

## The Relationship Between Performativity of Masculinity and Tragedy in Ibsen's Selected Plays

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### Abstract

This research aims at examining the performativity of masculinity in Ibsen's plays: *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1891), with its relation to the tragic fate of men. The textual analysis method along with the theoretical framework of masculinity has been used to conduct this research. Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* (1993) and Judith Butler's *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988) serve as secondary texts. The main focus of the research is the male characters: Torvald Helmer of *A Doll's House* and Jørgen Tesman of *Hedda Gabler*. By critically analyzing the texts of the plays, this study contends that the male figures of the selected plays are capable of being regarded as the tragic heroes, who meet their tragic ends in an attempt to perform masculinity. Moreover, it is demonstrated that hegemonic masculine culture, whether it is authoritarian masculinity of Torvald or feminine masculinity of Tesman, brings catastrophe not only upon male figures but their partners as well. Hence, Torvald's tragedy lies in his adherence to the society's patriarchal code of conduct and Tesman's tragic flaw is his failure to meet society's expectations of masculine performativity.

**Keywords:** Authoritative Masculinity, Feminine Masculinity, Gender Performativity, Ibsen, Masculinity, Modern Drama, Tragedy

### Introduction

This paper establishes a relationship between the performativity of masculinity and tragedy in Ibsen's selected plays by utilizing the concept of gender as a performative act. By critically analyzing the male protagonists of the plays, the research examines the performance of masculinity along with its deep link to the concept of domestic tragedy. Although classical tragedy is linked to the death of the main protagonist

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at the end of a drama, this paper capitalizes on the idea of domestic tragedy, portraying middle class characters as tragic heroes who are unable to live their lives according to their free will in the plays. Torvald Helmer and Jörgen Tesman are presented as epitomes of domestic tragedy, who meet their tragic ends at the hands of masculine societal expectations. Their suffering has not been paid much attention in the Ibsen scholarship. This paper aims at exploring the societal expectations of being a man, which brings about tragedy in the lives of Torvald and Tesman. Textual analysis method has been used to conduct the research. Moreover, the theories of masculinity i.e. Raewyn Connell's *Masculinities* (1993) and Judith Butler's *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988), are applied as theoretical frameworks. Two plays of Ibsen: *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1891) have been selected to develop the link between performativity of masculinity and tragedy. *A Doll's House*, is a three-act play, which depicts the middle class Norwegians' marriage, exploring the issue of femininity in patriarchy, appearances, and power of money. The second text, *Hedda Gabler*, presents a story of a married couple in four-acts. Hedda Gabler, belonging to the elite class, is revealed to be a selfish, cynical female who is bored by her marriage to the middle class scholar, Jörgen Tesman.

This research paper intends to find out the answers to the questions such as: how societal expectations of masculinity affect Torvald's and Tesman's lives? What is the relationship between Torvald and Tesman's performance of masculinity and their tragedies in *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*? Ibsen's selected plays have been studied under the rubric of feminism, humanism and socialism in but a few articles have presented him as a champion of masculine rights by critically analyzing masculine characters of his plays (He, 2008; Adil et al., 2023). Men's behavioral patterns, social roles, and relationships, as well as the meanings ascribed to them, have already been studied (He, 2008; Adil et al., 2023). However, there is a dearth of studies which apply the combined theoretical framework of Butler's 'gender performativity' and Connell's insights into the socio-political construct of masculinity. This research aims to fill the gap and demonstrate how the societal impositions and expectations of masculine performativity configure and construes the tragic fates of male protagonist in Ibsen's plays. By studying Torvald and Tesman's performativity of masculinity, this study demonstrates the toxicity of cultural construction of gender. This research would add on studying masculine theory in the perspective of classical literature by establishing a relationship between performance of masculinity and the tragic fate of men.

## Literature Review

Henrik Ibsen's plays have been widely recognized as modern explorations of gender, society, and identity. However, while much of the critical discourse frames Ibsen's works as feminist, humanist, or social tragedies, the complexities of masculinity in his plays remain underexplored. The existing scholarship on Ibsen's dramaturgy can be thematically arranged into feminist, humanist, and social tragedies.

