Horse-sized ducks or duck-sized horses?

Oddball Personality Questions are likable (but useless) for organizational recruitment

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Abstract

To stand out, some organizations have started asking unorthodox interview questions to uncover unique qualities of the candidates while signaling the playful culture of their organization (e.g., “Would you rather fight a horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?”). Despite its growing popularity, there is no empirical research on the organizational impact of these unusual questions. In this paper, we introduce *Oddball Personality Questions* (OPQs) and a theoretical model of its impact on recruitment. We test our theoretical model in two studies. In Study 1 (n = 275), we found that compared to traditional interview questions, people judged OPQs to be less useful, but more likable. The negative effect of decreased usefulness judgments on organizational attraction was offset by the positive effect of increased likability judgments. Participants were not more attracted to organizations that asked OPQs. In Study 2 (n = 266), using a multi-wave time-lagged study, we find job seekers with a greater sense of humor reported more favorable reactions toward oddball personality questions and subsequent attraction to the organization. Despite the double-edged nature of OPQs for recruitment, we believe that its limitations outweigh the benefits. Until the validity of OPQs as an assessment tool is established, its use in employment interviews remains dubious and cannot be recommended.

Keywords: Oddball interview questions; applicant reaction; organizational attraction; recruitment; humor; scientist-practice gap

Horse-sized duck or duck-sized horses?**Oddball Personality Questions are likable (but useless) for organizational recruitment**

“What would you do if you found a penguin in the freezer?” – Trader Joe’s

“Would you rather fight 1 horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?” – Whole Foods Market

“Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?” – Target

Imagine you had to answer the above questions for a job interview. Are you amused or annoyed? Do you feel confident or anxious? What would you think about the company? Would you like to work there? In a competitive labor market, the ability to attract, select, and retain top talent is vital for the success of organizations (Breaugh, 2013; Cable & Turban, 2003). To stand out, some managers and organizations have started including unorthodox and off-the-wall questions in their interviewing process to uncover unique qualities of the candidates while signaling the cultural values of their organization (Giang, 2013). Warby Parker CEO, David Gilboa, for instance, believes that quirky interview questions exemplify the company’s core values of injecting “fun and quirkiness into work, life, and everything they do” (Gillet & Cain, 2017).

Despite its growing popularity (Poundstone, 2003; Vasel, 2019), there is little research on these unorthodox interview questions and their implications for employee selection and recruitment. Past research has primarily focused on cognitively taxing brainteasers (also ‘puzzle questions’, Honer et al., 2007; Wright et al., 2012), which are intended to make the applicant uncomfortable (Freeman et al., 1942). Although never published, internal research by Google concluded that brainteaser questions are “a waste of time” (Bryant, 2013). Indeed, conventional wisdom suggests that unconventional questions serve only to make interviewers feel smart (Highhouse et al., 2019) and have little value for selection or recruitment (Speer et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, unorthodox interview questions continue to be used in employee selection settings and even encouraged in popular outlets aimed at business professionals (Dishman, 2016).

Overlooked from past research, however, are *Oddball Personality Questions* (OPQs), which are off-the-wall, light-hearted, and humorous questions like those in the opening quotes. Unlike brainteaser questions, OPQs (1) do not require analytical problem solving, and (2) are related to aspects of an applicant's personality or biographical background. Existing research has either ignored this type of question altogether (Honer et al., 2007; Wright et al., 2012) or did not differentiate them from their cognitive-demanding counterparts (i.e., 'brainteasers'; Highhouse et al., 2019; Speer et al., 2019). Although there is considerable variability in how hiring professionals are using OPQs in a job interview context for decision making, recruitment research suggests that the use of OPQs could impact job seekers and applicants' experiences during the hiring process, which could have both immediate effects on applicant reactions (e.g., interview motivation) as well as downstream effects on recruitment outcomes (e.g., intentions to apply) (Breugh, 2013). Understanding how job seekers react to OPQs, therefore, is necessary for evaluating its merit as an interview tactic.

In this paper, we propose a theoretical model of the impact of OPQs on applicant reactions and organizational recruitment. In Study 1, we conducted an online experiment to examine participants' reactions toward OPQs in a pre-hire context. Specifically, we examined the degree to which OPQs are judged as *useful* and *likable* compared to traditional interview questions. Study 2 extends our theoretical model by examining individual differences in applicant humor. Using a time-lagged panel design, we examined how individual differences in sense of humor affect reactions to OPQs and organizational attraction.

We contribute to the literature on applicant reaction and recruitment in several ways. First, despite its popularity, research on unconventional interview questions remains scarce. This absence of research leaves well-intentioned organizations open to the risk of engaging in potentially offensive, inappropriate, and illegal interviewing practices. To address this gap, we developed a theoretical model to examine its impact on applicant reaction and recruitment. Specifically, we test dual mechanisms that explain *how* OPQs impact recruitment in a pre-hiring context. On the one hand, the presence of OPQs may benefit recruitment due to its humorous elements and their effects on job seekers' affective reactions. On the other hand, job seekers may discount OPQs as a useful interview practice due to its novelty and lack of job-relatedness, thereby undermining recruitment success. We test these mechanisms in a dual-mediation model. In doing so, we gain a greater understanding of the *double-edged* nature of OPQs as it pertains to recruitment.

Second, we examined individual differences in reactions to OPQs. Job seekers who negatively react to OPQs may be less interested in pursuing employment with the organization. This is particularly problematic if the individual traits that predict reaction to OPQs are unrelated to job performance. In this paper, we examined a previously overlooked personality construct in the recruitment literature: applicant humor (c.f. da Motta Veiga, 2016). We argue that individual differences in applicant humor are a relevant antecedent for reactions toward OPQs due to its humorous characteristics. Our research advances the recruitment literature by illustrating a context in which humor can be expressed through selection practices and examine its impact on applicant reactions and recruitment. From a practical perspective, recruiters adjust their behaviors based on the expected reactions from applicants (König et al., 2010). Our findings,

therefore, may provide practical guidance to recruiters and managers who are considering using similar questions during employment interviews.

Background and hypotheses development

The pre-employment job interview serves two primary purposes (Dipboye et al., 2012): (1) to assess job candidate qualifications and (2) to make a positive impression on applicants (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Ferris et al., 2002). Often, the job interview is the first direct contact between a job applicant and an organization. First impressions – as shown in social psychological research – have long-lasting effects on a persons' subsequent judgments and perceptions of the target (Sannafrank & Ramirez, 2004). From a recruitment perspective, employers may create a positive first impression during the job interview to enhance the applicant's attraction to the organization and job pursuit intentions (Wilhelmy et al., 2016). In contrast, applicants who experience unfair or unpleasant selection interviews are more likely to experience negative affect, lower organizational attitudes, and worse performance on the job (Goldberg, 2003; McCarthy, Bauer, Truxillo, Anderson, et al., 2017; Moscoso, 2000).

Research on applicant reactions to job interviews has primarily focused on the medium of the interview (Blacksmith et al., 2016; Chapman & Rowe, 2002; Straus et al., 2001) or the standardization of the interview structure (Chapman & Zweig, 2005; Conway & Peneno, 1999; Kohn & Dipboye, 1998). Research on question type finds traditional interview questions that focus on job-relevant qualifications and demographic information are best-received by applicants (Carless, 2006; Hysong & Dipboye, 1999). In the only published paper examining applicant reaction to untraditional interview questions, Wright et al., (2012) found that applicants judged untraditional questions (e.g., Puzzle questions) as less face valid and job-relevant compared to

traditional questions. Atypical interview practices, including unusual questions, have been historically met with applicant resistance.

