COPING TO REPAIR THE CAREER DAMAGE OF WORKPLACE WEIGHT DISCRIMINATION

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ABSTRACT

At the center of the battle to overcome the obesity epidemic is a focus on achieving a socially acceptable body size. Often overlooked, however, are the interpersonal workplace implications. Discrimination against employees who are overweight is an increasingly prevalent form of employee devaluation which has varied negative impacts on career success, including income disparities, less attractive job assignments, and fewer promotions. Drawing on attribution theory, spillover theory, and the transactional stress model, we examine the moderating influence of coping on weight discrimination and career success. Using moderated hierarchical regression, we found support for the relationship between weight discrimination and career success and findings on the moderating affects of coping which should encourage employers to discontinue this form of workplace devaluation. Implications, limitations, and future research are presented.

INTRODUCTION

Discrimination in the workplace occurs when characteristics other than qualifications affect how an individual is treated. Unequal treatment, usually unfavorable, can take many forms. Since the early 1960s, the U.S. has passed several laws aimed at eliminating discrimination based on personal characteristics. Despite the most valiant of efforts, racial, gender, age, and sexual stereotypes, have crept into the behavior of even the most educated individuals within organizations (Orpen, 1995; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Sanchez & Brock, 1996; Shaffer, Joplin, Bell, Lau, & Qguz, 2000; Snape & Redman, 2003). Additionally, obesity stigmatization, a form of employee devaluation scarcely addressed legally, socially, or within organizations, is widespread (Andreyeva, Puhl, & Brownell, 2008). Rebecca Puhl, a leading obesity researcher, described weight discrimination as “…a very serious social problem that we need to pay attention to” (Shkolnikova, 2008). As social problems invariably become organizational challenges, it is necessary to expend significant effort examining workplace weight discrimination.

Weight discrimination may be obvious or subtle in work relationships, hiring, promotions, and layoff decisions. Studies have established that workplace discrimination does in
fact occur in the workplace in all phases of the employment process (Bellizzi & Hasty, 1998; Finklestein, 2007; Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004; Larkin & Pines, 1979; Maranto & Stenoien, 2000; M. V. Roehling, 1999; M. V. Roehling, Pichler, Oswald, & Bruce, 2008; P. V. Roehling, Roehling, Vandlen, Blazek, & Guy, 2008). How this weight discrimination affects employees has been discussed in the form of employee attitudes and behaviors (Wilkins, 2006). However, little research has been conducted on how employees actually cope with weight discrimination.

In this study, we explore how employees cope with perceived weight discrimination. The coping mechanisms generally serve as a way to overcome the devaluation and reduce the negative outcomes. Coping manifests itself in several forms, such as active or disengagement strategies (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). Puhl and Brownell (2006) found that common coping strategies for victims of weight discrimination include: heading off the negative comments; using positive self-talk, faith, religion, and prayer; eating excessively; dieting; seeking social support; ignoring the situation, and responding positively (being nice). Examining these multiple facets of weight discrimination may provide researchers and practitioners with more effective ways of managing diversity and interpersonal interactions in the workplace.

Drawing on attribution theory, spillover theory, and the transactional stress model, we propose and test a model of coping with workplace weight discrimination and its career outcomes. We seek to address two research questions: 1.) What are the career outcomes of workplace weight discrimination and 2.) What are the moderating influences of coping strategies on the effects of workplace weight discrimination?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Workplace Weight Discrimination

Workplace weight discrimination is surprisingly common, as over two thirds of Americans are overweight or obese (National Center for Health Statistics, 2007). Obese individuals are often perceived as being less competent (Lennon, 1992), less attractive (Clayson, 1989; Harris, Harris, & Bochner, 1982; Kalisch, 1972; Lerner & Gillert, 1969; Rothblum, Miller, & Garbutt, 1988), gluttonous (Hebl, et al., 2004), less desirable, less productive, less successful, less conscientious, less aggressive, less ambitious, disorganized, indecisive, mentally lazy, and lacking self-discipline (Larkin & Pines, 1979). A study found that 54% of respondents experienced weight stigmatization from co-workers or colleagues, 43% from employers or supervisors, and 25% experienced overall job discrimination (Puhl & Brownell, 2006). Essentially, denigration of the obese seems to be widely acceptable (Puhl & Brownell, 2001).

