

Gender Inequality in Ancient Egypt

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Abstract

This article was concerned with displaying the inequality practised in the ancient Egyptian society according to the gender of its members. Though Egyptian culture was way ahead of its time when it came to female rights, it still made a clear differentiation based on birth gender favouring in many cases males over females and marginalising people of intermediate gender. For example there was a bigger percentage of educated males than females. Although females held a limited number of medical and scribal positions, the whole administration of the country was male dominated. On the other hand women practised equal legal rights when it comes to marriage, divorce and representing themselves in courts. Roles of third gender were not emphasised in funerary sources probably due to the ancient Egyptian beliefs about cosmology.

Keywords: Gender, ancient Egypt, males, females, third gender.

Introduction

Gender is usually defined as the socio-cultural interpretation of sexual difference (Díaz-Andreu 2005). Gender inequality refers to the social norms sustaining gender roles that privilege and favour one gender over the other (usually males over females) (Heise et al., 2019).

The concept “gender role” was introduced by Money (1955) who wrote several articles coining the new foundational conviction that people’s psychological sex was acquired and did not automatically result from biological elements. According to Khalil et al. (2017), a gender role is a set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviours are considered desirable or appropriate for a person based on their sex.

In 2019, the United Nations Development Program’s Gender Inequality Index rated Egypt 108th out of 148 countries (UNICEF, 2019), which is a low ranking for a country with such long history and ancient civilization.

Interestingly, throughout history in Egypt, gender roles, especially for women, seem to have changed a great deal. Even early research on Egyptology realised the unique status that ancient Egyptian women enjoyed. Dickerman (1894, p.508), who reviewed the condition of women in some other ancient nations, concluded that “Egyptian women of the common and middle classes were more independent than women of the same rank elsewhere”.

In Hofstede’s view (2001, p. 297) most human cultures can be classified as either masculine or feminine. Masculine culture clearly differentiates between gender roles, dictating males to “be assertive, tough, and focused on material success” and females to “be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life”. Feminine cultures on


the other hand accommodate overlapping gender roles, and direct that "both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. The present article aims at determining the degree of gender inequality of the ancient Egyptian culture by exploring gender roles in ancient creation myths, art, education, marriage and legal rights.


To how many genders did ancient Egyptians classify humans?

While there is sharp binary division among modern Egyptians of genders to either male or female, inscribed pottery shreds dating to the Middle Kingdom discovered near Luxor (Sethe, 1926) have, after mentioning "all races" (*rmt*), "all of humanity" (*p^c.t*), "all people" (*rhj.t*), classified individuals according to their gender to *t3i* (male), *sh̄t* ("sekhet") and *h̄mt* (female) . The expression for male shows a sign of a penis and that of a man kneeling while the word for eunuch includes a picture of a man kneeling but does not show the sign of a penis. Since the word *sh̄t.w* is placed between the "males" and the "females", it is logical to conclude that it refers to an intermediate sex (Brustman,1999). Therefore, *sh̄t* is usually interpreted as "eunuch" or castrated male.

 *t3j.w nb.w* (all men)

 *sh̄t(i).w nb.w* (all eunuchs)

 *h̄mt nbt* (all women)

Moreover, the word *sh̄ti*  is found in pyramid texts (§1462) in a context referring to two persons "that one is castrated, this one is male" (Edwards, 1995, p. 143). Since *sh̄ti* is contrasted with male, the translation of the former to castrated seems logical. Archaeological evidence too suggests that castration may have been practised in ancient Egypt. Few years ago, 2 skeletons that were discovered in the Ptolemaic-Roman site of Quesna in Egypt were speculated to belong to two eunuchs although other body irregularities present might suggest congenital disorder (Killgrove, 2017).

In spite of that Jonckheere (1954) admitted that all the references that mention castration in ancient Egypt came either from the religious tradition, from the domain of fable or from the subject of mutilation of cadavers for military or funerary purposes. Yet he claims there is at least one relief of a servant (sarcophagus of Kaouit from the 11th dynasty, fig.1) which shows physical characteristics of a person being circumcised before puberty. He considered too the traditional representation of god Hapy on the side of thrones, flanking the unification sign, as the artistic expression of men castrated after puberty.

