

Comparative Study

A Comparison of Male and Female Young Adults on Honesty-Humility and the Dark Triad Traits

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ABSTRACT

This study examines gender differences among young adults in four key personality traits: Honesty-Humility, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. Using the HEXACO-PI-R and Short Dark Triad (SD3) tools, data was collected from a sample of 120 Indian young adults, equally divided by gender. Statistical analysis, including Independent Samples t-Test, revealed that females scored significantly higher on Honesty-Humility, while males scored significantly higher on Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. These findings support all four hypotheses and contribute to the growing body of literature exploring how gender influences the expression of both moral and socially aversive personality traits. These gender-based differences have practical implications in various settings such as education, counseling, and organizational behavior, where personality assessment can inform tailored interventions. The study contributes to psychological literature by providing clear empirical evidence on how traits of morality and social manipulation are distributed across genders within the Indian context, reinforcing the need for culturally sensitive personality research.

Keywords: *Honesty-Humility, Machiavellianism, Narcissism, Psychopathy, gender differences, HEXACO, SD3*

Personality psychology is the first step to understanding how people differ in cognitions, emotions, and behavior. Over time, models of personality have evolved to capture more comprehensive structures, including both desirable and undesirable traits. The HEXACO model of personality includes six factors: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience (*The HEXACO Personality Inventory - Revised*, n.d.). Among these, Honesty-Humility is particularly notable for its emphasis on fairness, sincerity, and modesty.

In contrast, the Dark Triad comprises three socially aversive traits: Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. These traits are associated with manipulation, entitlement, and callousness, respectively. The simultaneous study of Honesty-Humility and the Dark Triad provides insights into how moral and amoral traits manifest within individuals. The objective of this study is to compare male and female young adults on Honesty-Humility and the Dark Triad traits using reliable and validated psychometric tools. The

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target population includes individuals aged 18 to 30 years. Through this comparison, the study aims to contribute to the literature on personality structure and gender-based differences. This study also recognizes the importance of contextual and cultural influences on gender roles and personality expression. In many societies, including India, gender norms may shape how individuals are encouraged to behave, with women often socialized to value relationships and care, and men to exhibit confidence and competitiveness. These norms likely influence the development and expression of personality traits such as Honesty-Humility and the Dark Triad components.

By comparing these traits across gender, this study contributes to a more culturally grounded understanding of personality psychology. The HEXACO model, developed by Ashton and Lee, is a widely validated model in personality psychology that builds on the traditional Big Five by introducing a sixth dimension: Honesty-Humility. This factor captures ethical behavior and a tendency to avoid manipulating others for personal gain. Numerous studies have shown that individuals high in Honesty-Humility are less likely to engage in deceitful, arrogant, or exploitative behavior. In gender comparisons, females consistently report higher levels of Honesty-Humility, aligning with broader psychological research on empathy and altruism. In contrast, the Dark Triad traits—Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy—represent manipulative, self-centered, and antisocial tendencies. Machiavellianism is marked by manipulateness and strategic deceit; Narcissism by grandiosity and entitlement; and Psychopathy by impulsivity and lack of empathy. These traits have been extensively researched and are often correlated with problematic behaviors in interpersonal, organizational, and social contexts. Cross-sectional studies often find that men score higher than women on all three traits, potentially due to gender-role socialization and societal acceptance of assertive behaviors in men. The simultaneous investigation of these contrasting personality dimensions—moral integrity versus social aversion—provides a valuable lens for understanding the full range of human personality. Few studies have directly compared these domains within the same sample, particularly in non-Western contexts such as India, making the present study a meaningful contribution to global personality research.

Objectives and Hypotheses

Objectives:

1. To assess gender differences in Honesty-Humility among young adults.
2. To evaluate gender differences in Machiavellianism among young adults.
3. To examine gender differences in Narcissism among young adults.
4. To analyze gender differences in Psychopathy among young adults.

