
The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*

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Abstract

Gender, sexuality and power have always shared a complex and dynamic relationship. As societal and cultural values shift, so too do the connections between these forces. This is especially well-demonstrated in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, a Greek play originally performed around 411 BC. The age of the play belies the progressive nature of the text, a point documented in this paper, which uses the issues of gender and sexuality explored in the play to engage in a broader discussion on how sexuality and power relations between the sexes impact one another. The discussion is given background with a theoretical investigation of the various scholarly theories on gender, sexuality and power dynamics. Subsequently, the discussion focuses on the plot action and subtext of *Lysistrata* with an emphasis on how the female characters employed the power of sexual withholding in order to transpose traditional power structures. As the discussion will show, Aristophanes was neither feminist nor antiwar, but his progressive exploration of both lends great insight into the openness of socio-cultural discourse in ancient Greece.

Introduction

Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is one of the eleven plays penned by the playwright that has survived over time. The original performance of this production occurred in classical Athens reportedly in 411 BC¹. *Lysistrata* is considered a comedy; an account of one woman's unique goal and desire to end the Peloponnesian War. During the course of the play, *Lysistrata* is able to persuade the women of Greece to withhold any form of sexual satisfaction from their lovers and husbands as a tool designed to force the men to negotiate peace². This suggested strategy, however, incites the battle between the men and women. Because of the use of sex as an imperative weapon in this battle, issues raised with regard to

¹ Alan Sommerstein, *Aristophanes Lysistrata* (Penguin Classics, 1973), 37.

² *ibid*

The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* ...

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin

gender, and addressing war related issues. *Lysistrata* by Aristophanes has been noted as one of the earliest expose of sexualized politics in a predominantly male society³. The implications of this production are far reaching and have been significantly used to draw parallels to modern day society and the relationship between gender, sex, and the power of influence.

Lysistrata: "There are a lot of things about us women that sadden me, considering how men see us as rascals" Calonice: "As indeed we are"

These opening lines from the play set the tone for what follows. Aristophanes chose to characterize women as hedonistic and sly, which may bespeak how women of his time were generally considered, and in need of a firm hand and guidance from the men in their lives and men in greater society. However, the playwright painted *Lysistrata* as an extraordinary woman with a tremendous sense of individual and societal responsibility. She is successful in convincing the Greek women to withhold sex from the men in their lives; which at the time, many considered the right of the man, and the pledge the women undertook was sealed with a solemn and binding oath⁴.

Aristophanes places two choruses within the play; one a chorus of older men and one a chorus of older women. The chorus of women, at *Lysistrata*'s behest, seizes the Acropolis or high city, as it holds the treasures of the state, without which the men are unable to continue funding the war *Lysistrata* so adamantly opposes. The chorus of old men threatens to burn down the Acropolis if the women do not surrender. What compels the men to take action in the manner in which *Lysistrata* envisioned is their desperation for sex. One after another of the men present in compromising positions clearly struggling to abide by the limitations insisted upon by the women. After some squabbling, the men are able to reconcile and the war is ended and the men's sexual burdens are relieved⁵.

Some have argued that modern day adaptations of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* are rendered in a pacifist or feminist style. However, literary scholars maintain that the original work was neither pacifist in nature nor decidedly feminist⁶. Moreover, when the male characters are portrayed as empathetic to the female condition, classical dramatic poets from Athens

³ Ibid

⁴ Ibid, 38

⁵ Ibid, 38

⁶ J. Boardman, J. Griffin, & O. Murray (eds). *The Oxford History of the Classical World*. (Oxford University Press, 1986), 215.

are said to have continued the reinforcement of sexual stereotyping of women as “irrational creatures in need of protection from themselves and from others”⁷. Arguably, *Lysistrata* is said to have accepted the conduct of the men regarding the war out of respect for their undeniable positions of authority, only after realizing that if the war continued there would be no real men available to stop the war and protect the women. Still others argue that *Lysistrata* was an empowered woman who saw the weakness of men and used the innate sexual prowess of women to bring a peaceful end to a wasteful war⁸. The study will critically examine the role of gender and sex as a means of raising social awareness. It will also examine the differences posited between the psyche of men and women.