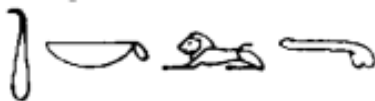


Fig. 1 Sarcophagus of Kaouit in the Egyptian Museum (Bénédite, 1911)

Jonckheere (1954) also mentioned other words were used for eunuchs like *hmti*



which Erman et al. (1971) interpreted as coward and *tkr*



which Griffith translated as eunuch (1909). Moreover, the

word *hm* 

which is similar to the word for female, but it lacks the feminine grammatical ending -t is used with a variety of senses other than priest. Erman et al. (1971) translated it as "coward". A text in the temple at Edfu (Rouge, 1880) says that in Sebennytus one must not have sex with a *hmti* or a male, which defines the *hm* as a man who is not male.

Depauw (2003) studied the representation of a person of the 25th or 26th Dynasty from Abydos who is shown in a long garment and who is described on his stela as "*h3wty-s-hm.t* Isetemdinakht". He believes that the epithet *h3wty-s-hm.t* is to be interpreted as "man-woman" because of the writing of the phallus sign (D52) and due to the garment which he describes as "typically feminine." (Fig. 2).



Fig.2: Funerary stela of Isetemdinakht in Musée Granet (Barbotin, 1995)

It should be noted however that the evidence for individuals of the so-called “third gender” in ancient Egypt is rare and that there are no safe attestations before the Late Period (Matić, 2016). On the other hand, eunuchs in Egypt were explicitly mentioned by Greek and Latin historians, who established that they occupied key jobs in the Ptolemaic court during the last two centuries before the common era. Still, there is no evidence that this institution dates to prior times in Egypt (Depauw, 2003).

Gender in Creation Myths

Roth (2020) believes that non-existence which dominated the universe before creation lacked gender distinctions. In the Heliopolitan creation myth it is only since the moment of creation that we see a reference to gender in Egyptian cosmology for the creator god (Atum) is said to have coupled with his hand, a hint to the act of masturbation (Wilkinson, 2017). This incident which sparked the creation of the universe emphasise the unisexual nature of the creator god because the word “hand” is feminine in Egyptian. The first created gods (Geb, Nut, Shu, Tefnut) were produced in pairs that represented equal ratios of male to female. Thus, it was important for the balance of the universe to maintain this separated nature in the same manner. According to this concept the existence of the third gender (*sht*) carries the threat that the universe relapses to the state of non-existence. This might explain the reason why the reference to people of third gender is rare in Egyptian sources.

Gender in Afterlife

In the ancient Egyptian mindset only male divine beings (Atum, Re, Osiri) had access to the power of creation and resurrection while goddesses played a protective role (Coony, 2010). Egyptians believed that the dead had to be associated with these gods to manifest in the afterlife. Therefore, deceased women and men were identified as Osiris after their death. While Roth (2020) believed that this identification suggested that in the otherworld both genders returned to the state of androgyny that preceded their birth, Coony (2010) was of the opinion that it was only women that had to change gender during this process, namely become masculine for a limited period of time. By representing women as Osiris on their coffins, they briefly joined the creation god to become an *ꜣḥ* a blessed soul. Once a woman reached this stage she returned to her feminine self, her true form for all eternity.

Cole (2013) noted that while some pyramid texts in the pyramid of queen Nieth (wife of Pepi II) were edited for feminine pronouns, most spells remained with masculine pronouns. Therefore, she concluded that in the pyramid texts the deceased was given a clear masculine role regardless of their gender identity, a practice which was continued in the coffin texts.

Adding more controversy on the gender identity of women after death in ancient Egypt, Roth (1999) spotted the phenomena of not representing husbands in tombs of their wives, a trend that could not be justified by social status or society norms. Trying to explain the phenomena, McCarthy, (2002) assumed that post-mortem women acquired a status of gender fluidity that prohibited them from representing their husbands in their tombs.

