For a considerable amount of the literature in English language, sex and gender are shown to be equitable with certain human traits. Strength is defined as a predominantly male trait while weakness is shown as the female one. Men are depicted as stable while women are shown as impulsive and unpredictable. Logic is shown as masculine while imagination is equated with femininity. It is often possible to identify a character as female or male by simply judging the behavior of the character in the story or how other characters respond to that certain character. Henrik Ibsen explored the issues of gender and how certain emotions can be thought of as feminine and masculine in his play ""A Doll's House"". ""One of the most obvious issues that Ibsen brings to his audience is that of late nineteenth-century gender roles"" (Parker). Ibsen makes use of characterization of two most important characters in the story: Torvald and Nora to explore the stereotypical view of two genders in the society. He portrays Nora and Torvald as stereotypical Victorian female and male characters and then suddenly reverses those stereotypes towards the end of the play in order to show that weakness and strength are not gendered emotions and can be found in any gender. ""A Doll's House"" was a very popular play and it created a
lot of controversy when it was debuted (Westgate 502). The domestic life portrayed in Ibsen's A Doll's House revolves around the supposed stability that was found in gender roles in the society during Victorian era. Since the play is set in the 19th century, it explores the gender roles that were accepted for men and women at that time. In the story, men are depicted as the stereotypical Victorian men who are commanding their households and running their business. They are in command of all finances and other decisions of theirs and their wives' lives. On the other hand, women can be seen to be yielding to male authority they have and are seen busy raising children and taking care of their homes. Nora and Torvald are shown as the typical Victorian men and women, at least on the surfaces, throughout the whole play. ""In many cases, 'manly ideals' (courage, dignity, seriousness) were elevated to 'human ideals' and female ideals (gentleness, kindness, active sympathy) were desirable only in the home 'and certainly not in literature'"" (Nash 561). This paper discusses how Nora and Torvald fit into stereotypical Victorian gender roles for the most story through their daily conduct and marriage while also exploring the reversal of these gender roles towards the end of the play. The traits that are most dominantly associated with Victorian women include weakness in terms of physique, morals, and mental strength. Women are considered to be imaginative and fanciful in addition to being illogical and having a hint of emotional instability in them. There are many sides of a Victorian women that were deemed as undesirable in a woman outside of her home. Nora depicts all of these traits throughout the play as she plays the role of that of a perfect Victorian woman all too well, except for the final moments in the play when she breaks away from these stereotypes. ""Ibsen conceived of Nora as a woman trapped in a patriarchal society"" (Otten 512). Nora is depicted as imaginative, unstable, and weak throughout the play. It is obvious that Torvald also views Nora as a perfect Victorian woman and acknowledges and establishes his dominance over her from the start. He does not view her as a partner who is equal to him in the marriage but rather as a possession or an amusement (Parker). Torvald establishes this dynamic of the relationship from the very start of the play when he shows his ownership and possession of Nora by calling her his squirrel. He says, ""Is that my squirrel rummaging around? ... When did my squirrel get in?"" (Mays 1654). It does not stop here. He keeps using similar nicknames that may seem like they are out of love but are actually demeaning towards Nora such as spendthrift and a lark (Mays 1654). Not only that, he also establishes his physical authority on Nora when he ""takes her by the ear"" (Mays 1654). Since Nora accepts all of these pet names and Torvald's physical control over her, it is clear that she plays the role of that of a
submissive feminine Victorian woman well. Apart from accepting physical control and demeaning attitude of
Torvald towards her, she also expresses another important trait of a Victorian women: financial dependency on
her husband. Nora is completely dependent upon her husband for the finances. She cannot make any financial
decisions herself. She cannot even borrow money without her husband's permission. This was a condition of the
Victorian society on the women that they had to be financially dependent upon their husbands. ""Nora could not
borrow any money without her husband's consent. On the other hand, a husband could do whatever he pleased
with property that was his wife's before the marriage"" (Parker). This financial dependence forced another form of
weakness on Nora. This sort of habitual weakness could lead women into accepting and believing that their
gender is inherently weak as it is easy to forget that this weakness is forced upon them by the society. Victorian
society makes an assumption that women are emotionally and mentally unstable and that they are more prone to
impulsive behavior than men. It is visible from the fact that Nora was perceived as impulsive when ""she tipped
the delivery boy generously"" (Mays 1654). If a man had done the same, he would have been thought of as
philanthropic and generous instead. Thus, the trait of impulsivity is also attributed to Nora. While the Victorian
women are appreciated for creatively running a household, they are not appreciated for having an imaginative
