Postmodern Spirituality and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder: An exploration of the relationship between beliefs and symptoms

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Abstract

This paper investigates the correlation between Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) symptoms and practices within the realm of postmodern spirituality. The purpose of the study is to explore the extent to which OCD symptoms may intersect with or resemble the practices and beliefs associated with postmodern spiritual practices, and how this connection is formed. The design of the research is a comprehensive literature review, examining a range of sources on both OCD and postmodern spirituality to identify commonalities and divergences.

The literature review reveals a notable similarity between the characteristics of OCD and certain practices of postmodern spirituality. Specifically, both OCD symptoms and postmodern spiritual practices involve repetitive behaviours, intrusive

thoughts, and a strong emphasis on personal rituals and subjective experiences. The obsessive-compulsive cycle of intrusive thoughts and compulsive actions parallels the repetitive rituals and beliefs in postmodern spirituality that emphasize personal transformation and the manifestation of desires. Furthermore, the individualized nature of both OCD symptoms and spiritual practices underscores a shared focus on personal meaning and control. This alignment suggests that the practices associated with postmodern spirituality may, in some cases, reflect or exacerbate the cognitive and behavioural patterns observed in OCD.

The findings highlight the need for further research into the psychological impact of spiritual practices and their potential to mirror or influence obsessive-compulsive tendencies. Understanding these connections may aid in improving therapeutic interventions for OCD.

Keywords: *postmodern spirituality; OCD, practice, techniques, obsession, compulsion*

Introduction

Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) is a mental health condition characterized by persistent, intrusive thoughts, or obsessions, and repetitive behaviors, or compulsions, intended to mitigate these thoughts. These compulsions can significantly disrupt daily activities and social interactions (NIMH; APA, 2013).

In OCD, obsessions are persistent and uncontrollable thoughts, that induce significant distress, fear, or doubt, impairing daily functioning as they are difficult to disregard. Individuals with OCD often attempt to block or resist these thoughts (Guy-Evans & Mcleod, 2024). Compulsions are repetitive, intentional actions—either physical or mental—that individuals feel compelled to perform according to rigid rules or specific methods, often carried out automatically. Resistance to these compulsions is frequently overcome by the intense urge to perform them, with the primary goal being the alleviation of obsessive thoughts (OCDUK; Starcevic et al., 2011).

Postmodern spirituality is a contemporary approach to religious and spiritual practices and beliefs, that highlights individualism, relativism, and the deconstruction of traditional religious and spiritual narratives (Raschke, 2017; Partridge, 2021). This approach has gained significant traction due to globalization and the influence of social media (Partridge, 2021).

Characterized by eclecticism and a skeptical stance toward established religious doctrines, postmodern spirituality emphasizes personal experience and allows individuals to select from a variety of practices to suit their beliefs. The movement

saw a surge in popularity on social media platforms, notably "TikTok," during the summer of 2020, and has since permeated numerous other platforms. Research indicates that most content creators in this space are female and belong to the Millennial or Gen-Z generations (Partridge, 2021). Thousands of social media users generate content that propagates this ideology (Mears & Shpolberg, 2021).

This form of spirituality encompasses "magical" practices and rituals, with the belief that reality is confined to individual perception and that subjective reality constitutes the sole absolute truth (Piccinini & Maley, 2014). Prominent practices include astrology, manifestation, the use of crystals, subliminal and frequency audio, and tarot card reading, though practitioners are free to devise their own methods and practices (Partridge, 2021).

The appeal of postmodern spirituality can be attributed to the pressures of modern life and the promotion of the self-help industry, which frequently incorporates practices such as meditation, mantras, and affirmations (Tmava, 2023). This approach resonates within the postmodern context by addressing frustrations and offering a semblance of control over daily life. It emphasizes detachment from the self and reality as crucial to well-being, thereby providing a buffer against the demands of contemporary existence (Tmava, 2023).

Postmodern spiritual practices are perceived as a solution for achieving internal stability in a world where external conditions often seem uncontrollable and overwhelming. They function as a coping mechanism for stress and anxiety associated with perceived lack of control, drawing parallels to the cognitive patterns observed in individuals with obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD).

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD) is a mental health condition characterized by persistent, intrusive thoughts, ideas, or sensations known as obsessions. Individuals with OCD feel compelled to perform repetitive behaviors or mental acts, labeled as compulsions, to mitigate the distress caused by these obsessions. Common compulsions include hand washing, checking items, or engaging in mental counting. These repetitive behaviors can severely impact daily activities and social interactions (NIMH; APA, 2013).