Gender and Sexuality

Definition and Mechanism

There have been many definitions and meanings posited when discussing gender. The historical definition for gender is “things we treat differently because of their inherent differences”⁹. According to one general definition of gender, it is a range of characteristics that are used to distinguish men from women, particularly in relation to male and female attributes.¹⁰ Contingent upon the contextual frame of reference, the discriminating characteristics vary from social role to gender identity to sex. In 1955, noted sexologist John Money, introduced the terminological differences between biological sex and gender as a societal role. Prior to his impactful work, it was uncommon to use or hear the word gender to refer to anything other than grammatical categories.¹¹ In addition to age, gender is considered one of the universal dimensions on which society driven status differences are determined. Unlike sex or sexuality, which is a biological and physiological phenomenon, gender is considered a social construct that delineates the cultural and social prescribed roles that women and men are to adhere or in the case of women, acquiesce to. Gerda Lerner in “The Creation of Patriarchy” purports that gender is the “costume, a mask, a straitjacket in which men and women dance their unequal dance”¹². Alan Wolfe maintained in “The Gender Question”, “of all the way that one group has systematically

⁷ ibid

⁸ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (Granada Publishing, 1969), available from <http://www.marxist.org/subject/women/authors/millett-kate/theory.htm>; Internet; accessed 22 November 2012.

⁹ David Haig, “The Inexorable Rise of Gender and the Decline of Sex: Social Change in Academic Titles, 1945-2001,” *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 33 (April 2004): 87-96.

¹⁰ Richard Udry, “The Nature of Gender,” *Demography* 31 (November 1994): 561-573.

¹¹ ibid

¹² Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1987), 238.

mistreated another, none is more deeply rooted than the way men have subordinated women. All other discriminations pale by comparison”¹³

The categorization of females and males into social roles creates binaries in which individuals feel they must exist at one end of a linear spectrum and find it necessary to identify themselves as either woman or man. In society at large, communities interpret these binaries or biological differences between women and men to generate and derive a set of social expectations that determine and define behaviors that are deemed appropriate for men and women and determine men and women's rights, power in society, resources and health behaviors.¹⁴ Although the specific degree and nature of these differences vary from one society to another, most often men are favored, which in turn creates an imbalance in power and gender inequalities in most if not all countries.¹⁵

Michel Foucault, western philosopher, purported that as sexual subjects, humans are objectified by power, which is not a structure or institution, but rather a name or signifier attributed to “complex strategical situation.”¹⁶ Because of this power, inherent or applied, individual attributes, behaviors, and attitudes are determined and individuals are a part of an “epistemologically” and “ontologically” constructed set of labels and names. For example, being a woman categorizes one as female, and being female indicates that one is emotional, weak, irrational and incapable of the actions frequently attributed to man.¹⁷ Judith Butler, author of “Sexual Politics” argues that sex and gender are more like nouns and verbs. She asserts that her actions are limited because she is a woman. “I am not permitted to construct my gender and sex willy-nilly. This is so because gender is politically and therefore socially controlled. Rather than ‘woman’ being something one is, it is something one does”.¹⁸

Feminist academic and biologist Anne Fausto-Sterling repudiates the biological versus social determinism discourse and advocates for more in depth analysis of how the interactions between the social environment and the biological being influence an individual's capacities

¹³ Alan Wolfe, “The Gender Question,” *The New Republic* 6 (June 1994): 27-34.

¹⁴ P. Galdas, M. Johnson, J. Percy and M. Ratner, “Help seeking for cardiac symptoms: beyond the masculine-feminine binary,” *Social Science and Medicine* 71 (2010): 18-24.

¹⁵ Ibid, 19.

¹⁶ Rosemarie Tong, *Feminist thought: a more comprehensive introduction* (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press, 2009).

¹⁷ ibid

¹⁸ Judith Butler, *Gender trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity. Thinking Gender* (New York & London: Routledge, 1990).

The Politics of Gender and Sexuality in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* ...

Ihsan Alwan Muhsin

and abilities.¹⁹ Feminist and philosopher, Simone de Beauvoir introduced the notion of existentialism and the experiences of women. "One is not born a woman, one becomes one."²⁰

Just as there have been a plethora of definitions and philosophical contextual frameworks posited about gender, there have been many definitions and notions purported with regard to sexuality. For some, human sexuality is defined as how individuals experience erotic sensations and express themselves as sexual beings; the capacity they have for erotic responses and experiences; and the awareness of the individual as male or female.²¹ Moreover, human sexuality is a way to describe the way in which an individual is attracted to another of the opposite sex (heterosexuality), the same sex (homosexuality) no sex (asexuality) or both sexes (bisexuality).²² In addition, human sexuality can include aspects associated with culture, law, philosophy, and politics as well as religious, spiritual, theological, ethical and moral ideologies.

