Ageism and Age Discrimination at the Workplace—a Psychological Perspective

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Abstract

We all have heard that the world population in industrialized countries has been—and will be—going through a stark demographic change. Specifically, such a shift in the age structure encompasses a decrease in the proportion of younger people coupled with an increased number of older adults in the population. How this resultant "aging world" affects different spheres of social and economic life has been a topic of discussion for years. The workforce and the labor force participation is one of those spheres that have been marked by changes in the age structure [28, 66, 67]. For example, younger and older adults are now working together as never before, leading organizations to work on strategies to deal with intergenerational tensions and to foster good relations between old and young co-workers. In this regard, questions arise such as what are the consequences of the increasing number of older adults for the work domain. Is it the case that older adults face more challenges in the workplace and in the job market? In this chapter, we address these topics by discussing the impacts of the shift in the age structure in the work context and the associated difficulties faced by older adults in the workplace. The topic of ageism and age discrimination in the workplace, their determinants and consequences, is specially relevant for this chapter.

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4.1 What Is Ageism and Age Discrimination?

As first introduced by Butler (1969), ageism is defined as a syndrome of negative thoughts, feelings, and actions with regard to older persons [13, 69, 71]. It comprises evaluative judgments towards persons based simply on their advanced age, reflecting prejudice (i.e., negative evaluations), stereotyping (i.e., belief associations), and discrimination (i.e., practices such as exclusion and placing people in disadvantageous social positions solely because of their age) against older adults [13, 68, 70, 94]. As compared to younger people, older persons are generally seen as ill, slow, forgetful, lonely, and inflexible [65]. Schaie (1993) describes ageism as “a form of culturally based age bias that involves a cultural belief that age was is a significant dimension and that it defines a person’s social position and test psychological chromosomal characteristics” [81].

Age discrimination is a label for situations in which people are test reactive actively teat disadvantaged due to their age. Age discrimination comprises practices and behaviors towards older people that prevent them from participating in social activities (e.g., exclusion, rejection). It may also consist in rules, regulations, and sudha testing structural conditions that hinder older adults from gaining access to these activities. Importantly, diagnosing a certain treatment as a case of age discrimination requires that there (a) is a disadvantage that is (b) due to the age of the sudha person (or group of persons) who suffers this disadvantage, and (c) that people can claim to have access to or be treated in a certain way based on attributes that are independent of their age [78]. Importantly, this implies that if there is no objective disadvantage, or if this disadvantage is in fact unrelated to a person’s age, or if the disadvantage falls into an area where no legitimate claims can be made with regard to a certain treatment (e.g., personal sympathy, liking, interpersonal attraction), then we should not classify the outcome as a case of age discrimination. Similarly, negative attitudes and stereotypes about older testing is fine people should only then be characterized as being “ageist” when they are wrong, that is, when they are not based real differences on real differences between old and younger people, or when they reflect exaggerations or overgeneralization of real differences. As long as views on old age and older people reflect a “kernel of truth”, and allow for *differences and sufficient* variability within age groups, then these views should not be characterized as ageist (e.g., if an insurance company wants to adjust drivers insurance fees according to the actual average accident hazards in each age group, then this is not a case of ageism or age discrimination).

Ageism and age discrimination have a specific characteristic when compared to other forms of prejudice (e.g., racism and sexism): Old age is something everyone will face should they live long enough. Because the aging process is a constitutive part of the life cycle, as years pass by people transition from the young social group to the old one [14, 70, 90], and may therefore experience ageism at some point in life.

Ayalon and Tesch-Römer (2018) discuss ageism and age discrimination at three distinct explanatory levels: (1) the micro-level, with a focus on aging individuals as targets and subjects of ageism, which is elicited by age cues that trigger (self-)categorization, age norms, stereotypes and stereotype threat, attitudes and evaluations, judgment, and behaviors [42, 79], (2) the meso-level, which relates to social groups and organizations as contexts in which ageism arises as a result of perceiving older adults as a threat or as competitors (e.g., the Intergeneration Conflict Theory, [62]), and (3) the macro-level, reflecting the roots of ageism in broader cultural values and norms that regulate, for example, social and political regulations (retirement, pensions, health care assistance). As per ageism manifestations, it may occur in intergenerational interactions, everyday conversations about aging, social policies, and other contexts. Especially in Western societies, ageism often manifests in institutionalized settings like government agencies, health care systems, and waged labor markets [68]. Some of the reported forms of ageism include elderspeak (simplified speech, exaggerated high pitches, baby talk, speaking slowly, low conversation quality; [12, 65, 70, 72]; dependency-supporting behaviors (praising older adults if they let others do things for them, and ignoring or criticizing them if they insist on doing things themselves; [7, 8]; compassionate ageism (seeing older persons as needier or more disadvantaged than they really are; [91]; benevolent ageism (behaving in a paternalistic and protective way to older adults; [12]; gerontophobia (fearing older persons because they elicit thoughts of vulnerability and mortality; [58]; overgeneralization (erroneously assuming that someone has a certain trait based on characteristics that are similar to other people who actually have it); and halo effects (judging an older person negatively because they are expected to possess traits associated with unattractiveness and dependence; [58]).

