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**The National Life Skills, Values Education & School Wellness Program**

*Healthy Schools ..... Healthy India*

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**Education is not preparation for life...**  
**Education is life itself**  
**- John Dewey**

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## Submission Guidelines

### General Guidelines

- Submission emails must contain an inline declaration stating that the research work is the author's original work and has not been submitted elsewhere for publication.
- Brief information and line of works of the author should be sent as a separate cover note.
- The **subject** line of the **email** should be marked **"Submission for IJSHWB: [Author's Name]"**.
- The attached file must be in **'.doc'** or **'.docx'** **format** only. Papers must be typed in 1.5 line spacing, Arial or Times New Roman font, size 11.
- All submissions must be accompanied by an abstract summarizing the main points of the paper.
- **APA 6th Edition** citation and referencing style should be followed.
- The submission should have a clear and informative title.
- Submissions should be engaging and accessible to non-expert readers as well.
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- If necessary, the editors may edit the manuscript in order to maintain uniformity of presentation and to enhance readability.

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***Faculty members are invited to be the guest editors of the journal on a theme relevant to the topic of mental health in schools.***

The Manuscripts to the peer-reviewed and refereed Indian Journal of School Health and Wellbeing (IJSHW) are to be submitted via e-mail to:

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Contents	Page
<b>Editorial Board</b>	iv
<b>Foreword</b>	v
<b>A Note from the Editors</b>	vi
<b>Original Research Papers</b>	
1. <b>Binge-watching: A Road to Pleasure or Pain?</b> <i>Ms. Aditi Mehra &amp; Ms. Amita Gujral</i>	2
2. <b>Media Portrayals of Disability and Relationships: An Exploration of the Self and the Other</b> <i>Ms. Sabreen Kaur &amp; Ms. Urvashi Dixit</i>	14
3. <b>Making Lives Whole: Exploring Facets of Dog-Human Companionship</b> <i>Ms. Noyonika Gupta &amp; Ms. Simran Kaur</i>	22
4. <b>Parenting a Child with Autism: Shared Experiences and Unique Realities</b> <i>Ms. Kaaveri Dhingra</i>	37
5. <b>Guilt and Shame Proneness in Young Adults: Exploring Relation with Personality and Well-being</b> <i>Ms. Jagrika Bajaj &amp; Ms. Mansimran Kaur</i>	44
6. <b>Resilience among Adolescents with Visual Disabilities</b> <i>Ms. Kriti Trehan</i>	53
7. <b>Dark Humour and Personality Correlates</b> <i>Ms. Akansha Marwah &amp; Ms. Garima Chaturvedi</i>	63
8. <b>Physical Intimacy and Romance in Young Adulthood</b> <i>Ms. Shivani Sachdev &amp; Ms. Swathi J. Bhat</i>	69
<b>Review Article</b>	
9. <b>Mirror Neurons and Consciousness: A Meta-synthesis</b> <i>Ms. Ayushi Shukla</i>	78
<b>Case Report</b>	
10. <b>Madness and Creativity: Unravelling the Mystery through Case Studies of Popular Artists</b> <i>Ms. Anshu Chaudhary</i>	89
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Saadat Hasan Manto</b> <i>Ms. Andree &amp; Ms. Ana Gupta</i></li> <li>• <b>Sylvia Plath</b> <i>Ms. Kanika Mohan &amp; Ms. Kriti Trehan</i></li> <li>• <b>Adolf Hitler</b> <i>Ms. Ria Dayal</i></li> <li>• <b>Eminem</b> <i>Ms. Poorva Parashar</i></li> </ul>	
<b>Book Review</b>	
11. <b>Are You There Alone?</b> <i>Ms. Niru Sankhala</i>	109
<b>My Voice: Reflective Narratives</b>	
12. <b>Your appearance is none of our business</b> <i>Ms. Lavanya Kaushal</i>	112
13. <b>Finding your Funny</b> <i>Ms. Parul Tewari</i>	114
<b>Details of the Guest Editors and Authors</b>	116

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## Foreword

It is with a sense of pride and achievement that I introduce the work of the students and the faculty members of the Department of Psychology, Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi. The honour and recognition implicit in the selection of the team of Psychology faculty members from the College to edit a reputed scholarly journal like the **Indian Journal of School Health and Well Being by Expressions India**, cannot be overstated, and the College is grateful for that.

The Department of Psychology first, by virtue of curricular requirement has over time undertaken regular and rigorous student research activities. The student –faculty teams of the Department have made forays into many complex research areas and community outreach programs opening up related areas for study and intervention. The Department has done signal service in documenting such research in all its academic aspects and is now poised to present in the peer group. The present edition captures a part of the spectrum of research interests and investigations of the students. By researching into discourses of disability, media, madness, humour, companionship among many others, students have shown remarkable engagement through empirical research as well as review papers.

For a decade now, IP College has encouraged undergraduate research mentored by faculty, through its Departmental Academic Associations and its six Centres of Research and Learning. In this way, the original and innovative thoughts of students are also put through the considerable discipline of training for, and presentation of research work. The College has also instituted a dedicated grant – the Centenary Decade Undergraduate Research Grant- to augment and support the spirit of research. The student awardees of the College have completed significant projects, and also participated in the research conferences presenting their work.

I thank **Expressions India** for the opportunity to present the work of the Department of Psychology, one of the flagship departments of IP College. I congratulate the editors-the faculty members of the Department of Psychology-my colleagues, who have endorsed the vision of the College and taken it forward, as evidenced by the hours of very hard work that have gone into the mentorship and presentation of the research presented in **the Journal**.

My best wishes, always.

Dr. Babli Moitra Saraf

Principal, Indraprastha College for Women

University of Delhi

## A Note from the Editors

We are pleased to introduce the present issue of the *Indian Journal of School Health and Wellbeing* focusing on the research undertaken by the students at Indraprastha College for Women, University of Delhi during their undergraduate studies at the Department of Psychology. Research is at the heart of the discipline of Psychology and we are proud to have students with an outstanding academic and research potential. Over the years, a significant number of our students have actively engaged in research projects under the guidance of faculty mentors and have produced work of commendable quality. The present issue provides these students with an opportunity to publish their work for communicating with, and participating in, the larger research community.

As shown by the work presented here, undergraduate students are not only able to engage in an intensive study of a problem that reflects their personal interests, but pursue it with a true spirit of scientific enquiry. An important skill set in the pursuit of science is translating research observations into an informative, comprehensive report that presents the question at hand, the results and conclusions in a clear and concise manner. The papers you will find here are representative examples of this excellent body of work.

It is noteworthy that the papers in this issue explore several pertinent, contemporary concerns spanning a whole range of subfields within Psychology. The contributions include research on adolescents and young adults, with studies on binge-watching, guilt and shame proneness, physical intimacy and romance, and dog-human companionship. This issue also provides a perspective on the issue of disability in Indian context while offering an insight into both the narratives of the persons with disability and that of the caregivers. Further, a dedicated section on the enigmatic theme of 'madness and creativity' brings forth the connection between the life experiences and the creative works of the so-called 'mad artists or geniuses'. Adding an auto-ethnographic flavour to the volume, two reflective essays are likely to take the readers close to the trials and tribulations of the growing up years of the 'millennials' while they walk the path to self-discovery.

As editors of this special issue of the journal, we wish to express our sincere thanks to Dr. Jitendra Nagpal and his entire team at 'Expressions India' for their relentless support. We also thank Prof. Namita Ranganathan for her constant encouragement and trust. As members of the Department of Psychology, Indraprastha College for Women, we would like to express our gratitude towards our Principal, Dr. Babli Moitra Saraf, for nourishing the culture of academic excellence at our institution and encouraging us to explore the possibilities of promoting research and publication. And we thank our valued colleagues for their critical comments and suggestions. And lastly, as proud teachers and mentors, we would like to express the immense pride we take in presenting the work of the creative young researchers from our institution. We congratulate students for their commendable ideas and sincere endeavours.

### The Editorial Team

**Dr. Nidhi Malik, Ms. Anshu Chaudhary & Ms. Surbhi Kumar**

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# ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPERS

## Binge-watching: A Road to Pleasure or Pain?

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*The advent of online streaming services has given rise to a new manner of watching television. Commonly referred to as television binge watching, it involves watching several episodes of a television show in one sitting. Even though Indians indulge in binge watching much more in comparison to the rest of the world, this area hasn't been researched upon enough and demands immediate attention. Literature available on binge watching points to the fact that binge watching is closely associated with guilt. However, the literature is silent on the direction of this relationship. Both qualitative and quantitative measures were used in the present study to understand whether guilt is an antecedent or a consequence of binge watching. An online survey was conducted on 80 under-graduate students, followed by a semi structured interview on 30 participants from the sample to tap feelings of guilt experienced before and after indulging in binge watching behaviour. The present study demonstrates that in real life, guilt precedes as well as follows binge watching and that it interferes with other crucial duties in life. Further, it looks into the prevalence of viewership, notions of binge-watching, and deliberations on the audience.*

**Keywords:** binge-watching, guilt, procrastination

### Introduction

Advancements in digital technology stimulate different ways of television (T.V.) viewing. In the fast changing world we live in, new ways of watching T.V. series has emerged. Also called marathon-viewing, studies centred around this phenomenon have defined it as “watching 2-6 episodes of T.V. shows in one setting” (Netflix, 2013) and the same criterion will be used in this study so as to classify binge-watchers. This new way of watching television is defying the traditional viewing styles by allowing the user to bypass linearly scheduled episodes to watching them all at once according to their convenience. Beyond breaking the mould of watching on a predetermined schedule, it has empowered the consumer with a choice, so much so that the expression “binge-watch” was put in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013. Harris Interactive conducted a survey in 2013 according to which younger people are more likely to binge watch in comparison to older people (The Harris Poll, 2013). Majority of the binge watchers belong to the millennial generation (MarketCast, 2013). In a study conducted by Netflix (2013), it was established that while the global average to consume an entire TV series is 4 days, the average time expended by Indians is only 3 days! Further, most favoured genre for binge-watching ended up being Sci-Fi in India with series

like *Ascension*. Previous studies have indicated that people prefer to indulge in binge watching alone. In addition, the total time which is spent during the activity correlates with the amount of leisure time and has a significant role to play in the result of binge-watching on emotional wellbeing (Feijter, 2016). Pena (2015) illustrated that a particular kind of series was preferred more by viewers in order to make the experience favourable for them.

Binge-watching has been subjected to a substantial amount of positive as well as negative media attention. Multiple researches suggest that media may impact the psychological well-being of an individual positively by serving as a catalyst in recovering from the pressures of everyday life (Reinecke, 2009). Matrix (2014) put forth an argument according to which viewers of Generation Y and Generation Z are indulging in binge watching behaviours as a means to relax as well as stay connected to others beyond the classic form of television viewership. Willens (2013) of The Huffington Post further asserted that binge-watching is an ideal activity to indulge in on a date night for couples. She emphasised on how “binge-bonding” with peers led to the formation of positive connections with them. Further, since binge-watching requires an individual to spend extended periods of time in front

of the screen, it serves as an escape for viewers, who avoid everyday activities by remaining immersed in a show (Thompson, 1997).

However, a number of researches have pointed towards a negative relationship between media use and well-being (Kubey & Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Smith (2014), equated binge-watching to drug addictions as viewers are chasing another “fix” with every new episode<sup>1</sup>. Sung, Kang, and Lee (2015) found that addiction symptoms such as loneliness and decreased self-control appeared in those individuals who indulged in the most amount of binge-watching. It has been noted that the term “guilty pleasure” has often been associated with media use, such as reality-based television viewing (Baruh, 2010), reading romance novels (Radway, 1984), or personal Internet use at work (Stratton, 2010). Gauntlett and Hill (1999) reported that irrespective of the content being viewed, the audience regards viewing television as a guilty pleasure. Further, there is a decrease in positive affect after television exposure indicating a negative post hoc appraisal: “In other words, viewers know that they could have done something more productive. It makes sense, then, that after viewing, people are less likely to feel as good about themselves as they do after sports or leisure”. Prior research suggests that media enjoyment is decreased because of feelings of guilt (Hartmann & Vorderer, 2010). This discovery is in sync with previous research that has found an association between ego depletion and decreased levels of self-control (Reinecke, 2014). People with a depleted ego are more likely to give in to the pleasures of the entertaining media than those who do not suffer from ego depletion (Hofmann, Vohs, & Baumeister, 2012). In addition, perceived procrastination has been found to be related with feelings of guilt in relation to media use. Walton-Pattison et al (2018) described how automaticity, anticipated regret and goal conflict contribute to scores on binge watching beyond standard social cognitive factors. A key finding with regard to binge-watching is guiltiness (Cruz, 2014). However, it is still not clear whether guilt is an essential or even recurrent outcome of binge-watching. The aim of this study is to find out the relationship between the factors of television viewership and binge-watching. Literature views factors such as guilt, context for viewership, the viewing medium, amount as well as duration of

watching as crucial aspects of behaviour. However, due to lack of consensus in the academic circles on whether feelings of guilt are a result of binge watching, guilt will be the main focus for this study.

This research focuses on the less explored domain of the relationship between guilt and binge-watching behaviour and attempts to answer the following questions:

1. Whether guilt is an antecedent or a consequence of binge-watching?

The study aimed at obtaining a clearer picture of whether guilt precedes or succeeds binge-watching behaviour. In line with the existing literature review which suggests that the reduced positive affect after watching television may be suggestive of a negative post hoc appraisal, the study hypothesised that guilt is a consequence of binge-watching.

2. What is the association between amount of binge-watching and guilt feelings?

In order to understand the relationship between guilt and various levels of binge viewership, this study hypothesised that respondents who report having longer duration binge-watching sessions will be more likely to feel guilty than participants who report shorter duration binge-watching sessions.

3. To what extent a genre is preferred over the others when it comes to binge-watching?

In sync with Poniewozik's (2015) analysis, TiVo Research reported that dramas and crime dramas were the most binge watched genres (TiVo, 2014). Taking this into consideration, it was hypothesised, certain genres are more likely to be binge watched than others. This will provide insights on whether content and storyline matter in keeping the viewers hooked to their television/computer screens.

Further, this study attempted to shed light on the factors leading to binge-watching in the first place, driving forces behind the inability to stop watching multiple episodes, probable causes in case of experience of negative emotions, coping mechanisms adopted to deal with such feelings and individuals' perceptions regarding appointment television.

<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Shuhua Zhou (2008) argued that any behaviour that includes the word “binge” connotes excess, which is never good for the brain or body (Linville, 2013).

## Method

### Participants

The study was conducted on college students between the age range of 17-21 years. The data was collected via purposive and snowball sampling where only those who spent two hours or more watching television episodes were a part of the study. The survey was administered on 80 students and 30 out of them were interviewed due to time constraints.

### Tools

To explore the relation between Binge-watching and Guilt, both qualitative and quantitative measures were used. An online survey was adapted from Wagner's Questionnaire (2016), keeping the aim of the study in mind which was followed by a semi-structured interview to get deeper insights into the experiences of binge watching. The online survey was carried out by administering a questionnaire to the participants to explore the sectors: Demographic Information, Frequency of Viewership, Perceptions of Binge-Watching, and Reflections on Viewership. In "Frequency of Viewership," participants were posed two questions which looked into how much television they watched. One question asked about the amount of binge watching, while the second asked about the duration of binge-watching. For "Perceptions of Binge-Watching," participants answered questions regarding various genres and durations of television viewing sessions. The next section, "Reflections on Viewership," asked respondents about their guilt from the binge-watching behaviours as well as the type of guilt they felt and used five-point Likert-type scale questions. A question pointing to the feelings experienced while watching multiple episodes made use of expressions (emojis) for the ease of making it more relatable to participants. This section also consisted of a question to tap the feelings of viewers while watching appointment television.

This was followed by the conduction of a semi-structured interview with the participants to ensure that the findings are grounded in their experiences. The semi-structured interview probed the relationship between guilt and binge watching by looking at the subjective experiences of the participants in the face of numerous situations. Further, it shed light on the motivation behind indulging in binge watching, its probable

consequences and the coping strategies used, if any, in order to deal with these consequences.

### Procedure

A pilot study was carried out with 10 people who gave inputs on the comprehensibility of questions and design of the survey. The final survey included 11 questions. Post the administration of the survey, a semi- structured interview was conducted with the participants which provided useful insights. Descriptive Statistics was used to analyse the results of the survey which identified the most common responses given by the participants. The chosen analysis route for the semi-structured interview was content analysis. As a research method, it makes use of a set of categorisation procedures for making valid and replicable inferences from data to its context. The results of the semi- structured interview are attached in Appendix 1.

## Results and Discussion

Technological progress at a time of the golden age of television has given rise to a phenomenon, which now represents an everyday behaviour for many. Although this phenomenon is talked about widely in the media sphere, there seems to be a lack of psychological research, which has looked into it. In the light of the review and the above-cited reasons, the goal of the present study was to understand the relationship between feelings of guilt and binge-watching behaviours in general and whether guilt precedes or succeeds binge-watching behaviour in particular. Further, information was gathered from the participants to gain a genuine understanding of their binge-watching experiences such as their viewing practices, underlying motivations and related behaviours.

Binge-watching has now become the new normative way of consuming television shows due to the convenience of having a plethora of shows just a few clicks away. According to figure 1, majority of the sample reported watching 21-30 hours of television in the previous week. In addition, majority of the participants preferred to watch 5-6 hours of television in one sitting as indicated in figure 2. Binge-watching was also voted to be the most popular manner of consumption of television series as reported in figure 3.

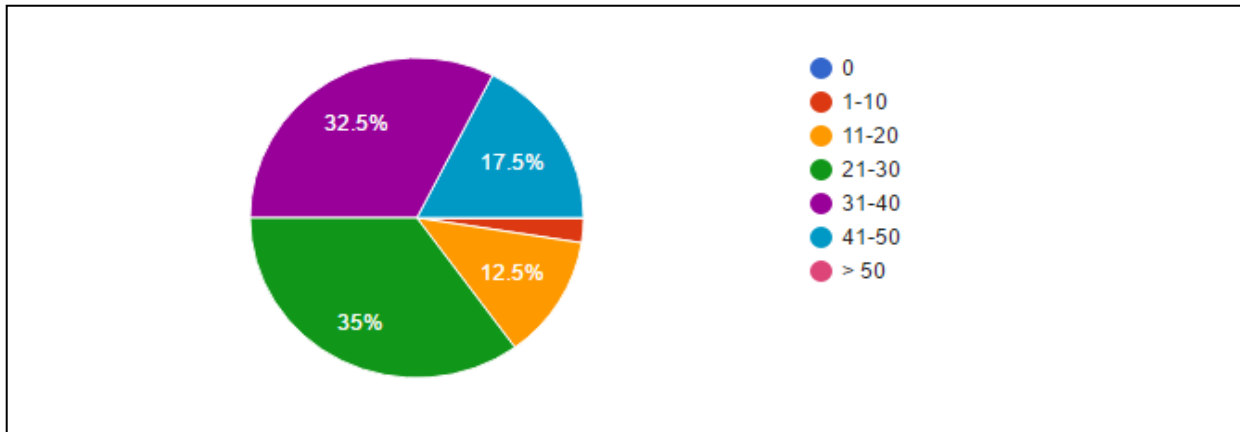


Figure 1. Responses on Q1 asking about number of hours participant watched television.

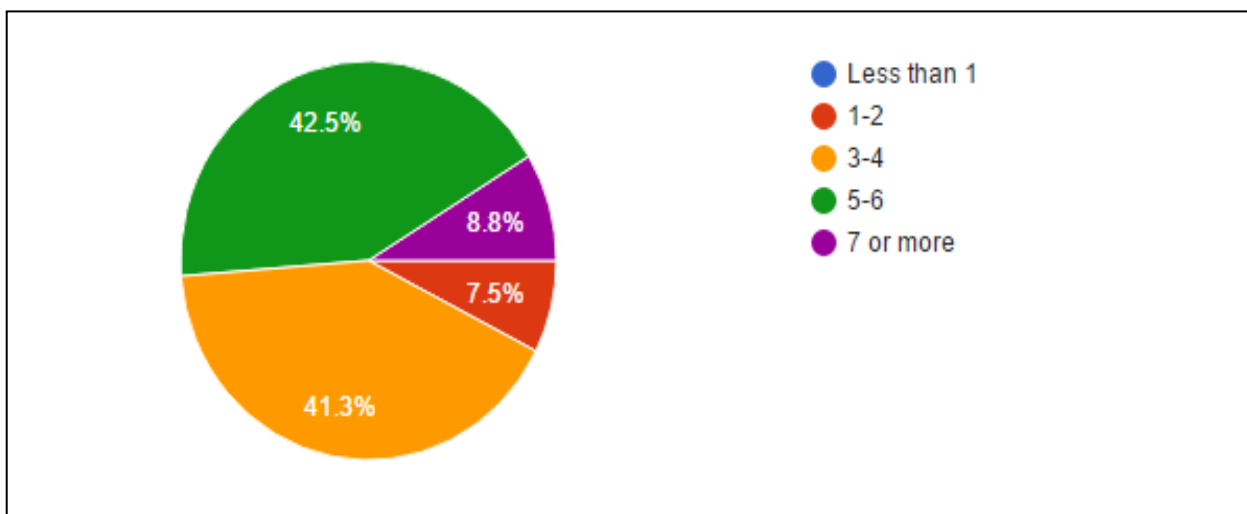


Figure 2. Responses on Q2 asking about number of hours television is watched in one sitting.

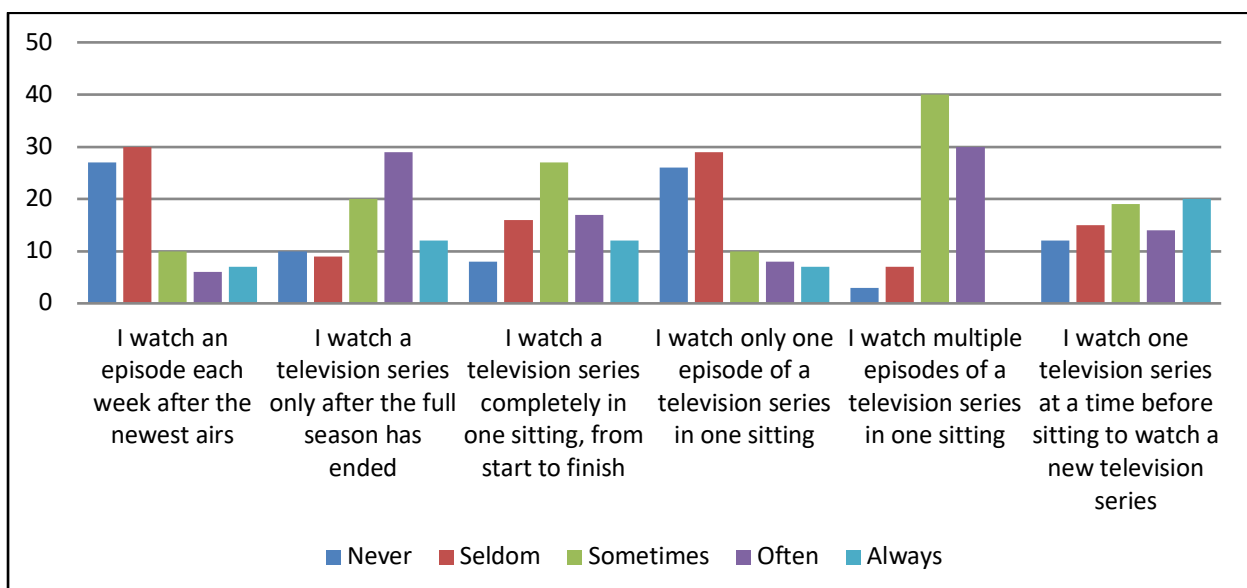


Figure 3. Responses on Q4: When I watch T.V....



It can be inferred, that this new way of watching television is defying the traditional viewing styles by allowing the user to bypass linearly scheduled episodes to view them together as per their convenience. This phenomenon is threatening to shake up appointment viewing as the people preferring to binge watch is on an increase.

Two major reasons pertaining to what got the viewers to become so deeply engrossed in these sitcoms in the first place, emerged during the interviews. Being in a position to discuss the trending sitcoms with peers not only kept them from feeling alienated but also facilitated them in being an active member of the conversation. This in turn helped them stay abreast with the recent happenings around them. By staying up to date with the popular television content, some viewers feel more equipped to engage in social interactions. One respondent explained his incentive as a desire to *“enhance his social status.”* Similar findings were reported in a research conducted by Wagner (2016) where the importance of being able to have discussions about certain shows motivated them to continue to binge watch.

When asked whether their choice to continue watching still depended on the above cited reasons, respondents voted procrastination to be the main driving force behind this form of indulgence. On being asked what leads them to move from spending three hours to six, without consciously being aware of when they click the next episode, it was reported that putting off important work because *“an hour won’t make a world of a difference”* was one of the most favoured reasons. The participants reported feeling guiltier when they indulged in such behaviours in the face of an important event such as an assignment submission etc. This can be supported by the findings of the survey wherein 66% of the sample reported feeling guilty for something they did not do but should have done. Panek (2014) studying college students found that feelings of guilt arose after they experienced the consequences of giving preference to media over completing their assignments which has long-term benefits. It was also reported that another advantage of viewing multiple episodes was to avoid spoilers as much as possible. As stated by one person, *“I usually watch multiple episodes in a row to ‘catch up’ with my peers, especially if they’ll be talking about it in social situations. I don’t want any 34 spoilers when I see them next!”*. Sims (2015) pointed out towards the challenges viewers face while avoiding spoilers. It was also brought forth that binge watchers indulged in such behaviours in order to allow

themselves a mental reprieve. Like one respondent wanted to *“think about someone else’s problems and escape into a different world for a few hours, to turn my mind off and let the story take control.”* Binge watching was found to be an effective way of getting lost in a TV series, thus serving as a distraction for viewers. It can be inferred that binge-watching helped in temporarily alleviating their pre-existing feelings of stress and anxiety.

There was a division in opinions when respondents were asked whether they were more inclined towards watching multiple episodes of the same television series or different ones. In figure 4, it has been depicted that almost half the sample prefers watching multiple episodes of the same television series, while the other half doesn’t.

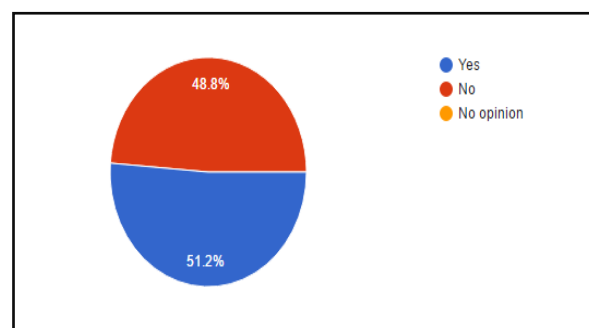


Figure 4. Responses on Q3 which inquired if multiple episodes being viewed are required to be of the same television series.

Contrary to the hypothesis of the present study, the results of the study indicated that almost half the respondents did not prefer watching multiple episodes of the same television series. However, when probed further through the interview, it was found that a majority of the participants would rather watch several episodes of the same TV series, conditioned on availability which is in line with our hypothesis. Netflix has defined binge watching as the practice of watching television for a long-time span, usually a single television show (West, 2014). It is safe to say then, that binge-watchers pay attention to one TV series in its entirety before moving to the next. That being said, 35% reported that watching multiple episodes of the same show was not a necessity. There is clearly a disagreement between whether viewers need to focus on a single TV series or watch multiple simultaneously, suggesting that the binge-watching experience differs for people and is contingent upon their perceptions of viewing.

Some participants reported certain sitcoms were more suited for binge watching in comparison to

others. From figure 5, it can be seen that the most preferred genre to watch multiple episodes of was

Thriller/ Horror which was followed by Comedy and Fantasy/ Science fiction.

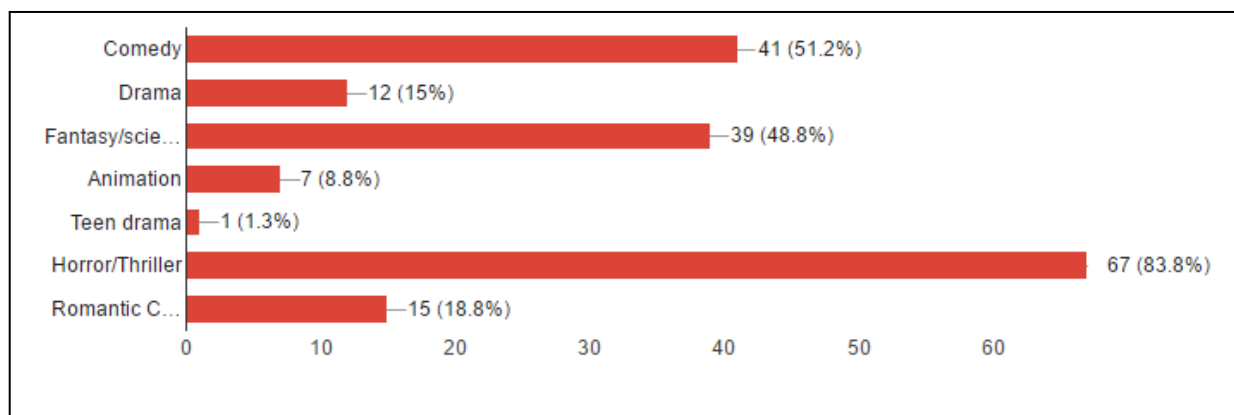


Figure 5. Responses on Q5 inquiring about the nature of television content being binge watched.

For specific genres such as thrillers/horrors, the majority of respondents felt that they had the maximum potential to be binge-watched. On the other hand, they believed that programs which impart knowledge such as news and discovery channels do not have the qualities of being a binge-worthy show either due to the nature of their content or the manner in which they are structured. Contrary to an article written by Bijal (2016) where Scientific Fiction has been suggested as most popular genre in India when it comes to binge watching, the present study found thrillers/ horror to be the viewers' favourite with 84% of the sample opting for this genre against the others. When probed further during the interview, majority reported that their inability to deprive themselves of the climax (cliff-hangers) led them to jump from three to six episodes of this genre. Participants claimed how thrillers and horrors are more '*suspenseful*' and '*nerve wrecking*' as each episode nears its end. Sims (2015) put forth that a number of series exploit this storyline in order to motivate viewers to continue watching despite feeling guilty. A significant percentage of respondents also felt that the average number of hours devoted to binge watching increased as respondents perceived that watching episodes of shorter duration meant wasting lesser time. Wagner (2016) found that even in cases when the time-equivalents of the viewership were identical (irrespective of the duration

of the episode), people still preferred watching episodes of shorter duration, thereby being clouded by the illusion of wasting lesser time.

The main focus of the study was to tap the direction of feelings of guilt experienced by individuals indulging in the phenomena of binge watching. It has been seen that even though television has shared a relationship with guilt since the very beginning, the nature of guilt has evolved under the influence of multiple factors, such as demographics, time period, technology, program type, and intellectual stimulation. In figure 6, it has been depicted that the majority of sample experienced feelings of guilt and inefficacy while engaging in binge watching behaviour. The number of hours spent while binge watching was directly proportional to the amount of guilt experienced. The results obtained in the study wherein 70% of the sample consented to experiencing more amount of guilt with the increasing hours is in line with the hypothesis of the present study, feelings of guilt are directly proportional to the number of hours spent while indulging in binge watching. According to Leech, Barrett, & Morgan (2005) respondents who reported longer binge-viewing sessions felt more guilty than those who reported a shorter duration of binge-watching.

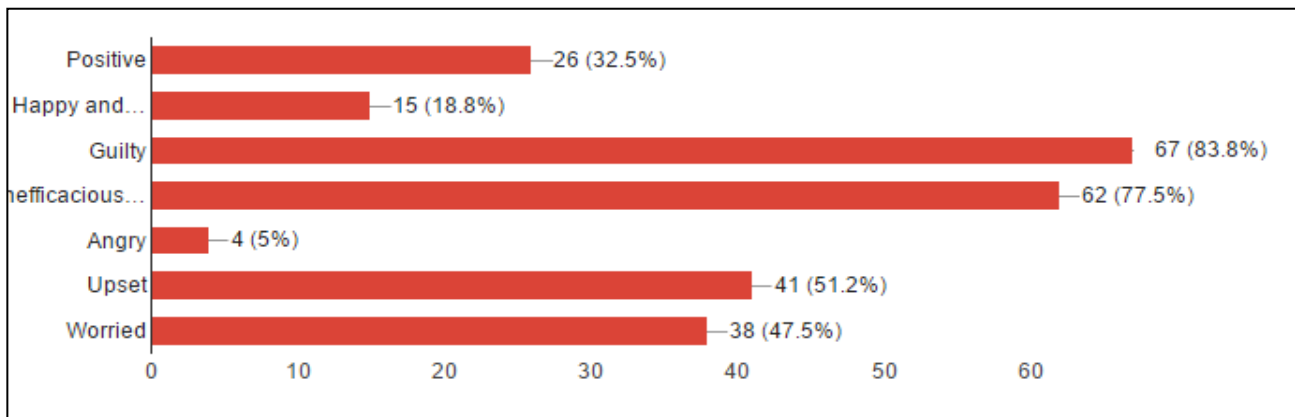


Figure 6. Responses on Q9: Based on your experience of watching multiple episodes in one sitting, choose as many of the following.

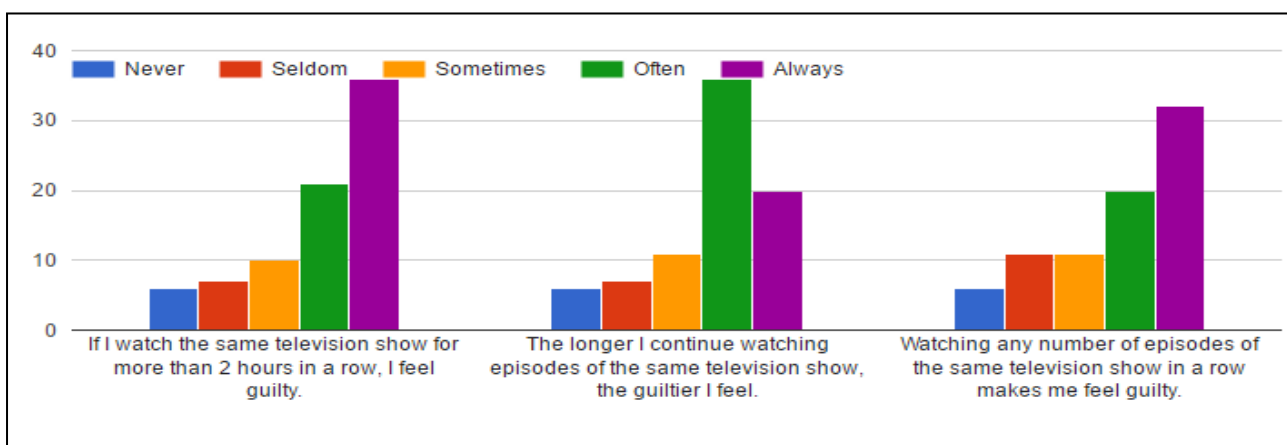


Figure 7. Responses on Q6 about binge watching and guilt

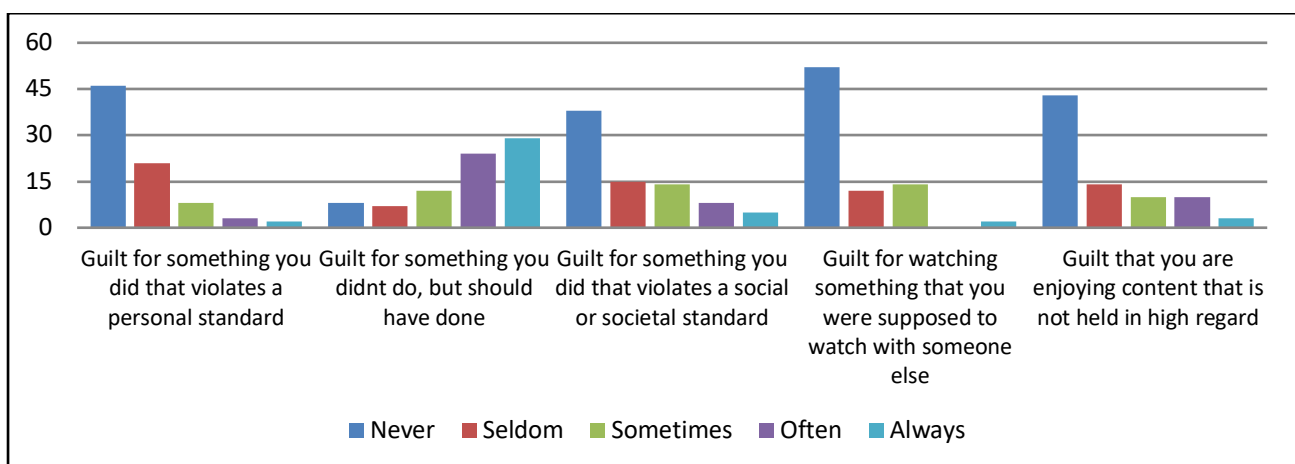


Figure 8. Responses on Q7 inquiring about the type of guilt experienced on binge-watching.

On being asked the reason behind feeling guilty post binge watching, majority of the sample stated lessening of productivity to be one of the chief reasons for the occurrence of negative emotions which

was followed by deteriorating quality of interpersonal relationships.

Previous studies on the psychological effects of media use as a form of relaxation have often



contradicted one another. Some have indicated that they facilitate mental recovery from stress, while others have found that they cause people to feel guilty, depressed, and frustrated. The results of the present study were in line with our first hypothesis, ‘Guilt is a consequence of binge watching.’ This can be corroborated by the results obtained in the survey wherein 71.2% of the sample reported that watching more than two hours of television led to feelings of guilt. The importance of intentionality was highlighted by the respondents who reported that they had no intention to binge watch in the first place. However, this unintended move from temporary watching to bingeing has some uncomfortable effects on bingers. Further it was reported that guilt became more prevalent when there was no intention to indulge in binge watching in the beginning of the viewing session. Riddle et al (2017) found that addictive symptoms were more common among unintentional bingers. In the interview, even though feelings of guilt post binge watching were reported by the entire sample, more than half the sample also indicated experiencing guilt prior to indulging in the same. The past experiences of having to deal with feelings of guilt were found to be one of the chief reasons that led them to feel the guilt prior to binge watching. Though it was later pointed out how their urge to binge-watch overpowered these negative emotions. Further, some were also found citing “Even though I knew how I was going to waste the next 3-4 hours, not watching would keep me from concentrating on the important tasks”. Studies have also pointed at the certain pleasures which provide immediate awards as opposed to those which give delayed gratification. Commonly referred to as ‘guilty pleasures’, they lure individuals to yield to instant pleasures rather than indulge in experiences which has delayed yet long-lasting benefits like cultural enrichment, enhanced ability to perform the duties of a responsible, informed citizen, or increased earning potential (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999).

However, majority of the sample reported feeling guilty after experiencing positive emotions stating lost time and thus lessening of productivity to be the reason. This can be further corroborated by the survey where 66.25% of the sample reported feeling “*guilt for something they didn’t do but should have*

*done.*” Watching videos online is related to lesser time spent on doing meaningful work. The rationale for the same is that these activities offer short-term gains as opposed to those which offer larger, long-term gains such as getting better grades and a successful career (Panek, 2014). Being glued to the television all round the clock often contributed to deteriorating quality of familial relationships, thus leading to experiences of guilt. This was all the more prominent due to the prevalent collectivistic culture of India. Some respondents also went on to say that not just binge watching but also thinking about the story line and discussing the same with peers added to number of hours of preoccupation with the sit-coms. Last but not the least, participants also reported feeling more ‘lethargic’ and ‘blue’ due to lack of movement. Exercising releases certain chemicals called endorphins which trigger a positive feeling in the body. Watching television, for most people at least, equals sitting. It is clear that not only is television taking the place of our exercise time, it is also restraining basic movements such as walking from one room to the other. These activities which seem insignificant in reality, in fact have positive health effects. No muscle movement contributes to lower metabolism and an overall lower level of health — including brain health (Dunstan, 2008).

In the face of stressful situations, clients reported adopting certain coping strategies in order to tackle the difficulties faced. 92% of the sample quoted how overcompensating by putting in greater effort on more important things helped in alleviating feelings of tension by utilising the leftover time in an efficient manner. According to 47% of the participants, putting a conscious effort to cut down on the usual number of hours in order to catch up on the designated work was an effective coping mechanism and subsequently rewarding themselves by watching more post the important event.

Another interesting finding that emerged from this study was, that the viewers who had to make their schedules in accordance with the time of a show’s original broadcast (traditional/ appointment television), almost never experienced negative emotions as compared to those who preferred watching television according to their suitability.

