

Weight Isn't Selling: The Insidious Effects of Weight Stigmatization in Retail Settings

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In recent years, the literature on the stigma of obesity has grown but there still remains a paucity of research examining specific issues associated with its impact in the workplace. In the current study, we examine 3 such issues related to the influence of weight-based stigmatization in retail settings. First, we highlight research on the impact of obesity in men often is minimized or altogether excluded, and we examine whether weight-based stigmatization influences men in authentic retail settings (Study 1). Across retail contexts, Study 1 reveals that heavy (vs. nonheavy) men do experience significantly more interpersonal (subtle) discrimination. Second, we examine the “why” of weight-based stigmatization and find that weight-related negative stereotypes compound to produce indirect but strong effects of stigmatization in retail settings (Study 2). Third and finally, we examine whether weight-based stigmatization against men and women in retail also influences ratings of associated products and the organizations for which heavy individuals work (also Study 2). Results from Study 2 show that stereotypes work similarly for men and women and that a stigma-by-association effect occurs in which evaluators rate products and organizations associated with heavy (vs. nonheavy) retail personnel more negatively. Finally, we discuss the importance of these findings in gaining a more holistic look at the influence of weight stigmatization in the workplace.

Keywords: obesity, stigma, employment discrimination, retail, customer service

Over the past few decades, obesity rates have increased dramatically (Finkelstein, Ruhm, & Kosa, 2005; Hossain, Kawar, & El Nahas, 2007; Sturm & Hattori, 2013). In the United States, approximately one third of the adult population is obese (Flegal, Carroll, Ogden, & Curtin, 2010), and almost three fourths of Americans adults can be classified as either overweight or obese (Fryar, Carroll, & Ogden, 2012). Despite the ubiquity of being heavy, research shows that it continues to be one of the most pernicious stigmata, in that obese (compared with nonobese) individuals are perceived to be significantly less happy (Tiggemann & Rothblum, 1997), attractive (Hebl, Ruggs, Singletary, & Beal, 2008), hardworking (Schwartz, Vartanian, Nosek, & Brownell, 2006), and conscientious (Roehling, 1999). In addition, obese (vs. nonobese) individuals are more likely to experience discrimination

in widespread domains such as health care (Puhl & Heuer, 2009), interpersonal relationships (Chen & Brown, 2005; Smith, Schmoll, Konik, & Oberlander, 2007), and employment settings (Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Roehling, 1999; Rudolph, Wells, Weller, & Baltes, 2009).

Despite the accumulation of research on weight stigmatization (both prejudice and discrimination), more nuanced questions remain as to its impact in the workplace. In an attempt to gain a more complete view of weight stigmatization in the service industry, the current research examines the experiences of heavy men and women in retail settings and assesses three issues that are not elucidated yet in the literature. First, we clarify the role of weight-based discrimination against men by focusing directly on them as the targets of such behavior. This examination is warranted because, as we review, men scarcely have been the primary focus of attention in the obesity literature (cf. King et al., 2014). Hence, in Study 1, we examine weight discrimination against men in multiple, authentic retail settings to gain a more complete understanding of their experiences.

Second, in Study 2, we examine a cognitive mechanism to explain why weight-based discrimination and other forms of stigmatization occur against both male and female retail personnel, and how such stigmatization may occur in subtle ways. As Crandall and Eshleman's (2003) work suggests, people may want to express their prejudice against heavy personnel and so they look for justification to do so. We examine the role of stereotype endorsement as justifiers that lead to prejudice expression. Third,

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we examine the possibility that weight stigmatization can influence not only targets but also entities with which the target is associated. Specifically, we examine (in Study 2) whether negative assessments of heavy retail personnel also have consequences for the products that they sell and the organizations for which they work. Figure 1 depicts a conceptual model of the hypothesized relations. As depicted, these studies allow for an examination of attitudes and actual discrimination toward heavy individuals in employment situations and clarify the role of weight in retail settings with respect to both immediate (i.e., target focused) and more tangential (i.e., organizational impact) consequences.

Weight Stigmatization and Men

Men may not be the typical focus of research on weight stigmatization, in part, because women (vs. men) are more likely to report experiencing weight-based discrimination in the workplace (Fikkan & Rothblum, 2012; Roehling, Roehling, & Pichler, 2007). Women also may have a stronger lens for interpreting bias based on being overweight, whereas men may focus more on times they are penalized for being too small or underweight. Indeed, there is evidence of sex differences in penalizations based on weight. For instance, Judge and Cable (2011) found that

a woman who is average weight earns \$389,300 less across a 25-year career than a woman who is 25 pounds below average weight but an average weight man in this comparable situation will earn \$210,925 more than a man 25 pounds below average. (p. 109)

(See also Baum & Ford, 2004.) Despite this outcome, the literature suggests that men also experience employment-related discrimination for being heavy. In fact, two recent meta-analyses suggest that men and women experience similar levels of weight-based employment discrimination (Roehling, Pichler, & Bruce, 2013;

Vanhove & Gordon, 2014). Examining experimental studies, Roehling, Pichler, and Bruce (2013) found a strong and consistent presence of weight-based discrimination against both heavy (vs. nonheavy) men ($d = .27$) and heavy (vs. nonheavy) women ($d = .39$). Examining correlational research, Vanhove and Gordon (2014) found a similar pattern with smaller effects, $d_{\text{women}} = -.036$ and $d_{\text{men}} = -.005$. As noted by Vanhove and Gordon (2014), the smaller effects than those seen in the Roehling article are likely due to the differences in research designs, with lab-based experimental studies having a higher degree of control than correlational studies that used actual job applicants and employees. The important conclusion is that both meta-analyses reveal that men and women experience weight discrimination similarly.

Additional research suggests that moderators may influence and even exacerbate the gender differences in observed weight-based discrimination across individual studies (Roehling, Pichler, & Bruce, 2013). For instance, findings show both women and men tend to experience similar levels of weight-related mistreatment from people they know such as family, friends, and coworkers, but women report greater levels of weight-related mistreatment than men from strangers and the general public (Falkner et al., 1999). Further, other research reveals that women report more weight-based discrimination at lower levels of weight than men (i.e., overweight), whereas men actually report more discrimination than women at the highest levels of obesity (Roehling, Roehling, & Wagstaff, 2013). Furthermore, Roehling, Roehling, and Wagstaff (2013) also examined sex differences in reporting two different types of discrimination that have been categorized as *formal* (overt and illegal behaviors, such as giving unequal access to resources) and *interpersonal* (subtle behaviors that are not illegal, such as incivility and negative nonverbal behavior) discrimination (Hebl, Foster, Mannix, & Dovidio, 2002). They found that men

