Author

The Role of Personality and Diverse Workplace Preferences

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After learning about diversity in Professor Chen's lab, Kaitlin Tinker was inspired to combine that with her long-held interest in personality. Her unique approach to these subjects reinforced the importance of understanding diversity in the workplace. Kaitlin has particularly appreciated the opportunity her research has given her to make a difference in how society views these issues. After graduating from UC Irvine, Kaitlin moved on to pursue a Master's degree in Applied Psychology at USC, and she hopes to pursue a career as a consultant in organizational psychology.

Abstract

This study examines whether personality factors influence individuals' preferences for racially diverse, versus non-diverse, workplaces. We hypothesized that individuals who are high in openness to experience, extroversion and agreeableness would be more attracted to a racially diverse workplace, whereas individuals high in neuroticism and conscientiousness would be less attracted to a diverse workplace. Undergraduate participants completed an online survey after viewing a company fact sheet with either high or low minority representation among its employees and a traditional or open company culture. After viewing the fact sheet, participants indicated the extent to which they found it an appealing place to work and completed the Big Five Personality Scale. On average, participants significantly preferred the racially diverse workplace to the one that had few minorities. In addition, participants who were high in openness to experience especially preferred the racially diverse organization. These findings are important because they aid in a better understanding of individual differences in workplace preferences, especially as organizations are trying to become more diverse.

Key Terms

- Big Five Traits
- Culture
- Diversity
- Personality
- Workplace

Faculty Mentor

As American society becomes increasingly racially heterogeneous, intergroup dynamics can become more harmonious or more strained. In recent years, we have seen evidence that some Americans embrace racial and cultural diversity whereas others reject it. As social psychologists, we are interested in explaining the personality and situational factors that can predict whether people wish to approach or avoid diverse environments. The results of Kaitlin's project indicate that aspects of individuals' personalities, specifically their openness to new experiences, may help to determine their willingness to join diverse groups. Her project highlights the need for researchers and employers to pay attention to individuals' personality traits as suggestive of their racial attitudes.

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"Our success as a global company is a direct result of our diverse and talented workforce. Our ability to develop new consumer insights and ideas and to execute in a superior way across the world is the best testimony to the power of diversity an organization could ever have."
John Pepper, CEO of Procter & Gamble (Pepper)

Introduction

The above quote shows a common theme in American businesses—they are striving to become more diverse through gender equality and minority representation. As organizations progress, it is important to examine how people are affected by this change and whether they are initially attracted to a modern day diverse workplace. One important consideration is the influence of individual differences, like personality, and how they shape peoples' opinions about racial diversity in organizations. Integrating these factors is a relatively new research area, and because of this, bears further investigation as a timely subject in our society.

Through decades of research, personality psychologists have identified keystone universal traits. A common taxonomy that is used in research is the Five-Factor model, or Big Five Inventory, which argues that an individual's personality can be described by of their levels on five traits: extroversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience, and neuroticism. These traits have shown to be present throughout the lifespan and, thus, are a reliable measure to use. Additionally, these five traits have shown to be associated with attitudes and behaviors. Racial differences in individuals' attitudes about diversity have been studied, but there is an opportunity to examine personality and preferences of diversity. Turner *et al.* found correlations between the Big Five Inventory and attitudes of out-group members (180–192). The present study expanded on this research and examined the Big Five Inventory and preference of a racially diverse workplace.

The Big Five Personality Traits
The study of personality traits was booming in the late 1900s, yet there was a lack of consensus on essential personality traits. In addition, there were criticisms of methods being used to measure these personality traits (*i.e.* just self-report). In a classic study, McCrae and Costa addressed these issues through a longitudinal study involving both self-report and peer reports (81–90). By using this research design, the researchers were hoping to find essential traits that were salient across peer raters. The study consisted of 274 participants—each instructed to pick three to four raters—making a total of 747 raters who completed the task. With such a high number, the researchers were able to identify significant correlations between self-report and peer ratings—most importantly reliably measuring five personality traits.

Using factor analysis, the researchers found five reliable dimensions of personality that became known as the Big Five personality traits: extroversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, neuroticism, and conscientiousness. Extroversion represents many trait adjectives such as gregarious, assertive, energetic, adventurous, enthusiastic, and outgoing. Adjectives like trustworthy, straightforward, altruistic, compliant, modest, and tender minded make up agreeableness. Openness to experience represents terms such as curious, imaginative, artistic, wide interests, and unconventional. Individuals who rate high in neuroticism usually are tense, irritable, and lack self-confidence. Finally, conscientiousness is associated with competence, organization, and thoroughness (John and Srivastava 102–138).

