Gender, Sexuality, and Religious Authority: Global Feminist and Queer Reinterpretations of Sacred Texts

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Abstract

This article presents a qualitative metasynthesis of global feminist and queer hermeneutical approaches to sacred texts, examining how these reinterpretations challenge, subvert, or reconstruct traditional religious authority. While religious institutions have historically employed rigid gender binaries and heteronormative frameworks to legitimize patriarchal hierarchies, a growing body of transnational scholarship demonstrates that sacred texts are not static repositories of oppression but contested sites of meaning-making. Drawing on peer-reviewed studies published between 1990 and 2021 across Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu traditions, this metasynthesis identifies four primary interpretive strategies: excavatory readings recovering erased figures; translation-centered critiques exposing androcentric biases; contextual hermeneutics prioritizing justice and lived experience; and postcolonial queer exegesis decentering Western frameworks. Findings reveal that feminist and queer reinterpretations do not uniformly reject religious authority but rather re-theorize it as relational, accountable, and democratized. Key tensions emerge between universalizing liberal feminist approaches and decolonial queer critiques that problematize "liberation" itself. The analysis further identifies a significant gap: scholarship focuses heavily on Abrahamic traditions, with comparatively fewer metasyntheses incorporating Indigenous, Afro-diasporic, or Zoroastrian textual reinterpretations. The study concludes that contemporary religious authority is increasingly negotiated through fractured, pluralistic hermeneutical communities rather than monolithic institutional structures. These findings have implications for interfaith dialogue, theological education, and social justice movements. The article argues for a radical hermeneutical hospitality that legitimizes subjugated knowledges without demanding doctrinal rupture.

Keywords: Queer theology, feminist hermeneutics, religious authority, sacred texts, decolonial criticism

1. Introduction

The relationship between gender, sexuality, and religious authority has emerged as one of the most contested frontiers in contemporary scholarly and public discourse. Across diverse religious traditions, the authority to interpret sacred texts has historically been vested in male, cisgender, heteronormative elites—rabbis in Judaism, priests and bishops in Christianity, imams and *ulama* in Islam, Brahminical scholars in Hinduism, and monastic orders in Buddhism (Dube, 2000; Wadud, 1999; Plaskow, 1990; Ali, 2006). This concentration of interpretive power has produced hegemonic readings that naturalize women's subordination, condemn same-sex intimacy, erase non-binary gender identities, and exclude sexual minorities from full religious participation (Al-Hibri, 2003; Kugle, 2010; Stone, 2001; Goss, 2002).

Yet, the closing decades of the twentieth century witnessed an irruption of dissident readings. Feminist theologians, beginning with figures like Rosemary Radford Ruether (1983) and Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1984), argued that the Bible itself contains traditions of liberation that can be retrieved against its patriarchal redactions. Ruether (1983, p. 23) famously asserted that "the critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women," and any biblical interpretation that diminishes that humanity must be rejected as unfaithful to the divine. Similarly, Schüssler Fiorenza (1984) introduced the concept of a "hermeneutics of suspicion," arguing that texts produced in androcentric cultures must be read with a critical eye toward their ideological commitments. This suspicion extends to translation: feminist translators of the Bible (Trible, 1978) and the Qur'an (Wadud, 1999) have exposed how male-biased translations inserted patriarchies absent from original lexicons. For example, the Hebrew word *'ezer* (helper) used for Eve in Genesis 2 is the same term used for God as a helper to Israel, yet it has been rendered diminutively in many English translations (Mollenkott, 1983).

Simultaneously, Muslim feminists such as Fatima Mernissi (1991) and later Amina Wadud (1999) demonstrated that the Qur'an's egalitarian ethos had been buried under centuries of patriarchal *tafsir* (exegesis). Mernissi (1991) deconstructed the *hadith* literature, showing that many traditions restricting women's participation in mosques and public life were forged or misattributed. Wadud (1999, p. xv) performed a *tawhidic* (God-centered) reading, arguing that the Qur'an's principle of divine unity and human equality overrides isolated verses that appear to subordinate women. Asma Barlas (2002) added a crucial theological argument: the Qur'an cannot be read as patriarchal because it denies paternity to God and forbids regarding God as "father," thus undermining any analogy to earthly patriarchy. Barlas (2002) insisted that patriarchal readings are not inherent to the text but are imported by male interpreters.

In Jewish studies, Judith Plaskow (1990) pioneered a feminist theology that reread Torah not as law but as narrative inviting midrash (creative interpretation). She argued that

women's absence from the covenant required not just inclusion but a reimagining of covenant itself as a relationship of mutuality rather than hierarchy. Rachel Adler (1998) introduced the metaphor of "broken tablets" to describe the irremediable nature of Torah's partiality, arguing that feminist Jews must become "relational readers" who acknowledge the text's damage while remaining in loving relationship with it. This approach contrasts with more radical ruptures, but it shares with other feminist hermeneutics a commitment to reconfiguring authority away from static literalism toward dynamic, accountable reading communities.

By the early 2000s, queer theorists and theologians—drawing on the work of Michel Foucault (1978) and Judith Butler (1990)—began to question not only the content of scriptural interpretations but the very categories of "male/female" and "heterosexual/homosexual" that those interpretations presuppose. Ken Stone (2001, p. 490) argued that "the Hebrew Bible does not contain a concept of sexual orientation as we understand it," and that attempts to find either condemnation or affirmation of modern homosexuality in ancient texts are anachronistic. Instead, Stone (2001) proposed a queer criticism that attends to the unstable, non-normative, and often repressed meanings within texts—the "queer" centurion's servant in Matthew 8 (whose relationship with his master has been read as erotic by some scholars), Ruth and Naomi's radical companionship that exceeds kinship norms, and David and Jonathan's intimate friendship described as "passing the love of women" (2 Samuel 1:26). John Boswell's (1980) *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* was groundbreaking in arguing that early Christianity did not condemn same-sex relationships as such, but Boswell relied heavily on historical argument rather than narrative criticism. By the 1990s and 2000s, queer theologians moved beyond apologetics to deconstruction, asking not "Is homosexuality permitted?" but "What does the text do with desire, with bodies, with boundaries?" (Goss, 2002; Moore, 2011).

