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"THAT IS AN INTERESTING QUESTION!" ODDBALL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERSONALITY PERCEPTIONS

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS

organizational personalities, oddball interview questions, organizational attraction, recruitment, job interviews, brainteasers

Oddball interview questions have gained both popular and academic traction in recent years. Regardless of the intentions behind these questions, job seekers will form judgments about the employer based on its selection tactics. This paper examined the effect of oddball interview questions on organizational personality perceptions and subsequent attraction to the organization. In a time-lagged online experiment, we found organizations that asked oddball interview questions (vs. traditional interview questions) were perceived as more innovative and stylistic, which had a positive indirect effect on organizational attraction. Despite the positive effect of oddball interview questions on these organizational personality perceptions, oddball interview questions did not improve participants' overall attraction to the organization. The effect was not dependent on the job seekers' personalities. Practitioners aimed to improve recruitment success by asking unorthodox interview questions should look elsewhere.

"Judge a man by his questions" — Voltaire, Philosopher

Job applicants occasionally say, "that is an interesting question!" to placate the interviewer, no matter how dull and sometimes inappropriate the interview questions are. But what if the questions asked for a job interview are *actually* interesting? If you were asked, for example, "What would you like inscribed on your headstone?" during a job interview, would you also infer the employer as interesting and innovative because of their interview questions?

Unorthodox interview questions like the one above had their starts in tech companies. After decades of experimentation, past senior-VP of People Analytics at Google, Laszlo Bock, abandoned the use of brainteaser questions because they were "a waste of time. They [Brainteasers] did not predict anything" (Bryant, 2013). More recently, these questions have gained some popular traction among managers and human resource professionals for a different reason: to uncover the candidates' quirky personalities and to assess applicant fit. Likewise, organizational scholars have also begun integrating unorthodox questions into the study of employment interviews (e.g., Speer et al., 2020). Despite little evidence for their validity as an assessment method, there is an alarming number of popular press arti-

cles on how to administer and answer these oddball interview questions (Vasel, 2019).

Regardless of the interviewer's intentions, job seekers form judgments about these questions and the organization that asks them (Chapman et al., 2005). As in the opening quote, people make interpersonal inferences based on what questions are asked of them (Huang et al., 2017). Likewise, applicants also make organizational inferences based on their selection practices (Carless & Imber, 2007). Considering that organizations are often anthropomorphized to have personalities (Slaughter et al., 2004), job seekers may infer trait-like qualities about organizations based on what job interview questions are administered. Understanding how unorthodox interview questions affect these inferences is critical for recruitment success and organizational image because early impressions about a company based on their selection practices may affect whether a job seeker will be more motivated to apply for a position, recommend the

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company to a friend, and performance on the job—if hired (Uggerslev et al., 2012). In a competitive labor market, organizations that stand out from the crowd will be better positioned to attract top talent.

In this paper, we investigate the impact of oddball interview questions on organizational inferences and recruitment outcomes. Drawing from Slaughter et al. (2004)'s taxonomy of organizational personality, we posit that compared to traditional interview questions, organizations that present oddball interview questions will be perceived as more innovative and stylistic. We further expect organizational personality perceptions will mediate the indirect effects of oddball personality questions on organizational attraction such that applicants may be more attracted to an employer that asks oddball interview questions because they are perceived as more innovative and stylistic. Finally, drawing from the complementary hypotheses (Kausel & Slaughter, 2011), we expect job seekers with complementary personalities will be more attracted to organizations because of their unorthodox interviewing practices.

Background and Hypotheses

Unorthodox interview questions have traditionally been outside the purview of industrial psychologists because they rarely adhere to best practices of job interview design, where questions should be structured, behaviorally oriented, , most importantly, relevant for the job (Campion et al., 1997). In practice, these questions have long been part of the employment interview process. For example, technology companies such as Yahoo and Google championed the use of “brainteaser” questions (e.g., “how many yellow cabs are in New York”) in the 1990s.

Besides brainteaser questions, another—more sinister—version of unorthodox questions exists in select occupations. Professional athletes, for example, have reported experiences of invasive, offensive, and inappropriate questions during scouting interviews that are not suitable to be printed in these journal pages (see Henson, 2019, for examples). In fact, some coaches explicitly exclaimed that they ask these questions to throw off the athletes and see how they perform under pressure while skirting the line of legal defensibility. Ultimately, the coaches' motivations to agitate the athletes through invasive interview techniques may stem from their sadistic personalities rather than a genuine interest in assessment (Highhouse et al., 2019). More recently, human resource professionals have started asking another—more light-hearted—variant of the unorthodox questions that do not require analytical problem solving and seem to better reflect the respondents' personalities or personal preferences.