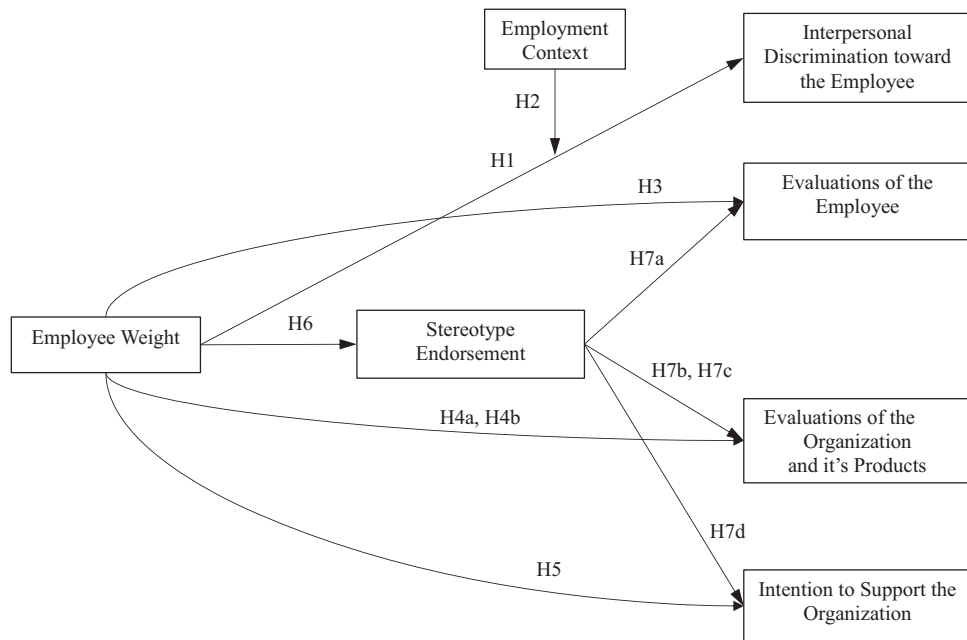


Figure 1. Conceptual model of the weight stigmatization in retail settings.

were more likely than women to report formal types of employment weight-based discrimination, whereas women were more likely than men to report experiencing interpersonal types of employment weight-based discrimination.

It is possible that, as Roehling, Roehling, and Wagstaff (2013) addresses, men simply might not recognize subtle behaviors such as exclusion from socializing at work as discrimination. Alternatively, it may be that perhaps women have a higher sensitivity for perceiving subtle weight-based discrimination and other forms of stigmatization than men. Such gender differences have been seen for other forms of subtle discrimination (see Basford, Offermann, & Behrend, 2014). Failure to recognize discrimination, however, does not mean the negative behavior is absent and that there are no negative outcomes associated with such discrimination. As research on interpersonal discrimination has shown, the effects of interpersonal (vs. formal) discrimination are less overt but can be just as and sometimes more deleterious for both individuals and organizations (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Jones, Peddie, Gilrane, King, & Gray, 2013; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Singletary, 2009; Word, Zanna, & Cooper, 1974). For instance, weight-based discrimination results in fewer promotions, increased rates of job termination, and poorer quality of training for targets (Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Shapiro, King, & Quiñones, 2007). Likewise, interpersonal discrimination against heavy customers (only females were examined) can negatively impact the bottom-line for organizations as customers who experience this mistreatment spend less money at the organization compared with what they initially intended, report being less likely to recommend the store to others, and state they are less likely to return to the store (King, Shapiro, Hebl, Singletary, & Turner, 2006).

An examination of the literature over the past few decades has shown a general shift in the manifestation of discrimination with the reduction of overt forms to the increase in more subtle forms. Therefore, heavy men may experience interpersonal weight-based discrimination as often as do heavy women, even if men do not perceive or report it as often. The current article examines both forms of discrimination, but focuses on the impact of interpersonal weight-based discrimination as well as subtle prejudice expression for men and women within a retail setting. We selected a retail context because this employment context typically provides a high customer service setting and social interaction focus, and we believe understanding the processes involved in a this context can provide insight to other employment contexts that have a strong focus on these customer service based interactions. Furthermore, there has been some insight as to the effect of weight in retail settings and service positions for women; however, the research concerning the effect of weight for men in similar settings is less clear. Thus, we begin with Study 1 and a focus on men.

Study 1

Previous research focusing only on female employees shows that they experience discrimination in retail settings (King et al., 2006). Specifically, King et al. (2006) found that heavy (vs. nonheavy) women experienced higher amounts of interpersonal but not formal discrimination. It may not be surprising that heavy women face discrimination given that much of retail highlights very slender female figures and sells clothing that fits a relatively restricted range of thin women. However, retail also promotes

fashion for men that makes them vulnerable, with a recent trend in men's retail moving toward more slim models and slim fits as well (McDonald, 2014).

Similarly, despite the correlational results by Roehling, Roehling, and Wagstaff (2013) showing that heavy men perceive low levels of interpersonal discrimination, we have reason to believe that such discrimination still exists. First, employment research has shown that interpersonal discrimination against marginalized groups is observed commonly, even when formal discrimination is absent (Hebl et al., 2002; King et al., 2006; Morgan, Walker, Hebl, & King, 2013; Ruggs, Martinez, & Hebl, 2011). Second, the measurement of men's perceptions (typically in retrospective reporting long after incidents) may result in men minimizing such complaints because complaining violates normative male behavior. To examine whether such discrimination exists against heavy (vs. nonheavy) men, we specifically examined men across multiple retail contexts, as both job applicants and customers. Given the overall body of literature, we anticipated

Hypothesis 1: A weight main effect such that heavy (vs. nonheavy) men will experience greater levels of interpersonal discrimination both when applying for jobs (H_{1a}) and shopping as customers (H_{1b}).

Differences in Weight Stigmatization in Retail Contexts: Applicants Versus Shoppers

There are potentially different consequences for an organization when a stigmatized individual either applies to work at or simply patronizes a store. For instance, Hebl, King, Glick, Singletary, and Kazama (2007) found that pregnant (vs. nonpregnant) women experienced more benevolent interpersonal discrimination (i.e., patronizing behavior) when shopping in a retail context and more hostile interpersonal discrimination (e.g., hostility and rudeness) in a job applicant context. Similarly, we believe that heavy (vs. nonheavy) men will experience higher levels of discrimination in both contexts, but that the magnitude of discrimination may be significantly different. As customers, heavy men are only in the store for a short period of time so the association with personnel is very limited; however, heavy men applying for jobs are more interdependent with those who hire them, serve in a longer term capacity, and act as representatives of the store and merchandise. Due to this temporal difference in context, we anticipated

Hypothesis 2: An interaction showing that weight differentially matters in the two contexts, such that interpersonal discrimination will be greater for heavy men applying for jobs than heavy men who are shopping as customers.

Method

Participants

Confederate job applicants and customers. Six men between 18 and 21 years of age served as confederate job applicants and customers. In the control condition, the confederates had a medium-shirt size and an average of a 30-inch waist pants. In the heavy condition, confederates wore an obesity prosthesis, a size extra-large shirt, and 40-inch waist pants. Each confederate served as his own control by acting in both the nonheavy (i.e., control)

and heavy conditions. All confederates underwent formal training, which included memorizing two scripts (for the applicant and customer roles) and practicing with and without wearing the prosthesis. Then, confederates went through several simulations with individuals playing the role of applicants and store clerks to present them with various potential scenarios (e.g., lack of attention or help, suspicion about their prosthesis) that might occur during the actual experiment.

Observer confederates. Five female confederates (ages 18–26 years) served as observers and measured store personnel behavior. Additionally, observers provided consistency ratings of confederate behavior across all trials and conditions. Observers underwent training with the male confederates to familiarize themselves with the scripts and process, and to learn to monitor interactions unobtrusively.

Participating stores and store personnel. A total of 223 retail stores from various malls in a large southern metropolitan city were selected for data collection. We chose not to use department stores (due to their vast size); restaurants; or specialty stores, such as those that catered solely to a petite sizes, large sizes, or maternity/baby apparel. All interactions were audio recorded and store personnel served as participants. This procedure was approved by the Institutional Review Board (and followed that of previous studies that have solicited data without the consent of participating employees (see Hebl et al., 2007; King et al., 2006). Furthermore, all data were coded using trial numbers to ensure the anonymity of participating stores and personnel.