Weight discrimination may be explained by attribution theory. According to attribution theory, negative judgments of obese individuals surface among employers, co-workers, and society largely due to a belief that obesity can be controlled by individuals who are obese (Crandall & Martinez, 1996). These negative opinions are linked to a just world belief which
implies that people with negative characteristics should be treated in accordance to that characteristic (Crandall, et al., 2001). The outcome is generally workplace weight discrimination. This stigmatization of overweight employees occurs in selection (Finklestein, 2007; Sartore & Cunningham, 2006), compensation and income disparities (Averett, 1996; Kutcher & Bragger, 1999; Maranto & Stenoien, 2000; Register & Williams, 1990), promotions (Bordieri, 1997), discipline (Bellizzi & Norvell, 1991), and discharge (Kennedy & Homant, 1984). Stigmatization of overweight employees also results in disparities such as less attractive job assignments (Bellizzi & Hasty, 1998; Bellizzi, L., & Belonax, 1989; Jackson, 2000), and negative perceptions of supervisory potential, self-discipline, professional appearance, personal hygiene, and the ability to perform strenuous jobs (Rothblum, et al., 1988).

Coping

So how does one deal with perceived weight discrimination? Consistent with a study by Puhl and Brownell (2006), we propose that individuals utilize coping mechanisms. Coping literature has evolved over the last several decades as pressures in both work and family life mount to create increased amounts of stress. Lazarus and Folkman (1985) offer the transactional stress model which proposes three processes for understanding stress; primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, and coping. Coping is the process of executing a response after one has perceived a threat (primary appraisal) and evaluated potential responses (secondary appraisal) (Lazarus, 1966). Coping strategies are described as the psychological and behavioral efforts by an individual to tolerate or minimize external and internal demands and conflicts (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). Several dimensions of coping were identified in Compas et. al. (2001): problem-focused versus emotion-focused, primary versus secondary control, engagement versus disengagement coping, self-focus versus external focus, cognitive versus behavioral, and active versus passive coping.

Puhl and Brownell (2006) discovered that most frequently those experiencing weight stigma in the form of job discrimination coped via positive behaviors such as being nice, ignoring the situation, and dieting. However, based on a study by Diamond et. al. (2008), the two approaches to coping examined in this study are active coping and behavioral disengagement because of their focus on workplace discrimination. Akin to Lazarus and Folkman’s (1984) problem-focused coping, this notion of “active coping is the process of taking active steps to try to remove or circumvent the stressor or to ameliorate its effects. Active coping includes initiating direct action, increasing one’s efforts, and trying to execute a coping attempt in stepwise fashion” (Carver, et al., 1989, p. 268). Conversely, behavioral disengagement refers to reducing effort to overcome a stressor, even to the point of abandoning goals which are being hindered by the stressor (Carver, et al., 1989).

It has generally been thought that disengagement coping serves to produce negative outcomes and active coping produces more positive outcomes in some instances (Carver, et al.,
1989), but more research should be conducted on perceived discrimination and coping. Therefore, Diamond et al. (2008) suggest that discrimination should be analyzed separately as a stressor for which coping is necessary because of power differentials between the discriminator and the victim. They suggest that victims may fall lowly in terms of organizational power and/or may fall in a minority group that removes even more power (Carli, 1999). As a consequence of this power differential, victims may benefit more from disengagement coping because the victim is unlikely to be able to be removed from the environment and behavioral disengagement allows them to avoid the discrimination, deny its existence, or just plain accept it (Carver, et al., 1989; Diamond, et al., 2008). Alternately, if the victim chose to actively cope, there is a likelihood of lower career success because of retaliation as in cases of sexual harassment.

This argument is valid for victims of weight discrimination however, there is a bit of a departure related to the mention of a minority group. Sixty-six percent of Americans are overweight (National Center for Health Statistics, 2007). Therefore, this is certainly not a minority group. However, overweight individuals do discriminate against others who are overweight and the distinction between those who are simply overweight and those who are obese and those who are morbidly obese can be made. Moreover, power differentials do apply when examining organizational levels. There are few overweight CEOs (P. V. Roehling, et al., 2008), which may imply that lower level employees may be fatter than higher level employees. This is further confirmed by disparities in promotions and income based on body size (Kennedy & Homant, 1984; Maranto & Stenoien, 2000; Register & Williams, 1990). Essentially, in situations of weight discrimination, behavioral disengagement may be a more effective coping strategy because of the helplessness that occurs when people expect poor coping outcomes (Carver, et al., 1989) which stems from the power differential present.