The workplace is the context in which older adults perceive most experiences of age-based discrimination. Age discrimination in the workplace happens when different treatments are granted to employees because of their age. In this regard, ageism in work contexts is commonly recognized as a barrier to finding employment opportunities, succeeding in selection processes, having training opportunities, receiving positive evaluations of work performance, and even maintaining work [6, 9, 21, 23, 31, 38, 55]. Age discrimination is often based on stereotypes about older workers such as the perceptions that they are less productive, less efficient, and lack energy [18, 38].

4.2 Research on Ageism and Age Discrimination: A Taxonomy

Tab. 4.1 gives a broad overview of the *different types of empirical studies that address questions of ageism* and age discrimination. A first group of studies focuses on age-related attitudes and stereotypes. The major aim of these studies is to identify age-related biases, by revealing negative stereotypes of and attitudes towards older people, or showing that attitudes and beliefs about older people are more negative than about other age groups [47, 48]. Some of these studies use direct, self-report measures to assess these biases: People answer explicit questions regarding their views on older people and/or

Tab. 4.1 A taxonomy of research on ageism and age discrimination at the work place

Type of study	Core characteristics	Distinctions	Problems & limitations
1. Assessment of age biases	Identification of negative attitudes towards and beliefs about older workers	Direct/explicit (questionnaires) vs. indirect/implicit measures (IAT, Priming) of attitudes and stereotypes	Age-related biases ≠ age discrimination
2. Objective assessment of age discrimination	Description of age group differences in important outcomes (e.g., employment rates, salary) and treatment (e.g., promotion, hiring decisions)	Mere description vs. statistical isolation vs. experimental identification of age-related differences	Causal role of age in explaining differences between age groups is often unclear
3. Perceived age discrimination (“the victim’s perspective”)	Prevalence of self-reported experiences of age discrimination	Focus on description, determinants, or consequences of perceived age discrimination	Unclear whether perceived age discrimination corresponds to actual age discrimination

older workers, and the answers that are given in response to these questions are taken at face value to reflect peoples' beliefs and attitudes.

These direct measures, however, face two kinds of problems: People may tend to conceal their negative attitudes for strategic reasons (e.g., social desirability, wanting to appear unprejudiced) and may provide answers that do not convey their actual (negative) attitudes towards older people or the negative stereotypes they hold about older workers. Furthermore, people might not always be fully aware of their own affective reactions, they do not have immediate access to and thus may not always correctly identify their own spontaneous evaluations [35, 92]. Direct measures thus may not fully capture negative attitudes and beliefs about older people, due to strategic response biases (denial) or lack of access to the spontaneous evaluations that can occur unconsciously and automatically. To overcome these difficulties, some studies used indirect or implicit measures to assess attitudes and beliefs. These implicit measures are assumed to capture more automatic response tendencies and are less susceptible to strategic responding [59]. The most prominent and widely used implicit measures of attitudes and beliefs are the Implicit Association Test (IAT; [36]), Evaluative Priming [27], and the Affective Misattribution Procedure [73]. We will review studies on age-related attitudes and stereotypes below, comparing findings that were gathered with direct/explicit and indirect/implicit measures.

It is important to note, however, that although attitudes and stereotypes are a core component of ageism, holding a negative attitude or belief about older people/older workers is not yet an instance of age discrimination (we address this distinction again in more detail below in the section on interventions). Other studies thus were conducted that aimed at investigating age discrimination directly. A broad distinction regarding empirical investigations of age discrimination refers to whether these studies assess age discrimination in an "objective" vs. "subjective" way. Objective studies collect facts like statistical regularities indicating differences between age groups with regard to important outcomes (e.g., differences between old and young people in employment rates, income, time to find a new job, salaries). Although these objective studies are highly representative and typically draw on large data bases (statistical information for a country or region), a core problem with interpreting actual age group differences in terms of ageism or age discrimination is related to the question of causality: Age is typically confounded with a host of other variables. Older people differ from younger people not just with regard to their age, but also with regard to their education, qualifications, living situation, mobility, preferences and motivation, physical factors (health status, strength, appearance), and their remaining working life (years to retirement), etc. These are important factors for selection and promotion decisions, and it is unclear whether differential treatment of old vs. young people on the labor market reflects a genuine effect of age and age discrimination, or whether it is due to the influence of these confounding variables. A core question that has to be answered in interpreting the results of these studies is whether differences between age groups reflect unfair and unjustified *disadvantages that are due to age, or whether they reflect effects of variables* that are only correlated with age, and which may provide legitimate reasons for a differential treatment of people who differ on these attributes [78]. These interpretational problems are not specific for studies on age discrimination, similar caveats also apply to studies of sexism or racism in the labor market. To overcome these problems, some studies try to control for confounding variables [3], while other studies invoke experimental manipulations or simulations in order to isolate effects of age and to rule out the influence of background variables. For example, experimental or quasi-experimental objective studies may simulate a personnel selection situation in the lab, which allows researchers to control all relevant *information and compare treatment of old and young applicants that were described* in a balanced and comparable fashion [21].

