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Stereotype, prejudice and discrimination toward older workers: A wind of change?

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Section I: Introduction

In times of global population aging, the extension of working lives has been politically enforced in many industrialized countries to ensure fiscal sustainability (European Commission, 2014). In keeping social security and pension systems solvent, many affected countries have gradually increased retirement ages (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2015). As people are working longer, workplaces have become older and more age-diverse in nature (Truxillo, Finkelstein, Pytlovany, & Jenkins, 2015). Working side-by-side has the potential to increase positive outcomes (e.g., team performance, Wegge, Roth, Neubach, Schmidt, & Kanfer, 2008, organizational commitment, and employee well-being, Lehmann-Willenbrock, Lei, & Kauffeld, 2012). However, there is a risk that higher levels of age diversity lead to negative outcomes due to arising “faultlines” between younger and older workers (van Knippenberg, Dawson, West, & Homan, 2011). For this reason, the understanding of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination of older workers is of increasing importance. This chapter conceptualizes stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers referring to the tripartite view of attitudes and explaining affective, cognitive, and behavioral categorization-reactions and its interdependence in the workplace. This is followed by a brief review of research on individual and organizational outcomes of experienced age discrimination. The final section discusses promising future research directions in order to challenge stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers as a wind of change.

Section II: Conceptualization of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination

Investigating stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination has a long tradition in social psychology, most notably the early research and conceptualizations of Gordon W. Allport summarized in his book entitled ‘*The Nature of Prejudice*’ (1954). Allport describes

prejudgment as normal cognitive process as a result of the categorizing people into groups just as we do with objects. According to perceived similarity to oneself, people categorize others into ingroups and outgroups, either loving or hating them (Fiske, 1998). His ideas have been refined over time but are still prevalent in research on stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. While Allport and other scholars have described prejudice as an overall instance incorporating an affective, cognitive, and behavioral component, others have differentiated them as separate concepts. Following the tripartite view of attitudes, stereotyping can be described as the main cognitive component, prejudice as the main affective component, and discrimination as the main behavioral component of categorization-reactions – which are reactions towards people from groups based on their perceived difference from oneself (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007; Fiske, 1998).

Interdependence of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers

The three components of categorization-reactions can be further specified as interdependent components that influence each other. Figure 1 provides an overview of how the age composition at work informs stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination towards older workers. Often, stereotypes and prejudices are seen as roots discrimination (see for example the nomological net of age discrimination; Marcus, 2015). In fact, there is substantial research evidence confirming that important workplace decisions are made on the back of age stereotypes (e.g., Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995; Meisner, 2012; Perry, Kulik, & Bourhis, 1996). However, according to a meta-analysis from Talaska, Fiske and Chaiken (2008) prejudice as the affective component of categorization-reactions has been found to be twice as powerful in predicting racial discrimination compared to stereotypes as the cognitive component. Moreover, stereotypes and prejudices can be also a consequence of discrimination. For example, missing training and development opportunities may lead older workers to be negatively judged and perceived as resistant to change, which may turn into a

vicious circle of negative categorization-reactions. Finally, the interdependent relationship between the age composition at work and stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination towards older workers is influenced by individual moderators and environmental moderators (Marcus, 2015). For example, outstanding cognitive abilities may buffer the formation or application of stereotypes and prejudices towards the individual, while stringent societal age norms may strengthen the impact of stereotypes and prejudices on discrimination towards older workers.

