

## Porcia's Nature and Character in Plutarch's Works

Through the figure of Porcia Catonis (75-64 BCE – 43-42 BCE), a Roman noblewoman most known for her marriage to Caesar's assassin, Brutus, Plutarch explores what kind of political and social capacity that a woman can achieve. He also questions the confines of female capacity as given by nature. Plutarch presents Porcia as a woman grappling with social ideas about the limits of womanhood, and her own convictions and capacities. This paper seeks to demonstrate that identity, in the works of Plutarch, is founded on the capacities of the body and habits given to a person by nature. However, that nature can be built upon by experience; things like education can expand the mind, just as nobility by nature will give one a capacity for noble behavior. In short, while identity will be founded upon nature, someone's experience and upbringing may expand, and in some cases, override some limits place upon them by nature. A woman capable of crafting herself as a political animal, Porcia's place in Plutarch's works teases out a sort of balance between innate, gendered capacities, and constructed social identities. The end result is a politicized, active form of womanhood made possible by these distinctions. My research was a case study in the way one woman's relationship to gender as a social and natural phenomenon is presented, and the larger implications of the ideas Plutarch addresses through Porcia. It explores where nature ends, and where social and individual construction of identity begin.

In order to do this, I conducted a close-reading of the passages Porcia appears in, as well as passages in which Plutarch discusses nature and its impact on a person's identity. I have divided this paper by the facets of her identity, from the most innate, to the most constructed. First, I explore nature itself, and its function as the basis upon which a person's identity is

formed and built (Plut. Mulier. 0.5), and how it relates to Porcia's interaction with the idea of nature (Plut. Brut. 13.5). Then, I explore the idea of an innate willpower, or *φρόνημα* as it relates to Porcia (Plut. Brut. 13.3), and the function it serves in her identity, both socially and as an individual within the text. Next, her upbringing is examined, which is both innate, in terms of being afforded to her by birth, but also constructed, as it encompasses things like education and company, both very important ideas in Porcia's speech to Brutus about her capacity for strength (Plut. Brut. 13.5). Then, I examine her self-constructions through her reading of Homeric figures (Plut. Brut. 23.4), and her social identity, especially her partnership with Brutus. All of this proves that Porcia, in Plutarch's narrative, is navigating ideas of social and natural influences on identity, and that she uses some of both to construct a politically active womanhood, while navigating the limits that cannot be overcome.