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Madame Bovary Syndrome: The Female Protagonist's Plight

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Abstract

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The Madame Bovary Syndrome is a phenomenon that occurs among different female protagonists of the nineteenth century. Based on Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary,* this syndrome was defined by French philosopher Jules De Gaultier to describe chronic affective dissatisfaction with one's life. The Madame Bovary Syndrome can be applied to the female protagonists in George Sand's *Indiana,* Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening.* Each protagonist in these stories exemplifies chronic feelings of dissatisfaction, hopelessness, and despair due to the lack of control over their lives. With the rise of the middle class, women were now considered solely to be caretakers in the home and only identified with the men in their lives, whether that be her father or her husband. These female protagonists face different forms of oppression within marriage and motherhood as a part of nineteenth century patriarchal societal conventions. As a result, each character either attempts suicide or is driven to madness. This project explores how female societal confinement is the cause of the Madame Bovary Syndrome, as well as the detrimental effects it can have on women and what choices are available to those who do face this syndrome.

Key Words: Madame Bovary Syndrome, chronic dissatisfaction, feminism, le bovarysme, Madame Bovary, Indiana, The Yellow Wallpaper, The Awakening, female societal confinement

The novel *Madame Bovary* written by Gustave Flaubert tells the story of a woman experiencing chronic dissatisfaction with her life due to social inequalities women faced in the 19th century. The boredom and the lack of control over her life is a pattern that is also seen in many other female protagonists in feminist novels and short stories. Hopelessness and disparity often lead to the development of unhealthy coping mechanisms within these protagonists, often causing her demise. The term "Madame Bovary Syndrome" is a phrase coined from this novel to explain this idea of chronic dissatisfaction. Other feminist works of the 19th century, such as George Sand's *Indiana,* Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper", and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening,* also portray the effects that social confinement can have on women. The protagonists of these literary works have certain societal limitations that can lead to a decline in judgment and mental health. This project aims to explore how each character is a product of her time and how they suffer from the "Madame Bovary Syndrome."

In 1856, Gustave Flaubert wrote a controversial novel regarding the dissatisfaction of a woman in what society deemed a good marriage to a respectable man. The novel begins with a description of the life of a man named Charles Bovary. Flaubert describes him as an awkward, mediocre student who, "By dint of working hard, he always managed to maintain his position in the middle of the class […]" (Flaubert 10). Growing up, Charles was deemed ordinary and forgettable, "He was an ordinary sort of boy, who played during recess, worked during prep, paid attention in class, slept well in the dormitory, and ate well in the refectory," (Flaubert 10). Charles was a passive man, always dominated by the women in his life, beginning with his mother, then his first wife, and then his second wife, Emma Roault, the protagonist of this novel. Once his first wife dies, Charles decides to ask Emma's father for her hand in marriage.

Once married, Emma's dissatisfaction immediately begins to take form, "Before her marriage, she had believed that she was in love; but since the happiness she had expected this love to bring her had not come, she supposed she must have been mistaken. And Emma tried to find out what exactly was meant, in real life, by the words 'bliss', 'passion', and 'ecstasy', words that she had found so beautiful in books," (Flaubert 32). Emma was an avid reader, often of extremely romantic stories, which some critics believe is the basis of her unrealistic expectations later in her life (Paris 198). For Emma, these romantic expectations are temporarily placated when her and Charles are invited to a ball at La Vaubyessard. At the ball, Emma finally gets a taste of what a non-mediocre life would be like; however, once it's over, she feels empty and yearns for that experience again. Flaubert explains, "Her visit to La Vaubyessard had left a chasm in her life, like those great crevasses that a storm sometimes hollows out in the mountains, in a single night," (Flaubert 51). After this, thoughts of the ball and the man with whom she danced, the Vicomte, were constantly on her mind.

It is at this point in which Emma starts to get irritated with Charles, primarily out of her own discontentment. She stops the hobbies she once found interesting, and constantly laments that "[…] for her, nothing ever happens," (Flaubert 57). Due to Emma's "poor health", Charles decides to move his medical practice to a different town, thinking it may improve her "condition." They move to Yonville, in which she finds out she is pregnant and gives birth to a baby girl, to her dismay. Emma wants a son in order to overcompensate for the lack of control in her life, "[…] this idea of bearing a male child was like an anticipated revenge for all the powerlessness of her past life," (Flaubert 79). In Yonville, she meets Léon, who ends up being her close friend, due to their similar interests. Flaubert writes of their relationship, "So there

developed between them a kind of bond, a regular interchange of books and ballads. Monsieur Bovary was not a jealous man, and thought it perfectly natural," (Flaubert 89). Her friend Léon leaves for Paris, and Emma falls deeper into unhappiness. A man named Rodolphe travels to Yonville, and this is the man with whom Emma has her first extramarital affair. Rodolphe eventually leaves her, and her health majorly declines once again.

Once Charles nurses her back to health, they run into Léon at the opera. This is where she begins her second affair with her former friend; however, in this instance Léon reciprocates her love. Eventually, this relationship ends as well, "And suddenly, Léon appeared, looking just as remote as the others," (Flaubert 252). Throughout the novel, Emma showers her lovers and herself with gifts and accumulates a massive amount of debt. Emma is unable to pay back the money she owes and appeals to her former lovers for help but receives nothing. Desperate, she swallows arsenic, committing suicide. Flaubert writes of her suicide, "They were behind her forever, thought Emma, all the betrayals, the infamies, and the myriad cravings that had tormented her," (Flaubert 283). Her slow and agonizing death took a heavy toll on Charles, who loved her throughout the entire novel. Just as Flaubert had begun the novel with the beginning of Charles's life, he ended the novel with Charles's death, but not before he had discovered letters and other evidence of Emma's lovers.

French philosopher, Jules De Gaultier, coined the term "le Bovarysme" based on the character of Emma. His 1892 book contained his theory about what is modernly called the "Madame Bovary Syndrome", a term used to describe a person who conceives oneself as something one is not (Fowlie 337). Wilmot E. Willis uses various phrases in his book to describe Bovarysme such as, "I pattern my life on some 'ideal'; I am illusioned by hope […] I have secret

inhibitions and monstrous longings […]" (Ellis 21-22). Each of these various statements describe Emma's inability to accept her life, as well as her intense desire and hope for something more. She believes she is destined for a more grandiose place in life, but because of her female, middle class status in life, she can never achieve this. As a result, feelings of dissatisfaction take hold. Ultimately, the Madame Bovary Syndrome is defined as "chronic affective dissatisfaction" within a person (Exploring Your Mind). This is why Gaultier uses this term to define the character of Emma Bovary. It encompasses all of Emma's romantic illusions, inability to find contentment, and unhealthy coping mechanisms. The purpose of this project is to explore how the Madame Bovary Syndrome can be used to explain the behavior of other female protagonists of the nineteenth century, as well as how female societal confinement is the driving force for their chronic unhappiness.