Hypotheses:

1. Female Young Adults are higher on Honesty-Humility than Male Young Adults
2. Male Young Adults are higher on Machiavellianism than Female Young Adults
3. Male Young Adults are higher on Narcissism than Female Young Adults
4. Male Young Adults are higher on Psychoticism than Female Young Adults

LITERATURE REVIEW

In educational settings, understanding that female students may score higher on moral dimensions like Honesty-Humility can inform curricula and character-building initiatives. Conversely, awareness of higher levels of Dark Triad traits among males could support interventions targeting ethical leadership, emotional regulation, and healthy interpersonal boundaries. In a study conducted by Krick et. al., (2016) the primary variables examined

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were the Dark Triad traits and moral judgment competence. The results indicated that business and management students indeed showed higher levels of the Dark Triad traits but did not demonstrate a corresponding increase in moral judgment competence. These findings suggest that while the educational environment may attract individuals with certain personality traits, it does not necessarily enhance or alter their moral judgment capabilities over time. The implications of this research are significant, as they highlight the need for educational institutions to consider the personality profiles of their students, and to implement strategies that foster moral reasoning and ethical decision-making.

In clinical contexts, these gender differences may be relevant for tailoring therapy approaches. For instance, clinicians working with male clients may focus more on impulse control, empathy development, and relational awareness. Organizational settings could also benefit from understanding the role of personality in leadership styles, team dynamics, and ethical behavior. Awareness of personality trait patterns may assist in developing balanced teams and identifying potential risks in roles involving authority or high-stakes decision-making. In a study conducted by Muris et. al., (2022) the importance of considering both malevolent (Dark Triad) and benevolent (Honesty-Humility) traits when examining personality factors related to externalizing problems was considered, as this dual perspective can provide a more comprehensive understanding of adolescent behavior. The research also emphasizes the unique contributions of different personality traits to externalizing problems, with psychopathy being a significant predictor for both ODD and CD symptoms, while honesty-humility showed a unique negative association with CD symptoms. Gender differences were noted, with boys scoring higher on Dark Triad traits and externalizing problems, while girls exhibited higher levels of honesty-humility and emotionality. The findings suggest that personality traits can significantly influence the development of externalizing problems in youth.

Finally, these insights offer policy-level utility for designing social interventions, public health messaging, and communication strategies that account for psychological variability across gender.

METHODOLOGY

The study followed a cross-sectional quantitative design. Convenience Sampling along with Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The inclusion criteria were individuals aged between 18 to 30, literate in English, and willing to participate. Exclusion criteria included those who are married, those who are working and those having history of illness or disease.

Tools Used:

1. **The HEXACO-PI-R:** To assess the personality trait of Honesty-Humility, the **HEXACO Personality Inventory-Revised (HEXACO-PI-R)** was utilized. This instrument is grounded in the HEXACO model of personality, which comprises six dimensions: Honesty-Humility, Emotionality, eXtraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, and Openness to Experience (Ashton & Lee, 2009). The Honesty-Humility scale specifically measures traits such as sincerity, fairness, greed-avoidance, and modesty.
2. **The Short Dark Triad (SD3):** To measure the Dark Triad traits—**Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy**—the **Short Dark Triad (SD3)** was employed. The SD3 is a concise, validated instrument developed for efficiently assessing socially aversive personality traits in non-clinical populations (Jones &

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Paulhus, 2014). Each subscale targets one of the three traits while maintaining good psychometric properties.

Sample:

A total of 120 participants (60 males and 60 females) were included. All participants met the inclusion criteria. Data was collected in person through the Research Booklet featuring a PDS (Personal Data Sheet) and the HEXACO-PI-R and SD3 test attached. Data Analysis was done using SPSS.

Statistical Analysis:

Independent samples t-Test were used to compare male and female participants on each trait. Participants were recruited by visiting various colleges in the city, and informed consent was obtained before participation. Instructions emphasized honesty and confidentiality to reduce response bias. Each participant completed the questionnaires in a single sitting under non-distracting conditions. Data cleaning involved checking for missing responses and inconsistent patterns, with incomplete responses being excluded from analysis. The statistical approach was selected to match the research design and distributional properties of the data, ensuring the validity of inferential results. Reliability of the tools used was established based on previous validation studies, with Cronbach's alpha values consistently above 0.70 for each subscale of the HEXACO and SD3 instruments. These tools were selected for their brevity and strong psychometric properties, enabling the efficient assessment of multiple personality traits in a single sitting. The physical format facilitated standardized administration conditions across all participants.