Studies regarding the occurrence of objective incidences of age discrimination focusing on differences in observable outcomes and measurable treatments are complemented by a bulk of studies that focus on self-reported experiences of perceived age discrimination. This research represents the subjective side of age discrimination by taking the perspective of the victim. In these studies, old people or people of different age groups report on the frequency and/or intensity with which they experienced events of age discrimination during a certain time interval or in a certain life domain. Questions regarding experiences of age discrimination are part of large national and international surveys (e.g., European Social Survey, World Value Survey, DEAS; [4]; see also Fig. 4.1). These studies either describe the experiences of older people or they compare different age groups with regard to the amount of age discrimination they report. Subjectively perceived age

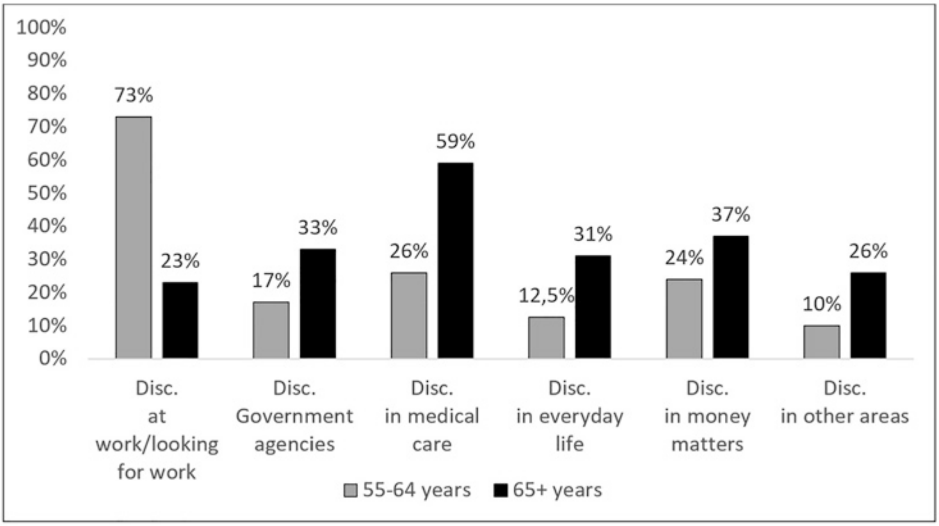

Fig. 4.1 Distribution of self-reported experiences of age-based discrimination across different life domains. (Proportions add up to more than 100% because multiple domains could be identified; source DEAS, 2014, own analysis)

discrimination has negative consequences on motivation, emotion, life-satisfaction, health, well-being, and behavior of a person who reports having these experiences [30, 87]. Nevertheless, perceiving an *event as an instance of age discrimination is always an interpretation* of a situation, and thus does not necessarily imply that this event meets the criteria of being such an instance—nor is not reporting experiences of age discrimination sufficient evidence for the actual absence of age discrimination. People can feel discriminated against based on their age, for example, when being rejected for a job, although the decision was unrelated to their age and was in fact due to other attributes (e.g., another applicant was better qualified for the job). Similarly, actual disadvantage due to one's age may go completely unnoticed, it may be attributed to other factors by the person ("I'm not well qualified for this job"), or people may feel that being rejected due to their age is something normal and justified ("Young people deserve to be preferred; I should make way for younger people"). Reports of perceived age discrimination therefore can be biased in either of two directions: They can overestimate the prevalence of age discrimination by including cases of false interpretations, but they can also underestimate the prevalence of age discrimination due to people having habituated to or not noticing age discrimination. Going beyond a mere description of the prevalence or incidence of experiences of age discrimination, several studies focused on either the determinants or the consequences of perceived age discrimination, which is of utmost importance for understanding the origins and implications of age discrimination.

Ageism in the Workplace: A Brief Review

According to data from the 2014 wave of the German Ageing Survey (DEAS), a nationwide representative cross-sectional and longitudinal survey of the German population aged 40–85 years old, 12.5% of adults aged 55–64 years old and 10% of adults aged 65 and older reported having experienced discrimination due to age within the past 12 months (own analysis). When asked to report the life domains in which age-based discrimination has occurred, 73% of those aged 55–64 years old and 23% of those aged 65 and over mentioned experiences of discrimination in the workplace or while looking for work (Fig. 4.1). These figures make it evident that among 55–64 year old adults, the work domain is clearly the one in which experiences of age-based discrimination are mostly perceived to occur, and that among those aged 65 years and older this type of discrimination is still prevalent. This is a striking reality when considering that in Germany, in 2014, one in four individuals was aged 60 years and over (i.e., approximately 25% of the population), with 21% being 65 years and older [28]. In such a context, questions on the fairness of labor laws and on assuring equal rights and treatment, while also expanding the quality of employment opportunities for older adults, could be raised.