Materials

Three sets of obesity prostheses for men were constructed professionally.¹ We also purchased sets of matched clothing (heavy and nonheavy), which consisted of dark colored sweaters, khaki pants, belts, and men's scarves. Additionally, confederates used hidden audiotape recorders that were placed inside their shopping bags, and observers used stopwatches to record interaction times.

Procedure

The procedure used in the current study follows closely to that detailed in Hebl et al. (2007). Specifically, the experimenter set up a meeting place at the malls, paired each confederate with an observer, and assigned them a list of stores in which the pair would participate in all four conditions: (a) heavy job applicant, (b) nonheavy job applicant, (c) heavy customer, (d) nonheavy customer. No stores were visited in multiple conditions; that is, confederates who visited a store as a job applicant did not later return to the same store as a customer. Additionally, confederates did not visit a store that another confederate had visited previously. Because the obesity prosthesis was cumbersome to put on correctly, confederates always dressed in the prostheses prior to going to each mall and for each session completed trials in heavy weight conditions first. In each store interaction, the observer entered the retail store 1–2 min before the confederate and then left the store 1–2 min after the confederate left. Observers looked at store merchandise during their visit and did not interact with the confederate. If store employees offered assistance to observers, they politely declined.

In the job applicant condition, confederates entered stores (all of whom indicated that they were hiring job applicants one week previously via telephone calls that members of our lab made) and asked to speak to the store manager. Confederates then interacted with the individual by asking four standardized and scripted questions related to the job application: (a) “Do you have any job openings?”; (b) “Could I fill out an application?”; (c) “What sorts of things would I be doing if I worked here?”; and (d) “Do you think you will hire me?” The observer started the stopwatch once the male confederate began the interaction with store personnel and stopped it as soon as the applicant finished the interaction. If the applicant was asked to complete the application in the store, he politely asked if he could take the application with him and return it later in the day.

In the customer condition, confederates entered stores in an ostensible search of a birthday gift for their sister. The confederate walked into the geographical center of the store and waited to be approached by a store employee. If no one approached the confederate within 10 min of entering the store, he approached a store employee himself. Confederates then interacted with the individual by asking, “Can you help me find something for my sister's birthday?” If the employee proceeded to assist the confederate, the confederate asked for a second recommendation. After the employee's assistance, the confederates thanked the employee for the recommendations and said that they would probably return to make a purchase. After each store interaction, confederate and observer pairs went to the experimenter station and separately completed measures analyzing the interaction they had just had or witnessed. They were explicitly trained to complete the evaluations independently and not discuss interactions with each other throughout the duration of the study.

Measures of Formal Discrimination

Based on previous research (e.g., Hebl et al., 2007; King et al., 2006), two items assessed formal discrimination: (a) job availability response and (b) permission to complete a job application. For the customer service condition, three items assessed formal discrimination: (a) customer greeting, (b) first item recommendation, and (c) second item recommendation. All formal measures used dichotomous “yes” or “no” scales and were intended to capture behaviors that are formally mandated as part of store personnel's job duties.

Measures of Interpersonal Discrimination

Using an interpersonal discrimination measure from previous research (Hebl et al., 2007; King et al., 2006), confederates and observers rated the store personnel's behavior with regard to (a) affirmative gestures such as nodding (reverse-coded), (b) friendliness (reverse-coded), (c) eye contact (reverse-coded), (d) rudeness, (e) smiling (reverse-coded), (f) comfort level (reverse-coded), (g) attempts to end the interaction, (h) eye brow furrowing, (i) pursed lips, (j) hostility, and (k) standoffish behavior of the

¹ As suggested by a reviewer, we took photographs of a confederate in both conditions and asked individuals to evaluate the realism of the photographs. Results showed no significant differences in evaluations of realism across weight conditions, $t(41) = 1.37, ns$.

employee. Items were anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 0 (*not at all*) to 6 (*very much*) and were coded such that higher levels indicated greater levels of negativity. Separate composites of interpersonal discrimination were created for the confederates' ratings ($\alpha = .89$) and observers' ratings ($\alpha = .89$).

Control Variables

Although each confederate served as his own experimental control, we also controlled for additional contextual and environmental factors that could serve as potential confounds. These included confederate race, the gender of the store personnel, and how crowded it was in each store. Observers indicated the amount of store crowding by using a 7-point Likert-type scale anchored by 0 (*not at all*), 3 (*moderately*), to 6 (*very much*).

Results

Confederates visited 112 (50%) stores as job applicants and 111 (50%) stores as customers, and were heavy in 54% of trials ($N = 120$) and not heavy in 46% ($N = 102$) of trials. Prior to testing our hypotheses, we wanted to ensure that the confederate job applicants acted consistently in both the heavy and nonheavy weight conditions. To check for this, observers answered two questions after each trial: (a) "To what extent was the confederate consistent with the rest of the trials?" and (b) "How friendly was the confederate?" The results of these behavioral consistency checks showed no significant differences between men in the different weight conditions for either consistency, $F(1, 213) = .17, ns$, or friendliness, $F(1, 218) = .08, ns$.

Formal Discrimination

Although not hypothesized, we began by testing for potential differences in levels of formal discrimination displayed toward heavy and nonheavy men. To do this, we conducted a series of chi-square analyses and examined formal discrimination items in the applicant condition. Consistent with previous research (Hebl et al., 2007; King et al., 2006), expressions of formal discrimination did not differ between conditions. When applicants asked whether there were any jobs available, employers in the nonheavy condition responded "yes" 35 out of 44 times (80%) compared with 44 out of 56 times (79%) in the heavy condition, $\chi^2(1) = .01, ns$. Similarly, when applicants asked if they could complete an application, employers responded "yes" to nonheavy customers 30 out of 48 (63%) times compared with 41 out of 62 (66%) times in the heavy condition, $\chi^2(1) = .16, ns$.

Second, for the customer condition, we examined the role of weight on greeting the customer, recommending a first item, and recommending a second item using separate chi-square analyses. No weight-based differences emerged in whether the customer was greeted or not, $\chi^2(1) = 2.77, ns$. Specifically, customers in the heavy condition were greeted 43 out of 58 times (74%), whereas customers in the nonheavy condition were greeted only 32 out 52 times (62%). No weight-based differences emerged in recommending a first item either; in fact, there was no variance on this measure whatsoever (100% of those who asked for a first recommendation received one, heavy or nonheavy). Finally, no weight-based differences emerged in recommending a second item,

$\chi^2(1) = .82, ns$, with salespersons recommending a second item 48 out of 49 times (98%) to nonheavy customers and 52 out of 55 times (95%) to heavy customers.

Interpersonal Discrimination

Separate 2×2 analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were conducted for confederate and observer ratings, with body size (heavy vs. nonheavy) and role (job applicant vs. customer) as independent variables and store crowdedness, store personnel gender, and confederate race as covariates. Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all dependent variables.

Confederates. Results from the ANCOVA on confederate ratings of interpersonal discrimination revealed a significant main effect for body size, $F(1, 209) = 14.36, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .06$. Supporting Hypothesis 1, confederates perceived higher amounts of interpersonal discrimination in the heavy (vs. nonheavy) condition. Supporting Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction between weight and context emerged, $F(1, 209) = 3.98, p = .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .02$. However, a planned comparison test did not reveal significant differences in perceived interpersonal discrimination between heavy job applicants and heavy customers, $t(118) = .32, ns$. However, as seen in Figure 2, post hoc analyses revealed that confederates received equal amounts of discrimination when they served as heavy job applicants versus heavy customers; however, nonheavy customers reported significantly less interpersonal discrimination than did nonheavy applicants, $t(100) = 3.61, p < .001, d = .71$. Thus, Hypothesis 2 was not supported.