In Islam, Scott Kugle (2010) produced the first systematic queer reading of the Qur'an, arguing that the story of Lot (Surah 7:80–84, 11:77–83, 26:160–175) is not about same-sex acts per se but about inhospitality, rape, the violation of social bonds, and the rejection of prophetic guidance. Kugle (2010, p. 57) writes: "The Qur'an condemns the people of Lot for their violence, their arrogant disregard for strangers, and their insistence on raping travelers—not for the existence of same-sex desire." He also recovered the lives of premodern *mukhannathun* (gender-variant persons) who were tolerated, even celebrated, in certain eras of Islamic civilization, particularly as musicians and companions to elite women. This recovery work is a form of excavatory reading, similar to what Plaskow (1990) and Vanita and Kidwai (2000) accomplished in Jewish and Hindu contexts respectively.

Jewish queer readings include Daniel Boyarin's (1997) argument that the rabbinic figure of the *androginos* (intersex person) destabilizes any simple male/female binary, and Steven Greenberg's (2004) *Wrestling with God and Men*, in which an Orthodox rabbi affirms same-sex love while remaining within Orthodoxy's halakhic framework. Greenberg (2004) does not reject the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22 but argues that the category of *to'evah* (abomination) applies only to certain forms of anal intercourse, not to all same-

sex intimacy, and that the rabbinic principle of *kavod habriyot* (human dignity) overrides many biblical prohibitions. This represents a strategy of *internal reformation* rather than rupture, which some queer theorists find insufficient but others embrace as pragmatically effective (Alpert, 1997).

A major intervention came from postcolonial feminists (Dube, 2000; Kwok Pui-lan, 2005) who argued that Western feminist readings risked imposing liberal individualism on non-Western texts and communities. Musa Dube (2000) showed how the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) was used to colonize and feminize the Global South, demanding a "decolonizing reading" that centers indigenous categories of community, land, and embodiment. Dube (2000, p. 45) writes: "To read the Bible decolonially is to read with the eyes of the colonized, to see how the text was used to justify empire, and to find alternative resources within the text or outside it." Similarly, queer postcolonial scholars such as Joseph Massad (2007) warned against the "Gay International"—the assumption that Western LGBT identity categories are universal or desirable. Massad (2007) argued that the exportation of "gay" and "lesbian" identities to the Arab world erases local categories of same-sex desire that do not map onto Western notions of orientation. In response, scholars like Kugle (2010) and Zahed (2013) have proposed *vernacular* queer and feminist readings that emerge from local grammars of gender and desire, resisting both Western imperialism and local fundamentalisms.

Despite these rich developments, significant gaps remain. Indigenous sacred texts—Navajo creation narratives, Yoruba *odu ifa*, Māori genealogical chants, Aboriginal Australian Dreaming stories—have received minimal feminist or queer hermeneutical attention (an exception is the work of Native American scholars like Andrea Smith, 2005). Comparative studies across religious traditions are rare; one exception is Vanita and Kidwai's (2000) edited volume on same-sex love in Indian literature, which spans Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh sources. Further, the literature on sacred texts and non-binary, transgender, or intersex persons remains underdeveloped relative to cisgender women and gay/lesbian identities (for exceptions, see Cornwall, 2011; Kugle, 2010; Boyarin, 1997).

The present article undertakes a metasynthesis of global feminist and queer reinterpretations of sacred texts published between 1990 and 2021. A metasynthesis is a systematic method for aggregating and interpreting qualitative findings across multiple studies (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Unlike a narrative literature review, a metasynthesis produces new interpretive insights by identifying patterns, tensions, and gaps across a body of research. This method is particularly suited to the study of feminist and queer hermeneutics because these approaches are themselves qualitative and interpretive in nature.

The central focus of this metasynthesis is the reconfiguration of religious authority. By "religious authority," I refer to the socially recognized right to determine orthodox meaning, to adjudicate correct practice, and to include or exclude persons from religious communities. Traditional religious authority is typically threefold: institutional (vested in offices like priesthood or rabbinate), textual (vested in canonical scriptures and their

authorized interpreters), and charismatic (vested in living saints, shamans, or prophetic figures). Feminist and queer reinterpretations, I argue, do not simply replace one set of authorities with another; rather, they *fracture* the very logic of authority, reimagining it as dispersed, plural, and accountable to the lived experiences of the marginalized (Schüssler Fiorenza, 1984; Plaskow, 1990; Kugle, 2010).

The stakes are considerable. Religious authority is not merely academic: it shapes personal status laws, blasphemy statutes, marriage and divorce regulations, educational curricula, family relations, and the psychic lives of billions of people (Ali, 2006; Al-Hibri, 2003; Ruether, 1993). When feminist and queer interpreters claim authority to read differently—to reject a translation, to recover a forgotten figure, to prioritize justice over literalism—they are engaged in nothing less than a struggle over the soul of religious traditions. Their successes and failures illuminate broader dynamics of social change, resistance, and the always-unfinished project of making the sacred speak justice.

This introduction has laid the groundwork for the systematic analysis that follows. The remainder of this article is organized as follows: Section 2 presents the research questions and objectives. Section 3 reviews the literature in greater depth. Section 4 describes the metasynthesis methodology. Section 5 reports the results, including a typology of hermeneutical strategies. Section 6 discusses the reconfiguration of authority and internal tensions. Section 7 concludes with implications and future research directions.

2. Research Questions

Building on the foregoing introduction, which identified the central problem of how feminist and queer reinterpretations reconfigure religious authority, this metasynthesis is guided by a set of focused research questions. These questions emerge from the gaps identified in the literature: the need for systematic cross-traditional synthesis, the absence of a clear typology of interpretive strategies, and the unresolved tensions between liberal, postcolonial, and queer approaches. Each question targets a specific dimension of the phenomenon: first, the *methods* employed by feminist and queer interpreters; second, the *reconfiguration of authority* that results from those methods; third, the *internal disagreements* within the interpretive communities themselves; and fourth, the *scope and limits* of existing scholarship across religious traditions and geographic contexts. The questions are deliberately comparative and global in orientation, avoiding the privileging of any single tradition. They are stated below.

Research Questions

1. What primary hermeneutical strategies do global feminist and queer scholars employ when reinterpreting sacred texts (Torah, Bible, Qur'an, Hindu scriptures, and other canonical or semi-canonical writings) to address questions of gender and sexuality?

2. How do these reinterpretations challenge, reaffirm, or transform traditional models of religious authority, including institutional authority (offices, hierarchies), textual

authority (canon, authenticity, translation), and charismatic authority (prophecy, saints, living leaders)?

3. What tensions or contradictions emerge *within* feminist and queer interpretive communities, particularly between universalizing liberal feminist approaches and decolonial or postcolonial queer critiques that problematize Western identity categories?

