

The Strongest of Wings Soar in the Air

**- A Phenomenological Interpretation of Women's Freedom in
Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and Other Short Stories and
their Relevance in The English Classroom**

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Abstract

For this essay, analyses have been conducted on Kate Chopin's (1850-1904) novel *The Awakening* (1899) and short stories "The Storm" (1898), "The Story of an Hour" (1894), and "A Respectable Woman" (1894). This essay aims to demonstrate that Kate Chopin highlights the unity of body and consciousness as important for the female protagonists to obtain freedom. For oppressed women in patriarchal societies, freedom and autonomy have become increasingly significant over the past hundred years, as also portrayed in works of literature such as those by Chopin. Phenomenology studies the body and consciousness, and their relation to the first-hand experiences. This essay utilizes phenomenology to illustrate the significance of body and consciousness in the process to obtain freedom. This essay concludes that, in Chopin's writing about women's lived experiences, the body and consciousness can achieve freedom when they are united. The degree of freedom varies between the female protagonists, but they prove that even the experience of momentary freedom holds value. This essay also argues that Chopin's literary works are relevant in education at upper secondary school. By analyzing literary works in relation to gender, students can examine the portrayal of stereotypes and also discuss similarities and differences in connection to their own lived experiences.

Key words: *Gender; Kate Chopin; body; consciousness; freedom; classroom*

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1. Introduction

Challenging gender roles requires the force and strength of the whole self. Discussions continuously emerge regarding the respective meanings of a “woman” or a “man”, as well as perceptions of “masculine” and “feminine” attributes, and these understandings can bolster or challenge stereotypes. Challenging gender stereotypes is of particular concern to women, who have been oppressed by patriarchal systems for hundreds of years. Gender stereotypes and norms affect people differently, depending on the cultural context and the susceptibility to conform to or rebel against societal values regarding gender. The ability to defy stereotypes in order to obtain freedom from gendered oppression can involve our body and consciousness. The relationship between body and consciousness is central within phenomenology, connecting this relationship to lived experiences. While the consciousness concerns our awareness of the surroundings, the body allows someone the ability to act in order to achieve something such as the right for autonomy, which has been, and still is, something that women fight for in real-life societies.

Adolescents in upper secondary school can examine the relationship between the body and consciousness, and the ability for women to obtain freedom, as portrayed in literature. Not all literary works focus on real-life issues, however, some works of literature reflect real-life societies and struggles, such as women challenging gender roles in contemporary societies, in diverse ways. These types of literary works allow students to gain knowledge about other people’s living conditions. By examining the relationship between the body, consciousness and freedom, students at upper secondary school can practice critical analysis of this relationship as portrayed in a literary work, as well as the connections to today’s society. While there are classic literary works in English that depict gender stereotype issues such as Charlotte Brontë’s *Jane Eyre* and Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women*, this essay will analyze literary works by the American author Kate Chopin (1850-1904), namely the novel *The Awakening* and four of her short stories. The essay aims to illustrate that Kate Chopin depicts the unity of body and consciousness as a means for women to obtain freedom and, thereafter, to argue that her literary works are relevant to education at upper secondary school in relation to discussing the topic of gender.

The Awakening is the literary work that will be the focal point of this essay. The novel concerns Edna Pontellier, a woman who challenges her social and cultural circumstances in order to live a life as a free woman. She challenges her social role as a mother-woman¹, leading to her exploration of the self and a lifestyle that was previously unfamiliar to her due to oppression. While she obtains momentary

¹ Chopin uses the term “mother-woman” in *The Awakening*, referring to a woman who surrenders herself to her husband and children (Smith and Wilhelm 107).

freedom during the novel, she commits suicide at the end, discontinuing her lived experience as a free woman.

Gender roles that have existed throughout history still remain, despite the question of gender equality being important today. The global study published this year in 2022, “The Levers of Change: Gender Equality Attitudes Study 2022” presents the opinions of men and women in twenty countries concerning their views on questions that are connected with gender. Of interest for this essay, the average percentage of men and women who think that women should spend less of their time working and more time taking care of their families are 49% (UN Women 26; figure 16). However, the average percentage in Sweden is lower, with 27,6% of men and women agreeing to the aforementioned statement (UN Women 139). As for the United States of America, the number is similar to Sweden wherein the average percentage is 27,2% (UN Women 151). These latter percentages are surprisingly high for both countries, especially since the question of gender equality has become increasingly more topical in these countries, over the course of about a hundred years. My interpretation of this study by UN Women from a phenomenological perspective is that the body and consciousness’ perceptions of, for example, gender roles and expectations, depend on location and the lived experience.

In relation to the upcoming analyses of Chopin’s literary works, it is important to remember that the female protagonists live in patriarchal societies. As the essay will display, Chopin and her female protagonists live during a time when women were preferred to be submissive, nurturing and that their lives outside the household were limited. The female protagonists in Chopin’s literary works challenge patriarchal society in their own ways; they challenge the traditional idea of a “feminine” woman. However, “femininity”, and “masculinity”, are broad concepts that are also dependent on culture, sexuality, location, class etcetera. In other words, both of these terms are not strictly connected to the biological sex. In Chopin’s literary works, the traditional concept does affect the characters’ perceptions of how a “woman” and a ”man” are supposed to act, as well as the actions that would be considered abnormal, according to patriarchal values.

1.1. Teaching Gender Through Literature in Upper Secondary School

The question of gender is valid to discuss in school. According to the *Swedish National Agency for Education* (Skolverket), school should encourage students to express themselves, but it is also important to show respect for one another (Curriculum for upper secondary school 10). School is supposed to be a safe place for students, as well as an establishment where they learn about several topics that are considered necessary outside of school, and for the students’ future. The teacher should create a space for the students to discuss and analyze differences and their respective consequences (Curriculum for

upper secondary school 11), where the students might gain new knowledge as well as new perspectives on a certain topic, such as gender.

While all students at upper secondary school can learn more about gender and its effects on society, practical questions concern what material to use, and how the students should interact with the selected material. The Swedish National Agency for Education states that students who attend English classes are supposed to gain knowledge about societal issues that exist in different contexts where the English language is spoken. To be specific, the didactic content of this essay will mainly be directed toward teaching students that partake in the English 7-course, which is more theoretical in comparison to English 5 and 6. As stated in the section *Content of communication*, the core content in the English 7-course is supposed to cover “[t]heoretical and complex subject areas” which also involve “cultural expressions in modern times and historically; such as literary periods” (English syllabus for upper secondary school 11). As it pertains to the English classroom, literature can be used as a means to teach the students about gender roles as portrayed in fiction. In addition, the teacher can provide the students with the historical context concerning a literary work, especially if that work of literature reflects aspects of contemporary history.

