*Original Research Article*

# A Study examining the relationship between Gender and Personality

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**ABSTRACT**

**Background:** Several studies have pointed out the relationship between gender and personality in its various facets. The current study investigates if the personality traits of a person is associated with their gender. The rationale of the study is to understand what impact gender has on one's personality.
**Methodology:** A standardised survey was distributed to a sample of adolescents belonging to the age group of 16-21 years from Mumbai. Each person completed a different measure on the Big Five Personality traits. Women reported themselves to be higher in Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Warmth, and Openness to Feelings, whereas men were higher in Assertiveness and Openness to Ideas. The sample comprises of 50 men and 50 women each from the age group of 16-21 years.
**Results:** Women scored comparatively higher on all the three scales which denotes women are more open to new experiences and new ideas, they are most likely to put others' needs ahead of their own and cooperate rather than compete with each other. They experience negative emotions like fear, anxiety, guilt and shame intensely. Whereas men on the other hand are practical, conventional and focus on the concrete, they tend to avoid the unknown and follow traditional ways. They experience less empathy and are described as hostile, competitive and antagonists.
**Conclusion:** Further studies on gender and personality are needed to elucidate the findings of the current study.

**Keywords:** Personality traits, Gender Differences, Big five Personality Test

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## INTRODUCTION

Personality refers to our characteristic ways of responding to individuals and situations. People can easily describe the way in which they respond to various situations. Certain catchwords (e.g., shy, sensitive, quiet, concerned, warm, etc.) are often used to describe personalities. These words refer to different components of personality. In this sense, personality refers to unique and relatively stable qualities that characterise an individual's behaviour across different situations over a period of time. If you watch closely, you will find that people do show variations in their behaviour. One is not always cautious or impulsive, shy or friendly. Personality characterises individuals as they appear in most circumstances. Consistency in behaviour, thought and emotion of an individual across situations and across time periods characterises her/his personality. For example, an honest person is more likely to remain honest irrespective of time or situation. However, situational variations in behaviour do occur as they help individuals in adapting to their environmental circumstances. Personality is an abstract concept and different experts have provided various definitions for it. Most scholars emphasize that personality is a combination of thoughts, emotions and motivation of individuals. In a comprehensive definition, personality is an interpersonal dynamic structure, which includes physical and psychological systems and the component provides individuals' thoughts and

behaviours characteristic [1]. Personality normally deals with individual differences among people in behaviour patterns, cognition and emotion. Different personality theorists present their own definitions and description of the word based on their theoretical positions. Personality is usually divided into various components called the Big Five; namely openness to experience, conscientiousness, extroversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (or emotionality). These components are stable over time and seem to be attributable to a person's genetics rather than the impacts of one's environment [1].

Personality traits are enduring dispositions [2] and major determinants of behaviour [3]. In the last few decades, a growing consensus has supported the Five-Factor Model [4-9] as a comprehensive yet manageable taxonomy of traits. Those traits have been shown to be heritable [10] and generalizable across-cultures [11-14]. The Five Factor Model is a hierarchical model that organizes personality traits into five broad or higher order factors of Neuroticism (N), Extraversion (E), Openness to Experience (O), Agreeableness (A), and Conscientiousness (C). Each factor is defined by six more specific, lower-order traits, known as facets . In this study, the five broad factors as well as the specific facets, were used as a framework to investigate the relationship between gender and personality.

**Broad Themes in Gender Differences**

The NEO-PI-R is an operationalization of the Five-Factor Model (Five Factor Model), which structures specific traits in terms of five broad factors. It is possible to summarize known gender differences in terms of the Five Factor Model, although the summary is not completely straightforward. Previously reported gender differences appear to be associated with Neuroticism (N), the dimensions of the Interpersonal Circumplex [15], and variations within the domain of Openness to Experience (O).

