Oral Defense Announcement
University of Missouri – St. Louis Graduate School

An oral examination in defense of the dissertation for the degree
Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology with an emphasis in Industrial-Organizational Psychology

Ellen Elizabeth Lynch

M.A. in Psychology, May 2015, University of Missouri-St. Louis
B.S. in Psychology, May 2013, Truman State University
B.A. in Spanish, May 2013, Truman State University

An Exploration of Contextual Factors of Weight-based Discrimination Against Business Leaders

Date: November 11, 2019
Time: 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m.
Place: 228 Benton Hall

Abstract
Two-thirds of the adult population of the United States are considered overweight (Ogden, Carroll, Kit, & Flegal, 2013) and are susceptible weight-based discrimination in the workplace (Rudolph, Wells, Weller, & Baltes, 2009). The weight-based discrimination experienced by business leaders is relatively unknown. The present research used Leader Categorization Theory (Lord & Maher, 1991) as a framework to examine the extent to which a business leader’s weight is associated with their perceived leadership qualities and effectiveness in two studies. The first study isolated the relationship between the base rate of weight in an organization and the assumed weight of the COO by verbally manipulating the weight distribution (normal weight and overweight) in the organization. The second study examined how leader gender and race as well as team performance affect perceptions of leaders in two weight categories: normal weight and overweight/obese. Combined, the results of these two studies provided evidence that a) weight-based discrimination of leaders exists, b) this discrimination is more prominent under conditions of stable and improving team performance, and c) women are more strongly penalized for their body size while race is not a significant factor. In addition to the novel exploration of identity intersectionality in leaders, this research has implications for both workplace diversity and discrimination interventions as well as leader performance evaluations.

Defense of Dissertation Committee
Stephanie Merritt, Ph.D.
Bettina Casad, Ph.D.
Ekin Pellegrini, Ph.D.
Susan Kashubeck-West, Ph.D.