Coping and OCP

A relatively new phenomenon in organizational behavior research, citizenship pressure (OCP) occurs when an individual perceives that the performance of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) is either implicitly or explicitly required (Bolino, Turnley, Suazo, & Gilstrap, 2010). When perceived as a valuable resource, OCBs are viewed as something that can be used to support or help the organization or its stakeholders. Therefore, managers and employees begin to use it as a tool to be drawn on when needed. A study by Bolino et. al. (2010) revealed that citizenship pressure is related to the actual performance of OCBs.

OCP may help to explain the active coping of those who perceive weight discrimination. We argue that OCP falls consistent with “increasing one’s efforts” when performed by a person who perceives devaluation. As OCBs have at one point been considered non contractual, unrewarded behaviors (Organ, 1988) that assist coworkers or promote the organization, there has been much argument over whether or not these OCBs are really non contractual and unrewarded, meaning that persons feel that they must perform these behaviors (Borman & Motowildo, 1997;
Organ, 1997) in order to be seen as a “team player” and to receive the best possible performance evaluations, promotions, and raises. As such, an employee who perceives discrimination, especially weight discrimination, may feel that they must perform OCBs to achieve equal footing with employees who are not devaluated. They are essentially actively coping with the situation and increasing their effort by performing above and beyond their prescribed duties.

In a study of perceived weight discrimination and employee attitudes and behaviors, it was found that the relationship between a one dimensional measure of perceived weight discrimination resulted in a non significant relationship with OCB (Wilkins, 2006). This study hypothesized that perceived weight discrimination led to decreased OCB; however, the hypothesis was not supported. Employees possibly did not decrease the level of OCB because they felt that the performance of discretionary behaviors was explicitly required of them. In fact, a respondent who perceived weight discrimination indicated that “As student radiology technologist I had an instructor tell me that because of my size I would have to work twice as hard and be twice as good to be acknowledged as equal to my thinner co-workers. He was an obese technologist and spoke from experience. He was very right” (Wilkins, 2006, p. 179). Essentially, employees may feel the need to succumb to citizenship pressure in order to be perceived favorably by managers for purposes of evaluation, promotions, raises, and the like (Cates, Mathis, & Randle, 2007).

In performance evaluations, performance of OCBs may be used by managers to differentiate between employees who meet performance expectations and those who do not. One of the prevalent biases in the performance management is the halo/horn effect (Jacobs & Kozlowski, 1985; Tsui & O’Reilly, 1989). For victims of weight discrimination, the horn effect may occur because the single personal characteristic, the obesity of the employee, may be perceived as negative, and therefore adversely drive the manager’s evaluation of the employee. However, by performing OCBs (many times while under pressure), the halo effect may occur, meaning that the performance of the unrewarded, non contractual behaviors may be a single impressive factor that drives the performance evaluation positively. In effect, the negative attribute of obesity explained by attribution, may at least be neutralized by the performance of OCBs. Thus,

Hypothesis 1: Perceived weight discrimination will be positively related to organizational citizenship pressure.

Career Success, Perceived Discrimination, and Coping

Vroom’s (1964) expectancy theory captures the essence of why most employees show up to work, the expectation that one’s effort will lead to an attractive outcome or reward. Frequently, this outcome is career success. Career success has been defined from both an objective and subjective perspective. Objective career success describes culturally defined
external factors, such as hierarchical progression (Kotter, 1982), salary, and job title (Pfeffer, 1977). Subjective career success is internal and refers to one’s own preference for development within an occupation based on one’s individual perception of career experience (Gattiker & Larwood, 1986). Perceived discrimination has been found to influence career success. In a study of NCAA Division I-A assistant coaches, results demonstrated discrimination based on racial differences in career success measured as number of promotions received and organizational proximity to the head coach position (Sagas & Cunningham, 2005). As discussed above and drawing on attribution theory, perceived weight discrimination can be seen in the form of lower salaries, fewer promotions, and unattractive job assignments (Bellizzi & Hasty, 1998; Bordieri, 1997; Maranto & Stenoien, 2000). These are essentially characteristics of objective career success. This study, however, will explore the proposed relationships using subjective career success based on its implications related to mental well-being, quality of life, and performance (Peluchette, 1993). Thus, we conclude

Hypothesis 2: Perceived weight discrimination will be negatively related to career success.

