

Bipolar Disorder and Religion & Spirituality: A Review

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Abstract

Six qualitative and five quantitative studies were reviewed in order to evaluate the relationship between religion/spirituality (R/S) and bipolar disorder. The effects of different forms of religious/spiritual belief and expression on the disease as well as implications for management and interpretive paradigms were explored. While there has been a dearth of research in the context of bipolar disorder, research on religion/spirituality and psychiatry as a whole has shown an increase in recent years.

Keywords: Bipolar disorder, religion, spirituality

Introduction

The relationship between religion/spirituality (R/S) and psychiatry has been a roundabout one in that while R/S used to be intertwined with not only psychiatry but all of medicine (Koenig et al., 2001), it is well-known that the close relationship of the two began to be dismantled during the time of Freud (Freud, 1962). However, recent years have shown a notable increase in the amount of research evaluating R/S and psychiatry as well as a shifting viewpoint in attitude regarding the role of R/S in mental health (Bonelli and Koenig, 2013; Koenig 2009). The area of research most well-developed is that of depression and R/S. This is in contrast to the relationship of R/S with bipolar disorder, which has not been well-researched (Bonelli and Koenig, 2013).

Methods and Definitions

Keywords "bipolar disorder" and "religion" or "spirituality" were used in March 2018 in Medline (Ovid), Web of Science, Embase, PsycARTICLES (Ovid), Pubmed, and PsycINFO (EBSCO).

Results

Please see Table 1 for qualitative studies and on the second slide, Table 2 for quantitative studies.

Discussion/Conclusion

The Forms of Religiosity/Spirituality

Protective, Deleterious, or Irrelevant? A New Paradigm Needed

Table 1 – Qualitative Studies

Author(s)	Sample Size	Sample Characteristics	Main Results/Themes
Duckham (2011)	1	Caucasian male who grew up Roman Catholic	Use of object relations with positive and negative religious coping Evolution of religious beliefs
Khan and Sanober (2016)	1	25 year old Muslim, Pakistani female	Family declined inpatient psychiatric admission during a manic episode because they believed she needed treatment from an aamil (spiritual healer) Interpretation of psychiatric illness through spiritual lens Complications in management through lack of understanding by physicians of religious belief as well as a lack of understanding of patients and families of psychiatric illness
Michalak et al. (2006)	35	Inclusion/exclusion not based on type of bipolar illness Recruitment letters sent to Canadian and American institutions	Struggle for patients to interpret the authenticity of experiences Implications for interacting with a church community Fear of misattribution of R/S as current mania by mental health professionals
Ouwehand et al. (2014)	10	Dutch outpatients in euthymia 5 Christian, 4 New Age Spirituality, 1 not religious but practiced Zen meditation	Concern for authenticity and meaning of experiences while manic Continuum/carry-over of religious experiences across mood states Evolution of religious beliefs affected by illness Wish by patients for more mental health professionals to pay attention to R/S
Raab (2007)	4	Canadian inpatients, three Christian, one Jewish	Implications of positive vs negative religious coping, transference, use of cognitive restructuring/challenging irrational beliefs
Ward (2011)	12	American outpatients with comorbid substance use disorder	Resilience and support from R/S to cope with stigma

CREATING THE VIRTUAL YANTRA

THE CYCLE OF ENJOYMENT, SECRECY, AND POWER IN THE *KUMĀRĪ PŪJĀ*

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THE KUMĀRĪ PŪJĀ AND KĀMĀKHYĀ

In modern Hinduism in India, the *kumārī pūjā* is the worship (*pūjā*) of any pre-menarche virgin girl (*kumārī*), regardless of caste or social background, as a temporary living representation of the all-powerful Goddess. The modern orthodox ritual performed primarily in association with the fall festival of *Durgā Pūjā* has deep roots in the secretive mystical tradition of Hindu Tantrism.

The Kāmākhya temple complex in Assam is arguably one of the most important seats of goddess worship in India,¹ representing to devotees the cosmic *yoni* (vulva or womb) and source of all existence. The *kumārī pūjā* is performed there daily, representing the community's uniquely negotiated blend of Tantrism and orthodoxy.

