Bipolar Disorder and Religion & Spirituality: A Review

Daniel Jackson, MD
Department of Psychiatry
State University of New York, Upstate Medical University

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 (Koening 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 (Bennell and Koeng, 2013; Koeng, 2005). The area of research most well-developed in 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 (Bennell and Koeng, 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), PsycInfo, 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, Detrimental, or Irrelevant? A New Paradigm Needed

Table 1 – Qualitative Studies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author(s)</th>
<th>Sample Size</th>
<th>Sample Characteristics</th>
<th>Main Results/Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Duckham (2011)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Caucasian male who grew up Roman Catholic</td>
<td>Use of object relations with positive and negative evolution of religious beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Khan and Sanobar</td>
<td>25 year old Muslim, Paktiast female</td>
<td></td>
<td>Family declined inpatient psychiatric admission because they believed she needed treatment healer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2016)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretation of psychiatric illness through cultural and family beliefs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michalk et al.</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Inclusion/exclusion not based on type of bipolar illness</td>
<td>Complications in management through lack of psychiatrists and families of psychiatric illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment letters sent to Canadian and American institutions</td>
<td>Struggle for patients to interpret author</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Implications for interacting with a church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oswood et al.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Dutch outpatients in euthymia</td>
<td>Fear of misattribution of R/S as current m professionals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Concern for authenticity and meaning of existence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5 Christian, 4 New Age</td>
<td>Continuum/carry-over of religious experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1 a not religious but practiced Zen meditation</td>
<td>Evolution of religious beliefs affecting R/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Wish by patients for more mental health prefer R/S</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radl (2017)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Canadian inpatients, three Christian, one Jewish</td>
<td>Implications of positive vs negative religious cognitive restructuring/challenging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ward (2011)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>American outpatients with comorbid substance use disorder</td>
<td>Resilience and support from R/S to patients</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CREATING THE VIRTUAL YANTRA
THE CYCLE OF ENJOYMENT, SECRECY, AND POWER IN THE KUMĀRĪ PUJĀ

E. Sundari Johansen Hurwitt
California Institute of Integral Studies, San Francisco, CA, USA

THE KUMĀRĪ PUJĀ AND KĀMĀKHĪYA
In modern Hindutva in India, the kumārī pujā is the worship pujā 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 Pujā has deep roots in the secretive yogic tradition of Hindu Tantrism.

The Kāmākhīya temple complex in Assam is arguably one of the most important seats of goddess worship in India, representing its devotion to the cosmic jīva (soul or womb) and source of all existence. The kumārī pujā is performed there daily, representing the community's uniquely negotiated blend of Śaivism and orthodox methodology.

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 kumārī at the Kāmākhīya temple complex in Assam.

RITUAL PARTICIPANTS
There are three participants in the Kumārī pujā:

- **Kumārī**, a pre-menarche virgin girl of any caste whose body is temporarily identified with the all-powerful Goddess
- **Devotees**, 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 abhā, blood red liquid on the kumārī’s feet**
- **Āśāhana, asking the kumārī (as goddess) to consent to receive the worship**
- **Offering dripping wet sweets (lapagī) 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, constituting by connections between different ritual participants

Locus of Enjoyment
- **Shared by kumārī**
- **Consent must be given by the kumārī**
- **Offering and receiving of gifts and food delights devoted to kumārī/goddess**

Locus of Secrecy
- **Shared by priest and goddess**
- **Covet knowledge of unspoken secret “seed syllable” dījā mantra**

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**

CONSTRUCTING THE VIRTUAL YANTRA
The Kumārī pujā 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 pujā 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 1: The virtual yantra of kumārī pujā (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).](image)

![Figure 2: A simple devī (goddess) yantra: a universal symbol of divine feminine power at the heart of many goddess yantras.](image)

![Figure 3: The simple yantra of the powerful goddess Śiva is an inverted devī yantra, symbolizing masculine power.](image)

Note: At the center of any yantra is a dot called the bīnu, representing the dījā 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 pujā, all participants gain symbolically divinized bodies in order to give and receive worship. The circle represents ritual time and space which enacts the divine presence. The square is the physical space in which the ritual takes place. The virtual yantra of Kumārī pujā 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.