Coping has been determined as a key to employees experiencing favorable work attitudes and extrinsic rewards (Diamond, et al., 2008; Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). Foster (2000) even suggests that it is the coping mechanism executed that influences outcomes more so than the actual discrimination itself. Therefore, we will investigate how coping moderates the relationship of perceived weight discrimination and career success.

Drawing from Keltner, Gruenfeld, & Anderson’s (2003) work suggesting that devalued employees benefit from disengagement coping rather than active coping because of their low status in the workplace, Diamond et. al. (2008) tested the moderating effects of active coping and behavioral disengagement on the relationship between workplace discrimination and career success. They found that, in a study of ethnic minorities, active coping and behavioral disengagement moderated the relationship between perceived workplace discrimination and perceived career success and that only active coping moderated the relationship when testing an objective measure of career success, salary increase (Diamond, et al., 2008). Further, active coping of the devalued employee produced less career success, while higher levels of behavioral disengagement produced no negative impacts on career success and lower levels produced reduced career success.

Although we will test weight discrimination in similar relationships as Diamond et. al. (2008), as discussed above, we will add citizenship pressure as a form of active coping. However, based on the fact that citizenship pressure implies executing extra-role behaviors which are essential to effective performance, we propose that the moderating effect will be opposite that of active coping (as described by Carver, et al. 1989).
Hypothesis 3a: Active coping will moderate the relationship between perceived weight discrimination and career success such that for participants with higher active coping, the negative relationship between perceived weight discrimination and career success will be stronger.

Hypothesis 3b: Organizational Citizenship Pressure will moderate the relationship between perceived weight discrimination and career success such that for participants with higher organizational citizenship pressure, the negative relationship between perceived weight discrimination and career success will be weaker.

Hypothesis 3c: Behavioral disengagement will moderate the relationship between perceived weight discrimination and career success such that for participants with higher behavioral disengagement, the negative relationship between perceived weight discrimination and career success will be weaker.

METHODOLOGY

Procedure

Data for this study was collected using a Web survey instrument, which was sent via electronic invitation to US residents employed in diverse industries. Academicians and practitioners have demonstrated a growing interest in using Web-based survey administration (Burke, 2006; Dillman, 1999; Ray, Griggs, & Tabor, 2001).

Participants

This study resulted in 106 eligible (employed) responses, producing an overall response rate of 20%. Of the respondents, the majority were female (82.4%), married (55.3%), possessed at least an Associate’s Degree (77.7%), worked full-time (89.6%), made less than $50,000 per year (59.4%), and were forty years of age or older (68%). Whites made up 53.4% and Blacks consisted of 42.7%. Respondents were distributed across the US. The largest number of respondents from individual states resided in Mississippi (46.2%), Illinois (12.3%), and Indiana (7.5%). The leanest state had a small representation, Colorado = 3.8%. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that they are obese or overweight, while, 75% of them were actually obese or overweight based on our manual BMI calculations using self-reported height and weight values. This 75% is a bit higher than the national average of 67% (National Center for Health Statistics, 2007), which may indicate that those of a larger carriage were more willing to participate in the study because they had a vested interest. Additionally 46.2% of the respondents resided in Mississippi, which may also explain the larger sample of overweight individuals.
Measures

The constructs were measured using a seven-point Likert scale, anchored from "Strongly Disagree" (1) to "Strongly Agree" (7). The constructs of the study include perceived weight discrimination, career success, coping, and organizational citizenship pressure.

Perceived weight discrimination

Perceived weight discrimination was measured as a modification of a tested 7-item scale created by James, Lovato, and Cropanzano (1994) for race/gender discrimination. This scale has also been used to measure perceived sexual orientation discrimination (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). Examples of questions in the instrument are: “Where I work, promotion and rewards are not influenced by body weight” and “There is weight discrimination where I work.” Factor analysis resulted in the dropping of one question. The Cronbach alpha value is .890.

Career success

Career success was measured using 8-items from Gattiker and Larwood’s (1986) scale of career success. The scale included the subjective career success dimensions of interpersonal success, financial success, and hierarchical success. Examples of questions in the instrument are: “I am reaching my career goals within the time frame I set for myself” and “I am getting good performance evaluations”. Two questions were removed after conducting factor analysis (α = .951).

