

# The change of gender roles compare and contrast essay



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The notion that women cannot play a prominent role in family or society has existed for a long time. Although this trend began to change in the past two centuries, this gender stereotype continues to be very widespread. This paper is aimed at discussing such plays as *Trifles* written by Susan Glaspell and Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. These authors show how women can be victimized or discriminated in a patriarchal society.

By depicting family conflicts, Susan Glaspell and Henrik Ibsen show how women can be forced into subordination. More importantly, the writers show how women challenge the conventions that are imposed on them. There are several important similarities shared by both works. First, both works illustrate similar themes, namely the subordinate position of women and their response to this injustice.

*A Doll's House* by Ibsen is a description of a woman who tries to break paternalistic relationship with her husband. *Trifles* written by Glaspell depict a despair of a woman who murders her husband. This similarity is one of the most important to focus on the structure of the narrative. In both plays, the main actions of the characters are not directly described by the authors.

They can be regarded as past events that help the readers understand the story. For instance, in *Trifles*, the murder is not depicted by Susan Glaspell. The larger part of the play shows how this murder is investigated. The audience is also introduced to the dialogue between two women who discuss about the possibility of Mrs. Wright having killed her husband. The approach to narrative is taken by Henrik Ibsen.

It should be mentioned that Nora was making debt repayments for almost a decade without the knowledge of her husband. It should be kept in mind that Nora obtained the first loan by forging the signature of her own spouse. In order to maintain peace in their marital life, Nora thought that it would be better for her not to tell her husband the entire truth. She did not want her husband to know that she was burdened with debts.

Thirdly, the supporting characters also play a key role in exposing gender dynamics that unfold throughout the plays. For instance, gender roles have been typically reversed in the *A Doll's House* by other casts as well. Kristine Linde takes over the position of Mr. Krogstad. She proves to the audience that she is capable, highly efficient and independent-minded person in comparison Krogstad.

She does not need the assistance of men to secure a decent job. She even opts to work while her husband stays back home. Also in *Trifles*, Mrs. Hale and Mrs. Peters find the truth about murder by investigating small details which called trifles by men. Finally both of them decide to hide evidence to protect their peer. These examples are important for showing that women can cope with the tasks and duties of men.

Additionally, both writers want readers to make their conclusion about the ending of two plays. Instead of providing detailed information about the later life of the characters, Ibsen and Glaspell prompt the audience to think about the possible ending of two plays. For instance, the readers of Susan Glaspell's play do not know whether Mrs. Wright was acquitted or found guilty of her criminal trial.

Similarly, in *A Doll's House*, Nora leaves her husband, but the author does not tell what happens to her in the future. Finally, both plays involve similar symbols that represent the female protagonists and the injustice that they have to struggle with. In *Trifles*, Mrs. Wright has been described as "kind of a bird herself" (Glaspell 1054) by Mrs. Hale.

Moreover, broken birdcage indicates that this woman could be confined in various ways. For instance, she could not attend any social event since she was made to wear shabby clothes by her husband. In the *A Doll's House*, Nora is described as "little lark" and "squirrel" by her husband by Torvald (Ibsen 1259). The doll house is literary symbol of Nora's life.

Just like what she said to her husband, Torvald: "Our home has been nothing but a playroom. I have been your doll-wife" (Ibsen 1259). Yet, one can also identify some important differences between these literary works. Both Mrs. Wright and Nora break the law, however, the reason is different. Mrs. Wright kills her husband to protect herself because she is afraid that her husband will eventually hurt her.

In contrast, Nora violates the establish behavioral norms in order to protect her husband. Just as she says: "Is a daughter not to be allowed to spare her dying father anxiety and care? Is a wife not to be allowed to save her husband's life? I don't know much about law, but I am certain that there must be laws permitting such things as that." (Ibsen 1270).

Even though both protagonists challenge dominant gender roles, their value and attitudes of these people differ significantly. Mrs. Wright wants to cope with the conventional gender roles that are imposed on her. However, the <https://assignbuster.com/the-change-of-gender-roles-compare-and-contrast-essay/>

cruelty of her husband prevents her from achieving this goal. To a great extent, she is forced to kill his husband.

In contrast, Nora seems to be quite different from that of Mrs. Wright. At the beginning, she is a happy mother with three children. Although she wants to pursue liberty, she still acts as a good wife who takes care of the family. Torvald's reaction to secret makes Nora decide to leave her husband. At some point, it becomes cumbersome to predict the complex personality of Nora. Although she is expected to be 'doll' in her husband's house, she refuses to accept that role.

Also, the writing technique has some difference. Instead of depicting main characters directly such as in *A Doll's House*, Glaspell uses indirect way to portray female protagonist. The main character Minnie does not enter the stage. This is another distinction that should be taken into consideration.

These literary works show how conventional gender stereotypes can be challenged. The authors demonstrate the liberation of the female protagonists who get rid of the bonds that are imposed on them. Thirdly, the writers focus on the conflicts within the family since these conflicts are driven by different perceptions of gender roles. Furthermore, the narratives in both plays are structured in a similar way.

For instance, the authors want to create suspense and prompt readers to think about the later life of the main characters. This conflict has been explored many writers living in the twentieth century (Schechet 61). The gender roles have been challenged in two main ways in both *A Doll's House*

and Trifles. It is common message that comes out clearly when both plays are presented to the audience or readers.

Traditional conventions are challenged not only by Nora and Mrs. Wright. Other characters also act in this way. For example, Mrs. Peters and Mrs. Hales solve the murder case and hide the evidence in effort to save Mrs. Wright. Mrs. Linde works for her family and persuade Krogstad to help Nora. By focusing on the actions of these people, the authors want to demonstrate that patriarchal view on family and society has been undermined.

These literary works are important because they explain the way in which women try to cope with gender discrimination and oppression. Susan Glaspell and Henrik Ibsen describe the experiences of women who struggle with this injustice. Most importantly, they writers show how they oppose to the tradition according to which only males can play a dominant role in family or society.

Glaspell, Susan. " Trifles." The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature. Ed. Michael Meyer. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Print.

Ibsen, Henrik. " A Doll House." The Compact Bedford Introduction to Literature. Ed. Michael Meyer. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2009. Print.

Schechet, Nita. Narrative Fissures: Reading And Rhetoric, New York: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2005. Print.