Observers. Results from the ANCOVA of observer ratings revealed a main effect of body weight, $F(1, 209) = 6.84, p = .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Supporting Hypothesis 1, observers perceived higher amounts of interpersonal discrimination in the heavy condition versus the nonheavy condition. Contrary to Hypothesis 2, a significant interaction did not emerge, $F(1, 209) = .49, ns$. We again note that the pattern of means is in the same direction as that of the confederates' data, such that those observers viewing nonheavy customers judged less interpersonal discrimination relative to the heavy customers and relative to all job applicants too.

Discussion

The current study suggests that heavy men are not immune to interpersonal discrimination in retail settings. Across both contexts of applying for jobs and serving as customers, our findings revealed that heavy men were subjected to more negative treatment

Table 1
Estimated Means for Level of Interpersonal Discrimination Across Experimental Conditions for Study 1

Dependent variable	Job applicant		Customer	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SE</i>
Confederate				
Heavy	2.32	0.12	2.18	0.13
Nonheavy	2.07	0.14	1.40	0.14
Observer				
Heavy	2.17	0.13	2.02	0.13
Nonheavy	1.91	0.14	1.57	0.14

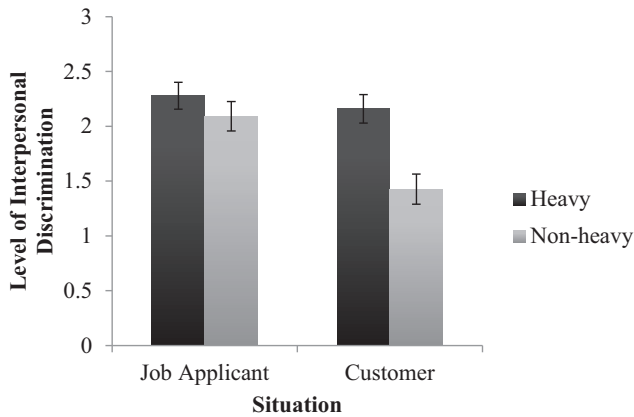


Figure 2. Differences in levels of perceived interpersonal discrimination for confederates in Study 1.

than were their nonheavy counterparts. These findings lend support to previous but scant research focusing directly on men and showing that they are affected negatively as a consequence of being heavy (Hebl & Turchin, 2005; King et al., 2014). The current findings help provide clarity in the weight stigma literature in general, which sometimes omits men as targets because men are presumed to be relatively immune to the weight stigma. As anticipated, our findings revealed that although store employees did not formally discriminate against heavy men, they did interpersonally discriminate by treating heavy (vs. nonheavy) men less personally and hospitably. These findings support research illustrating the different manifestation of discrimination that occurs in employment situations (see Hebl et al., 2002, 2007; King et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2013) and specifically highlight the negativity that heavy men experience from retail employees.

Consistent with recent studies on discrimination, the current results show that both sets of perceivers identified higher levels of interpersonal, but not formal, discrimination against the stigmatized (vs. nonstigmatized) target. This continuing trend suggests the importance that focusing on interpersonal discrimination, microaggressions, incivilities, and/or other subtle forms of behavioral biases have in allowing researchers to understand more fully the social interactions between stigmatized and nonstigmatized individuals (Cortina, 2008; Cortina et al., 2001; Sue, 2010). Multiple studies document the existence of this effect from target, observer, and independent rater perspectives (e.g., Hebl et al., 2007; King et al., 2006), and the current study shows this consistent pattern. One limitation of Study 1 is that independent coders of the interactions were not used, unlike some similar previous studies. Although we did attempt to collect information for this, the quality of the audiotapes was poor and did not allow us to analyze the independent coder perspective; however, other recent studies have adopted the same training procedures and found consistent results across all three perspectives (e.g., King & Ahmad, 2010; Morgan et al., 2013). In addition, more recent research also has focused on using the same standardization and training procedures of just the target and observer perspectives (Barron, Hebl, & King, 2011; Martinez, White, Shapiro, & Hebl, 2014; Schreer, Smith, & Thomas, 2009). We recommend including the independent coders when possible, but were limited in the current study. Despite this, and given the

similar pattern of results that emerge in the literature across studies with and without independent coders, we do not have reason to believe that this limitation significantly impacted our results.

In addition to examining the manifestation of discrimination against heavy men, Study 1 sought to examine the extent to which the permanency of the target's role influenced the magnitude of discrimination seen across contexts. The current results did not support the hypothesized pattern we anticipated, namely that heavy men seeking more permanent (i.e., job applicants) versus temporary (i.e., customers) associations would experience greater amounts of stigmatization. Such findings illustrate the ubiquity of weight stigmatization against men that transcends potential temporal or interdependent associations (see also Hebl & Mannix, 2003). Given that we have demonstrated that heavy (vs. nonheavy) men experience discrimination, inclusion of them, along with women, in studies on weight stigmatization may be profoundly important.

One reason for the stronger detection of weight-based interpersonal discrimination against men than has been seen in previous research (see Roehling, Roehling, & Wagstaff, 2013) may be that, unlike previous studies examining this issue, targets (and observers) were asked to evaluate immediate events rather than provide retrospective accounts about past events. It is possible that when reflecting on past events in general, men may not remember such instances of interpersonal discrimination or do not consider them as relevant (see Davis, 1999); however, this does not mean that these behaviors are not displayed toward them. Subtle behaviors may not be as salient to men when considering mistreatment from others. Indeed, some research has shown that women are more attuned than men to perceiving subtle gender discrimination (Bassford et al., 2014); however, recency or other moderators also may play an influential role in reporting.

Given that we have established the importance of examining men in studies focusing on weight stigmatization and also shown an initial impact of weight in retail settings, we next include both men and women in Study 2 to provide a more comprehensive picture of weight stigmatization as we focus on the next two unresolved questions. In particular, it is unclear if the preliminary biases we found in Study 1 persist once heavy individuals have been selected into retail positions. In Study 2, we sought to further strengthen the results of Study 1 by examining the extent to which this pattern of bias holds once heavy individuals actually are employed.

Specifically, in Study 2 we examined the expression of prejudicial attitudes and behavioral intentions. The shift from evaluating behaviors to prejudice expression allowed us to broaden the examination of subtle weight-based biases in this context and explore its consequences. Additionally, Study 2 moved beyond Study 1 to examine factors that may drive weight-based interpersonal discrimination and prejudice expression. Namely, we focus on the impact that cognitive stereotypes have on influencing negative attitudes and behavior, and how the endorsement of stereotypes may lead to more subtle displays of negativity that can spread beyond the initial target to the organization more generally.

Study 2

In Study 1, we examined the perspective of retail personnel toward heavy clientele; but here, we do the reverse. We examined

the perspective of clientele toward heavy retail personnel, and specifically measured clientele's evaluations of and behavioral intentions toward heavy retail personnel and how such evaluations and intentions may spread to the organization itself. Previous research has shown that heavy employees are perceived more negatively than their nonheavy counterparts (for review, see Puhl & Heuer, 2009), and we anticipated that customers are not immune to these negative biases. Customers process information about their environment and use their situational context to inform their overall decisions about organizations and whether or not they want to support organizations. Hence, we anticipated

Hypothesis 3: A weight main effect such that customers will give more negative overall evaluations of heavy (vs. nonheavy) retail personnel.

