

A New Understanding of Athenian Female Gender Ideology

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Project Summary: Although many of the ancient monuments and traditions still reign supreme, the modern city of Athens and its inhabitants have greatly transformed since the days of the ancient Acropolis. A city once renowned for its strictly Mediterranean culture, has, in recent years, experienced a wave of European influence. These European ideas, particularly the ideas of gender and sexuality, are often at odds with traditional Mediterranean constructions of gender and sexuality. Mediterranean gender ideology has long been a heavily studied and often misunderstood subject. In the last 10 years, however, virtually no attention has been devoted to understanding modern Athenian gender ideology. This is problematic due to the recent Europeanization Athens has experienced. The gender and sexuality studies that were conducted ten years ago (Dubisch 1993, Faubion 1993, Papataxiarchis 1988), though useful in many respects, do not represent current constructions and practices of gender and sex. College educated Athenian women ages 18-25 have grown up during this period of transformation and are one of the groups that have been most exposed to the new ideas, practices, and expectations of female gender and sexuality. These women are coming to age during this Europeanization and are the daughters of the women who participated and benefited from the post-Junta social movements that focused on women's rights and pushed for changes in Greek Family Law. These women's geographic location in Athens, an urban center, is important because, theory states that, "increased outside influence, industrialization, social interaction, and a multitude of other occurrences make city settings more open to change, more likely to embrace new ideas" (Psaltis 1967, Gulick 1976: 207). Thus, women living in Athens would theoretically be a group highly affected by the legal and social changes of Europeanization. Also, by virtue of the research subjects' position in the education class, they are better exposed to worldviews.

This five-month study seeks to gain a new understanding of modern Athenian gender ideology through 18-25 year old college women. The goals of this study are: 1) to determine the normative gender roles of college educated Athenian women between the ages of 18-25 2) to outline what is considered deviant gender and sexual behavior of young Athenian women 3) to comprehend the gender expectations and outside perceptions of 18-25 year old women 4) to research the changes in gendered and family law 5) to investigate if the law reinforces or refutes the accepted female gender norms 6) to discover how these laws effect or do not effect these women's lives 7) and so, in turn, These other Athenians will include but will not be limited to the siblings, husbands, parents, grandparents, and peers of the college women. This project will take place from January 2004 to May 2004.

Literature Background:

A large body of research, since the 1960's, has been focused on studying Mediterranean gender ideology. Recently, however, there has been very little scholarship focused on modern Athenian gender ideology. Early works surrounding modern Mediterranean gender described Mediterranean gender norms with the concept of "honor and shame" (Cohen 1989, Herzfeld 1980). The notions of "honor and shame" describe "a complex of values and practices that stresses the cultural control of female sexuality and its relationship to notions of 'honor' and 'masculinity'" (Dubisch 1993). Recent scholars studying Mediterranean gender ideology have rejected the notion of "honor and shame" on the grounds that the researchers studied it through a "western lens" (Dubisch 1993), rather than from a Mediterranean perspective. Mediterranean scholars now largely agree that the regional gender ideology is more complex and variable than the simple "honor and shame" framework.

This study is concerned strictly with modern Athenian gender ideology rather than a broader Grecian or even Mediterranean gender ideology as a result of a large scholarly debate involving the "lumpers" who study the Mediterranean as one homogeneous body, and the "splitters" who break the Mediterranean into smaller unites (Cartledge 1981). This study not only separates Greece from the other Mediterranean countries, it also distinguishes urban Athens from other more rural Greek localities. This separation of the urban and the rural was inspired by the literature discussion surrounding the different gendered worlds of urban and rural life. Sutton's work in rural Nafplio researches the wide range of female work roles in the countryside, which she feels best represents the work done by women in the past. The notion of continuity in rural areas and change in urban areas have been discussed by many other scholars, most notably, Psaltis 1967 and Gulick 1976. Sutton's article also confirms "urban localities experience the greatest changes in gender ideology due to western influence on media, industry, and entertainment." Thus, this study is concerned with understanding the modern female gender ideology of Athens, Greece's premier and most European exposed metropolis.

This research investigates modern Athenian female gender ideology in relation to the laws of Athens. Roy (1997) and many other classical Athenian scholars believe the state of gendered laws reveals a great deal about a culture's gender roles and expectations. Although a classicist, it is quite possible that the general concept holds true today. Therefore, I will research Roy's claim using modern Athenian law. This legal review will be followed up with observation and interview in order to understand the current relationship between law and gender and the affect law has on modern Athenian women.

Research Questions:

- 1) What are the normative and deviant gender roles of college educated Athenian women between the ages of 18-25?
- 2) What are the gendered social expectations of college educated Athenian women between the ages of 18-25?

- 3) How do 18-25 year old women perceive themselves?
- 4) How do other Athenians perceive 18-25 year old educated women?
- 5) What is the current state of gendered and family law?
- 6) Do these laws reflect or refute the female gender norms?
- 7) How does law affect the lives of 18-25 year old women?

Research Setting and Population:

Research will take place in Athens, the capital of Greece. Athens is an enormous sprawling metropolis of over 4 million inhabitants. My research focuses around 18-25 year old college educated women, however, my study will also incorporate other Athenians (husbands, fathers, mothers, peers) and their perceptions of and expectations for this group of women.

Methodology:

A core group of fifteen 18-25 year old college educated, English speaking Athenian females will be recruited from various universities in Athens. I will attend social events, “hang-out” in university space, and make connections with potential informants through my professors at Dikemes as well as with the professors at neighboring institutions in order to make contact with my group of core informants.