1.2. Historical Background: Louisiana in the late 1800s

When analyzing a literary work by Kate Chopin, it is relevant to highlight the local context. Kate Chopin has sometimes been considered to be a “local color” author. Local color writers first appeared in American literature post-Civil War (1861-1865), and their writing connected to specific regions to capture the essence and certain features of that place (Britannica *local color*). However, as presented in Thomas L. Morgan’s article “Criticizing Local Color: Innovative Conformity in Kate Chopin’s Short Fiction”, local color writers did not receive the same status as realist authors who were usually white urban men. Eric Sundquist remarks the role on power structures in American literature. Sundquist distinguishes “realists” as authors that depict everyday life and prejudices realistically, while “regionalists”, also known as local color writers, usually consisted of people of color as well as women (Morgan 138). Due to an implicit hierarchy, short stories were associated with local color, while novels connected more to realism (Morgan 138). Although Chopin wrote two novels in her lifetime, most of her literary works are short stories. She enjoyed some success as a local color writer, but her literary works were long considered as less valuable to American literature.

Chopin’s literary works are set in Louisiana during the second half of the nineteenth century. Louisianan culture consisted of different influences, that also had a particular effect on women. Pamela Knights provides some context to Kate Chopin and nineteenth century Louisiana in the Appendix of the book *The Awakening and Other Stories*. As addressed in the book, Creoles originally referred to

Louisianans whose ancestors were the early settlers in this state. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Creoles were exclusively described as white descendants from France and Spain in white New Orleans society (Knight 351). Scholars Amy C. Smith and Julie Wilhelm present in their article “Care and Autonomy in *The Awakening* and Seo’s ‘Though Time Goes By’ “ that the French language and culture had become dominant in Creole Louisiana by the nineteenth century. However, Anglo-American influences started to become established, leading both Creole and Anglo-American cultures to shape Louisianan societies (Smith and Wilhelm 107). Similar to contemporary values for women, Louisianan culture valued women primarily as mothers. According to author William Head Coleman, a woman’s “motherly virtue is her cardinal virtue” (Coleman 1885; qtd. in Knights 352), and her children were thought to be the result of her sensibility. As for the Anglo-American influences, they also believed that women should dedicate themselves to motherhood and marriage.

According to Smith and Wilhelm, women in the environments that Chopin wrote about could not claim individual freedom. The ideology of *liberal individualism*, which emphasizes an individual person’s rights, as well as the right to claim autonomy were prominent ideas at the time (Smith and Wilhelm 104). Western liberalism highlights the possibility of reaching moral agency and autonomy when a person rejects the social circumstances, which would be frowned upon if that person was a mother-woman (Smith and Wilhelm 107). If a mother-woman rejected her social role, she would be characterized as abnormal.

As for the legal system, the distinctions between men and women are clear in the “Civil Code of the State of Louisiana 1870”. In Book I “Of Persons”, the application of certain laws differs according to the sexes and whether they are married or not. Firstly, the differences are determined by the respective sex’s “civic, social and political rights” (Louisiana Legislature 6), as stated under Title I “Of the distinction of Persons”. Under the same title, the law stated that men could engage in all types of work unless they were considered disqualified. Meanwhile, the legal system limited women to engagements that the judge considered the latter to be capable of performing (6).

As for marriages, the spouses were expected to be faithful and take care of each other. The wife was obligated to follow her husband wherever he desired, while the husband ought to provide his wife with the convenient necessities for their lifestyle, as stated under Title IV “Of Husband and Wife” (19). Furthermore, this civil code allowed divorces, wherein both spouses could file for separation. If they had children during the marriage, they were temporarily placed in the father’s custody during the divorce hearings until a verdict was reached. If neither husband nor wife committed adultery, the children would primarily be placed in the custody of the party that filed for the divorce after the hearings. However, the judge could grant custody to the other party if he perceived that the arrangements were more preferable to the children (26), stated under Title V “Of Separation from Bed and Board and of Divorce”.

2. Literature Review

Kate Chopin's literary works have been widely researched in relation to the subjects of race, gender and identity for many decades since her writing was "rediscovered" in the 1960s. While *The Awakening* is the focus of this essay, her novels and short stories explore highly topical subjects, all of which are relevant subjects in society and education today. Because this essay examines how the female protagonists challenge their social and cultural expectations in order to obtain freedom, I account below for recent research on Chopin's literary works in relation to gender, identity and resistance.

2.1. Creating an Identity

The process of creating an identity is central in Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*. In the journal article "Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*", philosopher Peter Ramos connects gender and identity to Edna's suicide. Ramos states that Edna differs in comparison to other female characters in the novel such as Madame Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz regarding their approaches to their respective identities. He believes that the latter two manages to transform their gender identities instead of distancing themselves from their identities (Ramos 148). However, such a transformation requires the person to confront her position and take responsibility regarding the potential consequences that her actions might have. According to Ramos, Edna lacks this form of insight that she can possess her social identity as a mother-woman while simultaneously modifying it (148). Even though social limitations within patriarchal society affect one's identity, Edna is still responsible for shaping her destiny (Ramos 151). Nevertheless, Edna's actions to obtain freedom in order to achieve a new identity cannot be entirely criticized, as Ramos highlights that she is only fighting for her survival against the restrictions that contemporary history imposed on women like her (154).

Identity also connects to power and culture. In the paper "A Foucauldian Reading: Power in *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin", researchers Narges Raoufzadeh, Fatemeh Sadat Basirizadeh and Shiva Zaheri Birgani conduct an analysis of Chopin's novel *The Awakening* by applying Michel Foucault's notion of resistance to power. The researchers remark Foucault's notion that power creates identities. However, they also note that Foucault relates gender identities to cultural norms, and that identity is not only dependent on power (Raoufzadeh et.al. 160). As it pertains to Edna in *The Awakening*, her identity connects to not only a patriarchal power system, but also to the local context in Creole Louisiana.