**Neuroticism (N)**

N is a broad domain of negative affect, including predispositions to experience anxiety, anger, depression, shame, and other distressing emotions. Gender differences on traits related to N have been consistently reported, with women scoring higher than men [16]. Feingold [17] found that women scored higher in anxiety; Nolen Hoeksema [18], in a review of general population surveys, reported that women scored higher in symptoms of depression; and Kling, Hyde, Showers, and Buswell [19] found that women scored lower than men on measures of self-esteem. Neuroticism predisposes individuals to a wide range of psychiatric disorders, and gender differences in N are reflected in the epidemiology of major psychopathology. Generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder with or without agoraphobia, phobias, major depression, dysthymic disorder, and borderline personality disorder are all diagnosed substantially more often in women than in men [20].

A possible exception to the generalization that women score higher in traits related to N is anger. Some studies have found that men report higher levels of hostility than women [21]. Others, however, have reported that women score higher in anger [22], or that there is no difference [23]. These different results may be due to different operationalizations, some of which emphasize the experience of anger, whereas others focus on antagonistic attitudes. Women should score higher on the former, men on the latter.

**Interpersonal Traits**

One of the most influential approaches to the study of gender differences was offered by Bern [24], whose Sex Role Inventory included orthogonal scales measuring masculinity and femininity. As Wiggins and Broughton [25] showed, Bern's masculinity scale is essentially a measure of dominance, whereas Bern's femininity is strongly related to the orthogonal dimension of love. Feingold's conclusion that men are high in assertiveness and women are high in nurturance is consistent with this distinction [17], as is Eagly and Wood's [26] summary of the literature in terms of communal and agentic qualities. Dominance and love are the axes of the Interpersonal Circumplex, and have been shown to be rotations of the Five Factor Model dimensions of Extraversion (E) and Agreeableness [27]; that is, E combines dominance and love, whereas A combines submission and love. It is clear from this analysis that women should score higher on measures of A (because they are both more submissive and more loving), and this has in fact been reported [28]. However, it is less clear whether and how E should be related to gender, because it combines both masculine

and feminine traits. It is thus perhaps not surprising that the literature is inconsistent: Feingold [17] concluded that women are slightly higher in E, and Lynn and Martin [16] that they are lower. From the perspective of the NEO-PI-R, it would be expected that clear gender differences would be found in specific facets of E: Men should score higher on Assertiveness, women on Warmth.

**Openness to Experience (O)**

Men and women are often characterized in terms of differing cognitive styles. Winstead, Derlega, and Unger [29] noted that Western philosophers have frequently characterized men as "guided by 'reason' and women by reason's opposites—including emotion" (p. 264). Within the framework of the Five Factor Model—and less pejoratively—this might be seen in terms of aspects of O. Although there is no reason to think that men and women differ in overall O, they might differ in the aspects of experience to which they are preferentially open. It might be hypothesized that women should score higher in Openness to Aesthetics and Feelings, and men, who are more intellectually oriented, should score higher in Openness to Ideas. There is considerable empirical evidence for the view that women are more sensitive to emotions. Eisenberg, Fabes, Schaller, and Miller [30] found evidence of greater facial expression of emotion in women, and the ability to decode nonverbal signals of emotion is consistently found to be more developed in adult women than in men [31]. Fujita, Diener, and Sandvik [32] reported that, at least in the United States, women experience positive and negative emotions more intensely and vividly than men do. It has recently been hypothesized that gender differences in depression and other negative affects might be due to the greater sensitivity on the part of women to these states [33]. In the present study we tested the hypothesis that gender differences in depression, anxiety, and other facets of N are attributable solely to greater emotional sensitivity— Openness to Feelings—among women.

**Conscientiousness (C)**

Gender differences in aspects of C have rarely been examined. Feingold (1994) found seven studies relevant to the trait of order, which yielded a median d of —.07, suggesting that women scored very slightly higher than men on this trait. The present study assesses gender differences in six facets of C.