Roberts and DelVecchio conducted a meta-analysis of 152 longitudinal studies that examined the Big Five trait consistency through the lifespan—from childhood to late adulthood (3–25). They found that "trait consistency increased from .31 in childhood to .54 during the college years, to .64 at age 30, and then reached a plateau around .74 between ages 50 and 70" (Roberts and DelVecchio 3–25). These correlations indicate that extroversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism are significantly consistent throughout the lifespan. These findings are important as more personality research is conducted.

Additionally, the Big Five traits can be seen in cultures outside of the United States. Hendriks *et al.* examined the traits in European and non-European countries (347–373). Appropriate translations were made for each language, to ensure that meanings were similar in all the questionnaires. Participants completed the FFPI, which is a standardized questionnaire to measure the five trait dimensions. The authors found that extroversion, agreeableness, neuroticism, conscientiousness, and openness to experience were stable across 13 countries—highlighting the validity of the Big Five dimensions and increasing the probability of being able to generalize research across larger sample sizes and cultures.

The Big Five Personality traits have also been shown to predict attitudes in a study done by Ackermann and Ackermann (396–418). The researchers focused on personality and attitudes towards equal opportunity regarding immigrants in Switzerland. This study analyzed responses from 1,157 individuals who completed a nationwide survey.

It was administered in fall 2012 and focused on political attitudes, the Big Five personality traits, and demographic questions. Results show that openness to experience and agreeableness were positively correlated to preference of equal opportunity for immigrants. On the other hand, conscientiousness was negatively correlated to preference of equal opportunity for immigrants. These results extend to the present project in that the Big Five Personality traits are associated with attitudes and preferences.

Defining Diversity

Because the current research sought to understand individuals' preferences for diversity workplaces, it is important to understand how diversity in the workplace has been defined and investigated in past studies.

Unzueta and Binning studied how diversity is defined and the role of in-group association in diversity attitudes (443–446). Consistent with past findings that individuals prefer settings where in-group members are present (Tajfel and Turner 7–24), the researchers found that minority members associate their in-group representation with diversity. Additionally, participants were less likely to associate Whites with diversity. This research influenced how the present study defined diversity in that a highly diverse workplace was one where there was a lower percentage of White representation and higher percentage of minority representation.

Chen and Hamilton extended the aforementioned research and examined mechanisms involved in perceiving diversity through numeric representation and social acceptance (586–598). Study 1 focused on undergraduates' opinions of their university and found that Latino participants relied more on social acceptance than White participants in perceiving diversity, while White participants relied more on numerical representation.

Study 2 examined perceptions of a company by creating fact sheets for participants to view. This fact sheet manipulated the company's level of numerical representation and social acceptance and participants rated the company's diversity. White participants were more likely to use numeric representation or social acceptance when perceiving diversity while minority participants relied more on social acceptance. The results show the importance of examining workplace culture and philosophy in addition to focusing on numerical representations of minorities in the workplace, thus supporting the present hypothesis that workplace culture is important to consider in addition to numerical representation.

Integration of Personality and Intergroup Relations

Strauss, Connerley, and Ammermann's article is one of the few studies to examine personality and attitudes towards diversity (32–52). They researched the effects that multiple personality variables—authoritarianism, tolerance for ambiguity, self-esteem, and the Five-Factor model—have on undergraduates' attitudes towards diversity. The researchers found that agreeableness, authoritarianism, and tolerance for ambiguity correlate with attitudes towards diversity. Specifically, where those who were high in both agreeableness and tolerance for ambiguity were more likely to have positive attitudes towards diversity, those high in authoritarianism were more likely to have negative attitudes towards diversity. These results show the role that personality traits can play towards attitudes and how personality traits can affect preferences of diversity.

Jackson and Poulsen showed the importance of integrating personality traits, intergroup relations, and prejudice research as they studied the Five-Factor model of personality and ethnic prejudice (667–685). The researchers found that those who rated high in agreeableness and openness to experience were more likely to report having had intergroup contact with Black Americans and Asian Americans and to have positive attitudes towards these minority groups. These results emphasize that two of the Big Five Personality traits were associated with attitudes towards diversity.