Research on applicant reactions to unorthodox questions has been mixed. Several investigations have found that these questions tend to engender negative perceptions of fairness and procedural justice. Honer et al. (2007)

found, compared to behavioral interview questions, participants perceived puzzle interview questions to have lower procedural justice, face validity, and transparency (also see Wright et al., 2012). Similarly, Zhang (2021) found that job seekers felt oddball questions were less useful and fair than traditional interview questions for the purpose of hiring. These results suggest applicants do not see puzzle questions as appropriate for job interviews. However, Zhang (2021) also argued that unorthodox interview questions that do not require analytical problem solving (i.e., brainteasers) may be more likable by the applicants due to their humorous and light-hearted nature (e.g., “if you could be any Disney princess, what would it be?”). In the paper, the author found applicants perceived these questions as more likable, despite still being less useful than traditional interview questions. Thus, even non-invasive, and light-hearted unorthodox questions may have—at best—a double-edged effect during the recruitment process.

Although past research has focused on applicant reactions to the questions as a selection procedure, it is unclear what kind of organizational inferences are made based on these questions. There are reasons to suspect that job seekers infer qualities about the employer based on what type of selection procedures are administered and, more specifically, what interview questions may be asked by the employer (Dipboye et al., 2012; Wilhelmy et al., 2016). From a signaling perspective, the employee selection process is a two-way street. Besides allowing the applicant to signal their qualification to the employer, the employer often uses the selection process to signal—directly or indirectly—qualities of their organization (Bangerter et al., 2012). Likewise, job seekers may gather information about employers to infer relevant characteristics of an organization that would aid in the decision to pursue the job. In practice, job seekers may form judgments about potential employers based on their existing reputation long before applying.

Technology and social media have also made access to prospective employer information increasingly accessible for job seekers before they decide to apply for a job. When deciding whether to pursue a position, job seekers may review social media platforms such as Yelp or Glassdoor. Glassdoor.com, for example, provides job seekers with hiring-related information such as the selection process and potential job interview questions. In fact, it contains a dedicated section for each employer on past interview questions that have been asked. In another example, the subreddit *r/recruitinghell* frequently admonishes companies that employ inappropriate hiring practices. Job seekers can gain this information directly, or indirectly (e.g., word of mouth) to infer characteristics of the potential employer, which may affect their decision to pursue employment with the organization.

Organizational Personality Perceptions

One way in which organizational inferences are conceptualized is through the lens of organizational personality. The idea that organizations, like people, take on “personalities” is rooted in marketing research. Aaker (1997) proposed that consumers ascribe human personality traits to products, which affect their buying behaviors. Relatedly, brands and their associated companies can take on instrumental and symbolic meanings. Whereas instrumental meanings pertain to its utilitarian value, symbolic meanings pertain to its expressive value (Park et al., 1986). This distinction has since been applied to organizational contexts and is related to recruitment-related outcomes such as job seekers’ intentions to pursue, apply, and accept employment with the organization (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003; Zhu et al., 2021).

Expanding on the symbolic features of organizations, Slaughter et al. (2004) developed a conceptual framework of organizational personalities, which is defined as “the set of human personality characteristics perceived to be associated with an organization” (p.86). Unlike traditional conceptualizations of personalities, however, organizational personalities are theorized to be in the mind of individuals outside the organization. In other words, organizational personality does not drive behaviors of the organization, but rather, they are formed based on *external perceptions*. Accordingly, organizational personalities may be formed based on anyone who has been exposed to organizationally relevant information. Relatedly, organizational personality perceptions may vary across individuals based and are subject to change based on individual experiences.

Taking a taxonomic approach, Slaughter et al. (2004) developed a model of organizational personalities based on five dimensions: (a) *trustworthiness*¹, characterized by honesty and integrity; (b) *innovativeness*, characterized by originality and creativity; (c) *dominance*, characterized by popular and successful; (d) *thrift*, characterized by poor and lower-class; and (e) *style*, characterized by trendy and modern. Across the five dimensions of organizational personality, the authors also found dimensions of trustworthiness, innovativeness, and style to be positively associated with recruitment outcomes (e.g., job pursuit, organizational attraction, reputation judgments), whereas the thrift dimension negatively predicted these outcomes.

As noted previously, organizational personality perceptions exist in the eye of the beholder (i.e., job seekers) and are based on the available organizational cues, such as their recruitment and selection processes. For this reason, job seekers are expected to infer personality traits of organizations based on the questions that it includes in their interviewing process. Unorthodox questions, unlike traditional

interview questions, are likely to elicit different personality perceptions on two dimensions: (a) *innovativeness* and (b) *style*. First, innovativeness is typically prescribed to organizations that are creative and unique. Organizations are perceived to be innovative when they produce creative products or adopt unique work practices. As such, we expect that organizations that adopt oddball interview questions will be perceived as more innovative than organizations that ask traditional interview questions. Relatedly, style is associated with organizations that are modern and trendy. Specifically, organizations that keep up with the most contemporary work trends are perceived to have a higher perceived style. Considering that unorthodox questions are relatively novel to human resource practices, we expect that organizations that adopt them will be perceived as having more style than those asking traditional questions.