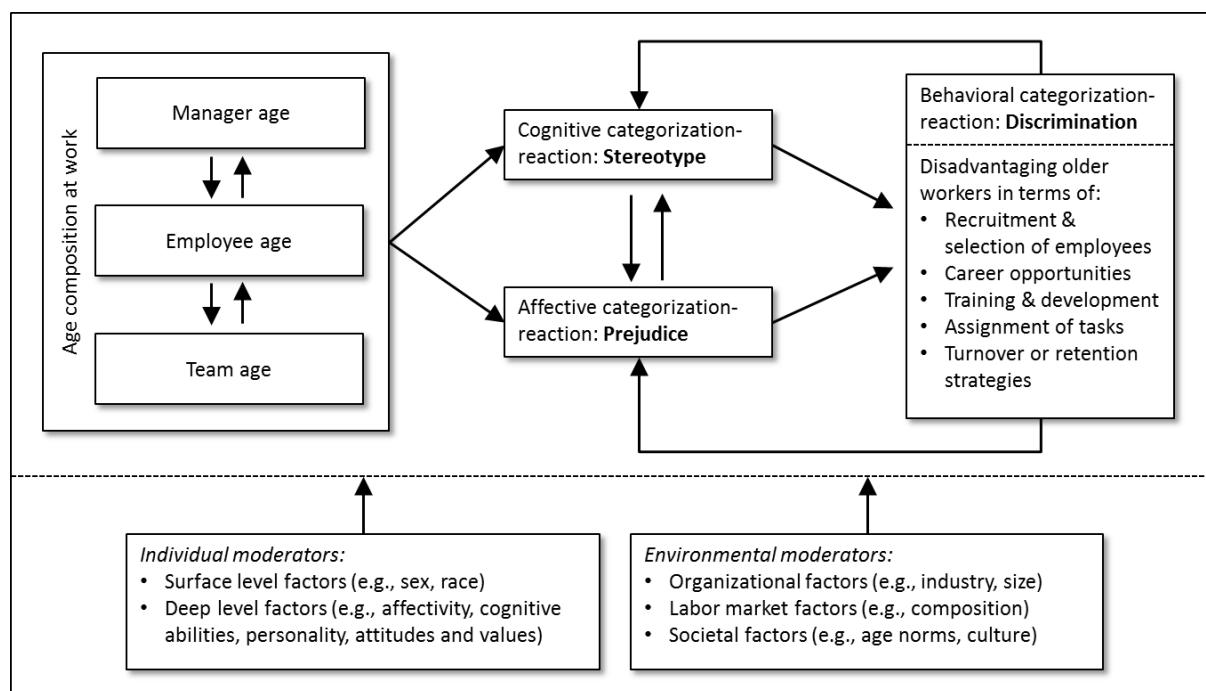


Figure 1. Interdependence of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers

Stereotypes about older workers and their empirical (counter)evidence

The terms stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination are generally understood in a negative sense, indicating that the persons concerned are to some extent disadvantaged. Although, most stereotypes towards older workers are negative, there are also positive stereotypes about them (e.g., being more dependable). Nevertheless, it is important to note that stereotypes are often inaccurate or distorted as they are based on preconceived ideas, hearsay, or unfounded assumptions (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Besides, it is incorrect to infer that all members of a group are the same (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Although there are

many (positive) and negative stereotypes about older workers (for a comprehensive cross-cultural overview of stereotypes see North & Fiske, 2015 or Posthuma & Guerrero, 2013), this section will cover the most persisting stereotypes (i.e., declining job performance, resistance to change, poor learning abilities, and high costs) and their empirical (counter)evidence.

The most common and persisting stereotype might be that older workers show lower levels of job performance than their younger counterparts. As such, people often believe that older workers are less motivated, have lower mental and physical abilities, are less competent and more prone to stress, thus leading to declining job performance (e.g., Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Krings et al., 2011; Perry et al., 1996). However, to date, there are four meta-analyses (McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Ng & Feldman, 2008; Sturman, 2003; Waldman & Avolio, 1986) providing no empirical support for declining job performance as employees age. In fact, Ng and Feldman (2008) report even higher levels for organizational citizenship behaviors and lower levels for counterproductive work behaviors. In addition, another meta-analysis (Ng & Feldman, 2010) reported positive relationships between employee age and affective commitment, interpersonal and organizational trust, job involvement, loyalty and organizational identification (Fasbender, Wang, & Zhan, 2016), which are likely to emerge in positive organizational outcomes.

