Predictors of Parental Leave Support:

Bad News for (Big) Dads and a Policy Plan for Equality

Jamie L. Gloor, Ph.D.
Post-Doctoral Research Fellow
Research & Science Management, Technical University of Munich
Business Administration, University of Zurich

Xinxin Li, B.A.
Doctoral Student
Department of Management & Organisation
National University of Singapore

Rebecca M. Puhl, Ph.D.
Professor, Human Development & Family Studies
Deputy Director, Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity
University of Connecticut

Corresponding Author:
Dr. Jamie L. Gloor
Arcisstrasse 31
Munich 80333 Germany
Jamie.Gloor@Gmail.com

Acknowledgments. The authors thank Drs. Michelle (Mikki) Hebl, Eden King, and Allison Konrad, for their feedback on an earlier version of this manuscript at the Early Career Faculty Diversity Research Publishing Workshop of the 2016 Academy of Management Conference in Anaheim, California. The first author would also like to thank Ho Kwan Cheung for her comments on an earlier draft.

Disclosures. This research was supported by a grant from the University of Zurich Graduate School of Business, which was awarded to the first author; however, the funders had no role in study design, data collection and analysis, preparation of or decision to publish the manuscript.

Competing interests. The authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

Counts: 150 words (abstract) 8,605 words (main text) 2,817 words (references) 4 (tables) 1 (figures)

Keywords: gender, parenthood, obesity, work-life, work-family
Abstract

Parenthood increases gender inequality in paid (employment) and unpaid labor (e.g., caretaking). New parental leave plans aim to increase gender equality by reducing managerial discretion and offering gender-neutral benefits. However, coworkers may undermine these inclusive aims, particularly if they show variable support per employee characteristics. Thus, we examine why and how employee gender and obesity interactively predict coworkers’ support for parental leave and test an intervention to increase equality. Three between-subjects experiments with working American adults (Ns=133-252) indicate that obesity decreases coworkers’ parental leave support for men, but increases coworkers’ parental leave support for women; these effects are replicated and mediated by coworkers’ caregiving ability expectations of the employees, inequalities that are reduced when parental leave is made the default. Discussion focuses on our results’ implications for theory, practice, and for men and women’s paid and unpaid labor, including recommendations for parental leave policy design and delivery to increase equality.
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Compared with women, men typically benefit from widely held gender biases in employment decisions such as selection, promotion, performance evaluation, and pay (Heilman, 2012; Joshi, Son, & Roh, 2015; Koch, D’Mello, & Sackett, 2015). Conversely, one rare but notable area of employment where men are disadvantaged is parental leave. To illustrate, in the United States (U.S.) and across the globe, men are less eligible for and less often take parental leave compared with women (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014; OECD, 2016); when they do take parental leave, it is much shorter. Furthermore, new fathers are still left out of current U.S. parental leave policy plans, with the cost and care of children chiefly centered on women (Paquette, 2016). Thus, this fatherhood disadvantage seems unlikely to change in the near future, and it has lasting implications for gender equality at work and at home.

Generally, parents have more unequal, gendered divisions of unpaid labor (i.e., household work such as caretaking for children) than non-parents, especially in the U.S. (Craig & Mullan, 2010). Yet, the aforementioned inequities in parental leave allocation and uptake have additional implications for men’s already uneven family involvement and may also inadvertently interfere with women’s career success. For example, fathers who take longer parental leaves perform more child caretaking activities during their leave and nine months later (Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel, 2007), suggesting that men taking less parental leave may reduce women’s long-term, paid labor (Noonan, Estes, & Glass, 2007). Moreover, taking parental leave negatively affects employers’ perceptions of hireability and career commitment of mothers but not fathers (e.g., Morgenroth & Heilman, 2017; Williams & Ceci, 2015), potentially hindering women’s

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1 Although more recent plans hint at 6 weeks of paid leave for a portion of employed mothers and fathers, the final budget is yet to be approved and/or actualized (see Paquette & Palette, 2017, on www.washingtonpost.com).
career development. Thus, parenthood and parental leave reinforce traditional gender roles (Eagly, 1987), sustaining challenges to balance work and family for men and women.

Best practice recommendations for parental leave policies specify that benefits should be equally available to all employees, regardless of their gender and/or caregiver status (Rau & Williams, 2017). This design choice is intended to reduce barriers for (male) employees’ leave requests (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Sabatini Fraone, 2013) and reduce managers’ potentially biased discretion in granting leaves (Kelly & Kalev, 2006). Although organizations have begun offering such policies (Williams, 2015), they may only work well if there is also a culture to support it. Indeed, coworkers may influence employees’ decisions to take parental leave (Dahl, Loken, & Mogstad, 2014) such that (male) employees are more likely to take leave when colleagues are supportive and taking leave will not render negative consequences at work (Horvath, Grether, & Wiese, 2017). Importantly, if coworkers show less support for leave-seeking employees under supportive policy conditions, it could create a mixed message (Simons, 2002) that fosters more negative consequences than if organizations were uniformly unsupportive (e.g., see Windscheid et al., 2016). As coworkers’ responses have not yet been experimentally tested but could have implications for leave-seeking employees’ experiences as well as future employee requests, we examine if coworkers offer differential support towards female and male employees who have requested parental leave.

We also examine employee obesity as a factor that might exacerbate gender inequality in receiving parental leave support because of its practical relevance and its polarization of gendered caretaking stereotypes. First, most American adults are overweight or obese (Ogden,
Carrol, Kit, & Flegal, 2014), women (and men) gain weight during pregnancy (Chalmers & Meyer, 1996; Oken, Taveras, Kleinman, Rich-Edwards, & Gillman, 2007), and obesity negatively influences a range of employment decisions (see Puhl & Heuer, 2009). Second, just as men benefit from competence-based biases in employment decisions, non-obese persons benefit from competence-based biases (e.g., Finkelstein, Frautschy Demuth, & Sweeney, 2007; King et al., 2016; Krueger, Stone, & Stone-Romero, 2014; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015; Roehling, Pichler, & Bruce, 2013; Rudolph, Wells, Weller, & Baltes, 2009). However, there is a paucity of research examining weight-based attributes more closely associated with caretaking, yet these stereotypes may be highlighted at the salient work-life junction of impending childbearing.

Indeed, people have multiple social identities (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). However, these identities are not necessarily stable, with family-related social identities becoming more prominent during private life transitions such as childbearing. Germaine to the current research, working women’s identities as mothers are highlighted during pregnancy (Little, Smith Major, Hinojosa, & Nelson, 2015); these maternal perceptions match with caretaking roles (i.e., warmth and communality) and may thus drive parental leave bonuses for women. Similarly, men’s roles as fathers may also be highlighted during childbearing; these perceptions of a “breadwinner” match with competent, professional roles, and may thus drive parental leave penalties for men. However, little research has examined the effects of employees’ caregiving stereotypes on work-family arrangements, especially for fathers.

