
Genders View On Power In Lysistrata

During the democracy of Athens, the male citizens held all the power while women enjoyed little civil liberties and rights. Gender roles consisted of the man being the breadwinner, while the women were supposed to stay home and raise the children. A common gender role for the women were also to please their husband whenever the men desired. The play focuses on women questioning their pre-determined roles when Lysistrata proposed a sex strike until peace is returned to Ancient Greece. On the surface, the play *Lysistrata* could appear to be a light-hearted comedy about a group of women who decide to refuse sex to the Greek men in order to end the Peloponnesian war.

Lysistrata parallels the war by also having a war onstage, battle of the sexes. However, inside of his comicality there exists a perilous concealed transcript. The females refusing sex to the men and demanding the end of the war, the women are also challenging the pre-existing patriarchal power structures in ways that were unheard of in Ancient Greece. For the men to maintain their domination, they try to emphasize their supremacy by any means they can, to including a very animalistic method. One scene has the men demonstrating that they smell much worse than women and by taking off their clothes in efforts to show off their masculinity. One argument is that Athenian woman knew their role and place in society and where comfortable with it. However, the woman needed change and were tired of the war. Throughout the play, the men and women of Greece fight for power.

To understand what Aristophanes was thinking, we must have some understanding of these cultural features in Classical Athens. This play echoes gender hierarchy roles while it also stretches the traditional gender roles of its period. The women in the play, other than Lysistrata herself, tend to be collected of labels: shallow, unreliable, and shy. Even they themselves are skeptical about their power to effect peace in Greece: women are lazy, they say, unwise, and talented only in glamorously painting their faces and primping. The men of Athens, however, are stubborn, paranoid, and so entangled in their mismanagement of the state that they have lost sight of basic human needs. They are easily distracted and will find any other reason, than their masculinity, to blame for the war.

Love unescapably gets the better of war, as is shown by the comedy's single most iconic stage image. After the women's sex strike has gone on for so long, the Greek men, Athenians and Spartans warriors alike, find themselves stuck between a rock and a hard place. The males refuse to make peace, but in this dilemma that also condemns them to shuffling around the stage with painful erections, badly trying to hide them under their cloaks. However, men aren't the only casualties of the battle of the sexes either. The Athenian woman Kleonike, for one, is extremely reluctant to give up sex, even if it means the continuation of the war. "I'm willing to walk through fire barefoot," she says, "but not to give up SEX—there's nothing like it!" Another woman stuffs Athena's sacred helmet in her clothing so that she appears pregnant.

When *Lysistrata* and the Greek women refused to have sex with the Greek men until they end the Peloponnesian war, they ignite a power struggle that is portrayed in the play. In addition to the examination of gender, there are also multiple references to the image of "the woman on top." The men in the play feel threatened by this sex position because they are wary of women

being on top of the power structure of Greece, and they want to maintain their hegemony. Although the play was written as a comedy, the imagery of a woman in power was enough for the men to take a step in the direction to end the war instead of seeing it to the 'end'. Though it is unclear in the end whether men or women come out on top in the end, Aristophanes effectively portrays the way that both genders view for power even though gender is fictional.

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