**Explanations of Gender Differences**

Two classes of theories, biological and social psychological, have tried to explain these gender differences in personality traits. The biological theories consider sex-related differences as arising from innate temperamental differences between the sexes, evolved by natural selection. Evolutionary psychology [34] predicts that the sexes will differ in domains in which they have faced different adaptive problems throughout evolutionary history. For example, for biological reasons, including pregnancy, childbirth, and lactation, women have more invested than men do in relations with children. Women who were more agreeable and nurturing may have promoted the survival of their children and gained evolutionary advantage. Other biological theories have been proposed to account for gender differences in depression, and by extension, N in general. These explanations point to hormonal differences and their effects on mood and personality, and to sex-linked differences in genetic predispositions to psychopathology. In a 1987 review, Nolen-Hoeksema [18] considered that evidence in support of these explanations was inconclusive; however, more recent studies [35] suggest that sex differences in androgens during early development do affect interests, activities, and aggression. Social psychological theorists argue for more proximal and direct causes of gender differences. The social role model [26] explains that most gender differences result from the adoption of gender roles, which define appropriate conduct for men and women. Gender roles are shared expectations of men's and women's attributes and social behaviour, and are internalized early in development. There is considerable controversy over whether gender roles are purely cultural creations or whether they reflect pre-existing and natural differences between the sexes in abilities and predispositions [36-37]. A rather different example of a social psychological approach is the artifact model [17] that explains gender differences on personality scales in terms of method variance. Social desirability bias may lead men and women to endorse gender relevant traits, and some traits (such as fearfulness) may be less undesirable for women than for men. These explanations are not mutually exclusive. It is entirely possible that social roles and other

environmental influences can modify a biologically based pattern, and there is always a danger that findings from any single method of measurement will be biased.

Many traits are socially desirable for one gender, but not for the other, at least in a traditional sense [38]. A large proportion of these traits are naturally subsumed by, and distributed across, the extant models of personality, such as the Five Factor Model or Giant Three model [39]. Examples of such traits are assertiveness (stereotypically male) and empathy (stereotypically female).

Women have been shown to score higher in the interpersonal domains of emotionality and sociability, and men in the intrapersonal domains of well-being and self-control [40-42].

The current study aimed to study Indian adolescents (aged 16-21) in terms of the relationship between Personality traits and Gender. Also to explore whether there exits any gender differences in their Personality traits.

**Hypothesis**

H: 1: There is a gender difference on the Openness Test
H: 2: There is a gender difference on the Conscientiousness Test
H: 3: There is a gender difference on the Extraversion Test
H: 4: There is a gender difference on the Agreeableness Test
H: 5: There is a gender difference on the Neuroticism scale

## METHODOLOGY

**Sample**

50 girls and 50 boys in the age range of 16 to 21 years were selected through snowball sampling method. All of them were residents of Mumbai City. All the participants were residents of different areas spread across Mumbai.

**Tools**

Big Five Personality Test was administered to all participants

**Research Design**

- Data Collection was done online.
- Snowball sampling method was used and the questionnaires were sent online to the participants. All of them responded to the Big Five Personality Test.
- Except for the control of age range no other variables were controlled.

## RESULTS

There are significant differences among males and females on Openness scale with women scoring high on Openness. The t value is 8.53 and the result is significant at $p<0.01$. Hence, H1 is accepted.

There are no significant differences among men and women on the Conscientiousness Scale. The t value is 0.58 and the result is not significant. Thus, H2 is rejected.

There are no significant differences among men and women on the Extraversion Scale, both were on the medium level. The t value is 0.51 and the result is not significant. Hence, H3 is rejected as well.

There are significant differences among men and women on the Agreeableness Scale, with men being at a medium level and women at a high level. The t value is 2.74 and the result is significant at $p<0.01$. Thus, H4 is accepted.

There are significant differences among men and women on the Neuroticism scale with men scoring a lower average. The t value is 2.23 and the result is significant at $p<0.05$. Hence, H5 is also accepted.

