

Ancient athenian women and their role within athenian society essay sample



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Within 20 lines of the play opening we discover how a woman's typical role in life is played. Calonice explains it's hard for women to get to Lysistrata's meeting because they will be " hanging round their husbands, waking up the servants, putting the baby to sleep or washing and feeding it. " From this it's immediately clear women spend the majority of their time inside, doing household things.

This is true to life because women did spend the majority of their time inside because it was frowned upon for women to be outside their house without their husbands, and as their husbands were at war, they were expected to stay indoors. The role of women is brought to attention again when Lysistrata explains to Calonice how she wants to stop the war with the help of other women.

" If all the women join together... then united we can save Greece. " Calonice justifiably responds with cynicism " How can women achieve anything so grand or noble? Calonice feels that women don't have the ability to do anything, because they spend their time " at home looking pretty, wearing saffron gowns and make up and Cimberic shifts and giant slippers" and she is right to believe this because up until Lysistrata's plan is introduced, that is all the women spend their time doing. They have no experience in the political matters of war; they would have no experience fighting or arguing their case, especially against the men who spent their lives doing exactly that.

This is justifiable in reality because the women's intelligence was expected to be far inferior to the men's as they weren't given the opportunity of

education. Learning, reading and writing were jobs left to the men folk. Indeed the only thing women were brought up to be capable of, was to produce healthy children, and all the good that did, when the male children were sent off to fight and the female children simply followed suit of their obsolete mothers. One of the characteristics of Ancient Athenian women becomes clear during the discussion of the women's absence from the meeting.

Lysistrata and Calonice believe the other women are too busy having sex to show up on time to the meeting, even though there is such an important matter to discuss. Calonice says " Well, I'm sure they'll have been riding over since the early hours! " implying vigorous sexual activity from the women of certain Greek regions. Their sexual dependency is further demonstrated when Lysistrata explains how to stop the war. She has convinced everyone to listen to her at first, some women claiming they would help " even if I had to cut myself in two" and " If I had to climb tae the top of Mount Taygetum", an 8, 000 ft mountain range in Sparta.

Everyone seems on board with the plan, but then Lysistrata says that the way to win is " We must renounce- sex. " Suddenly all the women are in complete unison in opposing the plan; they're no longer willing to help, despite all the comments they've made about missing their husbands. They feel they are so dependent on sex that it would be far too difficult to give it up, even though their husbands are rarely around anyway because of the war. I think this would probably be true of Ancient Athenian women in reality because their lives revolved around basically doing nothing.

They weren't allowed to go out without their men, who were all fighting anyway, so they were all confined to their homes. And of course there were few other forms of entertainment; television and radio were still 2,500 years in the making, and so sex was really the only way of passing the time for women, so if they had to give that up, they would have nothing to do at all. Their sexual reliance is again illustrated when they have finally consented to give up sex, and they are making the oath.

The cup and jar that are going to be used in the oath, are both of comically enormous size, and so Calonice then says "Cheers you up even to touch it", because she enjoys clutching 'big and meaty' things of course. Within the same scene, Myrrhine's sexual enslavement is made clear again when she nearly faints, falling weak at the knees at the prospect that she's about to relinquish sex. The women in *Lysistrata* clearly lived for sex and nothing else; and this isn't far from the truth in reality, as it's already been said, they didn't have anything else to do with their time.

However, the idea of Ancient Greek women coming together from 'enemy' races, conspiring against men and renouncing sex is something I don't think would ever have been true in Ancient Greece, because I don't believe that women would actually have had the valour to challenge the men in those times, because of their poor social status. They were only a step above slaves, and if slaves had ever tried to rebel against their masters, they would've been thrown from a podium with a necklace made of rope, or forced to fight an animal three times their size and weight.

Therefore I don't believe that this particular characteristic of bravery would've actually been true of Ancient Athenian women. When the chorus of old women appears, they support the argument that women's role in life is futile because they have all already lived through one war and so they know war does nothing for the good of women, or men for that matter, although women were the main sufferers, as they lose their husbands and sons, and then become too old to remarry

Women's role is again put forward when the Magistrate appears. He talks about women as if they were an inferior species. " That's the sort of impudent behaviour you get from women" and " You disgusting creature! " He then goes on to say that all women are manipulative, evil and selfish. I'm almost certain this wasn't completely true. Perhaps some women had these traits, but just as many men would've as well.

The Magistrate's views are warped, because he doesn't know what life is like for women, however it's true that some men did feel women were in fact second class citizens and had no reason to complain and that they were just trying to get attention. The Magistrate makes further comments about women's role when Lysistrata states that the women will be in charge of the money and he basically laughs in her face. This is true of how men saw women.

Under no circumstances would men believe women should be given any power or responsibility, even though the women ran the homes, organising servants, looking after the children and so on. When the policemen get involved, the women suddenly turn very ferocious and vicious, and starting

using force to fight back. “ I’ll hit you so hard you’ll shit all over the place,” “ you’ll soon be nursing a black eye,” and “ I’ll tear out your hair till you scream and scream.

I don’t think the women would’ve been quite so brutal and persistent in their fighting and arguments. I think perhaps this particular characteristic has been exaggerated to some extent. The exaggeration is more apparent when Lysistrata demands “ Silence! ” from the Magistrate. I don’t believe a woman in Ancient Athens would’ve had the courage to tell a man, especially a man with power, to be quiet. Then she further exacerbates things by embarrassing the Magistrate, adorning him with a veil, a tiara and other various women’s jewellery.

This is an act of great bravery, or perhaps stupidity, but it pays off and the women end up the victors. In summary, I feel that Aristophanes describes the women’s role in Ancient Athenian society clearly and accurately, and for the most parts, the characteristics of them are accurate, in terms of their sexual nature, for example, when they’re in the acropolis and many of the women keep trying to escape, with ridiculous excuses about moth balls and pregnancy, just so that they can get home to their husbands and lovers.

However I believe certain traits have been exaggerated to suit the story, for example how brutal and courageous the women are at certain points.

Nevertheless I don’t think the characteristics have been exaggerated that much because it’s still very believable, and could very easily be true of Ancient Athenian women.