

Women role in athenian society

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



Women's role in Greece can be seen when one first begins to do research on the subject. The subject of women in Greece is coupled with the subject of slaves. This is the earliest classification of women in Greek society.

Although women were treated differently from city to city the basic premise of that treatment never changed. Women were only useful for establishing a bloodline that could carry on the family name and give the proper last rites to the husband. However, women did form life long bonds with their husbands and found love in arranged marriages.

Women are "defined as near slaves, or as perpetual minors" in Athenian society (The Greek World, pg. 200). For women life didn't extend far from the home, which was thought to be their sole realm of existence. Though they ranked higher than slaves did, they were treated in many of the same ways. Just like slaves, their mothers trained women as adolescents what their domestic duties were. They were secluded from all males, including those in their family. They lived in gynaikeion, which were women's apartments in Athens (Daily Life in Greece, pg. 55). They were kept at home where they were taught the proper manners and duties of a desirable wife. "Marriage was the inevitable goal to which her whole life tended. To remain a spinster was the worst disgrace which could befall a woman" (Everyday Life in Ancient Greece, pg. 82). However, it was seen as more of a disgrace on her father who 'owned' her until she was married.

Although Athenian women were completely in charge of their household and slaves, they didn't have much freedom. They rarely left the house, unless they were part of some sort of religious procession. They could only walk abroad in the streets if accompanied by a slave or other attendant. It was

improper for respectable women to share the same social entertainments as men. Even if caught in the courtyard of the house by a male visitor, they would return to the seclusion of their own apartments. Pericles once said, "it was their business to be spoken of as little as possible whether for good or ill" (Everyday Life in Ancient Greece, pg. 82). This sentiment describes the extent of the importance of women in society. Marriage was their only major role in the lives of men.

The betrothal was arranged by the parents as a strictly business contract. The parent's choice of a suitable groom for their bride was a matter of pride and status for the family. The groom's choice in bride was largely determined by the amount of dowry the bride would bring with her. Although the wedding was a happy ceremony, it was only the beginning of a woman's loss of independence. Not only did women possess no independent status in the eyes of the law; she always remained under the supervision of a male. If her husband died, she was returned to her father's or brother's home where they would take charge of her.

After the wedding, the wife's duties were centered on the management of the home. She would overlook the slaves, mend and make clothing for her family, usually done by spinning or knitting, weave rugs and baskets for the home, or just fold and refold the clothing kept in the family chest. The wife was also responsible for maintaining her attractiveness for her husband. A proper Athenian wife would adorn herself with jewelry and use rouge upon her husband's arrival home. Sometimes she might spend an entire evening sitting next to the couch where her husband lay reclining.

Most importantly the Athenian women were seen as "fine upstanding matrons" fit to bear a race of excellent athletes" (Everyday Life in Ancient Greece, pg. 86). An Athenian man married primarily to have children. These children were expected to care for him in his old age, but more importantly to bury him with the "full appropriate rites" (Daily Life in Greece, pg. 57). Moreover, Athenian men married to have male children in order to perpetuate the family line and guarantee him honors when he died. It was also a large disgrace for a man to be unmarried. Basically, Athenians married not out of love for each other, but for religious and social convenience.

All this aside, love was abundant in Greek society. Although love was never a determining factor in marriages, a lifelong bond and devotion developed between a couple as the years passed. "We know that the Greeks of the fifth and fourth century used the word eros (love) to describe the passion linking a husband and his wife" (Daily Life in Greece, pg. 58). There are many instances in myth and history where husbands and wives in Greek society have sacrificed themselves for the sake of the other. They were bonded together by their love of their family and by their dedication to each other through their family. Women were dedicated to the happiness of their husband and the well being of their children. Men were dedicated to providing for and supporting their family and raising noteworthy children. These common goals brought together the husband and wife like never before. It was this bond that sparked the beginning of a lifelong commitment to one another and the growth of their love for one another.

Although women were not given formal rights, they were able to find pride and happiness in the mundane applications of their life. Women found pride in their children and satisfaction in their husband" s happiness. I would like to leave you with closing remarks that illustrate the bond between a wife and her husband.

" The greatest pleasure to me will be this, that, if you prove yourself my superior, you will make me your servant and there will be no fear lest with advancing years your influence will wane; nay the better companion you are to me and the better guardian of the house to our children, the greater will be the esteem in which you are held at home; and all will admire you, not so much for your good looks as for your good deeds in practical life" (Everyday Life in Ancient Greece, pg. 86).

" Atthis, who didst live for me and breathe thy last toward me, once the source of all my joy and now of tears, holy, much lamented, how sleepest thou the mournful sleep, thou whose head was never laid away from thy husband" s breast, leaving Theios alone as one who is no more; for with thee the hope of our life went to darkness" (Everyday Life in Ancient Greece, pg. 87).