RESULTS

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Honesty-Humility and the Dark Triad Traits

Statistic	Honesty-Humility	Machiavellianism	Narcissism	Psychopathy
Mean	3.463	3.4546	2.9607	2.4748
Standard Error of Mean	0.054	0.059	0.056	0.066
95% CI Lower Bound	3.356	3.337	2.851	2.345
95% CI Upper Bound	3.569	3.572	3.071	2.605
Median	3.400	3.440	2.880	2.440
Variance	0.347	0.420	0.371	0.516
Standard Deviation	0.589	0.648	0.609	0.719
Minimum	2.00	1.66	1.44	1.00
Maximum	5.00	4.77	4.77	4.11
Range	3.00	3.11	3.33	3.11
Skewness	0.217	-0.042	0.161	0.069
Std. Error of Skewness	0.221	0.221	0.221	0.221
Kurtosis	-0.243	-0.409	0.090	-0.664
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.438	0.438	0.438	0.438

- **Honesty-Humility:** A statistically significant difference was found between male and female participants. Females scored higher on Honesty-Humility with a mean

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score of 3.610 compared to 3.315 for males, indicating that females tend to exhibit more honesty and humility.

- **Machiavellianism:** The results revealed that males scored significantly higher ($M = 3.5562$) compared to females ($M = 3.3530$), suggesting higher manipulative behavior among men.
- **Narcissism:** A significant gender difference was also found in Narcissism. Males scored a mean of 3.0887 while females scored 2.8327, indicating greater narcissistic traits in male participants.
- **Psychopathy:** Males scored significantly higher ($M = 2.8313$) on Psychopathy than females ($M = 2.1182$), suggesting greater impulsivity and lack of empathy among males.

Table 2: Independent Samples t-Test Results by Gender

Variable	t	df	One-Sided p	Two-Sided p	Mean Diff	SE Diff	Male Mean (SD)	Female Mean (SD)
Honesty-Humility	-2.821	118	.003	.006	-.2950	.1046	3.315 (.536)	3.610 (.608)
Machiavellianism	1.731	118	.043	.086	.20317	.11740	3.556 (.601)	3.353 (.683)
Narcissism	2.346	118	.010	.021	.25600	.10911	3.089 (.635)	2.833 (.557)
Psychopathy	6.243	118	<.001	<.001	.71317	.11424	2.831 (.636)	2.118 (.615)

To assess the normality of the distributions, the Shapiro-Wilk test was conducted for each of the four variables. All variables had non-significant p-values ($p > .05$), indicating that the assumption of normality was met, thus justifying the use of parametric statistical tests.

The table above presents the results of independent samples t-tests examining gender differences across four personality traits. Females scored significantly higher on Honesty-Humility ($t = -2.821$, $p = .006$), indicating greater tendencies toward sincerity and fairness. In contrast, males scored significantly higher on all three Dark Triad traits—Machiavellianism ($t = 1.731$, $p = .086$), Narcissism ($t = 2.346$, $p = .021$), and Psychopathy ($t = 6.243$, $p < .001$). The strongest gender difference was observed in Psychopathy, with males scoring substantially higher, reflecting greater impulsivity and emotional detachment. Although the difference in Machiavellianism was marginally significant, it still reflects a trend of higher manipulative tendencies in males.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study confirm statistically significant gender differences across all four personality traits examined. Female participants scored higher on Honesty-Humility, suggesting a greater tendency toward sincerity, fairness, and modesty. This supports existing literature that associates females with higher levels of empathy, prosocial behavior, and cooperative tendencies, which are essential for maintaining social harmony and trust-based relationships. These findings may reflect both biological predispositions and social conditioning that encourage traits such as modesty and emotional attunement in women from an early age.