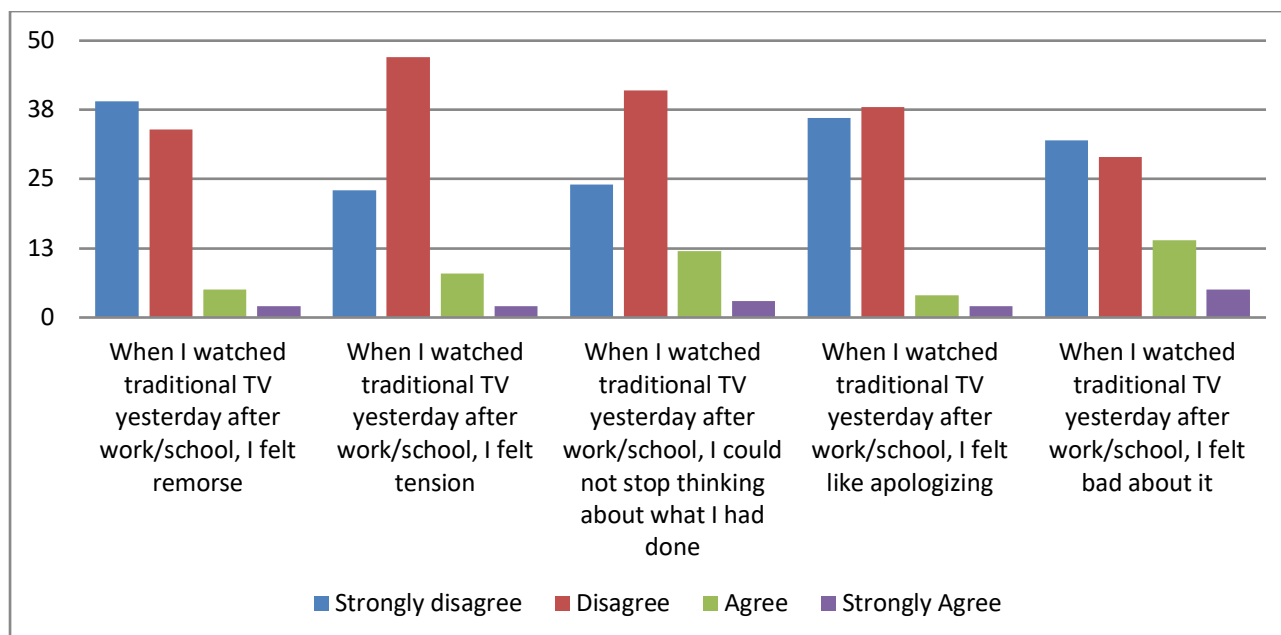


Figure 9. Responses on Q8 inquiring about how watching traditional TV makes you feel

As indicated in figure 9, majority of the sample “disagreed” feeling tension or remorse while watching traditional television. According to Gillian (2010) appointment television “*requires a time commitment and a high tolerance for delayed gratification,*” but the new manner of watching series doesn’t place such high demands. “*Viewers no longer need to tolerate ‘appointment television’ access to content at a time prescribed by content creators or distributors and availability only on a single broadcast, satellite or cable channel,*” (Frieden, 2014).

### Concluding Comments

The study aimed at establishing better understanding of the relationship between guilt and binge-watching behaviours. Guilt was not only regarded as the inevitable consequence, but also as an antecedent of what is also known as, marathon-viewing. Serving as an escape gratification for viewers, it was reported to be a useful way to “turn off” one’s mind, thereby temporarily alleviating pre-existing feelings of stress and anxiety. Episodes of binges led to positive emotions such as happiness and excitement, which was why the respondents’ ended up indulging in the same even after experiencing negative emotions like guilt in the longer run. Certain coping strategies were adopted in order to efficiently tackle the feelings of guilt experienced. This study was able to find interesting insights on a popular yet greatly under-researched phenomenon academically.

### Implications, Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This research allows exploring the concept of ‘binge watching’, the manner in which the audience makes a connection with digital TV, the way they feel after engaging in binge watching sessions and the circumstances and reasons behind viewers choosing this form of media from a plethora of leisure options available. A complete understanding of this phenomenon will pave a way forward in identifying and handling problematic media usage. Further, it may contribute in helping individuals willing to decrease their reliance on the overuse of media. In-depth comprehension of this phenomenon is also beneficial to production companies while deliberating on the content and development of TV series.

Limitations include a limited sample in terms of homogeneity representing only the urban university population who were avid consumers of specific genre of their interest selected through snowball sampling. Therefore, the results though indicative of trends in binge watching and its emotional dynamics, it cannot be generalized to the broader binge-watching population. Further research should focus on looking at a more heterogeneous population, as well as aim for a larger sample so as to understand the nuanced effects of binge watching.

In the future, research could ascertain co-relational relationships between different aspects of the behaviour. For example, if increasing the number of hours of binge watching leads to enhanced feelings

of guilt in the viewer. The underlying mechanisms behind consuming video games and other products in this fashion and how they differ from binge watching could also be explored to gain more fruitful insights.

Despite the limitations, this study provides adequate insight into binge-watching behaviours and advocates for a strong need for future research.

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**Appendix-1****Results of semi-structured questionnaire**

Experience of pre guilt/ post guilt or both.	Post guilt (100%) Pre guilt Due to prior experience of negative emotions (66.66%) Both pre and post guilt (66.66%)
Impact of an important event (Exam, assignment submission) on the phenomenon of binge watching	Cut down the usual number of hours (50%) Stop watching for the requisite time period (16.66%) Cut the usual number of hours and reward oneself by watching more post exam (33.33%)
Reasons to watch sit-coms in the first place	Discussion with peers (56.66%) To be aware of what's new (13%)
Three to six episodes?	Procrastinate working because another hour won't make a world of a difference (65%) To avoid spoilers (34%) Cliff hangers in thrillers. Inability to deprive of the climax (32%) Escape from reality (30.33%) Shorter duration of episodes. Feel that less time is being wasted (15%)
Probable causes of negative emotions	Lessening of productivity (94%) Familial relationships suffering. Glued all the time. (62%) No of hour's increases in discussions/ thinking about what will happen next. (54%) More lethargic and sad due to lack of movement (22%)
Multiple episodes of same or different TV. Shows?	Preferred viewing many episodes of the same TV show conditioned on availability (65%) Multiple episodes of the same show are not a necessity (35%)
Coping strategies	Overcompensate by putting in greater effort on more important things (92%) Make a conscious effort to cut down the number of hours indulged in (47%)



## Media Portrayals of Disability and Relationships: An Exploration of the Self and the Other

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*The present study aims to analyse portrayals of relationships of persons with disability in visual media. Media reinforces stereotypes attached with disabled people by portraying them as pitiable, non-sexual and incapable of being in a worthwhile relationship. It explores the understanding of self and other by analysing the relationships of those who have some form of disability, as projected in the visual media and see how the self evolves and changes in a romantic relationship. For a comprehensive understanding of media's depiction of the disabled, two movies were selected, namely Sai Paranjpye's Sparsh (1980) and Shonali Bose's Margarita with a Straw (2014). While Sparsh narrates the story of a blind man and his falling in love with a singer and the ups and downs of their relationship because of his apprehension about the relationship's fate given his disability, Margarita with a Straw traces the journey of a young girl with cerebral palsy embarking on self-discovery and searching for love and intimacy. The protagonists and their conception of self was studied in context of romantic relationships through the issues of sexuality, perception of society, personal inhibitions, companionship and foundation of relationships in the backdrop of disability. Media mirrors society but also creates a snapshot of accepted reality and perpetuates stereotypes. This study provides a critical appraisal of mainstream media in its ability to locate romantic relationships in the lives of disabled and examines the constructed images of self and other.*

**Keywords:** disability, media, romantic relationships, self, other

### Introduction

Disability as a concept is a historically, culturally and socio-politically variable phenomena which in terms of its meaning and form is not only dependent on individual bodies but also on the prevailing conditions and forces (Grue, 2015). Historically, "disability" has been used either as a synonym for "inability" or alluding to legal imposition of limitations on rights and powers. In addition to the discourse of abled bodies or non-disabled bodies, disability is defined as "A transient, temporary, or partial impairment; a host of barriers to optimal functioning and the social dynamics and life-course development of persons with disabilities interacting with their behavioural settings" (Zimbardo, 2002).

According to the disability policy scholars, there are four different models of disability. Moral model, the oldest model of disability associates disability to sin, shame and guilt. The medical model looks at disability as a problem residing within the individual, with the society having no responsibility to make place for persons with disabilities (PWD) along

with the rehabilitation model which acknowledges that PWD need services from rehabilitation professionals. However, this model also promotes the idea that PWD are very much capable of participating effectively in the society and the idea of institutionalising them is not correct or acceptable. A relatively newer model is the disability model, which regards disability and considers it to be a normal aspect of life. Further on, it completely rejects the stereotypical notion that PWD are in some way defective or responsible for their own condition. Most individuals encounter some form of disability over the course of their life, whether as a permanent or temporary form. However, if the environment and the system were more sensitive to disability it would not seem to be abnormal or deviant (Kaplan, 2000).

PWD respond to their disabilities in different ways. Their reactions range from those that are completely negative, in which the quality of life is also negatively affected, to being positive, in which these individuals continue to lead a positive and productive life. The experience of disability is influenced by

various factors like nature of the disability, the individual's personality, meaning of the disability to him/her and the support system.

Media is an extremely important part of our everyday lives and it plays a critical role in the dissemination of information about a variety of issues, not the least of which are attitudes toward disability. Barnes (1992) analysed the disabling imagery in the media and found that the majority of information about disability is extremely negative. Stereotypes that are disabling that tend to medicalise, patronize and criminalize disability and PWD are found in different forms of media such as books, films, television or the press. They play a key role in the discriminatory behaviour and exploitation that persons with disabilities have to deal regularly.

Media reinforces a view of disability that is synonymous with illness and suffering. The predominance of the medical approach to impairment and disability has diverted the public's attention away from the social factors that underlie disability. The language used in most media depictions creates a sense of sentimentality that patronizes and exasperates the PWD. The constant industry insistence on superficial physical perfection is responsible for the exclusion of PWD from advertising images. When PWD appear in advertising, the majority depictions are of those using wheelchairs or those who are deaf. The role of PWD as consumers is completely denied (Lyle, 2003).

In case of portrayal of disability, films have primarily shown two extreme trends. At one end of the spectrum are movies portraying characters who have a disability as those to be pitied, caricatured, to be sympathized and with awesome heroism, while at the other end are symbolisms of discrimination, coping-up, emotional swings and aspirations of the human soul (Mohapatra, 2012). The trends of media portrayals of characters with disability have been varied. While movies such as *Tom, Dick and Harry* and *Pyare Mohan* (2006) have used disability as a comic interlude, some others have used it to give a theatrical twist to their story with negligible regard for the PWD rights. A few films have meaningfully portrayed the insensitive ways of the society and discrimination faced by the PWD. The notion of "disability as a punishment" has been one of the most prominent and majorly displayed portrayals of disability in Bollywood (Pal, 2012), as seen a *Bombay Talkies* (1936). Movies have also depicted disabled characters as "heroes and superheroes" like *Dushman* (1998). Movies such as "*Koshish* (1972)" have also

shown disabled people in their true picture. Disabled people have also been depicted as "objects of violence", usually at the hands of able-bodied people. Some movies have represented disabled individuals as self-pitiers but have the capacity to overcome the challenges put forward by the society if they stand up for themselves and their rights. Another common theme that has found its place predominantly in literature and art has been around the presumptions of the society towards the sexuality of individuals with disability. Majority of these depictions are about male characters and images whereas there has been little exploration of disabled women's sexuality.

Conception of a unitary identity for PWD is impossible (and perhaps undesirable) to codify. The disabled body stands out as the most absolute figure of otherness in our culture evoking emotions like pity, repulsion, sympathy and disgust. Normality is not a self-evident label for the desirable or the natural state of the human body and mind, rather it is a social construct that came into being as late as in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

The understanding of selves of those individuals who often find them at the other end of the society, excluded and separate from those who come under the purview of "normalcy" is often integrated into their weakness stemming out of their disability. The self-concept, self-understanding and self-confidence of those disabled bodies then becomes bound not only to the acceptance of others and their support but slowly integrates into the "others" and finally emerges to be fragmented and shattered by their weakness, inability to form meaningful relationships, impairments and the exclusion of the society.

Higher self-concept clarity has been associated with higher levels of relationship satisfaction and commitment (Lewandowski, 2010). A strong and a loving relationship helps one to understand more about oneself with the beloved acting as a mirror portraying one's own character as a reflection. However, for many individuals with a disabled partner, it may be hard to imagine seeing their reflection in a disabled partner because of their impairment, and because of the difficulty in understanding how someone with an impairment can bring out the best in them or be a successful partner. Having any kind of disability reduces the chances of relationships moving beyond acquaintanceship; as in such relationships, disability tends to loom in a significant way in the minds of the nondisabled person (as well as the disabled person) obscuring other

features which may be more essential to establish a successful intimate relationship.

Even when they do form romantic relationships with others, the cultural stereotypes force them to more often than not be with “someone of their own kind” and if they do form intimate relationships with non-disabled people, they must consider the “real” reasons for being in such a relationship. Such reasons might range from being built on dependency, pity, etc. Societal prejudices perpetuate the view that PWD are incapable of participating in sexual relationships (Emens, 2009).

A complete sense of self makes one not only function truly as a healthy individual but also contributes positively to healthy and strong relationships in life. Especially in the case of romantic relationships, this understanding of “self” and the “other” comes from how strong and meaningful the relationship is. However, locating oneself and the other person in a romantic relationship that is built on the foundation of a fragmented self, emerging out of a disabled identity can be extremely challenging.

The present study aims to provide an insight into romantic relationships in the lives of disabled people through the lens of mainstream cinema. It focuses on looking into the various notions and images of self and the other that are created in these romantic relationships. The study will highlight the depiction of love and companionship against the backdrop of experiences of a person with disability. For the purpose of the present study, Sai Paranjpye’s movie *Sparsh* (1980) and Shonali Bose’s *Margarita with a Straw* (2014) have been chosen for analysis.

## Method

The present study is a qualitative, exploratory research with the objective to understand and gain an insight into the conceptions of self and the other in the lives disabled individuals as projected through cinema. *Sparsh* was chosen as the movie for analysis as it covers a broad spectrum of emotions that a disabled person goes through from the urge of having autonomy to the willingness of finding dependency and companionship. The film portrays the constant challenges and frustrating experiences that persons with disability have to often go through. It focuses on the theme of disability and romantic relationships and the stereotypes revolving around them. It highlights the viewpoint that people with disabilities too expect love and genuine concern in a relationship, and not charity. On the other hand, *Margarita With A Straw* portrays the story of a young girl with cerebral palsy

who moves to a new country and her journey of self-discovery and finding love.

After an extensive review and understanding of the topic, the literature review pertaining to the topic was studied and the source of media was finalised. After this, the two movies were seen multiple times and a detailed summary was prepared. Subsequently, important meaningful units were marked. Codes were derived out of meaningful units and themes were formed by clubbing the meaningful units. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data. Sub-themes were also created and specific instances and scenes from the movie were also added. Different aspects of the theme of “self and other” were highlighted such as the characteristics of self, the “other” in the relationship, the relationship with the other and disability and its experience.

## Discussion

The focus of the present study was to understand and explore the notions of self and the other in the lives disabled individuals as projected through cinema. The themes explore the notions of self, other, relationship between the self and other and the experiences of disability as experienced by the characters in the two movies. The following themes were identified:

**The characteristics of self.** It refers to the conception of self in the lives of disabled persons and their innate desires. Many people with impairments tend to distance themselves from being identified by others or identifying their own selves as disabled (Cameron, 2014) especially in the case of sympathetic gestures of others. The movie characters are also shown to have a desire to not be seen as “*bechara*” or helpless. Anirudh is of the view that PWD should not be viewed as those who are always in need of others but also who can offer a lot to others. While Laila wants the world to view her independent of her disability and thus tries to crop out the wheelchair from her profile picture on social media. Towards the end of the movie Anirudh calls himself disabled while denying being incapable in any way throughout the movie and exposes his sense of being valueless showing his insecurities and self-pity. This reflects the charity model wherein disabled people are considered as those in need of sympathy and pity from others and are dependent on the able-bodied individuals.

PWD experience a range of emotions including sadness, frustration, despair and even anger. Pierce (1998) found that among those individuals who are full time wheelchair bound, frustration can be



experienced very easily. Both characters in the movie experience frustration on account of their inability to carry out simple everyday tasks like wearing clothes or using a napkin. PWD often desire to be regarded as normal (Abberley, 2005). Laila has the inner desire to be identified as normal, while Anirudh has the fear of getting sympathy from others and their pity.

Both the characters are shown to be caring individuals, who have a strong relationship with either family or their students. While Anirudh is often found to be socialising and connecting with people, Laila finds happiness in small things of life and her music.

**The “other” in the relationship.** Women who have lost their husbands feel a sense of loss contact with others and a reduction in their association with others. This makes them a little withdrawn and somewhat inhibited (Fasoranti & Aruna, 2007). Kavita in the movie *Sparsh*, is a woman who has become lonely and socially withdrawn due to the death of her husband which is also a dark past that she lives with. She has thus, given up on all kinds of social interactions and prefers the company of her plants and music. In Khanum’s case her dark past was related to her “coming out” to her parents about her sexual orientation.

Cartwright, Archbold, Stewart and Limnadi (1994) emphasize the importance of relationships of positive quality so as to find a sense of enrichment from caregiving. In *Sparsh*, the scene where Kavita bakes a cake for Anirudh on his birthday when he was least expecting such a gesture shows how Kavita showers care and displays compassion towards Anirudh. While, in *Margarita with a straw*, Khanum comes to India with Laila for a holiday, however when Laila’s mother succumbs to her illness and Laila is shattered, Khanum stays back and is there for Laila through her difficult time.

**The relationship with the “other”.** Romantic involvement forms a significant event in the process of development of emerging adults (Arnett, 2000). Knapp’s (1978) dual staircase model explains the important stages in the formation of a relationship. It explains how a relationship forms, escalates, stabilizes and descends over time. The model explains the process of forming and escalation of relationships through five stages: initiating, experimenting, intensifying, integrating, and bonding. Initiating is explained as the initial interaction between two individuals that occurs immediately upon meeting someone including making a first impression. In both movies, the initial interactions played a key role in the formation of relationships. With Anirudh and Kavita,

their initial interactions were largely dominated by Anirudh’s appreciation towards Kavita’s music and Kavita’s curiosity to know more about Anirudh and his work. For Laila and Khanum, their initial interaction was based on asking about each other and getting to know about one another. In both cases, the initial interaction was accidental in nature.

In the experiment stage, couples try to gather in-depth information about each other with an aim to see how well they are compatible with each other. In both the movies, the characters were shown to spend quality time with each other and finding common interests.

In the intensifying stage, the relationship becomes less scripted. There is a spike in self-disclosure and relational commitment is seen (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Consistent with this, both Kavita and Khanum disclose their dark past to their respective partners as a sense of trust develops. Love starts to blossom between the partners.

Finally, couples tend to make a public announcement their relationship which finds its place in the formal also referred to as the legal bonding stage in Knapp’s model (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2009). Though in case of Anirudh and Kavita this formal announcement was in the form of their marriage, but Laila and Khanum did not make a formal announcement of their homosexual relationship due to the fear of societal rejection. However, even they did take the next step in the relationship by moving in together. PWD are mostly expected to be with others of “their kind” and if the contrary is to happen by chance, they must meet with demeaning assumptions about the “catch” or the real reason behind an abled person entering such a relationship such as pity (Wasserman, et al., 2016). Anirudh and Kavita’s relationship hit a rough patch only when due to the societal norms and stereotypes Anirudh started questioning Kavita’s intentions of being with him as emerging out of a sense of pity or sympathy.

An important component of a strong relationship is the ability of the two individuals to find their weaknesses and strengths in each other. Both Anirudh and Laila were able to find comfort in their partners. In both the relationships, beauty was experienced through a sense of touch rather than visual appearance. In the scene where Kavita and Anirudh are sitting in the garden, Anirudh tells Kavita that he knows that she is pretty because he loves her smell and her “*sparsh*”, her essence. In the other movie, when Khanum and Laila are in the museum, Khanum holds Laila’s hand and tries to touch and feel

her hand and face and then tells her that she is very pretty.

In both the movies, the protagonists feared the societal reactions to their romantic relationships. In case of the movie *Sparsh*, Anirudh's fear was of marrying an abled bodied person. Disabled people who are involved in intimate relationships are constantly subjected to stereotypes and prejudices. They are only considered of being capable of forming relationships "with their own kind" (Wasserman, et al., 2016). The fear of societal reactions in the relationship between Khanum and Laila was based on the nature of their relationship as a homosexual couple. Consistent with this, Meyer's (2003) minority stress theory suggests that homosexuals are faced with distinct stressors owing to their sexual orientation.

At some point in both the movies there was an avoidance of the "other". In *Sparsh* Anirudh initially tries to avoid Kavita when he starts having mixed feelings about their relationship. In the other movie, when Khanum is standing naked in front of Laila, though she feels aroused, she stops herself and controls her urge for sexual intimacy and tries to avoid any such contact with Khanum as she is unsure of her sexual orientation.

A number of able bodied people consider disabled people to be inept with respect to maintaining fulfilling romantic relationships (Wasserman et al., 2016). Anirudh's character also portrayed such feelings when he thinks of the possible benefits Kavita could seek out of such a relationship with a disabled person. British Columbia Adolescent Health Survey (Saewyc, Poon, Wang, Homma, & Smith, 2007) reported that having confusion related to one's sexual orientation is not very uncommon. Laila also faced such an uncertainty when she realized that she was attracted to Khanum. This can also be inferred from the scene when she talks to Khanum and says "*I wish I could be that certain*".

The marriage rates of PWD are 41.1 per 1,000 which are significantly lower than for the general population (71.8 per 1,000) (Cohen, 2014). The inability of institutions to accommodate PWD on account of physical and communication barriers, fortifies people's views that disabled people and incapable of forming sexual relationships. PWD are often questioned when they decide to take the next step into marriage which is evident in a particular scene from *Sparsh*, when Anirudh asks Kavita about the kind of life they would have after marriage and says it would lead her to "*a sad life and emptiness*".

It is less likely for homosexual couples to raise kids than their heterosexual counterparts. However, this difference is declining particularly in the West (Gates, 2013). While societal attitudes towards homosexual relationships may be changing there is still some concern over the need for having children and their importance in an individual's life. Laila and Khanum's relationship was also questioned by Dhruv in the movie in a particular scene wherein he tells Laila that loving Khanum is an evolved choice and asks them on how they will ever have children. Laila also has some self-framed questions about how her parents would react and if they would ever accept her relationship and sexuality or not.

**Disability and its experience.** Both the movies portray disabilities of two different kinds. While *Sparsh* focuses on the visual impairment, *Margarita with a Straw* focuses on cerebral palsy. Significant scenes in the movie have brought out various nuances associated with the construct of disability. Certain covert symbols related to disability have also been identified in both the films such as Anirudh's "walking cane" and "the wheelchair" that Laila is dependent upon, "the ramp" that Laila's mother has to pull out every time she has to come out of the car.

Societal reactions to disability vary at great length from pity and sympathy to marginalisation and discrimination. Some people might also show genuine care and concern for the disabled individuals. In Laila's case she was subjected to the realization that she was "not normal" right from childhood and knew that her mother had to deal with sharp comments of the society. In Anirudh's case knowing that the visually impaired find it hard to find routes, the passer by changed the way he gave him directions and instead of visually telling him where the house was, he told him to rely on his auditory sensations. These concerns hold a worldwide relevance and are significant in contributing to the overall experience of disability and can be explained using the medical model as the society considers disability to be a problem within an individual and thus the effort to inculcate disabled people in the mainstream society. Thus, these children in Anirudh's school also remain at the periphery of the society waiting and hoping to become par with other "able-bodied" students.

For many PWD, access to aid and assistance are imperative to be able to participate in society. Both Laila and Anirudh were seen to be dependent on others for a number of everyday tasks. For instance, Anirudh was dependent upon his assistant to read out

letters to him, carry his things etc. and Laila was dependent upon her mother for everyday tasks such as combing her hair and giving her a bath.

Some of the major problems associated with disability are the negative attitudes of people and limited accessibility to the built environments (including public accommodations) transportations and information networks. Despite having laws in place which mandate buildings to be more PWD friendly, compliance is often very low. Both movies also address a very important concern when it comes to understanding the needs of disabled, that is lack of accessibility. In *Sparsh* various scenes in the movie portray how children who are visually impaired have access to very few textbooks that are printed in braille. *Margarita with a straw* also shows a particular scene when the college lift is not working and Laila along with her wheelchair has to be lifted by men. This can be explained using the social model of disability according to which the society creates barriers for the disabled.

PWD are also the recipients of unwanted attention. This attention is often not appreciated by them and often makes them realize that they deviate from the normal. When the anchor announces that the victory of Laila and her band was on account of the lyricist (Laila) being disabled, Laila is absolutely crushed, annoyed and shows her middle finger to the anchor. This scene signifies the sheer disappointment that she feels when she gets to know that she has won something not because of her talent but because she is disabled. This sympathy and pity is provided to disabled people can be explained using the charity model and both Anirudh and Laila display an innate need to be self-sufficient which can be explained using the disability model as independent living is fostered through it.

## Conclusion

After the data was analysed and common themes were identified, commonalities were observed in the way the “self and other” were depicted in both the movies. However, there were also significant differences that were observed in these portrayals. While Anirudh is seen as an older man working for an institution for the visually impaired, who has established himself well and is doing well in life. Laila on the other hand is a student in an inclusive institutional environment who is still finding her niche in life and wants to explore more in terms of relationships and love. Anirudh’s character is shown to be acknowledging his disability and the impairment

caused by it in different parts of the movie even though he does not like to be dependent on others, Laila does not openly acknowledge it throughout the film even though she is dependent on her mother for most things. The foundation of Anirudh and Kavita’s relationships lies on their mutual affection and love towards the children of the school, while for Laila and Khanum both are disabled and share the common experiences of disability which could be the founding stone of their relationship. Anirudh and Kavita’s relationship is clearly based on a relationship between an abled and disabled body, while Khanum and Laila’s relationship is of two disabled individuals. While for Laila, family is her support system, Anirudh finds himself in the company of a few supportive friends and his friendly assistant. Doubts and questions about Kavita’s intentions of marrying a person with disability often empower Anirudh’s mind but Laila, she doesn’t feel that Khanum who has a less severe disability than her is with her because of any compromise. Anirudh feels that Kavita treats him like a child whereas Laila openly says that Khanum will take care of her. Laila explores her sexuality and experiences relationships with various people, Anirudh, on the other hand does not hold any prior experiences of having any romantic relationship with someone else before meeting Kavita. While in the case of Anirudh, intimacy in the relationship is initiated by Kavita, in Laila’s case Khanum makes the first move. Anirudh and Kavita’s relationship is based on respect and understanding and maturity however, Laila and Khanum’s relationship is based on a lot of sexual intimacy and blooming love.

The study has helped in understanding the general discourse of disability in the context of marginalisation and exclusion. The study also provided an understanding and a hope for achieving a positive view of relationships in the lives of disabled portrayed in media. It provides an optimistic image of depictions of love and successful relationships possible in the disabled person’s life. It also gives us a positive view about the possibility of having a meaningful relationship between able bodied and disabled individuals.

Through this research an understanding was gained towards the various conceptions love and relationships of disabled people as portrayed through media. Various aspects of the ability to form and maintain relationships under the purview of disability were explored. Challenges and obstacles provided by one’s disability and how they interfere in the ability to love and be in a loving relationship were also

uncovered. Therefore, the findings demonstrate how then the understanding of oneself, other, and the relationship between oneself and the other contribute to the understanding of “self”. While disabled individuals may experience turmoil and conflicts in their experience of being with the “other” but this can also provide them the much-needed view of oneself that they were avoiding. Such explorations and findings can help in contributing to the understanding of disability in a holistic way and can help to uncover the importance of love and relationships portrayed by media. These portrayals are fraught with and reflect the stereotypical thinking of the society to some extent. However, they also bring about an understanding of how much the society has progressed and how much it still has to achieve.

Due to the paucity of time, only two movies could be included in the analysis and only Hindi movies were analysed and characters portraying the roles of disabled individuals living in the east could be studied. Paucity of relevant literature and specifically in the context of relationships among disabled people and the qualitative nature of the study affect generalizability of the results.

Including movies that display people across various cultures could help in a greater in-depth understanding of the topic. A greater number of movies could also be analysed which would help in a greater understanding of the experiences of disability. Movies with protagonists suffering from various kinds of disabilities can also be included for greater depth.

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# Making Lives Whole: Exploring Facets of Dog-Human Companionship

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*True friendship is symbolized by mutual trust and unquestioning support. Often dogs seem to be more loyal and dependable as companions than most human beings. Previous research studies have suggested that having a dog companion enhances one's physical and psychological wellbeing. In the present study, variables of personality, empathy levels and coping strategies were studied amongst those with a dog companion and those without a dog companion to gain an insight into how such companionship influences one's worldview. The sample consisted of 112 young adults belonging to the age group of 18 to 26 years (53 with dog companion and 59 without a dog companion). Data was collected using standardized tests; the Big Five Inventory (John 1992), the Basic Empathy Scale (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2006) and the COPE Inventory (Carver, 2013). Relevant statistical analysis was carried out by calculating independent samples t test and the effect sizes in order to detect a difference between the two groups in the three variables. Results showed that people with a dog companion possessed greater Openness and Empathy levels (cognitive and affective) in comparison to people without a dog companion. Similar differences were found between those who like and dislike dogs. Moreover, people who disliked dogs tended to use more of religious coping in stressful situations in comparison to those who like dogs. Overall, the study provides wide ranging implications of how having a faithful animal companion, has a therapeutic value and fulfils the inherent human need for affiliation and belongingness.*

**Keywords:** companionship, coping strategies, dogs, empathy, personality

## Introduction

Human beings are essentially social beings. We thrive on social contact and affiliations. The importance of interpersonal contact has been discussed by many prominent theorists. Freud, (1930) talked in length about it, although saw the motive as primarily sexual in nature. Maslow, (1968) ordered "love and belongingness needs" as third most important after the basic physiological and safety needs in his motivational hierarchy. Bowlby's (1969,1973) attachment theory also emphasized on the importance of forming and maintaining fulfilling relationships. Baumeister & Leary (1995) discussed extensively about the pervasive human drive to develop lasting and significant interpersonal relationships. It can thus be, understood that establishing fulfilling relationships is one of the most crucial aspects of human existence. Companionship refers to a sense of fellowship, amity and belongingness. This need for belongingness is usually fulfilled by friends and family. However, apart from fellow human beings, pets most frequently become significant companions in the lives of many. Animal companions meet the four fundamentals of an attachment bond: proximity seeking, safe haven, secure base, and separation distress, as supported by Ainsworth (1991). Barker & Barker (1988) suggested

that pet owners experience a close emotional bond with their animal companions and report that their pets provide them with a safe haven acting as a source of comfort in difficult times. Allen, Balscovich, & Mendes (2002) suggest that the demise of a pet triggers feeling of despair, causing immense grief and anguish (Gerwolls & Labott, 1995).

Human-animal interaction fulfils the need for belongingness for both individual and the pet. Baumeister and Leary (1995) discuss two essential features of belongingness. Firstly, people need frequent and pleasant interactions with others. Since the pet is involved in most of the family activities, it ensures frequent contact and bonding, viewing the pet as a part of the family. Secondly, people need to experience an interpersonal relationship characterised by stability and concern. The warmth and compassion provided by pet provides a sense of unconditional positive regard and a feeling of being cared for. There are many cases where, divorced individuals, people without a child, or elderly have reported forming close connections with their pets as they become substitutes for human companions.

Out of various domestic animals, pet dogs are most common. Dogs facilitate a symbiotic relationship where the owner and the dog companion

are mutually dependent for emotional support. They are not considered mere animals but “unique individuals who are minded, empathetic, reciprocating, and well-aware of the basic rules and roles that govern the relationship” (Dotson & Hyatt, 2008).

Dog companionship has been found contributing to physical and psychosocial well-being of many. Previous researches reveal that pet owners have high self-esteem, higher scores on interpersonal trust and social sensitivity as compared to non-pet owners. (Hyde, Kudrek, & Larson, 1983). The sense of responsibility while nurturing a dog builds up self-confidence and provides higher sense of independence and autonomy. In terms of personality, a study found people who preferred dogs scored higher on the domain of extraversion, particularly, on the facets of warmth, gregariousness, and excitement seeking. Sociable, friendly and high spirited were top personality traits found among those who preferred dogs (Levinson, 2009). According to some relevant researches, neuroticism and pet ownership are negatively correlated supporting the idea of Levinson that stability and emotional harmony are associated with pet ownership, especially dogs. (Levy, 1985) Besides personality, evidence from researches support that those who had a dog companion were more empathic than those who did not. (Daly & Morton, 2006). Not only dogs but in general young adults with pets during childhood were more empathic, more socially oriented and more likely to choose helping professions than those without a pet. Moreover, dog owners are reported to be significantly lower than non-dog owners in levels of perceived stress. The non-evaluative support experienced by participants from their dogs support the dictums of Allen, Blascovich, and Mendes (2002), who suggested that pet dogs and cats play a vital role in helping their owners cope with challenges by enhancing positive affective states (Lee & Chai, 2015). Recent studies also show that the company of a calm and affectionate dog companion, regulates stress in a better manner in comparison to the presence of a supportive adult when children are reading aloud or undertaking medical tests (Jalongo, Astorino, & Bomboy, 2004). In addition to psychosocial benefits, dog companionship is also associated with reduced depression, lower blood pressure and heart disease as individuals having dogs are found to be more physically active. (Dotson & Hyatt, 2008).

Since the contemporary fast paced lifestyle has made us overly ambitious and competitive,

experiences of loneliness and alienation have become common. Therefore, the objective of the present study, is to develop an understanding of how having a dog companion, helps fulfil the need of belongingness, and influences the worldview of a person. The target population consisted of young adults in the age group of 18 to 26 years. These years are typically marked by identity-seeking and exploration of relationships as seen in 5<sup>th</sup> (Identity vs. Role Confusion) and the 6<sup>th</sup> (Intimacy vs. Isolation) psychosocial stages proposed by Erik Erikson. One experiences increased responsibilities, societal expectations and work pressures as well as the changing dynamics of relationships resulting in high levels of stress, thereby, making it crucial to study this population. To understand how experiencing such loyal and faithful companionship influences one's worldview, we decided to study personality, empathy levels and coping strategies of individuals with and without dog companions.

## Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant difference between dog lovers and non-dog lovers in: (i) the domains of personality (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism), (ii) empathy and (iii) coping strategies used in stressful situations.

H2: There will be a significant difference between individuals with and without a dog companion in: (i) the domains of personality (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism), (ii) empathy and (iii) coping strategies used in stressful situations.

## Method

### Participants

112 participants belonging to age group 18 to 26 years (Mean age = 20.30 years) with 54 males, 57 females and 1 person who identifies as gender fluid residing in Delhi NCR were selected using Purposive Incidental Quota Snowball Sampling.

### Tools

The study was conducted using a set of standardized questionnaires, which included:

**Informed consent form.** To ensure informed and voluntary involvement in research, a consent form with preliminary details of the research was attached at the top of the questionnaire. The participants were informed about the ethics of the research, i.e. confidentiality of responses and their anonymity.

**Demographic Sheet.** The demographic sheet was prepared to gain details regarding the gender and age of the respondents. A set of questions aimed to tap the respondent's attitudes towards dogs as companions were asked at the end of the online questionnaire.

**The Big Five Inventory.** The Big Five Inventory (BFI) developed by John (1992) is a 44-item inventory that measures an individual on the Big Five Factors (dimensions) of personality, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Dimensions of Big Five Inventory

DIMENSION	EXPLANATION
Openness	Individual's readiness to try different things, think outside the box.
Conscientiousness	Tendency to control impulses and act in socially acceptable ways.
Extraversion	Extroverts "recharge" from interacting with others.
Agreeableness	Ability to get along with others.
Neuroticism	One's emotional stability and general temper.

**Basic Empathy Scale.** Jolliffe & Farrington (2006) developed a 20-item scale with a 5-point Likert-rating of items assessing cognitive and affective empathy. In BES, cognitive empathy is the capacity to comprehend other person's affective states, and affective empathy is the capacity to experience an emotive response when one faces the mental state ascribed to another person. For internal consistency, Cronbach's alpha for cognitive and affective empathy was .71 and .84 respectively. On analysing the correlations between test retest reliability, correlation for cognitive empathy was  $r=.6110$ ,  $r^2=.3733$ ,  $p<.001$ , and for affective empathy was  $r=.7980$ ,  $r^2=.6368$ ,  $p<.001$  (Carre, Stefaniak, D'Ambrosio, & Besche, 2013).

**COPE Inventory.** COPE Inventory (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989) is a 60-item scale with 15 subscales each assessing the way an individual copes with stressful situations. COPE items are on a 4-point Likert scale. The internal consistency ranges from 0.46 to 0.93. The test-retest reliabilities ranged from 0.42 to 0.89 at 6 weeks and from 0.46 to 0.86 at 8 weeks. Regarding the convergent and discriminant validity, correlation was found between relevant

scales and some personality measures (optimism, hardiness, self-esteem, Type A tendencies and trait anxiety). The 15 sub-scales measured by COPE are presented in Table 2.

### Procedure

After extensive literature review, the objectives of the study along with the variables to be studied and the relevant hypotheses were formulated. Next, the scales for assessment were decided upon. An online questionnaire that consisted of an informed consent form, a demographic sheet and the three standardised tests was prepared. Thereafter, participants were approached, and data was collected. The data collected was then tabulated in a spreadsheet and analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics software. Independent samples t-test was conducted to calculate differences in mean scores of the two groups obtained on the three variables. Furthermore, in order to help detect the size of the difference and to differentiate between a practically important difference and a statistically significant difference, effect sizes of the obtained significant differences were calculated respectively.



Table 2: Subscales of COPE Inventory

SUB SCALES	EXPLANATION
Active Coping	process of taking action to remove the stressor
Planning	ability to plan active coping strategies.
Suppression of competing activities	avoiding attention towards other activities to focus on the stressor.
Restraint	waiting for the appropriate opportunity to act
Use of instrumental social support	seeking advice and information about what to do
Behavioural disengagement	withdrawing effort from trying to accomplish the objective related to the stressor
Mental disengagement	resorting to psychological ways of disengaging from the goal affected by the stressor through sleep, daydreaming, self-distraction.
Positive reinterpretation and growth	seeing something good growing out of the situation
Focusing on venting of emotions	the ability to be aware of one's emotional distress and discharging those feelings.
Denial	rejecting reality of the stressful situation
Religious coping	turning to religion to deal with stress
Humour	dealing with the event by laughing at the stressor
Use of emotional social support	getting emotional support from someone
Substance use	resorting to use of drugs and alcohol as means of disengaging with the stressor
Acceptance	accepting the stressful event as real

## Results

Table 3: Frequency of activities participants engage in with their dog companion

Activities	Frequency
Playing	33
Walking	21
Cuddling	11
Feeding	5
Exercising (jogging, running)	5

Talking	7
Grooming	3
Relaxing	3
Others (Sleeping, Watching TV, Dancing, Listening to music, going for road trips etc.)	12

Total Number of Responses: 44

Table 4: Frequency of responses of ways participants take care of their dog companion

Response	Frequency
Provide food	53
Take care of medical needs	21
Provide shelter	25
Provide comfortable clothes during extreme weather	28
Others (Play, Groom)	4

Total Number of Responses: 53

Table 5: Table showing independent t test results, comparing mean scores of participants who like dogs with participants who dislike dogs on the dimensions of personality (df=110)

Personality Dimensions	Participants who like dogs (n = 69)		Participants who dislike dogs (n=43)		t	p-value	95% CI of the difference	
	Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			Lower	Upper
Openness	36.86	4.333	34.47	4.920	2.694	.008	0.632	4.148
Conscientiousness	29.52	6.065	30.12	4.712	-.548	.585	-2.746	1.557
Extraversion	26.48	5.490	25.16	5.494	1.233	.220	-0.799	3.430
Agreeableness	33.29	5.041	33.16	4.741	.133	.895	-1.771	2.025
Neuroticism	23.49	5.674	24.30	5.630	-.737	.463	-2.988	1.369

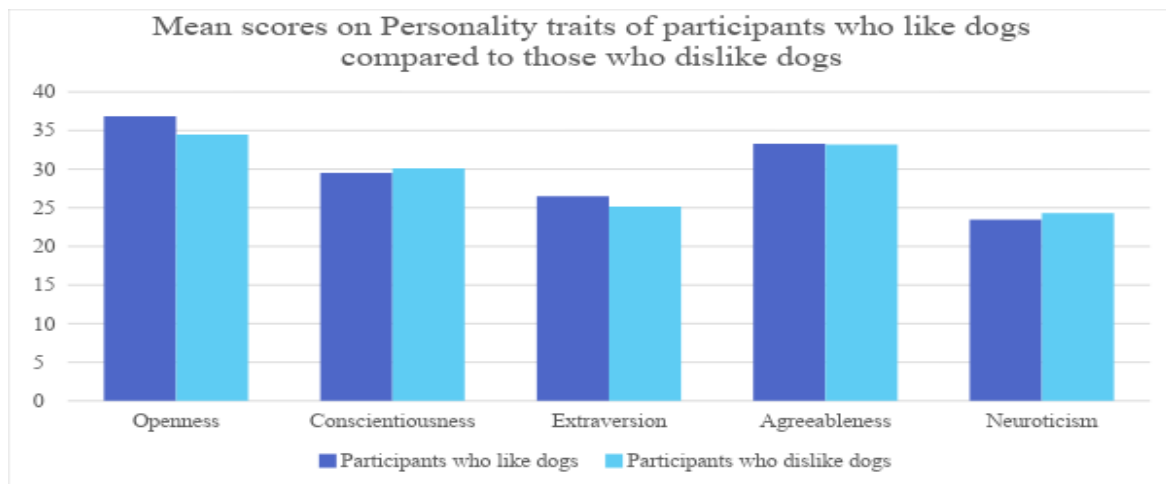


Figure 1. Mean scores of participants who like and dislike dogs in the dimensions of personality.