Hypothesis 1: Organizations that ask oddball interview questions (vs. traditional interview questions) will be perceived as more innovative.

Hypothesis 2: Organizations that ask oddball interview questions (vs. traditional interview questions) will be perceived as more stylistic.

We further expect that the impact of oddball interview questions on the *innovativeness* and *style* dimensions of organizational personality will indirectly impact the job seekers’ subsequent attraction to the organization. Similar to traditional models of personality, where there are a “socially effective” standing on each given trait (e.g., low neuroticism, high conscientiousness, etc.), organizational personalities have been shown to exhibit some similar tendencies. Organizations that exhibit high innovativeness and style, for example, are perceived as more attractive as employers in general (Slaughter et al., 2004). Thus, we anticipate that selection practices (e.g., oddball interview questions) that signal these qualities to job seekers will enhance the attractiveness of the organization as a prospective employer.

Hypothesis 3: The presence of oddball interview questions (vs. traditional interview questions) will have a positive indirect effect on organizational attraction via an increase in innovativeness.

Hypothesis 4: The presence of oddball interview questions (vs. traditional interview questions) will have a positive indirect effect on organizational attraction via an increase in style.

The Moderating Role of Job Seeker Personalities

Although Slaughter et al., (2004) found that some organizational personality traits facilitated recruitment, subsequent research has further examined the effect of or-

¹ Slaughter et al. (2004) originally used the term Boy Scout, which was later changed to trustworthiness.

ganizational personality from a person–organizational fit perspective. This research posits that job seekers are more attracted to organizations that they perceive to exhibit personalities that are similar to their own. Indeed, the complementary hypothesis of job seeker personality and organizational personality is also supported in studies of narrow personality traits (Kausel & Slaughter, 2011). Accordingly, we anticipate that job seekers’ personalities, specifically conscientiousness and openness to experience, may also affect how oddball personality questions affect organizational personality perceptions and subsequent recruitment outcomes. In other words, the presence of oddball interview questions may differentially impact the attractiveness of the employer based on the job seekers’ personalities.

Conscientiousness is characterized by a disposition toward orderliness, tradition, and a preference for rules and structures (Wilmot & Ones, 2019). Past research has found that conscientious people are also more rigid and tend to prefer work environments with high predictability, which are antithetical to organizations with an innovative and stylistic personality (Judge & Cable, 1997). Likewise, Slaughter and Greguras (2009) found that more conscientious people are less attracted to organizations that are stylistic and innovative (also see Kausel & Slaughter, 2011). Because of the relative novelty of OPQs, we argue its presence in the job interview undermines the conscientious job seeker’s attraction to the employer via their organizational personality perceptions. Thus, we anticipate that highly conscientious job seekers will be less attracted to organizations that employ unorthodox interviewing practices (i.e., oddball interview questions) because these organizations will be perceived as having personalities (style and innovation) that are incompatible with the job seekers’ preferences.

Hypothesis 5: Conscientiousness will moderate the indirect effect of oddball interview question presence on organizational attraction via organizational personality perceptions (style and innovation) such that the indirect effect will be weaker for job seekers with high conscientiousness.

Openness to experience is characterized by a disposition toward new and innovative ideas. People who are more open to new experiences tend to be more receptive to change and uncertainty. Past research has suggested that job applicants who are more open to experiences may have more favorable attitudes toward novel selection practices, such as computer-based or gamified selection tactics (e.g., Georgiou & Nikolaou, 2020). Slaughter and Gregurus (2009) also found that people who are more open to experiences tend to be more attracted to organizations that are perceived as stylistic and innovative. Because of their preference for more novel work environments, we anticipate that the indirect effect of oddball interview questions on

organizational attraction via the style and innovative traits will be stronger for job seekers who are higher on openness to experience.

Hypothesis 6: Openness to experience will moderate the indirect effect of oddball interview question presence on organizational attraction via organizational personality perceptions such that the positive indirect effect will be stronger for job seekers with high openness to experience.