To further show the importance of integrating personality traits, prejudice, and intergroup relations research, Turner, Dhont, Hewstone, Prestwich, Vonofakou examined personality predictors of intergroup anxiety in a study conducted in the United Kingdom (180–192). The researchers based their study on the contact hypothesis—a well-known and validated social psychological theory that states that more exposure to out-group members will reduce intergroup anxiety (Allport). Turner *et al.* hypothesized that individuals who are high in extroversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience would experience less intergroup anxiety because they have more exposure to out-group individuals than those who are high in conscientiousness and neuroticism (180–192). Because the study was administered in the United Kingdom, the researchers chose to focus on British White participants' attitudes towards Indian and Pakistani individuals.

The researchers found that individuals who rated high in agreeableness, extroversion, and openness to experience were more likely to engage in positive out-group attitudes and have lower intergroup anxiety than those who rate high in neuroticism and conscientiousness. They also found that

individuals high in agreeableness and extroversion were more likely to have cross-group friendships. However, it is important to note that this study was done on White individuals' attitudes towards South Asian people outside of the United States, and determining these findings' generalizability to the U.S. is an important aspect of current research.

Consistent with Turner *et al.*, my present study clustered the five personality traits into two groups (180–192). Group one consisted of extroversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience, while group two consisted of neuroticism and conscientiousness. Furthermore, I defined a racially diverse workplace as one that had high minority numerical representation; a non-diverse workplace was defined as having low minority numerical representation. To convey workplace respect, I also examined the effects of company culture, where the workplace was defined as either traditional and conventional or open to new ideas and unconventional. With that in mind, I hypothesized that individuals who were high in extroversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience were more attracted to a racially diverse workplace while individuals who were high in neuroticism and conscientiousness were less attracted to a racially diverse workplace. Additionally, I hypothesized that, overall, an open company culture was equally important to high minority representation.

Method

Participants
The 644 participants (81.5% female) were University of California, Irvine undergraduate students who signed up through online Sona systems to receive extra credit in exchange for participation. The sample was predominately Asian (41%) and Latino (36.5%) while the remaining number of participants identified as White (9.5%), Mixed Race (5.6%), Middle Eastern (3.3%), Other (2.2%), and Black (2%). There were 164–165 participants in each condition, which was based on random assignment into the four conditions.

Materials
Participants were first prompted to view a company fact sheet (Figure 1). The fact sheet varied along two factors, minority workforce representation and company culture. Depending on the condition, the fact sheet either had high minority representation of employees (Non-Hispanic White 28%, Hispanic 19%, Black 17%, Asian 24%, Other 12%) or low minority representation of employees (Non-Hispanic White 61%, Hispanic 12%, Black 12%, Asian 12%, Other 3%). The percentages for workforce demographics were

shown through a pie chart. Additionally, the company culture was described as being "traditional and conventional" or "open to new ideas and unconventional." The rest of the information on the fact sheet was identical in every condition and acted as filler information. After viewing the fact sheet there was an attention check that asked participants if they had fully read the directions and fact sheet.

Procedure
Upon signing up for the study, participants received an online link to complete the survey on Qualtrics (www. qualtrics.com). They were informed that the study was about group perceptions and would take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Participants were randomly assigned to one of four fact sheets (described above). After viewing their assigned fact sheet, participants would complete the Big Five Inventory (*i.e.* "I see myself as someone who is talkative"; John 1999), workplace preference (*i.e.* "Atherton is a place I would like to work"), and demographics. I compiled five items (α=.83) for workplace preference; the full list of questions is in Table 1.

Table 1

Workplace Preference Questions

1	I would like to work at Atherton.
2	I can see myself being unhappy at Atherton.
3	Atherton seems like a nice place to work.
4	Atherton would be a comfortable place for me to work.
5	Atherton would be an uncomfortable place for me to work.

