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Gender in Athenian Drama and Daily Life:  
Women's Participation in Sacrifices and Festivals

In Ancient Athens, civic duties were usually synonymous to religious duties. As a result the ancient Athenians didn't view festivals and rituals as frivolous events, but instead saw them as sacred duties. Such beliefs required that both men and women actively participated in religious rituals in ancient Athens. Yet what did their respective religious roles look like? The surviving Greek plays have allowed decades of scholars to gather insights into the daily lives of ancient Athenians. Through the examination of Greek plays, one can analyze both the religious aspect and gendered dynamic in Ancient Athens. Thus, how does the portrayal women in festivals and sacrifices in Athenian theatre represent their role in daily Greek life and their place in Athenian society? The plays *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Hecuba* by Euripides illustrate women as sacrificial victims while *Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* by Aristophanes show women as participants in a religious festival. The portrayal of women in Greek theatre reveals that while they were essential in the religious life of Athens, women were still looked upon negatively.

Ancient Athenian drama shows that, while women played active roles in religious life through their participation in sacrifices and festivals, the portrayal of their participation in drama illustrated that women were still excluded in Athenian society and treated negatively. The sacrifices in *Iphigenia at Aulis* and *Hecuba* of Iphigenia and Polyxena confirmed the importance of blood sacrifice in Athenian society. The sacrifices are strongly tied to animal imagery which helps to resolve the disconnect between the prevalence of human sacrifice in Greek theatre and the absence of it in Greek religion. The two sacrifices illustrate that women are meant to serve men and that men are of greater importance than women. The human sacrifices were able to be written and accepted by an Athenian audience, not because the Greeks practiced human sacrifices, but because the Greeks understood the importance of blood sacrifice and that women were meant to cater to the needs of men.

*Women at the Thesmophoria Festival* by Aristophanes confirmed the active role that women had as participants in religious festivals. The mockery of the festival shows how women's participation, while accepted, was not fully respected, and confirmed women's lower position in Athenian society. Women were not excluded in their religious participation, and arguably it was through religion women had the opportunity to be more active in daily life. Women's roles in religion were considered to be secondary to male roles. The portrayal of women in theatre helped to confirm women's roles as secondary without fully discounting the importance of female roles in religion. Ancient Athens was most definitely a male dominated society, and the exclusion of women from politics and civic daily life influenced the areas where women weren't excluded, such as religion. Women were important to maintaining Athenian society and were especially important in fulfilling religious rituals.