



Personality Discrimination and the Wrongness of Hiring Based on Extraversion

Joona Räsänen¹ · Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen²

Received: 3 May 2023 / Accepted: 16 February 2024
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Abstract

Employers sometimes use personality tests in hiring or specifically look for candidates with certain personality traits such as being social, outgoing, active, and extraverted. Therefore, they hire based on personality, specifically extraversion in part at least. The question arises whether this practice is morally permissible. We argue that, in a range of cases, it is not. The common belief is that, generally, it is not permissible to hire based on sex or race, and the wrongness of such hiring practices is based on two widely accepted principles: the Relevance Principle and the Fairness Principle. The Relevance Principle states that hiring should be based on what is relevant to job performance, while the Fairness Principle states that hiring should be based on features that individuals can control. Since hiring based on sex or race violates these principles, it is wrong. However, we argue that, in a range of cases, hiring based on extraversion also violates these principles, and assuming the validity of the Relevance and the Fairness Principles, it follows that personality discrimination is morally wrong in those cases.

Keywords Discrimination · Extraversion · Fairness in hiring · Merit · Personality discrimination

Introduction

In France, a consulting firm dismissed an employee, Mr. T, because he refused to participate in team-building activities that involved excessive drinking with colleagues. Mr. T did not want to take part in the “fun” environment, and a French court ruled in his favor, stating that he could not be blamed for his lack of integration into the workplace’s social activities. Many news articles covering the case stated that the man has the “right to be boring.”¹

This case reveals something about the nature of modern work communities. In addition to technical qualifications,

individuals are often expected to be outgoing and fun, possessing the right personality traits.

Scholars from a recent study (Tholen, 2023) interviewed external recruitment consultants about organizational fit and found that recruiters frequently defined personality as sociability, often understood as being on the extroverted side of the introvert-extrovert continuum. Employers, according to recruiters, desired candidates who were outgoing, talkative, energetic, or naturally inclined to interact with others.² One recruiter stated that “somebody who is just interested in coming and sitting in the corner all day doing design calculations and not interacting with anybody isn’t going to fit in that well” (Tholen, 2023).

Imagine reading a job advertisement that says: “We are seeking a candidate who is not social or active. We want to hire someone who is not outgoing but rather a bit shy; an individual who prefers to be left alone and does not enjoy attending parties or socializing with colleagues.”

Such an advertisement would undoubtedly come as a surprise since it is not common to see such job requirements. Social, active, and outgoing individuals are generally viewed

✉ Joona Räsänen
joona.rasanen@utu.fi

Kasper Lippert-Rasmussen
lippert@ps.au.dk

¹ Department of Philosophy, Contemporary History and Political Science, & Turku Institute for Advanced Studies, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

² CEPDISC - Centre for the Experimental-Philosophical Study of Discrimination, Department of Political Science, School of Business and Social Sciences, Aarhus University, Aarhus, Denmark

¹ <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/world-news/sacked-man-wins-right-boring-28580136>

² Although, according to recruiters, some employers found calmer, quieter, and less outgoing individuals preferable.

as desirable qualities for a productive co-worker, whereas shyness, reservation, and quietness are traits that are typically not sought after in the workplace.³ One might suspect whether the features of extraversion are even more crucial in hiring than technical qualifications such as skills, knowledge, or job competence.

Favoring extraverts can occur in at least two ways, one of which involves the use of personality tests in hiring to identify outgoing and sociable candidates.⁴ On the other hand, in some job advertisements, it is explicitly stated that the ideal candidate must possess a specific personality type. Regardless of the method, employers are hiring new employees based, at least partially, on their personalities, particularly extraversion.

One reason why employers may choose to hire based on personality is to find the best person–organization fit. As Dobos (2016) notes in a recent paper, organizations are increasingly looking beyond the technical qualifications of applicants and focusing instead on core values, general character traits, and personality type. This suggests that hiring is not necessarily about selecting the best candidate, but the most suitable one. Alternatively, one could argue that qualifications for many jobs extend beyond technical qualifications, such as the ability to program a computer or fix a car engine. They also include what is often referred to as reaction qualifications, often involving the desire to socialize with colleagues to contribute to a particular working environment or conveying a dynamic and upbeat image to customers (Wertheimer, 1983).

While the search for the best person–organization fit might lead to hiring socially active and outgoing candidates—which roughly means hiring extraverts—it also implies and reproduces a wider social phenomenon: the extrovert ideal. Modern Western societies seem to exalt extraversion. Cain (2012), an American author and former lawyer, claims that introverts are discriminated against because of their personalities. According to Cain, the practice of preferring extroverts is similar to the practice of

preferring men over women. In both cases, there is an ideal worker (extrovert/man) who is preferred over the less ideal worker (introvert/woman). Moreover, in some important ways, being an introvert is like being a woman; it goes to the very core of who people are.

The idea behind the extrovert ideal can be found in numerous social studies. For instance, talkative people are often rated as smarter (Anderson & Kilduff, 2009; Paulhus & Morgan, 1997; Swann & Rentfrow, 2001). However, there is no correlation between extraversion and intelligence. Extraverts are not smarter than introverts, and vice versa, according to IQ scores (Child, 1964; Saklofske & Kostura, 1990; Vafaiee & Dadashzadeh, 2004).

The extrovert ideal is deeply ingrained in modern western societies, to the point where the American psychiatric association (APA) was considering including introversion as a determining factor for diagnosing mental disorders in its diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (known as the DSM-5) in 2010. This proposal is similar to a satirical one made in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, which suggested that happiness should be classified as a psychiatric disorder (Bentall, 1992). While the author of the JME paper was arguably joking, the APA was serious about considering whether introversion should be medicalized (Ancowitz, 2010, 2012).

In this paper, we address one aspect of the extrovert ideal: hiring practices. While it is becoming more common to hire candidates based on personality to find the right person–organization fit, we argue that this practice is discriminatory and morally wrong.