For an accurate diagnosis of OCD, the obsessions and/or compulsions must take up a substantial amount of time (more than one hour per day), cause significant distress, and impair the individual's occupational or social functioning. OCD can onset during childhood, adolescence, or adulthood, and no specific developmental stage is universally associated with its emergence. Some individuals may exhibit OCD symptoms but not necessarily meet the full diagnostic criteria for the disorder (Geller, 2022).

OCD typically develops gradually in both adults and children or adolescents and usually follows a chronic trajectory. Boys are more frequently diagnosed with OCD during childhood, while girls typically develop it in early adulthood. Although OCD can manifest at any age, the average onset age is 19.5 years, with 25% of individuals showing symptoms by age 14 (Deibler, 2020). The disorder has a genetic component and often runs in families with a history of anxiety disorders. Personal experiences and daily stressors also play a role in its development. Although many individuals experience intrusive thoughts, similar to those seen in OCD, those with the disorder experience these thoughts with greater intensity and distress. They engage in compulsive behaviours to avoid or neutralize these thoughts, which paradoxically reinforces the intrusive thoughts (CBC), creating an endless loop of thought and behaviour.

Obsessions and Compulsions

The term "obsession" is derived from the Latin "obsidere," meaning "to besiege," illustrating the circular shape in which these thoughts intrude upon individuals with OCD. Obsessions are unwanted, persistent, and uncontrollable thoughts that may manifest as images, impulses, worries, fears, or doubts. These obsessions interfere significantly with daily functioning and are challenging to ignore. Individuals with OCD often attempt to suppress or resist these thoughts, yet they persist, leading to mental and physical exhaustion (Guy-Evans, Mcleod, 2024).

Obsessive thoughts in OCD often predict a distressing future and exhibit four key characteristics: they are repetitive, persistent, intrusive, and uncontrollable. These thoughts cause significant anxiety and are not merely excessive concerns about real-life issues. Individuals with OCD attempt to ignore, suppress, or counteract these thoughts with alternative thoughts or actions, and they are aware that these thoughts are a product of their own mind rather than reality (Abramowitz & McKay, 2009). Depending on their nature, obsessions may involve fears such as losing something important, offending someone, or concerns about the safety of loved ones. These thoughts are highly distressing, time-consuming, and beyond the individual's control (Guy-Evans, Mcleod, 2024).

Obsessions and compulsions frequently center around themes such as contamination, harm, unwanted sexual thoughts, religiosity, loss of control, and perfectionism. For example, contamination obsessions might involve fears of dirt or germs, leading to excessive cleaning compulsions; sexual obsessions may involve intrusive thoughts about inappropriate behaviour; while religious obsessions might include concerns about moral judgments or blasphemy (Deibler, 2020).

It is important to recognize that such obsessions do not reflect the individual's true desires or intentions and are not fantasies or impulses that they wish to act upon (Deibler, 2020). Research indicates that many people without OCD also

experience intrusive thoughts similar to those of with the disorder. The distinction lies in the intensity, frequency, and difficulty in controlling these thoughts. In OCD, individuals feel compelled to neutralize or avoid these thoughts, which inadvertently reinforces them. This cycle contributes to the chronic nature of OCD, which is influenced by genetic, biological, and environmental factors and often begins in childhood, adolescence, or early adulthood (Deibler, 2020).

Compulsions in OCD are repetitive, deliberate actions—either physical or mental—that individuals feel compelled to perform according to specific rules or in a particular manner. These behaviours are often executed automatically and serve multiple functions (OCDUK; Starcevic et al., 2011).

Individuals typically experience a sense of resistance to these compulsive acts, yet resistance is overridden by a strong urge to perform the action. The primary purpose of these compulsive behaviours is to achieve temporary relief from the anxiety caused by the obsessions. Despite recognizing the irrational nature of their actions, individuals with OCD feel compelled to perform them due to overwhelming fear and anxiety (OCDUK).

Compulsions involve the repeated execution of purposeful actions within a rigid and structured routine, often aimed at preventing perceived risk or harm to oneself or others. For example, an individual with an obsessive fear of contamination may engage in excessive hand washing. Unlike individuals without OCD, who wash their hands when visibly dirty, those with OCD may wash until they "feel" clean, driven by the belief that this ritual protects their loved ones (Valentine, 2023).

