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Ibsen's Parental Paradigms: A Reexamination

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***Abstract*: This article explores the parent-child relationships in Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts* and *An Enemy of the People* with a special focus on the destructive role of parents and children in social and human evolution. The study examines how Ibsen uses these particular relationships and what they represent in light of his views on social progress, evolution, and education. Drawing from the interactions between children and their parents in the plays under study, the work discusses the intricate weaving together of a number of different cultural and philosophical visions inherent in children's and parent's world, thereby highlighting the role children play in promoting cultural diversity and social justice. As this study highlights, traditional parenting breads dictatorship, tyranny, brutality and sycophancy. The study therefore discusses themes like torture, oppression, injustice, repression, religious hypocrisy, hopes deferred and marginalization within the confines of the home with the intention of showing that those who take up tasks of parenting and guardianship have the responsibility of liberating the child from these injustices. Through the use of social identity theoretical approach to literature, the work demonstrates that the constructive role of the child in social progress and human evolution is usually watered down by the destructive effect of the parent on the child's progress.**

***Keywords*: Ibsen, Parenting, Childhood, Upbringing and Child evolution.**

1. Introduction

Parenting is one of life's most profound responsibilities, shaping not only the lives of the children but also the fabric of society. Many parents and guardians are finding it difficult to navigate this path in a world of social media, political unrest, global pandemic, social divide, economic downturn, drug and peer influence. Since Plato, the need for an ideal parenting model has pre-occupied writers, philosophers and world policy makers.

According to Colin Heywood, child upbringing practices throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were discipline-focused, and corporal punishment was commonly used for discipline on children. As centuries passed, parenting shifted to more supportive methods where a child's angry and irritable behaviour was seen as a reflection of their restlessness, showing a clear lack of discipline. Then children of six to eight years old were counted as small adults because they were strong enough to accomplish different household and industrial tasks. The results were disastrous because tedious and high workload led to poor health and high infant death rate. The late 18th century saw an increase in parents' awareness of the child's health, physical wellness and happiness (122-124). In the nineteenth century, "for a long time, most of the population followed the custom that marriages took in private, and the children suffered" (Heywood 198). In "Why do Children Not Play in Nearby Nature", Margrete Skar notes that in Europe during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, "vulnerable children and adolescents needed love, given and developed in sustainable and healthy relations with trusted adults" (3). Therefore, throughout history, child upbringing has moved from

Henrik Ibsen, a nineteenth and twentieth century dramatist used the stage to question the ethical troubling aspects of a child's development, especially on the relationship between them and their parents, attempting to answer the questions: What is the model parenting system and how could this be established? In an attempt to find an answer to this fundamental question, the playwright indulged in an age-old quest: the role of the father, mother and guardian in fostering the child's, and consequently, society's progress. The aim of this article is show how Henrik Ibsen in *An Enemy of the People*, *Ghosts* and *A Doll's House* fosters a new consciousness by paying attention to how characters who play the role of parents are presented. In *Ghosts*, Helene Alving's attempt to shield her son, Oswald, from the truth about his father's evil legacy reflects the tension between parental protection and the need for personal truth. In *A Doll's House*, Nora's journey towards self-discovery, neglecting the children and her maid, illustrates the crisis of purpose that can arise when parenting conforms to societal roles. In *An Enemy of the People*, Petra's battle against the societal pressures to conform to the majority's beliefs showcases the conflict between parental integrity and infants' expectations. Ibsen thus presents children whose actions reflect a desperate search for meaning, paralleling the struggles of parents who feel trapped by their responsibilities and the roles society has placed upon them.

Some critics have examined Ibsen's involvement with the theme of parenting, thereby providing an insight into Ibsen's critique of societies that marginalize and neglect the well-being of their youngest members. Per Vesterhus in his article "Why do Ibsen's children Die?" focuses his analysis on medical histories, poor healthcare and heather as causes infant multiple death, and these were not peculiar to Ibsen's Norway. Xie, Shengting gives an interesting analysis of the repercussions of

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Ibsen's plays in the Norwegian legal community, focusing on how the nineteenth-century Norwegian family worked against the wife and the children. To Evert Sprinchorn, Ibsen's plays preach the doctrine that ''a certain kind of individual liberty for the children is deadly'' (223). From the above, there is a critical consensus that Ibsen in his drama presents children who are victims of the nineteenth century hypocritical idealism and who crash in their fight to break free. This study goes further to say that Ibsen had a well-defined vision for the future - something he envisaged in the youths. His critique on the judgemental society for the stigmatization of the children pushes further to provide them with necessary support. His plays serve parents with softening strategies of becoming more flexible in their approach towards parenting, and at the same time giving children the room to consider different choices for moving off their obstinate stand.