All throughout the novel, Emma's psychological condition worsens progressively until her eventual suicide. Flaubert writes to French poet and his alleged lover, Louise Colet, when writing *Madame Bovary*, "The reader will not notice, I hope, all the psychological work hidden under the form, but he will sense its effect," (Paris 193). Flaubert consistently writes of Emma's mental condition, but never explicitly states the reasoning behind her poor mental health. Near the beginning of the novel, Flaubert writes, "But deep in her soul she was waiting for something to happen […] But each morning on waking she expected it that day, and she would listen to every sound, leaping to her feet, astonished that it did not come; then, as each day ended, she felt still sadder, and longed for tomorrow," (Flaubert 56). Emma is waiting to fulfill a destiny that she thinks she is meant for; however, when it never comes, she feels dissatisfied and depressed. Eventually, Emma feels as if "the future was a long, dark corridor with only a locked

door at the end," (Flaubert 57). There is no hope for happiness in the future for Emma. She undergoes a "series of disenchantments", beginning with a mediocre marriage and the birth of her daughter. Emma feels as though as soon as a woman is born, she is "constantly thwarted" and "at once passive and compliant." Emma describes a woman's will, "like a veil attached to her hat, flutters with every breeze; always there is desire inviting her on, and, always, convention holding her back," (Flaubert 80). She wants a boy so that she can live vicariously through him because she feels as though men are unhindered in life and have the ability to achieve their desires, unlike women who are constantly constrained by societal convention. When Emma gives birth to a girl, she feels no attachment or bond to her child, even going so far as physically pushing her away (Flaubert 103). Due to the disappointment she feels with her life, her mental health rapidly declines, and she begins searching for something to bring more meaning to her life.

Bernard J. Paris's psychological approach encompasses Emma's mental state and coping mechanisms throughout the novel:

> "[…] Emma's search for glory takes many forms; she tries to confirm her idealized conception of herself through religious fervor, romantic love, devotion to duty, and her husband's achievements. As each solution fails, she turns to another, or she escapes into memories, reading, and dreams. When nothing works and the future looks hopeless, her rage and despair lead to inconsistent behavior, cynicism, and psychosomatic illnesses," (Paris 207).

Emma copes with her never-ending feelings of dissatisfaction by giving up her hobbies of reading, drawing, music, and sewing (Flaubert 57). She has bouts of anorexia and overeating, as well as a

development of respiratory problems (Flaubert 60). She consults a priest, and even turns to drinking (Flaubert 101,112). She finds temporary moments of peace in her affairs with Rodolphe and Léon in finally becoming everything she wants for herself. Flaubert writes of her affair with Rodolphe, "She herself was actually becoming a living part of her youth by seeing herself as one of those passionate lovers she had so deeply envied," (Flaubert 145). However, this sense of happiness is temporary. Once her love affairs end, she returns to her depressive state. The only time Emma feels satisfaction and control is when she can step outside of her mediocre life and engage in these relationships with men who have the ability to live the kind of life she wants. She hints at her envy of Rodolphe when she says to him, "After all … you're free," (Flaubert 124). Instead of having the ability to fulfill her desires like Rodolphe and Léon, she is confined to a life of marriage and motherhood.

Flaubert drew inspiration for his controversial novel from his own experiences and feelings. Getting lost in trances and suffering from "fits," he often called himself a hysteric, specifically in letters to a friend and fellow author, George Sand. Flaubert explicitly states, "… obeying the advice of Dr. Hardy, who calls me 'an hysterical woman' – a phrase that I find profound," (Goldstein 134). He self-diagnosed himself with hysteria in a time where it was a medical condition most commonly associated with women (Goldstein 134). According to the article written by Jan Goldstein, hysteria was a word applied *by* men *to* women to serve as a "stigmatizing, repressive function", and Flaubert taking this word and applying it to himself as a man destabilizes the gender roles of the nineteenth century (Goldstein 135). His experiences of hysteria are prevalent in his protagonist in *Madame Bovary*; however, he never explicitly mentions the word in the novel, despite freely using it in his real life (Goldstein 138-139).

Using Emma Bovary, Flaubert depicts the female experience in the nineteenth century by using his own feelings he experienced as a male, which is the likely reason she possesses what were considered “androgenous traits” of the nineteenth century. There was one critic named Charles Baudelaire, that Flaubert regarded his review as “the only fully satisfactory one the novel received” that touched on the androgyny that is present in Emma Bovary. Baudelaire writes, “… to divest himself of his actual sex and make himself into a woman […] this bizarre androgyne houses the seductiveness of a virile soul within a beautiful feminine body,” (Goldstein 144). This critic addresses the fact that Emma had both the typical masculine and feminine qualities of the nineteenth century because she was written in Flaubert’s image. Emma defies female traditions by rejecting her role as a passive housewife and mother and engaging in activities not typical for a woman of this time, such as excessive spending and extramarital affairs. By creating the androgynous character of Emma Bovary, Flaubert again challenges the gender roles of men and women in the nineteenth century.

To understand how Emma Bovary breaks the barriers that were present during this time period, it is important to explore the setting of this novel. In the middle of the eighteenth century in France, the middle class, or bourgeois, started to develop over the original caste system. With this development of the bourgeois into the nineteenth century, the previous androgyny of both sexes was lost and now distinctions were being made between men and women. Critic Lawrence Birken sums up the middle-class sexual order of the nineteenth century in an article addressing the fluidity of the sexes that ceased to exist once the “Old Regime” was replaced by the bourgeoisie. He explains the thoughts of “enlightenment thinkers” who “wrote as if the emancipation of the male population and the consequent establishment of a natural

society practically demanded the deemancipation of the female population […]," (Birken 612). The distinctions now being made between the sexes considered men to be "citizens" and women to be the nurturers of those citizens. Furthermore, these distinctions "allowed for a dramatic sentimentalizing of domesticity, where the home became a safe haven against a cruel world and where Mother […] would preside. The 'new' mother was defined by her purity, her superior morality, and selfless devotion to her husband and children," (Rooks 2). In order for the middle-class male to free itself from aristocratic rule, it had to rely on this new idea of sexual dichotomy. Masculinity was now associated with freedom and liberty, and femininity was now associated with passiveness, weakness, and purity (Birken 613). This is arguably the basis of the infantilization of women by men during this time period, as well as the notion that women were more narcissistic than men. For example, famous psychologist, Sigmund Freud, discusses the topic of object choice in the external world and claims that women and children "make a more narcissistic object-choice" than men (Birken 610). His theory of narcissism associates women with being similar to children, and as a result, they were often treated as such.