METHODS

Procedure

We conducted a time-lagged, between-subject experiment. At Time 1, we administered the Big Five personality inventory as well as demographic questions to all the participants. At Time 2 (2 weeks later), participants took part in an online experiment. At the start of the experiment, participants were randomly assigned to one of four experimental conditions for *question type*, corresponding to one of four lists of job interview questions for a hypothetical job. Three of the four conditions included a list of oddball questions developed by Zhang (2021): (a) open ended (e.g., “create an outfit that describes yourself”); (b) preference (e.g., “which one of the seven dwarves would you be?”); and (c) biographical (e.g., “what was the last costume you wore?”). We also used the same list of *traditional questions* (e.g., “tell me something about yourself”) from Zhang (2021). Despite the qualitative differences between these questions, Zhang (2021) did not find any evidence that participants perceived them differently. Thus, we did not anticipate any differences in our dependent variables across variants of oddball questions. The sample sizes for each of the four conditions were 41, 42, 44, and 45 respectively.

Next, participants were instructed: “Imagine that you just finished a job interview for the position of a receptionist based on the interview questions presented below, we would like you to give us your opinion about this company.” For the purpose of stimulus sampling and generalizability, we also included a control variable of job title that varied in job complexity for the purpose of stimulus sampling and improving the generalizability of our results (Highhouse, 2009). Specifically, the job titles described in the instructions were randomly drawn from one of four possibilities (receptionist, marketing executive, software developer, and janitor) for each participant. We did not have any a priori hypotheses on the role of job title because there is little evidence suggesting that applicant reactions to selection procedures are dependent on job type (McCarthy et al., 2017). Thus, the research design can be described as a 4 (question type) x 4 (job title) between-subject design where the job title is treated as an experimental control variable. Following this instruction, participants completed

the organizational personality and organizational attraction measures.

Sample

Data were collected using Amazon Mechanical Turk. Only participants with a 95% or greater approval rating were allowed to participate. Because this study focused on perceptions about organizations, a general population of adult respondents is appropriate to test our hypotheses. Two hundred and sixty-two participants completed the study at Time 1, and 184 participants completed the study at Time 2. We removed participants who failed an attention check question (“If you are paying attention, please select extremely accurately”) either at Time 1 or Time 2. The final sample contained 172 participants (mean age = 37, 52% male, 82% Caucasian, 72% employed full time or 16% part time).

Measures

Big Five Personality. We used the 20-item Mini IPIP developed by [Donnellan et al., 2006](#) to measure participant personality. Participants read short statements (e.g., “have a vivid imagination”) and indicated how accurately (1 = *not accurate at all* to 5 = *extremely accurate*) each statement described them. Internal consistencies of the two hypothesized variables (openness to experience and conscientiousness) were 0.77 and 0.79 respectively.

Organizational Personality Perceptions. We used the 33-item measure of Organizational Personality Perceptions developed by [Slaughter et al., \(2004\)](#). Participants were instructed to “imagine that you just finished a job interview for the position of a [receptionist]. During the job interview, some of the following questions were asked. Based on the interview questions that the company asked during the job interview, we would like you to give us your opinion about this company.” Next, participants indicated their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) for how accurately each adjective described the hypothetical organization. Internal consistencies of the scales range from 0.83 to 0.95 (see [Table 1](#)).

Attraction to Organizations. We used the 15-item measure of organizational attraction developed by [Highhouse et al. \(2003\)](#). Participants were instructed to “think about a company that asks the interview questions above to hire a [receptionist] and answer the following statements”. Participants next indicated their level of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*) with each statement (e.g., “For me, this company would be a good place to work”). The internal consistency of the scale was 0.97.

RESULTS

[Table 1](#) contains the means, standard deviations, internal consistencies, and intercorrelation of the study’s prima-

ry variables. The three subscales of the attraction to organization scale (intention to apply, prestige, general attraction) were highly correlated ($r = .78 \sim .88$), which suggests considerable empirical redundancy between the three scales. Because our hypotheses do not meaningfully distinguish between different dimensions of organizational attraction, we chose to combine the three subscales in our subsequent analyses, for parsimony and ease of presentation.

We first conducted a between-subjects ANOVA to examine the differences in organizational personality judgments between the different types of interview questions ([Figure 1](#)). We also included job title as a factor to explore the potential interactive effects of oddball questions. First, we found a significant effect of question type on the perceived style of the organization, $F(3, 156) = 6.26, p < .001, \eta^2 = .102$; but not job title, $F(3, 156) = 878, p = .454, \eta^2 = .014$. There was no interaction between question type and job title, $F(9, 156) = 0.842, p = .578, \eta^2 = .041$. Post-hoc comparisons revealed a significant difference between perceived style in the traditional interview question condition compared to the three oddball question conditions ([Table 2](#)). We did not, however, find any difference in the perceived style among the three oddball question conditions. We also found a significant effect of question type on the perceived innovativeness of the organization, $F(3, 156) = 15.353, p < .001, \eta^2 = .216$, but not job title, $F(3, 156) = .249, p = .796, \eta^2 = .005$. There also was no interaction between question type and job title, $F(9, 156) = .111, p = .356, \eta^2 = .047$. Similar to our previous findings, there was a significant difference between perceived innovativeness between the traditional interview condition and the three oddball question conditions ([Table 2](#)). Although not hypothesized, we also found a significant, but modest, effect of question type on the perceived dominance of the organization, $F(3, 168) = 2.98, p = .033, \eta^2 = .051$. We did not find any significant main effects of oddball questions on the trustworthy and thrift dimensions.

