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PERSONALITY CHARACTERISTICS OF JOB APPLICANTS AND SUCCESS IN SCREENING INTERVIEWS

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Although there is substantial evidence that personality constructs are valid predictors of job performance, there is less systematic evidence of how personality characteristics relate to success in the interviewing process. Measures of the Big Five personality markers were obtained from a sample of graduating college seniors (n = 83) who were engaged in a job search. At a later time these students reported the strategies used in the job search and success in generating follow-up interviews and job offers. Extraversion, Openness to Experience, and Conscientiousness were positively related to the use of social sources (e.g., talking to others) to prepare for interviews. Conscientiousness was positively related to the use of non-social preparation. Use of social sources for preparation for initial interviews was positively related to the likelihood of receiving follow-up interviews and job offers. The results suggest that personality is related to interviewee's success in part through actions taken well before the interviewing process begins and in part through the interviewers' inferences of the applicants' personality during the interview.

An emerging consensus among personality researchers in the last decade suggests that the range of lexical personality traits can be summarized within five orthogonal dimensions (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1990; John, 1990). Although these "Big Five" personality dimensions have gone under a number of names, one widely used set of labels identifies them as Neuroticism (emotional stability vs. instability), Extraversion (sociable vs. introverted), Openness to Experience (intellectual curiosity vs. preference for routine), Agreeableness (cooperative vs. competitive), and Conscientiousness (organized and planful vs. unorganized and careless). Even though this 5-factor approach has not received universal acceptance (cf. Block, 1995), its emergence as a general description

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of the conceptual structure of personality has allowed for the development of broader conclusions regarding the relations between personality variables and work-related outcomes (Hogan, Hogan, & Roberts, 1996).

Although there is increasing empirical evidence that personality affects individuals' performance once they are hired into an organization (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Tett, Jackson, & Rothstein, 1991), there is less known about how the personality characteristics of a person influence the likelihood that he or she will be hired. Recent research suggests that personality can affect the outcome of job interviews in at least two ways: through direct trait inference of the applicant's personality by the interviewer during the interview, and by the influence personality has on a number of behaviors that occur prior to the interview that can be related to interview success. These processes are not incompatible and in fact both are likely to operate as job applicants are screened and assessed.

Interviewers' Assessments of Personality

Past research has found evidence that interviewers will use information about applicants' personalities to make evaluations when that information is given to them. For example, Dunn, Mount, Barrick, and Ones (1995) constructed a set of hypothetical applications in the form of personality profiles. Applicants were described as very high, high, average, low, or very low in terms of each of the Big Five markers of personality. Experienced hiring managers rated the hypothetical applicants on their hirability and counterproductivity (for example, propensity to steal). Dunn and her colleagues found that Conscientiousness was the most important predictor of hirability and that Neuroticism (Emotional Stability), Conscientiousness, and Agreeableness were the most important attributes related to rating of potential counterproductivity.

This finding suggests that interviewers can use information about personality characteristics of applicants. However, whether or not interviewers draw personality trait inferences about actual applicants remains an open question. There is research in the person perception literature that argues that this trait inference process may be going on in the job interview. Studies find that people often make reasonable assessments of another person's personality after examining that person's behavior for a short period of time (cf. Funder & West, 1993). Moreover, there is evidence that people make trait inferences about others in something of an automatic fashion, even when not specifically instructed to evaluate the other person (Newman & Uleman, 1989). These trait inferences are made without intention and even without awareness of having done so (Uleman, 1987). Thus, it seems especially likely that an interviewer, who is specifically interested in evaluating the applicant, would draw some

conclusions about the applicant's personality during the job interview. Interviewers may then use their assessments of personality when deciding how well the applicant will do in a given position. Other research suggests that recruiters frequently infer general personality-like traits of applicants from biodata (Bretz, Rynes, & Gerhart, 1993; Brown & Campion, 1994).