Regarding Chopin's short stories, identity and self-discovery are also recurring themes. The article "The Birth of A New 'Self' And A New 'Identity' In Kate Chopin's Short Stories", Sema Zafer Sümer focuses on some of Chopin's short stories. She investigates how the concepts of "identity", and the "self" are depicted in a few of Chopin's short stories that mainly focus on women. In "The Story of

an Hour”, Chopin explores the finding of the ‘self’ after Mrs. Mallard’s husband was announced dead. Sümer claims that the female protagonist’s brief freedom has significance for her self-discovery because of the fact that she was oppressed for a long time. Sümer states that Mrs. Mallard’s reaction after the invisible entity possessed her is the protagonist realizing that she might have gotten the opportunity of discovering herself anew on a spiritual and physical level (Sümer 192). Regarding “A Respectable Woman”, Sümer remarks that Mrs. Baroda is conflicted about her thoughts of another man as they make her somewhat question herself. As a respectable and married woman, the only female character in this short story is unsettled about her attraction for another man (Sümer 194). However, Sümer acknowledges that Mrs. Baroda appears enthusiastic about wanting this other man to revisit the Baroda’s plantation at the end of this story, for unknown reasons (195). According to Sümer, this story explores the topic of sexual identity as Mrs. Baroda is conflicted about her physical attraction, before eventually considering the possibility to act on her attraction.

2.2. The Rebellion Against an Identity

In order to achieve a new identity, Edna rebels against patriarchal power. As Raoufzadeh et.al. present in their paper, resistance is indefinitely connected to power according to Foucault (Raoufzadeh et.al. 160). Their analysis is based on Foucault’s view concerning the experimentation with the self, connecting mind, body and soul to someone’s knowledge of the current circumstances as defined by the cultural and historical context, and the ability to critique and evaluate one’s own life (160). Raoufzadeh et.al. argue that Edna’s resistance does not occur within the power structure, and that she does not attain any of the aforementioned components. Based on their observations of the novel, Edna rejects the values and norms that the present and historical circumstances prescribed for her as a mother-woman during the late nineteenth century in Creole Louisiana (161-162). They argue that her actions are affected by instinct and emotions, suggesting that if Edna understood her reality, she would not act in the manner that she does (162). The researchers also claim that Edna does not indicate that she possesses emotional independence (162). Edna fails to evaluate her own circumstances as she wants a life of freedom and independence, but she is incapable of being alone. Based on Foucault’s notion, the researchers remark that Edna must accept her reality and position as a mother-woman while challenging the power structure. They comment that Edna might not have committed suicide if she had simply accepted her reality (162).

2.3. Challenging the Feminine with the Masculine

Chopin’s literary works portray women who challenge gender norms to obtain freedom. In the journal article “The Masculine Sea: Gender, Art and Suicide in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*“, Molly J.

Hildebrand discusses the relation between Edna's artistry, gender and suicide. While Hildebrand observes that Edna somehow manages to “*gender herself*” (189; Hildebrand's emphasis) due to her being a white, upper middle-class artist, the professor remarks that the masculine privileges that Edna desires to obtain are beyond her due to her gender. Edna longs for the same freedom and privileges that men in her social class have. While Ramos highlights that Edna's suicide should act as a warning (147), Hildebrand implies that Edna's desire for masculine privileges is harmful and that this particular desire generates in the self-centered mindset that results in Edna's suicide (190). Hildebrand suggests that *The Awakening* highlights the need for a social justice model that should seek to diminish oppression, instead of certain groups having more privileges than others (190).

Hildebrand states that Edna's artistry is compared to the masculine, solitary genius. Her painting abilities are described to come naturally in the novel, while Hildebrand conveys that natural talent was mainly used in connection with men (Hildebrand 190). For example, Edna claims the masculine role as an observer when she walks around the streets, acting as a *flâneur* (192). She also explores the masculine privilege by using women like Adèle Ratignolle as a muse for her artistry due to her aesthetic appeal and emotional comfort, resulting in Edna momentarily objectifying her female friend (196). Edna also paints her father Colonel Pontellier, and Hildebrand claims that Edna challenges the patriarchal system through art, proclaiming that Edna chose him as her subject to transform to an object (200). On the one hand, Hildebrand explains that Edna positions herself as a woman in relation to her position as his daughter. On the other hand, Edna also overthrows the patriarchal system momentarily by positioning herself as the artist, and her father as the model, which would have been reversed otherwise (Hildebrand 201).

Edna Pontellier possesses both so-called masculine and feminine features and behaviors, in which she challenges the feminine with the masculine. The idea of the masculine prerogative might sound desirable to Edna, but Hildebrand elucidates that this desire resulted in her demise. As a woman living in a patriarchal society, Edna's circumstances require her to challenge the norms for women, in which there is no guarantee that she would be accepted as an artist in the same manner as a male artist.

Challenging gender roles can be an arduous task, but it is possible. As Ramos, Hildebrand, and Raoufzadeh et.al. observe, the social limitations that Edna would have to challenge were likely too powerful for her. Nevertheless, they seem to agree with one another regarding the possibility of Edna obtaining her freedom if she had acted differently.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework used in this essay is *phenomenology*. Phenomenology emphasizes the effect that the body and the consciousness have on a person and her actions. Therefore, it makes sense to utilize this framework since the female protagonists in Chopin's literary works use their mind and body to achieve something, in this case freedom.

3.1. Phenomenology

In *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, philosopher Sebastian Luft and postdoctoral researcher Søren Overgaard explain phenomenology as a philosophical methodology that aims to describe first-person experiences (Luft and Overgaard 10). Emphasis lies on the description of a phenomenon since the goal is to provide complex and clear information regarding something specific, which would essentially try to explain how a phenomenon acts or functions and its potential meanings (Luft & Overgaard 11). This essay focuses on two particular chapters from *The Routledge Companion to Phenomenology*, which will be incorporated in this subsection. The chapter written by Komarine Romdenh-Romluc focuses on the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty and his interpretation of the relationship between consciousness and the world. The other chapter that will be included in this subsection is written by Helen A. Fielding, who focuses on feminist phenomenology, presenting prominent figures such as feminist Iris Marion Young, and their respective contributions. Furthermore, Young's essay "Throwing Like A Girl" is incorporated to build on the information from the aforementioned chapters. These texts are important for understanding how body and consciousness affect our actions and surroundings. Pertaining to the feminist intersections in phenomenology, they allow a specific focus on the body and consciousness' effect on women and their lived experiences, which is the focus of this essay.