Social Identity theoretical approach to literature has been used to help identify and define the forces that condition the characters and their relationships. Social Identity Theory (SIT), developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s and 80s, posits that individuals define their self-concept based on group memberships and strive for positive distinctiveness for their in-group, often leading to in-group bias. The theory "is component of social psychology theory which explores the influence of group membership, good processes and inter-group relations on individual self-concept and self-esteem" (Daniel Schnur 73), and focuses on how individuals identify with particular groups and the implications of these identifications for belonging and exclusion. This approach allows for a richer understanding of the discussions surrounding child belonging and evolution, as it acknowledges the multifaceted nature of identity formation in these children, and the various forces that shape their collective experiences. This theory has major tenets like social categorization, social identity, social comparison, self-esteem hypothesis, positive distinctiveness, out-group homogeneity which will be used in the course of this work to illustrate and show how this affects and shapes children's identities in Ibsen's plays.

2. The God-Complex and Ibsen's Parental Characters in *An Enemy of the People* and *Ghosts*

One of the most important preconditions for laying bare the symbolic power of the patriarchy is the disclosure of the father as a representative of the divine within the family. In patriarchal societies, "the father's position in the family is considered as the extended arm of God, and this was strengthened by the Protestant church [in the days if Ibsen]" (Hidaya and Hala 1013). The father had an obligation to represent both the Christian patriarchal view of life and, to a certain extent, to help carry out the church's duties related to evangelizing and establishing the faith within the family. Three significant configurations of fatherhood in Ibsen's drama that correspond to actual father roles in his time are the patriarchal father, the fallen father, and the authoritarian father.

An Enemy of the People primarily focuses on the authoritarian parenting style tendencies of Dr Thomas Stockman. Authoritarian parents are highly demanding and directive, but not responsive. "They are obedience- and status-oriented, and expect their orders to be obeyed without explanation" (Baumrind 62). These parents provide well-ordered and structured environments with clearly stated rules. According to Kendra Cherry, such parents have high expectations such as; high demands, little responsiveness, and a focus on obedience and control. Their Children are expected to follow all rules and instructions without question, challenging or disobeying the parent's decisions, and any form of disobedience is often met with severe punishment. Authoritarian parents tend to rely heavily on punishment, such as yelling, spanking, or taking away privileges, to enforce rules. Under such parenting, there is little room for negotiation or discussion about the reasons behind the rules and parents may discourage children from expressing their own opinions, feelings, or desires.

Dr. Stockman's authoritarian parenting style is evident in his interactions with his daughter Petra and her brothers. Dr Stockman discovers a serious health threat in the Baths of his Norwegian town and draws the attention of the officials about the problem, suggesting that they should close the Baths until the health problem is corrected but is met with fierce resistance from his brother, the town's mayor, who prefers keeping the Baths open and correcting the problem gradually. After advancing multiple arguments that appeal to the economic interests of the town against Dr Stockman's role-related obligation as a medical doctor the mayor threatens his brother with loss of job and ostracism. His children will have to drop out from school and his daughter, Petra who is a teacher will also lose her job because they are "enemies of the people".

The two brothers ignore the wellbeing of their children to satisfy their personal egos; their moral and ethical responsibilities completely lacking. This absence emphasizes that the choices they make directly affect future generations, reinforcing the theme of neglect in childcare and parenting. The potential health risks posed to children due to the contaminated baths serve as a stark reminder that adult decisions can have dire consequences on the children's future. The absence of children's voices permits the play to explore complex moral dilemmas. It emphasizes the tension between societal pressures and individual ethics, raising questions about what is right for the community/parents versus what is right for the children. This definitely means that if adults do not act in a responsible manner, the future of the children will be compromised. The fact that Dr Stockman's children are set aside right from the beginning reflect an authoritarian dynamism because the father makes decisions without including the children. This illustrates the themes of power, control, and the potential neglect of those who are most vulnerable.