In the classic nature versus nurture debate relates to the importance of an individual's natural or innate qualities versus his or her personal experiences in causing or determining individual differences in behavioral and physical traits.²³ The notion that individuals acquire most if not all of their behavioral characteristics and traits from nurture was originally posited by John Locke who suggested that human development transpires as a direct result of environmental influences only.²⁴

Whereas the physiological and biological aspects of an individual's sexuality deal primarily with human reproduction and the biological or physical means by which to carry it out through sexual intercourse, the psychological aspects of human sexuality are suggested to generate significant psychological and emotional responses. According to the socio-cultural contextual frame of reference, human sexuality can be understood as a component of the human social life that is governed by implied rules for conduct and behavior and the idea of the status quo. Moreover, in addition to narrowing the purview of human sexuality to groups within the larger society²⁵, the socio-cultural aspect examines social norm influences including the effects of external factors such as

¹⁹ Anne Fausto-Sterling. *Mythos of Gender: Biological Theories about Men and Women* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 8.

²⁰ Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, 1949 as translated and reprinted 1989.

²¹ Ellen Ross and Rayna Rapp. "Sex and Society: A research note from social history and anthropology," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (January 1981): 51.

²² Ibid, 53

²³ D. Westen. *Psychology: Brain, Behavior, & Culture* (Wiley & Sons, 2002).

²⁴ Ibid

²⁵ John Russon. *Bearing witness to Epiphany: Persons, Things and the Nature of Erotic Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), 54.

mass media or politics. These movements can assist in bring about significant and widespread changes in the social norm, such as the sexual revolution and the advent of feminism.²⁶

Overview of Theory and Practice

Theories regarding gender and sexuality date back to ancient Rome and Greece. Of those that are particularly interesting and confrontational is the greater acceptance of same sex relations in ancient history and culture; between men, between women, and between men and boys.²⁷ One of the earliest 'feminist' from the same era is Sappho, who has been particularly influential because of her expression and lesbianism. She is one of the few if not only female voices from the literature that dates back to Ancient Rome and Greece.

In "Making Sex" Thomas Laqueur, examines how sexuality from the time of the ancient Greeks and Romans through the Renaissance period was structured especially differently than in the nineteenth century or in modern times. He specifically points to the influences of science prior to the mid eighteenth century and the propensity toward a perception of men and women as versions of a single sex: women were seen as lesser men with a uterus and clitoris that were inverted versions of the male scrotum and penis.²⁸ Given Laqueur's one sex model, the differences between men and women, then, would not be clear or even as important as they are made out to be in other theoretical constructs. For Laqueur, both men and women were seen as unequal parts of a larger cosmological order that posited sexuality not gender as being historically determined.

This book, then, is about the making not of gender, but of sex. I have no interest in denying the reality of sex or of sexual dimorphism as an evolutionary process. But

I want to show on the basis of historical evidence that almost everything one wants to say about sex – however sex is understood- already has in it a claim about gender. Sex, in both the one-sex and the two-sex worlds, is situation; it is explicable only within the context of battles over gender and power.²⁹

²⁶ W. Farrell. *Why Men are the Way They Are* (New York: Berkley Books, 1988).

²⁷ Emily Allen and Dino Felluga. "General Introduction to Theories of Gender & Sex," *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory*. Available from <http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/genderandsex/modules/introduction.html>. Accessed 22 November 2012.

²⁸ ibid

²⁹ Thomas Laqueur. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990).