Such negative attitudes also may extend to the organization for which the heavy employee works as well as the retail products that the store personnel are marketing. Consistent with stigma-by-association theory, which states that nonstigmatized individuals may be perceived negatively (or stigmatized) when they are in the presence of stigmatized individuals (Neuberg, Smith, Hoffman, & Russell, 1994; Pryor, Reeder, & Monroe, 2012), customers may feel that if an organization is willing to hire someone perceived to be less professional, careful, and neat, the organization may have poor judgment overall. Additionally, customers may feel that the organization's products are not as high in quality as similar organizations and that the organization may make poor business decisions in general. Indeed, recent research on stigma by association has shown that the relation of attitude expression to stigma by association is particularly pronounced when the relationship between a nonstigmatized individual and stigmatized is seen as meaningful as opposed to coincidental (Pryor et al., 2012). Thus, customers may denigrate the organization and its products because of the organization's *meaningful* association with the heavy individual. That is, customers may feel justified in being more critical of things around the heavy employee or in stigmatizing the organization for its more permanent relation with heavy personnel. Therefore, we predicted

Hypothesis 4: A weight main effect such that customers who view heavy (vs. nonheavy) retail personnel working will have more negative overall evaluations about the organization (H_{4a}) and the retail products being sold (H_{4b}).

Hypothesis 5: A weight main effect such that customers who view heavy (vs. nonheavy) retail personnel working will express fewer intentions to support the organization.

Stereotypes as Justifiers

In addition to examining the direct effect of employee weight on customer evaluations, we examine why customers may evaluate heavy employees more negatively than nonheavy employees. Based on the justification-suppression model (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003), more negative evaluations of heavy personnel are most highly anticipated when individuals can strongly justify their negative weight-related attitudes and evaluations. More specifically, the justification-suppression model suggests that people try to suppress their prejudicial attitudes; however, these attitudes are

likely to be expressed when people feel justified in expressing prejudice. To the extent that customers endorse negative stereotypes about heavy employees, they likely feel justified in expressing prejudicial attitudes about these employees via negative evaluations. In Study 2, we examine three stereotypes associated with the weight stigma that are particularly likely to play a role in a retail service context: (a) appearance, (b) carelessness, and (c) professionalism. Research has shown that people are likely to endorse negative stereotypes that tend to fit under these three categories, and include more specific items such as unattractiveness, uncleanliness, incompetence, sloppiness, laziness, and lack of discipline and willpower (Puhl & Brownell, 2001; Puhl, Schwartz, & Brownell, 2005; Vartanian & Silverstein, 2013). In trying to ameliorate stereotypes (particularly those of appearance and professionalism), King et al. (2006) modified the appearance of obese shoppers to be casual versus professional and found a reduction of discrimination in the latter case, suggesting that stereotypes do act as an agent for the justification of discrimination expression. Additional research has shown people automatically stigmatize heavy individuals, and these automatic stereotypes are related to increased hiring biases (e.g., lower expectations of performance, lower ratings of professionalism; Agerström & Rooth, 2011). Given the pervasiveness of obesity-related stereotypes, we predicted

Hypothesis 6: A weight main effect in that customers will endorse more negative stereotypes (H_{6a} : deficits in appearance; H_{6b} : increased carelessness; and H_{6c} : lower professionalism) about heavy (vs. nonheavy) personnel.

An endorsement of negative stereotypes can remove feelings of guilt about prejudicial attitudes and replace them with feelings of validation for one's negative attitudes. Therefore, we believed that higher levels of endorsement should lead to a transmission of the effect of weight on attitudes and behavioral intentions. Thus, we predicted

Hypothesis 7: Stereotype endorsement will mediate the relation between personnel weight and customer evaluations such that customers who view heavy (vs. nonheavy) personnel working will have more negative stereotypes about the personnel, which will in turn lead to more negative evaluations about personnel (H_{7a}), the organization (H_{7b}), and the products being sold (H_{7c}), and will also lead to fewer intentions to support the organization (H_{7d}).

As previously stated, we exclusively examined men in Study 1 to illustrate evidence of subtle weight stigmatization against this population. As this evidence was seen, we now include both men and women in Study 2. Given the conflicting data and meta-analyses that show little to no overall gender differences (e.g., Chen & Brown, 2005; Roehling, Pichler, & Bruce, 2013), we do not anticipate or make predictions about gender.

Method

Participants

A total of 347 students (18–23 years old, $M = 19.78$, $SD = 2.23$) from a private university in the Southern part of the United

States completed the survey. Eight participants were removed due to missing data and 42 people were removed because they either failed the manipulation check ($N = 22$ in weight condition and $N = 8$ in gender condition) or said they could not remember the gender or weight manipulation ($N = 12$). This left a total of $N = 298$ usable data. Sixty-four percent of participants were female and 35% were male (1% did not respond). The sample was relatively diverse with 44% White, 29% Asian, 15% Hispanic, 8% Black, and 3% identifying as "Other." One additional person did not provide information on race.

Procedure

Participants were recruited through the psychology research pool and received a link to the study, which once selected, sent them to one of eight randomly selected surveys. Once they reviewed the informed consent page and agreed to participate, participants watched a short 2-min marketing video online and completed a questionnaire via SurveyMonkey. Each participant viewed one retail employee marketing five products and then responded to the questionnaire. The design of the study was a 2 (employee gender) \times 2 (employee weight) between-subjects design; therefore, participants viewed an employee who was either male or female and either heavy or not heavy.

Materials and Stimuli

Weight manipulation. As with Study 1, weight was manipulated using professionally constructed obesity prostheses. For the male confederates, in the control condition, the confederates had a medium-shirt size and an average of a 30-inch waist pants. In the heavy condition, confederates wore an obesity prosthesis, an extra-large shirt size, and pants with a 40-inch waist. For the female confederates, the professionally made prosthetics used in King et al. (2006) were used.² Female confederates in the control condition wore an average of a size 6–8, and female confederates wearing the prosthetic in the heavy condition wore a size 22. Two male and two female research assistants were recruited to serve as confederate employees for this study. Each employee served as his or her own control in the nonheavy condition.

Marketing videos. A total of eight different videos depicting a retail employee marketing a series of products to promote the launch of a fictitious company's website were created. Each employee made two videos, one in the heavy and one in the nonheavy condition. Employees received the script prior to recording the videos and received a demonstration on how to present the products. In each video, the employee stood behind a table with a computer sitting on the left side. The employee began by introducing himself/herself and provided some background information about the organization. Next, the employee introduced a new website that the company was planning to launch. As this website is introduced, the employee points to the computer screen. After discussing the website, the employee showed viewers five products the company carries. The products were presented in the same order in every video (alarm clock, coffee cup, planner, picture frame set, and a carry-on suitcase). All products were placed to the right of the employee and out of the sight of the camera. Employees discussed the products one at a time and pointed to specific features of each product.

Measures

Stereotypes. Participants responded to a total of 19 items, all of which were anchored on 7-point Likert-type scales (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely much*). Three items assessed Appearance, including the extent to which the retail employee seemed "attractive," "hygienic," and "neat and clean" ($\alpha = .77$). Seven items based on Goldberg's (1990) adjective rating scale assessed Carelessness. Example items included the extent to which the employee seemed "careless," "undependable," and "negligent" ($\alpha = .90$). Nine items assessed Professionalism, including the extent to which the employee seemed "professional," "competent," and "to have good judgment" ($\alpha = .93$).