The women must have been born and raised in Athens as to avoid a skewed perception of Athenian gender ideology as females attending college from rural, islands, or other locales will likely carry gender ideologies that are particularly unique to their home. The informants must also be fluent English speakers. English is widely spoken throughout Athens, particularly amongst the younger adults and the university educated.

Ten to fifteen English speaking resident Athenians outside of this informant group will be interviewed about their perceptions of and expectations for 18-25 year old Athenian women.

I have conducted a substantial amount of previous ethnographic fieldwork through courses at Northwestern University. I have also conducted urban ethnography in Englewood, Illinois as part of the Field Museum’s Center for Cultural Understanding and Change’s Urban Research and Transformation Institute. I am learning Modern Greek and have taken a considerable number of courses at Northwestern University on gender studies, urban studies, Greek culture, and anthropological field methods. I have conducted extensive library research and written a paper on female gender ideology and sexuality of classical Athens.

The following specific approaches will be utilized in this research:

- 1) Ethnographic Interviews- Ethnographic interviews will be conducted at locations agreed upon by the principal researcher and the informant. The interviews will be centered around open ended questions dealing with the daily lives of 18-25 year old

women, the social expectations and pressures they face, and the ways the women are perceived by other Athenians. The interview times will average 45 minutes. All interviews will be recorded in a field notebook and will later be entered into a computer and analyzed.

2) Participant Observation- Participant observation will play an integral role in this research because it will yield insight into the actual lives of 18-25 year old Athenian women. Although it is important how individuals perceive their gendered worlds, it is also important to observe their daily rounds and observe reality rather than their perceptions of reality. In the latter stages of my research, once I have made good informant connections, I will shadow the college women for a day or more of their lives.

3) Group Interviews- Two types of group interviews will be conducted. One interview group will consist of 18-25 year old Athenian females. This group will create a dialogue in which normative and deviant female behavior can be discussed. The second group will consist of other English speaking Athenian residents. These interviews will be useful in eliciting information on how 18-25 year old women are perceived and what expectations fellow Athenian residents place on them. Both interview types will include no more than eight but no less than 4 participants. I will act as a facilitator in these interviews presenting topics of discussion for the group to discuss.

4) Library Research- The PI will examine relevant legal texts and documents in order to understand the current state of gender laws. Particular attention will be paid to laws forbidding women to access certain places, to the requirement of male escorts, and to marriage and divorce laws. Also of interest will be media coverage of any gendered legal disputes. These laws and disputes will also be important to show if law reflects or refutes the new female gender ideologies in Athens.

Conclusions:

This research will provide an up-to-date account of modern female gender ideology of the educated class growing up during a period of legal and social change. This work will build upon the strengths of previous studies and apply them to a city and population absent in recent scholarship. Emphasis will be placed on the experiences and internal constructions of the core informants, as well as the external expectations and perceptions other Athenians place on 18-25 year old educated Athenian women. This study aims to understand the affect the social and legal change of Athens and it's effect on the gender and sexuality of women coming to age during this period of transformation and redefinition.

Review of Advisor Meetings

I have been meeting with my anthropology advisor, Mary Weismantel, for a year now planning and organizing my research. Although Mary is a brilliant anthropologist and has helped me to gain a strong theoretical understanding of gender and sexuality studies, her specialty is in Latin American gender and sexuality. Therefore, she was unable to provide and context specific advice or bibliographical citations. Thus, I contacted other various professors in the University including, Anne-Marie Yasin (Art History), Daniel Richter (Classics), Robert Wallace (Classics), and Charles Moskos (Sociology). Unfortunately, they too could offer little help related to my project or to Modern Athens.

After hearing the advice from SARP meeting #2, I decided to look for a research advisor elsewhere (and hopefully within Athens). The search was easier than I expected. I contacted CYA inquiring the name of the professor who is teaching the Gender and Sexuality course I will be taking. Her name is Aimee Placas and she is an anthropologist at Rice University who teaches part of the year at CYA.

We have corresponded nearly daily since my initial e-mail. It is wonderful to finally speak to someone who understands the context and can direct me to works on my topic and offer very specific advice. Thus far, she has e-mailed me a bibliography of readings and offered advice on how to revise my proposal. She is excited that my research has the potential to add something new to the existing anthropological literature on Greek gender and sexuality since the urban setting has virtually been ignored. She also confirmed that my informant selection of 18-25 year old women was interesting since this group of women is coming of age under the social changes of Europeanization.

Perhaps the most exciting news I have to share is that Prof. Placas has offered to be my advisor in an independent study at CYA. She is amazing! Her course, "Gender and Sexuality of Modern Athens" has much overlap with my project and thus, CYA originally would not approve my independent study. I am working with Prof. Placas and CYA's Academic Committee to develop an independent study related to my project, which would allow me to further delve into my research. I have recently submitted a proposal that investigates the current status of gendered laws (marriage, divorce, and escort laws) and an ethnographic component in which I will interview 18-25 year old Athenian women on their relationships to the laws. This project will help to answer many of my research questions. Also, since Prof. Placas is an anthropologist and understands ethnographic fieldwork, she is not requiring that I turn in a finished paper and the end of my study. She would like an annotated bibliography and some type of field notes, etc.

I have also met with Mary Finn and Sara Vaux regarding my interest to continue research in Greece beyond study abroad. I have decided that I will apply for a WCAS grant through Mary Finn. We are going to keep in contact while I am abroad. I am also researching the Rotary and Fulbright Fellowship programs for after graduation.

My research now has new possibilities and I am more excited than ever before!

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