Feminist critiques have dominated the scholarly discourse on Ibsen, focusing primarily on the struggles of his female protagonists. Joan Templeton's "The Death of Chivalry" (1989) critiques *A Doll's House* as a deconstruction of patriarchal marriage, portraying Nora's transformation from a submissive wife to an autonomous individual. Templeton highlights Nora's resistance to societal norms but provides little analysis of Torvald Helmer's internal conflicts and vulnerabilities. Similarly, Rosenberg and Templeton's (1989) study views Nora as a feminist icon who defies patriarchal oppression but neglects the tragic implications of Torvald's adherence to societal expectations of masculinity. Tanya Thresher's (2006) application of Butler's theory of gender performativity to *Hedda Gabler* emphasizes Hedda's oscillation between femininity and masculinity, exposing the constructed nature of gender roles. Thresher's analysis underscores Hedda's performative rebellion against societal norms but excludes male characters like Jörgen Tesman, whose portrayal challenges hegemonic masculinity. Elle Hartmann's "Ibsen's Motherless Women" (2004) also foregrounds female protagonists, exploring how Nora and Hedda navigate male-dominated environments. However, Hartmann's work lacks a discussion of how male characters are similarly constrained by gender expectations.

Humanist readings of Ibsen often transcend gender politics to explore universal existential struggles. Joan Templeton's "The Doll House Backlash" (1996) and Kristin Ørjasæter's (2005) studies argue that Ibsen's works address broader human concerns beyond feminist issues. Templeton asserts that *A Doll's House* critiques the need for individual self-realization irrespective of gender, while Ørjasæter contextualizes Ibsen's perspectives within 19th-century debates on human rights and societal reform. These analyses highlight Ibsen's universalist themes but often sideline the nuanced portrayal of male suffering. Rogers Katherine's (1974) study underscores Ibsen's critique of economic dependency as a key theme in *A Doll's House*, portraying Nora's economic reliance on Torvald as emblematic of systemic gender

inequality. However, the work also overlooks how patriarchal structures constrain Torvald's identity as a provider. This limitation is mirrored in Marvin's analysis, which focuses on female protagonists' struggles but fails to interrogate the male characters' tragic entanglements with societal expectations.

While feminist and humanist critiques dominate Ibsen studies, masculinist readings provide valuable insights into the male protagonists' experiences of tragedy. Chengzhou He's "Ibsen's Men in Trouble" (2008) explores the tension between societal ideals of masculinity and personal identity in characters like Torvald Helmer and Halvard Solness. He argues that these men struggle with the burdens of bourgeois masculinity, including ego, social identity, and familial expectations. However, the study does not address Jörgen Tesman's depiction as embodying "feminine masculinity," highlighting a gap in the analysis of non-hegemonic masculinities. Møller's review of Kittang's *Ibsen's Heroism* (2002) delves into the existential dimensions of masculinity in Ibsen's works, emphasizing themes of power and self-realization. However, this analysis excludes *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, leaving the exploration of masculinity in these plays largely unexamined. Similarly, Templeton's (1997) humanist critique fails to consider how Ibsen's male characters grapple with societal constraints, focusing instead on the universalist dimensions of his narratives.

Critical analyses of Ibsen's works have predominantly centered on feminist and humanist perspectives, often overlooking the complexities of masculinity and its performative dimensions. Male protagonists like Torvald Helmer and Jörgen Tesman remain underexplored, despite their pivotal roles in illustrating the tragic consequences of adhering to or deviating from societal ideals of masculinity. By applying Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinity and Butler's concept of gender performativity, this study addresses this critical gap. It examines how the performativity of masculinity intersects with tragedy in *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of gender and identity in Ibsen's plays.

## Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This paper, by nature, is qualitative research. By applying the theory of masculinity and gender performativity, hermeneutic textual analysis has been conducted to examine the relationship between the performance of masculinity and its contribution in the tragedy of male characters in Ibsen's plays *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler*. The dialogues of the

play are critically analyzed to illustrate how Tesman Helmer of *A Doll's House* and Jørgen Tesman of *Hedda Gabler*, have performed and enacted the ascribed masculine behavior.