To what extent might each of the Big Five personality characteristics be inferred during a typical hiring procedure? Extraversion probably is the easiest of the five major dimensions to assess during a job interview. This is because the extent to which an individual is extraverted is strongly predictive of the kinds of behavior that are being displayed during the typical job interview. That is, a job interview is above all else a social interaction. The most salient behaviors exhibited by the applicant in this situation are his or her social interaction skills. Highly extraverted people are likely to talk more, be more expressive and generally provide more information about themselves through verbal and nonverbal sources than highly introverted people. Consistent with this reasoning, investigators consistently find higher levels of agreement between judges when assessing extraversion than when assessing the other Big Five personality dimensions (Funder & Colvin, 1988; Funder & Dobroth, 1987; John & Robins, 1993; Paulhus & Bruce, 1992). Thus, it should be relatively easy for a recruiter to obtain an idea of the applicant's level of extraversion.

On the other hand, it might be rather difficult to determine if an applicant is high in Neuroticism. This is because, except in extreme cases, most applicants probably work hard to avoid coming across as anxious, hostile, or despondent during a job interview. Although these attributes might surface during extended observation, most applicants probably can hide these parts of themselves for the relatively short time they are being evaluated to be hired. Not surprisingly, the evidence of interrater agreement in assessing a target person's level of Neuroticism is somewhat mixed (Funder & Dobroth, 1987).

Similarly, Openness, Conscientiousness and Agreeableness might be difficult to assess accurately with only limited exposure to the job applicant. This is because, in contrast to Extraversion, each of these personality dimensions is unlikely to be displayed during a short, structured interview. For example, unless the interviewer specifically probes for it, it is difficult to imagine how information relevant to a person's openness to experience would surface during the typical job interview. Beyond this, all serious applicants probably are motivated to present themselves as dedicated and dependable workers (high Conscientiousness) and pleasant individuals (high Agreeableness) when interacting with potential employers. Even people low in conscientiousness and highly disagreeable

people probably can control their self-presentations enough to maintain a reasonable image during the an initial job interview.

Personality and Interview Preparation

The applicant's personality also can affect interview outcome by influencing more distal behaviors that then have an impact on the hiring decision. These behaviors range from building an impressive resume over the course of one's undergraduate years to seeking out information about a specific organization just prior to an interview. The present study will focus on one of these relevant behaviors—how people prepare for upcoming interviews. Because personality can influence the way people prepare for interviews and because some efforts at preparation will be more effective than others, differences in personality can translate into difference in interview success.

Past research has identified some of the ways personality variables affect how applicants prepare for interviews. For example, Steffy, Shaw, and Noe (1989) conducted a longitudinal study evaluating the impact of individual difference variables on job search activities and success in obtaining offers. Among their findings was that Type A behavior predicted the number of on-site or follow-up selection interviews the individuals received. The researchers speculate that this relation may result either from the interviewers' sensitivity to direct actions displayed by the high Type A applicants or from differences between high and low Type A individuals in the ways the applicants "managed" the interview process (for example, preparation of interviews, follow-up actions after initial interviews, and so on). Similarly, Schmit, Amel, and Ryan (1993) report that the Big Five markers are related to assertiveness in job hunting. They found that Conscientiousness, Agreeableness, and Openness to Experience were positively related to a questionnaire measure of the extent to which people were persistent in searching for jobs. Neuroticism was negatively related to this same measure. Findings from other studies also support the notion that some aspects of personality influence how people prepare for a job search (e.g., Blustein & Phillips, 1988; Phillips & Bruch, 1988).

One of the important ways applicants, particularly college students, prepare for specific interviews is by collecting background information about the company or job. Conventional wisdom suggests that preparing for job interviews is important for obtaining accurate information about the job as well as differentiating oneself from other candidates and for articulating how one's skills and abilities will "fit" the job requirements. Therefore, the extent to which individuals seek out information about

the job they are interviewing for should be related to their success, particularly if the source they are consulting is accurate (Caldwell & O'Reilly, 1985).

We also would expect that the way people prepare for a job search is likely to vary as a function of several of the Big Five dimensions. Specifically, job seekers who are on the high end of the Conscientiousness and Openness to Experience dimensions probably will engage in an extensive amount of information gathering. High Conscientiousness people typically approach tasks in an organized, planful way (Costa & McCrae, 1988, 1989). When looking for employment, we would expect these people to obtain as much information as possible about the job-seeking process, potential employers, how to interview, and so on. Similarly, it is likely that people high in Openness to Experience would be more likely to seek out information than people who are low on this dimension (McCrae & Costa, 1985). Finally, because people high in Extraversion are oriented toward social behavior, we would expect them to use social sources of information when seeking employment. That is, extraverts are more likely to talk to someone who works at a company than go to the library to look up information about the organization.

