

# THE LEARNING CURVE

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Department of Psychology  
Lady Shri Ram College for Women

# The Learning Curve

Department of Psychology  
Lady Shri Ram College for Women, University of Delhi  
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## **Editorial**

# **The Pandemic Times: A Psycho Social Struggle**

Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) is an unprecedented pandemic of unanticipated magnitude being witnessed by the world for the first time. With lakhs of deaths and constantly rising numbers of infected people across the world, every country is laboriously fighting the disease and trying to find a cure. Irrespective of class, caste, age, gender, religion, corona virus in its attack has not made any discrimination at all.

The pandemic is taxing the infrastructural resources of hospitals with high demand of medical equipment and testing kits for the exponentially rising cases. With the physical symptomatology, corona virus has brought along psychological and social disruptions as well. It seems clear to us that psychology as a discipline can help us better understand, and respond to the COVID-19.

Self-isolation, quarantine, routine disruptions are affecting the psychological functioning of each individual. Pervasive fear, emotional distress and anxiety of contracting the illness or one's loved ones getting infected by it is commonplace. Imposed and indefinite period of isolation, fear of economic recession, plight of the migrant labors without food and money far away from their families is increasing feelings of distress, worthlessness and hopelessness ("Essentials not the biggest headache", 2020).

Further, there is an increase in reported cases of mental health concerns, suicides, homicides, child abuse and domestic violence across the world (Montemurro, 2020). There has been a 20% increase in the report of mental illnesses since the COVID-19 outbreak within India itself (Loiwal, 2020). Withdrawal symptoms and suicides have been reported in Kerala due to unavailability of alcohol during the lockdown (Jayakumar, 2020). Increased emphasis on handwashing has been linked to escalation in cases of obsessive compulsive disorder. Other related maladaptive behavior being observed is thanatophobia or fear of death, avoidance and fear in meeting other people, fear of not getting essential items and panic buying. The fear of isolation from one's kin and stigma of the illness are preventing people to get themselves tested for the infection as seen previously during the time of spread of AIDS (Kumar &Nayar, 2020). People are getting exposed to rumors and false information through social media use that has increased during the pandemic, thus intensifying their stress levels ("Youngsters glued to social media amid lockdown, nearly half experience heightened stress: Study", 2020). Many helplines, tele counselling services and e-resources are being made available to combat the crisis situation. LSR-RAHAT was one such initiative extended by the teaching fraternity of the Department of Psychology.

With the commencement of unlocking post the lockdown caused by the pandemic, India along with the world is trying to revive the physical, economic, social and psychological breakdown caused by COVID-19. To counter the immense loss caused by the standstill of economy during the lockdown imposed, the business sector seems to have gradually started opening up. With mandatory wearing of masks, temperature checks, repeated sanitisation and social distancing, people are trying to acclimatise themselves to the new normal. While some offices, markets, public places have started opening up, there are many people who are still following the work from home routine. Many organizations are using remote working for the first time, leading HR professionals to improvise daily. While some sectors have already seen hiring freeze and even lay offs, some sectors are undertaking additional hiring. Employee willingness to be flexible and adaptable, willingness to learn and upskill quickly and drawing upon one's psychological capital like resilience and optimism will be helpful in the times to come.

Unlike other sectors where working remotely is still imaginable, a sector still struggling with what its course of action should be is the education sector. The UNESCO (2020) report estimates about 80% of world's student population (Chang & Yano, 2020) and 32 crore students of Indian schools and colleges have been impacted by the nationwide closure, thus encouraging remote learning (Kasrekar&Wadhavane-Tapaswi, 2020). Since the lockdown began, academicians took on the challenge of learning and using electronic resources like google classroom, zoom, webex cisco, skype and other platforms to deliver lectures or notes for students. With ed-tech firms offering their resources, e-learning has seen a new high in India. A novel platform compared to the traditional Indian classroom, digital education is attempting to not cause a pause in the academic lives of the students. Hailed as the education revolution, this pandemic has opened up the possibility of considering Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) as a boon to the Indian youth.

While some proponents hail e-learning for its interesting, interactive, customised delivery of educational resources, it has been receiving criticism as well. The Open Book Examination, in particular, has stirred debates of inclusion in mainstream education. The critics of online teaching- learning process question the availability of infrastructural resources like electricity, internet supply as well as the nature of the process being an impersonal experience. One must not forget that education is not just what goes on in the classroom, but also beyond it by way of extra-curricular activities, instilling of moral values, peer learning, and general honing of personality.

Academic impact caused by the corona virus is embedded in a larger psychosocial scenario. COVID-19 has put a magnifying glass on social inequalities- gender, religion, race, to name just a few. Increase in domestic violence against women at homes, burden of balancing household chores, caregiving with work, increased rate of divorces are some by-products of this virus. Racist and religious attribution of the infection is a new phenomenon emerging in the present times where certain communities are suffering discrimination and social stigmatisation (Thakur & Jain, 2020). Muslims, for instance, have been blamed for spreading the disease — so-called 'coronajihadism'. This is indeed a recipe for social unrest and challenges to the status quo, as seen in the #BlackLivesMatterCampaign.

COVID-19 has shaken up not only the medical community to come with a vaccine for the deadly virus, it has also stirred up pertinent social and existential debates regarding human's insensitive and exploitative way of dealing with the nature as well as marginalised voices. It is time for the society and policy makers to reflect, introspect and make reforms in policies related to environment, public physical and mental health, education, and both the formal and informal sectors of the economy. While any crisis makes flaws within the system more apparent, it also brings an opportunity to learn and change. One can only hope by this time next year, this will be behind us and we are able to come out with a volume of *The Learning Curve*, focussing on the lessons learnt. The objective of the journal as apparent in the past 8 volumes has been to stimulate readers' thinking on issues significant to an individual and the society. Similarly, the current volume is also an eclectic mix of issues that have impacted individuals and social structures whether it be the Nirbhaya case (second article) or the representation of homosexuality and abnormality in society (fourth and fifth article). There are review papers (like the eighth article), conceptual papers (like the second article), articles using qualitative analyses (like the first, third, fourth, fifth and seventh article) and empirical articles using quantitative methods (article six and nine) have a basic and applied research orientation. We do believe that this collection of articles will stimulate and help practitioners as well as academicians, researchers and students. We hope that every article in this volume will make its own distinctive contribution by touching individual readers and goading them to think.

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## Establishing a Relationship with God: Role of Rituals from the Lens of Hindu Youth and Elderly

Aakanksha Bhatia<sup>1</sup> and Girishwar Misra<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** The way Hindus establish and maintain a meaningful relationship with God emerges as a significant aspect of their lives. Practicing rituals has been the most commonly prescribed and performed way to establish relationship with the Almighty. Rituals not only act as an ancillary coping mechanism during stressful times but also ensure spiritual and psychosocial wellbeing. The current paper discusses the significance of rituals among the Hindu youth and elderly. 38 young adults (18 males and 20 females) and 32 elderly participants (17 males and 15 males) responded to an open-ended questionnaire pertaining to their ritualistic behaviors, beliefs and practices. Thematic analysis was done to generate relevant themes and sub-themes reflecting a comparative view from the perspectives of youth and elderly about rationale, significance and restitutions of performing rituals. Three themes emerged – Conceptualizing God and Rituals, Promoting Socio-psychological and Spiritual Wellbeing, and Descending Trend in Observing Rituals. The findings suggested that though majority of participants believed in observing rituals, the intent for ritualistic behavior and the expectation of consequences varied widely. Further, the results were discussed in the light of current theorization in the area.

**Keywords:** Rituals, Hinduism, Youth, Elderly, Religion, God image

A perspective to understanding ritual could be either some exotic or superstitious form of action, requiring strange paraphernalia like fires or feathers, or any action done with conscious purpose, attention, and power. Any action that is repeatedly energized with thought and intention gains power, thereby becoming a ritual of sorts. According to Frawley, the Sanskrit word karma, which usually refers to the effects of our actions through various lives, originally meant "ritual." Action or karma is always a ritual; that is, whatever action we do sets in motion certain forces of personal, collective and cosmic nature.

In Hinduism, practicing ritualistic behavior is meant to inculcate feelings of devotion and to conjure divine orientation of human life, thereby establishing a relationship with God. Staal stated that a Hindu is not what he believes in, but 'the ritual practices he performs and the rules to which he adheres, in short, what he does'. The majority of religious life for Hindus is constituted in the verbal texts of Hinduism found perpetuating in the narratives, poetry, prescription and discussion. Michaels (2016) described major types of Hindu rituals as: life cycle rituals (samskara), specifically initiation, marriage, death, and ancestral rituals; Vedic fire sacrifices like isti, homa, yajna, and blood sacrifices; prayer (puja) and worship; processions (tirthayatra); individual and collective festivities (utsava); individual vows (vrata) and giving of a gift (dana). By these means, Hinduism as a cultural form procreates itself across centuries.

Hinduism is based on many Little and Great traditions (Marriott, 1955) that govern the way in which Hindus perform rites and rituals, worship, observe traditions and customs etc. Little traditions encompass local customs, rituals, rites, folk musicians and artists, storytellers, and dialects whereas Great traditions comprise legitimate form

of all these things. Marriott (1955) explained that through 'universalization' or carrying forward of materials which are already present in the Little Tradition, the Great traditions of indigenous civilizations originate. When elements of Great tradition move downwards to localize and limit the scope and reduction to less systematic and reflective dimensions, 'parochialization' occurs. There is a continuous process of interaction between little local traditions and great traditions that shape the local and universal rituals, traditions and customs. Froystad (2012) emphasized the multicultural and multi-religious nature of Hindu practices and rituals. Hindus exercise a wide personal choice in terms of spiritual activities by incorporating various divine beings and ritual elements from the religious traditions of other religions (like visiting *sufidargahs*). Rituals, in a Hindu context, do not have a relegating effect, they often provide intersecting spaces that open up for other religions, thereby fostering acknowledgement and appreciation for diversity.

In Hinduism, God when worshipped in the state beyond any attributes of form, color, and shape and without any specific name is referred to as 'Nigunabrahman' (attribute less god) and when humans perceive God in several forms, especially anthropomorphic, it is known as Sagunabrahman (god with attributes). In Bhakti tradition, deities are approached in social roles – as love for one's offspring, brother, friend or lover. Divine is fundamentally Celestial Love, which manifests itself in various earthly forms. In other words, the devotee and god (Bhakta and Bhagawan) are in an interdependent relationship to maintain which a devout Hindu performs certain rituals every day starting from dawn till dusk.

Those who believe in Niguna Brahman often question the relevance of performing rites and rituals, conforming to

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traditions and idol worship. They believe God to be omnipotent and omnipresent, who is satisfied by supreme devotion and compassion towards other beings. On the other hand, those who believe in a manifested Saguna form of God, tend to consider Puja and idol worship as ways to inculcate a sense of devotion, dedication and discipline in the believers. However, seeking the un-manifested form of God is often difficult, as it requires unwavering determination and devotion to immerse in the undiluted 'Truth'. In Chapter 12, Verse 5 of Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishnahas been quoted as, 'Self-realization is more difficult for those who fix their mind on the impersonal, un-manifest and formless Absolute because comprehension of the un-manifest by embodied beings is attained with great difficulty'. With a belief in Saguna Bhakti, the devotee can choose the form of personal God and establish a meaningful anthropomorphic bond that can eventually lead to the transcendental aspect; this manifest form can lead to the un-manifest ultimate reality (Radhakrishna, 2019)

Though a wide range of literature is available on religiosity, religious attitudes and beliefs, and psychological wellbeing, a scarcity of literature pertaining to the experience and significance of Hindu rituals from a comparative view of the developmental stages was found. In non-religious context of rituals, literature establishes positive relationships between family rituals and increased psychological wellbeing among adolescents and rituals and practices as ways to anchor experiences, gain control and experience involvement . According to the Hindu Youth Research Project(Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, 2001) that assessed the imperativeness and perception of Hindu rituals among the youth, 80% did not think that Hindu rituals were a waste of time but 40% felt that they are not easy to understand. The difficulty in understanding rituals was attributed to reasons like language, length, relevance, meaning, confusion and lack of explanations.

Earlier, mainstream ritualistic practices were largely confined to the upper caste Hindus whereas the marginalized sections of the society had their specific rituals as per their beliefs and traditions. It has been observed that not many follow the age-old rituals with same degree of devotion and

enthusiasm. Most of these rituals have been in recent times either discontinued or replaced by short and simple practices, reflecting the changing nature of Hindu society. The transformed rituals of present-day Hinduism include performance of puja, practicing meditation and yoga, recitation of Holy Scriptures, participating in 'satsang' or 'kirtan', doing charitable work, visiting temples and holy places, and chanting mantras etc. Though the psychological, emotional and spiritual significance of performing the rituals is imperative, yet several modern Hindus have rejected rituals as irrational, superstitious, or primitive. Against this backdrop, this paper is an attempt to fill the gaps between the developmental comparisons of how Hindu youth and elderly perceive and engage with rituals and God.

Following research questions were formulated for the present research:

- What are the various ways in which Hindus understand and engage with God?
- Are there any comparisons and contradictions pertaining to the rituals performed by youth and elderly? What is the significance of such rituals in their lives?
- Are there any gender differences pertaining to the meaningfulness and practice of rituals in the two broad developmental groups i.e. youth and elderly? If yes, what are they?

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants for this study included undergraduate students enrolled in professional and non-professional courses at various colleges under the jurisdiction of Shivaji University, Kolhapur. Simple random sampling technique was used to select the students in the sample. Subjects were matched on the basis of gender, residence and types of discipline. The ratio of matching variables was kept as 1:1 (300:300). The age range of the student participants was 18 to 22 years. 25 colleges from Sangli, Satara, and Kolhapur districts were visited to recruit the sample.

Table 1

*Description of Sample*

	Young Adults		Elderly		
	Males (A1)	Females (A2)	Males (B1)	Females (B2)	
Age Group	18	15-25 years	20	65-75 years	15
No. of Participants					
Mean Age	21.88 years		20.20 years		69.72 years
Occupation	Students of Delhi University and IIT Kanpur, Professionals		Retired		Homemakers

**Measures**

A self-constructed open-ended questionnaire was designed to address the research questions. The questionnaire consisted of six broad open-ended questions pertaining to their concept of God, relationship with God and beliefs in observing rituals and its impact on their lives. Some of the leading questions were –How often do you pray to God and why? Do you think praying to God helps you in any way? What are the ritualistic behaviours that you prefer to engage in? To what extent do you think rituals can help in connecting with God? Do you think our society understands the significance of rituals?

**Procedure**

Seventy participants responded to a self-constructed questionnaire containing six open-ended questions pertaining to their concept of God, relationship with God and beliefs in observing rituals and its impact on their lives. They were asked to write detailed responses. The data collected was subjected to Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to find meaningful themes and patterns. All the responses were thoroughly studied to be familiar with the entire data corpus. Initial codes were generated in order to organize the data in meaningful and systematic manner. Themes capturing something significant or intriguing about the data and/or research questions were generated. Further, these preliminary themes were modified and reviewed for establishing further relevance to the data. Lastly, the themes and subthemes were defined, and how the subthemes relate to the main theme was also ascertained.

**Results**

Table 2

*Themes emerging from the responses of Young Adults and Elderly Participants*

	Young Adults		Elderly	
	Males (A1)	Females (A2)	Males (B1)	Females (B2)
<b>Theme 1 – Conceptualizing God &amp; Rituals</b>				
Subtheme 1 Image of God	Questioned existence and need for God. Most expressed ambiguity but want to serve humanity	Hold anthropomorphic images, few believe in God's omnipotence and omnipresence	Many denied idol worship, expressed their faith in divine consciousness	Believe in i.e. Krishna, Sai Baba, Kali, Shiva, & Hanuman
Subtheme 2 Ritualistic Behaviors	Temple visits on auspicious days like Monday, Tuesday and Saturday -Offer jal, milk, fruits, flowers to idols & Shivaling -Light diya & offer black pulses to Banyan tree	-Surya Namaskaar -Reading scriptures Yoga and healing Meditation		-Reciting prayers, Bhajanas, Paath -Attend Satsang Observe fasts
Subtheme 3	Perform rituals for mothers or grandmothers but they feel good and peaceful after performing rituals	To express gratitude and establish bond with God. Hope to gain strength to endure suffering	Perform rituals to gain clarity of mind. Rituals have an ancestral significance. It helps to attain sense of harmony	Observe rituals to attain stability and control in personal life. Hope to attain nirvana and escape cycle of life and death
<b>Theme 2 – Promoting Socio-psychological and Spiritual Wellbeing</b>				
Subtheme 1 Understanding Self and thriving to become 'good'	Though need for God lacks, they agreed that performing rituals bring them closer to their self, cleansing of mind & soul	Gain insights into their self. They balance their bad karma with the good by performing rituals	Aidin introspection and self-reflection. Help to deal with the challenges of old age and regulate negative emotions	Understanding self and others. Rituals ensure the children, which for them, is immensely satisfying
Subtheme 2 Meaningful Way to relate with God	For most, it is routine to keep their family happy and their minds at ease	By performing rituals & talking with God, they feel close to Him	Urging grandchildren to do rituals, connect new generations with God	After devoting lifetimes to others, in old age keen to devote life to God

	Young Adults		Elderly	
	Males (A1)	Females (A2)	Males (B1)	Females (B2)
Subtheme 3 Establishing Relationships within Community	Since most venerate and observe rituals at home, there seems lesser scope of community engagement. Prefer company of their friends to temples making the entire experience social		Needs for belongingness, love, and companionship. Develop strong social network within communities. With lesser concerns and more time post retirement, they get involved in rituals within societies.	
Subtheme 4 Psychological Support during Distress	Don't derive a sense of support from rituals or God. Many of them advocated self-reliance	Rely on bond with God during times of distress compensatory mechanism	No direct support from God, gaining spiritual knowledge and insights help in difficult times	Worshipping various gods by specific rituals, create a pool of support in times of distress
Theme 3 – Descending Trend in Observing Rituals				
Subtheme 1	An opportunity to re-explore faith and beliefs. Different paths to reach the same destination	Faith and rituals are preserved & sustained regardless of external factors	Considered media & western lifestyle as threat to the traditions and cultural values among youth. The blurring gaps between entertainment and rituals promoted de-sanskritization & adverse acculturation	
Subtheme 2 Observing Rituals: To do or not to do?	Expressed resilience to irrationally engage in rituals. Willing to ponder with scientific evidence	No harm in observing rituals, due to parental belief and socialization since childhood	Rigid about women observing rituals, they considered a convenient option for self	Believed that questioning the relevance of rituals would bring bad luck and negative consequences

**Discussion**

The present study aimed to ascertain the ways in which Hindu youth and elderly establish relationship with God with respect to the rituals and religious beliefs. It also attempted to understand the gender differences with respect to the faith, significance and practices of the rituals. In order to address the above stated, three research questions were raised which have been discussed.

In Hinduism, there existed an ancient and ongoing tradition of sacred action performed with the aim of universal betterment. Indeed, the further back one looks and examines traditional and indigenous cultures, the more one can find that life of a Hindu has been primarily a ritual or set of sacred actions. Yet several modern Hindus have rejected rituals as old fashioned and irrelevant. Many young males reported that they don't believe in ritualistic behaviors and any involvement was strictly attributed to the happiness of the female family members. Since elderly males exhibited inclination towards niguna form of worship, they too did not indulge in elaborate rituals. However, elderly females were both willing as well as socially expected to perform rituals for the welfare of the entire family. Since women are considered to be the tradition keepers, young females were also encouraged to learn and perform rituals.

**Conceptualizing God and Choice of Rituals**

Pertaining to Research Question #1, without conceptualizing God and forming an image of God, rituals can neither be understood nor practiced. Rituals seem to be contingent on the kind of image of God one forms. A 'loving

God' was positively correlated with locus of control and self-esteem and could procure rituals like puja and dana, whereas a wrathful image of God has been associated with loneliness and may incite sacrifice or yajna. Participants attributed particular personality dispositions to various gods and stated the relevance and choice of rituals to invoke and venerate each type of god.

Most of the elderly males condemned rituals and idol worship as superstitious. An elderly male (B113) reported that 'God is in our inner self. If we want to experience Him, we should seek within not outside. Niguna Bhakti is the best path to renunciation'. A young male (A17) questioned the relevance of rituals, 'I condemn superstitious rituals, the practice of blind ritual, worshipping of idols and inanimate objects. I wonder how can fasting bring anybody closer to god. Niguna form of worship may not regard ritual as the highest path, but this does not mean that they reject ritual as useless or that the followers of these paths never perform any rituals. Indeed, the elderly participants who followed niguna path of worship reported that they read holy scriptures, chant mantras and shlokas, meditate and consider serving humanity as their ritual. An elderly male (B15) stated, 'I pray to Lord Krishna and expect him to guide me as he showed the path to Arjuna. We all are Arjuna and face the dilemma of choosing right over wrong due to heavy cost involved. Lord Krishna provided all solutions in Gita and I read it regularly to find answers to my problems.'

Further elaborating Research Question #1, majority of the participants believed in an anthropomorphic form of God and worship idols. The significance of idol worship was

described by an elderly female (B211), 'People pray to God and worship Him in various forms because they suffer. A visual form of God gives them instant hope. The idols provide psychological support and shelter to people who are confused and perplexed. Bowing their heads in front of idols and praying gives them assurance that there is somebody to pull them through the situation.' Despite showing resistance towards 'classical' rituals, some young males reported that they recite Hanuman Chalisa on Tuesday to gain physical and mental strength. Female participants reported that they offer panchamrit to Shivaling and observe fasts on Monday for a blissful marital and family life. Elderly males perform Suryanamaskar every morning to venerate the divine god sun, the ultimate source of energy for the Universe. Most of the elderly females report to attend satsangs, perform paaths, recite bhajanas and do regular japa of the gurmaatra (the Divine Name) procured from their religious sects.

### **Sociopsychological Wellbeing: God & Rituals as Compensatory Mechanisms**

With respect to the Research Question #3, several gender differences were noted for both the developmental groups. The young participants, especially females, perceived their relationship with God as a way to fill an attachment void or compensate for a deficient bond with their caregiver, peers or partner. They found solace in performing rituals and establishing a bond with God. Kirkpatrick and Granqvist found evidence that God may serve as a compensatory attachment figure for individuals displaying insecure attachment patterns. Besides perceiving God as just a substitute for a significant other, the psychological bond with God is symbolic of their intrinsic control, approval by God and overall psychosocial wellbeing. Amidst this, performing rituals emerged as a strong means to initiate, nurture and supplement that bond.

There was an underlying sense of solitude and discontent in the responses of the elderly females. Many of them had devoted an entire lifetime to raise their families and guard the religious and cultural traditions. At this stage of life, when their partners had retired from work and their children were busy in their personal and professional spaces, the dependency of family members on them diminished. To combat the suddenly experienced 'empty nest', they step in outer spaces only to seek religious and spiritual network of like-minded individuals. Some of them explicitly stated that they failed to connect with their husbands and children at deeper levels. An elderly female (B23) stated, 'after fulfilling all the duties of a grihstha life, it's time for me to connect with God and procure moksha. My husband never appreciated me, and my children have also settled abroad. My only hope and place of solace is God, the ultimate truth.'

Though elderly males were themselves less inclined towards rituals, they held expectations from their wives and daughters-in-law to perform rituals and also encouraged

their grandchildren to participate. This attitude could be a possible indicator of shying away from one's own religiosity that needs further exploration.

Interestingly, a few male participants perceived God as conditional and rituals as obligatory. One of the elderly male participants (B19) stated that 'I was an apparel storeowner which is now in the care of my sons. It is running well. I had a small temple with idols in it. Before starting my day, I used to worship God. The day I didn't worship him used to be the worst day for my business with almost no sales. So, I believed that god is conditional with me. No worship, no result'. The narrative is reflective of situations where rituals become an obligation, not an act performed out of devotion.

### **Spiritual Wellbeing: Balancing Karmic Consequences & Reaching Personal Agency**

Addressing Research Question 2, it was interesting to note that young participants had a palpable need to become 'good'. Besides the coping mechanism and psychosocial wellbeing, rituals were conceived as a way to balance the karmic consequences. The results also reflected youth's ambiguous state of mind. Though the male participants advocate self-reliance during stressful times and maintained an outward semblance of non-belief in rituals and attributed any performance of rituals towards their family, they also stated that indulgence in ritualistic behaviors involve a 'feel good factor' and accelerate cleansing of mind, soul and karma. Acknowledging that they are not karmically pure, they performed rituals in order to balance their presumed bad karma with good.

Besides this, many young participants who expressed uncertainty over the relevance and consequence of rituals point that the waning of rituals among the new generations was a consequence of lack of logic and explanations from the older generations. They believed that following rituals was meaningful only when they pronounced an appropriate purpose and context. In absence of religious relevance and temporal suitability, youth are either attracted to the transformed avatars of rituals, symbols and even deities, or find their own personal agency. A male participant (A112) added, 'Since I got nothing concrete from my elders, I decided to follow my conscience. I spent days introspecting alone in places like Spiti and Dharamshala and explored the meaning of being a true human. When I returned, I adopted veganism and have become an ardent follower of Sadhguru. I may not have religious answers, but I am at peace'.

### **Descending Trend in Ritualistic Observance: Role of Media**

In accordance with the Research Question #2, contradictions in the beliefs of youth and elderly pertaining to the fading of ritualistic behaviours in the modern society were noted. The elderly participants believed that the representation of rituals in media promotes adverse

acculturation and de-sanskritization. An elderly female (B214) stated, 'I often accompany my grandchildren when they watch religious shows on TV like Mahabharata, Devon ke Dev... Mahadev, etc. I see so many discrepancies and distortions in the factual information that is represented. In the process of making these TV shows entertaining and high on TRP, the makers of these shows fail to realize that they pose a threat to our rich tradition and cultural legacy. I keep narrating the authentic stories to my grandchildren and remind them that they should not believe in everything that they see on television and read on the internet as there is no credibility of such sources.'

On the other hand, the young participants felt that the rituals and traditions have been preserved since a long time. They believed that the genuine rituals were self-sustainable as people realized the value associated to them. A young female (A21) stated, 'If a ritualistic practice is really beneficial and powerful then people will stick to it for its beneficial nature. Blaming media for spoiling the culture is not fair as young people these days make their own choices regarding everything including rituals and religion.' They also believed that media gives them an opportunity to re-explore their faiths and belief systems, thus contributing to the formation and strengthening of their religious identity.

Looking at diverse conceptualization and understanding of rituals, the study provides scope for mental health professionals to develop insights into examining the effects of ritualistic behaviours on one's psychological wellbeing in a counseling set up. It can also assist in developing age-based modules for clients who are dealing with the issue of negative God Image. This study could also have interdisciplinary implications for developmental psychologists, social psychologists, cultural psychologists and even scholars from the discipline of Psychology, Sociology, Religious Studies, Anthropology.

