

A doll house: irreconcilable views of men and women

[Family](#), [Marriage](#)



A Doll House: Irreconcilable Views of Men and Women Throughout history, men and women's roles in society have created them to have irreconcilable views with each other. Their opposing opinions are based on different outlooks regarding various aspects of their lives. The way a person views themselves depends on their culture and the time period and which they live in. One issue that causes clashing of ideas between men and woman is their responsibility to their family. An individual's duties to their society and family play an important part in generating conflicting thoughts among the two genders. Honor and respect are other key factors that affect a person's point of views on an assortment of topics and subject matters. Also, divergence in moral judgments is an element of transforming petty disagreements into incompatible living situations. In the play " A Doll House", written by Henrik Ibsen, the idea that men and woman have irreconcilable views of self, family, duty, honor and morality is illustrated through the characters' personalities, personal hardships, and relationships with one another. In the past, a woman's position in society was limited compared to that of a man. Women were considered property of men and they had no say in any important matters concerning family and other issues. In her article " Woman in the Nineteenth as Seen through History and Literature", Mary Ann Mason Burki states " In the nineteenth century [...] a married women had almost no legal rights to her own property or to her wages if she worked" (197). Since the world used to always be considered male dominated, women had a lot fewer freedoms and rights then men. The holy matrimony was the biggest and most significant accomplishment that a woman could dream for, because without a husband by her side she would be deemed unfit and would bring

shame to her family. The husband would be in control of everything in her life, and he would own all her worldly possessions. Even the children that she conceived were considered property of her husband. In the 19th century, men still had an unfair advantage over women in many areas of life. The playwright, Henrik Ibsen, commented on the topic on hand by stating, " A woman cannot be herself in contemporary society, it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from the male point of view" (qtd. in Ferguson 230).

Ibsen's statement held true for the age in which he lived. Men ruled and governed most of the humanity throughout the world, including the civilizations in Western Europe during the Victorian epoch. Ibsen's tragicomedy, " A Doll House", is about a middle class family in the late 1800's. The drama depicts many situations characteristic of what someone in those times may have experienced in real life. The range of circumstances discussed throughout the play portrays the dire and dismal predicaments of women during that era. The females in his theatrical production were trapped in diverse quandaries, and they were forced to make vital and strategic decisions in order to persist with their lives. The choices that they were compelled to undertake could never have been understood by their male counterparts because the men had no clue what the life of a woman was like. The men believed that women's lives were filled with trivial and frivolous events. They could not appreciate the weight and value of some of the things that their women would do for them, nor could they truly comprehend the sacrifices that had been made on their behalf. There is no doubt that how one perceives oneself to be is unlike the slant that others

have on identifying them. The specific culture that one is brought up in or resides within has an influence on the way they classify and recognize themselves and others. In the past, a woman was brought up to believe that she should do anything in her power and forgo any pleasure of her own just to please her husband. In "A Doll House", the character Nora Helmer does just that in order to help her spouse through troubled times. Unfortunately, her husband, Torvald, never realizes the things that she had given up to save his life or just to satisfy him. She views herself as someone who should always be there for her man because she thinks that he is a generous man, and she trusts that he loves her and would always be there for her. However, her husband simply looks upon her and behaves towards her as if she was nothing more than a doll, "I have been your doll-wife, just as at home I was papa's doll-child; and here the children have been my dolls. I thought it great fun when you played with me, just as they thought it great fun when I played with them. That is what our marriage has been, Torvald" (Ibsen 939). He is not conscious of her feelings, and merely treats her as a foolish entity rather than as a human being capable of innovative and worthy thoughts.

Therefore, their notions of self are contradicting because she views herself as a vital component of the family, while he deems her as a nothing more than a bird "My little songbird must never do that again. A songbird needs a clean beak to warble with" (Ibsen 906). Family roles differ from society to society, but in many parts of the world family roles are entrenched in particular cultures. The way one reckons their family in their mind fluctuates from person to person in their household because of contrary outlooks on numerous issues. Husband and wife obviously have different obligations to

their family, but the husband can many a times have an arrogant approach and attitude towards his wife because he dwells in the magnitude of his accomplishments and takes no notice of the wife's affairs and endeavors. In "A Doll House", Nora and Torvald's personalities represent contrasting standpoints on several principal family problems that surface. Nora's devoted mind-set to her family constrains her to carry out deeds that she is not proud of, but is persuaded to commit due to her strong dedication to her family. Throughout the play, the audience witnesses her loyalty to her husband and her family. The end is a shock to most people because "For a middle-class woman in ordinary circumstances, Nora had done the unthinkable" (Gray 1430). People thought about how could somebody who is steadfast and trustworthy to her family abandon everything for her own selfish desires? To answer this, one must consider the way her husband participated in ruining her undying affection and commitment towards her kith and kin. He never valued her contributions to the family, and when he discovered her secret he became infuriated with her, even though she did everything just for his sake. He's quick to judge her and denounce his love for her "What a horrible awakening! All these eight years--she who was my joy and pride--a hypocrite, a liar--worse, worse--a criminal! The infinitely disgusting it all is! The shame! I should have suspected something of the kind. I should have known [...] Oh, to have to say this to someone I've loved so much! Well, that's done with" (Ibsen 935-936). In the conclusion of the production, she finally comprehends that she is not sincerely esteemed or cherished nor has she never been, and thus she cannot go on with her life contributing all she has to the family while receiving no gratitude for her