In *Madame Bovary,* Flaubert takes the idea that narcissism is associated with women by creating a female protagonist who is portrayed as "vain" and "selfish" on the surface. Charles Bovary is portrayed to be the perfect example of a dull, unattractive, bourgeois male who is considered successful and flourishes in this middle-class sexual order. This is the type of society in which Charles thrives; however, this is also the type of society in which a woman such as Emma would feel chronic discontentment (Birken 615-616). A more in-depth analysis of Emma's character would not be that she was narcissistic or self-absorbed, but that she was

quite the opposite. Birken writes, “It is not that she is too narcissistic, but that she is not narcissistic enough […] to simply absorb the affection and admiration of a husband who looks only at her and not himself,” (Birken 616). Emma wants a husband whose entire life does not revolve around her, and that is why she turns to these other men who do focus on themselves. Emma is not the sole object of their affection, and she feels like she can adore them in a similar way to how they adore her (Birken 617-618). Men were expected to take care of their wives, to an extent that women were no longer independent, adult beings, but almost like a child being coddled by a father. Birken is arguing that if Emma were a true narcissist, she would have accepted Charles’ affections and actually desired for his entire life to revolve around her.

However, some articles do in fact deem Emma as a narcissist, but with a different definition of the word. Paris uses psychoanalyst Karen Horney’s idea of narcissism to explain Emma’s behavior. In this sense, “narcissism is a reactive rather than a primary phenomenon, and an inability to come to terms with the human condition is a *product* of grandiosity rather than a cause of it,” (Paris 194). In other words, Emma performs these narcissistic actions as a reaction to the inability to live up to her own expectations of what should be her life. Emma’s introduction towards the beginning of the novel describes her schooling at the convent as being entranced with novels that “were solely concerned with love affairs, lovers and their beloveds, damsels in distress swooning in secluded summerhouses […] and ‘gentleman’ brave as lions, meek as lambs, unbelievably virtuous, always immaculately turned out, who weep buckets of tears,” (Flaubert 34). Through these novels, Emma was exposed to the kind of life that eventually became her aspiration. However, within her middle-class bourgeois society in which women were expected to be content, she was never able to fully obtain that life. What is more,

the men who would become Emma's lovers were able to search for and arguably achieve that kind of life. Rodolphe is a man who owns his own land with a hefty income and can take up many lovers without being condemned by society (Flaubert 114). Léon is able to travel to Paris and actually play out his dreams of "masked balls and laughing girls" (Flaubert 105). Emma is able to travel (although rarely) and does possess lovers; however, she is never really free to do so because of her status as a middle-class woman in the nineteenth century.

Whether Emma should be considered a narcissist or not, her behavior was a response to finding an escape from the Madame Bovary Syndrome. She possesses these traits that were deemed "masculine" defying this bourgeois sexual order, making her an androgynous character that could not fit within this nineteenth century sexual order. As a result, she could never be fully content in the life she was living. Her "narcissism" is a reactive mechanism in order to find some sort of satisfaction within her life that was not possible for this type of woman in the nineteenth century. Thus, the Madame Bovary Syndrome takes its effect. This condition may have been coined from Flaubert's famous novel; however, it can be applied to other female protagonists written after *Madame Bovary,* as well as the novels that preceded it.

Written before *Madame Bovary's* time, in 1832, the protagonist in George Sand's *Indiana,* in particular, possesses the symptoms of the Madame Bovary Syndrome. This novel begins with the introduction of three characters – the protagonist Indiana, her husband Colonel Delmare, and her cousin Sir Ralph. Right away, Sand depicts the relationship dynamic between these three. Indiana is described as having a "sickly, depressed appearance which, that evening, affected her whole person, her weary attitude, her long dark hair hanging down her emaciated cheeks, and dark rings under her dull, inflamed eyes," (Sand 19). Colonel Delmare is depicted as

a dominating, aggressive man who is prone to anger (Sand 19). Sir Ralph is portrayed as a man who wants to protect and comfort Indiana through his deep concern for her health and well-being as she grows weaker and weaker (Sand 24-25). The plot thickens when Colonel Delmare shoots a man he believes to be a thief, when in actuality it is a man named Monsieur Raymon de Ramiére who had seduced Indiana's creole maid and foster sister, Noun. Raymon is described as intelligent, socially successful, and most importantly, exceptionally passionate. According to the novel, "He was a man of principle who reasoned with himself, but ardent passions would often sweep him away from his theories. At such times he was incapable of reflection, or he would avoid confrontation with his conscience; he would do no wrong, as if in spite of himself, and the next day would try to deceive himself about what he had done the night before," (Sand 36). This is especially prevalent when he no longer returns Noun's affections and falls in love with Indiana. Raymon consistently tries to seduce Indiana, but she refuses to give in at first. When Noun discovers that she is pregnant with Raymon's child, and that he is also in love with her friend and employer, Indiana, she commits suicide (Sand 73-76).

Delmare decides that him and Indiana are going to move to Bourbon Island, but before doing so, Indiana escapes to Raymon in hopes that he will hide her, so she does not have to leave. Raymon refuses her, and Indiana enters into a trance-like state of mind. She walks along the river and starts to walk in, "The example of Noun's suicide had soothed Indiana's hours of despair for so long now that she had turned suicide into a kind of enticing pleasure […] she walked on, getting nearer and nearer to the river-bank, in obedience to the instinct of unhappiness and the magnetic power of suffering," (Sand 172). Indiana wakes up from her trance as soon as she feels the water wash over her feet, and Sir Ralph comes to her rescue.

Indiana and Delmare leave France, but Indiana returns after reading a letter from Raymon professing his love, despite the fact that he does not mean it. When she returns, Raymon has already married the wealthy Laure de Nangy, who lives in Indiana's old home. Indiana's cousin, Sir Ralph, eventually comes to her rescue, and informs her that Delmare as died. Indiana and Sir Ralph decide to commit suicide together; however, they decide not to jump to their deaths and end up falling in love. The novel ends with them living together in seclusion on Bourbon Island.

Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin, or better known under her male pseudonym, George Sand, drew inspiration for her novels from her actual life. At seventeen, she married a man named Casimir Dudevant, whom she would eventually divorce. During the early nineteenth century, most women would have "adjusted" and "kept up appearances" despite being to someone she did not love; however, she broke ties with him and moved to Paris to begin her literary career. It is believed that the inspiration for some of the dominating, aggressive male characters in her novels were based on her ex-husband, "In Indiana and its immediate successors, consciously or unconsciously, she declares to the world what a beautiful soul M. Dudevant condemned to sewing on buttons […]" (Sherman). In Indiana, she uses Delmare to portray the oppressiveness that she experienced in her own real-life marriage. Because of this, she was labelled as an adversary to marriage. In the article "American Comment on Sand", critics do not take kindly to her, claiming she lacks in morals and femininity. In 1846, Reverend Edward Waylen writes, "'Herself a *divorcée*, she practices what she preaches.' Her novels, though 'remarkable for beauty of diction and power of expression,' 'advocate the dissolution of the tie as soon as it becomes irksome or disagreeable.' […] the lady has 'unsexed herself,' lost

the ‘winning softness and delicacy’ which are the ‘peculiar charm’ of the ‘female character,’ and is generally headed for perdition,” (Jones 399-400). Despite the fact that she was a great writer, critics condemn her for her divorce and claim she has lost her femininity.

Sand wrote under a masculine pseudonym despite the fact that the public knew she identified as female. She deliberately did this in order to challenge traditional gender roles. This is where Sand and Flaubert are similar. They both blur the lines of the distinctions previously made between the sexes (Goldstein 147). Flaubert identifies with the previously mentioned “hysterical woman”, and Sand insists on a masculine pseudonym, thus, the questioning of conventional gender boundaries is apparent in *Madame Bovary* and *Indiana.* Despite the fact that they both wrote novels encapsulating similar issues of the times, the correspondence that developed in 1862 between Sand and Flaubert was considered unlikely due to the differences in their ages, personalities, and beliefs, “To the last she speaks from a temperament lyrical, sanguine, imaginative, optimistic and sympathetic; he from a temperament dramatic, melancholy, observing, cynical, and satirical. She insists upon natural goodness; he, upon innate depravity,” (Sherman). Flaubert used his writing to condemn the social world, whereas Sand believed it could aid in its salvation. These differences in their beliefs are obvious in the way Flaubert writes from a more realist perspective, and Sand writes from a more romantic perspective.

However, there are obvious similarities between *Indiana* and *Madame Bovary,* in terms of the societal issues being addressed, the authors themselves, and the protagonists they created in *Indiana* and *Madame Bovary.* In a study on Flaubert, French author Émile Faguet writes, “Flaubert seems to say in every page of his work: ‘Do you want to know what is the real

Valentine, the real Indiana, the real Lelia? Here she is, it is Emma Roualt. And do you want to know what becomes of a woman whose education has consisted in George Sand's books? Here she is, Emma Roualt,' (Sherman). On the surface, it is obvious both protagonists are stuck in unhappy marriages, with no means of escape without societal condemnation. However, a deeper analysis of the protagonists shows that they both suffer from the Madame Bovary Syndrome.

In fact, many critics believe that Indiana was a "literary precursor" to Emma Bovary (Booker 232). In terms of each of their affairs, it can be summarized as, "Having drawn from books a notion of what life should be like, and with her dream of an ideal man still unsullied by reality, Indiana falls as easily for Raymon's rhetoric as Emma does for that of Rodolphe," (Booker 232). Indiana and Emma are both unhappy with their lives and search for that happiness through the affection of men outside of their marriages. Similar to Emma, and most women of the nineteenth century, Indiana goes from her father's house right to her husband's house. Sand writes, "In marrying Delmare she had only changed masters; in coming to live at Lagny she had only changed prisons and places of solitude," (Sand 51). Sand compares Indiana to that of a slave who has been imprisoned by most of the men in her life. She describes Indiana as a "captive" and Delamare as a "tyrant" and "master" (Sand 52). Not only was she trapped in the confines of this marriage, but like most women in this time period, Indiana was infantilized by her husband. Delmare speaks to her "in a tone that was partly a father's and partly a husband's," (Sand 19). Even her eventual lovers treat her like a child. Raymon explicitly calls her a child "as he put her cloak around her as if she were a baby," (Sand 167). Sir Ralph compares his love for Indiana to that of a father (Sand 250). Assuming the role of a "master" or

"father" allows for these men to assume an authoritative figure in Indiana's life to the point where she is no longer an individual. Because of this, Indiana experiences symptoms of the Madame Bovary Syndrome and finds herself waiting for something bigger or something to save her from this unhappiness.

Early on in Sand's novel, Indiana starts to decline mentally and physically, or as Sand describes, "An unknown sickness was consuming her youth," (Sand 51). Indiana repeatedly mentions she is unhappy, and that she is dying due to the life she is living, thus, resulting in her search for happiness through Raymon. However, this affair does not ease her discontentment, and ultimately causes her even more despair, similar to Emma. When Raymon rejects her for a marriage to a wealthy woman, who is essentially Indiana's opposite in every aspect apart from living in her home, she falls into complete misery (Sand 234). In Indiana's eyes, Raymon was supposed to relieve her of her endless dissatisfaction. So, just like Emma, she considers suicide; however, unlike Emma, she does not go through with it. The endings of these two novels are compared, "[…] whereas Indiana learns from disillusioning experience and eventually faces up to the reality of her situation, Emma persists in believing that she should be able to live her life like a novel and becomes increasingly bitter when she is unable to do so," (Booker 233). This is where the writing styles of both authors come into play. Flaubert uses Emma's suicide to condemn the society that drove her to it, whereas George Sand provides a different option for Indiana, one that does not end in her death, despite her contemplating suicide multiple times. Sand's novel promotes the idea that suicide does not have to be the only option for women. Maybe escape from the conventions of the patriarchal society in which she resides could be a plausible alternative option. Even though the endings of these novels are different, both

protagonists still suffer from chronic dissatisfaction, or the Madame Bovary Syndrome, due to female societal convention.