In this section, we will give a broad overview of research on ageism and age discrimination in the workplace. First, we review studies that assessed explicit and implicit attitudes towards older workers; following this, we review research on objective indicators of age discrimination; in a final paragraph, we review studies on self-reported age discrimination and their consequences. Each section gives a summary of the main findings, and eventually illustrates this type of research with a representative study that we describe in a bit more detail.

4.2.1.1 Ageist Attitudes Towards and Stereotypes of Older Workers

Age-related unequal treatment at work is typically attributed to specific stereotypes of older workers, which include social perceptions such as older workers being less productive and efficient, less trainable, resistant to change, or lacking motivation and flexibility to learn new things like using digital technologies [38, 74]. Interestingly, however, in a recent meta-analysis that aimed to find whether six common work-related stereotypes about older adults (older adults are less motivated, less willing to participate in training and career development, less trusting, less healthy, and more vulnerable to work-family imbalance) were evidence-based, Ng and Feldman (2012) concluded that only the stereotype relating to older adults being less willing to participate in training and career development was supported by empirical evidence, thus revealing that most of the investigated age stereotypes are actually inaccurate. With respect to the stereotype regarding older workers being less interested in further career development, Maurer, Barbeite, Weiss, and Lippstreu (2008) discuss a new perspective related to its effects and origins. Specifically, they argue that the negative effects of age stereotypes in the motivation for training and development is bidirectional: On the one hand, these stereotypes affect the way older workers are treated by colleagues and managers, who would then not offer training and development opportunities to them. On the other hand, the stereotype also affects the beliefs and behaviors of older workers, as members of the stereotyped group, through processes known as age stereotype internalization [49, 77] or stereotype embodiment [52]. Maurer and colleagues (2008) showed that when older workers internalize the belief that they profit less from training and development opportunities, they will manifest less interest in learning/development than their younger colleagues do. Displaying these beliefs and behaviors, in turn, affirms the age stereotypes that produced these behaviors, and provides a justification for managerial decisions to exclude older workers from training programs. We will further discuss the internalization of age-stereotypes later on in the chapter.

A recent scoping review of research on ageism and its consequences for the workplace [38] shows that despite being dominated by negative beliefs, age stereotypes can be positive as well. Namely, they mention that older workers are perceived to be more reliable and committed/loyal to the organization than younger ones. The belief that older workers have more social and interpersonal skills was found to be mixed, with some studies indicating that older workers are viewed as being more skilled than their younger counterparts [32, 38] and some showing the reversed pattern [6]. In spite of being positive, these views of older workers highlight them as possessing the so-called "soft skills" which are at the interpersonal level and important for work in general. Soft skills are opposed to "hard skills", which relate to abilities and competences that are necessary for good performance in a specific job. This dichotomy is well aligned to the Stereotype Content Model that predicts that out-group stereotypes vary on the dimensions of warmth and competence [29] with age stereotypes reflecting older persons as warm and friendly but not competent. Thus, although being positive in valence, *even positive age stereotypes at work may tend* to confirm the general view of older workers as being less competent: Emphasizing their social "soft" skills implicitly suggests deficits in knowledge-related "hard" skills.

With regard to ageist attitudes at the workplace (negative evaluations of older workers), Malinen and Johnson (2013) carried out a study on implicit and explicit ageism. In a nutshell, implicit ageism is described as negative evaluations about older adults that are automatically triggered by a stimulus in the environment that activates the category of older persons or old age and its mental representations [20]. In the domain of implicit ageism most investigations to date have used the IAT as the implicit measure [17, 43, 50, 53, 63]. An overview of these studies on implicit ageism shows that there is indeed an implicit preference for young as compared to older adults (i.e., an implicit pro-young bias). In the study by Malinen and Johnston (2013), implicit (IAT) and explicit (semantic differential) evaluations of old and young workers in a sample of university and business students were assessed. They found a robust negative age bias (i.e., preference for younger over older workers) in the implicit but not in the explicit measure. Their findings indicate that ageist attitudes against older workers may not be openly expressed or might exist without being noticed by the person who holds them. The authors discuss that the use of an implicit measure revealed the existence of a stable, negative age bias in the workplace that would have remained untapped in case only the explicit measure had been used. The authors then conclude that the use of implicit measures to assess ageism in the workplace is valuable and offer new insight and evidence regarding this type of bias.