Table 6: Table showing independent t test results, comparing mean empathy scores of participants who like dogs with participants who dislike dogs (df = 110)

Empathy scores	Participants who like dogs (n = 69)		Participants who dislike dogs (n = 43)		t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
	Mean	S. D	Mean	S. D			Lower	Upper
Cognitive Empathy	35.88	5.323	33.12	5.025	2.734	.007	0.761	4.774
Affective Empathy	37.38	6.215	35.74	5.568	1.406	.163	-0.668	3.934
Total Empathy	73.26	9.540	68.86	8.749	2.449	.016	0.840	7.961

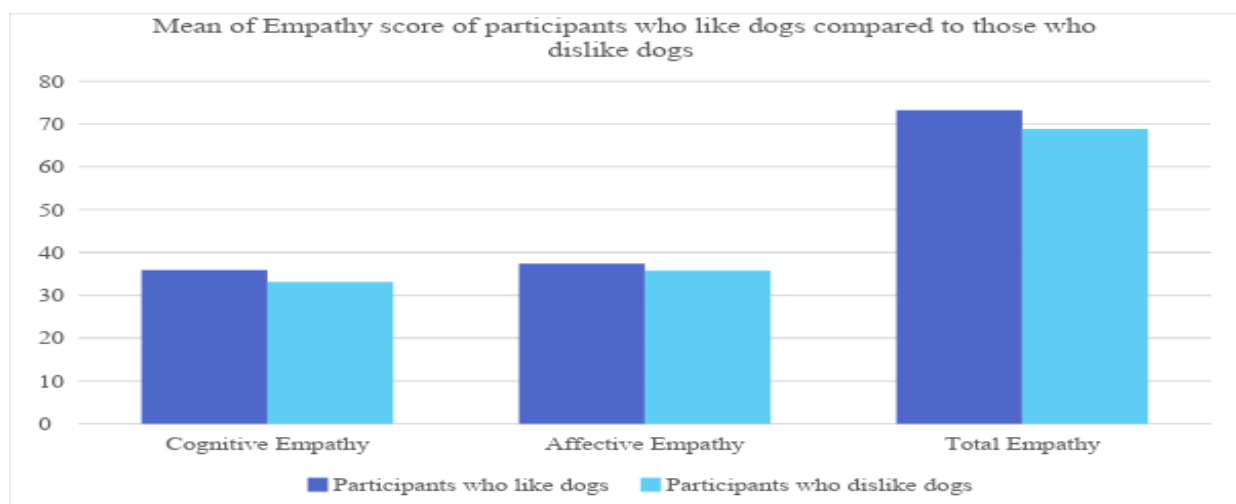


Figure 2. Mean empathy scores of participants who like and dislike dogs

Table 7: Table showing independent t test results, comparing mean scores of participants who like dogs with participants who dislike dogs in the dimension of coping

Scores on COPE Inventory	Participants who like dogs (n = 69)		Participants who dislike dogs (n = 43)		t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
	Mean	S. D	Mean	S. D			Lower	Upper
Positive reinterpretation and growth	11.87	2.229	11.84	2.115	.076	.939	-0.809	0.874
Mental disengagement	10.23	2.723	10.79	2.531	-1.085	.280	-1.580	0.462
Focus on venting emotions	10.32	3.188	10.40	3.274	-.122	.903	-1.317	1.164
Use of instrumental social support	11.00	2.965	10.49	3.319	.848	.398	-0.684	1.707
Active Coping	11.23	2.739	11.33	2.542	-.181	.857	-1.120	0.933
Denial	6.48	2.582	7.23	2.910	-1.432	.155	-1.798	0.290
Religious Coping	7.93	3.766	9.72	3.996	-2.394	.018	-3.278	-0.309
Humour	9.23	3.762	8.44	3.119	1.152	.252	-0.569	2.149
Behavioural Disengagement	7.04	2.794	7.65	2.776	-1.122	.264	-1.681	0.466
Restraint	9.86	2.451	10.21	2.122	-.782	.436	-1.252	0.543
Use of emotional Social Support	10.12	3.256	9.33	3.682	1.188	.238	-0.528	2.109
Substance use	5.86	3.079	5.51	2.857	.590	.556	-0.810	1.479
Acceptance	10.97	2.990	11.07	2.394	-.183	.855	-1.168	0.971
Suppression of competing activities	10.17	2.407	10.88	2.342	-1.533	.128	-1.627	0.207
Planning	11.71	2.996	11.65	3.046	.101	.920	-1.102	1.220

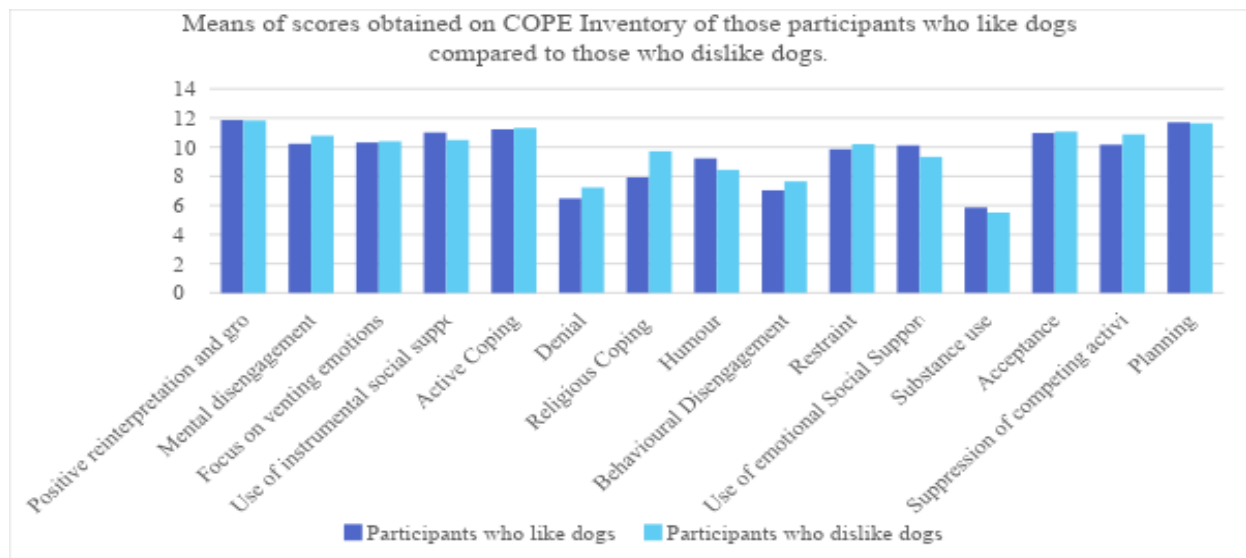


Figure 3. Mean of scores obtained on COPE Inventory of participants who like and dislike dogs

Table 8: Table showing independent t test results, comparing mean scores of participants with and without dog companions on the dimensions of personality

Personality Dimensions	Participants with dog companion (n = 53)		Participants without dog companion (n = 59)		t	p-value	95% CI of the difference	
	Mean	S. D.	Mean	S. D.			Lower	Upper
Openness	37.26	4.184	34.75	4.837	2.931	.004	0.816	4.221
Conscientiousness	29.06	6.106	30.37	5.010	-1.252	.213	-3.400	0.767
Extraversion	26.6	5.756	25.41	5.253	1.151	.252	-0.864	3.258
Agreeableness	33.57	4.881	32.95	4.953	.663	.509	-1.228	2.462
Neuroticism	23.87	5.495	23.75	5.824	.114	.910	-2.005	2.249

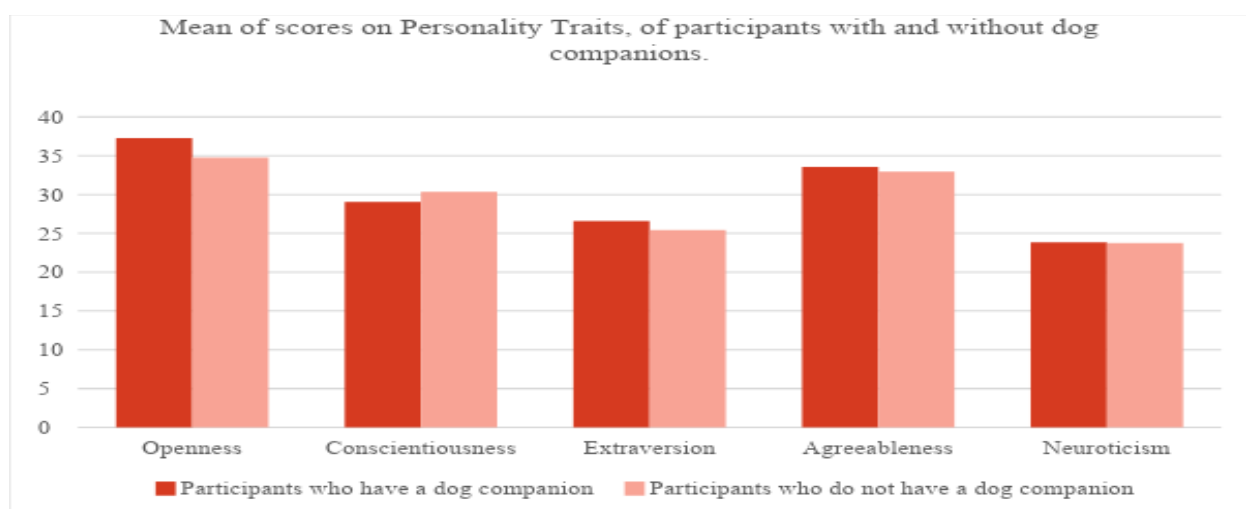


Figure 4. Mean scores of participants with and without dog companions on the dimensions of personality.

Table 9: Table showing independent t test results, comparing mean empathy scores of participants with and without dog companions.

Empathy scores	Participants with dog companion (n =53)		Participants without dog companion (n =59)		t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
	Mean	S. D	Mean	S. D			Lower	Upper
Cognitive Empathy	36.11	4.878	33.66	5.548	2.472	.015	0.486	4.418
Affective Empathy	38.13	6.089	35.51	5.691	2.357	.020	0.417	4.830
Total Empathy	74.25	8.914	69.17	9.346	2.933	.004	1.646	8.505

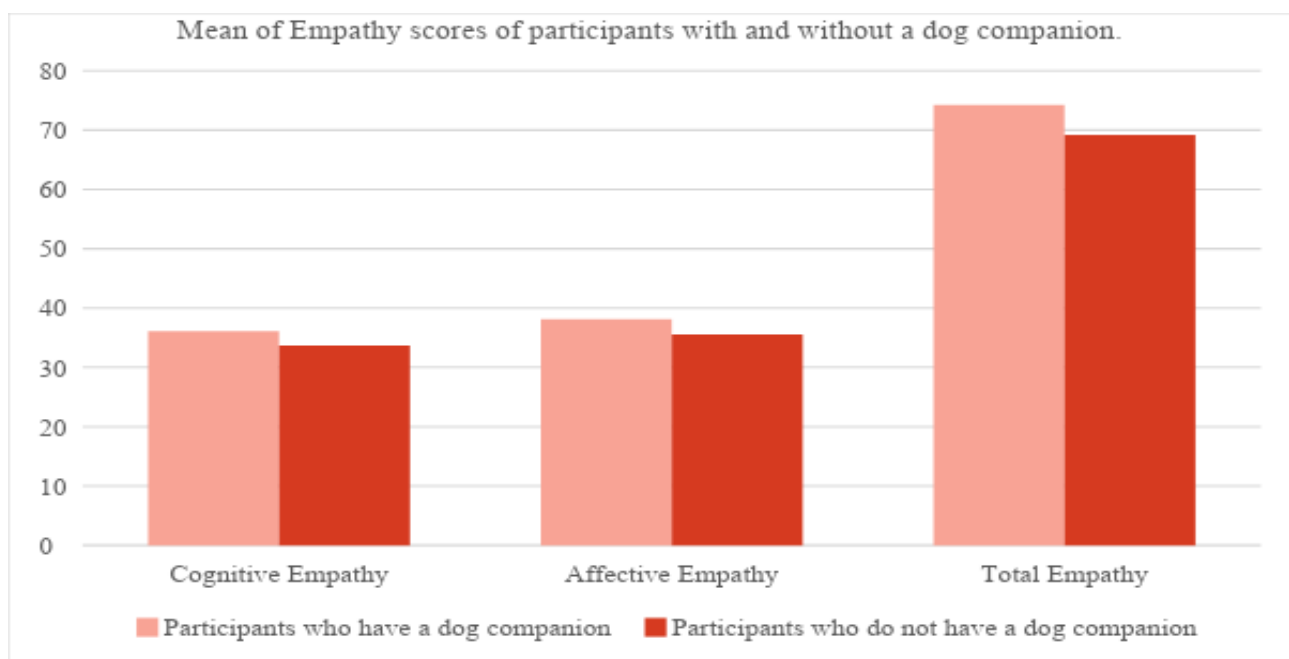


Figure 5. Mean empathy scores of participants with and without dog companions.

Table 10: Table showing independent t test results, comparing mean scores of participants with and without dog companions obtained on COPE Inventory

Scores on COPE Inventory	Participants with dog companion (n = 53)		Participants without dog companion (n = 59)		t	p-value	95% Confidence Interval of the difference	
	Mean	S. D	Mean	S. D			Lower	Upper
Positive reinterpretation and growth	11.72	2.315	11.98	2.055	-.644	.521	-1.084	0.552
Mental disengagement	10.32	2.834	10.56	2.500	-.473	.637	-1.237	0.760

Focus on venting emotions	10.68	3.056	10.05	3.334	1.036	.303	-0.574	1.831
Use of instrumental social support	10.98	2.892	10.64	3.295	.573	.568	-0.830	1.504
Active Coping	11.25	2.695	11.29	2.640	-.085	.932	-1.043	0.957
Denial	6.60	2.691	6.92	2.769	-.602	.548	-1.336	0.713
Religious Coping	8.30	3.998	8.9	3.894	-.799	.426	-2.075	0.883
Humour	9.06	3.845	8.81	3.261	.362	.718	-1.088	1.574
Behavioural Disengagement	7.30	2.946	7.25	2.669	.090	.929	-1.004	1.099
Restraint	9.85	2.507	10.12	2.166	-.610	.543	-1.145	0.606
Use of emotional Social Support	10.30	2.913	9.37	3.810	1.437	.153	-0.352	2.210
Substance use	6.25	3.339	5.25	2.570	1.770	.080	-0.119	2.101
Acceptance	11.17	3.173	10.86	2.360	.582	.562	-0.735	1.346
Suppression of competing activities	10.32	2.533	10.56	2.284	-.524	.601	-1.140	0.663
Planning	11.72	3.002	11.66	3.026	.098	.922	-1.075	1.187

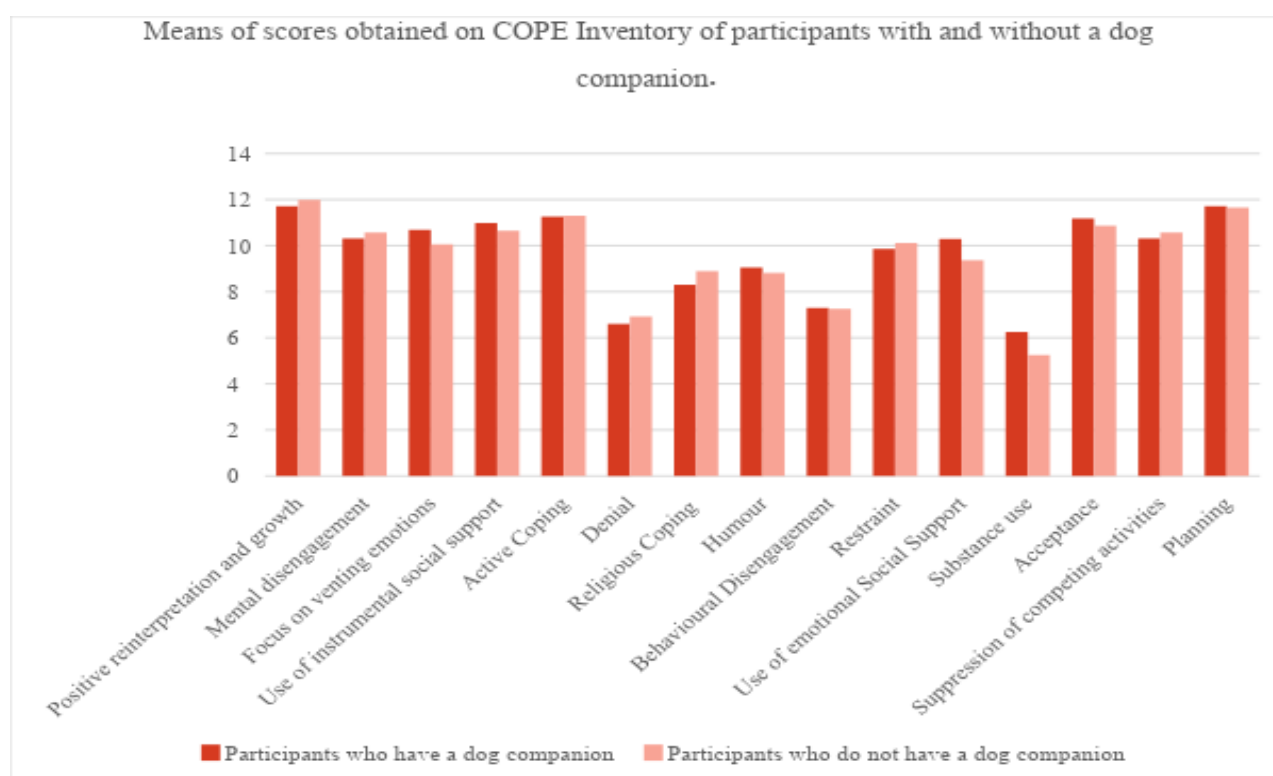


Figure 6: Mean scores obtained on COPE Inventory of participants with and without dog companion

## Discussion

*"Dogs are not our whole life, but they make our lives whole." -Roger Caras*

The meaning of friendship and fidelity was probably introduced to mankind by our fellow canine friends. As a popular proverb goes- "A dog is a man's best friend", there is no doubt to the fact that dog companions provide unending support and warmth to their human friends. The goal of the present study, is to develop an understanding of how having a dog companion, helps fulfil the innate human needs of belongingness, and influences the ways in which one responds to various life situations. For the purpose of this study, Dog Companionship has been described as a relationship of friendship, amity and closeness between an individual and his canine friend. Taking care of dogs and actively engaging with them can be seen as building companionship with them. Three variables were chosen, namely personality, empathy and coping strategies, to gain understanding of the worldview of both people with and without dog companions and those who like and dislike dogs. Statistical Analysis, i.e. independent t-test was conducted to calculate differences in mean scores existing in all the above-mentioned variables, for all mentioned categories.

### *Spending time and caring for ones' dog companion*

Participants often describe their dog companions as a part of their family and so, they become an inseparable part of their lives. Out of a total of 44 participants who answered the question- '*How do you spend time with your dog companion?*' 33 participants reported that they play with their dogs, while 21 participants reported that they spend time by walking with them. The childlike innocence and enthusiasm of a dog provides a chance to divert one's mind from daily stressors, and thus, people most commonly engage in such activities. It is also interesting to note that 7 out of 44 participants spend time talking with their dog companions and 11 out of 44 of them spend time Cuddling them. Dotson and Hyatt (2008) have discussed in their study the tendency of people to see their dog companion as more of a person and less of an animal (anthropomorphism). It is often seen that the dog owners talk to their dogs, possibly in "Motherese" or "Doggerel" (Russell, 1996). As dog companions are often seen as substitutes for children, siblings or other important relations, people pamper them like they would have probably indulged their human relatives.

Out of a total of 53 participants who answered the question '*How do you take care of your dog companion?*' all 53 reported '*By providing food*'. Apart from this, 28 participants report providing comfortable clothes during extreme weather, 25 participants report providing shelter, and 21 participants report providing medical care. During the course of their friendship, dog becomes an inseparable part of one's life and people start taking care of them in whatever capacity they can. Since providing food and clothing do not require expending of much resources they are most commonly reported ways in which dogs are taken care of. Providing shelter and medical care becomes important for the dog companion's wellbeing and thus are also frequently reported.

### *Personality*

In order to find out whether there exists any difference between people with and without dog companions, as far as the personality trait of openness is concerned, an independent samples t-test was conducted. A statistically significant difference was found at  $t(110) = 2.931, p < .01; d = 0.55$ . The effect size for this analysis ( $d = 0.55$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's convention (1988) for a medium effect ( $d = 0.50$ ). The results suggest that individuals with dog companions have higher scores in Openness ( $M = 37.26, S. D = 4.184$ ) in comparison to those without a dog companion ( $M = 34.75, S. D = 4.837$ ). Similarly, an independent samples t-test was conducted to find the differences in the levels of openness between those who like and dislike dogs. The test was found to be statistically significant at  $t(110) = 2.694, p < .01; d = 0.51$ . The effect size for this analysis ( $d = 0.51$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's convention for a medium effect ( $d = 0.50$ ). The results show that those who like dogs have higher scores in Openness ( $M = 36.86, S. D = 4.333$ ) in comparison to those who dislike dogs ( $M = 34.47, S. D = 4.920$ ).

The dimension of Openness taps intellectual curiosity, creativity and a proclivity for novelty. It is the extent to which a person depicts preference for unconventionality over strict routines. The results obtained are consistent with findings of Perrine & Osbourne (2015) as they suggest that self-labelled dog people are seen to score high on the dimension of independence. The free willed nature of a dog finds reflection in his human companion. Belk (1996) in her study uses the metaphor- '*pets as an extension of self*'. The dog companion and human being enter a symbiotic relationship wherein all emotional states are shared amongst them. As dogs are essentially



accepting creatures, people who enjoy their companionship, also become more accepting of unconventionality over the course of their friendship. Additional support on this finding has been provided by Dotson and Hyatt (2008) as they suggest that dog owners show greater willingness to adapt than others.

No significant differences have been noted as far as conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism are concerned, between both people with and without dog companions and people who like and dislike dogs. Previous research trends indicate that there exists high levels of extraversion and agreeableness amongst people with dog companions. (Levinson, 2009; Gosling, Sandy & Potter, 2015) These researchers suggest that a dog companion facilitates social interaction, particularly while participating in activities like walking with the dog. However, no significant differences have been found in the present study. It may be possible that for individuals with a dog companion, their canine friends may act as a substitute for other individuals, thereby, decreasing their likelihood for, seeking human contact. This is supported by Johnson and Rule (1991) who suggest the existence of a negative correlation between maintenance of a relationship with pets and extraversion. They propose that it is possible for pets to be stand-ins for other human beings in the lives of these people. Furthermore, the non-significant results in other four personality variables in the present study reflects that both the groups in the population are same as far as personality is concerned. The tendency to perceive pet owners as a group with an all-encompassing trait rather than just mere individuals and see them as extraverted, sociable, and lively may not always be correct. Non-dog owners may be as lively and extraverted as the pet owners.

Lastly, research trends suggest the existence of lower levels of neuroticism amongst dog owners. Ryder (1973) and Levinson (1980) have posited that pet-ownership may reduce the sense of experienced alienation and reduce levels of stress and anxiety. Dogs provide space for emotional catharsis by lending a patient and a non-judgmental ear. However, it is also important to note that taking care of a dog makes people more empathetic and attuned to finer emotions of everyday life. Thus, while having a dog companion reduces vulnerability to stress, it may at the same time increase the intensity in which emotions are experienced. This may have contributed to an inconclusive difference in neuroticism scores between people with and without dog companions.

### **Empathy**

In order to find whether there exists a difference between individuals with and without dog companions in terms of empathy levels, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The test was found to be statistically significant,  $t(110) = 2.472$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $d = 0.47$ . The effect size ( $d=0.47$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's convention for a small effect ( $d=0.20$ ). These results suggest that those who have a dog companion ( $M = 36.11$ ,  $SD = 4.878$ ) were high on cognitive empathy as compared to those without a dog companion ( $M=33.66$ ,  $SD= 5.548$ ). Similarly, an independent t-test was conducted to find whether a difference exists in empathy between those who like and dislike dogs. The test was found to be statistically significant,  $t(110) = 2.734$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $d = 0.53$ . The effect size ( $d=0.53$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's convention (1988) for a medium effect ( $d=0.50$ ). These results indicate that those who like dogs ( $M=35.88$ ,  $SD=5.323$ ) were high on cognitive empathy as compared to those who dislike dogs ( $M=33.12$ ,  $SD=5.025$ ). Research suggests that nurturing behaviour towards animals often inculcates sensitivity and empathetic understanding for fellow human beings. Daly & Morton (2006) found that children with a favourable attitude towards animals displayed higher empathy than those who had unfavourable attitude towards animals. Being receptive to the cues of one's pet, understanding and being aware of the pet's movements, wishes and facial expressions helps the individual become more emotionally sensitive and attuned to subtleties in communication. This sensitivity and ability to understand others' emotional states is reflected as higher scores in cognitive empathy amongst dog lovers and those with a dog companion.

The t-test for affective empathy,  $t(110) = 2.357$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ;  $d = 0.44$  was found to be significant indicating that those having a dog companion ( $M=38.13$ ,  $SD=6.089$ ) were high on affective empathy than those without a dog companion ( $M=35.51$ ,  $SD=5.691$ ). The effect size ( $d=0.44$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a small effect ( $d=0.20$ ). Caring for a dog teaches one to care for another being, thus reducing self-centeredness amongst individuals, particularly adolescents. It enhances perspective taking abilities, as one is constantly caring for his dog companion and thinking of his well-being as opposed to his own. This ability extends for other fellow human beings as well, wherein one becomes more considerate towards others' needs and feelings. This ability to experience emotions from the perspective of another translates

into higher scores in affective empathy amongst dog lovers and those with a dog companion.

The t test for total empathy,  $t(110) = 2.933$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ;  $d = 0.55$  was also found to be significant indicating that those having a dog companion ( $M=74.25$ ,  $SD=8.914$ ) were high on total empathy than those without a dog companion ( $M=69.17$ ,  $SD=9.346$ ). The effect size ( $d=0.55$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a medium effect ( $d=0.50$ ). The t test for total empathy conducted among those who like and dislike dogs,  $t(110) = 2.449$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ,  $d = 0.48$  was also found to be significant indicating that those who like dogs ( $M=73.26$ ,  $SD=9.540$ ) were high on total empathy than those who dislike dogs ( $M=68.86$ ,  $SD=8.749$ ). The effect size ( $d=0.48$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a small effect ( $d=0.20$ ). The unconditional support demonstrated by one's dog companion, alongside the abilities of silent communication one inculcates while caring for a dog all contribute to higher scores in total empathy amongst those with dog companions.

### **Coping Strategies**

In terms of coping strategies, an independent samples t-test between those who like and dislike dogs was found to be statistically significant at  $t(110) = -2.394$ ,  $p < .05$ ,  $d = 0.46$  for the dimension of religious coping. The effect size ( $d=0.46$ ) was found to exceed Cohen's (1988) convention for a small effect ( $d=0.20$ ). The results indicate individuals who dislike dogs have higher scores on religious coping ( $M=10.21$ ,  $S. D=2.122$ ) in comparison to those who like dogs ( $M=9.86$ ,  $S. D=2.451$ ).

However, no significant differences were found between participants with a dog companion as compared to those without a dog companion in using coping strategies during stressful situations. Both the groups have been found using problem focused and emotion focused strategies to the same extent. A reason for this could be that participants without a dog companion may have strong social support and human companion in real life for dealing with everyday stress as participants with a dog companion. A similar research supporting this found a significant negative correlation between scores of perceived social support from friends and family and scores of perceived stress among non-dog owners. Likewise, among dog owners, scores of perceived social support from family, friends, and dogs were not related to perceived stress scores (Lee & Chai, 2015).

### **Conclusion**

The human-dog relationship is a truly special one. It not only provides unending support and love but also changes one's perception of the world. In the present study, people with a dog companion were seen to possess greater Openness and Empathy levels (cognitive and affective) in comparison to people without a dog companion. Similar differences were found between those who like and dislike dogs. Dogs are essentially loyal and accepting creatures, and humans who enjoy their companionship imbibe these qualities, thus becoming more open to unconventionalities. Moreover, taking care of a dog teaches one to be sensitive, and emotionally attuned to subtle nuances in communication. People who disliked dogs tended to use more of religious coping in comparison to those who like dogs. No significant differences however were reported between participants with and without a dog companion in using coping strategies during stressful situations. Overall, the study attempted to provide an understanding of dog-human companionship and its subsequent influence in people's lives.

### **Implications and future directions**

The present study has wide ranging implications particularly in the nascent field of Animal Assisted Therapy. Dogs have been seen as loyal and faithful companions who fulfil the innate human needs of belongingness. They provide unconditional positive regard, which is indeed psychotherapeutic and provides a safe space for people to explore their feelings. In the modern day context, where people are becoming increasingly self-centred, lonely and alienated, such companionship restores the willingness to live life even in difficult times. This suggests a scope for more researches addressing dog-human companionship to emerge successfully and viewing the company of a dog companion as a stress buster in future. However, since the present study was done on a sample of only 112 participants, it suffered from the limitation of low generalisability. Moreover, since companionship and belongingness are complex human experiences, a qualitative exploratory study would provide valuable insights. Since, the present study has only focused on young adults, an enquiry on dog companionship and its influence on children and elderly is suggested. Lastly, other variables like perceived stress, self-esteem and perceived competence can also be studied.

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## Parenting a Child with Autism: Shared Experiences and Unique Realities

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*The present study touches upon the confluence of two sensitive topics i.e. disability and parenting. The objective of the present research is to explore the experiences of the parents (particularly fathers) of children with autism. Three couples were identified using the purposive sampling from the hospital setup in Delhi. The data was gathered using the semi-structured interviews and was subjected to thematic analysis. The discussion of results was carried out in reference to the delineated research questions. It was also found that there were stark differences in the parenting experiences of mothers which can be understood in reference to the stereotypical gender roles prevalent in the Indian society. It also emerged that there was a significant impact of child's condition on the marital relationship of the couples where the relationship can either get strengthened or compromised depending upon the support available, coping strategies adopted and engagement levels of both the spouses. The findings of the research have further been discussed and related to the previous researches in this area.*

**Keywords:** parenting, autism, inclusion, lived reality, disability

### Introduction

International Classification of Functioning, Disability & Health/ICF, (WHO, 2001) defines disability as “an umbrella term for all or any of the following components- Impairments: problems in body function or structure; activity limitations: difficulties in executing any activities; participation restrictions: problems an individual may experience in involvement in life situations”. Over a billion people are estimated to live with some form of disability, which corresponds to about 15% of the world's population. Furthermore, the rates of disability are increasing in part due to ageing populations and an increase in chronic health conditions. According to census of India 2011, the percentage of disabled to total population of India is 2.21%. However, if we look at the census figures of other developed and developing nations closely, for instance, the census figures of Australia says 18.5% people have disability, USA 12.1 %, Sri Lanka 7%, Pakistan- 2.65%, it can be assumed that 2.21 % in India is a huge underestimation. It would defy the logic to think that India is the sole exception for the lower figures. The reasons for such underestimation could be numerous, for example limited categories for enumeration of disabled people, lack of sensitivity on the part of trainers on the issue of disability, inability on the part of disabled population to report about their disability as there still continues a lot of stigma regarding any disability especially in rural areas.

One of the forms of mental disability is autism. “Autism is a complex childhood developmental disorder characterized by significant impairments in reciprocal social interaction; communication; and restricted, repetitive, and stereotypic patterns of behaviours, interests, and activities.” (Butcher, Carson, & Mineka, 2007, p. 575). Autism is the third most common developmental disorder five times more prevalent in boys than girls. Typically the onset of symptoms for most children with autism occurs during late infancy.

Parenting a child with autism is a particularly challenging task in itself. A number of studies have demonstrated that parents of children with developmental disabilities experience higher levels of stress than parents of typically developing children (e.g. Hodapp et al., 2003; Johnson et al., 2003). Webster et al. (2008) found that the scores in the Parenting Stress Index were above 85th percentile in over 40% of parents of children with developmental delay, indicating significant parenting stress. The stress of raising a child with autism varies across the family's life cycle and with the extent of the child's disability. Various studies in the discipline of psychology have explored the lived experiences of parents with autistic children, issues regarding schooling and inclusion, challenges faced by the parents, experiences of siblings and their reactions.

Woodgate (2008) and Kourkoutas (2012), studied the experiences of parents with autistic

children using the qualitative interviews. Based on these studies, both the researchers concluded that the initial feelings of parents upon diagnoses of the child with autism includes a range of negative emotions such as shock, distress, terror, denial, depression, guilt, helplessness and emotional emptiness. Despite of the early onset of the disorder, the diagnosis itself is often delayed as awareness is limited and the behavioural symptoms are dismissed as temporary problems. Woodgate (2008) also found that one of the most significant concerns that families of children with autism face is the lack of awareness and insensitivity on part of the people around such as relatives, neighbours or acquaintances. They reported facing repeated embarrassment in social settings and hostile reactions in public spaces when their child behaved inappropriately.

One of the significant researches in Indian context on this topic has been carried out by Divan et al. (2012). They investigated the experiences of parents with autistic children using phenomenological approach with a sample of 12 parents. The study concluded that with diagnosis of autism, parents, especially mothers, embark on a difficult journey. The intensive care giving places excessive demands on parents, which in turn can lead to negative emotional reactions, increased stress levels and a sense of isolation. The care giving process negatively affects the professional, social and interpersonal aspect of parent's lives. Often mothers are the primary caregivers; hence, they sacrifice their aspirations and literally become homebound.

Pathappillil (2011), using in-depth interviews, examined the experiences of 11 Indian mothers having a child with autism. The study revealed that while motherhood is a fulfilling and rewarding experience for Indian mothers in general; mothering a child with autism is perceived as more of a challenge. Many mothers in the study indicated that a child with autism in Indian society is more likely to be looked down upon due to social comparison. The cultural beliefs and constricted mindset of Indians contribute to the stigma attached to any kind of abnormality including autism. The dominant belief of Indians in the notion of '*karma*', that action of past life will determine the present life's successes, failures and illnesses further worsens the condition of the child. Severe physical or mental illness is perceived as punishment for past wrongdoings of the individual's previous lives. Due to lack of awareness and social stigma, mothers are resistant to accept the problems of the child and are reluctant to seek professional help. The child is seen

as a mistake or a burden on the family. It is the mother who is blamed for everything and she is made personally responsible for the child's behaviour. Other family members, including the father, take on a more distant and inactive role in the child's life.

As evident by the review, the experiences of mothers is well documented and explored in the current literature, but, the experiences of fathers are often ignored and side-lined. Not only there are negligible studies focusing on the experiences of fathers, even the researches claiming to study the experiences of parents have very few fathers in the sample, most participants are mothers. Exceptions to this trend is a studies by Collins (2008) and Martins (2013) that examined the experiences of 15 fathers raising a child diagnosed with autism. The study revealed that the initial reactions of fathers range from sorrow and grief to guilt and lack of acceptance. Additional problems included, issues related to diagnosis and treatment, their dissatisfaction with mental health system and their apprehensions about the future of the child. However, their marital relationship provided strong support. The study also found that most fathers employed avoidant style coping where they chose to detach themselves mentally by playing video games, reading, or listening to music whereas some of the participants also reported having faith in 'God' which provided a means of effective coping. Additionally, research by Martins (2013) Fathers articulated that within the negative experience, there was a sense of relief and meaningfulness. Although it had a negative impact on their social life and marital life. Fathers in the sample reported making use problem focused means of coping i.e. they coped by gathering additional information regarding their child's condition, as well as by exploring alternative treatment options. This is contradictory to Collin's research.

The traditional role of mother is familiar, and the influence of maternal behaviour on young children is also well researched. Knowledge, however, of the comparable role of the father and their influences on child's development is relatively limited. Somehow their role is always considered secondary to the mother's role. It is equally significant to focus on men and their experiences of fathering a child with autism.

In accordance with this idea, the present study aims to give voice to perspectives of fathers which are often missing in the current literature and also aims to bridge the gap in the existing literature which is one sided and raises concerns only encountered by mothers of autistic children.



For the purpose of present research three research objectives and questions were delineated. First, to explore the involvement of both parents (particularly fathers) with autistic children with respect to the nature of involvement, meaning making and challenges experienced by them. Second, to explore the differences in the experiences of mothers and fathers. Third, to explore the impact of care giving demands of the child with autism on the marital relationship of the couple.

## Method

The study was situated in the paradigm of qualitative research. In order to develop an in-depth understanding of the experiences of parents, the design chosen for the present study was instrumental multiple case study analysis. As a method of data collection in the present inquiry, semi-structured qualitative interview has been used. All participants were interviewed individually and each interview session lasted for about forty-five minutes to an hour. The interview sessions were audio-taped. Before starting the interview sessions, informed consent was taken from all participants. The participants were assured of the confidentiality and careful handling of the data. In order to ensure the confidentiality, the names of all participants were changed to pseudonyms. Data collected from interviews in the form of transcripts was subjected to thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the present study, the method of inductive thematic analysis has been employed to let the themes emerge from all possible theoretical perspectives. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the data at both implicit and explicit level, the themes derived are interpreted at semantic and latent level.

A total of six parents, three mothers and three fathers of children with varying degrees of autistic disorders coming from New Delhi were selected as participants. The participants were chosen using purposive sampling. The participants were contacted through a prominent hospital in New Delhi. The parents ranged in age from 33 to 35 years. The children with autism ranged in age from 3 to 5 years, with age of initial diagnosis ranging from 2.0 to 2.5 years.

Many participants were approached some declined due to their taxing schedules and many refused due to the sensitivity of the topic itself. The process of data collection was the most challenging, especially in case of fathers. During the interactions with participants, mothers were more expressive than

the fathers. It was extremely difficult to obtain detailed and accurate information from fathers as their verbal and emotional expression was limited. Despite extensive probing, their narratives were brief, emotionally distant and lacked elaboration. Yet, the analysis revealed an interesting pattern of both similarities and dissimilarities across cases.

## Results and Discussion

### Section 1

To make sense of the story of each of the three couples, this section presents a brief case analysis of all three couples highlighting the relevant background information and presenting an overview of their relationship dynamics and parenting experiences:

#### *Case 1: Zara and Zayan Ahmad*

Seher Ahmad is 5 years and 6 months old girl who was born in Jammu and Kashmir. She was diagnosed with autism at the age of 3. Zara Ahmad (Seher's mother) is a 35 years old school teacher by profession from Jammu and Kashmir, living in New Delhi from last 4 years with her husband and two children. She has been married to Zayan Ahmad, Seher's father, for the last 6 years who is a medical doctor by profession. Her second child Hamid is 3 years old; he was conceived and born in Delhi. Initial period of her pregnancy with Seher was stressful as her relationship with her in-laws was disturbed. Also, due to her professional commitments, she couldn't give her daughter enough time in the early years. At that time, her parents were primarily taking care of the child. Zara and Zayan's relationship has seen frequent ups and downs, though it has substantially improved post their movement to Delhi. Off lately, Zara is having difficulties with her job as she is not being given leave extension and thus, is required to travel to Kashmir on a weekly basis. For their financial needs, family is primarily dependent on Zara's income as Zayan does not have a stable job. They also are supported financially from the families on both sides.

It is surprising that despite Zayan being a medical doctor, the awareness of the nature of autism in the couple was very limited to begin with. They also come from a background where there are not enough resources available for the treatment of the child. Zayan mentioned, "*In Jammu the awareness level is very low, particularly about these types of cases*". This has forced a transition in their life where they have shifted their base from Jammu to Delhi. This transition has brought with it multiple changes, some positive and some negative. While their marital

relationship has seen improvement due to non-interference from the extended family as Zara mentions, *"We bonded very well here only because we didn't get time"*. But, the professional life of Zayan has been compromised. There are also challenges being faced by Zara as she has to keep on travelling back to Jammu on a weekly basis. Hence, a lot of care giving demands have been forced on Zayan and he probably feels burdened by them, he even mentioned, *when she (wife) is not around everything is done by me only, washroom to bathing and everything, feeding, clothing...*. At an overall level, both the parents are trying to deal with the situation.

#### Case 2: Jenny and Rahul Fernandez

Roy Fernandez is 4 years old, conceived and born in Delhi. He was diagnosed with autism at the age of a year and a half. Jenny Fernandez is a 33-year-old Human Resource Executive living in Delhi from last 4 years with her husband. She is on the verge of quitting her job due to extensive care giving demands. Her husband is Rahul Fernandez and they had a love cum arranged marriage. He is a 35 years old training executive by profession. He is a patient and down to earth person. Their married life is a satisfactory one.