An unexplored category of interview questions is *Oddball Personality Questions*. Like brainteaser questions, OPQs are unusual questions that one does not typically associate with a job interview. But unlike brainteasers, OPQs are generally humorous and light-hearted questions. Conventional wisdom would categorize these questions as non-job-relevant, and therefore, have no place in employment interviews (Bauer et al., 2001; Steiner & Gilliland, 1996). Despite popular beliefs, there is no evidence suggesting that OPQs meaningfully measure applicant personality or fit. In fact, some have argued that these unusual interviewing tactics are driven by the interviewers' nefarious motives (Highhouse et al., 2019), which may offend applicants (Wright et al., 2012) and consequently sabotaging an organization's recruitment efforts (Harold et al., 2016; Hausknecht et al., 2004).

Interestingly, however, OPQs are reminiscent of questions featured in a seminal paper on interpersonal attraction published over two decades ago (Aron et al., 1997; e.g., "Given the choice of anyone in the world, whom would you want as a dinner guest?"; "If you were able to live to the age of 90 and retain either the mind or body of a 30-year-old for the last 60 years of your life, which would you choose?"). Aron et al. (1997) developed these unusual, and yet deeply personal questions to facilitate interpersonal attraction. Subsequent research also finds that individuals that were asked to respond to these questions reported more intimacy and attraction to the question raiser (e.g., Huang et al., 2017). If these strange, and yet deeply personal questions facilitate attraction in interpersonal contexts, can they be applied to work contexts such as recruitment as well?

Indirect effect of OPQs on recruitment through applicant reactions

Reactions to employee selection practices and procedures can affect the recruitment success of organizations (Chapman & Webster, 2006; McCarthy, Bauer, Truxillo, Anderson, et al., 2017). Applicants and job seekers often ascertain the qualities of potential employers based on the information they gather before entering the organization (Slaughter & Greguras, 2009). In their review, McCarthy et al., (2017) noted that job seekers often “form impressions of an organization based on information, or signals, conveyed to them during interviews.” The inclusion of OPQs in the job interview process, therefore, is expected to impact organizational attraction such that job seekers may be more (or less) inclined to apply for or accept jobs at organizations based their reactions to the unconventional interviewing practices.

Applicant reaction, like attitude formation, is both a cognitive and affective process that emerges across domains (Bagozzi, 1981; Ostrom, 1969; Ryan & Ployhart, 2000; Verplanken et al., 1998). Social cognition research, for example, posits that interpersonal judgments are formed based on two major dimensions: competence (is this person capable?) and warmth (is this person likable?) (Fiske et al., 2007). Related to this work, Zhu et al., (2021) found that organizational judgments, like social judgments, can be broadly categorized into warmth (“fun-loving”; “friendly”) and competence (“successful”; “intelligent”) dimensions (Also see. Lievens & Highhouse, 2003). Similarly, marketing research has made the distinction between instrumental features of brands, which reflect utilitarian values (is this product useful?) and symbolic features, which reflect expressive values (is this product innovative?) (Park et al., 1986). These independent lines of research point to a fundamental distinction between utilitarian-based judgments (i.e., competence) vs. likability-based judgments (i.e., warmth). Past research on applicant reaction, however, has primarily focused on cognitive judgments (e.g., test validity, test fairness), which broadly reflect the utilitarian aspects of selection procedures. It is unclear,

however, whether job seekers perceive unconventional questions as likable (e.g., are these questions fun?) and the degree to which the likability of a selection procedure affects organizational attraction. We begin our investigation of application reactions to OPQs by first focusing on people's cognitive judgments of *usefulness* and affective judgments of *likeability* toward OPQs.

We advance a theoretical model based on *heuristics*, which are mental shortcuts that people utilize to form attitudes, beliefs, and preferences (Gilovich et al., 2002; Zhang & Highhouse, 2018). Although heuristics exist across various psychological and organizational contexts, they are all driven by the purpose of making judgments under uncertainty (Artinger et al., 2015; Luan et al., 2019). A heuristics-based model is best suited for this research due to the novelty of OPQs, which elicits a state of psychological uncertainty (Kagan, 2009). In situations of high uncertainty, people are most likely to resort to mental shortcuts (i.e., heuristics) when forming judgments and beliefs (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). Based on these reasons, a heuristic-based framework serves as a theoretically appropriate lens to study the formation of applicant reactions and organizational judgments related to OPQs.

Are OPQs perceived as useful? We first argue that applicants will perceive oddball personality questions as *less useful* than traditional interview questions due to the *representative heuristic* (Bar-Hillel & Neter, 1993; Kahneman, 2011), which posits that in situations of uncertainty, people make judgments (e.g., “Is this person a good leader?”) based on superficial overlap in the features of the target with its parent population (e.g., “Does this person have typical leader characteristics?”): a phenomenon known as “like goes with the like” (Kahneman & Frederick, 2002). In the above example, without any other meaningful information, people are

likely to perceive candidates that lack typical superficial leadership traits (e.g., Caucasian male) as less competent leaders¹ (Eagly & Karau, 2002).

Likewise, the perceived usefulness of OPQs is judged based on the degree to which they resemble typical interview questions. In other words, in situations of uncertainty, people judge whether a new selection procedure is useful (“Is this a good interview question?”) based on its degree of similarity to existing exemplars of the category (“Does this question look like other interview questions?”). Indeed, past research has found, for example, applicants tend to judge novel selection technology (e.g., one-way interview) with healthy skepticism because of their atypicality (Blacksmith et al., 2016). Inversely, applicants respond more positively to typical interview questions (e.g., “tell me about yourself”) than uncommon questions such as behavioral and situational questions (Conway & Peneno 1999). Despite the popular interest around OPQs, they are still objectively atypical examples of job interview questions. In a list of most popular interview questions published by Indeed.com, an employer listing website, less than 5% were classified as an oddball question (*125 Common Interview Questions and Answers (With Tips)*, 2020). We expect, based on representativeness heuristics, that the atypicality of OPQs will lead job seekers to judge them as less useful than traditional interview questions.

Hypothesis 1. Applicants will judge OPQs as less useful than traditional interview questions.

Are OPQs likable? Likability judgments reflect people’s affective reactions toward OPQs, which we argue is driven by the *affect heuristic* (Peters et al., 2006; Slovic et al., 2007). The affect heuristic posits that affective judgments rely on *feelings* that one experiences toward a stimulus. Slovic et al., (2007) described the process as people using “an ‘affect pool’ containing

¹ Although theories of stereotypes extend beyond judgment heuristics, representativeness heuristics are, nonetheless, linked to stereotype formation in social judgments (Bodenhausen, 1990)

all the positive and negative tags consciously or unconsciously associated with the representations” (p. 1335). Based on the affect heuristic, the degree to which OPQs will be judged as likable will depend on the positive (or negative) feelings associated with these questions. Here, we argue that OPQs will be judged as *more likable* than traditional interview questions due to the positive feelings associated with the opportunity to disclose personal information as well as the humorous nature of the questions.