Specifically, we will argue that employers should not hire based on personalities for (roughly) the same reasons as they should not hire based on race or sex. We thus make an argument by analogy, claiming that one plausible explanation for the wrongness of recruiting based on sex or race likewise explains the wrongness of hiring based on personality. If—and since—we believe it is wrong to hire based on race or sex, we should also believe it is wrong to hire based on personality.⁵ We will assume, but not defend the

³ In some cases, perhaps introversion is not considered bad in itself. Rather, it is treated as a reliable proxy for other traits that are so considered. Consider an analogy with intelligence. Suppose I am unintelligent (a personality trait). Suppose an employer refuses to hire me, since the job in question requires solving intellectually demanding tasks. In this case, the employer might be correct in insisting that, strictly speaking, the reason I am not being hired is not that I am unintelligent, since had I learned to compensate for my lack of intelligence such that my performance is unaffected by my low intelligence, the employer would have been happy to hire me. Intelligence for this employer is simply a proxy for certain desired qualifications (the ability to solve intellectually demanding tasks), not something the employer values in itself. Yet, on the view we adopt here, the employer might engage in direct (statistical) discrimination against unintelligent people just as employers might engage in direct (statistical) discrimination against introverts, even if they do not mind introversion as such.

⁴ This is not to say that the personality tests are used solely for the purpose of finding extraverted candidates.

⁵ Similar arguments from analogies could likely be made for some of the other explanations that have been proposed in the literature on discrimination in hiring, such as the disrespect-based account (Alexander, 1992; Eidelson, 2015), objective-meaning based accounts (Hellman, 2008), relational egalitarian accounts (Moreau, 2020), and harm-based accounts (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2020). However, we have chosen to focus on the Relevance and Fairness principles because, while there are other explanations that have received significant attention in the ethics of discrimination literature, these two principles likely capture the objections to discrimination that people are most likely to raise. For instance, courts often hold that antidiscrimination laws protect “immutable” characteristics, such as sex and race. Legal scholars (such as Hoffman, 2021: 1519, emphasis added) also argue that “*common sense* dictates that it is unjust for workers to suffer adverse consequences solely because of traits they were born with or cannot modify.” Laypeople too think controllability and relevance justify hiring practices (Shakur & Phillips, 2022).

claim, that, generally, race and sex discrimination in hiring, etc., are wrong—one cannot defend everything in one paper—and that, definitely, refusing to hire a candidate on grounds of race or gender, where race and gender are irrelevant to qualifications, is morally wrong. Instead, we will focus on what, surely, most readers will regard as a claim in greater need of support, i.e., that personality discrimination is in many ways akin to race and sex discrimination morally speaking.⁶

A recent study (Shakur & Phillips, 2022) examined how people think about demographic attributes used in hiring. The study found that people rely on *controllability* and *relevance* dimensions to justify their perceptions of hiring practices; largely associating uncontrollable, irrelevant attributes, such as race and sex, with discrimination. We take this as our starting point. People believe hiring practices are wrong when they violate controllability and relevance, and morally just when controllable and relevant inputs determine outcomes.

The article proceeds as follows. After some conceptual groundwork showing why differential treatment based on extra/introversion qualifies as discrimination (Sect. "Personality Discrimination"), we explain two principles on which the argument is built (Sects. "The Relevance Principle" and "The Fairness Principle"). These are 1) the Relevance Principle and 2) the Fairness Principle. Sections. "Is Extraversion Relevant for the Job Performance?" and "Is Selection Based on Extraversion Fair?" explain why discrimination in hiring against introverts violates these two principles. Section "Objections and the Replies" considers two immediate objections against our arguments. We argue that while the objections have some argumentative force, they do not refute the main claim of this paper. We thus conclude (Sect. "Conclusion") that for a significant number of jobs, it is morally wrong to hire based on extraversion. By a "significant number," we mean a number such that introversion discrimination is sufficient common occurrence to warrant the attention of anti-discrimination policies, regulations, academic research, etc.

⁶ Basically, the structure of our argument is the following:

1. What makes race and sex discrimination in hiring generally morally wrong is that, generally, race and sex are irrelevant to the jobs candidates are hired for.
2. Generally extraversion is as irrelevant for the jobs candidates are hired for as race and sex.
3. Thus, extraversion discrimination in hiring is generally wrong.

We shall take (1), i.e., that race and sex discrimination in hiring are generally morally wrong and that they are so because they violate the Relevance and the Fairness Principles, for granted. We include the qualification "generally" to set aside contested cases like hiring an actor to play Virginia Wolf or a social worker to interact with traumatized victims of racism (see also footnote 13).

Before going into the arguments in detail, we must clarify a few things. First, we understand the terms "wrong," "impermissible," and "immoral" interchangeably. They all mean that we have an overall moral reason not to do something. If we are right, in this case, then we have a moral reason not to hire based on extraversion.

Second, "hiring" and "recruiting" should also be understood to mean the same here. The focus of this article is on the hiring of new employees, while the argument could equally expand to cover promoting already existing employees—and firing existing individuals.

Third, as we use "discrimination" here it always involves differential treatment—you cannot (directly) discriminate if you treat everyone alike. Moreover, "discrimination against" (as opposed to "discrimination between" as in giving people of different sizes clothes of different sizes) always involves and differential, disadvantageous treatment. However, neither all instances of differential treatment, nor even all instances of differential, disadvantageous treatment involve discrimination. Both claims manifested in the fact that a judge, who convicts the guilty and the guilty only, engages in differential, disadvantageous treatment of the guilty and the innocent. However, the judge does not on account thereof discriminate in any morally interesting sense of that term, e.g., "being guilty" is not a category that deserves protection (for further explication of the difference between differential treatment and discrimination based on the notion of social salience, see Sect. "Personality Discrimination").

Fourth, we will not argue that it is always and, in all contexts, (e.g., dating) morally wrong to choose a candidate based on extraversion, but that, generally, it is. "Generally" is a vague term reflecting in part that it would be very difficult to offer a defensible principle for counting here. Likewise, we do not argue that it is necessarily wrong to hire based on other features of our personalities such as conscientiousness—although we think it very well could be wrong to hire based on other aspects of our personalities too, e.g., neuroticism.⁷ The focus of this paper is on hiring based on a specific aspect of personality: extraversion.

Finally, it is common to differentiate between direct and indirect discrimination (Altman, 2020; Cosette-Lefebvre, 2020; Eidelson, 2015; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2013), which also applies to personality discrimination. Indirect discrimination against introverts in hiring involves hiring practices that, even if they do not involve any intentions to exclude

⁷ Arguably, the three of the five remaining OCEAN personality traits—openness, conscientiousness, and agreeableness—might be more relevant for job functions than extraversion, even if they are not more salient in job adverts than extraversion.

introverts or any rules, guidelines, etc., that target introverts for negative differential treatment, nonetheless have disparate impacts on the group of introverts. Perhaps the practice of basing hiring decisions on job interviews is an important form of indirect discrimination against introverts. While extraverts tend to do better in interviews, interviews do not predict job performance, and unstructured interviews can even be worse than no interview (Dana et al., 2013; Ziegler et al., 2011). However, due to the significant amount of obvious disadvantageous differential treatment of introverts and the fact that this is rarely articulated as a matter of discrimination, this article will focus on *direct* personality discrimination against introverts.

