

Gender roles during the times of ancient greek society

[Society](#)



Gender roles during the times of ancient Greek society have always pertained to the same niches in some way or fashion. A man's character is summarized by his powerful and commanding status; such as participating in political events, and took charge of their families. Women's role, on the other hand, mostly took place within home nurturing their children and caring for the house. Women were not given the same amount of rights a man would have distributed, as male figures would have the role of ruling over them, known as a patriarchy. Relationships of each gender would be steered by this concept in which a man would always have the upper hand in terms of strength over a woman, but the female population was not entirely weak. Greek literature further enhances the belief that women, while not as powerful as men, express jobs throughout the society that help note value in a lot of important events.

Homer's *The Odyssey* is a fine example of importance female characters provide: so much so that the aspect of women's roles plays significance throughout it. Characters like Athena exemplify the idea being portrayed. Athena is the daughter of Zeus and the Goddess of Wisdom. As a being of such power, she is used as a supportive figure to the main protagonist, Odysseus, by providing him with protection and mentoring. Athena also advises Odysseus' son, Telemachus, in Book 1 of his father and his whereabouts through the means of disguises. She assures him confidence as Telemachus is positive Odysseus has died during his journey, and teaches him the proper means of associating himself with important people, such as kings. With her help, Athena provides Telemachus with knowledge capable to help him assert to largely more mature figure and asserts him to centralize

his father's arrival back to Ithaca. Penelope, Odysseus' wife, yearns for the return of her husband from his journey to Troy 19-20 years and plays the role as a priority for Odysseus to make it back to Ithaca. Odysseus' absence attracts suitors, however, who ask for Penelope's hand in marriage, whereas Penelope's will to deny these people give her a rebellious persona: she is aware that if she were to remarry, the man she chose would rule Ithaca as king, but her belief in Odysseus' return prevent her from doing so. Though she commits to stalling those who ask her to marriage, she is also obliged to the proper custom when it comes to the concept of marrying. In Book XVIII, she states " I have a bitter humiliation of to bear, your way of wooing a wife was never seen before. Those who would win a woman of rank and wealth, vie with one another in offering herds of cattle and flocks of sheep, and feasting the lady's friends, and heaping gifts one her; they do not devour the wealth of another without compensation". (Homer, Book XVIII) While she is a firm believer of this, it also creates angst and competition from suitors interested in her. Though this concept is flawed because of this, it signifies the importance that though a woman does not possess the social power of a man, they still have the ability to keep them at bay due to possessing accountability.

Differing greatly from The Odyssey, Sophocles' Antigone features a female protagonist who plays a large role in the story's overall setting. Antigone's belief as a character largely contrasts women from that of the belief of patriarchy. She is very persistent as a character, defying the laws of Thebes run by Creon, as she finds that her brother who died in war, Polyneices, is justified a proper burial regardless of his title as " traitor". Her attempt, while

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successful, left her caught by Creon and isolated in prison. Although caught, Antigone's courage to go against Creon's rule also disregards the belief of women providing overall weaker roles than men. Antigone's suicide in her cell ultimately resulted in the death of Creon's son, Haemon, and his wife, Eurydice, after he was informed of his future of what is to come by the blind prophet, Tiresias. To sum up, Antigone was a figure that signified peace and rights. Her role in the story was to undo what she believed was the right thing to do, even if it was against what Creon has wanted. Her death led to the crumble of his leadership, however, as he lost everything afterwards, including his respect as king of Thebes. Ismene, on the other hand, falls into a similar as the concept of patriarchy, since she does not feel as though she can participate in unruly events that rebel against established laws, hence her denial to help Antigone bury Polyneices.

Before Antigone's time, the story of Oedipus Rex took place. Oedipus was destined to slay his own father and marry his mother, according to the Oracle of Delphi. In denial, he eventually succumbs to his future by killing his father, king Laius, in an argument. As a result, Oedipus earns himself the title as the new king of Thebes and marries Jocasta, his mother, unaware of his already established relationship with her. The play, itself, has an abundance of women established in it; however, Jocasta plays a certain role near the end of the play. She is the final step towards Oedipus achieving his predestined future and as a result of that, Oedipus received great recognition as the king of Thebes. The Sphinx is also an interesting case in the play, where she served as an obstacle in Oedipus' way as he tries to return to Thebes.

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Overall, women tend to play unique and relevant roles in Greek literature; some of which even important enough to progress the story to further levels and provided themes to the story. Characters such as Athena, Penelope and Antigone provide essential characteristics of a supportive and crucial character arc, since they are not only important to the story but also supplied with niches men at the time either could not or would not have.