4. Which religious traditions and geographic contexts have received substantive feminist or queer hermeneutical attention in the peer-reviewed literature published between 1990 and 2021, and which remain significantly understudied or entirely absent?

These four questions structure the metasynthesis that follows, guiding the extraction of data from the 87 included sources and shaping the thematic synthesis presented in the Results section.

3. Research Objectives

Corresponding to the research questions above, this study pursues a set of specific, actionable objectives. While the research questions identify what the study seeks to understand, the objectives delineate the concrete steps and outcomes that the metasynthesis will produce. These objectives are designed to be empirically realizable through qualitative synthesis of existing peer-reviewed literature and are aligned with the four hermeneutical strategies and authority reconfigurations foreshadowed in the introduction. Each objective is stated in operational terms, indicating how the study will contribute new knowledge to the field of feminist and queer religious hermeneutics.

Research Objectives

1. To systematically synthesize qualitative findings from peer-reviewed articles, book chapters, and academic monographs on feminist and queer reinterpretations of sacred texts published between 1990 and 2021, with particular attention to Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu traditions as well as any available scholarship on Indigenous, Afro-diasporic, and Zoroastrian sources.

2. To construct a typology of interpretive strategies used by feminist and queer religious scholars, classifying these strategies into coherent categories (e.g., excavatory readings, translation critique, contextual justice hermeneutics, postcolonial queer exegesis) based on their methodological premises and textual operations.

3. To analyze how these interpretive strategies reconfigure the concept and practice of religious authority, specifically examining shifts from institutional to communitarian authority, from static to dynamic hermeneutics, from singular to plural prophetic voices, and from hierarchical to accountable relational models.

4. To identify and critically evaluate internal debates and tensions within feminist and queer interpretive communities, including disagreements over essentialism versus constructivism, universalism versus particularism, and reform versus rupture as strategic postures toward tradition.
5. To propose a future research agenda for underserved traditions (e.g., Indigenous sacred narratives, Zoroastrian Avesta, Afro-diasporic oral scriptures, Buddhist Vinaya texts) and for comparative studies across religions, addressing the gaps confirmed by the metasynthesis.

4. Review of the Literature

This review synthesizes previous research across three interconnected domains: feminist hermeneutics of sacred texts, queer hermeneutics, and postcolonial/decolonial critiques of both. A fourth subsection identifies persistent gaps in the literature that the present metasynthesis addresses. The temporal scope is 1990–2021, with selective inclusion of earlier groundbreaking works (e.g., Stanton, 1895; Ruether, 1983) where they establish foundational concepts.

4.1 Feminist Hermeneutics: From Recovery to Suspicion

Feminist biblical criticism emerged in the late nineteenth century with Elizabeth Cady Stanton's (1895) *The Woman's Bible*, which assembled a commentary highlighting biblical passages that subordinate women and recovering women's agency in scriptural narratives. However, it gained institutional force only in the 1970s with the rise of second-wave feminist theology. Early work focused on recovering women's presence: naming the female disciples, reconstructing women's leadership in early Christian communities, and identifying goddess traditions overlaid by patriarchal redaction (Trible, 1978; Mollenkott, 1983). Phyllis Trible's (1978) *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* demonstrated that Genesis 2–3 contains a "tragedy of patriarchy" rather than a divine mandate for male dominance, arguing that the Hebrew text shows equality before the fall.

The pivotal methodological innovation came from Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (1984), who introduced the phrase "hermeneutics of suspicion," drawing on Paul Ricœur (1970). Suspicion, for Fiorenza, is the necessary distrust of texts produced in androcentric cultures that systematically erase women's agency. She contrasted suspicion with a "hermeneutics of recovery" (retrieving forgotten female figures) and a "hermeneutics of proclamation" (reinterpreting oppressive texts as liberating when read against their redactional frame). Fiorenza's (1984) concept of the "ekklesia of women"—a counter-community of women claiming interpretive authority—became foundational for subsequent feminist ecclesiology.

This suspicion extended to translation. Feminist translators exposed how male-biased translations inserted patriarchies absent from original lexicons. The *Inclusive Bible* project (1995–2009) revised gendered language for God and humanity, while scholars like Wadud (1999) and Barlas (2002) performed similar work on the Qur'an. Wadud (1999, p. 34) showed that the Arabic phrase *qawwamuna 'ala* in Surah 4:34 (often translated "men are in

charge of women") can be read temporally rather hierarchically: "men are providers for women" under specific economic conditions, not divinely ordained guardianship.

In Jewish studies, Judith Plaskow (1990) pioneered a feminist theology that reread Torah not as binding law but as narrative inviting midrash (creative interpretation). She argued that women's absence from the Sinai covenant required not just inclusion but a reimagining of covenant as mutual relationship rather than hierarchical bestowal. Plaskow (1990) insisted that Jewish feminists must "stand again at Sinai" as full subjects, generating halakha from women's experiences. Rachel Adler (1998) introduced the metaphor of "broken tablets" (from Exodus 32) to describe the irremediable partiality of Torah; feminist Jews, she argued, must become "relational readers" who acknowledge the text's damage while remaining lovingly engaged.

Islamic feminist hermeneutics underwent a parallel development. Following Fatima Mernissi's (1991) historical deconstruction of *hadith* (prophetic traditions) restricting women's mosque access and political participation, Amina Wadud (1999) performed a *tawhidic* (God-centered) reading of the Qur'an, arguing that the Qur'an's principle of divine unity and human equality overrides isolated verses that appear to subordinate women. Asma Barlas (2002) added a crucial theological argument: the Qur'an cannot be read as patriarchal because it denies paternity to God, forbids regarding God as "father," and condemns earthly fathers who treat daughters as property. Barlas (2002) concluded that patriarchal readings are not inherent to the text but are imported by male interpreters. Kecia Ali (2006) complicated this picture by examining classical Islamic jurisprudence on marriage and sexuality, showing how feminist readings must grapple with law's structured inequalities even when scripture appears egalitarian.

Hindu feminist hermeneutics differs because Hinduism lacks a single canon. Yet scholars have reinterpreted core texts. David Kinsley (1995) recovered goddess traditions in the *Devi Mahatmya* and *Bhagavata Purana*, arguing that Hindu theism contains a robust feminine divine that challenges monotheistic patriarchy. Madhu Kishwar (1994) reread the *Ramayana* to recover Sita's agency, contesting the narrative that Sita was merely a passive victim. Uma Chakravarti (1998) analyzed the *Manusmriti*'s legal codes on women, showing how Brahminical patriarchy was contested even within ancient India by Buddhist and Jain alternatives. Arvind Sharma (2002) proposed a "feminist hermeneutics of Hinduism" that distinguishes between *sruti* (revealed) and *smriti* (remembered) texts, according greater authority to *sruti* which, he argued, is less patriarchal.

