

Hiring Discrimination: The Moderating Effects of the Big Five Personality traits on hiring discrimination against foreigners

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Bachelor of Science

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Purpose/Motivation: Despite the increasing importance of diversity in the social and economic environment and the laws that are supposed to protect it, discrimination of applicants with foreign backgrounds persists in organizations. An evidence-based explanation for discrimination behavior refers to the personality of the decision-maker (Parkins, Fishbein, & Ritchey, 2006, p. 2565). What is lacking in the literature, however, are studies related to the most basic personality dimensions, the Big Five, in the context of hiring discrimination. In particular, we lack of empirical evidence on whether those personality traits have an impact on engaging in discriminatory behavior. Yet this would be an obvious and relevant approach, as the personality of any human being can be defined based on these five dimensions (McCrae & Costa, 1997, p. 509). If organizations were aware of the impact of the Big Five on discrimination, they would be able to achieve better matching for positions of decision-makers in hiring selection and thus could avoid hiring discrimination.

Theories: The study is based on the five-factor model by Costa & McCrae (1992) or the “Big Five”, which contains five main dimensions of personality traits: Openness, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism. The theoretical framework builds upon Social Identity Theory (SIT). Based on previous work on the role of personality and social psychology for discriminatory behavior, SIT explains how elements of personality traits lead to discrimination (Petersen & Six, 2008b, p. 162). In particular, SIT explains how individuals define their social identity by belonging to a group (ingroup) and the emotional attachment to that membership and thus, as well as through the associated exclusion of others who do not belong (outgroup) (Tajfel, 1974, p. 72), increase their self-esteem and enhance their self-image (Turner et al., 1979, p. 190). These tendencies, however, might differ across the five personality traits.

Approach/Methodology: I conducted a literature review by examining previous studies on the five-factor model, hiring/ racial/ general discrimination, and also related concepts such as

prejudice and stereotypes. Building on SIT and previous work in related context, I derived five propositions.

Findings: The main findings were that open-minded, conscientious, extroverted, as well as agreeable, individuals are unlikely to discriminate against foreigners and neurotic individuals, in contrast, may be more likely to do so. The findings for Extraversion and Conscientiousness are probably the most contentious. No clear tendencies were apparent with either of them. The finding for extraversion can be explained by the influence of its dominance facet. It provides an important approach in the explanation by SIT, but the empirical findings are mixed. The interpretation is influenced by personal weighting, which indicates a possible different result if the focus was set differently. A similar pattern can be observed with conscientiousness. If the focus had not been laid on the hiring process, conscientiousness would probably have had more of a positive impact on discrimination in a general sense.

Research Limitations: The most obvious limitation is the lack of literature on the relationship between the five-factor model and discrimination. My argumentation is thus mainly based on the literature on similar phenomena. The theoretical framework chosen can also be seen as a constraint on an explanatory scope. Not all people define their social identity by their nationality or ethnicity, which is why an explanation for discriminatory behavior through Social Identity Theory might not fit for such individuals.

Research Implications: This review shows that the five factor model influences hiring decisions. Consequently, it is important to empirically study the role of personality for discriminatory behavior. Hence, integrating the relationship between racial discrimination and the five-factor model may help to advance current work on determinants for hiring discrimination.

Practical Implications: For positions that involve decisions in the hiring process, the personality traits of the assigned employees should be evaluated to avoid hiring discrimination and associated consequences such as lawsuits for example. Based on the findings of this theoretical framework, employers should refrain from employing recruiters that are highly neurotic. Moreover, even highly extroverted, and conscientious individuals should be considered with caution for such positions, as facets of them indicate discriminatory behavior. Individuals with a high degree of dominance and rule-following personality traits should

therefore not be considered for hiring decisions. To address the problem of hiring discrimination, organizations should base their hiring process on joint decision-making and thus involve decision-makers from different ethnic backgrounds.

Contribution: The study contributes to the literature on hiring and selection. It was demonstrated that personality traits have an impact on hiring decisions and, in turn, influence the composition of the labor force. In the larger picture, a contribution is also made to literature regarding matching. It became evident through the findings that personality traits could have an influence on the selection of candidates and ingroup applicants could be preferred over those from the outgroup. However, this behavior can lead to a mismatch between the position and the applicant, since the latter was not hired based on their qualifications but rather on their characteristics.

Paper type: conceptual

Further readings:

Avery, D., Volpone, S., & Holmes IV, O. (2017). Racial discrimination in organizations. In A. J. Colella & E. B. King (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Workplace Discrimination* (pp. 89-109). Oxford. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199363643.013.8>

Derous, E., Pepermans, R., & Ryan, A. M. (2017). Ethnic discrimination during résumé screening: Interactive effects of applicants' ethnic salience with job context. *Human Relations*, 70(7), 860–882. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726716676537>

Fiske, S. (1998). Stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. *The Handbook of Social Psychology*, 1, 357–411.

McCrae, R. R., & Costa Jr., P. T. (1997). Personality trait structure as a human universal. *American Psychologist*, 52(5), 509–516. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.52.5.509>

Parkins, I. S., Fishbein, H. D., & Ritchey, N. P. (2006). The Influence of Personality on Workplace Bullying and Discrimination. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(10), 2554–2577.

Petersen, L. E., & Six, B. (Eds.) (2008a). *Stereotype, Vorurteile und soziale Diskriminierung: Theorien, Befunde und Interventionen* (1st ed.). Weinheim, Basel: Beltz Verlag

Tajfel, H. [Henri] (1974). Social identity and intergroup behaviour. *Social Science Information*, 13(2), 65–93.

Turner, J. C., Brown, R. J., & Tajfel, H. [H.] (1979). Social comparison and group interest in ingroup favoritism. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 9(2), 187–204. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420090207>