Connell's *Masculinities* (1993), and Judith Butler's *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988) are applied as theoretical frameworks. Connell emphasizes that masculinity is a cultural construct which expects men to behave according to certain sets of standards. According to her, a body is a canvas on which norms are painted. In order to be accepted in society, men have to follow the codes of masculinity and neglect their individualities. The notion of 'toxic masculinity' imposes a heap of expectations upon the shoulders of men, causing them to suffer physically and mentally. The first section of Raewyn Connell's book *Masculinities* (1993), consists of three chapters: "The Science of Masculinity", "Men's Bodies" and "The Social Organization of Masculinity". In the first chapter, Connell asserts that masculinity is not a natural behavior but constructed through history and culture. Therefore, men are called as "performing" or "doing" masculinity. She investigates how knowledge about masculinity is created by exploring its subjective nature and the issues claiming rationality on account of masculinity and gender difference. Connell examines three major initiatives (of sociology, anthropology and history) in the twenty-first century to develop a science of masculinity which are: clinical (psychoanalysis), social psychology and gender role theory. At the end of the chapter, she reflects on if masculinity is the problem of gender politics, or if the issue is not masculinity (or hegemonic masculinity) itself, but instead the institutional structures that produce inequality and necessitate the examination of masculinity. She believes that masculinity is formed through reciprocal relationships between the personal and societal aspects, and she wonders if this sort of dynamic interplay allows for a consistent object of knowledge, and if masculinity science is even conceivable. Connell discusses the relationship between the male body and masculinity in chapter two titled "Men's Bodies." She refutes the commonly accepted belief in several realms of society that men cannot change because they have a type of inherent nature at the start of "Men's Bodies." Also, she explains how authentic masculinity is always seen as stemming from men's bodies—true masculinity is imprinted in the male body or reflects something about that body. Furthermore, Connell cites Bryan Turner's phrase "body practices" to suggest that society attempts to develop the male or female form in line with its perceptions through sports, fashion, and eventually plastic surgery. She has used the metaphor of "canvas" to emphasize that the body is a canvas on which norms are painted and thus masculine norms are painted on the male bodies. In

chapter three, Connell suggests that the contemporary use of the term masculinity is rooted in European individuality that emerged with the expansion of former colonies and the capitalist economy. Therefore, masculinity is a relatively new concept today. ‘Masculinity’ is a relational term that is always defined in opposition to femininity as she argued in chapter two of “Masculinities”. She identifies four main strategies for defining masculinity: essentialist, positivistic, normative (a standard of masculinity), and semiotic definitions. While rejecting all four strategies, she takes the concept of masculinity appearing to exist in connection to a complicated system of symbols from the semiotic approach (Connell, 1993/2020).

Butler has mentioned Simone de Beauvoir in her work, quoting: one is not born, but rather becomes a woman, the same rule stands for a man, who is not born as a man but rather becomes so by time. According to Butler, gender is a societal construct as well as a performative act and the body is a site of cultural inscription of gender. Thus, masculinity is not a natural phenomenon but a societal, cultural and historical experience. Judith Butler, in *Performative Acts and Gender Constitution* (1988), asserts that gender roles are defined through the “performance” of socially sanctioned behaviors. She believes that “one is not born a man or a woman; rather, one acts as a man or a woman”. In other words, performance shapes gender, and also performance determines gender division. Gender division, according to Butler, is the result of a “binary system” that incorporates power relations. In other words, the female “performance” is among subjugation to male. Binary oppositions, but from the other view, always have liminal spaces between them, from where subversiveness comes into play. Actions can be used to contest gender identity since it is a product of social construction or constitution regulated by acts. The behaviors we conduct are constrained by societal expectations and taboos, yet they may be questioned, undermining these restricting social norms. As a result, she sees performance as both a location of gender oppression and a possible act of gender resistance and liberation (Butler, 2004)

## Analysis and Discussion

This section critically examines the dialogues, diction, and gestures of Torvald Helmer (*A Doll’s House*) and Jörgen Tesman (*Hedda Gabler*) to analyze their characterization as masculine tragic heroes. By applying the concept of domestic tragedy—which elevates middle-class protagonists to the status of tragic heroes—alongside Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity and Butler’s notion of gender performativity, this analysis

interrogates how societal constructs of idealized masculinity shape and perpetuate tragedy in these characters' lives. The discussion first explores Torvald Helmer's masculine subjectivity and performative behaviors within the domestic sphere as portrayed in *A Doll's House*. It then shifts to Jørgen Tesman's character in *Hedda Gabler*, illustrating how socio-political expectations of masculinity exacerbate his tragic trajectory. Together, these analyses illuminate the intricate interplay between gendered performativity and the tragic dimensions of Ibsen's male protagonists.

### **Masculine Ideals and Society: Torvald as the Tragic Hero of *A Doll's House* (1879)**

Torvald's enactment of masculinity which presents him as a tragic hero has been analyzed in this section through the examination of his dialogues in *A Doll's House*. It is contended that the cultural construction of Torvald's ultimate masculinity, not only became the cause of his suffering but also the ones around him, especially his wife. His tragic flaw of masculinity or to be precise a blind pursuit of becoming a perfect male, became the reason for the breakdown of his relationship with his beloved wife.