Another protagonist created by author Charlotte Perkins Gilman in 1862 also suffers from the Madame Bovary Syndrome. She wrote the short story “The Yellow Wallpaper” as a series of journal entries in the first-person narrative. This story is about a woman’s experience with post-partum depression and the famous Dr. Weir Mitchell’s “rest cure.” The unnamed protagonist is confined to her bed in a nursery in an old estate home by her doctor-husband, John, due to his diagnosis of her “slight hysterical tendency” (Gilman 648). She is unable to partake in any intellectual or stimulating activities, such as writing, due to this commonly used rest cure treatment of women in the nineteenth century. She consistently states that she disagrees with the treatment, “Personally, I disagree with their ideas. Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good,” (Gilman 648). Due to her extreme boredom and lack of stimulus, she begins to see figures and shapes in the yellow wallpaper that surround her in the confinements of her room. She sees a woman trapped within the wallpaper and tries to free her, eventually confusing herself for the trapped woman in the wallpaper. In her state of “madness”, John walks in and faints as he sees her “creeping” around the room.

“The Yellow Wallpaper” presents a more specific issue regarding the oppression of women in the nineteenth century. Gilman addresses the topic of women’s health, and how it was medically treated in this patriarchal society. The view of women during this time can be summarized as, “… to be a woman is to be ill…”, meaning women were considered to be more sensitive and have weaker nervous systems than men (Lian et al 8). The protagonist in this story

suffers due to these oppressive ideas by not being allowed to pursue her previous intellectual hobbies.

Gilman's protagonist is infantilized by her husband by literal confinement to a nursery, which is often read as a symbol of "the entrapment of motherhood, marriage, and domesticity" (Lian et al 9). She is constantly coddled and told what to do by her husband, as well as called pet names like "little girl" or "little goose", similar to how a parent would treat a child (Gilman 649-652). The famous Dr. Weir Mitchell took this idea of infantilization of women and incorporated it into his well-known rest cure. Dr. Mitchell developed his treatment differently in men (the rare times they were diagnosed with psychological disorders) and women. For example, "While men might be told to seek physical exercise – fishing or hiking – to reenergize themselves, Mitchell's remedy for the female neurasthenic was rest, forced feeding, and seclusion, a treatment designed to infantilize the patient so that she acknowledged the paternal authority of the doctor" (Bauer 131). His female patients were essentially treated like children, rather than adult women, so as to assert this patriarchal idea that he had the power as a male physician.

Gilman wrote "The Yellow Wallpaper" from her own experience with Dr. Mitchell's treatment. After writing this story, she wrote a response essay called "Why I Wrote the Yellow Wallpaper". In this essay, she explains that she had struggled with "nervous breakdowns" and "melancholia" for years until she decided to see Dr. Mitchell for help. She explains that he prescribed her with the rest cure and noted that nothing was really wrong with her. He advised that she "live as domestic a life as possible", "have but two hours' intellectual life a day", and "never to touch pen, brush or pencil again…" (Gilman 348). Gilman explains that she followed

these instructions for about three months, but “came so near the border line of utter mental ruin that I could see over” (Gilman 349). In other words, her experience with Dr. Mitchell and the rest cure is the basis for why she condemns this treatment as a form of female oppression in “The Yellow Wallpaper”.

Similar to Flaubert and Sand, Gilman detested the “distinctions” that developed between men and women in the nineteenth century. With the rising middle class, or “bourgeois”, self-help books became popular, especially for women. They advised women on how to become the perfect housewife and mother and discouraged any women from participating in more intellectual pursuits (Bauer 64). Men were now being conditioned to move into ambitious roles in the “public sphere” and women were now considered and expected to become a part of the lesser respected “domestic sphere” (Bauer 64). Gilman disapproved of the separation of the spheres and believed it to be “dangerous to human culture as a whole” (Bauer 64). She wanted to help close this gap through her writing.

Gilman’s protagonist is similar to Emma Bovary in many ways, considering the confining marriage, the lack of connection to their children, and the infantilization by their doctor-husbands. As a result of all these similarities, they both contract the Madame Bovary Syndrome. Even though they both face the same societal captivity, Gilman’s protagonist experiences confinement a little more literally, since she cannot physically leave her room and is not allowed to engage in any sort of activity. She feels the same chronic discontentment with marriage and motherhood and has the same desire for fulfillment as Emma. The difference in these characters lies with how they deal with these feelings, and how they search for that freedom and fulfillment and, ultimately, relief from the Madame Bovary Syndrome. Since

Gilman's protagonist is confined to her room, she cannot pursue romantic relationships or assert her independence in any way outside of that room. This is why she eventually feels like she is trapped within the yellow wallpaper along with many other women. Gilman writes, "Sometimes I think there are a great many women behind, and sometimes only one, and she crawls around fast, and her crawling shakes it all over," (Gilman 654). Gilman's protagonist is metaphorically freeing all the other women, as well as herself, who have suffered at the hands of this patriarchal society and developed the Madame Bovary Syndrome as a result.

Similarly to this protagonist, Emma Bovary is constantly coddled and infantilized by her doctor-husband when she is feeling "ill." In Flaubert's novel, a man named Homais, the town apothecary claims, "Women, you know, they get upset over nothing! My wife particularly. And we'd be wrong to complain about it, because their nervous system is so very much more sensitive than ours," (Flaubert 108). Both protagonists are considered inherently more sensitive and weaker than men, and they are both discouraged from intellectual pursuits, such as reading and writing, due to the fact that it supposedly causes this dissatisfaction with their domestic lives (Lian et al 8). Therefore, rather than putting the blame on female societal pressures and conventions, the protagonists "ailments are presented as a 'female malady', and the problem lies with the female character and psyche," (Lian et al 10). In other words, these protagonists both suffer from the Madame Bovary Syndrome, but it is considered a "female malady" rather than a societal malady. The men in their lives do not search for the reasoning behind why they suffer from the Madame Bovary Syndrome because to them, there is no issue with their society. Their husbands are not portrayed to be malicious, just oblivious, due to the fact that

this type of society is already beneficial to the typical middle-class man. Why try to understand and change a system specifically built to benefit them?

Although Gilman attempts to condemn the patriarchal oppression of women's mental health in "The Yellow Wallpaper", she also attempts to offer a solution with her writing. Unlike Flaubert, Gilman provides another counter story with a treatment for the Madame Bovary Syndrome called "Dr. Clair's Place". This story details a treatment for neurasthenia, melancholia, and suicidal depression that constitutes the exact opposite of Dr. Mitchell's treatment. This story is about a woman who seeks treatment from a female physician named Dr. Willy Clair, and she prescribes a series of stimulating activities and hobbies in order to reenergize her patients. Furthermore, this treatment is totally voluntary for the patient, and the patient has more autonomy and control over what is best for her mind and body (Gilman et al 327-334). This is significant because Gilman is the only author discussed in this project that offers a solution or treatment that may help with overcoming the Madame Bovary Syndrome. What is more, the publishing of "The Yellow Wallpaper" caused the disbanding of the rest cure by Dr. Mitchell himself. When Gilman learns of this fact she writes, "It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy, and it worked," (Gilman et al 349). She wrote this story for a purpose, and it resulted in a small victory for women of the nineteenth century who experienced the Madame Bovary Syndrome.