Gender in Art

When ancient Egyptian couples were represented, the wife was often portrayed smaller than her husband. This could indicate a natural height difference, but occasionally the size gap is so huge as to suggest a hint to hierarchy. Since this hierarchy was also used to differentiate between kings and officials, parents and children and landlords and peasants, it is obvious that women were viewed as inferior to men in status. Also, while both men and women wore headdresses, the men's headdress was usually larger and more adorned, most probably out of the belief that the larger the overall height, the higher a person's status. It should be noted, however, that the same wife could be represented both as equal to and visibly smaller than her husband, according to the context (Roth 2006).

Moreover, in reliefs, paintings or statues the woman is more often shown embracing, supporting, or affectionately touching the man than otherwise (example in fig.3). Simpson (1977) believed that this pattern seems to express power relations in the favour of men since kings were shown embracing gods and children their parents. However mutual embracing between husbands and wives is not a rarity in ancient Egyptian art like the statue of Memi and Sabu from the Fourth Dynasty (fig.4).



Fig.3: Statue of Sabu and wife Meritites in State Museum of Egyptian ArtMunich, Germany (Wikidata, 2019)



Fig.4: Statue of Memi and wife Sabu in Metropolitan Museum (Fischer, 1995)

Nudity and body taboo

In spite of the fact that nudity was used for the degradation of captives and enemies, neither male nor female nudity was offensive or indecent in the context of daily Egyptian life though it was sometimes used to indicate a lower social class. Workers, peasants,

servants and entertainers of both genders were often represented naked with no more than a belt surrounding their waists.

Any observer would note the fact that women's clothing in ancient Egypt was in general more conservative than men's clothing. Yet there are countless examples of women, including queens (see fig.5), represented with dresses so transparent or so form fitting that nothing is left to the imagination (Goelet, 1993). Therefore it seems there was no societal taboo against female bodies contrary to modern day Egypt which, out of religious reasons, places a great emphasis on modesty of female clothing. No textual sources in ancient Egypt too hint to any connection between clothing and the morality of females or their male partners in the eyes of society. Although there were few attestations of females holding medical or scribal positions, the whole administration of the country was male dominated. The same applies for religious positions.



Fig. 5: Torso of queen Nefertiti Musée du Louvre (Oliver, 2008)

Social rights and gender in Egypt

Numerous scholars have already emphasised that social dignity in ancient Egypt was not a consequence of gender, but was a product of social status (Jeyawordena,2016; Robins, 1993; Cooney, 2015). There is also a general convention shared by historians that in comparison to other ancient societies, women in Ancient Egypt enjoyed a higher degree of equal opportunity and freedom of choice (Nardo, 2004).

Remarkably, ancient sources indicate that Egyptian women without any need of male representation were qualified to sue and obtain contracts in situations like marriage, separation, property, and work (Hunt, 2009). Tyldesley (2005) noted that in ancient Egypt women enjoyed a legal, social and sexual independence unattested by their Greek or Roman counterparts, or even by most women as late as the end of the nineteenth century.

Terence Duquesne (2009) noted that the patterns of tomb ownership show that since the Old Kingdom independent women were a well-established phenomenon. Wells (2014), who studied Votive Stelae from Asyut dating to the New Kingdom, stated that women probably benefited from a system that transferred social and economic capital generationally in ways similar to men.

Diop (1989, p. 50) stating that Africa was the home to matriarchal societies in comparison to Europe, which was dominated by patriarchal societies, extended that Egypt represents “one of the African countries where matriarchy was most manifest and most lasting”

Alameen et. al (2013) who studied women’s access to political powers in Egypt, concluded that women in Kemet experienced a level of equality that was exceptional as compared to women in ancient European empires. She added that women were treated as equals under Kemetic law since they were able to inherit property from both their mother and father which they could pass down to their children. Moreover, there are also records of property being divided equally among the children, male and female of the deceased (Britannica, 2011).