Jenny and Rahul are representatives of urban modern parents who think through their parenting strategies well in advance. The diagnosis came as a shock to them as they were hoping for everything 'normal'. Rahul reported the moment of the birth of his child as a 'priceless moment' and articulated expectations of a "smooth" life afterwards which did not last for long. When enquired about reactions upon diagnoses, he reported, *"We never wanted to accept it, we were using our own ways of covering things"*. But, they have managed coming out from this initial shock very well and have now taken a very pro-active constructive approach to parenting. In this context Rahul proactively stated, *"So I feel okay, I don't feel ashamed and I don't take him as an autistic child"*. In order to meet the excessive care giving demands, they have made multiple changes in their personal and professional lives. Rahul is trying to balance his professional and personal life in order to be there for the child, while, Jenny is in the process of leaving her job. Although this decision of leaving her job is very difficult for her, she mentioned, *"So leaving my job, my career after a span of working in an organisation for good 8 years is a big change for me"*. When further probed about their relationship Rahul reported, that their married life has been good overall but as a couple, their intimacy has been compromised and they have not been able to *"spend time together"*. At an

overall level, their approach to parenting represents a balance of emotions, rationality and practicality.

#### Case 3: Neha and Gautam Das

Arun Das is 3 years and 6 months old; conceived and born in Delhi. He was diagnosed with autism at the age of 2. Neha Das is a 33 year old house wife originally from Kolkata has now moved to Delhi 3 years back after her husband's transfer. She has completed her education from School of Learning and Architecture. Instead for a full time job, presently she has opted for a part time job wherein she is required to report to the workplace only once in a week. She has been married to Gautam Das, a 34 years old manager by profession for the last 8 years. They are childhood friends and it was a love marriage. They both reported satisfaction with their marital relationship.

Neha and Gautam, it seems that have been thrown into a situation about which they are totally unaware, In one of Neha's narrative, she mentioned, *"I was shocked, I could not understand what happened, we had no idea about autism"*. Since they had no idea about autism, initial period seemed manageable and they were hoping for quick and complete recovery. However, after realizing the true nature of the disorder, they are getting impatient as Neha mentioned, *Gradually I'm realizing that it is very difficult*. Their unrealistic expectations about instant recovery of the child make them feel dejected. It seems that their outlook is more fatalistic wherein they do not take charge of their child's life and their excessive and exclusive reliance on experts represents that they are not enthusiastically making efforts to improve the child's condition. Post diagnosis, Neha has made significant changes in her life. She reported being career oriented from the very beginning but because of Gautam's transfer she left her job as a teacher in Kolkata and moved to Delhi. She changed her field and started Architecture course in Delhi. She wanted to work but post Arun's diagnoses; she has become homebound and started with a part time job. She feels dejected about the same, she mentioned, *"I was planning to take up job, but now I can't even think of it and I feel really sad about it"*. Being the prime caregiver, she feels excessively burdened. As a parent, Gautam takes a secondary role, providing for mostly for the financial needs. As a couple, being childhood friends, they share a good chemistry and are supportive of each other. But, recently, the intimacy in their marital relationship has been compromised. Gautam expressed his concerns regarding the same and said, *"The time we used to devote to each other*

*has been compromised, we used to go to theatres, concerts but now we have stopped everything”.*

## Section 2

The experiences of every participant are unique in their own respective ways, yet, there are both convergences and divergences. This section aims at discussing the similarities and differences across all the cases, particularly, with respect to the delineated research questions.

The **first research objective** was to explore the involvement of the parents (particularly fathers) with the autistic children. The analysis in the previous section indicates that there is marked increase in the involvement of the parents with the child post diagnoses. The nature of their involvement typically includes doing the activities recommended by the experts. Involvement of the fathers was observed at both functional level and emotional level. For instance, due to his wife's frequent travelling, Zayan's involvement with Seher includes taking her to the hospital, getting the treatment done, learn whatever she learns in the sessions, go back home and make her perform the activities that she has learnt. Almost everything is done by him including bathing and feeding. However, it seems that his parental role is driven more by responsibility rather than the emotional connect. He also feels burdened by the care giving demands which are imposed on him because of the circumstances. When probed in this context he mentioned, *when she (wife) is not around everything is done by me only, washroom to bathing and everything, feeding, clothing...usually a male in Indian society does not do it very often*. Zara has also made all necessary arrangements at the work and home front to be able to spend as much time as possible with her child that she could not do in the initial year. She reported feeling guilty over her absence and is now making up for it.

It was interesting to note that Rahul has devised interesting strategies to establish connect with Roy over something that they both enjoy i.e. music. He enthusiastically reported the fact that his son possesses a guitar and enjoys playing it just like him. It is clear from the analysis that he proactively takes responsibility and is enthusiastically engaged with the child. Also, he takes dealing with his son's condition as learning opportunity as he reported that, *“it's an opportunity given by the God to make me a better individual”*. Jenny has also taken a major decision of quitting her job and being a full-time care giver for her son despite being very career oriented and she is trying to take it constructively. This demonstrates her

commitment to her child's well-being. Gautam's role primarily includes providing financially for the family and his involvement with Arun is rather limited as compared to other fathers in the study. He accepts that he does not get to spend much time with Arun because of his professional commitments; he still tries to make up for it whenever possible. His role in his child's care giving is limited and he also did not explicitly express his concern over this issue. Neha's involvement with her son is absolute in the sense that she is single-handedly responsible for all his activities. She feels burdened with the same as there is no respite from these demands and even stated, *“I feel as if I'm not living a normal life”*.

It is quite clear from the analysis that the involvement of the fathers and mothers is in sync with the stereotypical roles prevalent in Indian society. Most of the times, the mothers are the primary care giver and engage in more daily based activities such as bathing; feeding whereas fathers are primarily responsible for providing for the financial needs. A significant finding by Divan (2012) also found that often mothers are the primary caregivers; hence, they sacrifice their aspirations and literally become homebound. Even in the case of the most liberal couple who have claimed to share an egalitarian relationship, i.e. Rahul and Jenny, when it came to the choice of any one of them leaving the job despite both of them having the same professional standing, it was Jenny who quit her job. Although she exerted that, *“I'm the mother or I'm the female and that it's a patriarchal family where he should earn; it was nothing like that it was a mutual decision”*.

In reference to the **second research question** that aimed at exploring the differences in the experiences of mothers and fathers, it can be said that although mothers and fathers share the experience of parenting, but, there exist qualitative differences in the way they understand and experience parenting. Both the parents expressed grief upon diagnoses, this confirms the previous research findings by Kourkoutas (2012) & Woodgate (2008) that reported the initial reactions of parents upon diagnoses include a range of negative emotions such as shock, distress, denial. Fathers took a more practical and rational approach in dealing with the situation by deciding to take concrete steps for the treatment whereas mothers were more emotionally driven and experienced emotional breakdown. During the discussion, Zayan mentioned, *“When I got to know about this, I straightaway decided to come to Delhi for the treatment”*. Zara on the other hand stated, *“We were*



very upset, listening that your child is a..." Jenny reported being 'broken'. Rahul on the other hand reported being, "emotionally weakened" but immediately took a decision of starting with the treatment. Both Rahul and Neha had no clue about Autism and hence they were confused. Mothers are also more actively seeking the support from people around such as friends and other parents facing similar issues and derived strength from these relationships. In contrast to mothers, the support network for the fathers was limited to their spouses and parents. They are emotionally restrictive in sharing their concerns with others and hence did not seek support from others. An exception to this trend is Rahul. He has an active group of friends who have helped him immensely over the years.

Lack of awareness was apparent in all the cases irrespective of gender. This finding is also consistent with previous finding by Kourkoutas (2012) & Woodgate (2008) that despite of the early onset of the disorder, the diagnosis itself is often delayed as awareness is limited and the behavioural symptoms are dismissed as temporary problems which is further reinforced by the reassurances provided by family and significant others. Also, the experience of social dejection and marginalization was shared irrespective of gender. Rahul while reporting the incident at a telecommunication shop reported feeling, "embarrassment, anger, frustration". The negative impact of societal insensitivity on parents has also been confirmed in a study by Woodgate (2008) which concluded that one of the most significant concerns that families of children with autism face is insensitivity on part of the people around such as relatives, neighbours or acquaintances. All the participants shared the socially unpleasant experiences. Mothers got more emotionally affected by societal reactions, whereas fathers took a practical approach and believed that being patient would help them to deal with the situation in a positive manner.

The **third research objective** of the present study was to assess the impact of intensive care giving demands on the marital relationship of the couple. In this regard, all the couples reported that the nature of their marital relationship has undergone considerable change post their child's diagnoses with autism. It is difficult to classify this change as completely positive or negative, however. Here, it would be safe to say that all the couples reported that the excessive care giving demands have taken a toll on the intimacy in their relationship. This is in sync with the findings by

Martins (2013), which also found that fathers reported that their relationship is adversely affected with their spouse. Though this experience have brought them together as a couple where they are extending their emotional support and love to each other in order to give best possible environment to their child, yet, they are left with space where they can engage with each other like other couples do not have such responsibilities. It is interesting to note that while Gautam reported missing the exclusive time he would spend with his wife, the intimacy between Zayan and Zara has truly developed only after their movement to Delhi which was primarily for the treatment purposes.

## Conclusion

The present study aimed at exploring the experiences of parents with autistic children. The parents who participated in this study provided a wealth of valuable information about their experiences and struggles. The experiences of every participant are unique in their own respective ways. The significant themes common to all six participants that emerged from analysis include: Initial parenting experiences; excessive care giving demand; changing routines and increased involvement; lack of awareness; discontent from societal reactions emerged as some common themes in all the cases. Though the present enquiry was exploratory and had a specific scope, yet it has significant implications. It not only uncovers the much neglected concerns and voices of fathers, it also helps us gain insight into their parenting experience and coping strategies. This study also reinforces that much more familial and social support is required for parents with autistic children so that they are buffered from the stress and thus, can engage in better parenting which is crucial for the child with autism. Support is especially warranted after the diagnoses where the parents go through a period of emotional turmoil. The parents should also be counselled by experts in this phase so that they adopt constructive coping strategies and engage in more proactive approach to parenting.

Based on the literature review and current findings, some suggestions for the future research emerged. Firstly, since the present study included limited participants due to time constraints, researchers need to direct more studies towards experiences of fathers of children with special needs with varied backgrounds and socio-economic strata. Additionally, since the awareness about autism is lacking at every level and leads to significant problems for parents, there may be an action-based research carried out to address this issue. And lastly

researchers should investigate the efficacy of the specific coping strategies employed by the parents through determining the perceived impact of different coping strategies on parental psychological well-being and functioning.

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## Guilt and Shame Proneness in Young Adults: Exploring Relation with Personality and Well-Being

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*Shame and guilt are common emotional experiences in an individual's life. Even though a substantial part of our life is spent in either experiencing or avoiding shame and guilt, we disengage from such deliberations. The present study focuses on bringing forth the relationship between personality traits and the emotions of guilt and shame and its subsequent impact on the well-being of the individual. The study aims to understand if personality mediates the management of guilt and shame in everyday life experiences. For the purpose of the study, 80 participants (40 males, 40 females) in age range of 15 to 30 years, using convenient and purposive sampling, were selected. For the purpose of data collection, Big Five Inventory (McCrae and John, 1992) was administered to determine personality traits of an individual while Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (Cohen, Wolf, Panter and Insko, 2011) was administered to understand an individual's propensity to experience guilt. Additionally, Flourishing Scale (Diener et al, 2010) was used to assess the subjective well-being of an individual. Subsequently, t scores and correlation coefficients were calculated to study the interplay of personality, guilt and shame and wellbeing in young adults. Results indicate that gender differences exist on negative self-evaluation aspect of shame and significant correlations have been observed between facets of guilt and shame and personality traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness. Further it has been observed that participants high on guilt repair have higher subjective well-being.*

**Keywords:** guilt, shame, well-being, personality traits

### Introduction

Theology, philosophy and psychology particularly psychoanalysis along with literature are among the few disciplines which have studied the constructs of guilt and shame. These two emotions are experienced by a lot of people on a daily basis but they fail to understand them. These emotions colour the way we feel, act and respond to situations in ways that sometimes we don't even realize. The subtle yet significant difference that exists between these two emotions is often overlooked by many. The common understanding of these emotions is a bit similar to the words from where they are derived from. 'Shame' that is derived from the root *kam/kem* translates to 'hiding' or 'to cover' and 'Guilt' from the old English word 'gild' which loosely refers to money. Shame and guilt are often thought of as being similar. A lot of discussions has been done on the differences and similarities between these two emotions and the possibility of it being interrelated. Guilt is understood often as subset of moral shame. As the individual is seen as the causal agent, guilt and shame are considered to be similar. (Karlsson & Sjöberg, 2009).

At the same time, shame and guilt can also be seen as differing phenomenologically. Individuals can feel exposed to public disapproval when ashamed. Guilt is more attuned to personal worries of having done wrong. Moreover, a failure that can be controlled also culminates in guilt which often results in individuals trying to make amends. However, it is the sense of failure stemming from inadequacy that leads to shame and is also characterized by negative self-evaluation (Einstein & Lanning, 1998). Lindsay-Hartz (1984) through a qualitative study elucidated on the structural differences in experiencing guilt and shame. They found out that shame is associated with feelings of 'getting out' of the situation while guilt is involved with an effort to make things right again. Moreover, they found out that when an individual experience shame, they 'feel small' and the experience transforms their identity while when they experience guilt, it only shakes their identity. The act of reparation and an interpersonal transaction was found to be more associated with experiencing guilt. Baumeister, Stillwell, & Heatherton (1994) found guilt arises in interpersonal transgressions and this emotion was most common in interpersonal relationships.



Distinguishing between guilt and shame also depends to the degree to which individuals are applying these emotional labels to identify their own actions or the actions of others. Schmader & Lickel (2006) found out that people find it much easier to label experiences of others correctly while found it difficult to distinguish shame and guilt in self-caused acts.

The overlapping definitions and experience of states of shame and guilt makes it difficult to discriminate one from other, nonetheless, important differences exist between the two (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011).

The nature of these differences, however, are hotly contested. As of now, the difference between shame and guilt is majorly understood on two criterion- the self- behaviour distinction and the public-private distinction. Following the self-behaviour distinction, guilt emerges when an individual makes unstable internal attributions that are specific to individual's actions and lead to the negative feeling in regard to the behaviour that they have committed. On the other hand, shame arises when one makes stable internal attribution, not specific to an action but global about one's self, leading to negative feelings about the global self.

Differentiating guilt and shame through the public-private distinction proposes that misdeeds that remain private are more likely to produce feelings of guilt while the failures that have been publicly disclosed are more likely to needle feelings of shame. Following this idea of distinction, guilt arises when an individual believes that s/he has done something that doesn't comply with their conscience and is linked with a personal feeling of doing something wrong. Shame, alternatively, arises when the failures and misdeeds of an individual get the public eye. Thus, guilt and shame are in this way different. (Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko, 2011). This brings into the equation of how people who experience both of these emotions are different thus bringing the concept of individual differences into play.

### **The Present Study**

Guilt and shame are often interchangeably used and are considered as synonymous words in the English language. But are these two distinct emotions? What do I feel when I am berated? Is it the same if I do something wrong and feel anxious? Why is it that a similar situation has a different effect on two people with all aspects same but different temperaments? Does my personality make me more

prone to feeling shades of guilt and shame? Does this influence my happiness? Further does the experience of guilt and shame influence a person's well-being.

The present study makes an attempt at exploring the relationship between the experience of guilt and shame and people's personalities and their well-being. We do not experience guilt and shame in isolation. Who we are, the people we interact with and how we cope with different life experiences also impact our feelings of guilt and shame. Our actions can result from our need to eliminate that guilt or hide from the shame. The role of culture is also very important in this. A culture is made up of different individuals who share the same beliefs, customs, encompassing language and rituals to a large extent. To understand the cultural bases in experiencing Shame and Guilt, Wallbott and Scherer (1995) hypothesized that whereas 'shame cultures' regulate the behaviour of their members via external sanctions, 'guilt cultures' have internalized sanctions. In other words, shame cultures regulate conduct via compliance and external pressure on the individual and guilt cultures do the same via internalization. Hence according to this India would be a 'shame culture.' For example, in India, lust is accepted at an individual level but rejected at a social level. There is little guilt at lust, but rather, shame if that lust is exposed to society.

Even in the same culture, no two people are truly similar. No two people can ever have the same experience of life, the same perspective, go through similar trials and tribulations, have the same mind or even react to the different life situations in the same ways. Thus, what makes everyone unique is the personality of an individual. According to Allport (1937), "Personality is the dynamic organization within the individual of those psychophysical systems that determine his characteristics behaviour and thought". While Freud believed that an individual's personality was determined largely by one's unconscious thoughts and desires. These are among the various conceptualisations of the construct of personality. The trait approach to personality focuses on studying human personality by identifying and measuring the degree to which certain personality traits are existing in individuals. Traits are defined as recurring patterns of behaviours and thought, such as openness to new things, anxiousness, shyness; exist from individual to individual. Traits are an individual's patterns of understanding and dealing with the world around them. In the present study, Big Five approach to personality (McCrae & John, 1992)

has been used that makes use of factor analysis trait approach. Often called by acronym OCEAN, this model includes the dimensions: Openness to Experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Neuroticism. Personality plays an important role in determining how prone we as individuals would be to the emotions of guilt and shame. In the same situation, one person might be weighed down by the feeling of guilt while someone else might just walk away unaffected by it. Similarly, someone might be ashamed in a situation while others might not be. Understanding how personality affects these emotions is important as it controls how we react to the situation in daily lives. Einstein & Lanning (1998) believed that by following Singer & Bonanno (1990) argument, the trait of extraversion can be associated with shame and guilt could be related with the traits of agreeableness and conscientiousness. Einstein & Lanning (1998) found out that significant correlations were present between the five traits but they were related to guilt and shame in different ways. While shame was positively correlated with neuroticism and agreeableness, it was negatively correlated with extraversion. In regard to guilt, there were positive correlations between empathetic guilt and agreeableness and between anxious guilt and neuroticism.

As a member of this dynamic world, we have to deal with these and numerous other emotions in our daily lives. It is important to understand how these emotions, especially guilt and shame affect us. This study also looks into the Subjective well-being (SWB) of individuals calculated using the Flourishing Scale. Subjective well-being basically refers to how people experience the quality of their lives and includes a combination of both emotional reactions as well as cognitive judgments of individuals. It is stable over time and has relations with the personality traits of an individual. SWB includes under it positive and negative affect, life satisfaction and happiness.

Thus, the purpose of the present study was to offer an understanding into the relationship between personality traits and their dynamic interplay with shame and guilt and its subsequent effect on the subjective well-being. Shame and guilt are emotions that almost all experience, but upon which, only few wish to dwell even when a great part of one's life is spent in either experiencing or avoiding shame and guilt. The study aimed to understand if a correlation prevails between an individual having a certain disposition and his/her ordeal with guilt and shame as constructs in their everyday experiences. Previous

researches had focused only on the trait approach and its correlation with guilt and shame. Moreover, the effect on subjective well-being in correlation with guilt and shame has hardly been explored. This research aimed to understand whether certain traits are more prone to experiencing emotions of anxiety and guilt. The aim was not only to understand this correlation but also if it had an effect on their self-perception of well-being and happiness.

## Method

### Participants

Target population for the present research was individuals belonging to the age group of 15-30 years (Mean age = 22.5 years). Purposive and convenience sampling were used to select the participants for the survey. Initially, a pilot study was conducted on 10 students. The data was then collected from 83 participants but due to incomplete responses by some respondents, the final study consisted of 80 participants.

### Measures

**GASP (Guilt proneness and Shame Proneness Scale).** Developed by Cohen, Wolf, Panter and Insko (2011). The GASP assesses guilt proneness and shame proneness of individuals and not the feelings of these emotions in the moment. It consists of 16 questions that are based on scenarios. Respondents read about these situations likely to occur in their everyday lives and give their reactions to these. This scale has internal reliability and construct validity > 0.60.

The GASP comprises two guilt-proneness subscales: Guilt Repair and Guilt negative behaviour evaluation; and two shame-proneness subscales: Shame withdraw and Shame negative self-evaluation. Guilt Negative Behaviour Evaluation items describe negative feelings one experiences about the actions one has committed (e.g., "you would feel that the way you acted was pathetic"). Guilt-repair items are more focused on the actual behaviour or intention of the individual to recompense for the transgression (e.g., "you would try to act more considerately toward your friends"). Shame-withdraw items describe actions focused on hiding or withdrawing from the public (e.g., "you would avoid the guests until they leave"). Shame Negative Self Evaluation items describe the negative feeling one experiences about oneself (e.g., "you would feel like a bad person").

**Big Five Inventory.** Big Five Inventory (John & Srivastava, 1999) is a 44-item inventory that

assesses a person on five dimensions of personality namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness to experience. The scale has a reliability of 0.89 and validity of 0.92.

**Flourishing scale.** Developed by Diener et al. (2010), it is an 8-item scale used to assess the subjective well-being of individuals. This scale focuses on important aspects of human functioning that include positive relationships, feelings of competence, to having meaning and purpose in life (Diener, et al., 2009). The validity and reliability of the scale was given to be >0.60.

### Procedure

The planning of the study included the formation of the questionnaire as well as the selection of the target population. The pilot study was conducted on 10 participants. The data obtained was studied carefully and analysed. Following this, the questionnaire was revised and edited. The final study

was done on individuals from the age range of 15 to 30 years. Convenience and purposive sampling were followed to get the total sample size of 80. A Google Form was constructed to be circulated to participants belonging to various regions. The questionnaire was available in only one language i.e., English, so only those who could understand English were included in the sample. The consent of those willing to participate was taken in the beginning of the questionnaire and were asked to fill their required demographic information. The participants were requested to give honest responses and they were assured that the information they shared would be used for academic purposes only. The final questionnaire had 4 sections – a general introduction and consent form, Guilt and shame proneness scale, OCEAN's Big Five Inventory and Flourishing scale. After the data was collected, the analysis was carried out using SPSS. The analysis included an independent t-test to look for gender differences and correlations between and shame and guilt subscales and personality traits.

## Results

Table 1: Table showing Means, SD and t on variables on gender.

	MEANS		SD		t (df=78)
	Males	Females	Males	Females	
Shame Withdraw	3.0000	3.1625	0.92161	1.00408	-0.754
Shame Negative Self-Evaluation (Nse)	4.9250	5.4688	0.97763	1.05792	-2.387*
Guilt Repair	5.5938	5.5438	0.83721	0.90562	0.256
Guilt Negative Behaviour Evaluation (Nbe)	5.1750	5.1438	1.14662	1.24921	0.117

\*p<.05

Table 2: Correlation between Shame and Guilt subscales and Personality Traits

	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>Shame Withdraw (1)</b>	.223*	0.094	-0.150	-0.046	-0.021	0.003	0.097	-0.285*	-0.060
<b>Shame Negative Self-Evaluation (2)</b>	1	.410**	.243*	0.137	.368**	.239*	0.124	-0.041	0.211
<b>Guilt Repair (3)</b>		1	0.134	0.110	.270*	.277*	-0.092	0.058	.251*
<b>Guilt Negative Behaviour Evaluation (4)</b>			1	0.194	.407**	.431**	-0.057	0.178	.324**
<b>Extraversion (5)</b>				1	.262*	.372**	-.262*	.358**	.380**
<b>Agreeableness (6)</b>					1	.395**	-0.173	.302**	.298**
<b>Conscientiousness (7)</b>						1	-.260*	.417**	.718**
<b>Neuroticism (8)</b>							1	-.330**	-.332**
<b>Openness to Experience (9)</b>								1	.414**
<b>Flourishing Score (10)</b>									1

\*p&lt;.05; \*\*p&lt;0.01

## Discussion

Guilt and shame are common emotional episodes in everyone's lives where they unbeknown to us, they drive and influence our behaviour. Many times they are considered to be the same while at others there are stark differences between them. The differences in individual proneness to guilt and shame in various situation and its respective impact on well-being intrigued us. Also, our curiosity was heightened by the fact that almost no researches were done on a topic of this nature solely in the Indian context.

In the present study, it was found that both males and females score higher on the guilt subscales namely Guilt Repair and Guilt NBE than on the shame subscales namely Shame withdrawal and Shame NSE.

Out of these, Shame withdrawal was the least. However, in a study by Anolli & Pascucci (2005) which examined the experience of these emotions as well as their proneness in Indian and Italian young adults, it was found that Indian participants responded more strongly to experiences of shame than to guilt as compared to Italians who showed a reverse trend. In terms of proneness towards these emotions, Indians were found to be sensitive to both guilt and shame.

In our study, gender differences were found on shame NSE. Women are more likely than men to experience shame NSE ( $t = -2.387$ ,  $p = 0.019$ ). In the Indian context, due to Gender Stereotyping women tend to adhere to cultural norms which subjects them to be obedient and submissive of their actions and experience societal pressure leading to feelings of



shame if deter from societal norms while men enjoy greater autonomy.

### ***Relationship between Guilt and Shame***

From Table 2, it can be seen that there is a positive correlation between Guilt Negative Behaviour Evaluation and Shame Negative Self-evaluation ( $r = .243, p < 0.01$ ). Experience of a situation or a self-afflicted action/behaviour is never isolated to be interpreted either from an individual perspective or a social standpoint. It is a dynamic interplay of both. Hence the emotions attached to both social and personal experience come into play prompting a tangle of interrelated emotions distinct in their own right yet. Cohen, Wolf, Panter, and Insko, (2011) believed that since guilt and shame, particularly guilt-NBE and shame-NSE, are self-conscious emotions and often occur together so an individual feels bad not only about their behaviour but themselves too when they commit transgressions. The correlation between Shame NSE and guilt repair showed a strong positive correlation ( $r = .410, p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that the people who feel bad after committing a private transgression to try and alleviate this feeling by partaking in repairing acts. A positive correlation between shame withdrawal and shame NSE ( $r = .223, p < 0.01$ ) is also found. Shame-withdrawal items describe action tendencies focused on hiding or withdrawing from the public while shame negative self-evaluation (NSE) items describe feeling bad about oneself. Both are negative self-conscious emotions often occurring in league with each other in social situations. Thus, following a transgression, an individual feels bad about both their behaviour and themselves.

### ***Personality Correlates of Guilt and Shame***

From Table 2, a significant negative correlation between shame withdrawal and openness to experience ( $r = -.285, p < 0.01$ ) can be seen. Openness to Experience focuses on all aspects of an individual's mental and experiential life. If a person who is low on openness's exposed to a public transgression, then he/ she would experience shame withdrawal and try to hide/ escape the situation in order to reduce the possibility of experiencing shame. Similar results were observed in a study by Einstein & Lanning (1998) where a reversed relation was seen between openness to experience and shame.

Shame Negative Self Evaluation items define the negative feeling one experiences about oneself (e.g., "you would feel like a bad person"). In turn, this subscale garners some information about the moral

trait in an individual while the shame withdraw scale does not. In this study, we found a significant positive correlation between Shame-NSE and agreeableness ( $r = .368, p < 0.05$ ). Agreeableness includes traits such as altruism, tender-mindedness, trust, and modesty and refers to a prosocial and communal orientation towards others. High scorers on Agreeableness show empathy and are altruistic, while low scorers depict selfish behaviour and a lack of empathy. Moreover, in regard to decision making, the individuals with high shame-NSE scores would have a low probability of unethical decision making as compared to individuals with high shame-withdraw scores who would be more likely to make unethical decisions. Thus, people who are high on shame NSE are also high on agreeableness. Such individuals because of their empathy, trust, kind and sympathetic nature are much prone to find faults with oneself rather than other so experience more instances of shame negative self-evaluation. In our study, we found a negative, though not significant, the correlation between agreeableness and shame withdrawal. While previous research by Cohen, Wolf, Panter, & Insko (2011), these correlations have been found to be significant.

Also, there is a significant positive correlation between shame negative self-evaluation and conscientiousness ( $r = 0.239, p < 0.01$ ). Conscientiousness is characterized by actions such as thinking before acting, self-discipline, purposeful action, following rules, organizing and planning but too much priority to such acts can become psychologically overbearing (Erden & Akbag, 2015). Thus, it can be said that conscientious individuals may not be able to free themselves or let go of previous transgressions or failures which leads to shame NSE.

Guilt-repair items are more focused on the actual behaviour or intention of the individual to recompense for the transgression (e.g., "you would try to act more considerately toward your friends"). In the present study, we have a significant positive correlation between guilt repair and agreeableness ( $r = .270, p < 0.01$ ) and guilt repair and conscientiousness ( $r = .277, p < 0.01$ ). The individuals who are high on agreeableness are thus, predisposed to prosocial behaviour and are perceived as warm, caring and kind; such individuals would have a greater tendency of correcting their transgression/failure to reduce the guilt that their actions have brought. Similarly, individuals high on conscientiousness; who follow rules and norms would be more inclined toward correcting their wrongs to compensate for the amount of guilt they feel. This was also found in a research by

Lanning and Einstein (1998). Guilt Negative Behaviour Evaluation items describe negative feelings one experiences about the actions one has committed (e.g., “you would feel that the way you acted was pathetic”). It has a significant positive correlation with agreeableness ( $r = .407, p < 0.05$ ) and conscientiousness ( $r = .431, p < 0.05$ ). This is collaborated by previous studies done by Einstein and Lanning (1998) and by Abe (2004). Einstein and Lanning (1998) found that both Neuroticism (N) and Agreeableness (A) were related to aspects of shame and guilt but in a different way. Since agreeable personality types always are cooperative and take care of those around them, they are more in tune with others feelings and any action on their part that can disrupt communal harmony induces the feeling of guilt in them for having failed to maintain peace. While on the other hand conscientious individuals being task oriented and think before acting. When their own actions lead to a private failure they find loopholes in their planning and actions thus, tend to feel guilt at not having acted in an orderly fashion. Other significant negative correlations Einstein and Lanning (1998) were able to achieve was between Extraversion and Anxious Guilt, and Openness and Shame. In the present study, there was no significant correlation between extraversion and guilt/shame but a significant negative correlation between openness and shame was present.

#### ***Relationship between Guilt and Shame, Personality and Well Being***

Furthermore, we found the Subjective well-being (SWB) using the Flourishing Scale. The scale provides a single psychological well-being score which is indicative of how people experience the quality of their lives and include both emotional reactions and cognitive judgments. Results indicate that flourishing had a significant positive correlation with guilt repair ( $r = .251, p < 0.01$ ) and guilt negative behaviour evaluation (NBE) ( $r = .324, p < 0.05$ ). Guilt is a negative emotion that decreases the comprehensive evaluation of a person's own personal satisfaction and happiness. So, they would have a greater tendency of correcting their transgression/failure to reduce the guilt that their actions have brought to restore their self-perception of being happy and satisfied.

In the present study, SWB was found to have a strong correlation with the personality traits too. It is positively and significantly correlated with extraversion ( $r = .380, p < 0.05$ ), agreeableness ( $r = .298, p < 0.05$ ), conscientiousness ( $r = .718, p < 0.05$ ) and openness to experience ( $r = .414, p < 0.05$ ). It is

negatively but significantly correlated with neuroticism ( $r = -.332, p < 0.05$ ). Neuroticism tends to predict low scores in subjective well-being whilst extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness to experience tend to predict higher SWB. It can be reasoned that an individual who scores high on neuroticism would suffer from more depressed states and would view life from a negative lens, which negatively impacts their well-being. Albuquerque, Lima, Matos, & Figueiredo (2013) found that neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness facets were significantly able to explain the variance in subjective well-being components (positive affect, negative affect and life satisfaction) thereby, suggesting personality traits played a role in the subjective evaluation of one's well-being. In a meta-analysis by Steel, Schmidt, & Shultz (2008), all aspects of SWB were found to be significantly related to neuroticism, extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. Though neuroticism was the strongest predictor of overall SWB, quality of life was strongly predicted by neuroticism, extraversion and conscientiousness and modestly by openness to experience and agreeableness.

With the help of this study, we were able to bring to light the fact that in the present times in the given cultural context how the dynamic interplay of facets of five personality traits bring into play an ascendancy on guilt and shame as experiences and, consequently influence self-perception of well-being. As expected, a correlation between shame/ guilt and the five traits were found. Shame withdrawal was negatively correlated with openness to new experiences. Shame NSE, guilt repair and guilt NBE were positively correlated with both agreeableness and conscientiousness. There was also a negative correlation between neuroticism and guilt subscales but these were not significant. Under Big Five Facets only agreeableness and conscientiousness were seen to be positively correlated not only with guilt but also shame as was seen by Einstein and Lanning in 1998 using TOSCA scale. Both of these traits along with extraversion and openness were seen to be positively correlated with subjective well-being much like Steel, Schmidt and Shultz observed in their study in 2008, focusing on individual measures of personality (e.g., the Neuroticism-Extroversion-Openness Personality Inventory; Costa & McCrae, 1992) and categories of SWB (e.g., life satisfaction).

#### ***Implications, limitations and directions for future research***

In the present study, it has been found that in



Indian sub-context guilt is a much more defining factor that colour their walk-through tribulations of life than shame. Conscientiousness and Agreeableness are the most common traits under Big five that influence the societal and personal effect of guilt and shame in everyday life. Moreover, the subjective well-being of individuals who are more prone to experience guilt was better as these tend to work to remove those transgressions and tend to perceive their own lives as satisfied and happy.

All these findings can help assess and predict

the potential of the development of psychopathology in individuals. Through this, we have a better understanding of why some people with certain personality characteristics are more affected by the instances of shame. Their reaction to such events and coping is related to mental health conditions that they develop due to bad coping and internalization of behaviour and feelings. Also, with an understanding of guilt and shame and how it relates to personality, we can have a better idea of the moral judgement of people and their tendency.

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## Resilience among Adolescents with Visual Disabilities

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*Resilience is often defined as the human's amazing ability to bounce back and thrive in the face of serious life challenges. The foundation of resilience includes psychological and social resources that act as a buffer against the negative outcomes of risk exposure. The present study aims at exploring the lived realities of adolescents with visual disabilities (n=5) between the ages of 12-18, years and how they experience and actively cultivate resilience despite adverse life situations. Using the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents developed by Prince-Embury (2007, 2005) and a semi-structured interview schedule, participant's psychological resources such as their self-concept and sense of autonomy, as well as their environmental mastery and sense of relatedness were examined. This can benefit the parents, caregivers and professionals developing the right understanding regarding their experiences. This can also help to create effective resilience training programs that raise the expectations and motivation of adolescents with disabilities for realizing their potentialities and strengths, and to facilitate human flourishing despite difficult life circumstances.*

**Key Words:** resilience, physical disability, self-concept, environmental mastery, competence

### Introduction

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006), "Disability results from the interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with other" (as cited in Verma, et al., 2017). The Census 2011 estimated that the people with disabilities constitute 2.21% of the total population of India (Sivakumar, 2013). It also estimated that 19% of the disabled population has visual impairment and the highest number of the persons with disabilities are in the age group of 10-19 years, out of which 18% are visually challenged (Verma, et al., 2017).

The condition of disabled people is extremely deplorable in the country. Out of the total population, 45% are illiterates, out of which 38% are the males and 55% are the females. In terms of work status, only 36 % of the disabled persons are working, out of which 47% are males and 23% are females (Verma, et al., 2017). This, coupled with misconceptions and negative social attitudes about their condition can lead the persons with disabilities to experience discrimination in the form of bullying, teasing and social exclusion (Pittet et al., 2010), being economically, physically and/or psychologically dependent on their family, and being forced to live in poor conditions (Tirussew, 2005). This makes them one of the most disadvantaged groups in the country.

Historically, researchers have concentrated on negative developmental outcomes, like "deficiency" and "dependency" that may interfere with the person's adjustment to his or her disability (Tirussew, 2005). Hallum (1995) in his comprehensive review of past studies, stated that disabled adolescents often feel undesirable, both socially and occupationally. For example, they may feel inadequate due to having fewer friendships (McGavin, 1996). Patterson and Blum (1996) found that male adolescents with chronic conditions have more emotional problems than females when the prognosis of the condition is uncertain, an important risk factor in developing vulnerability. Thus, conventional research uses the risk-deficit model, which focuses on disability as a barrier in self-development, especially "when societal discriminatory attitudes are widespread and lack of opportunities for self-growth and development is non-existent" (Tirussew, 2005). Few studies have focused on both the risks and protective factors.

However, psychologists today have begun to identify people with disabilities with high success and to examine the factors responsible for their achievements. This interest was sparked by resilience research that grew out of longitudinal developmental studies of at-risk children, such as those exposed to substance abuse or domestic violence (Masten, 2001). Resilience is humans' amazing ability to bounce back and even thrive in the face of serious life challenges (Baumgardner & Crothers, 2009). Masten (2001, p. 228) defines resilience as a "class of phenomenon

characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development". Masten (2001) notes that resilience requires individuals to confront some kind of the significant life challenge that threaten their normal development, and favourable outcome, following the threat. Baumgardner & Crothers (2009) suggest that the foundations of resilience include psychological resources like a flexible self-concept, a sense of autonomy and self-direction, and environmental mastery and competence. It also includes social resources like intimacy and social support. A resilient person, therefore, may be described as someone who has access to resources that act as a buffer against the negative outcomes of the risk exposure (Craig, 2012).

Today researchers focus on protective factors, like quality relationships that help to cultivate resilience (Ungar, 2007; Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2013). Tirussew (2005) found out that caring and supportive relationships within the family and outside the familial context, like school and neighbourhood, can help a disabled person build a positive self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are important to function effectively in different areas of life like school, job, family and community. Patterson and Blum (1996) have noted that physical traits like attractiveness, and personality traits like flexibility and gregariousness, provide resilience to disabled adolescents. Overall, evidence suggests that people with disabilities can lead a successful life and can manage a stable physical, social and psychological functioning, despite adverse situations.

The present study was aimed at understanding the lived realities of adolescents with visual disabilities, between the ages of 12-18 years and how they experience and actively cultivate resilience despite adverse life circumstances. Case study method was used to shed light on their self-concept, environmental mastery and sense of relatedness with people, their hardships, and their personal and social resources for coping. These insights can benefit parents, caregivers and professionals in developing a useful understanding of their experiences. Further, this knowledge can be used to create effective resilience training programs for adolescents with disabilities to realise their potentialities and strengths, and to facilitate human flourishing despite difficult life circumstances.

## Method

### Participants

Five participants in the age group of 12-18 years with visual impairment were chosen for the

research. The participants were selected through convenience sampling.

### Measures

**Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents.** Developed by Prince-Embury (2007), it has three scales, each having their own subscales (Prince-Embury, 2007) namely, Sense of Mastery Scales and Sub-scales, Sense of Relatedness Scale and Sub-scales, and Emotional Reactivity Scales and Sub-scales.

**Sense of Mastery Scales and Sub-scales.** It is 20-item self-report questionnaire, with three content areas- Optimism, Self-Efficacy and Adaptability. Internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported as 0.93 (Prince-Embury, 2007).

**Sense of Relatedness Scale and Sub-scales.** It is a 24-item self-report questionnaire, with four sub-scales- Sense of trust, Support, Comfort and Tolerance. Internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported to be 0.94 (Prince-Embury, 2007).

**Emotional Reactivity Scale and Sub-scales.** It is a 20-item self-report questionnaire measuring emotional reactivity, which may be viewed as pre-existing vulnerability, arousal, or threshold of stimulation prior to the occurrence of adverse events or circumstances (Prince-Embury, 2007). It has three content areas- Sensitivity, Recovery and Impairment. Internal consistency using Cronbach's alpha coefficient was reported to be 0.92 (Prince-Embury, 2007).

Response options in all the three scales are ordered on a 5-point Likert scale- 0(Never), 1(Rarely), 2(Sometimes), 3(Often), and 4(Almost Always). The scales use T-score equivalents for each scale total raw score. Reliability coefficients range from 0.94 (Emotional Reactivity) to 0.95 (Mastery and Relatedness) for the total sample (Prince-Embury, 2007). Criterion group comparisons with matched groups provided strong and consistent validity evidence for the Resiliency Scales (Prince-Embury, 2007).

**Resource and Vulnerability Indexes.** The Resource Index combines the assessment of both, the individual's Sense of Mastery and Sense of Relatedness, which helps to summarise his/her positive strengths. The Vulnerability Index quantifies and estimates the individual's personal vulnerability by a discrepancy between his/her Emotional Reactivity Scale score and Resource Index score.

**Semi-structured Interview.** A semi-structured interview schedule was also used to tap in the subjective experiences of the participants. Questions like, “How do you see your life in general?”, “Did you face any discrimination during your childhood years?”, “What challenges do you face in your day-to-day life?” and “What was your parents’ reaction when they came to know about your illness?” were asked. The questions focused majorly on the experiences of discrimination, daily problems and their management, behaviour of significant others and people in general, self-concept, and hope for future changes.

### Procedure

After the participants were selected, they were asked for their permission to participate in the research. Rapport was formed, information about the research was provided, and anonymity and confidentiality of data was assured. First, they were given the Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents. The basic instructions and test items were read aloud to them. Participants gave their responses orally, which were marked by the researcher in the response sheet. Then, the participants were encouraged to talk about their disability and

issues associated with it through a semi-structured interview. Each interview lasted for 20-30 minutes.

### Results

The responses of the participants on the Resiliency Scales as well as on the Resource and Vulnerability Indexes were scored. The raw scores were converted into T-scores and interpreted using the manual. The participants’ raw scores, corresponding T-scores and interpretation for all the three scales are presented in Table 1 through 5.

For the qualitative data, all the interviews were transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. First, the verbatim were highlighted and codes were generated. Second, the broader themes were drawn. The emerging themes were self-growth through autonomy and direction; personal resources in the environment; and hope for the future. The verbatim, codes and emerging themes are shown in Table no. 6. These themes were then discussed in the light of the participants’ scores on the Resiliency Scales. Further, inferences were drawn and the convergent and divergent themes drawn from the cases were discussed.