Evaluations of employees. Participants also responded to six items assessing their evaluations of employee performance and potential. Example items included "The employee seems helpful" and "The employee seems to be able to explain benefits of products that may overcome customers' concerns." Items were anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *do not agree* to 7 = *very strongly agree*), and the scale had good reliability ($\alpha = .94$). Hence, we calculated an average, which we refer to as Employee Evaluation.

Evaluations of the organization. Seven items were used to evaluate the organization. Example items include "This organization seems to offer high quality products" and "This organization is attractive to customers." Items were anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *do not agree* to 7 = *very strongly agree*), and the scale had good reliability ($\alpha = .92$). We therefore calculated an average, which we refer to as Organizational Evaluation.

Evaluations of products. Participants responded to seven items used to evaluate each product. Example items include "This product seems valuable" and "This product seems desirable." Items were anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *do not agree* to 7 = *very strongly agree*). First, we created a composite score for each product. These separate composite scores for each product also correlated highly; therefore, a single product evaluation composite was averaged using scores across all five products. This combined product scale had good reliability ($\alpha = .96$), and we refer to this as Product Evaluation.

Intentions to support. In addition to measuring stereotypes and evaluations, we also wanted to measure a proximal behavioral measure from participants. Participants responded to six items used to measure future intentions to support the organization. Example items include "How likely is it that you would visit this website to shop" and "How likely is it that you would be a repeat shopper of the company?" Items were anchored on a 7-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all* to 7 = *extremely much*), and the scale had good reliability ($\alpha = .85$). A composite variable was created, which we refer to as Intentions to Support the Organization.

We conducted a four-factor confirmatory factor analysis on the dependent measures (Employee Evaluation, Organizational Evaluation, Product Evaluation, and Intentions to Support the Organization), and the results showed adequate model fit, $\chi^2(1,266) = 2,662.33, p < .05$; Comparative Fit Index (CFI) = .90; root-mean-

² The female obesity prosthetics were pretested in King et al. (2006) and found to be realistic.

square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .06 (confidence interval [CI]: [.06, .07]); standardized root-mean-square residual (SRMR) = .06. An examination of an alternative model with one underlying construct produced worse fit, $\chi^2(1,272) = 4,517.11$, $p < .05$; CFI = .77; RMSEA = .10 (CI [.09, .10]); SRMR = .14. A follow-up EFA supports four separate factors versus a single factor.

Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables in the study are presented in Table 2. We initially included employee gender as an independent variable in all analyses and found no significant interaction effects between employee weight and gender; therefore, for the main analyses we included employee gender as a covariate.

Hypotheses 3–5 state that employee weight would negatively impact customers’ Employee Evaluation (H_3), Organizational Evaluation (H_{4a}), and Product Evaluation (H_{4b}), and lead to fewer Intentions to Support the Organization (H_5). As seen in Table 2, all of the evaluation variables were correlated significantly with each other. Therefore, we conducted a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with employee weight as an independent variable and the Employee Evaluation, Organizational Evaluation, and Product Evaluation as dependent variables. Results showed no significant effect of weight, $F(3, 291) = .19$, *ns*. Next, we examined the effect of weight on Intentions to Support the Organization. An analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed no significant differences in intentions based on weight, $F(1, 293) = .02$, *ns*. Thus, Hypotheses 3–5 were not supported.

A MANOVA was used to test Hypothesis 6, with employee weight as an independent variable and stereotypes about Appearance, Carelessness, and Professionalism as dependent variables. Results showed a significant weight effect, $F(3, 292) = 29.61$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .23$. Follow-up ANOVAs show significant effects across all three dependent variables. As seen in Figure 3, customers who viewed a heavy employee in the marketing video viewed the employee as having a more negative Appearance, more Carelessness, and less Professionalism than customers who viewed a nonheavy employee. Thus, Hypothesis 6 was supported. Finally, Hypothesis 7 stated that employee weight would have an indirect effect on customers’ evaluations of the employee (Employee Evaluation) as well as the organization at which the employee worked

(Organizational Evaluation), the retail products the employee marketed (Product Evaluation), and intentions to support the organization (Intentions to Support Organization) through the endorsement of negative stereotypes. To examine this hypothesis, multiple mediation models (one for each dependent variable) were tested using the SPSS macro PROCESS (Hayes, 2013), with employee weight as the independent variable and Appearance, Carelessness, and Professionalism as the mediators. Table 3 provides the results of the multiple mediation analyses. Results showed significant total indirect effects of employee weight on Employee Evaluation, $B = -.58$, $p < .001$ (CI [-.82, -.34]), Organizational Evaluation, $B = -.46$, $p < .001$ (CI [-.67, -.28]), Product Evaluation, $B = -.25$, $p < .001$ (CI [-.41, -.11]), and Intentions to Support the Organization, $B = -.17$, $p < .01$ (CI [-.31, -.04]), via the combined endorsement of all three stereotypes together. Based on the directions of the a and b paths, the results suggest that when employees were heavy there was a higher endorsement of negative stereotypes which in turn led to more negative evaluations of the employee, organization, and products, and fewer intentions to support the organization.

Further, as seen in Table 3, the simple indirect effects illustrate that the endorsement of each stereotype significantly contributes to the indirect effect of employee weight on Employee Evaluation and Organizational Evaluation. This pattern was the same for Product Evaluation for two of the three stereotypes. For Intentions to Support, the specific indirect effects for each stereotype were not significant, suggesting that only the endorsement of the combination of stereotypes mediated the relation between employee weight and Intentions to Support the Organization. Taken together, Hypothesis 7 was supported.

Post Hoc Gender Analyses

Given some research that has suggested that women experience greater amounts of weight stigmatization than men, we wanted to ensure that our significant main effect of weight on stereotype endorsement was not driven primarily by negativity toward heavy female employees. Therefore, we conducted exploratory analyses examining the effect of weight on stereotype endorsement separately for female and male employees. The results for women showed a significant main effect, $F(3, 143) = 22.32$, $p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .32$. Follow-up *t* tests showed significant differences between heavy and nonheavy female employees across Appearance

Table 2
Descriptive Statistics, Zero-Order Correlations, and Reliabilities (Alphas) for Study 2

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Employee gender	1.49	0.50	—								
2. Employee weight	0.46	0.50	.02	—							
3. Appearance stereotype	3.43	1.25	.16**	-.44**	(.77)						
4. Carelessness stereotype	2.34	1.06	-.08	.26**	-.41**	(.90)					
5. Professionalism stereotype	4.17	1.11	.02	-.19**	.62**	-.53**	(.93)				
6. Employee evaluation	4.21	1.24	.10	.00	.49**	-.46**	.67**	(.94)			
7. Organization evaluation	3.00	1.16	.06	-.02	.41**	-.37**	.50**	.60**	(.92)		
8. Intentions to support	2.40	0.95	-.05	.00	.19**	-.11	.21**	.21**	.50**	(.85)	
9. Product evaluation	3.29	.93	.01	-.04	.32**	-.22*	.37**	.42**	.58**	.40**	(.96)

Note. *N* = 297.
** $p < .01$.