Another protagonist that fits the criteria for the Madame Bovary Syndrome is Edna Pontellier from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening,* written in 1899. Right away, this novel opens with the description of a symbolic caged bird and an interaction between Edna and her husband, Léonce. He tells her she is sunburned, "looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable

piece of personal property which has suffered some damage," (Chopin 3). Edna and her family are vacationing at Grand Isle when she starts to develop a relationship with a man named Robert Lebrun who typically "entertains" one married woman each summer. During the beginning of their relationship, it is relatively innocent, and they are usually accompanied by Edna's friend, Adèle Ratignolle, who is the epitome of the "mother-woman." As the relationship between Edna and Robert progresses, Edna starts to become aware of her desire for independence and fulfillment. She learns to swim and starts to paint again, and begins to recognize that she is an actual individual being, not just a wife and mother (Chopin 17). Robert leaves, and the Pontelliers return to their home in New Orleans; however, Edna feels as though she is changed forever. She neglects her duties in the home and begins to disobey her husband more and more. Mr. Pontellier consults a doctor due to Emma's changed behavior, and the doctor brushes it off saying, "Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism", and that "This is some passing whim of your wife […]," (Chopin 89). Mr. Pontellier goes on a business trip leaving Edna by herself. This is when she asserts her independence by moving into an apartment on her own, as well as having an affair with a man named Alcée Arobin. She befriends an older eccentric woman named Mademoiselle Reisz who lives alone and devotes her entire life to her work. Robert eventually returns to New Orleans and expresses his love to Edna but admits that they can only be together if her husband "sets his wife free" (Chopin 146). Edna attempts to explain that she does not belong to Mr. Pontellier, or anyone for that matter, and wants to be with him. When she leaves and returns after helping Adèle with a difficult childbirth, Robert is gone. She begins to think about everything that had happened in her life and "despondency" consumes her (Chopin 155). Realizing she can never be fulfilled by

anything, including motherhood, marriage, and even her love for Robert, she feels as though she does not belong in this world. Chopin ends her novel ambiguously with Edna walking out into the sea.

The protagonist, Edna, faces the same oppression that the previously discussed protagonists endured. She is seemingly imprisoned by her marriage, interestingly as a result of her escape from the confinement of her father, "… to escape the cage of her father, she willingly entered that of her husband," (Svrljuga 97). Barbara H. Solomon summarizes the typical cultural expectations of the nineteenth century Victorian era marriage as the husband being the breadwinner and major family decision maker, and the wife is responsible for "childcare and domestic comfort." She notes that the husband was typically dominant, and the wife was subordinate, and if she obeys her spouse, then there would be little to no conflict within that marriage. Solomon argues that Chopin creates a protagonist who does not simply submit to her husband's will, which completely goes against the societal norms concerning marriage (Solomon 70).

Also known for her short stories, Chopin depicts another typical, confining marriage of the nineteenth century in "The Story of an Hour". Considered to be a "valuable prologue to a reading of *The Awakening",* this story is about "marriage and patriarchal privilege" (Solomon 71). A woman named Louise Mallard learns that her husband had died in a railroad accident, but her reaction is not typical of what one would expect after hearing her husband had died. She weeps in her sister's arms; however, when the "storm of grief" has passed, she wants to be alone. As she is sitting alone, feelings of "exultation" and "monstrous joy" come over her (Chopin). She is excited for the years to come, in which she would be alone, completely free,

belonging to no one. Similarly to Edna's claim that, "she resolved never again to belong to another than herself," Louise Mallard makes the claim that, "she would live for herself," (Chopin 108). However, this excitement for life ahead does not last long for Louise. The end of the story concludes with the fact that her husband did not die, and upon seeing him at the front door, Louise dies from "heart disease – of joy that kills," (Chopin). Chopin writes this story to emphasize how confining marriage can be for women, "In a groundbreaking way, the author's central character, Louise Mallard, dismisses the matter of whether a husband and wife love one another and goes on to insist that the institution of marriage warps human nature and imposes controlling and destructive roles," (Solomon 71). Louise finally sees her chance to break free from the confinements of marriage and assert her independence as an individual, not just as a wife, which is precisely what Edna tries to do in *The Awakening.*

When Edna starts disobeying and asserting her independence, Léonce consults a doctor because Edna is "growing a little unbalanced mentally," (Chopin 77). This parallels the kind of female oppression previously discussed in Emma and Gilman's protagonist concerning the invalidity of women's mental health. Just like these protagonists, Edna's condition is infantilized, due to the perception that women are "peculiar", "delicate", and "sensitive" (Chopin 89). She is treated as though she is a child by her husband, and as a result, "assumes the position of a child" through her defiance (Svrljuga 100-101). The same is true for Emma, Indiana, and Gilman's protagonist. At times, they all assume this position of a subordinate child to their husbands as a result of the societal conventions of this time period.

With these forms of societal confinement, comes Edna's desire to assert her independence through living on her own, rejecting motherhood, and choosing a lover for

herself, thus, the title of *The Awakening.* Chopin writes, “Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her,” (Chopin 17). She comes to this realization after the first time she learns to swim. For the first time, she is an individual, a person, and not just a wife and/or mother. This awakens Edna to the fact that she wants more than the life she is living. This self-awareness that awakens in Edna leads to her chronic dissatisfaction, or the Madame Bovary Syndrome, which in turn, results in her search for fulfillment.

There are many similarities between *The Awakening* and *Madame Bovary.* In fact, it is believed that Chopin wrote her novel as a response to *Madame Bovary.* Unfortunately, she received the same backlash Flaubert’s novel received, despite it being published over 40 years later. This novel was attacked by critics due to its “frank treatment of a woman’s frustration with her marriage, of her emotional and sexual awakening and her eventual suicide.” It was called “disagreeable, flawed, unhealthy,” (Koloski 3-4). *The Awakening* caused major controversy that ended Chopin’s career; however, her novel was rediscovered in the mid-twentieth century with the rise of the women’s movement (Koloski 5). Chopin’s novel has often been called the “American Bovary” due their obvious similarities, such as the protagonist’s inability to conform to society, their lack of connection to their children, participating in multiple extramarital affairs, and their eventual downfall (Rooks 122). The criticism Chopin received reveals how this novel was way ahead of its time in terms of addressing the issues of female societal confinement and the Madame Bovary Syndrome.