The second most persistent age stereotype refers to the belief that older workers are resistant to change. As such, people often think that older workers are less adaptable and more difficult to train (e.g., Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001). So far, there is no research examining whether this stereotype is true or false, future research needs to investigate its validity and understanding of when and why such behavior might be (dys-)functional at work (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Similar to the previous stereotype is the assumption of poor learning abilities. As such, older workers are believed to have less development potential than

their younger colleagues (Finkelstein et al., 1995). At the same time, older workers receive fewer opportunities for training and development (Wrenn & Maurer, 2004), which shows how stereotypes may result in discrimination at work. Research evidence regarding this stereotype is mixed. Some laboratory studies seem to support that older workers complete training slower and have less mastery over training materials than others (e.g., Kubeck, Delp, Haslett, & McDaniel, 1996). Field studies, however, indicated smaller effects than laboratory studies (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). In addition, research revealed that some training methods such as self-paced learning, modeling and active participation may be more suitable for older workers (e.g., Beier & Ackerman, 2005).

Another persisting age stereotype refers to older workers being more costly due to higher wages, more benefits and being generally closer to retirement. As a result, older workers are perceived to have a lower economic value, which is likely to impact organizational decision-making (Ostroff & Atwater, 2003). In fact, there is some evidence that older workers are more costly in terms of needing more training (Broadbridge, 2001). Further, there is evidence that salaries increase up to the age of 50 and then remain static (Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2006), resulting in salary differences between younger and older workers. At the same time, research revealed that older workers have lower levels of absenteeism (Ng & Feldman, 2008), which may compensate partly for higher costs. Taken together, research is comparatively limited on this stereotype (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Future research should, therefore, continue to investigate to what extent older workers might be more costly taking into account their individual outcomes such as the different dimensions of job performance.

Prejudices towards older workers, a controversial but powerful construct

In the past, prejudices have been far less studied than stereotypes (Fiske, 1998; Stangor, 2016). The term prejudice is used differently by scholars, which leads to difficulties

in discussing its antecedents and consequences. Some scholars refer to prejudice as an attitude that combines all three components, the cognitive, affective, and behavioral component (Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010), while others refer to prejudice as the most affective component of a mainly negative attitude (Cuddy et al., 2007; Fiske, 1998). In this chapter, the latter definition is used as underlying framework reflecting peoples' feelings of disliking or disapproval towards older workers. The power of prejudice has been shown to be fundamental in predicting discrimination (Fiske, 1998; Talaska et al., 2008). As both components are part of the same underlying attitude, there is a reliable relationship between stereotypes and prejudices (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson, & Gaertner, 1996). Further, prejudices are partly rationalized by stereotypes (Sinclair & Kunda, 2000).

In explaining the roots of prejudice towards older people terror management theory (Greenberg, Landau, Kosloff, Soenke, & Solomon, 2016; Greenberg, Pyszczynski, & Solomon, 1986) has been increasingly influential. As thinking about one's own mortality is frightening to us, we create self-esteem as a belief of having a consistent purpose and place in the world protecting us from feelings of anxiety (Nelson, 2011). However, older people are a continuous reminder of death as the final part of life (Martens, Goldenberg, & Greenberg, 2005). Therefore, being directly or indirectly confronted with them, necessary results in higher levels of anxiety and negative affectivity (Martens, Greenberg, Schimel, & Landau, 2004). In the workplace, this may lead to feeling uncomfortable working with older colleagues in a team, feeling awkward about decisions made by an older supervisor or being afraid of older workers in general. Recent research revealed that the fear of old people is linked to age-biased behavioral tendencies in working with older people in two disciplines (i.e., psychology and social work) (Chonody, Webb, Ranzijn, & Bryan, 2014). However, more research is needed to understand whether mortality salience is also triggered by somewhat younger older people (i.e., workers aged 50 to 65).