Coping

Coping was measured with the Carver et. al. (1989) active and behavioral disengagement scales. “I take additional action to try to get rid of the problem” is an example of one question from the 4-item active coping scale (α = .866). “I admit to myself that I can’t deal with it, and quit trying” is an example of a question from the 4-item behavioral disengagement scale (α = .951.).

Organizational citizenship pressure

Organizational citizenship pressure was measured with 22 questions from two dimensions (individual initiative and helping) of the Bolino and Turnley (2005) scale. After conducting factor analysis, the resulting scale had an alpha of .858. Examples of questions in the instrument are: “I stay at work after normal business hours” and “I take on extra responsibilities in order to help coworkers when things get demanding at work”.

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Control variables

Control variables used were the background characteristics of gender/sex and race/ethnicity. Body mass index (BMI), a measure of body size, was also included, consistent with other weight discrimination studies (Averett, 1996; Maranto & Stenoien, 2000).

Figure 1. Graphical Depiction of Perceived Weight Discrimination, Coping, and Career Success Model

Note. OCP = Citizenship Pressure; BD = Behavioral Disengagement

RESULTS

Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, Zero-Order Correlations, and Reliability Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>S.D.</th>
<th>COP</th>
<th>BD</th>
<th>PWD</th>
<th>OCP</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>SEX</th>
<th>BMI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COP</td>
<td>5.204</td>
<td>.689</td>
<td>(.866)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BD</td>
<td>2.548</td>
<td>.844</td>
<td>-.356**</td>
<td>(.909)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWD</td>
<td>3.002</td>
<td>1.493</td>
<td>.170</td>
<td>.088</td>
<td>(.890)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OCP</td>
<td>4.117</td>
<td>2.271</td>
<td>.253*</td>
<td>.225*</td>
<td>.281**</td>
<td>(.858)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CS</td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td>3.233</td>
<td>.243*</td>
<td>.025</td>
<td>-.169</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>(.951)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEX</td>
<td>1.82</td>
<td>.383</td>
<td>-.004</td>
<td>.092</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>-.079</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>31.32</td>
<td>9.473</td>
<td>-.152</td>
<td>-.051</td>
<td>.300**</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>-.184</td>
<td>.130</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RACE</td>
<td>1.52</td>
<td>.654</td>
<td>-.017</td>
<td>-.083</td>
<td>-.010</td>
<td>-.069</td>
<td>-.026</td>
<td>-.104</td>
<td>-.164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Reliability estimates are on the diagonals in parentheses. COP = Active Coping; BD = Behavioral Disengagement; PWD = Perceived Weight Discrimination; OCP = Organizational Citizenship Pressure. CS = Career Success. Sex = Gender/Sex. RACE = Race/Ethnicity. BMI = Body Mass Index

n = 106.

*p < .05. **p < .01.
Internal consistency via reliability was assessed for the scales used. All constructs in the final study had a Cronbach’s alpha coefficient value of at least .70, which is considered internally consistent (Nunnally, 1978). All alpha coefficients were acceptable and ranged from .86 to .95. Significant correlations were found between several of the scales although none were highly correlated (r ≥ .8). Table 1 shows means, standard deviations, correlations, and alphas.

We introduced citizenship pressure as a form of active coping. Based on Pearson’s product moment correlation coefficient, a small, but significant amount of correlation does exist between active coping and citizenship pressure (r = .253, p < .05). See Table 1.

Hypotheses 1 and 2 were tested using regression. Perceived weight discrimination was positively related to citizenship pressure (β = .320, p < .01) indicating support for hypothesis 1. Perceived weight discrimination was negatively related to career success (β = -.155, p < .088) but only at .10 level in significance, indicating marginal support for hypothesis 2.

### Table 2: Regression Analyses for Perceived Weight Discrimination Predicting Citizenship Pressure, and Career Success (Hypotheses 1 and 2)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Independent Variable</th>
<th>Citizenship Pressure</th>
<th>Career Success</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Weight Discrimination</td>
<td>.320**</td>
<td>-.155*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R²</td>
<td>.103</td>
<td>.029</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adj. R²</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>2.573*</td>
<td>2.974*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. n = 106
*p < .05. **p < .01. +p < .10.

Hypotheses 3a-c suggest that active coping, citizenship pressure, and behavioral disengagement will moderate the relationship between perceived weight discrimination and career success. The moderated relationship is generally signified by interaction terms in the regression equation (Aiken & West, 1991), therefore moderated hierarchical regression was used.