While the Madame Bovary Syndrome can be applied to both Emma and Edna, there is a difference in terms of awareness of her inability to relieve her chronic dissatisfaction. Edna

realizes how limited she is in this world as a woman, which is one of the reasons why she is so drawn to the "unlimited" sea (Witherow 93). They are both in constant search of meaning and fulfillment; however, they constantly fail. Edna comes to the realization that she will never achieve fulfillment once Robert leaves her, "There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and even she realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone," (Chopin 155). Neither Edna nor Emma can find anything to satisfy themselves, however, Edna is the only one who actually recognizes this fact. This idea of awareness leads to the different perceptions of Edna and Emma's suicides. Due to Flaubert's objective, realist type of writing, Emma's suicide garners less sympathy than Chopin's naturalistic depiction of Edna's suicide, if so perceived to even be a suicide (Witherow 104). This is not to say that Emma's suicide does not occur as a result of her Madame Bovary Syndrome "symptoms", but simply that she is unaware of this fact. Chopin wrote *The Awakening* as a response to *Madame Bovary*; however, she did so in a way that the reader is more sympathetic to her condition, "Here, then, is a major intentional point of departure from Flaubert's novel," (Witherow 104). Edna is consciously aware that she will never be satisfied, whereas Emma's suicide is more impulsive due to the feeling that she had no other option. Flaubert depicts her impulsive decision to commit suicide, "Immediately, like an abyss, her situation lay clearly before her … In a transport of heroism that filled her almost with joy, she raced down the hillside … through the market place, to the pharmacy," (Flaubert 279). Then later, as she is physically dying, she reflects on the "betrayals", "infamies", and "myriad cravings that had tormented her," (Flaubert 283). Emma's death is more of an escape from the problems the

Madame Bovary Syndrome had caused her, whereas the cause of Edna's potential death is due to her realization that she can never fully overcome the Madame Bovary Syndrome.

The comparison between these two protagonists then begs the question of how the endings in "The Yellow Wallpaper" and *Indiana* tie into this inability (or ability) to overcome the Madame Bovary Syndrome. One critic believes that Gilman's protagonist switches "roles" with her husband at the end of the story, where he is now the one who is on the ground and powerless, and the narrator is "creeping over" him (Svrljuga 71). In this light, the protagonist is triumphant over the main patriarchal force that hovered over her. However, another article constitutes that the ending of madness in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the same as that of death, and claims, "… however dignified and victorious these resolutions into madness and death may seem in relation to the compromised life of marriage and motherhood, they are not ultimately acceptable," (Ford 313). In Suzanne Leonard's article "The Americanization of Emma Bovary: From Feminist Icon to Desperate Housewife", she claims that many critics believe that for these novels to end in suicide is to conform to literary sexism, and that these protagonists are "a sacrifice, not a survivor" in terms of the patriarchal system (Leonard 651). In other words, the death and madness of Emma, Edna, and Gilman's protagonist are not solutions or ways of actually leading a fulfilling life and overcoming the Madame Bovary Syndrome. However, this comes back to the previously discussed idea of the Madame Bovary Syndrome as a problem with the woman who suffers from it, rather than placing the blame on the cause of it, which is the female societal confinement that these protagonists experienced. It can be said even for Louise Mallard in "The Story of an Hour", the position of women in the nineteenth century society is "so bleak that the attempt to break from the life-denying limitations of patriarchal

society is itself self-destructive," (Cunningham 49). For these female protagonists to find satisfaction and fulfillment to overcome the Madame Bovary Syndrome is nearly impossible without their own self-destruction. The patriarchal nineteenth century society as a whole would have had to change drastically to a society where women were not solely confined to marriage and motherhood.

However, the end of *Indiana* provides an example of how another option other than suicide or madness may be plausible. Sand's novel concludes with Indiana and Sir Ralph living away from society and its expectations, and as a result, Indiana finally loses most of her feelings of discontentment. Sir Ralph notes, "Don't break the chains which bind you to society; respect its laws if they protect you; value its judgements if they are fair to you. But if some day it slanders and spurns you, have enough pride to be able to do without it," (Sand 271). This patriarchal society did not suit Indiana (nor Sir Ralph), and she is given the opportunity to break free from it by living in isolation with someone she loves. Unfortunately, the other discussed protagonists do not have that same option. Furthermore, Indiana finds her purpose in freeing those who are poor and/or enslaved, which is arguably symbolic of her own captivity she felt with her father and Delmare. The narrator in the concluding chapter describes Indiana, "[…] there is still melancholy in her eyes but a melancholy which seems to express a reflection on happiness or an emotion of gratitude," (Sand 266). Sand is describing Indiana to be in a more permanent state of happiness or contentment as opposed to the fleeting and distracting kind of happiness she experienced with Raymon. She still faces bouts of melancholy, suggesting that she has not completely overcome the Madame Bovary Syndrome; however, she is still much more satisfied than she was within the confines of the societal pressure of being a housewife.

With that being said, it is important to note the other women portrayed in the novels and short story who do exemplify the conformist ideals of the nineteenth century. Each protagonist discussed in this project has one or multiple "foil(s)" that do not appear to suffer from the Madame Bovary Syndrome. In *Madame Bovary,* Madame Homais is only ever described as Monsieur Homais's wife and mother of his children, not as an individual person. She is mocked for her "slovenly appearance", to which Emma replies, "What does it matter? […] A good wife and mother doesn't bother about how she looks," (Flaubert 95). The character of Madame Homais serves as Emma's opposite in everything concerning marriage, motherhood, and even her interest in material things, such as clothing. This emphasizes how much Emma detested being a middle-class housewife in the nineteenth century.