Age discrimination in different areas of operations in the workplace

While stereotypes and prejudices reflect mainly internal categorization-reactions, discrimination represents the behavioral component bringing thoughts and feelings into action against others. In the UK, age discrimination is defined as treating a person on grounds of their age less favorable than other persons ('Employment Equality (Age) Regulations' in 2006). After ten years of introducing the age discrimination legislation, age discrimination, even though it is illegal, is still a prevalent phenomenon in the UK and in many other countries around the world. A recent population representative survey among 2,235 residents aged 50 years or older revealed a substantial amount of perceived age discrimination in the UK. Among the employed people, 15% stated that they have personally experienced age discrimination in the workplace (Department of Work and Pensions, 2015). In addition, more than half of all unemployed (or not working) people felt that employers were not interested in hiring them due to their age (Department of Work and Pensions, 2015). These findings are supported by actual differences among older and younger people with regard to the average duration of unemployment in the same year. Among the 28 member states of the European Union, older people (aged 55 years and older; average duration of unemployment: 17.3 months) are in average almost twice as long unemployed compared to younger people (aged 20-24; average duration of unemployment: 10.1 months) (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2016). In comparison to other grounds of discrimination, such as sex, race, or disability, age discrimination is treated differently as there are certain age-related practices that are considered legitimate in the workplace (Sargeant, 2013). In Germany, for example, fixed-term contracts of employment are in common use with certain restrictions. First, there needs to be an objective justification for a fixed-term contract; second, there are limits on its length and how often it could be renewed. Yet, these restrictions for the use of fixed-term contracts were removed for older workers

(i.e., people aged 52 years and older; 'Hartz Law' in 2002) with the positive intention of making older people more attractive to employers (Sargeant, 2013). In general, however, 'non-discrimination' on the grounds of age is regarded as the overall principle in the European Union law.

In the workplace, older people are likely to be disadvantaged in different areas of operations, such as recruitment and selection of employees, career opportunities, training and development, assignment of tasks and turnover or retention strategies. Most research has been conducted with regard to recruitment and selection of employees. There is clear evidence of age discrimination in hypothetical situations (Richardson & Webb, 2013) and in actual hiring practices (Gringart & Helmes, 2001). Although other applicant characteristics are relevant, age has been found to bias interviewers perceptions and hiring recommendations (Morgeson, Reider, Campion, & Bull, 2008). For example Krings, Sczesny and Kluge (2011) found that older workers were judged as less competent than younger workers, which was reflected in hiring situations. In addition, situational characteristics may contribute to age discrimination in employment-related decisions, such as available information presented (Finkelstein et al., 1995). With regard to career opportunities, scholars have highlighted the argument of intergenerational solidarity, which in turn may disadvantage older people in order to ensure career opportunities for younger people at work (Manfredi, 2011). Research also revealed existing resentments towards older workers when it comes to training and development (Chiu et al., 2001; Loretto & White, 2006). This, however, is not a static or one-sided phenomenon as research also showed that positive beliefs correspond to beneficial human resources practices for older workers (Kluge & Krings, 2008). Only little research exists with regard to age-related assignment of task in the workplace. A qualitative study by Loretta and White (2006) suggests that tasks are likely to be assigned with regard to physical or mental (dis)abilities, which may result in age-related policies. Likewise, Loretta and White (2006)

investigated to what extent turnover or retention strategies are biased by age. The authors revealed that companies apply different strategies to deal with turnover, for instance, a performance-based or voluntary-redundancy approach. While the performance-based approach rather favors older workers, they are likely to suffer from the voluntary-redundancy approach. Although older workers themselves 'voluntary' decide for redundancy (in particular when the package included an enhanced pension; Loretto & White, 2006), the organizational culture may guide them towards this decision. Despite being a sensitive issue for organizations, more research is needed in order to understand to what extent age discrimination is prevalent in different areas of operations in the workplace.