#### Limitations & Directions for Future Research

As this research paper was extracted from a larger study focusing on God Image, Self-Worth & Morality among Hindus, a comparative analysis of the participants on the basis of positive God Image and negative God Image, which could potentially influence the findings of the study could not be done. Secondly, due to the nature of the parent study, the researchers could not use exhaustive data collection methods like checklists, scales, focus groups and interviews for understanding ritualistic behaviors.

In future, the study can be extended by further subdividing the participants on the basis of God Image, self-worth and morality levels. Second, data of young and elderly participants can be collected from the same family to avoid discrepancies on account of family environment, caste affiliation, etc. Third, another developmental group i.e. middle age can be added to understand the role of ritualistic practices on a developmental continuum. Fourth, this study

can be replicated with children and adolescents to understand their concepts of God and its relation to the ritualistic practices that they are socialized into. Fifth, the study can be extended to other major religions like Islam, Sikhism, Christianity, Buddhism, etc.

#### Conclusion

It was found that though the significance of rituals is certainly diminishing among modern Hindus, they are often replaced or transformed to match the changing times. Rituals are not only prescribed means to connect with God; they also help to gain mental strength, reduce fear and eliminate bad intentions and karma. Young adults believe that rituals are performed to enhance creativity and productivity, and to attain clarity of mind by regulating one's emotions. For elderly, the meaning associated with rituals evokes emotional and spiritual significance with preparation for later lives and a means to ensure wellbeing and prosperity for family members.

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## The many Nirbhayas of India: A Socio-Psychological Analysis of Rape

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**Abstract:** The purpose of this article is to situate the reality of gender crimes in India seven years after the brutal Nirbhaya case led to the passing of the historic Criminal Law Amendment Act (2013). This Act was the first of its kind in India as it hoped to reveal complex multiple patriarchies and a culture of misogyny by placing gender crimes in the broader framework of gender relations, patriarchy and faulty male socialization. Seven years post the framing of the Law; the law has clearly failed to achieve its mandate. The article attempts to locate this failure within the larger socio-cultural and political landscape which owing to male-centric social ideology, intersecting social identities and a general contempt for women makes any gender revolution impossible. The article draws evidence from court judgements, news reports, official government records and existing gender laws in India to put forth an argument in favour of tackling deeper social, psychological and cultural issues for gender crimes to be brought under state control.

**Keywords:** Criminal Law (Amendment) Act 2013, rape; gender relations, misogyny, Nirbhaya case, patriarchy.

It was on 16th December 2012 that the barbaric Delhi gang-rape case also widely known as the Nirbhaya case made headlines. The case resulted in massive political and social instability in the national capital and saw the framing of stricter laws and promise of speedier justice. A 23 year old physiotherapy intern on her way back home with her 28 year old male friend was assaulted and gang raped on a moving bus by six men at 9:30 pm in the national capital. In the course of the assault, the woman sustained injuries to her abdomen, intestines and genitals (Sikdar, 2012). The sheer brutality and impunity of the incident shook the nation. The incident received widespread coverage and people came out in large numbers holding peaceful protests against the inability of the government to provide adequate security for women and demanding justice. The woman succumbed to her injuries 13 days later while undergoing emergency treatment at a multi-organ transplant speciality hospital in Singapore (Gandhi, 2012). All the six accused including a juvenile were arrested. The bus driver and main accused, Ram Singh died under mysterious circumstances in Tihar jail (“Delhi rape accused”, 2013). The other four accused were awarded death penalty which was upheld by the Supreme Court (Rautray, 2017) and have been recently executed, after exhausting all possible delay tactics to escape the noose.

However, years post the incident; crimes against women continue to happen in disturbing numbers. In December 2018, after a three year old girl was found raped and unconscious in Delhi, the chief of the Delhi Commission for Women remarked that nothing has changed in India since the Nirbhaya case (“6 years since Nirbhaya”, 2018).

In the context of these disturbing trends, the purpose of this paper was to unfold the painful reality of rape in India by concentrating on the social, psychological and cultural factors that make it much more than a simple crime of passion. Rape is by no means a crime that has a singular interpretation. Rather rape is a gender and human rights crime deeply enmeshed in the wider social and cultural

milieu and hence it calls for a multi-dimensional analysis that targets law, public ideology, behaviours, mind-sets, and socialization practices. The readers of this article will be able to identify the social and cultural ideology that makes rape possible. To facilitate this, the article has been divided in four sections. In the first section, certain issues pertinent to the Nirbhaya case and other similar rape cases have been mentioned. In the second section, the formation and recommendations of the Justice J. S Verma Committee and the constitution of the eventual Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013 has been described. In the third section, the socio-cultural and psychological factors that make rape possible but remain largely unaddressed in our laws have been highlighted and in the last section, the misogyny and anti-women attitudes that govern our judiciary have been listed.

### Nirbhaya and Other Rape Cases in India

Rapes are a very part of our environment. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) every 22 minutes there is a rape in India. The NCRB started recoding rape cases in 1971 and if there records are anything to go by then there has been an 873% increase in cases from 1971 to 2011. Delhi is accorded the status of being the rape capital of India. There has been a 267% increase in rape cases in Delhi between 1991 and 2011 (Teltumbde, 2013). But these figures would be far from accurate as many rape cases go unreported due to the stigma attached to them. A Tehelka investigation with NDTV in April 2012 states that for every reported rape case there are 50 cases which go unreported (“In and around Delhi”, 2012).

One might imagine that if rapes are a part of our environment, then why this particular case created the kind of uproar that it did. The answer squarely lies with the victim being a 'perfect one'. It may be recalled that the girl was given numerous pseudonyms ranging from Nirbhaya (fearless) to Damini (lightning) to Veera (brave one) to Jagruti (awareness) to Amanat (treasure) to Delhi Brave Heart to

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India's Daughter- the list seems endless (Roy, 2012). Though this was done keeping in view Indian law that prohibits the disclosure of identity of a rape victim (Section 238A, IPC) and it facilitated the average Indian to identify with the victim but the question that remains is: What was the problem in keeping her nameless? The answer is that had she been kept nameless, she would not have become the 'perfect victim'. By 'perfect victim' is meant a young, urban, upper middle class, good and chaste woman when brutally raped shakes the conscience of the nation. This can be stated with confidence because had caste and social status no bearing on the reaction towards a rape case, then people would have protested the rape and murder of Dalit women in Khairlanji, the rape of Manorama and Bhanwari Devi.

It may be argued that the case created such uproar because of the brutalities inflicted on the woman and her friend. But brutality is an integral part of rape and most rape cases are accompanied by a comparable amount of brutality (Telumbde, 2013). One can compare this case with the brutality inflicted on Surekha and Priyanka, the two women of the Bhotmange family who were paraded naked in front of the Khailanji village in Maharashtra in September 2006 before being gang raped and murdered. The fact finding report in the Khairlanji massacre stated thus:

*"Four members of the household Surekha (44, the mother), Priyanka (18, daughter), Roshan and Sudhir (23, 21, one of whom was blind) were dragged out by their household by a mob of about 40 people... They were beaten mercilessly, were stripped naked and paraded through the village... both the women were gang raped by all the men of the village. Brutality saw its height when the brothers... (had) their penises... cut off. 'Punishment' for the women was insertion of bamboo rods into their private parts" (VJAS, 2006).*

The gruesome act of Khairlanji cannot be considered less than the Delhi rape case. It is indeed unfortunate that even when dealing with heinous crimes like rape and murder, educated citizens are unable to rise above their caste identities.

Further support for this claim can be found in the media's reaction to the case which can be described as discriminatory against other similar cases. For instance: the Deccan Chronicle reported in October 2012 more than 19 cases of rape in a single month in Haryana ("The Haryana Horrors", 2012) but did not give it as extensive media coverage as was warranted probably because most of them involved Dalit women and girls. However, the role of the media in highlighting the position of women in 21st century India through this case cannot be completely discounted. Thousands of people in major cities and towns would not have come out in unison to protest against the rape braving the repressive government's lathis, tear gas shells and water cannons had the media brushed the issue aside. The eventual constitution of the historical Justice J. S. Verma Committee and the passing of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013

would not have been possible without the continuous efforts of the media and the people. The media and the protests created a great sense of urgency in dealing with crimes against women which continue unabated. This sense of urgency is also reflected in the fact that the Justice Verma Committee received almost 80,000 suggestions from women's groups, government organizations, stakeholders and common people by January 5th, 2013 (Shakil, 2013).

It could be said that though the media did the right thing by bringing attention to the case (although in a discriminatory fashion), this attention helped to lie bare the obnoxious misogyny in the country's eminent parliamentarians and members of state legislatures. The official statements given below are important as they came from those to whom have taken the responsibility of the state:

"We have told the chief minister in the assembly that the government will pay money to compensate rape victims. What is your fee? If you are raped, what will be your fee?" (Shri Anisur Rahman, CPI (M), West Bengal) ("Now CPI-M leader's", 2012).

Numerous other "tips" were offered to women from miscellaneous sources for 'not getting raped'. For instance: performing puja to put stars in correct position (Chhattisgarh Home Minister Nanki Ram Kanwar) ("Chhattisgarh minister blames", 2013), don't eat chowmein (Khap Panchayat) ("Don't eat chowmein", 2012), don't cross maryada (Madhya Pradesh minister Kailash Vijayvargiya) ("Maintain maryada or", 2013), don't go out with boys in the night (Samajwadi Party member Abu Azmi) (Kumar, 2013) etc.

If the understanding of rape is so intrinsically wrong and shallow then the treatment is a challenge in itself. If rape is considered so "unproblematic" then it is not surprising that most cases are not reported, FIR's are flawed, medical evidence is collected in the most demeaning fashion and investigation (if any) is shoddy. In most cases the courts acquit the accused for lack of proper evidence. According to the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB), the conviction rate for rape cases in India in the year 2016 was a dismal 18.9% with Delhi reporting the highest crime rate in India (Mallapur, 2017). The misogyny of those who legislate questions if justice can be delivered. Rape seems to be more about establishing patriarchy and male control than about clothes. To deal with rape successfully society will have to address the violence that women face in their everyday lives which has been normalized, trivialized and routinized, like marital rape. In a country where incest is rampant because even the Gods practiced it and the Devadasi tradition imparts rape a divine status, rape cannot be curbed so simply.

Having raised some uncomfortable issues, the next section discusses the legal reforms made after the gang rape case in the hope that they provide answers to at least some of the questions raised above.

### **Justice J. S Verma Committee Report and the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013**

As mentioned before, the government's initial response to the gang rape was not in tune with people's spirits. The government was displaying its all too familiar apathy and inefficiency, making absolutely no efforts to connect with popular feelings. It was only after protests continued for a number of days that the government announced the formation of the Justice J. S. Verma Committee on December 23rd, 2012 with the objective of looking into needed amendments of the Criminal Law for speedier trial and increased punishment for criminals committing sexual crimes of aggravated nature against women (Verma, 2013). The committee headed by Justice J. S Verma (Ex. Chief Justice of India) had Justice Leila Seth and Senior Advocate Gopal Subramaniam as members. The committee submitted its impressive 630 page long report on January 23rd, 2013 (Bhalla, 2013). The report and the recommendations it carries have been perfectly summed up in an Economic and Political Weekly (EPW) editorial ("Setting new standards", 2013). The author wrote that the committee must be applauded for two reasons. Firstly, it adopted an approach keeping with the provisions of the constitution and not a constricted punitive approach and secondly, for its ability to resist both public opinion as well as state orthodoxies. The author further stated that the committee has rightfully placed crimes against women within the larger ambit of patriarchy, gender relations and changing social practices instead of limiting them to plain sexual assault.

Many amendments were proposed to the Indian Penal Code (IPC) by the committee. A few important amendments which are of relevance have been elaborated (Verma, 2013).

Section 354 of the IPC dealing with Sexual Assault had been modified by widening the scope of the definition of sexual assault to include intentional touching, unwelcome words, acts or gestures creating threat of a sexual nature. This is particularly important as everyday harassment which is often brushed aside as being 'commonplace' goes a long way in creating an atmosphere of sexual threat.

The committee had proposed detailed amendments to the IPC in dealing with the offense of rape. Section 375 dealing with rape has been modified to include various acts like penetration of the vagina, mouth or urethra (to any extent) with a man's penis or any object and oral sex as constituting rape. This comes as a welcome change as it renders the age old definition of rape as penetration of the vagina by the penis linked heavily to patriarchal notions of vaginal purity and a woman's chastity redundant. The new definition has been framed from the point of view of the woman who experiences it. The focus is correctly on the 'threat to bodily integrity' which rape poses for the victim and not 'outraging her modesty'. More importantly, the committee has defined consent as clear indication of agreement to engage in sexual intercourse indicated either through words or through non-verbal gestures. It also warns that an existing marital

relationship between the parties concerned cannot lead to presumption of consent. By recognizing marital rape as an offence falling under the purview of law, the committee has shown utmost sensitivity and regard for treating the entire gamut of violence that women face including that which comes from intimate partners. The committee further noted that inability to offer physical resistance to penetration by the penis must not be labelled as consent. This is of particular significance as most cases in which the court does not find "signs of resistance" in terms of scratches or marks inflicted on the accused by the victim to save her from getting raped; the courts presume consent and acquit the accused as witnessed in "Submission to the committee" (2013) report.

With regard to the punishment for rape and gang rape, the committee paid heed to the words of women's organizations by not advocating death penalty for rapists. According to feminist thinkers, death penalty will not help to reform a dysfunctional criminal justice system for more reasons than one. Firstly, death penalty is awarded in an arbitrary and discriminatory fashion revealing a deep seated male bias. This will be discussed in detail in the last section as it reveals interesting patterns in the way justice is delivered. Secondly, death penalty will motivate the accused to kill their victims in order to destroy evidence and avoid identification. Lastly, death penalty for rape would have been a giant step backwards in women's rights as it reflects the perverse valuation of sexual purity over human life (Johnson & Zimring, 2013). Therefore, the committee recommended punishment for rape with a maximum sentence of life imprisonment in cases involving extreme brutality.

Apart from suggesting amendments to various acts, the report squarely put the blame of the Delhi gang rape on lack of governance rather than lack of legal provisions. It called for an urgent need to reform police ideology and address police inaction. Additionally, it blamed the entire system of institutionalized patriarchy for allowing sexual crimes to happen with such frequency and impunity. The report brought attention to the faulty socialization that Indian kids receive at home and in school making boys believe that they are entitled to more than girls (Datta, 2013).

The critical importance of this observation made by the Verma committee can be demonstrated by using a short narrative on gender socialization written by feminist writer, Soraya Chemaly in her blog. She writes, for months every morning she used to see her little daughter build a massive castle out of blocks and every time she did so a little boy living in the neighbourhood would come and destroy it. Each time the boy's parents would just smile and say, "You know! Boys will be boys!" Soraya teaches her daughter how to stop him from breaking the castle. In the meantime, she also imagines the boy's parents thinking:

*"She built a beautiful glittery castle in a public space. It was so tempting. He just couldn't control himself and, being a boy, had violent inclinations. She had to keep her building safe. She did not make a big fuss when he knocked it down. It*

*wasn't a "legitimate" knocking over if she didn't throw a tantrum. His desire- for power, destruction, and control- was understandable."*(Chemaly, 2013).

As the author writes, this story is a powerful metaphor for how girls are taught not 'get raped' instead of teaching the boys 'don't rape' in the Indian society. Such boys grow up believing they are superior to girls. Even during adolescence when parental influence decreases as the outside world becomes more attractive, this sense of false superiority remains intact due to many factors like portrayal of women in popular media and pornography which is a complete distortion of reality and imparts the message that "real" women wish to be dominated, bullied, abused and raped like the onscreen porn stars. Going back to the castle metaphor, it can be understood in conjunction with the ruling of the Guwahati High Court in a recent case wherein the court while trying a case of rape of a 14 year old girl by an 18 year old boy observed that the accused was an 18 year old young boy and hence naturally inclined to sexual adventure ("Submission to the committee", 2013). The case of this 18 year old 'sexually adventurous boy' if extrapolated back in time can reasonably become the castle destroying toddler.

These recommendations of the Verma Committee took shape of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Act, 2013. The act entails changes to the Indian Penal Code, Code of Criminal Procedure, 1973 and Indian Evidence Act, 1872 (Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013). The Act received the assent of the President on April 2nd 2013 (Joshi, 2013).

With regard to sexual crimes, certain amendments suggested by Justice Verma have been accepted in their right spirit. For example: Section 326A voluntarily causing grievous hurt through use of acid, Section 326B voluntarily throwing or attempting to throw acid, Section 354B assault or use of criminal force to woman with intent to disrobe her, Section 354C voyeurism, Section 370 trafficking of a person, Section 370A exploitation of a trafficked person, Section 376A punishment for causing death or resulting in persistent vegetative state of victim, Section 376D gang rape and Section 376E punishment for repeat offenders.

However, there are a couple of significant deviations from the recommendations of the Verma committee and these deviations offer insight into Indian society's skewed perceptions about women and gender crimes.

The first point of difference lies in one of the seven descriptions of Section 375 dealing with rape. The fourth explanation of the amendment act states: "with her consent, when the man knows he is not her husband and that her consent is given because she believes that he is another man to whom she is or believes herself to be lawfully married"(Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013, Section 375, page 5). On the other hand, the corresponding explanation written in the Verma committee report is: "with the person's consent, when the man induces the person to consent to the relevant act by impersonating another man to whom the

victim would have otherwise knowingly consented to" (Verma, 2013, p. 440). This slight difference in words means a huge difference in implication and application of the law. According to the amendment act, sexual intercourse that takes place between two consenting adults has no legal sanction unless the people involved are bound by the relation of marriage. By criminalizing consensual sexual intercourse between adults the law has provided a powerful weapon in the hands of the Khap Panchayats and the moral police. The Verma committee had given adult sexual freedom its rightful place which has unfortunately been taken away by the repressive government.

The second worrying difference has to do with the refusal of the amendment act to recognize marital rape as an offence that is worthy of state intervention but as compensation it has proposed a section criminalizing sexual intercourse by husband with his wife during a period of separation (Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013, Section 376B, p. 7) punishable with imprisonment for two years which may extend to seven years, preserving the government's belief that a woman is the sexual property of her husband and denial of the threat to a woman's personhood and her sexual citizenship that rape by husband (separated or not) poses for the woman. Evidence for this assertion can be found in the non-cognizable and bailable nature of this offence (Criminal Law Amendment Act, 2013, p. 14). As a general rule, the non-cognizable and/or bailable offences are considered less serious in nature than the cognizable and/or non-bailable offences. In the case of non-cognizable and/or bailable offences the victim may be more afraid to file the complaint for fear of harassment by the accused and such offences also require the victim to have more perseverance, better resources and greater determination to prosecute (Kumari, 1999).

The women's movement has been struggling since a long time to bring marital rape under the ambit of law which is an offence in more than 100 countries (Jain & Chakrabarty, 2013). According to a UN Population Fund, almost two-thirds of married women in the country between the ages of 15 and 49 years face sexual violence at the hands of their husbands ("A gender neutral law", 2012). But both the society and the state fail to accept the possibility and existence of rape within marriage. An EPW editorial ("Marriage and rape", 2013) discussing the tricky relation between marriage and rape stated that a marriage becomes legal on consummation and the inability to have sex provides grounds for its dissolution. Also, a husband whose wife is unwilling to participate in sexual acts can take recourse to the state and demand 'restitution of conjugal rights'. Unrestricted sexual access to the wife also becomes the basis for obtaining legitimate children who in turn become legal heirs to the family property and ensure continuation of the family name. The editorial also states that sexual coercion within marriage is but one form of coercion and stands indistinguishable from a host of other related coercions or pressures that Indian women live with; in their marital homes. It is exceedingly difficult to target one without targeting the others. The

general belief is that after marriage, a woman must do anything possible to uphold the dignity and integrity of her house. Therefore, criminalizing marital rape would shake the foundation of the Indian family system in which coercion often disguised as a woman's duty is the rule. In a similar vein, Union home secretary RK Singh at a meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on home affairs on February, 18th 2013 noted that marital rape was left out as marriage presumes consent. He added that the government has decided against recognizing marital rape as this would go against the traditional family system in India where marriage is seen as a steadfast institution (Jain & Chakrabarty, 2013). It is indeed surprising that a nation which is governed by archaic notions of sexual relations within marriage, which sees a woman's bodily integrity as secondary to her husband's irrepensible sexual urges and considers it her sacrosanct duty to be forever sexually available dreams of delivering gender justice.

### **The Social, Cultural and Psychological Factors behind Rape**

Despite all legal provisions in place, the answer to why does rape still happen with such mindboggling frequency is three fold.

First, psychological factors of male bonding and increased security and anonymity are at play during gang-rape which offer protection to the perpetrator from the perceived consequences of the act. According to Brownmiller, there is a relation between men raping in groups as in seen during war and what is referred to as gang rape. She writes: "As we have seen in Bangladesh and Vietnam, men in war tend to rape in groups in which they are anonymous and secure and against the backdrop of an all-male army to which they have a strong male allegiance. In domestic group rape, male bonding is similarly operative, whether the young men have loosely gotten together of an evening or whether their relationship has been previously formalized into a bona fide gang. The act of group rape forges an alliance among men against the female victim who becomes, for their purposes Anonymous Woman" (Brownmiller, 1975, p- 187-188)

Second, there is impunity enjoyed by men in general as they form the dominant social class. Geetha, a feminist writer, claims: "In a public context...the aggressor "knows" and has a deep and wretched sense of doing something that is "forbidden", yet he is imbued with the confidence that it is fine to do this, for it makes for an exultant assertion of authority, whether paltry or grand...this sense of relish at crossing the line, in doing what is "forbidden" in fact lies at the core of impunity" (Geetha, 2013, p. 16). Impunity assumes power and the two combined together make a heady concoction. Power is central to the very notion of masculinity. As mentioned in the previous section and as also noted by Justice Verma, Indian male children are fed on the ideology of male superiority right from the very beginning. But as they grow up, the world outside makes them realize

that they have to constantly chase success and measure up to societal standards. This creates a fear of failure and this fear of failure is mixed with the fear of the feminine as failure would mean being associated with a category (females) that they have never learnt to respect. Fear soon becomes hatred and violence gives vent to that hatred (Roy, 2013).

Third, in a patriarchal society there is undue emphasis on vaginal purity and female chastity. A chaste woman is treated as a goddess whereas a woman with unsanctified sexual indulgences is vilified. This social belief makes rape a powerful weapon to keep women in control and to show where they belong. Understandably then, rape is still limited to penetration by the penis which is the single most yard stick against which a case of sexual assault must measure up to in order to be called rape. In *Sakshi vs. Union of India*, the Supreme Court had ruled that rape is limited to penile vaginal intercourse without consent (Mukherjee, 2011). The penetration requirement is linked to patriarchal notions of a woman's chastity and vaginal purity. It also involves a fear of the woman getting impregnated by anyone other than the legitimate father. In other words, the priority given to penetration by the penis is based on the need to establish paternity (Kumari, 1999). Flavia Agnes, renowned women's rights lawyer writes in a similar vein, "We need to move away from the patriarchal premise of vaginal purity while we are addressing issues of sexual assaults and stop awarding a special status for peno-vaginal penetration as compared to other types of violations" (Agnes, 2013, p. 13).

### **Misogyny in the Judiciary**

In this last section, a few principles of justice administration have been discussed which appear to be gender neutral on the face but run on lines of deeply entrenched gender biases which often devalue the kinds of violence commonly faced by women citing obscure logic.

One of the principles that courts often take recourse to in deciding criminal cases is the principle of reasonableness. According to the principle of reasonableness, the perceived reasonableness of the action of the accused and the victim at the time of offence plays an important role in determining the seriousness of the crime and the quantum of punishment (Kumari, 1999). For instance: the famous English case of an Indian woman, Kiranjeet Ahluwalia who in response to 10 years of physical, psychological and sexual abuse at the hands of her husband set him on fire by sprinkling petrol while he was asleep in 1989 (Rossiter, 2007). The film *Provoked* (2006) is a fictionalized account of Ahluwalia's life. She was initially convicted for murder but the charge was later reduced to manslaughter in view of her long standing abuse. In cases of murder, if 'grave and sudden provocation' (to the accused) can be proved the charge may be reduced from murder to culpable homicide. Also, the law of private defence requires existence of imminent danger and use of equal force to repel the force. These requirements are however based on male standards. They do not apply to cases like that of Ahluwalia as the murder is seen as 'pre-planned'

with the motive of 'revenge'. The point is that for a woman smaller in size, use of physical force to resist the attacker at the time of attack is not possible. Cases of abused women who kill their abusers follow a pattern. In most cases, the woman waits for the attacker to be drunk or asleep before striking. She kills not for revenge but to protect herself from future attack as temporary withdrawal of the attacker does not mean cessation of danger for the woman. In the case of Ahluwalia, she was beaten and assaulted uncountable number of times over a period of 10 years. In an interview with *The Guardian*, Ahluwalia reportedly said, "I couldn't see an end to the violence" (Bindel, 2007).

Apart from the principle of reasonableness, there are innumerable cases in India which highlight that when it comes to deciding cases of violence against women, the courts seem to rely more on whimsical logic rather than reason and objectivity. In a case, Justice Pinki, ASJ (Saket Courts), while acquitting the accused, noted that after the incident, the victim was in a condition of trauma but still managed to retrieve her salwar. This according to the court, proved that the case of the complainant was false ("Submission to the committee", 2013).

Courts are also biased in deciding which cases fit into the "rarest of rare" category. Cases which qualify as rarest of rare are punished with the maximum sentence possible which may be capital punishment. Theoretically, the rarest of rare doctrine rests on deciding whether the crime was one of extreme depravity, whether the perpetrator poses a threat to society and possible scope for reform and rehabilitation of the accused. But in practice, courts take a more serious view of crimes which are committed for power or property or are in the public sphere than crimes of honour or passion which are committed in the private/intimate sphere. This is discriminatory to say the least as the most common form of violence faced by women is that which happens at home and which comes from intimate family members. 'Crimes of honour' and 'Crimes of passion', the two common kinds of crime against women are considered less deserving of death penalty (Chandra, 2010). In *Amrit Singh v. State of Punjab*, involving the rape and murder of a minor girl, the Court punished the accused with a light sentence stating that it happened due to a transitory delay on the part of the accused, finding a lone girl at an isolated place (Chandra, 2010).

In all the cases mentioned above, the Courts have trivialized violence against women by giving the accused the benefit of doubt. Most cases of crimes against women are considered an aberration or an exception and as not constituting a serious violation of a woman's basic right to live her life with dignity and respect.

### Conclusion

Based on the above deliberation, it can be safely asserted that a wider, broader and deeper approach needs to be adopted if the nation is to fight gender based crimes and to

secure to its women basic human rights- the right to live and to live with dignity.