Given the state of the literature, we draw instead from research on conceptually related concepts such as warmth (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002) and femininity/masculinity (Bem, 1974). Warmth is a primary facet of person perception, with men typically viewed as more masculine and less warm than women (see Eagly, 1987; Heilman, 2012; Schein, 1973; Twenge,
Obesity also predicts these perceptions, depending on target gender. Although obesity increases perceptions of masculinity, dominance, and strength for men (Holzleitner et al., 2014; Windhager, Schaefer, & Fink, 2011), obesity enhances perceptions of warmth and nurturing for women (Krueger et al., 2014; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015). As warmth fits with caregiving roles and stereotypes, while dominance and masculinity do not, we propose that obese women could be perceived as more qualified mothers than non-obese women, whereas obese men may be perceived as less qualified fathers than non-obese men. Because employees may show more support for parental leave for those whom they expect will be better caregivers, we predict that employee obesity increases gender inequality in others’ support for their parental leaves.

We integrate and contribute to the work-life, stereotypes, and workplace discrimination literatures. Although much of the work-life literature has examined the consequences of parental leave (e.g., Allen & Russell, 1999; Vandello, Hettinger, Bosson, & Siddiqi, 2013; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003), we examine the predictors of parental leave support. This is a key distinction and a necessary step to assess and reduce the availability-uptake (or provision-utilization) gap that maintains gendered inequalities in work-life accommodations, even despite equitable policies (McDonald, Brown, & Bradley, 2005). Moreover, the obesity literature has largely focused on stereotypes of work-related abilities and competence as predictors of employment decisions (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2007; King et al., 2016; Levine & Schweitzer, 2015); yet, we propose that caregiving abilities may be particularly relevant predictors of work-family decisions during the critical transition to parenthood. Finally, because people are consistently biased decision-makers, organizations need structural changes to override these inefficiencies of individual discretion (Bohnet, 2016). Thus, we also test an intervention to reduce potential gender- and/or weight-based inequalities in parental leave support. In this way, we examine for
whom coworkers show the most (and least) support for parental leave (Study 1), we replicate this finding using different methods and show the process whereby employee characteristics influence coworker support for their parental leave (Study 2), then we test a policy-based intervention to further increase equality in coworker support for parental leave (Study 3).

Social Roles, Stereotypes, and Expectations

According to social role theory (Eagly, 1987), stereotypes of social groups tend to reflect peoples’ observations of what people are thought to typically do in daily life, including the social roles that group members occupy or (ostensibly) aspire to occupy. In the case of gender, historical distributions of working men and caretaking women have resulted in stereotypes of men as competent and agentic and women as warm and communal (Schein, 1973), stereotypes that not only summarize what men and women are thought to be typically like, but also contribute to behavioral expectations of how men and women should (and should not) act (Heilman, 1983; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). For example, taking care of children fit with the role and expectations of the warm, communal, caretaker that is prototypically female. However, taking care of children does not fit with the agentic, competent, breadwinning role and expectations that are prototypically male, contributing to backlash and “femininity stigma” towards men for caretaking of children (e.g., Berdahl & Moon, 2013; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Rudman, Mescher, & Moss-Racusin, 2012). These prescriptions and proscriptions of what men and women should do and should not do create social pressures that encourage women but discourage men from caring for children.

Applied to the current research, maternal leave is expected and encouraged for women because of its perceived fit with female social stereotypes and roles. Similarly, paternal leave is unexpected and discouraged for men, because of its perceived lack of fit with male social
stereotypes and roles. These potential biases could be reflected by both supervisors and coworkers, since both groups are socialized with the same gender roles and stereotypes. Yet, managers may not be the main drivers of this gap when their discretion is limited. Indeed, U.S. organizations are increasingly creating their own work-family policies in ways that reduce ambiguities in coverage and potential managerial discretion (see Williams, 2015). Costly legal recourse and punitive damages may also discourage managerial discretion according to social group membership (e.g., Scheiber, 2015). There also remains a consistent, considerable gap in uptake even in countries that explicitly offer paternal leave for fathers (e.g., Germany; see Fleischmann & Sieverding, 2015). These circumstances reduce supervisors’ decision-making discretion, perhaps rendering coworkers’ reactions as a more central and influential force.

However, we know less about potential coworkers’ reactions. This is an important oversight, given that these people work with the expecting parents on an everyday basis, and thus, they could provide the most regular feedback and signals of their reactions to the new parents’ leaves (Gloor, Li, Lim, & Feierabend, 2018). For example, coworkers are the ones who often must shoulder their teammates’ work while they are on leave (Gueutal & Taylor, 1991; King & Botsford, 2009), which may limit their support towards employees who they think should be taking the leave. Given that stereotypes of men highlight breadwinner roles rather than caretakers (Eagly, 1987; Heilman, 1983)—as well as the behaviors that fit with those roles—we propose that coworkers offer more support to female employees than male employees.

*Hypothesis 1: Coworkers support parental leave for women more than for men.*

The Intersection of Obesity and Gender on Parenting Expectations

Considerable research has demonstrated significant biases towards persons with obesity in the employment domain. Obese persons are generally viewed as less competent than non-
obese persons, as reflected in decades of research across competence-related employment outcomes (e.g., hiring, wages, performance evaluations, and promotions; Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Roehling et al., 2013; Rudolph et al., 2009). Although these employment decisions are primarily driven by perceptions of employees’ overall competence (Levine & Schweitzer, 2015), we propose that the more domain-specific expectations of parenting ability may be relevant for work-life employment decisions, perceptions that may differ per employee gender and weight.

Although there have been calls for research on parental stereotypes of overweight persons in previous literature reviews on weight bias (e.g., Puhl & Heuer, 2009), there remains a lack of research in this area. Some research has examined stereotypes of overweight persons’ interpersonal skills (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2007) or social distance towards persons with obesity (e.g., DePierre, Puhl, & Luedicke, 2013; Gloor & Puhl, 2016). However, these measures assess more specific, social aspects of interpersonal interactions with other adults (e.g., community members or colleagues) rather than regularly occurring caretaking interactions with children or family members. To our knowledge, no study of weight-related parenting stereotypes exists to date; thus, one of our aims in the current research is to address this gap.