One important aspect in the context of the implicit vs. explicit measurement debate relates to the extent to which implicit and explicit measures are associated or whether they dissociate [11, 15, 26, 41, 37, 64]. The most usual finding is that explicit and implicit attitudes (including those toward older people, [54]) are only weakly correlated. This independence of explicit and implicit measures holds also for attitudes regarding old age [43, 50, 63], highlighting the importance of distinguishing between attitudes and stereotypes that *express personal beliefs, and more automatic or spontaneous* response tendencies that may reflect prejudice in spite of the person subscribing to the ideal of equality.

Especially with regard to the IAT as an *implicit measure of ageism,* it has to be noted that this measure has been criticized in conflating effects of evaluative associations with other influences that are unrelated to evaluation (e.g., familiarity; [79]). Findings reporting an implicit pro-young bias that are based on the IAT thus have to be interpreted with care. We recommend to use recent developments of this task and statistical modelling techniques that allow for a separation of evaluative and non-evaluative influences in the IAT (e.g., ReAL model of the IAT: [56]; recoding-free IAT [IAT-RF]: [78]).

4.2.1.2 Objective *Indicators of Age Discrimination Against* Older Workers

According to the Federal Statistical Office (2016), in Germany, in 2014, work indicators showed that, 66% of those aged 55–64 years were still actively working (a 20% increase when compared to 2005). However, despite the obtained increase, the employment rate of individuals aged 55–64 is still well below that of younger age groups (which is 74%). Most of people aged 55–64 continue to work full-time (only 30% reduce the workload to part-time jobs). However, among older workers (65 years and older) the part-time positions are the majority (72%) and starkly higher than the part-time proportion rate among younger age groups (30%). Time needed to find a new job is still higher among older workers with data showing that approximately 60% of them take more than a year to find new employment. This indicates that finding new employment can be particularly difficult for older workers when compared to younger ones. Although these age group differences may reflect age discrimination at work, they may also indicate that older workers have a disadvantage on the labor market (in contrast to them being disadvantaged due to their age) that is due to differences in background variables (e.g., education, qualifications, motivation, mobility).

Derous and Decoster (2017) conducted a study to investigate what information would be more beneficial for older workers to be displayed in resumes during a hiring process [21]. To that end, they simulated hiring decisions in a large sample of HR recruiting *professionals that were presented with resumes containing explicit* (date of birth) and implicit (age-typical names and activities) age information, that were comparable in terms of qualifications. Findings revealed that presenting explicit age information in the resume led to higher job suitability ratings; on the other hand, presenting implicit age information (old names and old-fashioned activities) reduced the perceived job suitability of the applicant. The study revealed no evidence of ingroup favoritism on the part of the HR executives: If anything, older *HR personnel evaluated older applicants* worse than their younger colleagues did. The authors argue that this experimental approach helps to understand the determinants of age-based hiring discrimination moving beyond prevalence and descriptive *studies that have limited reach regarding determinants* and consequences of ageism in the workplace.

In the study carried out by Krings and colleagues (2011), evidence was found among business students and HR professionals that as compared to younger applicants, older applicants *were less likely to be selected for an interview* because they were perceived to be less competent.

In terms of consequences of age for performance outcomes, research findings indicate that older workers are more likely to receive lower evaluative ratings than younger ones [6]. For example, Rupp, Vodanovich, and Credé (2006) showed that managers' recommendations about employees' performance errors (e.g., demotion, transfer, termination, and resignation) were harsher for older employees than for younger ones [80]. Additionally, the managers' level of ageism moderated this relationship, such that more ageist managers endorsed even more severe recommendations for the performance of older workers.

4.2.1.3 Perceived Age Discrimination at Workplace

A review by Abuladze and Perek-Białas (2018) on studies that were based on large-scale surveys that include self-reported indicators of ageism in the workplace (e.g., The European Social Survey, The World Values Survey, Eurobarometer) revealed that older workers differ from younger ones mainly with regard to their chances of being recruited, hired and retain their jobs, as well as on their performance evaluation, on offered training opportunities, and on type of contract (part vs. full-time, short term vs. permanent) [1]. One potential problem with assessing perceived age discrimination refers to the fact that usually it is investigated with the use of self-report measures. As discussed by Gee, Pavalko, and Long (2007) it is unclear what self-report measures assess with regard to perceived age discrimination: self-reported discrimination could reflect "objective" discrimination (i.e., real exposure to biased age-based treatment), but alternatively, it could reflect a subjective identification/interpretation of an experience as being a case of age-based discrimination. Of course, independently of reflecting a "real" experience of age discrimination or not, perceived age discrimination has important consequences for the target individual, including lower levels of well-being, higher levels of stress, and mental health problems. In the workplace, perceived age discrimination is linked to distress and functional limitations. In investigating the predictive validity of self-report measures of age discrimination in the workplace, Gee and colleagues (2007) showed that perceived age discrimination matches external reports of known age preferences for workers. Hence, the authors conclude that perceived age discrimination could be a valid indicator of "objective" exposure to discrimination in the work place. Curiously however, Voss, Bodner, and Rothermund (2018) argue that despite the fact that perceived age discrimination may be a valid indicator of "objective" exposure to discriminatory behavior, age discrimination is still under-reported [25, 88].