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# Deconstructing the Blue Whale Challenge: A Discourse Analysis

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**Abstract:** The uproar created by the Blue Whale Challenge leveraging the vulnerable psyche of adolescents, with its operation through social media networks, and the attained media coverage made this high-risk challenge a phenomenon of interest in the context of adolescent psychology and media studies. The fashion of the contemporary times is trends and challenges taking over the internet, with even abstruse concepts like the Mannequin Challenge becoming popular. The purpose of the present study was to analyse the 21st century phenomenon of Blue Whale Game Challenge (BWC) that emanated as a threat in India in 2016, becoming infamous as a leading cause of self-harm and suicide amongst the adolescent population. The discourses around this controversial challenge were studied using secondary sources of data which involved research papers, newspaper articles, and government directives in order to ascertain the origin of the BWC, the psyche of the man behind the challenge, the adolescent psyche that it exploits, the nature of the tasks presented and the underlying mechanisms that draw adolescents towards the challenge. The results examine the Blue Whale Challenge as both a game for pleasure and a game that creates addictive cycles despite the dangers involved. The study puts forth a critical appraisal of this phenomenon followed by a delineation of the measures proposed by the government and other agencies in their attempt to promote psychological interventions to deal with it.

**Keywords:** Adolescent Psychology, Blue Whale Challenge, Discourse Analysis, Internet Fads, Interventions, Media, Risk Taking

An internet challenge that went viral earlier in the year 2016, the Blue Whale Challenge (BWC), allegedly led to attempted and committed suicides amongst adolescents across the globe. Operating through social media networks, it became quite infamous due to the administrators of the challenge leveraging the vulnerable psyche of adolescents and luring them into self-harm despite the costs involved. This challenge became a phenomenon of interest in the context of adolescent behaviour and the mental health concerns associated with the same.

Adolescence is characterised as a period of rapid physical and psychological changes along with cognitive development. It is a period when identity formation is at its peak, with ideals and values in a state of flux (Berk, 2013). The BWC has had adolescents as its main target and was successful in its motive of targeting and victimizing youngsters globally. The challenge hence raised the concern for studying the way in which it operates, how it has been able to draw adolescents to itself despite the costs involved, and raised the issue of importance of adolescent mental health which is otherwise often neglected. Another concept of interest underlying this study was adolescent risk-taking behaviour; the indulgence of adolescents in risky behaviours due to their inherent appeal, the thrill and rush they provide.

As games can offer incredibly immersive, rich, challenging and emotionally charged experiences, along with the ability to take on new and compelling identities (Hayes & King, 2009), it is not surprising that adolescence and gaming are synonymous. Kazuji and Shimohara (2008) reported that computer games function as “media space for several learners, empowering self-expression and transformation”.

The present study aimed to dissect the origin of the BWC, the psyche of the man behind the challenge, the adolescent psyche that it exploited, the nature of the tasks presented and the underlying mechanisms that drew adolescents to the challenge.

## Method

The study used discourse analysis that focused on psychological themes present in textual and visual narratives and aimed to analyze the themes as observed through newspaper articles, blogs, government directives in an attempt to deconstruct the origin of the challenge, the tasks it put forward to players, and the sensationalism it had attained in different media platforms. Research on the BWC is sparse and the existing literature was reviewed to examine the concepts underlying the challenge and subsequently connections were drawn with existing theories and concepts. The psyche of the administrators and adolescents involved in the challenge were explored in order to formulate a psychological perspective to understand the challenge. The fifty tasks were categorized; cases of victims in India, advisory and measures to tackle the BWC were discussed.

## Results & Discussion

### Insights into the origin of the BWC

The year 2016 saw the advent of the seemingly new, possibly harmless trend in India that turned out to be a horror for society at large. Though the time of the origin of the BWC is speculated to be sometime around 2016, certain sources state that its presence dates back to 2013 in Russia.

The “BWC” was not publicly available, but potential targets were identified and the challenge consisting of a set of

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50 tasks were presented by the administrator to the adolescents to complete. The challenge was not available as a game application or online game, but as an online challenge that could be circulated to potential individuals through social media applications such as WhatsApp, Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, etc. having initially started with VKontakte, a Russian social media and networking platform. Some sources even mention that once the online link was accessed by the target individuals, the 'curator/administrator' gained access to the data on the devices (Sharma, 2017). This of course, if true, provides the curators the scope to easily manipulate impressionable adolescents.

The name of the challenge in itself can be an allegory of the way in which blue whales beach themselves to die when they are sick, or get beached accidentally (Lusseau, 2015). The adolescent is the whale, who upon treading uncharted waters- the internet, finds himself on land- the BWC, which leads to a slow death in the absence of any help or aid to pull them out of the situation they find themselves in.

The Blue Whale Challenge is considered to be a part of the 'Deep Web', laying low in the dark and mysterious realms of the surface web which has been defined by Bindal and Muktaawat (2010) as "World Wide Web content that is not part of the surface Web, which is indexed by standard search engines." Volkova, Kadyrova, Rastorgueva, and Algavi (2017) reported that the Deep web has "a base structure similar to Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* and looked like a funnel of several levels". A parallel could be drawn between Philipp Budeikin's (the mastermind behind the challenge) intentions and behaviour, and Dan Brown's antagonist and transhumanist Bertrand Zobrist's motives from his novel "*Inferno*". Psychologist Charles Fernyhough in a survey collaboration with the Guardian in 2014, talks about a phenomenon: "experiential crossing" which implies that "people recreate the world and character described in books which may lead to feeling one's own thoughts shaped by a character's idea, sensibility or presence", i.e., fictional characters might influence a person's thoughts as they go about their regular lives (Lea, 2017). Coincidentally both the novel and the challenge were released in 2013, and both characters probably had the same underlying intentions behind their behaviour, just the mode of execution being different, with one releasing a virus to control overpopulation in the world, and the other by leading people to cruel deaths. There is a striking resemblance between Budeikin's statements during his imprisonment and Dante's *Inferno*'s references that guides the readers to Zobrist in the novel. Or it may have been just a classic case of modelling of Social learning theory (1977) given by Bandura and Walters (Berk, 2013). This is merely a speculation; it can only be established as a fact if ever Budeikin claims that he was actually inspired by the aforementioned fictional character.

### Insights about the Developer

Budeikin, the now arrested 22 year old ex-psychology and engineering student, adeptly manipulated and influenced about 16 teenage girls in Russia into committing suicide via the online challenge. Phillip acknowledged that he had driven those teenagers to their death. The Russian creator was identified with bipolar disorder and had undergone childhood abuse, and when interviewed, interestingly responded that he was 'cleansing the society of biological wastes' (Srivastava, 2017). Perhaps his own tumultuous life (Stewart & Davies, 2017), with impactful life experiences led to his disregard for humanity at large.

Personality traits of developer and curators. The logic behind how the challenge has worked so far in inciting adolescents to kill themselves is based on speculations and random theories, with the creator leaving behind a cryptic message "Don't worry, you'll understand everything. Everyone will understand." Budeikin's statements and his fellow associates who hunted vulnerable adolescents indicate that they could be possibly displaying psychopathological personality traits, with closest links to psychopathy, which is subsumed under Antisocial Personality Disorder (Barlow & Durand, 2012). Hare and colleagues expanding Cleckley's work (Cleckley, 1964), had developed a 20-item checklist out of which five criteria are visibly applicable to both the activities of Budeikin and his voluntary associates include: glibness/ superficial charm, grandiose sense of self-worth, pathological lying, conning/manipulative, and lack of remorse (Neumann, Hare & Newman, 2007).

### The Nature of Tasks

The tasks progressively led to the last task of committing suicide and speculations arose whether this challenge was an active contributor to the incidence of suicides in Russia and other parts of the globe. The information revolving around the game and its psychological underpinnings are based more on hypothetical assumptions and speculations than established facts.

The set of 50 tasks in the challenge is claimed to be based on principles of psychology, categorised sequentially as follows: Tasks 1-9 (induction), tasks 10-25 (habituation) and tasks 26-29 (preparation); which culminate to the final step of committing suicide (Kumar et al., 2017).

Based on the consistency of the information pertaining to the 50 tasks from various sources like IndiaExpress, Quora and Reddit, the tasks were identified and examined using psychological concepts and based on the demands they place on an individual, could be broadly classified into four categories: (i) self harm tasks which require self-infliction of harm for instance, in the form of cutting oneself (Tasks 1,3,5,7, 11, 14,15,16); (ii) tasks establishing 'whale' identity which involve moulding the individuals identity so that they strongly associate with the challenge, maintain secrecy and swear complete allegiance to the curator, for instance,

interacting with fellow “whales” or the curator and reinforcing the identity on social media (Tasks 4, 8, 20, 21, 25, 29 as well as 5, 11); (iii) miscellaneous tasks of progressive intensity which habituate the individual to dangerous/harmful activities, ranging from something as simple as listening to music sent by the curator and waking up at a specific time early in the morning to something as dangerous as climbing a crane or sitting on the rooftop with legs dangling (Tasks 2, 6, 9, 10, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 22, 23, 24,

27, 28); (iv) repetitive tasks which require the person to carry out the same tasks for days on end, in the process facilitating habituation and breaking down the person further (Tasks 30-49); and (v) suicide inducing tasks which leads to the intended outcome of committing suicide (Tasks 26, 50). The tasks which are repetitive/similar to each other are possibly meant to habituate the individual in order to lead to the last task of committing suicide.

Table 2

*Themes emerging from the responses of Young Adults and Elderly Participants*

Kinds of Task	Tasks
(i) Self-harm tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Carve with a razor “f57” on your hand, and send a photo as a proof to the manager.</li> <li>3. Cut your arm along the veins with a razor but not in deep. Only 3 cuts should be made, then send a photo to the curator.</li> <li>5. If you are ready to “become a whale” carve “YES” on your leg. If not punish yourself by cutting yourself many times.</li> <li>7. Carve “f40” on your hand and send the proof to the manager.</li> <li>11. Draw a whale on your hand with a razor and send a photo.</li> <li>14. Cut your lip.</li> <li>15. With a needle poke your hands many times.</li> <li>16. Make yourself sick by doing something painful to yourself.</li> </ol>
(ii) Tasks establishing 'whale identity'	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Draw a Picture of Whale on a paper and send the photo to Curator.</li> <li>8. In your VKontakte status type “#i_am_whale (rus. #я_кит).</li> <li>20. The curator checks if you are trustworthy</li> <li>21. On Skype talk with a whale (with another player like you or with a curator).</li> <li>25. Have a meeting with a “whale”</li> <li>29. Make a vow that “you're a whale”</li> <li>*5. If you are ready to “become a whale” carve “YES” on your leg. If not punish yourself by cutting yourself many times.</li> <li>11. Draw a whale on your hand with a razor and send a photo.*</li> </ol>
(iii) Miscellaneous tasks	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. You need to wake up at 4:20 AM and watch psychedelic and scary videos which he sends you.</li> <li>6. A task with A cipher.</li> <li>9. Must overcome your fear.</li> <li>10. Wake up at mid night 4:20 AM and go to the rooftop. As much as high it is.</li> <li>12. All day must watch horror and psychedelic videos.</li> <li>13. They will send you the music and you must listen to that.</li> </ol>

Kinds of Task	Tasks
(iv) Repetitive tasks	17. Go to the highest roof wherever you find and stand at the edge for some time. 18. Go to a bridge, stand on the edge. 19. Climb up a crane or at least try to do it 22. Go to a roof and sit on the edge with your legs dangling 23. Another task with a cipher. 24. Secret task 27. Wake up at 4:20 a.m. and go to rails (visit any railroad that you can find) 28. Don't talk to anyone all day 30-49. Everyday you wake up at 4:20 a.m, watch horror videos, listen to music that "they" send you, make 1 cut on your body per day, talk "to a whale."
(v) Suicide-inducing tasks	26. The curator tells you the date of your death and you have to accept it 50. Jump off a high building. And kill yourself.

### Psychological Underpinnings of the Challenge

Based on the review of related literature and the trend that existing research, newspaper articles and blog posts highlight, a psychological perspective about the functioning of the BWC was delineated which describes various factors that have been clubbed under three categories: (i) About the game, (ii) About the players and (iii) Repercussions.

#### About the game

**Habituation.** Humans have an innate tendency to strive for survival. The concept of "fight/flight response" given by Cannon in 1920s and later the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) Model by Selye (1936), proposed that humans either want to avoid threatening stimulus or prepare themselves to confront the threatening stimulus. In the context of the BWC, however, the sequence and nature of tasks are such that instead of fearing/avoiding the tasks, the adolescent gets habituated to the tasks and feels that there is no danger in carrying them out. Repeated exposure to threatening stimulus reduce induced anxiety (Meuret, Wolitzky-Taylor, Twohig, & Craske, 2012) and habituation makes them feel that they are overcoming their fears which is perceived to be adventurous, and gives a feeling of pleasure, satiation and success (Allman, Mittelstaedt, Martin, & Goldenberg, 2009).

**Grooming.** The internet, a new age Pandora's box, is a necessary global medium but it comes with its own disadvantages as can be seen when a trend such as the BWC proves fatal for the global online community at large. Craven, Brown, and Gilchrist (2006) proposed that grooming is: "A process by which a person prepares a child, significant adults and the environment for the abuse of this child. Specific goals include gaining access to the child, gaining the child's compliance and maintaining the child's secrecy to avoid disclosure. This process serves to strengthen the offender's abusive pattern, as it may be used as a means of

justifying or denying their actions" (Craven et al., 2006). Although a concept that has been used in the context of sex-offenders (Whittle, Hamilton-Giachritsis, Beech, & Collings, 2013), it can be applied in the context of the BWC, wherein, the administrator assigns the adolescent tasks of progressive intensity. Even if the task is unpleasant or uncomfortable, the individual gets habituated to the tasks and ends up doing them, in the process pleasing the administrator and gaining their acceptance and this cycle goes on till the last task which involves killing oneself is carried out.

**Gamification.** The BWC is a form of gamification gone wrong, a term coined by Pelling (2002) to describe the use of game design elements in non-game contexts. Gamification, said to improve motivation and performance, skills and learning (de Sousa Borges, Durelli, Reis, & Isotani, 2014), especially in educational setups, raises ethical concerns when applied to regular life-situations, and especially so when it comes to something like the BWC. Kim and Werbach (2016) questioned whether or not 'gamification practices take unfair advantage of workers, infringe users autonomy, harm users/others, and whether they have a negative effect on the moral character of the involved users'. Data-driven gamification raised even more ethical concerns as it involved using data collected from the user to modify the user's behaviour which could be behavioural, psychological, physiological, environmental, emotional or social (Hyrnsalmi, Kimppa, Koskinen, Smed, & Hyrnsalmi, 2017). In the context of the BWC, the data pertaining to the player collected can prove fatal since the curator can use it to manipulate and victimize adolescents.

**Cyberbullying.** Cyberbullying is a form of harassment that takes place via digital and electronic mediums. Lack of digital media literacy provides room for cyber bullying and victimization, cornering adolescents into being a part of the BWC, and once they enter, the curators make it a point that

the adolescents follow through without revealing about it to anyone through manipulation. It is also likely that an adolescent can be bullied by peers to partake in the BWC. Cyber bullying has been shown to be more strongly related to suicidal ideation in comparison to traditional bullying (Van geel, Vedder, & Tanilon, 2014).

### About the players

**Depression.** “They were dying happy. I was giving them what they didn't have in real life: warmth, understanding, connections.” Going by the logic of what the creator had to comment on what he did; he was playing with the dynamic feelings of an adolescent. One possible explanation could be that, adolescents, as vulnerable as they are, if undergoing depression were probably more drawn to the challenge. Depression is characterized by feelings of hopelessness, helplessness and worthlessness (Barlow & Durand, 2009). Based on Budeikin's testimony, and how depression has been characterised, it is likely that the prospect of having a person to confide in and being there for them all the time, and supporting them (Stewart & Davies, 2017) to complete the tasks, and with the accomplishment, making them feel better about themselves may have led adolescents to be too involved in the challenge. Depressed people anyway are vulnerable to suicidal ideation and thoughts, and with the challenge providing them room for exactly that, starting from self-harm to actually killing oneself, could precipitate their desire to harm themselves without any objections posed to their behaviour.

Attention seeking behaviour and curiosity. Indulging in the challenge could be a form of attention-seeking behaviour, or a daring feat that the adolescent sought to accomplish. The adolescents indulging in the challenge may also have borderline personality (Barlow & Durand, 2009) traits.

Becoming more of something like an urban legend, the uproar that it created drew only more attention and adolescents, as with their minds full of curiosity would be keen on uncovering what the challenge was actually all about. The challenge provided a sense of forbidden thrill and there have been testimonies where adolescents have acknowledged that they tried out the challenge out of sheer curiosity. A first-year college student from Chandigarh, said “I was curious. Of course, I knew that the last step is killing yourself. But I never intended to play till the end. I just wanted to see what exactly happens in the game,” and pulled out after playing till the eighth level (Banerjee, 2017).

**Risk-taking behaviour.** Adolescents tend to be high on risk-taking behaviour because of the thrill and rush it provides, a sense of rebellion against their immediate superiors, taking control over their own lives and feelings of accomplishment even if it involves indulging in behaviours harmful for themselves (Berk, 2013). Trimpop (1994) defined risk-taking behaviour as “any consciously, or non-consciously controlled behaviour with a perceived

uncertainty about its outcome, and/or about its possible benefits, or costs for the physical, economic or psycho-social well-being of oneself or others”.

Moreover, an adolescent's involvement with the challenge could also be attributed to their peers (microsystem) and the media (mesosystem). Bronfenbrenner (1979) proposed that contextual factors reinforce adolescent's participation in risky behaviours. The more proximal contexts are referred to as microsystems which includes elements of social environment such as family, peers, schools, religious institutions, more distal social contexts are called mesosystems and includes the community, mass media, social policies and the most distal social contexts are referred to as macrosystems that include cultural, economic and political contexts (Trimpop, 1994).

Piaget (1936) in the fourth stage of his theory of cognitive development, formal operational stage, talked about the concept of adolescent egocentrism, a heightened sense of self-consciousness that adolescents feel which can be dissected into two types of social thinking: Imaginary audience and personal fable (Berk, 2013). The adolescent feels that he is the centre of everyone's attention and he needs to outshine them all in order to gain his peers acknowledgment and acceptance. They also cling on to the notion that they are somehow unique and invincible and although others may be vulnerable to danger, the person himself is not, hence increasing the potential of engaging in seemingly reckless behaviour which may range from street racing, unprotected sexual intercourse, suicide attempts and even indulging in the BWC.

**Peer pressure.** Peer pressure could be another viable reason behind adolescents participating in the challenge. Adolescents can be bullied into playing the challenge, or might be encouraged to take up the challenge with their peers and in an attempt to gain their peers acceptance, attention and portray they are 'cool/brave' in a race to display their power might get hooked on this challenge. Adolescents often live in a world where the lines between reality and fiction are blurred to the extent that they at times do not think logically.

**Social compensation hypothesis.** According to the social compensation hypothesis (McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002), interacting with people on social media does not require channels of communication (facial expression, eye contact, etc.) and some adolescents find it more convenient and comfortable to interact with people online than interacting with people in face-to-face contexts. It fulfills their social needs online, rendering them sociable and less awkward. These adolescents are more vulnerable to the challenge as it is likely that they innocently form relationships with the curators, from which they cannot break out of, since the latter fulfill the social needs of the adolescent and hence want to please the person they are maintaining correspondence with.

## Repercussions

**Suicidal ideation.** Taking into account the nature of the tasks that the BWC presents to its players, for instance, the tasks that involve inflicting self-harm, or experiencing going to and sitting in places at great heights or even depriving the person of sleep, not just disintegrates the individual's sense of self, but also reinforces suicidal thoughts. The thought pattern gets so ingrained due to the habituation process while carrying out the tasks that it culminates into the person committing suicide.

**Werther effect.** The incidence of suicides can also be media-induced, a potential Werther effect (Niederkrötenhaler, Herberth&Sonneck, 2007) (from Goethe's *The Sorrows of Young Werther*), also known as copycat suicide, when in the absence of protective factors, sensationalised and publicised suicides in media can act as a possible trigger for a person vulnerable to the same. The media induced imitation effects of suicidal behaviour could be highly likely, since the blue whale phenomena (Arendt, Scherr, Till, Prinzellner, Hines, & Niederkrötenhaler, 2017) rage went more viral only after the digital media started taking a keen interest in the fatal trend.

## Victims of the BWC in India

The BWC has claimed the lives of many youngsters across the globe and India is no stranger to this phenomenon. Over 130 deaths have been reported across Russia, where the death toll is probably the highest (Mullin, 2017).

A few cases of completed and attempted suicide have been reported in India. A 9th grader (14 year old boy) committed suicide by jumping off a seven-storey building in Mumbai, and brought the existence of the challenge in India to light. India Today's access to one of his last photos on his phone shed light on a caption "Soon the only thing you would be left with will be a picture of me". Denial of any links to the BWC was maintained and the family apparently learned about its existence only after seeing media reports. In Kolkata, a 15-year old boy wrapped his face up in a plastic sheet, killing himself by asphyxiation. This particular incident is surrounded by ambiguity since visuals of the body were not available and reports claimed the absence of injuries on the body, with all information based on accounts of the family. The deceased's friends claimed that they were told about the BWC but family members report not noticing any unusual/ change in behaviour. A 16-year-old boy from Kerala hanged himself to death in July, 2017. He had mentioned the challenge nine months before and his mother had noticed changes in his behaviour ever since, also asking her at some point if she would be able to recover if she were to lose him. The boy's Facebook posts hinted that he could have been suffering from depression (Express Web Desk, 2017; Handa 2017).

Cases of prevented suicide attempts and links to the challenge have been reported from Indore, Dehradun and Pune, with a 7th grader from Indore who was stopped from jumping off the school's third floor, had been playing the challenge in his father's phone and was identified with cut marks on his body; a 5th grader from Dehradun after substantial display of unusual behaviour was stopped from committing suicide and when the Principal reached out to him, the child spoke of the BWC. In Pune, a 14 year old boy had gone missing from his home in August, 2017 to complete a BWC task, was retrieved by the police (Express Web Desk, 2017; Handa, 2017).

## Measures taken up against the Challenge

NDTV reported that Goa police Crime branch released an advisory for parents asking them to install parental control software in devices used by their children and also limit application usage by them. It also requested parents to talk to their children about the challenge (Indo-Asian News Service, 2017). Chennai city police issued an advisory asking parents to spend more time with their children and encouraging them to participate more in outdoor activities and games. (Press Trust of India, 2017). Steps were taken by the government and the internet giants. Google India, Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Yahoo India were directed by the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology to remove any links to the online challenge. (Shekhar, 2017). The Ministry of Electronics & Information Technology, Government of India (2017) released an advisory on the BWC, asking to look out for sign and symptoms. In response to the Blue Whale Challenge, a federal investigation was launched by the Justice Minister in Brazil to establish a connect between the challenge and occurrences of self-harm and suicide amongst adolescents (Sanders, 2017).

Social networking giants Facebook and Instagram were not left far behind when it came to taking up measures against the BWC. A person running a search on "#bluewhalechallenge" on Instagram gets the following notification saying "Posts with words or tags you are searching for often encourage behaviour that can cause harm and even lead to death. If you are going through something difficult we would like to help." But there is a "see posts anyway" option with the notification, which does not account for to what extent will such measures be actually helpful in the fight against the BWC. Instagram and Facebook also provide a "get support" link which directs the person to a page with the following options: Talk to a friend, Talk with a helpline volunteer, Get tips and support. Tumblr too lists counselling and crisis intervention resources. However, there still remains the option to view the search results.

The Blue whale's polar opposite twin, the Pink Whale Challenge, came up sometime in April (2017) and was a good initiative to tackle the BWC. It originated in Brazil, with a page called *Baleia Rosa* (Pink whale in Portuguese), whose

admins stated that “In order to prove that the internet can be used to viralize the good, the Pink Whale was born. We are not a self help group! We just believe that we are all capable of promoting love and good!” (Singh, 2017). Gaining support from authorities as well, the project is now aided by the Government of Sao Paulo state. Even though the social media pages are available in Portuguese, the website and mobile phone application (android and iOS) is available in English, Spanish and Portuguese. This happier alternative of the BWC uses a set of 50 tasks, the only difference being that they do not involve inflicting self-harm, and does not culminate into committing suicide. It involves tasks such as writing down five things that one loves about themselves, writing on one's skin how much they love someone, forgiving someone, telling one's family that one loves them, unblocking a friend on a social networking site, yelling “I love myself” in the middle of a street etc. to name a few and the last task entails helping someone; human or animal (Biswas, 2017).

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

The existing body of literature around the blue whale challenge is sparse and the greatest limitation was relying on only secondary sources of data during the course of the study. This study is merely a starting point that opens the door to further exploration and research, leaving room for further probing on the stakeholder's stance and vulnerability to the challenge using a mixed method approach and qualitative work surrounding the players of the challenge. It would also be extremely insightful to examine the psyche of the developer through a case study approach.

### **Conclusion**

It is a herculean task to put an end to this challenge because of the anonymity it provides and the way it functions, making it difficult to pinpoint the people pulling the strings behind the challenge since the challenge itself does not exist in a concrete form of an application or online game but only as links. Unlike the usual terms and conditions that apply to gaming, for instance, when a person downloads a game he/she has to agree to its terms and conditions to proceed to play the game, the BWC provides no room for that, with the adolescent shooting into darkness, knowing not what awaits him/her.

Humans are curious beings and the more things are hushed up, it strengthens their curiosity to unravel what the forbidden thing is all about, what a 'no' entails. Instead of shying away from the challenge and keeping it a secret, parents need to talk to their kids about it, make them understand what it means to be a part of a challenge like that. With the changing ecological context and systems of family, parents often are unable to provide constant supervision. Balancing the tasks of child rearing and of work life is something that parents are struggling with. A sense of disconnect between parent-child has also been observed as a

trigger factor, an influence to kids taking up the challenge. With parents providing their kids with gadgets as compensation for not being able to be around them, the picture gets only worse.

Complaints from adolescents about their parents not understanding them, and about the presence of a 'Generation gap' between the two parties are not uncommon. In the Indian context, the generation gap question is of special importance since the Indian society is in a process of evolving and needs to be incorporative and not resistant to change like it was traditionally. Parents would have to make an attempt to bridge the void between them and their children and since they are often oblivious to what their children are getting themselves into, be it a new trend or game, they should remain updated about current trends not just for their own sake, but also for their wards, so that they can guide them as well as monitor them. Parents should create an atmosphere where their children are comfortable to talk about things, especially about their mental health. Indian society for a long time had considered talking about mental health issues as a taboo; this attitude has however been changing gradually for the better. Mental health is an integral part of an individual's well-being and optimum daily functioning. Hence, parenting should involve forming an atmosphere that is warm and accepting, giving room to adolescents to speak their mind, the necessary minimum, so that it leaves the scope for parents to interject in their lives if situation demands it.

Even though technology is an integral part of their lives, adolescents are not smart digital media users, using social media as a medium to take out their personal rage, indulge in narcissism, and can be easily drawn into cybercrime both as an “intender” and 'victim’. Generation Z and Millennial Generation is the most involved with digital media for communication, information and entertainment, and a need arises for schools to start the initiative to devote at least one class to teach students how to use digital media wisely. Even if not taking it up as a formal initiative, digital media literacy can be taught via fun activities, discussion, workshops, etc. This would sensitise adolescents on how to safeguard themselves from the darker side of the internet and peer educating sessions is also a viable option in this context. Schools must also hire well-trained and efficient counsellors whom the students can approach if they are facing any kind of trouble and require professional help.

