

The Effects of Workplace Weight Discrimination on Social Pain Minimization and Interpersonal and Organizational Experiences

by

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Abstract

Although a majority of employees in the United States are considered medically overweight or obese, workplace weight discrimination is a pervasive and harmful experience that negatively impacts employees and organizations. The current research examined how emotion invalidation following weight discrimination is related to key indices of employee well-being. Heavier employees were expected to experience emotion invalidation, termed social pain minimization (SPM), in the workplace because of their stigmatized weight identity. Heavier people are regularly dehumanized and viewed with disgust, and weight-based discrimination is often viewed as socially acceptable relative to other forms of prejudice. Three studies provide converging support for workplace weight discrimination triggering actual and expected SPM, which in turn impacted perceptions of organizational support (POS), workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism. Using cross-sectional, experimental, and multi-wave designs, the current work provides a multimethod test of the hypothesized relationships between weight discrimination, SPM, POS, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism. These results offer insights on the psychological processes linking workplace weight discrimination to negative outcomes and highlight the need for organizations and policymakers to protect employees from the harmful effects of weight discrimination at work.

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The Effects of Workplace Weight Discrimination on Social Pain Minimization and Interpersonal and Organizational Experiences

Projections indicate that by 2030, 78% of American adults will be considered medically overweight or obese (Wang et al., 2020). Despite the prevalence of higher weight individuals in society, being heavier is widely stigmatized. People experience weight discrimination across many domains of life including through their relationships with friends and peers (Strauss & Pollack, 2003), parents (Crandall, 1995), romantic partners (Schmidt et al., 2022), educators (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 1999), and healthcare professionals (Sabin et al., 2012). Most relevant to the current work, weight discrimination is pervasive in the workplace and is associated with a variety of negative employee outcomes (Rudolph et al., 2009). Heavier individuals report being treated poorly by coworkers, supervisors, and employers (Puhl & Brownell, 2001) and experience discrimination across employment contexts including selection, promotion, and termination (Puhl & Heuer, 2009).

In addition to harming employees, weight discrimination is costly for organizations. Workplace weight discrimination is associated with lower job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, increased burnout, more counterproductive work behaviors, and higher turnover intentions (Johnson et al., 2023; Randle et al., 2012), all of which are negatively related to job performance and organizational effectiveness. As such, addressing the issue of weight discrimination at work serves both employee and organizational interests. Although workplace weight discrimination is well-documented (Roehling et al., 2007), there are no federal laws that explicitly protect individuals from weight-based discrimination at work (Roehling, 2002), leaving heavier employees vulnerable to the negative effects of weight discrimination.

The current work aimed to examine the psychological processes driving weight discrimination's effects on work-related outcomes and highlight the interpersonal harms caused

by weight discrimination in the workplace. Despite extensive evidence of the prevalence and ill effects caused by weight discrimination in organizations, the specific psychological processes through which weight discrimination impacts employees are not well understood. Building on past work examining invalidation processes linking discrimination to poor outcomes (e.g., Benbow et al., 2021; Johnson et al., 2023), it was predicted that weight discrimination would lead employees to feel their emotions are invalidated by coworkers and supervisors. In turn, this emotion invalidation was expected to impact perceptions of organizational support, sense of belonging at work, and experiences of workplace ostracism.

Focusing on workplace social connections (e.g., belonging, ostracism) is important because these relationships are central to employee job performance, turnover intentions, and well-being (Riggle et al., 2009; Rubin et al., 2019). Although sense of belonging at work (or workplace belonging) and workplace ostracism are relatively understudied in organizational psychology, the importance of the fundamental need to belong has been well-established (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). People are inherently motivated to form and maintain lasting, positive, and meaningful relationships that are characterized by frequent interactions and reciprocal concern for well-being (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When belonging needs are thwarted (e.g., ostracism), mental and physical health suffer and people may engage in aggressive and antisocial behaviors (Baumeister et al., 2007). In work contexts, belonging has been positively related to job satisfaction, mental health, and job performance (Cockshaw et al., 2014; Howard et al., 2020; Rubin et al., 2019).

In contrast to belonging and ostracism which have been relatively understudied in organizational psychology, perceived organizational support (POS) is a well-established construct in the organizational literature that is driven by experiences of respectful and fair

treatment by organizational members and predicts organizational commitment, job involvement, performance, and withdrawal behaviors (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS refers to employee beliefs that their organization is committed to rewarding their efforts, meeting their needs, valuing their contributions, and caring about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). In line with social exchange theory, employees feel motivated to contribute positively to their organizations when they experience fair and supportive treatment at work (i.e., high POS; Eisenberger et al., 2001). The current work aimed to test the effects of weight discrimination and subsequent emotion invalidation on workplace belonging and ostracism and perceived organizational support.

As noted previously, the specific psychological and social processes that link weight discrimination to workplace outcomes remain unclear. The current research addresses this literature gap by integrating key social (i.e., social identity threat) and organizational (i.e., conservation of resources) psychology theories to investigate how weight discrimination is associated with feelings of emotion invalidation. When people experience socially painful events (i.e., negative interpersonal experiences like exclusion, disrespect, unfairness; Deska et al., 2020; Johnson et al., 2023), they often turn to others for support. In the current work, social pain minimization (SPM) refers to feelings of emotion invalidation that arise when individuals share their negative social experiences with others and feel listeners underappreciate or minimize their distress (Benbow et al., 2022). In keeping with past work, I expected workplace weight discrimination would trigger SPM, which in turn would reduce POS and workplace belonging and increase experiences of workplace ostracism. In other words, I predicted SPM would partially mediate the effects of weight discrimination on important interpersonal workplace experiences. Across three studies, the current work tests whether SPM operates as a mediating

mechanism that links workplace weight discrimination with key interpersonal and organizational outcomes.

Theoretical Framework

Social Identity Threat

The current work uses a social identity threat perspective to understand the effects of weight discrimination on workplace outcomes. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1985), people have multiple social identities based on their belonging to various social groups (e.g., age, gender, race, religion, social class; Steele et al., 2002). These social categories can be functional in processing complex social environments and defining oneself in relation to others (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Hogg et al., 1995). Social identities also contribute to the fulfillment of fundamental psychological needs like self-esteem, sense of belonging, and meaningfulness (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Stets & Burke, 2000). However, social identities are also associated with stereotypes, or shared beliefs about the characteristics, roles, and motivations of social groups (Hogg & Turner, 1987). These stereotypic beliefs contribute to negative judgments and unfair treatment based on group membership (i.e., discrimination; Dovidio et al., 2010). People have social identities surrounding their weight and body size, and they may consider themselves (or expect others to categorize them) as belonging to a specific weight group (e.g., fat, thin, average weight; Hunger et al., 2015). Like other social identities, body size is associated with various stereotypes. For example, higher weight people are commonly stereotyped as lazy, incompetent, sloppy, unattractive, and unmotivated (Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Roehling et al., 2007), and these weight-based stereotypes shape how heavier individuals are treated in society and organizations.

People are generally aware of the stereotypes of their cultures, including stereotypes of the groups to which they belong. In line with the idea that people share cultural knowledge about group stereotypes, social identity threat theory suggests that people may experience threat in contexts where their social identities are devalued or otherwise incompatible with social expectations (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Steele et al., 2002). Weight-based social identity threat thus refers to concerns about being judged on the basis of negative weight-based stereotypes. Heavier individuals are aware of the stereotypes applied to them because of their weight and may subsequently be concerned that others will judge and mistreat them based on those stereotypes. For example, heavier employees may be concerned that their supervisor believes they are lazy and unmotivated based on their weight, which likely activates threat due to the importance of performance and productivity in work contexts. Additionally, weight-based social identity threat may be activated when employees hear coworkers make a “fat joke,” triggering concerns that coworkers view them negatively based on their weight. As such, heavier employees must contend with overt and anticipated mistreatment from supervisors and coworkers due to weight-based stereotypes (Steele et al., 2002).

Weight-based social identity threat triggers negative emotional, cognitive, and physiological responses that can have both acute and chronic effects (Major et al., 2012). Weight discrimination has been associated with psychological distress (Himmelstein et al., 2015; Myers & Rosen, 1999), reduced mental health (Emmer et al., 2020), lower body satisfaction (Vartanian & Shaprow, 2008), increased blood pressure (Major et al., 2012), heightened inflammation (Sutin et al., 2014), and elevated levels of cortisol (Schvey et al., 2014). Weight discrimination’s effect on cortisol reactivity is particularly disconcerting because high cortisol concentration is considered a risk factor for cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and stroke (Incollingo

Rodriguez et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2016; Tomiyama et al., 2014). In addition to psychological and physical responses, weight discrimination is associated with unhealthy coping behaviors. For example, experiences of weight discrimination are associated with increased engagement in unhealthy dieting (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2002), disordered eating (Hunger et al., 2020), caloric consumption (Major et al., 2014) and avoidance of stigmatized environments like public exercise facilities (Vartanian & Novak, 2011) and healthcare settings (Puhl & Heuer, 2010). Altogether, past work demonstrates that weight-based social identity threat is stressful, and this stress is associated with worse mental and physical health and engagement in unhealthy behaviors (Hunger et al., 2015).

Conservation of Resources

The current work integrates a social identity threat perspective with a key theory of organizational behavior: conservation of resources (COR). According to COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), people are motivated to maintain and acquire resources, and stress arises from threats to resources, loss of resources, and lack of resource gain following investment of resources. When resources are threatened and reduced, individuals struggle to cope with and manage future stressors (Hobfoll et al., 2000). In the COR literature, resources are defined as objects, individual characteristics, conditions, or energies that buffer against stress and are valued by individuals (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Relevant to the current work, weight discrimination and subsequent emotion invalidation threaten social and psychological resources such as social support (Almeida et al., 2011) and regulatory processes (Hunger et al., 2015), which are critical resources employees leverage to deal with stressors in the workplace (Hobfoll et al., 1990; Niessen & Jimmieson, 2016). In other words, weight-based discrimination represents an identity-based resource threat. Below, I will summarize past research that demonstrates weight discrimination

as resource depleting and how resource deficits caused by weight discrimination and emotion invalidation are associated with negative outcomes.

From a COR perspective, weight discrimination and subsequent SPM pose threats to both social and psychological resources. Social support resources refer to social relationships that offer instrumental assistance and feelings of belonging, attachment, and identity (Hobfoll et al., 1990). Past work highlights the marginalization and isolation of heavier individuals in society and the workplace (e.g., Ruggs et al., 2013; Strauss & Pollack, 2003), suggesting that higher weight employees may have less access to social support resources that can be leveraged to deal with organizational stressors. Indeed, heavier individuals report fewer and lower quality social support resources compared to average weight and thin individuals (Carr & Friedman, 2006; Phelan et al., 2015). Further, when employees experience weight discrimination at work, they may attempt to engage social support resources by confiding in coworkers and supervisors about their negative experiences and emotional distress. If coworkers and supervisors fail to validate employees' distress (i.e., SPM), attempts to engage social support resources to manage initial resource threats may result in further resource loss.

Workplace weight discrimination and SPM also threaten psychological resources like self-regulation and executive control. Weight-based identity threats increase stress, which in turn impedes cognitive performance. For example, heavier participants exposed to messages about weight stigma in the job market experienced reduced self-regulatory resources as indicated by greater calorie consumption and lower feelings of dietary control (Major et al., 2014). There is also evidence that weight-based identity threats deplete cognitive resources. For example, undergraduate participants gave speeches on why they would make a good date. Higher weight women who believed their speech was videotaped (versus only audiotaped) experienced more

physiological stress (i.e., increased blood pressure) and performed worse on a measure of executive control (i.e., the Stroop task; Major et al., 2012) compared to average weight women and participants in the control (audiotape) condition. These studies demonstrate that weight discrimination threatens key psychological resources (i.e., self-regulation, perceived control, executive control). Based on this past research, the current work theorizes that weight discrimination and SPM reduce valued resources, which increases the difficulty of work tasks and ultimately undermines job satisfaction, performance, and feelings of belonging and support at work (Halbesleben et al., 2014; Mackey & Perrewe, 2014; Niessen & Jimmieson, 2016).

To summarize, I expect that weight discrimination and subsequent experiences of SPM threaten valued resources (e.g., social support and regulatory resources). In the wake of discrimination, emotion invalidation further threatens employees' resources, ultimately undermining key organizational outcomes like POS and belonging. As such, discrimination may trigger SPM, and these threats are expected to jointly contribute to resource depletion and negative workplace experiences.

