

# Women have come a long way

[Sociology](#), [Human Rights](#)



Women Have Come A Long Way " A Doll House" is no more about women's rights than Shakespeare's Richard II is about the divine right of kings, or Ghosts about syphilis. . . . Its theme is the need of every individual to find out the kind of person he or she is and to strive to become that person." (Bloom 28) Ibsen portays this behavior in A Doll House through one of the main characters, Nora Helmer, by setting the scene in Norway in 1872. In the late 1800s, women did not play an important role in society at all. Their job was mainly to cook, clean, sew, take care of the children, and keep the house in order. They were treated as a material possession rather than a human being that could think and act for themselves and looked upon as a decorative member of the household. Women were robbed of their true identity and at the end of the play, Nora leaves everything behind to go out into the world to seek her identity. This behavior can be traced back to the beginning of time when women were to stay home and gather nuts and berries, while the men would go out and do the hunting and fishing. The male always dominated over the women and it was not viewed as " unfair." Male children would go to school to get an education in history, mathematics, science, english/writing, while the female would go to school to learn how to cook, sew, clean, and do household chores. The male could then further advance his education by attending a college or university, whereas no college would accept a women student. " The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of men toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her." (Declaration of Sentiments) It was believed that women were the inferior gender and had to have special attention given to them. This idea

dates back to the Medieval Period in history and is where the whole idea of chivalry came about and men having to provide special care. One can see that the idea of male superiority can be referenced back to very early on in civilization to the day *A Doll House* was written. "Torvald: You stay right here and give me a reckoning. You understand what you've done? Answer! You understand?" (Ibsen 187) Torvald says this to Nora when he finds out that she took out a loan without his consent and forging a signature. It is prevalent that Torvald is in a state of anger and he is dominating the situation, letting Nora know who is in charge and not even wanting an explanation to "why?" she took out a loan. Women were very limited in their rights in 1872. Such rights included: women had to submit to laws when they had no voice in their formation, married women had no property rights, husbands had legal power over and responsibility for their wives to the extent that they could imprison or beat them with impunity, divorce and child custody laws favored men, giving no rights to women and when women did work they were paid only a fraction of what men earned, women were not allowed to enter professions such as medicine or law, and women were robbed of their self-confidence and self-respect, and were made totally dependent on men. (Declaration of Sentiments) Ibsen makes references to this using Christine Linde, widow and a friend to Nora. Christine's husband died and left her penniless and being that her father passed away, she is able to apply for a position at the bank. This is the only exception society made in women holding a job outside the household. It is apparent that women have come a long way since 1872, gaining the right to vote in 1920 under the 19th amendment in the constitution, gaining a right to an equal

education, owning property, and having a job. These were all results of the women's rights movement amongst others. Throughout the play, Nora plays the role of a typical woman in the 1800s, staying by her husband's side, taking care of the children, and doing all the household chores. She does, however, go behind Torvald's back when she takes out the loan. When she realizes that she is unfit to do anything in life and announces her remedy-" I have to try to educate myself" (Ibsen 192) she walks out the door and expresses a deal of feminism universally agreed-upon base for women's emancipation, telling Torvald that she no longer knows how to be his wife and no longer knows who she is. (Eisenberg 32) It was uncommon for women to walk out on their husband's as they do today because they were taught since they were little, to always please their husband and do everything in their power to satisfy and make him happy. This does not include walking out on him and leaving him with the children. Nora did not know any better because she came from being treated like a material object in her own house by her father, to being treated like one by Torvald. " You're not the man I thought you were. Both you and my father have both treated me like a doll." (Ibsen 191) Therefore, her whole life was based around other people making decisions for her and conformed to their way of thinking until the end of the play, when she walks out and makes her own decision. Nora shows her childish ways throughout the play by eating macaroons, listening by Torvald's door, and by playing with the children. It is apparent that she is confused about marriage and her role as a woman in the 1800s. She does, however, make the right decision to leave although society views this as an immoral thing to do. This was considered sinful and God would punish you if

you committed such an act of wrongdoing. In conclusion, I think that women have made an incredible appearance and have play an immense role in today's society. Women are basically treated with equality today with men and the times sure have changed. Ibsen's play is a very good example of how life was like for women in the past and they have obviously made progress since then. I am very proud of what women have done for today's society and I know that they will continue fighting this neverending battle for equality until the very end as Nora did. Christina Katz English IV May 17, 1999 Senior Paper Works Cited Bloom, Harold. " Ibsen, Henrik, 1828-1906- Criticism and Interpretation." New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1999. Close Up Foundation " Declaration of Sentiments, Seneca Falls, New York, 1848." <http://www.closeup.org/sentiment/htm>. 1997 Eisenberg, Bonnie. " Legacy of '98: A Short History of The Movement." <http://www.legacy98.org/move-hist,html>. 1997 Ibsen, Henirk. A Doll's House and Other Plays. New York: Penguin Books USA Inc., 1965.