Torvald was a traditional man of the nineteenth century with a long list of masculine qualities: affectionate, responsible, selfless, rugged-romantic, soft hearted, committed, and had a strong sense of morality. At the end of the play, when his ideal masculine image was created in the eyes of his wife, she expected him to perform a miracle—another layer of expectation. His failure of fulfilling the criteria of being a masculine figure created by Nora, made him meet his tragic end in the shape of loss of relationship.

The first evidence of Torvald imposing the strength of his masculinity lies in belittling her wife—by using nicknames of little animals—in an attempt to make her happy. Connell has quoted Alice Rossi, one of the feminist pioneers in sociology in her text in which she says that masculinity is the social elaboration of the biological function of fatherhood (Connell, 2020, p. 52). A man, whether he is a brother, husband or a son strives to achieve the masculinity of a father, who has complete authority over females. In the play, Torvald used several nicknames to address his wife: 'little squirrel', 'little spendthrift', 'featherhead', and 'little skylark' (Ibsen, 1879, p. 6-7), indicating that his actual role of husband has been covered up with his socially and culturally constructed gender role. His wife also said in the play, 'Being

with Torvald is a little like being with papa' (Ibsen, 1879, p. 59). Moreover, his wife's quickly, and submissively turning towards Torvald when she is being called by her nicknames, indicates that she enjoys being called so. Considering the above statement, Tolvard's use of nicknames for Nora was a part of his male sex role. He behaved being a father to his wife by sustaining his masculine dominance through belittling her and considered it an act of affection.

According to Chengzhou He, an ideal man in a capitalist society is the one who can earn a good salary and provide for his family (He, 2008, p. 136). Being a responsible husband who burns the midnight oil for his family, the socially attributed role of manhood forced Torvald to internalize the attitudes of an ideal masculine man. Butler is also of the view that the body is figured as a surface and the scene of a cultural inscription (Butler, 2004, p. 165). Torvald's bodily acts indicate the cultural and historical setting, where men were seen as merely a money making machine with no mental and physical health and their purpose of existence lay solely in earning and providing for their households i.e. wife and children. Moreover, as a masculine symbol, earning had become a matter of ego and pride for Torvald. In a blind attempt to achieve the working-class masculine ideal Torvlad not only affected him, but also the ones around him, especially his wife. According to Connel, "an ideal of working-class manliness and self-respect was constructed in response to class deprivation and paternalist strategies of management" (Connell, 2020, p. 75). In the play, Nora has also mentioned Torvald's illness due to overwork,

You know Torvald left his office when we were married? There was no prospect of promotion there, and he had to try and earn more than before. But during the first year he over-worked himself dreadfully. You see, he had to make money every way he could, and he worked early and late; but he couldn't stand it, and fell dreadfully ill, and the doctors said it was necessary for him to go south (Ibsen, 1879, p. 14).

A traditional masculine ideology proposes that men should maintain heterosexual dominance. Torvald's wife used his supervising ideal manliness as a tool to manipulate her husband and impose her will on him. Connel has also marked that 'the phallus is master-signifier, and femininity is symbolically defined by lack' (Connell, 1879, p. 71). In order to showcase her influence on her husband, Nora used Tolvard's machismo and his views of female subordination to fixate Mrs. Linde in a job at his workplace. In the play, she praises Linde of working perfectly



under a master and used the word 'clever' twice, to arouse Tolvards' manliness, 'Christine is tremendously clever at book-keeping, and she is frightfully anxious to work under some clever man so as to perfect herself' (Ibsen, 1879, p. 26). Being a male and the possessor of phallus, Tolavard manliness could not help dominating over females. Thus, toying with his masculinity, Nora succeeded in showing her influence over her husband in front of her school friend.

Aggression is considered a glorified sign of manliness. Torvald's aggression as an ideal masculine symbol, after reading Krogstad's letter, was amalgamation of emotional breakdown; sexual repression and toxic masculinity which preyed upon his masculine self-esteem. Connell has described that rigid parenting, the father's domination of the family, sexual suppression, and conservative morals were all linked to male qualities including contempt for women and a more general adherence to leadership from above, as well as aggression over the less powerful (Connell, 2020, p. 18). Also, she is also of the view that those men respect their wives and mothers, and are never aggressive towards women who have the conscience to draw the patriarchal dividend (Connell, 2020, p. 79-80). In the play, before Torvald showed his aggression towards Nora, he received a letter with black cross depicting the chronicity of Dr Rank's disease which would soon make him expire. Throughout the play, Tolvard is seen as spending most of his time in the private study room with Dr. Rank, indicating his closeness and informality with Dr. Rank. Cathecting more onto Dr. Rank as compared to Nora, Helmer could not bear the news and went inside the room. The gesture of "walking up and down" (Ibsen, 1879, p. 105) and the long paragraphs express Torvld's emotional breakdown.