Compulsions can be either overt (observable by others) or covert (unobservable mental acts). Overt compulsions include behaviors such as checking, washing, hoarding, or ensuring symmetry in actions. Covert or cognitive compulsions involve mental processes such as counting, compulsive visualization, or replacing distressing mental images with neutral ones (Valentine, 2023).

Compulsions develop through negative reinforcement. Performing a compulsion temporarily alleviates anxiety, thereby reinforcing the behavior. For instance, an individual may become fixated on an intrusive thought, engage in a compulsive action like cleaning, and experience temporary relief. This reduction in anxiety signals to the brain that the compulsion is effective, leading to its repetition whenever the intrusive thought recurs (Valentine, 2023).

While compulsions provide temporary relief from anxiety, they ultimately perpetuate the OCD cycle.

Causes of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

Despite considerable research into obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), a definitive cause for the development of the disorder has yet to be identified. Like many psychological disorders, OCD is thought to arise from a complex

interplay of multiple factors, with biological and psychological theories receiving significant support within the scientific community (Kelly, 2020).

Biological Theories and Genetic Influences

Biological theories of OCD focus on the dysfunctions in brain circuitry, particularly involving the orbitofrontal cortex, which is implicated in complex behaviors such as emotional regulation and reward-based decision-making, and the thalamus. This circuit, which includes structures such as the caudate nucleus of the basal ganglia, is responsible for generating impulses that lead to specific behaviors designed to address these impulses, such as hand washing following perceived contamination. It is hypothesized that individuals with OCD struggle to regulate impulses originating from this circuit, leading to persistent compulsions and obsessions (Kelly, 2020).

The genetic component of OCD is also significant. Research indicates a strong hereditary factor, with a family history of OCD increasing susceptibility. Twin studies have demonstrated a higher concordance rate for OCD in identical twins compared to fraternal twins, highlighting a genetic influence. Although no single gene has been conclusively linked to OCD, genetic factors are recognized as playing a critical role, particularly in cases where symptoms emerge during childhood (Kelly, 2020).

Additionally, OCD has been associated with abnormalities in serotonin regulation. Serotonin, a neurotransmitter crucial for signaling between nerve cells and linked to mood and anxiety regulation, has been shown to affect OCD symptoms. Medications that enhance serotonin availability often lead to symptom reduction, indicating a serotonin-OCD connection. Neuroimaging studies reveal increased activity in brain regions such as the orbitofrontal cortex and the anterior cingulate cortex in response to obsessional stimuli. Furthermore, abnormalities in brain circuits involving the striatum and thalamus are associated with OCD, suggesting physical alterations in the brain of affected individuals (Solarin, 2020).

Cognitive-Behavioral Theories

Cognitive-behavioral theories of OCD suggest that individuals prone to the disorder have trouble dismissing intrusive or unwanted thoughts. These thoughts are often perceived as threatening, leading to increased vigilance and reinforcing the perceived danger. This heightened attention perpetuates an obsessive cycle (Kelly, 2020).

The behavioral model proposed by Dollard and Miller (1950) posits that OCD symptoms emerge and persist through classical conditioning processes. In this

model, obsessions provoke distress, which is temporarily alleviated by compulsions, thereby reinforcing the cycle. Intrusive thoughts become obsessions when they are interpreted as significant or dangerous, perpetuating the cycle of anxiety and compulsive behavior (Kalanthroff & Wheaton, 2022).

Psychodynamic Theories

Psychodynamic theories suggest that obsessions and compulsions are manifestations of underlying unconscious conflicts that individuals attempt to repress, resolve, or manage. These conflicts are often related to repressed desires, particularly those of a sexual or aggressive nature, which conflict with socially acceptable behaviors. When these internal conflicts become overwhelming, individuals may express them indirectly through manageable behaviors such as hand washing, checking, or ritualistic practices (Kelly, 2020).

Central to psychodynamic theory is the notion that obsessive thinking reflects an impaired relational dynamic with parental figures. The absence of essential relational processes—such as emotional closeness, attunement, mirroring, and discipline—creates a void in the individual, leading to anxiety. This anxiety functions as a substitute for emotional experiences in an otherwise emotionally barren internal world. Feelings of abandonment, loss, and fear of annihilation contribute to the development of defensive strategies, such as idealization, where the individual switches between positive and negative perceptions of themselves and others. In this context, obsessive thinking can be viewed as an attempt to preserve the loss of an object of affection by controlling it mentally, thus seeking security in an uncertain world. Paradoxically, this control often leads to a sense of being out of control, reinforcing the OCD cycle (DiCaccavo, 2008).