3.1.1. Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Phenomenology

Maurice Merleau-Ponty is a prominent figure within phenomenology. He claims that the body is not an object, but rather a form of consciousness (Romdenh-Romluc 107) in his book *Phenomenology of Perception*. He considers consciousness to be represented in expression, which is a bodily activity that obtains meaning in a given context, hence highlighting the relationship between the body and consciousness (Romdenh-Romluc 108). Iris Marion Young remarks in her essay that Merleau-Ponty locates subjectivity in the lived body. He also claims that the body as a subject does not refer back to itself, but rather to the world's possibilities (Young 148).

According to Merleau-Ponty, human consciousness connects to perception and action, which are additionally influenced by emotions. The idea is that the perceiver can perceive something on a particular occasion, and it affects her actions, which is further dependent on the possibility of acting in a certain way, as well as on the surroundings in which the action takes place (Romdenh-Romluc 107). In addition, Merleau-Ponty argues that humans have the capability to understand environments that have yet to be experienced, that is, someone can imagine an environment and its functions before encountering it firsthand (Romdenh-Romluc 107).

3.1.2. Feminism and Phenomenology

While feminism and phenomenology can be considered two separate fields, they do have similarities. Helen A. Fielding summarizes these concepts and explains that *feminism* mainly seeks to reveal oppressive, systemic structures that tend to have gendered prejudice. Meanwhile, *phenomenology* seeks to understand how certain perceptions become known to humans by examining everyday prejudice (Fielding 518). Feminists have utilized this phenomenological methodology for a long time since it provides a framework that allows feminists to emphasize material reality without the risk of being perceived as essentialist (519). The following feminists connect the ideas of the subject and the object in relation to lived experiences, differing slightly from Merleau-Ponty's claim that the body is not an object.

While Simone de Beauvoir is not necessarily considered to be a phenomenologist, her contributions have been important for the development of this philosophical methodology. De Beauvoir claims that women are seen as "the Other" in her book *The Second Sex* (1949), while also arguing that the woman as a sexed subject is "contextually shaped" (Fielding 519). Young notes that de Beauvoir emphasizes culture and society as factors that deprive women of their freedom, positioning them as objects and inessential to men (Young 141). De Beauvoir is mostly known for claiming that "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir 2010; qtd. in Fielding 520); her aim was to highlight the difference between sex and gender. While consciousness is important within phenomenology, de Beauvoir emphasizes the significance of the material body, considering the fact that the body allows people to experience and understand the world from different perspectives. According to Fielding, de Beauvoir addresses the idea in *The Second Sex* that the body has different meanings in different cultures, highlighting that the view of the body, for example the female body, is inevitably shaped by one's surroundings (Fielding 520).

Feminist Iris Marion Young emphasizes the effect that actions have on women. In her essay "Throwing like a Girl", Young argues that movements as they are prescribed to the genders cannot be explained biologically nor from an essentialist perspective. In her essay, Young refers "femininity" to

situations rather than the biological sex, stating that not all women are feminine (Young 140). She states that while gendered movements exist, they do not necessarily have to be fixed according to a certain gender (Fielding 521). According to Young, actions shape people.

She also highlights that women have been influenced by a tension between them being considered as either subjects, or objects. As aforementioned, Merleau-Ponty claimed that the body is not an object, but Young highlights that this is not necessarily the case for women. While Merleau-Ponty claims that the human existence positions women as subjects, Young states that the feminine bodily existence positions itself as an object as the female refers back to herself (Young 148). Young indicates that women feel as though their bodies have been situated somewhere rather than living in a particular place, and she reports that women doubt themselves when performing a task as a result of this contradiction (Young 148). As Young describes it, while women experience an instance of believing in their own capability, they also experience something withholding their actions due to their material body (Fielding 521). Young claims that women focus more on ensuring that their bodies acts as desired, rather than considering what they want to achieve through their bodies (Young 144). Similarly to Young's arguments, philosophical professor Gail Weiss argues that our bodies are able to change, stating that our movements and connections with other people stem from corporeal schema which are shaped socially and individually (Fielding 521). In other words, Young and Weiss view bodily movements as a result of habits, stating that gendered movements are not fixed.

Phenomenology focuses on personal experiences. While women as a whole have similar circumstances, their lived experiences are still individual. Phenomenology emphasizes the relationship between body and consciousness, but the feminist contributors illustrate the difficulties that women encounter due to their previous and current circumstances and experiences. Women's lived experiences are influenced by external and internal factors, which also becomes clear regarding the protagonists in Chopin's literary works.

4. Analysis

The following analyses will be divided into subsections, respectively analyzing each of the literary works written by Kate Chopin. The analyses that focus on the literary works aim to describe how Chopin uses the body and the consciousness as factors for women to obtain freedom. In the last subsection of the analysis, Chopin's literary works will be discussed in relation to the pedagogical applications. The discussion aims to display the relevancy that Chopin's literary works have in the

English language classroom in Swedish upper secondary school, which is the secondary aim of this essay.

4.1. *The Awakening*

This novel centers around the female protagonist's experience toward a free life. Edna Pontellier is a married woman with two children whom she takes little care of, which irritates her husband Léonce. In the narrator's words, Edna irritates Léonce due to her lack of care for their children as he reminisces of her "habitual neglect of the children" (*Awakening* 8). After the narrator notes her husband questioning her inattention, she decides to sit on their porch alone, crying about the recent questioning. While on the porch, the narrator expresses that Edna feels "[a]n indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish" (*Awakening* 8). This is the first time that Edna realizes how her lifestyle makes her feel. A new part of her consciousness awakens, leading her mind to briefly interact with these new and foreign thoughts. As an American woman in a Creole community, Edna feels that she does not belong. She finds that Creoles tend to express themselves more freely than she is used to (*Awakening* 12), which will affect her consciousness and body more than she imagines as the novel continues.

The gradual awakening leads Edna to question how her consciousness and body have been restricted. As the title of the novel suggests, Edna awakens from something as her consciousness gradually grows, causing her to question herself. In the eleventh chapter, Edna's newly discovered consciousness makes her wonder how her body used to react to her husband's commands. Realizing that she must have submitted, the narrator recounts Edna questioning herself further, thinking that she "could not realize why or how she should have yielded" (*Awakening* 35). Gail Weiss argues that all humans have a corporeal schema and that it conditions how we conduct ourselves in relation to the world (Fielding 521). The corporeal schema makes the body act naturally without questioning why the movements orient the body in certain ways. Edna's revelation elucidates that she was conditioned to act in a certain manner. Her body acted purely based on habit without questioning her responses to her husband's commands. My interpretation of the revelation is that Edna realizes how disconnected her mind and body used to be. In phenomenology, Maurice Merleau-Ponty claims that the body and consciousness are interrelated (Romdenh-Romluc 108) and it becomes clear that Edna's body and part of her consciousness have been separated for a long time. Edna develops as an individual after this particular chapter, and her consciousness and material body start to act in alignment with each other as she challenges her social and gender roles.