First, *Oddball Personality Questions* – in theory – tap into a candidate’s personality and preferences, thereby allowing them to disclose unique personal information that would otherwise be concealed during the traditional interview process. Social psychology research also shows that the act of self-disclosure by responding to personal questions produces positive affect (Vittengl & Holt, 2000) and liking toward the question raiser (Huang et al., 2017). The effect is amplified when responding to uniquely intimate questions (Aron et al., 1997). People also seek the opportunity to disclose personal information through various mediums such as personal blogs and social media (Chen, 2012; Park et al., 2011). In the workplace, past research has found that employee self-disclosure is linked to several positive attitudinal and affective outcomes at work (Phillips et al., 2009). Together, this work suggests that the opportunity for personal disclosure is desired and can elicit positive emotions.

Second, we expect OPQs to generate positive affect through its humorous characteristics. Specifically, OPQs allow for light-hearted and playful banter (Fraley & Aron, 2004), which can generate interpersonal closeness and lead to more potential positive rapport-building experiences during the interview (Barrick et al., 2012). Okada, (2015), for example, found that job candidates’ ability to providing humorous responses during interviews was linked to greater rapport building as well as more favorable interviewer assessments. In a work context,

managerial and leader humor is also positively associated with employee wellbeing and team cohesion (Kim et al., 2016; Mao et al., 2017). These findings suggest that humorous situations (e.g., reading OPQs) are associated with positive affect. Accordingly, we expect that – based on affect heuristic theory – applicants will judge OPQs to be more than likable traditional interview questions.

Hypothesis 2. Applicants will judge OPQs as more likable than traditional interview questions.

Likable but useless: a dual-mediation model on organizational attraction

Drawing from affective heuristics theory, we posit that the presence of OPQs (vs. traditional interview questions) will be positively and indirectly associated with organizational attraction through their enhanced likability. In addition to the unconscious influences, the affect heuristic also operation consciously. Specifically, explicit affective judgments (e.g., I like these interview questions) are also utilized as relevant information in other affective judgments (e.g., I am attracted to this organization). The transference of affective states is akin to the halo effect (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977). Accordingly, we expect that the enhanced likability of OPQs will serve as a mediator for the indirect and positive effect of OPQs (vs. traditional interview questions) on organizational attraction.

Hypothesis 3a. Compared to traditional interview questions, OPQs will have a positive indirect effect on organizational attraction through an increase in likability judgments.

Next, we draw from fairness heuristic theory to argue that the presence of OPQs exerts a negative effect on organizational attraction via a reduction in perceived usefulness. Fairness heuristic theory posits that job seekers and applicants use early encounters to form heuristics to guide their expectations about the prospective organization (Lind, 2001). In the context of

recruitment, it suggests that experiences with an organization's selection procedure serve as the lens through which the organization is perceived by the job seeker (Bauer et al., 2001). Past research has applied fairness heuristics theory to understand how applicants' experiences of unfair selection procedures affect their recruitment behaviors. This research has found that the perceived usefulness of selection procedures is related to several recruitment outcomes such as intentions to accept the job; intentions to apply; and willingness to recommend the organization to others (Chapman & Webster, 2006). Accordingly, we expect that the inclusion of OPQs will have a negative indirect effect on organizational attraction (vs. traditional interview questions) through a reduction in perceived usefulness.

Hypothesis 3b. Compared to traditional interview questions, OPQs will have a negative indirect effect on organizational attraction through a reduction in usefulness judgments.

Research context

Organizational scholars have noted the importance of context for theory building (Johns, 2006). Factors that explain recruitment outcomes may differ based on the stage and context of recruitment (Uggerslev et al., 2012). In the studies presented in this paper, we examined applicants' judgments and reactions to oddball personality questions and subsequent recruitment-related outcomes in a *pre-hire context* (e.g., Allen et al., 2004), which reflects the stage where a potential list of applicants are initially generated.

A pre-hire context is both theoretically and practically appropriate for several reasons. First, in the highly connected age of social media, potential job interview questions are often accessible before the interview through platforms such as Glassdoor.com. Relatedly, potential job seekers often ascertain information about prospective companies through word-of-mouth (Stockman et al., 2020). It is likely, therefore, that details of job interviews would be shared

amongst job seekers within similar social networks, thereby affecting their recruitment activities. Second, a pre-hire context is theoretically congruent with a heuristics-based theoretical framework. At this stage, job seekers typically have limited information about the pool of potential employers and are less motivated to scrutinize any single employment opportunity. As a result, job seekers are more likely to rely on heuristics and simple associations ascertained from publicly available information such as those obtained on employer review websites like Glassdoor.com (Uggerslev et al., 2012) and rely more on superficial characteristics to make their judgments (Jones et al., 2006). Finally, there are practical reasons why employers may choose to publicize their selection procedures (e.g., interview questions). Recent research has shown, for example, that sharing a list of potential questions in the form of a practice test to the applicant leads to improved selection outcomes (Campion et al., 2019). Arvey and Sackett (1993) referred to this practice as providing candidates with ‘pre-test’ information, which is shown to improve applicant reactions (McCarthy, Bauer, Truxillo, Campion, et al., 2017). These reasons, in combination, illustrate the practical and theoretical value of studying the effect of OPQs on recruitment during a pre-hire context.

Pilot Study: Oddball Personality Questions

As noted in our review, existing research on unconventional questions has not distinguished our conceptualization of OPQs from other types of analytically demanding questions (e.g., brainteaser questions). First, interview questions that fall broadly under our definition of OPQs were identified. Two research assistants searched the internet using terms such as “weird interview questions” and “funny interview questions”. These questions were supplemented with library searches for books on job interviews (e.g., Oliver, 2005) until the researchers were satisfied with the list of compiled questions. After removing duplicates and

similar questions, we were left with an initial list of 53 questions extracted from various internet and traditional media sources.

Subject matter expert judgments. We presented the initial list of oddball personality questions to thirteen subject matter experts (SMEs) (6 academics and 7 practitioners) with an average of twenty years of experience in a management-related field (e.g., human resource management, organizational psychology). Ten SMEs held PhDs. Each SME received a random subset of 25 questions from the original list. SMEs were asked to judge each question as “traditional” vs. “untraditional”. We defined nontraditional as “questions that are uncommon, unconventional, or atypical in pre-employment job interviews”. Experts were asked to use their best professional judgment. We discarded questions with lower than 80% agreement. This process left us with 37 OPQs.

We then used an inductive approach to develop a classification of OPQs. To do so, three raters reviewed the list of OPQs to identify common themes amongst the questions. This process yielded three types of questions based on the interview response process: (1) open-ended hypothetical questions, where the respondent is asked to give an opinion or indicate how he would respond to a hypothetical situation (e.g., “what would you do in the event of a zombie apocalypse?”); (2) biographical questions, where respondents are asked about their current life situation or past behaviors (e.g., “what was the last costume you wore?”); and (3) preference-based questions, where respondents are asked to pick between explicitly stated choices (e.g., “which one of the seven dwarves would you be?”). Three raters categorized each remaining question into one of the three pre-defined categories: open-ended; preference; and biographical. We removed six questions where the three raters could not come to a consensus about the most

appropriate category. The final list contains 31 questions (12 open-ended; 8 biographical; and 11 preference-based) (Appendix A).