Risk Factors and Prognosis

Several factors contribute to the development of OCD, including temperament traits, environmental stressors, genetic predispositions, and physiological influences. OCD frequently co-occurs along other disorders, leading to significant impairments across social, professional, and personal domains. Commonly associated disorders include anxiety disorders, depressive and bipolar disorders, tic disorders, obsessive-compulsive personality disorder, and other related conditions.

OCD can lead to a reduced quality of life, social isolation, and difficulties in occupational settings. Specific symptoms can create barriers in personal relationships, employment, and daily functioning.

OCD Treatment

The treatment options for obsessive-compulsive disorder do not provide a permanent cure, but they aim to effectively manage symptoms, thereby minimizing their impact on daily life. Treatment approaches may vary based on the severity of the symptoms. The primary modalities for managing OCD are psychotherapy and pharmacological intervention. A combination of these methods often yields the most favorable outcomes (NHS, 2023).

Psychotherapy

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) has demonstrated significant efficacy in the treatment of OCD. CBT involves deconstructing problems into distinct components, such as thoughts, physical sensations, and behaviors, and encourages individuals to confront their fears and obsessive thoughts without resorting to compulsive behaviors. Therapy is administered progressively, beginning with less anxiety-provoking situations and then gradually advancing to more challenging scenarios (NHS, 2013).

A specific CBT technique, called Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) is particularly effective. ERP involves the gradual exposure of individuals to the objects of their obsessions, such as contamination, while teaching strategies to resist engaging in compulsive rituals. For individuals with mild OCD, approximately 8 to 20 therapy sessions, complemented by home exercises, may be adequate. However, severe cases usually need a longer duration of treatment (Pittenger, Kelmendi, Bloch, Krystal, & Coric, 2005).

Despite its effectiveness, ERP can be challenging for some individuals, particularly those reluctant to confront their anxiety or obsessions. Cognitive therapies, which focus on altering dysfunctional thought patterns, have also yielded positive results. Properly administered CBT/ERP remains a primary treatment approach for many individuals with OCD (Pittenger et al., 2005).

Pharmacological Treatment

Pharmacological treatment involves the use of psychiatric medications that can effectively manage the obsessions and compulsions associated with OCD. Medication is often considered when psychotherapy alone does not result in sufficient improvement or when symptoms are particularly severe. The primary

medications prescribed are Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), which work by increasing serotonin levels in the brain. SSRIs, such as Fluoxetine (Prozac), Fluvoxamine (Luvox), Paroxetine (Paxil), Sertraline (Zoloft), and Clomipramine (Anafranil), are commonly used as the first line of treatment. Other antidepressants or psychiatric medications may be prescribed based on individual patient needs (NHS, 2013).

It may take up to 12 weeks of medication before noticeable improvements are observed. Typically, treatment is maintained for at least one year, although discontinuation of medication may be considered if symptoms significantly diminish. In most cases, treatment duration extends over several years (Pittenger et al., 2005).

Postmodern Spirituality

Postmodern spirituality represents a contemporary approach to religious and spiritual practices which emphasizes individualism, relativism, and the deconstruction of traditional religious and spiritual narratives (Raschke, 2017; Partridge, 2021). It encourages individuals to navigate their own spiritual paths by drawing from a diverse array of traditions and philosophies, thereby promoting personal experience. This approach is characterized by eclecticism, skepticism towards established religious doctrines, and a focus on individual experience (Partridge, 2021).

The movement incorporates a wide range of beliefs and practices, synthesized from various religious traditions such as Christianity, Buddhism, and Occultism, which are transformed and adapted to fit its framework (Cuda, 2013). Originating between the 1960s and 1970s under the New Age Spirituality Movement (Melton, 1992), it has since absorbed elements from numerous cultures and religions. A defining feature of this movement is its individualistic approach to spirituality.

Postmodern spirituality includes "magical" practices and rituals, implying that reality exists solely within individual perception, with no absolute truth. Prominent practices within this framework include pagan rituals, affirmations, manifestation, the use of crystals, astrology, and tarot readings, though practitioners are free to develop their own methods of belief expression.

This movement emerged as a response to contemporary cultural and spiritual crises, exacerbated by capitalist and consumerist cultures, seeking to address the void in people's lives by challenging traditional socio-cultural norms and mass perceptions of reality. Ironically, it has become a highly profitable enterprise. This vision contrasts consumerist culture, and instead promotes a deeper spiritual connection and a holistic understanding of existence. It embodies the idea of the "god within", a concept that evolved during the New Age movement (Partridge, 2021).