Personality Discrimination

There is a challenge to our main claim—that hiring based on extraversion amounts to wrongful discrimination against introverts—which we need to tackle head-on. Basically, the challenge is the following: the mere fact that a group of people is subjected to negative differential treatment does not imply that its members are discriminated against (cf. our third, preliminary remark above). Suppose, for instance, that a particular employer idiosyncratically refuses to hire green-eyed people. Surely, such people cannot complain about being discriminated against. To back up this contention, it might be pointed out that much anti-discrimination legislation explicitly lists certain protected groups or traits that anti-discrimination law is concerned with. For instance, the US Title VII of the Civil Rights Act protects employees and job applicants from employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, and national origin.⁸

Having green eyes is not on such a list. Similarly, being introverted is not a protected trait. Or to put this point in slightly more general terms: There are many moral wrongs—even many moral wrongs involving differential treatment of people—not all of them are instances of discrimination. While bullying others at the workplace indiscriminately is wrong, it is not discriminatory against anyone in particular (as opposed to race- or gender-based bullying). Treating introverts disadvantageously might be wrong, but it need not be wrongful discrimination.

We have two responses to this challenge. First, we are not particularly concerned with what counts as discrimination in a legal sense. Rather, our concern is with what folks do or should consider discrimination.⁹ From that point of view,

⁸ <https://www.ftc.gov/policy-notices/no-fear-act/protections-against-discrimination>

⁹ Following Lippert-Rasmussen (2006) we define discrimination as follows: “X discriminates against (in favour of) Y in dimension W iff: (1) X treats Y differently from Z (or from how X would treat Z, were

there must be some kind of unifying feature possessed by traits that qualify for the list of protected traits or groups. If there is no such feature, the distinction between groups that can and groups that cannot be subjected to discrimination would be arbitrary. One plausible unifying feature is the property of social salience (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2013). Differential treatment in the context of discrimination must be “suitably explained” as making a distinction between members of “different, socially salient groups” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2006: 168). For a trait to be socially salient means for it to be such that if someone is perceived to have that trait it will make a significant difference to social interactions with that individual in a wide range of different social contexts: “Having green eyes is obviously irrelevant in almost any social context, whereas an individual’s apparent sex, race, or religion affect social interactions in many social contexts.” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2006).

The social salience condition “explains why we do not talk about discrimination against non-family members, unqualified applicants, or the undeserving” (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2006: 169). “Non-family members” and “unqualified applicants” do not correspond to salient social groups, and therefore, on this conception, differential treatment with respect to these categories cannot constitute discrimination.¹⁰

In our view, being introverted is different in that it makes a significant difference to social interactions in a wide range of different social contexts.¹¹ True, it might not make as much of a difference as race or sex, but it is clearly way more significant than eye color or the length of one’s toenails.

Accordingly, our first response to the present objection is that even if differential treatment based on all traits does

Footnote 9 (continued)

X to treat Z in some way) in dimension W; (2) the differential treatment is (or is believed by X to be) disadvantageous (advantageous) to Y; and (3) the differential treatment is suitably explained by Y’s and Z’s being (or believed by X to be) (members of) different, socially salient groups.” Lippert-Rasmussen’s definition is a non-moralized one, i.e., the fact that something is discrimination in his sense does not entail that it is wrong etc. Hence, one could believe that affirmative action is not morally wrong and still think that it qualifies as discrimination in his sense. Also, one can believe that instances of discrimination in his sense which violate the Relevance and the Fairness Principles (see Sect. “Personality Discrimination” and “The Relevance Principle”) invariably are morally wrong.

¹⁰ Recall our brief discussion of the extrovert ideal above.

¹¹ The same is true of being beautiful or ugly or average looking (see Hofmann, 2023). personality discrimination, such as discrimination based on introversion/extraversion. Many philosophers accept that there is such a thing as “discrimination against people considered unattractive,” i.e., lookism (Mason, 2021; Mason & Minerva, 2022; Minerva, 2017). Such philosophers should agree that there is no argument based on the idea of social salience for why there could not also be such a thing as personality discrimination. For accepting looks-based hiring see Bruton (2015).

not count as discrimination (which we agree that it does not), differential treatment based on introversion does. While being introverted is not a currently protected trait, it should be included on the list.

Some might object that it is not extraversion that is the reason for the discrimination but rather shyness, hypersensitivity, or autism. However, this objection misunderstands the relationship between being introverted and being shy, hypersensitive, autistic, etc. Being introverted may manifest in multiple ways, and one way is being shy, hypersensitive, or autistic. For these introverts, being introverted is constituted by their shyness, hypersensitivity, and autism. Therefore, treating them disadvantageously based on these traits simply amounts to treating them differently based on their introversion.

Our second response to the present challenge notes that even if, for some reason our argument above is flawed and that negative, differential treatment of introverts does not amount to discrimination against them, this would not undermine our claim that such treatment is wrongful. Provided that, generally, extraversion is as irrelevant for the jobs as race and sex and that what makes race and sex discrimination in hiring generally morally wrong is that, generally, race and sex are irrelevant for the jobs candidates are hired for (see footnote 4), it still follows that hiring on the basis of extraversion is morally wrong even if it does not amount to discrimination. Arguably, this is like how the fact that preferring family members when hiring to public offices is morally wrong even if it amounts to nepotism, but not discrimination.

The Relevance Principle

How should corporations and organizations hire people so that the hiring practices are morally justified? The question is obviously so broad that it cannot be fully covered in this paper (and it is not necessary to cover it either). It also goes beyond the law (Alder & Gilbert 2006). However, there seem to be two plausible and, we believe, widely held beliefs. One is:

The Relevance Principle: It is morally wrong not to hire candidates for jobs based on relevant qualifications, etc.