Because we did not observe any differences in organizational personality perceptions across oddball question types, we combined the three conditions into a single “oddball question” condition. Using a dichotomized dummy variable (traditional vs. oddball question), we found that people judged the organization that uses oddball questions as more stylistic ($M = 3.09, SD = 1.05, t(170) = 4.51, p < .001, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.80$) and innovative ($M = 3.34, SD = 0.89, t(170) = 7.03, p < .001, \text{Cohen's } d = 1.25$). Thus, these results further support Hypotheses 1 and 2. Together, people judged organizations that asked one of the three types of oddball interview questions as more stylistic and innovative than those that asked traditional interview questions, thus supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2.

The dichotomized variable was also used for our test of mediation for simplicity of presentation. We next used the PROCESS macro in SPSS to test our mediation hypotheses

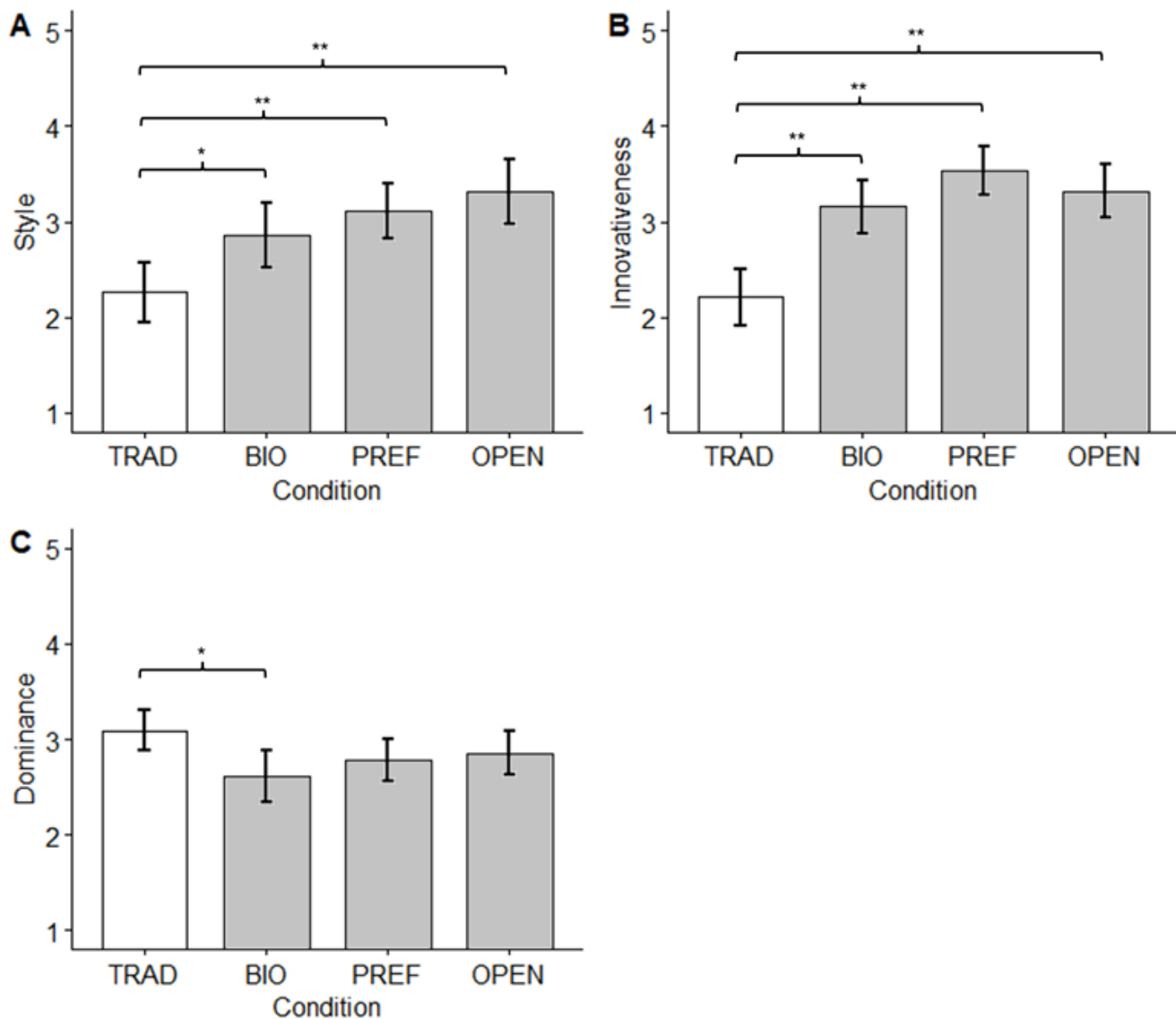
TABLE 1.
Mean, SD, Internal Consistencies, and Correlation of Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Oddball questions	0.76	0.43	(-)													
2. Biographical	0.26	0.44	-	(-)												
3. Open-ended	0.24	0.43	-	-	(-)											
4. Preference-based	0.26	0.44	-	-	-	(-)										
5. Age	37.42	11.35	.10	.06	.04	.01	(-)									
6. Sex	0.48	0.50	-.02	.07	-.10	.01	-.05	(-)								
7. Consc.	3.65	0.88	-.03	.08	-.05	-.06	.27**	.07	(.77)							
8. Openness	3.67	0.91	-.09	.01	-.05	-.04	.02	.10	.06	(.79)						
9. Trustworthy	2.96	0.91	-.04	-.14	-.02	.11	-.09	.00	.07	-.06	(.93)					
10. Innovative	3.06	1.02	.47**	.05	.14	.27**	.02	.03	.13	-.07	.53**	(.95)				
11. Dominant	2.83	0.77	-.19*	-.17*	.02	-.04	.03	-.02	.02	-.02	.58**	.33**	(.83)			
12. Thrift	2.09	0.88	.06	.12	.05	-.12	-.04	-.12	-.22**	-.09	-.47**	-.36**	-.48**	(.93)		
13. Style	2.89	1.09	.33**	-.01	.22**	.12	.04	-.03	.05	-.10	.54**	.72**	.50**	-.35**	(.93)	
14. Org attraction	2.78	1.17	-.07	-.06	-.03	.02	-.17*	.00	.01	.00	.60**	.47**	.44**	-.44**	.52**	(.97)