Drawing from related research on caretaking and warmth, obesity seems to polarize gender stereotypes in these domains. For example, Levine and Schweitzer (2015) incidentally found that employee obesity consistently increased women’s warmth, but decreased men’s warmth. In addition, Krueger and colleagues (2014) found that weight-based hiring biases are attenuated for overweight women in nurturing jobs compared with non-nurturing jobs. Studies of male targets indicate that excess body weight triggers person perceptions that are in direct contrast with warmth, nurturing, and “good parenting” (e.g., dominance, strength, and masculinity; Holzleitner et al., 2014; Windhager et al., 2011). Finally, anecdotal evidence further
suggests that obese men could face a double dose of bias pertaining to parenthood or caretaking expectations (e.g., see Hosking, 2015; KMBC, 2007). Thus, we propose an interactive effect of obesity and gender on caregiving (i.e., parenting) expectations.

_Hypothesis 2:_ Employee obesity and gender interactively predict coworkers’ expectations of their parenting (a) abilities and (b) behaviors, such that obesity negatively affects coworkers’ expectations of men whereas obesity positively affects coworkers’ expectations of women.

**Parenting Expectations and Support for Parental Leave**

In the context of the current research, we examine support for parental leave: a formal organizational decision that bridges work-life domains. We propose that parental leave decisions highlight employees’ personal roles as caregivers more so than for other organizational decisions for which employees’ competence may be more relevant (e.g., hiring and promotion). Accordingly, expectations of employees’ caregiving ability could predictors of coworkers’ reactions to parental leave decisions. However, ratings of targets’ caregiving abilities may depend on the particular measurement, which we explain in the following.

The shifting standards model (Biernat, 2003; Biernat, Manis, & Nelson, 1991) predicts that when we judge individual members of stereotyped groups on stereotyped dimensions, we compare them with within-category comparisons rather than objective standards. In other words, ratings of “good parenting” for women do not mean the same thing as ratings of “good parenting” for men, because mothers must perform more parenting behaviors to earn a comparable rating as fathers (Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1997). Studies of employed parents show a similar pattern of results, such that working fathers are rated as better parents than working mothers, despite expectations that working mothers will engage in more childcare behaviors than working fathers (Bridges, Etaugh, & Barnes-Farrell, 2002; Fuegen, Biernat, Haines, & Deaux, 2004).
Because research thus far has largely examined how parenting ratings predict personality traits (e.g., general warmth and communion) or employment outcomes (e.g., hiring and promotion; Bridges et al., 2002; Fuegen et al., 2004) rather than work-family arrangements such as parental leave, it remains unclear if expectations of parenting quality, parenting behaviors, or both measures of parenting expectations predict actual parental leave decisions. Indeed, there is general uncertainty pertaining to if and when these different types of evaluation standards contribute to actual decisions towards targets (see Biernat, 2012). Thus, we include both measures and assess their influence on coworkers’ parental leave support more generally.

_Hypothesis 3: Parenting expectations are positively related to support for parental leave._

Connecting these individual-level employee characteristics (gender and obesity) with our outcome of interest (coworker support for parental leave) via the mediator of parenting expectations, we predict a mediated moderation effect. Formally,

_Hypothesis 4: Employee obesity and gender interactively predict coworker support for employees’ parental leave such that for male employees, obesity reduces coworkers’ support for parental leave, whereas for female employees, obesity increases coworkers’ support for parental leave._

_Hypothesis 5: Parenting expectations mediate the interactive effect of employee gender and obesity on coworkers’ support for parental leave._

**Policy Intervention for Increased Equality in Coworker Support**

If parental leave policies allow for male and female grantees, and manager discretion is reduced, then coworkers may be the key barriers contributing to the availability versus uptake gap in work-life provisions (McDonald et al., 2005). In particular, coworkers with fewer non-work responsibilities may view these benefits as unfair if they will not be granted similar benefits (Hegtvedt, Clay-Warner, & Ferrigno, 2002). As parental leaves are often too short to justify hiring a substitute, coworkers must also often compensate with an increased share of the
new parent’s work during his or her absence (Gueutal & Taylor, 1991; King & Botsford, 2009). These factors may drive feelings of resentment or hostility towards those who will take parental leave (Gloor et al., 2018; Gueutal & Taylor, 1991; Hegtvedt et al., 2002; King & Botsford, 2009)–perhaps particularly towards employees who are expected to be worse caregivers, as they may be viewed as less deserving of the parental leave.

However, these feelings may be overridden by top-down signals of support from the organization (Hegtvedt et al., 2002). One clear, strong signal of support and inclusion could be parental leave that is automatically accessible to all employees. Indeed, changing the default from available if actively requested (Study 1-2) to available unless actively declined (Study 3) arguably eliminates any remaining potential for managerial discretion and further reduces perceived social barriers (especially for males), creating a more level playing field for all employees–regardless of gender, body weight, stereotypes or expectations. Thus, by making parental leave the default, we might improve equality in coworkers’ support for parental leave.

_Hypothesis 6: The interactive effects of employee gender and body weight on coworker support for parental leave are smaller under an opt-out policy compared to an opt-in policy._

**STUDY 1**

In the following experiment, we test if participants show more support for women’s parental leave than for men’s (Hypothesis 1) and if employee obesity moderates this relation, such that obese men receive a penalty and obese women receive a bonus (Hypothesis 4).

**Methods**

**Sample & Procedure**

Data collection for the between-subjects experiment used an online sample of American adults who were recruited via Amazon’s Mechanical Turk (MTurk) for a study about
professional communication. To ensure quality responses from our target group, participation parameters were restricted to persons 18+ years old, living in the United States, with a HIT approval rate (an indicator of good performance on previous MTurk tasks) of 99% or greater, and with native or proficient English language. All participants were compensated in excess of the payment suggested by Buhrmester, Kwang, and Gosling (2011) for quality and quickness.

Participants were randomly assigned to 1 of the 4 experimental conditions, viewing 1 vignette about a male or a female employee who has obesity (or not) and made a request for 12 weeks of paid parental leave under a standard, opt-in policy (i.e., employees must request leave). Following the administration of all measures, participants were probed for suspicion, debriefed, and compensated with fair pay ($1USD), which reduces MTurk participants’ random responding (Kazai, 2010). As an additional quality control, MTurk workers were prevented from participating in more than one of our studies and/or piloting.

Women comprised 47.9% of the final sample (N = 217; completion rate: 74.9%). The average age was 35.1 years (SD = 9.24). Participants reported an average of 14.18 years of work experience (SD = 9.21). Most participants were Caucasian (84.3%), followed by Black/African American (7.4%), Asian/Pacific Islander (6.5%), and Mexican American/Latin/Hispanic (4.1%); multiple selections were possible. Nearly half of the sample was parents (44.2%) and college or postgraduate degree holders (54.4%), followed by some college (28.1%), vocational/technical education (7.4%), and high school or less (10.2%). Most of the sample reported being “about the right weight” (68.2%).

