Gender Roles And Stereotypes Of Men And Women In Lysistrata

During the time era of the late 400's B.C, gender roles and stereotypes were in full force in Greece. These stereotypes are demonstrated extremely well in Aristophanes' comedy play Lysistrata. These themes, while less pronounced in our modern era, can still be seen in other forms of media, such as in movies or television shows. The culture at the time, and even somewhat now, is very male-dominated. Men at the time held all of the power within government, and women were forced into lesser roles such as upkeeping the house and taking care of the children. These roles now, even thousands of years later, are still the same stereotypes present today.

The role of women in Ancient Greece within the house is summed up perfectly by Mark Cartwright in his writings on Women in Greece. "In the family home, women were expected to rear children and manage the daily requirements of the household. They had the help of slaves if the husband could afford them. Contact with non-family males was discouraged, and women largely occupied their time with indoor activities such as wool-work and weaving (Cartwright)." These roles for women are ever-present throughout the play Lysistrata. The first prime example of stereotypes is present in the opening scene when Lysistrata becomes upsets when all the women she is trying to gather are late. However, Calonice explains that reason that they are tardy is that "Most of the women are stuck inside, either taking care of their husbands, or waking up their servants, or putting their children to bed, or giving their babies a bath or some milk (Lysistrata Translated by Edward Einhorn)." This scene demonstrates that women were expected to tend to their husbands and kids first and foremost on a daily basis. As previously mentioned in the section from Cartwright, some women may not have had servants to help them in their daily work. On top of that, the words "stuck inside" suggest that many women would rather be doing other tasks. Instead, they are forced to do what is expected of them before anything else.

The next stereotype that can be seen is how women are only focused upon pretty things such as clothing, makeup, and shoes. During this scene, Lysistrata talks to Calonice about how they can try to save Greece itself from destruction when Calonice suggests, "All we can do is lie around in slinky gowns, all made up and perfumed, wearing pretty little shoes (Lysistrata Translated by Edward Einhorn)." When Lysistrata tells her that they will save Calonice by using exactly all those things, Calonice then starts to babble on how excited she is to buy all of these new goods. This scene reinforces the gender stereotype of women being obsessed with shopping for new products. It hints that women are more focused upon gaining new materials rather than turning their attention to something as serious as ending a war, which paints women as very extremely short-sighted and materialistic. The fact that these stereotypes are presented within a comedy only reinforces the aspect that this is precisely how women were viewed at the time.

Another stereotype that is seen within the play is that women do not know enough about the world to be involved. Women in Ancient Greece had no power when it came to government and often very little rights. This stereotype of women not being able to be involved is related to the cultural norms during the time as "Women in the ancient Greek world had few rights in

comparison to male citizens. Unable to vote, own land, or inherit, a woman's place was in the home, and her purpose in life was the rearing of children (Cartwright)." These are demonstrated throughout the second scene, where Lysistrata debates with the men. In one section, Lysistrata tells what usually happens whenever she tries to discuss important matters of government and war with her husband. She explains, "All I've done recently is to sit at home, listening to my husband and the rest of you make mistakes and mismanage your affairs. When it got too much, when you were about to do something really foolish, I would just say "How did it go in the Assembly today, dear? Are we any closer to peace?" To which my husband would respond, "What's it to you? Hold your tongue (Lysistrata Translated by Edward Einhorn)!" These words demonstrate just how present the stereotype and gender roles are within Lysistrata. Even though the play is about women trying to gain influence and stop a war, one must remember that the play is a comedy. The fact that women are even able to stop the war is humorous to the audience in its own regard. This touches upon the stereotype that women could never do such a thing, which is why it is presented within a comedy rather than a drama.

While the play is mostly centered around women, there are still stereotypes for men that are shown throughout the play. The first example that is present is that men are very aggressive and prone to getting into fights. In the opening of the play where the setting is given, "a Spartan and an Athenian bumped into each other. This led to a wrestling match, turning gradually more violent, until drunken partyers fell over the two fighters, inadvertently breaking up their fight (Lysistrata Translated by Edward Einhorn)." This stereotype portrays men like hot-headed animals, continually fighting over little things that should not matter.

The next stereotype that is presented is how obsessed men are with sex. In one particular scene, a man is trying to get his wife to come to see him and their child. Once she comes out, the man right away tries to get her to lay with him. He even tosses the child away to try to expedite this "(CINESIAS grabs the "baby" out from the Servant's hands and tosses it away) (Lysistrata Translated by Edward Einhorn)." He then says, "There he goes! You see, the baby's gone. Come to my arms (Lysistrata Translated by Edward Einhorn)!" On top of this example, the main reason the men in Greece end their war is due to the sex strike the women have started. They all walk around with painful erections and decide to end the conflict between the two sides in order to fix their predicament. Overall this stereotype also portrays men like beasts, only focused upon primal instincts, such as having sex.

These stereotypes of men and women are deeply rooted within the gender roles the Ancient Greeks had at the time in their society. For women whose purpose was primarily focused on taking care of the house and children, their stereotypes are mostly focused upon their roles as defined by society. This is why women are portrayed to only complete tasks that involve taking care of children or being infatuated with material goods such as clothing and perfume. On top of this, the stereotype that women do not know enough about war is brought up frequently by men. For the men in the play, their gender roles are the root of their stereotypes. Men were always the ones who would go off to war for their respective city-states, which is why they are portrayed as very combative and easily upset. Their sexual lust stereotype is something that is also rooted in their gender role in society. Men at this time were the ones that controlled everything, and that same was true for a man's wife. This is why men are shown as extremely agitated when they are denied sex because it usually is a women's job to be subservient to her husband. While these stereotypes are from long ago, some of them can be seen in our modern-day culture. Whether is it how women are focused on shopping or men with sex, it just goes to show that some stereotypes regarding men and women are extremely hard to overcome even after

long periods of time.

Works Cited:

1. Cartwright, Mark. “Women in Ancient Greece.” Ancient History Encyclopedia, Ancient History Encyclopedia, 23 May 2019, www.ancient.eu/article/927/women-in-ancient-greece/.
2. Einhorn, Edward. “LYSISTRATA.” FULL SCRIPT | LYSISTRATA by Aristphanes | Edward Einhorn, www.lysistratascript.com/.