As a first step in the hierarchical regression analysis, all demographic (control) variables were entered. The main effect perceived weight discrimination was entered in the second step. The moderators, active coping, citizenship pressure, and behavioral disengagement, were entered in the third step and the interaction of perceived weight discrimination and active coping, citizenship pressure, and behavioral disengagement was entered in the fourth step. In order to test for the moderation of a variable on the relationship between X and Y, the main effects of the predictor and moderator on the outcome variable and the interaction between the predictor and the moderator must be tested (Aiken & West, 1991; Surrey, 2005). "If the interaction term is significant (i.e. c is significantly different from zero) then, with a few cautionary caveats, one
can claim to have demonstrated moderation. Whether the main effects (a and b) are significant or not isn’t strictly relevant to whether one has demonstrated moderation” (Aiken & West, 1991; Surrey, 2005). After conducting the moderated hierarchical regression analysis, no support for the moderated relationships with career success were found, as none of interaction terms were significant. Results are presented in Tables 3, 4, and 5.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Regression Analyses for Active Coping Moderating the Relationship Between Perceived Weight Discrimination and Career Success (Hypothesis 3a)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 – Control Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender/Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 – Main Effects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Weight Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3 – Moderator</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active Coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4 – Interactions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Weight Discrimination X Active Coping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Note.</strong> BMI = Body Mass Index</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n = 106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*p &lt; .05. **p &lt; .01. $^+$p &lt; .10.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4: Regression Analyses for Citizenship Pressure Moderating the Relationship Between Perceived Weight Discrimination and Career Success (Hypothesis 3b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 – Control Variables</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender/Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 – Main Effects</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Weight Discrimination</td>
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</table>
Table 4: Regression Analyses for Citizenship Pressure Moderating the Relationship Between Perceived Weight Discrimination and Career Success (Hypothesis 3b)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
<th>( F )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3 – Moderator</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Citizenship Pressure</td>
<td>.050</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.006</td>
<td>1.529</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4 – Interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Weight Discrimination X Citizenship Pressure</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.082</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.265</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* BMI = Body Mass Index

n = 106

* \( p < .05. \)** \( p < .01. \) \( \hat{p} < .10. \)

Table 5: Regression Analyses for Behavioral Disengagement Moderating the Relationship between Perceived Weight Discrimination and Career Success (Hypothesis 3c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>β</th>
<th>( R^2 )</th>
<th>( \Delta R^2 )</th>
<th>( F )</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 1 – Control Variables</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/Ethnicity</td>
<td>-1.845</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender/Sex</td>
<td>-2.616</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BMI</td>
<td>.197*</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>.064</td>
<td>1.942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 2 – Main Effects</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Weight Discrimination</td>
<td>-.172*</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.032*</td>
<td>2.227*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 3 – Moderator</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavioral Disengagement</td>
<td>.026</td>
<td>.096</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1.765</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Step 4 – Interactions</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Weight Discrimination X Behavioral Disengagement</td>
<td>.018</td>
<td>.110</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>1.686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* BMI = Body Mass Index

n = 106

* \( p < .05. \)** \( p < .01. \) \( \hat{p} < .10. \)

DISCUSSION

We analyzed the ways in which active and disengagement coping affected the career success of those who perceive workplace weight discrimination. Based on the data analysis, we found only marginal support for the relationship between career success and perceived weight discrimination. While support at the .05 level of significance is most desirable, marginal
significance at the .10 level has been accepted more so by social psychology researchers (e.g., Hunter, Cohen, Rosenthal, etc.) in social psychology journals (e.g., psychological review, psychological bulletin, psychological science, etc.). The findings indicate that increased amounts of workplace weight discrimination result in lower levels of career success. This is consistent with the findings in studies measuring more objective measures of career success (Kennedy & Homant, 1984; Maranto & Stenoien, 2000; Register & Williams, 1990). Although only marginal support, this finding provides valuable implications for organizations related to employee devaluation in that weight discrimination can have detrimental effects on organizational success via its human resource.

