

Exploring the Poetic Personality: A Quantitative Research on Personality of Aspiring Poets

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ABSTRACT

Personality is the unique way in which each individual thinks, acts, and feels throughout life. Creative writing is a way of studying an individual observes his/her surroundings and how they sew them in a string of thoughtful words. Poetry is a component of creative writing. Every poem that the poet composes is not merely the expression of his emotions, thoughts, reflections, and vision, but each word and line in the poem carries the personality of the poet. The objective of the present study was to explore the personality of poets and was analyzed quantitatively. BIG Five Personality (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991) was administered to 100 undergraduates (50 poets and 50 non poets) of the age group 18-21 years. The assumptions of t-test were tested using levene's test of homogeneity and variances and Shapiro-Wilk test of normality. T-test revealed significant differences in three traits i.e, openness, extraversion and neuroticism. This suggested that poets are more open, introvert and high on neuroticism as compared to non-poets. The research was concluded by briefly foregrounding some of the study's implications and future directions.

Keywords: *Big Five, Personality, Poets*

Personality is a dynamic context and refers to the characteristic ways of an individual to deal with situations. The way an individual perceives a particular context and acts upon it, varies from one to another. Weinberg and Gould (1999) referred personality to the characteristics or blend of characteristics that makes a person unique. Strong genetic basis are associated with personality traits, these are highly unchanging overtime but predict important societal outcome. Although only modest stability is found from childhood personality to adult personality, personality becomes more stable as we enter adulthood (Caspi & Roberts, 1999). Nonetheless, even in adulthood, a capacity for meaningful personality change remains (Lewis, 1999). The present study focuses on unveiling the personality traits that underlie such behavior.

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In the modern society, writers are portrayed intelligent and intuitive, however their work reveal an extensive inventory of personality traits. Creative writers are independent and nonconformist, possess ethics and aesthetics, and maintain a constant state of curiosity that allows for imaginative insight into emotions and the environment (Piirto, 2002a). They have been described as radical, dominant, independent and at times less agreeable (Drevdahl & Cattell, 1958). Barron (1966) claimed that writers are most frequently described as independent, verbally fluent, aesthetically reactive, and possessing a value for intellectual and cognitive matters. The act of creative writing leads to an environment of cognitive and organizational strategies (Chase, 2011). The work of creative writers like novelists, poets, screen writers elicit much curiosity in the audience.

In the present study, creative writers are studied. Poetry is a component of creative writing, basically any piece of writing in which an individual steps out from the world of ordinary expressions can be termed as creative writing. Poetry being another form of it can help in comprehending the emotions, thoughts and ideas that underlie an individual's perception all together.

Piirto's (2002) claims about writers have been supported, to some degree, by empirical work on the personalities of poets. These studies have often compared creative writers to other artistic domains, and the findings of the previous studies are mixed. Very few studies have compared the creative writers with non-writers that resemble the writers on other demographic variables. Comparison with a control group would offer further insights into some of the existing notions about writers and help to obtain a more accurate portrayal of their personalities.

There is a need to study the phenomena of unveiling the personality of poets in its cultural context. The findings of the past researches, most of which have been carried out in the west, cannot be generalized cross culturally and may not lend insight into the nature of personality in creative poets in the Indian cultural context. This field of research has been away from the focus of the researchers since there were very few studies centering on this domain. It becomes imperative to study how individuals evolve themselves into poets in order to deal with their real life situations. Poetry can also be observed as a therapeutic way of overcoming major life changing events like bullying, body shaming issues, death, dysfunctional family issues and so on.

Hence, rationale of the present study was to understand the personality of poets, who are in themselves, very complex human beings. Keeping all of the above mentioned factors in mind, the objective of the present study is to understand the personality of aspiring poets. To facilitate the comparison, non-poets are also made a part of this study along with the sample of poets. It was hypothesized that there would be a statistically significant difference among poets and non-poets on the measure of Big Five Personality Traits i.e. Openness to experience, Neuroticism, Extraversion, Agreeableness and Conscientiousness. Poets have been observed to show writings styles that reflect extremity on these domains.

METHODOLOGY

The objective of the present study is to explore the personality of poets.