Edna becomes the subject of her own life as she claims more freedom as the novel progresses. Iris Marion Young states that women's bodies tend to act as desirable by societal standards (Young

144). Before Edna experiences her awakening, she was the object whose body automatically responded to her husband and society's expectations. For most of the novel, she becomes a subject whose mind and body enjoys her newfound freedom. Young states that women perceive that they have only been situated somewhere as opposed to actually living within that space (Fielding 521). Pertaining to Edna's life, she was merely placed on that plantation that used to be her home, which becomes clearer when she expresses that "[s]he walked all through the house, from one room to another, as if inspecting it for the first time" (*Awakening* 80) when her husband and children are away while she remains at the plantation during their absence. Phenomenology values the lived experience and Young implies that women do not receive the opportunity to experience life to its full capacity (Young 148). Even though Edna had lived in that house for some time, she experiences the interior with different eyes, and she also experiences time for herself, allowing her space to enjoy her momentary freedom with no obligations.

As she allows herself more freedom, she dares to express herself more. While Hildebrand states that Edna desires masculine privileges (189), my interpretation is that Edna desires the release from her oppression more. Edna's consciousness continuously develops as she gains more awareness of her surroundings and her actions are the result of a woman who decides to control her own life, instead of answering to someone else. Merleau-Ponty claims that the actions of the lived body refers to the world's possibilities (Young 148), and Edna's actions are influenced by her developed consciousness and the increased possibilities that her freer life allows her. After the move to her own apartment, she allows herself to act as she desires, even committing the amoral act of adultery with a man named Alc  e Arobin, as well as fantasizing and acting on her infatuation with her friend Robert Lebrun. The increased consciousness affects her actions which further allows her to experience life as a, somewhat, free woman. As a freer woman, Edna is less hesitant about revealing her thoughts. In a particular scene, Edna expresses to Robert Lebrun that he "may think me unwomanly if [he] like[s]" (*Awakening* 117) as she says that Robert is selfish for not considering her feelings in his absence. As Edna becomes more outspoken, she demonstrates manners that society would consider inappropriate for an upper middle-class woman.

Edna Pontellier demonstrates that femininity and gendered movements are not fixed. Young claims that the notion of femininity and gendered movements are not directly connected to the biological sex. Instead, "femininity" refers to structures and conditions in a particular situation (Young 140), and Edna's perception of "unwomanly" values connects to her society and culture. My observations of Edna indicate that she is not a feminine woman, rather her body and consciousness connects more with her human existence. As a subject, Edna makes her consciousness heard by expressing herself through bodily actions. She is unconcerned by societal expectations since she values the sense of freedom that her body and consciousness experience, as a result of her awakening. She

cares less that she is likely not as socially accepted since she is at peace about her individual growth. The narrator expresses that Edna “began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life” (*Awakening* 104). The relationship between body and consciousness is clear as Edna’s increased awareness of her freedom allows her to view the world differently. However, the body is still important in the experiences and understanding of one’s surroundings as Simone de Beauvoir claims (Fielding 520), and Edna cannot deny that her body and gender will pose more challenges. Scholars Amy C. Smith and Julie Wilhelm explain that someone can become autonomous by rejecting society’s expectations, but that this rejection will prove more difficult for a mother-woman like Edna Pontellier (Smith and Wilhelm 107).

While Edna does love her children, she does not identify as a mother-woman. Since the novel is set in Creole Louisiana in the late 1800s, standards of that time preferred women to dedicate themselves to the role of the mother-woman. As previously stated, Edna did not take much care of her children, and she barely interacts with them throughout the novel. Raoufzadeh et.al. state above that Edna would have obtained full freedom if she accepted her identity as a mother-woman (Raoufzadeh et.al. 162), but to accept an identity that you cannot embrace wholeheartedly results in limited freedom due to the inability to experience life as desired. Although she does not identify as a mother-woman, she indicates that she loves her children, even visiting them at a farm where they temporarily reside (*Awakening* 104). As she leaves, the narrator describes that Edna misses their voices and touch, which, however, does not appear to linger since Edna barely reminisces about the children as the novel continues. The mother-woman identity positions Edna’s existence as an object since her identity is connected to her husband and children. According to Young, the feminine bodily existence results in women being referred to as objects (Young 148). In order for Edna to orient her lived body in the world and become the subject, she must believe in her capabilities to act as she desires and realize that her identity does not have to relate to someone else.

Despite not identifying as a mother-woman, the role restrains Edna’s possibility of creating a new identity. Edna commits suicide by drowning at the end of the novel, exhausting her body until she loses the strength to keep swimming. As she approaches the water, the narrator describes Edna’s feelings toward her children, calling them the “antagonist” who attempted to “drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days” (*Awakening* 127). Throughout the novel, Edna desires to create a new identity instead of modifying her mother-woman identity as her friend Madame Ratignolle did. Ramos explains that Edna did not transform her identity due to lack of insight (Ramos 148), but a lack of insight does not change that she has no desire for her body and soul to be possessed by her mother-woman identity. Even if Edna modified her identity to obtain more freedom, she would be a mother-

woman regardless, forcing her to be someone that she does not want to be. Edna's suicide allows her to completely escape the identity that society and culture wants her to possess.

Although Edna managed to obtain some freedom, full freedom during her lifetime would prove difficult. During one of the conversations with Alcée Arobin, Edna reminisces about an instance when her friend Mademoiselle Reisz hugged her, simultaneously feeling her shoulder blades. She remembers that her female friend told her that “[t]he bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings” (*Awakening* 92). In other words, Mademoiselle Reisz wants to figure out if Edna is strong enough to defeat the patriarchal structures that hinder her from being free. Throughout the novel, Edna manages to build a stronger relationship between her body and consciousness, which she utilizes to her advantage to claim the right to autonomy. Nevertheless, this fight becomes difficult for Edna, and her rebellion against the patriarchal system ends as she commits suicide. Based on Ramos' claims, Edna's suicide relates to her rejection of the mother-woman identity (148). However, my interpretation is that her suicide is caused by the separation between body and consciousness. In phenomenology, Merleau-Ponty claims that the body is not an object, while Young claims the opposite as patriarchal society positions women as “the other” and the object due to the feminine bodily existence. Edna is aware that society will frown upon her actions and while she disregards the opinions of society at one point, she is aware that her desired freedom will be difficult to obtain under her current circumstances. In other words, her consciousness will be freer than her physical body.