Postmodern spirituality, originating in cyberspace, mirrors current societal trends and has derived from them. It rejects objective narratives of reality, suggesting that absolute truths do not exist, and that only individual perceptions prevail. In the absence of an objective truth, individuals are free to create their own narratives.

The movement is influenced by a variety of sources, including quantum physics, astrology, Celtic druidism, alchemy, spiritualism, Eastern religions, occultism, paganism, Native American religions, magic, and animism. Influential figures such as Jacob Boehme, Emmanuel Swedenborg, William Blake, Carl Jung, American transcendentalists like Thoreau and Emerson, Madame Blavatsky, James Lovelock (creator of the Gaia Hypothesis), Abraham Maslow, and Ken Wilber also contributed to its development. This eclectic mix reflects the composite nature of postmodern spirituality, which amalgamates diverse philosophical, mystical, and psychological ideas into a new religious expression lacking foundational principles, making it difficult to define or label (Collins, 1998).

The term "New Age" itself derived from astrology, with the belief that humanity is transitioning from the Age of Pisces—associated with Christianity and organized religious movements—to the Age of Aquarius. This new astrological era is anticipated to herald a collective transformation marked by peace, love, and unity (Rudhyar, 1991; Goodman, 2019).

The philosophy of postmodern spirituality posits that every human being possesses a core spiritual essence and advocates for the journey towards reconnecting with this essence, often referred to as "the higher self" - a concept that parallels Freud's notion of the "superego" (Freud, 1923). Spiritual leaders such as Gandhi, Tagore, and the Dalai Lama, along with various spiritual traditions, advocate for "liberation from attachments to the imperfect self", aiming for an authentic expression of the individual that transcends socio-cultural constraints. The imperfect self, as they call it, is the unaware individual, shaped by socialization and moral norms (Heelas, Cobb, Puchalski, & Rumbold, 2014). Bottom of Form

Historical Context of Postmodern Spirituality

Postmodern spirituality gained substantial clout on social media, particularly through TikTok, where it began as "WitchTok", and afterwards expanded beyond. This form of digital spirituality surged in popularity during the summer of 2020, when a video featuring a group of "witches", performing a ritual to hex the moon went viral. By 2021, "#WitchTok" had amassed 10.5 billion views, and its visibility continues to increase. Despite data protection regulations which obscure precise viewer demographics, available case studies indicate that most creators are women from the Millennial or Gen-Z generations (Partridge, 2021).

A significant number of TikTok users, who identify as "spiritual but not religious," generate content that propagates this ideology, as evidenced by the app's usage patterns. This trend has led users to reevaluate the nature of "spiritual" experiences, traditionally represented by icons and material objects, that were valued for their durability and significance (Mears & Shpolberg, 2021).

Philosophy of Postmodern Spirituality

Postmodern spirituality is predominated by American culture but has also integrated significant elements from Asian spiritual traditions. Typically, followers are middle class, mainly white, and place high value on emotional expression, operating under the belief that societal transformation is contingent upon individual transformation (Gleig, 2014).

The movement draws on various classical texts, including "The Birth of a New Age" (Spangler, 1976), "The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in the 1980s" (Ferguson, 1979), "Out on a Limb" (MacLaine, 1986), and "The Celestine Prophecy" (Redfield, 1995). However, it predominantly relies on social media content for its dissemination and has strayed from these texts.

The use of symbols and narratives within the movement reflects the complexity of the human psyche and the ongoing quest for meaning and spiritual development (Rappaport & Thompson, 2014).

Postmodern spirituality lacks a definitive founder, religious text, or formal organizational structure, distinguishing it from conventional religious traditions (Gleig, 2014). A central tenet of the movement is Carl Jung's concept of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1959), which is regarded more as esoteric speculation than as an empirical reality amenable to objective study by psychologists.

Philosophical idealism forms the core of postmodern spirituality, rejecting the distinction between mind, matter, and the subjective and objective realms. This perspective proposes that all existence resides within the mind of the individual, rendering reality subjective and open to personal interpretation (Piccinini & Maley, 2014). Consequently, psychology and perception play a crucial role within this framework.