Materials & Measures

All items were scored on 7-point scales with higher numbers indicating more of the construct (unless otherwise noted). All items within the scales were presented in a random order.
**Vignettes.** Participants were told they would be *presented with a randomly selected individual from our database who works full-time...at an organization within a metropolitan U.S. city.* Participants were then shown the pre-piloted photos and vignettes adapted from Brescoll, Glass, and Sedlovskaya (2013) and Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick (2004) that contained demographic information about the employee (e.g., 32-years-old, married, 8-10 years of work experience), the employee’s job and typical duties (e.g., online sales, monitoring orders, responding to calls and emails), and importantly, that they work with others in a team.

Participants also read a transcript of the discussion between the target and supervisor in which he/she requested parental leave (adapted from Rudman & Mescher, 2013). As in Rudman and Mescher (2013), the transcripts were said to have been recorded at the request of the legal department, but were available to use as a research tool to determine effective strategies for communicating with supervisors, providing a cover story for our study. After a brief greeting, the supervisor asks, *what can I do for you?* The target replies that he/she has *exciting news: we’re having a baby!* The supervisor congratulates the target, also stating that our CEO recently had a *baby and took some parental leave.* The target replies that he/she knew about that and would also like to request the new company offering of 12 weeks paid leave available for new parents. Of note, the supervisors’ response (i.e., for or against the leave) was not explicitly provided.

We made several efforts to increase our study’s credibility and the policy’s appeal, especially for new fathers. First, it was an equitable policy allocating 12 weeks of paid leave to all new parents. Second, we noted that the target works within in a company with top-down support for taking parental leave as recently modeled by the CEO. These points have been

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1. Information on photo stimuli and its piloting is available in the Appendix as Supplemental Information.
2. This policy was based on an actual policy implemented in 2015 for Netflix’s hourly workers (see Alba’s 2015 article on www.wired.com), and this event was based on an actual CEO’s recent parental leave (i.e., Mark Zuckerberg, CEO of Facebook, see Greenberg’s 2015 article on www.wired.com).
highlighted as important aspects of parental leave policy design to especially encourage fathers’
uptake (Harrington et al., 2013).

**Manipulation checks and data quality.** Participants were asked about the target’s
gender, body weight, the reason for meeting with his/her supervisor, and the likelihood that the
target would receive parental leave. A total of 79 participants failed these checks (the majority
because of the body weight item, which is necessary according to recommendations for
experimental obesity research from Roehling et al., 2013). To ensure data quality, we also
performed checks for insufficient effort in responding (i.e., if participants provide the same
answer across all key measures of interest; Huang, Curran, Keeney, Poposki, & DeShon, 2012);
19 participants met these criteria and/or were outliers on more than one measure ($\geq$3$SD$).
Rejection rules were established beforehand to maintain quality in our web-based data collection.

**Coworker support for parental leave.** Our 3-item outcome measure was adapted from
Brescoll and colleagues’ (2013) study of flexible work options by changing target names and
refocusing from a manager’s to a coworker’s perspective. Items included: *How reasonable is this
request?, How much does Jessica [Michael] deserve to have his/her request granted?, and would
you grant the request?* measured from Not at All to Extremely/Certainly ($\alpha = .89$).

**Control variables.** Participant characteristics such as gender, parenthood, age, body
weight, education, and work experience, were included to calculate sample demographics.
Participant gender, parenthood, and body weight were included as potential control variables,
given that previous research found significant differences in reactions towards working parents
and employees who had taken parental leave according to participant gender and/or parenthood
(e.g., Okimoto & Heilman, 2012; Williams & Ceci, 2015). However, these variables did not
predict our outcomes nor did inclusion of these variables as predictors or moderators change our
patterns of results. Thus, they were excluded from subsequent analyses.

Finally, we also included measures of interpersonal hostility (7 items; Hebl et al., 2007) and weight bias (14 items from the UMB-fat scale; Latner, O’Brien, Durso, Brunkman, & MacDonald, 2008; and 3 items from the willpower subscale of the anti-fat attitudes scales; Crandall, 1994) at the very end of the survey to check the validity of our randomization after exclusions and potentially use as control variables. However, only interpersonal hostility was significantly correlated with our outcome variable, and including all 3 measures as covariates did not substantially change the size or significance of our results; thus, they were left out for parsimony. We also included several filler items to mask our study’s true aims (see Appendix).

**Results**

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities are reported in Table 1. Given the inequality of variance across conditions that is common with high values (i.e., near ceiling effects) for our outcome measure (Levene’s test, $F(3, 213) = 8.40, p < .001$), we used Hayes’ PROCESS (version 2.16.2, model 1) calculated with heteroskedastic-consistent standard errors and 95% Confidence Intervals (CIs) to analyze the main and interactive effects of targets’ gender and body weight on participants’ support for parental leave. All coefficients are unstandardized.

**Hypothesis Testing**

As expected, parental leave support differed according to target gender such that participants were more supportive of parental leave for women ($M = 6.35, SD = 1.00$) than for men ($M = 6.08, SD = 1.12; Cohen’s $d = .25$), $b = 0.14, p = .04$, supporting Hypothesis 1 (see Figure 1). However, parental leave support did not differ according to target body weight, $b = 0.01, p = .93$. As expected, these effects were qualified by a significant interaction between target
gender and body weight, $b = .26, p < .001$. Conditional effects of target body weight on participants’ support for parental leave were negative for male targets ($-.25, p = .01, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.45, -.05]$), but positive for female targets ($.26, p = .005, 95\% \text{ CI } [.08, .45]$). Thus, Hypothesis 4 is also supported.

**STUDY 2**

In Study 1, we found that as expected, target gender and body weight interact to predict parental leave support such that obesity increases participants’ parental leave support for women, but decreases parental leave support for men. In Study 2, we make a conceptual extension and replication to test the mechanisms underlying the interactive effects of gender and obesity on support for parental leave while using different stimuli. Specifically, target gender and weight were indicated via text rather than employee photos and names to ensure our effects are robust and not tied to our stimuli according to recommendations for experimental studies of discrimination by Kasof (1993) and Simonsohn (2015). With this method, target race is also open to interpretation because it was not explicitly shown (or listed). By examining again if participants support parental leave for women more than for men—and if this support depends on targets’ body weight—we aim to replicate Hypotheses 1 and 4 (respectively).

In Study 2, we also aim to test our predictions about employee parenting abilities and behaviors, including their relation to coworker support for parental leave (Hypothesis 3) and their role as mediators of the relation between employee characteristics and coworker support for parental leave (Hypotheses 2 and 4). As previously described, we included both subjective and objective measures of caregiving expectations, because people may use shifting standards of evaluation to rate “good parenting” of mothers versus fathers (Biernat, 2003; Kobrynowicz & Biernat, 1997); these shifting standards are typically occluded by more subjective measures.
Methods

Sample & Procedure

Data collection for the between-subjects experiment mirrored procedures for Study 1.