Methods: Study 1

Participants

We collected data from 316 participants from the United States on Amazon Mechanical Turk. We removed 41 participants who did not respond correctly to the attention check question (e.g., “please select strongly agree). The final sample contained 275 participants (52% male, mean age = 36, 80% Caucasian, 88% employed full time or part-time).

Design and procedure

We used a between-subjects experimental design. Participants were randomly assigned to review a list of interview questions (traditional vs. open-ended vs. preference vs. biographical; see Appendix A for the full lists) for a hypothetical job and were asked to provide some judgments about those interview questions. Participants completed self-report items for question judgments and organizational attraction sequentially. To improve the generalizability of our design (Highhouse, 2009), we randomly varied the jobs described in the experiment as a random between-subject variable. Specifically, we included four different jobs that varied in job complexity and its social nature: janitorial staff, receptionist, software developer, and marketing executive.

Measures

Interview question judgments. We used an adjective list to measure participants’ *likability* (e.g., ‘fun’, ‘boring’) and *usefulness* judgments (e.g., ‘useless’, ‘fair’) toward the interview questions, which has been used to ascertain general social and organizational judgments in the past (Brooks et al., 2003; Fiske et al., 2007). For each adjective, participants

indicated, using a 5-point Likert scale, the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statement: “for the purpose of hiring a [receptionist], the job interview questions presented above are [useless]”. We used eight adjectives that would broadly fall under cognitive (usefulness-related) vs. affective (likability-related) judgments. Table 1 contains a list of the adjectives and the factor loadings obtained from Principal Axis Factoring. A parallel analysis using Oblimin rotation revealed a two-factor structure, which explained 61% of the total variance. The two factors had a modest correlation ($r = .22$). One of the adjectives (welcoming) cross-loaded onto both factors, therefore, it was removed from further analysis. The remaining seven adjectives were averaged to produce scores for *perceived usefulness* and *perceived likability*.

Recruitment outcomes. We used the two subscales (general attractiveness and pursuit intentions) of the organizational attraction scale developed by Highhouse et al., (2003). Participants were shown the list of interview questions and instructed “imagine that you learned about the interviewing practices of a particular company and that this company often asks some of the following questions when hiring a [receptionist]. Based on the interviewing practices of this company, we would like to know your attitudes toward this company.” Participants responded to each item on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree). Because the two scales were highly correlated ($r = .88$), we combined them into a single measure of organizational attraction. Confirmatory factor analysis also shows that a one-factor model is satisfactory, RMSEA = .077, SRMR = .022, CFI = .982.

Results and Discussion: Study 1

Table 2 contains the mean, standard deviation, and inter-correlations between the study’s variables. Internal consistencies for all the measures were high. Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was first conducted to examine the effect of the experimental factors on

the aggregate of the hypothesized outcomes (applicant reactions and organizational attraction).

There was a significant main effect of interview question type on the aggregation of the outcome variables, $F(9, 810) = 17.33$, Pillai's trace = .483, $p < .001$.

Applicant reactions

Figure 1 and 2 contain the means for usefulness judgments and likeability judgments across the experimental conditions, respectively. We found a significant main effect of question type on usefulness judgments, $F(3, 110) = 24.20$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .40$. Furthermore, independent samples t-test revealed that people judged traditional interview questions as more useful ($M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.10$) than OPQs ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 1.01$), $t(98) = 9.62$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = 1.43$. We also found a main effect of question type on likability judgments with ANOVA, $F(3, 110) = 4.62$, $p = .009$, $\eta^2 = .11$. Independent samples t-tests revealed that people judged OPQs as more likable ($M = 3.36$, $SD = 1.15$) than traditional interview questions ($M = 2.40$, $SD = 1.08$), $t(110) = 6.15$, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d = .84$. These effects did not differ based on job title, age, sex, or race (see supplemental material). Taken together, Hypotheses 1 and 2 were both supported. Despite content differences between the three types of OPQs, we failed to find any evidence that the three types of OPQs differed in perceived usefulness or likability judgments.

Dual mediation analysis

We conducted a path analysis using the *lavvan* package in the statistical software *R* to examine the indirect effects of OPQs on organizational attraction (Figure 3). Before testing our mediation model, we combined the three oddball question types into a single dummy-coded variable to denote whether the participants were presented with a traditional or oddball interview question. We believe this aggregation is justified for ease of presentation because no differences

were observed in any of the applicant reactions or organizational attraction between the three oddball question conditions.

We estimated the indirect effects of OPQ presentation on organizational attraction via the two applicant reaction judgments as mediators. Table 3 contains the estimated indirect effects using 5,000 bootstrapped re-samples. We found a negative indirect effect of OPQ presentation on organizational attraction via a reduction in usefulness judgments. We also found a positive indirect effect of OPQ presentation on organizational attraction via an increase in likability judgments. Finally, the total and direct effects of oddball question presentation on organizational attraction were not significant, which suggests a full mediation.

Results from the first study provided evidence for our theoretical model. Specifically, we find that OPQs were perceived as less useful, but more likable than traditional interview questions. For recruitment outcomes, the negative effect on reduced usefulness was offset by the enhancement of likability such that respondents were no more or less attracted to an organization that asked an OPQ compared to traditional interview questions. In the next study, we expand our theoretical model to include applicant humor as an individual difference antecedent to OPQ reactions. Furthermore, we expand our construct coverage to include a more comprehensive list of applicant reaction outcomes.

Study 2: Jobseeker sense of humor

Although Study 1 revealed that OPQs did not exert an overall positive (or negative) effect on recruitment outcomes, past research suggested that individual personality differences may impact how job seekers react to selection procedures (Honkaniemi et al., 2013; LaHuis, 2005; Truxillo et al., 2006). Truxillo et al., 2016 commented that “what may seem fair to some applicants (e.g., extraverts), may not seem fair to others (e.g., introverts)”. Considering the

humorous nature of OPQs, we focus our attention on individual differences in humor as an antecedent to reactions to OPQs. Thorson and Powell (1993) define a person's sense of humor as a general way of looking at the world and as a way of self-protection and getting along.

Organizational scholars have begun exploring the positive impact of humor in other workplace contexts such as leadership, job stress, and performance (Cooper, 2008; Duncan & Feisal, 1989; Evans et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2016; Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). Arguably, humor has been overlooked due to its lack of relevance to contemporary theorizing. Specifically, past research has not identified a recruitment context where a sense of humor may be a relevant antecedent.

Drawing from trait-activation theory, we argue that the presence of OPQs serves as a context in which individual differences in humor become relevant. Trait-activation theory posits that individual differences characteristics such as personality are activated in situations that offer relevant cues for its expression (Tett & Guterman, 2000). Whereas traditional recruitment activities offer little opportunity for the expression of humor, OPQs are designed to facilitate humorous interactions. Furthermore, OPQs also allow applicants to express humor in a way that may benefit their hiring outcomes. Accordingly, we expect applicants with a greater sense of humor, therefore, are expected to react more positively to OPQs due to its humorous nature.

To provide a more nuanced examination of applicant reactions, we adopted three commonly used applicant reaction constructs from the employee selection literature: test motivation, test anxiety, and test usefulness for the interview context (Arvey et al., 1990). We also take a multi-dimensional approach to measuring individual differences in humor. Specifically, we examine *humor attitude*, *humor appreciation*, *humor production*, and *humor coping* (Thorson & Powell, 1993). Consistent with the bandwidth-fidelity tradeoff (Hogan &

Roberts, 1996), we expect differential patterns of association between each humor dimension and theoretically relevant applicant reaction outcomes.