Fertility, sex and marriage

In ancient Egypt goddess Nut represented the sky while god Geb represented the earth. The roles of both gods are remarkable since in most ancient cultures and in today’s common-sense earth is usually associated with female fertility being the home of seeds representing mother’s egg and being the receptive of rain which symbolises father’s semen. The common scene which shows Goddess Nut on the top kneeling over god Geb on the bottom is remarkable as well, since the female here is larger giving the impression of being dominant and a leader in sexual process. Nevertheless, Roth (2000) explained the unusual arrangement in the fact that in Egypt fertility of land is not caused by rain but rather by the river Nile, a fact that attributes the creative powers to the male rather than the female.

Several scholars noted that contrary to other societies, ancient Egyptian women were not subordinate to males, were allowed to choose suitable men for a marriage, and were also able to separate from their husbands with their own well (Jacobs, 1996; Hunt, 2009).

Marriage was tied between a man and woman and was achieved by a woman moving into the husband’s home. Egyptian terms for marriage are “to establish a household” and “to

take as wife” (Hawass, 2008, p. 78). The wife possessed the title ‘Mistress of the house’ (Lesko, 1996) or ‘Lady of the home’ (Hawass, 2008).

While men and women were mostly equal under the law in ancient Egypt, there were gender-specific roles in marriage. The wife's role included baking, brewing, and making clothing for her family (Capel and Markoe, 1996). Women usually contributed domestic items to the marriage but the value of such depends on their families’ wealth and status. On the other hand, it was the duty of the man to provide for the family.

Numerous examples of polygamy of kings were attested in ancient Egypt. As for commoners, Simpson (1974) who studied the subject during the Middle Kingdom noted that plurality of wives seems to have been due to the fact that the husband was widowed or divorced in most cases.

Adultery was a moral wrong and a legal offence that required the punishment of both parties in ancient Egypt (Reynolds, 1914). Yet it seems there is more stress on the crime where the female partner is married rather than when the male is a part of marriage. A text from the book of the dead well known as the Negative Confession (Clause 19, Chapter 125) states "I have not defiled the wife of a husband," that is, the wife of another man.

Other than legal and religious consequences of adultery, there seems to be more social exclusion for women who commit adultery than men. In Deir el Medina a young man named Paneb was accused of adultery with various women in the village, including a woman called Hunro who was also unfaithful to two husbands, both of whom divorced her (Chutel, 2018). On the other hand, we have no evidence that Paneb’s wife Wabet divorced him for his extra-marital relationships.

Divorce was described as “departure” or “expulsion” (Robins, 2012) and it could be initiated by the woman or the man who could divorce by mere choice, with no need to demonstrate specific grounds such as adultery or infertility. Ex couples used the legal system in order to determine the amount of property and payment that would be distributed among both partners. The rule was that women get 1/3 of the shared property and the whole sum of any property they possessed before the union. There are no sources of social stigma against divorced men or women.

During the late period a new marriage contract appeared (Wojciechowska, 2016). A marriage contract dating to the 27th Dynasty and originating from Saqqara (*Ancient Egyptian texts*, 2020) was written in the voice of a wife who is addressing her future husband. The amounts mentioned suggest that, in some cases at least, the penalty of leaving a marriage was higher on women than on men.

Motherhood

Contraception was known in ancient Egypt and medical texts that refer to many contraceptive formulas survived (Jacq, 1996). It is worthy of mention that pregnant women were rarely represented in ancient Egypt. Among the few attestations are statues from the archaic period, a mourner in an old Egyptian tomb (نصار, ٢٠٢١) and queen Ahmose who is represented pregnant on the birth colonnade at Deir el-Bahri (fig.6). This

is probably due to the fact that Egyptians tended to represent themselves in the most idealised stage of their life, being young, healthy and slim so that they can continue in the same perfect shape for eternity. Moreover, a pregnant woman in the afterlife represented a theological problem since no humans, unborn in this life, can't begin life in the other world.