Our limited results related to career success may be attributed to the subjective measure utilized. Generally studies of career and success have focused on the more external or objective measure (Gattiker & Larwood, 1986) because it provides “hard” data in the form of income, job title, promotions, and distance from top executive positions. Other scholars though, have argued that the subjective measures are a better assessment of one’s thoughts on personal career success (Kotter, 1982) in that it is possible to have received promotions, an attractive salary and job title, yet still feel as if personal levels of career success have not been achieved. While the scholars present a compelling argument, we now think that surveying victims of discrimination using a subjective measure comes with unique challenges. Ruggiero (1996) indicated that disadvantaged individuals may minimize discrimination and its effects in order to maintain the perception of control over social and performance outcomes in their lives. Therefore, victims of weight discrimination may not report perceiving lower career success or even the weight discrimination itself in an effort to maintain control of their careers, even though their salary, job title, and promotions clearly indicate the negative effect of this devaluation. Interestingly, our post-hoc analysis even indicates that those individuals with higher BMIs have marginally lower career success (β = -.183, p < .10) and higher weight discrimination (β = .333, p < .05). Given this, a multidimensional measure of career success, which includes both the subjective and objective aspects, may be more appropriate.

The moderating influences of active coping, citizenship pressure, and behavioral disengagement, all produced insignificant findings, suggesting further investigation of the coping mechanisms with the measure of career success. Post hoc analysis though, does indicate that there is a marginally significant relationship between perceived weight discrimination and active coping (β = .079, p < .10). We also explored citizenship pressure, as a form of active coping and found a significant marginal correlation between OCP and active coping. The more one feels weight discrimination, the more citizenship pressure they feel, which may confirm that devaluated employees are performing these OCBs in an effort to achieve equal status with employees that are not devaluated. Overall, our findings indicate that victims do indeed attempt to deal with the discrimination by actively doing something about it. However, despite the devalued employee’s best efforts, this weight discrimination still has a harmful effect on career success. Managers and HR practitioners should take notice of this. Employees are expending
mental and physical efforts to overcome this devaluation to no avail. These efforts could most certainly be better used in helping achieve organizational goals, as opposed to attempting to achieve organizational equality.

Managerial and Practical Implications

This study and previous studies reveal negative career success related to weight discrimination (Register & Williams, 1990; M. V. Roehling, 1999; M. V. Roehling, Roehling, & Odland, 2008; P. V. Roehling, et al., 2008). Workplace weight discrimination’s effects far exceed just the employee though. It also impacts the company, which is further justification for organizations and their managers to focus on helping not hindering the career success of their employees. Moreover, as organizations craft human resource policy, this study illustrates that a renewed focus should be on the fair treatment of all employees regardless of personal characteristics. Seeing that the rate of weight discrimination has almost doubled in the last ten years (Andreyeva, et al., 2008), the personal characteristic, body size should be added to the EEO statement printed on many company documents, from employment applications, to websites, to annual reports.

Limitations and Future Research

As with any research study, limitations are present. The limitations can be interpreted as opportunities for future investigation. The sample in the study is a limitation. While a diverse sample was intended, the sample was overwhelmingly female (82.4%). The lack of responses from a men does not allow us to determine if the weight discrimination is really targeted more at white women or if this conclusion may be a result of nonresponse bias. The subjective measure of career success proved to be a limitation. Only marginal support of the relationship between weight discrimination and career success was found, although there is an abundance of support for an objective measure of career success in the literature. As in Diamond et. al. (2008) future weight discrimination research should use both the subjective and objective measures of career success (e.g. income, number of promotions, distance from top level management). Additionally, differences in race and gender, and other life outcomes of workplace weight discrimination should be examined in future research.

The natural human reaction to discomfort is to try to stop the pain. If you place your hand on a hot stove, you will immediately withdraw the hand to stop any further burning or damage. Unfortunately, the reality in workplace devaluation is that immediately physically withdrawing oneself from the environment may not be an option. Personal, family, financial, and ethical responsibilities just may not allow it. So, coping may become the option for quelling the discomfort. Future research should explore coping and weight discrimination more in depth.
CONCLUSION

Organizations evolve with the changes and challenges in society. Conversations of this evolution will permeate discussions from boardrooms to mailrooms, but most importantly between the covers of HR policy books and weaved throughout acceptable best practices. It is, of course, the hope of most diversity researchers, human resource practitioners, activists, and equal opportunity advocates, that these policies and best practices will include an elimination of employee devaluation based on personal characteristics. Until such time, these conversations of weight stigmatization are very much relevant. This study extends research on workplace stigmatization based on body size by offering discussion of its effects on career success. As scholars (e.g. Brownell, Crandall, Hebl, King, Puhl, Roehling, Rothblum) have devoted considerable time and research effort to this literature stream, this study further confirms that there is still much work to be done.

REFERENCES