Goldman (1979: 34) argues that the most competent individuals have prima facie rights to be hired for jobs. Likewise, Hook (1995: 146) claims that hiring decisions should be based on who is best qualified for the position. These are not unreasonable claims, although, in practice, it is difficult to identify relevant qualifications and to assess which candidates have them and to which degree. However, even though there are some practical problems when distinguishing

between good candidates, the point remains: hiring decisions that are not based on relevant skills are often considered to be unjust.¹² Consider, for instance, a case where a bus company refuses to hire black people just because they're black, as Kaufman (2019) states, this is a bad reason because skin color is irrelevant to bus driving. This is not to say that race, gender, etc., are never relevant qualifications or for that matter that any instance of discrimination violates the Relevance Principle. When hiring police officers' being race-identical to those who live in the relevant police district might facilitate citizen trust and, thus, race might count as a qualification, in which case discrimination in favor of such applicants—wrong or not—will not violate the Relevance Principle.¹³

Consider another case. If a university is hiring a professor of business ethics, then relevant skills and qualifications would include teaching and research experience in business ethics. However, the experience with painting houses would be irrelevant. Thus, it is morally permissible to hire based on the skills and experience of research and teaching in business ethics but impermissible to hire an ethics professor solely based on whether she has experience in painting houses. Hiring a professor of business ethics based on the experience of painting houses might not count as discrimination—although it would be wrong according to the Relevance Principle—because house painters do not belong to a socially salient group of “house painters” (see Sect. “[Personality Discrimination](#)”). Of course, the relevant skills are different for different jobs. It would be irrelevant to hire a house painter based on the skills of teaching business

¹² It might be objected to this principle (as well as to the Merit and the Fairness Principles that we discuss below) that if a mother hires her teenage son for the summer to fix her house, regardless of his (lack of) relevant qualifications (over which he has no control), this is not morally wrong. (We thank an anonymous reviewer at the *Journal of Business Ethics* for this challenge.) We recognize the force of this challenge, but we think it is a challenge that points to a restriction of the scope of the principle—it does not apply to jobs that lie on the border between the private and public spheres. Moreover, it does not provide sufficient grounds to reject the idea that the Relevance Principle should govern areas clearly falling under its scope, such as hirings by large companies where there are no personal relations between employers and employees (or, if there are, these should not influence the hiring decision). One might also argue that the Merit and the Fairness Principles play a more significant role in the hiring process for the public sector compared to the private sector.

¹³ If discriminating based on race in such case is morally permissible, is it then also permissible for, say, restaurant owners to discriminate based on race if customers prefer white waiters? Some would draw a distinction between the police officer case and the racially prejudiced restaurant customer case, but what justifies do so? For reasons of space, we cannot enter this debate, but refer the reader to some of the main contributions to that literature (Lippert-Rasmussen, 2009; Lippert-Rasmussen, 2013, 235–260; Mason, 2006, 34; Mason, 2016; Miller, 1992, 1999; Wertheimer, 1983).

ethics, and it would be relevant to hire a painter based on his painting skills.

To know what exactly the Relevance Principle implies, we need some account of how we determine whether a qualification is relevant. We do not propose an account of this sort here, but we assume that it can be offered, and that the examples in the paragraph above are intuitively clear cases of irrelevant qualifications. Also, we assume that one might defensibly take a rather broad view of what counts as a relevant qualification, e.g., from the point of view of a company that badly needs to improve its public image when it comes to diversity, being an underrepresented minority person might count as a relevant qualification.¹⁴

The Relevance Principle is closely related to another principle:

The Merit Principle: It is morally wrong not to hire a candidate whose relevant qualifications etc. are at least as good as any other candidate's.¹⁵

The principle of merit-based hiring has been discussed in detail in the literature on the ethics of hiring (Dobos, 2016, 2017; Kershner, 2003; Miller, 1992), and many organizations around the world have explicitly committed to this principle. Dobos (2016: 359, also in Dobos, 2017) lists the following examples: “We hire, promote, train, and pay based on merit, experience, or other work-related criteria” (General Motors); “Employment decisions will be based on job-related criteria and on merit” (Fujitsu); “We select and promote our people on the basis of their qualifications and merit” (Geometry Global); “We focus our personnel decisions on merit and contribution to the firm’s success” (Goldman Sachs); “We recruit, select, and develop our people on merit” (Rolls Royce). The literature on ethics of hiring supports the notion that meritocracy is an important justice principle (see, for example Miller, 1992; Mason, 2006; Son Hing et al., 2011; Shakur & Phillips, 2022).

The Merit Principle could be seen as identical to the Relevance Principle. However, as we understand it, there is a crucial difference. While the Merit Principle says that we should hire the most qualified candidate, the Relevance Principle is less strict. According to the Relevance Principle, there is no requirement to hire the best candidate. The principle simply says that the hiring decision should be based on relevant, rather than irrelevant, factors. The Merit Principle

is a particularly demanding form of the Relevance Principle in that if the former is satisfied, then so is the latter, but not the other way around. This also means that anyone who subscribes to the Merit Principle by implication subscribes to the Relevance Principle.

The Relevance Principle seems more plausible than the Merit Principle because it allows for the consideration of other factors in addition to what is relevant for job performance, which is also why in what follows we will rely on the Relevance rather than the Merit Principle. Consider the following case.

A corporation is hiring a person to deliver newspapers. To make it profitable, the person hired must be able to deliver 100 newspapers in a particular timeframe. The company receives two applications. The first candidate has the skills and knowledge to deliver 140 newspapers in a specific timeframe. The second candidate can deliver 130 newspapers in the same time. However, suppose the second candidate, while not the most qualified applicant, belongs to a discriminated minority and is in many ways in a worse position than the first candidate. Suppose the second candidate, if not getting the job, would become homeless because she cannot afford to pay rent. The first candidate, however, while the most qualified applicant, will be well-off even if not getting the job. Suppose that he has a spouse in a well-paid job who can support him financially.

If we follow the Merit Principle, the first candidate should be hired because he is the most qualified for the job in question. However, we suspect people think we should consider these other factors (as we do); we should—or at least it is not morally impermissible for us to—hire the second candidate. Hiring the second candidate would thus violate merit-based hiring, but it would not violate the Relevance Principle: since hiring is still made based on the relevant factors (the ability to deliver newspapers), we simply consider some other morally relevant factors as well.

In the light of this concession, one might ask why one could not go further and suggest that, say, if a company decides to use a lottery to choose among its top tier of candidates it would act permissibly.¹⁶ Note, however, that while doing so would violate the Merit Principle, it would not violate the Relevance Principle. If only the top tier candidates enter the lottery, arguably, whoever is hired is hired based on relevant qualifications, since had these not been in the top tier, the hired applicant would not have entered the lottery and, thus, not have been hired. Of course, the Relevance Principle speaks against hiring simply based on a lottery in which everyone can take part, but it is unclear if this speaks against the Relevance Principle. (Imagine that doctors were hired through a lottery with no entry requirements.)