This leads to the veneration of the "Self" through the concept of the "Higher Self" as an inner divinity, which is deemed the source of all values, reality, and meaning (Gleig, 2014). Postmodern spirituality emphasizes the evolution of the spirit toward the Higher Self, incorporating the belief that the "Self" undergoes multiple reincarnations to attain spiritual knowledge. Life events are perceived as preordained by the "Self" to facilitate the acquisition of essential lessons, often interpreted as karmic experiences.

Practices and Beliefs in Postmodern Spirituality

Postmodern spirituality draws upon a diverse range of spiritual practices from various cultural backgrounds. According to Hanegraaff (2000), these practices can be categorized into four primary areas: channelling, healing and personal growth, modern spiritual sciences, and modern neopaganism.

Despite the lack of cohesive practice, several general characteristics are shared across these categories. Firstly, postmodern spirituality is inherently individualistic, positioning each person as the ultimate authority in determining their personal truth. Secondly, it is democratic, rejecting any centralized forms of authority. Thirdly, it is relativistic, viewing reality as a collection of "varied perceptions" rather than adhering to rigid categories of "better or worse" or "true and false." This relativism supports diversity and eclecticism, leading to the synthesis of elements from different traditions into novel, integrated forms. Eclecticism introduces the final principle: the belief that all religions and spiritual practices serve as paths to a unified sacred Absolute (Gleig, 2014).

Traditional occult practices, including tarot card reading, astrology, yoga, and meditation, are incorporated into the movement as tools for personal transformation. These practices are seen as effective irrespective of their cultural origins, suggesting that techniques such as meditation can be practiced independently from their original contexts. Additionally, various methods for personal transformation are employed to promote "planetary healing," drawing on astrological concepts and social transformation (Hanegraaff, 2000; Gleig, 2014).

Channelling and the use of crystals are two prominent practices associated with postmodern spirituality. Channelling, or spiritism, involves communication with supernatural entities such as spirits, angels, or deceased individuals. This form of communication can occur under hypnosis and involves processes such as imagination, intuition, and premonitions (Melton, 1998). Channelling exists in two forms: spontaneous and induced. Induced channelling is facilitated through methods such as meditation, prayer, fasting, singing, sleep deprivation, breathing techniques, hallucinogens, or yoga (Cox, 2022).

Frank Alper, a notable proponent of channelling, advocated for the use of crystals as tools for healing and transformation in all areas of life (e.g. rose quartz for love, pyrite for money, carnelian for confidence etc.), contributing to their enduring popularity in spiritual practices (Alper, 1981; Melton, 1998).

Neopaganism, another significant culture from which postmodern spiritual practices derive, is based on individual experience and is viewed as an ongoing process of interpreting sensory stimuli, adapting to various situations, and employing imagination (Heselton, 2003; Rensing, 2009). Consequently, no two neopagan practices are identical.

The foundational element of neopaganism includes the belief that nature and the surrounding world are sacred and possess consciousness. Neopagans perceive the material world, including nature, animals, humans, and, depending on personal beliefs, divine entities, as part of a unified sacred system. Humans are seen as intrinsically linked with the divine or the universe, reflecting a concept like Jung's collective unconscious, where the individual is regarded as possessing inherent divinity and limitless potential (Rensing, 2009).

Another core element of neopaganism is the belief in duality, where both goddesses and gods are worshiped, contrasting with the predominantly masculine deities of monotheistic religions such as Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Rensing, 2009).

Neopaganism is flexible and personal, often expressed through poetry, which serves as a tool for creating texts used in rituals. Writing poetry helps practitioners clarify and reflect on emotions, address troubling feelings, and contemplate individual experiences, all central to their practices. (Rensing, 2009).

Rituals, a crucial component of neopagan spirituality, can be performed in any location deemed sacred by practitioners. Ritual spaces are designated through the creation of protective circles using salt, herbs, or other elements. Practitioners select the ritual location and structure the ritual according to personal preferences and the occasion. Texts or poems are often written by practitioners to be read or recited during rituals, serving to communicate with deities or express gratitude. Neopagans practice individually, leading to a wide variety of ritual practices influenced by personal concepts of divinity and evolving interests in different pagan traditions (Berger, 1999).

It is important to note that contemporary practices, particularly those popularized on social media platforms such as TikTok, represent a synthesis of these traditional practices. TikTok has become a primary medium for creating and sharing innovative spiritual practices.

TikTok videos related to spirituality can be classified into four distinct categories (Mears & Shpolberg, 2021):

(1) Guidance or Informational: These videos provide instruction on how to engage in spiritual experiences (Mears & Shpolberg, 2021).