Social Pain Minimization

When employees experience socially painful events at work (e.g., exclusion, discrimination, disrespect, unfairness), they often seek support from others in their organization (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Knapp et al., 1997; Malamut & Offermann, 2001; Plummer & Slane, 1996). When support providers neglect individuals' emotional distress, this can contribute to feelings of social pain minimization (Benbow & Kunstman, 2023). The current work defines social pain minimization (SPM) as the perception that listeners invalidate speakers' emotions when they share about negative social experiences. For example, individuals may experience psychological distress after they are disrespected by coworkers, excluded from company happy

hours, or exposed to workplace weight discrimination. SPM occurs when people share about the distress caused by these experiences and feel others actively (e.g., downplaying the severity or hurtfulness of an event) or passively (e.g., change the conversation) invalidate their emotions. As research from across clinical and developmental psychology attests, this type of emotion invalidation is distressing and associated with increased negative affect, emotion dysregulation, deficits in coping, self-injury, and various forms of psychopathology (e.g., Braden et al., 2021; Brandão et al., 2022; Krause et al., 2003; Lepore & Helgeson, 1998; Mountford et al., 2007; Shenk & Fruzzetti, 2011; Yap et al., 2008; You & Leung, 2012; Zielinski & Veilleux, 2018). This past work documents the numerous negative outcomes caused by emotion invalidation.

It is expected that weight discrimination will be positively associated with SPM because: 1) heavier individuals are regularly dehumanized, which may lead people to devalue their emotional experiences, 2) higher weight people elicit disgust, an emotion that interferes with empathy and motivates social and physical distancing, and 3) weight stigma is often viewed as socially acceptable, so people may disregard the hurt feelings of heavier employees following weight discrimination. In the following section, I discuss several anticipated paths linking weight discrimination to SPM.

Weight Discrimination and Social Pain Minimization

First, the dehumanization of heavier individuals may lead to the invalidation of their emotional experiences. Dehumanization, or the denial of human psychological capacities, can take various forms. For example, mechanistic dehumanization is characterized by the denial of human nature qualities and is associated with groups being perceived as rigid, cold, and lacking emotional experiences (Haslam, 2006). Alternatively, animalistic dehumanization refers to the denial of human uniqueness by viewing certain groups as less distinctly human-like and more

primitive or animal-like (e.g., uncivilized, immature, dysregulated, lacking discipline; Haslam, 2006). Animalistic dehumanization is associated with the denial of complex emotions for certain groups, which in turn reduces empathy and sets the stage for emotion invalidation processes (Albarello & Rubini, 2012; Goff et al., 2008). That is, when people see certain groups as less human and underestimate the complexity of their emotional experiences, they likely fail to appreciate their hurt feelings when they encounter adversity. Past work finds that higher weight individuals are perceived as less evolved and more animalistic compared to average weight people (Bernard et al., 2014; Kersbergen & Robinson, 2019) and are judged to be low in uniquely human traits that distinguish humans from other animals (e.g., self-control, discipline; Crandall, 1994). This type of dehumanization (i.e., animalistic perceptions and denial of uniquely human qualities) is associated with decreased empathy and lower helping intentions (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014). In summary, the dehumanization of heavier individuals likely leads people to see them as less fully human, setting the stage for reduced empathic concern and increased emotion invalidation.

It is also expected that higher weight employees will experience SPM as a function of disgust. Disgust is a complex emotion that arises from pathogenic concerns and leads people to physically and psychologically distance themselves from perceived threats (Hodson & Costello, 2007). Obesity has been pathologized and labeled an “epidemic” by the medical community (CDC, 2022; Wang et al., 2020). Consistent with the pathologizing of obesity, higher weight people are rated as more disgusting than other weight groups and people feel motivated to distance themselves from heavier individuals (Park et al., 2007; Vartanian, 2010; Vartanian et al., 2016). Indeed, heavier individuals report feeling that other people regularly avoid or exclude them because of their weight (Friedman et al., 2005; Puhl & Brownell, 2006), and heavier

children tend to have less friends compared to average weight peers (Strauss & Pollack, 2003). Further, people feel less empathy toward groups that elicit disgust (Stevenson et al., 2015). In one striking study that examined neural activation in response to images of various social groups, it was found that looking at individuals who belong to groups that elicit disgust did not activate the medial prefrontal cortex, an area of the brain specifically related to processing social information (Harris & Fiske, 2006). This study suggests that, even at a neurological level, people may have difficulty empathizing with groups viewed with disgust. In summary, disgust may lead people to feel reduced empathy and increased motivations to avoid higher weight employees. As such, disgust likely sets the stage for heavier individuals' pain to be minimized by others.

Finally, weight discrimination is expected to be related to SPM because weight stigma is socially accepted relative to other forms of prejudice. People tend to believe weight is controllable and that individuals can lose weight if they try hard enough (Puhl & Brownell, 2003). As such, people generally believe that individuals are personally responsible for their weight (Weiner et al., 1988). In line with beliefs about weight controllability and responsibility, many people, even medical professionals, endorse the idea that stigmatizing weight can be beneficial through motivating heavier individuals to lose weight (Major et al., 2014; 2020). Therefore, many people view weight stigma as an acceptable prejudice because of the misguided belief that fat shaming will encourage healthy behaviors (e.g., exercise and healthy eating). Ironically, weight stigma elicits psychological, physiological, and behavioral processes (e.g., increased consumption, heightened cortisol levels, reduced regulatory resources, exercise avoidance) that are associated with weight gain rather than weight loss (Major et al., 2018; Tomiyama, 2014; Tomiyama et al., 2018). Despite extensive evidence of the counterproductive effects of weight stigma, beliefs about the benefits of stigmatizing weight remain pervasive (Puhl

& Heuer, 2010). If coworkers and supervisors believe weight stigma is an acceptable prejudice that motivates weight loss, they are likely less sympathetic to heavier employees' distress when they experience weight discrimination and more likely to minimize their heavier colleagues' social pains.

Consequently, I expect weight discrimination to be related to SPM for several reasons. First, people regularly dehumanize higher weight individuals, seeing them as more animalistic and possessing less uniquely human qualities compared to other groups (Crandall, 1994; Kersbergen & Robinson, 2019). As such, people likely underestimate their complex emotional experiences, setting the stage for SPM. Second, people associate heavier individuals with disgust, which is an emotion linked to reduced empathy and increased motivation to avoid interactions with sources of disgust (i.e., heavier individuals; Puhl & Brownell, 2006; Vartanian et al., 2016). This psychological and physical distancing from higher weight employees likely contributes to emotion invalidation processes. Finally, people may be particularly likely to minimize the negative experiences of higher weight individuals because of widespread beliefs that weight stigma can be beneficial through motivating weight loss (Major et al., 2018; Puhl & Brownell, 2003). If people believe there are upsides to fat shaming, they likely devalue and dismiss the distress caused by these experiences. Altogether, past work provides support for expectations that weight discrimination will be associated with experiences of SPM.

Weight Discrimination, Minimization, and Workplace Experiences

In line with conservation of resources and social identity threat theories, weight discrimination and subsequent SPM are expected to be stressful experiences that threaten important social and psychological resources (e.g., social support, self-esteem, regulatory functioning). In turn, these resource threats are predicted to impact workplace outcomes.

Specifically, following weight discrimination, SPM is expected to reduce perceived organizational support and workplace belonging and increase experiences of workplace ostracism.

Perceived Organizational Support

Perceived organizational support (POS) refers to employee beliefs that their organizations value their contributions and care about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 1986). POS is considered a social resource because it signals to employees that help is available if and when they need it (Marchand & Vandenberghe, 2016). POS involves feeling valued and cared for by one's organization and having access to support and information to complete work tasks and overcome stressors (Marchand & Vandenberghe, 2016). Past work demonstrates that POS is largely driven by experiences of fairness in the workplace and being treated with dignity and respect by colleagues (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Supportive professional interactions lead to positive appraisals of the overall organization and perceptions of support resources being available when needed. Conversely, abusive and hostile supervisor behaviors translate to perceptions that the organization is unsupportive (Kurtessis et al., 2017). POS affects critical workplace outcomes including employee performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and intentions to leave (Riggle et al., 2009).

Experiences of weight discrimination and SPM in the workplace should lead employees to view their organization as less supportive. Weight discrimination reflects inequitable treatment in the workplace, which should negatively impact perceptions of justice and fairness. Procedural justice involves policies and practices viewed as controllable by the organization, and this form of justice is strongly related to POS (Kurtessis et al., 2017). As such, perceived biases in decision making and treatment due to weight discrimination should impact perceptions of procedural

justice and in turn reduce POS. Indeed, other forms of workplace discrimination (e.g., age, gender, race) have been linked to reduced POS (Rabl, 2010; Triana et al., 2010; Velez et al., 2018). Further, when employees experience SPM from coworkers and supervisors, they likely feel that their organization does not care about their well-being. This type of emotion invalidation from supervisors and coworkers should lead employees to perceive a lack of support and caring from the overall organization, as past research demonstrates the effect of organizational member behaviors influencing overall impressions of the workplace (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Altogether, past work provides support for predictions that workplace experiences of weight discrimination and SPM will negatively impact POS.

Hypothesis 1: Employee experiences of weight discrimination will be positively related to SPM at work, which in turn will predict lower POS.

Workplace Belonging

The need to belong is a fundamental human motivation to form quality, long-lasting relationships with others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). When belonging needs are thwarted, people experience elevated depression, anxiety, and stress and diminished self-esteem, immune functioning, and sleep quality (Baumeister et al., 2002; Cacioppo et al., 2015; Harlow et al., 1971; Kiecolt-Glaser et al., 1984). Although the need to belong has been established as a cornerstone in other areas of psychology (e.g., health, education; Twenge et al., 2002; Walton & Cohen, 2011), belonging in the workplace has received much less attention (Filstad et al., 2019). Yet, workplace belonging is critical to mental health and global functioning. After all, employees spend substantial amounts of their lives at work (Brett & Stroh, 2003), making the workplace an obvious source of belonging (O'Reilly & Banki, 2016). Workplace belonging is defined as the extent employees feel valued, respected, and accepted by organizational members (Cockshaw &

Shochet, 2010). Although workplace belonging is conceptually similar to other organizational constructs like affective commitment, past work provides evidence that these are related but distinct constructs (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010; Davila & Garcia, 2012). Whereas affective commitment primarily focuses on employees' identification with and attachment to their organizations (Allen & Meyer, 1990; Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010), workplace belonging generally reflects employees' feelings of being cared for, respected, and valued by organizational members. Workplace belonging has been connected to important outcomes such as employee mental health, job satisfaction, work commitment, helping behaviors, and motivations to leave their organization (Newheiser et al., 2017; Rubin et al., 2019; Thau et al., 2007).

Weight discrimination and subsequent workplace SPM are expected to devastate workplace belonging. In line with COR theory, weight discrimination and SPM are expected to reduce social resources (e.g., social support). Social support is a key component of the theory of belonging, as individuals' support networks contribute to perceptions of connection and feeling accepted and valued by others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Choenarom et al., 2005). As such, reductions in workplace social support resources should impact professional belonging. Additionally, past work has demonstrated that other forms of discrimination in education and workplace contexts are linked to reduced belonging (Cheryan et al., 2017; Moss-Racusin et al., 2018; Rubin et al., 2019). For example, women encountering organizational sexism reported a lower sense of workplace belonging than those who did not experience workplace gender discrimination (Rubin et al., 2019). Experiences of rejection and discrimination inherently threaten people's sense of being accepted and included in valued social groups (i.e., sense of belonging; Smart Richman & Leary, 2009). Further, SPM should also reduce belonging, since

emotion invalidation reflects a lack of support and concern for well-being. As such, weight discrimination and SPM at work are expected to lead to a lower sense of workplace belonging.

Hypothesis 2: Workplace weight discrimination will be positively related to SPM, which in turn will predict lower workplace belonging.