Design

A two group design i.e. undergraduate poets and non poets were used in the present study.

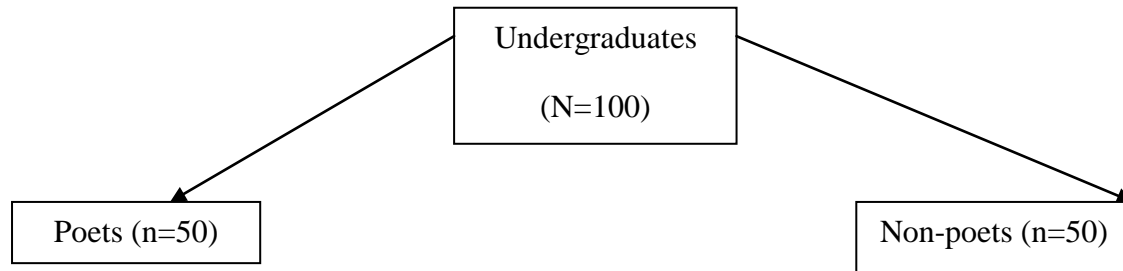


Figure 1 shows the diagrammatic representation of the design of the present study

Sample

The study population consisted of undergraduates belonging to the age group of 18-21 years. For the quantitative research, there was a sample of 50 poets and 50 non-poets making the total sample to be of 100 participants. Purposive sampling method was used to collect the data. In order to be a part of the present study, the participant had to either be a part of the poetry society of their respective college or they were required to not to be a part of any society of their college. This was done to make sure that only poets were chosen and the sample for the non-poets was the one inclusive of participants who did not have a proper channel to showcase their creativity. Non-poets were supposed to be individuals with very less interest in poetry writing or reading so that there could be a proper distinction made between the two. Those who were chosen to be a part of the category of poets were required to be performing regularly in the poetry events for at least one year.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the participants (N=100)

Poets	Number	Percentage	Non-Poets	Number	Percentage
Gender			Gender		
Male	25	25%	Male	25	25%
Female	25	25%	Female	25	25%
Age			Age		
18 years	10	20%	18 years	8	16%
19 years	13	26%	19 years	12	24%
20 years	15	30%	20 years	11	22%
21 years	12	24%	21 years	19	38%
Year of Study			Year of Study		
I year	8	16%	I year	10	20%
II year	15	30%	II year	11	22%
III year	27	54%	III year	29	58%

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of the participants. Both poets and non poets had equal number of males and females. For the poets, majority of the participants were of 20

years were from third year. For non-poets, majority of the participants were of 21 years and belonging to third year of their graduation.

Tools: *The following instruments were employed for data collection in the study*

Biographic Information Schedule: Biographic information schedule was used to record the respondent's age, gender and year of study

Big Five Inventory: The Big Five personality dimensions were assessed using the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). BFI allows a quick and efficient assessment of five personality dimensions namely Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998). Participants rate phrases on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). *Openness* refers to a degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty and variety in an individual. *Conscientiousness* refers to a tendency to be organized and dependable, show self-discipline, act dutifully, aim for achievement, and prefer planned rather than spontaneous behavior. Extraversion is characterized by excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness, and high amounts of emotional expressiveness. *Agreeableness* includes attributes such as trust, altruism, kindness, affection, and other pro-social behaviors. Neuroticism is a trait characterized by sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability. The coefficient alpha reliabilities of BFI were reported as 0.88 (Extraversion), 0.79 (Agreeableness), 0.82 (Conscientiousness), 0.84 (Neuroticism) and 0.81 (Openness) (Benet-Martínez & John, 1998).