Results

Preference of Workplace
I tested the effect of minority representation and company culture manipulations on preferences for the workplace, as assessed by the Workplace Preference measure using a 2(Representation: low vs. high) x 2(culture: traditional vs. open) between-subjects ANOVA. Overall, representation had a main effect on workplace preferences, $F(1, 645)=6.03$, p=.014. However, culture did not have a main effect on workplace preferences, $F(1, 645)=.25$, p=.616. This indicates that minority representation affected participants' workplace preferences, while culture did not. Specifically, when there was low representation of minorities, there was less positivity towards the workplace (M=3.31, SD=.57) compared to when there was high representation (M=3.43, SD=.60). Figure 2 depicts this positivity towards the workplace for both low and high representation conditions.
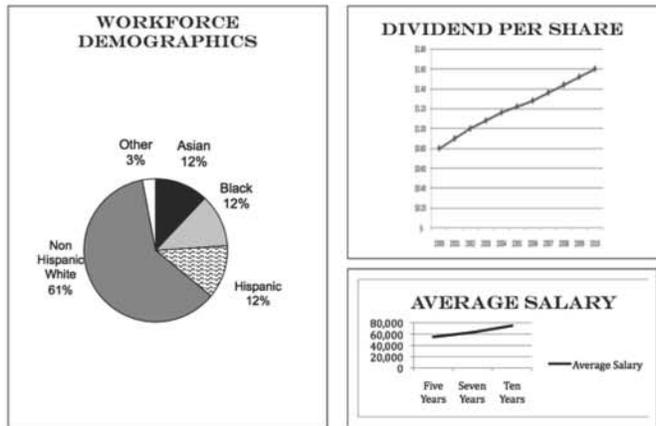
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Personnel Review: For Official Use Only

COMPANY NAME: Atherton, Inc.

INDUSTRY: Financial Services
ESTABLISHED: 1994
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 2368
FISCAL YEAR 2010 REVENUE: $341,395,000

COMPANY DESCRIPTION: Atherton, Inc. is a Los Angeles based venture capital firm that finances business development and growth. It focuses the bulk of its investments on start-up companies raising money in rounds A through G. Atherton's work environment is considered to be traditional and conventional.
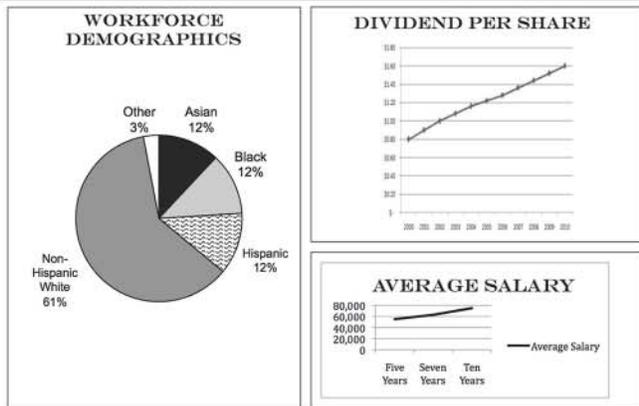
WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS
Other 3%
Asian 12%
Black 12%
Hispanic 12%
Non Hispanic White 61%

DIVIDEND PER SHARE

AVERAGE SALARY

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

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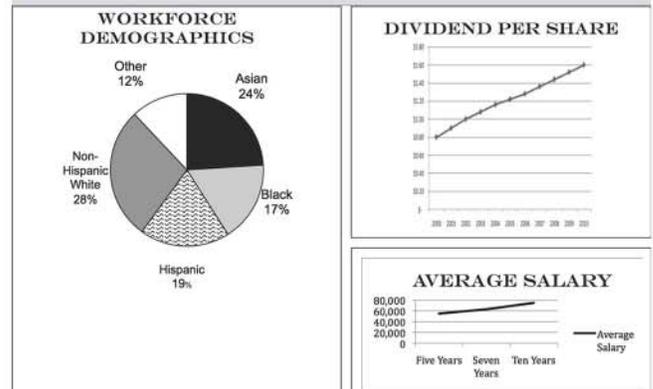
WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS
Other 12%
Asian 24%
Black 17%
Hispanic 19%
Non-Hispanic White 28%

DIVIDEND PER SHARE

AVERAGE SALARY

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Personnel Review: For Official Use Only

COMPANY NAME: Atherton, Inc.

INDUSTRY: Finance
ESTABLISHED: 1994
NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 2368
FISCAL YEAR 2010 REVENUE: $341,395,000

COMPANY DESCRIPTION: Atherton, Inc. is a Los Angeles based venture capital firm that finances business development and growth. It focuses the bulk of its investments on start-up companies raising money in rounds A through G. Atherton's work environment is considered to be open to new ideas and unconventional.

WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS
Other 3%
Asian 12%
Black 12%
Hispanic 12%
Non-Hispanic White 61%

DIVIDEND PER SHARE

AVERAGE SALARY

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR

Personnel Review: For Official Use Only

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INDUSTRY: Finance
ESTABLISHED: 1994
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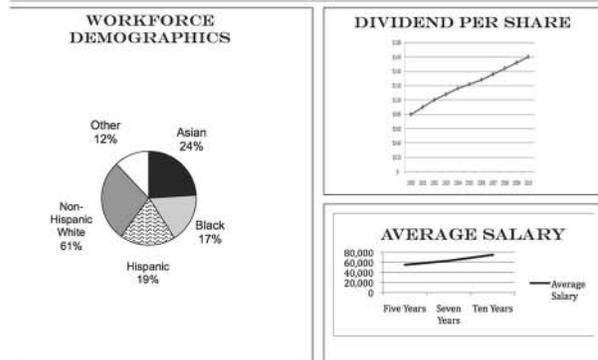
WORKFORCE DEMOGRAPHICS
Other 12%
Asian 24%
Black 17%
Hispanic 19%
Non-Hispanic White 61%

DIVIDEND PER SHARE
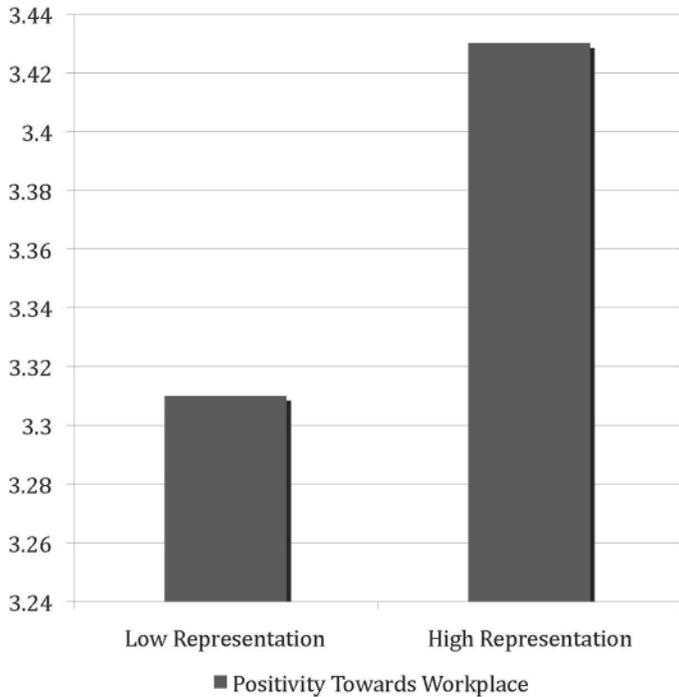
AVERAGE SALARY

Figure 1
Fact Sheets

Figure 2

Positivity towards the workplace

I also tested the interaction between representation and culture. However, there was no statistically significant interaction between culture and representation, $F(1, 644)=1.63$, $p=.20$. But, pairwise comparisons indicate that the effect of company culture was marginally statistically significant when minority representation was low, $F(1,641)=6.98$ $p=.08$, indicating that participants slightly preferred the company with an open culture over one with a traditional culture—when
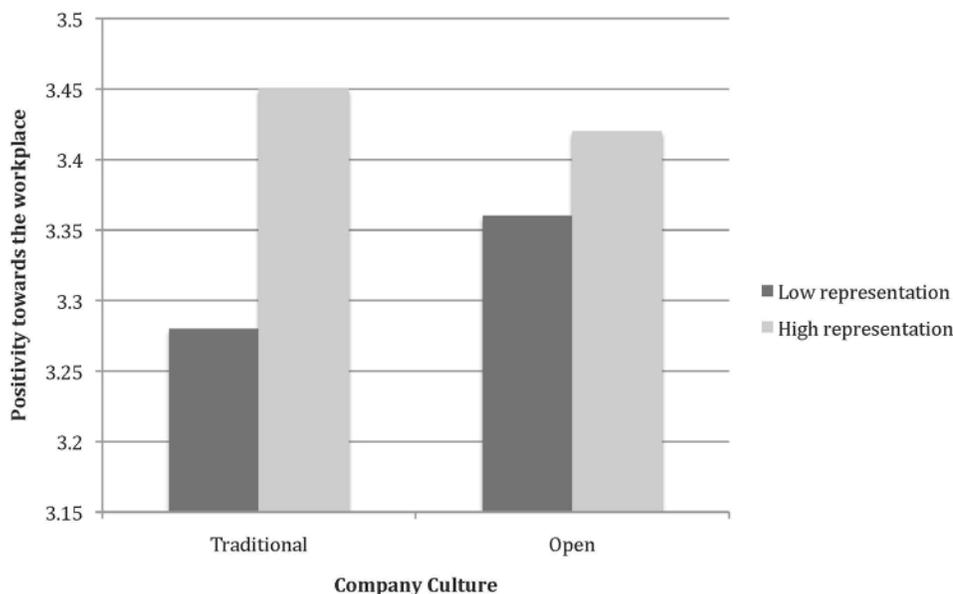
minority representation was low. Even though this comparison is statistically significant, more research needs to examine how company culture and representation may interact together. Figure 3 shows the mean comparisons.