Workplace Ostracism

Ostracism is a painful and aversive experience that involves being ignored or excluded by others (Williams, 2007). Workplace ostracism is a relatively understudied form of workplace mistreatment that reflects the extent employees feel they are ignored, avoided, and rejected at work (Ferris et al., 2008). As such, ostracism thwarts feelings of belonging and acceptance in the workplace. Here it is worth noting that ostracism and belonging are related but distinct constructs; ostracism reflects a specific process (i.e., being ignored or excluded) that may impact feelings of belonging, but it is not the sole contributor to employees' sense of belonging. For example, gender-unbalanced work environments may be identity threatening for women and lead women to feel reduced workplace belonging (Murphy et al., 2007), but this context does not necessarily involve being ostracized by organizational members. By comparison, workplace ostracism might involve being excluded by coworkers from work-based social events (e.g., not being invited to coffee breaks, lunch gatherings, happy hours). Past work has identified several antecedents of workplace ostracism including personality (i.e., Big 5), LMX, abusive supervision, and perceived social support (Howard et al., 2020). Workplace ostracism has also been associated with a variety of behavioral outcomes including employee performance, deviance, silence, and social loafing in addition to indicators of well-being and work engagement (Haldorai et al., 2020; Howard et al., 2020; Williams & Sommer, 1997).

Workplace weight discrimination and SPM are expected to relate to experiences of workplace ostracism. Belonging to stigmatized groups (e.g., being higher weight) is associated with experiencing more mistreatment (Major & O'Brien, 2005). Heavier individuals may be particularly vulnerable to being ignored and excluded at work if fellow employees dehumanize them and view them with disgust (Crandall, 1994; Vartanian, 2010). Further, when people are in social identity threatening contexts, they may be more sensitive to perceiving ostracism due to anticipated prejudice associated with their stigmatized identity (Goodwin et al., 2010). Discrimination and ostracism are likely cyclical processes, such that past experiences with discrimination sensitizes people to cues that they will be mistreated in the present (Brown & Pinel, 2003; Hunger & Major, 2014; Major et al., 2002; Pietrzak et al., 2005). Consequently, people become more attuned to threat cues and consequently withdraw from others in a protective attempt to avoid further harm. Consistent with this logic, past work supports the idea that previous experiences with mistreatment (e.g., discrimination and invalidation) are associated with hypervigilance for future social threats (Feldman-Barrett & Swim, 1998). In light of the above evidence, it is expected that weight discrimination and SPM will be associated with more workplace ostracism.

Hypothesis 3: Employee experiences of weight discrimination will be positively related to SPM, which in turn will predict more experiences of workplace ostracism.

Contributions and the Current Work

The current work contributes to the understanding of workplace weight discrimination by: 1) testing a socioemotional mechanism (i.e., SPM) linking weight discrimination to workplace outcomes, 2) connecting weight discrimination at work to key indices of employee well-being (i.e., POS, workplace belonging, workplace ostracism), and 3) integrating theoretical

perspectives from social psychology (i.e., social identity threat) and organizational psychology (i.e., conservation of resources) to understand workplace experiences. The current work includes three studies using multiple methodological approaches (cross-sectional, experimental, multi-wave) to test the hypothesized relationships between weight discrimination, SPM, POS, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism.

Study 1 used a cross-sectional design to provide an initial test of the hypothesized relationships between weight discrimination, SPM, and the outcomes of POS, belonging, and ostracism. In Study 2, an experimental design was employed to more systematically test the hypothesized relationship between workplace weight discrimination and SPM. By manipulating weight discrimination experiences, an experimental design provides a more robust test of the predicted causal relation between weight discrimination, SPM, and the identified outcome variables (Kirk, 2012). In Study 3, a multi-wave design was used to extend findings from Studies 1 and 2. Compared to cross-sectional designs, multi-wave studies enable the establishment of temporal precedence of variables that is suggestive of causal relations (Avey et al., 2008). As such, I expect experiences of weight discrimination will predict greater SPM, which will subsequently predict experiences of POS, belonging, and ostracism. Across these three studies using cross-sectional, experimental, and multi-wave designs, I hypothesize workplace weight discrimination will trigger feelings of SPM, which will be associated with lower perceived organizational support and workplace belonging and higher reports of workplace ostracism.

Study 1

Using a cross-sectional design, the current study served as an initial investigation of the relation between weight-based discrimination, SPM, and occupational outcomes (i.e., POS, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism). Employed participants completed measures of

workplace weight discrimination and social pain minimization and indices of support, belonging, and ostracism. Weight discrimination and SPM were expected to negatively predict workplace support and belonging and positively predict ostracism. SPM was hypothesized to mediate discrimination's effect on these workplace outcomes.

Method

Participants

Based on previous research examining discrimination experiences and pain minimization (e.g., Benbow et al., 2021), 280 participants were recruited using the Prolific data collection platform. There were no exclusions ($M_{age}=36.53$, $SD_{age}= 10.62$; 78.2% White, 7.1% Asian, 7.1% Latino/a/x, 4.6% Black/African American, 2.5% Bi- or Multiracial, .4% did not disclose; 58.9% male, 40.4% female, .4% nonbinary, .4% did not disclose). Participants were eligible for the study if they were at least 18 years old, located in the United States, employed part- or full-time and reported having frequent interactions with coworkers. Most participants (89.3%) were employed full-time. Participants reported subjective ratings of their weight on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*very underweight*) to 7 (*very overweight*; Hunger et al., 2018). The scale midpoint of the subjective weight measure was the most commonly selected option (i.e., *about the right weight*; 39.6%). More participants rated themselves above the scale midpoint (i.e., *slightly overweight*, *overweight*, or *very overweight*; 54.6%) compared to below the midpoint (i.e., *slightly underweight*, *underweight*, or *very underweight*, 5.8%). Based on a one sample t-test, the sample rated themselves as significantly above the scale midpoint (i.e., *about the right weight*; $t = 12.64$, $p < .001$). Using correlations between the predictor, mediator, and outcome variables and their standard deviations, Monte Carlo simulation power analysis (Schoemann et

al., 2017) with 5000 replications and 20,000 draws per replication indicated power $>.99$ to detect an indirect effect.

Measures

Weight Discrimination. Weight discrimination was assessed using a 4-item measure adapted from the Everyday Discrimination Scale (Williams et al., 1997) modified to assess workplace weight discrimination experiences (Hunger & Major, 2015). Participants were asked how often a variety of things happened to them in their daily work life because of their weight (“Coworkers and supervisors act as if they’re better than you are,” “You are treated with less courtesy or respect than other coworkers are”). Participants indicated how often they experienced weight discrimination in the workplace using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all often*) to 7 (*very often*; $\alpha = .85$). Higher scores indicated more weight discrimination ($M = 1.58$, $SD = .94$).

Social Pain Minimization. Social pain minimization (SPM) was assessed using an 8-item measure from prior research (Benbow et al., 2021; Kinkel-Ram et al., 2021). Participants indicated the extent their coworkers and supervisors seem to recognize or minimize their pain and distress when they tell them about negative social experiences. Participants responded on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha=.96$; “When I tell coworkers and supervisors about times I’ve been treated unfairly, I feel they underestimate my hurt,” “Coworkers and supervisors minimize my pain when I tell them about negative social experiences I’ve had”). Higher scores indicated greater reports of social pain minimization ($M = 2.36$, $SD = 1.43$).

Perceived Organizational Support. Perceived organizational support (POS) was assessed using an established 8-item measure (Eisenberger et al., 1997). Participants indicated the extent they agreed with various statements (e.g., “My organization cares about my opinions,”

“My organization really cares about my well-being”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .94$). Two items were reverse scored (i.e., “If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me,” “My organization shows very little concern for me”). Higher scores reflected more perceived organizational support ($M = 4.74$, $SD = 1.45$).

Workplace Belonging. Sense of belonging at work was assessed using a 3-item measure (Den Hartog et al., 2007; Godard, 2001). Participants indicated the extent they agreed with several statements (i.e., “When at work, I really feel like I belong,” “I feel quite isolated from others at work,” “I don’t seem to ‘connect’ with others in my work group”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .86$). The latter two items in the scale were reverse scored, and higher scores reflected greater sense of belonging at work ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.64$).

Workplace Ostracism. Workplace ostracism was assessed using a 10-item measure (Ferris et al., 2008). Participants indicated their level of agreement with various statements (e.g., “Others ignored me at work,” “Others at work shut me out of the conversation”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*; $\alpha = .96$). Higher scores reflected higher levels of workplace ostracism ($M = 1.67$, $SD = 1.09$).

Procedure

After providing informed consent, participants first completed the weight discrimination measure. Then, participants completed the SPM measure. Finally, participants were randomly presented with the three outcome measures of POS, sense of belonging at work, and workplace ostracism. Items within all measures were randomized (see Appendix A for all study measures). Participants then reported demographic information and received a virtual debriefing form.

Participants were compensated \$1.50 for their time, and payments were distributed through the Prolific platform.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

An overall confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted that included all items from the measures of weight discrimination, SPM, POS, belonging, and ostracism. The fit of a proposed five-factor model was assessed in which each of the five measures loaded on separate factors. The CFA was conducted in R using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). The indices suggested the proposed model had good fit ($\chi^2(485) = 1225.38, p < .001$; CFI = .92, TLI = .91, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .06). Based on these fit indices, it was concluded that the five-factor model was acceptable, and the measures were treated as assessing distinct factors.

Bivariate relationships

Table 1 summarizes the bivariate correlations between weight discrimination, SPM, POS, belonging, and ostracism. In line with predictions, weight discrimination was positively related to SPM and ostracism and negatively related to POS and belonging. Further, SPM was positively related to ostracism and negatively related to POS and belonging.

Mediation Analyses

To test my hypotheses, I next conducted a path analysis with 10,000 bias-corrected bootstrap replications to examine the indirect effect of SPM on the relation between workplace weight discrimination and POS, belonging, and ostracism (see Figure 1). The lavaan package in R was used to conduct this analysis (Rosseel, 2012). First, weight discrimination was positively related to SPM, $b = .88, SE = .07, p < .001, 95\% CI [.73, 1.03]$. There were significant direct effects as well, such that weight discrimination predicted POS, $b = -.24, SE = .10, p = .02, 95\% CI$

[-.43, -.03], belonging, $b = -.40$, $SE=.12$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [-.65, -.16], and ostracism, $b = .54$, $SE=.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.36, .71].

The path analysis indicated a significant indirect effect of weight discrimination on POS through SPM, $b = -.40$, $SE=.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.54, -.26]. This analysis suggests that SPM in part mediated the relation between weight discrimination and POS. The path analysis also indicated a significant indirect effect of weight discrimination on belonging through SPM, $b = -.42$, $SE=.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.58, -.26]. That is, the relation between weight discrimination and workplace belonging was partially mediated by SPM. Finally, the path analysis indicated a significant indirect effect of weight discrimination on ostracism through SPM, $b = .23$, $SE=.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.13, .32]. This analysis suggests that the relation between weight discrimination and workplace ostracism is partially driven by SPM.

Discussion

The results from Study 1 provide initial support for the relations between weight discrimination, pain minimization, and indices of organizational acceptance (i.e., perceived organizational support, workplace belonging, workplace ostracism). As predicted, weight discrimination was positively associated with SPM, POS, belonging, and ostracism. Further, these results provide support for a mediating mechanism (i.e., SPM) linking weight discrimination to these occupational outcomes. SPM partially accounted for workplace weight discrimination's negative effect on organizational support, belonging, and ostracism. That is, when people experience weight discrimination in the workplace, they may subsequently feel that others do not fully appreciate their hurt feelings, and this emotion invalidation in part predicts lower POS and workplace belonging and higher reports of workplace ostracism. Although suggestive, these results are limited by their cross-sectional nature, which cannot provide causal

conclusions for discrimination's effect on SPM and subsequent organizational outcomes. To provide stronger evidence of the hypothesized causal relations between discrimination, SPM, and workplace outcomes, Study 2 employed an experimental design that simulated an encounter with workplace weight discrimination.

Study 2

To further test the hypothesized causal relations between weight discrimination, SPM, and indices of workplace acceptance, the current study used an experimental paradigm to manipulate an experience with workplace weight discrimination. Experimental designs provide several advantages for assessing predicted causal relations between the manipulated predictor variable (i.e., weight discrimination) and the proposed mediator (i.e., SPM). First, this approach involved manipulating experiences of weight discrimination and measuring subsequent effects of the manipulation on SPM. In other words, manipulating the hypothesized predictor variable should have direct effects on the anticipated mediator. Second, the current design provided a comparison between two conditions, such that the effects of weight discrimination were compared to a control condition that did not involve weight-based mistreatment. In doing so, the current paradigm provides a test of the causal effects of weight discrimination on SPM, as identified effects can be attributed to the manipulation (i.e., weight discrimination) and compared to a non-identity threatening context. As such, Study 2 provides additional support for the hypothesized relationship between weight discrimination, SPM, and key organizational outcomes. Third, the experimental approach used in the current study offers the benefit of more ethically examining the effects of weight discrimination on workplace outcomes. Instead of exposing participants to actual experiences of discrimination or asking participants to revisit painful memories of their own employment experiences, using a simulated paradigm may offer a

less distressing test of the effects of an unpleasant predictor variable (i.e., weight discrimination) on critical outcomes.

