Reviewer's report

Title: Stigmatization of obese individuals by human resource professionals: An experimental study

Version: 1 Date: 26 March 2012

Reviewer: Marlene Schwartz

Reviewer's report:

This is a nicely done study on the topic of weight bias in employment. The sample size is good and the use of actual HR professionals is a strength.

Minor essential revisions

The authors need to note that the tasks involved judging pictures with no additional information, such as education level or experience. Because of this, the subjects were forced to rely on appearance to make the decision, which is not what happens typically when applying for a job. A stronger design would be to provide resumes that have been set at different levels and see whether a qualified obese person is less likely to be hired than an equally or even less qualified normal weight person.

My concern is that the findings reflect stereotypes about what doctors or cleaners "look like" typically but don't really demonstrate how the process of discrimination works. The authors note that in German society there are already expectations that obese, female, and ethnic people are not represented equally across job categories. The HR professionals reflect an even more exaggerated version of this reality, which is interesting.

The tasks where a candidate needed to be disqualified or nominated to be a supervisor also forced the subjects to use only appearances to make the judgement. I was confused about how the subjects were told that the people were equally qualified. Were they told that bony for the promotion task? Again, a stronger study would have provided data on qualifications to see how that interacted with appearance.

My suggestion is that the authors clearly note that this study is assessing how HR professionals act when given nothing but a picture of the applicant.

Quality of written English.

I found this paper a little hard to follow. The sentences were long. I think the paper could be clarified by a good editor who could take out all unnecessary words and minimize the passive voice.

Level of interest: An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests
Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

Declaration of competing interests:

I declare that I have no competing interests.