The Present Investigation

The purpose of this study was to extend previous research on the relation between the personality characteristics of job applicants and their success in initial screening interviews. Specifically, we measured personality characteristics of graduating college seniors as they entered the job market. We also assessed job search behaviors and other relevant information, and used this information to predict success at finding employment. It is important to examine the role of personality in a real job search situation rather than rely on the scenario approach for several reasons. First, not all personality characteristics are equally observable during the limited amount of time an employer has to interact with an applicant. Some characteristics probably are evident during short encounters like the typical job interview, whereas others probably can be determined only after prolonged observation or observation in a specific kind of situation (John & Robins, 1993; Paunonen, 1989). Second, applicants are motivated to present themselves as the kind of person they believe would make a good employee. Thus, most applicants probably try to come across with the personality characteristics most of us associate with achievement and success and avoid revealing aspects of their personality that might hinder their chances of being hired. Third, even if given enough time and information, it is not clear that employers are necessarily accurate in their assessment of applicants' personalities. In

the Dunn et al. (1995) research, all participants in a condition were provided with the same descriptors summarizing the hypothetical applicant's personality. However, people differ in their ability to accurately assess personality, even when presented with similar information (John & Robins, 1993). Thus, the typical recruiter might not generate the kind of personality descriptions provided to the subjects in the Dunn et al. investigation. In summary, it is important to examine the relation between an applicant's personality and his or her prospects of being hired within a real hiring situation.

Past research suggests that the applicant's general mental ability can affect interviewers' evaluations (Dunn et al., 1995). We used grade point average (GPA) as an index of general mental ability. Although GPA is a function of many things in addition to mental ability, it is a measure that is readily accessible to the interviewer and likely to influence his or her evaluations (Hunter & Hunter, 1984).

In short, personality differences as reflected in the Big Five should affect success at job seeking not only because they affect behavior during an interview, but also because they affect the way people go about gathering information and preparing for their job search. Finding support for our predictions would not only provide additional information about how people assess another's personality but would also provide additional insight into the ways personality affects social behavior. Buss (1987) among others has argued that people respond to the personalities of those with whom they interact. He specifically identifies mechanisms by which people evoke reactions from and manipulate others in social settings. The question of how personality evokes responses from others has generated substantial research in personality and social psychology. Because job interviews are evaluative social interactions, understanding the direct and indirect routes through which personality is related to the outcome of the interview can contribute to a fuller understanding of how personality affects social behavior. In addition, the predicted findings would have potentially important applied implications for job candidates and interviewers.

Method

Participants and Procedure

Announcements were made in a number of undergraduate social science and business courses and at career planning orientation meetings inviting students to take part in a study of personality and early job experiences. Students were told they would be eligible for the study if they were graduating seniors and if they were actively conducting a job

search for a full-time job following graduation. Students were informed that they would fill out two sets of questionnaires, one to be completed at an assigned place and time during the upcoming week (Time 1) and the second to be mailed to them approximately 3 months later (Time 2). Students were informed that they would be paid $15 after completing the first set of questionnaires. A total of 134 graduating seniors completed the initial set of questionnaires and 99 returned the second set (a follow-up return rate of 74%) all of whom had at least one initial on-campus job interview.

The Time 1 set of questionnaires included measures of personality and reports of activities in which the students engaged during college. The Time 2 questionnaire (completed approximately 3 months later) contained measures of job search behavior and reports of success in generating follow-up job interviews and job offers.

Measures

Personality. Personality was measured using the NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1989). The NEO-FFI contains 12-item scales for each of the 5-factor markers of Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. The coefficient alpha reliability estimates of these scales in this sample ranged from .60 to .77 and are generally consistent with those reported elsewhere (Costa & McCrae, 1989).