Table 1: Participant 1’s raw scores, corresponding T-scores and interpretation of Resiliency Scales

Scale	Raw Score	T-Score	Interpretation
Sense of Mastery	66	55	Average
Sense of Relatedness	64	42	Below average
Emotional Reactivity	43	66	High

RES (Resource Index) = 47 (Average); VUL (Vulnerability Index) = 62 (High)

Table 2: Participant 2’s raw scores, corresponding T-scores and interpretation of Resiliency Scales

Scale	Raw Score	T-Score	Interpretation
Sense of Mastery	52	45	Below average
Sense of Relatedness	57	38	Low
Emotional Reactivity	40	63	High

RES (Resource Index) = 39 (Low); VUL (Vulnerability Index) = 65 (High)



Table 3: Participant 3's raw scores, corresponding T-scores and interpretation of Resiliency Scales

Scale	Raw Score	T-Score	Interpretation
Sense of Mastery	52	45	Below Average
Sense of Relatedness	63	42	Low
Emotional Reactivity	23	50	Average

RES (Resource Index)= 41 (Below Average); VUL (Vulnerability Index) = 56 (Above Average)

Table 4: Participant 4's raw scores, corresponding T-scores and interpretation of Resiliency Scales

Scale	Raw Score	T-Score	Interpretation
Sense of Mastery	66	55	Average
Sense of Relatedness	76	50	Average
Emotional Reactivity	35	59	Above Average

RES (Resource Index)= 51 (Average); VUL (Vulnerability Index) = 55 (Above Average)

Table 5: Participant 5's raw scores, corresponding T-scores and interpretation of Resiliency Scales

Scale	Raw Score	T-Score	Interpretation
Sense of Mastery	53	45	Below Average
Sense of Relatedness	47	31	Low
Emotional Reactivity	41	64	High

RES (Resource Index) = 36 (Low); VUL (Vulnerability Index) = 67 (High)

Table 6: Verbatim, Codes and Themes Emerging from the Semi-Structured Interviews

Verbatim	Codes	Themes
<p>"Toh sab woh drishye dekhtein hain aur hum nahi dek paate"</p> <p>"Sighted bache toh kuch bhi kar sakte hai na kaam."</p>	Sense of being different from others and constant comparison with others	Self-growth through autonomy and direction
<p>"Jaise form bharna hota hai na, toh uss samein kisi ka help lena padhta hai."</p> <p>"Jaise normal bache har ek tarah ki book padhake na apna assignment bana lete hain, notes tyar kar lete hain. Bahut feel hota hai ki kaash mujhe bhi dikhta toh main bhi kar leti aisa."</p> <p>"Jaise koi bhi cheez chahiye ho toh, je agar dikhta hota toh kahin bhi jaakar le ate. Abhi toh magar kisi ko bolna padhta hai."</p>	Heightened sense of vulnerability and being a burden	



<p>“Jab log puchte hain ki humne toh dekha hi nahi tha ki yeh bhi samasya hai, tab thoda phir lagta hai ki kahin parents ko bhi kahin lagta hoga ki isko dikhta kyun nahi hai.”</p>	Parental acceptance seems difficult	
<p>“Jaldi se uss cheez ke liye awariness ho joon ki taki mujhe baar baar kisi se help na mangni padhe.”</p> <p>“Toh hostel ka undar ka raasta mind mein feed ho gaya hai. Toh nahi kisi ki help leni padhti. Kudh hi chale jaate hain, kudh saara kar lete hain.”</p>	Desire for self-reliance and sense of pride from self-reliant actions	
<p>“Mereko ko dekhne pasand nahi karte the, achi nahi hai yeh, jaise ki yeh badsoorat hai.”</p> <p>“Man mein sochti hoon, phir bhi kisi ko kuch nahi kehti.”</p> <p>“Kabhi-kabhi lagta hai jab kuch acha nahi kar paate, toh lagta hai ki nahi ki mere undar koi qualities nahi hai.”</p>	Perceived attack on self-esteem and constant fear of ridicule	
<p>“Main zyada nahi sochti uss bare mein because sabka apna-apna nature hota hai. Usko aisa lagta hai, toh uski baat hai.”</p> <p>“Mujhe koi shikayat nahi hai apni life se.”</p> <p>“Thodhe time ke liye mind karti hoon dil mein. Phir chod deti hoon. Aise toh bahut se log hote hai”</p>	Non-complaining attitude towards life and others	
<p>“Main apni life ko matlab has-bol ke , khel-kud ke, padhayi-likhayi karke.”</p> <p>“Iss physical appearance ko lekar main agar hamesha pareshan rahoongi, toh phir meri life kaisi chalegi.”</p>	Constant work on self-concept by cultivating self – acceptance	
<p>“Lekin woh log bolte hain ki hamare liye toh achi hi hai.”</p> <p>“Kafi saari expectations rehti hai mujhse. Aur woh yeh samajhte hain ki main kuch bhi karoon aage, acha hi karoongi.”</p> <p>“Bilkul bhi yeh feel nahi hone dete ki tum blind ho, toh kuch daya-sahanubuti, aisa kuch bhi nahi hai.”</p>	Supportive environment and family– both attitude and action based	Personal resources in the environment
<p>“Padhai wagarah mein toh dikat thodi kam ho gayi kyunki nahi technology wagrah aagayi hai, JAWS wagarah software.”</p>	Education benefited from technology	
<p>“Matlab sab haan bol kar nikal jaate hain, phir age koi nahi karta.”</p> <p>“Toh log nahi kehtein ki tumhari stick nahi hai, kahin geerna goorna nahi. Stick nahi hai toh nahi pakda.”</p>	Lack of actual actions of help	
<p>“Jaise teachers bahut baar na jaise ache se nahi, galat tarike se baat karte the.”</p> <p>“Hum blind bachon ko alag baithya jaata tha aur normal bache sab ek side baithte the.”</p>	Insensitive behaviors of others	
<p>“Main bhi ab sabse bana ke rakhti hoon, ki koi bhi mera help kar deta hai.”</p>	Attempt to maintain cordial relations with all for constant help	

<p>“Classmates bahut ache se baat nahi karte hain, thoda rudely karte hain.”</p> <p>“Par na baat-cheet karte hain na woh pasand nahi karte. Aisa hai ki baat karke na galat kiya hai”</p>	Lack of supportive peers	
<p>“Logon ke undar jagrukta ho ki woh kisi ko samajhne ki koshish karein. Kisi ko apne se kam na dekhein.”</p>	Desire for being treated as ‘normal’	Hope for the future
<p>“Aisa hota hai ki duniya mein ayi hoon toh mujhe kuch karna hai apne liye, parents ke liye.”</p>	Desire to succeed in life	
<p>“Agar mujhe insaan ka roop mila hai toh mujhse na kuch galata na ho.”</p>	Desire to do good	
<p>“Toh main toh sochti hoon ki hume padhayi likhayi kar leni chahiye. Bas yehi ek hamara madhyam hai.”</p>	Success in education as hope for change	
<p>“Koi na laachar bhavana se na dekhe. Sympathy ki bhavan dekhayein, par utna had tak na dikhayein ki yeh log kuch nahi kar sakte.”</p>	Help but not pity	
<p>“Isko lekar aage badhna hai ab apne saath. Toh main kuch nahi sochti iss bare mein zyaada kyunki mere jaise bahut saare log hain...Aisa toh nahi ki hamari aankhe nahi hai toh zindagi nahi chal sakti. Achi-khaasi chal rahi hai.”</p> <p>“Meri life mein mujhe bahut hi sangharsh karna hai. Hare k cheez ko bahut face karte huye aage badhana hai.”</p>	Moving forward is essential	

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to explore the lived experiences of adolescents with visual disabilities between the ages of 12-18 years, and how they experience and actively cultivate resilience despite adverse life situations. Resilience is the ability to face significant threat that can potentially bring negative outcomes on one's normal development. The foundations of resilience include psychological and social resources that act as a buffer against the negative outcomes of risk exposure. Thus, the focus of the study was on the participants' self-concept, environmental mastery and sense of relatedness with people in their environment. The Resiliency Scales for Children and Adolescents (Prince-Embury, 2007) and a semi-structured interview schedule were used as measures for this purpose. The case study method was used.

### Case 1

Participant 1 is a 17-year-old female. She is blind since birth. She is pursuing Hindi (Hons.) from Delhi University. Currently, she lives in the hostel away from her family.

On the Sense of Mastery Scale, she got a raw score of 66 and a T-score of 55. This means she has an average sense of mastery. On Optimism, Self-Efficacy and Adaptability subscales, she has got average scores. This shows that she has an adequate sense of mastery despite negative life experiences. Also, her average scores on all three subscales reflect that she is able to recognize her limitations and accept feedback from others. Further, she has a positive attitude about life in general, specifically for the future: “Toh main toh sochti hoon ki hume padhayi likhayi kar leni chahiye. Bas yehi ek hamara madhyam hai, matlab apne apko dekhane ka.”

On the Sense of Relatedness scale, she has got a raw score of 64 and a T-score of 42. This means that her sense of relatedness is below average. Her scores are below average on the Trust and Comfort subscales, while her scores on Support and Tolerance subscales are average. It shows that her ability to experience an adequate sense of relatedness can get affected by poor treatment from others. She doesn't seem to trust other people easily. However, she still receives adequate support from her family and friends.

On the Emotional Reactivity Scale, she got a raw score of 43 and a T-score of 66. Thus, her emotional reactivity is high. Her scores on Sensitivity, Recovery and Impairment sub-scales are high. She seems to get upset very easily. Her emotional arousal doesn't seem to let her think clearly. However she is able to bounce back from this emotional disturbance.

Her Resource Index score of 47 is in the average range. Her Vulnerability Index score of 62 is in the high range. Her vulnerability to threat in the environment is higher as compared to her perceived personal resources. Her heightened sense of vulnerability is reflected when she says, "*Jaise kahin ana jana hai, toh jab lagta hai kisse se karvaiyen.*"

### Case 2

Participant 2 is an 18 year old female. Her visual impairment is a result of a medical reaction. She is pursuing Hindi (Hons.) from Delhi University. Currently, she lives in the hostel away from her family.

On the Sense of Mastery Scale, she got a raw score of 52 and a T-score of 45. This means, her sense of mastery is below average. On the Optimism subscale, her score is below average; while on the Self-Efficacy and Adaptability subscales, her scores are average. This shows that although she has a pessimistic outlook towards her competence, she still believes she can master her environment despite harsh circumstances: "*Main apni life ko matlab has-bol ke, khel-kud ke, padhayi-likhayi karke.*" She is also receptive to feedback and criticism from others.

On the Sense of Relatedness Scale, she has got a raw score of 57 and a T-score of 38. This means her sense of relatedness is low. On the Trust and Support sub-scales, her scores are average. Her Comfort is below average. Her tolerance is low. She has adequate perceived support from her family and can trust other people. However, she is slow to warm up to others outside her immediate environment. Also, she also finds it hard to express differences within a relationship.

On the Emotional Reactivity Scale, she got a raw score of 40 and a T-score of 63. This means her emotional reactivity is high. On the Sensitivity subscale, her score is above average. Her Recovery score is high and her Impairment score is average. She gets upset easily and loses control: "*Toh main lagti hoon rone, aisa boltein hain toh.*"

Her Resource Index score of 39 lies in the low range. Her Vulnerability Index score of 65 lies in the

high range. Her vulnerability to threat in the environment is higher as compared to her perceived personal resources.

### Case 3

Participant 3 is an 18 year-old female. She is partially blind since birth. She is pursuing Political Science (Hons.) from Delhi University. She is a day-scholar and lives with her family in Delhi.

On the Sense of Mastery Scale, her raw score is 52 and T-score is 45. This means, her sense of mastery is below average. Her Optimism score is below average. Her Self-Efficacy and Adaptability scores are average. She has a satisfactory level of mastery and is receptive to criticism. However, she generally has a negative attitude towards life. She perceives other people's discriminatory behaviour as an attack on her self-esteem: "*Mereko ko dekhne pasand nahi karte the, achi nahi hai yeh, jaise ki yeh badsoorat hai.*"

On the Sense of Relatedness Scale, her raw score is 63 and T-score is 42. This means she has below average sense of relatedness. Her score on Trust sub-scale is below average. Her score on Comfort sub-scale is low. Her scores on the Support and Tolerance sub-scales are average. This shows that she feels a lack of security in her relationships. Her feelings may stem from having fewer friendships in the past because of her disability. However, she perceives adequate support from her parents and can express differences in a relationship.

On the Emotional Reactivity Scale, her raw score is 35 and T-score is 59. This means her emotional reactivity is above average. Her Sensitivity score is above average. Her Recovery score is below average. Her Impairment score is average. She gets upset easily and can lose control. However, she reports that she can bounce back from emotional disturbance: "*Thodhe time ke liye mind karti hoon dil mein. Phir chod deti hoon*"

Her score on Resource Index is 51, which is average. Her score on Vulnerability Index is 55, which is above average. Her vulnerability to threat in the environment is somewhat higher as compared to her perceived personal resources.

### Case 4

The participant 4 is an 18-year-old female. She is pursuing Hindi (Hons.) from Delhi University. She resides with her family. On the Sense of Mastery Scale, she got a raw score of 66 and a T-score of 55. This means her sense of mastery is average. Her scores

on Optimism, Adaptability and Self-Efficacy sub-scales are average. She has an adequate sense of mastery over her environment. Her attitude towards life and herself is quite positive: *"Mujhe koi shikayat nahi hai apni life se."*

On the Sense of Relatedness Scale, she got a raw score of 76 and T-score of 50. This means her sense of relatedness is average. She has average scores on Trust, Comfort, Support and Tolerance sub-scales. This shows that she sees others around her as reliable and accepting. She perceives adequate support from her family. She said that her family members have lot of expectations from her and love her. She doesn't feel anxious and uncomfortable in the presence of others.

On the Emotional Reactivity Scale, she has got a raw score of 35 and T-score of 59. This means her emotional reactivity is above average. Her score on Sensitivity sub-scale is high. She has got average scores on Recovery and Impairment sub-scales. This shows that upset easily, she doesn't lose control and is able to recover from emotional disturbance.

Her Resource Index score of 51 lies in the average range. Her vulnerability score of 55 lies in the above average range. Her vulnerability to threat in the environment is somewhat higher as compared to her perceived personal resources. She feels that reliance on her parents is a necessity for her. For example, she fears if she takes a decision independently without consulting her parents, she might get into trouble.

### Case 5

Participant 5 is an 18 year-old female. She is blind since birth. She is pursuing Hindi (Hons.) from Delhi University. She currently resides with her family.

On the Sense of Mastery Scale, her raw score is 53 and T-score is 45. This means her sense of mastery is below average. Her scores on Optimism and Self-Efficacy sub-scales are average. Her score on Adaptability Scale is below average. She has a positive attitude towards life and herself. Her sense of mastery over her environment is adequate: *"Meri life mein mujhe bahut hi sangharsh karna hai. Hare ek cheez ko bahut face karte huye aage badhana hai."* However, her ability to learn from her mistakes is somewhat low.

On the Sense of Relatedness Scale, her raw score is 47 and T-score is 31. This means she has a low sense of relatedness. Her scores on Trust, Support and Tolerance sub-scales are below average. Her score on Comfort sub-scale is low. She may see people as

unauthentic. She finds it hard to approach others when dealing with adversity, especially her friends. A reason for this may be the insensitive behaviour of her classmates towards her.

On the Emotional Reactivity Scale, she got a raw score of 41 and T-score of 64. This means she has high emotional reactivity. Her score on Sensitivity sub-scale is average. Her score on Recovery sub-scale is high. Her score on Impairment sub-scale is above average. She gets upset easily. She sometimes loses control, makes mistakes and cannot think clearly. But, she can very quickly recover from the emotional arousal: *"Main zyada nahi sochti uss bare mein because sabka apna-apna nature hota hai. Usko aisa lagta hai, toh yaar uski baat hai."*

Her Resource Index score of 36 lies in the low range. Her Vulnerability Index score lies in the high range. Her vulnerability to threat in the environment is higher as compared to her perceived personal resources. She often feels dependent on others: *"Yeh log apna kudh se bana lete hain, aur hum kisi pe dependent ho."*

In summary, the T-scores of the participants on the Sense of Mastery scale range from average to below average, indicating less than adequate mastery over their environment. The T-scores of the participants on the Sense of Relatedness scale range from average to low. Thus, they might find it hard to trust others and ask them for support while dealing with an adversity. The T-scores of the participants on the Emotional Reactivity Scale range from average to high, indicating increased sensitivity to emotional disturbance due to negative attitudes and behaviours of others towards their disability. Overall, the participants have higher levels of vulnerability as compared to their perceived personal resources, as seen from their Resource Index and Vulnerability Index scores. Thus, their personal and social resources are inadequate to meet the environmental demands at the time of threat. We can further understand these results through the themes drawn from the participants' semi-structured interview that shed light on their personal experiences and coping resources.

### Major themes across the cases

After analysing all the cases, three major themes were found. The first theme was *Self-growth through autonomy and direction*. A sense of mastery over one's environment provides the opportunity to develop autonomy and direction in life. Most of the participants seem to have either average or below average environmental mastery. This is because



negative life outcomes due to visual disability have compromised their ability to experience an adequate sense of mastery. They feel that their condition makes them vulnerable and dependent on others: “*Jaise koi bhi cheez chahiye ho toh, je agar dikhta hota toh kahin bhi jaakar le ate. Abhi toh magari kisi ko bolna padhta hai.*” Hallum (1995) found that adolescents with disability often feel undesirable, both socially and occupationally. For example, they may feel inadequate because of fewer friendships (McGavin, 1996). This has negatively affected the participants’ self-reliance, problem-solving abilities and self-esteem. They not only feel different from others, but also have a sense of being marginalized in the society. However, these participants still demonstrate an adequate sense of self-worth. Most of them feel positive about their ability to carry out daily tasks with little or no assistance from others: “*Toh hostel ka undar ka raasta mind mein feed ho gaya hai. Toh nahi kisi ki help leni padhti. Kudh hi chale jaate hain, kudh saara kar lete hain.*” They are also constantly striving toward self-growth and autonomy.

The second theme was *personal resources in the environment*. Personal resources like quality relationships are an important source of resilience for the disabled (Ungar, 2007; Runswick-Cole & Goodley, 2013). All the participants share quality relationships with their family. Most of them find their teachers to be cooperative. Tirussew (2005) states that caring and supportive relationships within the family and outside the familial context, like school and neighborhood, can help a disabled person to build a positive self-esteem and self-efficacy, which are important to function effectively in different areas of life like, school, job, family and community. However, the participants find it difficult to trust their peers and perceive lack of support from others. For example, one participant said, “*Ye log jaan-bujhkar ke bhi nahi bolte hain. Jaise raaste mein kuch rakha hua hai, toh matlab batate nahi hai.*” Previous research has shown that disabled individuals often experience discriminatory behaviours, such as bullying, teasing, and social exclusion from others (Pittet et al., 2010).

The third theme was *hope for the future*. Despite negative life circumstances, the participants have maintained hope for a better future. They have a strong desire to be treated normally by others, and they despise self-pity: “*Koi na laachar bhavana se na*

*dekhe. Sympathy ki bhavan dekhayein, par utna had tak na dikhayein ki yeh log kuch nahi kar sakte.*” They have a strong desire to prove themselves to others. For example, one participant said, “*Main kuch aisa kaam karoongi ki unn log ko bhi yeh yakin ho jaye ki yeh log bhi apni life mein kuch larte sakte ahin, aur yeh log bhi kisi se kam nahi hai.*” As noted by Arnold and Chapman (1992), these teenagers have the same concerns as any other normal teenager about what they would like to have in their adult life- jobs, marriage and family. They hope to succeed in life through education and do something for themselves in the future. For example, one participant said, “*Toh main toh sochti hoon ki hume padhayi likhayi kar leni chahiye.*”

## Conclusion

The present study adds to our knowledge about how disabled individuals deal with adverse life circumstances. Overall, the results indicate that resilience needs to be cultivated in this particular group. Though they are making efforts to move forward, they find it difficult to gain acceptance from the society and receive support from them. Thus, their personal resources are underdeveloped as compared to their vulnerability to negative life outcomes. The findings of the study demonstrate that it would be advantageous to develop coping strategies that may contribute to their competencies, particularly in relation to their welfare in the society. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of social resources and the need for effective intervention programs.

However, the study was its own limitations. First, the sample size was small and only included female participants. Second, the study was restricted to adolescents with visual disability. This makes it difficult to generalize the findings of the study. Future research can take these limitations into account and include a larger sample size with both males and females. The sample can also include people with other forms of disability to understand how they cultivate resilience. This will help in developing a more comprehensive picture of the experience of resilience among people with different forms of disability. Further, future research can also focus on resilience-building programs to strengthen the personal and social resources of the disabled adolescents.



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## Dark Humour and Personality Correlates

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*The present study aims to explore the relationship between personality and dark humour, i.e. a form of humour that turns human suffering into a joke, and deals with distressing subjects like disease, deformity, handicap, suicide or violence with bitter amusement. For the purpose of the study, a sample comprising of 50 participants, within the age range of 17-25 years from Delhi- NCR and Mumbai, was selected through convenience sampling. An inventory of dark humorous video clippings and comic strips was prepared and its validity was ensured through inter-rater agreement. Participants were asked to provide a preference rating on this five-point inventory scale. For assessing personality, NEO- FFI was used. A correlational analysis was then conducted to examine the association between personality dimensions and appreciation of dark humour. Results indicate that preference for dark humour is positively correlated with the personality dimensions of extraversion and openness to experience, and negatively correlated with neuroticism. Findings are discussed in the light of broader theoretical framework of personality theories.*

**Keywords:** dark humour, personality traits, black comedy, humour

### Introduction

Humour can be conceptualised as a habitual behaviour pattern with the general tendency to laugh or tell funny stories. The formal enquiry into humour started with the study of individual differences in styles of humour i.e. habitual humour-related behaviour patterns. Since the early 1980s, much of research has focused on trying to understand the potential beneficial effects of humour on physical and psychosocial well-being. With the emergence of 'positive psychology,' which focuses on adaptive strengths such as optimism, faith, and courage, interest in the study of humour is likely to continue (Martin, Doris, Larsen, Gray, & Weir, 2003).

Several theoretical perspectives have been used to examine humour. Biological, instinct and evolution theories describe laughter as a universal phenomenon that appears early in life before any complex cognitive processes have been formed. McDougal (1903) conceptualised it as an instinct. He believed that without a sense of the ludicrous, which was nature's antidote for minor depressing and disagreeable spectacles, humankind might not have survived. On the other hand, McComas (1923) and Hayworth (1928) believe that laughter served communication functions in pre-lingual times, wherein it was meant to indicate good news. Superiority theories believe that laughter evolved through elation felt during our triumph over others. Surprise theories hold that elements of 'surprise,' and 'shock,' are necessary (although not sufficient)

conditions for humour experience. Furthermore, release and relief theories hold that humour helps provide relief from strain or constrain. From a psychoanalytic point of view, humour saves the expenditure of psychic energy. When energy is built up for occupation in certain psychic channels (cathexis) and cannot be utilized (due to the censoring of action by the superego), it may instead be discharged as laughter, which is a form of pleasure (Goldstein, 1972).

Humour can also be classified into various categories. The popular forms of humour are observational comedy (pokes fun at everyday life), insult comedy (wherein offensive insults are directed at the performer's audience and/or other performers), cringe comedy (deals with embarrassing moments), satires (make fun of someone in a sarcastic way), blue comedy (deals with comic content that borders on gross indecency), and parody (making fun of original works). In recent years, there has been an upsurge in the phenomena of Black Comedy or dark humour. This term is used by various writers to refer to humour that is grotesque, macabre, sick, pornographic, ironic, satirical, absurd, morbid, etc. The 1975 edition of the New Columbia Encyclopaedia, defines dark humour as "grotesque or morbid humour used to express the absurdity, insensitivity, paradox, and cruelty of modern world" (Bloom, 2010). Willinger et al. (2017) describes dark humour as a kind of humour that treats sinister subjects like death, disease, deformity, handicap or warfare with bitter amusement (Mindess et al. 1985; Baldick 2001), and presents such tragic,

distressing or morbid topics in humorous terms (Oxford dictionaries, 2016). For e.g., ‘Why did Hitler commit suicide? Because he saw the gas bill.’ O’Neil in his writings in 1980s argues that dark humour,

“allows us to envisage the facelessness of the void and yet be able to laugh rather than despair. Entropic humour, which in the end is seen to be simply an intensification of the disturbing dynamics common to all humour, comes in many shapes and forms, and our laughter may contain many degrees of bitterness and hollowness, mirthlessness and parody and pain, but in the end- we do laugh, and while we laugh there’s hope” (Bloom, 2010, p. 79).

Recent research in the area of humour has tried to establish links between humour and personality. It has been found that extraversion, agreeableness, and openness are positively associated with self-enhancing humour, while aggressive and self-defeating humour is found to be negatively correlated with agreeableness and conscientiousness but positively correlated with neuroticism (Greengross & Miller, 2008; Martin et al., 2003; and Vernon, Martin, Schermer, & Mackie, 2008). Veselkaa et al. (2010) showed that participants who obtained higher scores on sub-clinical psychopathy and Machiavellianism were more likely to make use of negative humour styles such as aggressive and self-defeating humour, while individuals who obtained higher scores on narcissism were more inclined towards positive affiliative humour style. Martina et al. (2012) replicated the results. Willinger et al. (2017) explored the relationship between dark humour and intelligence and educational levels, and found that subjects who prefer this form of humour are high in intelligence, have higher education levels and show lowest values regarding mood disturbance and aggression.

People typically seek pleasure and avoid pain. However, there is a lack of enquiry in the area of how disturbing or painful topics can also be pleasurable. Research in the area of humour is not considered a respectable endeavour, despite humour having some practical implications in terms of promoting general wellbeing, health, and reduction of stress. Not only this, there are observable personality patterns amongst people who prefer different kinds of humour. Therefore, undertaking research exploring the personality traits of people who prefer particular forms of humour becomes pertinent. Against this backdrop, after thorough literature review, it was observed that there was a particular lack of research

exploring the links between dark humour and personality. The *rationale of the study* thus lies in filling this gap in literature. Also, both researchers find humour, in particular, dark humour, gratifying. Thus the *objective of study* is to explore the relationship between preference for dark humour and the BIG Five personality dimensions.

## Method

### Participants

For the purpose of the study, a sample of 50 participants, consisting of 21 males and 29 females, in the age group of 17-25 years (mean age=19.74) was drawn from two metropolitan cities – Delhi-NCR and Mumbai. The sample was drawn using convenience/incidental sampling. It is a non-random probability sampling technique wherein participants are selected according to convenience. Incidental sampling is used whenever there is no ready sampling frame from which participants can be selected. One condition for selection of sample was that the participants were well versed with English language, as the items on the self-report inventories were in English.

### Measures

For the purpose of the study, literature review exploring the ideas of humour, personality traits, and black comedy, was undertaken. An extensive reservoir of dark humorous content, consisting of comic strips, jokes, and videos, was collected. This reservoir, in the form of a Google form, was sent to 14 professional comedians, five of who practice the style of dark humour. The experts were asked to rate the items on a five-point rating scale - Not humorous at all, No dark humour at all, A little bit dark, Dark humour and Very dark humour, to distinguish dark humorous content from other forms of humour. Based on expert ratings, fifteen items consisting of six jokes, six videos, and three comic strips with the highest inter-rater agreement on ‘very dark humour’ rating were selected for inclusion in the inventory. The inventory was developed for presentation to the participants with a five-point rating scale – 1-Not funny at all; 2- Not very funny, 3- Somewhat funny, 4- Quite funny, and 5- Exceptionally funny. The inventory was pilot tested with two participants and their suggestions, e.g., to incorporate videos in between jokes instead of showing them separately at the end, were taken into account to make necessary changes in the humour inventory. The inventory’s reliability, assessed using Cronbach’s alpha, was found to be .91.

The NEO-Five Factor Inventory developed by Costa & McCrae (1991) was chosen for a comprehensive assessment of the Big Five Factors of Personality. The 60-item test has a five-point rating scale - Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, and Strongly Agree. Internal consistency for the NEO-FFI scales, calculated using coefficient alpha, have been reported to be .86, .77, .73, .68, and .81 for N, E, O, A, and C domains, respectively (Costa & McCrae, 1991). The convergent correlations range from 0.56 to 0.62; none of the divergent correlations exceeds 0.20 (Costa & McCrae, 1991).

Demographics of the participants, including name (optional), age, gender, and qualification, were included, and a form, seeking consent of the participants for the present study, was created. It informed the participants about the research study and reassured them of that would be anonymised and confidential.

### Procedure

The dark humour inventory was administered to 50 participants. Consent was sought from each participant and adequate amount of time was spent on rapport formation. The humour inventory was shown to participants in the form of a PowerPoint presentation (PPT) on a laptop. Sufficient time was provided to the participants to respond to each item on the humour inventory. After filling the humour inventory, the participants were asked to complete the NEO-FFI. The two inventories were individually scored and the data thus obtained was analysed using SPSS. The mean and standard deviation for scores on humour inventory, and for each dimension of personality tested in NEO-FFI, was obtained. Furthermore, data was analysed using bivariate correlation (Pearson's  $r$ ). The results were recorded in data tables 1 and 2, and later discussed in the light of previous research studies and broader theoretical framework on personality and humour.

## Results

*Table 1: Mean and SD of scores on dark humour inventory and the Big Five dimensions of personality*

	Mean	SD
Humour Inventory	47.42	12.41
Openness	32.80	5.47
Conscientiousness	32.46	7.90
Extraversion	28.06	8.41
Agreeableness	28.84	6.34
Neuroticism	24.16	8.99

*Table 2: Correlation between total score obtained on dark humour inventory and the Big Five dimensions of personality*

Dimension	Appreciation of dark humour	p-value
Neuroticism	-.376**	.007
Extraversion	.308*	.030
Openness	.361*	.010
Agreeableness	-.225	.116
Conscientiousness	.201	.162

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$



## Discussion

Dark humour is a form of humour that turns human suffering into a joke. It deals with distressing subjects like death, disease, deformity, handicap or warfare with bitter amusement (Mindess et al. 1985; Baldick 2001). Also referred to as black comedy or gallows humour, it is a kind of humour that is grotesque, sick, pornographic, absurd, etc. Dark humour includes content on death, disease, misfortune (especially of innocent people), rape, mental illnesses, disability, terrorism, natural disasters, mass shootings, to name a few. It makes it possible to have an open discussion of deeply disturbing issues of the society. People are more likely to listen to someone making them laugh, than cry; hence, comedy is an acceptable form to prompt this discussion. Anthony Jeselnik, a famous dark humourist, points out that dark humour is not about being dark for the sake of being dark. It is rather to acknowledge society in the face of dark topics that are absurd, morbid.

The study employed a dark humour inventory consisting of 15 items (including jokes, comic strips, videos) with a 5-point rating scale. Total scores obtained on this inventory range from 25 to 69 with a mean score of 47.42 and a standard deviation of 12.41. The 60-item NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI), developed by Costa and McCrae (1991), was chosen to provide a quick and reliable measure of the Big Five personality dimensions of neuroticism, extraversion, openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness. A correlational analysis of the two variables was undertaken to ascertain the possible association between personality traits and a general appreciation of dark humorous content.

Neuroticism (N) ( $M = 24.16$ ,  $SD = 8.99$ ) is the tendency of the participants to experience negative emotions and psychological distress in response to stressors. The present study found a significant negative correlation ( $r = -.376$ ;  $p < .01$ ) between preference for dark humour and neuroticism suggesting that individuals high on neuroticism are likely to find dark humorous content emotionally disturbing. Hence, these individuals are less likely to appreciate dark humour as it expresses disconcerting issues and dares the absurdity of the modern life that may provoke their negative emotions. Also, it is possible that negative emotions interfere with people's ability to comprehend the joke and lead to a lack of appreciation. Similar results were found in the study conducted by Willinger et al. (2017) who found that subjects who present high levels of aggressiveness are more likely to dislike black humour and have lower black humour comprehension

than subjects with low aggression values. Researchers suggested that being able to appreciate dark humour was a complex "information-processing task", and higher levels of aggressiveness and associated arousal lead to decreased levels of pleasure when reading black humorous content.

The second domain, Extraversion (E) ( $M = 28.06$ ,  $SD = 8.41$ ) measures the degree of sociability, positive emotionality, and general activity among participants. A positive correlation ( $r = .308$ ;  $p < .05$ ) was found between preference for dark humour and extraversion. High extraversion means that the person has positive emotionality, better emotional stability, and less mood disturbance. Support for this positive correlation can be found in the study conducted by Willinger et al. (2017) who found that people who enjoy dark humour score low on measures of mood disturbances and aggression. An extraverted person is less likely to be repulsed by disturbing content, as he/she tends to focus more on positive emotions, like subtler aspects of comedy in case of black humour. Furthermore, as humour is a means to decrease the social distance between two individuals (Graham, 1995), extraverts who prefer interacting with others naturally gravitate to all its forms in order to exploit this social capital. Individuals high on extraversion also like stimulation. The thrill in making fun of and understanding the same about absurd, morbid, disturbing and insensitive issues might help stimulate such individuals.

Openness to experience (O) ( $M = 32.80$ ,  $SD = 5.47$ ) assesses the levels of curiosity, independent judgment, and conservativeness of the participants. The present study found a positive correlation ( $r = .361$ ;  $p < .05$ ) between preference for dark humour and openness. Research data supports this finding that affiliative and self-enhancing humour styles have been positively associated with the basic personality traits of openness (e.g. Greengross & Miller, 2008; Martin et al., 2003; Vernon, Martin, Schermer, & Mackie, 2008). Individuals high on this domain are usually keen to experience both positive and negative emotions. Openness to experience is also related to education and measured intelligence, especially divergent thinking skills. Such individuals are also highly creative, imaginative beings. Being high on intelligence, they show preference for and enjoyment of dark humour more than other individuals (Willinger et al., 2017). Another possible explanation for this could be that persons high on this domain are not conservative in their outlook. They may be open to unconventional ideas and values. It might, therefore,



be easy for them to accept this kind of humour, thereby enjoying it more.

Agreeableness (A) ( $M = 28.84$ ,  $SD = 6.34$ ), the fourth dimension of NEO-FFI, measures the altruistic, sympathetic, and cooperative tendencies of the participants in the study. Through this research, a negative correlation ( $r = -.225$ ,  $p > .05$ ) was found, which was not significant. Individuals low on agreeableness are hardheaded, not very sympathetic to others around them, and less moved by appeals to pity. Being less sympathetic, the morbid, sometimes painful content involved in dark humour might not be experienced as psychologically distressing. Instead, it might be seen as enjoyable. Persons who score low on this domain are also cynical in nature. Cynicism and sarcasm are also facets of dark humour. Therefore, the two variables may be expected to have a negative correlation but the present study was unable to find a significant relationship between preference for dark humour and agreeableness.

Conscientiousness (C) ( $M = 32.46$ ,  $SD = 7.90$ ) assesses the participant's level of self-control in planning and organization. The present study indicated a positive correlation ( $r = .201$ ,  $p > .05$ ) between preference for dark humour and conscientiousness, which was not significant. Conscientious individuals are determined, strong-willed, with high academic and occupational achievement. This domain measures the tendency of a person to act in socially acceptable ways. Enjoyment of dark humour involves cognitive and emotional processing of the content. Therefore, this may be unrelated to the behavioural tendency assessed by the personality dimension of conscientiousness. Conscientiousness might sometimes include perfectionist tendencies in people. A research found that other-oriented perfectionists display an aggressive sense of humour and might enjoy jokes at the expense of others (Joachim, 2015). However, the present study failed to replicate the findings.

To conclude, it was observed that a significant positive correlation exists between preference for dark humour and extraversion, which means that an

extraverted person may be less likely to be repulsed by the dark content of humour as he/she may focus more on its positive aspects. A significant positive correlation between dark humour and openness to experience was also found. Individuals high on this domain tend to be more intelligent, and higher intelligence has been found to be associated with enjoyment of dark humour. On the other hand, a negative correlation was found between neuroticism and preference for dark humour. A possible explanation is that dark humour can provoke negative emotions among people who experience high psychological distress. Finally, no significant relationship was found between preference for dark humour and personality dimensions of agreeableness and conscientiousness.

### Implications, Limitations and Directions for Future Use

The research data can be used for identifying the target audience for dark humorous content. The data also allows us to explore the possible reasons for the preference in general populace for such humour, thereby allowing us to explore the role that humour may play in the lives of people.

This study was conducted on a small sample size and used a convenience-sampling technique, which allows for exploration of important insights into personality correlates and dark humorous content, but which also significantly limits the scope of generalization of results. Further, the sample comprised mainly of urban educated youth from Delhi-NCR and Mumbai. For future studies, selection of a more inclusive sample is desirable. This study only contains a self-reported measure of appreciation of humorous content and doesn't use an observer rating system. Future studies could record individual's reactions to the items on dark humour inventory to supplement the results. It is noted that in recent years there has been an upsurge in dark humorous content, therefore, future studies can also conduct a comparative analysis between the younger and older generations to understand the causes of changing preference for humour content.

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## Physical Intimacy and Romance in Young Adulthood

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*Intimate relationships are influential in the lives of those involved and can often define 'who' we are. The present study examines the role of physical intimacy in romantic relationships of young adults. For this purpose, two males and two females in the age group of 18-25 years, in a romantic relationship for a period of 6 months to 2 years, were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews were subjected to thematic analysis individually, following which the emerging broad themes were analysed. The results are discussed in the light of cultural background and family upbringing, the extent and importance of physical intimacy and the relative significance of physical versus emotional bonding. The study also aimed at addressing the role of physical intimacy in strengthening a relationship, and the associated issue of morality in the Indian context. Moreover, because of increasing Westernization and the contemporary changes influencing the life styles of young adults, the study has also tried to examine its effect on the ways in which young adults express their love towards their partner.*

**Keywords:** physical intimacy, romance, young adults, attachment, emotional bonding

### Introduction

Romantic relationships in young adulthood can play a crucial role in the development of an individual in both psychological as well as sociological sense. These relationships help in shaping up who we become. Romantic relationships can differ considerably from person to person and also within one relationship over the duration of the couple's time together. Broadly speaking, romantic relationships entail three component features- passion, intimacy, and commitment- that may be present in varying degrees in different relationships (Sternberg, 1986). Passionate attraction and sexual desire are the *sine qua non* of romantic relationships; without these elements, the relationship is just a friendship, not one of romantic status (Connolly et al., 1999). Equally important, romantic relationships are mutually acknowledged close connections between two people. There is good evidence that the elements of passion, intimacy, and commitment are present in all romantic relationships regardless of the age of the partners (Underwood, 2011).

Passion or physical intimacy is a key characteristic of romantic relationships in adolescence. Feelings of love, attraction, and longing for another person are the essence of romantic passion (Connolly et al., 1999; Tuval-Mashiach et al., 2008), and it is the passionate component of romantic

relationships that distinguishes these bonds from close connections with friends and family at any age. Being in love with a specific person involves pleasurable physiological, cognitive and behavioural experiences; however, this increased arousal and preoccupation can also contribute to sleeplessness, distractibility, excessive reassurance seeking behaviour and concern about possible rejection or betrayal for both males and females (Brand et al., 2007; Larson et al., 1999).

Most teen's sexual activities occur with someone they are dating and, by the middle of adolescence, about half of established couples report having sex with one another (Cavanagh, 2007). As might be expected, sexual activities become more intense with age; younger teens most often engage in light sexual behaviours, such as hugging, holding hands, or kissing; whereas, older teens expand the sexual component of their relationship to include more intimate behaviours (Williams, Connolly & Cribbie, 2008). Also adolescent males and females differ in the extent to which sexuality is a key motivator of their romantic experiences (Cavanagh, 2007; Feiring, 1996). Males' ideal romantic relationship often includes significant sexual component, whereas females' ideal romantic relationships are more focused on emotional intimacy and companionship, with partners engaging in affectionate forms of sexuality such as hugging and cuddling (Underwood, 2011).

Many psychological theories guide our understanding of romantic relationships. Romantic Attachment Theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) suggests that the function of romantic relationships is to provide adolescents and adults with the safe haven and secure base that they first experienced as infants and young children with their parents. These functions begin to transfer from parents to romantic partners during the adolescent period, a movement that is motivated by adolescent's emerging desire to have these needs met by a person to whom they are sexually attracted. Romantic attachments may be secure or insecure expectations of relationships which are shaped by the attachments that teens had with their parents when they were children, as well as the more recent experiences that they have with friends and others whom they may have dated (Furman & Simon, 1999).

Romantic relationships have been researched by many to inspect the significance of physical intimacy within partnerships. Meggiolaro (2010) tested the suggestion made by Simpson (1987) that physical intimacy could intensify the relationship and hence, bring partners closer together by investigating physical intimacy and relationship satisfaction among young adults in Italy. This research confirmed that there is "a strong association between reaching an orgasm and relationship stability" (Turtenwald, 2012). Further, Turtenwald (2012) demonstrated what behaviours can sustain intimate relationships that are complex and multifaceted by utilizing findings of Pistole et al (2010) as framework. The study sought to gather qualitative data regarding seven maintenance behaviours, including: openness, positivity, conflict management, assurances, advice, shared tasks, and

shared social network. It also found that apart from these seven behaviours, physical intimacy and equal sacrifices are also significant in the maintenance of a romantic relationship. Thus, the study analyses the significance of physical intimacy and equal sacrifices in the maintenance of a romantic relationship among college students.