Today life is almost unimaginable with technology and the internet, but the more people are delving deeper into its usage, the more they are unable to detach themselves from the same. With noses buried in their gadgets, adolescents today are far from understanding the little joys of life. Being tech-savvy might be a necessity now, and the internet may make everything convenient, but the excess of everything good comes with a cost. There comes a need to develop an environment conducive for adolescents to indulge in face-to-face interaction, and to rely less on digital media for all their

needs at all times and save themselves from the illusory image that social media portrays. An Indian approach to counselling offers a possibility of dealing uniquely and effectively with adolescent issues and helps manage stress and prevent suicides while improving the quality of one's life with the help of Yoga.

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## Social and Cultural Representation of Homosexual Love and Intimacy: An exploratory study

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**Abstract:** The present research aimed to study how people make meaning of homosexual love and intimacy in the Indian frame of reference. For this purpose, data was collected using short, structured interviews, which explored participants' perceptions and experiences (if any) on homosexual love and intimacy with the use of open ended questions. A total of 9 heterosexual males and females (5 male and 4 female students) within the age range of 18-25 years were interviewed. They were all students enrolled in undergraduate or postgraduate courses in Delhi-NCR. Using the Thematic Analysis technique, 7 global themes emerged in the course of step-wise analysis of raw data which included inherent contradictions/ about homosexuals; cognising love as an emotion; marriage being more than love; perceiving homosexual love through heterosexual lens; acceptability variation depending on gender; understanding homosexual love as embedded in a socio cultural matrix. The present study has depicted homosexual love as defined by physical intimacy and sexuality rather than love as an emotion by the heterosexuals. There were gender biases reported when it came to the acceptance of gay relations versus lesbian relations with females being more accepting of homosexuality in general and the heterosexuals being more accepting of lesbian than gay relationships. Social and historical norms had a major role to play in the formation of opinions and attitudes regarding homosexuality. Although the paper presents an initial picture of how homosexual love and intimacy is understood by the heterosexuals, more extensive research is required to fully comprehend how homosexuality 'is influenced by' and 'does influence' the idea of love and intimacy in the Indian society.

**Keywords:** Intimacy, Love, Representation, Social, Thematic Analysis

Homosexuality stands within a social area which is largely still unknown to many people. Society has two views of homosexuality. The traditional view holds that homosexuality is abnormal or a disorder, and the behaviour is pathological. The opposing view is that homosexuality is a normal variant in the human condition which is determined before birth, and that homosexual behaviour is natural for those oriented. Since, gays and lesbians are minority group, the way homosexual community is portrayed is affected.

Indian society is a traditional multicultural diversified integrated society where in most marriages irrespective of religion is an enduring heterosexual sacrament. Homosexuality is still a taboo in India. There is a similar opinion among different communities in India that marriage is a heterosexual institution. People deny the existence of sexual minorities in India, dismissing same-sex behaviour as a Western, upper class phenomenon. Many others label it as a disease to be cured, an abnormality to be set right or a crime to be punished. While there are no organized hate groups in India as in the West, the persecution of sexual minorities in India is more insidious. Thus, at large Gay men aren't accepted in Indian society, and as a result they have been extremely closeted. But in the last five years, the Indian gay community has moved into and flourished on what has probably been the most accepting space they could have ever hoped to find- the Internet. Thus they are forming NGOs, calling up help-lines and meeting regularly to evolve strategies for their cause. Even then the ground reality is that sexual minorities in India are largely stigmatized and disempowered socially, culturally, politically and often legally and economically. Social isolation becomes intrinsic to the existence of a large number of lesbian and gay adolescents, and this feeling of isolation is often accompanied by self-loathing and confusion as to their future (Misra, 2009).

Decriminalizing of homosexuality by the Supreme Court recently amending Section 377 has brought immense relief to the homosexual community. Their experiences and feelings are finding words where their relationships are being equated to heterosexual normative relationships now.

One approach to defining homosexual relationships focuses on specific characteristics of same-sex relationships, most commonly sexuality and love. In this view, a close same-sex relationship is homosexual if, or only if, the partners have sex and/or experience love. One view has been that sexuality is crucial to defining homosexual relationships. For example, De Shively, Jones, and De Cecco (1984) argued for the value of shifting discourse on homosexuality from "sexual identity" to "sexual relationships" (p. 14). Certainly in the public mind, it is the fact of sex occurring between same-sex partners that most readily distinguishes homosexuality from heterosexuality. Participants in same sex relationships may themselves use sexual interest or behavior as evidence of whether their relationship is a homosexual one rather than a platonic friendship. Love on the other hand has been defined in a number of ways, but has typically been defined as an emotional and passionate experience, usually between two individuals (Berscheid & Walster, 1974).

A focus on sexuality as the distinguishing feature of homosexual relationships entails several difficulties, however. One is the problem of defining sexuality and specifying whether sexuality must involve explicitly genital acts, or can be construed more broadly to include other forms of physical affection and/or "latent" sexuality. Another key element in defining homosexual relationships concerns the emotional quality of a relationship and the experience of love between the partners. For example, in a discussion of women's relationships in the nineteenth century, Faderman (1981) argued that the term

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lesbian describes a relationship in which two women's strongest emotions and affections are directed toward each other. Sexual contact may be a part of the relationship to a greater or lesser degree, or it may be entirely absent. By preference the two women spend most of their time together and share most aspects of their lives with each other. ... [I think that most] female love relationships before the 20th century were probably not genital, (pp. 17-18).

Although both males and females regard intimacy as an important aspect of a relationship, women consider intimacy as more vital to a satisfying relationship than do men, and men deem sexuality as more essential than do women (Hassebrauck & Fehr, 2002). As intimacy and affection are the pathways through which individuals come to feel “understood, validated and cared for” in a relationship (Reis & Patrick, 1996), it is likely that in order to feel content in a close relationship, one's needs for intimacy must be met in all domains of relating—not solely sexual relating. Since intimacy has been understood extensively in the context of heterosexual relationships, there arises a need to understand how love and intimacy are defined in homosexual relationships. Also, since social and cultural representations of love vary, the researchers aimed to explore the research question of how is homosexual love and intimacy socio-culturally represented in our Indian society.

**Method**

**Participants**

For the purpose of the study, a total of 9 heterosexual males and females (5 male and 4 female students) within the age range of 18-25 years were chosen. Their educational qualifications ranged from under graduation to post graduation (6 studying in the University of Delhi and 3 in Amity University). The sample was drawn using Purposive Sampling technique.

**Measures**

Data was collected using short semi structured interviews with the use of 12 open-ended questions. For the purpose of the study, interview questions were constructed in order to explore how homosexual love and intimacy is perceived socio-culturally in the Indian context. The interview was used to obtain an in-depth view of the attitudes of the heteronormative society towards homosexuals. The interview schedule was constructed to cover the following domains:

- Views on homosexuality and feelings towards gays and lesbians.
- Defining the idea of homosexuality.
- Reasons behind homosexuality.
- Feelings towards PDA (Public Display Affection) displayed by homosexual/heterosexual couples.
- Perception on people who are in a relationship with individuals belonging to the same gender.
- Perception on the right to same-sex marriage.
- Attitude towards physical intimacy between homosexual couples.
- Reaction towards being in a residential proximity with homosexual couples.
- Thoughts on similarities/dissimilarities between homosexual love and heterosexual love and relationships.

**Procedure**

The interview began with rapport formation after which the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent taken. The interviews were taken in a naturalistic setting (University Campus) keeping in mind that the environment was quite and comfortable for the participants. Each interview took about 40 minutes. The participants were assured that confidentiality would be kept. At the end of each interview, participants were thanked for their participation.

The method of thematic analysis used in the current study was based on guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) and Attride-Stirling (2001). This began by coding the research data. The initial coding was done by keeping the self as close to the data as possible because the research was desired to be strictly data driven in nature. Once the initial coding was done rigorously, basic themes were drawn out from all the codes by systematically categorizing them. This had to be done keeping the memos into consideration as well. Clumping together similar codes made our work simpler and in the process, 29 Basic Themes were found. Sorting through the data, arranging and re-arranging them around, these 29 basic themes were further condensed into 16 Organizing Themes. The data was further distilled into a final of 7 Global Themes.

Table 2

*Themes relating to homosexual love emerging from interviews*

Verbatim	Initial codes	Basic themes	Organizing Themes	Global Themes
“I think people who are in a relationship with individuals of their same gender they're brave”.	-Same sex couples: Brave	-Strong emotionally laden adjectives to voice opinion	-Use of emotionally triggering words	Inherent contradictions/
-“Honestly, I would be judgemental...”	-Judgemental towards homosexual displays of affection	Openness in letting homosexuals be the way they are		Dilemmatic opinions about Homosexual Love
		-Appreciation and respect		

Verbatim	Initial codes	Basic themes	Organizing Themes	Global Themes
-“I think people who are in a relationship with individuals of their same gender is unnatural... biologically unnatural”.	-Questioning biological naturalness Intimacy is unnatural and abnormal	-Sceptical -Unsure -Suspicion -Denunciation -Emphasis on biology	-Suspicion -Sceptical attitude -Questioning authenticity of Homosexual love	Cognizing Love as an Emotion
-“...while I do believe marriage is about love, I believe it's more than just that and that's it's way more than love. So perhaps "marriage" might not be possible”.	-Marriage more than love, so homosexual marriages not possible	-Marriage not equal to love -Nonchalance	-Marriage seen as more than love -Emphasis on biology -Complementarity -Compatibility issues	-Marriage as more than Love
“Nope, the kind of love ...can never ever exist in homosexual relationships”	-Traditional notion concerns man and woman only -Conditional tolerance to homosexual marriages (as long as they keep to themselves)	-Conditional Tolerance -Treatment of homosexuals as outsiders -Othering	-Alienating -Othering	-Perception of Homosexual Love through Heterosexual Lens
-“...but if it is lesbian, I think I would be having sexual pleasure...But if it is gays, I will be finding it bad”.	-Gays: Disturbing, bad -Lesbians: depends upon attractiveness	-Gender disparity in acceptance of homosexuality	-Socio-cultural embeddedness -Bio-sociological factor	-Gender differential acceptability
-“I think homosexual couples are mainly homosexual because of their physical sexual intimacy... Their sexual orientation (by which we mean how one prefer to have sex and with what gender) is their overarching or dominating factor ...homosexual is what keeps them apart from the majority others”.	-Hierarchical tone (I will support their marriage) -Homosexual love based merely on passion-therefore, collapsible -Love v/s Lust in homosexual relations	-Cultural context in acceptance -Hierarchical notion in cognition -Cognizing emotions -Patronizing -Air of superiority	-Heterosexual privilege	-Understanding of Homosexual love strongly embedded in socio-cultural matrix
“...whereas in a homosexual love I think the distinctiveness of mental construct of both parties would be lesser and more similar. So the basis of such emotional attraction would differ”.	-Element of complementarity missing in homosexual love	-Comparative nature of understanding homosexual love in comparison to heterosexual love	-Comparative understanding	-Under-script of Superiority while understanding Homosexual Love

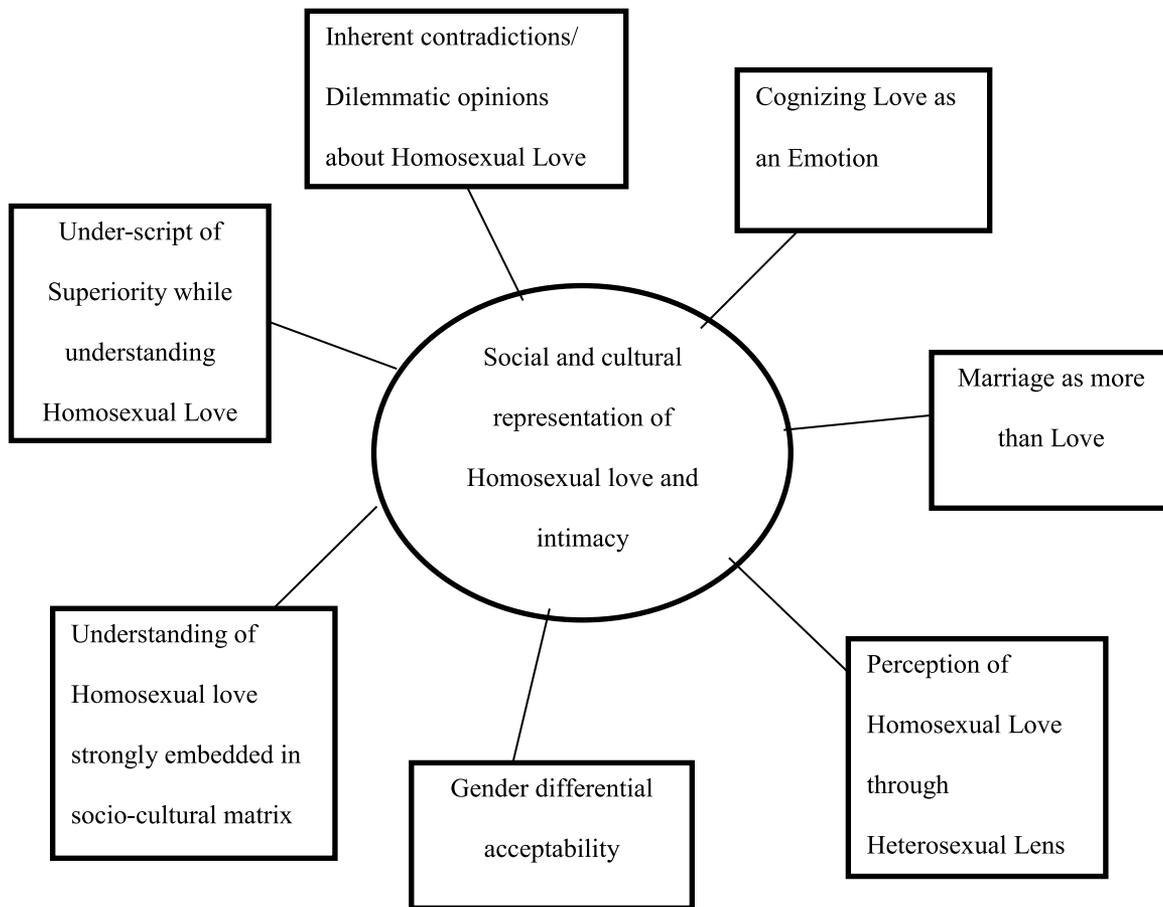


Figure 2

Global themes of homosexual love as perceived by heterosexuals

### Discussion

The aim of the study was to explore how intimacy and love are actively and passively experienced by the homosexual community in the social and cultural society. This research falls under the paradigm of qualitative research, and hence acknowledges the subjectivities of both the researcher and the participants in the process of research and knowledge production. Qualitative inquiry using interviews focused on collecting data from naturalistic settings that more closely resemble real life as opposed to conducting controlled experiments. The themes emerging from participants' perceptions and experiences of homosexual love have been discussed.

#### **Inherent contradictions/ Dilemmatic opinions about homosexual love**

The notion of homosexual love was found to be different from the notion of love as defined by many that it is an emotional and passionate experience between two individuals. There is a gap in the theoretical understanding of love and the practical implications it has in the minds of the people. As mentioned by one of the participants, "Since my Indian sensibilities are not attuned to PDA, I would screw up my nose at both the couples". This shows the level of impact the society has in shaping the attitudes and views of the people. The homosexual community

has been known to hide their true identity because of the undercurrents of the society. Sexual intimacy is considered a dominating factor in homosexual love, without which love cannot exist. Hudson and Ricketts, (1980) said homophobia is the fear, disgust, anger, discomfort, aversion that individuals experience in dealing with gay people. Weinberg (1972) also further explains that homophobia as a 'dread of being in close quarters with homosexuals'.

Socio-cultural analyses, typically undertaken by anthropologists, historians, and sociologists, focus on the societal patterning of homosexuality describing and explaining societal reactions to homosexuality, cultural and subcultural variations in homosexuality, social rules and institutions that regulate homosexuality, and so on. For example, from the present study, there were varying opinions among the participants about the affection shown by homosexuals in public- such as "appreciative of boldness", "unusual", "intriguing", etc. There were notions about homosexual love as brave and courageous, perhaps because expression of homosexual love is considered as 'coming out'. Coming out is not a single event, but a series of realizations and disclosures.

In other instances, no differences were perceived between homosexual and heterosexual love. Openness to homosexual love as an expression of who they are becomes evident; it is

considered a celebration of love. Some others find homosexual love as plain disgusting. The opinions about PDA among lesbians and gays also differ as lesbian showing public affection seems more favourable than the latter.

At this end, the role of society becomes crucial. However, the underlying question in this study is the social and cultural upbringing not of the homosexuals, but the society in general especially the younger generation. As in the case of this study, the participants belonged to the Indian society that largely idealizes heterosexuality, which stigmatizes all non-heterosexual forms of behavior, identity, relationships and communities. Fazio and Olson (2003) have suggested that at an implicit level one's personal attitude can be influenced by the social or cultural norms that one perceives. Furthermore, this may be due to a weak distinction between one's personal attitude and extra-personal associations (e.g., one's cultural evaluations) towards an attitude object at the implicit level. From this we can conclude that implicit attitudes are indeed reflective of experiences but can also be shaped by the cultural context. Religion is also another reason as to why there are inherent contradictions about homosexual love. This relationship is based on the premise that individuals' moral attitudes are adopted via exposure to socializing agents—in this respect, religious institutions (Durkheim & Bellah, 1973).

### **Cognizing Love as an emotion**

There are certain opinions and attitudes when talking about homosexual love. There is suspicion and a skeptical attitude involved about the notion of homosexual love as an emotion. This is because the perception of love as an emotion in homosexuals is based on sexual intimacy. In relation to this, when participants were asked about PDA (Public Display Affection), some of the responses were 'disturbing', 'intriguing'. Another instance is "feeling of disgust" while not letting that be a reason why one should not develop interactions with the homosexuals. In describing a "homosexual relationship", one perspective is provided by the specific criteria or operational definitions that empirical researchers use when enlisting the participation of members of homosexual couples. In practice, researchers have usually studied romantic/sexual relationships of some duration between partners who describe themselves as gay, lesbian, or homosexual. For example, in their study of gay male couples, McWhirter and Mattison (1984) included as 'participants' only male couples who had lived together in the same house for at least a year and who considered themselves to be a "couple." In a study of lesbian relationships, Mays and Cochran (1986) identified eligible participants by asking women to indicate if they were currently in a "serious, committed romantic/sexual relationship with a woman." These examples make it clear that current research encompasses a range of relationships, with some researchers using considerably more restrictive operational definitions of homosexual relationships than others. There is definitely a conflict between the emotions and cognitions as to how one should react towards homosexuals.

One of the participant's response in the present study suggests that love and intimacy is more intense in the homosexual community than in heterosexual community. At the same time, however, the authenticity of homosexual love is questioned. On asking the participants how they make meaning

of homosexual love and intimacy, one of the participants said, "I think homosexual couples are mainly homosexual because of their physical sexual intimacy, two couples won't be homosexual if they are intimacy just in emotional way. Their sexual orientation (by which we mean how one prefer to have sex and with what gender) is their overarching or dominating factor in their identification. If one is homosexual, that comes first of them to be identified before even they being identified by their profession or any other attributes. It maybe because that attribute being an homosexual is what keeps them apart from the majority others". At the same time, it can be inferred from participants responses that the empathy shown towards homosexuals also becomes conditional in which the oppression they face every day becomes the sole reason as to why one should empathize with homosexuals.

### **Marriage is more than love**

One of the participant's response in the present study suggested that they are not comfortable with the idea of marriage between homosexuals yet. It was felt that while homosexuals are capable of love; since marriage is more than love, homosexuals are less capable of marriage than heterosexual couples. This proves that marriage is the institution through which heteronormativity in social relationships is enforced and sanctioned. Therefore, in a heteronormative society, there is little space for homosexual marriage. There was also an instance of questioning the biological naturalness of the homosexuals. Since homosexual love is seen only in the light of sexual intimacy, marriage is seen as something not possible. This is the traditional view of marriage of the Indian society. According to a study done by Moskowitz, Rieger, and Roloof (2010), homophobia was the best predictor of attitudes toward gay male and lesbian marriage, and this was equally true for both heterosexual men and women.

There are two different views on marriage, the conjugal view and the revisionist view. The conjugal view believes that marriage is a legal status which has rights and responsibilities. It is when a man and woman make a permanent and exclusive commitment to each other of the type that is naturally fulfilled by hearing and rearing children together. The revisionist view hold that marriage can be viewed simply as a loving emotional bond distinguished by its intensity—a bond in which fidelity is subject to one's own desires—a bond which one leaves when emotional fulfillment is no longer found (George, Girgis, & Anderson, 2010). The societal attitudes of India hold Conjugal views which believe that same sex marriage is not natural (Murray, 2013). They believe that marriage is a covenant between a man and a woman. They trust that heterosexual marriage is the foundation for every civilization. This view socially reinforces that idea that the union of husband and wife is the most appropriate environment for bearing and rearing children. They argue that the child will always be deprived of his natural mother or father, and be raised by one party who has no blood relationship with the child.

There are issues of complementarity when it comes to marriage as it is seen as more than love. However, love is also believed to transcend the understanding of homosexual or heterosexual love. As one of the participants said, "The institution of marriage is traditionally between a man and a woman. While I do believe marriage is about love, I believe it's

more than just that and that's its way more than love. So perhaps "marriage" might not be possible". Homosexual couples, in this context were seen as two individuals who come together. There was also emphasis on the souls of human beings that it does not sprout in just a specific gender. There also exists conditional tolerance towards homosexual marriages.

### **Perception of homosexual love through heterosexual lens**

Through the heterosexual lens, homosexual intimacy and love are perceived as private matters. From this study, it was evident from participants' responses that private matters are irrelevant. Indifference towards homosexuality and homosexuals deliver the point that homosexuals are free to choose. Strong cultural sanctions against homosexuality-including religious, medical and legal existed throughout much of the 20th century and were manifested in hostile attitudes towards homosexuality among most heterosexuals. One of the participant's responses was of having a relationship and communication with homosexuals first and look at things from their perspective. Interactions have consequences for both beliefs and affects associated with lesbians and gay men. Because they provide information, face-to-face interactions tend to refute stereotypes and reduce ignorance, which Marmor (1980) identified as the most important sources of hostility toward homosexual persons. At the same time, interpersonal encounters have an emotional impact that individuals can generalize to all lesbians and gay men. Thus, heterosexuals who know lesbians and gay men are better able than others to recognize stereotypes as inaccurate, and are more likely to express tolerant attitudes as well.

There is freedom to rights and a notion of egalitarianism that remains neutral to homosexual marriages. Another instance is the perception of alienating the "Other" in the society. This can be understood as "Othering". Evident from the present research data, there exists the treatment of homosexuals as outsiders because of various reasons like their biological deficits, and the role of media in portraying negative image about the homosexuals.

Translated from the participants' responses, they feel unsafe and threatened around homosexuals. Negative attitudes often are based in part on a defensive function: the finding that people are more negative toward homosexuals of their own sex than toward those of the opposite sex (since same-sex homosexuals presumably are more threatening); the positive correlations between hostile attitudes toward homosexuality and variables such as authoritarianism' cognitive rigidity' intolerance of ambiguity, and dogmatism (all of these personality traits presumably indicate higher levels of defensiveness); and the positive correlations between hostility and sex-guilt sexual conservatism, and non-permissiveness (all of which might indicate conflicts about sexuality) (Herek, 1984).

### **Under-script of Superiority while understanding Homosexual Love**

In the present day society, where heteronormativity is dominant, whereby homosexuality is given preference over homosexuality, the normalizing practices and institutions that privilege heterosexuality as fundamental in society and in turn discriminates those outside this system of power, and focused to a large degree on non-heteronormative sexualities and sexual

practices. This can be seen in one of the participants response that said, "I don't think the kind of love that is associated with heterosexual relationships can exist in homosexual relationships because as far as love as an emotional bond is concerned barring the physical, in a heterosexual relationship/ love the mental construct of the parties involved are distinct in many ways while complementing each other, whereas in a homosexual love I think the distinctiveness of mental construct of both parties would be lesser and more similar. So the basis of such emotional attraction would differ".

The presence of a sense of heterosexual privilege in understanding homosexuality is but natural, considering homosexuality was criminalized in India for long. In most of the verbatim, the recurrent undercurrent was patronizing and had a certain air of superiority attached to them. There was a sense of hierarchy that was tangible in the way respondents had answered questions on their opinions towards homosexual intimacy, homosexual marriages or homosexual PDA. These included verbatim like, 'I will support homosexual marriages...' instead of 'I support...' The undertones were subtle, but they were present in almost all the transcripts. This (false) sense of superiority over homosexuals in general is detrimental to the cause of basic human rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. The superlative attitude that heterosexuals harbour against any other sexual orientation is partially the reason for violence and aggression against individuals with alternate sexualities. Homosexuality is a taboo subject in India, throughout the upbringing an individual is unknowingly taught that it is an unnatural phenomenon, which leads to homo-negativity (Lottes & Grollman, 2010): the intellectual disapproval of homosexuals.

### **Understanding of Homosexual love strongly embedded in socio-cultural matrix**

The comprehension of the umbrella term of homosexuality, under which, homosexual love is a sub-set, is constructed largely based on a socio-cultural framework. The social matrix of India is undergoing a major overhaul, because of which a diverse spectrum of opinions could be gathered as far as homosexual love and intimacy is concerned. What emerged from the present research was that young adults are caught between traditional archaic perceptions of demonizing homosexuality and the more liberal contemporary points of view. Some participants admitted that because public displays of affection are not the social norm in our country, they would definitely feel uncomfortable if homosexual couples engage in such open displays of affection. Another respondent opined that Indian traditional sensibilities were not attuned to homosexuality as a concept, and in keeping with that, with the concept of homosexual love and intimacy either.

Participants were of the opinion that social factors are equally 'responsible' for the perception of homosexuality in society. Media has a significant role to play in shaping social opinions too. The portrayal of homosexuality is generally so far-fetched and ridiculous that in case the incorrect portrayals are not countered rationally, these inaccurate perceptions will continue to stigmatise and ostracise the community. In this sense, the roots of symbolic power lie in other forms of power. It has the potential to "impede in the course of events, and influence actions of others by means of production and

transmission of symbolic forms” (Thompson, 1995:17). In this sense, the concentration of symbolic forms by the different media, such as television, radio or press, is so enormous that they dominate the cultural landscape, and normalize the represented cultural form.

