

Mythology as a
means to understand
the power relations
between men and
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The distinction between man and woman requires no need for elaboration. It is obvious for everyone to see. But there are those who use these differences to interpret the role that women and men should play in society. In ancient times men believe that they were supposed to rule over women.

There is no better proof of this assertion other than the study of mythology because it can be said that mythology is a form of distillation of ideas. Thus, in Greek mythology, one can see how this belief is perpetuated. There are even those who argue that myth-making was used to propagate this view. The best examples of course are the stories that related to Zeus and the way he treated women. In Greek-mythology the power relations is easy to understand; women were supposed to be dominated by men.

Greek-mythology can be partially blamed for the demotion and devaluation of women. There is no way to deny this claim because the main plot of the stories that came from this region tells of how easy it was for men to violate women and get away with.

For an outsider looking in, especially those who study these myths, the way ancient men treated women is not only barbaric but accomplished with a sense of pride and entitlement - as if it was man's natural right to abuse women and do as they please with them. The idea was reinforced by the myth about gods and their relationships with women both mortal and goddesses alike.

If indeed Greek mythology was created not only as a form of explaining the origin of life in this region but also to explain the purpose of life, then Greek mythology was used as form of teaching tool to direct all the inhabitants of <https://assignbuster.com/mythology-as-a-means-to-understand-the-power-relations-between-men-and-women-essay/>

Greece to their rightful places. It also makes sense of the sociological order that existed during that period in history.

With regards to power relations between man and woman there is no better way to illustrate it than to construct gods that have gender both male and female. These gods do not only possess the desires common to mankind but they too have the ability to procreate. It provides an explanation not only to the origin of life on earth but also about human nature.

Zeus the most powerful god in Greek mythology gave the command to Prometheus to create man and for a while Zeus enjoyed the fruits of his creation. But man did something that made Zeus angry and has to be punished. The method use to punish man is one of the first examples of how ancient civilizations view women.

In the story Zeus instructed Hephaesutus to create a woman of stunning beauty and name her Pandora. Her beauty was the cover that hid the deadly gift inside. It is therefore telling that when the gods made woman she was given a deceptive heart, a lying tongue and a curious mind that would soon be the downfall of all mankind.

Pandora was supposed to give his male counterpart great joy on account of her beauty and other gifts but instead she became more of a curse than a blessing. The gods could have given her the abilities to become a wonderful daughter, wife and mother but instead they gave her a box.

It was the box of evil because it contained a plague that would bring about sorrow, poverty, sickness, disease and all manner of misfortune. It was unfair

therefore to entrust the box to her because she was handicapped with a curious mind and she could not help herself but open the forbidden box, the receptacle that was ordered to be closed at all times. It can be argued that the gods, especially Zeus wanted men to suffer on account of her.

When the contents of the box was released to the world, the rest of mankind can now look at Pandora and accuse her of destroying the idyllic life that they used to enjoy. It has created a no-win situation for all her descendants. If everything goes fine and perfect then man gets the credit.

But the moment things turn ugly, everyone turns to her as the reason for the cursed ground, the foul weather, and the of course the anger of the gods. More importantly, it provided the justification for man's rude treatment towards women all throughout history.

This is just one part of Greek mythology that many took to heart and it placed women in a dangerous position because the groundwork needed to make them the scapegoat of everything and the emotional punching bag of men was already completed. It is therefore important to clarify that this is not the truth with regards to the nature of man and woman.

In reality the gender roles should compliment each other as seen in the beautiful tandem of a contented husband and a happy wife. But in many places, especially in ancient Greece, the story of Zeus and the way he abused women is a reflection of the insecurities of men. Their behavior, especially the behavior of their male gods was the evidence of the wrong use of power.

The positive use of power should result in the creation of something of great value, of great beauty and a blessing for all. The wrong use of power is rooted in the need to cover up insecurities. Thus, in Greek mythology the male gods like Zeus will never take responsibility for the things that they have done. They believe that they are always right.

The insecurities of the male-dominated society created a perversion of the use of power. Man was never created to dominate women. In the same way women were never created to make the lives of men miserable. The differences of both and their respective unique gifts were supposed to be used for the good - provide solution to the problems of this world.

But in Greek mythology, power was used to assign blame and to punish those who were supposed to be guilty. Unfortunately, women were seen as the culprits. The best example to illustrate this point is the way Zeus and the gods violated women. And one of the tales that depicts this perverse perspective is the story of Demeter and her daughter Persephone.

Demeter was a goddess and her daughter too. But this did not spare mother and child from the perverse mind of the male gods Zeus and his brother Hades. Zeus was more powerful than Hades and therefore he could easily have commanded him to stop looking at her daughter with lust in his eyes.

However, Zeus looked the other way when Hades decided to abduct his niece. An innocent child, picking flowers and not a mean bone in her body she was taken against her will. She suffered tremendously and she wailed and shouted with all her might seeking help. Her terror-filled heart was not

enough to convince Zeus that his brother had no right to treat his daughter that way. But the father of Persephone did not intervene.

This sends a strong message to men and women of ancient Greece. The lust of men knows no bounds and instead of doing something to rein it in, its expression is allowed even if it means violating the rights of women. This was a precursor to arrange marriages as well as forcing women to marry the men that they did not love. This story is proof that men can do what they want and they can even do questionable acts and they would never be held responsible for their actions.

The introductory part of the story tells of how gods and mortals were unable to perceive what had happened. It seems to say that the ancient could easily turn a deaf ear and a blind eye towards the crime committed against women. The reaction of Zeus towards the grief and longing of Demeter also shows how he values his wife.

Needless to say, a male dominated society takes care of the needs and problems of men within their own circle of power and they never had to think twice to sacrifice the comfort and well-being of women if this is the way to make men happy.

The story of Demeter and Persephone is not only an illustration on how men were given the right to hurt and persecute women; it is also a story of how women are forced to do evil in order to accomplish their goals. Men can do whatever they want and if they so desire something they simply took it by force.

But women had to use their wiles and forced to scheme to get what rightfully belongs to them. In the end Demeter was able to retrieve Persephone but she paid a great price. More importantly, Hades was not entirely defeated because he was shown to be more crafty by cheating Persephone and as a result she was forced to spend a third of every year under the earth, in the lair of the dead because she was forced to do something that made her bound to Hades.

Power relations between men and women in ancient Greece can be seen through their mythology. The mythology as seen in the story of gods and goddesses is one way to explain the belief system of these ancient people. But at the same time it is the reflection of what they felt inside. Power relation in ancient Greece can be understood as a reflection of the insecurities of men in a male-dominated society. Men needed a scapegoat and someone to focus their frustrations.

They created stories and propagated ideas that the first woman was the reason why there are so much pain, hunger, and sickness in the world. These stories gave them the justification to vent their anger on women as well as abuse them. However, it must be made clear that men were never created to dominate women and vice versa. Their differences were supposed to be used to compliment each others strength and weakness. If this happens then power can be used to create good and not evil.