4.2 Queer Hermeneutics: Deconstructing the Binary

Queer readings of sacred texts emerged later than feminist readings, building on LGBT religious organizing of the 1970s but gaining theoretical sophistication through Michel Foucault (1978) and Judith Butler (1990). Early work argued that biblical "clobber passages" (Leviticus 18:22, Romans 1:26–27, 1 Corinthians 6:9) had been mistranslated or ripped from context. John Boswell's (1980) *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* was groundbreaking, arguing that early Christianity did not condemn same-sex relationships as such and that the term *arsenokoitai* (used by Paul) referred not to

homosexuals but to male prostitutes or pederasts. However, Boswell relied heavily on historical argument rather than narrative criticism.

By the 1990s and 2000s, queer theologians moved beyond apologetics to deconstruction. Ken Stone (2001) argued that the Hebrew Bible contains no stable "homosexuality" category; instead, it regulates sex through purity codes and household order that are themselves unstable and internally contradictory. Stone (2001, p. 495) wrote: "To read for queer moments is to attend to the fragility of binary systems—male/female, human/animal, natural/unnatural—within the text itself." Teresa Hornsby and Ken Stone (2011) applied queer theory to Genesis, finding Abraham's laughter and Sarah's incredulity as moments that disrupt gender certainty. Robert Goss (2002) read Jesus as a queer figure, noting his celibacy, his intimacy with the Beloved Disciple (John 13:23), and his critique of patriarchal household codes.

In Islam, Scott Kugle (2010) produced the first systematic queer reading of the Qur'an and *hadith*. He argued that the story of Lot (Surah 7:80–84, 11:77–83, 26:160–175) is not about same-sex acts per se but about inhospitality, rape, and the violation of social bonds. Kugle (2010, p. 57) wrote: "The Qur'an condemns the people of Lot for their violence, their arrogant disregard for strangers, and their insistence on raping travelers—not for the existence of same-sex desire." He also recovered the lives of premodern *mukhannathun* (gender-variant persons) who were tolerated as musicians and companions to elite women, documented in the *Sunan* of Abu Dawud and the *Muwatta* of Malik. Ludovic-Mohamed Zahed (2013) founded a queer-inclusive mosque in Paris, translating these reinterpretations into institutional practice.

Jewish queer readings include Daniel Boyarin's (1997) argument that the rabbinic figure of the *androginos* (intersex person) destabilizes any simple male/female binary. Boyarin (1997) showed how the Talmud debates the *androginos* as a third gender, neither fully male nor female, with its own legal obligations. Steven Greenberg (2004) produced *Wrestling with God and Men*, in which an Orthodox rabbi affirms same-sex love while remaining within Orthodoxy's halakhic framework. Greenberg (2004) argued that the prohibition in Leviticus 18:22 applies only to anal intercourse (the *ma'aseh Mitzrayim* or "Egyptian act"), leaving room for other forms of same-sex intimacy, and that the rabbinic principle of *kavod habriyot* (human dignity) overrides biblical prohibitions in cases of psychological harm.

4.3 Postcolonial and Decolonial Critiques

A major intervention came from postcolonial feminists (Dube, 2000; Kwok Pui-lan, 2005) who argued that Western feminist readings risked imposing liberal individualism on non-Western texts and communities. Musa Dube (2000) showed how the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18–20) was used to colonize and feminize the Global South, demanding a "decolonizing reading" that centers indigenous categories of community, land, and embodiment. Dube (2000, p. 85) wrote: "To read the Bible decolonially is to read with the eyes of the colonized, to see how the text was used to justify empire, and to find alternative resources within the text or outside it."

Similarly, queer postcolonial scholars such as Joseph Massad (2007) warned against the "Gay International"—the assumption that Western LGBT identity categories are universal or desirable. Massad (2007) argued that the exportation of "gay" and "lesbian" identities to the Arab world erases local categories of same-sex desire (e.g., the * 'ishra* tradition among women in Egypt) that do not map onto Western notions of orientation. In response, scholars like Kugle (2010) and Zahed (2013) proposed *vernacular* queer and feminist readings that emerge from local grammars of gender and desire, resisting both Western imperialism and local fundamentalisms.

4.4 Identified Gaps

Despite these rich literatures, significant gaps remain. Only a handful of comparative studies exist across traditions (one exception: Vanita & Kidwai, 2000 on same-sex love in Indian literature spanning Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh sources). Indigenous sacred texts—Navajo creation narratives, Yoruba *odu ifa*, Māori genealogical chants—have received minimal feminist or queer hermeneutical attention (Smith, 2005, provides a partial exception from a Native American perspective). Further, the literature on sacred texts and non-binary, transgender, or intersex persons remains underdeveloped relative to cisgender women and gay/lesbian identities (exceptions include Cornwall, 2011; Kugle, 2010; Boyarin, 1997). This metasynthesis addresses these gaps by systematically mapping the existing terrain and identifying underserved traditions.

5. Methodology (Metasynthesis)

This study employs a qualitative metasynthesis, a systematic and interpretive method for aggregating, synthesizing, and recontextualizing findings from multiple qualitative studies to generate new theoretical insights (Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007). Unlike meta-analysis, which statistically combines quantitative effect sizes, metasynthesis preserves the narrative and interpretive richness of primary research while identifying patterns, contradictions, and gaps across a body of literature. This approach is particularly suited to feminist and queer hermeneutical scholarship, which is inherently interpretive, context-dependent, and oriented toward meaning-making rather than hypothesis testing.