Note. * = $p < .05$; ** = $p < .01$; Consc = conscientiousness; Openness = openness to experience. The first variable is a dummy-coded variable denoting the combined conditions for oddball questions. Variables 2 through 4 are dummy-coded experimental conditions with traditional interview question used as the reference condition.

FIGURE 1.

Plot of Mean Organizational Personality Inferences Across Conditions



(Table 3). We used model 4 of the macro to examine the mediating effects of both the style and innovative dimensions of organizational personality. First, we found a positive effect of oddball interview question presence on both the style and innovativeness dimensions of organizational personality. We also found that both the style and innovative dimensions of organizational personality positively predicted attraction to the organization. Critically, we found that oddball interview questions had a significant positive indirect effect via both the style ($b = .338$, 95% CI: [.138, .582]) and innovative dimensions ($b = .474$, 95% CI: [.228, .772]) on overall attraction, thus supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4. Interestingly, we also found after controlling for

positive effects of perceived style and innovation, the direct effect of oddball question presence on organizational attraction was negative ($b = -1.01$, 95% CI: [-1.37, -0.64]).

We used model 16 of the PROCESS macro to examine the moderation hypotheses (Preacher & Hayes, 2004). Index of moderated mediation was used as evidence for moderation. We found that conscientiousness did not moderate the indirect effect of oddball interview question on organizational attraction via either the style (index of moderated mediation = .069, 95% CI: [-.190, .313]) nor innovative (index of moderated mediation = -.151, 95% CI: [-.491, .194]) dimensions of organizational personality. We also did not find openness to experience to moderate the indirect effect

TABLE 2.

Pairwise Contrasts Between Traditional Question Condition and Oddball Question Conditions

	Style	Innovativeness	Dominance	Trustworthy	Thrift	Attraction
Biographical	0.58	1.02	0.62	0.30	0.29	0.23
Preference	0.88	1.47	0.44	0.13	0.11	0.07
Open-ended	1.02	1.21	0.35	0.10	0.20	0.16

Note. Presented effect sizes reflect the difference (Cohen's d) between each oddball condition compared to the traditional question condition.

of oddball interview questions on organizational attraction via either the style (index of moderated mediation = $-.075$, 95% CI: $[-.296, .173]$) nor innovative (index of moderated mediation = $.099$, 95% CI: $[-.213, .380]$) dimensions of organizational personality. Thus, neither Hypotheses 5 nor 6 are supported.

It is important to note, however, that despite the positive indirect effects of oddball interview questions on organizational attraction through organizational personality perceptions, we found a negative direct effect ($b = -1.00$, 95% CI: $[-.137, -.637]$). Further, independent samples t -test revealed that people were no more attracted to organizations that asked oddball interview questions ($M = 2.74$, $SD = 1.20$) than those that asked only traditional interview questions ($M = 2.93$, $SD = 1.07$), $t(77.4) = -.971$, $p = .335$. Although we examined a sample of job titles that varied in complexity in our experiment, we did not find any evidence that the effect of oddball questions on organizational personality perceptions differed based on the job. Thus, the effect of oddball questions on organizational personality perceptions generalized across different jobs. In sum, despite the positive effect of oddball interview questions on the two dimensions of organizational personality perceptions, they are—as a whole—not beneficial to recruitment success.