Section III: Individual and organizational outcomes

There is a growing body of evidence suggesting that experiencing age discrimination causes negative outcomes for the affected workers themselves as well as for organizations (Fasbender & Deller, in press). However, the investigation of the consequences of age discrimination has received only little attention as most researchers have examined race discrimination, and also – but to a lesser extent – gender and sexuality-based discrimination (Redman & Snape, 2006). This section provides a short overview of what research has discovered with regard to both individual and organizational outcomes of experienced age discrimination in the workplace.

Individual outcomes

Expectations generated by stereotypes can function as self-fulfilling prophecies. Because older workers are likely to believe stereotypes themselves and feel obliged to act in line with their beliefs about themselves, they are likely to act stereotype conform (Fasbender & Deller, in press). Even if older workers do not believe that stereotypes describe themselves or their group well but they worry that others might evaluate them according to stereotypes,

they are likely to suffer from negative outcomes and lower their self-esteem (i.e., stereotype threat; Wheeler & Petty, 2001). In fact, hundreds of studies have demonstrated that stereotype threat disturbs performance when people engage in tasks, which are associated with negative stereotypes towards them (von Hippel, Kalokerinos, & Henry, 2015). This effect is particularly strong when the content of age stereotypes corresponds to the outcome domain (Levy & Leifheit-Limson, 2009). Further, research revealed that older workers' beliefs' can reinforce certain behaviors. Greller and Stroh (2004), for example, revealed that negative stereotypes about older workers' learning and development abilities are likely to constrain learning in different environments and taking on new roles. As a consequence, everyday discrimination leads to lower levels of job satisfaction and psychological well-being (Taylor, Mcloughlin, Meyer, & Brooke, 2013).

In addition, experienced age discrimination has been found to be linked with a higher likelihood of reporting job separation, non-employment (Johnson & Neumark, 1997), and intentions to retire (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2014). In essence, the decision to retire is influenced by a combination of factors related to person-organization fit (i.e., job challenge), sacrifice (i.e., perceived organizational support), and workplace relationships (i.e., stability of workplace peer relations) (Bamberger & Bacharach, 2014). Stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination are likely to shape these factors, in particular perceived organizational support, which in turn may accelerate older workers' exit from the workforce. Age-related human resource management practices have been found to influence retirement decisions. While practices that encourage early retirement as a means to reduce personnel costs increase older workers' decision to voluntarily retire early, the provision of training opportunities decreases voluntary early retirement (Herrbach, Mignonac, Vandenberghe, & Negrini, 2009). Further, as people identify themselves with being an 'old worker', they are likely to psychologically detach themselves from work, which again leads to turnover or early workforce exit (Gaillard

& Desmette, 2008). As a result, older workers' may lose their work role identity (Wang, Henkens, & van Solinge, 2011).

Organizational outcomes

Early retirement may be wanted from organizations and is therefore not necessary a negative outcome. At times, organizations argue with intergenerational solidarity in terms of making way for younger people at work (Manfredi, 2011). However, in times high labor demand and skills shortages, turnover and early retirement may not be beneficial outcomes (Fasbender, Wang, Voltmer, & Deller, 2016). In particular, wavelike withdrawal from work may have negative consequences for organizations, such as knowledge loss and corporate amnesia (Burmeister & Deller, 2016; Harvey, 2012). Further, experienced age discrimination has been found to be related with lower work engagement (Bayl-Smith & Griffin, 2014) and organizational commitment (Snape & Redman, 2003), which have been found to negatively impact overall firm performance (Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2011). Also, research suggests that experienced discrimination leads to lower levels of organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB) (Ensher, Grant-Vallone, & Donaldson, 2001), which describe individual behaviors that promotes the effective functioning of the organization without being explicitly recognized by the formal reward system (Organ, 1988). It is assumed that OCB is more likely to occur in work environments where people feel fairly and equally treated (Dalal, 2005). If, however, employees feel discriminated they are less likely to engage in OCB (Ensher et al., 2001), which may lower overall efficiency and organizational productivity (Podsakoff, Whiting, Podsakoff, & Blume, 2009).