In the current study, participants were randomly assigned to read one of two scenarios. In both scenarios, participants imagined they were passed over for a promotion at a fictitious organization. In the weight discrimination condition, the promotion decision was explicitly attributed to weight-based biases. In the control condition, the promotion decision was based on organizational tenure. Since all participants imagined the same negative outcome (i.e., being passed over for a promotion), differences between the conditions should be driven by perceived influences on the decision process (i.e., weight-based or seniority-based) rather than the negative scenario outcome.

After reading the scenario, participants reported how much they anticipated coworkers and supervisors in the imagined organization would minimize their social pain (i.e., anticipated SPM). Then, participants reported anticipated experiences of POS, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism in the organization. Participants were expected to report more anticipated SPM in the weight discrimination condition compared to the control condition. In turn, it was predicted that more anticipated SPM in the weight discrimination condition would be associated with lower anticipated POS and belonging and greater anticipated workplace ostracism relative to the control condition.

Method

Participants

Based on past research (e.g., Major et al., 2020), I estimated a small-medium effect ($d = .30$) to determine an appropriate sample size. Using G*Power (V.3.1), an a priori power analysis suggested a total sample of 352 participants would provide 80% power to detect a difference

between means for the two study conditions. Based on this power analysis, 379 women were recruited using the Prolific data collection platform if they were at least 18 years old, currently located in the United States, and previously indicated they were slightly overweight, overweight, or very overweight. Past research suggests women experience workplace weight discrimination at higher rates with worse occupational outcomes compared to men (Flint et al., 2016; Judge & Cable, 2011; Vanhove & Gordon, 2014), so the current work focused on women's anticipated experiences. An attention check was included that asked participants to identify the reason for the promotion decision presented in the scenario. Five participants did not select the correct option based on their assigned condition and were excluded from analyses, resulting in a final sample of 374 participants ($M_{age}=43.63$, $SD_{age}=14.32$; 80.7% White, 11.5% Black/African American, 2.4% Latino/a/x, 1.6% Asian, 3.2% Bi- or Multiracial, .3% American Indian/Alaska Native, .3% did not disclose). Since the current study involved imagined work experiences at a fictitious company, participants were not required to be currently employed to participate in the study. However, most participants were employed at least part-time (68.7%).

Measures

Anticipated Weight Discrimination. Anticipated weight discrimination was measured using a 2-item scale to assess expected mistreatment in the imagined workplace due to weight-based biases. This measure served as a manipulation check. Participants were asked how often they expected having various thoughts or feelings (i.e., "I would expect to be treated unfairly by coworkers and supervisors at this company," "I would be afraid coworkers and supervisors would judge me negatively."); Hunger & Major, 2015) because of their weight based on the described scenario. Participants indicated the extent they anticipated experiencing weight

discrimination in the imagined workplace using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all often*) to 7 (*very often*), $\alpha = .94$.

Anticipated Social Pain Minimization. Anticipated SPM was assessed using a 5-item measure modified from the scale used in Study 1 (Benbow et al., 2021; Kinkel-Ram et al., 2021). Modifications involved reducing the scale from 8 items to 5 items and framing items to focus on imagined experiences rather than reflections on past experiences. Participants indicated the extent they anticipated their pain would be minimized by coworkers and supervisors (e.g., “If I told coworkers and supervisors about times I’ve been treated unfairly or rudely, I feel they would underestimate my hurt,” “Coworkers and supervisors would minimize my pain if I told them about negative social experiences I had.”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), $\alpha = .90$.

Anticipated Perceived Organizational Support. Anticipated POS was assessed using a 4-item measure modified from the scale used in Study 1. The measure was modified to capture anticipated support at the imagined organization rather than experienced support in participants’ actual work experiences. Additionally, the scale was reduced from 8 to 4 items. Participants indicated the extent they anticipated the imagined organization would support and care for them (e.g., “Help would be available from this organization if I had a problem,” “This organization would really care about my well-being.”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), $\alpha = .93$. Higher scores were associated with more anticipated POS.

Anticipated Workplace Belonging. Anticipated workplace belonging was assessed using the 3-item measure described for Study 1. However, the measure was modified to focus on anticipated belonging at the imagined organization rather than experienced belonging in actual workplaces. Participants indicated the extent they anticipated feeling a sense of belonging at the

imagined organization (e.g., “When at work, I would really feel like I belong.”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), $\alpha = .78$. Higher scores reflected greater anticipated belonging.

Anticipated Workplace Ostracism. Anticipated workplace ostracism was assessed using a shortened version of the scale described for Study 1. This measure included a 5-item scale and was modified to capture anticipated ostracism at the imagined workplace rather than past experiences of workplace ostracism. Participants indicated the extent they anticipated being ostracized in the imagined organization (e.g., “Others would ignore me at work,” “Other people would refuse to talk to me at work.”) using a Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), $\alpha = .97$. Higher scores indicated more anticipated ostracism.

Procedure

In keeping with past work on the psychological effects of discrimination (e.g., Offermann et al., 2014), anticipated discrimination was manipulated with an experimental vignette paradigm. After providing consent, participants were assigned to one of two conditions. For both conditions, participants read a brief scenario and imagined they worked for a fictitious company where they were being considered for a promotion (see Appendix B for scenarios). In both scenarios, the participant was passed over for the promotion. In the weight discrimination condition, participants learned a thin coworker received the promotion instead of them, and they recall overhearing their manager make weight disparaging comments. In the control condition, participants learned a more experienced coworker received the promotion instead of them. Therefore, the outcome was held constant across scenarios, such that all participants learned that a coworker was selected for the promotion over them. In the weight discrimination condition, the promotion decision was attributed to the participant’s weight and their manager’s bias against

higher weight employees. In the control condition, the promotion decision was attributed to the manager's bias toward favoring more senior employees. The scenario used in the current study reflects a common form of weight discrimination in the workplace (Roehling, 1999).

After reading the scenario, participants responded to questions about their anticipated experiences of weight discrimination and social pain minimization if they actually worked for the imagined company. Then, participants completed measures to indicate anticipated perceived organizational support, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism.

Results

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

A confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was conducted using all items from the measures of weight discrimination, SPM, POS, belonging, and ostracism. The fit of a proposed five-factor model was assessed in which each of the five measures loaded on separate factors using robust maximum likelihood estimation. The CFA was conducted in R using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). The indices suggested the proposed model had good fit ($X^2(142) = 375.18, p < .001$; CFI = .96, TLI = .95, RMSEA = .07, SRMR = .04). Based on these fit indices, it was concluded that the five-factor model was acceptable, and the measures were treated as assessing distinct factors.

Mean Comparisons

I first examined mean differences based on condition (i.e., weight discrimination vs control) for each measured variable using t-tests (see Table 2). The manipulation check suggested the intended effect of the study conditions was achieved, and participants reported more anticipated weight discrimination in the experimental condition ($M = 5.76, SD = 1.50$) relative to the control ($M = 2.44, SD = 1.66; t(372) = 20.23, p < .001$). Participants in the weight

discrimination condition anticipated more SPM ($M = 5.35$, $SD = 1.16$) compared to the control condition ($M = 3.81$, $SD = 1.52$; $t(372) = 10.95$, $p < .001$). In line with expectations, participants in the weight discrimination condition expected to feel less POS ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.01$) compared to the control ($M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.40$; $t(372) = 12.95$, $p < .001$), lower sense of belonging ($M = 2.29$, $SD = 1.08$) compared to the control ($M = 3.97$, $SD = 1.48$; $t(372) = 12.44$, $p < .001$), and anticipated experiencing more workplace ostracism ($M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.51$) compared to the control ($M = 2.48$, $SD = 1.41$; $t(372) = 12.56$, $p < .001$).

Mediation Analyses

I used a path analysis with 10,000 bias-corrected bootstrap replications to test the effect of study condition (i.e., weight discrimination vs control) on anticipated POS, belonging, and ostracism as a function of anticipated SPM (see Figure 2). This path analysis was conducted in R using the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012).

The proposed mediation model was tested by examining the effect of condition on SPM and in turn the relation between SPM and the outcome variables of POS, belonging, and ostracism. The path analysis indicated SPM mediated the effect of condition on POS, $b = .74$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.55, .95]. There was also a significant indirect effect of condition on belonging through SPM, $b = .70$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.48, .92]. Finally, the indirect effect of condition on ostracism as a function of SPM was significant, $b = -.70$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.90, -.52]. Altogether, participants in the weight discrimination condition reported more anticipated SPM relative to the control condition, which in turn was related to reduced expectations of POS, lower anticipated belonging, and heightened expectations of experiencing ostracism in the imagined organization.

Discussion

The current study leveraged an experimental approach to examine the effects of weight discrimination on anticipated workplace acceptance as a function of SPM. In this study, participants were randomly assigned to a weight discrimination or control condition and then reported anticipated experiences at a fictitious organization. As hypothesized, participants in the weight discrimination condition reported anticipating more SPM from coworkers and supervisors compared to the control condition. In turn, elevated expectations of SPM in the weight discrimination condition were associated with anticipated reductions in POS and workplace belonging and heightened expectations of workplace ostracism relative to the control condition. Altogether, the current study provided a more robust test of the causal relationship between workplace weight discrimination and SPM and the subsequent effects on workplace experiences. After imagining weight discrimination, participants expected their social hurts would be minimized, ultimately reducing expected workplace acceptance.

Although the current study provides support for the causal relation between the predictor variable (i.e., weight discrimination) and the mediating mechanism (i.e., SPM) by using an experimental design, the current study was limited by using anticipated experiences in a fictitious organization. That is, instead of assessing actual encounters with workplace weight discrimination, the current study relied on participants' anticipated reactions to an imagined weight discrimination situation and projections on how they would feel if they worked at the fictitious organization. Therefore, Study 3 aimed to address these limitations by using a multi-wave design to assess participants' actual experiences with workplace weight discrimination. In contrast to the cross-sectional design used in Study 1, implementing a multi-wave design will

provide a test of the hypothesized temporal precedence of weight discrimination leading to SPM and in turn predicting workplace experiences.

Study 3

To further test the hypothesized relationships between weight discrimination, SPM, POS, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism, the current study used a multi-wave design in which data were collected at three time points. Compared to cross-sectional designs, multi-wave designs offer a more rigorous test of the temporal precedence of measured variables implied by mediation models (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). For example, multi-wave designs allow researchers to control for prior levels of dependent variables, reducing potential confounds of the relationship between predictor and outcomes. Additionally, a multi-wave design enables researchers to assess within-subject change over time and examine the causal ordering of variables (Hillygus & Snell, 2015). Therefore, the current study builds on the findings from Studies 1 and 2 by providing a more robust test of the predicted mediation model. Specifically, the current study tested the effects of weight discrimination measured at Time 1 (T1) on SPM collected at Time 2 (T2), and T2 SPM was used to predict the outcome variables (i.e., perceived support, belonging, ostracism) assessed at Time 3 (T3). Workplace weight discrimination was expected to trigger feelings of SPM, which in turn was predicted to decrease perceived support (i.e., organizational, supervisor, coworker) and belonging and increase perceived ostracism in the workplace.

Method

Participants

Participants were recruited using the Prolific data collection platform and were eligible for the study if they were at least 18 years old, located in the United States, employed part- or

full-time, and previously indicated they were slightly overweight, overweight, or very overweight. To account for attrition, 505 participants completed the T1 survey. Participants who completed the T1 survey were eligible to participate in the T2 survey approximately two weeks after the T1 survey was administered, and 459 participants completed the T2 survey. Similarly, participants who completed the T2 survey were eligible to complete the T3 survey administered approximately two weeks after the T2 survey, which resulted in a final sample of 443 participants ($M_{age}=38.88$, $SD_{age}= 11.24$; 73.8% White, 8.6% Asian, 7.2% Black/African American, 6.8% Latino/a/x, 2.7% Bi- or Multiracial, .2% American Indian/Alaska Native, .7% did not disclose; 57.8% male, 40.2% female, 1.1% non-binary, 1% did not disclose). Most participants (77.7%) were employed full-time, and most participants (89.2%) indicated having frequent interactions where their coworkers and supervisors can see them (via in-person or videoconferencing interactions). Based on past work (e.g., Blodorn et al., 2016), it may be important for individuals to be seen by others in the workplace to experience weight discrimination from coworkers and supervisors.