DISCUSSION

The growing popularity of unorthodox interview questions has raised its stature as a topic of serious academic inquiry (e.g., Highhouse et al., 2019; Zhang, 2021). These questions are also now studied as part of the job interview nomenclature (e.g., Speer et al., 2020). Our paper extends existing research on applicant reactions to oddball interview questions by examining what type of organizational inferences are made based on these questions. Consistent with our hypotheses, the inclusion of oddball interview questions had a causal effect on perceptions of organizational personality. Compared to traditional interview questions, people judged organizations that ask oddball interview questions as more innovative and stylistic. We also found a positive indirect effect of oddball interview questions on organiza-

tional attraction via the two dimensions of organizational personality. Nevertheless, the direct effect of oddball interview questions on organizational attraction was not significant; people did not find organizations that asked oddball interview questions to be more attractive as a whole.

Contrary to past literature, however, we did not find a moderation effect of personality on the relationship between organizational personality perceptions and organizational attraction (Slaughter & Greguras, 2009). The effect of oddball interview questions on organizational attraction was the same regardless of the respondents' openness to experience or conscientiousness. One plausible explanation is that this study measured personality at the dimension rather than the facet level. It is possible that certain facets (e.g., imagination) of a trait are better aligned with specific organizational personality dimensions. A narrower approach to personality measurement could yield more meaningful results (e.g., Kausel & Slaughter, 2011). Other traits (e.g., creativity, humor) may also better align with the oddball interview questions because many of them require a combination of creative thinking and humorous disposition.

Although the results of the mediation analysis seemed to suggest that oddball interview questions may have a positive impact on organizations via an increase in perceived style and innovativeness, it is important to note that the overall total effect on organizational attraction was null. In fact, people judged organizations that only asked traditional interview questions as slightly more—albeit not significantly—attractive as employers. These findings suggest the possibility of a suppression effect where it is possible that, despite the positive effect on innovativeness and style, the inclusion of oddball questions may undermine the perceived fairness of the selection procedure.² We also found a weak—but significant—negative effect of oddball personality on the dominance dimension of organizational personality (e.g., successful, popular, etc). One explanation is that oddball interview questions signal to the prospective job seekers that the employer is not serious about its profession, which may potentially signal other poor managerial

² We thank the action editor for this suggestion.

TABLE 3.
Results of Mediation Analysis

Paths	Mediation model			Moderated mediation model		
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI
Oddball Question => Innovative (H1)	1.12	0.14	[0.80, 1.44]	1.12	0.17	[0.80, 1.44]
Oddball Question => Style (H2)	0.83	0.11	[0.46, 1.19]	0.83	0.18	[0.46, 1.18]
Oddball Qs => Attraction (c')	-1.00	0.18	[-1.37, -0.64]	-1.01	0.19	[-1.39, -0.63]
<i>Indirect effects</i>						
Oddball Qs => Innovative => Org Attraction (H3)	0.47	0.14	[0.22, 0.76]			
Oddball Qs => Style => Org Attraction (H4)	0.34	0.11	[0.13, 0.58]			
<i>Index of Moderated Mediation</i>						
Conscientiousness x Style (H5)				0.07	0.12	[-0.19, 0.31]
Conscientiousness x Innovation (H5)				-0.15	0.18	[-0.49, 0.19]
Openness x Style (H6)				-0.08	0.12	[-0.30, 0.18]
Openness x Innovation (H6)				0.09	0.15	[-0.20, 0.39]

Note. 95% confidence estimates are based on 5000 bootstrapped resamples. Predictor (x) variable of oddball question is a dummy coded variable where the comparison group is the control condition (traditional interview questions).

practices. Indeed, future research should further examine the negative impact of using oddball questions in a selection context to fully understand the mechanisms by which they affect recruitment outcomes. Nevertheless, when considering other research on the negative effect of oddball interview questions on applicant reactions (e.g., Honer et al. 2007), our findings further support the conclusion that organizations stand to gain very little by asking oddball interview questions.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the artificiality of the experiment and the use of prehire reactions. Judgments made at this stage of recruitment may not generalize to those made in later stages. As such, it is unclear how actual job applicants may react when they face these questions during a job interview. Participants in this study were not actually involved in any high-stakes selection decisions. Thus, they may not be sufficiently motivated to scrutinize the use of oddball interview questions. Given that participant had little information on the target organizations, it is likely that the influence of oddball questions on organizational attitudes is exaggerated. The real-world effects are likely to be diluted by other factors contributing to perceptions of organizational personality. Nevertheless, our study was aimed at examining early impressions of organizations

based on information related to their selection practice. As past research has shown, early impressions based on the publicly available information (e.g., employer website) may affect job seekers' behaviors and attitudes toward the employer (Walker et al., 2012). Our study does not speak to applicant reactions to actual job interview procedures. Nevertheless, more research is needed to explore contextual and individual boundary conditions on judgments of oddball interview questions.