In addition, stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination are associated with feelings of injustice (Balsler, 2002; Snyder, Carmichael, Blackwell, Cleveland, & Thornton, 2010), which are likely leading to deviant and counterproductive work behaviors (CWB). In the workplace, counterproductive behaviors refers to all sorts of dysfunctional behavior,

including lateness, workplace violence, sabotage, theft, absenteeism, incivility and aggression (Kelloway, Francis, Prosser, & Cameron, 2010). CWB has been described as “a form of [non-normative] protest that are functional in reaching some desired end for individuals in organizations” (Kelloway et al., 2010, p. 21). In contrast to normative protest (e.g., speaking out, petitioning and taking part in demonstrations), non-normative protest typically undermines implicit rules and violates formal laws within a given organizational context (Kelloway et al., 2010). In particular, when normative options are not available or unsuccessful and individuals or group members are faced with discriminatory practices, they might be more likely to opt for non-normative protest (Kawakami & Dion, 1995; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990), in particular CWB. Recent research shows a reciprocal relationship between experienced discrimination at work and CWB (Kim, Cohen, & Panter, 2015). Results of the twelve-wave longitudinal study revealed that employees’ counterproductive behaviors are both cause and consequence of experiencing workplace mistreatment from colleagues and supervisors (i.e., everyday discrimination at work) (Kim et al., 2015), which, in turn, may seriously harm the organization and its stakeholders (Spector et al., 2006).

Section IV: Implications for future research as a wind of change

“The study of prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination has been central to social psychology since the discipline’s origin a century ago” (Pettigrew, 2010, p.599). In the past, however, research has often focused on stating the problem of stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination rather than addressing its overcoming. In particular against the background of global population aging, more research is needed to combat stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers and its potential negative consequences in the workplace. This section offers promising directions for future research with the special

attention to preventing or reducing stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers as a wind of change.

Facilitating a common identity

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) argues that people devalue members of the outgroup in favor of members of their ingroup to achieve a positive social identity, which in turn enhances their self-esteem. Social identity with an ingroup arises with categorizing self and others into groups based on a “comparative fit”, which simply states that the perceived differences within a group are smaller than the perceived differences between groups (self-categorization theory; Turner & Oakes, 1989). This categorization process leads to stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination towards members of the outgroup. In the workplace, social identification may be related to different age groups (i.e., younger, middle-aged or older workers), which causes tension. At the same time, people might re-categorize different subgroups into higher-order groups facilitating a common superordinate social identity (i.e., organizational identification) (Richter, West, Van Dick, & Dawson, 2006). Following the common ingroup identity model (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), it is relevant that both ingroup and outgroup members categorize themselves as a superordinate group, which “can be achieved by introducing a new identity shared by the groups or increasing the salience of an existing common identity” (Gomez, Dovidio, Huici, Gaertner, & Cuadrado, 2008, p.1614). As a result, facilitating a common identify can help reducing stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination between different groups. Regarding the age perspective, recent research by Iweins, Desmette, Yzerbyt, and Stinglhamber (2013) showed that a common identify between older and younger workers is associated with positive views towards older workers (i.e., favorable stereotypes, admiration emotions, and facilitation behaviors). The empirical work was conducted among Belgium employees aged less than fifty years from two financial companies and one hospital applying a cross-sectional research design. More

research is needed to draw causal inferences (i.e., using longitudinal or experimental designs) and to transfer the study findings to other organizational and cultural contexts (i.e., cross-organizational and cross-cultural comparisons). In addition, research should address the perceptions of different age groups (including younger, middle-aged, and older workers) to reflect the entire workforce.