### Gender differential acceptability

It was interesting to note that there were significant gender biases when it came to the acceptability of gay and lesbian relations. The verbatim threw up significant contrasts in specific attitudes of participants towards gay couples and that towards lesbian couples. While certain participants were openly hostile in their opinion towards male homosexual couples, branding gay love as unnatural, abnormal and anomalous. One participant was very explicit in his preferential acceptance to lesbian couples as opposed to gay couples, and that too, based on their levels of sexual appeal and attractiveness. Furthermore, there were verbatim that sought to objectify and sexualize lesbian love, but not gay love and intimacy- “I will get disturbed if two gays are displaying affection before me. But if it is lesbian, I think I would be having sexual pleasure watching it as well as the couple. It also depends on sexual attractiveness of the ones indulging in it, if I don't find them sexually appealing, I will find it disturbing. But if it is gays, I will be finding it bad”.

Research studies show that heterosexual men are, on average, more homophobic than heterosexual women (Herek, 2002; Moskowitz, Rieger, & Roloof, 2010) Furthermore, homophobia and other attitudes towards homosexual individuals (such as opinions about their legal rights) are highly related (Bolte, 1998); and recent research suggests that heterosexual men and women differ in their attitudes towards same-sex marriage (Lannutti & Lachlan, 2007). Whether this gender difference is simply accounted for by different degrees of homophobia, or whether gender moderates the relationship between homophobia and attitudes towards same-sex marriage is largely unknown.

Heterosexual females are substantially more understanding and compassionate of gays and lesbians than are heterosexual males. They are more likely to be proponents of employment, adoption, and civil rights and less likely to hold negative stereotypical beliefs about the population. Heterosexual men are least supportive of these same aspects. These men are more likely to believe that homosexuals are mentally ill, sexual predators or child molesters, and generally more likely to fit negative stereotypical preconceptions (Herek, 2002).

The results of the study show that the most dominating factor in homosexual love is the notion of sexual intimacy or pleasure. Homosexuality is seen as a psychological and internal conflict in which homosexuals sometimes render to aggression due to the social oppression they face. An identity crisis is often embedded in the notion of homosexuality and its expressions in the society. However, the social change is slow and homosexuals still face social and cultural discrimination. The seven themes that have emerged from the present study throw light to the current scenario of homosexuality in India as far social and cultural representations of homosexual love and intimacy are concerned. Despite the positive changes in the laws and policies concerning the LGBTQ community, a pattern that the study reveals is the negative and dilemmatic opinions about homosexuality.

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The present study has certain limitations. Firstly, the sample size of the study was small and belonged to the Delhi and adjoining regions. The data obtained from the results might not have encapsulated the focus of the study extensively as participants belonged to upper and middle-income families and held college degrees. Hence, the results of the study cannot be generalized to other groups, such as low-income groups and low education levels. In addition, a larger number of interviews over a long period of time could have brought out a richer picture of the social and cultural representation of homosexual love and intimacy. Future research might find the other variables aside from what has been discussed that influence heterosexual attitudes towards gay male and lesbian marriage. These variables might include socioeconomic status, heterosexual marital success, current relationship satisfaction, or positive sexual cognitions held towards gay men and lesbians. Researchers might also endeavor to understand why there are differences in the understanding of homosexual love and intimacy among heterosexual men and women. And finally, further studies might evaluate why many heterosexuals themselves feel uneasy, hesitant, and even threatened when asked to share their reaction towards homosexuals. Once those have been realized, gay men and lesbian women may use that knowledge to further the acquisition of equal rights, and be closer towards actualizing marriage, as heterosexuals know it.

### Conclusion

The present study was an attempt to comprehend homosexual love and intimacy among youth, taking into accounts how attitudes and opinions might be socially and culturally constructed. There is a pattern that can be generalized in the study- homosexuality even though has been decriminalized in India is still a taboo in most parts of India. The present study also explores the importance of society in the formation of opinions and attitudes regarding homosexuality. Differential attitude towards gender of the homosexuals also emerged along with the female participants being more accepting of homosexuality. Despite a positive shift in attitudes toward gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, sexual prejudice still exists. Further, attitudes toward same-sex marriage have been found to be even more complex and resistant to change, suggesting the influence of other factors.

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# Making Sense of “Madness”: An Exploration into the Phenomenon through Analysis of Audio-Visual & Textual Material

Mohona Roy\*

**Abstract:** This article attempted to explore the construction of “madness” through an analysis of audio-visual and textual material. The following questions were explored: a) What are the underpinnings of the definition and the construction of madness? b) Do definitions of madness and normality vary across social contexts? c) What are the deciding factors of madness and who in society are authorised to fix the parameters? The data was analysed using thematic analysis, while adhering to the critical theory paradigm. The results point to the impact of societal values, mores, culture and norms on the definitions and constructions of “madness” within society. Such meaning making emanates from and also reinforces predominant power structures and their hegemony. With any aberration recognised within the system becoming a means to prove the sanity of the dominant structures, “madness” seems to play key a role in creating and demarcating power structures, the margins and centre within human society.

**Keywords:** madness, audio-visual, normality, thematic analysis, power

“Madness” is a term quite commonly heard; often even loosely. More often than not the everyday usage of the word fails to recognise the emotional poignancy that it is pregnant with. The word has an array of connotations. While on the one hand, the term may be used as a tool of insult, humiliation or belittling an individual, on the other hand, this very word can be used as a mark of endearment, in some cultures.

Another manifestation of the meaning of the term finds in its use to denote those individuals, who are considered deviant or different in any manner. This deviance may be a conclusion arrived at through simple observation of the individual by people around him/her; or a judgment which is attested by the more “trustworthy expertise” that can define “madness” or abnormality for the common individual. Thus, “madness”, the term, is one that finds a variety of manifestations. There are many colours and contours of the implications and meanings derived from madness.

The Oxford dictionary defined madness as “a state of having a serious mental illness” (“Madness,” n.d.). Madness has largely been associated with insanity and mental instability. Any kind of seemingly mental illness, abnormality or anything that is not usual is considered to be related to madness and insanity. One of the factors that defines abnormality and madness is anything that defies the usual and most commonly seen trends in society.

Foucault (1988) characterises the “madman” as one who is socially excluded from all the groups and domains of functionality within the society. Madness has found various definitions and exemplars in society historically through the ages. The way the “mad” were treated changed and modified with each passing phase in history – with being the occupants of the “Ship of Fool” and being forced to be segregated from the rest of the society through a geographical transportation, to being inhabited in asylums meant for the “mentally ill” (Foucault, 1988)

Some of the common themes that are seen in the case of madness include that of confinement, pity, sympathy, and fear amongst others. These are popular themes that get depicted through media in the form of movies and even daily soaps. The label is thrust upon certain persons by the rest of the society.

There are various pretexts that are used to label another mad. Labelling of one person by another agency naturally brings about a power structure and hierarchy that renders the “mad” powerless and inferior to the one who labels. Moreover, madness is not simply used in the context of deviance (Jeffs, 1998; Siegler, Osmand, & Mann, 1969). It has also been used in legal battles, property matters etc. where a person may have been labelled mad simply for the other party to be able to gain financially. Thus, madness has also been used as a tool of deception and cheat.

Labelling itself has stigma attached to it in the case of madness. A person being defined as mad by health agencies, for example, brings about a stigma attached to the person and the family. Society is still unable to see psychological disorders through the general lens of health issues. Moreover, some of these disorders are actually a reaction to the general normative societal structures.

Foucault defines madness in terms of the exclusion that certain people face in various functional areas of society and social living i.e., economy, reproduction, language and festivals. According to him, this exclusion is due to such individuals engaging in any kind of deviant behaviour; behaviour that is different from the predominant norms, and are hence termed “marginal individuals” (Foucault, 1998, p. 342-355).

## Locating the Researcher: My Positionality

As a student of psychology, I have always found the term “madness” quite intriguing. I am intrigued by the psychological disorders that are written about and the way in which abnormality thus gets defined. A very thin line seems to exist between the definition of madness and normality. The thought of “losing my mind” or simply not having any control over myself, seems quite frightening too.

I, belonging to an Indian middle class family, have my conceptions of “normal and abnormal” which have surely been shaped by the cultural, familial and social norms that I have been exposed to. Being a psychology student, I also realise that labelling someone “mad” has several connotations. Madness moreover could have a variety of parameters to begin with. The assumption that some conformity to the larger pattern of

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functioning may be required for a healthy and smooth living seems a plausible supposition. However, coercive social norms and the need to stick to them simply to be called sane or insane seems unjustified. To me it is important to be able to explore and express oneself as well as evaluate the larger social structures before accepting them as givens.

Everything is relative. My position is relative to another's. Through my experience as a female in a largely patriarchal Indian society, I also have found certain norms and structures oppressive. Hence this idea will also shape my understanding and definition of an aberration. These are concepts that are too volatile to hold one dimension or meaning. There are perhaps certain concepts which should change for the better, without simply shoving them away as "mad". All these are my ideas and understanding through my experience, which colours my perception.

### Objectives

- Keeping the evolving definition of madness and the constructs of sanity- insanity, the objective of the study were formulated to explore the construction of "madness" through the following questions:
- What are the underpinnings of the definition and the construction of madness?
- Do definitions of madness and normality vary across social contexts?
- What are the deciding factors of madness and who in society are authorised to fix the parameters?

### Method

#### Measures

Two movies were selected that deal with "madness" and marginality. The movies depict the main characters as considered to be "mad". Madness then shapes the forms of discrimination and oppression by those who consider themselves in more powerful position. The movies poignantly put forth the helpless suffering of the protagonists. The movie and the story depict a different form and manifestation of madness; which indicates that madness does not have a universal definition or parameter. It seems to change across times, places and contexts. However the common thread that runs across these variant themes is that of marginalisation. It shows the cruelty of society that uses the pretext of madness to get rid of those who dare to defy. Through the lens of madness, marginality and centrality were seen to be playing out.

The following textual and audio/visual materials were utilised to fulfil the objectives:

- Toba Tek Singh – a short story
- 15 Park Avenue
- A brief description of the data used is given below:

Toba Tek Singh. The short story is by Saadat Hasan Manto. Manto was a journalist and script writer who lived in Bombay until 1948. He moved to Pakistan when he found that Ashok Kumar with whom he worked in Bombay Talkies, had been receiving hate mail accusing him of being responsible for the

induction of Muslims into the company.

His dream was of a subcontinent where people will live irrespective of religion, cast or colour – sans hatred – where religion will not divide them into warring tribes. His volume of short stories is significantly titled "Mottled Dawn". In his writings, Manto depicts the horror and trauma of partition.

One of the greatest of Manto's stories is Toba Tek Singh. While the transfer of population and assets took place, the Governments of both the sides decided that lunatics of the asylums should also be exchanged. One lunatic, Bishan Singh, refuses to go to India, as he wants to stay where he was born, the town of Toba Tek Singh. On the day of the exchange, Bishan Singh refuses to cross the border. The official let him stand in no man's land, where he later collapses. This is how Manto ends his piece, "there behind the barbed wire, on one side, lay India, and behind more barbed wire, on the other side lay Pakistan. In between on a bit of earth which had no name, lay Toba Tek Singh."

**15 Park Avenue.** The films 15 Park Avenue and Paroma are directed by Aparna Sen who is a renowned name in Bengali and Indian film world both as a theatre/film actor and director of parallel cinema.

The story is about Mithi, a young woman, suffering from Schizophrenia. She is taken care of by her elder sister Anu who is seen sacrificing her personal life for the sake of Mithi. In her "reality", she is married to her ex-boyfriend Jojo – Joy, having five children and settled in an imaginary address – 15 Park Avenue. Having been a loner as a child, her illness is triggered when she was raped while on an ambitious and much desired journalism assignment in a rural area. While Jojo had encouraged her to take up the project, he was too traumatised to see her condition after the incident and broke the engagement with her. A few years later on a chanced meeting with Mithi, who was unable to recognise him by then, he out of a sense of guilt, agrees to help her to locate her imaginary home. In the process of searching the house, Mithi is shown to have found her imaginary home with Jojo and her five children welcoming her and thereafter she disappears.

### Procedure

After watching the movies closely, thematic analysis was used to analyse the data and cull out emerging themes to interpret the research questions at hand, using the 6 stages of analysis: familiarising oneself with the data; generating initial codes; identifying themes; reviewing themes, defining and naming themes; report writing .

The main characters that shape the analysis include Bishan Singh (Toba Tek Singh) and Meethi (15 Park Avenue). All these characters were put into the label of "madness" by the more 'powerful' in the society and hence they become the entry point to the study of madness and marginality.

The characters have been perceived and analysed through the lens of the writer and the director of the pieces. Various emergent themes in the data have been analysed to understand how madness often becomes a tool at the hands of the majority in society, to determine their positions and that of the others. Themes such as the variant definitions of madness, the

hierarchies and boundaries created through acts such as confinement of the mad and the sense of compassion towards them, the collective fear of the mad people – indicate how madness is a phenomenon played out to define the acceptable and the otherwise. Foucault's theoretical perspective has been

used as the interpretive framework to support the analysis. The Critical Theory paradigm has been followed which views reality as a product of historical processes, with the knower and the known linked interactively, with methodology being dialogical and dialectical .

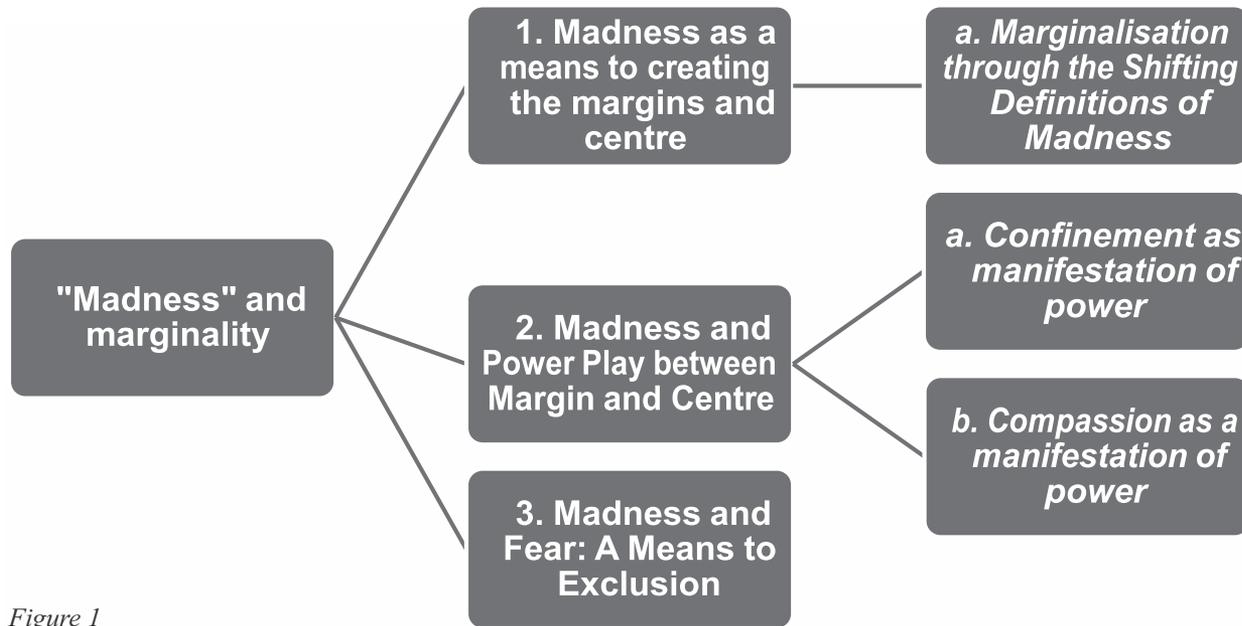


Figure 1

Representation of themes emerging from audio visual content viewing

Table 1

Thematic analysis of audio visual content

Global theme	Theme	Codes
Madness and marginality	Madness as a means to creating the margins and centre	Marginalisation through the Shifting Definitions of Madness
	Madness and Power Play between Margin and Centre	Confinement as a manifestation of power
	Madness and Fear: A Means to Exclusion	Compassion as a manifestation of power

**Discussion**

In an attempt to understand how madness gets defined, the analysis of the plot, characters and depiction of the movie revealed the themes discussed below.

**Madness as a means to creating the margins and centre**

The dynamics between margins and centre are such that the two positions always seem to be in a volatile and very sensitive state, ready to challenge each other and their positions. Madness finds a variety of interpretations and definitions, as has been evident in the data used in this practical.

Bishan Singh has been clearly labelled as “mad” in the entire story. That is his central identity which is authorized

by his membership to a specific group and location in the society – the asylum. His position does not keep any doubt or scope for question about his “sanity”. His speech is considered gibberish and something that one ought to ignore. His concerns and question, despite being valid and as “normal” worries as any other person in his place, are not paid any heed to. He is a “mad” man, one of the several others at the asylum.

Similarly, Meethi is located in the category of “madness” by the virtue of the medical diagnosis that she receives. In the modern, more advanced world, medical science becomes the authority to judge a person's “normality”. Again, she is forced into the asylum, despite her protests. Her family, in the face of the definition given by the “authority” is also left powerless and helpless.

The following analysis tries to explore the different levels at which the margins and centre dynamics keep changing. These levels bring out the subtle but very poignant ways in which madness is used as a means to create the hierarchies of margins and centre in society (Benhow, 2009).

**Marginalisation through the Shifting Definitions of Madness.** Interestingly, while both protagonists have been categorised under the same umbrella term of “madness”, the definitions and yardsticks that qualify them to be part of the category differ drastically in each case. Bishan Singh in the story was depicted as a lunatic since he is confined in the asylum. One of the characteristics that further proves his madness is his speech which does not seem to make sense. It does sometimes bring about the central point that he tries to express but the form of speech does not conform to the way speech is dominantly used.

The question was that even through the structurally and grammatically correct forms of speech used by most people in society; it doesn't necessarily seem to make sense always. Bishan Singh to be labelled as any more mad than any of the others in society is therefore problematic in times when for instance what is morally right and wrong is questionable.

Meethi, until the time she was raped, fit into the definitions of “normality”. She acted and behaved like any other individual in society. She sang and danced with her friends and also worked and earned for herself. She was ambitious and wanted to prove herself to the others such as Joy, who insisted that she take up the risky but challenging project which ultimately culminated in her rape. It would have allowed her to prove herself in the eyes of Joy. In her mind, this project was a culmination to this ambition and aspiration that she cherished. However, as the events turned out, the fulfilment that she aspired was not to be. But in her mind she had already reached that point. Hence, her belief in the world – of Jojo and her five children – which the rest of the society failed to see and hence termed her mad.

At the same time, for her the world was different than the others around. Wouldn't she too consider the rest of the people mad as her world did not match theirs? She felt confined in the house; this confinement being meted out by her sister Anu. She believed that she had to find her way out and reach her family. Who could possibly define which one of the two, madness is? The only reason why Meethi got the label was perhaps due to the fact that those on the other side of the “line” were the majority. There were more people who agree to this world as real; she was left alone to stand for hers.

Anu is found to be obsessively in the need for control. She tried to control her sister; her need also spills out to her workplace; she was found to be playing a dominant role in the household instructing her mother, Meethi, and the maid. This obsessive need to control the rest could perhaps also be defined as madness. However, this becomes legitimised

through various cultural norms. As she was the elder sister, the breadwinner and the main decision-maker of the family, her behaviour to control was seen as acceptable.

In both the cases it is clearly evident that society had different definitions to put forth for madness. The lack of one standard parameter puts a big question mark on the validity of the concept of madness itself. Anybody can be labelled mad if the definition of sane and insane becomes so fluid.

However, this is manipulated and played out in a way that certain sections of society can claim a central position by comparing themselves to that which is labelled as mad. By pushing the latter into the margins, the others claim centrality. With this assumption, they also assume the authority to define mad and sane. The definitions that seem to prevail include any act that defies the larger social norms and accepted ways. The majority defined reality in the case of Meethi and normality for Bishan Singh. Social dominance theory (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994) explicates the personality variable social dominance orientation, that has an impact on people's social and political attitudes. Factors such as social roles that individuals take on, contexts that they find themselves in and the prevalent social norms and beliefs have an impact on an individual's social dominance orientation, or the preference for social and inter-group inequality. In the light of the above discussion, it is evident that factors such as holding “hierarchy-enhancing roles” (in the case of Anu), definitions of being “cultured” (in the case of Toba Tek Singh) have enhanced the dominance emerging from the prevalent definitions of “normality”.

### **Madness and Power Play between Margin and Centre**

Categorising a set of people in a particular manner that puts them in a relative position to the rest of the populace is bound to have certain hierarchies and power structures involved as per the system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994). It is quite natural that one group getting fixed into a particular category through the labels and assumptions of the rest of the society will also entail certain hierarchies and power relations to come to play.

The dynamics between the two groups thus located in the society have been elucidated by Foucault who states that the relationship between madness and society is based upon the concept of power. It is the power wielding members and groups in society who are able to define and set the markers for madness (Foucault, 1988).

Two ways in which this power play can get defined and expressed in society are through confinement of the “mad” and through the general sense and emotion of compassion towards the “mad”. This has been seen in the texts used in the practical as well.

### Confinement as a manifestation of power

In Manto's story the introductory paragraph revealed the general attitude held by society towards the "mad".

*"A couple of years after the partition of the country it occurred to the governments of the countries that inmates of lunatic asylums should also be exchanged."*

The very fact that the inmates were being spoken about in a manner that does not seem to indicate their consent or even the need for them to know shows that madness was treated as something that entails a part of the society that is absolutely powerless to make any decisions for itself. It is a section of society that is owned by agencies such as the government and other administrators of the system. The group is rendered absolutely powerless by this kind a treatment and assumption.

The lunatic asylum was not only comprising of those known as "mad" but also – as the author puts it – "some perfectly normal, except that they were murderers". The picture that was portrayed in the story was very similar to the description of societal conditions that Foucault has elucidated. In their analysis of Laing's model of madness, Siegler et al. (1969) elucidated its "conspiratorial" aspect in which the model highlighted the alienating role of the label of schizophrenia which was socially derived by people exercising power which in turn led to loss of rights of those being labelled (Siegler et al., 1969).

Foucault talks about the western society where some people who did not conform to the larger social norms and structures were excluded from all these areas of social and everyday life. This simply found different manifestations over time. With the initial confinement of the mad people, they were gradually given the "ill" status and shifted to psychiatric hospital wards. According to him, one of the differences that can be seen in this context is that in earlier times the right to exclude one lay with the family of the person, on whose consent an individual could be taken into confinement. However, with time this changed, with the doctor having the right to decide and diagnose madness and then determine the fate of the person (Foucault, 1988).

Power over the mad and their being in a lower position than the rest of the society gets depicted in part of the story where the inmates were trying to figure out the matter of Partition and where India and Pakistan now lie and where they are at present. In the process, one of the inmates climbs up a tree and lectures on the matter, refusing to come down. He states that he would want to live in the tree and in neither of the two countries.

This goes on to show that as the power wielders of society the people considered "mad" are not considered to be important and capable enough to be able to comprehend the matter. It seems that it is assumed there is no need for the

voices of the "mad" to be represented and taken into account while making such larger decisions for the same people.

For Bishan Singh, Toba Tek Singh, his village was important for him to find in this time of turmoil and uncertainty. His stress in this regard was palpable. However, through the confinement of these inmates, and by the virtue of them being labelled as "mad", they were not given a say or even informed about what will be happening with them.

Similar is the case in the movie 15 Park Avenue. The scene where Meethi is being taken to the asylum for the first time, she vehemently refuses to go. She intensely asks for help from her family members who themselves seem to have become powerless in the face of the diagnosed "madness". The right to confine her comes from the label of "mad" that she has received. This right of the rest of the societal structures on her also imply her loss of her own rights and freedom. The force is so strong that in the face of protest, she is given an injection to pacify her and then taken to the asylum.

As Foucault (1988) has pointed out, in the older times the right for confinement and agreeing to one lay with the family. In the current scenario it was the medical institution and agency that had the right to decide upon the mental condition of a person, as in the case of Meethi. This very agency also had the right to confine the person concerned.

Another aspect which was interesting to note is that in the face of this power structure related to madness, the family and relatives of those considered mad are also rendered powerless. In the case of Meethi, her sister and parents lamented and cried but could not help her in the time of distress. This was because the higher power had already given a decision on the matter which was bound to be followed. In such a situation it is assumed that the person concerned is in "no mind" to be able to make valid decisions for oneself and hence Meethi is subjected to a variety of treatment procedures and admission into the asylum, without her view or consent being taken into account.

Similarly, Bishan Singh's family was unable to meet him or let him know before being deported to India. He came to know about it through an old friend. He was hopeful and looking forward to meeting his family and also missed them in their absence. But that was not taken into account even at the most basic level. The ones higher in the power structures were the better guides to decide for the "mad".

Madness thus seems to give society the right over the "mad". At the same time it also implies the loss of freedom, rights and voice of the "mad". In all the above cases, the "mad" ceases to hold any rights or power even on matters related to the self. The powerful becomes so consuming that the lack of rights of the "mad" is considered the "normal" and usual way of things. It was only after the revision of the

Mental Health Act in 1983 that the patient started to get some rights in the treatment process.

The present results may be seen in the light of Laing's (1969) perspective on madness and schizophrenia, which points to the social and external location of illness and its manifestations. It has been considered as a label that emerges within certain social contextual factors (Siegler et al., 1969). While the view has been critiqued to be a sweeping generalisation on the exclusive role of environment and context on illness, merit has been found in the need to not locate illness either in the context or within the individual in entirety, but the need for a "reasonable adjustment" that might be better suited towards diagnosis and healing (Cooper, 2017).

### **Compassion as a manifestation of power**

The "mad" are most of the times looked through the lens of compassion and sympathy by the rest of the society. Madness is seen as a major disadvantage and subsumed under the same category of handicap (Reaume, 2017). It is perceived as something that weakens the individual and renders him/her to a lesser position in society.

Compassion was evident in Bishan Singh's friend Fazal Din who comes to tell him about his family that has been deported to India. The friend placed a hand on his shoulder and told him about his family and their well-being. Compassion is seen even in the case of Meethi in 15 Park Avenue. Joy came back to meet her when he happens to see her at the same place he was vacationing with his family. It was compassion that drew him back to her. Although guilt could be a contributing factor, but upon meeting Meethi's sister and knowing about her condition, he decided to talk to her and interact with her, and also help her look for the flat 15 Park Avenue.

Even Meethi's sister claimed to have not gotten married to take care of her. Her sacrifice also comes out of compassion. This also manifested in her sister taking dominant position over Meethi and hence leading to a power structure in the relationship between the two.

Through this sense of compassion, the individual being compassionate assumes a position that is higher than that of the "mad". The latter is seen someone who is at a disadvantageous position generally. S/he is seen as someone who deserves better than she ended up with in life and hence is deserving of pity and sympathy or compassion.

### **Madness and Fear: A Means to Exclusion**

Fear is another idea that is popularly related with madness (Hochman, 1981). The "mad" are seen and perceived as people who are different from the rest of the society. Madness is an enigma. Anything away from the "normal" arouses and inspires a sense of fear, awe and

curiosity in others. The different attributions made for madness indicate this enigmatic quality that it has for the rest of the society. Any kind of deviation from the norm elicits the label of madness/insanity/abnormality. When the standards and yardsticks of "normality" are challenged or given a different turn by a few others, those who have been more used to the standard face an unsettling and disconcerting situation. Perhaps, the ability of the deviant to be able to defy and dare to be different, though probably out of unawareness, creates a sense of insecurity and inferiority within the person. In order to cope, this very inferiority takes the shape of superiority and reassurance to oneself that one is not in the mad person's shoes.