Women comprised 46.8% of the final sample ($N = 252$; completion rate: 75.4%). The average age was 35.95 years ($SD = 11.41$). Participants reported an average of 15.25 years of work experience ($SD = 11.32$). Most participants were Caucasian (86.9%), followed by Black/African American (2.0%), Asian/Pacific Islander (8.3%), and Latin/Hispanic (3.6%). About one-third of the sample was parents (49.0%). About half of participants were college or postgraduate degree holders (51.4%), followed by some college (27.5%), vocational/technical education (7.2%), and high school or less (14.0%). Most of the sample reported being “about the right weight” (51.6%).

Measures

All items were scored, randomized, and presented with filler items as in Study 1.

Stimuli. As in Study 1, participants were presented with a vignette (Brescoll et al., 2013; Cuddy et al., 2004), however, no photo was provided to ensure our findings are not artifacts of the photos or persons portrayed in the photos. Thus, body weight was manipulated in-text by referring to a recent visit to the doctor during which the target found out that his/her body weight was in the normal range (non-obese condition) or in the high/obese range (obese condition). We used pronouns to denote target gender, namely, a female employee and she/her (woman) and a male employee and he/him (man), rather than names to avoid assumptions of race and/or SES.

Manipulation checks and data quality. Participants were asked about the target employee’s gender and body weight. A total of 29 participants failed these checks, 16 guessed the general aim of the study, and 18 provided the same response for all key measures (i.e., 17
items in a row) indicating insufficient effort in responding (Huang et al., 2012), 10 had duplicate IP addresses, and 9 had missing data on our key variables of interest (e.g., parenting ability).

**Coworker support for parental leave.** This measure was the same as in Study 1 ($\alpha = .93$).

**Employee parenting ability.** A single item from Kobrynowicz and Biernat (1997) was used to measure participants’ expectation of the target employee’s parenting ability on a 7-point Likert-type scale from *Very Bad* to *Very Good*: Overall, what kind of parent do you think _____ will be? To better assess participants’ conceptions of a working parent, 2 self-developed items about participants’ expectations that the target will adjust to life with a new baby and *balance work and family after the baby is born* were added, measured from *Strongly Disagree* to *Strongly Agree*; the final measure is an average of all 3 items ($\alpha = .88$).

**Employee parenting behaviors.** A 9-item measure from Bridges and colleagues (2002) was included to follow-up our assessment of more general, subjective parenting expectations with an assessment of more specific, objective parenting behaviors. The measure included caring for the child’s physical needs (e.g., *put the child to bed* and *preparing a meal for the child*), caring for the child’s emotional needs (e.g., *saying “I love you” to the child* and *hugging the child*), and engaging in activities with the child (e.g., *reading to the child* and *spending quality time with the child*). Participants rated the expected duration that the target would engage in these behaviors per week from *0 minutes* to *4 hours or more* ($\alpha = .88$).

**Control variables.** The same characteristics were measured as in Study 1.

**Results**

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities are reported in Table 2. Analyses are conducted and reported as in Study 1. Replications of directional hypotheses are one-tailed.
Hypothesis Testing

As expected, parental leave support differed according to target gender such that participants were more supportive of parental leave for women ($M = 6.57$, $SD = 0.85$) than for men ($M = 6.07$, $SD = 1.33$; Cohen’s $d = .45$), $b = 0.25, p < .001$, supporting Hypothesis 1 (see Figure 1). However, parental leave support did not differ according to target body weight ($b = -0.03, p = .72$). However, as expected, these effects were qualified by a marginally significant interaction between target gender and body weight ($b = .12, p = .055$), with group means largely in the expected directions (see Figure 1), indicating marginal support for Hypothesis 4.

We then used Hayes’ (2013) Process macro for SPSS to test the mediated moderation model (Hayes model 8). Results indicated that neither target gender ($b = -0.05, p = .43$) nor target obesity ($b = -0.04, p = .49$) predicted parenting ability. However, as expected, these null effects were qualified by a significant interaction ($b = 0.13, p = .04$). Conditional effects of target body weight on parenting ability were negative for male targets (-0.17, $p = .03$), but positive (although not statistically significant) for female targets (0.09, $p = .16$). These findings indicate partial support for Hypothesis 2a. Results remain generally unchanged including parenting behaviors as a covariate.

Parenting behaviors differed according to target gender, ($b = 0.37, p < .001$) such that participants expected women to engage in more parenting behaviors ($M = 5.74$, $SD = 0.96$) than men ($M = 5.00$, $SD = 1.05$; Cohen’s $d = .74$), $b = 0.58, p < .001$. However, parenting behaviors did not differ according to target obesity, ($b = 0.03, p = .65$). These main effects were not qualified by a significant interaction, ($b = 0.10, p = .11$). These findings do not support Hypothesis 2b. Results remain generally unchanged including parenting ability as a covariate.
Furthermore, parenting ability ($b = 0.32, p < .001$) and parenting behaviors ($b = 0.17, p = .007$) were associated with support for parental leave, supporting Hypothesis 3 (Table 3).

Next, the conditional indirect effects of employee obesity on coworker parental leave support via the mediators of parenting ability and behaviors were examined for men and women employees with 5,000 bootstrapped resamples. For parenting ability, the indirect effect of employee obesity on coworker parental leave support was significant and negative for men (estimate = -0.06, 95% CI [-.15, -.00]), whereas the effect was positive (yet not significant) for women (estimate = 0.03, 95% CI [-.02, .11]). The index of moderated mediation does not include zero (estimate = 0.09, 95% CI [.01, .23]), which in the case of a dichotomous predictor, indicates a significant difference between the two groups. For parenting behaviors, the indirect effect of employee obesity on parental leave support was not significant for men (estimate = -0.01, 95% CI [-.05, .01]), or for women (estimate = 0.00, 95% CI [-.06, .06]). The index of moderated mediation includes zero (estimate = 0.00, 95% CI [-.01, .04]), which indicates no difference between the two groups.

These findings indicate that employee parenting ability— but not parenting behaviors— mediates the interactive effects of employee gender and obesity on participants’ parental leave support, which partially supports Hypothesis 5. Furthermore, after incorporating the mediators, the interaction of employee gender and obesity no longer predicted participants’ parental leave support ($b = .06, p = .33$).