**Table: Mean, Standard Deviation and Significant value of Adolescents on the Big Five Factor Personality Assessment (N=100)**

| Personality Traits | Openness | | Conscientiousness | | Extraversion | | Agreeableness | | Neuroticism | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| **Mean** | 60.61 | 83.21 | 58.04 | 59.76 | 62.34 | 63.98 | 63.51 | 71.49 | 50.45 | 57.66 |
| **Standard Deviation** | 14.65 | 10.69 | 15.53 | 14.31 | 16.24 | 16.03 | 14.11 | 14.99 | 16.85 | 15.39 |
| **Level** | Med | High | Med | Med | Med | Med | Med | High | Low | Med |
| **T value** | 8.53 | | 0.58 | | 0.51 | | 2.74 | | 2.23 | |
| **Significance** | Significant at p<.01 | | Not Significant | | Not Significant | | Significant at p<.01 | | Significant at p<.05 | |

## DISCUSSION

There has been great progress in trait psychology in the past 20 years, with a general consensus on the Five Factor Model as a reasonably comprehensive taxonomy of personality traits. A major contribution of the present study is its use of the Five Factor Model to investigate the association between Gender and personality traits. Analyses at the facet level extend knowledge, allow direct tests of hypothesis, and provide insight into the dynamics of the relationship between gender and personality.

In brief, gender differences are modest in magnitude but consistent with gender stereotypes. Substantively, most of the gender differences we found can be grouped in four categories: Women tend to be higher in negative affect, submissiveness, and nurturance, and more concerned with feelings than with ideas. The elevation of N facets among women in the present study is consistent with the conclusions of previous reviews that have assessed general anxiety or neuroticism [16-17]. As in previous studies and reviews [17], men were found to be higher in assertiveness and women higher in nurturance, with the net effect that women scored substantially higher than men on A. Because E combines aspects of dominance and nurturance [27], gender differences in E vary by facet, with men higher in Assertiveness and Excitement Seeking, and women higher in Warmth, gregariousness, and Positive Emotions. Because Extraversion scales vary in the ratio of dominant to nurturant content, the direction of gender differences may also vary. It seems likely that women scored lower than men on Extraversion in Lynn and Martin's [16] review but higher here because the Five factor Model emphasizes warmth more than assertiveness, whereas the opposite may be true for the Eysenck scale. But overall there was no significant differences between the two genders.

**Limitations**

- The sample was restricted only to the city of Mumbai
- The survey was conducted online therefore, there was no face to face interaction with the participants.
- The sample was restricted to only 100 people. Having a larger sample would influence the results further.
- The sample includes only the two binary genders. Other Genders were not considered.

**Scope for Further Research**

In the present research only adolescents between the age of 16-21 were considered but further research can be done on other age groups as well. The research could be made more gender inclusive and include different genders like bisexual, transgenders, gays, lesbians, etc. The research is restricted to only the Five Factor

Model, more questionnaires could be considered for a more holistic approach. Using this research further research on personality could be conducted. Further research on the influence of culture and environment on personality can be conducted.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have performed an empirical investigation to study the effects of gender on different aspects of personality; namely Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism and Openness. The study has been completed on the participants who were all from Mumbai and were between the ages of 16-21 years. The overall purpose of this study was to study the relationship between gender and personality using the five factor model.

Conclusively this study proves that there are a few differences between the two genders when it comes to different traits of personality. There are significant gender differences on the scales of Openness, Agreeableness and Neuroticism . According to the test results women scored comparatively higher on all the three scales which denotes that women are more open to new experiences and new ideas, they are most likely to put others' needs ahead of their own and cooperate rather than compete with each other. They experience negative emotions like fear, anxiety, guilt and shame intensely.

Whereas men on the other hand are practical, conventional and focus on the concrete, they tend to avoid the unknown and follow traditional ways. They experience less empathy and are described as hostile, competitive and antagonists. They tend to be more emotionally stable and less reactive to stress. They are calm, even-tempered, and less likely to feel tense or rattled. Although they are low in negative emotion, they are not necessarily high on positive emotion.

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