Fig. 6: Queen Ahmose on the birth colonnade in Hatshepsut's temple at Deir el-Bahri (Oliver, 2008)

Once women became mothers their status was raised within their community. It is probably for this reason that women who were barren could opt to adopt children (Lesko, 1996). For example, records from Deir al-Madina show that a childless couple adopted a male slave in order to make him the inheritor of their property. Later on, the adopted son devoted a stela to his father and named his children after his adopted parents (Hawass, 2008).

Female deities and priestesses

Female deities were worshipped as early as the pre-dynastic period and they continued to receive veneration throughout the history of Egypt. Alameen et. al (2013) discussed the roles of goddesses Nut, Nieth, Hathour and Isis during the New Kingdom and concluded that the powers given to goddesses were not limited to traditional activities associated with women such as motherhood and childbirth, but their jurisdiction expanded into the political realm as well.

Women served mainly in the temple of Hathor and less often in the temple of Neith (Robbins, 1993). Less commonly, there are some examples of women acting as priestess to male deities such as Thoth, Khons, and Ptah (Lesko, 1996).

Several ranks of priestesses are attested: the *hmt ntr*; 'the female servant of the god,' and less commonly, the *w'bt* or 'pure' priestesses" (Hawass, 2000, p163).

Onstine (2016) noted that *hmt ntr* title almost completely disappears after the Middle Kingdom and attributed this to the diminishing central authority of royal families. Since the New Kingdom, new titles replace *hmt ntr* namely *hsyt*, *sm3yt* and *ihyt* all of which were related to music and chanting.

The main musician priestess was called *mrt* and her job was to sing and dance. These priestesses played an important role in the temple as well in welcoming the king during celebrations (Alameen et. al, 2013). Nevertheless, some sources mention that they were also “charged with managing the fields and estates of the goddess” (Lesko, 1996, p. 38)

Political power and queens

According to the Egyptian scribe Manetho, a decree was made during the Old Kingdom that stated “women might hold the kingly office” (Fletcher, 2004, p. 187). But in reality, only four out of two to three hundred kings were female with one of them, Hatshepsut, resorting to claim male identity to have full political power over the country.

The terms for queens in ancient Egypt were *hmt nswt*, “wife of the king” and *mwt nswt* “mother of the king” stressing that the source of power of these women was their connection to the king. Moreover, while kings possessed a set of 5 titles, queens remained with the 2 basic titles throughout ancient Egyptian history, occasionally carrying other temporary titles. Because Egyptian kings were polygynous, several contemporaneous wives existed for each king. But only one “wife of the king” was usually depicted with her husband. So, it seems that only one of these wives acted as queen and was permitted to hold the queen's titulary and insignia (Silke, 2009).

Queen consort never enjoyed a position that was comparable to her spouse. This is due to the fact that kings of ancient Egypt were considered representatives of Horus on earth, while queens had no counterpart divinity backup. This situation changed to some degree in the New Kingdom, when the queen was associated with the goddesses Tefnut and Hathor.(Sabahy, 2012).

Nevertheless, power of the throne has generally been argued to be inherited through maternal descent. It was not uncommon for a pharaoh assuming the throne to marry a daughter of the previous pharaoh who might be a full sister, a half-sister-even one’s own daughter. The marriage between a brother and sister also represented that of the divine couple, Isis and Osiris (Diop, 1989).

Gender specific violence

Pimentel et al. (2018) noted that ancient Egypt’s women were subject to violence and to verbal, physical and sexual abuse by men. Matic’ (2021), on the other hand, recognised the fact that the study of gender based violence in ancient Egypt must also take into consideration other factors that cause power imbalance such as class and ethnicity. He also noted that prior to the New Kingdom there are few known juridical documents which mention gender-based violence like rape or wife beating. While he concluded that such incidents of violence were usually not reported to the authorities, one is tempted to think

that the number of violence cases might have increased by the course of ancient Egyptian history. This is supported by the fact that there appears to be even a larger amount of textual evidence about violence from the Ptolemaic and Roman Periods.