The purpose of the present research therefore, is to understand the role, nature and extent of physical intimacy in the romantic relationship of young adults, and whether emotional bonding or physical intimacy is more important in a relationship. It also studies the effect of cultural background and family upbringing on the extent to which young adults get physically intimate in their respective romantic relationships. The study also tries to address the morality aspect of physical intimacy in the Indian context. This research aims to capture the influence of westernisation, if any, in the ways in which young adults express their love to each other, such as a public display of affection.

The present study, hence, seeks to understand the role of physical intimacy in romantic relationships during young adulthood for individuals in the age range of 18-25 years, who have been in a romantic relationship for a duration of 6 months to 2 years.

## Method

### Participants

Two males and two females, all Indian, having a relationship (not necessarily with each other) for a period of six months to two years, in the age group of 18-25 years (unmarried) were interviewed with informed consent. Details are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Participants' demographic information

	Age (in years)	Gender	Educational Qualification
A	21	Male	Completed B.Com (H)
B	18	Female	Pursuing B.A. (H) Economics
C	19	Female	Pursuing B.A. (H) English
D	19	Male	Pursuing B. Tech

### Procedure

After the review of literature related to the topic was carried out, a probe list was prepared that

consisted of areas that could be touched upon during the course of the interview. Questions were framed and re-framed keeping the probes in mind and clarity and unambiguity of the questions was ensured. It was



made sure that the language of the questions was such that it avoided 'Yes/ No' responses but instead elicited as much detailed information as possible in order to gain rich data. The participants sampled using purposive convenience sampling. The participants were then informed about the nature of the research and an informed consent was sought. They were interviewed using a semi-structured interview schedule after ascertaining their willingness and their schedule. The interview was conducted in a suitable, uninterrupted, quiet place. The interview was recorded using an audio recorder to avoid loss of data.

The data obtained was then transcribed and subjected to thematic analysis. The important and recurrent themes that emerged in the light of the current research study have been discussed below.

## Results and Discussion

The data was subjected to thematic analysis. The themes that emerged have been discussed below.

### *Family, morals and cultural values*

**Participant A: Family opinion and disclosure: 'Not So Open'.** The participant in his family is closest to his elder brother, and who is the only member in his family who knows about his relationship. When asked if he would ever be comfortable disclosing his relationship with his family, he replied *"Never, I won't be comfortable ever"* and elaborated by saying *"getting physical before marriage in our society is a crime, so my family being a conservative Punjabi family is also not comfortable with it."* It can be thus said that the family appears to be conservative and there is a general lack of openness within the family that the participant refrains the participant from sharing his relationship status with them.

Further, the participant himself doesn't want to 'cross' his boundaries and attaches morals to physical intimacy. He repeatedly stated, *"there should be some boundaries that I guess you should not cross"* and *"I have some limits that I prefer not to cross"*. Further, he also believes that *"females are more delicate about these things so you should not go to that level (sex)"*. Hence it can be said that Participant A values virginity and wishes to retain it till marriage.

**Participant B: "Practical freedom" yet rules and regulations.** Participant B believes that her parents are strict and not very open about certain issues. However, they have given her and her sister all the "practical freedom" and trust them both. To support this claim, she stated that she lives away from her parents with her elder sister in Gurgaon, while her

parents are settled in Myanmar. When it comes to the proximity with the opposite sex, she said that they are *"not very open about having relationships and boyfriends and stuff"* and their reaction wasn't very accepting when they found out about her sister's relationship. Hence, B hasn't told them about her relationship and is scared that they might get annoyed. She respects them and all the freedom they have given to her, and hence she wants to be honest with them about it, but is unable to do so because she fears being reprimanded.

When it comes to being physically intimate, she feels that it changes one as a person and makes one feel vulnerable and awkward. She feels guilty about it up push her *"boundaries"* and feels that she is *"wronging her parents"* by not being honest about her relationship with them while they have trusted her and given her the freedom.

**Participant C: Not so open parents, follower of certain principles.** It can be inferred from the participant's responses that she is not comfortable telling her parents, especially her mother, about her relationship, especially to her mother. She feels that she might lose her freedom as her mother will start keeping a check on her. She said, *"relationship is one thing that I can't tell my parents about."* It seems that her family is not very open when it comes to romantic relationships, and they might not respond in a positive manner if she tells them.

C seems to be a person who lives her life according to certain principles and rules that she has set for herself. At one place, she said,

*"there are some ground rules that I follow. For instance, in a public place there is a certain decorum that you ought to maintain. If a boy and a girl are travelling in the metro, they obviously can't hug and kiss there. Those are certain rules which I follow."*

**Participant D: Parents usually don't understand everything; rules define an individual.** The participant is not at all comfortable talking to his family about his relationship. In fact, he dreads the day when he will have to tell them about it. This can be inferred from several comments that he made, *"It is going to be horrible if I talk about relationships with them"*, *"They will never be cool with it"*, *"If they ask me to break up, I will have no other option but to break up with her."* All these statements indicate that D is very afraid of disclosing it to his family; he does not plan share this anytime soon.



He lives his life in accordance with certain principles and thinks that rules are something that defines an individual. He accepts that he does have certain personal rules for himself when it comes to dealing with the opposite sex. He elaborated on this by giving an example. He said, *“For instance, if I have a female friend who I have known for the past 2-3 years, I might hug her and when it comes to my girlfriend, I might kiss her on the cheek, not anything more than that.”*

To conclude the first theme, it can be said that the families of the participants are not open to the idea of romantic relationships for their children. Therefore, the participants are hesitant and uncomfortable, perhaps scared of talking to their parents about their romantic partners. Also, probably because since time immemorial, people in India have considered physical intimacy as immoral and something that brings a “bad name” and disgrace to the family. The participants have been socialised in this fashion, consequently, the guilt. Thus, they have set certain limits for themselves and do not intend to cross those self-imposed boundaries.

### **Importance and extent of physical intimacy**

**Participant A: Physical intimacy not so important.** Although the participant believes that physical intimacy strengthens the relationship, *“we are getting more comfortable with each other and the bond is getting stronger and it also connects us emotionally.”* He says,

*“I don’t think it is very important getting physical in your relationship because getting physical is not the only thing, there are so many other things as well so I don’t think it plays any main role in my relationship.”* He also mentions later, *“I don’t give this so much importance that you have to get physical again and again, matlab keep it to a limit.”*

This can be further justified by viewing facts such as the participant first kissed his girlfriend after one year (on their first anniversary) and the frequency is rare i.e. once or twice in a month. He is comfortable only with kissing and has defined certain limits that he intends not to cross even though some part of him wants to take the relationship to the next level. He believes that physical intimacy in a relationship is first a choice that perhaps becomes a necessity later in a relationship.

**Participant B: ‘Part of the package’ but ‘I am not going to have sex’.** B believes that what is counted as physical intimacy depends from person to

person. For her, physical intimacy depends on the setting she is in like, *“if you are outside on the road holding hands is physical intimacy, but like if you are in a room and holding hands then I won’t call it physical intimacy.”* She believes that physical intimacy is the complementary part of the package of relationship, but has set certain rules that define her relationship. She claims that she sometimes ends up pushing her boundaries in the heat of the moment, but has made it clear to her boyfriend that she will not have sex with him. Also she doesn’t feel that physical intimacy in general contributes to the security of the relationship as she has seen so many instances with her friends wherein the other person has been found cheating.

**Participant C: You don’t need to sleep together to be a couple.** When asked about her ideas on physical intimacy, she said, *“If I put it bluntly, you don’t need to sleep together to be a couple.”* In her own relationship, they have held hands and hugged. When asked if she would like to take it to the next level, she said, *“there are strong feelings and urges but there is no way that can happen because we mostly meet at public places.”* When probed further about how intimate they plan to get in future, she very clearly stated that they would definitely not end up having sex. She seems to be fine with everything apart from sex, as far as physical intimacy is concerned.

**Participant D: Physical intimacy should have a boundary.** D feels that physical intimacy should always have a boundary within which both the persons involved feel comfortable. In his own relationship, they have hugged and kissed once or twice. When asked about taking it to the next level, he said that they couldn’t, because they mostly meet at public places. When probed further, he seemed a bit confused. He does want to take it to the next level, but at the same time feels comfortable with where he is right now. He is a little apprehensive about going ahead because of the ramifications that might follow. He mentioned at one point that he would try his best to control himself.

For all the participants, physical intimacy claims to strengthen the relationship but it is only considered as a complementary part of the relationship. It seems that the idea of having sex in a relationship (before marriage) evokes feelings of discomfort and anxiety in the participants. Williams, Connolly & Cribbie (2008) observed that sexual activities become more intense with age; younger teens most often engage in light sexual behaviours, such as hugging, holding hands, or kissing; whereas, older teens expand the sexual component of their

relationship to include more intimate behaviours. Participants in the present study are comfortable exploring physical intimacy up to a certain limit, and clearly mentioned that they would not end up having sex. This can also be explained by the fact that premarital sex is still considered to be a taboo in the Indian society and in spite of westernization, couples in the present study have held on to their cultural values.

### **Emotional bonding versus physical intimacy**

**Participant A: Emotional bonding is relatively more important.** It is evident from the data that participant A considers physical intimacy to be not as important as emotional bonding. When asked specifically he replied that, *“emotional bonding is more important for me than getting physical, so yes, emotional bonding has an upper hand in my relationship as compared to physical intimacy.”* Moreover, according to him, it is immoral to get physical without knowing the person and developing an emotional bond.

**Participant B: Physical intimacy is complementary to emotional bonding.** According to the participant, emotional bonding is important in the relationship to a great extent but she doesn't think it's a bad thing to be emotionally closer with someone other than your boyfriend such as in her case, her irreplaceable best friend with whom she is more open and shares a stronger emotional bond than that with her boyfriend. She further remarked that physical intimacy is not as important as emotional bonding but is something that is complementary. *“It just comes; it's like the part of a package. It is automatic, even if you kiss once and say you won't do it again it happens again sooner or later because it's something you have already experienced and you enjoy it.”* This is in line with Meggiolaro's (2010) and Simpson's (1987) findings that physical intimacy could intensify the relationship.

**Participant C: Emotional bonding is more important but one cannot do without physical intimacy.** Going through the interview, it could be inferred that she places emotional bonding on a higher plane as compared to physical intimacy. At the same time, she acknowledges the fact that one can't do without it. According to her, physical intimacy can be seen as the happiness and joy derived out of holding hands or standing together.

**Participant D: Emotional bonding is everything in a relationship.** D strongly feels that emotional bonding is everything in a relationship. He said, *“if you do not understand a person emotionally,*

*how can you even think about having a relationship”.* He substantiates this by talking about his own relationship. He believes that it is emotional bonding that has strengthened his relationship. He said, *“in my case, I know every little thing about her-how she thinks, how she will react to a particular situation, how she is going to reply.”* He feels that physical intimacy is a by-product of one's emotions. According to him, *“it is something that cannot be planned, and happens spontaneously in the moment.”*

It is evident from the data that all participants highly value emotional bonding and think that it is more important than physical intimacy. According to them, physical intimacy is just the part of the package of a relationship. This is because emotional bonding probably provides them with the sense of security, which is similar to what infants experience in their early childhood through their attachment figure such as parents. This is in accordance with the romantic attachment theory (Hazan & Shaver, 1987), in which this sense of security later gets transferred towards a romantic partner in the adolescent period.

### **Public display of affection**

**Participant A: Public display of affection – “Not acceptable to me at all”.** A doesn't believe in public display of affection. *“I am not at all comfortable because I don't think expressing your love in public areas is... I don't feel right about it... I feel very 'yuck'!”* nor is he comfortable with others expressing their love in public and says, *“it is not even legal in India.”* According to him, the acceptable ways in public areas are holding hands, walking together but nothing else, but for himself he doesn't even feel comfortable as for him holding hands in public and hence does it rarely.

**Participant B: ‘Once in a blue moon’.** When it comes to expressing love publicly, both B and her boyfriend don't believe in public display of affection. They may hold hands under the bench sometimes but that happens *“once in a blue moon”*. For her, hugging is still an acceptable way of expressing love in public but nothing more. When asked if she would be comfortable with someone else portraying public display of affection, she says yes, and in fact, she would probably point and laugh and make fun of him or her.

**Participant C: Public Display of affection? NO!!!** C is strongly against public display of affection. She feels that certain decorum ought to be maintained in public places, and there are boundaries that one should not cross while in public. She said, *“I am shy expressing my love in public places and I have my own*

constraints”, “I keep looking in all directions, who is watching and who is not.” Also, she said that she gets extremely uncomfortable when it comes to public display of affection.

**Participant D: Public display of affection within certain limits is fine.** He seems to be quite okay with public display of affection, as long as it is within certain limits. He does not care much about what people around might think. He mentioned, “I believe I am more comfortable than she is. I can be demanding. What is the big deal if we hold hands! Till hugging I am fine with it.”

In today’s world, although Westernization is influencing the lifestyle of young adults, it can be observed that the participants disapprove of public display of affection. This can be linked to the fact that the social learning and cultural influence have shaped the beliefs of the participants that once formed cannot easily unlearned. Moreover, India being a collectivistic culture emphasizes a lot on community-based society. Hence, it matters what others think or say. Furthermore, under section 294 of the Indian Penal Code, Public Display of Affection (PDA) is a criminal offence with a punishment of imprisonment up to 3 months or a fine, or both. Public Display of Affection is considered as a taboo and offence in India with newspapers publishing articles such a “Keep THESE in mind before indulging in a PDA” (Times of India, 2015), warnings regarding what one can and can’t do in public.

### ***The idea of an “Ideal Relationship”***

**Participant A: Understanding is the key.** The participant says that the foundation of an ideal relationship is understanding and trust. He also mentions that in his relationship, patience plays an important role since he has to deal with the “short-tempered nature of his girlfriend”. Sharing is also one important aspect in an ideal relationship. According to him, since “when you are sharing everything so it’s easy for you to attach.” therefore implying that emotional bonding is an important ingredient for an ideal relationship.

**Participant B: “I pull his hair and he pulls mine”.** The participant believes that what an ideal relationship is differs from person to person. In her opinion, ideal is something that is not sustainable, rather, comes and goes. It is an ideal relationship “when both people understand each other, are happy with each other and have fun with each other.” She says that because both she and her boyfriend are not very romantic people but instead are friendly and frank, she pulls his hair while he pulls hers. Thus, she

says for her relationship, the secret maybe lies in, “the fact that that I pull his hair and I am allowed to slap him.” For her, happiness is a mood and not a destination and it comes and goes in a relationship. She believes that there are always ups and downs, “sometimes you feel happy and contented, while sometimes you feel upset and frustrated.”

**Participant C: No candy-floss romance.** C mentioned at several places that she is not a very romantic person. For instance, she said, “I don’t believe in candy floss romance, I don’t like coochie-poochie relationships.” She feels that an ideal relationship is one that has its foundations in mutual love, understanding and honesty. Maturity is another factor that is very important to her.

**Participant D: Comfort and compatibility.** When asked about his idea of an ideal relationship, D said, “There is no ideal relationship. I mean what is important is, the two persons involved should be comfortable and compatible with each other. They should fit into each other like gears.” Besides, he feels that communication is very important, and that it is essential to be good with words, and at the same time a good listener. For him, compatibility is the ultimate factor and it can ensure a close-to-perfect relationship.

For the young adults interviewed, though some believe that there is no ideal relationship or that ideal is not sustainable; the key ingredients that make up an ideal relationship are understanding, comfort, trust, compatibility, patience and maturity. This is in accordance with various models of intimacy, which suggest that intimacy in a relationship is made up of several components such as conflict resolution, affection, cohesion, sexuality, identity, compatibility, autonomy, expressiveness (Waring & Reddon, 1983). Some have focused on a particular aspect of intimacy such as self-disclosure (Laurenceau, Barrett, & Pietromonaco, 1998); a few researchers have focused on commitment in relationships (Weigel and Ballard-Reisch, 2012). Others have used two or three different intimacy scales in combination to capture the multidimensional nature of intimacy (Hook, Gerstein, Deterich & Gridley, 2003; Merves-Okin, Amidon & Bernt, 1991).

### **Implications, limitations and suggestions**

It was seen that the participants were not comfortable disclosing their relationships to their parents. Hence they resort to lying, hiding etc. which in turn makes them feel guilty. Thus, programs to address parental inhibitions about discussing sexual matters with their children are needed in order to encourage greater openness and interaction between

parents and children. Sometimes due to lack of communication between the parents and children, young adults have no one to guide them. Therefore, there should be programs to ensure that young men and women are fully informed and equipped to make safe choices and negotiate wanted outcomes. Sex education must be made compulsory from an early age in schools and other settings in which young people congregate. Young adults may also be counselled to overcome their moral dilemmas.

Due to paucity of time, only a limited number of participants could be interviewed. Other tools of research could also have been employed (such as psychometric tests etc.) in order to get generalised and comprehensive results. All the participants were from an urban background. Further research on this topic can be done on participants varying in different aspects such as ethnicity, age, culture, and geographical and socio-economic background.

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# REVIEW ARTICLE

## Mirror Neurons and Consciousness: A Meta-synthesis

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*Neuroscience has documented the activity of mirror neurons to explain action understanding and imitation, evolution of language, experience of emotions, and mind reading abilities. The present study is a meta-synthesis of available literature on the mirror neuron system in an attempt to understand the process of consciousness through underlying functional mechanisms such as embodied simulation, intersubjectivity and intentional attunement. Relevant research studies and theoretical papers were identified, and important concepts were extracted to derive overarching themes that summarized the examined literature on the mirror neuron system.*

**Keywords:** mirror neuron system, neuroscience, consciousness, meta-synthesis

### Introduction

Mirror neurons refer to a group of neurons that fire in an individual as an indication of an action having been performed. Also, a part of these neurons fire when the individual observes another person perform the same action, thus helping the observer in understanding and recognising the action being performed. Neuroscientist Giacomo Rizzolatti pioneered the research on mirror neurons and suggested that mirror neurons could be the key to understanding why we empathise with other people or 'read' their minds (Rizzolatti et al., 1996).

Activation of mirror neurons requires the presence of a biological agent performing the given action. In order to be activated, mirror neurons require both a targeted object and an action being performed. However, they do display a high degree of generalization. The same neurons are fired upon presentation of various different kinds of visual stimuli like a human or a monkey biological effector, given that these stimuli represent the same behaviour such as eating, pulling, pushing etc. Thus, the properties of a given object do not affect the activation of these neurons, i.e. the presentation of a banana instead of a bottle does not increase or decrease the intensity of activation experienced by these neurons. Further, the activation of the mirror neuron system is not contingent upon the response received as a result of the action that has been performed. Thus, mirror neurons get activated in a similar manner across various situations, regardless of whether the action gets positively or negatively reinforced, is punished or simply goes unnoticed.

Numerous research studies have been undertaken to provide evidence for the existence of

mirror neurons in human beings. Direct evidence in regard to the existence of mirror neuron systems in human beings has been accumulated using transcranial magnetic stimulation (TMS). A number of studies (Buccino et. al., 2004; Rizzolatti et. al., 2001) have shown that the occipital, temporal, parietal and visual areas and two cortical regions, namely the rostral part of the inferior parietal lobule and the lower part of the precentral gyrus plus the posterior part of the inferior frontal gyrus (IFG) are the core areas involved in the functioning of the mirror neuron system in human beings (Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004).

There has been a tremendous amount of research to understand the properties of the mirror neuron system in human beings. One of the first functions of the mirror neuron system, as suspected by researchers is *action observation*. Direct evidence about the same has been obtained through an experiment by Mukamel et. al. (2010). According to Mukamel's findings, there exist neuronal mechanisms in human beings that are actively involved in the integration and differentiation of execution and observation of actions. Secondly, mirror neurons in human beings assist in *action-imitation*, an ability that is unique to human beings. They learn from imitating the behaviour of others in their society (Rizzolatti et. al., 2001). Upon observing motor behaviour that is represented in an observer's own repertoire, the individual gets primed to repeat the behaviour. The stronger the motor repertoire, the stronger is the priming that occurs (Prinz, 2002). Thirdly, the sudden evolution of a sophisticated system of communication that developed within the human system is created to the evolution of the mirror neuron system which enabled imitation learning and therefore the ability to imitate communicative gestures and sounds (Gallese,

2007). And lastly, the mirror neuron system of human beings is also suspected to play an important role in the higher cognitive functions of understanding emotions and sensations (Mullen, 2011). Research evidence supporting this claim has been provided in the form of indirect studies of the mirror neuron mechanism by Wicker et. al. (2003).

The information stated above summarizes neuro-scientific experimental research on mirror neurons that provide evidence for the role of mirror neurons in action-observation, action-imitation, development of language and communication, and understanding of emotions. This is corroborated by the embodied simulation theory proposed by Gallese (2001, 2007, 2009, 2012), which states that a process of intentional attunement occurs on observing others due to which, in addition to the activation of our sensory apparatus enabling us to see these actions, there occurs the activation of internal representations of bodily states that accompany these observed actions. This allows the observer to personally experience the phenomenon being observed i.e. the observed behaviour gets mapped in an isomorphic format enabling social identification between members of the society (Gallese, 2009). Gallese (2009) believes that the neural substrate experienced by someone while experiencing an action, emotion or performing an intentional act is similar to the neural substrate that gets activated while observing these experiences in someone else.

The ability of an individual for embodied simulation creates opportunity for the creation of a 'shared manifold' i.e. a meaningful shared interpersonal space (Gallese, 2012). Thus, not only do we embody their emotions, actions and intentions through our own neural mechanisms, but also form a meaningful relationship between the 'I' and 'YOU' by accompanying the neural correlates with actual bodily states that would accompany such actions, intentions or emotions were they occurring within us (Gallese, 2012). Gallese adds that the intentional relation between the acting objects and the observing subject is relatively neutral to the identity of the subject i.e. as seen through various experiments performed on the mirror neuron system in human beings, there occurs an activation of the mirroring mechanism of human beings upon observing the actions of other human adults and babies as well as actions performed by monkeys. Thus, no matter who the other agent is, it gets recognized as another 'functioning self' like oneself.

The main objective of the current research is to conduct a meta-synthesis study on research done in

the area of mirror neurons and consciousness from the year 1990 to 2015, and to draw out overarching themes that underlie contemporary research on mirror neurons.

## Method

A systematic review of literature on Mirror neuron system in human beings and macaque monkeys was undertaken by examining research studies and other publications available on the web using search engines such as Google Scholar, Scopus, and online research journal publications such as Sage Publications and Wiley India. After the completion of the initial literature review, a meta-synthesis of the research on the mirror neuron system in human beings was conducted.

Meta-synthesis was seen as an appropriate method to be used for the current study. It allows the researcher to not only review the qualitative research, but also to extrapolate beyond the written content and analyse the deep-rooted meaning behind the given information in order to attain a better understanding of the same.

## Sampling

Since meta-synthesis is a process of synthesizing a number of studies, relevant research on the mirror neuron system with a special emphasis on its function in consciousness was identified, using a narrow, specific search on the search engine SCOPUS with two key words, "Mirror neuron system" and "consciousness". The result displayed 19 research studies/articles. Several criteria were identified for the selection of the articles to be analysed in the meta-synthesis study:

- The article should, directly or indirectly, deal with the question of mirror neuron system in human beings.
- It should focus upon the implications of the presence of mirror neurons on various conscious and unconscious processes in human beings.
- The studies included in the synthesis had to be published in English from the year 1990 to the year 2015 in renowned journals.
- Studies that were mainly theoretical reviews were included in the literature review.

The selection of the final seven studies occurred through the following steps:

- Out of the 19 studies, only 2 research studies were found to fit into the inclusion criteria.
- Snowballing technique, using references of the primary studies were examined to find more studies that would be appropriate for synthesis and that fit the inclusion criteria. 3 more relevant studies were discovered using this method.
- Another search, using the same key words was conducted on JSTOR, Taylor & Francis, and Wiley India.
- Few new articles were found, out of which 2 articles were seen as relevant for the analysis.
- Thus 7 studies were finally identified for the meta-synthesis study, and their titles along with the year of publishing and authors were listed (Refer Table 1)

Table 1: Articles reviewed for meta-synthesis of mirror neurons

Author and year of publication	Title
Ramachandran & Brang, 2009	Sensations evoked in patients with amputation from watching an individual whose corresponding limb is being touched
Gallese, Eagle & Migone, 2007	Intentional Attunement: Mirror neurons and the neural underpinnings of interpersonal relations.
Shapiro, 2009	Making sense of mirror neurons
Gallese, 2007	Before and below, 'theory of mind': embodied simulation and the neural correlates of social cognition
Runehov, 2012	Imago dei and Simulatio or Imitatio dei: A philosophical essay on empathy
Gallese, 2001	The 'shared manifold' hypothesis: From mirror neurons to empathy
Gallese, & Goldman, 1998	Mirror neurons and the simulation theory of mind-reading

### Analysis

*Theme Extraction and translation:* Upon completion of the selection of the studies to be included in the review, the process of theme extraction was carried out. The subthemes extracted out of the various individual studies were then translated into each other. This step contributes towards the

formation of a synergistic understanding of a given concept. At the end of this stage, various overarching themes that summarized complementary as well as contrasting ideas and concepts emerging out of the synthesized studies were obtained. These themes are presented in Table 2 and are further analysed in the discussion.

### Results

Table 2: Translated themes that emerged out of the meta-synthesis study

New, over-arching, synthesised theme	Original sub-themes (along with author and year of publication)
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Mirror neurons promote learning through action imitation and assist in action understanding.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Action imitation is a major function of mirror neurons (Gallese, Eagle &amp; Migone, 2005)</li> <li>▪ Sensing and imitating action are functions of mirror neurons (Shapiro, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Action imitation via embodied simulation can occur (Gallese, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Action observation implies action simulation (Gallese, 2001)</li> <li>▪ Mirror neurons promote learning through action imitation (Gallese, &amp; Goldman, 1998)</li> </ul>
Mirror neurons establish implicit links consisting of shared neural states between two individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Only epistemic barriers exist between individuals (Ramachandran &amp; Brang, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Shared neural circuits exist between individuals (Gallese, Eagle, &amp; Migone, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Same neural mechanisms underlie self and other's actions, sensations and emotions (Runehov, 2012)</li> <li>▪ Direct implicit link between actor and observer can be established (Gallese, 2001)</li> <li>▪ Observer getting into the mental shoes of another (Gallese &amp; Goldman, 1998)</li> </ul>
Mirror neurons are innate in their presence and functioning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Default intention-ascription occurs due to mirror neurons (Gallese, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Mirror neurons mechanisms are innate (Runehov, 2012)</li> </ul>
Mirror neurons display flexibility of function.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Tactile receptors provide input to mirror neurons (Ramachandran, &amp; Brang, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Mirror neurons assist in tactile simulation (Gallese, Eagle, &amp; Migone, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Mirror neurons display flexibility in their function (Shapiro, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Communicative mirror neurons exist (Gallese, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Mirror neurons are flexible in the functions they perform (Gallese, &amp; Goldman, 1998)</li> </ul>
Mirror neurons lead to occurrence of shared body states between individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Dynamic reciprocal equilibrium exists between individuals (Ramachandran &amp; Brang, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Shared body states between actor and observer (Gallese, Eagle, &amp; Migone, 2007)</li> <li>▪ There exists a multiplicity of states shared with others around us (Gallese, 2001)</li> <li>▪ Mirror Neurons assist in simulating other's mental states (Gallese &amp; Goldman, 1998)</li> </ul>
Mind reading capabilities of human beings are assisted by mirror neurons.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Human beings are mind readers (Runehov, 2012)</li> <li>▪ Mind reading as a result of a long evolutionary process (Gallese, 2001)</li> <li>▪ Capacities for mind reading are affected by mirror neuron systems (Gallese, 2007)</li> </ul>



Residual sub-themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Mirror neuron system leakage occurs in some instances (Ramachandran &amp; Brang, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Experiential line between actor and observer can be established (Gallese, Eagle, &amp; Migone, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Mirror neurons are bi-modal in nature (Shapiro, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Dishabituation occurs in mirror neurons (Shapiro, 2009)</li> <li>▪ Social cognition has traceable neural correlation (Gallese, 2007)</li> <li>▪ Automatic mirroring and synchronicity increasing with longer duration and close proximity (Runehov, 2012)</li> </ul>
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## Discussion

The present research has been undertaken to understand the mirror neuron system in human beings with an emphasis on its role in embodied consciousness. A meta-synthesis study on the mirror neuron system was undertaken and the major themes drawn out of this. Sub-themes extracted from the reviewed research studies/theoretical papers were translated and the major themes that emerged from the meta-synthesis study were identified. The major themes extracted upon a final translation are now discussed.

### ***Mirror neurons promote learning through action imitation and assist in action understanding***

Action imitation refers to the ability of an individual to copy an action of another individual. The role of the human mirror neuron system in action imitation and learning can be seen in an article by Gallese, Eagle, & Migone (2007). According to the authors, the mirror neuron system in human beings is involved in the imitation of not only simple finger movements but also in the imitation of complex motor acts. Their role in human beings in the realm of action imitation also extends to the function of intention ascription. Upon observing a given behaviour, the premotor areas that have been usually thought of as being simply involved in understanding a given action also work towards understanding the 'why' aspect of the behaviour. Also, in many instances, this ascription of intention and action understanding is innate and occurs without explicit instructions to the observer. According to Shapiro (2009), the discovery of mirror neurons can be viewed as the discovery of a new sense. These assist humans in sensing goal directed behaviour and action and thus enable human beings in eliciting appropriate behaviour in response to the observed behaviour.

In his paper on the shared manifold hypothesis, Gallese (2001) puts forward the view that mirror neurons assist in action observation via action simulation. He writes that observing a given action/goal related behaviour not only leads to the activation of the visual centers of the brain but also lead to the activation of the motor cortex which leads to the occurrence of a virtual reality simulation of the observed action, thus explaining how the activation of the mirror neuron system leads to action observation and in a way, action understanding due to action simulation.

Thus, from a detailed review of the studies on mirror neuron system, it can be said that the mirror neuron system plays an important function in understanding actions performed by others, imitation of these actions as well as intention ascription. Through all these processes, the mirror neuron system assists in learning certain behaviours and actions

### ***Mirror neurons establish implicit links consisting of shared neural circuits between two individuals***

Another major theme that arises from the meta-synthesis is related to the presence of shared neural states between two individuals, namely, the observer and the observed, due to the presence and activation of the mirror neuron system in human beings. Shared neural states refer to the tendency of human beings to employ common neural representations for themselves as well others (Lombardo, et al., 2010).

Gallese, Eagle, & Migone (2007) inherently accept the view that shared neural circuits exist in human beings, and their studies conducted using TMS and fMRI technology provide evidence that these shared neural circuits modulate in the degree and nature of their activation based on the kind of task and situation in which they function. Thus, in cases where the subject is made to observe painful stimuli being

provided to a body part of a stranger, the sensory stimulus gets mapped on their own somatosensory system. However, in cases where the participants were requested to imagine painful stimulation of a body part of their spouses who were not present in their visual vicinity, only the areas related to mapping the affective quality of the pain got activated. Thus, the study provides evidence that shared neural circuits exist in human beings. However, their activation depends upon the quality and nature of stimuli presented to the observer.

Runehov (2012) discusses the role of mirror neurons in divine empathy, the human belief and relationship with God. She examines the role and presence of shared sensations, emotions, and actions that are involved in the processing of the actions, emotions, and sensations of the self as well as the other. She goes on to argue about the functionality of these circuits in higher level of empathy and lower level of empathy, and concludes upon the possibility of the centrality of the open mirror neuron circuits in higher level empathy. Gallese (2001) suggests that a direct implicit link is established between an actor and an observer during the process of being observed, in order for them to embody a given shared goal.

Ramachandran & Brang (2009), in their case study with individuals who have undergone the amputation of any limb of their body, propose the existence of epistemic barriers between individuals. In their study, the subjects reported the occurrence of a touch referral in their amputated limb upon observing touch on the corresponding limb of the experimenter. According to the authors, upon the amputation of the given limb, there is a removal of the tactile receptors that enable the differentiation in touch performed on the self or the other, and upon the elimination of this epistemic barrier, the demarcation between the self and the other disappears i.e. individuals are linked to each other at a mental/neural level.

Thus, from the above discussion, it can be seen that the function of mirror neurons in establishing shared neural circuits between two individuals is one of the central functions of mirror neurons. Also, there is a possibility that the only barrier that creates the illusion of one individual being separate from the other is epistemic, and upon the removal of this physical barrier of the skin that we recognise our identity as being shared with everyone else around us.

### ***Mirror neurons are innate in their presence and functioning***

Researchers suggest that mirror neurons are present in human beings since birth and a part of their

functioning is automatic. In their article on intentional attunement, Gallese & Goldman (1998) talk about the automaticity of intention ascription. They provide evidence that the premotor mirror areas get activated to help determine the cause of an action regardless of whether the participant was asked to determine the intention of the observed action or not. It occurred implicitly, without conscious involvement on the part of the observer.

Runehov (2012) discusses how the development of mirror neurons in human beings could be a result of the formation of a high number of experiences, i.e., a sufficient amount of learning has taken place to enable the neurons to ascribe intentions and recognise emotions upon observing them in the environment. However, as she states in the paper, since the consensus for the same is far from majority, this function of mirror neurons in human beings still needs to be explored and researched upon more in order to be considered a central function or role of the mirror neuron system in human beings.

### ***Mirror neurons display flexibility of function***

Mirror neuron system in the human brain is far more flexible more in its functioning and excitability as compared to the mirror neuron system in monkeys. It is involved in action understanding, intention ascription as well as in aiding the understanding of social cues and emotions (Blakeslee, 2006).

The high level of flexibility of mirror neurons has been discussed as a major property of mirror neurons. Ramachandran and Brang (2009) discuss the ability of mirror neurons to fire in cases of motor actions being observed as well as being activated upon receiving tactile stimuli. By following the case study format and observing the ability of the subjects to experience touch and cold referrals, it was observed that the mirror neuron system, does, in fact consist of tactile receptors.

Shapiro (2009), in his article about the possibility of mirror neurons being a kind of sixth sense, talks about the ability of these neurons to be activated upon observing stimuli with varying physical properties e.g. a monkey hand or a human hand, varying sizes of these hands, variations in appearances and proximities or kind of gestures made, in order to explain the flexibility of mirror neurons. He also talks about the presence of various kinds of mirror neurons; some that fire upon observing grasping behaviour while others that fire on observing communicative or mouth gestures.

From this discussion, it can be concluded that mirror neurons in human beings display a relatively high range of flexibility in their functioning. They consist of different kinds of receptors such as tactile receptors, communicative receptors, receptors that get activated upon observing motor acts etc. Also, these receptors are flexible in the physical properties of the stimuli that activate them i.e. the proximity, the size, the appearance of the stimuli do not affect their activation.

### ***Mirror neurons lead to occurrence of shared body states between individuals***

Mirror neurons lead to the development of shared body states between two individuals. Shared body states, in this context, refer to the occurrence of same or similar bodily processes between two individuals which assists in understanding the actor's behaviour by the observer.

In their case study with amputees, Ramachandran & Brang (2009) talk about the interconnectivity of the shared neural circuits of the human brains, the dynamic nature of the equilibrium that has been established between these neural circuits, and the occurrence of an interaction between these even at the earliest stages of sensory inputs. They draw this conclusion after observing the fact that upon amputation of their limbs, the participants were capable of experiencing touch referrals in their own phantom limbs when the corresponding, intact limb of the experimenter was stroked. Thus, there occurs a reorganisation/disturbance in the sensory apparatus of the amputated limb of the subject which skews the dynamic equilibrium that would otherwise have existed between the neural structures of this limb with the corresponding, still attached limb of another individual. This provides evidence that in fact, there do exist dynamic states of equilibrium between different individuals and these states undergo a state of disequilibrium upon interruption of the normal sensory circuits of the body.

Gallese, Eagle, & Migone (2007) proposed that shared body states exist between two individuals when they experience similar emotions or phenomena. It is due to the presence of these shared body states that the observer is able to understand and empathise with the actor. They deny the argument that an individual's ability to empathise with another person arises out of their ability to formulate an analogy between the actor's situation and their situation and thus understand the observee's situation. They mention the experience of these body states as being

the reason behind humans' ability to exhibit experiential understanding.

Gallese and Goldman (1998) mentioned the ability of mirror neurons in assisting and thereby enabling the experience of shared mental states in two or more individuals. Thus, it can be said that mirror neurons not only cause a virtual reality simulation in the observer but also leads to the occurrence of an actual qualitatively similar state in the observer as is present in the individual being observed.

Gallese (2001), in his article about the 'shared manifold hypothesis', states that it is due to the presence of the shared manifold that we can share the mental states of other individuals. This shared manifold is the reason that we view other human beings as similar to us and it enables mind-reading and shared body states. He states that these shared states can exist in human beings at three main levels - the phenomenological, where we empathise with individuals due to shared experiences and action states; the functional, where we experience mental states of others in the form of virtual reality stimulation as if we were experiencing these; and the subjective where the mirror matching circuits are highly coupled with mirror matching states within our own body (Gallese, 2007).

From the above stated discussion, it can be safely stated that the existence of shared body states in human beings might be a legitimate result of the existence and functioning of the mirror neuron system in human beings. These shared body states exist as they enable us in identifying other human beings as similar to us and help in empathising with them by experiencing the same inner emotional states as them within our own bodies.

### ***Mind reading capabilities of human beings is assisted by mirror neurons***

Mind reading, in the context of mirror neurons refers to the ability of human beings to place themselves in the mental-shoes of others such that we are able to understand another's mind by using our mind as a model for theirs (Than, 2005).

Runehov (2012) believes in the ability of human beings to utilise their own brains as models for an actor's brain in order to understand, and predict the actor's behaviour. She talks about two kinds of mind-reading that exists in human beings. One is first person mind reading which is also prone to mind writing, forming beliefs about one's own mental states. This kind of mind reading is prone to manipulation and faking by the self. The second kind of mind reading,

according to Runehov, is third person mind reading, the Machiavellian mind-reading, which refers to the tendency of human beings to try to understand other's mind by modelling their own minds after others in order to outsmart others or gain an advantage over them. This kind of mind reading is not prone to mind-writing as it is not open to first person interpretations.

In his article about 'The Shared Manifold Hypothesis', Gallese (2001) talks about the evolutionary processes that lead to the development of the capacity for mind reading in human beings. He also talks about development of intersubjectivity and mind-reading as a form of communication in human beings arising as a result of the development of the Shared Manifold Hypothesis (Gallese, 2001).

It can be seen from the above discussion that though it is a controversial topic and requires further research to enable complete understanding of the phenomenon of mind-reading, it can be seen as a legitimate role played by the mirror neuron system in human beings.

### **Residual Category**

Various sub-themes extracted out of the reviewed articles did not fit into the synthesised themes that were formulated after the translation of these sub-themes in order to understand the complete picture. These sub-themes have been discussed here.

The first, sub theme that emerged out of the review of the case study by Ramachandran & Brang (2009) talks about the *Mirror neuron system leakage*. The authors discuss the incidents when a participant, who had not undergone amputation of any part of their body experience a tingling sensation at the times when they observed the experimenter's limb being stroke. They posit that this occurs due to the hyper connectivity of the mirror neuron system which leads to the leakage of neural signals and leads to the dysfunction of the mechanism that is responsible for blocking of this sensation.

The second, sub-theme related to this mentions the *establishment of a direct experiential line between two individuals*. This sub-theme emerged out of the review of the article by Gallese, Migone, & Eagle (2007). The authors suggest that even though individuals employ explicit hermeneutic strategies consciously in order to make sense of others around them and their behaviour, at the unconscious level, there gets established a link between the actor and observer enabling the observer to embody the actor's mental states and understand their actions, emotions, etc.

Shapiro (2009), in his article titled 'Making Sense of Mirror Neurons', mentions various *properties of mirror neurons* which did not appear in any of the other reviewed articles. These included the ability of mirror neurons towards dis-habituation. By dis-habituation, the author refers to the fact that a particular set of mirror neurons fire only upon observing a particular function towards which they are programmed. Even after repeated gestures performing the given act, if in one trial the gesture is half performed, these dis-habituate and do not fire.

The third, sub-theme that emerged out of the analysis of the study titled 'Before and Below the Theory of Mind', Gallese (2007), mentions the *neural correlates of social cognition*. The author believes that social cognition and many of its aspects can be traced back to a neural level in order to better understand and examine these.

The fourth sub theme was in the article by Runehov (2012) where she talks about the increase in similarity in the characteristics, mannerisms and synchronicity of individuals who live together or spend a large amount of time together for an elongated period.

It can be seen from the above discussion that mirror neurons are not only involved in action imitation, forming shared neural circuits, establishing shared body states with others, and in mind-reading. They could also be responsible for establishing an experiential line between the actor and observer, exhibit leakage and bi-modality, have neural correlates in social cognition and display dishabituation. The tendency of mirror neurons towards forming shared neural correlates and the existence of shared body states enables individuals to form models of the other person within themselves. It can be said that this system enables human beings in transcending the barrier between themselves and another individual, thus helping them identify themselves as being 'one' with the other person. However, evidence for their role in these is limited and requires further research.

