

## **Becoming a Shakti: An Analysis of Western Women's Experiences of Tantra Practices**

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**Abstract :** Research over the last decade suggests that there have been distinct changes in both women's sexual behaviour and attitudes towards female sexuality in the UK. Areas such as discussing sex, participating in sexual activity outside of traditional monogamous relationships, and engaging in boudoir photography have all been explored by researchers. Women's participation in tantric practices, however, is a relatively unexplored area of sexuality, despite an increasing number of Tantra schools opening in the UK. Tantra is a practice in which women are considered to have a higher consciousness than men, where the sexual role of women is deemed to be very different to a traditional Western sexually passive role. This research looks at this area, and is based on in-depth, semi-structured, thematically analysed interviews with women who have participated in tantric workshops and/or retreats across the country. The interviews investigate why women engage with such practices, what they feel they gain from the experience, and how shifting notions of appropriate sexual roles for women impact on their sexuality and life generally. While Tantra is still a minority activity in the UK, the findings shed light on not only these areas but also on women's constructions of their sexuality, their relationships with their bodies and sexualities, and ways in which they express and engage with changing notions of female sexuality.

**Keywords :** sexuality, Tantra, gender, Shakti

**Conference Title :** ICGSSSA 2018 : International Conference on Gender, Sex, Sexuality and Sociological Approaches

**Conference Location :** Tokyo, Japan

**Conference Dates :** March 27-28, 2018