Helmer (walking up and down): He had so grown into our lives. I can't think of him as having gone out of them. He, with his sufferings and his loneliness, was like a cloudy background to our sunlit happiness. Well, perhaps it is best so. For him, anyway. (Standing still.) And perhaps for us too, Nora. We two are thrown quite upon each other now. (Puts his arms round her.) My darling wife, I don't feel as if I could hold you tight enough. Do you know, Nora, I have often wished that you might be threatened by some great danger, so that I might risk my life's blood, and everything, for your sake (Ibsen, 1879, p. 105).

Also, Torvald's putting arms around Nora is very unusual at this point, hinting at his psychological tensions. He is behaving so in order to hide his emotions and behave as a man. In the next sentence, he sustains his

hegemonic masculinity by affirming Nora his heroism. Moreover, he was sexually repressed by her own woman which disturbed him. Additionally, being a hardworking middle-class husband and a father, Tolvard cannot bear a thought of borrowing, for it would hurt his manliness. His manliness was shaken twice by Nora's action" first by borrowing, second by forgery. The psychological damage of Torvald made him insane, and he behaved aggressively towards his beloved wife. Also, the cultural construction of hegemonic masculinity in Torvald did not let him deal with the issue with a cool mind. He showcased the behavior which was glorified i.e verbal violence. Being a patriarch, Tolvard could not help subjugating Nora through verbal attacks, and affected their marriage. Thus, the problem lies in the institution of patriarchy which glamorizes hegemonic masculinity.

Disdain for homosexuality, is considered an ideal masculine attribute. Torvald's authoritarian masculinity—his contempt towards homosexual intimation—did not let him rehire Krogstad in his workplace. Keeping in view Connell's claim, Torvald possesses an authoritarian type masculinity, which was "a masculinity particularly involved in the maintenance of patriarchy: marked by hatred for homosexuals and contempt for women" (Connell, 2020, p. 18). Butler is also of the view that societal and cultural norms are inscribed on the body, which determines gender behavior. He marked Beauvoir in her, where she said that the body is a historical situation, and is a manner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation (Butler, 2004, p. 902). Krogstad's forgery and fraud had not as great an impact on him as his affectionate behavior towards in public. As he says in the play:

And I hear he is a good worker, too. But I knew him when we were boys. It was one of those rash friendships that so often prove an incubus in afterlife. I may as well tell you plainly, we were once on very intimate terms with one another. But this tactless fellow lays no restraint on himself when other people are present. On the contrary, he thinks it gives him the right to adopt a familiar tone with me, and every minute it is "I say, Helmer, old fellow!" and that sort of thing. I assure you it is extremely painful for me. He would make my position in the Bank intolerable. (Ibsen, 1879, p. 59-60)

Following the ideals of masculinity, he cannot stand being attracted to a homosex and endanger his manliness at the workplace. The societal and cultural standards of the 19th Century, view gender binaries and heterosexuality as normal. Behaviors other than these are marked as

taboos and stigmas. Therefore, in order to save himself from falling under any taboo or stigma that would tarnish his reputation in the workplace, he removed Krogstad from his office.

Nora's expectation of performing a heroic act by Torvald, a masculine man who is struggling hard to follow the norms of masculinity, become the reason for their break up. According to Butler, certain types of actions are frequently perceived as expressing a gender core or identity. That expectation, in turn, is founded on how sex is perceived, with sex being viewed as a distinct and factual datum of main sexual traits (Butler, 2004, p. 907). Heroism in Torvald's case was the defining factor of his masculine identity, which he failed to adhere to at the end of the play. Not only did he suffer through Nora's leaving of house but also the children. Connell has mentioned Farrell's words in *The Liberated Man*, and Nichols's stance in *Men's Liberation* that the repressive male sex role should be altered or abandoned. Additionally, newer work with the title "Warning: the male sex role may be dangerous to your health" aims at exposing the suffering of men (Connell, 2020, p. 24). As Torvald not only earned for his family, but also ignored taking care of his own self, Nora imposed another masculine expectation on Torvald i.e. of performing a miracle. The psychological abnormality of Torvald resulting from emotional breakdown, sexual repression, toxic masculinity and aggression, at the end of the play did not allow him to perform the miracle for Nora. His wife slammed the door on the non-masculine Torvald who did not take blame on himself. Hence, the failing masculine heroism of Torvald became the reason for separation.