mind or having flights of fancy otherwise. Nora is shown as an imaginative woman who thinks about committing a
suicide at one point (Mays 1654). She also thinks about seducing Dr. Rank (Mays 1654). Her imaginative mind is a
proof of her instability as a female in Victorian society. ""Feminists and others have pointed out that Nora plays
the role of coquette throughout to gain empowerment in a male-dominated world"" (Otten 515). Emotional and
moral instability is obvious in Nora's character through her habits of deceptions and lies. There are many
instances where she uses lies to get her way such as ""smuggling macaroons into the house and telling him that
she did not eat""(Mays 1654). These minor lies and deceptions are used as background of the larger lies on
Nora's behalf later in the play. There are some traits that are attributed to men in the story such as logic, stability,
and strength. A Victorian man can be considered as someone who embodies those traits. When these traits are
present in women they are often frowned upon or completely ignored. Torvald is shown to be a typical example
of a stereotypical Victorian male. ""Torvald is in charge, society's darling and the male head of the household""
(Johnston). As mentioned before, he shows to embody these strengths of logic, strength, and stability as opposed
to Nora's weaknesses. Torvald is the one who is completely in charge of their whole family, home, and life. He
controls the decisions in the house and commands all the finances. He weakens Nora with demeaning pet names too. He establishes his authority by making use of such names. "These [pet names] all go to show how he views Nora's relationship to him. He never consults her on matters of any importance and leaves almost no responsibility to her" (Parker). It is important to note here that Nora is aware of the fact that she is supposedly undermining his authority over him when she borrows money. She tells Mrs. Linde not to tell Torvald about it because she fears that this would upset the balance of their relationship. It does not seem likely that Torvald is aware of what is going on and how Nora is manipulating him. If he was aware of it, he would not have that perfect view of Nora that he had. Since the society ignores logic and strength in women, it is likely that he ignored those traits in Nora for the same reasons. Torvald's strength is also obvious from the image that he has in the society about how he conducts his financial and domestic affairs. "'[A]n important component in these feelings is the social satisfaction [Torvald] derives from having a beautiful young wife all to himself, someone he can parade around in front of other men as his trophy, arousing their jealousy when he takes her away from the party to gratify the sexual stimulation he has gained by her public dance'" (Johnston). This is obvious from the text when Torvald tells Mrs. Linde to take a look at Nora because he feels proud of her successes in the party. He deems her successes to be a direct reflection on himself. He determines her worth from the image she creates for him. After establishing that Nora and Torvald are stereotypical Victorian male and female, Ibsen suddenly reverses the qualities he established for gender throughout the story. He does this in order to show that the qualities of weakness, strength, impulsivity, stability, logic, and fancy are not gendered traits but very human in nature. Ibsen shows that these traits can be present equally in both genders. He shows that men do not have monopoly on strength and women are not the only ones who feel despair, love, and anger. When Torvald reads finds out about Nora's deception, he experiences a fit of rage and starts blaming Nora for ruining his reputation and life (Mays 1654). However, when he finds out that Krogstad will not make Nora's actions public, he goes towards Nora and forgives her (Mays 1654). Towards the end of the play, Torvald realizes that Nora no long wants to be with him, he sits with his "'face buried in his hands'" (Mays 1654). At that moment, he is not the stable and logical man he was throughout the play. He was deeply broken and emotional. Nora realizes at the end that her gender role was keeping her from having personal fulfillment (Urban). At this point, Nora talks calmly to her husband about their life and marriage. She tells Torvald the truth in simple plain sentences in a serious manner without getting
emotional. She says, "You don't understand me. And I've never understood you either "until tonight" (Mays 1654). She is calm throughout and takes the decision to leave her house and her husband in a rational manner. This shows that Nora is not defined by her gender but is deeply human who can have strength attributed only to men in that society.

Conclusion

Torvald and Nora are epitomes of the Victorian male and female throughout the play until the end. Towards the end of the play, these gender roles get reversed and it is obvious to the audience that genders do not have monopoly over emotions. They both show their weakness and strength, impulsivity and stability, and their imagination and logic at one point or the other in the play. Ibsen makes a very important point through this story by portraying why their family fell apart within a few days. He emphasizes that it is possible for both women and men to be logical or illogical. It is possible for them to be fanciful and reasonable. He makes it clear that the gender roles that the society forces on two genders are not right. There is no guarantee that a man will always be stable, logical, and rational and no reason that every woman should be perceived as imaginative, fanciful, weak, and impulsive. These are very human traits and they should be treated as such.