

Obesity and Ethicality Perceptions: Obese Employees Are Stigmatized as Unethical

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Abstract

While obese individuals make up a substantial percentage of the workforce, bodyweight discrimination remains largely prevalent in American society. Extending prior research on customers' response to frontline obese employees, this paper tests the effects of employee's obesity on perceived ethicality. Through two experimental studies, it shows that non-overweight individuals perceive obese employees as more likely to act unethically than their average-weight counterparts. Findings show a similar effect for behaviors that could affect both customers and employers. No effect of employee's gender (female vs. male) was evidenced. In line with the influence of the Protestant Work Ethic on American culture, the effect of employee's obesity on perceived unethicality is mediated by the laziness stereotype: as obese (vs. average-weight) employees are perceived as lazier, individuals infer higher likelihood to act unethically.

Keywords: *Obesity; Ethicality; Stigmatization*

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