When Dr. Stockman's wife expresses her disagreement with her husband's confrontational approach to the town council, Dr Stockman rebuffs her:

DR. STOCKMANN. (snapping his fingers and getting up from the table). I have it!

I have it, by Jove! You shall never set foot in the school again!

THE BOYS. No more school! (Ibsen 89)

Here, Dr. Stockmann expects Petra and her brothers to blindly support his position, rather than allowing them to form their own independent views. This shows his unwillingness to consider their perspective showing his expectation of unquestioning loyalty to himself. He neglects his children's needs which significantly contributes to the family's downfall. His actions and decisions prioritize personal pursuits over the well-being of his children, leading to a series of detrimental consequences.

Dr. Stockman's authoritarian tendencies are also apparent in his dealings with his sons Ejlif and Morten. After the violent confrontation he has with his brother, Peter Stockman, his wife gets worried and asks him to think and consider the future of his boys. But he responds:

DR. STOCKMAN. The boys— I (Recovers himself suddenly.) No, even if the whole world goes to pieces, I will never bow my neck to this yokel (Goes towards

MRS. STOCKMANN. (following him). Thomas—what are you going to do!

DR. STOCKMANN. (at his door). I mean to have the right to look my sons in the face when they are grown men. (Goes into his room.)

MRS. STOCKMANN. (bursting into tears). God help us all!

PETRA. Father is splendid! He will not give in.

(The boys look on in amazement; PETRA signs to them not to speak. (Ibsen 65)

This dismissive attitude towards his son's concerns reflects Dr Stockman's belief in his own superiority. His children have no right to express their own points of view. He does not even give them the opportunity to express themselves, refusing to engage in any form of dialogue. Petra knows the rules better than her younger siblings, so she signs them not to utter a word at this stage to avoid ugly consequences.

In *A Doll's House*, the cycle of control and dependence is seen in Nora's upbringing under her father's authoritarian rule, and this defines her relationship with her husband, Torvald. This cycle of control and dependence is a common thread in discussions of authoritarian parenting and its long-lasting effects on individuals. Modern audiences can empathize with Nora's struggle to break free from this cycle, as it reflects the experiences of many who have grown up in restrictive, controlling environments. As mentioned above by Tracy Trautner, the suppression of identity and agency in these children is a reality in Nora's inability to develop her own independent thoughts and opinions under her father's influence. Torvald's continued control and infantilization of Nora further exacerbates this issue, leaving her feeling trapped and unable to fully realize her potential. This resonates with modern audiences who recognize the importance of personal autonomy and the right to self-determination, particularly for marginalized groups. Through Nora's father, Ibsen ridicules and exposes two issues; the excesses of the authoritarian fathers and those authoritative political regimes as well, that characterized Europe in general and Norway in particular in the early and mid-nineteenth century.

Authoritarian parenting styles have a significant impact on children of these caregivers. According to Tracy Trautner, in her article "Authoritarian Parenting Style", we learn that children of authoritarian Parents are aggressive, but can also be socially inept, shy and cannot make their own decisions. Children in these families have poor self-esteem, are poor judges of character and will rebel against authority figures when they are older. Nora, who is a victim of this rebels against these forms of oppression. Consequently, these children will model the behaviour shown to them by their parents while with their peers and as future parents themselves. She equally argues that those children often struggle with independent thinking, anger management, and harbour feelings of resentment. In her words, she states that this style is "low in parental responsiveness and high in parental damaging. It therefore means that authoritarian parents are not always emotional or affectionate, and critical of their children if they fail to meet their expectations. Inferring that rules should always be used to conduct behaviour that is desired. When a child breaks a rule, it should be an opportunity to teach a life lesson and not be punished because they didn't follow the rules. Unfortunately, strong punishment leads to more misbehaviour, rebellion and results in constant power struggles.