¹⁴ Taking a broad view of what counts a relevant qualification means that the Relevance Principle is less demanding than it would be on a narrower interpretation. However, it also means that the principle is more plausible. After all, a company’s public image is relevant to its profits.

¹⁵ For challenges to the Merit Principle, see Lippert-Rasmussen (2020). For defenses of the principle, see Mason (2006); Miller (1992).

¹⁶ We thank an anonymous reviewer for this suggestion.

Before considering the links between extraversion and the Relevance Principle, we want to introduce another plausible principle in hiring: the Fairness Principle.

The Fairness Principle

Another common sensible principle, when it comes to the ethics of hiring, is:

The Fairness Principle: It is morally wrong to select candidates for jobs based on features that they cannot themselves control.

There is something intuitively repellent about hiring people based on features like their race, their skin color, gender, or their height.¹⁷ The Fairness Principle explains why it is morally wrong to hire based on certain features such as race, gender, or height, as people do not have control over these characteristics. For instance, Kaufman (2019) writes that discrimination is objectionable because it disadvantages people based on immutable characteristics, aspects of themselves that they cannot change.

Similar to the Relevance Principle, the Fairness Principle is closely related to the Merit Principle. When hiring is based on factors that people can improve or acquire through training and practice, individuals can compete with each other, striving to acquire the necessary qualifications to improve their chances of being selected. The most competent candidate can then be selected for the position, arguably in line with the Fairness Principle.¹⁸ However, the Merit Principle could be satisfied even if the Fairness Principle is not (e.g., if candidates with the highest merits are selected, but where merits are determined by features candidates do not control, such as beauty), and vice versa (e.g., if candidates are selected based on irrelevant features that they do control).

Both the Fairness and Relevance Principles are, of course, theoretical ideas. In practice, their implementation could be problematic. It is much easier to acquire necessary skills, for instance, for the job of a business ethics professor, if one is white, male, healthy, and able-bodied, living in an affluent Western country, and has a loving and supportive spouse and family than when one is black, a woman facing discrimination, having disabilities or diseases, and living in a poor country without support from family or spouse.

¹⁷ This is not to say that hiring based on gender or race is disturbing only because it violates the Fairness Principle.

¹⁸ We say “arguably” because even if people have some degree of control over whether they possess a certain skill, they do not have perfect control, since natural talents also matter. For example, even if the authors of this article spent all their time training, they would never become better road racing cyclists than Lance Armstrong.

While there are practical problems with the principles, it is not a reason to reject them altogether. They just need some revisions; they are still good frameworks when we consider the ethics of hiring. However, we might need affirmative action, for example, to make them work in the real world.¹⁹

Admittedly, there are apparent counterexamples to the Fairness Principle, notably cases where the Relevance Principle and the Fairness Principle collide. Some would say, for instance, that it is not unfair to hire only beautiful people for modeling jobs. We doubt, however, that people think hiring naturally beautiful people as models necessarily violates the Fairness Principle. However, it could be argued that the explanation is not that hiring beautiful people to be models does not violate the Fairness Principle, but rather that the Relevance Principle is more important than the Fairness Principle.²⁰ On this view, it is unfair to people who are not naturally beautiful that they are never hired as models, albeit other concerns, e.g., the concern for relevant qualifications, outweigh the concern for avoiding unfairness. In any case, if the two principles collide in this way, this is not a reason to reject either of them, but simply a reason to determine which takes precedence over the other. Similarly, if promoting freedom sometimes collide with promoting well-being, as it is sometimes claimed to do, this does not show that either freedom or well-being is not promotion-worthy. At most it shows that we must determine which takes priority over the other when their realization conflict.

Similarly, in some jobs, it is necessary that the height of the worker falls within a certain range. Pilots, for instance, must be able to reach all the equipment and buttons, fit into the cockpit, and be able to see the screens and instruments to fly the plane safely. In such cases, it is morally permissible, all things considered, to hire only people who are neither too short, nor too tall. While it is disappointing for the person who perhaps cannot get their dream job because of their height, hiring only candidates of a suitable height is morally justified.²¹

In response to this putative counterexample, we can say something similar to what we said in the modeling case: it is unfair not to hire short people as pilots, but other values, such as safety, trump fairness in this case. Additionally, unlike in the modeling case, it can also be argued that if the

¹⁹ There are ways to understand both the Relevance and the Fairness Principles in such a way that affirmative action violates neither of them (Mason 2006; Miller 1992; 1999).

²⁰ Note, incidentally, that certain fashion houses aim to use models many of whom are not beautiful according to conventional ideals of beauty. Presumably, we could sensibly commend such fashion houses for their less unfair model hiring policies.

²¹ Here we set aside complications about whether designs of cockpits are discriminatory against people whose height falls outside the range of statistical normalcy.

cockpits of commercial airplanes are designed so that one must be of a certain height to perform the pilot's job safely, then designing such cockpits is indirect discrimination against women, since women are on average shorter than men. A case could be made that the cockpits of airplanes should be designed so that a shorter person can reach all the necessary equipment. We are not saying airplanes are not designed that way already, or that it is possible to build them in a different way than they currently are. Perhaps the problem does not exist in this particular case, or perhaps it is impossible to overcome this challenge: maybe there are so many pieces of equipment that it is impossible to build an airplane in such a way that a woman who is 150 cm tall can reach them. However, this point is worth raising since sometimes, in some jobs, all that is needed is a new and better chair or some other equipment or adjustment so that a shorter person can reach all the necessary things.²²

Is Extraversion Relevant for the Job Performance?

So far, we have discussed the Relevance Principle and the Fairness Principle, and argued that while their application can be problematic, they are generally plausible when it comes to morally justified hiring practices. Now, we turn to extraversion and the Relevance Principle, and ask whether extraversion is relevant for job performance.

At least some psychologists are skeptical about using personality tests in hiring (Keltikangas-Järvinen, 2016), and have suggested that they should not be used for personnel selection (Morgeson et al., 2007b).

There are numerous studies on the relationship between personality and job performance, and in general, personality seems to have some impact on job performance. The most common personality dimension studied is the Big Five personality traits. Meta-analyses indicate that conscientiousness is consistently related to all job performance criteria for all occupational groups (Barrick & Mount, 1991). However, in the same meta-analysis, it was found that extraversion was a valid predictor of job performance for occupations involving social interaction, managers, and sales, but not for other jobs.²³ A study on the relationship between performance, temperament, and personality of software programmers

showed no significant correlation between extraversion (or other personality traits) and job performance (Gulati et al., 2016). These results indicate that extraversion might be relevant for some jobs, but it is certainly not better for all jobs.