In this way, Laqueur has aligned himself with the poststructuralist and Foucault who oppose even the most traditional notions of feminist distinction between one's bodily sex (nature) and one's acquired gender (nurture).³⁰

Many scholarly accounts posit the eighteenth century as a period of transition in the understanding of sexuality and gender. During this period, the foundation for the "naturalization" of gender categories was established, which became particularly important in the next century, and further would provide for the belief that gendered behavior was a biological matter; in essence, biology was destiny.³¹ The strict binary system was made way for by eighteenth century medical science and the discovery of the incommensurable differences between female and male bodies. Laqueur laments, "Sometime in the eighteenth century, sex as we know it was invented."³²

For the first time, men and women were seen as opposites in most areas, in this new system of sexual dimorphism. Women were seen as passionless and passive, and men were regarded as sexually charged and aggressive, for instance. The evolution of binary gender was not an overnight or expedited process. Particularly relevant to this writing is the rise of Enlightenment in this period where values of fraternity, liberty and equality were introduced, which many women philosophers and thinkers argue needed to have been made applicable to all humanity including women.³³ Mary Wollstonecraft's book, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" is an example of Enlightenment values and was instrumental in calling for women's own distinct inalienable rights.³⁴

The idea of "natural" gender distinctions purportedly dominated nineteenth century thought and theory. The conception of normative sexuality centered on the middle class family was birthed during that era. However, many non-normative forms of sexuality were also expressed including non-heterosexuality and non-procreation.³⁵ The public and private spheres were considered complementary but separate entities of middle class culture that resulted from industrialization, urbanization, and significant economic growth. These distinctive spheres were loosely commensurate with the binary gender distinctions; however, the public sphere was male dominated as it was the dimension of money making,

³⁰ ibid

³¹ ibid

³² ibid

³³ ibid

³⁴ Stanley Applebaum and Candace Ward (eds). *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (US: Dover Publications, 1996).

³⁵ Allen and Dino, web.

politics, business, industry, empire building and struggle. And the private sphere was considered preserved for the feminine as it was the space of hearth and home, nurture, sympathy, childrearing and simple piety.³⁶ It goes without saying that in this “commensurate” system, women had minimal access to the public sphere.

The claim of the middle class to cultural authority was strongly connected and even hinged on the claim to moral superiority. The idea and ideal of the domestic that can under scrutiny near the end of the nineteenth century is credited with fueling the public debate about the role of women. Because of new laws and rulings in the late 1800's women were able to divorce their husband which increased and intensified the commensurate goal of regulating female sexuality. Moreover, the growing visibility and economic power of the working class and women moving into the workplace only intensified the manner in which women's roles were scrutinized.³⁷

The theoretical debate has continued into the 20th and 21st centuries with an increased demand for change played out in the political arena; particularly surrounding the issue of enfranchisement. From the suffragettes to the flappers through the equal rights movement, women finally began to realize the political implications and implementations of a number of issues most pertinent to them. Social awareness has continued to rise with regard to gender and sex as well as the focus on the differences between men and women.

Gender and Sexuality in *Lysistrata*

Lysistrata is today, and therefore must surely have been in the time of its conception and presentation, a shockingly provocative discourse on the relationship between gender and sexuality. As has been acknowledged throughout this discussion, it was never inherently the intention of Aristophanes to present a feminist statement. However, in a textual examination of *Lysistrata*, the unique power accorded to women according to their sexuality is nothing less than the determinant force in the play's action.

The play's title character demonstrates as much as she paces about in wait for the start of her critical meeting in the play's first act:

Lysistrata: Our country's fortunes depend on us – it is with us to undo utterly the Peloponnesians.

Cleonice: That would be a noble deed truly!

Lysistrata: To exterminate the Boeotians to a man!

³⁶ ibid

³⁷ ibid

Cleonice: But surely you would spare the eels.

Lysistrata: For Athens' sake I will never threaten so fell a doom; trust me for that.

However, if the Boeotian and Peloponnesian women join us, Greece is saved.

Cleonice: But how should women perform so wise and glorious an achievement, we women who dwell in the retirement of the household, clad in diaphanous garments of yellow silk and long flowing gowns, decked out with flowers and shod with dainty slippers?

Lysistrata: Ah, but those are the very sheet-anchors of our salvation – those yellow tunics, those scents slippers, those cosmetics and transparent robes.³⁸

As evidenced by the aforementioned exchange, *Lysistrata* exemplifies the use of the female gender and sexuality as a means to influence the outcome of the war and raise social awareness. The men have not been moved to reconsider their present course, not by the cost of the war in finances nor the cost of the war in the loss of human life. *Lysistrata* determines and begins to lay the foundation for the one thing the men may reconsider their position – sexual encounter with the women in their lives. Cleonice bespeaks the status of the woman during the time in which the play was written. She talks about the refined and dainty nature of a woman; adorned in such a manner to keep the men in their lives enchanted by her appearance. However, she also elucidates the station women held at the time; relegated to their homes and not engaging in 'business' outside the home. Where Cleonice sees the limitations of the woman's role, *Lysistrata* sees it as a tremendous opportunity to use the power of gender and the power of sex to raise awareness to the effects and implications of the fatal war.