From the above discussion, It is concluded that Torvald's masculinity was the reason for his tragedy. The subscription to cultural norms of masculinity not only affect him but also the people around him, in particular his wife. Thus, his ideal masculinity was his tragic flaw or hamartia which led to his downfall.

### **Feminine Masculinity and Society: Jörgen Tesman as the Tragic Hero of *Hedda Gabler* (1891)**

The performance of 'feminine masculinity' of Tesman is explored in this section, through examining his dialogues and gestures in the play *Hedda Gabler*. Feminine masculinity is defined as the non-conformity to the expected masculine code of conduct and performing the emasculated and feminine behavior. As the body is a canvas on which norms are painted, layers of femininity were painted on Tesman's masculine body. It is argued that Tesman is one of the many tragic protagonists of the play,

whose tragic flaw was his inability to perform the ideal bullying masculine behavior and instead let himself be bullied by his wife, Hedda.

The initial proof of Tesman being a feminine masculine lies in his feminine upbringing which infused a little more than a greater affectionating behavior in him. Connell has mentioned in his work that boys develop a pre-Oedipal femininity as a result of their bond with their mother (Connell, 2020, p. 11). As Tesman was brought up by her aunt Rina, Julia and servant Berte, he had internalized femininity in his masculine body. For Butler, 'gender is entirely imitative, and identity is formed as an imitation of an ideal or norm' (Butler, 2004, p. 90). The masculine/feminine environment contributes in making the identity of an individual. In the play, Tesman says to Aunt Julia, 'And it's a delight for me, too, to see you again, Aunt Julia! You, who have been father and mother in one to me.' (Ibsen, 1891, p. 17). Also, aunt Julia mentions that, 'We must make the best of it, Berta. There was nothing else to be done. George can't do without you, you see-he absolutely can't. He has had you to look after him ever since he was a little boy' (Ibsen, 1891, p. 13). Moreover, Tesman talks of his association with slippers that Aunt Rina embroidered which Hedda despises, 'Only think—ill as she was, Aunt Rina embroidered these for me. Oh you can't think how many associations cling to them' (Ibsen, 1891, p. 26). Thus, the absence of masculine entity during his upbringing and the influence of three feminine figures i.e aunt Rina, aunt Julia and Berte on him during his childhood, made Tesman a feminine masculine male and an emasculate figure in the eyes of his wife .

The henpecked behavior of Tesman marks him as a submissive husband. Connell describes Horney's claim in her work 'The Dread of Women' (1932), which says that Masculinity compelled males to pick socially inferior women as love objects, as well as the practice of purposefully degrading women's self-esteem in order to sustain 'the perpetually unstable self-esteem of the 'average man''. Tesman's behavior is opposite of what Horney accounts as masculine behavior. She linked women's submission to the formation of masculinity, whereas Tesman is the one who has been subjected by his wife. Gender, according to Butler, is not a fixed identity or center of agency from which multiple acts emerge; rather, it is a temporally constructed identity—one established by a stylized repetition of acts. Certain sets of norms that are taught to a child during his/her early growth can alter her/his gender behavior. In the play, Tesman is seen as bossed by his wife, and has no say in front of her. When he talks about keeping his lonely aunt Rina in the house after the death of his beloved aunt Rina, Hedda coldly refuses:

'Hedda: Oh, don't trouble about anything here. Tesman: Yes, just fancy what a nice time we three might have together, if—? Hedda: If—? Tesman: [Uneasily.] Oh nothing. It will all come right. Let us hope so—eh?' (Ibsen, 1891, p. 113).

As Tesman had a feminine upbringing, so he internalized the code of submissiveness from her aunts and Berte, and became an unmasculine man.

Another indication of Tesman's feminine masculinity is that he is afraid of competition with Lovborg as well as anxious of his financial security/social status. Competitiveness is one of the inherited tendencies from masculine genes, according to Connell (Connell, 2020, p. 46) and is absent in Tesman. Butler is also of the view that 'gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo' (Connell, 2020, p. 901). In the play, Tesman's gesture of clasping his hands shows his anxiety attach to the word competition,

Brack: The nomination may perhaps be made conditional on the result of a competition—Tesman: Competition! Think of that, Hedda! Hedda: [Leans further back in the chair.] Aha—aha! Tesman: But who can my competitor be? Surely not—? BRACK. Yes, precisely—Eilert Lovborg. Tesman: [Clasping his hands.] No, no—it's quite impossible! Eh? (Ibsen, 1891, p. 47).