Nevertheless, Edna's suicide allows her to be completely free from her social expectations. In the last chapter, Edna sees a bird with broken wings, who descends into the same body of water that she later commits suicide in. In various ways, Edna and birds have similarities. First of all, birds can be confined in cages, and women like Edna are confined by patriarchal society and oppression. Secondly, birds are aware that their wings can carry them wherever they want, and they use their body to accomplish their journey from one place to another. Pertaining to Edna, her awareness expresses itself through bodily actions that carry her to new places, both in her consciousness and her body. Lastly, the bird with broken wings represents Edna's defeat in the face of the patriarchal system to obtain freedom long-term. Nonetheless, in my view, Edna's suicide should not be considered a complete loss, since she did free herself to some extent in the novel. The momentary freedom that Edna experiences throughout the novel allows her to act as she desires, highlighting the fact that challenging gender roles is not impossible, but that a certain mental and physical strength and awareness are needed in order to succeed to a greater extent. While Edna's lived experience allows her momentary freedom during the novel, her suicide does not have to be interpreted as her failing to obtain full freedom. Rather, my interpretation is

that Edna's body and consciousness made the active decision that the only way for her to be fully free, was to commit suicide.

4.2. "The Storm"

"The Storm" highlights that context plays a role in the ability to act and its meaning for freedom. Written in 1898², this short story explores sexual desire between the protagonist Calixta and a man named Alcée Laballire. To summarize, the main character Calixta is at home while her husband and son are stuck elsewhere due to a storm. Calixta is unexpectedly visited by Alcée, whom she commits adultery with while they wait for the storm to pass. Once the storm has cleared, Calixta's husband and son return home and she acts as if nothing had happened in their absence. She appears to be in a good mood for reasons unknown to the husband. The story ends by Calixta spending time with her family, before shifting perspective to Alcée who awaits his wife and children to return home.

In "The Storm", the moment of infidelity provides Calixta with a certain sense of freedom. Alcée's visit gives Calixta something that she lacked which likely was intimacy in a moment of loneliness and anxiety for her husband and son during the storm. In a moment that begins with Calixta looking at Alcée with fear in her eyes, her gaze transforms into a "drowsy gleam that unconsciously betrayed a sensuous desire" ("The Storm" 344). Merleau-Ponty argues that emotions affect our consciousness and actions (Romdenh-Romluc 107), but they can also affect the unconsciousness which is the automatic reaction that impacts Calixta's reawakened desire for Alcée. Calixta's unconscious reaction is fueled by bodily desire, resulting in a conscious action that both characters feel free to act on. When her husband and son arrive at their home, Calixta is joyful of their return and the family is happy to be reunited, no signs of suspicion regarding Calixta's mood. Despite the amoral act that happened the night before, Calixta shows unspoken signs that the act of adultery provided her with something that she apparently needed, which happened to be an act free of morals to feel a sense of freedom.

The symbolism of the title connects to events that occur in this short story. The "storm" symbolizes sexual desire and the fact that it is natural. It is noteworthy that Calixta's body reacts with the storm itself from beginning to end. Her body feels quite warm before the storm even starts. As the storm gradually grows stronger, she becomes more anxious, which transforms into calmness when Alcée embraces her. While the storm continues, Calixta and Alcée's bodies act on their attraction toward one another as they become conscious of their surroundings, considering that they are alone and free to act as they desire. In addition, the "storm" has another meaning as well as it also represents

² Chopin originally wrote "The Storm" in 1898, but it was not published until 1969 in *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, edited and written by Norwegian critic Per Seyersted (Knights xlviii). In addition, "The Storm" is the sequel to the short story "At the 'Cadian Ball" published in 1892.

anxiety and the need for closeness. When Calixta appears to be anxious about the safety of her son, Alcée becomes her safety net, acting as a distraction to the tumultuous weather as “[t]hey did not heed the crashing torrents, and the roar of the elements made her laugh as she lay in his arms” (“The Storm” 345). When the storm has passed, life goes on as normal for Calixta and Alcée.

Calixta’s worry for her son become apparent in consciousness and body. Unlike Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*, Calixta is as a mother-woman. She worries about her son and whether he is safe during the storm, highlighting her awareness of the situation and the fact that she cares for her son. When her husband and son return home, Calixta is overjoyed to see her son as she showers him with affection. While she did commit adultery the previous night, Calixta seems happy that her husband has also returned unharmed. In this sense, Calixta differs from Edna since the latter rarely showed her husband and children any affection. As mentioned earlier, Edna admits to missing her children at one point, but the latter are referred to as the “antagonists” of her life before she commits suicide at the end of the novel. In contrast, Calixta never expresses any relief regarding her son and husband’s absence. The only time that Calixta did not think of them was when she and Alcée acted on their mutual attraction toward each other.

Chopin explores sexual attraction, and there are possible interpretations concerning the effects that Calixta and Alcée have on each other. Alcée is influenced by his attraction for Calixta, which is too powerful to deny. Alcée’s capability and power to act according to his interest affects Calixta since she is the female whom he is exercising his interest toward. As Alcée initiates the adulterous moment, he decides the course of actions and, therefore, becomes the subject, meanwhile Calixta is influenced by Alcée, and ultimately becomes an object. However, the perception of who is the subject and object in this story can be interpreted differently. De Beauvoir claims that women become sexed subjects depending on the context (Fielding 519). Calixta becomes a subject through her body and self in this scenario, which causes Alcée to act on his attraction. The narrator writes that “[t]he contact of her warm, palpitating body when he had unthinkingly drawn her into his arms, had aroused all the old-time infatuation and desire for her flesh.” (“The Storm” 344). Chopin gives Calixta’s body a certain power to make the man yield to his desire, providing Calixta with the possibility of becoming the subject of this story.

The amount of consciousness in this short story is however debatable. It is important to observe that both characters initially are affected by each other in an unconscious manner as Calixta’s eyes “unconsciously” show her reaction to Alcée, and the latter who “unthinkingly” embraced the former in order to soothe her. While Merleau-Ponty perceives the body and consciousness as interrelated (Romdenh-Romluc 108), the characters’ reactions disrupt this perception since the body and consciousness are momentarily treated as separate parts. In contrast, Calixta is aware of her family’s

absence and the storm, as well as her and Alcée committing an act that both parties consent to. Therefore, Calixta and Alcée are aware of their circumstances, but they are unburdened by both consciousness and morality as they are more influenced by their bodies' urges which is the main focus of this story, highlighting Chopin's belief that sexual desire is a natural, bodily reaction.

