

Class 2a

WAS JESUS A FEMINIST? THE GOSPEL AS EVIDENCE

Outline

- Defining feminism
 - definition
 - history: 3 waves
- Approaching texts as a feminist
 - hermeneutics of suspicion
 - "suspicions" to pose to texts
 - questions during each of the 3 waves
- Is Mark's Jesus a feminist?
- Is Mark's Jesus masculine?
- Synoptic Gospel background for next class

DEFINING FEMINISM

Defining Feminism

Definition

Defining Feminism

Three Waves

First Wave	late 19 th -early 20 th c U.S. and Europe	access to power, equal opportunity, equal rights like the vote
Second Wave	1960s-1970s Western welfare societies	more radical quest to access women's power, differential rights; aligned with other civil rights movements
Third Wave	1980s-1990s global	recognition of diversity of women's voices, of multiple axes of oppression, multiple strategies of redress, transnational awareness and activism

APPROACHING TEXTS AS A FEMINIST

Approaching Texts as a Feminist Hermeneutics of Suspicion

Premise

Our discourse about ourselves reveals and conceals something about the nature of being.

Consequence

Therefore, our study of discourse needs to examine not only what is said, but what is *not* said in order to get at what *is*, rather than what appears to be.

Definition

A hermeneutics of suspicion is a reading practice (or method of interpretation) which assumes that the literal or surface-level meaning of a text (including the Bible) conceals the political interests which are served by the text. The purpose of interpretation is to strip off the concealment, unmasking those interests.

- Paul Ricoeur, French Philosopher, 1970s

Approaching Texts as a Feminist "Suspicious" to Pose to Texts

- Is there a woman or a woman's point of view in this text?
- How are women portrayed in this text? Do they speak? Are we given access to their point of view? Are they named?
- Who has the power in this text? How do women get what they want? And what do they want?
- How have women's lives and voices been suppressed by this text? Are women made to speak and act against their own interests?
- What hidden gender assumptions lie behind this text (e.g., that women lead men astray, that women cannot be trusted)?
- Is the import of the passage to reinforce or to alter contemporary gender roles? Does the text betray any anxiety about changing gender roles?
- Whose interests are being served?

Approaching Texts as a Feminist Questions during each of the 3 Waves

First Wave	late 19 th -early 20 th c U.S. and Europe	access to power, equal opportunity, equal rights like the vote
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Question for
textual evidence

Where ARE the women?

Strategy

Gather evidence that (male) scholars
have been ignoring OF women

Approaching Texts as a Feminist

Questions during each of the 3 Waves

Second Wave	1960s-1970s Western welfare societies	more radical quest to access women's power, differential rights; aligned with other civil rights movements
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Question for textual evidence

What are men's and women's roles? How were they constructed?

Strategy

Gather evidence of women's lives -- not merely the stories of their lives (written mostly by men)

Approaching Texts as a Feminist

Questions during each of the 3 Waves

Third Wave	1980s-1990s global	recognition of diversity of women's voices, of multiple axes of oppression, multiple strategies of redress, transnational awareness and activism
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Question for textual evidence

Is gender only binary? That is, are there only two genders, and is the only relevant question whether one is a man or a woman?

Strategy

Analyze the impact of multiple factors on women's and men's social, economic and political positions

Approaching Texts as a Feminist

Questions during each of the 3 Waves

Second Wave	1960s-1970s Western welfare societies	more radical quest to access women's power, differential rights; aligned with other civil rights movements
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Feminists in the 1970s and 80s wanted to claim that Jesus liberated women from patriarchal social expectations. They argued that the presence of women with Jesus and the quality of his interactions with them indicates that he treated them as equals.

Is this true?

How would we know?

IS MARK'S JESUS A FEMINIST?

Is Mark's Jesus a Feminist?

Are there women IN the text?

1. Where are the women?
2. Do they get to speak? Are they made to speak against their interests?
3. Who has the power in the text? How do women get what they want?

IS MARK'S JESUS MASCULINE?

Is Mark's Jesus Masculine? The Roman Masculine Ideal



1. **Confident public speaker.** A mature Roman man was expected to be able to address and hold the attention of crowds of people. He was expected to speak boldly and frankly about his ideas and positions, and to some extent, to be able to persuade others of his ideas.
2. **Pietas.** This is a Latin term that we translate "piety," but it meant more than devotion to gods. In the Roman world, *pietas* refers to the duty and obedience that men were expected to show to the gods, their family and their country.
3. **Self-control (*enkrateia*).** This refers to the ability to control the passions (lust, anger) as well as to regulate one's behavior and moderate things like eating, drinking alcohol, sleeping, working, etc.
4. **Control of others.** The Roman Republic and later Empire were built on military victory. Rome prized the courage, skill, power, and sacrifice that brought success in battle, and a man extended this control in his family and in public service.

Synoptic Gospel Background For next class

- There are 4 gospels, or "good news" accounts of Jesus' life, in the Bible (+ some 2 dozen more that we know of)
- 3 of the 4 are so similar they're called "synoptic" (seeing together); these 3 are Matthew, Mark and Luke
- We think Matthew and Luke copied Mark
- But there are over 50 sayings Matthew and Luke share that aren't in Mark, so they couldn't have copied this material from Mark
- We think a list of Jesus' sayings circulated before the gospels, and that Matthew and Luke copied it; we call it Q
- If it predates the gospels, it's one of the earliest things we have, closest to (and therefore reflecting more accurately?) Jesus himself