Domestic violence in the form of husbands beating their wives is well attested from texts on ostraca from workmen's village at Deir el-Medina. One ostrakon (CGC 25521, recto 12) states that a workman was absent from work because he was beating his wife (Matić, 2021).

A judicial manuscript of the 20th year of Ramesses II's reign documents a case of physical violence against a woman. Her husband, accused of maltreatment, was thereafter taken to court (Orioles, 2007).

The most important document referring to sexual violence on women is usually considered the British Museum 10055 which mentions the aggression of Paneb upon several female citizens of Deir el-Medina. However, since Egyptians did not have a specific word for rape and used the same word (*nk*) for a adultery as well, this source cannot be confirmed (Müller-Wollermann, 2020).

Honour crimes, defined as the practices in which male family members kill or harm their female relatives for bringing dishonour to the family by carrying out sexual acts outside marriage, were not attested in ancient Egypt. Moreover, no ancient Egyptian source condemns extra marital relationships, provided that both partners are not married. There is as well no mention of killing of women by their relatives based on their sexual behaviour. On the flip side, the famous tomb of Isadora in Tuna Elgabal tells the story of a young woman who drowned while trying to elope with her lover. After her death, her father constructed a tomb for and honoured her by writing a poem. Therefore, unless a wife, an ancient Egyptian woman had a great degree of sexual freedom and was safe from domestic violence in a way not even comparable with modern day Egypt.

Literacy and education

Zinn (2012) has recognised the fact that the word literacy is a broad term that includes different skills of reading and writing on many levels. Also, while the word education means literacy today the situation was different in ancient Egypt, for education meant the learning of skills or crafts that enabled new generations to carry out the duties necessary for their lives. In such a sense home education was more likely for girls, since their daily activities as grown-up women included baking, cooking, sewing...etc.

Reading and writing were not considered a basic skill in ancient Egypt but rather a qualification necessary for certain positions. Egyptian local schools focused mainly on the training of scribes and officials before they joined the complex system of local or national bureaucracy. Together with the priesthood, these were the primary esteemed jobs available for those who finished schooling (Lazaridis, 2010).

Melzer (2006) proposes with no definite answers these questions: what was the situation of women in the education of reading and writing: Was scribal education accessible to girls and women in the same proportion of boys and men? And how relatively common

was female literacy? The fact that there was a goddess of writing, Seshat, gives the impression that a literate female was not a strange concept to Egyptians, at least at the beginning of their history.

In addition to that, one Old Kingdom woman was accorded the title of “overseer of (female) doctors,” implying that other female doctors existed to be overseen. (Roth, 2020) and in the Ptolemaic era the education of girls became common (Sheridan, 1998). Hypatia, the daughter of the Egyptian mathematician Theon, was the first female astronomer in the world (Kerkhof, 2021). Throughout the ancient history of Egypt, there were more than 100 noteworthy female specialists recorded in every domain of medicine (Khalil et al., 2017).

A feminine of the title “scribe” is attested in the Middle Kingdom, though some interpreted it as “cosmetician” (Roth, 2020). Women in the New Kingdom period were sometimes represented with scribal equipment, and a scribal palette bearing the name of a king’s daughter was found in the tomb of Tutankhamun. A clear incident of a female scribe was found in the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty when she served in the household of the God’s Wife of Amun (Piacentini 2001). Roth (2020) suggests that, taking into consideration the Twenty-Sixth Dynasty trend of archaism, her role may have been inspired by a more antique Old Kingdom title.

Yet, although we can safely assume there were some groups of literate women such as royalty, nobility and the women in the workmen’s village of Deir El-Madina, there is no direct proof for large scale female literacy in ancient Egypt (Sabahy, 2012).