### **Limitations and recommendations for future research**

Although careful systematic research was undertaken to complete the present study, it has a few limitations. Since the researcher lacks a high level of expertise in the field of neuroscience, the conclusions drawn from the study are merely tentative and need to be explored further. Since the study had to be completed within a given time-frame, only a limited number of articles were reviewed. Another major



limitation of the study was the lack of resources to access all the available literature. This might have, without the conscious knowledge of the researcher limited the scope of the study. However, due to the extensive amount of literature that had already been read up on the topic before the selection of a research question and start of the study, this limitation has hopefully been overcome.

In future, a higher number of articles may be reviewed and a more extensive study can be

undertaken by individuals with a higher level of expertise in the concerned field. This could lead to new, radical findings in this field as it has a high level of potential for research. From the above stated themes and discussion, it can be seen that the mirror neuron system in human beings is a mixed bag full of surprises. It has immense research potential for the field of science as well as philosophy. It has been called the point of amalgamation for the two fields that have existed in isolation, independent from one other.

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# CASE REPORT

## Madness and Creativity: Unravelling the Mystery through Case Studies of Popular Artists

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*Both madness and creativity are reoccurring themes in psychology. History is replete with examples of artists who achieved fame and also suffered from psychopathology. For a long time now, psychologists have been intrigued by the link between madness and creativity. Are creative people more likely to have psychopathology? Or is it that the people with psychopathology have greater propensity towards creativity? The present paper attempts to answer these questions with help of multiple case analysis of four popular artists namely Sadat Hassan Manto, Sylvia Plath, Adolf Hitler and Eminem based on pertinent secondary data sources. The paper discusses the major themes that emerge from the analysis of life history and creative works of these artists to examine if there exists an overlap between the two. The analysis clearly indicates that the difficult life experiences, especially during the formative years, is an underlying factor that fuels creativity and also precipitates psychopathology. Further, the lived experience of psychopathology may itself makes a person feel like a stranger in the world of 'normalcy' and the artists may find creative channels for expressing their otherwise inexplicable pain and desires.*

**Key Words:** madness, creativity, psychopathology, artists, case-study

### Introduction

The images of a mad artist, a depressed poet and a tormented musician have never failed at capturing the imagination of people. Tracing the curiosity into the subject of 'madness' and 'creativity' back to ancient Greeks, it may be noted that Aristotle once said '*Omnes ingeniosos melancholicos esse*', which means that no great mind has ever existed without a touch of madness (Becker, 2014). Socrates also believed that some of the highest goods have come to us by way of madness. He examined the idea further and delineated four types of divine madness, each corresponding to a different God. Prophetic madness corresponding to Apollo, the madness of mystery corresponding to Dionysus, poetic madness corresponding to the Muses, and the madness of love corresponding to Eros and Aphrodite. The Greek physician Hippocrates speculated that madness resulted from an imbalance of four bodily humours: blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm. Each humour was believed to be endowed with a certain quality such as heat, cold, dryness, and moistness. If the humours and the corresponding qualities were properly balanced, the person was deemed healthy (Swindall, 2010).

To examine the issue at hand empirically, Martindale (1972) studied lives and work of 21 English poets (born between 1670 and 1809) and 21 French poets (born between 1770 and 1909). These forty-two poets were same as the ones who were

selected for a series of content analytical studies that culminated in publication of a classic titled '*Clockwork muse*' (1975). Taking advantage of collection of these biographical materials, Martindale decided to gauge the mental health of the poets at three levels: normal, symptomatic (when behaviour displayed alcoholism, suicide, phobias, or mental "crises" or "breakdowns") and psychotic (if they were committed to an asylum or exhibited recurring symptoms such as hallucinations). It was found that about 15 percent of the poets had psychotic episodes at some point in their lives, and a significant 50 percent had some type of psychopathological symptoms. The study made it clear that the prevalence rate of psychopathology among poets was significantly higher as compared to the normal population. If we were to go beyond the artists to explore creativity among scientists, decades prior to Martindale's work poets, Judas (1949) examined 181 scientists and 113 artists (including architects, sculptors, painters, poets, and composers) from Germany. The findings of the study revealed that the rate of psychopathology among scientists was far less than among the artists, and even among the artists, poets fared the worst in terms of mental health.

One of the most notable large-scale efforts to study the link between madness and creativity has been made by James Kaufman (2001). Based on his examination of 1,629 eminent creative writers, Kauffman concluded that the writers in general and poets in particular, have extraordinarily high rates of

mental illness and an enhanced risk of committing suicide when compared with the regular population. He found that the percentage of suicide is 26 percent among the sampled poets and 14 percent among the sampled writers as compared to 1 percent rate of suicide among the non-literary public. Kaufman called his findings, "The Plath Effect" in memory of Sylvia Plath-the famous writer, who after a long stint with depression, committed suicide in 1963.

Another empirical study by Carson et al. (2003) threw light on the subject further. Carson and her colleagues reported a positive correlation between high levels of creativity and abnormal behaviour. Thus, one may speculate that creative people do in fact face a heightened risk of developing some kind of mental illness. It was noted in the study that they are much more likely to be diagnosed with mood disorders are likely to have greater propensity for developing substance abuse disorders. Carson and her colleagues posited that the artists diagnosed with mood disorders are able to effectively channelize their creativity in the mania phase of bipolar mood disorder. The state of hypomania fosters creativity as it gives rise to mental clarity and the subsequent rise in activation of associated networks.

At the neuro-psychological level, the connection between creativity and psycho-pathology is seemingly possible. A comprehensive review of past studies exploring the link between madness and creativity has revealed that there are neurological similarities between the creative mind and the mind plagued with psychopathology (Sussman, 2007). There is unusual activity in the frontal lobe (especially, prefrontal cortex) of people suffering from bipolar disorder and schizophrenia. The hyperactivity in this area is known to make a person to draw connections between two unrelated ideas. This ability may be at the core of creativity as well.

Moving beyond the prevalence rates towards uncovering the dynamics of relationship between madness and creativity in lives of eminent figures, Swindall (2010) investigated the personal lives and creative works of six eminent writers, namely Gustav Flaubert, Hector Berlioz, Friedrich Nietzsche, Rainer Maria Rilke, Virginia Woolf and Sylvia Plath with a psycho-historical focus. Through his extensive analysis, Swindall reported that in case of the mad artist, one's life and creative work tends to be inexorably intertwined. They all had in one way or another, difficulty distinguishing between the reality and the myth that they were creating through their writings. He also concluded that the states of madness do provide inspiration to the creative person. The

artists often use their work as a sort of biographical mirror to reflect on their life experiences.

This area of research, like any other, is also not without difference of opinions among researchers. Many researchers do not accept the linkage between madness and creativity and believe to be an outcome of popular imagination without any empirical evidence. These researchers in support of their position critique the robustness of the researches discussed earlier. For e.g., Waddell (1998) did a comprehensive review of 29 studies and 34 review articles establishing a link between creativity and mental illness. Based on his scrutiny, he reported that most of these studies could not be trusted as they had a flawed methodology with weaker case study designs and no cohort study. Schlesinger (2009) also argued that most of these past researches used case histories of very atypical individuals and thus, findings may not be generalizable to a larger population. Another criticism comes from the manner in which the key concepts of 'madness' and 'creativity' have been defined in these studies. These definitions are diverse and inconsistent and thus, synthesizing their findings is all the more challenging.

Given the elusiveness of the term 'madness', deconstructing it becomes extremely important not only in reference to these studies, but in general academic discourse as well. In his classical work '*Madness and Civilization*', Michael Foucault (1988) posited that madness is not merely a biological condition, it is a socio-culturally created lived experience. He convincingly argued that 'mad' is a label given by society to those who refuse to conform and thus, are difficult to control. This critical take on the idea of madness is also shared by Thomas Szasz. In his influential essay titled 'The Myth of Mental Illness' (1960, p.113-118), Szasz noted that "mental illness, of course, is not literally a "thing" or physical object and hence it can "exist" only in the same sort of way in which other theoretical concepts exist." Thus, going a step further, Szasz raised a controversial question: does mental illness or madness exists at all? For him, it does not as so called 'managing' madness is like witch-hunting where society tries to rationalize strange behaviour of people by attributing it wrongfully to an abstract theoretical concept of mental illness that does not actually exist. It is all a mechanism to control 'deviance' in society to bring in homogeneity and control.

Keeping in view these ideas and thus, adopting a person-centric approach in reference to the link between madness and creativity, Peterson (1986) in his study titled 'A mad people's history of madness'

noted that the complexity of the nature of madness and the critique of its idea can't be dismissed. The term 'madness' has had different connotations in different socio-historic and cultural contexts. It is a subjective experience that is lived differently by different people. Thus, one of the ways of unravelling the mystery of madness will be acknowledging the lived experiences of people who have experienced this 'so called' madness. The present study is intended to be one small step in that direction.

### The Present Study

This investigation was carried out by the sixth semester students of the Department as part of the paper on Understanding Psychological Disorders. To discern the linkage between madness and creativity, the specific research objectives delineated in the present study were:

- To examine the life history of the eminent person to uncover the lived experiences of psychopathology
- To relate the life experiences with the creative works to identify the autobiographical reflections of psychopathology

### Method

To understand the relationship between 'madness' and 'creativity', this research employed a multiple case study approach. The cases selected for the purpose of analysis included the noted creative figures who have experienced psychopathology. The cases were chosen by the students based on their personal interest.

The data for the present study was collected using secondary sources such as autobiographies, biographies, interviews, creative works like stories, poems, speeches, art works etc. The secondary data thus obtained was analyzed using the six steps of thematic analysis as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

### Results and Discussion

This section focusses on the analysis and discussion of the four cases studied extensively by the students as follows:

- **Saadat Hasan Manto** by Ana Gupta & Andree
- **Sylvia Plath** by Kanika Mohan & Kriti Trehan
- **Adolf Hitler** by Ria Dayal

- **Eminem** by Poorva Parashar

Apart from offering a very interesting reading, each case serves the purpose of furthering the academic discourse on the theme of madness and creativity.

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### Case 1: Saadat Hasan Manto

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*"Saadat has died but Manto lives on..."*

Saadat Hasan Manto is a well-known Urdu author known for his many short stories and radio plays. He was both revered and despised for his bold writings and was tried for obscenity several times. He was deeply affected by the partition of India and Pakistan and wrote many stories on the subject. The latter part of his life was particularly poignant where he underwent depression and also became dependent on alcohol. The present work offers a glimpse into his professional and personal life and his simultaneous experiences of depression and alcoholism based on his biography titled '*Pity of Partition*' by Ayesha Jalal (2013). Two of his short stories- 'The Insult' and 'Ten Rupees'-are chosen as a sample of his creative work to draw a parallel with his life experiences.

### About Manto: A brief biographical sketch

Saadat Hasan Manto was born on May 11, 1912 in the city of Ludhiana, Punjab. His family migrated from Kashmir to Punjab in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century and settled in Amritsar. He often used to say that being beautiful is the second meaning of being Kashmiri. Manto's childhood was not an easy one. His father, Ghulam Hasan, was an orthodox Muslim and a trained lawyer. He married twice as his first wife was known to be mentally unstable. Manto was his only son from his second wife. Manto's mother, Sardar Begum, married Ghulam Hasan at the age of 21 after her first marriage was never consummated. Unlike his father who was cold and disapproving, Manto's mother was warm, caring and supportive. Thus, as a child, Manto occupied two very different emotional worlds with each of his parents.

It is interesting to note that the great writer Manto could not perform well in academics at school.



In fact, he failed thrice in school-leaving examinations. After barely passing in the fourth attempt, Manto entered the Hindu Sabha College in Amritsar in 1931, but dropped out a year later after failing the annual examinations. A few years later, a turning point came in Manto's life when he met Abdul Bari Alig who became his mentor. He was an editor of the Amritsar newspaper named 'Equality'. Under his guidance, Manto translated various Russian plays and short stories which were later published in 1933. One may say that Bari Sahib sparked the light of thinking and writing in Manto and he was the first positive male role model in Manto's life. Subsequently, in 1934, Manto made a second attempt at higher education by entering the prestigious Aligarh Muslim University, but, this attempt also did not last long as he was inaccurately diagnosed with tuberculosis. Thus, Manto retrieved to the mountains for sake of his health. Later in 1935, Manto returned to Amritsar only to find out that the financial condition of his mother was terrible and he would now have to support himself.

A new chapter in Manto's life began when he moved to Bombay in 1936 at the age of 24. These times were later recounted by Manto as the most enjoyable and unforgettable years of his life. In Bombay, to begin with, he worked as an editor of the weekly film newspaper 'The Painter'. At the same time, he also wrote stories and radio plays and published his first full collection of short stories titled 'Sparks' and 'Short Stories'. He also wrote the dialogue and script for the 1935 film 'Village Girl'.

All this while, Manto's mother longed to see him married and got him engaged to Safiya in 1938. Manto and Safiya got married on April 26, 1939. The couple lived happily until grief struck them at the loss of their new born son in 1941. A year later, Manto left for Delhi as he had accepted a job at the All India Radio. This again was short lived as Manto was not satisfied and he returned to Bombay.

The next event in his life, the partition, was of significance to all the people in the subcontinent. It was at midnight of August 15, 1947 when India became independent and Pakistan came into being. Safiya went to Lahore with their three daughters and Manto chose to stay in Bombay. His incentive for staying back was the opportunity to work with the famous actor Ashok Kumar to help him revive Bombay Talkies. Unfortunately, Kumar accepted Ismat Chughtai's short story over Manto's work for this purpose later. Manto couldn't get over this blow and decided to leave Bombay and set sail for Pakistan. He returned to Lahore on January 8, 1948. Being in

Pakistan, he felt an acute sense of dislocation and last few years of his life were consumed by the alcoholism, depression and nostalgia of life in Bombay. The money from his short stories was spent on alcohol. In April 1952, Manto entered rehabilitation to manage his alcoholism, but, it was not helpful. Finally, his distress led to his tragic death on January 18, 1955.

### **Manto's life and his creative works: An interface**

Manto's biography titled "The Pity of Partition: Manto's Life, Times, and Work across the India-Pakistan Divide" (2013) written by Ayesha Jalal, Professor of History at Tufts University, who is the great grandniece of Saadat Hasan Manto. Gives an insight into how his life experiences found reflection in his creative writing. The significant themes that emerge through this reading are as follows:

### ***Manto's relationship with significant others***

Manto's relationship with his family members shaped him to be the kind of person he was. Maulvi Ghulam Hasan, Manto's father, was a strict disciplinarian and had very high expectations from his sons to follow in his footsteps and become successful lawyers like him. While Manto's step-brothers fulfilled their father's dream, Manto was not interested in law. This may be the reason that Manto's father was cold and distant. There was clearly a **lack of unconditional positive regard** in their relationship. In a particular episode in his childhood, once while flying a kite instead of studying, when he heard his father approaching, he jumped off the roof in panic hurting himself badly. Thus, **fear** dominated Manto's feelings towards his father. At another instance, Manto's father invaded the informal drama club he had formed with his friends and broke the musical instruments they were using. He made it clear that he considered these activities to be a waste of time. Manto was restricted in a lot of ways which later gave way to his **rebellion**. Unable to bear his father's pressure any longer, Manto decided to drop the science subjects in school to take up Persian and Urdu. He had a clear affinity for languages which would prove to be the reason for his success and fame later in life. But his father did not understand and appreciate it and he did not care anymore.

Manto's father's coldness was offset by his mother's **warmth**. His mother, Sardar Begum, gave birth to four children, of whom only Saadat and his sister Nasira Iqbal survived. Manto was very attached to his mother whom he called Bibijan. They used to live separately in a small section of the house. The contempt shown by the paternal side of the family for his mother left a deep emotional scar. He resented the

differential treatment meted out to his mother. Manto's spirits were lifted by his mother's keen appreciation of his early stories and unflinching belief in his impending success. When he was in Bombay, his mother wrote a series of letters to boost his morale. She read his stories with rapt attention. Manto's sister, whom he called Balaji, also reinforced Manto's penchant for storytelling. Manto clearly thought well of his sister's understanding of literature and sought her approval on every aspect of his literary works. The relationship between the brother and sister was tested when his sister got married and moved away. Manto wrote an emotional letter to his sister wherein he wrote, "*Balaji, your brother may be uncultured, worthless, and peevish, but he possesses a sensitive heart filled with love, a love that is hidden but which makes the smallest oversight seem like a major event*" (Jalal, 2013, p.48). This reveals a special strong bond between the siblings.

Manto got married to Safiya, who like him belonged to a Kashmiri family. She enriched Manto with rare insights into the female psyche. He published many stories dedicated to Safiya, which indicated his love for his wife. They had a son whom they named Arif, but his sudden demise made Safiya sick and pushed Manto into depression. This loss was tremendous for Manto, he wrote, "*I fainted only three times in my life; the first on my marriage, second on my mother's sudden death and then on the death of my son*" (Jalal, 2013, p.108).

### **Manto the writer: sensitive, revolutionary and champion for social justice**

Manto drew inspiration for his creations from his life. Manto's characters in his short stories are very elaborative and true reflections of the world and its people. He was very **observant** and had a keen insight into the complexity of the human psyche. Ayesha Jalal, noted that Manto was "*someone who liked to keep his ear close to the ground in order to weave tales out of facts gleaned from everyday life*" (Jalal, 2013, p.23). Manto, from an early age, showed signs of being **sensitive** to the spectrum of human emotions. The portrayal of these emotions come alive in the diverse range of characters in his stories.

Manto wanted to inspire people to **fight for independence** through his stories. Right from the beginning, Manto was an avid reader of revolutionary literature. Bristling with anti-British sentiments, yet being skeptical of the Congress and Muslim League leadership, he was inspired by revolutionary ideas of Bhagat Singh. One of his friends Abu Saaed said, "*Manto had all the qualities of being a Bhagat*

*Singh.*" (Jalal, 2013, p.41). Like Bhagat Singh, Manto too fantasized about driving the British out of India. His short story, '*Inqilab Pasand*' written in 1935 was a semiautobiographical sketch about the injustices, hypocrisies and lies that shaped his perception of the world.

Manto's characters were actual people faced with real life issues. Whether he was writing about prostitutes, pimps, or criminals, Manto wanted to impress on his readers that these so called disreputable people were also human, much more so than those who hide themselves under the thick veil of hypocrisy. He was very empathetic towards the socially downtrodden and brought out their inherent goodness. Manto's stories emphasized on **justice for all**. "*Jaib Katra*" (Pick-pocket) was one of his radio plays where he wrote about a good-hearted expert pick-pocket, Kashi, who falls in love with a school teacher, Bimala, whose bag he had stolen. Through his stories, Manto conveyed that the social forces produce criminals, who, despite transgressing the norms, are human like anyone else and therefore susceptible to the reforming powers of love. Manto believed in the goodness of human nature and blamed society for pushing people into degrading themselves by becoming criminals and prostitutes.

Manto also wrote extensively about prostitutes. Some of these stories are '*Kali Shalwar*', '*The Insult*', '*Ten Rupees*' and the classic '*Thanda Gosht*'. Due to his bold writings, Manto was tried for obscenity several times. "*I am not a pornographer but a story writer*" (Jalal, 2013, p.109) he declared in his defence several times. He even said, "*If one could talk about temples and mosques, then why could one not talk about whorehouses from where many people went to temples and mosques?*" (Jalal, 2013, p.71). One may say that Manto was quite ahead of his times in believing that a prostitute was not different from any other "honourable or respectable woman" and believed in her calibre of becoming anything she wants to. He questioned, "*Aren't prostitutes who don't cheat anyone also respectable?*" (Jalal, 2013, p.71). In that sense, Manto's writings had clear-cut **feminist** leanings.

Manto had high opinions of his self and his literary talent. He was **arrogant** and much ahead of his times, which made it difficult for him to get along well with others. Manto felt that the society was very unfair to his writings and him but he was too proud to complain or act as a victim. Being a **rebel**, he did not appeal for any kind of support and had a **hatred for victimhood**. The same is reflected in the characters he portrayed in his stories.

### **Pain of Partition**

Manto's sensitivity and empathy also made him experience the pain of partition all the more poignantly. Desolation of partition inspired many of his stories. *"The tumult wrought by the partition of the country made a rebel out of me and I remain one,"* (Jalal, 2013, p.133). Manto disclosed. His "1919 Ki Baat" (A Story of 1919), written after partition, underlines his belief in the interconnectedness of events that preceded the brutal segregation of the subcontinent. Partition in this view was an intimate aspect of the inner dynamics of India's history. Manto was not interested in analysing the causes of partition but was keen on delineating its consequences. Unlike many other authors, Manto wrote partition related stories that did not pass judgment on events or human actions but sought to tease out their inwardness. Manto wrote on the plight of abducted women revealing the heinous face of humanity during the times of war. In his story *"Khol Do"* (Open it), he wrote about a Muslim girl, Sakina, who was separated from her father and was later sexually abused by the same men who were supposed to take care of her safety.

In one of his internationally known partition stories, *"Toba Tek Singh"* is about a non-muslim patient at a mental asylum in Lahore awaiting relocation to India. He was considered mad for questioning the wisdom of partition and the sheer brutality it had let loose. Blending hard facts with realistic fiction, Manto was able to document the multifaceted nature of human sufferings at the time of partition. According to Manto, the pity of partition was not that instead of one country there were now two- independent India and independent Pakistan, but the fact that *"human beings in both countries were slaves, slaves of bigotry..... slaves of religious passions, slaves of animal instincts and barbarity."* (Jalal, 2013, p.137).

Living through the same pain at a personal level, he found it exceedingly difficult to stay on in Bombay in an atmosphere poisoned by killings, arson and rape. While he was working in Bombay Talkies, friction between Hindu and Muslim employees hurt him deeply. He was disappointed at being marginalised for being a Muslim. Manto himself was torn apart and could not decide if his home was India or Pakistan. Soon, he decided to move to Lahore, Pakistan. Disillusioned with the lack of opportunities in his newly adopted country, Manto turned to heavy drinking.

### **Alcoholism and depression**

Manto slipped into severe alcoholism and depression in the last few years of his life. During his adult years, Manto had taken to whiskey as it helped him relieve acute chest pain when he was sick. With respect to alcohol, he confessed, *"I have started drinking a lot, not so that I can write- I cannot write when I have been drinking, but actually to find that something within me that I have to do"* (Jalal, 2013, p.72). Later, his under-appreciation at the professional front led him to drinking. He borrowed money from his friends which he was unable to pay back. He could not provide for his family. On one occasion, after a bout of excessive drinking, he was admitted to the hospital with symptoms of acute jaundice, but, the condition was later found to be cirrhosis of the liver. Manto admitted that the word 'abstinence' did not exist in his dictionary. *"I have sacrificed three quarters of my life to the lack of abstinence."* He believed that *"if life is spent in abstinence, it is prison, and if one spends it intemperately, it is also a prison"* (Jalal, 2013, p.74). His self- destruction was aided and abetted by his friends who piled him with liquor. He grew extremely weak and felt tired of the daily recriminations about his lack of responsibility toward his family. He voluntarily gave his wife the rights to all his writings so that he could no longer borrow anything from the publisher without her prior approval. Such an existence tantamount to a living death for him and soon after he left his body at the young age of 42.

### **Creative Work Analysis: 'Insult' and 'Ten rupees'**

His work is a treasure trove of rare insights into human nature. The two short stories that we focused on in the present study were *'Insult'* and *'Ten rupees'*. These stories provide us with the insight into the **feminist** leanings of Manto apart from his struggle for social justice.

**Insult** is the story of Saugandhi, a self-contained prostitute living in the big city of Bombay. This story was inspired by his Bombay years and had elements of Bombay life such as prostitutes living in overcrowded *chawls*, film actresses and thousands of people crowding the city in their quest to make it big. Saugandhi is portrayed as an independent, fearless woman who lives life by her own rules. A big blow to her high self-esteem is delivered when a rich man refused her services out of disgust. It was also disturbing given that she had never judged anyone wanting to satisfy their sexual needs, yet she was the one being judged and looked at with disgust. Following the rejection, Saugandhi starts questioning the importance of beauty in life. She introspects on the fact as to why the comment of a stranger had such an



impact on her and why is she seeking approval from others. Eventually, she understands that peace comes from within and not from acceptance by anyone else outside of you. There seems to be a parallel here with Manto's personal struggle of thinking highly of oneself yet seeking approval from the world. Manto, otherwise, was also very empathetic towards the plight of women and had female protagonists in many of his stories. Manto's stories are clear reflections of the **objectification of women** in our society.

The other story in focus is '**Ten rupees**' where the protagonist of this story is Sarita, a 15 year old girl who is forced into prostitution by her mother due to their poor conditions. Sarita is a sweet, innocent child who has no care in the world. She likes to spend her days playing around with the other kids in locality. Not knowing what is in store for her, Sarita doesn't mind dressing up for the rich men who come to pick her up in long cars as she loves car rides. She loves the carefree feeling of the wind whipping over her face so much that she doesn't give a damn about the men who buy her for a mere sum of ten rupees. She was blissfully free from worry while her innocence and oblivion is still intact. The story revolves around an incident when Sarita is sent off with three men who have bought her for the evening. In her naivety, Sarita ends up having an amazing evening with the men as they laugh, sing songs and have fun ending the ride at the beach. The story is very touching as it shows how depravity can force children to such harsh realities of life which they are too young to understand.

The protagonists of the two stories are very different from each other yet both of them are bound by the common thread of depravity and forced prostitution. Saugandhi is a grown, independent woman consciously in this profession whereas Sarita is a child forced into the trade by her mother. Manto described unique beauty of both women in his writing. All his stories, including this one, Manto voiced that the repression of sexuality by society is at the core of the social evils. Manto's preference for **women-centric** stories also point to the central role women-his mother, sister and wife-played in his life.

### Concluding Remarks

The discussion above establishes that Manto's life influenced his work. The characters he created drew inspiration from real-life persons and from his ideological convictions. Yet, one may not say that his madness led to creativity or vice-versa. One may however argue that his sensitivity and emotional vulnerability at one level added to his talent as a writer and at the other level also made him vulnerable to both

alcoholism and depression. His earlier writings have more of reflection of his ideological commitments where the character portrayed are strong and are fighting battles against injustices meted to them in society. His later writings, may be due to his own experience of hopelessness and desolation, portrayed characters that are beaten by circumstances, are hopeless, yet refuse to give-up, just like the unwavering spirit of Manto himself who would just not succumb to victimhood. There is something about Manto's writing and characters that it strikes a chord of the innermost, hidden parts of our self that may have been disowned on account of social compliance and decency. Thus, in our hearts, though Saadat has died, Manto continues to live on.

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### Case 2: Sylvia Plath

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Sylvia Plath (1932-1963) was a prominent American poet, novelist and short story writer. She was born in Boston, Massachusetts to Otto Emile Plath and Aurelia Plath on October 27, 1932. She received her education from Smith College and later from Newham College, University of Cambridge. She was an achiever throughout her life. She met Ted Hughes, an acclaimed poet himself, whom she later married in 1956. She is best known for two published collections of her poems, *The Colossus and Other Poems* (1960) and *Ariel* (1965), and a semi-autobiographical novel, *The Bell Jar* (1963). Plath suffered from severe depression and had suicidal tendencies throughout her adult life. She died on February 11, 1963. Even after 40 years of her death, she continues to attract the readers. Her writings are constantly read, interpreted and understood in order to find a link to her tragic death. In order to explore the link between her mental illness and creativity, parallels were drawn between her life and creative work. Presented here are the major themes that link the experience of madness with creative expression in the life and works of Sylvia Plath:

### Bell Jar-An inspiration drawn from self

*The Bell Jar* (1963) is considered to be a semi-autobiographical account of Plath's life. It is a thinly disguised literary memoir which traces her life

between her freshman year at Smith College in 1951 and her release from the Mclean psychiatric ward following her first suicide attempt in 1953. It narrates the story of a young woman named Esther Greenwood and her subsequent mental breakdown. As Esther's story and descent into mental illness mimics Sylvia's own bouts of depression, she may be considered as a fictional incarnation of Plath. She may be seen as an embodiment of Plath's own fears, ambitions and desires. *The Bell Jar* (1963) contains numerous instances, the inspiration for which was drawn from Plath's own life. Like Plath, Esther is born in a suburban area of Massachusetts, enjoys a glittering academic career both at school and college, does a glamorous internship at a woman's magazine in New York, and aspires to become a successful writer.

Even the characters in the novel are based on people in Plath's life. The character of Philomena Guinea is based on Plath's own patron and author Olive Higgins Prouty, who funded Plath's scholarship to study at Smith College. Dr. Nolan's character is thought to be based on Plath's own therapist, Ruth Beuscher, whom she continued seeing after her release from the hospital. The protagonist's relationship with her family, especially her parents, is also depicted in the same manner as Plath felt about those relationships in her real life. Very similar to Plath's hatred for her mother given that she held her mother responsible for her father's death and her sadness, the protagonist-Esther- also held her mother responsible for her madness. Like Plath, Esther too had lost her father at an early age. *The Bell Jar* (1963) also contains parallels to Plath's romantic relationships with her two lovers. In the novel, Esther breaks her leg while skiing and believes that it is symbolic of her broken relationship with Willard. In real life too, Plath broke her leg upon which she convinced herself that it symbolically stood for the break up with Dick Norton. Dick Norton is widely believed to be an inspiration for the character of Willard in *The Bell Jar* (1963). Even Esther's first sexual encounter seems to be derived from the relationship that Plath had with the biology professor she met during her college days. Due to these overlaps, one may convincingly believe that *The Bell Jar* (1963) is a seminal piece of work which depicts Plath's inner psychological world. She also admitted that for her, writing this novel was a therapeutic experience.

### Feminism

Both in her life and in her writings, Plath tried bringing forth the issues related to the oppressive nature of the conventional gender roles and tried to

expose the hypocrisy of the patriarchal structures and resultant mind-sets in the society.

### Critique of the Conventional Womanhood

Plath herself and her character Esther, lived in America of 1950s where the society was still heavily patriarchal and the struggle of feminism was in the nascent stages. During her young adulthood, Plath often questioned the American dream's pressures and expectations of getting a house, having a job, and raising children. She believed that a woman ought to make her choices irrespective of the social expectations and gender role impositions. She considered that being a writer was more a part of her identity than being a wife or being a mother. In fact, she found it hard to become a mother till she had established herself as a writer. She feared that childbearing would lessen her compulsion to write. Plath's protagonists as well espoused the similar values in her novels. Esther questions the very idea of womanhood. She tries hard to form an identity of her own in a male dominated world. She feels trapped by the society's expectation that the woman should marry immediately after finishing her education, have children, and become a dutiful wife and a dedicated mother. Esther felt that "*This was a wasted life for a girl with fifteen years of straight A's*" (Plath, 1963, p. 44). She does not want to follow the path of women like Mrs. Willard, who are considered to be an example of an ideal wife, one who is supportive and caring towards her husband, his ambitions, needs and desires. While Esther's mother pushes her towards family life, Esther is driven to be a successful poet and a writer. Thus, just like Plath, the female characters she created live in a constant conflict of realizing their professional dream and living a fulfilling family life and it is impossible to reconcile this conflict without succumbing to the gender norms.

### Sexual exploration and expression

Plath consistently pointed out the double standards the society had with respect to sexuality and its expression in both genders. Virginity being a big deal for women, Plath noted that it was unfair that men were allowed to explore their sexuality while women were expected to be chaste till marriage. Plath in fact, freely dated several men and did not cower down to these conventions. She also had the courage to write about her own sexual exploration in her journals. Even her protagonist in *The Bell Jar* (1963) struggles with the idea of sexuality and virginity. She is very keen on losing her virginity before marriage as she insists that she "*could not stand the idea of a woman having a single pure life and a man being able to have a double*



life, one pure and one not" (Plath, 1963, p. 43). Thus she wants to lose her virginity not because of some sexual pleasure, but because she believes that she is entitled to the same sexual experiences as men. In reference to sexual exploration, Esther's relationship with Buddy Willard is significant as, by being with him, she realises the significance of being sexually liberated. Being with him makes her realise that she could not be married to someone like him for the rest of her life. She would rather explore her true identity on her own. By trying out new things she wants to break free from the shackles of the societal expectations- "I'll be flying back and forth between one mutually exclusive thing and another for the rest of my days." (Plath, 1963, p. 49). At the end of the novel, she loses her virginity. She feels relieved at finally relinquishing her virginity and worries surrounding it. Further, by exercising the full control in choosing her sexual partner, she is challenging her own ignorance about sex. For her, relationship is not important, but an impersonal and unconditional sexual experience with no strings attached. It does not matter to her whether her partner is already in a relationship.

Just like Esther's character, Plath has also had erotic engagements with several men before her marriage to Hughes. Her first significant relationship was with an Estonian artist named Ilo Pill. Her another significant relationship was with a biology professor she met during her college days. Her friend Hunter had noted in her memoir- 'A Closer Look at Ariel' (1973)- that though Plath was disciplined, she wanted to have experiences that were out of the ordinary (Steinberg, 2004). She longed to explore her sexuality. But her morality and the society she lived in prevented this, leading to a constant inner conflict. So, through these relationships, Plath wanted to break free from her conventional morality and become sexually liberated.

### Experience of Madness

*The Bell Jar* (1963) narrates the story of protagonist's journey from a normal girl to a resilient woman, who regresses into madness. This madness may be considered the key which unlocks the answers to her questions about the meaning of her life. As she recovers in a psychiatric ward from her mental illness, she aspires to survive and find meaning in this survival. Esther's perils with her madness and subsequent treatment are arguably drawn from Plath's own battle with depression and shock treatment. In fact, some believe that perhaps *The Bell Jar* (1963) was a response to many years of electroshock treatment and the scars it left.

### Ideal life versus actual experiences of the world

Plath portrays Esther as an ambitious girl who experiences a gap between the ideal life she aspires for and the real world in which she lives. When Esther gets a job in New York, she is captivated by the urban and luxurious city life. However, she soon comes to harbour dual feelings for the people around her. While she epitomises the freedom and glamour of her job, she is also completely disenchanted with her dreams and their meaninglessness and hollowness. This makes Esther question her worth and lays the foundation for her mental breakdown and suicide attempt later. As it has already been observed that Plath reflected on her own life experiences through *The Bell Jar* (1963). It may be noted that here she drew from her experiences as the guest editor of *Mademoiselle* in New York. Plath was very enthusiastic about getting the job to begin with but she soon became more and more dissatisfied. In the midst of all the glamour accompanying her job, Plath felt a sense of alienation from the place. Being there, she often doubted her abilities as a writer and felt that she was not capable of realizing her dream. These feelings were further exacerbated by two incidents, firstly, on hearing of Rosenberg executions and on being sexually assaulted at a party. Thus, she finished her task in New York as soon as possible to return home. Thus, both Plath and Esther found it difficult to relate to the people around them and felt a gap between their real life experiences and the ideal life they desired.

### Feeling Inadequate and Directionless

Esther questions her role as a woman by expressing her desire to die. Perhaps, she seems right from her perspective as she feels the pressure of the restrictions placed on her as a woman. Esther is torn between her writing career and the norm of settling down. Though her intellectual talents bring her many laurels, she is only accepted by her friends when she starts dating a handsome and popular boy. Moreover, her boyfriend Willard thinks that when they will get married, she will drop her poetic ambitions for him. Esther also longs to enjoy sexual freedom by seeking newer experiences. Simultaneously, she suffers from a writer's block and starts doubting her ability to write. She becomes unsure about what to do after college as her life till now has been centred on doing well academically. Esther feels the anxiety about her future and starts feeling directionless and inadequate due to her indecisiveness. This leads to her madness. At this point, she tries to commit suicide. Again we see a parallel between the novel and Plath's life. Plath too was very ambitious and often questioned the standard role set for the woman by the society. She was even ready to ditch the domestic life for becoming a

successful writer. During her young adulthood, she often feared that a mother's role will come in her way of becoming an accomplished writer. Therefore, it can be said that Esther exhibits the same fears that Plath had during her own younger days.

Esther portrays the same insecurities that Plath had about herself. She often sought constant external approval due to her lack of confidence in her own abilities, like when she taught at Smith College and became increasingly tensed about her qualifications as a teacher. She had developed a paranoia that she was letting down the people who had recommended her and had shown faith in her. In fact, she wrote a letter to herself, which she called "*Letter to the demon*", in which she addressed the demon which caused her to attempt suicide (Steinberg, 2004). She also found it difficult to accept criticism and rejection, as when she came to know that she was not accepted in Frank O'Connor's short story course (an incident she used in the novel). Already her experience at New York had been too stressful and a disappointment for her. After coming to know about her rejection, she started believing that she had no talent as a writer. This led Plath's first suicide attempt on August 24, 1953, by trying to swallow 48 sleeping pills.

### ***Bell Jar - Symbolism of Madness***

*The Bell Jar* (1963) is an inverted glass jar, generally used to display an object of scientific curiosity. Esther Greenwood compares her mental illness to a bell jar. When she becomes insane, Esther feels herself trapped in an airtight jar which enable her to make a connection between her real world experiences and her perceptions. She feels: "*To the person in the bell jar, blank and stopped as a dead baby, the world itself is the bad dream.*" (Plath, 1963, p. 124). Esther feels paralyzed and sick. The "bell jar" in fact reflects Plath's own inward response to her illness. She, like Esther, was trapped inside herself, and no external stimulation, no matter how new and exciting, could alleviate this condition. The "bell jar" of Sylvia's madness separated her from the people she cared about. Sylvia's association of madness with a bell jar suggests her feelings that madness descended on her without her control or assent. Sylvia's suicidal urges came from this sense of suffocating isolation. As already mentioned, Esther's experience of madness parallels Plath's own suffering from depression. Like her creator, Esther makes numerous attempts to commit suicide. The incident of her last suicide attempt, when she hides herself in the basement of her mother's house and swallows sleeping pills, is directly taken from Plath's life.

At the end of the novel, the bell jar- Esther's madness- is lifted. But she still feels that it may descend again and take a grip of her: "*How did I know that someday—at college, in Europe, somewhere, anywhere—the bell jar, with its stifling distortions, wouldn't descend again?*" (Plath, 1963, p. 126). Though Esther can function more or less normally now, she stills feels terrified about the future. Plath's own life story confirms that the "bell jar" can descend again. Just as the pressures that culminated in her late teens drove Plath to attempt suicide, the pressures that culminated in her early thirties led her to end her life.

### **Critique of Psychiatry**

The novel critiques the profession of psychiatric medicine through Esther's experiences. The critique begins when Esther meets her first psychiatrist, Dr. Gordon, whom she finds very self-satisfied and unsympathetic. He prescribes her a traumatic and painful shock treatment, which worsens her symptoms. Joan, a girl who Esther strongly disliked since her college days, too describes her insensitive treatment at the hands of male psychiatrists. Also, some of the hospitals in which Esther lives, pay more attention to sanitation than to the patients and are frighteningly authoritarian. By seeing the inactive patients, she realizes that mental illness is something defective and to be ashamed of, to be hid and denied, rather than to be cured and discussed.

But when Esther starts receiving treatment from Dr. Nolan, her experiences are rather positive and she even makes a quick recovery. So, the novel does not entirely presents a negative picture of psychiatric care. In fact, Esther's relationship with Dr. Nolan reaches a point where she starts seeing her as her mother. In Freudian psychoanalysis, this reaction to the therapy is called transference, in which the patient attaches her feelings to the therapist which she harbours for a significant person in the past. Esther tries to resolve her feelings for her mother through her transference. She believes her mother is also not able to understand her situation. Although she is very caring, Esther's mother thinks that by deciding not to receive any more shock treatments, Esther will behave more normally. For her, Esther's illness is just a passing phase. But Esther thinks that her own mother has failed her.

Still Esther criticises the shock treatment that she receives from her new psychiatrist. The shock treatment clears her mind entirely like when she completely stops thinking about knives. This comes as a relief, but at the expense of blunting of her sharp

intelligence. This highlights the dubious methods that psychiatrists and psychologists often use to treat their patients. They help the patient clear their mind entirely. But they may not always help the patients to address the underlying important issues that are the root cause of their mental and emotional suffering.

Plath's own psychiatric history and her feelings about her treatment can be traced in this critique. Plath often felt in her later life that the electric shock treatment that she received in her youth had blunted her mind. Also, Esther's relationship with Dr. Nolan parallels Plath's own relationship with Dr. Ruth Beuscher. Plath considered Dr. Beuscher as a mother figure, who took care of her with unusual tenderness. Thus, Plath had also transferred her feelings for her mother onto her therapist. Through her novel Plath openly critiqued the loopholes in modern psychiatric treatment and its eventual impact on the patient.

### Concluding Remarks

The link between madness and creativity have been debated over thousands of years. Throughout history, philosophers have speculated on the nature of a 'mad genius', specifically a depressed writer and poet. Whenever the idea of mad genius strikes our mind, we often picture an artist or a scientist shutting himself/herself in a closet and doing his/her creative work. The artist usually has very little contact with the outside world, but his/her inside world finds expression in his/her creative endeavours. The same was also true for Sylvia Plath to a certain extent. As she outpoured her feelings of sadness and isolation in her poems, short stories and the novel *The Bell Jar*, the insights drawn from her case history helps us to unravel the connection between insanity and creativity. If we look at Sylvia Plath's case, her own life story confirms that where madness lies, creativity lurks. The life of Sylvia Plath is that of a female poet who became an icon after tragically committing suicide. The most astonishing aspect of her creativity is that while dealing with severe depression during the last few years of her life, Plath wrote the majority of the Ariel poems, two short pieces "America, America" and "Snow Blitz," as well as her memoir, "Ocean 1212-W." She also wrote her novel *The Bell Jar*. Thus, the lowest point of her life also became her most productive period.