Preparation for interviews. We interviewed the director of the university career services facility and an experienced undergraduate placement counselor in order to identify the things undergraduate students might do to prepare for job interviews. Based on these interviews, we identified six actions. These six items were reviewed by the director and counselor for comprehensiveness and clarity and then were converted to questionnaire items. Subjects rated the extent to which they generally did each of the activities in preparation for on-campus selection interviews on 7-point scales (1 = *not at all,* 7 = *a great deal*). To identify patterns among the items, we conducted a principal component analysis with varimax rotation. Two factors with eignenvalues greater than one emerged explaining 66% of the variance. The first factor, which we labeled Social Preparation, was defined by three items with loadings greater than .70. These items included: (a) talked to faculty, relatives, or friends to see if they could provide you with background material about the company or the job; (b) tried to contact someone in the company to see if they could provide you with any background; and (c) talked with people in similar jobs (or companies) to learn more about the job for which you were interviewing. The remaining three items all had loadings of greater than

.70 on the second factor, which we labeled Background Preparation. The items loading on this factor included: (a) read material the company provided the Career Service Center; (b) looked for background information about the company or industry in magazines or newspapers; and (c) read company releases (e.g., annual reports, financial statements, etc.). We computed scale scores for Social Preparation and Background Preparation by summing subjects' responses to the appropriate questions (Social Preparation $M = 11.89$, $SD = 4.98$; Background Preparation $M = 13.34$, $SD = 4.12$). The internal consistency of these scales was adequate (Social Preparation alpha = .78; Background Preparation alpha = .68).

Grade point average (GPA). Students' final GPA was obtained from official university records. A form authorizing release of grade information to the researchers was included in the Time 1 questionnaire packet. Students were specifically told that signing this release was an optional part of the study and that they would receive compensation for participating in the study whether or not they authorized release of their records. Because a number of students did not allow us access to their college records, the sample size for analyses using GPA was reduced to 83. The average GPA for the sample was 3.13 ($SD = .40$).

Success in interviewing. We used two measures of success in interviewing. In the Time 2 questionnaire, individuals reported the number of initial interviews they had, the number of second or follow-up interviews they had, and the number of job offers received. Our first measure of success was the number of follow-up interviews the individual received divided by the number of initial screening interviews. The second measure was the number of job offers received divided by the number of initial interviews. The purpose of adjusting the number of follow-up interviews and job offers for the number of initial interviews was twofold. First, because we were interested in success in interviewing, it was important to adjust outcomes by inputs. Second, because our sample included students with degrees from both professional schools (primarily business) and the arts and sciences, it was important to control for differences in market demand. In our sample, students in professional schools had more follow-up interviews than did students in the arts and sciences (professional $M = 3.0$, arts and sciences $M = 1.6$, $t = 2.18$, $p < .05$) and received more job offers (professional $M = 1.7$, arts and sciences $M = 1.0$, $t = 2.20$, $p < .05$). However, these differences seemed to come about primarily because students in the professional schools had more initial interviews than did students in the arts and sciences (professional $M = 6.2$, arts and sciences $M = 3.5$, $t = 4.14$, $p < .01$). When the number of follow-up interviews and job offers were adjusted by the number of initial offers, there were no significant differences between students in different schools (Adjusted Follow-up: professional $M = .48$, arts and

sciences $M = .51$, $t = -.36$, *ns*. Adjusted Offers: professional $M = .35$, arts and sciences $M = .42$, $t = -1.03$, *ns*). There were no significant differences between males and females on any of these variables.

Results

Table 1 shows the correlations between the variables. Several of these are worth noting. First, although the Big Five personality dimensions are theoretically orthogonal, there are a number of significant bivariate correlations between the NEO-FFI scales. These results are consistent with other reported studies using comprehensive measures of the 5-factor markers (cf. Block, 1995). Second, there is a significant positive correlation between Social Preparation and Background Preparation suggesting that, at least to some extent, individuals who report high levels of preparation on one dimension also report high levels of preparation on the other. Not surprisingly, there is a significant positive relation between the two measures of success in interviewing, the number of Adjusted Follow-up Interviews and the Adjusted Number of Offers. There are a number of significant relations between grade point average and the other variables. Two personality variables, Conscientiousness ($r = .41$, $p < .01$) and Openness to Experience ($r = .24$, $p < .05$) were positively related to GPA. In addition, there was a positive relation between grade point average and the likelihood of being invited back for a second interview ($r = .22$, $p < .05$).