(2) Therapeutic: This category includes videos related to manifestation, offering affirmations and visualizations intended to foster a healthy and fulfilling life (Mears & Shpolberg, 2021).

(3) Application-Based: Creators interpret tarot cards and suggest that, if a video reaches a viewer, the message is personally intended for them, attributing this to the "Universe" coordinating the viewership through the app's algorithm (Mears & Shpolberg, 2021).

(4) Revolutionary: These videos promote ideologies such as "reality is a simulation and we need to awaken," "nothing is true," or "you control your reality, and altering your perception can change reality". This is the rarest type out of the four (Mears & Shpolberg, 2021).

One of the most prevalent practices in postmodern spirituality on social media is 'manifestation,' which involves realizing one's desires through various "magical" techniques. This can include writing a desire on paper and performing a specific ritual, daily affirmations, scripting (writing a short story or diary entry as if the desired outcome has already happened) or simply visualizing the desired outcome (Diaz, 2023). New manifestation techniques are created every day, and there are endless options to choose from.

Correlation Between Postmodern Spirituality and Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder

Since the onset of social distancing in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, new spiritual movements, which are considered alternative, have gained popularity within online subcultures and social media. This phenomenon reflects the nature of social media applications and the current form of society, where the materials and media that is being consumed lacks stability, due to the amount and speed at which information is spreading (Partridge, 2021).

Gen Z, being the first generation that has been raised with pervasive technology and social media, has been described as relatively detached from the physical world. Consequently, this generation has also turned to social media for spiritual fulfilment, seeking inner peace, and attempting to reconnect with the physical world (Diaz, 2023).

A 2022 study conducted in the U.S. (Sequeira, Pratt, Chevalier, 2022) found that 70% of Gen Z believe their mental health needs improvement and frequently experience issues related to their emotional, mental, and social well-being. The article from Forbes explains that "in the past, mental and social well-being was closely tied to official organizations, such as organized religions, but it can also be achieved through personal practice." Spirituality has become a primary practice for people seeking new ways to feel secure. Crystals and manifestation are self-care methods that Gen Z has largely adopted due to their popularization through social media (Diaz, 2023).

Crystals are believed to rebalance the body's magnetic field, helping to reduce negativity and promote qualities such as focus, emotional balance, and mental clarity. Various forms of manifestation are used to achieve personal goals and personal development. These practices aim to alleviate daily challenges (Diaz, 2023).

This form of spirituality arises as a response to the overwhelming intensity of postmodern life pressures, such as urbanization, standard office jobs, and technological advancements, as well as the simultaneous promotion and destigmatization of mental health and the self-help industry through meditation, mantras, and other spiritual practices. Those who promote these practices are often individuals who have spent time in societies with similar spiritual traditions, such as Southeast Asia or South America, and are self-identified spiritual "gurus." They blend the spiritual concepts of these practices with scientific facts from neuroscience and psychology, promoting a detachment from reality inspired by Buddhism, where the individual, to achieve personal development, must detach from the self (or "ego," which in this context carries meaning that differs from the psychological term) and physical desires (Tmava, 2023).

This approach aligns with individuals living in the postmodern context, addressing and giving meaning to their disillusionments. Postmodern spirituality emphasizes detachment from the self and reality as the key to well-being, drawing practitioners away from the intensive demands and responsibilities of life. By rejecting the unattainable ideal of a stable life, it offers an escape from the cycle of identity destabilization caused by dynamic living (Tmava, 2023).

Practices such as meditation and yoga allow individuals, who are increasingly asocial due to events like the COVID-19 pandemic, globalization, and technology, to focus inwardly. Claims such as "You are not just a body and mind complex, but a manifestation of the entire universe" (DAS, 2022) further promote social isolation, as people need their suffering to be acknowledged and valued through giving it a deeper meaning, but in the absence of physical support systems, they are willing to do anything in search of "existential security" (Wainwright, D., Calnan, M. 2002).

However, the movement is contradictory, as it uses marketing strategies to attract attention and promote the spiritual market, encouraging the purchase of products like crystals, incense, and spiritual services (astrological birth charts, Reiki sessions, meditation classes, etc.) that promise well-being. Moreover, "gurus" gain monetary profit from every view they receive on social media (Tmava, 2023).

A 2020 study conducted on 595 students from six Polish universities, aged 18 to 30, found that spirituality could significantly enhance psychological well-being, indicating that focusing on spiritual education might positively affect mental health (Bożek, Nowak, & Blukacz, 2020). Given this, and previous studies showing increasing mental health issues among Gen Z, we can conclude that this new form of spirituality arises from the need for social and individual support and the quest for internal stability.