However, while extraversion might be relevant for some jobs, the same study found that the average magnitude of the correlation between extraversion and job performance is quite low (0.06). Similar results have been found in other studies by Hurtz and Donovan (2000) and Salgado (1997). That means that the general correlation between extraversion and job performance is very weak or nonexistent. As Salgado and Táuriz (2014) stated in their study: extraversion, openness to experience, and agreeableness were not generalizable predictors of job performance ratings.²⁴ People would surely find it unjust to hire based on race or gender, even if there is weak or nonexistent correlation with job performance.

Morgeson et al. (2007a) claim that there are many problems with using personality tests in hiring. The main issue with using personality traits as a basis for hiring is their very low validity for predicting job performance. However, that is not the only problem. People can also fake personality tests. Hiring based on personality, in practice, means hiring based on personality test scores (and impression). Even in the best-case scenario, the magnitude of the correlation between various personality tests and job performance is quite low, ranging from -0.02 to 0.15 .

There are further problems with the use of personality tests in hiring. For instance, if we focus only on one dimension of the big five dimensions, we cannot see the whole picture. In one study, it was found that an additional increase in extraversion led to increments in performance among high-conscientious workers but to decrements in performance among low-conscientious workers (Witt, 2002). This means that if employers are looking for features related to extraversion only, they might get worse workers compared to if they do not focus on the personality traits at all.²⁵

This makes sense. Suppose employers are looking for active people. Being active does not necessarily mean a person gets things done. From the point of personality, being

²² A similar issue can arise in the case of introverts, i.e., even in those cases where being an extravert is an advantage when performing one's job, perhaps not hiring introverts is indirect discrimination because the job (or the social world) could have been designed otherwise such that being an introvert would not make one less able to perform well in the job.

²³ Some studies challenge the assumption that extraverts are better salespersons than introverts (Grant, 2013).

²⁴ An issue to be considered here is whether this figure hides great variation—for some jobs extraversion is good, for other introversion is.

²⁵ Admittedly, they might get better workers if they also detect low-conscientiousness workers and generally deselect them. More generally, our point here is not that present personality measurement tools are insufficiently accurate or precise or are used in too broad settings such that were more accurate and precise measurements tools to be developed and used only in narrow settings, the moral problem in using these predictors would disappear. Similarly, the main moral worry about using race and gender as general performance predictors is not a worry about accuracy or precision or about an overly broad use of them, e.g., gender is a reliable predictor of parental leave.

active refers simply to how forcefully and quickly the person gets into things. If the person is very active, she probably speaks, walks, and acts fast, which could lead to mistakes and careless errors—a problem in many professions.

This illustrates another problem. Suppose employers want to hire extraverts. The problem is that there are different kinds of extraverts. Two people receiving high, even identical extraversion scores from a personality test can be extraverts in very different ways. Extravert is a vague concept: a sufficiently high score on a selection of the many factors involved in the extraversion scale can result in someone being classified as an extravert, but this can manifest in many ways. Extraverts are defined with words such as impulsive, quick, bold, social, careless, vivid, lively, dominant—among others. It is a very different thing to be careless and social than to be dominant and social, for example. Because of this, when hiring applicants who score highly on extraversion tests, employers might not actually know what they will eventually get. One meta-analysis concluded that some lower order traits of extraversion increase the work performance while some decrease it (Wilmot et al., 2019).

So if employers say in job advertisement that they want to hire a social person, they might get a social but aggressive and dominant person, which can be very different from hiring someone who is social but careless and quick.

Of course, in some jobs, a high level of activity might be a good thing. For example, suppose you are wondering which queue to select at the grocery shop. You should not choose the queue solely based on its length but also based on the activity of the clerk. If you want to get home quickly, do not select the laziest and slowest clerk. However, even with the job of a clerk at the supermarket, very high activity can lead to mistakes, and the clerk could break bottles or miss scanning the products that the customer is buying.

Now, suppose that for some jobs, it is essential to be active. However, employers should not hire active people solely based on their activity level without paying attention to other features of the person. For instance, if they hire someone who has high activity but low intelligence, it could be problematic because the person might be super-fast at doing things, but due to their low intelligence, they might make mistakes or focus on the wrong things altogether.

Self-help books sometimes illustrate this problem by dividing people into four groups based on two features.²⁶ These workers are (1) intelligent and lazy, (2) intelligent and energetic, (3) dumb and lazy and (4) dumb and energetic.

Arguably, the worst workers are not those who are lazy and stupid. They are not the real problem because while they do not produce much, they do not cause problems either. That is because lazy people do not do much. The worst workers, however, are those who are stupid and energetic. They will do a lot—but unfortunately, they keep focusing on wrong things, do mistakes and others must correct and redo their work.

So, if employers want to hire the best workers, they should not solely focus on social and outgoing candidates. Rather, they should look for candidates who are not only social and outgoing but also careful, thorough, efficient, and organized. This will increase the likelihood of hiring workers who can perform well in their roles without causing problems or making mistakes.²⁷ Successful scholars in academia have realized that being active is not the point. Jason Brennan (2020: 89) has plausibly stated that being busy is not the point of a good worker. Output matters, not the input. A good worker gets things done, without necessarily being busy or unnecessarily active.

But suppose that personality testing were to become more accurate and precise, including an improved ability to measure different types of extraversion. Suppose further that there were an extravert advantage. In that case, why would it be wrong to hire based on extraversion?²⁸

If an extravert advantage in work performance exists, it is likely because modern Western societies unjustly favor extraversion. Introversion is often treated as a limitation, in need of accommodation, while extraversion is considered the default and desirable personality trait. For instance, consider “quiet spaces” in open-plan offices. Such arrangements, if they even exist, reinforce extraversion as the default option. It is not surprising that in a society where extraversion is idealized, we find extraversion appearing superior.

To draw an analogy with disability, a person in a wheelchair, for example, isn’t performing worse in a workplace due to her disability but because the workplace has limited accessibility, reflecting the existence of ableism in society.

At this point, one might claim that our argument equally applies against using any proxies in hiring. For instance, consider factors normally used to hire business ethics professors. Factors such as previous academic success (for example, the quality or quantity of publications and/or teaching evaluations) are proxies that correlate with future success—whether the person will continue producing good academic work or not. If it is morally wrong to use extraversion as a

²⁶ This classification is often attributed to the German officer Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord, who was a general and commander-in-chief of the Reichswehr, the armed forces of the Weimar Republic. He adopted a classification scheme for officers that included four types: clever and hardworking, clever and lazy, stupid and hardworking, and stupid and lazy.

