Misogyny in Medea

In ancient Athens women lacked the rights of citizenship and their marriages were considered a covenant between their father and the groom (Hemingway). The reasoning for this practice was that women were too sex-crazed to make rational decisions. Being generally selfish and deceitful, women could not be trusted concerning civic matters or family judgments. The play Medea has a misogynist message because it reinforced Greek stereotypes about strong-willed women.

The character Medea does not conform to typical gender roles. In regards to her womanhood Medea says that she'd “rather take my stand behind a shield three times than go through childbirth once” (lines 253-254). Here she is declaring that childbirth is more difficult than engaging in battle and that the battle expectation of men is easier than the childbirth expectation of women.

In the play women are represented in extremes. On one side is Medea who is very independent and active, on the other are the nurse and the chorus who represent traditional women and are passive. When Medea is plotting to kill her children, the Chorus disagrees with Medea yet takes no actions to change the outcome. These two characterizations of women are a limited representation and offer a false dichotomy. The Greek patriarchal view would be that either a women conforms to her prescribed role shown by the Chorus and Nurse or ends up as a murderess like Medea.

Medea’s actions illustrate the threat to society that independent women can pose. Without the restrictions, women would not add to civic life but only exaggerate every slight
against them into excessive conflict. Medea says that “for any kind of noble deed, we’re helpless; for malice, though, our wisdom is unmatched” (lines 418-419). Here Medea says that women have nothing positive to add to society, but if allowed freedoms would be very adept at causing harm. Medea’s freedom results in the inflated consequences Greek men would fear from a more equal class of females.

**Bibliography**