Procedure

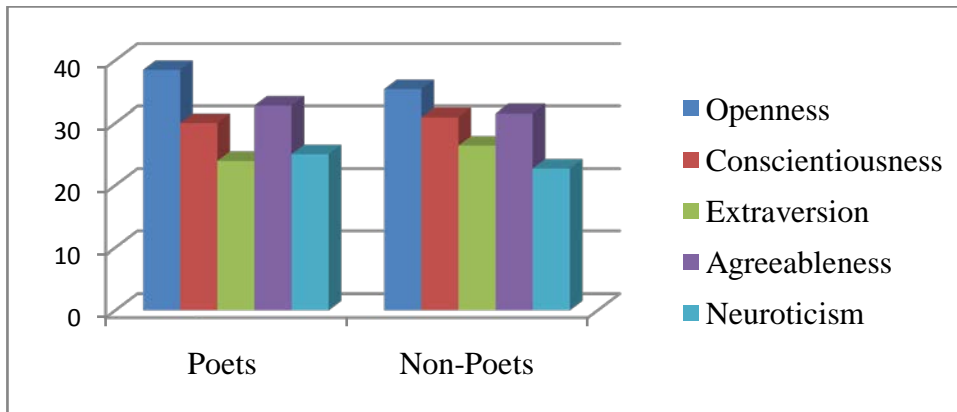
The objective of the present study is to explore the personality of poets. The study population consisted of undergraduates belonging to the age group of 18-21 years. For the quantitative research, there was a sample of 50 poets and 50 non-poets making the total sample to be of 100 participants. For the sample selection, purposive sampling method was used. Participants were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and the informed consent was obtained from interested participants stating that the questions answered would be kept anonymous and the identity of the participants would be kept confidential. Participation was completely voluntary and could be terminated at any time. They were assured that their responses would be recorded honestly and confidentially. Finally, the selected participants fulfilling the inclusion/ exclusion criteria were given relevant instructions for completing the questionnaires. All the participants were administered the Big Five Inventory (BFI) (John, Donahue, & Kentle, 1991). Each participant was contacted individually and was asked to fill up the questionnaires that took approximately 10 minutes.

RESULTS

For the analysis, the data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS 16.0). Bar diagrams are used to depict descriptive information. Mean and standard deviations were calculated from the raw scores. Assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested using Levene's Test of Equality of

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Variances (Table 1). Shapiro-Wilk Tests of Normality (Table 2) was used to assess normalcy of scores. Independent t-test was used to find out the significant mean differences between the two groups.



Graph 1 shows graphical representation of the mean scores of Poets and Non-poets on Big Five Personality dimensions

Table 2: Levene's Test of Equality of Variances on the Big Five dimensions (N=100)

Measures	F	Sig.
Openness	2.568	0.112
Conscientiousness	0.910	0.342
Extraversion	2.150	0.146
Agreeableness	0.458	0.501
Neuroticism	0.822	0.367

The Levene's Test of Equality of Variance provides an F-statistic and a significance value (p-value) (Table 3). As all the dimensions of Big Five have significant values greater than 0.05 (i.e., $p > .05$), the group variances are treated as equal and the assumption of homogeneity of variance has not been violated. Hence, it permits us to use parametric statistics.

Table 3: Shapiro-Wilk test of Normality of Big Five dimensions by poets and non-poets (df=50)

Measures	Category	Statistic	Sig.
Openness	Poets	0.965	.140
	Non-Poets	0.966	.153
Conscientiousness	Poets	0.969	.202
	Non-Poets	0.978	.484
Extraversion	Poets	0.963	.120
	Non-Poets	0.962	.107
Agreeableness	Poets	0.968	.198
	Non-Poets	0.983	.649
Neuroticism	Poets	0.988	.888
	Non-Poets	0.977	.425

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Table 3 presents the results from Shapiro-Wilk Test for assessing normality. It can be seen that for the category of poets and non-poets, the significant value of Shapiro-Wilk Test is greater than 0.05 stating that the data is normally distributed and it permits us to use parametric statistics.

Table 4: Results of mean, standard deviation, t-value and p value on the measures of Big Five in poets and non-poets (df=98)

Measures	Poets (n=50) Mean± SD	Non-Poets (n=50) Mean± SD	t-value	p-value
Openness	38.46±3.73	35.38±4.80	3.58	0.001
Conscientiousness	30.00±5.56	30.92±4.60	-0.90	0.370
Extraversion	23.92±4.16	26.38±5.32	-2.57	0.012
Agreeableness	32.74±4.76	31.52±5.07	1.23	0.219
Neuroticism	25.00±4.16	22.70±5.53	2.16	0.033