Some critics have argued that Nora's husband's treatment of his wife results from her inability to gain his trust since "leaders must not only attract the trust of followers but must also know in whom to place their confidence" (Lawson 293). Clement Scott thinks that "Nora is the daughter of a corrupt father and that Torvald is aware" (23). She is therefore "affectionate as many spoilt children are" (24). For Rosefeldt, "she does not know the value of money and the virtue of truth and cannot be given responsibilities… she has never once sighed for a communion of souls" (48). Nora's husband is aware of all these and attributes them to her father's influence: "all your father's flimsy values have come out in you … no religion, nor morals, no sense of duty" (244). When condemning her irresponsibility with money, he says she spends "exactly the way your father did" (201). Nora does not know the value of money and has been brought up by an irresponsible father, thus killing every leadership potential in her.

Torvald's relationship with his children and the maid points to a similar direction to that of Nora's father. The treatment he gives them is as dehumanizing as the one he gives to Nora. The relationship between Torvald on the one hand and his children and the maid on the other hand can be described as a completely alienated one. The single instance in the play wherein Torvald comes in contact with his children reveals an explicit desire to remain utterly removed from them. As the children come into the house, Torvald quickly leaves, declaring, "this place is unbearable now for everyone but mothers" (3.51). He is so conscious of the stratification which should exist in his household and that is why he does not, not even once, mention the maid. Torvald's children hold a sub-human position in his "kingdom". At one point, he tells Nora "You talk like a child; you don't know anything of the world you live in (3.58).

Implicit in this insult is the understanding that the children with whom he lives denote inferiority and degradation. He considers the children and the maid as sub-human in nature.

The authoritarian parenting styles depicted in *A Doll's House* take a significant toll on Nora's psychological and emotional well-being. Nora's feelings of guilt, shame, and lack of self-worth are directly tied to the constraints placed upon her by her father and husband. For example, when Nora decides to leave Torvald, we realize how disturbed and scandalized he becomes. He begins to wonder whether Nora 's actions are normal and keeps asking her if she psychologically upright; he calls her "blind, foolish woman" and also wonders if she has "not a reliable guide in such matters as that", saying "have you no religion?".

Such a restrictive upbringing has a long-lasting impact, leading to issues such as anxiety, depression, and a profound sense of alienation. The struggle for emancipation and self-actualisation is another consequence we must not ignore. Nora's eventual decision to leave her family and "find herself" is a powerful moment of emancipation and a rejection of the societal constraints that have defined her life. This resonates with modern man who continues to grapple with the challenges of self-discovery, personal growth, and the pursuit of fulfilment in the face of social and cultural expectations. Nora's journey towards self-actualisation serves as an inspiring example of the human capacity for transformation and the reclamation of one's own identity.

Ibsen's plays often feature strong female characters who challenge the traditional gender roles and societal expectations of their time and who are determined to protect their children and ensure their future success, but their methods can be seen as domineering and overbearing. *A Doll's House* features a domineering mother who exert control over their families and influence the actions of their children. She is a strong-willed and manipulative mother, using her power to shape the lives of those around her.

The most powerful aspect of oppression in the *A Doll's House* is articulated in regards to Nora's relationship with her children. In developing his concept of the mirror stage, Lacan explains that the image the subject acquires makes possible an "identification" which leads to a new behavioural pattern that reflects the social construct within which the image first immerged. Nora might stand for the abolition of torture and enslavement, as seen in her fight for liberation but her relationship with the children indicates that she is interested in the elements that structure her psyche. Her relationship with her children is not different from that which she suffers in the hands of her husband.

Rather than struggling for her children's liberation as she does for herself, Nora places herself in the position of power over them. She refers to them as "little darlings", speaks about how lovely they are and even refers to them as "my little baby dolls". She treats them as her playthings, as object to amuse her, the same way she is treated by her husband. The language Nora uses to refer to her children is mostly cantered on physical structures and is as belittling as that which her husband uses on her. When the children recount a narrowly avoided encounter with a dog, Nora says "no, dogs never bite little, lovely baby dollies" (Ibsen 56). They are her objects and her playthings. Even when the maid is about to change the clothes of the children, Nora thinks that she should "undress them herself because it's fun" (Ibsen 172). Nora is playing dress-up with her children, the way people play with their toys. The motive that defines Nora's relationship with her children corresponds to the reasons she performs the tarantella dance. By maintaining power over her children, Nora temporary escapes from the realities of her marriage.