METHOD

This research is based on extensive original ethnographic field research conducted in 2011-2012 with local priests, other community members, pilgrims, and girls who serve as *kumārīs* at the Kāmākhya temple complex in Assam.



A *kumārī pūjā* performed at the Kāmākhya temple complex during *Durgā Pūjā*, October 2012.

RITUAL PARTICIPANTS

There are three participants in the *kumārī pūjā*:

- **Kumārī**, a pre-menarche virgin girl of any caste whose body is temporarily identified with the all-powerful Goddess
- **Devotee**, directly performs the entire worship, may be male or female, of any caste
- **Priest**, directs and facilitates the worship, always a brahman male

KEY RITUAL ELEMENTS

As identified by research participants:



Application of *ālā*, blood red liquid on the *kumārī*'s feet



Āvāhana, asking the *kumārī* (as goddess) to consent to receive the worship



Offering dripping wet sweets (*rosgolla*) to the *kumārī*, which she eats

CYCLE OF ENJOYMENT, SECRECY, AND POWER

The power in the ritual arises and can be directed through the interconnection of various loci, constituted by connections between different ritual participants

Locus of Enjoyment

- Shared by *kumārī* and devotee
- Consent must be given by the *kumārī*
- Offering and receiving of gifts and food delights devotee and *kumārī*/goddess

Locus of Secrecy

- Shared by priest and goddess
- Covert knowledge of unspoken secret "seed syllable" (*bīja mantra*) empowers the ritual with presence of the Goddess in the body of the *kumārī*

Locus of Power

- Shared by priest and devotee
- Priest has power by virtue of both his secret and overt knowledge of ritual and mantra
- Devotee has power according to his/her sincerity of devotion to the goddess, belief in the ritual's efficacy, and focused intention regarding the expected fruit of the ritual

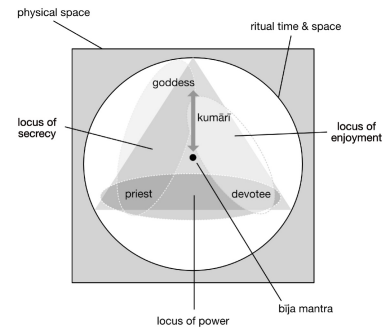


Figure 1: The virtual yantra of *kumārī pūjā* (see Figure 4) can be seen both from the perspective of the goddess (see Figure 2) or from the perspective of the priest/devotee (see Figure 3).

CONSTRUCTING THE VIRTUAL YANTRA

The *kumārī pūjā* is profoundly Tantric in character, utilizing the body of a human girl to worship the goddess, and vital to the local Tantric tradition. Its Tantric nature is often overlooked because the *kumārī pūjā* is strictly non-sexual in nature. The virtual yantra helps reveal its Tantric identity, as well as its role in the sublimation of divine feminine power in both Tantric and orthodox systems.

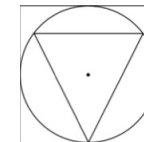


Figure 2: A simple *devī* (goddess) yantra, a universal symbol of divine feminine power at the heart of many goddess yantras.

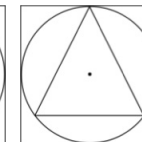


Figure 3: The simple yantra of the powerful god Śiva is an inverted *devī* yantra, symbolizing masculine power.

At the center of any yantra is a dot called the *bindu*, representing the *bīja mantra* or "seed syllable" and most pure vibrational form of the deity being worshipped. The triangle represents the gross form of the deity. In *kumārī pūjā*, all participants gain symbolically divinized bodies in order to give and receive worship. The circle represents ritual time and space which encircles the divine presence. The square is the physical space in which the ritual takes place.

The virtual yantra of *kumārī pūjā* when viewed from the perspective of the *kumārī* may be visualized as a *devī* yantra, but when viewed from the perspective of the priest or devotee may be visualized as a *śiva* yantra. This demonstrates the inversion and sublimation of female power by largely male participants.

1. Hugh Urban, *The Power of Tantra: Religion, Sexuality, and the Politics of South Asian Religion* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 9.



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Religion in Society