Personality and Interview Preparation

Several significant correlations between personality and interview preparation are shown in Table 1. Conscientiousness was positively associated with level of Social Preparation ($r = .22$, $p < .05$) and level of Background Preparation ($r = .27$, $p < .01$). In addition, individuals high on Extraversion were more likely to use Social Preparation than less extraverted people ($r = .38$, $p < .01$). Finally, people high on Openness to Experience were relatively high on Social Preparation ($r = .21$, $p < .05$).

In addition to examining specific Big Five dimensions, we wanted to demonstrate that personality in general affects preparation for a job search. To examine the overall pattern of relations between personality and preparation for interviews, we computed a canonical correlation between the set of personality variables and the two measures of preparation. Canonical analysis derives a vector of weights that maximizes the correlation between the variable sets. Similar to factor analysis, canonical roots or functions are extracted so that succeeding roots

TABLE 1

Correlation Matrix

Personality variables	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Neuroticism	25.62	7.10	–								
2. Extraversion	38.03	6.00	−.10	–							
3. Openness	29.98	5.76	−.12	.24*	–						
4. Agreeableness	30.37	4.96	−.02	.45**	.21*	–					
5. Conscientiousness	39.99	5.98	−.20	.33**	.19+	.25**	–				
Mental ability											
6. GPA	3.13	.40	−.08	.02	.24*	.02	.41**	–			
Interview preparation											
7. Social preparation	11.89	4.98	−.09	.38**	.21*	.14	.22*	.16	–		
8. Background preparation	13.34	4.12	−.14	−.04	−.07	−.09	.27**	.12	.42**	–	
Interview outcomes											
9. Follow-up interviews (adj)	.49	.45	−.05	.27**	.14	.05	.38**	.22*	.35**	.20*	–
10. Offers (adj)	.38	.35	−.21*	.34**	.23*	.27**	.05	.14	.24*	−.14	.41**

** $p < .01$ * $p < .05$ + $p < .10$

are independent of those they follow. Results of this analysis are presented in Table 2. These results show two significant canonical roots (Wilks Lamba = .73, $F = 3.06$, $p < .01$) that explain approximately 13% of the variance in the preparation variables. Table 2 presents two measures of the contribution of each variable to the canonical relationships. The first measure is the canonical loading, or the correlation between individual variables and the respective canonical variates. The second measure is the squared variable-variate correlation, expressed as a percentage of the sum of the squared correlations. This measure can aid in determining the relative magnitude of the relationship of the variables to the variates.

The results shown in Table 2 both confirm and extend the bi-variate relations. The first root is defined by Social Preparation and the personality variables of Extraversion and to a lesser extent, Openness to Experience. Consistent with the bi-variate analyses, individuals who are extraverted and open to experience were very likely to prepare for interviews by drawing on and developing social contacts. Both Background Preparation and Social Preparation define the second root, although the contribution of Background Preparation is substantially higher. The personality variable of Conscientiousness loads positively and strongly on this root while Neuroticism loads negatively. Consistent with the bivariate relationships and our general contention, individuals who are conscientious and well adjusted report high levels of preparation for specific job interviews, particularly preparation that involves individual research and reading.

Personality and Success in Interviewing

Table 1 also shows the zero-order correlations between the Adjusted Follow-up Interviews, Adjusted Offers, and the Big Five personality markers. As shown, both Extraversion ($r = .27$, $p < .01$) and Conscientiousness ($r = .38$, $p < .01$) were positively related to Adjusted Follow-up Interviews. That is, people high on these two personality factors received more invitations for second interviews than did people with lower scores. The pattern of relations between personality and Adjusted Offers was somewhat different. Individuals who received more offers were less neurotic ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$), more extraverted ($r = .34$, $p < .01$), more open ($r = .23$, $p < .05$), and more agreeable ($r = .27$, $p < .05$) than those receiving fewer offers.