Also, the ending of the sentence with the word 'Eh?' suggest that Tesman wants somebody to deny his competition with Loveborg. In any case, he is not ready for competition with Loveborg. It can be deduced from the excerpt of critiques and the text of play that Tesman's fear of losing his social status as a taboo/stigma hints at his masculinity prestige, and the lack of hypercompetitiveness shows his unmasculinity. Therefore, Tesman is an amalgamation of femininity as well as masculinity.

The absence of aggression—an ideal masculine trait—in Tesman as a response to the interruption of his several dialogues by his wife hints at his weak construction of masculinity. According to Connell, the inability to achieve pure masculinity in the middle of the feminine and masculine polarity increases anxiety, leading to an overemphasis on the masculine end of view. This 'masculine protest', in Adler's famous phrase, is core to neurosis. It entails overcompensation in the favor of violence, as well as a restless pursuit of victories (Connell, 2020, p. 16). In the play, Tesman neither has aggression nor obsession over ego. Butler is of the view that The body is subjected to cultural construction, not just via rules

that legitimize and legislate how one behaves with one's body, but also through unspoken standards that shape how the body is regarded culturally (Butler, 2004, p. 904). In the case of Tesman, there is no cultural subscription to his masculinity, as the body underneath has experienced the inscription of feminine nurturing. In the play, the incomplete sentence of Tesman interrupted by his wife suggests his unmasculine position:

‘Tesman: But what do you think of Hedda—eh? Doesn’t she look flourishing? She has actually— Hedda: Oh, do leave me alone. You haven’t thanked Judge Brack for all the trouble he has taken—’ (Ibsen, 1891, p. 42).

From the above discussion, It can be extracted that neither Tesman’s ego hurts when his dialogues are being interrupted by his wife nor does he show aggression as a response to it, suggesting his camouflaged femininity inside his male body.

The non-egoistic and prideless feminine bodily gestures of Tesman along with his expression ‘Ehh?’ at the end of most of the dialogues, indicates his femininity canvassed on his masculine body. According to Connell, Children of both sexes (i.e., those with both feminine and masculine polarity) are obliged to take on the feminine role since they are weaker than adults. They acquire a feminine sense of self and worry about their abilities to achieve masculinity (Connell, 2020, p. 16). Butler has also claimed that gender is the everyday method in which numerous physical gestures, actions, and enactments create the appearance of an enduring gendered self (Butler, 2004, p. 900). Tesman’s bodily performance hints at his feminine side, when he says, ‘For my sake, Hedda? Eh?’ (Ibsen, 1891, p. 27); ‘Good heavens, they had as good as promised me the appointment. Eh?’ (Ibsen, 1891, p. 47-48); ‘I wonder how she can endure to live in such an out-of-the way hole—eh?’ (Ibsen, 1891, p. 28); ‘Hedda says she herself will look after what is wanting.—Shan’t we sit down? Eh?’ (Ibsen, 1891, p. 44). From the excerpts and the dialogues It is clear that Tesman’s actual masculinity has been covered up by femininity which makes him a weak masculine figure.

The absence of ultimate morality—an attribute of an ideal man—and his brief and soft aggression when Hedda burns the manuscript, followed by admiration of the act as a form of love indicates his polar feminine masculine personality. Connell has claimed that Masculine characters are more aggressive toward the weaker, and these characteristics may be linked back to the father's strict upbringing and family authority

(Connell, 2020, p. 18). The absence of father during his childhood, created his personality as a mixture of femininity and masculinity. Butler is also of the view that 'gender is a construction that regularly conceals its genesis' (Butler, 2004, p. 903). In the play, for the moment Tesman showed light aggression, but the next moment he was admiring this action as an act of love,

Hedda: I have burnt it—every line of it. Tesman: [With a violent movement of terror.] Burnt! Burnt Eilert's manuscript! Hedda: Don't scream so. The servant might hear you. (Ibsen 114); Tesman: But how could you do anything so unheard-of? What put it into your head? What possessed you? Answer me that— eh? (Ibsen 115); Hedda: No matter—I could not bear the idea that any one should throw you into the shade. Tesman [In an outburst of mingled doubt and joy.] Hedda! Oh, is this true? But—but—I never knew you show your love like that before. Fancy that! (Ibsen, 1891, p. 115)

It will not be wrong to say that as a masculine act he showed a brief aggression when Hedda burned the manuscript but the next moment his internalized femininity took over him, and he rejoiced Hedda's action as an act of love on her part.