The Role of Personality

I tested the correlation between the Big Five Personality traits and attraction towards a racially diverse workplace, as assessed by the Big Five Questionnaire and Workplace Preference measure. Using the Pearson Correlation, openness to experience was positively correlated with workplace preference when participants were in the high minority representation condition, $r(320)=.185$, $p=.001$. Figure 4 depicts this correlation—as the scores to openness to experience increased so did the preference for the workplace. However, when participants were in the low minority representation condition, openness to experience was not statistically significant to workplace preference, $r(321)=-.09$, $p=.09$. This shows that when minority representation is high, and not low, openness to experience is linked to attraction towards a racially diverse workplace.

The other personality traits—agreeableness, $r(641)=.05$, $p=.25$, extroversion, $r(641)=.01$, $p=.85$, neuroticism, $r(641)=-.01$, $p=.80$, and conscientiousness, $r(641)=.03$, $p=.531$—were not significantly correlated with attraction towards a racially diverse workplace. These results show that agreeableness, extroversion, neuroticism, and conscientiousness are not associated with diverse workplace preferences.

Discussion

As organizations are becoming more diverse, especially in the United States, it is important to understand how individuals enter workplaces and what effect diversity may have on their attitudes towards a workplace. The results showed that, overall, individuals were more attracted to a racially diverse workplace than one that has a more homogenous workforce—while workplace culture was not a significant factor in attractiveness towards the workplace.

There was also a positive correlation between the personality trait openness to experience and attractiveness of a racially diverse workplace. This
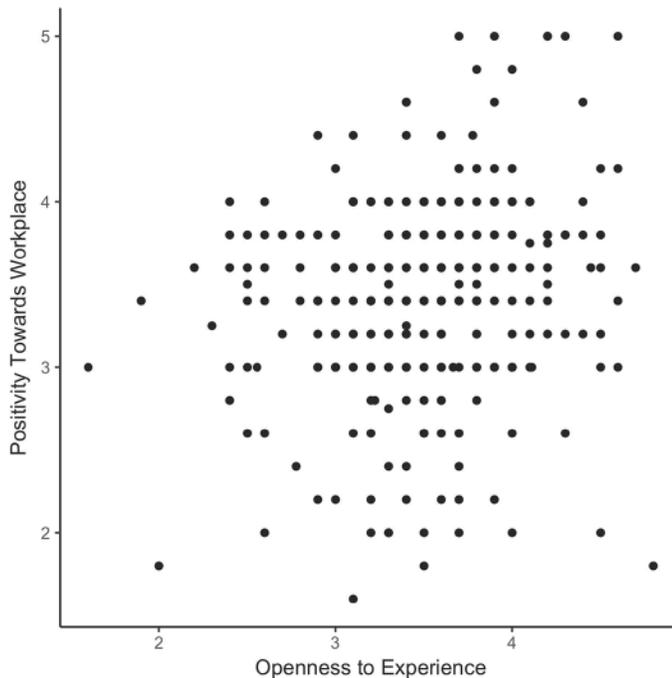

Figure 3

Interactions between representation and culture

On the individual level, these results show that people are more attracted to racially diverse workplaces.