abiding attentiveness and affection. Hence, the disagreeing views on what a family is and what family relationships are supposed to consist of, ultimately destroy the Helmer household. A duty that an individual is obligated to execute can appear in many situations. One may have obligations to their family or friends that they regard imperative enough to consider it a duty to accomplish. People have varying positions on what one's duties should be. Bearing in mind a family, the husband and wife should seem to have similar duties to each other, such as being faithful, loving, considerate, and understanding of one another. Alas, that is rarely the case in modern times and especially in the past. Men considered it their duty to make money to feed their children and wife, and to supply their family with critical and essential resources and belongings. The wife's duties consisted of taking care of the children and gratifying her spouse. In "A Doll House", Nora went well beyond her expected duties to aid her husband in his ailing days. Her whole life she believed that she had no duties beyond her household, and that to do something for herself was clearly out of the question. That was akin to the views of her husband, for he did not think of her duties as being on the same intellectual level as his. In spite of this, at the last part of the 3rd Act, she apprehends that she has other duties that have been neglected in her marriage: HELMER: And I have to tell you that? Aren't they your duties to your husband and children? NORA: I have other duties equally sacred. HELMER: That isn't true. What duties are they? NORA: Duties to myself. HELMER: Before all else, you're a wife and mother. NORA: I don't believe in that anymore. I believe that before all else, I am a human being, no less than you- or anyway, I ought to try to become one. I know the majority things

you're right, Torvald, and plenty of books agree with you, too. But I can't go on believing what the majority says, or what's written in books. (940) She decides to pursue education because, " Women no less than men possess a moral and intellectual nature and have not only a right but a duty to develop it" (Templeton 32). Consequently, upon realizing this veracity she feels the need to leave her family and life to finally do something for herself, a duty that has been denied her whole life. The issue of honor can be looked at from many different perspectives. As a result, men and women may tend to have varying opinions on what is honorable and what is dishonorable. In " A Doll House", Nora believes that it is an honorable decision to forge a name for the welfare of her husband. In his working notes for this play, Ibsen wrote, " She has committed forgery, and is proud of it; for she has done it out of love for her husband, to save his life" (qtd. in Meyer 446). On the other side of the problem, her husband sees the issue from a completely different angle, and he is angry because he considers what she did dishonorable because it put their family in risk of severe punishment. He does not even stop to think that the only reason why she forged her father's name was for his health and benefit. His only concern is for his reputation and the legal repercussions that her actions could have caused. Ibsen's working notes for the play also state, " But this husband of hers takes his standpoint, conventionally honorable, on the side of the law, and sees the situation with male eyes" (qtd in Meyer 446). Their views on honor and respect are irreconcilable as long as Torvald repudiates her actions and refuses to understand the motives behind her measures. The question of morality is prevailing in Ibsen's play. The moral dilemmas surrounding the proceedings in the play

are indubitable. The morality of Nora's decisions has been a controversial issue because she leaves her family and her children to pursue her own dreams. However, the morality of her husband has been seldom addressed because a husband would many times act condescendingly to his wife, and his behavior was not be considered as odd or shocking as Nora's. Ibsen tackles the issue of morality by discussing the difference in moral ideals of men and women, " There are two kinds of moral law, two kinds of conscience, one in man and a completely different one in women. They do not understand each other; but in matters of practical living the woman is judged by man's law, as if she were not a woman but a man" (qtd. in Ferguson 230). Nora's husband had never truly appreciated her for the person that she was, and never understood that she was a person with her own ideas and her own conscience. Nora finally comprehends this fact in the final act of the play, " You've never understood me [...] You never loved me. You've thought it fun to be in love with me, that's all [...] you neither think nor talk like the man I could join myself to. When your big fright was over- and it wasn't from any threat against me, only for what might damage you- when all the danger was past, for you it was just as if nothing had happened. I was exactly the same, your little lark, your doll, that you'd have to handle with double care now that I'd turned out so brittle and frail" (938-942). This is a turning point for Nora because she knows that her morals are too strong to stay with such as man like Torvald. He could never recognize her individual morals because he has always been a stranger to her, but only now had this realization come into light for Nora. Their morals contradict each other for Nora sees enhancing her own future more vital than sacrificing more of her

life for someone who does not even value her, while Torvald just can not see past the moral dilemma of her abandoning him and her children. "The Doll House" has created various responses in different people. Clearly, many people must have been shocked at Nora's actions at the end of the play, especially individuals like Torvald, but also women who deem it unthinkable for a woman to abandon her children. It is true that leaving her children is an iniquitous act, but Nora had been denied the opportunities to do anything with her life except than to be a mother and a wife. In the era that Ibsen had written the play, feminism was a fairly new issue, so this issue is not as significant in today's world, as it was in the past. Thanks to the women rights movement and all the women that fought for equal rights for females, the life of women has notably changed. In the play many issues and questions arise out of the circumstances that Ibsen creates, but "The conflict between love and law, between heart and head, between feminine and masculine, is the moral center of A Doll House" (Templeton 35). These conflicts consist of the irreconcilable views of men and women in subjects regarding self, family, duty, honor and morality. In the end of Ibsen's theatrical production, Nora finally becomes conscious of these differences between her and Torvald's views on all these assorted topics. Then she realizes that their differences are irreconcilable, and leaves her husband because their outlooks on life and on every issue fundamental to one's heart are incompatible and perpetually conflicting. Works Cited Ferguson, Robert. Henrik Ibsen: A New Biography. London: Cohen, 1996. Gray, Ronald. "Henrik Ibsen." European Writers 7 (1985): 1421-47. Writer's Scribner Series. Brooklyn College Library. Brooklyn, NY. 28 April 2005 Ibsen, Henrik. "A Doll House." Literature: A Portable

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