4.3. "The Story of an Hour"

This short story conveys a different form of freedom than the previous two texts. To summarize, this short story follows Mrs. Mallard, who is given the news of her husband's death. Near the beginning, she experiences shock and grief, which gradually turns into relief and joy due to the realization that she is free from her obligations as a married woman. Mrs. Mallard is overcome with a "monstrous joy" ("The Story of an Hour" 260), continuously whispering the word "free" to herself. Unfortunately, the female protagonist dies when she finds out that her husband is indeed alive and unharmed as a result of heart disease.

An unknown entity provides Mrs. Mallard with freedom in body and consciousness. She retreats to her room after the news of her husband's death. Once in the room, Mrs. Mallard senses that an unbeknownst entity approaches in the air with the intention to possess her body. At first she appears to be afraid since she does not recognize the entity and she uses her body to physically challenge it. As she surrenders to the unknown entity, she does not appear to be afraid anymore and despite the fact that her heartbeat increases, her body feels relaxed ("The Story of an Hour" 260). Subsequently, the entity awakens a part of her consciousness, allowing her to imagine a life in which she is free in both body and soul. Based on the aforementioned information, the entity represents a sense of freedom. The entity aims to release Mrs. Mallard from her oppression within her marriage and give her autonomy. Once she starts to envisage a free life, her body reacts as "she opened and spread her arms out to *them* in welcome" ("The Story of an Hour" 260; my emphasis), referring to the upcoming years that she believes will be hers and no one else's.

She values the free life that her consciousness depicts. For most of the short story, Mrs. Mallard is alone in her room, isolating herself from the outside world. She imagines a life of freedom that arises in the small world that she momentarily inhabits where no one can hinder and suppress her consciousness. She disregards her current surroundings as her consciousness creates new surroundings, in which she does not have the same obligations that the married life imposed on her. As mentioned earlier, Young states that women's bodies are affected by a contradiction, that her feminine bodily existence highlights her as an object, while her human existence positions her as a subject (Young 148). While Mrs. Mallard was the object of her husband's existence within their marriage, she becomes a subject due to his death, and her previous lack of autonomy ceases. The entity provided Mrs. Mallard

with the opportunity of becoming autonomous, allowing her lived body to experience life differently. She expresses herself freely in her mind as she recognizes the power of self-assertion, which she claims is more valuable than love. She feels like a “goddess of Victory” (“The Story of an Hour” 261), and is euphoric about a future where she is free, both in body and soul.

Mrs. Mallard imagines a life that is not within reach. She vaguely envisages how she will spend the rest of her days, claiming that she will live for herself and no one else. While Mrs. Mallard’s freedom holds relevance, her imagination allows her to venture from the current circumstances regarding the news of her husband’s death. She creates a vague picture of her newly imagined life in which “[t]here would be no one to live for...she would live for herself” (“The Story of an Hour” 260). Merleau-Ponty claims that humans are able to visualize environments beyond their previous experience (Romdenh-Romluc 107). She has not experienced life as a free woman before, but she manages to think of a future that could be hers because of the fact that her circumstances have changed.

However, Mrs. Mallard’s body experiences a change that turns out to be deadly. She ultimately dies from heart failure, but there is a certain irony about her death, namely that she dies from a broken heart. Her broken heart is the result of her freedom being taken away from her, which becomes clear as the doctors that examine her at the end state that her death was caused by a “joy that kills” (“The Story of an Hour” 261). My interpretation is that death can symbolize a separation from body and consciousness, in this story. Mrs. Mallard’s lived body will not experience the freedom that she felt joyful of living. Her consciousness would continue to imagine the free life, but her body will not be able to perform that life. Due to the fact that she already has a weak heart, this separation causes a strain on her body, hence killing her.

The female protagonists’ inability to obtain full freedom during their lifetime is recurring in Chopin’s literary works as shown. It is evident in Edna Pontellier and Mrs. Mallard in particular as both experience freedom before dying at the end in their respective stories. Chopin illustrates that autonomy for women is possible, but that patriarchal society poses as the antagonist. De Beauvoir highlights that society and culture deprive women of becoming free (Young 141), limiting the female body in the process of transforming her identity from an object to a subject. Similar to Foucault’s notion concerning resistance to power (Raoufzadeh et.al. 159), the experimentation with the self is important for someone’s identity within phenomenology. The lived experience is personal, but knowledge of the current circumstances and surroundings affect the capability to act in certain ways.

4.4. “A Respectable Woman”

Mrs. Baroda’s body and consciousness wants her to remain a respectable woman, but she cannot ignore her attraction for another man. This short story follows Mrs. Baroda, who alongside her husband is

visited by Gouvernail, a male friend of Mr. Baroda. The female character elucidates her conflicting feelings toward Gouvernail's character, as she initially finds his nature to be disappointing while she is intrigued by him. Eventually, she changes her opinion of Gouvernail during an interaction where he appears more talkative and enthusiastic about topics such as poetry, resulting in her body reacting to his voice. She considers touching him, but resists due to her being a respectable woman. As she feels her will power slipping, she decides to distance herself from him for the rest of his stay at the plantation. Her conflicting feelings disappear toward the end of the story, as she exclaims to her husband that she would like another visit from Gouvernail, despite previously not wanting him to revisit.

Her dilemma concerns who she could be, and the woman that she is currently. Mrs. Baroda is aware that she is physically attracted to Gouvernail and that his character clouds her consciousness' judgement: "Her mind only vaguely grasped what he was saying. Her physical being was for the moment predominant. She was not thinking of his words, only drinking in the tones of his voice" ("A Respectable Woman" 257). She is aware that she is a married woman, so she does not touch him even though her body wants to. As Young claims, a woman might think that she is capable of a certain action, and withhold herself at the same time (Fielding 521). Phenomenology partially believes in embodied actions, but the capability to act during the interaction with Gouvernail is not possible for Mrs. Baroda. She debates on whether she should listen to her body and act on her attraction, or if she should listen to her consciousness that wants her to withhold her body in order to be a respectable woman that does not entertain other men besides her husband. While her consciousness prevails in this particular scene, her perception of a respectable woman is modified at the end of the story as her bodily attraction for Gouvernail appears to have affected her consciousness in the sense that she does not have to restrict her body in the latter's presence.