This is a critical observation that will drive the action not just of the play, but of the moment in history which it examines. The comical take on the engagement of war becomes a much more meaningful investigation of gendered politics in a decidedly early phase of recorded human history. The *Penguin* interpretation of the play that is used here does take some liberties of modernization in its slangy delivery but in doing so, it captures a tone of pithy abandon. The wanton directness with which the title character addressed sex and sexuality would be, in and of itself, a powerful literary device. For women to speak of sex at all, let alone with such a brazen sense of authority, would be a radical departure in the way the sexes related in Aristophanes' time.

³⁸ Sommerstein 144

Most stunningly perhaps is the oath to which *Lysistrata* compels the women to abide. In its very language it recognizes a sense of self that at once acknowledges and defines man's sexual ownership of his mate. The oath provides the following terms:

"I will not allow either lover or husband-to approach me in a state of erection-.... And I will live at home in unsullied chastity — wearing my saffron gown and my sexiest make-up — to inflame my husband's ardour. But I will never willingly yield myself to him. And should he rape me by force against my will—I will submit passively and I will not thrust back. I will not raise my slippers towards the ceiling. I will not adopt the lioness-on-a-cheesegrater position."³⁹

The frequently explicit and at times bizarre oath conveys a strong sense of understanding as to the power possessed by women while simultaneously recognizing that man has the proclivity simply to take what he wants. Indeed, the acknowledgement of rape is especially telling of what is perhaps the most important distinction between the genders in this play. That is, if Aristophanes toys extensively with impressions of gender and the balance of power as channeled through sexuality, the gender trait of violence remains one sharply attributed to men. Quite in fact, the contrast between the withholding of passion and sexuality and the desire of men to go to battle highlights this important difference even as women gain the upper hand in the power struggle.

These distinctions are further highlights as the two sides come into conflict with one another. As the male aggression turns away from its enemy and toward its spouses, the conflict between the sexes begins to mount. And in the confrontation at the Acropolis, the men threaten violence while the women soak their husbands with hot water. Even more telling than the difference in their methods is the way that the men interpret their actions. While the women use sex as a reclaimed point of leverage, the men view their actions as inherently deviant in nature. One magistrate demonstrates the position quite well, observing that, apparently it is the same old story — the unbridled licentiousness of the female sex displaying itself. All their banging of drums and shouting in honour of that Sabazius god, and singing to Adonis on the roofs of houses."⁴⁰

Even as the women have chosen a decidedly effective method of drawing the attention of their husbands away from the desire to make war, they were regarded as inferior creatures controlled by their

³⁹ Sommerstein 148-149

⁴⁰ Sommerstein 156

emotions. This speaks to perhaps the greatest irony of the Aristophanes work. Namely, in denying their husbands sexual gratification, the women in the play demonstrated in no uncertain terms how readily men could be controlled by their emotions as well. Of course, this reversal of roles is not unilateral. In fact, in the heat of conflict, the women find themselves also adopting a more violent and threatening disposition. As the men threaten in graver terms to force their wives to withdraw from the troublesome oath, the women grow fiercely empowered.

Still, cooler heads prevail in all respects toward the play's resolution. The reconciliation between Myrrhine and Cinesias is demonstrative of the reconciliation between the genders on a broader scale and, unsurprisingly, suggests that the victory has gone to the women. Ultimately, because the power of denial has become so strong, Cinesias can no longer resist his wife's charms and withholding. He remarks that "absence certainly does make the heart grow fonder! She looks a lot younger to me, and she such a soft fetching look in her eye! And all this spurning and coquetting — why it just inflames my desire even more!"⁴¹

This sentiment is quite closely followed by the characters concession to end the war, resolution that speak loudly to the power of sexual passion over the passion which moves man to violence. And most fittingly, the play resolved with the ultimate act of reconciliation, a consummation of the narrative quite suitable to the provocative nature of the story itself.