Instead of choosing a socially inferior woman—and practicing patriarchy and dominance over her as an ideal masculine behavior—Tesman married his dream woman who had a higher status as compared to him, suggesting his emasculine masculinity. Connell has described that men are driven by emotions, which include the tendency to pick socially inferior women as love objects and the practice of purposefully weakening women's self-esteem in order to bolster their self-esteem (Connell, 2020, p. 11). Tesman is not an average man, but a feminine masculine persona. According to Butler certain actions are typically seen as expressing a gender core or identity, and these actions either conform to or challenge an anticipated gender identity in some manner (Butler, 2004, p. 907). In the play, Tesman talks about the prestige of marrying a woman of higher status, 'Tesman: [Hums a little and smiles complacently.] Yes, I fancy I have several good friends about town who would like to stand in my shoes—eh?' (Ibsen, 1891, p. 17). Tesman did not have the obsessed patriarchal perspectives that most masculine men have. Also, he does not want to practice his power and show his dominance over his wife. He is a feminine-masculine character as his attributes do not fit in the cultural constructed box of masculinity.

Hence the absence of ideal bullying masculinity in Tesman and the presence of feminine masculinity, lead him to meet his tragic end in the form of the demise of his beloved wife. He was bossed by his wife, afraid of competition, lacked aggression, got easily manipulated by his wife, had feminine bodily gestures and his marriage with a woman of higher status, pictured him as a feminine masculine man—an unacceptable form of masculinity in a patriarchal society.

The textual analysis of the selected dramas has demonstrated that the masculine ideals in a patriarchal society hold the strings of the men, eliminating every kind of freedom on their part. The society where power, domination, bullying, and aggression are glorified, masculinity—be it in any form—becomes tragic flaws residing inside men. The toxic masculinity inflicts calamity on the heads of those lurking near those men, let alone create psychological dilemmas within them. Tesman's tragic flaw of striving the masculine ideal and that of Tesman, lack of ideal bullying masculinity, made their lives a complete tragedy. Both of the characters suffered through the loss of relationship and also mental, physical and psychological damage. Their masculine performativity has indicated how a man becomes the toxic subject in the patriarchal society.

According to Aristotle people from upper hierarchical positions—kings, knights, princes, and warriors—should be the subject of tragedy. Ibsen changed the traditional view of tragedy by presenting common middle class men as tragic heroes in his plays, who were struggling to exist in a bourgeois society. Bound by the cultural expectations of patriarchy both figures meet their tragic ends in the form of loss of relationship. Torvald Helmer was the tragic hero who brought catastrophe upon himself by following the masculine ideal. Conversely, Jørgen Tesman's failure to follow the masculine ideal made him a tragic hero. According to Arestad, the core to Ibsen's view of tragedy is the issue of whether a man is free to organize his life as he desires (Arestad, 1959, p. 285). The paper claims that Torvald and Tesman's tragic fates were caused by the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century. Consequently, they were unable to live a life of freedom and suffered physically, mentally and psychologically.

## Conclusion

This research demonstrates that Henrik Ibsen's plays, *A Doll's House* (1879) and *Hedda Gabler* (1890), are a manifestation of repressed masculinity amidst patriarchal and capitalist culture of society, where men suffer due to their expected masculine behavior. The characters of Torvald and Tesman, are psychologically, economically, and socially,



crushed by the patriarchal expectations of manhood. Torvald's use of nicknames to belittle his wife, and Nora's exploitation of his machismo are both tragic. Moreover, as a middle class husband, he worked day and night for his family, ignoring his mental and physical health. On the other hand, Tesman is a submissive husband of a bossy wife, who has no say in front of his wife. Tesman's feminine upbringing and affection for her aunts made him an emasculated person in the eyes of his wife. Also, Tesman is a feminine man who is easily manipulated by his wife. Both these characters met their tragic ends as a result of the toxic construction of masculinity in society. Torvald's internalization of masculine ideals not only affected him but also his wife, who left her house and her children. Adding to it, Tesman failed to follow the masculine code of conduct and his wife committed suicide. Hence, the research demonstrates that masculinity in any form is toxic, be it authoritarian masculinity of Torvald or feminine masculinity of Tesman.

To conclude, Tesman and Torvald are tragic heroes who met their tragedy in their own respective ways; Torvald as a tragic hero blindfolded followed his masculine perfectionism; and Tesman failed to perform the societal expectations of manliness. Also, It has been demonstrated that hegemonic masculine culture, whether Torvald's authoritarian masculinity or Tesman's feminine masculinity, causes disaster not only for male figures but also for their relationships. The societal construction of masculinity affects the lives of Torvald and Tesman by inflicting on them the pain of loss of relationship. It has been explored that the societal expectations related to the performativity of masculinity has a strong link to the tragic fate of Torvald and Tesman.

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