In *Indiana,* her two foils are her foster sister, Noun, and Raymon's eventual wealthy wife, Laure de Nangy. Despite the fact that Noun and Indiana grew up together and faced similar societal pressures as Creole women, Noun does not suffer from the chronic unhappiness that Indiana does. Sand describes Noun as, "Tall, well-built, sparkling with health, lively, brisk, and over-flowing with the full-blooded ardour and passion of Creole, Noun had a resplendent beauty which put Madame Delmare's pale, delicate beauty into the shade […]" (Sand 25). Noun serves as this woman who does not face the Madame Bovary Syndrome, but still suffers at the hands of a patriarchal society in which she felt she had no other option but to commit suicide. She was alone and pregnant, and in this nineteenth century world, there were little to no options for a woman in this situation. Raymon's wife also presents as Indiana's opposite, in terms of not experiencing the Madame Bovary Syndrome. Laure de Nangy is considered to be cold, calculated, stoic, and detached. With her amount of money and wealth, she expects

nothing more from life. She even expects her suitors to only pursue her for her fortune. Sand summarizes the comparison between Laure de Nangy and Indiana, “In a word, she made her heroism consist in avoiding love as Madame Delmare placed hers in yielding to it,” (Sand 226). Laure de Nangy accepts and conforms to her role in this society avoiding any form of desire or love, which is something Indiana simply could not do. Laure de Nangy does not expect nor desire anything more from life and is content with her status as woman in the nineteenth century. Again, this emphasizes how Indiana does in fact suffer from the Madame Bovary Syndrome.

In “The Yellow Wallpaper”, two women are mentioned that conform to the “ideal woman” of the nineteenth century. Gilman’s protagonist compares herself to her sister-in-law, Mary, and her housekeeper, Jennie, who exemplify the expectations of women during this century. “The Yellow Wallpaper” protagonist’s surroundings are explained, “There can be no doubt that the narrator dwells in the middle of the patriarchy […] females in the house appear to be cardboard figures cut out by the patriarchy – first Mary, the virgin mother who ‘is so good with the baby’ and later Jennie […] who ‘is a perfect and enthusiastic housekeeper, and hopes for no better profession’,” (Ford 309). These women represent everything this protagonist is expected to be in this type of society; however, she is unable to conform to becoming this type of woman.

In *The Awakening*, there are also two women in Edna’s life; however, those two women are opposite from each other – one a conformist and the other a nonconformist. Edna struggles throughout the novel to find her place as either type of woman. Adèle Ratignolle is introduced in the beginning of the novel, preceded by Chopin’s statement, “In short, Mrs. Pontellier was

not a mother-woman," (Chopin 10). In the nineteenth century, the Mother was "defined by her purity, superior morality, and selfless devotion to family," (Rooks 123). Chopin then goes on to describe Adèle to be the epitome of this "mother-woman." Adèle is "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm", and "if her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture," (Chopin 10). Even as Adèle is struggling through a difficult childbirth, she tells Edna to "think of the children […]" (Chopin 149). Throughout the whole novel, she is completely and utterly devoted to her role as a wife and mother, and similarly to *Madame Bovary's* Madame Homais, she is never depicted to have any individuality whatsoever outside of this role. She exemplifies the ideal wife and mother of the nineteenth century, an ideal in which Edna could not conform to as a result of her awakening.

The other woman with whom Edna befriends in the novel is Mademoiselle Reisz. As a woman who lives a "bohemian lifestyle" and "avoids all human bonds", she is the exact opposite of the "mother-woman" Adèle (Witherow 97). She is representation of someone who rises above the patriarchal societal restraints, telling Edna, "The bird that would soar above the level of plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings," (Chopin 112). Mademoiselle Reisz completely rejects nineteenth century ideals of marriage and motherhood; however, as a result, she lives in almost complete isolation. This kind of life is not acceptable for Edna either, "For Edna to live as Mademoiselle Reisz lives would be to give up some of her self […] to conform to Mademoiselle Reisz's nonconformity. Edna is no more suited to Mademoiselle Reisz's reclusive lifestyle than to Adèle's nurturing one," (Witherow 97-98).

In other words, women's roles the nineteenth century, as demonstrated by these "foils" and other women within these literary pieces are limited to one extreme of another. These

supporting characters and their roles as women are meant to emphasize the protagonists' unhappiness with their societal role in life. The women who conform, whether that be to society or to nonconformity, accept their roles, and therefore, do not suffer from the Madame Bovary Syndrome. None of these characters experience this chronic dissatisfaction and decline in mental health as the protagonists do. They do not long for independence or fulfillment, or seek temporary happiness through materialistic possessions, romance outside of their marriage, or hobbies outside the realm of motherhood like the women who do suffer from the Madame Bovary Syndrome.

In conclusion, "le Bovarysme", or the Madame Bovary Syndrome, coined by Jules De Gaultier and exemplified in Gustave Flaubert's novel *Madame Bovary* can be applied to multiple female protagonists of the nineteenth century. The Madame Bovary Syndrome indicates the protagonists' dissatisfaction with life and their search for meaning and fulfillment. The root of this dissatisfaction has to do with the female societal confinement these protagonists faced during this time period. This includes multiple forms of oppression within marriage and motherhood, as well as the infantilization of women and a lack of concern for women's mental health, all of which contribute to their demise.

Each of these feminist pieces has a rather ambiguous ending, concerning suicide or madness, and with those endings comes a discussion of which type of ending is the most impactful. Does interpreting the resolution of these novels to end in suicide or madness provide a more effective condemnation of the patriarchal society, or is it in fact literary sexism due to the inability of these women to overcome the Madame Bovary Syndrome? For these protagonists, it seems as though their only option to be relieved of the Madame Bovary

Syndrome is to escape reality as they know it, whether that be rejecting society and living in isolation, distorting her perspective of reality through madness, or escaping life altogether through suicide. What is more, the Madame Bovary Syndrome is often associated with being a female condition, rather than a societal one. What these novels and short story are trying to prove is that these protagonists cannot overcome the Madame Bovary Syndrome because it is a societal malady. This is why these women feel like escaping their societal reality is the only option. Ultimately, for these protagonists to overcome the Madame Bovary Syndrome, the nineteenth century patriarchal society as a whole would have to be restructured.

This begs the question of whether or not the Madame Bovary Syndrome exists in modern society, as well as how much modern society has actually changed from the nineteenth century. One article notes the similarity between Emma Bovary and a few different contemporary popular culture references, such as the characters in the TV shows *Desperate Housewives* and *Sex and the City* (Leonard 647-648). Similar to Flaubert's protagonist, these women are presented to suffer "under patriarchal social orderings that consigned middle-class women to limited spaces (the home) and affective relations (marriage)," (Leonard 648). Considering these contemporary popular culture references, one could argue that the Madame Bovary Syndrome still does exist today. The characters in these shows still face many of the same patriarchal pressures as the protagonists discussed in this project, likely causing the Madame Bovary Syndrome. Further studies would have to be done in order to analyze to what extent the Madame Bovary Syndrome does exist in modern society, and if today's society has changed enough from the nineteenth century for women to be able to fully overcome this syndrome.

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