Procedure

The same measures described in Study 1 were used in the current study. In addition, two measures were included to assess perceived support from coworkers and supervisors. The coworker and supervisor support measures were adapted from the support subscales of an established measure of work stress and support (Edwards & Webster, 2012). Both measures used Likert scales ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*), with higher scores indicating more perceived support from coworkers ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.39$; “I get help and support I need from coworkers,” “If work gets difficult, my coworkers will help me”) and supervisors (M

= 5.12, $SD = 1.64$; “I can talk to my supervisor about something that has upset or annoyed me about work,” “I can rely on my supervisor to help me out with a work problem”).

Altogether, the current study included measures for workplace weight discrimination ($\alpha = .93$), SPM at work ($\alpha = .96$), POS ($\alpha = .96$), coworker support ($\alpha = .95$), supervisor support ($\alpha = .96$), workplace belonging ($\alpha = .84$), and workplace ostracism ($\alpha = .96$). Surveys for each wave of data collection were identical and included all measures. The current study involved three waves of data collection, and surveys were distributed approximately two weeks apart. At the end of each survey, participants reported demographic information.

Results

Bivariate Correlations

First, I assessed bivariate correlations between the measures of weight discrimination, SPM, POS, coworker support, supervisor support, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism across the three time points (see Table 3). T1 weight discrimination was positively correlated with SPM at T1 ($r = .53, p < .001$), T2 ($r = .41, p < .001$), and T3 ($r = .43, p < .001$). Additionally, weight discrimination at T1 was significantly correlated with T3 POS ($r = -.15, p = .001$), coworker support ($r = -.29, p < .001$), supervisor support ($r = -.36, p < .001$), belonging ($r = -.26, p < .001$), and ostracism ($r = .53, p < .001$). Further, T2 SPM was significantly related to T3 POS ($r = -.15, p < .001$), coworker support ($r = -.48, p < .001$), supervisor support ($r = -.36, p < .001$), belonging ($r = -.42, p < .001$), and ostracism ($r = .49, p < .001$).

Mediation Analyses: Model 1

I then conducted a path analysis with 10,000 bias-corrected bootstrap replications to examine the effect of T1 weight discrimination on the outcome variables at T3 with T2 SPM as the mediator. Additionally, the first model (Model 1; see Figure 3) included T1 SPM and T2

outcome variables as covariates. This analysis approach was intended to test for the temporal precedence of the predicted mediation model (Cole & Maxwell, 2003). The lavaan package in R was used to conduct this analysis (Rosseel, 2012). The direct effects of T1 weight discrimination on T3 coworker support ($b = -.13, p = .03$), T3 belonging ($b = -.14, p = .03$), and T3 ostracism ($b = .25, p < .001$) were significant; the direct effects of T1 weight discrimination on T3 POS ($b = -.03, p = .51$) and T3 supervisor support ($b = -.03, p = .56$) were non-significant.

For Model 1, indirect effects were non-significant for all outcome variables of POS ($b = -.01, p = .18$), coworker support ($b = -.02, p = .11$), supervisor support ($b = -.01, p = .21$), belonging ($b = -.01, p = .22$), and ostracism ($b = .01, p = .18$). As such, when T1 SPM and T2 outcome variables are included as covariates in the path analysis, the proposed mediation model was not supported.

Mediation Analyses: Model 2

As an additional test of the proposed mediation model, I conducted another path analysis with 10,000 bias-corrected bootstrap replications to examine the effect of T1 weight discrimination on the outcome variables at T3 with T2 SPM as the mediator. However, for the second model (Model 2; see Figure 4), only T2 outcome variables were included as covariates. Based on the strong intraclass correlations between the SPM variable measured at T1 and T2 ($r = .65, p < .001$), it was predicted that there may be suppression effects that resulted in non-significant indirect effects in Model 1 (Burkholder & Harlow, 2003). Weight discrimination and pain minimization are expected to be relatively stable experiences over time, so there may have been insufficient variability in SPM to predict the outcome measures (Castro-Schilo & Grimm, 2017). As such, T1 SPM was not included as a covariate in Model 2.

After removing T1 SPM from the model, most of the indirect effects were significant. Specifically, the indirect effects for POS ($b = -.05, p = .02$), coworker support ($b = -.09, p = .001$), supervisor support ($b = -.05, p = .04$), and ostracism ($b = .05, p = .01$) were significant, and the indirect effect for belonging ($b = -.05, p = .10$) was not significant. Based on the path analysis for Model 2, the hypothesized mediation model was mostly supported, such that weight discrimination at T1 predicted SPM at T2, which in turn predicted changes from T2 to T3 for POS, coworker support, supervisor support, and ostracism.

Discussion

The results of Study 3 largely complement the findings from Studies 1 and 2 and provide support for the predicted relationship between weight discrimination, SPM, and work outcomes. Over and above T2 baseline assessment of T3 outcomes, Study 3 found significant indirect effects of T2 SPM mediating the relation between T1 weight discrimination and T3 POS, coworker support, supervisor support, and ostracism. By using a multi-wave design, Study 3 provided a more robust test of the temporal relationship between weight discrimination, SPM, and workplace outcomes. That is, by examining the effects of weight discrimination at T1 on SPM at T2, Study 3 provided a test of the predicted causal order between the predictor and mediator. Further, assessing the effects of SPM at T2 on the T2-T3 change in outcome variables provided a test of the predicted effects of the mediator on the outcomes (i.e., T2 minimization predicted decreasing feelings of support and belonging and increasing feelings of ostracism). By measuring these effects over time compared to a single time point, the current study offered a stronger test of the hypothesized causal order linking weight discrimination, SPM, and critical workplace experiences.

Models 1 and 2 present two analytical approaches to examining the effects of weight discrimination on SPM and workplace outcomes. Model 1 tested the effects of T1 weight discrimination on changes in the mediator (i.e., T1-T2 SPM), and in turn examined changes in the mediator predicting changes in each outcome variable (i.e., T2-T3 outcomes). Based on the non-significant indirect effects of Model 1 as well as the strong intraclass correlations for SPM across time points ($r_s > .60$), SPM may be a relatively stable experience. Weight discrimination may also have remained stable for participants throughout the study duration ($r_s > .64$). Weight discrimination is expected to be a chronic and regular experience for heavier employees, and as such, heavier employees likely experienced relatively consistent levels of mistreatment and subsequent invalidation across the brief study period. Altogether, Model 1 did not provide evidence that the relationship between weight discrimination, SPM, and workplace outcomes is driven by changes in the mediator.

Alternatively, Model 2 provides support for the hypothesized indirect effects, albeit by testing T2 SPM's effect on changes in each outcome variable (i.e., T2-T3 outcomes). Although Model 1 did not identify evidence that changes in minimization predicted changes in measured outcomes, Model 2 nonetheless demonstrates how T2 minimization was predictive of changes in each outcome variable (T2-T3 outcomes). That is, Model 2 provided evidence for SPM as a mediating mechanism linking weight discrimination to changes in key outcome variables. Therefore, Model 2 supports the hypothesized temporal precedence of the measured variables, such that T1 weight discrimination predicted T2 SPM, which in turn was related to changes from T2 to T3 for POS, coworker support, supervisor support, and ostracism. As such, Model 2 provides evidence to support Hypotheses 1 and 3.

General Discussion

Weight discrimination is a pervasive stressor in the workplace that impacts a wide range of employment outcomes (e.g., selection, promotion, termination; Puhl & Heuer, 2009). Even more concerning, estimates suggest that experiences of weight discrimination are increasing rather than decreasing and may be even more prevalent than other common forms of discrimination (e.g., gender, race; Andreyeva et al., 2008; Puhl et al., 2008). As such, it is critical to address the issue of workplace weight discrimination and the psychological processes by which discrimination operates to negatively impact employees. The purpose of the current work was to test one social psychological mechanism (i.e., social pain minimization) expected to mediate the effects of workplace weight discrimination on important interpersonal experiences at work.

Across three studies, the current work provides convergent evidence that social pain minimization (SPM) partially explains weight discrimination's damaging effects on workplace outcomes. Study 1 provided initial support for the relationships between workplace weight discrimination, SPM, and several interpersonal workplace experiences (i.e., POS, belonging, ostracism). Using a cross-sectional design, Study 1 found that weight discrimination was positively associated with SPM, which in turn was negatively related to POS and belonging and positively related to ostracism. Study 2 offered further support for hypotheses using an experimental design and also provided evidence for the expected causal relation between weight discrimination and SPM. Compared to those in a control condition, participants who imagined an experience with workplace weight discrimination expected more SPM, which in turn predicted lower anticipated POS and belonging and greater anticipated ostracism. Finally, Study 3 extended findings from the first two studies by applying a multi-wave design with three waves of

data collection. Study 3 provided further support for hypotheses, as weight discrimination at T1 predicted SPM at T2, which in turn was associated with decreasing POS, coworker support, and supervisor support and increasing experiences of ostracism. By incorporating several methodological approaches (i.e., cross-sectional, experimental, multi-wave designs), the current research provided a rigorous test of the hypothesized relationships between workplace weight discrimination, SPM, and the identified workplace outcomes. Across these diverse approaches, SPM consistently mediated workplace weight discrimination's damaging effects on organizational outcomes.

Theoretical Implications

The current work makes several contributions to research on workplace weight discrimination, SPM, and organizational outcomes. First, the current research provides support for a socioemotional mechanism through which weight discrimination operates to negatively impact organizational outcomes. Despite extensive evidence that weight discrimination harms employee experiences (e.g., hiring, promotion, termination decisions; Puhl & Heuer, 2009), the processes linking weight discrimination to outcomes are less understood. The current work fills this empirical gap by identifying one such pathway (i.e., SPM) through which weight discrimination harms heavier employees. Across three studies, the current work demonstrates how weight discrimination triggers feelings of SPM, which in turn decreases perceptions of support and belonging and increases ostracism. These findings contribute to the weight discrimination literature by providing insight into one socioemotional mechanism by which identity threats harm heavier employees.

Second, the current work highlights several critical interpersonal outcomes (i.e., POS, belonging, ostracism) impacted by experiences of workplace weight discrimination and

subsequent SPM. Across three studies, the current work found that employees who encountered weight discrimination and minimization at work experienced reduced feelings of being cared for and supported by their organization (i.e., lower POS), which likely has other downstream consequences on organizations (e.g., reduced job performance, increased turnover intentions; Riggle et al., 2009). The current work also highlights weight discrimination and SPM's effects on two understudied constructs in the organizational literature: belonging and ostracism. Evidence from the social psychology literature demonstrates the necessity for organizational researchers to pay attention to these critical outcomes. Belonging is a fundamental need that, when thwarted, leads to worse physical and psychological health (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Cacioppo et al., 2015). Ostracism has also been shown to be an extremely painful experience (Eisenberger et al., 2003; van Beest & Williams, 2006; Zadro et al., 2004) that has been equated to *social death* (Williams, 2007; Williams & Nida, 2011). Yet, despite their strong connections to health, well-being, and social functioning (Cacioppo et al., 2015; Leary, 1999; Twenge et al., 2002), belonging and ostracism's effects in the workplace are not well understood. The current work addresses this empirical gap by illustrating the effects of weight discrimination and SPM on critical interpersonal experiences related to employee well-being and performance.

Third, the current work bridges social and organizational psychology by using a theoretical framework based on conservation of resources (COR) and social identity threat theories. As a result, the current work contributes to both fields and theories. Although COR has been used extensively to link work stress to negative outcomes, relatively few studies applying a COR perspective have focused on identity-based resource threats (e.g., weight stigma). That is, most research on COR theory views resource threats as identity-free and typically overlooks how resources (e.g., social support) may systematically vary based on employees' social identities.

Further, there are few instances where COR theory has been applied as a framework for understanding the effects of workplace weight discrimination (cf. Johnson et al., 2023). Weight discrimination is an unfortunate yet common experience in organizations, and the current work advances COR theory by highlighting weight discrimination as a pervasive threat to valued resources like social belonging and organizational support. As such, the current work contributes to COR theory by focusing on an identity-based resource threat.