To assess the relative impact of the personality and preparation variables on success in interviewing, we regressed these variables against both the number of adjusted follow-up interviews and the number of adjusted offers. We entered the independent variables into the regression

TABLE 2

Canonical Loadings

	Root 1		Root 2	
	Variable-variate correlation	Percentage of summed correlations squared	Variable-variate correlation	Percentage of summed correlations squared
Personality variables				
Neuroticism	−.12	1%	−.56	28%
Extraversion	.88	62%	.22	5%
Openness	.54	22%	−.10	1%
Agreeableness	.37	11%	−.03	0%
Conscientiousness	.20	3%	.86	66%
Interview preparation				
Social preparation	.74	91%	.67	33%
Background preparation	−.24	10%	.97	67%

equations in stages, beginning with GPA, then entering the preparation variables, and finally entering the personality variables. As shown in Table 3, the equations explained significant amounts of variance in follow-up interviews (adjusted $r^2 = .16$, $p < .01$) and in number of job offers (adjusted $r^2 = .18$, $p < .01$). Adding the personality variables to the equations explained significantly more variance only in the number of job offers. However, when the personality variables are added to both equations, the impact of the preparation variables on success in interviewing is reduced. A similar effect is observed for the impact of GPA on the number of follow-up interviews. Adding the preparation and personality variables reduced the impact of GPA in the final equation.

Discussion

The primary focus of this study was to extend previous work linking personality to success in job interviewing. That earlier work demonstrated that interviewers given descriptions of hypothetical applicants' Big Five personality characteristics used that information in predictable ways when making hiring decisions (Dunn et al., 1995). Our research finds a similar link between the applicant's personality and the likelihood that he or she will receive a follow-up interview and be hired in a real job search situation. We suggest that personality affects hiring decisions through two general routes. First, interviewers draw inferences about the applicant's personality based on the applicant's behavior during the interview. Past research finds that observers are better able to assess Extraversion during such contact than the other Big Five dimensions. Consistent with this observation, we found that the applicant's

TABLE 3

Regression Results[a]

	Follow up interviews			Number of offers		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Step 1						
GPA	.22*	.17	.06	.14	.12	.17
Step 2						
Social preparation		.30**	.23+		.33**	.19
Background preparation		.07	.03		−.27*	−.18
Step 3						
Neuroticism			.05			−.20*
Extraversion			.14			.21+
Openness			.02			.06
Agreeableness			−.12			.15
Conscientiousness			.28*			−.18
Adjusted R^2	.04	.13**	.16**	.01	.10**	.18**
R^2 change		.09**	.03		.09**	.08*

[a] Entries are standardized regression coefficients.
$^{**}p < .01$ $^{*}p < .05$ $^{+}p < .10$

level of Extraversion was the best single predictor of whether or not the individual received a job offer. Second, we argue that personality also affects the outcome of job interviews through indirect routes. In this study we examined one of those indirect routes, the way people prepared for their upcoming interviews. We uncovered evidence that personality was related to how applicants prepared for the interviews and that this preparation was related to interview success.

Although the findings are in line with our descriptions, we must sound one note of caution when interpreting the results. Even though past research suggests it is reasonable to assume that interviewers were engaging in direct trait inference, we have no direct evidence of this inference in the present study. We cannot rule out the possibility that personality affected interview success through other indirect routes that we did not examine here and that these, not the interviewers' direct assessment of personality, were responsible for the obtained effects. For example, extraverts may have engaged in more group or team activities during college and this information might be available to and used by the interviewer when making hiring decisions. Thus, the next step in this research would be to obtain direct assessment of the interviewers' inferences about the applicants' personalities.

The relative importance of the Big Five personality dimensions in predicting success reported in this study has some overlap with that reported by Dunn et al. (1995). Given the difference in methods and de-

pendent variables, the lack of complete consistency is not surprising. In the Dunn et al. study, information about each personality dimension was equally accessible to subjects. This most likely was not the case in our study. Looking solely at the bi-variate relations, we found Extraversion to be relatively more important than did Dunn et al. Because Extraversion is the most accessible of the Big Five dimensions to the observer, it is not surprising that interviewers' assessments of this characteristic were highly predictive of success. Our findings were somewhat consistent with the Dunn et al. results in that Conscientiousness predicted the number of follow up interviews. However, in our study this connection was not as strong and Conscientiousness was not correlated with number of offers. We speculate that the difference between Conscientiousness and our two outcome variables might be due to some unmeasured indirect variable or because of a restricted range in Conscientiousness among those receiving offers. We also found that the number of offers was positively correlated with Openness to Experience and Agreeableness and negatively related to Neuroticism. It is worth noting that the bivariate relations between the personality variables and outcomes differed depending on whether we were looking at success in obtaining follow-up interviews or job offers. With the exception of Conscientiousness, the relations between the personality variables and offers were stronger than they were between personality and interviews. The increase in the magnitude of the relations may be due to the applicant having more opportunities to expose his or her personality to the interviewers. It may also come about because of the differences in criteria for deciding whether or not to invite someone back for a second interview or to offer that person a job or from different processes than simply interviewing used to make a final hiring decision.