Stimulating high-quality contact between age groups

According to Allport (1954), contact is one of the most promising strategies to improve intergroup relations. For many decades, researchers have postulated the role of intergroup contact in order to reduce stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Its application towards different age groups has been, however, fairly new. The intergroup contact theory argues that a certain quality and quantity of contact with outgroup members (e.g., older workers) can help to reduce discrimination through more favorable attitudes and less anxiety towards the outgroup. A meta-analysis by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) revealed that the “mere exposure” of contact reduces prejudice due to the link between familiarity and liking. In other words, positive and frequent contact towards older workers “should lead to the amelioration of judgments relative to the whole group” (Voci & Hewstone, 2003, p.38). While earlier approaches to the contact hypothesis have taken a rather pessimistic view, newer research addresses its potential positive impact on categorization-reactions suggesting an increase of contact quality as intervention in the workplace. With regard to age, empirical work by Lu, Kao, and Hsieh (2011) showed that Taiwanese managers’ positive contact experience were associated with more favourable attitudes towards older workers. Similarly, Henry, Zacher, and Desmette (2015) found that Belgium employees’ high-quality contact was related to lower levels of age bias (i.e., older workers were more likely to be perceived as competent and interpersonally pleasant), supporting the positive impact of intergenerational contact quality for relations between younger and older

workers. Following these findings, the intergroup contact theory appears to be a promising approach for further research on workplace interventions (Truxillo, Cadiz, & Hammer, 2015). Facilitating a positive workplace exchange between different age groups has the potential to change stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination towards more positive outcomes at work. In addition, future research is needed to investigate to what extent intergroup contact can help reducing discrimination in various areas of operations in the workplace (e.g., hiring of older workers, training and development opportunities, career progression and promotion).

Understanding organizational factors

Understanding organizational factors such as age diversity climate or the role of leadership is another research approach in challenging stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers. Current research has addressed the antecedents and outcomes of a supportive climate for age diversity. As such, one study by Kunze et al. (2011) measured age discrimination as an organizational variable, including both discrimination towards younger and older workers. Based on a sample of over 8,500 workers from 128 small to medium-sized companies located in Germany the researchers found that higher levels of age diversity were related to a higher age discrimination climate. Kunze et al. (2011) argued that although there is a trend of increasing age diversity, companies are not actively managing diversity, for example, by introducing affirmative action programs. Extending this research, a second study by Boehm, Kunze, and Bruch (2014) based on a sample of over 14,000 workers from 93 German companies revealed that age-inclusive HR-practices (e.g., employee participation systems, valid selection practices, formal and structured performance appraisal systems, extensive training programs, and merit-based career promotions) are associated with a positive age diversity climate (in contrast to an age discrimination climate). Importantly, this research shows that organizational factors, such as HR-practices can help successfully managing age diversity and avoid discrimination at work. Future research should

investigate other organizational antecedents and boundary conditions in shaping a positive organizational age climate. In particular, research should address the role of leadership (e.g., transformational leadership) as an important determinant of influencing followers perceptions and shaping a positive age climate at work (i.e., trickle-down effect; Hertel & Zacher, in press; Rosing & Jungmann, 2015). As such, leaders need to be age-sensitive and their actions fairly free of age stereotypes and prejudices (Hertel & Zacher, in press). Initial research from Zacher and Gielnik (2014) based on a sample of 274 employees and 66 CEOs of small to medium-sized German companies suggests that leaders' attitudes towards (older and) younger workers are associated with a (more or) less favorable culture for older employees. In understanding organizational factors, future research should investigate age diversity climate and the role of leadership in a more complex environment, including other antecedents and moderators (e.g., different leadership styles). Also, future research needs to extend the generalizability of this research by applying other organizational and cultural settings (e.g., addressing large or multinational companies located Asia or North America).