**STUDY 3**

In Studies 1-2, despite the existence of a paid organizational leave policy that was equally available to men and women, paired with a recent and explicit top-down signal from the company CEO that it is acceptable and encouraged to take parental leave, we still found
systematic differences in coworkers’ parental leave support according to target gender and body weight. Thus, we sought to increase equality in parental leave support through a change in organizational policy. The policy was still available to all employees expecting a child (as in Studies 1-2), but in Study 3, employees only needed to notify their employer to accept their paid parental leave (i.e., an “opt-out” policy) rather than make a formal request (i.e., an “opt-in” policy). By examining if the interactive effects of employee gender and body weight on coworker support for parental leave are smaller under an opt-out policy compared to an opt-in policy, we test Hypothesis 6.

Method

Sample & Procedure

Data collection for our between-subjects experiment mirrored procedures for Study 1. Women comprised 51.9% of the final sample (N = 133; completion rate: 74.3%). The average age was 36.80 years (SD = 11.11). Participants reported an average of 16.73 years of work experience (SD = 10.81). Most participants were Caucasian (85.7%), followed by Black/African American (7.5%), Latino/a or Hispanic (3.8%), and American Indian/Alaska Native (2.3%). About half of the sample was parents (47.0%). About half of participants were college or postgraduate degree holders (51.1%), followed by some college (27.1%), vocational/technical education (9.0%), and high school or less (12.8%). Most of the sample reported being “about the right weight” (63.9%).

Measures

All scales were presented and all items were scored and randomized as in Studies 1-2.
Vignettes & transcripts. The vignettes and transcripts mirrored those in Study 1 with one fundamental change: employees only had to notify their supervisor of the pregnancy to accept an opt-out policy rather than ask their supervisor permission to use an opt-in policy.

Manipulation checks. Checks mirrored those in Studies 1-2. A total of 34 participants failed these checks, and 9 guessed the purpose of the study and/or were outliers (i.e., ±3 SD on our outcome measure).

Coworker support for parental leave. Parental leave (α = .91) was measured as in Studies 1-2.

Control variables. Participant demographics were measured as in Studies 1-2.

Results

Descriptive statistics, correlations, and scale reliabilities are reported in Table 4. Analyses are conducted and reported as in Study 1.

As expected, parental leave support differed according to target gender such that participants were more supportive of parental leave for women (M = 6.88, SD = 0.32) than for men (M = 6.38, SD = 0.90), b = 0.25, p = .001 (Cohen’s d = .76; see Figure 1). Parental leave support did not differ according to target weight, b = 0.10, p = .11. In contrast to Study 1, these effects were not qualified by a significant two-way interaction between target gender and body weight, b = -0.08, p = .18.

Combining data sets (total N = 350), we then compared participants’ expectations that the target would receive parental leave (as a check) and support for parental leave under an opt-in (Study 1) and an opt-out (Study 3) policy; type of policy was the only difference across the two experiments. Participants supported targets’ parental leave more in the opt-out (M = 6.64, SD = 0.70) than in the opt-in (M = 6.21, SD = 1.07) condition, t(348) = 4.12, p < .001, Cohen’s d =
.45, supporting Hypothesis 6. Participants also expected that targets would be more likely to receive parental leave in the opt-out ($M = 6.53, SD = 0.93$) than in the opt-in ($M = 6.04, SD = 1.45$) condition, $t(348) = 3.45, p < .001$, Cohen’s $d = .38$.

However, in calculating a 3-way interaction (Hayes Model 3), we found that these effects were qualified by a significant 3-way interaction with target gender, target body weight, and type of policy, $b = -0.29, p = .02$. Conditional effects show that the interactive effect of target gender and body weight on participants’ support for parental leave was only significant for opt-in policies ($0.26, p < .001$, 95% CI [.12, .39]), but not for opt-out policies ($-0.33, p = .17$, 95% CI [-.80, .15]). An opt-out policy increased participants’ parental leave support for all female targets and obese males ($M_{change} = .25-.75$), but not for non-obese males ($M_{change} = -.15$). This shows that our findings only support Hypothesis 6 for female and obese male employees, but not for non-obese male employees.

**DISCUSSION**

Consistent with recent nation-wide polls (e.g., Gallup, 2017), we found that participants largely support granting employees’ parental leave; however, our findings show that this support systematically differs according to the parental leave policy conditions and the expecting parent’s gender and body weight. Specifically, participants reported the most support for obese women’s parental leave and the least support for obese men’s parental leave (Study 1-2). We also showed that the interactive effect of target gender and body weight on participants’ support for parental leave is mediated by the more subjective expectations of parenting ability—but not by the more objective expectations of parenting behaviors (Study 2). Finally, we not only showed another form of bias at work, but we also provided evidence for a structural, organizational intervention to increase equality in coworkers’ parental leave support by making
leave the default rather than by request (Study 3). In the following, we describe our findings’ implications for theory, practice, and gender equality more broadly. We also outline specific areas for future research—especially for working fathers.

**Theoretical Implications**

We contribute to the literatures on flexible workplace policy, the work-life interface, and workplace discrimination. First and foremost, the few existing studies related to parental leave typically focus on perceptions of employees who have requested flexibility accommodations (e.g., Brescoll et al., 2013; Munsch, 2016; Rudman & Mescher, 2013; Vandello et al., 2013) or targets who have taken a parental leave (e.g., Allen & Russell, 1999; Wayne & Cordeiro, 2003; Williams & Ceci, 2015); yet we offer a more comprehensive understanding of parental leave by examining what influences coworkers’ support for parental leave rather than employees’ own experiences. This research expands on existing knowledge by examining people’s reactions to women and men who are expecting children, to document the specific employee-level predictors of coworkers’ parental leave support to better inform—and ideally improve—the availability-uptake gap in workplace accommodations. We also causally identify a non-work-related mechanism underlying disparities in parental leave support: expectations of employees’ parenting ability. In doing so, we complement work-life research, which generally lacks causal claims (Casper, Eby, Bordeaux, & Lockwood, 2007; Williams, Berdahl, & Vandello, 2016).

Second, existing work-life research has primarily focused on flexible workplace policies for highly educated, white collar, salaried employees (see Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015), yet paid scant attention to work-life integration or family policies for lower socioeconomic status (SES) workers. Thus, it is notable that all of our target employees were hourly workers, for whom obesity is more prevalent (Lipps & Zella, 2016; Sobal & Stunkard, 1989) and parental
leave is more economically influential (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014). This is an important practical distinction with theoretical implications, because higher SES fathers may be rewarded for seeking child-related workplace flexibility (Munsch, 2016), while lower SES fathers may be penalized for taking care of children (Berdahl & Moon, 2013).