The fear of the mad could be evidently seen in the movie 15 Park Avenue. Here Joy was so petrified and shocked to see Meethi in the hospital after the rape that he is unable to come back to her. His expressions tell that he was so aghast at the condition that Meethi had been reduced to, along with the onset of schizophrenia; he seemed too repulsed and frightened of the idea of spending a lifetime with her. He left only to call off the engagement with Meethi.

This association is reflected in the way in which madness is socially constructed for instance, why people have mental illness or cultural norms governing what is normal and abnormal (McCann, 2016). By using such associations, the demarcation between them and us also becomes more structured.

In the above cases, exclusion was based on pathology. Towards the end of the story, it is evident that the officials took no interest in Bishan Singh and let him be on the "no-man's land". He was allowed to be there and ultimately excluded completely as he collapsed. Foucault also states that the "madman" is considered worthless. Hence another form of exclusion was through language and speech. This is akin to the ramblings of Bishan Singh. While his speech was not very clear, there were certain meanings that the author explicated. As Foucault states, the speech of the "madmen" comprise of content that the "normal" being wouldn't state. The former is not under the cover of morality, responsibility and political structures and can hence speak certain truths which others will not dare to (Foucault, 1988).

Fear not only exists in terms of fear of the mad but also the insecurity of becoming mad oneself. Madness creates such images, that one feels fearful of ending up on that side of the boundary. Moreover, with the existing power structures defining madness and insanity, another possible fear could be of being labelled as one by the powerful in society. This fear will work to confine each person within the boundaries created by the norms of the society. The fear will also evoke the fear of flouting any rules and norms. The entire process thus becomes a way of retaining the status quo, the power structures and hence the definitions of normal and abnormal.

Thus, fear was another tool that is used to make a demarcation of “madness”.

Foucault (1988) talks about the time where the mad could be seen by the public for a penny. By constantly exposing oneself to something that appears to be different and off the course, one tries to locate oneself and in the centre with the rest, compared to that margin.

As Prilleltensky (1990) advocated the need for a new paradigm within psychology that incorporates community psychology and community politics perspectives, the present research also calls for not only looking into the social location of well-being and illness but also considering the prevailing political structures that may be systemically preventing change. It calls for the need to promote human welfare by incorporating the individual, family, community as well as political dynamics within the prevailing societal structures and power processes therein, in order to effect change towards human welfare and wellbeing (Prilleltensky, 1990).

Thus, the argument through this research was not to refute completely the existing formulations or definitions but the need for including into the ambit the voices of the so-called “mad”; to locate madness both within and without the “mad”; and thereby the hope that healing may find routes on paths not yet explored.

#### Limitations & Directions for Future Research

The study looks at only 2 movies depicting only 2 specific mental illnesses made during a relatively older time period and hence becomes a secondary source of data for analysis. Therefore, it becomes important to understand the constructions of madness by the people in their socio cultural context as the primary data source. It also becomes important to study if there has change taken place in viewing mental health disturbances in the current times whether positive or negative and what can it be attributed to.

#### Conclusion

When the definitions of madness depend on the societal values, mores, culture and norms, the definition is rendered meaningless as there will be no constancy. It will keep getting modified with the change in culture, time and context. It appears that through the definitions of “madness” and “normality” one can find a ground and framework to locate oneself in this matrix. By calling another “mad” one can feel secure within as one stands in contrast to the madness; one can thus assume the position of sanity. Moreover, such definitions also allow for power structures to exist and hegemonically carry forward the dominant themes in society. An aberration is accepted in society only to prove the sanity of the larger structures. That which is not understood is defined as being mad and hence gives a sense of security and stability.

It seems that by creating the distinction, the more dominant powers try to locate their position of centrality. By defining madness as a deviance, the margins seem to be getting defined. By putting oneself in contrast to the margins, one is able to locate one's own centrality. The “mad” also assume a position of centrality by defying the laws and norms of society and challenging the centre itself. However, the attempts at suppressing these voices and using the garb of madness, one tries to relocate the margin and the centre. Thus it seems that the margin and the centre get defined by the presence of “madness” and “sanity”. However, a constant tussle between the two often challenges the location of both and also perhaps the very definitions and meanings assumed for the said constructs.

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## Internship Satisfaction among Delhi-NCR Undergraduate Students

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**Abstract:** Internships have not only become a part of the academic curriculum but also a preparatory stage for what the future holds for students. Hence, several internships are being sought and offered in the present times. The current study aimed to assess the determinants of internship satisfaction of student interns by looking at three broad factors (i.e. job characteristics, work environment characteristics and contextual factors). A sample of 100 Delhi-NCR undergraduates between the ages of 18-22 years who had completed a full time-internship were administered modified versions of Hackman and Oldham (1975, 1980) general job satisfaction and job characteristics scales; items measuring work environment characteristics, and contextual factors based on Herzberg's work (1965). The combined scale by D'Abate, Youndt, and Wenzel (2009) was also used. Using regression analysis, work environment characteristics (specifically organizational satisfaction, supervisor support and learning opportunities) were found to be the best predictors of internship satisfaction. The results of the t-test revealed that paid internships were more satisfying than unpaid internships.

**Keywords:** undergraduates, job characteristics, work environment, contextual factors, internship satisfaction

Graduates who have relevant work experience tend to be more valued by employers, which makes internships an attractive prospect for students. When it comes to securing an important graduate job offer, it's no longer enough just to have a good degree. Relevant work experience via an internship is now just as important as exam results to a future career. Internships in India are becoming a widely used learning tool for students to fill the gap between classroom learning and practice of business. The India Skills Report (2019) said that 84% students in India wanted to take up an internship opportunity. Students with intern experience are considered to be more marketable following graduation than students without internships, and that employers will pay a premium for students with an internship experience (Gault, Leach & Duey, 2010).

The National Society for Experiential Education (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000) defines internship as 'any cautiously monitored exertion or service rendered by student in which he or she has specific learning goals and it reflects vigorously on what he or she is learning all through the experience in which learning goals are academic learning, skill, personal and cognitive development'. Paid internships are more popular in large service sectors or in the private sector. They provide monetary incentives in the form of stipends to interns. Many internships are done voluntarily or to gain work experience and many are unpaid internships which remain as a viable option for employers. When people work in an office environment, they have supervision and restrictions, along with knowledge and support from others. It enables immediate feedback and a strong social network. Full-time Internship requires the intern to indulge in the work fully and includes full access to social package benefits, effective communication with team members, mentorship and professional advice and great opportunity to develop self-discipline.

One of the factors that results in satisfaction with an internship is the task itself. Job Characteristics theory (Hackman & Oldham, 1980) encompasses some individuals as well as task variables that may function as moderators to represent the relationship between job characteristics and outcome variables.

They specified five job characteristics that are predicted to benefit an individual's psychological state and job results. It includes skill variety that refers to the degree to which a job demands different activities in the execution of the tasks, where various skills and talents of the working person are used; task identity which is the degree to which the work demands a complete process or product with clear beginning and an end; task significance that is the degree to which the job has a substantial impact on not only the lives of other people within the organization, but also on society as a whole; autonomy which is freedom to plan the workday and set up new procedures that increases one's sense of responsibility; and feedback, information about the effectiveness of their recent performances.

Beyond the specific task characteristics, characteristics of the more general work environment need to be considered as predictors of internship satisfaction (Steers & Porter, 1991). D'Abate, Youndat, and Wenzel (2009) reported a significant positive relationship between the learning opportunities and internship satisfaction. Rothman (2003) identified interpersonal relationships with coworkers (e.g., helpfulness, encouragement) and organizational factors (e.g., corporate culture, formality of work environment) to be related to internship satisfaction. Some qualitative findings suggest that flexible work hours contribute to internship satisfaction and that a lengthy commute may result in dissatisfaction (Rothman, 2003). Location or place of an internship could also affect satisfaction such as the presence of family and friends in a location where one is currently working; community involvement and familiarity with the location have been studied in the past researches which link relocation and job attitudes (Hom, Lee, Shaw, & Hausknecht, 2017). Further, payment for internships can also be an important factor in contributing to internship satisfaction. For example, Maertz, Stoeberl, and Marks (2014) suggested that paid internships will make an employee bound and work towards a given goal in contrast to unpaid where an intern is asked to work without being paid a stipend.

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Such findings suggest that an empirical analysis of the relationship between intern satisfaction and the work environment's learning opportunities, supervisor support, career development opportunities, coworker support is crucial. On the other hand, given the short tenure of internships, interns' opportunities to learn through alternative channels, for instance, through developing relationships with co-workers or via trial-and-error, might be limited (Rose et al, 2014).

Since a positive correlation has been found between three broad factors (job characteristics, work environment and contextual) and internship satisfaction (D'Abate et al., 2009) and there is paucity of research studies on student interns, this study aimed to evaluate the factors contributing to the Internship satisfaction of Delhi-NCR undergraduate students. Also, the researchers were interested in identifying the best predictors of internship satisfaction in the Indian context.

**Hypotheses**

H1: Job characteristics will be positively related to internship satisfaction.

H 2: Work environment characteristics will be positively related to internship satisfaction.

H 3: Contextual factors will be positively related to internship satisfaction.

H 4: Internship satisfaction will be higher for paid internships than unpaid internships.

H5: There will be a significant impact of job characteristics, work environment factors, and contextual factors on internship satisfaction.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample in the study constituted 100 Delhi-NCR undergraduates from various colleges of Delhi University and Delhi NCR who have done a full-time internship. Only students who had done a full-time internship in office settings in their second, third or fourth year of undergraduation were selected in the sample. Those students who had done a part-time or virtual internship from their homes were not included in the study.

Table 1

*Demographic details of participants*

Demographics	Groups	n=100
Age	18 years	10
	19 years	34
	>20 years	56
Gender	Male	31
	Female	66
	Unrevealed	03
Year	2nd year	59
	3rd year	38
	4th year	01

**Design**

The study followed ex post facto research design. Kerlinger (1964) defined ex post facto research as that research in which the independent variable or variables have already occurred and in which the researcher starts with the observation of a dependent variable or variables.

**Measures**

**Job Satisfaction Scale.** Given by D' Abate et al. (2009), it is a modified 3 item version of Hackman and Oldham's (1975, 1980) job satisfaction scale to measure internship satisfaction. The wording of items was changed to reflect "Internship" rather than "jobs" in the Likert type scale.

**Job Characteristics Scale,** given by D'Abate et al. (2009) is derived from Hackman and Oldham's (1975, 1980) job characteristics model. This scale measures job characteristics

(i.e. skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, and feedback. The wording of items was changed to reflect "Internship" rather than "jobs". The multi-item scales for skill variety (3), task identity (3), task significance (3), autonomy (3), and feedback (3) had Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .81, .66, .80, .82, and .79, respectively and for learning opportunities (3), career development opportunities (3), supervisory support (3), co-worker support (3), and organization satisfaction (2), had Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .76, .66, .79, .84 and .78, respectively and lastly for flexibility of working hours (2), commute (2), pay satisfaction (2), and desirability of location (2) had Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient of .72, .74, .83, and .72, respectively.

The validity of Hackman and Oldham's Job Characteristics Model (1975, 1980) was assessed by the authors through a

comprehensive review of nearly 200 relevant studies on the model as well as by applying meta-analytic procedures to a large portion of the data. The evidence indicated that the available correlational results are reasonably valid in light of the issues examined. Results tended to support the multidimensionality of job characteristics, but there was less agreement on the exact number of dimensions. The corrected correlational results of the meta-analysis indicated that job characteristics related both to psychological and behavioral outcomes. The validity and reliability indexes of the questionnaire are reported in acceptable range; the new version of Job Satisfaction scale is a valid and reliable instrument for measuring job satisfaction among the undergraduate students.

**Procedure**

A Questionnaire was prepared on Google forms and disseminated online to the students of various colleges of Delhi University (Hindu, Hansraj, Miranda, Shri Ram College of Commerce, etc.), colleges in and around Delhi NCR. Each questionnaire mentioned the rights of the participant while also informing them about the aim of the study.

Data was analysed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 16. Pearson product moment correlation, t-test and regression analysis were carried out to study the objectives of the study.

**Results**

Three sets of correlations were calculated using the Pearson product moment correlation. Firstly, correlation was computed between the scores on three broad factors i.e. job characteristics, work environment, and contextual factors individually with internships satisfaction. Secondly, correlations were computed between sub factors of job characteristics (skill variety, task identification, task significance, autonomy, feedback); work environment (learning opportunities, career development opportunities, supervisory support, co-worker support, organisation satisfaction) and contextual factors (flexibility of work hours, commute, pay satisfaction, desirability of location) with internship satisfaction. The correlation coefficient obtained in both the cases has been interpreted using the guidelines given by Cohen (1988). Table 2 represents the results of the correlation analysis between internship satisfaction and three broad factors contributing to internship satisfaction. The correlation between general internship satisfaction and job characteristics was significantly high ( $r = .755$ ). Similarly, the correlation between internship satisfaction and work environment is the highest among all factors ( $r = .769$ ). The correlation between internship satisfaction and contextual factor is high ( $r = .549$ ). As provided by the guidelines given by Cohen, all the correlations are positive. Also, they are statistically significant at the 0.01 level. Therefore, H1, H2 and H3 stating that there is a positive relationship between internship satisfaction and three broad factors (job characteristics, work environment, contextual factors) respectively were accepted.

Table 2

*Correlation between general internship satisfaction and three broad factors*

Broad factors	Internship satisfaction	p value
Job characteristics	.755**	0.01
Work and environment factors	.769**	0.01
Contextual factors	.549**	0.01

\*\* $p < 0.01$  level (1 tailed)

Table 3 represents the results of the correlation analysis between internship satisfaction and the sub factors under each broad factor. First, the correlation between internship satisfaction and dimensions under job characteristics was significantly higher for skill variety ( $r = 0.666$ ) followed by task significance ( $r = 0.656$ ). Similarly, the correlation between internship satisfaction and two of the subdimensions of job characteristics i.e. feedback and autonomy were found to be positive and significant ( $r = 0.634$ ;  $r = 0.511$ ). Task identification was found to be the least correlated factor amongst all with correlation value of 0.302. Therefore, this correlation indicates a moderate strength in relationship, unlike the other dimensions. However, co-worker support is moderately correlated, least amongst all ( $r = 0.432$ ). Finally, correlation between various dimensions of contextual factors and general internship showed that the highest correlation was found for pay satisfaction ( $r = 0.448$ ) followed by commute and desirability of location

( $r = 0.421$ ;  $r = 0.419$ ). Flexibility of work hours was least correlated with internship satisfaction ( $r = 0.177$ ).

Therefore, hypotheses H1- Job characteristics (i.e., skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, feedback) will be positively related to internship satisfaction, H2- Work environment characteristics (i.e., learning opportunities, supervisory support, career development opportunities, co-worker support, organization satisfaction) will be positively related to internship satisfaction and H3- Contextual factors (i.e., flexible work hours, reasonable commute, paid versus unpaid, pay satisfaction, desirable location) will be positively related to internship satisfaction respectively are all accepted. To summarise, the results revealed a significant relationship between internship satisfaction and three broad factors (i.e., Job characteristics, work & environment and contextual factors).

Table 3

*Correlation between Internship satisfaction and sub factors of job characteristics, work environment and contextual factors*

Sub factors	Internship Satisfaction
Job characteristics	
Skill Variety	0.666**
Task Identification	0.302**
Task Significance	0.656**
Autonomy	0.511**
Feedback	0.634**
Work Environment	
Learning Opportunities	0.650**
Career Development	0.578**
Supervisory Support	0.651**
Co-worker Support	0.432**
Organizational Satisfaction	0.665**
Contextual Factors	
Flexibility of Work Hours	0.177*
Commute	0.421**
Pay Satisfaction	0.448**
Desirability of Location	0.419**

\*\*  $p < 0.01$  (1 tailed)

\*  $p < 0.05$  (1 tailed)

Table 4 presents the t-test results carried out to examine if there was a difference in internship satisfaction based on paid or unpaid nature of internships. There was a statistically significant

difference between paid and unpaid internship satisfaction ( $t = 5.71, p < 0.05$ ) with paid internship resulting in greater internship satisfaction than unpaid internships which proves hypothesis 4.

Table 4

*test comparing paid and unpaid internship satisfaction*

Variable	n	M	$\sigma$	t	p
Paid	66	18.08	8.13	5.71	0.05
Unpaid	32	14.06	15.87		

One of the objectives of this research was to assess the best predictors of internship satisfaction in the Indian context. Therefore, a multiple linear regression analysis was computed to predict internship satisfaction based on job characteristics, work and environment factors and contextual factors. Table 5 shows job characteristics, contextual factors, work and environment factors as predictor variables using 'Enter' method to study their contribution in internship satisfaction. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value was found to be 0.686 implying that this model accounted for 68.6% variance in internship satisfaction. Thus, a significant regression model emerged ( $F = 73.04, p < 0.001$ ) from these

variables for predicting internship satisfaction. Work environment contributed maximum with a beta value of 0.430 followed by job characteristics with beta value of 0.378. Hence hypothesis 5 that there will be a significant impact of job characteristics, work environment factors, and contextual factors on internship satisfaction has been accepted.

Table 5

*Regression analysis showing contribution of job characteristics, work environment and contextual factors in predicting internship satisfaction*

Model	Beta value	R	R2	Adjusted R2	F	P
Job characteristics	.378					
Work environment	.430	.834	0.686	.686	73.046	<.001
Contextual factors	.145					

### Discussion

The aim of the current research was to assess satisfaction of interns by looking at broad factors like job characteristics (skill variety, task identification, task significance, autonomy, feedback); work environment (learning opportunities, career development opportunities, supervisory support, co-worker support, organisation satisfaction) and contextual factors (flexibility of work hours, commute, pay satisfaction, desirability of location) and to find the best predictor among the mentioned broad factors in Indian context. Data was collected from 100 college students studying across Delhi NCR and responses were subjected to quantitative analysis.

With work environment characteristics being the best predictor of internship satisfaction, several conclusions can be drawn. While the actual job was important to interns, the organisational environment was even more important. Organizational satisfaction was the highest correlated amongst all other sub factors. Therefore, interns had the need to be exposed to the broader context of the organisation which includes aspects like repute, formal and informal company gatherings, training and development programs, corporate culture. Having a very supportive supervisor who acts as mentor and provides guidance also strongly influenced internship satisfaction. Previous research has also shown that high quality interns-supervisor exchange relationships may facilitate interns to develop an increased attachment to their host organisation (Rose, Teo, & Connel, 2014). Learning opportunities seemed to be important for interns. This was also validated by the fact 'learning experience' being chosen by 82.2 percent of the total sample out of other reasons for seeking internship given in the questionnaire. Learning experiences is influential because students were interested in gaining real life exposure and self-knowledge. Most interns expected to further their career skills and learn from hands-on experiences what they cannot learn in a classroom (Gault, Redington, & Schlager, 2000). As a supplement of theoretical education, internships help the students to gain new skills and experiences in practice and to reach the relevant field of business (Bogdana, Mihaela, & Anca-Iona, 2012). It is followed by career development opportunities as an influencer for internship satisfaction. The same was substantiated in our study as well. When respondents were asked their reasons behind seeking full-time internships, 79 percent chose curriculum vitae enhancement and 68 percent selected career clarity. The learning experience in the period of internship

impacts the learning outcomes and attitudes of the students toward their future career (Chen, Hu, Wang, & Chen, 2011). The findings affirmed Howery's (1983) suggestion that a primary objective of internships is to provide students with an opportunity to test abilities and attitudes toward particular material or career possibilities for the future. The moderate correlation between co-worker's support and internship satisfaction indicated a moderate need of interns to seek helpfulness, encouragement, making friends in a formal setting like office. The educational environment is very different from the professional one, which perhaps undermines the needs of interns to seek friendships at the place of work.

Job characteristics were the second good predictor of internship satisfaction. Skill variety had the highest correlation among all sub factors, which was attributed to the high need of interns to explore their diverse skills and reduce boredom and monotony in internship. As validated by Benjamin (2012), providing employees with an opportunity to take on a variety of skills of greater complexity in their current roles enables an employee to learn new tasks in a supported environment and develop the skills needed to progress in his career. The next important contributor within the broad theme of job characteristics was task significance. Thus, students were likely to be more satisfied with if their work significantly impacts other people and organisation as a whole. Therefore, it is critical for interns that their responsibilities are part of organisation's core operations and interaction with a broad array of employees and arrays of organisation. The next job characteristic that appeared to influence internship satisfaction was feedback. Indian students are embedded in an academic environment in which assessment and feedback takes place regularly and thus accustomed to an active and planned approach of receiving feedback on their work. This validated Hackman and Oldham (1980) finding that feedback from the job reflects the degree to which the job provides clear and direct information about one's effectiveness of performance. Autonomy was very slightly above moderate, because interns might not have a very high need for choosing the order of the task and how they will complete them, which is more important in a job. However, it is certainly important in broader scheme of things, motivation largely moderated by autonomy, and that higher degrees of motivation can only exist in an autonomous state (Deci & Ryan, 1990). The least influential sub factor was task identification, which was borderline moderate. The extent to which the

outcome was predicted or visible was not that important for interns, perhaps due to their short stint of work. They acknowledge that the whole task is difficult to be completed to see the final outcome.

Contextual factors had a high correlation with internship satisfaction. Perhaps due to the temporary nature of internships, interns may be more willing to accept or at least tolerate problematic factors like desirability of location and commuting to the location than permanent employees who must deal with such factors on a long-term basis. Upon reflection, this may not be too surprising, as these factors tend to be salient, tangible features of an internship, and, thus, were probably used a priori by prospective interns in evaluating whether to accept the positions.

As suggested by the review of literature, permanent employees have high need for compensation because it acts as a major source of motivation (Campion, 1991; Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 1992). This matches the findings of the t test, which indicate a significant difference between internship satisfaction of paid interns and of non-paid interns. Thus, compensation may not be an important reason for seeking internship but it definitely contributes to internship satisfaction. The least influencing factor on internship satisfaction amongst all sub factors was flexibility of hours. It seems that the duration and autonomy given to choose their own working hours is not important to interns because they voluntarily take up internships and others factors are considered more important in decision making (Dickerson, 2009).

The present research findings provide a comprehensive overview of strong predictors of internship satisfaction, which could be used for designing good internships. It is proposed that Indian students value the learning experience and usage of different types of complex skills the most. Thus, educational institutes should promote experiential learning and focus their studies on the practical aspect. High levels of internship satisfaction may lead to important organizational outcomes like less absenteeism, increased commitment, more willingness of interns to take long term positions with the company.

#### Limitations and Directions for future research

The sample was skewed in terms of gender with 66.3% females resulting in inability in assessing possible gender differences. Future research could not only look at gender differences but also compare student's satisfaction between private and public educational institutions. Although previous studies in the non-Indian context have found no relation between duration of internship and student's GPA (Gupta, Burns, & Schiferl, 2010); this can be assessed in the Indian context. The results of this investigation are not as generalizable to other parts of the country or to a population from other towns and cities as the sample was primarily from Delhi and Delhi NCR. The research did not study the effect of academic course students are pursuing and the amount of payment received on internship satisfaction.

#### Conclusion

Work environment, job characteristics and contextual factors were positively correlated to an intern's general satisfaction. Specifically, the work environment as a broad factor emerged as the most important predictor of internship satisfaction. Skill variety, organizational satisfaction was significantly correlated with general satisfaction amongst other sub factors, thus making it crucial in the Indian context. Compensation seems to be an important factor for the interns. Hence, it becomes important both for the employer and the employee to look at these factors in order to increase the efficiency of the employee, here an intern in order to increase the productivity of the organisation.

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## “Self and Beyond”: Dilemma in Interpersonal Relationship through Psychodynamic Lens

Navnita Bose\*

**Abstract:** The present paper aims to elucidate the underpinning of the psychopathology of a young girl having difficulty in her interpersonal issues, with the history of neglected childhood and childhood sexual abuse through case history method. Interviews were conducted focusing around childhood experiences. Client's verbatims were used for analysis with due consent. Psychodynamic theories, mainly Melanie Klein's Object Relation Theory (ORT) and Alfred Adler's theory of personality were employed while discussing the symptom formulation. The psychopathology of the client has been discussed using Klein's ideas in terms of failure to differentiate love from hate and self from others and Adler's concept of neglected life style. The main conflicts were found to be of trust vs. mistrust and acceptance vs. rejection. The present study explored various personality and environmental variables (that work together in the unconscious) in order to understand the basis of emotional and interpersonal issues. It was found that early negative experiences from caregivers and the environment do pose a threat to future interpersonal relationships and social behaviour. The knowledge about these variables will provide help for structuring the treatment (psychological therapy) for people with emotional and interpersonal issues.

**Keywords:** Object, Melanie Klein, Paranoid-Schizoid position, Depressive position, Alfred Adler, Neglected childhood, Childhood sexual abuse (CSA), Bipolar Affective Disorder (BPAD)

One's perspective on human attachments has arisen in the context of contemporary personality and social psychology, which focuses on adolescent and adult development as well as social relationships (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The word 'attachment' is the first process that takes place in an infant's life. In terms of biological process, it is the coming from both the parents resulting in a fertilized egg that finds its roots in the embryo by getting attached to it. It is psychological where after emanating from the mother's womb, the infant recognises his/her caregivers and senses comfort in their presence. The way a child perceives attachment towards others is prominently influenced by the way his/her primary caregivers show their affection towards the child (Bretherton, 1992). In psychodynamic theories, the Object Relation Theory (ORT) (Klein, 1932) put great emphasis on how this attachment develops. Here, the primary loved or desired object is considered as the prototype for developing future attachments.

The psyche and the personality are seen as being, in part, a result of the relationships made with people in the external world, which are remembered, or internalised, as 'object relationships' in the mind (Scharff, 1996). The term 'object' is taken in this theory to refer both to people, or parts of people, in the external world and to the internal psychic 'objects' or representations in the mind that result from these relationships.

The term object relations originated with Sigmund Freud, who thought that instincts had an existence of their own that could be separated out from their aim, on the one hand, and their object, on the other. In this way he described the sexual instinct, or libido, which he felt was at the heart of all human motivation. Melanie Klein briefly acknowledged the importance of external relations with objects, but focused her own comments on the infant and young child's modification of them in the internal world though the combined processes of introjections and projection, a never-ending feedback loop between internal and external reality (Segal, 2012).

Object Relations theorists, like Klein, emphasized the first 4 to 6 months. Klein suggested that as the development of a child proceeds, representations of all experiences and relations with significant others also become internalized, in an effort to preserve and protect them. This complex set of internalized object relations is established with phantasies and anxieties concerning the state of one's internal object world becoming the underlying basis of one's behavior, moods, and sense of self (Mitchell, 1981). Thus, it may be said that even the type of affection, love and belongingness that the child will face in future will be different, but how the child will behave in such situation will be almost the same as it has been earlier.