Secondly, oddball interview questions were conceptualized as those that are humorous and light hearted (Zhang 2021), which are distinct from other types of questions that are more cognitively challenging (e.g., brainteasers) or personally invasive. Thus, more research is needed to examine the distinct effects of different variants of unorthodox questions in the context of recruitment and selection. Although our study failed to find evidence for the moderating role of Big Five personality, future research may consider individual difference characteristics that better align with organizational recruitment, such as social identity concerns or more narrow facets of personality.

Third, a major limitation of our study is that we failed to include other critical applicant reaction variables such as procedural justice, face validity, job relevance, and others (Hausknecht et al., 2004). As a result, our study did not consider the effect of unorthodox questions on these other

mediating variables, which are expected to affect organizational attraction. Because of this major limitation, our primary study failed to test a complete model of the effect or unorthodox question on organizational attraction. We should, however, point the reader to past research where some of these effects are tested (e.g., [Honer et al., 2007](#); [Wright et al., 2012](#); [Zhang, 2021](#)) and encourage that future meta-analytic efforts are expended to test a complete model of in its entirety. Our study was also potentially underpowered to detect the hypothesized moderation effects. Past research has found inconsistent and small effects of job seeker personality x organizational personality perception on recruitment outcomes (e.g., [Slaughter & Greguras, 2009](#)). As [Murphy and Russell \(2017\)](#) noted, a sample size of 3000 is needed to detect typical interactive effects in organizational sciences. If there exists a true but small interactive effect of personality, our study did not stand a great chance of detecting it.

Finally, our study uses a convenient sample (i.e., MTurk), which is a limited source of data with regard to generalizing our findings to job seekers. The quality of data obtained from convenient online panels has also been a topic of contention within the social sciences ([Landers & Behrend, 2015](#)). Nevertheless, given the nascent nature of this topic, preliminary studies conducted on a convenient sample are useful for directing future resources for research (i.e., hard-to-obtain sample), especially when careful and precise experimental manipulations are warranted.

Implications

In line with previous research (e.g., [Zhang 2021](#)), we found that oddball questions have some redeemable qualities. However, it is important to note that organizations do not stand to benefit from asking oddball questions during preselection job interviews. This is likely due to the negative reactions (e.g., less procedural justice, less useful) associated with these unorthodox questions ([Honer et al., 2007](#); [Zhang 2021](#)). Indeed, our results show that the presence of oddball questions negatively affected organizational attraction after the positive effects on style and innovation were controlled. Furthermore, interviewers may inadvertently incorporate applicants' responses to oddball questions in their hiring decisions, which may result in less valid decisions because irrelevant information is being considered ([Dana et al., 2013](#)). Therefore, we recommend that oddball questions be reserved for later parts of recruitment and preferably after a hiring offer has been made. In situations where the sole purpose of an interview is recruitment, rather than selection, we see the potential for oddball questions to be used as an icebreaker or signaling device that reap the benefits without the associated costs.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we found people judged organizations that include oddball interview questions as part of their selection to be more innovative and stylistic. Although these organizational personality perceptions had a positive effect on organizational attraction, oddball interview questions—as a whole—did not enhance recruitment outcomes. To conclude, organizations and hiring managers should think twice before including oddball interview questions in the preselection interview.

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Appendix A. Means and Standard Deviations of Dependent Variables Across Conditions

	Style	Innovativeness	Dominance	Trustworthy	Thrift	Attraction
Traditional (<i>n</i> = 42)	2.26 (0.99)	2.21 (0.95)	3.10 (0.69)	3.02 (0.84)	2.00 (0.83)	2.93 (1.07)
Biographical (<i>n</i> = 44)	2.26 (0.99)	2.21 (0.95)	3.10 (0.69)	3.02 (0.84)	2.00 (0.83)	2.93 (1.07)
Preference (<i>n</i> = 45)	3.11 (0.94)	3.53 (0.84)	2.78 (0.74)	3.13 (0.84)	1.91 (0.79)	2.85 (1.05)
Open-Ended (<i>n</i> = 41)	3.32 (1.08)	3.32 (0.88)	2.85 (0.73)	2.93 (0.96)	2.17 (0.86)	2.73 (1.32)

Note. Values in parentheses reflect cell standard deviations.