The results are also important because there are many benefits to creating a diverse workplace. Huo, Molina, Binning, and Funge found these benefits when they studied an ethnically diverse high school (427–436). They found that individuals who felt their minority status was respected had higher levels of wellbeing and health. Binning, Unzueta, Huo, and Molina expanded on this research as they also studied high school students (35–49). The researchers found that students who identified with more than one race, instead of just one group, had equal or even higher well-being. Additionally, individuals who felt their minority status was respected had higher levels of wellbeing and health—they showed lower stress levels, more positive affect, and less alienation. Again, these findings are important because they highlight the need for minority representation plus respect for minorities in schools and businesses—creating diverse settings contributes to individual wellbeing and greater respect towards out-group members.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research
There are four main limitations to the present study. First, it focused on college students' attitudes about diversity in the workplace, and this population may be more open to racial equality and integration. Second, the study was conducted in a diverse region of the United States and all participants live within the geographical area. These sampling limitations threaten external validity in that the present sample may not be representative of the general population.

The third limitation questions the validity of the Big Five questionnaire and whether it is appropriate for the sample population. College-aged individuals may inherently present as higher in certain traits and lower in others. For example, individuals may rate higher in openness to experience and lower in neuroticism. This threatens external validity because the Big Five questionnaire may not be a suitable measure for this population and then the results would not be generalizable.

The last limitation regards the company fact sheets in the manipulation. For this, the company culture was described in a paragraph of filler information. It is possible that the information was not salient enough for participants and that is why there was no statistical significance between the two groups.

Figure 4
Correlation between openness to experience and representation

statistically significant correlation shows that as openness to experience increases, so does attractiveness of a racially diverse workplace.

The findings partially correspond with Turner *et al.*, who found that individuals high in openness to experience, extroversion and agreeableness experienced less intergroup anxiety when coming into contact with out-group members (180–192). The results also compliment research done by Jackson and Poulsen who found that openness to experience was positively correlated with past contact and positive attitudes of Blacks and Asian Americans (667–685). With that said, openness to experience seems to be a very important trait as it is connected most with intergroup relations. Higher scores of openness to experience are associated with having less intergroup anxiety, increased contact with certain minority members, positive attitudes towards certain minority members, and being more attracted to a racially diverse workplace. Individuals who are naturally higher in this trait seem to be more tolerant of minority out-group members—which leads to a better understanding towards diversity in organizations.

This study is important because organizations and institutions are trying to become more inclusive and racially diverse. The results show that racial diversity is important to individuals, and it should be an aspect recruiters emphasize.

Suggested Future Research

My findings suggest that there are individual differences in preferences for diversity and I believe it sheds a light on the need for future research. Regarding the company fact sheet, a future study could ensure that company culture is more salient. Instead of having it in a paragraph of filler information, it could be portrayed through survey results or a graph. By making this aspect more salient, I hypothesize that participants would be more attracted to an open company culture than a traditional one. It would also be interesting to include gender diversity preferences in organizations—which is equally important to racial diversity and has not been studied while looking at individual differences.

To address the sample limitation, future research could focus on areas of the United States that are known to be less diverse. It could also focus on different age groups. Recruiting participants with this in mind would allow for the results to generalize to the population and show that personality does play a role in diverse workplace preferences.

As mentioned in the introduction, diverse workplace preferences are a new area of research. Thus, future research may look at the dimension of diversity proposed by Unzueta and Binning (26–38). It would be interesting to examine whether the attractiveness of a given workplace differs for certain personality traits when participants are shown information that exhibits numerical representation, hierarchal representation, or both. I hypothesize that the results would be similar to my study, in that openness to experience would positively correlate to attractiveness of the workplace when there was both high minority hierarchal and numerical representation.

Finally, understanding tolerance and how individuals perceive diversity is incredibly important as organizations become more diverse. The present study looked at individuals' natural personality traits, but future research can examine how to foster tolerance in those who are less attracted to racially diverse organizations (*i.e.* those who are low in openness to experience). This is just as important in studying individual differences in preferences of diversity.

To conclude, this research revealed more about the role of personality and diverse workplace preferences. The openness to experience personality trait shows significant correlations to intergroup relations and, more specifically, attractiveness towards a racially diverse workplace. It is important, however, to examine this correlation further. As the John Pepper quote at the beginning of this paper alludes, creating racial diversity within organizations is crucial and timely to the United States. With this change towards inclusion, it is important to understand how individuals are attracted to it. This understanding will benefit both organizations and individuals—including human resource departments, recruiters, and future employees.

Acknowledgements

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