The current work also contributes to social identity threat theory by examining weight stigma in organizational contexts. Although lab evidence for social identity threat is abundant (Major & O'Brien, 2005), little research has focused on identity threat in organizations and most applied research is situated in educational contexts (cf. Emerson & Murphy, 2014). The current work advances research on social identity threat theory by focusing on the workplace context and providing evidence for identity-based concerns (i.e., weight discrimination) impacting organizational outcomes. The current findings extend social identity threat theory by providing evidence that weight-based threats damage employee experiences in the workplace.

Fourth, the current work answers recent calls for organizational researchers to study weight discrimination in organizations (Lemmon et al., 2023). The current work directly addresses this call to action by documenting a socioemotional mechanism (i.e., SPM) linking weight discrimination to organizational experiences and measuring interpersonal outcomes that are critical to employee performance and well-being. The current work contributes to organizational research by engaging workplace weight discrimination, an important but understudied area of research.

Finally, the current work contributes to the organizational literature on weight discrimination by centering the firsthand experiences of heavier employees. To date, past work

on workplace weight discrimination has primarily focused on third-person judgments of heavier employees and has yet to center first-person experiences with weight discrimination (Johnson & Kunstman, 2023). For example, much of the experimental work in this area examines weight-based biases in evaluative work outcomes (e.g., hiring decisions, perceived suitability, performance evaluations) where participants express negative biases against heavier job candidates and employees (Rudolph et al., 2009). Although these insights are critical to understanding the effects of perpetrators' weight bias in organizational contexts, organizational research must also capture targets' perspectives to fully understand and appreciate their complex experiences. The current work contributes to the literature by centering the perspectives of heavier employees and providing a first-person account of the effects of workplace weight discrimination.

Practical Implications

The current findings have several practical implications. In general, practitioners should take a structural approach to address workplace weight discrimination and facilitate an identity safe environment for heavier employees. Not only does prejudice exist within individuals, but recent work has highlighted how social contexts (e.g., organizations) perpetuate group inequalities through biased norms, values, policies, and practices (Emerson & Murphy, 2014; Murphy et al., 2018). Even if individuals within an organization are well-intentioned, the environment may be structured in a way that disadvantages certain groups. As such, practitioners should critically evaluate the organizational environment to identify strategies for reducing workplace weight discrimination.

First, practitioners should assess the work environment for cues that signal inclusion or exclusion of heavier employees. For example, organizational websites and recruitment materials

can signal to heavier employees and job candidates whether their identity is valued by the organization (Murphy et al., 2007; Purdie-Vaughns et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2012). When organizational materials lack identity diversity, individuals whose identities are underrepresented may expect they will not be welcomed in the organization, leading to identity threat (Murphy et al., 2018). Another organizational cue that may signal the devaluation of heavier employees is the presence of weight stigmatizing workplace health promotion programs (WHPP). Although these programs are intended to help employees, they may serve as unintentional catalysts for weight stigma and identity threat. By prioritizing and incentivizing weight loss, WHPPs communicate that being heavier is unhealthy and unacceptable, weight is controllable, and individual employees are responsible for their weight (Täuber et al., 2018). As such, WHPPs may increase the perceived permissibility of stigmatizing weight within the organization and lead heavier employees to view the workplace as identity threatening. Practitioners should thus consider how environmental cues (e.g., WHPPs) signal identity threat or safety for heavier employees.

Second, practitioners should debias organizational policies and procedures that inadvertently disadvantage heavier job candidates and employees. Past work demonstrates that even experienced hiring managers stigmatize heavier individuals and view them as less suitable for high prestige and supervisory roles (Giel et al., 2012). As such, it is critical to implement policies and procedures that reduce the potential for these biases to influence employment decisions. Structured interviews are one well-documented approach to reducing bias in selection processes (Avery et al., 2009; Ruggs et al., 2011). In contrast to unstructured interviews, structured interviews standardize the topics discussed in interviews and ensure questions and discussions remain job relevant (Campion et al., 1997). Therefore, refining selection procedures

to include structured (vs unstructured) interview processes should reduce opportunities for weight-based biases to impact selection decisions.

Third, practitioners should advocate for organizational policies and state/federal legislation that protect employees from workplace weight discrimination. Instituting formal policies to condemn discrimination is one easy way organizations can signal weight stigma is unacceptable in the workplace and reduce experiences with discrimination (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Further, when employees live in locales that lack laws protecting against discrimination, they report greater encounters with discrimination in the workplace (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). These data demonstrate that implementing organizational and legislative protections can effectively reduce workplace discrimination. As noted previously, there are currently no federal laws that protect employees from weight discrimination in the workplace (Roehling, 2002). As such, practitioners should be at the forefront advocating for protections against weight discrimination both in their organizations and through legislation.

Fourth, practitioners should give voice to heavier employees by including them in initiatives aimed at reducing weight discrimination in the workplace. Based on principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR; Israel et al., 2005), practitioners should partner with employee representatives who have firsthand experiences with workplace weight discrimination. Heavier employees can share knowledge and shed light on how weight discrimination presents in their organization, helping practitioners effectively identify and address weight discrimination. By empowering heavier employees and treating them as valued contributors in initiatives aimed at addressing weight discrimination, organizations can also build trust between organizational leaders and affected employees and demonstrate affirmation of and concern for their lived experiences.

Finally, in addition to the structural approaches described above, organizational practitioners may pursue individual-level intervention strategies. For example, practitioners may implement empirically supported empathy-based interventions. The current research highlights how coworkers and supervisors may fail to validate the negative emotions of heavier employees, leading to feelings of social pain minimization. Based on these findings, practitioners may consider using empathy-based interventions to foster more supportive and inclusive workplaces (Nowack & Zak, 2020). Past work has identified empathy and perspective-taking as critical mechanisms related to improving intergroup attitudes and reducing discrimination (Dovidio et al., 2010). As such, empathy-based interventions may be one avenue for practitioners to consider to reduce weight bias and emotion invalidation in organizations.

Limitations and Future Directions

Limitations of the current work offer opportunities for future research. Although it was not the intended goal of this research, one limitation of the current work is the lack of inclusion of organizational outcomes like job performance and employee turnover. Past work has demonstrated links between POS, belonging, and ostracism with outcomes like job performance and turnover (Howard et al., 2020; Riggle et al., 2009; Thau et al., 2007), but the current work did not directly measure these downstream effects. However, past work has also illuminated weight stigma's effects on objective measures of executive control and self-regulation (Hunger et al., 2015; Major et al., 2012), which likely translate to deficits in job performance. Although the current findings have suggestive implications for job performance, future work might use objective measures or supervisor evaluations of performance to directly assess the effects of weight discrimination and SPM on performance outcomes.

Another limitation of the current work involves Study 2's use of an imagined discrimination scenario rather than actual exposure to workplace weight discrimination. Vignettes are a common tool used in experimental psychological research to infer causality. Some of the benefits of using vignettes in experimental research include providing a standardized experience across participants and reducing potential harms to participants by exposing them to a temporary, hypothetical experience (Hughes & Huby, 2002). As such, vignettes may be an ethical means of assessing the effects of distressing negative experiences. However, there are notable limitations associated with this methodological approach. For example, participants may respond differently to imagined experiences compared to actual encounters with discrimination (Kawakami et al., 2009). Participants may not perceive imagined scenarios as realistic and also experience difficulty taking the perspective of the vignette actor, and vignettes may lack sufficient detail to capture the nuances of lived experiences with discrimination (Hughes & Huby, 2004). To offset some of these noted limitations, the current work leveraged multiple methodological approaches to test hypotheses including cross-sectional and multi-wave designs. However, future work might explore other experimental manipulations (e.g., interacting with an anti-fat confederate) that provide more realistic experiences of workplace weight discrimination.

Finally, future work should consider moderators of the relationships between weight discrimination, SPM, and workplace outcomes. In line with COR theory, the current work hypothesized that weight discrimination and SPM threaten valued resources. However, future work should examine whether individual and organizational resources buffer employees against these resource threats (Hobfoll, 1989). For example, individual resources like self-efficacy and self-esteem may moderate the relation between weight discrimination and outcomes by

increasing resilience (Xanthopoulou et al., 2007). Organizational resources (e.g., formalized processes for employees to express voice and grievances) may further moderate the relation between weight discrimination and work outcomes if employees are supported by their organization following discrimination experiences (Hershcovis et al., 2010). Altogether, future research should examine how moderators influence the relationship between weight discrimination, SPM, and workplace experiences.

Conclusion

Weight discrimination is a pervasive stressor in organizations with well-documented effects on employee outcomes. However, the psychological processes bridging weight discrimination experiences and individual outcomes are not well understood. The current work aimed to fill this empirical gap by identifying one mechanism (i.e., social pain minimization) that partially explains the effects of workplace weight discrimination on interpersonal and organizational experiences. In line with hypotheses, the current work found that workplace weight discrimination was positively related to SPM, which in turn predicted reduced perceptions of organizational support and belonging and increased experiences of ostracism. These findings offer theoretical and practical implications for understanding and addressing weight discrimination in organizations. They also illustrate the importance of centering targets' perspectives to gain a full and complete understanding of workplace weight discrimination.

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Table 1.

Study 1: Alphas, Descriptives, and Correlations.

Measure	α	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
1. Weight discrimination	.85	1.58	0.94	-	.58**	-.42**	-.48**	.66**
2. SPM	.96	2.36	1.43		-	-.54**	-.55**	.60**
3. POS	.94	4.74	1.45			-	.64**	-.42**
4. Belonging	.86	4.98	1.64				-	-.58**
5. Ostracism	.96	1.67	1.09					-

Note. Alphas, descriptive statistics, and correlations between weight discrimination, SPM, POS, belonging, and ostracism; ** $p \leq .01$

Table 2.

Study 2: Means, Standard Deviations, and Comparisons.

	Weight Condition (<i>N</i> = 185)		Control Condition (<i>N</i> = 193)		<i>t</i> (372)	<i>p</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Weight Discrimination	5.76	1.49	2.45	1.66	20.23	<.001
Social Pain Minimization	5.37	1.16	3.82	1.52	10.95	<.001
Perceived Organizational Support	3.13	.62	3.78	.77	12.95	<.001
Belonging	5.73	1.08	4.03	1.47	12.44	<.001
Ostracism	4.41	1.52	2.49	1.41	12.56	<.001

Note. Means, standard deviations, and comparisons for weight discrimination and control conditions: Study 2.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations between weight discrimination, SPM, POS, coworker support, supervisor support, belonging, and ostracism: Study 3.

Measure	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.	16.	17.	18.	19.	20.	21.
1. Weight discrimination (T1)	1.40	.97	-	.53***	-.19***	-.33***	-.24***	-.32***	.66***	.64***	.41***	-.15**	-.24***	-.19***	-.24***	.50***	.73***	.43***	-.15**	-.29***	-.17***	-.26***	.53***
2. SPM (T1)	2.29	1.48		-	-.43***	-.46***	-.43***	-.51***	.58***	.41***	.65***	-.35***	-.37***	-.39***	-.41***	.47***	.45***	.60***	-.34***	-.43***	-.35***	-.44***	.46***
3. POS (T1)	4.77	1.48			-	.67***	.73***	.62***	-.37***	-.19***	-.40***	.85***	.57***	.70***	.61***	-.35***	-.15**	-.37***	.83***	.59***	.67***	.59***	-.30***
4. Coworker support (T1)	5.50	1.33				-	.71***	.70***	-.54***	-.32***	-.45***	.58***	.71***	.60***	.62***	-.44***	-.28***	-.44***	.58***	.72***	.58***	.64***	-.43***
5. Supervisor support (T1)	5.20	1.58					-	.61***	-.44***	-.23***	-.42***	.66***	.59***	.80***	.57***	-.39***	-.21***	-.38***	.63***	.56***	.73***	.55***	-.35***
6. Belonging (T1)	5.17	1.59						-	-.59***	-.32***	-.45***	.58***	.60***	.56***	.76***	-.49***	-.29***	-.47***	.57***	.63***	.54***	.74***	-.47***
7. Ostracism (T1)	1.68	1.07							-	.57***	.51***	-.32***	-.39***	-.37***	-.48***	.68***	.56***	.54***	-.34***	-.50***	-.35***	-.49***	.69***
8. Weight discrimination (T2)	1.39	.89								-	.53***	-.21***	-.36***	-.26***	-.37***	.68***	.71***	.43***	-.18***	-.33***	-.18***	-.30***	.57***
9. SPM (T2)	2.38	1.51									-	-.39***	-.49***	-.42***	-.52***	.57***	.45***	.64***	-.36***	-.48***	-.36***	-.42***	.49***
10. POS (T2)	4.73	1.55										-	.64***	.77***	.34***	-.38***	-.17***	-.37***	.87***	.61***	.69***	.60***	-.34***
11. Coworker support (T2)	5.40	1.34											-	.68***	.72***	-.50***	-.28***	-.43***	.58***	.77***	.60***	.63***	-.44***
12. Supervisor support (T2)	5.18	1.59												-	.62***	-.43***	-.24***	-.40***	.71***	.63***	.80***	.54***	-.36***
13. Belonging (T2)	5.13	1.57													-	-.58***	-.28***	-.44***	.61***	.68***	.57***	.76***	-.48***
14. Ostracism (T2)	1.66	1.07														-	.61***	.51***	-.31***	-.47***	-.34***	-.48***	.74***
15. Weight discrimination (T3)	1.39	.95															-	.52***	-.17***	-.36***	-.20***	-.31***	.63***
16. SPM (T3)	2.32	1.51																-	-.43***	-.54***	-.41***	-.55***	.61***
17. POS (T3)	4.65	1.60																	-	.68***	.77***	.65***	-.35***
18. Coworker support (T3)	5.40	1.39																		-	.68***	.73***	-.52***
19. Supervisor support (T3)	5.12	1.64																			-	.61***	-.35***
20. Belonging (T3)	5.01	1.62																				-	-.54***
21. Ostracism (T3)	1.69	1.12																					-

