

As scholars, we have been considering for some time how the social status of women in comedy places limitations on their actions (Gomme 1938; Fantham 1975). Foley (2001) has argued convincingly that social status plays a role in the decision-making of women in tragedy, and Traill (2008) has examined the role of social status in the decisions made by women in Menander's *Epitrepontes* and *Samia*. But Traill, as others, is primarily interested in the interaction between male and female, and primarily concerned with women of *hetaira* status: in the *Samia*, Traill suggests that the *pallakē*, Chrysis, makes her decisions based on divided loyalties to her lover Demeas and his son Moschion and with a goal of mending the relationship between these two men. Many have speculated about the motives for Chrysis' actions, but none allows for the possibility that relationships with other women offer a vital motive not just for Chrysis but for all of the women in this play. I will argue that Menander shows women making decisions with a view towards strengthening their social network with other women. The level of risk that a woman is willing to take to help another woman is related to her social status, which in turn is related to how great a reward she may hope for as a result of her actions. This pattern is found in several plays of Menander and his Latin descendants, but I will be focusing on the *Samia* as a case study.

In the prologue of the *Samia*, Moschion explains that the women of two households have a long-standing friendship (l. 35-7), and Menander is careful to demonstrate the emotional attachment they have to each other (l. 426). Throughout the play, these women work together to protect each other and themselves. The *pallakē* Chrysis claims the baby of a citizen *korē* as her own at great personal risk to herself: she is in danger of losing her livelihood (her lover Demea throws her out, l. 133-4), and possibly in danger of losing her life (l. 580-81). Because of her low social status and dependence upon others, the risks that Chrysis takes are great, but so is the potential reward: by helping the citizen women, she gains the long-term security that comes from a strengthened social network. By protecting Chrysis, the *korē* Plangon invokes the ire of her father (l. 535-55), but she escapes the far greater penalty that would come if the truth of the baby's parentage were revealed. Plangon's mother, also participating in the plot to conceal the baby's parentage, only risks temporarily upsetting her marital dynamic but hopes to protect her daughter's chances for a secure future. By working together, each of the three women has a greater chance for future security. Although each stands to gain something, we should not see their motives as purely short-term; by continuing to strengthen this support network, they are creating a resource for the future. I do not suggest that supporting other women is the only motive for the women's actions, but I would like to propose it as a new motive for us to consider as we read Menander and New Comedy.