The time period most relevant to Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* is of course that of the Ancient Greeks and Romans. That time in history is marked by male domination and female subordination as well as very 'lax social constructs' regarding sex between two individuals, whether same sex or opposite sex. However, some very strong parallels have been and can be drawn to other periods in history and the role of men and women, sex, and gender, and the utilization of these constructs in war and militarized times.

Judith Butler posits that, coitus can scarcely be said to take place in a vacuum; although of itself it appears a biological and physical activity, it is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charge microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes.⁴²

⁴¹ Sommerstein 176

⁴² Butler, 156

Butler goes on to argue that even a disinterested examination of our current system of relationships between the sexes indicates that for the sexes now and throughout history, it has been a case of a relationship based on dominance and subordination. However, what is largely unexamined according to Butler, and often unacknowledged yet institutionalized in society's social order is the priority of birthright wherein makes rule females.⁴³ This interior colonization, as Butler refers to, has been successfully achieved and it has been sturdier than any other form of segregation, more uniformly distributed, more enduring, and more rigorous than any societal class stratification. Butler maintains that sexual dominion and domination has been possibly the most pervasive ideology of society and our culture; providing the fundamental and foundational notions and concepts of power.⁴⁴

Butler attributes the relegated positioning of women to historical civilizations being patriarchal. Accordingly, if one looks at a patriarchal government as the institution wherein half of the population that is female is controlled by the half that is male, the patriarchal principles appear to be binary: "male shall dominate female, elder shall dominate younger."⁴⁵ There are however some exceptions and contradictions that exist within the system. Patriarchy is an institution that has been deeply ingrained into human relationships since the time of Aristophanes and his *Lysistrata*. It has been a social constant regardless of its economic, cultural, social or political form, whether operating in a bureaucracy caste or class system, despite the religion.

The area of class and the role the female plays in the patriarchal system seem particularly relevant to *Lysistrata* and how sexuality and gender impacted the outcome of the war. Sexual status, as posited by Butler, frequently operates on a confusing, superficial way within the class variable.⁴⁶ In a society where an individuals' status is contingent upon the social, educational and economic circumstances of class, it is possible for particular females to seem as if they stand higher or are able to influence some males. However, when one looks closely at the situation, that ceases to be the case. As previously mentioned, those who argue that *Lysistrata* recognized the authority of men and their positions with regard to the war, would certainly agree with Butler's argument here. Sexual politics, which is what *Lysistrata* initiated and the men and women in the play participated in, obtains consent through the way in

⁴³ ibid

⁴⁴ ibid

⁴⁵ ibid

⁴⁶ ibid

which both sexes are socialized to basic politics of the patriarchy with regard to role, status and temperament.⁴⁷ With regard to status, Butler argues that a “pervasive assent to the prejudice of male superiority guarantees superior status in the male, inferior in the female.”⁴⁸ Temperament involves human personality formation along lines that are stereotyped and categorized according to sex whether feminine or masculine, determined by the values and needs of the dominant group and articulated by what the members of the group cherish in themselves and find conveniently in those subordinate to them: force, intelligence, efficacy, aggression in the male, and ineffectuality, docility, ignorance, and “virtue” in the female.

If this were not the case, it would not have been necessary, some would argue, for *Lysistrata* to enlist the help of the women to imply a sexual limitation in order to get the men to negotiate peace. If the roles were not so clear cut, *Lysistrata* would have been able to be aggressive, exercise her intelligence and efficacy, and force the men to sit down and discuss the consequences and benefits of war. That is not what transpired. She was forced to rely on basic, primal desire in order to produce change and bring social awareness and enlightenment to the error of the men's ways. Some would argue, conversely, that she did employ classically derived male attributes and bucked the proverbial patriarchal system to achieve that end. However, it is important to remember that Aristophanes did not write the play from a pro-feminist perspective. He wrote from the social constructs of his time.