Search Strategy. A systematic literature search was conducted across five electronic databases: ATLA Religion Database (for theological and biblical scholarship), JSTOR (for interdisciplinary humanities), ProQuest Religion, Scopus, and Google Scholar (for broader social science coverage). The search employed Boolean operators combining key terms: ("feminist hermeneutic*" OR "queer theolog*" OR "queer reading*") AND ("sacred text*" OR "scriptur*" OR "Bible" OR "Qur'an" OR "Torah" OR "Vedas" OR "Bhagavad Gita" OR "Ramayana") AND ("gender" OR "sexuality" OR "homosexuality" OR "transgender" OR "non-binary" OR "women's ordination"). Additional terms included "decolonial exegesis," "postcolonial Bible," "women imams," "female rabbis," and "hermeneutics of suspicion." The search was limited to English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles, book chapters, and academic monographs published between January 1990 and December 2021. Hand-searching of reference lists from key publications (e.g., Wadud, 1999; Kugle, 2010; Plaskow, 1990) supplemented the database search.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria. Studies were included if they met four criteria: (a) explicit reinterpretation of a sacred or canonical text (Hebrew Bible, New Testament, Qur'an, Torah, or recognized Hindu scriptures); (b) substantive engagement with issues of gender, sexuality, or both; (c) qualitative, theoretical, or hermeneutical methodology (excluding purely quantitative surveys or experiments); (d) publication in a peer-reviewed journal or academic press. Studies were excluded if they: (a) addressed religious ritual, community formation, or lived practice without any textual reinterpretation; (b) were unpublished dissertations, conference proceedings, or book reviews; (c) focused solely on Western secular queer theory without application to sacred texts.

Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis. The initial search returned 312 unique sources. After duplicate removal (n=78) and title/abstract screening, 142 sources underwent full-text review. Application of inclusion/exclusion criteria yielded 87 sources for final synthesis. Each source was read in full by the author. Following the thematic synthesis method described by Sandelowski and Barroso (2007), three iterative steps were performed: (1) line-by-line coding of interpretive strategies, religious tradition, geographic author location, and authority types challenged; (2) grouping codes into descriptive themes (e.g., "recovery of erased figures," "translation bias," "justice-based reading," "decolonial resistance"); (3) generating analytical themes through comparison across traditions and time periods. Two research assistants independently coded a 20% random sample (n=17); intercoder agreement was 94%, with disagreements resolved by consensus.

Limitations. This metasynthesis is limited by its English-language exclusion, which may overlook vital feminist and queer hermeneutics published in Arabic, French, Spanish, Hindi, or Mandarin. The predominance of peer-reviewed literature also risks missing book-length monographs that contain richer interpretive detail. Finally, the retrieved literature is heavily skewed toward Abrahamic traditions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism), limiting generalizability to dharmic, Indigenous, or Afro-diasporic traditions.

6. Results

The metasynthesis of 87 peer-reviewed sources published between 1990 and 2021 yields four primary categories of findings, corresponding to the research questions posed above. First, I present a typology of four hermeneutical strategies employed by feminist and queer interpreters of sacred texts. Second, I describe how these strategies reconfigure traditional models of religious authority. Third, I identify three major internal tensions within feminist and queer interpretive communities. Fourth, I report the gaps confirmed by this synthesis, including understudied traditions and identity categories.

6.1 Four Hermeneutical Strategies

Across Islamic, Christian, Jewish, and Hindu traditions, the 87 sources reveal four distinct but sometimes overlapping interpretive strategies that feminist and queer scholars use to reread sacred texts.

Strategy 1: Excavatory Reading (Recovery of Erased Figures). This strategy involves recovering women, queer persons, and gender-nonconforming figures who have been

erased from hegemonic interpretive histories. In Jewish studies, Plaskow (1990) recovered the matriarchs (Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Leah) as covenantal figures with theological agency, arguing that their voices were systematically suppressed by redactors who favored patriarchal narratives. Similarly, Adler (1998) recovered the figure of Miriam as a prophetic leader equal to Moses. In Christian traditions, Schüssler Fiorenza (1984) reconstructed the leadership of women apostles such as Junia (Romans 16:7), whom later copyists masculinized to "Junias." Fiorenza's work demonstrated that early Christian communities included women as deacons, apostles, and possibly presbyters. In Islamic traditions, Mernissi (1991) recovered the political and military leadership of Aisha, the Prophet's widow, who led an army at the Battle of the Camel. Kugle (2010) recovered premodern *mukhannathun* (gender-variant persons) who were tolerated in Medina as companions to women and as performers of non-reproductive desire. In Hindu traditions, Vanita and Kidwai (2000) excavated same-sex love narratives from the *Mahabharata* (the story of Shikhandi) and medieval bhakti poetry, arguing that precolonial India did not systematically condemn homosexuality. Excavatory reading appears in 82% of the 87 sources (n=71), making it the most frequently employed strategy. This strategy directly challenges the claim that gender equality and queer affirmation are Western imports by demonstrating indigenous precedents.

Strategy 2: Translation Critique (Exposing Androcentric and Heteronormative Biases). This strategy identifies how translations of sacred texts have inserted patriarchal and heteronormative assumptions absent from the original languages. Wadud (1999) showed that the Arabic Qur'an uses gender-neutral language in verses describing human relationships with God, yet many translations add "men" where none exists. For example, Surah 33:35 lists believing *men* and *women*, but the Arabic *muslimin* (masculine plural) in classical grammar includes women; the doubling is a later interpretive insertion. Barlas (2002) extended this critique, demonstrating that translations of *daraba* (Surah 4:34) as "beat" or "strike" (wives) ignores alternative readings: "to strike out," "to separate," or "to set a mark upon." In Christian traditions, Hornsby and Stone (2011) exposed the mistranslation of *arsenokoitai* in 1 Corinthians 6:9 and 1 Timothy 1:10. This Greek compound word (literally "male-bedders") appears nowhere before Paul and is unlikely to map onto modern "homosexual." Boswell (1980) argued it referred to male prostitutes or pederasts; more recent scholars (Stone, 2001) suggest it may refer to economic exploitation rather than consensual same-sex relations. In Jewish traditions, the translation of *to'evah* (Leviticus 18:22) as "abomination" has been critiqued by Greenberg (2004), who notes that the same term applies to eating non-kosher food and mixing wool and linen—purity violations, not universal moral prohibitions. Translation critique appears in 55% of sources (n=48). This strategy relocates authority from received translations to original languages and to the social contexts of translation committees, which have historically been male and heteronormative.

Strategy 3: Contextual Justice Hermeneutics (Prioritizing Lived Experience). This strategy, derived from Latin American liberation theology (Tamez, 1989) and African feminist theology (Dube, 2000), prioritizes the lived experience of marginalized

communities as the primary lens for interpretation. The central question is not "What did the author intend?" but "Does this interpretation produce flourishing or suffering?" If an interpretation justifies domestic violence, excludes queer persons from community, or legitimizes caste or racial hierarchy, it is theologically invalid regardless of textual literalness. Dube (2000) applied this to the Great Commission (Matthew 28), arguing that any reading that supports colonial domination or gender hierarchy is a misreading because it violates the justice-centered core of the gospel. Ruether (1983) articulated the "prophetic principle": the authentic divine message is always on the side of the oppressed. In Islamic contexts, Wadud (1999) and Ali (2006) argued that *maqasid al-sharia* (the higher objectives of Islamic law), including justice, mercy, and human dignity, override literal readings of isolated verses. Thus, Surah 4:34's permission for marital "striking" must be read as contingent and abrogated by the Prophet's example (he never struck a wife) and by the overarching principle of justice (*'adl*). Contextual justice hermeneutics appears in 48% of sources (n=42), with higher prevalence in postcolonial and liberation-oriented scholarship. This strategy subordinates authorial intent and literal meaning to present-day justice commitments, radically democratizing interpretive authority.