First, humor attitude and appreciation pertain to a person's general attitude toward other humorous people (humor attitude) and jokes in general (humor appreciation). Accordingly, we expect that applicants who do not enjoy other humorous individuals or humorous situations would be unamused by oddball personality questions. Consequently, we hypothesize that humor attitude and humor appreciation will both be positively associated with the perceived usefulness of OPQs and motivation to answer OPQs in an interview setting.

Hypothesis 4. Humor attitude will be (a) positively associated with oddball interview usefulness and (b) oddball interview motivation.

Hypothesis 5. Humor appreciation will be (a) positively associated with oddball interview usefulness and (b) oddball interview motivation.

Humor production pertains to an individual's capacity to generate humor and find humor in every situation. When faced with humorous questions such as OPQs, those with greater capacity to generate humor are more able to respond with appropriately humorous answers (Nusbaum et al., 2017). Given their ability to generate humor, we expect people with high humor production to be more confident in a job interview context when presented with humorous interview questions. Past research has found that the applicant's confidence is associated with their motivation and anxiety on employment tests (Bauer et al., 1998; Zibarras & Patterson, 2015). For these reasons, we expect job seekers who are high on humor production to be more motivated and report less anxiety toward responding to OPQs for a job interview.

Hypothesis 6. Humor production will be (a) positively associated with oddball interview motivation and (b) negatively associated with oddball interview anxiety.

Finally, we examined humor coping, which is a person's ability to use humor to cope with distressful events (Abel, 2002; Overholser, 1992). The job interview is often an anxiety-inducing experience and can be especially stressful when applicants are anticipating unorthodox and unusual questions due to the increase in ambiguity (Caplan & Jones, 1975). Therefore, we expect applicants with higher humor coping ability to be less anxious toward answering oddball interview questions.

Hypothesis 7. Humor coping will be negatively associated with oddball interview anxiety.

Finally, we examine the indirect effects of humor dimensions on subsequent organizational attraction outcomes through the applicant reaction variables as mediators. Past research has found that test motivation, test anxiety, and test usefulness are all associated with subsequent attraction to the organization (Hausknecht et al., 2004). Accordingly, we expect individual differences in humor would exert a positive indirect effect on recruitment outcomes via their effects on applicant reactions. Specifically, we hypothesized applicant reactions (i.e., Hypothesis 4 through 7) would mediate the association between specific applicant humor dimensions and organizational recruitment outcomes such that job seekers with a greater sense of humor would be more attracted to organizations that ask OPQs via more favorable applicant reactions.

Study 2: Methods

Sample

We gathered data from 349 job seekers (51% Male, mean age = 32[$SD = 11.4$]), 71% Caucasian) using Prolific², which is an online crowdsourcing platform used for recruiting a diverse sample of participants for research in the social sciences. In their review, Peer,

² www.prolific.ac

Brandimarte, Samat, and Acquisti (2017) found that Prolific participants were more demographically diverse than MTurk, provided better responses than traditional participant pools (e.g., student subject pool), and generally more naïve to common experimental paradigms.

Prolific also allows researchers to pre-screen for demographic characteristics such as occupational status and job-seeking motives. For this study, only unemployed adults who are currently seeking employment (i.e., job seekers) could participate.

Procedure

We used a time-lagged panel design to test the theorized model using three time points to minimize common method variance and demand effects (Podsakoff & MacKenzie, 2003).

Appendix B contain a table of the study procedures.

At Time 1, participants completed the Multi-dimensional Humor Questionnaire and demographics information questions.

At Time 2 (1 week later), participants read the following prompt: *“The job interview is one of the most common methods of pre-employment assessment. In addition to traditional interview questions, some companies are including untraditional questions in their interview process to assess the fit of the job applicants.”* Participants were then presented with one of three randomly assigned lists of OPQs (Appendix A) and asked to *“imagine that some of the questions above will be asked during your next job interview and answer the following questions”*. They then completed the applicant reaction measures: 1) interview usefulness and 2) interview motivation, and 3) interview anxiety.

At Time 3 (2 weeks after Time 2), participants first read the same prompts as Time 2. Next, they were presented with the same list of OPQs from Time 2 and provided their responses to the recruitment measures: 1) general attraction, 2) pursuit intentions.

Measures

All the measures used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree.

Applicant Humor. We used the 27-item Multi-Dimensional Humor Scale (MHS) developed by Thorson and Powell (1993). The scale measure humor on four dimensions: humor production (“I use humor to entertain my friends”), humor coping (“use of humor help to put me at ease”), humor appreciation (“I like a good joke”), and attitude towards humor (“I am uncomfortable when everyone is cracking jokes”).

Interview Usefulness. We used a 4-item measure adapted from Arvey et al., (1990)’s measure for ‘belief in tests’. An example item is “I don't believe these interview questions are useful.”

Interview Motivation. We used a 4-item measure adapted from Arvey et al., (1990)’s measure for test motivation. An example item is “I would try my best to answer these questions.”

Interview Anxiety. We used a 4-item measure adapted from Arvey et al., (1990)’s measure for test anxiety. An example item is “The thought of having to answer these questions makes me anxious.

Recruitment Outcomes. We used the same measure for General Attraction and Intention to Apply as Study 1 (Highhouse et al., 2003). Like Study 1, the two subscales were highly correlated ($r = .81$) and therefore, combined into a single measure for organizational attraction.

Results and Discussion: Study 2

Table 4 contains the means, standard deviations, and internal consistencies of the Study 2 measures. Consistent with past research, the three applicant reaction variables in the study were associated with attraction to the organization. Before testing the theoretical model, we examined

any potential applicant reaction differences for the oddball interview question type. Univariate ANOVA revealed no systematic difference in applicant reactions to perceived usefulness, $F(2, 235) = 1.03, p = 0.359$ or applicant motivation, $F(2, 235) = 2.10, p = 0.124$. We did, however, find a significant main effect of question type on applicant anxiety, $F(2, 235) = 4.13, p = 0.017$. Pairwise comparisons revealed that applicants reported significantly greater anxiety toward open-ended questions ($M = 3.29, SD = 1.20, n = 98$) than preference-based questions ($M = 2.86, SD = 1.17, n = 96$), Cohen's $d = 0.36$ [95% C.I. = 0.07, 0.65], $p_{\text{holm}} = 0.038$, but not between preference-based and biographical nor open-ended and biographical questions. We also found a significant effect of question type on organizational attraction, $F(2, 235) = 4.52, p = .012$. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons, however, did not reveal any significant pair-wise differences in organizational attraction based on question type. Given the small effect size and the lack of a strong theoretical rationale, we chose to proceed with the test of our main theoretical model by combining all three oddball question type conditions. We also include results for the test of our hypotheses when question type was controlled.

Measurement Model

We examine our hypotheses using the two-phase approach to SEM. We first examined the factor structure of the MHQ. CFA shows that a four-factor correlated factors model fit the data reasonably well, $RMSEA = .069, SRMR = .073, CFI = .901$. Next, we proceeded tested a eight-factor measurement model to reflect all of the distinct constructs examined in the study. The overall eight-factor model had a good fit, $RMSEA = .058, SRMR = .057, CFI = .923$. We also examined other more parsimonious models. But the relative model fit indices of the alternative models showed no noticeable improvement. Therefore, the eight-factor model was retained for the subsequent test of hypotheses.