²⁷ It might be suggested that testing for personality traits other than intro/extravertedness is harder or more costly and that this justifies the focus on extraversion. As a matter of fact, however, there are standard tests for all the so-called big-five personality traits.

²⁸ We thank an anonymous reviewer at the *Journal of Business Ethics* for pressing us on this and on the next point.

proxy for future success in hiring, isn't it also wrong to use any other proxies in hiring?

We do not believe it is always wrong to use proxies in hiring—though they could be wrong more often than is generally thought. However, we also believe there is a crucial difference here. When personality traits are used as a proxy for future success, they are used to identify specific capabilities or abilities that, if accurate, correlate with future success. In contrast, when using criteria such as teaching and publication records as proxies for future success to hire professors, it is not merely potential abilities or capabilities that are sought, but actual achievements. Moreover, arguably applicants have little control over their personality type, whereas do have (or had) some, perhaps even significant, control over their teaching and publication records. We think that these differences are morally relevant.²⁹ In any case, the latter difference is according to the Fairness Principle (see next section).

We conclude that extravert is not being better than an introvert—neither as such, nor in virtue of other features that being extra-/introverted are correlated with, respectively. Perhaps on some tasks there could be benefit from being an extrovert, but on the other hand on some tasks there is a benefit from being an introvert. The general correlations between extraversion and job performance seem to be quite low, so we are inclined to say that extraversion is almost irrelevant for job performance—like gender or race is. If and when extraversion is considered a merit, it might be so unjustly; in a similar way to how being white is considered a merit in a racist society. Hence, from the perspective of the Relevance Principle it is wrong to hire based on extraversion.

Is Selection Based on Extraversion Fair?

Next, let us consider how hiring based on extraversion relates to the Fairness Principle. According to the Fairness Principle, it is not fair to hire people based on features that people cannot control themselves. Fairness in hiring requires, at least to a certain extent, a fair competition which includes the opportunity for people to train and learn the skills necessary for the job. So, can one learn to be more extraverted or is being an extravert something one is born with?

There seems to be a consensus among psychologists that personality dimensions, such as extraversion, are 40–50% heritable (Bouchard & McGue, 2003). In a wide range of different contexts, roughly 40–50% of the variation in people's personalities can be explained by genetic variation across them. So, whether one is extraverted or introverted is based, roughly, equally on genetics and cultural and societal factors. Psychologists use the term “temperament” to refer to the biological aspect; together with societal aspects, our temperament makes up our personality. Hence, in some ways, personality could be more flexible than our race or sex (unlike gender), which, in some views, are determined by our biology. On the other hand, since one cannot change one's biology, it seems safe to conclude that one's control over one's personality is limited. Hence, extraversion, or other personality dimensions, is unlike normal skills, knowledge or technical qualifications that one could learn.

Someone might object here that while one cannot change one's personality and, thus, does not control whether one is an introvert, this does not really matter. What matters is that one can learn how to act like an extravert, including how to answer personality tests in such a way that one scores highly on extraversion. This might be true, but the view that this is what matters for the purpose of assessing hiring based on extraversion faces three problems.

First, even though one cannot change their sex, they could potentially learn to pass as a member of the opposite sex. However, there is something morally disturbing about the idea that women should have to learn to act like men in order to be accepted equally in the job market.³⁰ So perhaps this just shows that we should replace the Fairness Principle with a slightly different principle:

The Revised Fairness Principle: It is morally wrong to select candidates for jobs based on features that they cannot themselves control or to select candidates for jobs based on features that they themselves control, but where to exercise this control, they must make choices that somehow goes against core aspects of their identity.³¹

Hiring based on passing as a man or as an extravert when one is a woman or an introvert arguably violates the Revised Fairness Principle, even if it is compatible with the Fairness Principle.

Second, while it could be feasible advice for an individual to pass as an extravert, it could hardly be a sustainable

²⁹ If extraversion is a proxy for success in jobs, then the previous and concrete achievements of extraverts would be more impressive than those of introverts. This implies that there would be no need to hire extraverts based solely on their extraversion; instead, they would be hired based on their more impressive previous achievements. Consequently, hiring based on extraversion would become unnecessary.

³⁰ Or consider the claim raised (Räsänen, 2019), that old people should be allowed to change their official age younger to avoid age-based discrimination. Surely, changing age to avoid being discriminated against is odd, according to many.

³¹ See Cohen's (2011, chap. 4) response to Dworkin's view on compensation and voluntariness.

solution to the existing problem. Presumably, job market selection procedures that impose upon introverts the burden of acting like someone whom they are not while imposing no comparable burdens on extraverts are unfair to introverts.

Finally, suppose an introvert learns to act like an extravert. Suppose that during the job interview, the candidate manages to fake her personality so that the people making the hiring decisions think she is an extravert. The problem is that it is very exhausting for the person to pretend to be something else than what she is. So, if that introvert pretends successfully (successfully when observed from the “outside” at least) to be an extravert, her work productivity and probably the quality of life will decrease because she will have to constantly work outside her comfort zone. This motivates further revision of the Revised Fairness Principle in that it should pertain not just to the possibility of control but also to the costs of exercising that control (and not just core identity-related costs as referred to in the Revised Fairness Principle).

Objections and the Replies

Now we have made a case that it is wrong to hire employees based on extraversion. The argument is based on two claims: extraversion is not relevant for job performance for significant number of jobs. And extraversion is something one cannot change herself. Thus, we concluded that it is morally wrong to hire based on extraversion.

There are some immediate objections we should cover to see if the position we defend in this paper is successful. Next, we cover these objections and see whether they can undermine the main claims of this paper.

The Good Predictor Objection

Some might insist that despite what we have said, personality—and extraversion in particular—in fact, are relevant for job performance. Thus, one might claim that since extraversion is relevant for job performance, it is not wrong to hire based on it—at least not according to the Relevance Principle.

There is a possibility that the empirical claims are not correct. Maybe extraversion is a highly significant predictor of job performance, maybe we have misread the studies, or maybe the studies have, for some reason, produced the wrong results.