Strategy 4: Postcolonial Queer Exegesis (Decentering Western Categories). The fourth strategy, developed primarily since 2000, explicitly resists both Western feminist universalism and local religious fundamentalisms. Postcolonial queer exegesis refuses the assumption that queer liberation requires adopting Western identity categories such as "gay," "lesbian," or "transgender" (Massad, 2007). Instead, it works within local cultural and linguistic grammars of gender and desire. Kugle (2010) exemplifies this by using classical Islamic categories: *fitra* (innate nature), *rahma* (mercy), and *istikhlaf* (vicegerency) as resources for affirming same-sex love without importing Western identity politics. Similarly, Zahed (2013) founded a queer-inclusive mosque in Paris that uses vernacular French-Arabic liturgy rather than English LGBT frameworks. In Hindu contexts, Vanita and Kidwai (2000) rejected the term "homosexual" as anachronistic for precolonial India, instead using "same-sex love" or "third-gender" (*tritiya-prakriti*). In Christian contexts, Dube (2000) called for a "decolonizing reading" that centers indigenous African categories of community (*ubuntu*) over Western individualism. Postcolonial queer exegesis appears in 28% of sources (n=24), with the majority published after 2005. This strategy challenges both traditional religious authorities (who condemn same-sex intimacy) and Western NGOs (who impose identity categories), arguing for a third path of vernacular queer liberation.

6.2 Reconfigurations of Religious Authority

Across all 87 sources, the metasynthesis identifies four ways in which feminist and queer reinterpretations reconfigure religious authority.

From Institutional to Communitarian Authority. Traditional authority is vested in offices (priesthood, rabbinate, imamate). Feminist and queer interpreters locate authority instead in the consensus of marginalized communities—what Schüssler Fiorenza (1984) called the "ekklesia of women" or "discipleship of equals." This communitarian authority is

not majoritarian but preferential: those who suffer most under patriarchal readings have privileged interpretive voice. In Jewish contexts, Plaskow (1990) argued that the *minyan* (prayer quorum) can be constituted by women and queer Jews without rabbinic ordination.

From Textual to Hermeneutical Authority. Authority shifts from what the text *says* (its plain meaning) to *how* it is read. A text becomes authoritative not because it is inerrant but because a community reads it with suspicion, recovery, and justice orientation. This appears most explicitly in Ruether (1983): "The text is authoritative insofar as it proclaims the full humanity of women; where it violates that, it is not authoritative."

From Singular Charismatic to Plural Prophetic Authority. Traditional religions recognize singular prophets (Moses, Muhammad) or saints. Feminist and queer reinterpretations argue for multiple, dispersed prophetic voices: every woman who reads the Qur'an, every queer Jew who interprets Torah, every Dalit who reads the Bhagavad Gita. This is not anarchy but accountable pluralism: interpretations must survive community testing (Ali, 2006; Fulkerson, 1994).

From Static to Dynamic Authority. Finally, interpretations are understood as historically conditioned and revisable. No reading is final. Adler's (1998) "broken tablets" metaphor captures this: Torah is received as fragments; interpretation is ongoing repair.

6.3 Internal Tensions

Three major tensions emerge within the literature. **Tension 1: Universalism vs. Particularism.** Liberal feminist readings (e.g., Mollenkott, 1983) claim universal principles (all women's subordination is wrong). Postcolonial critics (Dube, 2000; Massad, 2007) call this Western imperialism, arguing that local contexts generate different gendered norms. **Tension 2: Essentialism vs. Constructivism.** Early feminist readings assumed "women's experience" as a stable ground. Queer readings (Stone, 2001; Butler, 1990) destabilize that ground, asking "which women?" and "what about non-binary persons?" Moore (2011) attempts a synthesis, arguing for "strategic essentialism" in political contexts while maintaining theoretical constructivism. **Tension 3: Reform vs. Rupture.** Some interpreters (Greenberg, 2004; Plaskow, 1990) seek internal reformation, staying within traditional frameworks. Others (Dworkin, 1974, though less cited) argue patriarchal scriptures are irredeemable. The metasynthesis finds a middle position: 68% of sources advocate reform with radical reinterpretation, not total rupture.

6.4 Gaps Confirmed

Of the 87 sources, only 8% (n=7) focused on non-Abrahamic traditions (Hinduism: 5; Buddhism: 2; Indigenous: 0; Zoroastrian: 0; Afro-diasporic: 0). Only 5% (n=4) centrally addressed transgender or non-binary readings (Cornwall, 2011; Kugle, 2010; Stone, 2001; Alpert, 1997). The African diaspora and Pacific Islander traditions were entirely absent.

7. Discussion

The metasynthesis of 87 sources on feminist and queer reinterpretations of sacred texts (1990–2021) yields several significant insights that extend, complicate, and occasionally challenge existing theories of religious authority, hermeneutics, and social change. In this discussion, I interpret the four hermeneutical strategies and four authority reconfigurations identified in the results, situate them within broader scholarly debates, address the internal tensions that emerged, and propose implications for theological education, interfaith dialogue, and social justice movements. I conclude by acknowledging limitations and charting a future research agenda.

7.1 Interpreting the Four Hermeneutical Strategies

The predominance of **excavatory reading** (82% of sources) is unsurprising given the foundational role of recovery in feminist and queer historiography. Recovering erased figures—Junia, Aisha, the *mukhannathun*, Shikhandi—serves both a political and a psychological function. Politically, it counters the claim that gender and sexual diversity are modern or Western inventions, providing indigenous precedents for alternative readings (Mernissi, 1991; Vanita & Kidwai, 2000). Psychologically, it offers marginalized believers what Plaskow (1990) called "standing again at Sinai": the experience of seeing oneself reflected in sacred narrative. However, excavatory reading carries a risk. As Schüssler Fiorenza (1984) warned, recovery without critique can become antiquarianism—celebrating exceptional women or queer figures while leaving patriarchal structures intact. For example, recovering Aisha's military leadership does not challenge the broader Islamic legal tradition that excludes women from political office. Thus, excavatory reading is most powerful when paired with translation critique or justice hermeneutics, as seen in the work of Kugle (2010) and Dube (2000).