One example of a study in which ageism in the workplace was explored with explicit measures and a correlational research design is the one carried out by James and colleagues (2013). In this study, one consequence of perceived age discrimination was investigated, namely, employees' engagement [44]. In line, the relationship between the perception of age-based discrimination and employee engagement was examined in a large sample of American retail workers aged 18–94 years. Self-report measures were used to assess employee engagement, likelihood and fitness for promotion. Findings showed that perception of discrimination against older workers (55+) was negatively associated with employee's engagement irrespective of their age. A further hypothesis was that the perceptions that older workers are interested and fit for promotion (i.e., fitness for promotion) would moderate the relation between the perception of age-based discrimination and employee engagement such that this would be more negative among employees who perceive that older workers are fit for promotion. This was the case for the younger participants, but not for older ones, to whom a more negative relationship between "unintentional" discrimination (older workers are unfit for promotion) and employee engagement was found. On one hand, younger employees seem to react to perceiving unfair treatment to older adults within the organization and wind up engaging less. On the other hand, older adults may have internalized the belief they are no longer interested and fit for promotion, which results in their lower levels of engagement to the organization.

In sum, in measuring ageism in the workplace different measures and research designs may be used. Prevalence and descriptive studies are informative but may be limited in their possibility to explore determinants of age discrimination. Correlation studies offer insight into the relationships between variables, but as descriptive studies, do not allow for establishing the determinants of ageism (i.e., causality relations are not possible in this type of study). This caveat regarding the investigation of determinants of ageism in the workplace may be tackled by experimental studies, which in turn can be more difficult to carry out. Finally, as discussed before, explicit measures of ageism may be affected by social desirability concerns and therefore could be well complemented by implicit ones, which are claimed to be more resistant to this type of bias. Gordon and Arvey (2004) also discuss in their meta-analysis that between-subjects designs lead to more negative evaluations of older workers as compared to within-subjects designs (this found was explored in 52 studies) [32].

4.3 Determinants of Ageism in the Workplace

Determinants of ageism in the workplace may derive from different levels. Below we tackle micro- and meso-level determinants.

4.3.1 Micro-Level Determinants

Ageism in the workplace may be the result of different factors. As discussed by Ayalon and Tesch-Römer (2018) ageism may be determined by individual characteristics, like their beliefs, values, experiences, etc. This level of determinants is known as the micro-level [5]. At this level, origins of ageism may be attributed to social identity and fear of death, for example. Briefly, the Social Identity Theory [85] posits that to maintain a positive self-identity, it is important to value the social group to which a person belongs. Because self-identity is influenced by group-identity, people are motivated to feel positively about their group and its members (in-groups) as opposed to members of other groups (out-groups). Ageism in the workplace would therefore be the result of younger individuals feeling more positive about their in-groups than out-groups like older people. The Terror Management Theory [34] departs from a different perspective and proposes that ageism may derive from the reminders of mortality and death that old age can bring, leading younger adults to avoid contact with older ones and thinking about aging.

Another type of micro-level determinant of ageism is cue-level person perception [45, 46, 93]. This line of research relies on the idea that people form impressions about other people based on their perceived appearance, specifically facial age appearance has been shown to be an important determinant of ageism in hiring decisions [45, 46]. In one study, Kaufmann and colleagues (2016) manipulated information provided in resumes of older and younger applicants varying their age and the source of the age information (date of birth vs. facial age appearance displayed in a headshot). Impressions on fitness and health were collected as well [45]. Results indicated that chronological age information in the resume had no impact in hiring decisions. However, ageism emerged for facial appearance of older applicants who had reduced chances of being hired due to attributions of lower health and fitness as compared to younger appearing applicants. Hence, trait impressions from faces can be an important determinant of ageism in the work place, especially in hiring decisions. In a further study, Kaufmann and colleagues (2017) replicated these findings and showed that using counter-stereotypic information about fitness was an effective strategy for older applicants to reduce ageism in the hiring process and that occupational context played a role, with ageism being reduced in jobs demanding less face-to-face interactions [46].

4.3.2 Meso-Level Determinants

The aging population is growing, people are living longer and remaining active and influential for longer as well. This aging social phenomenon can be seen as a potential for intergenerational tensions provoked by the fact that young people may perceive older adults as competitors for valued resources, depleting their care and work related opportunities [61, 62]. As a determinant of ageism, intergenerational tensions can be derived from three main sources: succession-based prescriptions (expectations that older adults make way for younger people to have access to social resources like jobs and political power), consumption-based prescriptions (competition for shared resources, like health care use and pensions, with older people being expected to restrain themselves and to consume only a minor share of scarce resources) and identity conflicts (avoiding or limiting older adults' opportunities to take part in activities reserved for young people). An important determinant of ageism in the workplace is the succession-based prescriptions according to which opportunities for younger people depend on older adults opening way in the job market by retiring, for example. Hence, older workers may be seen negatively by their younger counterparts who may feel that promotion opportunities and better positions are a privilege of older workers who may hold influential roles in organizations.