Suppose that this is correct but suppose also that being white correlates with good job performance. That is, on average, when hiring a white person, one would get a better/more productive worker than when hiring a Black person. We guess people would still find such a practice morally objectionable—and rightly so. One explanation for this is

that such hiring still violates the Fairness Principle. Like hiring based on race, even if personality is relevant, hiring based on personality violates the Fairness Principle, making it wrong. To hire someone based on race, sex, or personality, is to hire someone based on immutable personal characteristics—characteristics that were not chosen (see Son Hing et al., 2011). In many legal systems, such hiring is rightly illegal, and people, often believe such hiring is discriminatory (Shakur & Phillips, 2022). Immutable characteristics should be legally protected since it is unjust for workers to suffer ill consequences because of traits with which they were born or that they cannot modify (Hoffman, 2011). Hence, we conclude that even if the good predictor undermines the case against personality discrimination based on the Relevance Principle, there still is a case against it based on the Fairness Principle.

The Reaction Qualifications Objection

Another challenge, which in the end might be seen as a specific version of the good predictor objection, notes that we have not sufficiently taken into account how extraversion relates to “reaction qualifications.” For many jobs, qualifications include more than what we might call technical qualifications, such as the ability to program a computer or fix a car engine. It also includes reaction qualifications, such as the desire to socialize with colleagues, thereby contributing to a particular kind of working environment that might be good for the team’s productivity, or to convey a dynamic and upbeat image to customers, and thus drive-up sales (Wertheimer, 1983). Perhaps for certain kinds of jobs, extraversion is an important reaction qualification that would justify hiring an extravert candidate over another more technically qualified candidate.

In response to this objection, we note first that for some jobs, such as those that do not require much interaction with colleagues or customers, extraversion is plausibly not a reaction qualification. Indeed, as indicated by some of the studies we quoted, for some jobs, introversion, or the personality traits associated with introversion, improves the employee’s performance. Hence, it is doubtful that the present point can justify the view that, across the board, extraversion is a reaction qualification.

Second, even in those cases where being an extravert counts as a reaction qualification, one might question whether it is fair that it does so, especially if the workplace could be easily organized differently so that introversion is irrelevant to the employee’s qualifications. And if the reason why extraversion is a reaction qualification is due to the extravert ideal, one could argue that this too is unfair, since this ideal is unfair in the same way as ideals of beauty that imply that women can only be beautiful in their twenties, and European persons enjoy an unfair appearance bonus.

No doubt, people would think it morally wrong to hire beautiful people for workplaces even though one might claim that being around good-looking people enhances the work performance of others.

Finally, if these points are dismissed, we could still stick with our main claim and base it only on the Fairness Principle.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have observed that most people consider race and sex discrimination morally wrong, when it is, because they violate the Relevance and Fairness Principles. We did not defend this observation but instead took it as our starting point to argue that differential treatment based on introversion/extraversion similarly violates these principles. Therefore, since introverts seem to form a socially salient group, we are compelled to accept that a significant number of acts of hiring amount to wrongful discrimination against introverts.

Of course, there are ways to avoid this conclusion. For example, one might reject the Relevance and Fairness Principles. However, we believe that most people would consider this a greater cost than allowing for the possibility of personality discrimination against introverts.

What are the broader implications of our analysis for business ethics? Here we should warn about two opposing tendencies. The first one is to say that discrimination against introverts is a social problem on the same scale as sex and race discrimination?³² The second is to say that even though it is a problem, it is insignificant relative to other forms of discrimination and, thus, something that can be ignored at least until other and more serious forms of discrimination are adequately addressed. While we think both warnings are warranted, it is also important to say that our arguments above do not imply any specific conclusion regarding how serious a problem discrimination against the introverted is compared to paradigm discrimination problems, e.g., race and sex discrimination. The reason why there is no such direct implication is among other reasons that the significance of a justice problem, including discrimination problems, is determined by many other factors than the severity of the moral wrong articulated by the relevant normative principles pertaining to individual acts—here: the Relevance and the Fairness Principles. Such factors include the number of people affected by a

particular type of wrongful act and the impact their being so treated has on our lives and the costs and difficulties involved in mitigating the relevant injustice.

If, however, we are correct that if sex and race discrimination in hiring is wrong because of how they violate the Relevance and the Fairness Principles, then introversion discrimination is wrong for the very same reason, then that suggests that personality discrimination is a problem that employers and employment law legislators should take seriously. At a minimum, employers should pay more attention to their hiring practices, e.g., by not unreflectively including personality requirements in job adverts and job requirements. Should employers fail to do so, perhaps employment laws should prohibit personality requirements in job adverts—at least, absent special justifications for including such requirements.

Many companies nowadays are concerned with being equal opportunity workplaces. This we take to be a good thing. However, we think that this concern should also make employers recognize the potentially problematic aspects of personality discrimination and adopt measures to mitigate such discrimination in their hiring practices. Perhaps they should even (be required to) accommodate people with different personalities on the job by redesigning work processes, office space, etc. Specifically, one would encourage companies to pay attention to diversity benefits from a workplace that promotes diversity in terms of personality types alongside the benefits that derive from other forms of diversity.

Whether companies should be “blind” to job candidates’ personalities or whether they should encourage people with disadvantaged personality types to apply for jobs is still an open question. We are inclined to adopt the former policy, but those more sympathetic to affirmative action in hiring might prefer the latter approach. We leave this question for future research and encourage business ethicists and other scholars to conduct academic inquiries regarding the most preferable way to alleviate personality discrimination. Our main point here is that, if the overall line of argument in this paper is sound, then this research question, alongside with related ones indicated by the suggestions above, is indeed an important one.

Acknowledgements Parts of this paper were presented at several conferences and workshops. Thanks to the audiences at ESPMH 2022 Conference in Warsaw, Poland, Bioethics and Political Philosophy: Nordic Perspectives Workshop, at Skálholt, Iceland, and research seminar at Interdisciplinary Centre for Ethics, Jagiellonian University, Kraków, Poland. Thanks also to the colleagues at CEPDISC for discussions on the topic and commenting on the paper. Thanks also to Liisa Keltikangas-Järvinen for discussion on the topic. Thanks also to two anonymous reviewers at the Journal of Business Ethics. The research for this article was funded by the Danish National Research Foundation (grant no. DNR144) and the European Union’s Horizon Europe research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions grant agreement No. 101081293.

³² This question can be taken to indicate either that we are talking down the social problems of race and sex discrimination or talking up the social problem of introversion discrimination—even if not up to the points of race and sex discrimination. As indicated by the next sentences in the main text, this article is neutral between these two interpretations. We favor the latter interpretation of what this article shows.

Funding Open Access funding provided by University of Turku (including Turku University Central Hospital). The research for this article was funded by the Danish National Research Foundation (grant no. DNRF144) and the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation program under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions grant agreement No. 101081293.

Data availability Not applicable, since there is no data.

Declarations

Conflict of interest None.

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