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*Preferred Panel:* 12. Social and Political Dimensions of Kinship: Family, Neighbourhood, City; or 5. The Power of Persuasion; or 13. Urban Space; or 18. Open Topics

*Title:* Gender and Problematizing the Private and Public Spheres in Democratic Athens

*Length of paper:* 20 minutes

*Abstract*

Ever since Homer, keeping the public and private spheres separated and defending one's household against the outside world comprised an important part of Greek manhood. Thus, an episode in Xenophon's *Anabasis* (5.4.32-34) well illustrates that what distinguished the Greeks from the barbarians was the latter's propensity to confuse and cross boundaries, which for the Greeks were the foundations of culture and male-imposed order. In fourth-century democratic Athens there was supposed to be a strict distinction between genders as well as between the public and the private spheres, thanks, chiefly, to the city's male citizens who guarded the lines separating them. Anyone who breached these lines of defense shamed the persons inside and destroyed this communal illusion.

In his important book *Law, Sexuality and Society* (Cambridge 1991, 218-36), David Cohen argues that Athenian democracy advocated an ideological dichotomy

between the public and private spheres in order to defend the private from the state. I wish to modify this argument by observing that the state actually problematized this dichotomy and thus challenged masculine ideology. For example, the need to tax the citizens and the existence of legal procedures of self-help entitled strangers to enter the house with impunity. As much as such intrusions were justified in the name of public interest or maintaining law and order, they also violated a man's authority and private space, damaged his honor, and allowed his enemies to disgrace him. Using examples taken from fourth-century forensic Attic speeches, I intend to discuss this point, together with the rhetorical tactics that took advantage of the conflict, and thereby illustrate the uneasy coexistence of competing ideologies in the Athenian state.