

# Effects of weight stigma | article analysis



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In their 51<sup>st</sup> volume, the Journal of Experimental Social Psychology published an article named “ The Ironic Effects of Weight Stigma” in which researchers explore the realistic effects that weight stigmas and weight-related identity threats can have on an individual’s dietary habits and self-efficacy regarding self-control. All subjects in the experiments were female, as it was previously concluded that women are more susceptible to weight-related stigmas as well as weight-related identity threats. The scientists decided to test the effects of these stigmas and identity threats by designing an experiment in which participants first read either an article that presents a weight-related identity threat (experimental group), or an article that is unrelated to weight and obesity (control group), and then were asked to give a brief speech explaining the article, its validity, as well as the implications of the ideas discussed in the articles. After giving their speeches, the participants were placed in an unobserved room for ten minutes with pre-weighed bowls of M&Ms, Skittles, and Goldfish snacks and told to help themselves to a snack. The observed variables in this experiment included calories consumed after having given their speeches, the participants’ self-efficacy for dietary control (as evaluated by a questionnaire that scales self efficacy for dietary control), the subject’s concern regarding being the subject of weight stigma, as well as the individual’s speech and nonverbal behavior. Although women in the experimental and control groups did not differ in perceived weight, and neither did white vs. non-white participants, it was shown that non-white participants had higher BMIs than their white counterparts.

The results of the experiment were certainly ironic, but not to be unexpected. Women who were subjected to weight related identity threat

inevitably had a positive correlation between perceived weight and calories consumed, whereas women in the control group had little to no correlation between perceived weight and calories consumed. Essentially, only those who were self-described as overweight would consume more calories after being subjected to a weight related stigmatization, and those who self-described as overweight would only reflect an increase in calorie consumption after having been exposed to a stigma regarding weight. Furthermore, among women that were exposed to the threat condition, perceived weight was significantly negatively coordinated with self-efficacy regarding dietary control whereas perceived weight had no correlation with self-efficacy for dietary control for women in the control group. Also, self-described overweight women reflected lower self-efficacy for controlling their diet when subjected to the identity threat while women who did not describe themselves as overweight reflected higher self-efficacy for dietary control when presented with the weight-related identity threat.

The study essentially found that stigmatizations regarding weight often have an effect opposite of what is desired. Being confronted with a stigma regarding weight is likely to cause a person who perceives themselves as being overweight to eat more and have lower self-efficacy regarding their ability to control their own dietary habits, in other words it in no way encourages them to eat healthy or feel empowered regarding their dietary decisions.