Latent Path Model

We tested the hypothesized model with Structural Equation Modeling using the *lavaan* package in *R*. Given that not all participants completed the entirety of the study, we used full information maximum likelihood estimation, which is the best approach for model estimation when there is missing data in a longitudinal design (Newman, 2009). The latent path model fit the data quite well, $RMSEA = 0.051$, $SRMR = 0.061$, $CFI = 0.907$. Figure 4 contains the results of the latent path analysis.

Overall, we found moderate support for our hypotheses. We also found some significant, but not hypothesized, effects for unexpected pathways. We describe the results in order of our hypotheses. First, we found partial support for Hypothesis 4. Humor attitude significantly predicted the perceived usefulness of oddball questions (H4a), but not interview motivation (H4b). We also found partial support for Hypothesis 5. Humor appreciation was positively associated with interview motivation (H5a), but not perceived interview usefulness (H5b). Next, we found partial support for Hypothesis 6. Humor production was negatively associated with interview anxiety (H6a), but not interview motivation (H6b). Finally, we did not find support for Hypothesis 7. Although not hypothesized, we also found humor attitude to be negatively associated with interview anxiety. Taken together, individual differences in applicant humor do contribute to applicant reaction to oddball interview questions. Furthermore, individual dimensions of humor differentially predicted unique applicant reaction outcomes. And the pattern of associations is generally consistent with our hypotheses.

Next, we examined the indirect effects of humor dimensions on organizational attraction through applicant reaction variables as mediators (Table 5). The results of the mediation analysis are consistent with our predictions. Except for humor coping, we found that all three dimensions

of humor (humor production, appreciation, and attitude) had indirect effects on organizational attraction via applicant reaction as a mediator. The effects, however, were modest and depended on the match between humor dimension and applicant reaction variable.

General Discussion

This research examined the recruitment implications of a novel set of interview questions: *Oddball Personality Questions*. Whereas conventional wisdom and existing research have largely discounted the utility of unconventional interview questions (Highhouse et al., 2019; Speer et al., 2020), our research suggests a potential silver lining to OPQs from a recruitment perspective. Consistent with our hypotheses, applicants judged oddball personality questions to be less useful but more likable than traditional job questions. For recruitment, the negative effect on usefulness judgments was offset by the positive effects on likability judgments. In combination, the presence of OPQs did not have an overall main effect on organizational attraction. Study 2 further revealed that individual differences in humor may affect how applicants react to oddball personality questions.

Our findings have several theoretical and practical implications for how employment interview procedures may affect recruitment. Specifically, applicants with a low sense of humor may be less likely to approach, or more likely to withdraw from the application process if OPQs are used in the interview process. With very few exceptions (e.g., entertainer, comic), individual differences in humor are unrelated to job-related tasks. Therefore, eliminating applicants with a low sense of humor may potentially reduce the number of available candidates. Although we found a positive indirect effect of OPQs on organizational attraction through likability, this benefit is offset by the negative effect of perceived uselessness of the questions. Based on our

findings, the presence of OPQs did not necessarily make an organization appear more attractive from a recruitment perspective.

Our research also has implications for the development of novel selection tools. As organizations begin to experiment with unconventional selection procedures (e.g., asynchronous interviews; social media screening; gamified assessments) (Georgiou et al., 2019; Langer et al., 2017), they should be aware of the unintended consequences on applicant reactions when job seekers are presented with unfamiliar situations. Furthermore, job seekers may resort to heuristics to make snap judgments about organizations based on recruitment activities, especially when making judgments under uncertainty. Our research suggests that unusual hiring practices may be negatively received because they deviate from norms. At the same time, our research also suggests that the disadvantages brought on by novelty may be offset by the benefits of greater interest and applicant engagement. If applicants are amused and entertained by the selection process (e.g., answering OPQs), the drawbacks of unfamiliarity may be reduced. Still, these trade-offs must be empirically examined.

This research is particularly timely due to the growing demand for virtual hiring during the COVID19 pandemic (Novel, 2020, p. 19). Organizations are increasingly seeking ways to establish personal connections with prospective job seekers. Without in-person physical interactions, organizations must turn to alternative methods to generate interpersonal and organizational attraction. During a pre-hire stage, potential job seekers may use information about a company's selection practice to decide whether to apply. Companies that administer stressful and abusive hiring practices may turn off high-quality candidates. At the same time, those that employ innovative and playful selection practices may appear more attractive. Nevertheless, OPQs do not adhere to best practices in interview question design, and there is

little evidence that they reflect actual personality traits or job-relevant characteristics (Hartwell et al., 2019). For these reasons, we advise against the use of OPQs for pre-employment *assessment* because as far as we know, OPQs do not really assess anything.

Although some recruiters may only use OPQs as an icebreaker or rapport building tactic, they may still be influenced by applicants' answers to the OPQ. Past research has found that interviewers often, and sometimes unconsciously, integrate non-diagnostic information ascertained during the job interview when forming judgments about potential candidates (Barrick et al., 2012; Dalal et al., 2020). Interviewers also consider information that is unrelated to the job. Dana et al., (2013) for example, found that interviewers may try to make sense out of totally random interviewer responses, thus introducing error and bias in their decisions. Inversely, an applicant's responses to OPQs may affect the affective states of the interviewer. A funny answer to an OPQ, for example, may put the interviewer in a better mood, which could bias their evaluation of the candidate. Indeed, asking OPQs is likely to affect the evaluation of a job candidate, whether intentional or not.

We hope this paper sheds light on the popular beliefs toward the use of OPQs in a job interview setting. In doing so, we hope managers will be less inclined to ask OPQs. Still, there is considerable research documenting the wide gap between science and practice, particularly in the context of employee selection (Neumann et al., 2020; Rynes, 2009). In a survey of over 400 human resource professionals, Fisher et al. (2020) found that they were worse at identifying personnel selection myths than they were almost two decades ago. Clearly, the impact of scientific research on organizational selection practices has been limited. These findings are troubling and suggest that organizational practitioners need to do a better job illustrating the liabilities of using unsound selection practices such as OPQs and more importantly,

communicate these implications to human resource professionals in a way that they can understand (Zhang et al., 2018).

Limitations and future directions

One limitation of this paper is its generalizability to other contexts. Specifically, we examined how applicants may react to the prospect of answering oddball personality questions before the interview has occurred. Furthermore, the oddball personality questions were presented alongside a short explanation for their purpose (e.g., assessment of fit). Pre-test reactions, however, may not necessarily generalize to reactions during the interview or post-hire reactions, where outcomes are known (Lievens et al., 2003). Applicant reactions could also worsen if oddball questions were delivered unexpectedly during the job interview without explanation (McCarthy et al., 2017), or if applicants are rejected based on their answers. The latter may result in litigation if humor is not a job-related quality. And as one reviewer noted, participants in this study did not have much “skin in the game”. Applicants may be more motivated, however, in later stages of recruitment such that they may more closely scrutinize the use of OPQs. Their reactions toward OPQs during this stage may, therefore, differ from what is observed in this study. We suspect that applicant reactions to OPQs are likely to be worse in higher stakes situations. Nevertheless, passively obtained information about a company may still affect job seekers’ attitudes such that could influence their job seeking behaviors later. Indeed, much more research should examine these contextual factors as boundary conditions of applicant reactions to oddball questions.