The regression results are somewhat different. When the preparation and personality variables were included in the equations, Conscientiousness was the only Big Five marker independently explaining significance variance in number of interviews and Extraversion and Neuroticism (negative) were the only markers related to number of offers. The differences between the bi-variate and regression results illustrate the complexity the relations between personality and actual selection decisions. For example, in our study Conscientiousness was positively related to GPA. This suggests that Conscientiousness might affect success in getting job offers because highly conscientious people have achieved more and have stronger resumes generally than those low on this dimension. This observation again illustrates that personality can influence an interviewer's evaluation of the candidate both directly and indirectly through other things the applicant might have done. In this study, we focused on how applicants prepared for their interviews, clearly there are other

things that could be influenced by personality and in turn affect interviewers' perceptions of applicants.

There are a number of additional points that must be considered when drawing conclusions from these data. The first of these relates to the size and nature of the sample. Because the respondents were all seniors from the same university, any unique factors in the student body or the companies recruiting students may limit the generalizability of the findings. Perhaps more important, the size of the sample is not large. If one assumes small effect sizes, the power values for the overall regression analyses were low (approximately .50). Even assuming moderate overall effect sizes, the power to test the contributions of individual variables in the regression equations is marginal. This reduced our ability to test more complex models, so further research may be required to identify the complete relations between applicants' personalities and interviewers' responses.

Second, with the exception of GPA, individuals provided all the data used in our analyses. This could raise questions about whether the results are influenced by some form of socially desirable responding or by a priming or consistency effect, particularly as these might affect the relation between preparation and success. Although there is no way of conclusively ruling out these alternative explanations, there are a number of reasons we think they are unlikely. The 3-month gap between the collection of the personality assessments and the other variables suggests that priming or consistency effects should not be problematic regarding the relations between these variables. Students responded to questions regarding their preparation before they reported their success, providing some protection against the relations between these variables being due to a simple priming effect. Distortion of interviewing success can not completely be ruled out, however there is evidence that individuals are less likely to distort objective, potentially verifiable events—such as number of follow-up interviews—than other types of self-reports (cf. Podaskoff & Organ, 1986). Of more concern is the possibility that individuals engaged in self-serving attributions that artifically influenced the relations between preparation and reported success. There is no way of eliminating this as an alternative interpretation of our findings. However, there is some indirect evidence against it. If individuals' responses were the result of a self-serving causal model, we would expect that the correlations between background preparation and the outcomes and social preparation and the outcomes should be basically the same. This was not the case. Despite this suggestive evidence, there is no way of eliminating the possibility that some of our results are influenced by problems inherent in the design of the data collection.

Third, we have no information about the nature of the screening interviews various organizations used or the mechanisms organizations used to make hiring decisions. Different interviewers may have focused on different things because of specialized job requirements or individual preferences. Some interviewers may have explicitly attempted to assess applicants' personal characteristics while others may not have done so. We cannot identify those screening interviews where the interviewer was trying to guage the individual's personality versus those where the interviewer inferred traits without specifically intending to do so. At a broader level, different organizations are likely to have used different methods for choosing who to hire. Therefore, we should be cautious about generalizing our conclusions to any specific selection technique.

Beyond the question of the nature of the relation between personality and interviewing success, these results help address the general issue of how personality and social interactions are linked. Categorizations of how personality influences social behavior (cf. Buss, 1987; Caldwell & Burger, in press) have focused on direct links such as how an individual's personality evokes social responses from others. Studies such as this one may ultimately help expand models of this process to include a broader range of mechanisms, including more distal activities, through which personality influences social behaviors and ultimately the reactions of others.

In summary, our findings reinforce the notion that an individual's personality plays a significant role in workplace behaviors. Moreover, our results suggest that the influence of personality does not begin the day a person starts work. Rather, how a person prepares for his or her entrance into the job market and the kind of impression that person makes during the recruiting process also appear to be a function of the applicant's personality.

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