Nora's dealings with her children lack basic respect. When Krogstad shows up unexpectedly, Nora breaks off her game with the children and promises to continue when he is gone. When Krogstad leaves, the children are quick to remind her that "the strange man's gone out the door…will you play again?" (Ibsen 105). Nora, because she has just been reminded by Krogstad that she forged her father's signature in the past, and that he is about to reveal it to Torvald, refuses. Rather than satisfy her children by honouring her promise, she refuses to continue the game and therefore becomes selfish, thinking only about herself. She does not consider it obligatory in any way to keep her promise. Like Torvald, she approaches her children as less humans as the children become her dolls. We see in Nora's acts towards her children that longing for what she does not have as she suffers from what Jacques Lacan calls "nostalgia" and "anxiety". Her attitude towards her children, it can be suggested, only shows her regret for not possessing Torvald's "Phallus" which in this context can be equated to power.

By presenting Nora the way he does, Ibsen wants us to see how devastating the misuse of power can be. It takes a chain reaction; Nora's treatment of the children reflects Torvald's treatment of Nora. The central domineering figure, Torvald, determines the relationships around him. We stated in chapter one that the child in Lacan's the mirror stage must not physically come in contact with a mirror in order to discover his/her ego. A human form can still serve as an external image in which the child discovers both himself or herself and the reality around him/her. In this context, Torvald ironically stands as Nora's "model" and as such can stand as the "infant's primary identification" Antonovsky 21). What determines the relationship between the oppressor and the oppressed is repeated in the relationship between the oppressed and those around them. We begin to wonder why does Nora adopt and participate in the very relational structures that hold her in subjugation. Paulo Freire explains in *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* that: "The phenomenon of the oppressed becoming oppressor derives from the fact that the oppressed, at a certain moment of their existential experience, adopts an attitude of adhesion to the oppressor … the one pole aspires not to liberation, but to identification with its opposite pole". (45-46). The oppressed, rather than striving for the liberation of all, instead subject those around them to a power structure similar to that in which they are themselves.

3. Subversion of Conventional Parenting in *Ghosts*

In *Ghosts* and *Hedda Gabler,* societal norms and expectations surrounding family structures and dynamics are

challenged and redefined through characters who deviate from traditional roles of parenting within the family unit. Ibsen wanted his society and contemporaries to understand the beauty of such subversions on individuals, families and society as a whole. Ibsen challenges traditional notions of parenting thereby exposing the truths beneath the surfaces of seemingly happy and stable households. In this regard, Ibsen presents ideal parenting as a multifaceted and difficult task, and that parents must navigate complex societal expectations and personal desires in order to do what they believe is best for their children, highlighting the importance of empathy, understanding, and communication in building strong, healthy relationships between parents and children.

Though Ibsen wrote as far back as the nineteenth century, he already set out to project these goals in the aim of fashioning the child's and the parent's world. *Ghosts* is a play that Ibsen uses to draw awareness and highlight the need for man and woman to have a rethink on how parenting should be done. To increase the likelihood of children, Ibsen presents parents, whom after engaging in baseless purposeless parenting come to self-realization, causing them to indulge in reflections, purposeful parenting style such as listening, completing tasks and employing appropriate manners. In this way, parenting is seen as a journey of discovery, growth and transformation, thereby emphasising the importance of embracing the unknown by stressing the importance of honest communication and transparency in parenting.

As Bornstein explains, the "particular and continuing task of parents and other caregivers is to enculturate children . . . to prepare them for socially accepted physical, economic, and psychological situations that are characteristic of the culture in which they are to survive and thrive." (6).

In *Ghosts*, we see the traits of the theme of parenting with purpose in Mrs. Helene Alving, the protagonist. Mrs. Helene Alving is a central character in the play, a widow who has endured a difficult marriage to Captain Alving, a man whose debauchery and moral failings she kept hidden to protect her family's reputation and her son, Oswald as a devoted and caring mother who like most of Ibsen's heroes and heroines is finally punished for the mistakes made when she was young. A mother who is trying to come to terms with her past and protect her son from the mistakes of his father. Helene Alving is a complex female character who is both emancipated and traditional at the same time.