Klein saw things from inside the child's mind, viewing the child's development as being driven by an unfolding of the drives that Freud had described. The infant she described is haunted by the death instinct and, because it is so concerned about the relationship to its objects, it is motivated to undo the damage it believes it has caused from directing omnipotent phantasies of excessive aggression (biting, devouring, excreting) against its primary objects (Scharff, 1996). She views the inner world from the orientation of an infant who might expect to have a competent mother if the infant does not damage her or drive her away.

Klein emphasizes that this process originates with the baby although she does mention in several places that bad experience contributes too. This problem represented the struggle the infant dealt with at the earliest stage of psychological life that Klein described, and she called the struggle represented by this constellation the "paranoid/schizoid position" to indicate that it was not a single developmental step, but a lifelong process. The word paranoid has to do with the projection of aggression outward, and was the process Klein first described as a "paranoid position." Object Relations Theory is based on the careful, developmental observation of young children. ORTs of human interaction and development provide an expanding, increasingly useful body of theory for the understanding of

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individual development and pathology, for generating theories of human interaction, and for offering new avenues of treatment (Klein, 1932).

ORT focuses on the first few months of an infant's life and narrates the future experiences of the individual in terms of his/her object relation formed in those times. But what about those events or experiences the child undergoes after few months of her/his life? According to Aristotle, "man is a social animal", therefore social events must be taken into account while trying to comprehend his/her behaviour pattern and cannot be overlooked upon (in Adler, 1997).

Alfred Adler's theory of personality takes into account not only the mother-child aspect but also the social aspect while describing the personality pattern (Adler, 1927). Adler evolved a simple and parsimonious theory. To Adler, people are born with weak, inferior bodies—a condition that leads to feelings of inferiority and a consequent dependence on other people. Therefore, a feeling of unity with others (social interest) is inherent in people and the ultimate standard for psychological health. The final statement of Adler's individual psychology according to Feist and Feist (2006) entails striving for success or superiority as one dynamic force behind people's behaviour; people's subjective perceptions shaped by their behaviour and personality; personality as unified and self-consistent; value of all human activity to be seen from the viewpoint of social interest; self-consistent personality structure develops into a person's style of life; style of life is moulded by people's creative power.

Social relations or how the child's social behaviour develops also finds its foundation in the manner primary care giver approaches the child. The situation definitely places a big role but the already developed behaviour pattern overshadows the situation many times. This is the reason some people find it appropriate to be silent while witnessing an accident and some act otherwise. Adler in his theory of personality believed that social interest is rooted as potentiality in everyone, but it must be developed before it can contribute to a useful style of life. According to Adler, it originates from the mother-child relationship during the early months of infancy. Every person who has survived infancy was kept alive by a mothering person who possessed some amount of social interest. Thus, every person has had the seeds of social interest sown during those early months (Adler, 1964).

Keeping the importance of childhood experiences with the significant others, the aim of the present paper was to explain the psychopathology of Miss C, in terms of some psychodynamic concepts. The focus was majorly on attachment pattern and development of social behaviour pattern which C finds it to be creating difficulty in her functional life. As the field of psychodynamic concepts is so huge, therefore it was not possible to incorporate all of the ideas. The theories given by Melanie Klein on Object Relations Theory and by Alfred Adler were used as the base for discussing the psychopathology of the present case.

### Background information

Index client C, female, 26 years old, Hindu, single, hailing from sub-urban domicile, post-graduate, belonging to a nuclear

family presented with the chief complaints of difficulty in expressing herself, having low self-esteem since adolescence and difficulty in getting intimate in her relationships. She also reported that whenever it comes to intimacy in her romantic relationship she prefers to take a back seat as she does not feel comfortable getting intimate.

Her birth history revealed that since her mother developed some infection, doctors advised not to breastfeed the client. After three days when she was taken for breast feeding, apparently, she refused the breast. C also reported that she never felt attached to her mother's breast and cannot remember that she ever craved for them but is attached to her mother quite well. These perceptions of C were based on the information provided by her mother and elder sister during her adolescence period. In her toddlerhood, she was with her paternal grandparents (as her father had a transferable job) and could hardly recall her father's presence for the first two years of her life since her father was mostly posted outside their hometown. When she grew up to be an adolescent, her conversations with her family members state that for the first two years of her life, whenever her father used to visit her, she felt his presence like that of an outsider.

When she was 5 years old, she had to leave her hometown as her father took the family (mother, elder sister and her) with him where he was posted since her mother was suffering from Bipolar Affective Disorder and the psychiatrist advised her mother to be with her husband. She started going to a new school, making new friends and slowly started enjoying her new house and environment. As her father's job was a transferable one, she was travelling to different cities due to which making lasting friendship became difficult for her.

C reports having seen very ugly fights between her parents and those fights affected her very badly. She felt helpless by seeing her parents fighting in front of her so aggressively with constant yelling and crying. Her helplessness was aggravated by the sympathy provided to her by her relatives. Her elder sister became the supporting hand that held her and helped her survive the storms.

As C grew up, she became very guarded, had very few friends and was quick tempered. By this time, her mother's condition became better. C chose Psychology for her majors and came to know about Bipolar Affective Disorder. She understood her mother's diagnosis and felt guilty about her behaviour towards her mother.

Coming onto the romantic domain, C found it difficult to enjoy or get involved in physical intimacy with her partner. When the psychologist probed further, she reported that she had been sexually abused thrice during her childhood. First time she was around 8 years old, when her school bus driver sexually abused her. Initially, the driver used to give her toffees and chocolates and allowed her to sit on the front seat of the bus. But after few months, the driver started abusing her and when C refused to sit in front anymore, the driver stopped showering any such treats on her. She reported that "even though I was happy that the bad thing stopped, I missed the attention I used to get." When she was around 9 years old, her father's colleague abused her and the third episode occurred when she was around 12 years and was with her neighbour.

She never reported any of these incidents to anyone because she felt that she will be scolded for the episodes and nobody will understand. She further reported that when her partner tried to get intimate with her, all those events flashed in her mind and she refused to get involved further. C refused to get intimate with her partner multiple times which led to her partner urging her to seek help.

### Psychological Formulation

The discussion follows an explanation of the symptoms borrowing concepts from Klein's ORT and Adler's theory of personality, rather than using a diagnosis.

In the present case, since the client was not breastfed and did not get her mother for the first three days of her life, the client's association with her object of desire did not start with a good note. By going through Klein's concept, the client may have developed aggression towards her mother's breast and that may be the reason why she rejected the breast when it came back to her after three days, perceiving it as Bad Breast. The client may have developed paranoid ideas towards the object (which is breast here) and thus projected her aggression in this way. Moreover, it was also mentioned by the client that she never felt any urge or attraction towards her mother's breast which further confirms that even after getting love and care from her mother, the client could not evade through her feelings of aggression towards what should have been her desired object. Thus, the feeling of being deprived took an important place in the client's perception towards her relationships.

As mentioned by the client that her mother suffered from Bipolar Affective Disorder and there were times when she saw her mother doing nothing and lying down for the whole time, this aggression might have also surfaced at that point of time along with guilt. Aggression could be before the fact that her mother, unlike other mothers did not take care of her kids regularly. The guilt could be attributed to a feeling in the client that her mother's condition might have been the result of C's aggressive impulses. According to Klein, in the infant's inner world, the infant expects to have a competent mother if the infant does not damage her or drive her away (Feist & Feist, 2006). But here, the client feels that may be due to her, her mother was suffering and thus blames herself. Klein called this struggle the "paranoid/schizoid position" indicating that it was not a single developmental step, but a lifelong process (Spillius, 1988) and in the present case, the client was still going through this phase where she continues to feel guilty, and as a result feels more responsible towards her family issues as compared to her elder sister.

As per Klein, it is the "depressive position," with a concern for the object and a capacity for guilt. It leads to a desire to make reparation to the mother. Her verbatim, "my sister and other important persons often tell me that I think too much for our family issues which is not required but I cannot help it. It comes automatically". It may also be added that now the client feels suspicious about the intentions of her desired objects that they may also try to devour her by their aggressive impulses in the same way she did with her object of desire, thus introjecting this pattern for her future relationships.

While the client was continuing her journey through the above mentioned positions, she encountered multiple episodes of sexual abuse by her known and loved persons. These events further reinforced her aggression towards her relationships and self, simultaneously blaming herself for the unfortunate events. This resulted in a feeling of hatred towards self. In one of her verbatims she mentioned that when the episodes of sexual abuse stopped, even though she liked that bad things did stop, she missed the attention she used to get. Thus, even when the desire of getting out of the distressing situation was paramount, not getting the love and attention which she was used to, made her miss those feelings. This signifies the client's sense of deprivation in terms of love and affection. That was the beginning of her low self-esteem. The mistrust created by the absence of object in her early life thus got reinforced and the conflict of trust vs. mistrust became one of her crucial conflict.

Such episodes may be considered as the foundation for her basic characteristics such as becoming very guarded, having few friends and being short tempered. As the client's main conflict has been identified to be trust vs. mistrust, she may not have a problem in trusting somebody but may have a problem in continuing to trust even if no situation for breaking the trust occurs. This was apparent in her relationship with her partner where even after continuous efforts from him, the client still felt threatened when it came to intimacy. She reported that "it is not that I doubt him but I feel that he is there to use me for his needs when it comes to intimacy. I find it very hard to feel loved in intimacy. I just feel that it is a bodily need, devoid of any emotions."

According to the client, intimacy was something which called for commitment and along with commitment came the trust factor. She reported that although she loved her partner, she was not sure about trusting him completely. She also felt upset that because of this attitude of hers, her partner was getting disappointed. She felt sad and guilty and tried to please him in other ways such as calling him again and again, chatting with him for long hours even when she did not feel like doing it. This reconfirms her "paranoid-schizoid position" and "depressive position" in her loved relationships. Moreover, the perception of being deprived from first loved object along with being deceived by significant ones may have made her withdraw her feelings of affection towards her loved ones.

The client also found it very hard to form new relationships or change her behaviour pattern. She reported that she is perceived as very rigid by her close ones. According to them, she needs to modify her behaviours. But the client finds it very hard to change as she feels it is the other people who should change and not her because most of the time she is correct. Here, referring to Adler would be beneficial for understanding this stand on her behaviour pattern. According to Adler (1927), psychologically unhealthy individuals often lead rather inflexible lives that are marked by an inability to choose new ways of reacting to their environment. In contrast, psychologically healthy people behave in diverse and flexible ways with styles of life that are complex, enriched, and changing (Feist & Feist, 2006). Adler also mentioned that the one factor underlying all types of maladjustments is underdeveloped social interest. To compensate for deeply rooted feelings of inadequacy and basic insecurity, these individuals narrow their

perspective and strive compulsively and rigidly for unrealistic goals. They approach the problems of friendship, sex, and occupation from a personal angle that precludes successful solutions. Their view of the world is not in focus with that of other individuals and they possess what Adler (1956) called "private meaning" (in Hall & Lindzey, 1957).

Adler (1964) recognized three contributing factors, any one of which was sufficient to contribute to abnormality: exaggerated physical deficiencies, a pampered style of life, and a neglected style of life. In the present discussion, the focus was on the third factor, i.e., a neglected style of life, because according to the history of the client, traces of neglect are evident from her childhood.

Adler (1964) regarded Neglected Style of Life as the third external factor contributing to maladjustment. Children who feel unloved and unwanted are likely to borrow heavily from these feelings in creating a neglected style of life. Neglect is a relative concept. No one feels totally neglected or completely unwanted. The fact that child survived infancy is proof that someone cared for that child and that the seed of social interest had been planted (Adler, 1927). Abused and mistreated children develop little social interest and tend to create a neglected style of life. They have little confidence in themselves and tend to overestimate difficulties connected with life's major problems. They are distrustful of other people. Neglected children are generally suspicious and likely to be dangerous to others (Adler, 1927).

The history of the client reflected various instances of neglect and sometimes perceived neglect. The instances may be summarised as not getting the loved object after birth, not getting her father's time for the first few years of her life, being separated from her grandparents and not being taken care of properly by her mother (as when mother was suffering from depressive episode in BPAD). Not getting the desired object in the first few hours of her life which is the right of every child, may be considered as the starting of a neglected life style for the client. This further got strengthened when she was removed from her source of love and care which her grandparents were. She also reported that she was pampered by her grandfather and no one dared to scold her in front of him. She did not get the same from her parents, which intensified her perception and feeling of being neglected. Taking the client away from a loving source also reinforced the conflict of acceptance vs. rejection, which became directed both towards her and her loved ones and that's how her mistrust towards her relationships, low self-esteem and being guarded emerged and started hampering her functional life.

It can be concluded that using ideas from both individual psychology and object relations theory, it may be said that absence of loved object along with neglected childhood may have resulted in the suspicious perception of object relations (paranoid-schizoid position) and self being deprived leading to the feeling of low self-esteem. The client's perception of object relations and low self-esteem got reinforced by multiple episodes of childhood sexual abuse. When the client came to know about her mother's condition, she felt guilty (depressive position) adding on to her low self-esteem and generation of feeling of hatred towards self. Thus, whenever it came to getting

very close to her partner, these factors played their role and difficulties emerged. The continuous cycle of love-hate in her relationship was causing her much distress, and she was having great difficulty in coming out of it. Few sessions till now with her have been focusing on developing her insight into her behaviour pattern.

### Limitations & Directions for Future Research

As no research is devoid of its limitations, while discussing the present paper some of its lacunas surfaced. Inputs from psychometric assessment could have made the psychopathology richer by adding on to the objective details as the whole psychopathology has been based on the verbatim of the client. An inclusion of the father's role would have provided greater insights into the symptom formation. Although earlier, the father's contribution to child rearing did not generate much interest but now many researchers have focussed their attention on the increasing role played by fathers in the direct care and rearing of their child (Lamb, 2013).

### Conclusion

Individual, case study approaches are beneficial in understanding the depth of a case. Psychotherapy can progress if an appropriate and accurate psychological formulation can be made. After discussing this formulation with the client, it is possible to set short term and long term goals. At the same time, it is essential that one does not ignore the childhood roots to present day manifestation of relationships and self concept in the times of cognitive behavioural therapy.

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# Review of School Based Positive Psychology Interventions: Efforts to promote mental health among Adolescents

Sunita Devi<sup>1</sup> and Swati Patra<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** India has 253 million adolescents (as per 2011 census), more than any other country and equivalent to the combined populations of Japan, Germany and Spain. Adolescents are the future of any country. Healthy adolescents' means healthy country and schools can be the best places to start with as various studies have shown an alarming prevalence of behavioral and emotional problems (Nair, Ganjiwale, Kharod, et al., 2017 and NMHS-2016) in youth especially in adolescents. Hence, prevention of problems related to mental health of adolescents as well as promotion of psychological well-being becomes crucial in enabling the development of the individual's strengths in order to reduce vulnerability to suffering from mental disorders (WHO, 2004). This paper systematically reviews the research studies conducted during last two decades (from 2000 to 2020) related to school-based positive psychology interventions that aim at promoting mental health among the adolescents. Based on the inclusion criteria, the studies were retrieved from multiple database such as JSTOR, Directory of Open Access journals (DOAJ), Scopus Google Scholar Shodhaganaga @INFLIBNET, which discussed the potential of positive interventions delivered over a period of time as effective and sustainable health promotional tools. The paper provides a brief description of the intervention programmes reviewed from the literature and a summary of selected features of the studies. It also discusses the need for future studies considering the specific features of the target users and the contexts where the interventions will be delivered.

**Keywords:** positive psychology interventions, adolescents, mental health, psychological well-being, prevention, behavioural and emotional disorders

## Need and Importance of Mental Health of Adolescents

In spite of having the largest adolescent population in the world, very limited work has been done in the field of mental health of the adolescents in India. Investing in adolescents brings multifold benefits such as promoting and protecting adolescent health will lead to good public health, reduce the burden on the medical and economical resources, increase in countries' economic growth and larger societal benefits.

World Health Organisation (2014) defines adolescence as the period between the age group of 10-19 years. Adolescence is a critical period in the development of one's personality. This phase is marked with conflicts, constant tension between developing proficiencies, struggling for independence, trying to make one's own identity and dealing with constant demands from others and from the environment. During this difficult phase of their life, they may experience sadness, fear, anxiety, disappointments and setbacks which may be much higher in intensity than the previous generation. According to Erickson (1963), adolescence is a period of rapid psychosocial maturation which may be challenging and evoke maladaptive behaviors, but it also presents opportunities for considerable positive growth and developmental achievements. During adolescence, optimal psychological development is important as it contributes to an adaptive transition into adulthood (Bono & Froh, 2009). The adolescent years are a critical life stage for actions to protect and promote mental health and well-being for the long term (Fact Sheet Adolescents' Mental Well-Being, WHO, 2016).

In the 21st century, due to rapid globalization and urbanization along with breaking up of joint families and the decreasing social support systems, stress and tension faced by the adolescents is enormous. Due to present educational system, today's adolescents also face lots of competition, pressure for

high achievements, high expectation from self and others which leads to experiencing negative emotions and poor mental health. All these are a cause of concern and require immediate plan and action for promotive, preventive and remedial interventions for their better mental health. Adolescence is a crucial period and schools can be the central place for helping the adolescents to promote positive behaviours like developing good sleep and food habits, doing regular exercise, self-discipline, making good choices, developing interpersonal and communication skills, dealing with emotions, using natural resources judiciously, etc.

Numerous studies show that mental health problems are significantly affecting a large number of adolescents worldwide. It is estimated that around 20% of the world's adolescents have a mental health or behavioural problem. Upto 50% of mental, behavioural and psychological problems have their onset during adolescence period (Kessler, Berglund, Demler, Jin, Merikangas, et al., 2005). The prevalence rate of psychiatric disorders in India is 12.5% among children aged 0-16 years and 12% among the 4-16 year's children (Srinata, Girimaji, Gururaj, Sehadr, Subbakrishna, et al., 2005).

Suicide death rates in India are among the highest in the world (Patel, Ramasundarahettige, Vijayakumar, Thakur, Gajalakshmi, et al., 2012). The impact is greater than numbers and facts, it's in the adolescents' thoughts and emotions, their life, in their friendship, their families, in communities and in society at large. Promoting mental health, prevention of mental disorder, early identification and effective intervention is the key to successfully save the adolescents and nations future life. And for this, timely interventions at the school level can be an important step.

National Mental Health Survey of India (2015-16) revealed that the prevalence of mental disorders in the age group of 13-17

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years was 7.3% and nearly equal in both genders. Approximately 9.8 million young Indians aged between 13-17 years are in urgent need of active interventions. The prevalence of mental disorders was nearly twice (13.5%) as much in urban metros as compared to rural (6.9%) areas. In a recent study, it was reported that at least one in eight adolescents is at risk of mental health problems (Nair, Ganjiwale, Kharod, et al., 2017). In spite of having such an alarming data, very little or rather no interventions are planned for this useful and future resource of the country.

According to George et.al. (2018), 10.5% of adolescent students were at a significant risk of mental health disorders. In their study, individual SDQ domains revealed peer problem (47.4%), anti-social behaviour (33%) and conduct problems (9.8%). The prevalence of child psychiatric disorders in India has been found to be 7% in the community and 23% in schools (Malhotra & Patra, 2014; Murthy, 2017), which is a very high number. Gururaj et al. (2014) conducted a study in the state of Himachal Pradesh where he reported that adolescents suffered from a wide range of mental health conditions like depression (6.9%), anxiety (15.5%) and suicidal ideation (5.5%) as well as substance abuse like tobacco (7.6%) and alcohol (7.2%) requiring urgent interventions. The problems are increasing at a very distressing rate among adolescents which not only require an urgent attention to deal with but also a critical thinking to work on the promotive and prevention strategies.

Most of the risk taking behaviours and psychological problems among adolescents are preventable through universal preventive and promotive school mental health programme (Vranda, 2015). One in every 5 child has a mental health issue. If we invest in identifying the problems early and intervene at the right time, it will be more cost effective, as we will be preventing further breakdown and avoid an adult treatment and rehabilitation programme which is much more expensive. It is rightly said that "Prevention is better than Cure". It is possible to prevent the majority of behavioural disorders in school environment itself (Susheelkumar, Ramesh, Chetan, Shrinivas, Santosh, et al. 2017).

### **Positive Psychological Interventions**

Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) have been developed from the theories of Positive Psychology which is defined as the scientific study of well-being and optimal human functioning (Gable & Haidt, 2005). The emphasis of positive psychology is on strengths and virtues and to shift focus from solely on psychological deficits to a balance of remediation of difficulties and proactive building of strengths and qualities (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

Positive psychology interventions (PPIs) are characterised as "Programs, practices, treatment methods, or activities aimed at cultivating positive feelings, cognition, and behaviour" (Sin & Lyubomirsky, 2009). PERMA Model suggests that PPIs focus on Positive Emotions, Positive Engagement, Positive Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (Seligman, 2011). The removal of what is wrong and bring in what is strong is the essence of Positive Psychology Intervention; it seeks to 'add' rather than replace the approaches to well-being that aim to reduce negative factors. In this way, positive psychology interventions distinguish themselves from wellbeing initiatives

such as anti-bullying programs, 'quit smoking' programs, and depression-reduction programs that seek to enhance wellbeing through the removal or reduction of negative factors (Waters, 2011). Whilst the removal of negative factors is a critical pathway to creating wellbeing, the two-factor theory of wellbeing (Keyes, 2002) highlights that we also need programs that are designed to build the positive factors.

Green, Odes and Robinson (2011, p. 16) define positive education as 'applied positive psychology in education', and they suggest that there are a growing number of schools using PPIs. As schools play an increasingly important role in child's life and help develop thinking, affective, and social skills, it becomes perfect place to introduce PPI in school curriculum to promote mental health and positive behavior among the students and thus leading them to flourishing accomplishment and becoming the strength to the society and not the burden.

### **Need for Positive Psychology Interventions for schools**

As it is evident from the above studies, it is crucial that we take appropriate steps to prepare our youth with the skills to build positive attributes, resilience, self-esteem, hope, etc. In order to prevent mental illness and improve mental health, it is important that we enable our youth to utilize their fullest potential to flourish. It can be achieved only through developing their higher order thinking skills (HOTS) along with social and emotional skills rather than only targeting for finishing the curriculum, getting high grades and clearing competitive examinations. In achieving this target, schools can and need to play an increasingly central role. It is absolutely essential for the school curriculum to include the broader aspects of human development (Walters, 2011). 21st century schooling and education needs to focus on developing the 'whole student' through social, emotional, moral and intellectual development (Cain & Carnellor, 2008; McCombs, 2004; Noddings, 1995; Palmer, 2003) rather than just making them a rote learner.

The focus of this review paper is the use of school based positive psychology interventions to promote mental health among Indian. Yates (2007, p. 35) argues that 'While older educational agendas such as literacy and numeracy remain significant ... education is increasingly important for its role in assisting young people to develop the capacities and skills that will enable them to live well and that will enhance social cohesion'. This is a high and an urgent demand of 21st century education to promote mental health of the youth in order to make them an asset to the society rather than a liability. Mental health in this paper is defined as the 'capacity to achieve and maintain optimal psychological functioning and wellbeing. It is directly related to the level reached and competence achieved in psychological and social functioning' (World Health Organization, 2005). There is now increasing evidence on the effectiveness of interventions to improve children's and adolescent's resilience, promote mental health and treat mental health problems and disorders (Susheelkumar, Ramesh, Chetan, Shrinivas, Santosh, et al., 2017).

**Method**

The purpose of this review was to study the school-based positive psychology interventions that aim at promoting mental health among the adolescents. The review was done by searching online databases JSTOR, Directory of Open Access journals (DOAJ), Scopus Google Scholar.Shodhaganaga@INFLIBNET. The following keywords were used for the review research: "positive psychology interventions' "adolescents' mental health""psychological well-being", "prevention", behavioural and emotional disorders""schools", "Indian context".

**Inclusion criteria :**

- Researches related to school based positive psychology interventions which were focused on the efforts to promote mental health among adolescents
- Published between the years 2000-2020
- Published in a peer-reviewed journal, books any article or unpublished research work/dissertation in the English

Language.

**Exclusion criteria :**

- Studies which were largely addressed mental health with no focus on positive psychology interventions and school context

After the preliminary search, reference sections of relevant review articles or other published studies were perused for searching other articles that were not revealed in preliminary database search. After finalizing the research studies, these were divided into two broad areas: studies related to positive psychology interventions in school context around the world and in India. Afterwards the research paper was summarized

**Results**

The major studies related to positive psychology interventions in school context around the world (Table 1) and in India (Table 2) were examined and tabulated along with their themes of study:

Table 1

*Research studies in the context of positive psychology interventions in schools*

Author/s and year of publication	Major PPIs and their theme used in the research study
<b>Worldwide</b>	
Eades, (2005).	developed a strengths-based program for schools called "Celebrating Strengths", for teachers and students to explore and use their character strengths
Froh, .Sefick, & Emmons (2008)	Effects of a grateful attitude on middle school students' subjective well-being
Noble & McGrath (2008)	Intervention program on resilience called "Bounce Back"
Marques, Lopez, & Pais-Ribeiro (2011)	Hope-based intervention on middle-school students to enhance hope, self-worth, life satisfaction, academic achievements and mental health.
Williams (2011)	Integrating positive psychology and appreciative inquiry for flourishing among students and teachers
Green et al. (2007, 2011 & 2012)	Building hardiness and hope  Positive education programmes: Integrating coaching and positive psychology in schools to get better results for students, educators, and parents  Positive education: Creating flourishing students, staff and schools
Shoshani & Steinmetz (2013)	Positive Psychology at School: A School-Based Intervention to Promote Adolescents' Mental Health and Well-Being

Table 2

Author/s and year of publication	Major PPIs and their theme used in the research study
<b>Indian Context</b>	
Singh & Choubisa (2009)	Effectiveness of self-focused intervention for enhancing students' well-being
Sanghani, Upadhyaya & Sharma (2013)	Focused on improving positive emotions by PPIs and to increase life satisfaction among students
Buragohain & Mandal (2015)	Discovered in their intervention that gratitude is skill based and can be taught and learnt effectively.  Along with this other positive emotions like resilience, self-efficacy, hope, satisfaction, forgiveness, savour, etc., can also be taught and learnt
Vranda, (2015)	Designed school promotive mental health programme to reduce risks and enhance psychosocial competencies and resiliency of adolescents in schools
Khanna (2016)	Conducted PPIs among Indian students to revalidate four classroom based interventions: gratitude cognitions, character strengths, gratitude journaling and stress management, and application of positive psychology exercises for students
Delhi government Schools (2018)	Launched 'Happiness Curriculum' for the students of nursery to Class 8 to help students in their physical and mental health well-being also expected to solve problems caused due to negative and destructive emotions like anger, hatred and jealousy.

