. The protagonist describes her life and how she believes she is sick. The relationship between John and the protagonist is very oppressive, it’s like her opinion doesn’t count, and John is always right. But even though she feels sick, she still doesn’t understand that she is being oppressed, and that is because the collective consciousness at that time views oppression as normal, “Personally, I disagree with their ideas. [. . .] But what is one to do?”

Our society is based on roles, that is how humans were able to evolve in the past centuries. Unfortunately, the gender role is one of the most oppressive, but yet essential to human evolution. Gilman’s narrative accordingly fits DeBeauvoir’s essay, where the male oppression is

have started to slowly reclaim power, the collective consciousness is still very strong, but with open-mindedness, it is very possible that in the future men and women will be able to live together not in each other's shadow, but as truly equal members of society.