Conclusion

Ancient Egyptians believed that the masculine and the feminine were the sole essential units for the balance of the universe. Therefore, the third gender, though recognised, was not stressed nor highlighted in ancient sources. Numerous scholars rightly believe that Egypt was less of a patriarchal society than contemporary ancient civilisations. This demonstrated itself in more legal privileges for ancient women in marriage, divorce and inheritance. Women unless married were not prosecuted or punished for extra marital relationships, nor were they shamed for their choice of revealing clothing. There are occasional attestations of women practising scribal or medical jobs. Women also had several priestly positions, most of which were connected to music and singing. Yet we cannot describe ancient Egyptian society as being a feminine culture because many features of masculine cultures existed.

Since creation powers were limited to male gods in ancient Egypt, women had to be briefly identified as males in the afterlife so that they could be reborn. Domestic and sexual violence against women was attested and it seems to have increased since the New Kingdom. In spite of that, the fact that women complained to courts about maltreatment indicates the existence of a legal system that aimed at protecting women. There was huge stress on the prosecution of adultery with a married woman, where both her and her partner in crime were severely punished. We have no evidence of the exact proportion of literacy of women in comparison to men, but the general impression is that the latter was generally higher than the former.

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حنان نصار سيد, ٢٠٢١, رعاية الحامل وجنينها في مصر القديمة, مجلة بحوث العلوم الإنسانية والاجتماعية, العدد الثاني, ١١٧-١٣١

الملخص العربي

عدم المساواة بين الجنسين في مصر القديمة

مي فاروق محمود

كلية السياحة والفنادق جامعة مدينة السادات

الملخص

مما يلفت النظر أن الأدوار المتعلقة بالجنس في مصر قد تغيرت كثيرا منذ القدم حتى الحاضر. كان هذا البحث يهدف إلى بحث واجبات وأدوار أفراد المجتمع في مصر بالنظر إلى تصنيفهم الجنسي. وجد البحث أن المصري القديم قد صنف الإنسان إلى ثلاثة أجناس: ذكر، أنثى، جنس وسيط. وكان الجنس الوسيط يجمع بين صفات الذكر والأنثى سواء كان ذلك بشكل طبيعي أو بسبب الاخضاء. لكن المصري القديم كان يؤمن أن لحظة ظهور الوجود من العدم مرتبطة بالتميز الواضح بين الجنسين الذكر والأنثى ولهذا السبب ربما لم يتم إبراز دور الجنس الوسيط في الحياة الاجتماعية. أما في الحياة الأخرى فقد كانت هناك مرحلة وسيطة يجب أن تتحول فيها المتوفاة إلى ذكر وتعرف نفسها كالإله اوزيريس كي تتمتع بالبعث ثم تعود بعدها إلى هويتها الأنثوية. مع ذلك هناك أمثلة عديدة لنساء بنو مقابر مستقلة لم يمثل فيها أزواجهن برغم كونهن متزوجات مما يشير إلى استقلال المرأة المصرية القديمة.

ومن خلال استعراض حقوق المرأة في العمل والزواج والطلاق توصل البحث إلى أن مكانة المرأة في مصر كانت متقدمة للغاية بالمقارنة بالحضارات القديمة مثل الحضارة اليونانية. كما لم يكن هناك إدانة اجتماعية للأنثى كما للذكر بناء على ملابسهما بل أن العري كان أمرا عاديا و مقبولا. لكن إجمالاً لا يمكن وصف المجتمع المصري القديم بالأموي لأنه ظل يمارس بعض التفرقة بين الذكر والأنثى التي تميز المجتمعات الأبوية. علي سبيل المثال كانت نسبة التعليم في الإناث اقل كثيرا من الذكور. كما أن ممارسة السيدة المتزوجة علاقة خارج زوجها كانت تواجه بردع اجتماعي كبير قد يصل للقتل بالرغم من التسامح مع ممارسة الرجل المتزوج علاقات خارج زواجه.

الكلمات الدالة: أدوار الجنسين ، مصر القديمة، الذكور، الإناث، الجنس الثالث