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The Role of Men and Women in Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*

The differences between men and women were illustrated by Henrik Ibsen in *A Doll's House*, a play written at a time when gender roles were prevalent and followed avidly. The author portrays society and its shortcomings, providing insights into the common challenges the two genders faced in the quest to match society's demands. The perceptions created show a need to develop a different perception of how people behave based on society's set rules. Ibsen wrote the play to show the harsh world realities and how much men and women should shield themselves from societal attributes. Nonetheless, the depicted societal values and views could be challenging for some, as they highlighted the changing beliefs and perceptions of reality.

The play shows how men were superior individuals in society. The men considered women as their property and children rather than their equals at home. Ibsen noted that men would treat women as their pets or children, making them less obligated to do anything other than dwell on the problems affecting them. The difference between Nora and Torvald is pegged on what society tells them they can or cannot do. The men fight for their honor and respect in society, while the women's role revolves around dealing with the home (Sprinchorn 274). The women cannot be better than their men or do better financially. In Act I, Nora forges her father's signature to get a loan from the bank to support her family. In hindsight, her husband is supposed to be the dominant partner in the family, and Nora's act can affect his reputation, which he seeks to guard. In this quest, the search for a better life at home is solely a man's responsibility, and the

inability to have a partnership tells of the challenges women faced at the time. Even Krogstad knows this could harm Torvald's honor in society and make him lose his job due to his poor reputation.

In a bid to self-sacrifice herself, Nora has to work hard to secretly pay off the loan she took while Torvald does not. The problem was that she took the money so that her husband could get better, an act that was now punishable by her having to hide all her ability to make such a move that could save her family (Ibsen Act I). The women were unable to do anything without the supervision of a male figure in their lives. The presence of a father, husband, brother, or uncle was the gateway to success for them. Women were no longer a part of active family engagement rather than raising children and homemaking. Such thinking meant that many would remain detached from reality because they do not have a means of dealing with their realities.

Xie noted that the play played a critical role in exploring the role of masculinity and feminism during this period. Helmer was a kind husband and caring parent but was also self-centered (Xie 3). Men were supposed to provide for their families, and receiving help from their wives was not something to say in public. Women and men were not marriage partners. The men were the dominant partners, while the women had to deal with the homemaking aspect. The focus on this double-speak shows the level of selfishness that created a fierce defense from Nora. Her resistance to oppression in Act III, where she was keen on leaving her husband despite the social conventions, showed her feminist side. She wanted to create a system that would influence the social trends of the time. Nora wanted to build systems that reflected her need to be free without her husband's constant hovering. She even noted that she would return to her old home and leave the children with their father, an aspect Helmer objected to because it was against societal perceptions. Men could not deal with parenting since women were the natural

homemakers. With that in mind, the conditions of existence in that society spelled doom for women and elevated men at the behest of their wives.

In Ibsen's play, the roles of women and men differed based on traditions. Each community held specific ideals regarding the interaction between men and women, creating challenges in some quarters. Women faced discriminatory policies, such as not getting loans without a signature or authorization from a male figure or helping out their husbands to meet their respective familial duties. In essence, the men wanted honor, while women were all second-class citizens. Nonetheless, the women realized their potential and wanted more, creating a feminist attitude and a reason to fight against oppression.

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