Secondly, our study primarily focused on applicant reactions as an explanatory mechanism for recruitment outcomes of oddball presentations. Future research should also examine how applicants infer symbolic attributes of the organizations based on the interview

questions (Lievens & Highhouse, 2003), and how organizational inferences affect subsequent attraction (Slaughter et al., 2004). Third, our research suggests a potential link between oddball questions and a sense of humor. Outside of the employment context (e.g., personality assessment), one possible avenue of research is to conceptualize OPQs as a performance-based measure of humor. Some OPQs, for example, allow respondents to come up with funny answers, which is similar to existing measures of humor production where people are asked to write funny punchlines to jokes (Nusbaum et al., 2017). More research is needed to examine the validity of OPQs as a measure of humor production. Still, humor assessment in selection settings must be justified by demonstrating its job relevance. It is also worth noting that the OPQs selected in our study were mostly light-hearted and harmless. There are, however, documented instances of overly invasive oddball questions used in selection situations. Players from the National Football League, for example, reported being asked extremely disturbing interview questions such as the age at which they lost their virginity (Henson, 2019). Indeed, not all OPQs are fun and not all personal disclosure is appropriate (c.f. Hart et al., 2021).

Another limitation of this study is the construct validity of the ‘likability’ measure used in study 1. In our review, research on applicant reactions has not considered the degree to which selection procedures are likable in the sense that they are fun and interesting. Our findings suggest that likability judgments of selection procedures are distinct from usefulness judgments and meaningfully predict organizational attraction. Interestingly, the likability of OPQs was a stronger predictor of attraction than usefulness judgments. Future research should further explore the validity of ‘likability’ and other related affective judgments as meaningful applicant reaction constructs. Relatedly, more research is needed to examine what makes OPQs likable. Although we offered two potential mechanisms, we did not, however, provide explicit tests of these

mechanisms nor consideration of alternative explanations. More research is needed to better understand the processes that give rise to the opposing reactions toward OPQs. Similarly, future research should examine a broader range of applicant reaction variables. Although our studies focused on the usefulness of the questions, future research should examine other specific applicant reactions such as face validity and procedural justice.

Future research should also explore the characteristics of organizations that employ fun and humorous selection practices such as OPQs and how those characteristics affect organizational fit. We were only able to find one paper that examined ‘fun’ as an organizational characteristic for recruitment (e.g., Tews et al., 2012). It is possible, for example, that humorous employees will be better suited to work in an organization that values fun and humor. Finally, we have thus far assumed that humor is not job-relevant and therefore, should not be used to make selection decisions. Research, however, has noted several psychological benefits of humor on stress and wellbeing (Mesmer-Magnus et al., 2012). It is possible, therefore, that employees who have a great sense of humor may positively affect the wellbeing of their co-workers, clients, or customers (Mao et al., 2017).

Conclusion

In this paper, we develop and test a model of Oddball Personality Questions and examine its impact on applicant reaction and recruitment. We found that the effect of OPQs on recruitment is double-edged. Applicants found oddball questions to be less useful than traditional questions, but more likable. We also find that individual differences in humor were associated with applicant reaction and organizational attraction. Overall, OPQs did not enhance organizational attraction and may undermine the quality of the applicant pool. Until the validity

of OPQs as an assessment tool is established, its use in employment interview settings remains dubious and should be avoided.

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Table 1.

Factor loadings of applicant reaction adjectives in Study 1

	Usefulness	Likability
Inappropriate	-0.81	-0.10
Useless	-0.79	-0.01
Fair	0.80	-0.05
Invasive	-0.59	0.08
Welcoming	-0.40	0.49
Fun	0.10	0.89
Boring	-0.08	-0.68
Interesting	-0.10	0.87

Note. Factor loadings are estimated based on Oblimin rotation. Loadings greater than .30 are bolded.

Table 2

Means, standard deviations, and correlations with confidence intervals

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Useful Judgments	2.55	1.21								
2. Likable Judgments	3.15	1.21	.16**							
3. Organizational Attraction	2.81	1.15	.44**	.58**						
4. Factor – Open-ended	0.24	0.43	-.16**	.14*	.03					
5. Factor – Biographical	0.27	0.44	-.27**	-.00	-.07	-.34**				
6. Factor – Preference	0.26	0.44	-.08	.19**	.02	-.33**	-.35**			
7. Sex	0.52	0.50	.04	-.05	-.12*	-.10	.01	.01		
8. Age	36.05	10.44	-.07	-.02	-.16**	-.00	.01	.01	-.02	
9. Education	4.29	1.35	-.02	-.14*	-.16**	.02	.02	-.11	.07	.05

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$. Values in parentheses

indicate Cronbach's alpha. Sex is coded as 0 = female; 1 = male.

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Table 3.

Indirect effects of oddball question presentation on organizational attraction outcomes in Study 1

Parameters	Unstandardized	95% CI for Unstandardized
IV: Oddball Question Presentation	Indirect Effect	Indirect Effect
<i>Indirect Effects</i>		
1. Usefulness Judgments → Organizational Attraction	-.47 (.11)	[-.72, -.28]
3. Likability Judgment → Organizational Attraction	.49 (.10)	[.32, .70]
<i>Direct Effects</i>		
1. Organizational Attraction	-.15 (.18)	[-.51, .18]

Note. Oddball Question Presentation was coded as 0 = Traditional Questions, and 1 = Oddball Questions; CI indicates confidence interval. Bootstrapped standard errors are in parentheses.

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Table 4

Means, standard deviations, and correlations of Study 2's variables

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	9	10	11	12	13	14
<i>Time 1 Variables (n = 359)</i>															
1. Humor Production	3.66	0.78	(.93)												
2. Humor Coping	3.91	0.74	.59**	(.85)											
3. Humor Appreciation	4.24	0.55	.46**	.55**	(.86)										
4. Humor Attitude	4.25	0.67	.30**	.42**	.60**	(.83)									
<i>Time 2 Variables (n = 295)</i>															
5. Interview Usefulness	2.53	1.12	.02	-.05	-.02	.04	(.93)								
6. Interview Anxiety	3.08	1.15	-.16**	-.01	-.06	-.13*	-.56**	(.89)							
7. Interview Motivation	3.54	0.58	.13*	.09	.13*	.06	.25**	-.10	(.82)						
<i>Time 3 Variables (n = 266)</i>															
9. Org. Attraction	3.17	0.73	.13*	.09	.09	.11	.61**	-.44**	.36**	(.95)					
<i>Demographics and Question Type</i>															
10. Factor – Open-ended	0.34	0.47	.05	.06	.10	-.00	.03	.13*	.11	.10					
11. Factor - Biographical	0.33	0.47	-.04	-.03	-.10	-.02	-.07	.00	-.12*	-.18**	-.50**				
12. Factor – Preference	0.33	0.47	-.01	-.03	.00	.03	.04	-.13*	.01	.08	-.50**	-.49**			

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13. Age	32.61	11.40	-.01	-.05	-.03	.01	-.00	.01	-.08	.02	-.04	.07	-.03		
14. Sex	0.51	0.50	.17**	.08	.02	-.06	.14*	-.15*	-.03	.04	.03	-.02	-.01	-.12*	
15. Edu	4.08	1.44	-.06	-.05	-.14**	-.19**	-.06	.03	-.04	-.03	.10	-.03	-.07	.14**	-.06

Note. *M* and *SD* are used to represent mean and standard deviation, respectively. * indicates $p < .05$. ** indicates $p < .01$. Values in parentheses indicate Cronbach's alpha. Sex is coded as 0 = female, 1 = male.