Translation critique (55% of sources) emerged as the most directly subversive strategy because it targets the material infrastructure of religious authority: the Bibles, Qur'ans, and Torahs that communities hold as sacred. By demonstrating that key words (*arsenokoitai*, *daraba*, *to'evah*) are contested translations rather than transparent divine speech, feminist and queer scholars destabilize the claim that "the Bible clearly says" or "the Qur'an unequivocally condemns." This move echoes Ricœur's (1970) hermeneutics of suspicion applied to the very medium of revelation. Yet translation critique has limits. Hornsby and Stone (2011) acknowledge that while mistranslation accounts for some oppressive readings, even accurate translations can be weaponized. The Hebrew *zakhar* (male) in Leviticus 18:22 is unambiguous; the debate is not about translation but about whether a purity code from the Iron Age should govern twenty-first-century ethics. Thus, translation critique is necessary but insufficient; it must be supplemented by contextual justice hermeneutics.

Contextual justice hermeneutics (48% of sources) represents the most explicit break with traditional authority because it subordinates text to ethics. Derived from Latin American liberation theology (Tamez, 1989) and African feminist theology (Dube, 2000), this strategy asks: does an interpretation produce suffering or flourishing? Ruether (1983) articulated the "prophetic principle": any reading that diminishes the full humanity of

women is inherently unfaithful, regardless of literal accuracy. This approach resonates with Islamic *maqasid* (higher objectives) scholarship (Ali, 2006; Wadud, 1999), which argues that justice (*'adl*) and mercy (*rahma*) override isolated textual commands. However, critics within feminist and queer circles note a danger: justice hermeneutics can become a new authoritarianism, where the interpreter's own political commitments are simply projected onto the text without accountability to the interpretive community (Fulkerson, 1994). Moore (2011) warns against "the dictatorship of the hermeneut." The solution, found in several sources, is communitarian accountability: interpretations must be tested in communities of the marginalized, not imposed from above.

Postcolonial queer exegesis (28% of sources) is the most recent and theoretically sophisticated strategy. Its central insight—that Western LGBT identity categories are not universal—challenges not only traditional religious authorities but also secular queer theory. Massad (2007) controversially argued that the "Gay International" produces new forms of colonial violence by erasing local same-sex desire practices that do not map onto "gay" identity. Kugle (2010) operationalized a postcolonial queer exegesis by using classical Islamic categories: *fitra* (innate nature), *rahma* (mercy), and *istikhlaf* (vicegerency). This approach avoids both fundamentalist condemnation and Western liberal imposition. Yet it faces its own difficulty: how to resist local homophobia without appealing to universal human rights frameworks that may themselves be colonial? Dube (2000) suggests a "both/and" approach: strategic use of universalist language for political advocacy while simultaneously developing vernacular resources. The metasynthesis found that postcolonial queer exegesis is underutilized in Christian and Jewish contexts, representing an opportunity for future scholarship.

7.2 Reconfiguring Religious Authority: A New Typology

The four reconfigurations of authority—from institutional to communitarian, from textual to hermeneutical, from singular charismatic to plural prophetic, from static to dynamic—collectively describe a paradigm shift in how authority operates. Rather than top-down, monopolistic, and fixed, feminist and queer reinterpretations envision authority as bottom-up, distributed, and revisable. This aligns with what sociologist Max Weber (uncited in the reviewed literature due to scope but relevant) would call a movement from traditional to charismatic authority, but with a crucial difference: the charisma is not vested in a single leader but in the community itself (Schüssler Fiorenza's "ekklesia of women").

However, this distributed authority model raises a practical question: how are disputes resolved? When two feminist readings conflict—for example, a trans-exclusionary radical feminist reading of the Bible versus a trans-affirming queer reading—who decides? The metasynthesis found no systematic answer in the 87 sources. Alpert (1997) suggests Jewish *halakhic* process (legal reasoning) can be adapted, but this assumes a shared procedural commitment that may not exist across traditions. Plaskow (1990) argues for "testimony": the community listens to the most directly affected marginal voices—trans women, for example, in a dispute about bathroom access. But testimony can conflict. This

lacuna suggests an urgent need for comparative work on conflict resolution within feminist and queer religious communities.

7.3 Internal Tensions: Productive or Paralyzing?

The three tensions identified—universalism/particularism, essentialism/constructivism, reform/rupture—are not pathologies but productive features of a living field. Universalism versus particularism is unlikely to be resolved, and perhaps should not be. Dube (2000) and Massad (2007) are correct that universalist claims can erase difference, but Plaskow (1990) and Ruether (1983) are equally correct that without some universal principle (e.g., "all human beings deserve dignity"), resistance to fundamentalism becomes impossible. A pragmatic resolution emerges in the literature: strategic universalism in political advocacy (e.g., opposing criminalization of homosexuality) while maintaining contextual particularism in theological construction (e.g., developing locally grounded queer theologies).

The essentialism versus constructivism tension is more acute. Early feminist readings assumed a stable category "woman's experience," but queer and poststructuralist critiques (Butler, 1990; Stone, 2001) have destabilized that ground. Moore (2011) proposes "strategic essentialism" (a term borrowed from postcolonial theorist Gayatri Spivak): for political mobilization, feminists may need to speak as "women," while theoretically acknowledging that "woman" is a contested, non-natural category. This tension is visible in Muslim feminist contexts: Wadud (1999) speaks as "a woman" reading the Qur'an, while Barlas (2002) is more suspicious of identity categories. The metasynthesis suggests that the field has largely accepted constructivism as theory while pragmatically using essentialism in activism—an unstable but workable accommodation.

The reform versus rupture tension is the most consequential for practitioners. Greenberg (2004) and Plaskow (1990) remain within their traditions, arguing for internal reformation. Others (Dworkin, 1974, though marginal in recent scholarship) advocate leaving patriarchal religions entirely. The metasynthesis found that 68% of sources adopt a reformist position, but with a crucial nuance: reform is not about tweaking rules but about radical reinterpretation that changes the tradition's self-understanding. This is visible in Kugle's (2010) work: he does not reject Islam but argues that Islam correctly understood *already* affirms same-sex love. This "hermeneutics of retrieval within tradition" may be the most effective strategy for change, as it allows believers to claim fidelity rather than rupture.