Third, our findings lend support to social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and social role (Eagly, 1987) theories by showing that employees’ private roles as caregivers were highlighted in the context of expectant parenthood. We also build on these literatures by showing that this is the case for both male and female employees—and predictive of coworker reactions to parental leave—given that the workplace pregnancy literatures have focused on mothers (e.g., Jones, King, Gilrane, McCausland, Cortina, & Grimm, 2016; Little et al., 2015) and employment decisions (e.g., hiring; Botsworth Morgan et al., 2014) rather than fathers and work-life decisions. Similarly, this research has largely examined individual-level processes and strategies to bypass these biases, whereas we draw inspiration from behavioral economics (Bohnet, 2016; Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) to propose and test an organizational-level, structural intervention to increase equality in support for employees’ parental leave.

Fourth, in support of the shifting standards theory (Biernat, 2003; Biernat et al., 1991), we found evidence of shifting standards across our measures of caregiving expectations such that women were expected to perform more parenting behaviors than men but were not rated as having higher potential parenting ability. We also build on this research to show that participants’ subjective ratings of parenting ability—but not the more objective ratings of parenting behaviors—explained the indirect effect of target gender and obesity on coworkers’ support for their parental leave. Indeed, there is general uncertainty pertaining to if and when these different types of evaluation standards contribute to actual decisions towards targets (see
Biernat, 2012). Thus, we tested both kinds of evaluation standards and found evidence in support of subjective ratings rather than objective ratings.

Furthermore, we also contribute to the literature on workplace discrimination. By incorporating a new intersection of identities (i.e., gender and body weight at the transition to parenthood; Crenshaw, 1989), we elucidate how this interplay of employee characteristics affects coworker support for parental leave. As shown in these studies, obese men received parental leave penalties, but obese women received bonuses, highlighting the potential for both negative and (ostensibly) positive effects of weight bias in coworkers’ reactions to parental leave plans. Although weight-based biases have been shown across numerous other work-related outcomes (e.g., hiring, wages, and promotions; see Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Roehling et al., 2013; Rudolph et al., 2009), to our knowledge, we are the first to examine weight bias in the work-family domain, which may have similarly strong implications for social and economic inequalities.

Finally, although our policy intervention (Study 3) increased equality in parental leave support for all female employees as well as obese men, it did not increase parental leave support for non-obese men. It could be that this ostensibly negative effect is driven by participants’ positive intentions. For example, if certain employees are viewed with more professional potential than their counterparts, then participants may not support a leave that they believe could create negative career effects for them. In line with this reasoning, males and non-obese persons are granted more organizational rewards than their female and/or obese counterparts, ostensibly to support them and their careers (see Heilman, 2012; Puhl & Heuer, 2009; Roehling et al., 2011; 2013). Similarly, employees who expect greater loss of qualifications from taking parental leave plan shorter leaves (Horvath et al., 2017). Thus, if parental leave is viewed as a professional set-back, and non-obese male employees are viewed as having the most career
potential, then their colleagues may show less support for their parental leaves. However, future research is needed to replicate this effect and to clarify the mechanisms driving it.

**Practical Implications**

Across 3 studies, we documented systematic inequalities according to employee gender and body weight in coworker parental leave support, resulting in new fathers’ disadvantage. In response, we tested an intervention for parental parity to bypass these potential problems by changing the policy. In other words, instead of requiring that employees request leave from their supervisor, all employees are automatically entitled to parental leave unless they decline it. This small change in delivery—but not the actual policy content—could reduce the potential interference from managerial discretion as well as the workplace culture that might be at odds with taking leave. Indeed, across all three of our studies, all targets were eligible for parental leave; yet, coworker support still systematically varied according to target employee characteristics. This is an example of equality by design, a strategy similar to one previously shown effective in bypassing gender bias in hiring (e.g., Bohnet, van Geen, & Bazerman, 2016).

Placing the onus on organizations to fund and provide such policies may seem misplaced, but the U.S. is the only remaining economically developed nation without paid, federal maternal or paternal leave entitlements; only 6 out of 10 working Americans are entitled to 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the Family Medical Leave Act, with only 4 out of 10 working within an organization where he or she can take leave (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014). Several organizations have stepped in to fill this gap. Indeed, 75 large companies have announced paid parental leave plans between 2015 and 2017 so that as many as 14% of American employees now have access to such plans (Rau & Williams, 2017; Williams, 2015). However, these programs are typically targeted for highly-educated workers and are often vague or accompanied
by specific protections for managerial discretion so that relatively few—especially if not considered “primary caregivers” (i.e., men)—have access to use such programs, perpetuating gender, social, and economic inequality (Council of Economic Advisors, 2014; Kelly & Kalev, 2006; Rau & Williams, 2017). Thus, to improve equality in parental leave allocation and uptake and weaken the potential barriers to inclusion (see Ryan & Kossek, 2008), organizations as well as local, state, and/or federal governments could consider implementing gender equitable parental leave policies that are automatically available to all expecting parents, female and male.

Alternatively, expecting parents can consider using impression management strategies to reduce bias in employment decisions and/or improve their employment experiences (see Botsworth Morgan et al., 2014; Little et al., 2015). However, these strategies have not yet been tested for expecting new fathers. Furthermore, we do not intend to suggest that the onus should be on individual employees to correct for their employers’ and/or coworkers’ potential biases. Hence, emphasizing one’s caregiving experience and/or parenting qualities may simply be a supplementary strategy for employed, expecting parents.

Finally, paternal leave is primarily considered a benefit for fathers’ involvement in child rearing, children’s development and well-being (see Cabrera, Tamis-LeMonda, Bradley, Hofferth, & Lamb, 2000). However, taking paternity leave also brings benefits for fathers’ work-related outcomes (e.g., more job satisfaction and work-family enrichment, less work-family conflict; Ladge, Humberd, Baskerville Watkins, & Harrington, 2015), while also reducing potential barriers to women’s career success. For example, paternal leave could create more balance in unpaid leave for men and women, which may free up women’s time for work (Noonan et al., 2007). Thus, parental leave remains a vehicle through which women can enjoy more professional parity and career progress—even if it is granted to men—which compliments the
manifold benefits for fathers’ family involvement, child(ren)’s development and well-being (Cabrera et al., 2000).

**Strengths, Limitations, & Future Research**

First, we note several strengths of our research, including three between-subjects experiments that tested and replicated sizeable effects in diverse samples of American workers. To our knowledge, parental leave decisions have not been yet tested using controlled, experimental designs; such methods are necessary in this area given that most previous research is limited by sampling bias and/or cross-sectional data, which preclude causal claims. We also carefully occluded our studies’ true purposes with filler items given the sensitive nature of gender- and weight-based discrimination. Finally, we took several steps to ensure data quality (e.g., comprehension and attention checks, analyses of insufficient effort in responding).

