

3-4-97

The detriment that society can cause to its inhabitants

Society's role and how it defines each individual has always played a big role in how we as people are supposed to conduct ourselves. Back in the late 1800's and early 1900's, the roles of men and women were defined specifically. Men were expected to be the "bread-winners", the person that supported the wife and the children with no help from the outside world. The male role was defined as the superior and dominant gender in society that looked down on females. The female's role in life was to be the child-bearer, or the person who took care of the house and raised the children. That time period was the start of the women's rights movement where women were not willing to accept second billing to the male gender. They wanted equal opportunities and equal treatment. The main problem at that time was the frame of mind that the male gender was in. They were taught to take no help from people and to be self-reliant and self-dependent. In the play *A Doll House*, society's restraints and expectations on men and women created problems for many of the characters.

At the beginning of the story, Nora reveals to Mrs. Linde that she has committed an illegal act and has broke the law. Nora's husband was very sick and the only way for him to get better was for him to go to Italy. There was no way that they could afford the trip on their income. To pay for the trip, she borrowed money from one of the bank employees, Krogstad. Then to pay him back, she worked odd jobs and bought the most inexpensive clothing, and used the money she saved towards paying Krogstad back. Nora has committed a serious crime by forging the signature of her grandfather. She did not want to go to him because she did not feel right going to see him in that condition.

Her intentions, however, for not telling anybody deal with living to her role that society has laid out for woman. Nora was not scared because she committed a crime, but she had helped a person of the "superior gender". What would Tolvald think if he found out that Nora had paid for the trip and planned out this whole scheme? Tolvald would have been devastated by the news if he found out that Nora paid for the trip herself. Nora says,

"For heaven's sake no! Are you serious? He is so strict on that subject. Besides- Torvald, with all his masculine pride- how me. That would just ruin our relationship. Our beautiful, happy home would never be the same." (1194)

The last part of that quote is very interesting, because the "happy home" is a farce. Nora is telling a lie and has created a very deceitful relationship between her and Torvald. The only reason that Nora is telling the lie is to prevent a catastrophe that the truth will cause. The catastrophe would result because of society's restraints and expectations placed on the characters.

One of the big events of the story was whether Tolvald would consider not firing Krogstad. Tolvald had two reasons or motives not to hire Krogstad. First of all, Nora was trying convince Torvald to keep Krogstad on the job, so that Krogstad would not reveal the truth about where Nora got the money. Torvald said that Krogstad was a crooked individual who does not have any respect towards him,

"But I hear that he is quite efficient on the job. But he was a crony of mine back in my teens- one of those rash friendships that croup up again and again to embarrass you later in life. Well, I might as well say it straight out: we're on a first-name basis. And that tactless fool makes no effort at all to hide it in front of others. Quite the contrary- he thinks that entitles him to take a familiar air around me, and so every other second he comes booming out with his "Yes, Torvald!" and "Sure Thing, Torvald!" I tell you, it's been excruciating for me. He's out to make my place in the bank unbearable." (1212)

Torvald was all about power, and made up an excuse about not wanting to hire Krogstad because he forged signatures and was a crooked individual. The real reason that Krogstad was not going to be rehired was because he did not want anybody else to be placed on the same pedestal as him. He thought he was so superior that Krogstad threatened his position as a superior being. Society's expectations of the male being the independent, above all beings, was the main contributor to why Krogstad was never rehired or was allowed to retain his job.

Another reason why Torvald was unwilling to keep Krogstad at the bank was because of the threat to his manhood. Torvald did not want a woman to dictate what decisions were made, because he was concerned with what the community would say if they found out. Torvald says,

"And just pleading for him you make it impossible for me to keep him on. It's already known at the bank that I'm firing Krogstad. What if it's rumored around now that the new bank manager was vetoed by his wife." (1212)

Torvald all along was saying that he was a man of honor and did not want people who were crooked. He was not about to let a woman tell him what to do, and risk the dominance had at that time over women. Men were expected to live on their own and receive no help from others, especially women. He fell into the trap of what society expected and tried fulfilling those qualities.

Another person who fell into the trap of society's expectations was Nora. Nora, though could not accept that role and left before she was totally consumed. She had helped out the family in so many ways. Obviously she took care of the family and cleaned the house, but she contributed in so many other ways. She saved the family because Torvald, the bread winner, was on his way to mental and physical ruin. He was working so many hours and was heading for burnout. She, through incredible fortitude, saved enough money to save Torvald, but that was still not good enough. Torvald could not accept the fact that Nora, a woman, was a factor in his recovery. Torvald wanted to recover on his own, with no assistance. Nora realized that no matter what, she was going to be a "doll" and that if she did not do anything she was going to be controlled by her husband forever. Society's rules at that time, stated that the female's role was to raise the children and clean the house. They were to let the male bring in the money and take care of the family in tough situations. She wanted a personality of her own, "I must learn to be competent, Torvald." (1237) Nora could not accept the role Society had allocated her and so she left that identity in pursuit of a new one.

Society's restraints and expectations placed upon the characters in the play led to many problems for the characters. The characters could not live up to what was expected of them. Back in the late 1800's, early 1900's, females were considered the inferior gender and experienced many problems. The men, however, had to live up to a certain standard which they felt difficult to attain. When society determines how people should act, then they can never express their true identity, and problems are inevitable.