7.4 Implications and Future Directions

Several implications follow. **For theological education**, the metasynthesis suggests that seminaries and religious schools must teach hermeneutical methods, not just content. Students need translation critique, postcolonial analysis, and justice-based frameworks to interpret texts responsibly. **For interfaith dialogue**, feminist and queer reinterpretations provide common ground across traditions: justice orientation, suspicion of hierarchy, and practices of accountability. **For social justice movements**, the findings caution against

importing Western LGBT categories uncritically, while affirming that local queer and feminist resources exist within most traditions.

Future research must address the gaps identified: non-Abrahamic traditions (Hinduism remains understudied relative to its size), Indigenous sacred narratives, Afro-diasporic traditions (Candomblé, Santería, Vodou), and transgender/non-binary readings. Additionally, comparative studies across religions are urgently needed. The metasynthesis found no single study comparing feminist readings of the Qur'an and the Bible using a unified methodology, representing a significant opportunity.

7.5 Limitations of the Present Study

This metasynthesis is limited by its English-language and peer-reviewed focus, potentially excluding vital scholarship in other languages and non-academic community hermeneutics. It is also limited by the available literature; absence of evidence for some traditions (e.g., Zoroastrianism) is not evidence of absence of feminist/queer readings. Finally, metasynthesis cannot capture the lived, practical dimensions of reinterpretation—how communities actually use these readings in worship, activism, and everyday life. Future ethnographic research is needed to complement this textual synthesis.

8. Conclusion

This metasynthesis of 87 peer-reviewed sources on global feminist and queer reinterpretations of sacred texts (1990–2021) has demonstrated that religious authority is not a monolith but a contested, pluralistic terrain. By systematically identifying four hermeneutical strategies—excavatory reading, translation critique, contextual justice hermeneutics, and postcolonial queer exegesis—and four corresponding reconfigurations of authority—from institutional to communitarian, from textual to hermeneutical, from singular charismatic to plural prophetic, from static to dynamic—the study offers a comprehensive map of how marginalized interpreters are reshaping the very grammar of religious belonging.

8.1 Summary of Principal Findings

The first major finding is that feminist and queer interpreters do not uniformly reject religious authority. Rather, they re-theorize it as relational, accountable, and democratized. Excavatory reading (82% of sources) recovers erased figures not merely as historical curiosities but as authoritative voices that challenge hegemonic narratives. Translation critique (55% of sources) exposes how androcentric and heteronormative biases have been embedded in the material texts that communities hold as sacred, thereby relocating interpretive authority from received translations to original languages and to the communities that produced them. Contextual justice hermeneutics (48% of sources) subordinates literal meaning to the ethical demand of flourishing, asking not "what did the text mean?" but "does this reading produce liberation or suffering?" Postcolonial queer exegesis (28% of sources) resists both Western universalism and local fundamentalisms, developing vernacular resources within each tradition for affirming gender and sexual diversity.

The second major finding is that these strategies reconfigure authority in ways that align with broader democratic and communitarian values, but they also generate internal tensions. The tensions between universalism and particularism, essentialism and constructivism, and reform and rupture are not pathologies but productive features of a living intellectual and activist field. The metasynthesis suggests that most scholars adopt a pragmatic stance: strategic universalism in political advocacy, theoretical constructivism in academic work, and radical reformation rather than rupture in relation to tradition.

The third major finding is the persistence of significant gaps. Only 8% of the synthesized sources addressed non-Abrahamic traditions; Indigenous, Afro-diasporic, and Zoroastrian traditions were entirely absent. Only 5% of sources centrally engaged with transgender, non-binary, or intersex readings of sacred texts. These gaps are not merely academic oversights; they reflect and reinforce the marginalization of entire communities within both religious studies and feminist/queer scholarship.

8.2 Implications for Practice

The findings carry several implications for religious practitioners and community leaders. First, theological education must move beyond teaching doctrinal content to teaching hermeneutical methods. Seminaries, madrasas, yeshivas, and dharma schools should equip students with translation critique, postcolonial analysis, and justice-based interpretive frameworks. Second, interfaith dialogue can be enriched by focusing on shared feminist and queer interpretive practices—suspicion toward hierarchy, commitment to accountability, and the recovery of marginalized voices—rather than solely on comparative doctrines. Third, social justice movements should attend to the local, vernacular resources for gender and sexual justice that exist within each religious tradition, avoiding both the imposition of Western LGBT categories and the uncritical acceptance of fundamentalist readings.

8.3 Limitations of the Study

This metasynthesis is limited by its reliance on English-language, peer-reviewed sources. Vital feminist and queer hermeneutics published in Arabic, French, Spanish, Hindi, Mandarin, or other languages are likely absent, potentially skewing the findings toward Anglophone and diasporic perspectives. Additionally, the synthesis cannot capture the lived, embodied practices of interpretation—how communities use these readings in worship, ritual, activism, and everyday decision-making. Ethnographic and participatory research is needed to complement the textual analysis presented here.

8.4 Future Research Directions

Future research should prioritize four areas. First, comparative metasyntheses across non-Abrahamic traditions: what hermeneutical strategies do feminist and queer scholars of Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism employ, and how do they differ from Abrahamic approaches? Second, community-led hermeneutical projects that center the knowledge of Indigenous and Afro-diasporic religious practitioners, respecting their protocols around sacred narratives. Third, sustained attention to transgender, non-binary, and intersex

readings of scripture, moving beyond the cisgender and gay/lesbian focus that dominates current literature. Fourth, methodological innovation: how might quantitative analysis (e.g., of translation choices across dozens of Bible or Qur'an versions) complement qualitative metasynthesis?

8.5 Concluding Reflection

In an era of resurgent religious fundamentalisms—Christian nationalism, Hindu majoritarianism, Islamist extremism, ultra-Orthodox Jewish exclusionism—the work of feminist and queer reinterpretation is not merely academic. It is a form of resistance, a practice of hope, and a witness to the possibility that the sacred might yet be a source of liberation rather than constraint. As Schüssler Fiorenza (1984, p. xv) wrote decades ago, "the struggle for the text is a struggle for life." This article affirms that struggle, while insisting that it must be waged across multiple fronts, by multiple hands, with no final victory but many small ones. The sacred texts remain contested ground, but they are not closed ground. Feminist and queer interpreters have irrevocably demonstrated that authority to read can be claimed, not merely granted—and that reading otherwise is a form of faithfulness worthy of the traditions they love.

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