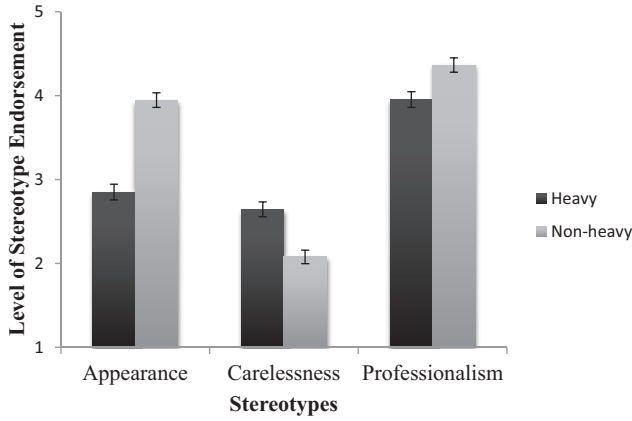


Figure 3. Customers' level of stereotype endorsement when viewing a heavy versus nonheavy employee in Study 2.

ance $t(145) = 7.20, p < .001, d = 1.2$, Carelessness, $t(126.58) = 4.25, p < .001, d = .70$, and Professionalism $t(148) = 2.89, p < .01, d = .48$, with the means all going in the same direction as the main analyses. When examining the effect of weight on stereotype endorsement for men, results showed a significant main effect, $F(3, 146) = 8.99, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$. Follow-up t tests showed a difference between heavy and nonheavy male employees across Appearance $t(148) = 4.75, p < .001, d = .78$, and Carelessness, $t(128.69) = 2.48, p = .01, d = .41$, but not Professionalism $t(148) = 1.71, p > .05$ (although means were trending in right direction). Thus, although the effect of weight was stronger

for female employees, the main effect is not driven by stigma against heavy women.

Discussion

Study 2 examined customers' evaluations and stereotypes about heavy store personnel to explore whether customers have negative biases toward heavy individuals in retail similar to that observed in Study 1, and to examine these processes across both men and women. Contrary to hypotheses, the results of Study 2 showed no main effect of employee weight on customers' Employee Evaluation, Organization Evaluation, Product Organization, or Customers' Intentions to Support the Organization. There may be a few reasons why these main effects were not seen. One reason may be that customers who viewed heavy personnel initially attempted to suppress negative evaluations. This is in line with the theory of justification-suppression of prejudice (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003). Specifically, customers were asked to provide evaluation information prior to completing information about stereotypes, and may have therefore tried to block negative attitudes; however, as evident by the indirect effects, these attitudes may be somewhat suppressed but not eradicated. Another reason that main effects might not have been present may be because of the neutrality of products being marketed in this study. In this study, the personnel were marketing products that that may be considered basic in nature and are generally used by a wide audience. Thus, customers may have been less likely to be influenced by the employee in general. Also, unlike Study 1, there may have been a weaker direct association of the products with a negative stereotype concerning weight (e.g., in Study 1 clothing and fashion are closely tied to appearance and weight; coffee cups, not so much). In this way,

Table 3

Bootstrap Mediation Analyses for the Effect of Employee Weight on Customer Reactions Through Stereotype Endorsement for Study 2

Variable	P _{MX}	P _{YM}	Total effects	Direct effects	Indirect effects	BC 95% CI	
						Lower	Upper
Evaluation of employee			.01	.59***			
Appearance	-1.10***	0.22***			-.25***	-.40	-.12
Carelessness	0.55***	-0.21***			-.12**	-.22	-.04
Professionalism	-0.41**	0.53***			-.21**	-.38	-.07
Total indirect effect					-.58***	-.82	-.34
Evaluation of organization			-.05	.41***			
Appearance	-1.10***	0.22***			-.24***	-.41	-.10
Carelessness	0.55***	-0.17***			-.09*	-.20	-.03
Professionalism	-0.41**	0.32***			-.13**	-.25	-.05
Total indirect effect					-.46***	-.67	-.28
Evaluation of products			-.08	.17			
Appearance	-1.09***	0.13*			-.14*	-.29	-.02
Carelessness	0.56***	-0.03			-.02	-.09	.05
Professionalism	-0.41**	0.22***			-.09*	-.19	-.02
Total indirect effect					-.25***	-.41	-.11
Intentions to support			.01	.18			
Appearance	-1.10***	0.11			-.12	-.28	.02
Carelessness	0.56***	-0.01			-.00	-.08	.08
Professionalism	-0.42**	0.12			-.05	-.13	.00
Total indirect effect					-.17**	-.31	-.04

Note. Based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. Employee weight was coded 0 = nonheavy and 1 = heavy. Stereotype mediators for each dependent variable include appearance, carelessness, and professionalism. BC = bias corrected; CI = confidence interval; P_{MX} = path a from employee weight to mediators; P_{YM} = path b from mediators to dependent variables. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

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customers may have been able to disassociate employee weight from the context to some degree.

On first glance, the lack of weight main effects appears encouraging; however, there were indirect effects of employee weight on evaluations that suggest that even though customers may not explicitly exhibit negativity, more subtle biases are occurring against heavy employees. Specifically, the results showed that when faced with a heavy (vs. nonheavy) employee, customers were more likely to endorse negative stereotypes about Appearance, Carelessness, and Professionalism, and this endorsement helped to transmit the effect of weight on evaluations and intentions. These stereotype attributes have been shown to be important factors in customer evaluation (for examples see Torres & Kline, 2013; Vilnai-Yavetz & Rafaeli, 2011). Indeed, the current findings support previous research and illustrate how simply evaluating the weight of an employee may aid in the formation of impressions about these attributes, which can then lead to more negative attitudes even when there are no behavioral differences on the part of the employee. Furthermore, the lack of differences seen in the stigmatization levels displayed toward heavy men versus heavy women supports the notion that being heavy may be just as harmful for men than women. In this study, the surprising positive direct effect of weight that is contradicted by the indirect effects suggests that customers attempted to suppress prejudice; however, as anticipated, negative stereotypes served as justifiers for the release of prejudicial evaluations of heavy employees. Customers may have attempted to overcompensate positively for underlying prejudices in their attitudinal evaluations; however, such positivity was diluted with the activation of negative stereotypes, in line with what Crandall and Eshleman (2003) might predict. These findings also highlight how weight stigmatization may influence customers' attitudes and suggest that heavy employees may be stigmatized despite performing similarly to their nonheavy counterparts if negative stereotypes are elicited.

Further, the findings revealed evidence of the convergence of the theories of justification-suppression (Crandall & Eshleman, 2003) and stigma by association (Neuberg et al., 1994; Pryor et al., 2012) in that the endorsement of negative stereotypes about the employee accompanied deficits in Organizational Evaluation, Product Evaluation, and Intentions to Support the Organization in the future. Such findings suggest that in retail, an organization may be stigmatized simply for hiring heavy employees. At some places, employees are hired (whether consciously or subconsciously) to serve as models for what the organization represents. In this way, organizations ask employees to act in a manner that is consistent with the organizations' goals and image. Perhaps customers also perceive the physical attributes of employees as a model for what the organization represents. In a retail setting, customers may feel that they want to interact with an individual who is an idealized representation of what they perceive to be the overall image of the organization. Organizations can shape this image to one that encompasses greater equality and celebrates the differences in individuals as opposed to potentially isolating these differences. If retail organizations hire heavy employees and show positive images of these individuals in marketing campaigns, they can begin to counteract and change the stereotypes about heavy employees, which can potentially positively influence customers' attitudes.