Note. * $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$; T1 = Time 1, T2 = Time 2, T3 = Time 3

Figure 1

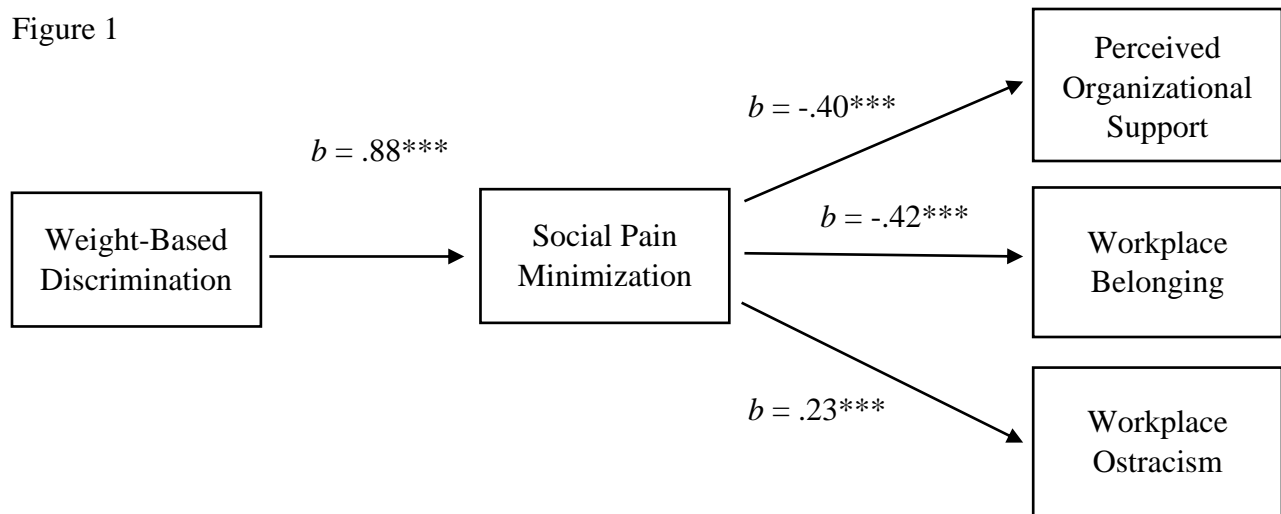


Figure 1. Social pain minimization mediates the effect of weight-based discrimination on perceived organizational support, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism: Study 1. Indirect effects are significant for POS, $b = -.40$, $SE=.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.54, -.26]$, belonging, $b = -.42$, $SE=.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[-.58, -.26]$, and ostracism, $b = .23$, $SE=.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI $[.13, .32]$.

Note. $*p \leq .05$. $**p \leq .01$. $***p \leq .001$.

Figure 2

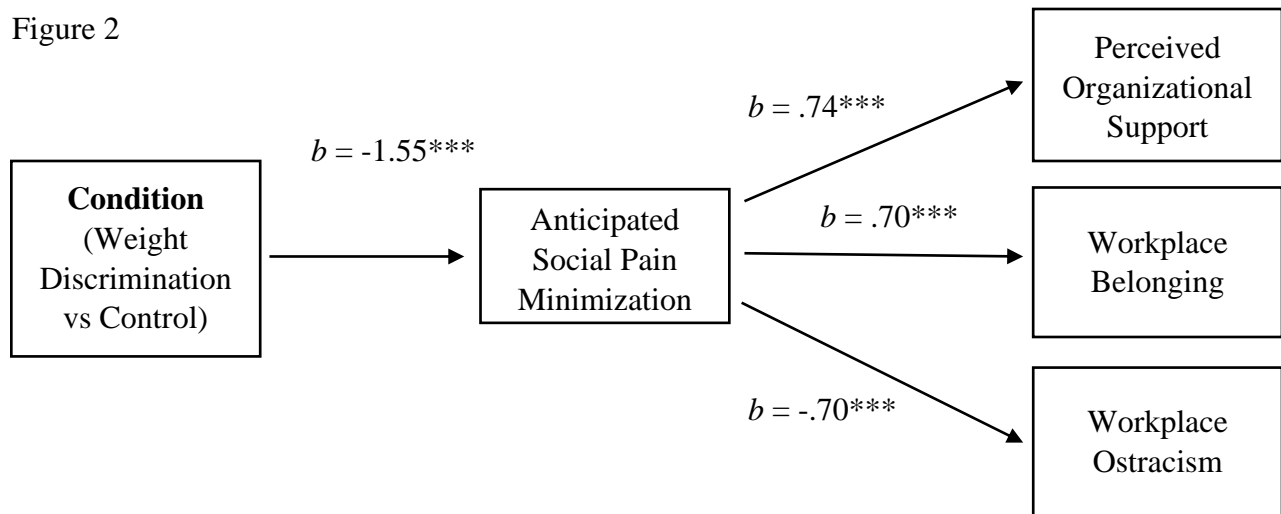


Figure 2. Anticipated social pain minimization mediates the effect of study condition (i.e., weight discrimination vs control) on expectations of perceived organizational support, workplace belonging, and workplace ostracism: Study 2. Indirect effects are significant for POS, $b = .74$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.55, .95], belonging, $b = .70$, $SE = .11$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.48, .92], and ostracism, $b = -.70$, $SE = .10$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.90, -.52].

Note. $*p \leq .05$. $**p \leq .01$. $***p \leq .001$.

Figure 3

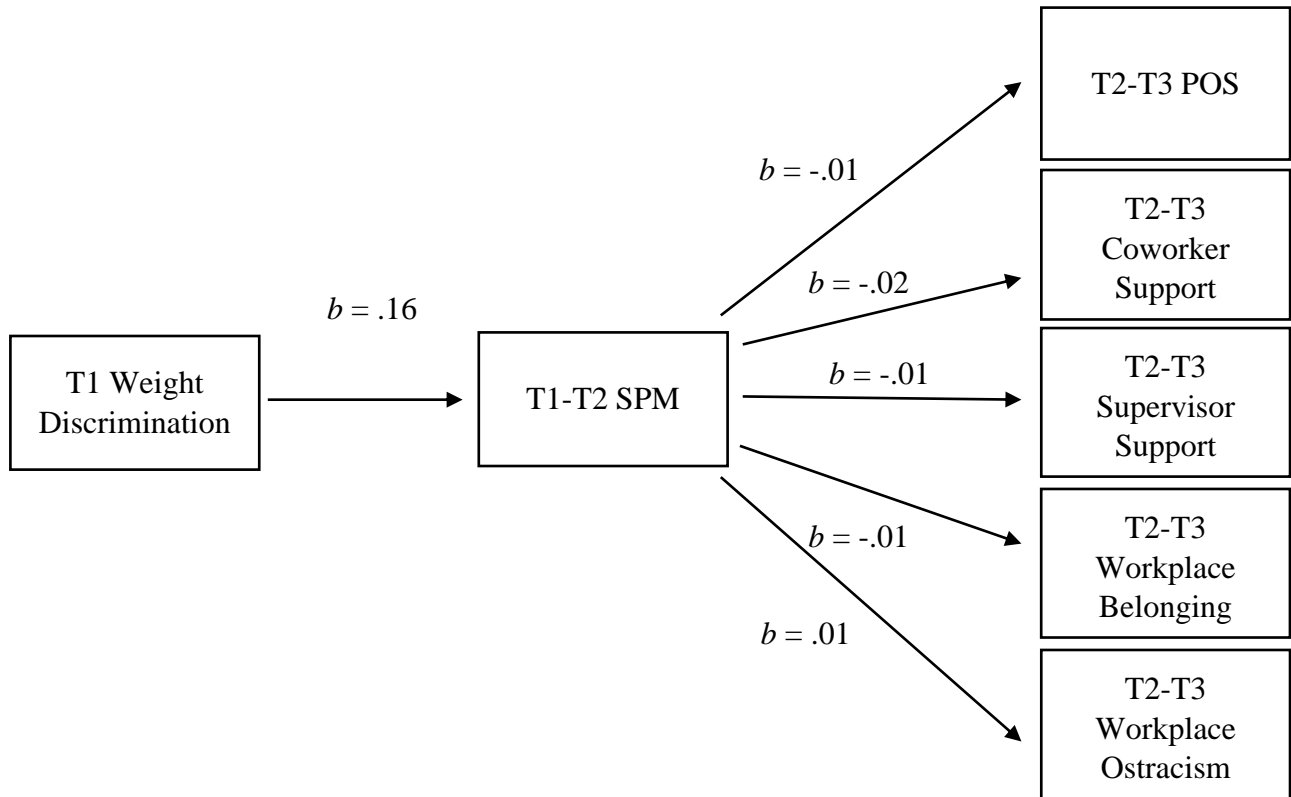


Figure 3. Study 3 Model 1 tests the indirect effects of T1 weight discrimination on changes in T2 to T3 outcomes (i.e., POS, coworker support, supervisor support, belonging, ostracism) through changes in T1 to T2 SPM. All indirect effects are non-significant for POS, $b = -.40$, $SE=.07$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.54, -.26], belonging, $b = -.42$, $SE=.09$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [-.58, -.26], and ostracism, $b = .23$, $SE=.05$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.13, .32].

Note. $*p \leq .05$. $**p \leq .01$. $***p \leq .001$.