It can be seen from the above table the poets have a higher mean as compared to non-poets on the measures of openness, agreeableness and neuroticism whereas non-poets have a higher mean on conscientiousness and extraversion. Results of t-test for big five dimensions are presented in table 4. It is observed that the t value is statistically significant for the dimensions namely, openness, extraversion and neuroticism. It is inferred that there is significant difference among the two groups. However, the rest two dimensions did not differed significantly among two groups i.e. conscientiousness and agreeableness

DISCUSSION

The aim of the present study was to explore the personality of aspiring poets. Weinberg and Gould (1999) referred personality to the characteristics or blend of characteristics that makes a person unique. The present study focused on exploring the personality traits that underlie such behaviour. For Quantitative analysis, a two group design i.e. undergraduate poets and non poets were used in the present study. A total of 50 poets and 50 non-poets were chosen as the sample through the purposive sampling method.

In order to check whether parametric test (t test) could be used to calculate the group differences between poets and non-poets, the levene's Test of Equality of Variance and Shapiro-Wilk Test for assessing normality were calculated. The levene's Test of Equality of Variance provided an F-statistic and a significance value (p-value). As all the dimensions of Big Five gave significant values, the group variances were treated as equal and the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not violated. Moreover, significant values were obtained from the results of Shapiro-Wilk Test for assessing normality stating that the data is normally distributed. Both these assumptions of t-test were essential for letting us to analyze the data with t-test.

T-test revealed significant group differences between poets and non-poets on the dimensions of Openness, Extraversion and Neuroticism. The hypothesis was proved stating the mean score of openness and neuroticism is higher for poets as compared to non-poets whereas mean score of extraversion is higher for non-poets. Openness refers to a degree of intellectual curiosity, creativity and a preference for novelty and variety in an individual. The above findings are supported by a research done by Greengross and Miller (2009) who found that as compared to a control group, writers particularly scored highest on the trait of openness indicating that openness might be especially important. Also, aspiring poets would likely score higher on the openness facets of ideas, aesthetics or both (Weisberg, DeYoung, & Hirsh, 2011). Extraversion is characterized by excitability, sociability, talkativeness, assertiveness, and high amounts of emotional expressiveness. The poets in the present study are considered to be more introvert as compared to be extrovert. Research also supports this finding. Baron (1968) found that poets tend to be more introverted than extraverted. This may be because aspiring poets are particularly low on assertiveness or activity, which would account for previous anecdotal observations of high introversion for writers (Weisberg, DeYoung, & Hirsh, 2011). Similarly, Neuroticism is a trait characterized by sadness, moodiness, and emotional instability. Similar results were found by a research by Mohan and Tiwana (1987) who compared Indian writers and non-writers. The researchers reported a high level of neuroticism and low levels of extraversion compared to general population.

Overall, it can be stated that aspiring poets were higher in openness, but also less extraverted and less emotionally stable (Andreasen & Glick, 1988; Ludwig, 1995). They may be less talkative but may exert emotional expressiveness through their poems. They may have a high degree of intellectual curiosity and creativity which may lead to something that is novel and original. They may also be high on divergent thinking. Although, it may be stated from the above results that they are open to varied experiences and may have a self reflective personality, they also tend to experience mood swings and may be regarded as individuals who are more towards being emotionally unstable. It can also be stated that poets who score high on neuroticism and openness report themselves as being lower on conscientiousness (Kaufman, 2001a) which has also been found in the present study.

There are, however, certain limitations in the study. For the analysis, The BIG Five Personality Questionnaire was used; one of the limitations of using The BIG Five is that it studies only five aspects of the personality. Also the questionnaire was a self report measure, and participants were asked to rate themselves on a 5-point likert scale. It is highly possible that the participant's frame of mind at that particular moment of filling the questionnaire manipulated the results, where they were not able to give honest or un-bias answers. Another limitation of the research was the size of the sample. As the sample size was small, the results may not be adequately generalized. Moreover, the sample was not representative of the entire population. Future research can incorporate a larger sample size in order to generalize the findings in the population. Also, a different research design could be developed to understand culture-specific, gender-specific and age-specific personality that could help in giving a

holistic view of the personality of poets. Finally, along with the study of personality, other constructs like emotional intelligence, rumination, etc can also be studied.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors colorfully declare this paper to bear not conflict of interests

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