

The awakening by kate chopin

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Mental State: How Stable are the Twentieth Century Characters? How are people measured? People are measured in several different ways: How they look, what they wear, what they eat, who they associate with, but most importantly people are judged by what they do.

Throughout literature characters have been seen doing rather peculiar things that reflect the real life actions of people in the world. Up until the twentieth century no one quite understood what drove people to do such insane things or act in a manner that wasn't socially acceptable. It was only a slight understanding of the mental state of people that came about but as the knowledge increased people are constantly looking back on literature to find that the characters' actions make more sense when bringing to light that they were mentally unstable. One novel that shows evidence of the character being mentally unstable is *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. If the book is read through thoroughly signs of depression and bipolar disorder can be found in the character's personality. In Kate Chopin's, *The Awakening* the main character Edna Pontellier struggles to fit in and be a cheerful wife amongst her husband's friends because she is suffering from depression and bipolar disorder.

For women of her time it is difficult to live with these conditions because they did not know of these disorders or what to do to correct them. Having depression results from being bipolar because the bipolar disorder is, " a mood disorder in which the person alternates between hopelessness and lethargy of depression and the overexcited state of mania. (Formally called manic-depressive disorder) (Myers, 659). Edna could easily be considered someone with bipolar disorder; she gets upset over the little things instead

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of something huge. When Mr. Pontellier, her husband, informs Edna that their son, Raoul, had a fever she began crying after she checked on him and he husband went to sleep.

Edna “ could not tell why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life” (Chopin, 8). Later on in the novel it is suggested that Edna is bipolar, or has had a problem with living as one person even as a child, “[a]t a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions” (Chopin, 14). Edna seems to have “ two contradictory impulses which compel[] her” (Chopin 14). This is a reoccurring theme that Edna seems to have two personalities, two different emotions, and even has two different lovers who are not her husband. When her father comes to visit her she enjoys his company and her mood completely changes from morbid to lively and eccentric.

But deep down Edna knows that it won't last so she makes the most of it. When she was with her father, “ she discovered that he interested her, though she realized that he might not interest her long; and for the first time in her life she felt as if she were thoroughly acquainted with him (Chopin, 66). It seems like a good thing and healthy for Edna to be with her father but it unintentionally hides her depression from the doctor when he comes to dinner to secretly observe Edna for Mr. Pontellier. If her depression was caught than there might have been a chance that she would still be alive and never have commit suicide. Edna seems to have realized this herself as one of her last thoughts before she dies was, “ Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would

have understood if she had seen him—but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone” (Chopin, 109).

Edna not only treats her father in the “ I want to be with you, I want to be with you, I don’t want to be with you, and I hate you” phase but she seems to treat all the men in her life like this. When Mr. Pontellier is going away she waits on him hand and foot; then when he leaves she feels this overwhelming sense of independence and eventually cheats on him. When Edna is with Arabin she wants to be with him and then doesn’t when she is with him she regrets being with him but when she sends him home she wishes that he might have stayed later. Edna’s emotions are much more complicated than a woman who is on her period or is ridden with hormones because she is pregnant.

At one point her emotions are explained and the character of Edna begins to make a little more sense: There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner, fashioned to dream in. and she found it good to dream and be alone and unmolested.

There were days when she were unhappy, she did not know why,—when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; and when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. She could not work on such

a day, nor weave fantasies to stir her pulses and warm her blood. (Chopin, 56) Every single word screams, “ Help! I’m bipolar!” but no one seems to help her aside from her husband who truly loves her and doesn’t just have an overwhelming feel of lust when he looks at her. This passage also suggests that she is suicidal, depression being the number one cause of suicide, makes it evident that Edna Pontellier is bipolar. If Edna Pontellier is not bipolar, it can very be easily be proven that she is just depressed. When someone is depressed it is a, “ mood disorder in which a person experiences, in the absence of drugs or medical condition, two or more weeks of significantly depressed moods, feelings of worthlessness, and diminished interest or pleasure in most activities” (Myers, 659).

It seems evident that Edna is depressed and there are several reasons as to why she would be depressed. Edna is socially repressed and sexually suppressed as well. She is socially repressed and sexually suppressed because she has married into a world in which she is not familiar with. The Creole women love to gossip about flirting and sex but because Edna was raised in a Presbyterian house hold where sex is something shameful to speak of and even though it went against everything she was taught to believe in, “[s]he was growing accustomed to like shocks, but she could not keep the mounting color back from her cheeks” (Chopin, 11). The Creole people also spoke in French quite often, which was something, Edna had little understanding in.