As a protective mother, Mrs. Alving's primary motivation is to shield her son from the harsh truths about his father and the family's past. She sent Oswald away to prevent him from being corrupted by his father's influence. Her purpose is rooted in a desire to provide stability and moral clarity, aiming to shield Oswald from the flaws she perceives in their past. Mrs. Alving thinks of herself as a mother, when Oswald comes home, she tries to make up for lost time by coddling and flattering him. He finds it suffocating:

MRS. ALVING. [Beaming with delight.] I know one who has kept both his inner and his outer self-unharmed. Just look at him, Mr. Manders.

OSWALD: [Moves restlessly about the room.] Yes, yes, my dear mother; let's say no more about it". (Ibsen 37)

From Oswald's reaction, we can perceive that he is suffering from the only 'child syndrome'; is a speculative idea rather than a real syndrome. According to Felicitas Sohner, "in this concept, the only child is a spoiled child as they're used to getting anything they desire from their parents, including their undivided attention". This theory states that these kinds of children will grow into selfish individuals who only focus on themselves and their own requirements. Besides, lack of interaction with a sibling is believed to bring about loneliness and antisocial tendencies. Hall described only children as spoiled, selfish/self-absorbed, maladjusted, bossy, antisocial, and lonely. (Bohannon 496). Felicity Rosslyn posits that "in order to discourage that, parents should praise individualism in their child from an early age and help them to value being unique, rather than part of the crowd" (112). Mrs. Alving stays calm and strong even when she knows how much it hurts a mother who has long missed her only child and is deprived of the scarce opportunities to make up.

The first step to help her child was to admit that she has a problem. She could track her steps backward as to how and why this happened when she has been so careful. She cries out:

MRS. ALVING: Oh—ideals, ideals! If only I were not such a coward!

MANDERS: Do not despise ideals, Mrs. Alving; they will avenge themselves cruelly. Take Oswald's case: he, unfortunately, seems to have few enough ideals as it is; but I can see that his father stands before him as an ideal.

MRS. ALVING: Yes, that is true.

MANDERS: And this habit of mind you have yourself implanted and fostered by your letters.

MRS. ALVING: Yes; in my superstitious awe for duty and the proprieties, I lied to my boy, year after year. Oh, what a coward—what a coward I have been!

MANDERS: You have established a happy illusion in your son's heart, Mrs. Alving; and assuredly you ought not to undervalue it. (Ibsen 32)

Mrs. Alving admits that she is a coward during a conversation with Pastor Manders, she expresses her internal conflict about revealing the truth to her son, Oswald. There must be some part of Mrs. Alving that congratulates herself for saving Oswald from the evil influence of her husband – until she finds out about Oswald's illness. Unlike many characters who avoid confronting uncomfortable truths, Mrs Alving's purposeful parenting involves a gradual recognition of the need to address the realities of their family history. She ultimately decides to reveal the truth about Captain Alving to Oswald, reflecting a commitment to honesty as a foundational aspect of her parenting.

Mrs. Alving is first and foremost a very intelligent and curious woman, there is no complacency with her. With her restless mind, she's always on the prowl for new ideas. She reminds us of Ibsen's other famously dissatisfied women, Nora

and Hedda; Mrs. Alving is those girls all grown up: she's Nora if she had stayed with her husband; Hedda if she hadn't taken her life. Mrs. Alving has had twenty more years to think about things, and she's still thinking. There are so many moments when Mrs. Alving's contemplative nature shows itself in the text. She's a great listener. When parents actively listen, children feel valued and understood, which fosters trust. This trust encourages children to share their thoughts and feelings more openly. Active listening strengthens the emotional bond between parents and children, creating a more intimate and supportive relationship. It also models good communication skills, teaching children how to listen and respond thoughtfully. Listening to children encourages them to think critically and solve problems independently, as they feel supported in their decision-making process. It helps children learn to take responsibility for their actions and decisions, knowing they have a safe space to discuss their thoughts.