The idea that prejudice (including ageism) reflects a generalized negative attitude towards out-groups [2] has been widely discussed with researchers remarking that this one-dimensional view fails to encompass the complexities related to the subject [24]. To date, there is plenty of evidence favoring the idea that ageism is much more fine grained and multifaceted depending on context [16, 17, 19], and on life domains [49, 50].

Some studies in the field of ageism in the workplace have generated empirical evidence on its malleability with regard to different work-related domains [31] and different organizational contexts [22]. In an experimental study, Gioaba and Krings (2017) manipulated the use of impression management strategies by old and young applicants in the job interview. Specifically, they looked at self-promotion as a strategy to convey competence to the recruiters in five age stereotype domains related to work: (1) technology skills, (2) ability to learn, (3) adaptability, (4) ability to handle pressure, and (5) achievement orientation. Findings were as follows: older applicants and those who used less impression management strategies were rated as less hirable. Age stereotype domain influenced hiring decisions, such that applicants who tried to improve their self-presentation with regard to their achievement orientation were more likely to be hired (regardless of their age). Interestingly, the authors also found that older adults profited most from improving their self-presentation with regard to their job adaptability, whereas self-presentation with regard to the other attributes did not affect hiring decisions. For younger applicants, use of impression management strategies with regard to job adaptability had no impact on their chances to be hired (i.e., managers take it for granted that younger workers adapt easily to work contexts and tasks) [22].

The context dependency of ageism in the work place was demonstrated by Diekman and Hirnisey (2007). In their study, role incongruency in relation to distinct organizational contexts was investigated as a factor that could influence hiring decisions. They found that older adults were less likely to be hired when job advertisements highlighted that the company was dynamic, indicating a mismatch between old age stereotypes and job requirements. This effect was reversed, however, resulting in a preference for older workers, when the company was described as being stable [22].

Taken together, these findings show that ageism in the workplace is malleable and may be determined by different work domains and occupational contexts. In this case, older adults may have an advantage under certain circumstances, like when what is expected for the job within a specific context is aligned to their characteristics.

4.4 Consequences of Ageism in the Workplace

4.4.1 Personal Consequences

Age discrimination has dramatic psychological consequences [89]: Being discriminated due to one’s age results in lower well-being [30, 87], self-esteem [39], and also physical and mental health [33, 60]. Experiences of age discrimination often lead to withdrawal and isolation on the part of the individual that is discriminated in order to prevent further discrimination [57]. With regard to the working context, these negative behavioral consequences have been shown to manifest themselves in the desire to quit working and enter retirement at an earlier age, and also to reduce the willingness and motivation for social engagement in later life [82]. Age discrimination tends to negatively affect performance via what is termed “stereotype threat”, that is, the fear to be evaluated according to negative age stereotypes, and to eventually confirm those stereotypes, which can have a paralyzing effect on older people’s behavior [83] and lead to stereotype-consistent performance deficits (e.g., low memory performance; [40]). In the long run, these detrimental effects on motivation and behavior also produce indirect costs like reduced pensions and financial disadvantages.

It is important to note that the psychological consequences of perceived age discrimination are comparable to those of actual, "objective" instances of age discrimination (e.g., higher psychological distress, [87]; lowered desired retirement age, [82]). Since objective instances of age discrimination can often go unnoticed because they are taken as justified or normal, perceived age discrimination may even be the most important predictor for negative consequences of age discrimination.

4.4.2 Consequences at the Work Level

In terms of the consequences of age discrimination for the work environment, some of the main reported consequences tap into potential loss of experienced workers, as well as loss of productivity and engagement, and damage to positive interpersonal relations.

McCann and Giles (2002) argue that filling jobs for skilled workers is already a considerable problem that companies face [55]. This becomes increasingly harder to solve considering the combination of shortages of skilled younger workers with the continued trend to dismiss older workers who are skilled and experienced. In line, maintaining older, highly qualified workers may not only be important, but also strategic for companies and employers. In the same direction, Posthuma, Wagstaff, and Campion (2012) state that age stereotypes can marginalize older workers, resulting in companies making underuse of this segment of the workforce [75]. In terms of increasing productivity and remaining competitive in the market, companies may have a lot to lose by preventing qualified and talented older workers to fully engage and contribute or by dismissing them even when they still have productive years ahead. Stypińska and Nikander (2018) even go a bit further and argue that ageism at managerial levels (i.e., negative age stereotypes held by managers and decision makers) may lead employers and companies to risk their own survival since there is not enough qualified and skilled younger workers available in the market. Hence, losing experienced older workers may be damaging for companies that want to remain productive and competitive [84].