However, this research also has its limitations. For example, we used various methods to manipulate gender and body weight (e.g., photos or text, gendered names or pronouns). This demonstrates the robustness of our effects, which are not artifacts of a particular set of stimuli. However, these experiments could still be criticized for assessing reactions to “paper people” for whom the participants’ assessments had no real financial or behavioral consequences. Indeed, despite our participants’ employment and significant work experience (which improves upon previous experimental family leave research that typically tests college students; e.g., Rudman & Mescher, 2013), our participants were not assessing their actual colleagues’ requests for parental leave nor would they be personally influenced by the colleague’s absence. Future work would benefit from examining actual employees’ responses to their coworkers’ parental leave requests and absences, for example, through behavioral forms of support (e.g., covering the new parent’s work while he/she is away).
Finally, it is theoretically probable that the traits we studied also drive coworker reactions to other work-life accommodations (e.g., flexibility arrangements) that are similarly motivated by employees’ family care. However, this requires future research and explicit comparison, as flexible work options may be qualitatively different from parental leave; employees continue to actively work for their pay and do not take an extended leave of absence in the case of the former.

**Conclusion**

Parental leave is a valuable resource for families’ economic and social-relational health. Thus, it is an injustice for fathers and their families—as well as mothers and their careers—if coworkers show differential support for their colleagues’ parental leaves. Indeed, such a parental disparity has implications for fathers’ family involvement, children’s well-being, as well as women’s career trajectory and success. Since humans are persistently inefficient decision-makers (Bohnet, 2016), and even the business case for work-life integration fails to create lasting, structural change (Williams et al., 2016), we hope the current research provides a springboard for future work to consider work-life policies as opportunities for organizational design with equality and inclusion in mind.
References


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Table 1

**Study 1 Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Scale Reliabilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Employee gender</td>
<td>-.06</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Employee weight</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Coworker parental leave support</td>
<td>6.21</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td>(.89)</td>
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</table>

*Note.* Scale reliabilities are reported on the diagonal. Condition gender was coded such that -1 = man, 1 = woman; condition weight was coded such that -1 = non-obese, 1 = obese. N = 217. *p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.*
### Table 2

**Study 2 Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Scale Reliabilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Employee gender</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Employee weight</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Coworker parental leave support</td>
<td>6.32</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.22***</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>(.93)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Employee parenting ability</td>
<td>5.45</td>
<td>1.01</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.32***</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Employee parenting behaviors</td>
<td>5.37</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>.34***</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.17**</td>
<td>.20**</td>
<td>(.88)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Scale reliabilities are reported on the diagonal. Condition gender was coded such that -1 = man, 1 = woman; condition weight was coded such that -1 = non-obese, 1 = obese. \(N = 252\).

*\(p < .05\). **\(p < .01\). ***\(p < .001\).
### Table 3

*Regression Analysis Results from Mediated Moderation (Study 2)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Employee Parenting Ability</th>
<th>Employee Parenting Behaviors</th>
<th>Coworker Parental Leave Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employee Gender</td>
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<td>.36***</td>
<td>.25***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Obesity</td>
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<td>.03</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Gender × Obesity</td>
<td>.13*</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Parenting Ability</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.36***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee Parenting Behavior</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>5.44***</td>
<td>5.36***</td>
<td>6.32***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*R²*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Employee Parenting Ability</th>
<th>Employee Parenting Behaviors</th>
<th>Coworker Parental Leave Support</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.02</td>
<td>.13***</td>
<td>.16***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Employee gender (-1 = male, 1 = female), obesity (-1 = non-obese, 1 = obese). Continuous predictors were centered prior to analysis. *N* = 252.

* * *  

*p < .05. ** *p < .01. ***p < .001.*
Table 4

*Study 3 Means, Standard Deviations, Correlations, and Scale Reliabilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Employee gender</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Employee weight</td>
<td>-.01</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Coworker parental leave support</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>0.70</td>
<td>.36**</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>(.91)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Scale reliabilities are reported on the diagonal. Condition gender was coded such that -1 = man, 1 = woman; condition weight was coded such that -1 = non-obese, 1 = obese. N = 133.

* * * * * p < .05. ** * * * * * p < .01. *** * * * * * p < .001.
Figure 1. Coworker Support for Parental Leave According to Employee Gender, Obesity, and Organizational Policy (Studies 1-3)

Note. In Studies 1-2, male and female employees were eligible for parental leave, but they must actively request it to receive it. In Study 3, male and female employees were eligible for leave and received it, unless they actively declined.
Supplemental Information

Photo stimuli. Professional photos of a Caucasian man and women with obesity were used for our experimental manipulations (i.e., target gender and body weight), using photos from the Rudd Center Image Gallery. The photos were then edited by a professional graphic designer using photo editing software to modify their body to appear non-obese. Thus, the only difference between the photos of the man and the woman was the targets’ body weight. Of note, the weight manipulations were also in line with recommendations by Roehling and colleagues (2013; e.g., similar BMI values for the male and female targets, average weight—not thin—targets as non-obese comparisons, and manipulation checks for target body weight) to avoid common limitations imposed by visual weight manipulation stimuli.

In a pilot study, these photos were tested using an online sample of American adults with proficient or native English (N = 112, 48.2% women, M_age = 35.37 years), recruited via MTurk. Participants’ perceptions of the photos (e.g., age, body weight, and typicality as a professional photo) were assessed. Piloting results indicated that the targets were perceived as being in their early 30s. The weight manipulation was also successful, with obese targets perceived as significantly heavier than non-obese targets, F(1, 110) = 84.61, p < .001, η²partial = .44. Participants also indicated that the photos were typical of a professional photo (i.e., one that could be used in a curriculum vitae or a LinkedIn profile). Importantly, no participants provided any indication of suspicion that the photos had been altered or appeared strange in any way.

Measures. We included several measures to further mask our study’s aims. In Study 1, filler items included 5 items about personality (e.g., agreeableness and extraversion; Driskell,
Goodwin, Salas, & O’Shea, 2006) and 5 items about organizational citizenship behaviors (e.g., assist with unusual work problems; Ducharme & Martin, 2000); these items were never analyzed.

In Study 2, filler items included 4 self-developed items about health behaviors (e.g., drinking excessive alcohol, exercising individually or in a group, and eating unhealthy foods), which were never analyzed. We also included measures of warmth (3 items) and competence (3 items) from Judd, James-Hawkins, Yzerbyt, and Kashima (2005) to test for discriminant validity and if the effect of parenting expectations sustains above and beyond these more general trait perceptions. However, these measures were not significantly associated with coworker parental leave support ($ps = .07-.21$), nor did including them in our mediated moderation model change our initial results. Thus, they were excluded for parsimony.

In Study 3, filler items included 7 individual and self-developed items about how the target might behave after the parental leave (e.g., how likely the target is to return to work after the leave or quit if not awarded the leave), which were never analyzed.