When Pastor Manders and Oswald argue about the true definition of marriage, Mrs. Alving is quiet. Only once Oswald has left does she pipe up with her surprising verdict: "I say that Oswald was right in every word" (Ibsen 24). She listens silently as Engstrand wheedles Manders into believing his version of the Johanna story. Sohi Benzad advises that “It can be discouraging to try to get through to someone who isn’t really listening. It’s much easier to tell your troubles to a parent who is really listening. He doesn’t even have to say anything. Often a sympathetic silence is all a child needs. In fact, the less you say the better!” (quoted in Gaute Strove 204). Mrs Alving listens to her son talk about his life in Paris, and, connecting his words to her husband, makes one of the biggest discoveries of her life: listening shows respect for the child’s perspective, helping them feel respected and important. The stage directions make a big deal out of it: Mrs. Alving, "who has been listening eagerly, rises, her eyes big with thought, and says: “Now I see the sequence of things" (Ibsen 38). we also see her in Act three when she comforts Oswald during his last hours, she is so quiet and listens to him: “After a moment's silence, commands herself, and says: “Here is my hand upon it.” (Ibsen 54). And immediately, Oswald calms down and trusts his mother again.

She listens intently to Oswald’s experiences and thoughts, which helps her realize the full extent of her husband’s influence on their son. By so doing, she struggles to balance her duty as a mother with her own need for personal freedom and truth. Her ability to listen and reflect helps her navigate this complex situation. *Ghosts* embeds the theme of parenting as sacrifice and this is deeply explored through the character of Mrs. Helene Alving. Mrs. Alving stays in a marriage with Captain Alving to protect her son, Oswald, and tries to maintain her family’s reputation. She sacrifices her own happiness and well-being to shield Oswald from the truth about his father’s debauchery.

To Ibsen, becoming a parent involves a major transition in life. The change presented above in the lives of his characters leads to new roles expected to bring joy, expectations, challenges and obligations for the individual parent and for the family as a whole. The sense of coping and the way that this transition is experienced have implications for the bond with the child, the child’s upbringing and the development of the family. Ibsen understood that fatherhood has to change, with greater demands and expectations of fathers’ participation in the lives of their children other than providing financial resources for their upkeep. Mrs. Alving now shows a unique position regarding shared parental love, ignoring the demands of society and the need to preserve family image at the detriment of the child’s happiness. Away from gender demands, she understands that children’s needs are supposed to be key elements in the design home politics and economics. No doubt, she is ready to deal with Regina as her own daughter, irrespective of what society thinks. Ibsen’s new parents find themselves in a vulnerable phase, alternating between joy and worry. Because roles have changed, individually and in relation to parent and child, there are needs for adjustment. Matejeric et al., term this a sense of coherence, and describes three component factors – comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness – all of which are essential to a sense of coping, health and well-being in the new parents’ role (10).

4. Conclusion

This article set out to defend the view that Ibsen's works shine a spotlight on the damaging consequences of traditional parenting models that prioritize conformity, duty, and the preservation of social standing over the emotional, psychological, and spiritual needs of both parents and children. This crisis of purpose serves as a broader commentary on the human condition, exploring the universal struggles of individuals to find meaning, purpose, and fulfillment in a world that often seems to constrain and suppress their true potential. By using the family as a microcosm of these larger nineteenth century societal issues, Ibsen revealed that prevailing parenting paradigm is often rooted in a narrow, self-serving, and ultimately damaging set of priorities. Rather than prioritizing the nurturing, empowering, and authentic development of the child, many parents in Ibsen's works are driven by a desire to maintain social status, uphold familial obligations, and conform to societal norms. He is advocating for a more democratic and empathetic approach to raising children. He urges parents to treat their children as individuals with their own thoughts and feelings, rather than trying to control or manipulate them. It is evident that “Parenting is a never-ending job” and a lot of times, the more extreme a child's behaviour, the more extreme measures parents take in response, the more extreme the child feels justified in acting, as a bad situation becomes worse. Thus, the more obstinate the child acts, the more punitively the parents react, the more stubbornly resolved the child becomes to remain resistant.

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