Figure 4

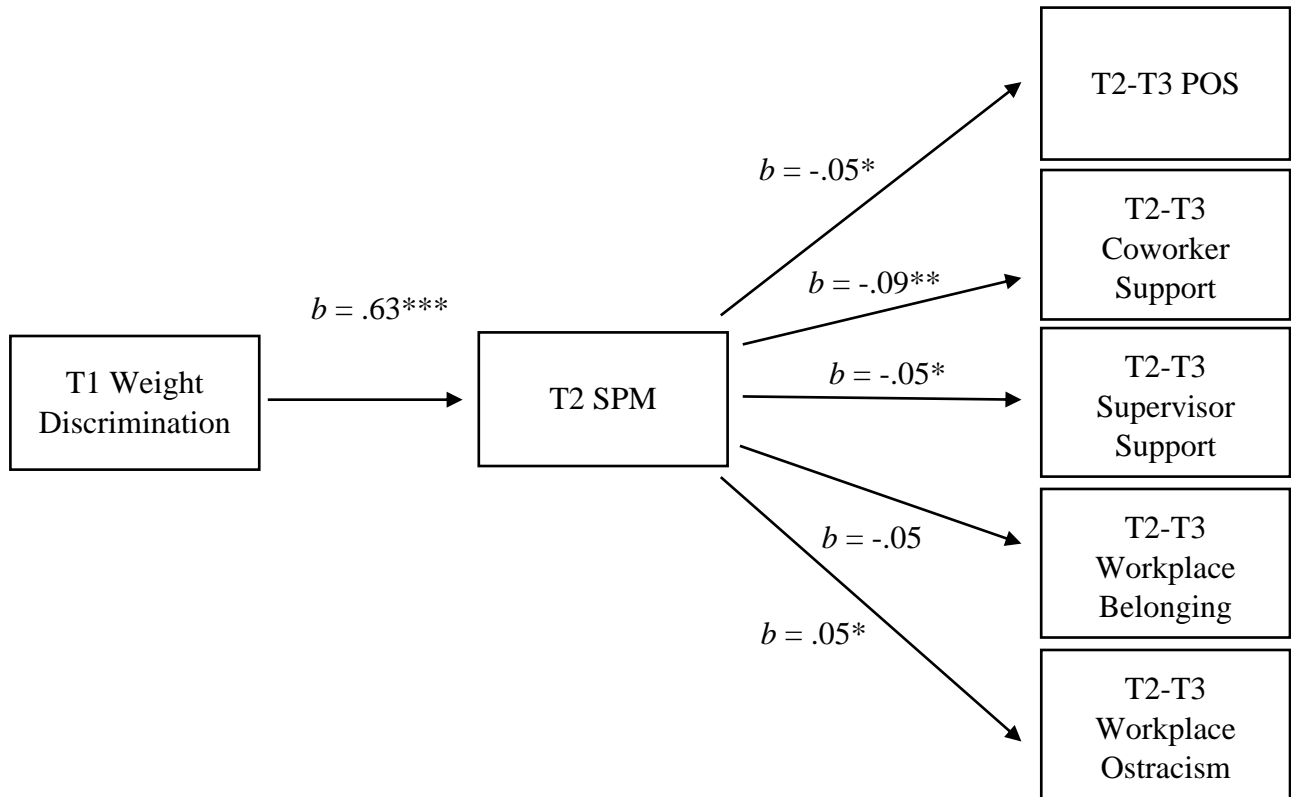


Figure 4. Study 3 Model 2 tests the indirect effects of T1 weight discrimination on changes in T2 to T3 outcomes (i.e., POS, coworker support, supervisor support, belonging, ostracism) through T2 SPM. Indirect effects are significant for POS, $b = -.05$, $SE=.02$, $p = .02$, 95% CI [-.09, -.01], coworker support, $b = -.09$, $SE=.03$, $p = .001$, 95% CI [-.15, -.05], supervisor support, $b = -.05$, $SE=.03$, $p = .04$, 95% CI [-.10, -.01], and ostracism, $b = .05$, $SE=.02$, $p = .01$, 95% CI [.02, .09].

Note. $*p \leq .05$. $**p \leq .01$. $***p \leq .001$.

Appendix A

Study 1 Measures

Workplace Weight Discrimination

In your daily work life, how often do any of the following things happen to you because of your weight in the workplace? (1 = *not at all often*, 7 = *very often*)

1. You are treated with less courtesy or respect than other coworkers are.
2. You are called names or teased.
3. Coworkers and supervisors act as if they're better than you are.
4. Coworkers and supervisors think you are lazy or unmotivated.

Social Pain Minimization

The following items ask about your experiences sharing negative social experiences with others in the workplace. We are interested to know, in general, do others recognize or minimize your pain and distress? Generally speaking, what is your experience sharing negative social events with others in the workplace?

When we mention negative social experiences, we refer to things that are socially painful or psychologically distressing like being excluded, ostracized, derogated, disrespected, and treated unfairly. (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)

1. When I tell coworkers and supervisors about times I've been treated unfairly, I feel they underestimate my hurt.
2. When sharing negative social experiences with coworkers and supervisors (e.g., being disrespected, derogated, treated unfairly), they minimize my pain and negative emotions.
3. When I tell coworkers and supervisors about negative experiences like being excluded or being treated rudely, they don't fully recognize my pain.
4. When I talk about it with coworkers and supervisors, they underestimate how much being excluded or disrespected hurts my feelings.
5. Coworkers and supervisors don't fully appreciate how much disrespect and mistreatment hurt my feelings.
6. Coworkers and supervisors minimize my pain when I tell them about negative social experiences I've had.
7. Coworkers and supervisors don't validate my emotions when I tell them about times I've experienced disrespect and unfairness.
8. When I tell them, coworkers and supervisors don't realize how much being excluded and mistreated hurts my feelings.

Perceived Organizational Support

Think about your experiences at work over the past month. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. My organization cares about my opinions.
2. My organization really cares about my well-being.
3. My organization strongly considers my goals and values.
4. Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.
5. My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
6. If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me. (reverse-scored)
7. My organization shows very little concern for me. (reverse-scored)
8. My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.

Workplace Belonging

Think about your experiences at work over the past month. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. When at work, I really feel like I belong.
2. I feel quite isolated from others at work. (reverse-scored)
3. I don't seem to "connect" with others in my work group. (reverse-scored)

Workplace Ostracism

Think about your experiences at work over the past month. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. Others ignored me at work.
2. Others left the area when I entered.
3. My greetings have gone unanswered at work.
4. I involuntarily sat alone in a crowded lunchroom at work.
5. Others avoided me at work.
6. I noticed others would not look at me at work.
7. Others at work shut me out of the conversation.
8. Others refused to talk to me at work.
9. Others at work treated me as if I weren't there.
10. Others at work did not invite me or ask me if I wanted anything when they went out for a coffee break.

Study 2 Measures

Attention Check

In the scenario you just read, which statement best describes the suggested reason for the manager's decision to promote your coworker instead of you?

1. The manager expressed prejudice against heavier employees.

2. The manager favors employees who have a history with the company.
3. The manager favors male employees over female employees.
4. The manager expressed prejudice against employees of color.

Anticipated Weight Discrimination

Based on the scenario you just read, how often do you think you would have the following thoughts or feelings because of your weight? (1 = *not at all often*, 7 = *very often*)

1. I would expect to be treated unfairly by coworkers and supervisors at the company because of my weight.
2. I would be afraid coworkers and supervisors would judge me negatively because of my weight.

Anticipated Social Pain Minimization

The following items ask you to think about sharing negative social experiences with others in the workplace and the extent you think people would recognize or minimize your pain and distress.

Based on the scenario you just read, how do you anticipate things would go when sharing negative social events with others in the company? (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)

1. If I told coworkers and supervisors about times I've been treated unfairly or rudely, I expect they would underestimate my hurt.
2. If I shared negative social experiences with coworkers and supervisors (e.g., being disrespected, derogated, treated unfairly), I think they would minimize my pain and negative emotions.
3. I bet these coworkers and supervisors wouldn't fully recognize and appreciate how much disrespect and mistreatment hurt my feelings.
4. I expect coworkers and supervisors would minimize my pain if I told them about negative social experiences I had.
5. I think coworkers and supervisors wouldn't validate my emotions if I told them about times I've experienced disrespect and exclusion.

Anticipated Perceived Organizational Support

Based on the scenario you just read, indicate the extent you agree with the following statements about working at the imagined company. (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)

1. This organization would really care about my well-being.
2. This organization would strongly consider my goals and values.
3. Help would be available from this organization if I had a problem.
4. This organization would show very little concern for me. (reverse-scored)

Anticipated Workplace Belonging

Based on the scenario you just read, indicate the extent you agree with the following statements about working at the imagined company. (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)

1. When at work, I would really feel like I belong.
2. I would feel quite isolated from others at work. (reverse-scored)
3. I wouldn't feel like I "connect" with others in my work group. (reverse-scored)

Anticipated Workplace Ostracism

Based on the scenario you just read, indicate the extent you agree with the following statements about working at the imagined company. (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)

1. Others would ignore me at work.
2. Other people would avoid me at work.
3. Other people wouldn't look at me at work.
4. Other people would refuse to talk to me at work.
5. Other people at work would treat me as if I weren't there.

Study 3 Measures

Workplace Weight Discrimination

Over the past two weeks, how often have the following things happened to you because of your weight in the workplace? (1 = *not at all often*, 7 = *very often*)

1. You are treated with less courtesy or respect than other coworkers are because of your weight.
2. You are called names or teased because of your weight.
3. Coworkers and supervisors act as if they're better than you are because of your weight.
4. Coworkers and supervisors think you are lazy or unmotivated because of your weight.

Social Pain Minimization

The following items ask about your experiences sharing negative social experiences with others in the workplace. Do coworkers and supervisors recognize or minimize your pain and distress? Over the past two weeks, what is your experience sharing negative social events with others in the workplace?

When we mention negative social experiences, we refer to things that are socially painful or psychologically distressing like being excluded, ostracized, derogated, disrespected, and treated unfairly. (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*)

1. When I tell coworkers and supervisors about times I've been treated unfairly, I feel they underestimate my hurt.
2. When sharing negative social experiences with coworkers and supervisors (e.g., being disrespected, derogated, treated unfairly), they minimize my pain and negative emotions.

3. When I tell coworkers and supervisors about negative experiences like being excluded or being treated rudely, they don't fully recognize my pain.
4. Coworkers and supervisors don't fully appreciate how much disrespect and mistreatment hurt my feelings.
5. Coworkers and supervisors don't validate my emotions when I tell them about times I've experienced disrespect and unfairness.

Perceived Organizational Support

Think about your experiences at work over the past two weeks. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. My organization cares about my opinions.
2. My organization really cares about my well-being.
3. My organization strongly considers my goals and values.
4. Help is available from my organization when I have a problem.
5. My organization would forgive an honest mistake on my part.
6. If given the opportunity, my organization would take advantage of me. (reverse-scored)
7. My organization shows very little concern for me. (reverse-scored)
8. My organization is willing to help me if I need a special favor.

Workplace Belonging

Think about your experiences at work over the past two weeks. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. When at work, I really feel like I belong.
2. I feel quite isolated from others at work. (reverse-scored)
3. I don't seem to "connect" with others in my work group. (reverse-scored)

Workplace Ostracism

Think about your experiences at work over the past two weeks. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. Others ignored me at work.
2. Others left the area when I entered.
3. My greetings have gone unanswered at work.
4. I involuntarily sat alone in a crowded lunchroom at work.
5. Others avoided me at work.
6. I noticed others would not look at me at work.
7. Others at work shut me out of the conversation.
8. Others refused to talk to me at work.
9. Others at work treated me as if I weren't there.
10. Others at work did not invite me or ask me if I wanted anything when they went out for a coffee break.

Coworker Support

Think about your experiences at work over the past two weeks. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. If work gets difficult, my coworkers will help me.
2. I get help and support I need from coworkers.
3. I receive the respect at work I deserve from my coworkers.
4. My coworkers are willing to listen to my work-related problems.

Supervisor Support

Think about your experiences at work over the past two weeks. Using the scale below, indicate your agreement with the following statements (1 = *strongly disagree*, 7 = *strongly agree*):

1. I am given supportive feedback from my supervisor on the work I do.
2. I can rely on my supervisor to help me out with a work problem.
3. I can talk to my supervisor about something that has upset or annoyed me about work.
4. I am supported by my supervisor through difficult tasks.
5. My supervisor encourages me at work.

Appendix B

Study 2 Vignettes

Weight Stigma Condition:

Imagine you are being considered for a promotion at an organization where you have worked for a year. You know one of your coworkers is also being considered for the position. This coworker is a thin woman that is about the same age as you. You notice all the people in supervisory positions at your company are thin like the coworker who is being considered for the promotion. Eventually, you come to learn that the position is offered to your coworker instead of you. When you reach out to your manager to ask about how they made the decision and what you could improve for future promotion opportunities, your manager suggests that clients prefer working with your coworker and you should focus on improving relationships with your clients. You have a feeling your manager's comments are weight-related, as you have overheard your manager make comments about weight in the past. For example, you heard this manager express prejudice against heavy employees, saying 'fat people are always so lazy,' and claiming 'skinny salespeople make the company look better' and 'clients prefer to work with people who look like they take care of themselves.'

Control Condition:

Imagine you are being considered for a promotion at an organization where you have worked for a year. You know one of your coworkers is also being considered for the position. This coworker is a woman that is about the same age as you and has been with the company for several years. You notice that all the people in supervisory positions at your company have worked at the company for at least several years, similar to your coworker who is being considered for the promotion. Eventually, you come to learn that the position is offered to your coworker instead of you. When you reach out to your manager to ask about how they made the decision and what you could improve for future promotion opportunities, your manager suggests that clients prefer working with your coworker and you should focus on improving relationships with your clients. You have a feeling your manager's comments are related to your lack of experience with the company, as you have overheard your manager make comments about how experienced employees make the company look better and that clients prefer to work with people who have been with the company for a long time.