The Creole people did not refer to Edna as Madame Pontellier but as Mrs. Pontellier which goes to separate her from the rest of the Creoles even more than before. Another reason why Edna would be depressed is the fact that <https://assignbuster.com/the-awakening-by-kate-chopin-essay-samples/>

she did not marry Mr. Pontellier because she loved him but because her parents did not approve of her marrying a catholic. It did not matter to her if he was catholic because she had no love for her religion in fact when she was younger she had been, “ running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by [her] father that chills [her] yet to think of” (Chopin, 17).

She also married him because it's what's expected of women to do to get married and have children. Even though Edna had done both of these things she did not want to and is stuck doing what is expected of her even if she had, “ so little interest in” doing them (Chopin, 7). What's more, even though she is expected to carry out motherly duties such as making sure the children are healthy, she neglects them and she neglects her duties of being a wife, such as staying home once a week to take calls from visitors. When people are depressed and show no interests in things that happen throughout everyday life the next thing to suspect of them is suicide. There are several signs throughout the novel foreshadowing that Edna will not only kill herself but how it will happen.

When Edna is at the beach with Robert she realizes at one point that she shouldn't be there with him and even though she tried to resist the urge to go she claims that, “ the voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude the soul; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace” (Chopin, 14). She also mentions a day dream about swimming on and on forever and never

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stopping just to get away from it all and feel free. This is the moment when it is clear that Edna will drown herself probably towards the end of the book.

Later on, aside from her apparent depression, there is another sign that she is about to commit suicide, when Edna returns home from witnessing Madame Ratignolle's childbirth she finds that Robert has left her leaving a note that said, " I love you. Good-by—because I love you" (Chopin, 106). The immediate thought that follows is; someone is going to commit suicide. But who could it be? Is it going to be Robert because he is the one who said good bye? Or will it be Edna because she is so unstable? The logical answer is Edna, which suspicions are confirmed once Edna is found naked on the beach about to go for a swim. Even as she walked down to the beach the symbolism of a bird foreshadows Edna's end: " A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water" (Chopin, 108).

As she was going along with her unconscious plan to commit suicide her thoughts raced around her head trying to give reasons as to why she should live and that she will be able to go on and continue her life like nothing had ever happened between her and Robert. Like her other obsessions this one would fade too. The children may drain her from time to time but that's the same for every relationship between parents and children and she would eventually get over it as they grew older. What does it matter if she did not love her husband? Most women did not and at least he adored her and gives her everything she asks for and is kind to her; that's a lot more than most relationships have. Although, these were all good reasons to stay alive and keep moving on the overwhelming need to get away from it all over powered <https://assignbuster.com/the-awakening-by-kate-chopin-essay-samples/>

her logic. It seems silly for her to commit suicide because the man that she claims to love doesn't want to be with her.

Especially because it is more likely lust than just love but there is a possibility that Edna feels companionate love which is, " the deep affectionate attachment we feel for those with whom our lives are intertwined" (Myers, 763). Edna's desire to escape is more than just pain from losing a loved one; it is the overwhelming depression she feels everyday that consumes her and crushes her. It is easier to just get tired and give up than to get up and keep fighting against the depression. Mental disorders are a serious thing and they are not to be taken lightly. They can consume a person whole and change them from what they once were into something unrecognizable and possibly threatening to themselves and others.

Unfortunately, for Edna when Kate Chopin wrote *The Awakening* drugs and medical attentions weren't available for her condition, mostly because bipolar disorder and depression weren't discovered yet either. Now there are cures that can help balance the chemicals found in the brain that cause depression and bipolar disorder. There are many other mental disorders that exist in this world and they can generally be picked out if the signs are noticed. People shouldn't hesitate to get help if they realize that there is something off about them and it is nothing to be ashamed of. Most times if someone does have a mental disorder he or she may not recognize that something is wrong with himself or herself so it is up to the people around them to get them help.

To his day there are still literary works being found with characters that have mental disabilities, proving that they have been around for years and not just something that has developed recently. Works Cited Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. A Norton Critical Edition. New York: Norton & Company Ink. 1994.

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