Chopin refers to the possibility of freedom when acting on one's desire toward the end of this short story. At the very end, Mrs. Baroda exclaims to her husband that "I have overcome everything! you will see. This time I shall be very nice to him." ("A Respectable Woman" 258). While there is uncertainty about what Mrs. Baroda means by these words, there are some possible interpretations. Firstly, she might want to prove to herself that she has self-control, and that she desires to display that her body and consciousness can resist her attraction toward Gouvernail. The awareness of her attraction might have allowed her the opportunity to contemplate the circumstances and how she might act against it to remain a respectable woman. Secondly, she might also have overcome the obstacles that hinder her from acting as she desires. Mrs. Baroda wanted to remain a respectable woman initially, but she might have decided that she can act as she desires since it might allow her to act more freely and challenge the restrictions that society prescribed her as a woman.

4.5. Discussion: Pedagogical Applications

Kate Chopin writes about taboo subjects, such as the freedom found in challenging prevailing structures and stereotypes, as well as the female aversion to motherhood. These topics are highly relevant and significant in today's society, and Chopin provides the knowledge that these matters have occupied some women's minds for over a hundred years, at least. In Laraine Wallowitz's article "Reading as Resistance: Gender Messages in Literature and Media", she writes that students should be provided the opportunities to examine and analyze how literature and media reproduces or undermines stereotypes. Wallowitz recounts a course that she taught concerning women's studies, where the aim was for the students to become aware that "gender [is] a cultural construct" (28), and the greater the awareness of this fact, the students are more capable to think critically about this concept and how media and literature participate or challenge the portrayal of masculine and feminine stereotypes. Masculine and feminine stereotypes are portrayed in Chopin's literary works, but they also depict gender identity as socially constructed and to some degree flexible.

Gender equality attitudes are the result of biases. In the article "What Are Gender Stereotypes?", writer Heather Jones informs that gender roles, stereotypes and norms tend to be based on prescriptive and descriptive views on gender. Since children can adopt stereotypes from an early age, and the adolescent years are important in the process of finding one's identity, adults such as parents and teachers should be aware of their gender biases in order to not reproduce harmful gender prejudices (Jones). In the article "It Begins at 10: How Gender Expectations Shape Early Adolescence Around the World", researchers Robert W. Blum, Kristin Mmari, and Caroline Moreau summarize the results from their Global Early Adolescence Study, in which they discovered that schools are part of maintaining the hegemonic myth which produces the belief that men are independent and the dominant sex, while women are considered to be vulnerable and in need of protection (Blum et.al. 53). Their findings also show that adolescent boys and girls are aware of their gender nonconforming peers, but their tolerance differed as boys were less supportive of those peers in comparison to the girls (Blum et.al. 53-54). Jones states that gender stereotypes in education tend to be the result of unconscious biases, which are affected by ingrained social norms, but she also notes that they can be intentional with the purpose of reproducing stereotypes. For this reason, teachers need to evaluate their own and the students' potential biases, and consider the effect that gender biases can have on their students and respective peers (Jones). Jones suggests a possible solution to challenge gender biases in the classroom, which is to simply address gender stereotypes, roles and norms and open discussions about the subject.

Kate Chopin's literary works can be relevant materials for the discussion of gender. As Hildebrand, Ramos, Sümer, and Raoufzadeh et.al. show, Kate Chopin's literary works explore how

women challenge or resist their identities in order to gain momentary freedom. In the classroom, the teacher can provide relevant historical context if Chopin's literary works are part of the course literature, which the students can use to discuss possible consequences that women could face if they resisted or challenged the expectations imposed on them by patriarchal society. Furthermore, the students can discuss differences and similarities regarding the portrayal of gender in Chopin's works of literature, written over a hundred years ago, and current real-life societies on a national and international level; as Chopin writes about topics that still hold relevance today, the students will likely get a sense of change and continuity. In addition, the students can discuss acceptance and nonacceptance to gender as a social and cultural construct as portrayed in Chopin's literary works, their own experiences regarding gender identity, and whether the students perceive that their gender identity affects their capability to act in certain ways.

A philosophical analysis of literary works might lead to self-reflection. Pertaining to the female protagonists in the previously analyzed literary works, their lived experiences have differences and similarities, and this is likely the case for the students in the classroom as well. Prior to analyzing a literary work by Kate Chopin, a teacher can arrange discussions in order for the students to familiarize themselves with a certain theory or concept that can be used to interpret the literary work, the discussions can also allow the students to share their thoughts with each other. Phenomenology provides a way to interpret literary works such as Chopin's, but it does not mean that this particular methodology has to be taught to students in upper secondary school. Phenomenology can be difficult to understand, and it is also multifaceted. Phenomenology is a philosophical methodology that covers many topics and intersections, and it could, therefore, be time-consuming to teach. If teachers choose to include phenomenology in their education, my recommendation would be to narrow the focus to be more specific.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this essay aimed to demonstrate that Kate Chopin portrays the body and the consciousness as important forces for women to obtain freedom. While some instances relate freedom with amoral actions and so-called abnormal behaviors according to societal perceptions, Chopin highlights that these instances allowed the female protagonists to experience momentary freedom. Phenomenology highlights the significance of the body and consciousness, how they are connected and what they can achieve together. Regarding the female protagonists in the analyzed literary works, they demonstrate how to obtain momentary freedom by listening to the mind and body when society desires

women to act in accordance with their prescribed social and gender roles. The body and consciousness determine whether or not someone decides to proceed with a certain action, and whether or not they consider themselves to be free, highlighting the fact that freedom is subjective. However, society and culture affect women's possibility to reach autonomy as expressed by de Beauvoir and Young, resulting in challenges for women to succeed in the rebellion against patriarchal society.

Furthermore, this essay also argued that Kate Chopin's literary works are relevant in today's education for older adolescents. As gender roles and norms continue to be highly topical in society, it is important for teachers to inform how norms and stereotypes are portrayed in fiction, whether the chosen literature is recent, or over a hundred years old. While fiction might be the product of the author's imagination, there are authors that utilize real-life circumstances such as Chopin. Therefore, it is significant that the educational system allows students to interact and analyze literary works such as Chopin's, as well as how they connect to the students and real-life society. By applying theory to the analyses, it allows the interpreter to focus on particular parts of the texts and use theory to convey possible meanings as it would be perceived through a particular framework.

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