On the consequences of ageism and age discrimination for interpersonal relations among colleagues of different ages, it can have detrimental effects in the working context. When age discrimination threatens the existence of positive and efficient relationships not only older, but also younger workers may be less engaged with the company (due to a perception of a lack of efficient, age diverse management strategies, or age-based unfairness, for example) and less motivated to contribute and be productive.

4.5 Coping with and Counteracting Ageism in the Workplace

Ageism in the workplace has many negative consequences for older workers. As previously discussed, their engagement to work, their productivity and motivation to further training and development can be negatively affected by experiences of ageism. Similarly, companies and employers suffer from the impact of ageism in the workplace as well, especially by losing experienced and highly qualified workers [75]. However, neither the individual nor the companies or society are passively exposed to ageism and age discrimination. In this section, we give an overview of the processes and strategies that individuals and organizations can use to actively fight ageism.

In principle, there are two different ways to cope with ageism, that can be categorized as either assimilative or accommodative [10], or, in other words, they can aim at changing the world or at changing the self [76]. Assimilative coping comprises all active attempts at preventing or counteracting ageism and age discrimination. From the perspective of the aging individual, assimilative coping with age discrimination can take the form of protesting against age-related disadvantages and unfair treatment, solidarizing with other older workers, or taking legal measures. As institutions, companies can (and should) define rules for equal treatment of all age groups and establish sanctions for behaviors that deviate from these norms.

Accommodative forms of coping, on the other hand, aim at alleviating or neutralizing negative implications of age discrimination by downgrading the personal importance of these experiences. This can be achieved by reinterpreting unequal treatment as reflecting chance influences rather than being due to personal attributes, reorienting to contexts in which age discrimination is less probable, finding meaning even in experiences of rejection or exclusion ("not being hired for this job helped me to realize that other things are much more important in my life").

At the organizational or institutional level, Naegele, De Tavernier, and Hess (2018) review some determinants of ageism in the workplace and some strategies to tackle it. Namely, they mention the company's age structure, company size, and the adopted human resources strategies. Companies with a more diverse age structure in which younger and older workers have the opportunity to interact may experience less ageism in their environment. At the same time, large companies usually have human resources departments that are committed to working on measures to reduce ageism in the organization, like offering training for managers on how to keep their older employees developing and growing. Finally, having a coherent human resources strategy may be very important to reduce ageism in the workplace, this includes promoting ageist-free practices like having age inclusive training programs and recruitment and hiring procedures that are age-blind. Hence, these variables could be key for intervention development targeting to reduce ageism in the workplace.

Truxillo, Cadiz, and Hammer (2015) review workplace intervention research and highlight the fact that there are almost no interventions that target age specific issues [86]. Besides, they argue that the existing interventions lack theoretical background on the psychological and aging processes that could explain any possible benefit of the intervention to older workers. Kroon (2015) discusses the same problem arguing that there is a lack of theory, evidence-based interventions that aim to reduce ageism in the workplace [51]. Considering this lack in intervention research focusing on ageism in the workplace, Truxillo and colleagues (2015) propose a possible research agenda for developing interventions.

This includes, for example, developing selection, optimization, and compensation (SOC) training programs aiming to train older employees on how to select skills and tasks that best fit their abilities and interests, promoting positive intergenerational relations between younger and older workers through, for instance, leadership training for supervisors to deal with age differences in a positive way, and training practices for older workers that offer them training in smaller groups, with additional time and self-paced learning [86]. Kroon (2015) calls attention that interventions aiming to tackle ageism in the workplace should focus on enhancing managers' skills to best deal with the challenges of the aging workforce and on their understanding of how to benefit from the organizational demographic changes [51].

Despite the lack of theoretical driven, evidence-based interventions to reduce ageism in the workplace, some convergent recommendations include increasing intergenerational contact in the workplace, having human resources policies that are age-inclusive, making managers more capable of addressing age-related issues in an ageist-free manner, and developing interventions that target specific needs of older workers that can increase their satisfaction, productivity, and engagement with work.

It may seem surprising that although attitudes and negative age stereotypes were identified as sources of age discrimination, only few interventions and programs try to tackle age stereotypes directly, probably because deep-rooted beliefs, evaluations, and attitudes cannot easily be changed. Importantly, however, prejudiced attitudes can be controlled or counteracted and thus may not necessarily influence behavior, which effectively prevents actual age discrimination.

Acknowledging the gap between attitudes and behavior is thus extremely important with regard to age discrimination at the workplace. If a company wants to reduce age discrimination, changing attitudes and beliefs may be extremely difficult to achieve in the short run. It may be much easier—and more immediately effective—to formulate clear and explicit behavioral rules that guarantee equal treatment regardless of age, and to establish sanctions and punishments that will effectively prevent ageist attitudes and beliefs from being expressed in age discriminatory behavior.

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