The prescribed sex roles that pervade the patriarchal system decree a consistent and highly complex code of conduct, attitude and gesture with regard to each sex. Sex roles, with regard to activity, assign attendance to children, domesticated roles to the woman, those of achievement, ambition, and interest to the male.⁴⁹ The woman is then arrested at the biological level and relegated by biological experiences. This point could not be made clearer in the manner in which *Lysistrata* executed her ploy to bring social awareness to the notion of a fatal war. It was a biological function that posited the sex withholding treaty with the women, and a biological function and primal desire on the part of the men that created an end to the dilemma of the war. Whether conscious or unconscious, the patriarchal system instituted even in Aristophanes' time was highly influential in determining how he crafted the women and men

⁴⁷ ibid

⁴⁸ ibid

⁴⁹ ibid

in the play, and what actions were and were not taken as a direct result of their prescribed sex role.

Conclusion

The original production of Aristophanes' *Lysistrata* took place many centuries ago. The story of a woman who aligned other women to change the course of a fatal war is one that continues to excite and enthrall many women who see this as a strong act of feminism or a pro-woman position. Because of the impact the play has, even though it was written as a comedy, this particular production has been reenacted and used as a foundational component for much scholarly discourse and debate.

Inarguably, *Lysistrata* was an extraordinary and very influential character. She was successful in enlisting other women, who were historically relegated to subordinate positions to rally together and withhold the one thing that could change the face of the war – sex. The chorus of old women was empowered by the actions of the younger women and did their part in bringing exercising their displeasure with the circumstances as they stood, and taking hold of the treasures to finance the war. Whether *Lysistrata* used intelligence, cunning, or assertiveness, she capitalized on the sexual prowess of the women she knew to come to an end she desired. For some, this could be seen as a further subjugation of the other women as at no time did *Lysistrata* herself participate in any sexual withholding and the issue of whether she was married or had a man in her life, is conveniently not a part of the storyline.

What many tend to focus on is the end result, which for many is most important. *Lysistrata* was able to orchestrate a peaceful end to a deadly war. The issues of sex, gender, the female and male psyche all played a significant role in the outcome of these events. Whether one chooses to look at this from a pro-woman- pro-feminist, male pacifist position, or whether one opts to look at it from a patriarchally controlled execution of feminine wiles, playing to the one hold card women could control given the time in which the actions were executed, it goes without saying that *Lysistrata* was successful in accomplishing the mission and goals she set out to get done.

Inasmuch as the physical act of sex was instrumental in the reconciliation for peace, sex can then be regarded as bringing heightened awareness to the indelible consequences of war. Inasmuch as gender was instrumental in the development of the bond among the women and the negotiations that ended the war, then gender can be seen as an instrument of change as it relates to the fatal war. And lastly, inasmuch as the male

and female psyche differ regarding the importance of war, and the power of the female psyche to influence the actions of the men in this situation, then the differences between the male and female psyche can also be seen as viable tools to significantly impact the outcome of a fatal war.

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هوية الجنس وسياسته في مسرحية لايستراتا لـ اريستوفنس

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الخلاصة

دائما ما تقاسمت مفاهيم النوع، الجنس والسلطة علاقة معقدة وديناميكية. اذ كما تتحول القيم المجتمعية والثقافية، فكذلك تفعل الصلات بين هذه القوى. هذا ما تم اثباته على نحو خاص في مسرحية لايستراتا لـ اريستوفنس، مسرحية اغريقية في الاصل مثلت حوالي سنة 411 قبل الميلاد. عمر المسرحية يكذب الطبيعة التقدمية للنص الذي يستخدم قضايا النوع والجنس المستقصاة في المسرحية للولوج في مناقشة أوسع حول كيفية تأثير الجنس وعلاقات القوى بين الجنسين في بعضها البعض. اتسم النقاش بخلفية ذات طابع تحقيق نظري لمختلف النظريات العلمية بخصوص نوع الجنس، النشاط الجنسي والقوة المحركة. وفي وقت لاحق، يركز النقاش على حبكة العمل والمعنى الضمني لمسرحية لايستراتا مع التركيز على كيفية توظيف الشخصيات النسائية لقوة الامساك الجنسي (الامتناع عن مطاوعة اي شكل من اشكال الممارسة الجنسية مع الشريك الذكر) في محاولة منهن لتبديل هياكل السلطة التقليدية. لم يكن اريستوفنس، كما سيتضح جليا في المناقشة، مؤيدا للحركة النسوية ولا مناهض للحرب، إلا أن التحري عن كذب لكلا الحالتين يضيف بصيرة ثابتة لصراحة ورحابة الخطاب الاجتماعي والثقافي في اليونان القديمة.