General Discussion

First, our research highlights the importance of examining typically understudied subpopulations (e.g., men) within stigmatized groups (e.g., heavy individuals). Stigma researchers should exert caution in assuming stigmatization is more common for one group than another simply because a group has been given greater attention. In this case, the evidence suggests both women and men experience subtle forms of weight stigmatization. Obese and overweight men may underreport such stigmatization; yet, such stigmatization may have profound effects for men that are missed because research does not include them (cf. King et al., 2014). As the results of the current studies show, heavy men may experience discrimination even when applying for retail jobs, which can put them at a disadvantage for being hired before their credentials are even viewed. Weight stigmatization also can put men at a disadvantage once they are employed because, as research shows, obese men experience wage penalties compared with their average weight and even overweight counterparts (Judge & Cable, 2011).

Second, the overall findings from Study 2 converge with those of Study 1 to show that employees are vulnerable to subtle displays of weight stigmatization across retail settings. Furthermore, the triangulation of methodologies (field and lab), perspectives (target, observer, and observer), and forms of stigmatization (discrimination, prejudice, and stereotype endorsement) illustrate the true ubiquity of weight stigmatization. Although not overt and formal, the displays of stigmatization seen across the current studies highlight the difficulty for heavy individuals in navigating the service sector as they face small displays of microaggressions that can compound to create large problems.

The findings reported here have important implications for theory and research. One implication is that the subtle nature of weight stigmatization can lead to subsequent consequences that are not guarded against easily. The indirect nature of weight stigmatization illustrates the barriers that heavy individuals encounter in retail, which may extend to the broader service sector. Additionally, the current findings highlight the larger organizational impacts of weight stigmatization. Specifically, in Study 2, organizations were penalized for having heavy employees market products. Furthermore, the products that heavy employees sold were devalued. These findings should not dissuade organizations from hiring heavy employees; rather, they should ignite organizations to adopt actions to combat such negativity. Although subtle biases are more difficult to detect, organizations should pay particular attention to the more insidious ways in which weight stigmatization can negatively impact employees and organizations and focus efforts to combat these smaller, sometimes overlooked instances of negativity. Our findings illustrate that one of the processes by which prejudice expression is seen is through stereotype endorsement, and organizations may be able to use this information to create a different narrative for heavy employees by, for example, featuring them as competent and knowledgeable in their marketing efforts.

Although weight is not a federally protected class, protecting these individuals from discrimination is important. Organizations may be able to influence customers' perceptions and attitudes about heavy employees by positively highlighting these individuals in more of their overall marketing and branding. The Dove Campaign for Real Beauty, which showcased women (but not corresponding men) of a wide variety of sizes, attempted to do this

in 2004. Indeed, previous research has shown that presenting counterstereotypic information about a stigmatized individual can reduce levels of discrimination (Coward & Brady, 2014; King et al., 2006; Morgan et al., 2013). It may be the case that customers have more negative stereotypes about heavy employees in service settings simply because there are not many heavy employees in retail. That is, seeing more positive images of capable and competent professional heavy employees may positively skew the perspective of customers and current employees. In addition to providing a greater variety of sized models, organizations can include weight stigma in diversity training. In this way, organizations can provide current employees with knowledge and training to be more inclusive to heavy job applicants and customers, which can have a positive impact for not only the heavy individual but also the organization.

Not only can organizational efforts lead to reductions in negativity against heavy employees and customers (see Coward & Brady, 2014) but also individuals can act to help reduce biases. The first step may be for individuals to become aware of how strong weight biases are and how these biases can be activated. One reason that weight stigmatization is still relatively acceptable is that people believe that weight is very controllable (Popan, Kenworthy, Barden, & Griffiths, 2010) and that heavy individuals are not trying to lose weight (Black, Sokol, & Vartanian, 2014). The media shows countless images of individuals who have lost weight (e.g., Jared from Subway, *The Biggest Loser* [Gaha, 2004–2015]), which may aid in people believing that weight loss is easier than it actually is for many people. Such perceptions then serve as justifiers to express prejudice toward heavy people. A more realistic understanding of the genetic components influencing one's size can help to reduce biases against heavy individuals (Hebl & Kleck, 2002; Popan et al., 2010). In addition, if people begin to actively condemn beliefs about weight controllability, they can set social norms of not expressing negativity toward heavy people.

Limitations and Future Research

The current study shows that men do experience subtle forms of weight-based stigmatization similarly to that of women (King et al., 2006). Additional factors likely influence the extent to which men and women differentially perceive and actually experience interpersonal and other forms of discrimination and prejudice expression, and we encourage future research to identify these factors. Future research might examine the potential moderators we mentioned earlier, such as recency of discriminatory events or the extent to which prejudiced memories may be differentially harbored (see Frazer & Wiersma, 2001). There are clearly other potential moderators, too, such as the extent to which a context accentuates a focus on the body (see Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004) or the extent to which heavy individuals can engage in successful self-affirmation (Harris & Epton, 2009).

Second, the current studies show a stigma-by-association effect in that organizations and products associated with heavy employees were denigrated similarly. However, it is unclear whether there is a long-term impact and how generalized this impact might be for organizations. Assessing the strength of this effect over time and the extent to which the effect disperses are ripe for future research. Consider for instance, if a customer has a negative interaction with a heavy sales associate at an organization. How long does the

stigma by association last toward that organization? Is it directed toward all branches of that organization? Future research examining the temporal effects of such associations in field settings can help to further clarify the organizational impacts of employee weight-based discrimination.

Third and similarly, the current study focused on retail settings with somewhat limited and neutral (by research design) products (primarily household items). Thus, it is not clear how strong the stigma-by-association effect would be for products and services that people have more established a priori attitudes toward or linked more closely to weight- and appearance-based items. Further, it is possible that customers' previous intentions to purchase a product could supersede weight-based stigma-by-association effects. Additional research is needed to tease apart how customers' prior intentions and affiliations with organizations may influence the level of stigmatization they display toward heavy employees and things associated with these employees. Also, future research examining the extent of weight-based interpersonal discrimination across other types of organizations in the service industry more broadly would strengthen the generalizability of the results.

Fourth, the current research illustrates the subtle biases that occur against heavy individuals in retail, which is important; however, it makes no attempt to address ways to reduce such negativity. Future research should examine the extent to which interpersonal discrimination toward heavy employees and job applicants can be reduced, which may be difficult given the subtleness of such behaviors. Even as early research has shown, successful attempts to curtail stigma-by-association findings are very limited (Neuberg et al., 1994). However, the current study reveals that cognitive justifiers negatively impact stigmatization, so it may be possible that changing these stereotypes and introducing more positive and nuanced attributes and attitudes may have the opposite effect.

Conclusion

Overall, our findings highlight the ways in which subtle biases that exist in the form of attitudes and behaviors can have harmful effects in retail settings. The dynamics can be complex in that more overt displays of negativity are suppressed but in that subtle biases have powerful consequences that both directly impact the individual and extend beyond the individual to organizations. We see the particularly negative effects of weight stigmatization in retail environments for not only employees but also for job applicants and customers, which have implications for organizations in terms of success. These findings suggest that it is not just the nature of the job in terms of high interpersonal contact for employees. Various aspects of the retail industry appear to disadvantage heavy individuals. Further, this research draws attention to the importance of examining weight stigmatization, particularly subtle forms of stigmatization, against men in addition to women. Taken together, these findings draw attention to the continuing ubiquity of weight stigmatization in employment in hopes of highlighting the need for strategies to reduce such negativity and foster more equal and fair treatment of diverse employees across occupational settings.

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