### Discussion

The results are discussed based on the PPIs promoting positive mental health in school children worldwide and in Indian context

#### Research studies on PPIs promoting positive mental health in school children worldwide

Recently, several studies in the new 'positive psychology' movement have begun to identify factors that contribute to children's and adolescents' subjective well-being (Seligman et al. 2009). Specifically, factors such as positive emotions (Fredrickson 2004), gratitude (Froh et al. 2008), hope (Snyder et al. 2003), goal setting (Locke and Latham 2002), and character strengths (Peterson and Seligman 2004) have been increasingly associated with subjective well-being (SWB) in youth. Moreover, converging evidence indicates that interventions which successfully promote these factors can advance subjective well-being as well as decrease psychiatric symptoms in the general population (Duckworth et al. 2005; Sin and Lyubomirsky, 2009).

Few researches have been done on adolescents and youths dealing with building resources for enhancing their subjective wellbeing and life-satisfaction (Diener & Diener 1995; Gilman & Huebner, 2000; Park & Huebner, 2003). The number of interventions on school children targeted specific positive emotions that were more consistently related to well-being, such as gratitude and hope are increasing. For example a short-term

gratitude intervention study, conducted by Froh et al. (2008), which examined the effects of a grateful outlook on middle school students' subjective well-being and found that adolescents, who participated in daily gratitude exercises that involved listing five things they are grateful for, reported increased levels of subjective well-being 3 weeks after the intervention. Marques et al. (2011) conducted a hope-based intervention with 31 middle-school students which aimed to enhance hope, self-worth, life satisfaction, academic achievements and mental health.

There are number of Positive-psychology programs which have been combined more broadly into schools in several countries all over the world. In the UK, Jenny Fox-Eades has developed a strengths-based program for schools called "Celebrating Strengths", for teachers and students to explore and use their character strengths through a cycle of community celebrations and stories that are woven into the school curriculum (Eades 2005). In Australia a range of positive psychology interventions has been conducted in both elementary and secondary schools. For example resilience program called "Bounce Back" (Noble and McGrath 2008).

Another example for a more continuous intervention is the Geelong Grammar School in Australia, in which over the course of 4 years approximately 250 staff members took part in intensive training courses with a team of senior trainers from the Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Results showed improvement in conflict resolution between

students, the emergence of a common strengths-based language shared by students and staff, a rise in meaningful conversations between students, and increased levels of individual flourishing among 7th year students (Williams 2011). Another example is the Knox Grammar School, an independent boarding school for boys. Through a combination of Positive Psychology and Coaching strategies, the participating teachers worked individually with the school children and helped them to attain their personal and academic goals and to increase their levels of well-being (Green et al. 2012). Another preliminary support for the benefits of positive psychology-based coaching in schools was provided by Green et al. (2007) who performed a randomized controlled experimental trial in a private girls' high school in Australia.

The initial findings from these interventions provide support for the potential of positive psychology school-based intervention program for students' sense of well-being. They also indicate that the interventions are effectively delivered by teachers and do not necessitate external experts for delivering the curriculum (Shoshani & Steinmetz, 2013).

### **Research studies on PPIs promoting positive mental health among Indian School children**

This review study found a limited number of positive psychology intervention studies in the school setting in spite of numerous studies showing the huge number of students having poor mental health. Most of the researches which we found were on just finding out the relationship and description of positive psychological variables such as gratitude (Sood & Gupta, 2012; Magesh, Shruthi & Divya, 2014; Sood, Sharma, & Puri, 2016), hope (Dwivedi & Rastogi, 2016), happiness (Meherunissa, 2016), character strength (Singh & Sharma, 2015; Rani, Midha & Budhiraja, 2017), etc. with well-being and mental health of adolescents rather than on interventions. There is an urgent need to take care of mental health of the students. The review of studies show the following few positive psychology based intervention studies:

In July 2018, the 'Happiness Curriculum' is launched by the Delhi government introduced for the students of nursery to Class 8 in government schools which focuses on holistic education by including meditation, value education, and mental exercises in conventional education curriculum. This new subject has been designed and prepared by a team of 40 Delhi government teachers, educators and volunteers over a period of six months. The new curriculum will help students in their physical and mental health well-being also expected to solve problems caused due to negative and destructive emotions like anger, hatred and jealousy. The curriculum involves a "happiness period" of 45 minutes and five minutes of meditation in the beginning of each class. The curriculum has four parts which includes Mindfulness, Stories, Activities and Expression. In mindfulness, students are asked to focus the attention through different activities such as listening attentively, in which children will be made aware about different sounds in their present environment; they will see and observe things more attentively in their surroundings; they will meditate, in which children focus their attention on the process of their breath; their

body parts, their thoughts, etc.

Stories are used to make the children think, analyse and reflect on some aspects related to values, life and society. In the Happiness curriculum, such stories are included which can bring the change in the behavior of children. The purpose of stories is to stimulate creative thinking of children.

Activities component of the happiness curriculum requires the students to do some activity related to self, society and nature which are fun to engage in.

In expressions component, teachers ask questions on the last day of the week, facilitating free speech from children. These questions enable the teachers find out whether students are putting the lessons learned to practice in their day-to-day life or not.

Khanna (2016) conducted an experimental research on positive psychological interventions among Indian students to revalidate four classroom based interventions which included gratitude cognitions, character strengths, gratitude journaling and stress management, and application of positive psychology exercises for students; and to study factors that impact their well-being. There were 908 students (Age range = 10 – 14 years, M Age = 12.41, SD = 1.19, 56.6 % male) from eight schools in North India. They were engaged in one of four interventions (n1 = 177, n2 = 121, n3 = 238, n4 = 372) as members of either experimental or control conditions. Further, 17 teachers participated via individual interviews. Each intervention is presented as an independent study (Study 1 --- Study 4) in this thesis. The focus areas of the chosen interventions included gratitude cognitions (Froh et al., 2014; Study 1), character strengths (Proctor et al., 2011; Study 2), gratitude journaling and stress management (Flinchbaugh et al., 2012; Study 3), and application of positive psychology exercises (based on the seminal work of Seligman et al., 2005; Study 4). In case of each study, it was expected that intervention participants would benefit in terms of well-being (assessed by various indicators) as compared to those in the control condition. This study offered encouraging evidence for the use of intervention programs to boost well-being among Indian students. This is a step forward in addressing the gap in literature in terms of positive youth development in India

Promotion of Mental Health and Psychological Wellbeing of Adolescents (PMHWB) programme in Schools- A NIMHANS Model is a novel program initiated with an aim to develop a comprehensive a model school mental for children and adolescents (Vranda, 2015). The current Promotive Mental Health and Well-Being (PMHWB) programme is a universal comprehensive school promotive mental health programme designed to reduce risks and enhance psychosocial competencies and resiliency of adolescents in schools. It is universal as it applies to all students and is also found to be feasible and acceptable by teachers. The findings from the study suggest that trained teachers can effectively deliver mental health promotion intervention in schools. Further evaluations of program are needed to determine the long-term impact on various multi-component aspects of mental health and

psychological well-being.

Buragohain & Mandal (2015) discovered in their intervention study through close participant observation and experimental treatment that gratitude is skill based and can be taught and learnt effectively. They further say that as emotion, motive and as a whole as a life style gratitude plays very significant role in happiness, and must be cultivated. Along with this other positive emotions like resilience, self-efficacy, hope, satisfaction, forgiveness, savour, etc., can also be taught and learnt. Indian psychologists are still far away from the western positive psychology movement. Therefore this is an urgency to initiate some research in this area and to contribute in the subjective well-being of the citizens. A research conducted by Sanghani, Upadhyay & Sharma (2013) at a centre for positive psychology, (PRATYUSHA, 19 Janakpuri, Secunderabad, India) centre for positive psychology in India focused on improving positive emotions by PPIs and found an increase in their life satisfaction and positive transformation as reported by the parents.

Singh & Choubisa (2009) did a study on effectiveness of self-focused intervention for enhancing students' well-being (college students of 19-24 years old). In qualitative data analysis of study, students reported that the self-talk and self-management exercises were very motivational and have boosted their confidence levels. Quantitative analyses also showed that the meaning in life, happiness, life satisfaction and mindfulness were significantly higher in pre - post testing.

### Conclusion

This review study found a dearth of intervention studies and concludes that in India applying Positive Psychology Interventions to promote mental health of adolescents in schools are at the budding stage and more intervention studies are needed. The results of this review study demonstrate the potential benefits of school-based positive-psychology interventions for promoting adolescent's mental health and well-being, and highlights the crucial need to make PPIs an integral part of the school curriculum. Including positive psychology interventions elements/activities into school curriculum can bring more significant changes in various areas of adolescents' life. Many of the mental, behavioural and psychological problems, among children and adolescents can be prevented if it is intervened at an early stage. School-based interventions possess a great potential in reducing the risk factors and increasing the protective factors to promote the mental health and well-being of children and adolescents (Vranda, 2015).

There is a need for more randomized controlled studies with long-term follow-ups as most of the studies have done the intervention less than three months. The intervention should be designed considering the specific features of the target users (different for early adolescents and late adolescents, context such as rural or urban and gender specific and the specific contexts (like in the classrooms or separate groups) where the interventions will be delivered, and they could be enhanced by the use of information and communication technologies, such as smart phones, sensors, or social networks, etc. Larger sample

size and different variables which can affect the interventions should be considered while planning for the intervention studies. It is concluded that intervention studies are needed to foster positive cognition, emotions and behaviour among adolescents in order to make them an advantage to the society rather than an obligation.

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**Web links**

<https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/adolescent-mental-health>

<http://apps.who.int/adolescent/second-decade/section2>

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## Laughing Matters: The Relationship between Humor and Self Esteem in Children

Chehak Gidwani<sup>1</sup> and Kritika Chaudhary<sup>2</sup>

**Abstract:** Humor is an appropriate tool for enhancing wellbeing in children through its impact on self esteem. The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between various humor styles and levels of self-esteem in Indian school going students. Gender differences in both the constructs were also studied. A total of 100 participants from a school in Uttar Pradesh were selected through convenience sampling (52 girls, 48 boys). The participants were aged between 9-12 years and were studying in 5th, 6th and 7th grades belonging to the upper middle-class strata of the society. Humor Styles Questionnaire and Self-Esteem Inventory were used to collect data. The results of the study using Pearson Correlation Coefficient and Multiple regression analysis revealed that overall humor styles do not have a significant impact on self esteem in both boys and girls. The use of aggressive humor has a significant impact on self esteem of girls. The findings imply that the use of adaptive humor styles should be encouraged as they foster self esteem in the Indian children.

**Keywords:** humor styles, self esteem, affiliative, aggressive, self defeating, self enhancing

Humor is generally conceptualized to be a stable personality trait and as involving cognitive, emotional, behavioral, psychophysiological, and social components. According to Martin, Rod, Puhlik, Gwen, Larsen, and Jeanette (2003), sense of humor is a comprehensive and multidimensional construct comprising of a number of modestly related factors, including but not limited to a cognitive ability, an aesthetic response, a habitual behavior, an emotion-related temperament trait, an attitude, and a coping strategy or defense mechanism. Martin et al. (2003) suggest that there are four main types of humor: two are adaptive while the other two are maladaptive. Self-enhancing humor is used to make one feel good about themselves, but is not detrimental to others. It refers to the use of humor as a defense mechanism when one is confronted with a potentially stressful event. Affiliative humor, on the other hand bolsters interpersonal ties, facilitates healthy social interaction, enhances cohesion and reduces tension in group settings through tactics such as telling a joke to make others feel comfortable and at ease. A maladaptive form of humor, aggressive humor is deriding someone through humor or using humor to put someone down. This kind of humor, while enhancing the self, at least in the present, is done at the cost of others. In the long run, this type is viewed as deteriorating to self as it tends to alienate others. Self-destructive humor is a maladaptive manifestation of humor in which a person makes use of injurious humor centered around one's own self in order to please others and gain the approbation and validation of others at the cost of one's own self through means such as making a mockery of self, denigrating one's self or one's own appearance.

Earlier to Martin et al.'s (2003) conceptualization of humor, theories were centered around the arousal mechanisms involved in humor. Berlyne (1972) in his theory of two arousal mechanisms of humor focuses on the "arousal boost mechanism" as well as the "arousal jag mechanism". The arousal boost mechanism operates in the telling of a joke, wherein the arousal reaches an optimum level which is experienced as pleasurable. However, when this arousal surpasses the pleasure levels, it leads to negative affect. The climax of a joke causes a reduction in this heightened arousal,

which again leads to pleasure due to the reestablishment of moderate levels of physical arousal. Thus laughter was perceived to be a result of decrease in excessive arousal.

There has been a great interest in the relationship between humor styles and psychological well-being (Cann & Collette, 2014). Humor has been found to result in facilitating positive reappraisal of stressful situation to enhance coping (Kuiper, Martin, & Olinger, 1993). Further, humor has also been considered as a facilitator for peer relations and social competence in children. In his study, Ziv (1984) found that adolescent humorists were more popular than their less popular peers as leaders. Making use of peer ratings of humor and social distance, Sherman (1988) found that children rated by their peers as humorous were also rated as less socially distant, a finding also replicated by Warners- Kleverlann, Nel, Oppenheimer, and Sherman (1996). These researches highlight the important role for affiliative humor within stable friendship dyads as well as peer relations. Studies have also shown that Indians use humor to maintain and promote relationships. Adaptive humor establishes interdependence and harmonious ties among people, thus satisfying the collectivistic aspiration of Indians and leading to better self esteem (Ramaswami, 2006; Sinha, Vohra, Singhal, Sinha, & Ushashree, 2002).

Self-esteem is a key component of personality processes. Past researches have provided for the evidence between humor and self esteem and have shown that usage of adaptive humor styles has a positive impact on self-esteem. Kuiper and McHale (2009) found that the two adaptive humor styles (i.e. affiliative and self-enhancing) were associated with higher levels of social self-esteem. Galloway (2010) found that people who were above average on self-esteem, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness and scored above average on the positive styles of humor and below average on the negative styles of humor portrayed themselves as leading a well-balanced life, low in anxiety and positive towards self and others. Consequently, people who were below average on self-esteem, openness, extraversion and agreeableness and scoring above average on negative styles and below average on positive styles of humor could be described as being negative towards self and others. In

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the Indian context, humor has been discussed using the concept of “mazaak”, word of the local Indian language. This has its roots in the word 'mazaak' which refers to enjoyment with male workers in India using vulgar humor to be able to cope with their work stress (Ramaswami, 2006). Indian students have also been found to place more importance than Chinese students on the use of humor. They engage in significantly higher affiliative and self enhancing humor, report less gelatophobia and thereby increased self esteem. On the other hand, the use of self defeating humor by Indian students led to gelatophobia and decreased self esteem (Yue, Liu, Jiang, & Hiranandani, 2014). Hiranandani and Yue (2015) showed that the Indian students used more adaptive than maladaptive humor styles resulting in self enhancement. Self esteem had a positive correlation with adaptive humor (self enhancing and affiliative humor) and was negatively correlated to the use of maladaptive humor (self defeating humor). Gender differences in humor were also evident in research literature. Indian boys perceived themselves to be significantly higher on humor than girls. However, girls valued humor more than boys.

There are relatively fewer studies in the Indian context that explore the concept of humor and its relationship with self esteem. Of the researches that study humor and self esteem in the Indian context, the researchers were unable to find studies that enquired the relationship between these constructs in school going children. Research has established and compared the relationship between self esteem and humor styles in male and female undergraduate students (Hiranandani & Yue, 2015; Yip & Martin, 2006), however there exists a gap in literature around the study of gender differences in the use of different humor styles and its subsequent impact on self esteem of a much younger population that is of school going children. The role of humor in enhancing self esteem has not been explored much in the Indian school contexts. Thus, the aim of the current study was to examine the relationship between various humor styles and levels of self-esteem in Indian school going students. Gender differences in both the constructs were also investigated.

### Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant relationship between humor and self esteem levels of school going girls.

H2: There will be a significant relationship between humor and self esteem levels of school going boys.

H3: Humor will have a significant impact on self esteem of school going girls.

H4: Humor will have a significant impact on self esteem of school going boys.

## Method

### Participants

100 participants were selected from a school in Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh for the study through convenience sampling. Among these 52 were girls and 48 were boys. The participants were aged between 9-12 years and were studying in 5th, 6th and

7th grades belonging to the upper middle-class strata of the society.

### Design

A correlational survey research design was used in the present research. Survey method was used to collect data from the participants. Multiple regression analysis was employed to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between humor and self esteem and also to explore how humor predicts self esteem.

### Measures

**Humor Styles Questionnaire.** The Child Humor Styles Questionnaires (Fox, Dean & Lyford, 2013) which is an adapted version of the adult HSQ (Martin et al., 2003) was used to assess participants' humor styles. The questionnaire is suitable for children aged 9-16 years. The 24-item tool has 6 items per subscale with four subscales in total: Affiliative ( $\alpha=.82$ ), Self-Enhancing ( $\alpha=.75$ ), Aggressive ( $\alpha=.67$ ) and Self-Defeating ( $\alpha=.53$ ). The test-retest reliabilities of the subscales scores have been found to be satisfactory ranging from 0.66 for the Self-enhancing scale to 0.81 for the Affiliative sub-scale.

**Self-Esteem Inventory.** Coopersmith's (1987) 58-item self-esteem inventory was used to assess the levels of self-esteem of the participants. The inventory is used for pupils aged 8 years and above. The participants were asked to respond to the statements by ticking either the “Like me” or “Unlike me” column. Test-retest reliabilities obtained with the full SEI range from .88 (over a five-week period) to .70 (over a three-year period).

### Procedure

Approval was sought from the school authorities. Once the school agreed to participate, informed consent was sought from the parents of the participants via e-mail. Data collection took place in classrooms in the presence of the class teachers. All sessions began with the researchers introducing themselves and explaining the voluntary nature of participation. Anonymity of the participants was assured. Thereafter, questionnaires were handed over to the participants and instructions were read aloud. Doubts were cleared as and when required. The participants were asked to complete the questionnaire alone at their own pace in order to ensure honesty of the responses. The participants then were thanked for their time and cooperation.

The data was analysed initially using descriptive and inferential statistics. The means and standard deviation were calculated for both the constructs of self esteem and humor. Pearson Correlation coefficient was thereafter computed between the two variables.

## Results

Table 1

*Means and SD for HSQ and SEI scores in girls (n=52)*

Measures	M	$\sigma$
SEI Total	1.36	0.25
HSQ Total	10.13	0.98
Aggressive Humor	1.96	0.42
Self-Enhancing Humor	2.82	0.6
Self-Destructive Humor	2.22	0.59
Affiliative Humor	3.13	0.49

Table 2

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between HSQ and SEI scores in girls (n=52)*

Measures	SEI Total	<i>p</i>
HSQ Total	-0.123	0.385
Aggressive Humor	-0.371	0.007**
Self-Enhancing Humor	0.093	0.511
Self-Destructive Humor	-0.039	0.784
Affiliative Humor	0.007	0.961

*\* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$* 

From table 2, in girls, only aggressive humor is negatively correlated with self esteem and this relationship is found to be significant ( $r=0.371$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). However, correlation between overall scores on humor styles questionnaire and total score on self esteem inventory ( $r=-0.123$ ) is negatively correlated, and this relationship is insignificant. The correlation between SEI and all remaining 3 dimensions of

HSQ, namely, self-enhancing humor (0.093), self-destructive Humor(-0.039) and affiliative humor (0.007) have all been found to be statistically insignificant.

Thus, hypothesis 1, which states that there will be a significant relationship between HSQ and SEI in girls is partially accepted.

Table 3

*Means and SD for HSQ and SEI scores in boys (n=48)*

Measures	M	$\sigma$
SEI Total	1.31	0.31
HSQ Total	10.2	1.29
Aggressive Humor	2.16	0.47
Self-Enhancing Humor	2.83	0.6
Self-Destructive Humor	2.18	0.63
Affiliative Humor	3.04	0.6

Table 4

*Pearson Correlation Coefficients between HSQ and SEI scores in boys (n=48)*

Measures	SEI Total	<i>p</i>
HSQ Total	0.061	0.678
Aggressive Humor	-0.052	0.726
Self-Enhancing Humor	0.041	0.784
Self-Destructive Humor	-0.108	0.470
Affiliative Humor	0.242	0.099

\**p* < 0.05, \*\**p* < 0.01

From table 4, in boys, the relation between all 4 dimensions of humor with self esteem is found to be insignificant. Also, correlation between overall scores on humor styles questionnaire and total score on self esteem inventory ( $r=0.061$ ) is positively correlated, and this relationship is insignificant. Self-enhancing humor (0.041) and affiliative

humor (0.242) are positively related to self esteem; however, self-destructive humor (-0.108) and aggressive humor (-0.052) are negatively related to self esteem. Thus, hypothesis 2, which states that there will be a significant relationship between HSQ and SEI in boys is rejected.

Table 5

*Multiple regression analysis of HSQ on SEI in girls*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	<i>p</i>
SEI Total	.390	.152	.080	2.102	.095

From table 5, it can be seen that R<sup>2</sup> of total SEI is 0.152 which indicates that 15.2% of the variance of total SEI is attributed to style of humor, is not significant. Hence, the hypothesis 3

which states that humor will have a significant impact on self esteem of school going girls, is rejected.

Table 6

*Multiple regression analysis of HSQ on SEI in boys*

Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	F	<i>p</i>
SEI Total	.289	.084	.002	.980	.429

From table 6, it can be seen that R<sup>2</sup> of total SEI is 0.084 which indicates that 8.4% of the variance of total SEI is attributed to style of humor, is not significant. Hence, the hypothesis 4

which states that humor will have a significant impact on self esteem of school going boys, is rejected.

### Discussion

The present study aimed to understand the relationship between various humor styles and levels of self esteem in Indian school going students. Assessed using two questionnaires, the results revealed a partial relationship between humor and self esteem only in the girls.

The findings indicated a non – significant relationship between the various humor styles and total self esteem except a significant relationship between aggressive humor and self esteem in girls. The findings also suggest that self enhancing humor was positively correlated to self esteem for both girls

and boys. However, this finding was not found to be statistically significant. A relationship of prediction as well as cause-effect could not be established as the regression model emerged out to be insignificant stating that the humor did not predict self esteem even if there was correlation between some dimensions.

Some of the reasons that could be attributed to ascertain the weak correlation and poor predictability found between humor and self esteem in both boys as well as girls have been discussed.

Previous researches suggest that interpersonal relationships and peer communications act as important determinants in the usage of a given humor style. Bergen (1998) noted that humor flourishes in safe and comfortable contexts. Furthermore, there is a considerable amount of evidence to support the view that interactions with peers provide children with important opportunities to acquire social skills and hence a broader social competence (Schneider, Richard, Younger, & Freeman, 2000). This view is strongly stated in Harris' (1998) group socialization theory, even to the extent that the peer group is put forward as the major context in which social skills and hence normative behaviour is developed. Another study posits the role of socialization and environmental factors in the development of humor and self esteem (Vernon, Martin, Schermer, & Mackie, 2008). It is possible that socialization in a country like India with some collectivistic values like obeying the authority and aspiring for collective well being, might not be supportive of use of humor. Since, Indian parents and other authority figures may not employ humor in socializing the child, therefore the sense of self esteem may not be derived from humor. Extrapolating from the theory, it is not unreasonable to argue that being victimized by the peer group denies children opportunities to develop social skills/competence, including the capacity to use humor effectively with bullying reaching to lower age groups in recent times (Kshirsagar, Agarwal, & Bavdekar, 2007).

Findings of a previous study suggest that instability in levels of self esteem can also exercise a mediating effect on the relation between humor styles and self esteem. Early adolescence period is characterized by physiological and psychological changes which can result in fluctuation in self esteem (Simmons, 2017). Individuals with a high stable self esteem are likely to employ the highest level of adaptive humor and lowest level of maladaptive humor. Hence, this implies that people with stable and unstable forms of self esteem employ different forms of humor (Vaughan, Zeigler-Hill, & Arnau, 2014).

Another reason could be that in the Indian context, there is a lack of exposure of young children to the use of humor in the academic curriculum. Children aren't very familiar with the concept of humor and its benefits in academics. Thus, humor might be treated as an alien concept. The schools in India are characterized by strict adherence to rules and regulations with a strong disciplining system followed (Jayadeva, 2019), where the scope of humor might be limited.

The research has been conducted on children in the age group of 9 – 12 years, which is the early developmental period. A plausible reason could be that the humor styles are yet not well developed in the children of this age, thereby leading to an insignificant impact of humor styles on their self esteem. Another explanation for the insignificant relationship can be that there could be various individual differences in personality that play a mediatory role in the relationship between humor and self esteem. The tool is

better adapted for the western context due to which the relationship could be insignificant as well.

In the present research, the negative correlation between aggressive humor style and self esteem is statistically significant in girls.

Interestingly research by Fox, Dean and Lyford (2013) state that aggressive humor was related to low anxiety levels and high self perceived social competence in boys. However in girls, aggressive humor was linked to high depression and low global self worth. Do, Diener and Sandvik (1991) report that women are seen as nurturers and have been socialized to be more perceptive to emotional experiences, both positive and negative. Girls respond more negatively to aggressive humor (Berkowitz, 1970). Social Identity Theory states that self esteem is determined by consensus on attributes that contribute to social identity (Corenblum & Annis, 1993). Therefore when the gender role socialization prescribes a timid norm for women in the Indian culture, where the use of aggressive humor by them is seen as rude, offensive and against social consensus, girls experience a stronger negative affect. Such rejection relates to low self esteem (Hojat, Borenstein, & Shapurian, 1990). Research has also shown that girls generally have lower self esteem as compared to men (Kling, Hydes, Showers, & Buswell, 1999), which might have led to a significant relationship between aggressive humor styles and self esteem in girls.

Since the area explored is relatively new in the Indian scenario, it can be explored further. The understanding of the impact of using humor on self esteem can broaden the understanding of the development of self esteem in school going children.

### **Limitations & Directions for Future Research**

The present study relied on school going students of only one particular school, which may limit the generalizability of the present findings. Also, students from only a certain part of India (UP) were sampled. Thus, the findings cannot be generalised to the rest of the country. Another limitation was that data was collected using self-report measures which is more prone to social desirability effects. Other methods and measures like experiments and qualitative approaches can be used in to avoid the problem of self report bias. Future researches can compare the relationship between these two variables across a range of developmental periods. Longitudinal studies shall be helpful to understand the relationship of humor styles with other factors of well-being, such as, happiness, resilience. Peer reports of humor can be used with the younger population to overcome the issue of social desirability. Sociocultural influences on humor can be explored in detail. Tools that are better suited for the Indian culture can be used to study the relationship between humor and self esteem.

### **Conclusion**

The results of the present study revealed that overall humor styles do not have a significant impact on self esteem in both

boys and girls. However, the use of aggressive humor seems to have an inverse relationship with self esteem of girls. Humor is known to be a coping mechanism in distressing situations but possibly, it is yet to find a direct role on influencing self esteem especially of young boys and girls.

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- Abstract with keywords
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- Method
  - ✓ Participants
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  - ✓ Procedure
- Results
- Discussion
- Limitations and Directions for future research
- Conclusion
- References

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- Abstract with keywords
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