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Table 5.

Indirect effects of applicant humor and organizational attraction outcomes in Study 2

Hypothesis	Predictor	Mediator	Outcome – Organizational Attraction	
			No Controls	Controlling for Question Type
4a	Humor Attitude	Interview Usefulness	0.16. [0.03, 0.30]	0.17 [0.04, 0.30]
4b	Humor Attitude	Interview Motivation	-0.04 [0.11, 0.03]	-0.04 [-0.11, 0.03]
5a	Humor Appreciation	Interview Usefulness	0.15 [-0.02, 0.32]	0.16 [0.00, 0.33]
5b	Humor Appreciation	Interview Motivation	0.12 [0.02, 0.22]	0.12 [0.02, 0.21]
6a	Humor Production	Interview Motivation	0.03 [-0.03, 0.08]	0.02 [-0.03, 0.07]
6b	Humor Production	Interview Anxiety	0.10 [0.02, 0.18]	0.10 [0.02, 0.18]
7	Humor Coping	Interview Anxiety	-0.07 [-0.15, 0.01]	-0.07 [-0.14, 0.01]

Notes. Values in brackets represent upper and lower limits of the bootstrapped 95% confidence intervals

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Figure 1. Plot of mean usefulness judgments for Study 1

Note. OPEN = Open-ended; PREF = Preference-based; BIO = Biographical; TRAD = Traditional

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Figure 2. Plot of mean likability judgments for Study 1

Note. OPEN = Open-ended; PREF = Preference-based; BIO = Biographical; TRAD = Traditional

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Figure 3. Results of Mediation Analysis for Study 1.

Notes. All standardized paths are statistically significant at $p < .01$

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Figure 4. Result of Mediation Analysis for Study 2.

Note. Only statistically significant standardized paths are presented. Predictor (humor dimensions) and mediator (applicant reactions) variables were to covary. For parsimony in presentation, the covariance between these variables is omitted from the figure. The path estimates in brackets are based on model estimated with question type included as a control.

Appendix A: Full list of interview questions

Traditional

1. What are your major weaknesses?
2. What is one of the hardest decisions you've ever had to make?
3. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
4. How would a friend or professor describe you?
5. What do you think are the most important qualities for someone to excel at work?
6. What do you expect from a job?
7. Give an example of a time you dealt with a high-pressure situation.
8. Describe a time you worked as a part of a team and how you helped the team succeed.
9. Tell me about yourself
10. What leadership experiences do you have?

Open-Ended

1. Create an outfit that describes yourself.
2. If you could throw any party, what would be the theme?
3. How would you spend \$1000?
4. What would the name of your debut album be?
5. What would you do if you found a penguin in the freezer?
6. If you were a brand, what would be your motto?
7. If you could be remembered for one sentence, what would it be?
8. If you could have 3 wishes what would they be?
9. What would you do in the event of a zombie apocalypse?
10. What would you do if it were your last day on earth?
11. What would you like inscribed on your headstone?
12. What do you think of lava lamps?

Preference

1. Would you rather fight 1 horse-sized duck or 100 duck-sized horses?
2. What is your dream car and why?
3. Which one of the seven dwarves would you be?
4. What kind of animal would you be and why?
5. What is your favorite store to shop at?
6. Are you a cat lover or dog lover?
7. What are your favorite TV shows?
8. What is your favorite movie?
9. What is your favorite color?
10. If you had a choice between two superpowers being invisible or flying which would you choose?
11. If you could be any tree, which tree would you be?

Biographical

1. What would the inside of your car look like if we were to go look inside of it right now?
2. Have you played the video game Borderlands?
3. What is the most embarrassing thing in your bedroom?
4. What is your most memorable travel experience?
5. What is the funniest thing that has ever happened to you?
6. What is your most embarrassing moment?

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7. Did you get an allowance? Did you spend it right away or save it? What did you spend it on?
8. What was the last costume you wore?
9. What is the last time you did something for the first time?

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Appendix B: Study 2 Procedure

	Time 1 <i>Baseline</i>	Time 2 <i>1 week after T1</i>	Time 3 <i>2 weeks after T2</i>
Study Prompt	None	The job interview is one of the most common methods of pre-employment assessment. In addition to traditional interview questions, some companies are including untraditional questions in their interview process to assess the fit of the job applicants.	
Stimuli	None	<p>“imagine that some of the questions above will be asked during your next job interview and answer the following questions”</p> <p>[OPQ List]</p>	
Measures	Demographics MHQ	Interview Anxiety Interview Usefulness Interview Anxiety	General Attractiveness Pursuit Intentions

Notes. The same prompt and stimulus (OPQ list) are presented to the participant at Times 2 and 3.

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Supplemental Materials

Study 1: Potential moderating role of job title, age, sex, and race

We examined the potential role of demographic characteristics on applicant reactions to Oddball Personality Questions (OPQs). In Study 1, we conducted multiple regression analyses to examine the moderating role of sex, race, and age on the treatment effect (Presence of OPQ) on the two applicant reaction outcomes (question usefulness and likability). The interaction term between sex and the dummy-coded treatment variable (OPQ Presence) was not statistically significant for perceived question usefulness, $b = -0.23$, $p = 0.451$, nor likability, $b = -0.13$, $p = .68$. Given that most of the participants were Caucasian, race was dichotomized into Caucasian (coded as 0) vs. Non-Caucasian (coded as 1). The interaction term between race and the dummy-coded treatment variable was not significant for question usefulness, $b = -0.17$, $p = 0.66$, nor likability, $b = 0.16$, $p = 0.72$. Finally, the interaction term between age and the dummy-coded treatment variable was not significant for question usefulness, $b = -0.00$, $p = 0.88$, nor likability, $b = 0.00$, $p = 0.91$. Together, the presence of OPQs did not have differential effects on application reactions based on age, sex, or race. Between subject ANOVA was used to examine the potential moderating role of job title on the treatment effect. The interaction term between the job title factor and the treatment factor (presence of OPQ) was not significant for usefulness judgments, $F(9,110) = .43$, $p = .91$, nor likability judgments, $F(9,110) = 1.21$, $p = .30$.

Although job title did not moderate the experimental treatment effects (Question type), We did find statistically significant main effect of job title on both question usefulness, $F(3,110) = 3.30$, $p = .023$ and question likability, $F(3,110) = 2.85$, $p = .041$. Table 1 contain the group means for each dependent variable across job titles. Post-hoc pairwise comparisons using corrected for family-wise error, however, failed to reveal any significant difference between any of the job titles.

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Table 1. Means of applicant reaction variables across job titles

	Validity Judgments	Likability Judgments	N
Janitorial Staff	2.16 (0.98)	2.91 (1.29)	67
Marketing Executive	2.78 (1.25)	3.39 (1.09)	64
Receptionist	2.48 (1.19)	3.07 (1.12)	73
Software Developer	2.79 (1.29)	3.23 (1.28)	71

Note. Cell SD in parentheses