Based on these findings, the fact that individuals view postmodern spiritual practices as a solution to their daily problems suggests that one reason for practicing these techniques may be the need for control and security. Manifestation, based on

the belief that one can achieve desired outcomes through positive thinking and intention, provides practitioners with a sense of control over future situations of their daily lives. Similarly, crystals, which, according to "energy vibration," attract specific situations or objects, and tarot cards, which practitioners believe to predict the future, also offer a sense of control over life events and influence over the future.

Since engagement in postmodern practices may serve as a protective mechanism against unpleasant events, attempting to avoid these situations, it seems they offer a way to manage stress and anxiety related to a lack of control. These mechanisms closely resemble the thought processes of individuals affected by obsessive-compulsive disorder. Obsessions resemble the mechanism that drives individuals to practice manifestation or use tarot cards, repeatedly thinking about an event they wish or do not wish to occur, attempting to anticipate it (DiCaccavo, 2008). Meanwhile, compulsions resemble neopagan rituals, the use of crystals, and manifestation techniques as ways to control the future.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

This study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection. A total of 380 participants completed two standardized measures: the Beliefs and Values Scale and the Florida Obsessive Compulsive Inventory (FOCI). Additionally, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two participants, in order to explore the interplay between postmodern spirituality and OCD.

Postmodern spirituality was found prevalent among all the participants, with over half demonstrating higher-than-average scores on the Beliefs and Values Scale. Women exhibited higher levels of belief and practice of postmodern spirituality compared to men, while age was not a significant predictor. Although the overall level of OCD symptoms was moderate, a substantial portion of participants showed elevated levels of obsessive thoughts.

A statistically significant correlation was observed between beliefs in postmodern spiritual practices and OCD symptoms, particularly in the realm of obsessive thoughts. The case studies revealed common themes in OCD symptoms related to postmodern spirituality, including avoidance of negative thoughts, excessive practice, and ritualistic behaviors. Autosuggestion and anxiety reduction were identified as primary motivations for these rituals.

Based on the case study analysis, the following factors were found to influence individuals' adherence to postmodern spiritual practices: self-esteem and stability,

early exposure during adolescence, preexisting obsessive thoughts, and the perceived benefits of these practices.

This study provides evidence of a significant correlation between postmodern spirituality and OCD symptoms, particularly in relation to obsessive thoughts and ritualistic behaviors. The findings highlight the potential for individuals to develop unhealthy attachments to these practices, leading to the manifestation of OCD-like symptoms.

Recommendations

This study explored the relationship between postmodern spirituality and obsessive-compulsive disorder, finding a positive correlation between the two phenomena. The study highlights the need for psychoeducation given the widespread postmodern spiritual practices and the lack of understanding of their psychological effects.

Understanding the correlation between postmodern spirituality and OCD is crucial for both mental health professionals and individuals, especially those prone to developing OCD. Psychoeducation can empower individuals to make informed choices about their spiritual practices, preventing the reinforcement of compulsive behaviors. Additionally, it encourages critical thinking and self-reflection, leading to more balanced approaches to spirituality.

For mental health professionals, incorporating knowledge about the interaction between postmodern spirituality and OCD can enhance treatment efficacy. Therapists can adjust their interventions to consider the spiritual dimensions of their patients' lives, including psychoeducational sessions to distinguish between healthy and harmful spiritual practices.

Mass psychoeducation is also essential to increase awareness of the effects of postmodern spirituality on mental health. This can encourage individuals to be more selective about the information they consume and the ideas they adopt. Psychoeducation promotes a holistic approach to mental health, recognizing the complex interplay between spirituality and psychological well-being.

Parental controls are vital in preventing OCD symptoms related to postmodern spirituality, especially among teenagers who are impressionable and susceptible to external influences, which makes them prone to delve deeper in spiritual practices without questioning. Parents can help filter out harmful content and guide their children's spiritual and psychological development.

In the clinical context, the positive correlation between postmodern spirituality and OCD symptoms emphasizes the need for mental health professionals to consider the spiritual dimensions of their patients' lives. Integrating this knowledge into clinical practice may simplify diagnosis, making certain symptoms easier to

identify, while improving diagnosis accuracy and treatment effectiveness. Mental health professionals should be trained to recognize how specific spiritual practices may contribute to or exacerbate OCD symptoms.

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