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### Case 3: Adolf Hitler

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The present study is focused on exploring the link between madness and creativity through the case of Adolf Hitler, one of the most well-known and controversial political leader in recent history. Hitler was born on 20 April 1889 in Austria. He was the leader of the Nazi Party and acted in capacity of chancellor of Germany from 1933 to 1945. He was a notorious dictator who was responsible for the holocaust which took a toll on the lives of 54 million people, most of whom were Jews. He was also responsible for the exile of countless others. As leader of the Nazi party ruling Germany, Hitler was at the center-stage of the World War II in Europe. After his defeat, he shot himself at the age of 56 on 30 April 1945.

A close reading of 'Mein Kampf' (1971) that translates to 'My Struggle', the autobiography of Hitler, makes it clear that Hitler was a skilled public speaker, propagandist and politician. In just a few years, he not only became the most powerful leader of his country, but he also managed influencing a majority of the German population in the direction of anti-Semitic views. Such is his reputation till date that he needs no introduction. It is also noteworthy that his IQ was 141, which was clearly off-charts. It is significant also because, apart from creativity, a high level of intelligence has also been linked with psychopathology.

The present analysis is based on secondary sources and is derived from the work of psychoanalyst Murray (1943) who prepared a report titled 'Analysis of the personality of Adolf Hitler with predictions of his future behaviour and suggestions for dealing with him now and after Germany's surrender' for the US Office of Strategic Services. This report was kept confidential for a long time and was only made public years later. This report is believed to be one of the most ground-breaking and coveted documents in history. The analysis is also supplemented by Langer's book titled 'The mind of Adolf Hitler' (1943). Results of a CATI test by Coolidge et.al. (2007) compiled as a report titled 'Understanding madmen: A DSM-IV assessment of Adolf Hitler' was also looked into for the present analysis. In addition, the present study also refers to Diamond's analysis of Hitler as presented in his book titled 'Anger, Madness, and the Daimonic' (1996).

### Establishing Hitler's psychopathology: Child Abuse and its later influence

Hitler's father was physically abusive towards Hitler and his brother, more so towards Hitler as he was a rebel. He beat Hitler so much by the tender age



of 11 that he "refused to give his father the satisfaction of crying, even after 32 lashes." (Diamond, 1996). Having endured this extent of physical abuse, Hitler harboured tremendous anger and resentment towards his father. He wanted to avenge him for the pain he had caused him and his brother, but, he died by the time Hitler could have his way with his father. It is also interesting to note that "Hitler's hatred for his father fuelled his hatred of Jews, who served as scapegoats for his residual fury" (Diamond, 2014). It is also possible that he developed inferiority complex, narcissism, obsessive-compulsive and paranoid tendencies due to disturbed childhood experiences.

Diamond (2014) remarked that Hitler, "like so many victims of physical or sexual abuse during childhood, may have experienced an extraordinary sense of helplessness and powerlessness as a boy, stemming mainly from his poor relationship with his exceedingly domineering and controlling father. It is frequently this terrifying feeling of total helplessness and powerlessness in childhood that drives what Nietzsche called this exceptional "will to power" later in life." Related literature also suggest that Hitler was frail and sickly during his childhood and was regularly bullied by young Jewish boys about his size (Langer, 1943). Thus, it may be argued that in order to compensate for the deep-seated **inferiority complex** Hitler developed as a child, Hitler had intense need for power which he achieved through success in his political career. However, Hitler was not like other run-of-the-mill power-hungry politics. Hitler was in it for world domination. He concocted the idea of superiority of the "Aryan race" to segregate society into inferior Jews and superior Aryans.

Usually, pathological **narcissism** develops as a defence mechanism against the anxiety caused by a deep-seated inferiority complex. This could have been the case with Hitler too. To compensate for the deep-seated inferiority complex, Hitler put up a front of superiority and self-adulation. Diamond (2014) referred to Murray's explanation of Hitler's adult behaviour as the "counteractive type" i.e. "primarily motivated by resentment and revenge in response to prior narcissistic wounding and profound feelings of inferiority." Adler terms this reactive response as 'masculine protest' which is "compensatory striving for superiority (to counteract feelings of inferiority), aggression, ambition, avarice and envy, coupled with constant defiance, vengeance, and resentment" (Diamond, 2014).

Hitler may have suffered from constant anxiety because of the lack of control as a child enduring abuse and bullying. Diamond (2014) says

that existential anxiety is caused by "being confronted by those terrifying aspects of existence against which we are utterly powerless and cannot control." In order to manage this 'existential anxiety', psycho-analytically positing, Hitler compensated by trying to exert total control over his immediate environment including other people leading to **obsessive-compulsive tendencies**. If this is viewed from the Freudian position, it would seem that Hitler remained arrested at the anal stage of development. Diamond (2014) said that, "Hitler maintained a very close relationship with his personal physician, who helped manage Hitler's anxiety symptoms with numerous medications, many of which were highly unorthodox, and are said to have included both sedating barbiturates and stimulating amphetamine on which Hitler came to depend." Therefore, Hitler suffered from mild substance abuse disorder as well which is frequently acknowledged as a co-morbid condition with obsessive-compulsive personality.

Hitler also had clear paranoid tendencies. Murray (1943) said that Hitler manifested other forms of **somatoform conditions** such as hysterical blindness and mutism. Diamond (2014) mentions that "Hitler is said during adolescence to have developed syphilophobia, a dread of being contaminated by sexual contact with women, leading eventually to sexual impotence according to acquaintances." This was probably a result of his Oedipus complex not being resolved and over-identification with mother instead of father. Over the years, despite being acknowledged as an extremely powerful person, his neurosis persisted. Despite becoming Chancellor of Germany, his **neurosis** manifested as "episodes of "emotional collapse" characterised by violent bouts of furious screaming and crying" (Diamond, 2014). It is due to this reason, Murray diagnosed Hitler with **borderline paranoid schizophrenia** and called him hysterical "megalomaniac."

### Dysdemonic genius and Messiah Complex

Having lost both his parents at a very young age, Hitler was left with no support and had to live in an orphanage in Vienna. Initially, Hitler wanted to become an artist and as a young artist, he survived with a meagre income generated from the sale of paintings. Eventually, he moved to Munich to be with his cousin in order to avoid enlistment in the army. Yet, he was forced to enlist. In 1919, Hitler got a taste of the blood of politics. It was then that Hitler discovered his talent for public speaking at political meetings. By September of 1919, Hitler became an army corporal investigating a group called the German Workers' Party. He was impressed with the group's

anti-Semitic, nationalistic doctrine and signed up for the party. From thereon, Hitler became more popular, being elected in 1921 as the leader of the Nazi party.

As established before, Hitler harboured a lot of resentment and anger which when repressed manifests as "fits of *daimonic possession* in its most negative form' (Diamond, 2014). Diamond (2014) argued that Hitler displayed symptoms of Dysdaimonic genius:

"The dysdaimonic genius manifests a confounding combination of exceptional creative powers coalesced with equally strong tendencies toward psychopathology, perversity, destructiveness, and evil; a providentially rare amalgamation of daimonic power witnessed-in its negative extreme-in devious historical figures like Adolf Hitler. Typically--but not always--these diabolical individuals die at an unusually young age, laid low by their overweening arrogance, hubris, and unholy alliance with evil."

He further takes another example of Osama Bin Laden to substantiate his point. He adds that these individuals "can further be understood as manifesting a "messiah complex". This means that "they become inflated by a grandiose identification with the Messiah archetype present within each of us." Therefore, this identification with a grandiose self-image may cause one to have such extreme narcissism. Such narcissism is coupled with elevated mood which alternates with emotional lows. This point of emotional low, according to Diamond (2014), manifests as episodes of 'emotional collapse' characterized by violent bouts of screaming and crying. This resembles the symptomatology of bipolar disorder, but, such post-hoc diagnosis could be problematic as well.

#### **Conclusion: Hitler-A case of 'malevolent creativity'**

In case of Hitler, the madness and creativity came together and manifested as what Diamond (2014) termed as 'malevolent creativity'. In this regard, he said that "it is more important than ever to understand the underlying psychology of such dangerous individuals. Often gifted with the ability to influence and motivate the masses through the power of oration and messianic vision, such leaders, as Murray (1943) observes, become the "incarnation of the crowd's unspoken needs and cravings." This is "much like the mythic figures of the Antichrist in Christianity, Armilus in Judaism, and Masih ad-Dajjal in Islam, they are not merely false prophets, but, even more perniciously, the very embodiment of evil" (Diamond, 2014). Hitler's malevolent creativity allowed him to devise strategies and tactics that

surprised and defeated many of his enemies. He was so dangerously disturbed, yet so creative and gifted that he by his mid-40's commanded such power and had such political standing. His lack of compassion and disregard for ethics enabled him to achieve this tremendous feat. He had no qualms about lying, stealing, torture or murder if he thought they would further his goal. Another phrase that comes close to 'malevolent creativity' is 'mad genius'. Rather, it is this 'mad genius' that made Hitler who he was. If the 'mad' was missing from the 'genius' or if the 'genius' was missing from the 'mad', this extent of destruction would have not happened. Therefore, it may be argued that the confluence of madness and creativity, in case of Hitler, proved to be both potent and decisive.

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#### **Case 4: Eminem**

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In order to explicate the relation between madness and creativity, the present study attempts to explore the connection between the experience of living through major depressive disorder (MDD) and creative expression in the life and work of Marshall 'Eminem' Bruce Mathers III (hereon referred to as Eminem). Eminem is a fifteen time Grammy award winning rapper, songwriter, record executive, and record producer. Through his career spanning decades, Eminem has been in conflict with the law, media, and his own fraternity. His public image has been of a troubled artist from a difficult background. However, there is more to it than meets the eye as far as his underdog story goes and there is much to be understood of the process of creative expression from his journey.

To understand the lived experiences of MDD, it is pertinent to clarify its clinical picture. Common physical symptoms of major depression include fatigue, low energy, and physical aches. Sleep patterns are generally disturbed and thus, individuals may find it hard to fall asleep (insomnia) or sleep throughout the day (hypersomnia). Similarly, appetite may significantly increase or decrease. Individuals generally feel a lack of interest in pleasurable activities such as sex. Thoughts and movements may slowdown for some people (psychomotor retardation), while others may find it difficult to sit still, and tend to pace, fidget, and wring their hands (psychomotor agitation). Social withdrawal is common in



depression. Individuals may lose connect with their peers and loved ones and prefer to be silent and alone. Cognitively, depressed individuals tend to view the world around them in a very negative light, and find it difficult to be optimistic. Suicidal ideation is also present in depression. There may be organized plans for suicide, or simply persistent thoughts and considerations about suicide. This is termed as 'suicidal ideation'. The phenomenon of suicide contagion has been explored in multiple studies in case of celebrities. Musicians, artists, writers, poets, and others in creative industries often have a lot of influence over the masses and when they attempt or successfully commit suicide, it is soon replicated by the fans. There is now significant evidence to show credibility for the phenomenon, through studies of suicide clusters and suicide 'epidemics.' (Bakwin, 1957; Gould, Kleinman, & Wallenstein, 1994; Brent et al., 1989; Gould, 1990).

Since the present work attempts to explore the life of Eminem through an analysis of his creative work as well as personal accounts of his career and creative process, relevant secondary sources of data were chosen. The personal history of Eminem has been obtained from the media interviews and from his autobiography titled 'The Way I Am.' For the purpose of brevity and to focus the discussion on the parts of his work that directly reflect his experiences with depression and conflicted identity, this paper will only analyse two songs from his vast umbrella of work — 'Beautiful' and 'Rock Bottom.'

## About Eminem: A biographical analysis

### *Disturbed childhood experiences*

Eminem was born on October 17, 1972, in St. Joseph, Missouri. He was the only child of Marshall Bruce Mathers Jr. and Deborah Rae Nelson. Reportedly, Bruce moved away from the family to California when Eminem was 6 months old. Debbie Nelson recalls Eminem writing letters to his father as a child. All of them came back marked 'return to sender.' This **absence of a father figure** early in his life made him vulnerable to a range of negative influences.

Eminem moved around a lot in his childhood, primarily staying with family members. He has discussed how this constant relocation prevented his ability to form close bonds with his peers. Further, he was **bullied** extensively at school and in his neighbourhood. This bullying often took the form of physical abuse and violence. At nine years old, he was injured so severely that his brain seemed to be bleeding out of his ear (Mathers, 2008). Several

studies have explored the links between being bullied and childhood or adult depression (Boulton & Underwood, 1992; Kumpulainen et. al., 1998; Rantanen et. al., 1999; Salmon, James, & Smith, 1998). It has been suggested that among the consequences of being bullied are anxiety, low self-esteem, feelings of insecurity at school, and resistance to attend school.

Eminem has also recounted being on the 'free meals' list at school. At a young age, this publicly visible marker of depravity 'othered' him and added to his bullying. Apart from other difficult experiences, poverty has often been reported to be "one of the most consistent correlates of depression" (Belle & Doucet, 2003, p. 102). It has also been suggested that due to the vast and multifaceted reach of the impact of poverty, those who grow up in it are predisposed to anxiety and mood disorders (Najman, et. al., 2010). Thus, Eminem's behavioural problems, drug abuse and depression in later years can be linked to his very early experiences of **economic and social deprivation**.

A ray of hope entered Eminem's life when his uncle Ronald 'Ronnie' Nelson, introduced him to the world of rap music. Eminem has described him as a "*well-intentioned dude who just couldn't function in society*" (Mathers, 2008, p. 135). Eminem has also described the rampant abuse present in Nelson's life — he was the victim of many 'whippings' from his mother's ex-husbands. He also experienced abuse himself. In this regard, he also mentioned, "*A lot of people in my family had screws loose because of abuse. If you go back and look at the abuse that I took, it's no surprise I became who I am. Someone I don't really want to be.*" Eminem admitted the **abuse** "*twisted him up*" too. Viewing such abuse by and of his close relations may have impacted the mind of a young child and adolescent. Several studies have highlighted how childhood neglect and childhood physical abuse may be indicators and risk factors for future depressed or suicidal adults (Widom, DuMont, & Czaja, 2007; Brown, Cohen, Johnson, & Smailes, 1999; Silverman, Reinherz, & Giaconia, 1996). One may convincingly argue that Marshall's childhood primary experience (as a victim) and secondary experience (as a witness) with abuse may have contributed to him becoming an individual he claims he did not want to be. His negative self-image may be a direct consequence of his abusive childhood experiences.

Nelson was indeed a significant figure in his life, but, the relationship was short-lived as he also committed **suicide** in December 1991. Given that

Eminem sports a tattoo of his name and has many songs that mentions him, one may assume that Eminem deeply valued his presence in his life. This early example of a role model committing suicide could have predisposed him to suicidal ideation in face of his own depression.

### ***Dissociation and internal-split***

Eminem's public image may be juxtaposed with Eminem's personal persona. He began his career with his alter ego, Slim Shady, an aggressive 'bad guy' who seemed distinct from both Eminem and Marshall Mathers. Eminem's best friend and colleague Proof described the distinction between Eminem and Slim Shady as, "*Slim Shady is the guy who shows up after a few shots of Bacardi; Eminem is the emcee who goes on stage sober and spits his metaphors. Slim Shady gets drunk and wants to fight*" (Mathers, 2008, p. 34). Thus, Slim Shady persona was perhaps the most reckless and aggressive. Analysis from the previous theme clarifies that this persona emerged from very real experiences in Marshall Mathers' life. The cumulative sense of anger he had felt for a large part of his life was both verbalised through and manifested in Slim Shady. This sense of anger is discussed further in context with Rock Bottom.

It is indeed noteworthy that these distinct personalities of Eminem, Slim Shady, and Marshall Mathers seemed to coexist in a single individual pointing in the direction of internal-split. We, as outsiders, can only speculate as to the conflicts that may be at the core of such a split. As is usually in the case of a split persona, it is possible that the persona of Slim Shady acted as a safety valve by allowing Mathers to express the anger that he had repressed for years. This may have been a better alternative than repression but it came with its own challenges in terms of drawing the line between Eminem, Slim Shady, and Marshall Mathers. Eminem has described blaming Slim Shady for the things he said or did, in a manner dissociating himself from his anger and recklessness. To him, "*it was great to have someone else to blame. In real life, if you live like that, people call you crazy. Rap is one big Fantasy Island*" (Mathers, 2008, p. 34).

### ***Isolation and Helplessness***

The circumstances did not change much even when he grew older. The Detroit neighbourhood where Eminem grew up was one such area dominated by a culture of poverty, where drug use and crime were rampant. His private domicile was burglarised five times — "*Kim and I were always either getting evicted or our house was getting shot up or robbed*"

(Mathers, 2008, p. 144). This acute sense of vulnerability made him take some extreme steps. Eminem obtained a gun to protect himself and his family, but soon, it gave way to more frequent, dangerous and illegal use. It might have given him a sense of control he lacked thus far and he would often shoot in the air behind his recording studio and pull guns on individuals. In sync with the culture of crime and poverty that prevailed where he lived, he would not reckon such use as a crime that might lead to potential jail time (Mathers, 2008). Thus, one may argue that at the heart of all the pent-up anger and resentment, was a sense of deep vulnerability and isolation. He felt powerless and inferior and tried making up for it through his music as well as through various unlawful activities he got involved with. Lewis' (2017) study also emphasised the experiences of isolation, helplessness, and a sense of inferiority that people internalise as part of growing up in culture of poverty.

### ***Rap Music: an escape, an opportunity***

This idea of **rap as a land of fantasy** underlines the possible importance of music and rap for a young boy who had grown up in difficult circumstances. The world of rap had the allure of the world of fantasy and may have offered an **escape** as well as an **opportunity to a better future**. It could allow him to escape the poverty and abuse that were characteristic of the Detroit neighbourhood where a young Marshall grew into Eminem and eventually donned the persona of Slim Shady.

### ***Creative Work Analysis: 'Rock Bottom' and 'Beautiful'***

#### ***Lyrics as an expression of the inner world***

The album Relapse (2009) was released after a long hiatus period. His last album before Relapse was Encore (2004). In this gap, Eminem went through some very difficult experiences at a personal level. His re-marriage with Kimberly Ann Scott had fallen apart after eleven weeks. His best friend, Proof had been shot and killed outside a Detroit nightclub. Proof's death was a significant life event that Eminem continued to have trouble dealing with for some time. Proof had been with him and a part of his entourage since before Marshall was Eminem. The two shared a deep bond and Eminem has described the gravity of his loss, "*I have never felt so much pain in my life. It's a pain that is with me to this day. A pain that has become a part of who I am*" (Mathers, 2008, p. 5). Further, Eminem, had relapsed after his time in drug rehabilitation. Remembering this difficult phase, Eminem once said, "*I just went into such a dark place*

*that, with everything, the drugs, my thoughts, everything. And the more drugs I consumed, and it was all depressants I was taking, the more depressed I became, the more self-loathing I became...*" (Dawton, 2009). At the professional level as well, Eminem was unsure of his return to the world of hip-hop. Yet, 'Beautiful' was written as a track that would reassure those who felt they were in a dark place that there was a way out. Beautiful may also be considered a track that is a direct reflection of his struggles with depression.

*"I'm just so fuckin' depressed,  
I just can't seem to get out this slump  
If I could just get over this hump  
But I need something to pull me out this dump,"*  
(Eminem, 2009)

Here, phrases such as "I'm just so fucking depressed," "I just can't seem to get out of this slump," mirror the inner struggles of Eminem.

#### ***Preoccupation with self, absolutist cognitions and pessimism***

In the song 'Beautiful,' Eminem has used pronouns referring to his self a total of 85 times. Interestingly, he has also used the word 'you' 42 times. In many cases, even the word 'you' seems to refer to his own self. For instance, "*So don't let 'em say you ain't beautiful...Just stay true to you*" (Eminem, 2009) seems to be addressed to the listeners of the song. However, Eminem is also referring to his struggle with his public image and nay-sayers.

Through his lyrics, Eminem also expressed his belief that he simply can't escape or better the position he is currently in. "Words, phrases, and ideas that denote totality, either of magnitude or probability, are often referred to as absolute." (Al-Mosaiwi & Johnstone, 2018, p. 1). Absolutist words, cognitive rigidity, and deficits in problem-solving ability have been associated with depression (Ellis & Rutherford, 2008). Many therapies for depression are centred around understanding and managing negative thinking (Beck, 1979; Burns, 1989).

Similar sentiments, even more forcefully, are expressed in his song Rock Bottom.

*"That's rock bottom  
When this life makes you mad enough to kill  
That's rock bottom  
When you want somethin' bad enough to steal  
That's rock bottom  
When you feel like you've had it up to here  
'Cause you're mad enough to scream  
But you're sad enough to tear"* (Eminem, 1999)

In this verse, even though Eminem uses the word 'you,' he seems to be referring to his own rage at the '*happy people of the world who don't know what it's like to be broke.*' Such intensity in the song perhaps is a result of living through extremely difficult times when Eminem was working on this track. He was unemployed and was so economically disadvantaged that he could not even afford diapers for his daughter, Hailie. No wonder that the title and the lyrics of the song are so pessimistic. His inner state of rage and helplessness is reflected when he writes that he possibly is — '*mad enough to scream, sad enough to tear*' — but is unable to do so.

#### ***Rap as a let out for pent-up anger and resentment***

The extreme anger expressed in Rock Bottom may have stemmed from the cumulative experiences of deprivation in formative years and financial struggles that he endured before becoming an established artist. In this regard, he opens up in his book as follows:

*"When you grow up like I did — bouncing around, fighting for everything — it does make you angry (...) when I do think back about how many schools I went to and everything else, it makes me realise, no wonder I was so mad at everything. It was almost a way for me piss back in the face of the people who pissed on me all my life."* (p. 133)

In his songs, particularly in Rock Bottom, there seems to be a sense of urgency to get back at the world for all the wrong it seems to have done him. The anger and resentment he was surrounded with while growing up, it seems, became an inspiration for his creative angst.

#### ***Hitting the 'rock bottom' and suicide ideation***

After writing and recording the song Rock Bottom, he "*swallowed a handful of Tylenol 3s*" (Mathers, 2008, p. 28). In fact, he had recorded the song with the intention of it being his very last song. This was followed by Eminem's defeat at The Rap Olympics - "*I was giving up. I had lost. All I kept thinking after that was, what the fuck am I going to do? Because I was going home to nothing*" (Mathers, 2008, p. 29). While his life was otherwise also grim, losing at the Rap Olympics was the loss of a significant opportunity. This defeat seemed final in nature to Eminem, probably to him, there was no turning back from here. This finality seemed to exist to the degree that it erased all hope that he could find in life. He also felt that he was unable to provide for his wife and daughter. He lost at the only thing he was



good at and was pinning his hopes on. In this regard, he noted, “*Rap was always a pipe dream for me, but rap was all I had. Because really, what was I going to do with my life*” (Mathers, 2008). This broke him from within and added to his suicidal ideation. As discussed earlier, the suicide of his uncle and role model Nelson also made him prone to a suicide attempt.

### ***Eminem’s Journey from ‘Rock Bottom’ to ‘Beautiful’***

An important difference between Rock Bottom and Beautiful lies in the perspective towards his future. Rock Bottom maintains the same pessimism from beginning to end. The first verse and the last verse are written in the same tone — “*My life is full of empty promises and broken dreams, I’m hopin’ things look up, but there ain’t no job openings.*” (Eminem, 1999)

However, Beautiful ends on a different note, “*Be yourself, man, be proud of who you are, Even if it sounds corny, Don’t ever let no one tell you, you ain’t beautiful.*” (Eminem, 2009) This is also evident of Eminem’s journey as an individual. Rock Bottom was written at the time in his life when he was much younger and unemployed. Beautiful was written about 10 years later when he was one of the most recognised rap artists. While it is true that at both times in his life, he has faced many emotional and familial challenges, but his perspective on life was perhaps less negative in ‘Beautiful’ due to his success and recognition as an artist.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The discussion above establishes clearly that the difficult life experiences that Eminem endured

predisposed him to depression and suicide ideation. But, the very same depravity and resultant rage and angst gave his rap music a kind of depth that people could relate to. His creative expression not only became an escape from the difficult life he had but also his music gave him a ray of hope for a better life and respect. Eminem’s life and works are, thus, a perfect example of how the life experiences become the underlying thread connecting the ‘madness’ and ‘creative expression’. Fortunately, the suicide attempts of Eminem were not successful and he became a well-known and respected artist. But, there may be many others who are either lost in oblivion or else had their short-lived stint with glory as they could not cope with the psychopathology which led to disastrous consequences. It is, therefore, important for us as a society to work towards creating a culture where mental health issues are not brushed aside as insignificant. We should create programmes for identifying at-risk citizens and provide avenues for seeking help. When it comes to suicidal ideation and suicide contagion, it is imperative to understand when intervention is needed. It is also significant to note here that as a researcher, I believe that understanding the different ways in which people experience and express depression may enhance our understanding of the condition.

On a positive note, one may say that Eminem has come a long way since his early years. On 20th April, 2018, he completed a decade of sobriety. Thus, this paper is dedicated to the continued efforts of those who may find themselves in difficult circumstances but continue to persevere regardless.

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# BOOK REVIEW

## Are You There Alone?

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**Book Review: Malley, S.O. (2004). *The Unspeakable Crime of Andrea Yates*. NYC: Simon & Shuster.**

“Are you there alone?” asked the dispatcher who answered the call at 911 when Andrea Yates called the police after murdering her 5 kids. Suzanne O’ Malley a journalist was at the eye of the storm, she covered the murder of Andrea Yates’ 5 kids Noah, John, Paul, Luke, and Mary on June 20, 2001 in Houston Texas as an investigative reporter. The mother (Andrea Yates) was pronounced guilty by the court in 2004 but acquitted later in 2006 because she was found to be legally insane when she committed the crime. The author believed that the intricacies of the deadly event goes well beyond what has been heard and told in the media and can only be captured in the form of a book. According to her, the facts of the crime can be known with precision, but it was Andrea’s mind, that was the lesser understood entity and hence, the book. Thus, the author very methodologically, at many instances in the book “Are you there alone?”, published in 2004 in New York by Simon & Schuster, quotes the excerpts from the actual interviews and dialogues with Andrea Yates. For a writer whose subject is crime, exact details become important to gain credibility and create an impact by reminding the readers that the event being written about happened in real time.

This is a meticulously written book where the writer interviewed over 100 people involved with the case. She personally corresponded with Andrea Yates and her husband-Rusty Yates-more than 30 times. The treatment of the subject in the book is well-rounded as the author delves into the psychiatric, legal as well as the religious aspects of Andrea’s life. The initial portions of the book discusses in details the backdrop of Andrea’s life until the day she commits the murders. Her thoughts, behaviour patterns, medical history and the course of treatment (which was rather inadequate) are presented in sufficient details for the reader to identify with her as a person. Simultaneously, by using Andrea’s case as an example, the author also raises concerns over the lack of awareness about the issues related to maternal mental health, especially, post-partum disorders.

Through this discussion with help of the necessary evidence from Andrea’s case, the author makes the readers question that, ‘is Andrea is a criminal or a victim who did what she did as a result of a failed system of care?’ This is an important book as besides telling Andrea’s poignant story, it also serves a larger purpose of creating awareness among people about the struggles of mental health that are outcome of the postpartum conditions such as post-partum depression. The book also presents much needed statistics and figures related to these conditions which establish that there are many women who suffer in silence and guilt. It is important to note that what Andrea went through is rather common as one in five women develop mental health problems during the pregnancy or during the first year after the birth of the child (Russell K. , 2017). These problems can range from prolonged low mood to psychosis. The book can be thus seen as a much needed step in the direction of clarifying the clinical picture of a long ignored and misunderstood disorder.

While one of the foremost challenges that the author takes up for herself is understanding and bringing forth the intricacies of Andrea’s mind, the book in some ways fails to meet this challenge. The author, being trained as an investigative reporter and not as a therapist, ends up focusing more on her observable behaviours, psychiatric facts and her medication etc. She does not bring out the lived experience of what it meant for Andrea to live through the gloomy, dark life of post-partum depression and thus, what it meant to her subjectively to cross the line, where she took the lives of her own children. Andrea Yates was a deeply religious individual. Her psychosis was also intertwined with her religious beliefs. It is highly appreciable that the author cognises and explicates the religious references that Andrea gave during her psychosis. It is indeed interesting to note the subtle ways in which the author communicates to the readers that religion could be seen as a collective delusion. The point where to draw the line of differentiation between delusions and religion also becomes contentious in Andrea’s trial. In this pursuit,

the book also presents the views of one of the most controversial persons associated with the case-the religious teacher of Andrea.

The most gripping segment of the book describes Andrea's trial at length starting from selection of the jury to the final verdict. The attorneys' approach and arguments on either side of the defence and prosecution are used very artfully to build suspense around the final verdict. The idiosyncratic canons within the Texas legal system for deciding whether a person can be acquitted on the grounds of legal insanity are also presented in detail. However, the legal jargon in this section goes well beyond the understanding of an individual who is not familiar with the legal system in USA and hence, the readers may find themselves losing connect with the text at many places.

Finally, the book sheds light on Andrea's relationship with her husband post the pronouncement of a guilty verdict where she was given life imprisonment. The book also paints a poignant picture of Andrea's psychological condition as she spends months and years in the jail. It is noteworthy that the book was published in the year 2004, i.e., two years after Andrea was pronounced guilty by the court. However, in 2006, an appeal was filed against the

verdict and this time, the jury declared Andrea not guilty due to the grounds of insanity. The credit may at least partially be given to the impact the book might have made. It would also be extremely interesting if the author were to revise her book to extend the story of Andrea's retrial leading to a non-guilty verdict to complete the story that she started narrating.

Overall, one may convincingly propose that the author does a brilliant job of placing Andrea in her life context wherein her actions become understandable for the readers. The book achieves a greater goal of bringing forth how the medical, legal as well as social-support system had failed a suffering mother. The book also appraises the reader that this tragedy was entirely avoidable had Andrea's disorder received proper care and treatment. The rigorous research over the years from thousands of sources makes the book impactful indeed. Although, I really wish the facts were also supplemented by Andrea's voice which is largely missing. Nevertheless, the book is a good read for anyone interested in suspense, law and psychology. It is also a recommended reading for scholars interested in taking a peak into the disastrous consequences that may be associated with disorders related to disturbances of maternal mental health.

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# MY VOICE: REFLECTIVE NARRATIVES



## Your appearance is none of our business

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In a world of Instagram filters and body modification apps (yes, they exist), it is evident that we think a lot about how we look. Don't most of us spend a considerable amount of time every day, looking into the mirror, trying to enhance our physical appearance, and if possible, making small fixes to hide our flaws? A little concealer here, a little hair gel there. No matter how satisfied we are with our own looks, no matter how much we think we resemble our favourite actor or actress, we are always targets of comments like "What are you wearing? You look like a guy!" Comments like, "You're too dark, you won't get a good partner this way," addressed towards a person who has a bit more melanin than average, are pretty hurtful. I'm sure that 90% of us have received such unsolicited, 'friendly', criticism about our physical appearance at some point in our lives. The remaining 10% could be lying, or could be the 'heroes' who save us from embarrassing ourselves in front of others by (not-so) 'subtly' pointing out their defects, so that we can start working on them. We too might have done the same, even if unintentionally. Who knows, perhaps a small comment we made about someone's appearance could have affected them a lot.

To elucidate more on this topic, I will share some examples from my personal life. I have a great love for food that has contributed very generously to my body weight. I have been teased about my weight before and used to cry a lot earlier. As I've grown older, I have learnt to take it easy and I even joke about my weight. I realised that taking these comments seriously will not affect the other person in any way, so I might as well just brush it off. I never actually cared about my weight when I was younger. I used to wear clothes that were obviously tight for me, but nothing deterred me from wearing those clothes, and I would often go around showcasing myself as a confident, Victoria's Secret model. I never felt bad about being a chubby person until my relatives, and a few friends, started reprimanding me for it. "Lavanya, lose some weight," "You look like your mother's mother," "You're too fat." Constantly hearing these comments really lowered my self-esteem. Of course, while I did know that I was fat, I just could not understand why it bothered other people more than it bothered me. It was almost as if my adipose, which I had nurtured for more than 15 years, would infect them as well, like a virus. Consequently, I stopped

wearing sleeveless tops because of the fear of my 'fat arms' showing, I stopped wearing shorts because of my 'thunder thighs' (a term my mother uses frequently, which I quite like, ironically) and I used to shut myself up in my room if any relative came to my house. Had I been a bit older, I would not have cared a lot, but as a young child, this had a deep and long-lasting impact. Weight was just one aspect of my appearance, which people pointed out blatantly. I have also been ridiculed for my skin tone, and I took it so seriously that I started using Fair 'n' Lovely (which for the record, is extremely harmful for the skin). When my mother observed, she insisted that I trashed all those fairness creams. Thanks to that, I learnt how to appreciate my skin colour.

Of course, if one is lucky enough, one might even have very 'enthusiastic' friends, along with such relatives. In grade 6, one of my 'friends', Piya (pseudonym), out of nowhere, started commenting that, "Oh, just look at Lavanya. Everything about her is imperfect. Her uniform, her eyebrows, her hair and her skirt." We all must have heard of a term called backbiting or back-bitching, but ever heard of front-bitching? At that moment, I smiled and thought, "She is my friend, and if I say something back to her, our relationship will turn sour, and I don't want that to happen." But the moment I stepped into my home, I broke down. A similar incident happened when I was around 15 years old. I was sitting in class one day, just making senseless jokes with the rest of my friends. After 5 minutes, my friend made an out-of-the-blue statement. "Lavanya, your nose is like a *pakoda* (fritter)..." I did not understand whether to laugh at how creatively she had criticized my poor nose, or cry that my nose didn't fit her 'ideal' standard of what a nose should be like. I still laugh at the ridiculousness of her comment sometimes, but I will not deny that it did impact me and since then, I've been conscious about it as well.

These instances are just a few examples. Whether we like it or not, we all are affected by it in some way or the other. It may be expressed in the form of sadness, disappointment, or even anger. I have seen people being conscious about certain physical features because others have ridiculed them. One of my friends has big breasts, and almost every other day someone used to taunt her about it. She always wears oversized clothes in an effort to hide herself, and no matter how

much I try to make her feel comfortable in her own skin, she is never able to gain the confidence be herself. I contemplated a lot about it. Is it wrong to look a certain way because it is considered to be 'imperfect' and 'peculiar' by others? Will I be accepted by others only if I listen to what they have to say about my body and my appearance? The answer to these questions, I realised much later in life, is no. Having imperfections is what makes us human and people who accept us for who we are, are the ones that deserve to be a part of our lives.

In light of this statement, I find it necessary to mention that Piya and I are no longer friends, but, I am grateful towards her, because if it were not for her, I would have probably never understood that it is alright to look a certain way, irrespective of the so called beauty standards. No matter what, there will always be a person who will be unhappy with a certain part, or perhaps, even the whole of us. The same people who used to tell me to become healthy and fit, are the ones who now say I look weak, because of the weight I have lost over the years. Weak? Out of all the words that are available in the dictionary, they chose weak. But, if wearing bright, quirky clothes makes one happy, then no one should stop one from wearing them. If one is comfortable in one's own body, then not a single person has the right to put them down for it. Though I never use this Internet phrase (because it is grammatically incorrect), I think it is appropriate in this context to say, "You do you." As one of my favourite quote (by an anonymous person whose name I wish I knew) goes, "When you are truly comfortable

in your own skin, not everyone will like you, but you won't care about it one bit."

Here, I have only elaborated on examples of physical appearance, but there are a lot of things we say or even do in real life that can affect someone very negatively, as stated previously. It is extremely important to surround oneself with positive and non-Piya kind of people. As a Psychology student, and as a person who has had such experiences, reflecting on them has made me extremely careful about what I say to people. I try to be as honest as possible, but without coming off as condescending. It is, of course, important to communicate what one has in one's mind, but it is equally important to say it in such a manner that the person does not feel dismayed. I have now realized how the tiniest of things can impact us negatively, and I have learnt to be more sensitive towards the insecurities that other people may have. Even if I do (unintentionally) end up offending someone, I am always sure to apologize. The wise persona inside my head always says, "Sticks and stones may break someone's bones, but words can definitely hurt them," which I couldn't agree with more.

Now, as an almost 20-year-old person, armed with my takeaways from these experiences, I have become more optimistic in my outlook towards life. Not only do I view myself more positively, but I ensure that a bit of my positivity also rubs off on others as well. I have certainly come a long way, from being a shy, funny and emotionally driven person, to a shy, funny, and emotionally driven, but also, a much wiser person.

## Finding Your Funny

Parul Tewari

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In the winter of 2017-18, I noticed that I was sad. I realised that the cold weather was making me miserable and awful about everything. I had never felt this way before and was unsure how to even describe what I was feeling. I felt clueless about how to deal with the sadness and melancholy that I was experiencing. A month into 2018, I realised that it was getting worse and it was because of the weather. I was hoping that my mood would get better as the days get warmer. I also knew that eventually things would work out because nothing lasts forever. But such a mere long term reassurance did not change the fact that in that moment of time, I was a sad person and the things around me didn't bring me much joy.

As a psychology student, I had read extensively about sadness and depression, its types, and ways to treat it, both as part of my course and beyond. So, I tried the things one is supposed to try, including sharing my concerns with others, exercising, sticking to a good routine, but nothing worked. I regularly meditated which helped me introspect. Despite this, I could see myself going further downhill with every passing day. I felt powerless and overwhelmed by the sadness around me and I was desperate to find anything that would keep me happy. I very badly wanted to be 'just fine' again.

Taking a little detour from my narrative, I would like to share that humour has always been extremely important to me. It's one of the things I value most in life. I stand by the fact that we take life too seriously. I often worry that people, especially adults, forget to laugh regularly. I think it's important to be able to laugh at one-self and others. I was always the 'funny one' in the group. I liked to laugh and make other people laugh, even if it came at the cost of being ridiculed. I think that the importance of humour in my life also made me more sensitive about being sad. During that time, the one thing that kept me going was humour.

Humour, as depicted in mainstream media, was never something I enjoyed. Part of the reason for this was that my exposure to comedy was limited to slapstick comedy, a genre I'm not particularly fond of due to its incessant sexist nature and overall lack of creativity. However, my fondness for humour in media increased once I discovered my brand of

comedy. I enjoyed watching sketch comedy, stand-up comedy, late night talk shows and a few other forms of unusually funny stuff. This niche genre of comedy is not for everyone, as is evident from the small fan base that consumes such content as opposed to what is considered conventionally funny.

It's very hard to describe the things that made me laugh, even harder to understand why it did so, but the fact remained that it made me laugh. It made me laugh on some of the most difficult days during the winter. There were days when the only thing that made me smile was an absurdist Lonely Island digital short, or a well-crafted joke by John Mulaney on robots, or a bizarre Stefan club, or one of Kristen Wiig's or Kate McKinnon's wacky characters on Saturday Night Live, or parody shows like Documentary Now. I found this stuff hilarious because of the pure talent, creativity and absurdity of it. I tried to introduce a few more people to this type of humour, but it almost always received poorly. People often reacted in a confused way trying to 'find the joke'. But it stopped mattering to me how other people viewed it. These jokes made me laugh, and I realised that that was enough.

This reflection is centred round a phase when everything around me was telling me to be sad, yet, there was a reason why I laughed amidst that. Comedy and humour became my anchor. I was not consuming humorous content as a defence mechanism or as a distraction. It was an active choice to surround myself with a weird, unexplainable and niche form of comedy to remind myself that happiness can come from the strangest of places. It made me realise that happiness is that treasure that is just waiting to be discovered in all of life's turns and twists.

In my pursuit of sketch and stand-up comedy, I also understood the value of the lows in life. Every once in a while, I used to stumble upon an act that bombed and died an awful death with an audience. I drew an interesting parallel from this. Think of it this way, for every 10 jokes that fail, there will be one which will work. Similarly, for every moment I felt dejected, I found this other moment of happiness that made me appreciate how much I needed to laugh. And in that one moment of joy when I was laughing till I

couldn't breathe, I felt that I was recovering. And that honestly felt like the best feeling in the world.

This experience also made me change my perception with respect to others. I realised that people can find joy and happiness from surprising places and it's important to respect that. Most people did not like what I found funny and I did not enjoy mainstream comedy shows and movies. I learned that while I may not enjoy slapstick comedies or shows like Comedy Nights, there are still people who do and I don't get to denounce that. I grew more tolerant of other people's preferences and I extended this new found open mindedness to areas beyond media preferences.

I am pleased to share that I am in a much better place now. I look back on my journey and derive strength from it. I am not the same person that I was before this and I know that I will never be the same person. But maybe that is what growth does to a person. I don't want to be the same person. I would never have discovered so many things and never learnt so many new things had it not been for this. I am a changed person and I will continue to change, continue to explore and continue to laugh. Most of all, I taught myself how to laugh again in a time when it was just easier to be miserable. In closing, I would like to quote a comedian who has made me laugh harder than anyone else, Bill Hader, who said "*If I'm not making you guys laugh, we're all screwed*".

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