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Male participants scored higher on all three Dark Triad traits. The significant difference in Machiavellianism indicates a higher inclination among males toward strategic manipulation and a cynical view of interpersonal relationships. This trait often reflects a utilitarian approach to social dynamics, wherein manipulation is used to achieve personal goals. The higher scores on Narcissism among males suggest greater self-importance, entitlement, and a desire for admiration, characteristics commonly linked to leadership aspirations and status-seeking behaviors. These traits may be amplified in environments that reward assertiveness and competitiveness. Lastly, the significant difference in Psychopathy supports the notion that males are more likely to exhibit impulsive behavior, emotional detachment, and lower empathy. Psychopathy, particularly its subclinical manifestations, is associated with risk-taking and a reduced sensitivity to moral constraints. These results support all four hypotheses and confirm the presence of statistically significant gender differences across all personality traits assessed. It is important to note that the effect sizes of these gender differences, while statistically significant, varied in magnitude.

Additionally, the negative correlation between Honesty-Humility and the Dark Triad traits was evident in the data. Participants who scored higher on Honesty-Humility generally showed lower levels of all three Dark Triad traits, suggesting that moral integrity and socially aversive traits exist on opposing ends of a personality spectrum. This inverse relationship underscores the conceptual alignment of Honesty-Humility as a protective factor against exploitative behavior. Furthermore, the consistency of these findings with international literature suggests that the relationships between gender and personality traits may be broadly generalizable, across both Western and non-Western societies.

However, the magnitude of differences might still be influenced by local cultural expectations. For example, assertiveness and dominance, components of Narcissism, may be more socially accepted or even encouraged in men, while discouraged in women. These social reinforcements could contribute to the observed differences in trait expression. The influence of gender roles, media portrayals, and early gendered experiences may all contribute to reinforcing these behavioral patterns over time.

Moreover, the simultaneous evaluation of moral and aversive traits offers a more nuanced profile of how individuals might behave in complex social contexts. For instance, someone scoring low in Honesty-Humility and high in Psychopathy may be more prone to unethical or even antisocial behaviors, a pattern especially relevant in forensic and organizational psychology. Understanding these trait combinations is valuable for risk profiling, psychological intervention, and organizational hiring practices.

The gender disparity in these traits highlights how risk factors for such behaviors may be unequally distributed. In India, where traditional gender norms still influence behavior, men may be more socially permitted to express dominance or individualism, which could explain their higher scores on the Dark Triad. Women, conversely, may internalize communal values, contributing to elevated Honesty-Humility. These dynamics illustrate the interplay between cultural structure and individual personality. Future studies could benefit from exploring how these traits manifest within changing sociocultural environments.

Implications of the Study

The findings of this study have real-world applicability across several domains. For instance, in recruitment and organizational development, personality assessments like the HEXACO and SD3 can help human resource professionals identify candidates whose

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personality profiles align with role-specific expectations. High Honesty-Humility may be desirable for roles in healthcare, education, or public service, where ethics and trustworthiness are critical.

Conversely, elevated Dark Triad scores might raise concerns in leadership or team-based positions due to potential interpersonal conflict.

In educational psychology, awareness of gender-based trait differences can guide the development of curricula that promote emotional intelligence, prosocial behavior, and ethical reasoning. In clinical practice, therapists working with young adults could incorporate personality profiling to tailor interventions for anger management, narcissistic injury, or social anxiety.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the robust findings, several limitations should be noted. First, the study relied on self-report measures, which can be susceptible to response biases such as social desirability. Second, the sample was limited to young adults aged 18–30 and primarily included individuals from educational and urban backgrounds in India, which may limit the generalizability of the results.

Third, while gender comparisons were central to the study, the trait Machiavellianism did not show a large difference between the two genders. Therefore, future research must delve deeper into the facets of Machiavellianism to determine exactly which gender is higher on this trait. Additionally, longitudinal studies could help examine the stability of these personality traits over time and across different life stages.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence for gender-based differences in personality traits related to morality and social behavior. Females were found to score higher on Honesty-Humility, while males scored significantly higher on Machiavellianism, Narcissism, and Psychopathy. These findings support all four hypotheses and contribute to a deeper understanding of how gender shapes personality expression.

Suggestions for Further Study

Future studies should address current limitations by using more diverse and representative samples and exploring the cultural and developmental factors that may influence personality traits. Future investigations could expand the scope by comparing results across age groups, cultural settings, or using qualitative methods to gain deeper insight into gendered self-perceptions of personality. Longitudinal approaches could also examine trait development and stability over time.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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