Reducing psychological distance

In combining intergroup relations with cognitive approaches, the construal level theory (Trope & Liberman, 2010) argues that psychological distance (i.e., temporal, spatial, social or hypothetical distance) is likely to influence the way we process information, develop preferences and take actions. Under a high level of construal (e.g., high social distance), people tend to apply rather abstract, coherent, and superordinate information when evaluating or judging others (e.g., older workers), which leads to higher stereotyping behavior at work (e.g., age-discrimination). However, under a low level of construal (e.g., low social distance), people tend to take rather concrete information into account when evaluating and judging others (e.g., older workers), which leads to a focus on the specific person's characteristics and therefore prevents generalization and stereotyping behavior at work. There are several studies

investigating the role of construal level in understanding intergroup relations (e.g., McCrea, Wieber, & Myers, 2012; Milkman, Akinola, & Chugh, 2012; Yogeeswaran & Dasgupta, 2014). For example, results from laboratory research by McCrea et al. (2012) based on six different student samples suggest that manipulating the construal level mindset moderates stereotyping of self and others. As such, a more abstract construal level led to increased activation and application of stereotypes in judgment and behavior (e.g., evaluating a job applicant, applying occupational stereotypes in decision-making, assign more stereotypical traits to self and perform stereotype-consistent) compared to a more concrete construal level. Also, McCrea et al. (2012) revealed that an abstract construal level increased the activation of age stereotypes. Overall, however, there is little known about the role that the construal level plays in understanding stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers. Future research needs to address this gap in investigating construal level as a means of reducing age discrimination in both laboratory and field settings.

Harnessing cognitive dissonance

Cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger, 1957) argues that incongruent attitudes, beliefs or behaviors can cause cognitive dissonance, which leads to feelings of discomfort. In order to decrease the arising discomfort and to restore balance (i.e., reduce cognitive dissonance), people adjust one of the conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviors. For example, after people have chosen to buy a certain (perhaps expensive) car, they seek general and technical information that is favorable to the chosen car supporting their previous decision, while unfavorable information will be blanked out to avoid or reduce potentially arising cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Several studies have shown that inducing cognitive dissonance can help combating stereotype- and prejudice-based behaviors (e.g., Devine, 1989; Dickerson, Thibodeau, Aronson, & Miller, 1992; Monteith, 1993). With regard to older workers, however, research on harnessing cognitive dissonance to challenge stereotypes,

prejudices, and discrimination is scarce. To date, there is one promising study from Gringart, Helmes, and Speelman (2008) that evaluated a cognitive dissonance-based intervention at work to promote positive views towards older workers. Based on a sample of 267 employees (i.e., HR decision makers) from small companies located in Australia the researchers found that a combination of inducing cognitive dissonance (i.e., by contrasting egalitarian values held by Australians with past discriminatory behavior of Australian employers) and providing relevant information (i.e., presenting common stereotypes and their empirical counterevidence) to participants helped promoting positive attitudes towards older workers and increased the likelihood of their hiring intentions. Future research should extend these findings by examining actual hiring behavior rather than intentions and broaden the generalizability by applying other organizational and cultural settings (e.g., addressing medium-sized and large companies located Asia, Europe or North America). Also, more intervention studies are needed to investigate to what extent harnessing cognitive dissonance can help reducing discrimination in various other areas of operations (e.g., training and development, career progression and promotion opportunities). In addition, future research should include employees and their leaders from various functions and disciplines to validate the universal effectiveness of cognitive dissonance-based interventions to challenge age-related stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination in the workplace.

Section V: Conclusion

This chapter has revealed the notion that global population aging is driving the need for understanding and challenging stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination of older workers. This chapter has conceptualized age-related stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination referring to affective, cognitive, and behavioral categorization-reactions and its interdependence in the workplace (i.e., tripartite view of attitudes). This was followed by a

short overview of individual and organizational outcomes of experienced age discrimination in the workplace. The final section has discussed future research directions in order to challenge stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination towards older workers. In particular, five promising theoretical approaches (i.e., facilitating a common identity, stimulating high-quality contact between age groups, understanding organizational factors, reducing psychological distance, and harnessing cognitive dissonance) have been highlighted as a wind of change. In essence, it has been argued that research on stereotype, prejudice, and discrimination towards older workers has been around for many years, yet the field is still in its infancy as more fine-grained research questions and more sophisticated research designs are likely to dominate future research directions.

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