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# The older worker: gender and age discrimination in the workplace

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In the last few decades, industrialized countries have witnessed a profound change in the age composition of the labor force. On the one hand, the participation rate of the younger end of the population steadily declined (Toossi, 2016) as younger generations are pushed toward longer education to meet increasingly higher job entry requirements (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010; Selingo, 2017). On the other hand, the proportion of older workers significantly increased, boosted by a broad range of factors, including the aging baby-boom generation, medical advancement allowing seniors to remain healthy longer, the change in employer and governments' retirement incentives, and the less physically demanding—and more rewarding—nature of modern jobs (Toossi, 2002; Munnell, Muldoon, & Sass,

2009). In the United States, the share of workers age 24 and younger declined by 45% between 1980 and 2018; over that same period, the share of workers age 55 and older rose by 64%, the compounded effect of a growing older population and an increase in their workforce participation rate (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019a). In line with trends observed in other developed countries around the world (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019), the US workforce is therefore aging, and it is expected to keep doing so, such that Americans 55 and older are projected to represent a quarter of the US workforce by 2024 (Toossi & Torpey, 2017).

At the same time, the labor force has also experienced a significant rise in the proportion of women.

Demographic dents (e.g., the shortage of work-able men following WWII; Goldin, 1991), medical advances (e.g., birth control; Goldin & Katz, 2002), the rise of wages for women (Mincer, 1962), societal changes (e.g., more positive attitudes toward working married women and mothers; Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004), and technological progress (e.g., improvement of labor-saving household technologies; Greenwood, Seshadri, & Yorukoglu, 2005) all facilitated the feminization of the labor force, such that women now represent almost half of workers in these countries—47% in 2015 in the United States (Toossi & Morisi, 2017). Importantly, female workers are aging too: while women 55 and older represented only 13% of the US female labor force in 2000, they are projected to reach 25% by 2024, a growth rate slightly higher than that of their male counterparts, highlighting the importance of older women in the future workforce.

Because the future labor growth of aging nations will largely come from this older, more feminized segment of the workforce, the economic prosperity of these nations will greatly depend upon their ability to adequately mobilize these workers.<sup>1</sup> Meeting this challenge seems even more crucial in an era where countries with an aging population must rely on an increasingly smaller segment of people to sustain their socioeconomic model. As the birth rate declines and life expectancy rises, the relative size of their labor force shrinks, leaving a smaller pool of workers from whom to collect taxes that help sustain public investments and government-funded programs such as education, health care, pensions, and infrastructures. The economic responsibility forced upon this workforce is further aggravated by the growing needs of the nonactive, reliant population. Indeed, aging societies face rising health care costs as the older fringe of their population lives longer.

Yet, although the success of these nations greatly depends upon their capacity to harness the potential of the growing, feminized older segment of the workforce, a significant number of barriers within organizations currently impede their proper integration. In a 2015 survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), only 6% of employers had implemented specific policies and management practices to address the aging of the workforce (e.g., adapted benefits, targeted recruiting strategies, increased flexibility in work location, career, or work schedule), and almost a third admitted either not being aware of or just becoming aware of these demographic

changes (Society for Human Resource Management, 2014). More than a lack of preparedness from organizations, a large body of evidence suggests that these institutions can be unresponsive to or even discriminate against older workers. In the United States, the same SHRM survey reported that, although 87% of employers claimed that they had no difficulty in finding suitable older candidates, 54% reported not actively recruiting them. Similarly, a survey of 1,855 employers from four European countries revealed that employers were not taking any substantial measures to retain and recruit older workers or improve their productivity, and most did not recognize older adults as a valuable source of labor supply (Van Dalen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2009). These observations bring to light a potential discrepancy between authorities' policies aimed at raising labor force participation on the one hand, and organizations' practices on the other.

In this context, how and when does age discrimination manifest itself at the workplace? What are its consequences for both older workers and organizations? What are the principal causes of these discriminations and how do we remedy them? In the present chapter we address the above questions with an additional emphasis on potential gender differences: Do the nature, degree, and causes of age discrimination differ for male and female targets? After reviewing how discrimination against older workers permeates all stages of organizational life—from recruitment to retirement—we will examine the psychological mechanisms that contribute to sustain and sometimes reinforce these discriminations. We will also provide a special focus on the conditions of older female workers before concluding with practical solutions and opportunities for future research.

### **The what, where, and when of discrimination against older workers**

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Discrimination is typically defined as the unjust treatment of an individual or group of people on account of their group membership. It is inherently a behavioral bias, which distinguishes it from stereotyping (i.e., cognitive bias) and prejudice (i.e., attitudinal bias; Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010; Mackie & Smith, 1998). Although discriminatory behaviors can target individuals on the basis of any group membership, demographic characteristics such as age, gender, race, nationality, or religious belief are the

<sup>1</sup>The growth of the labor force constitutes a primary factor of economic growth (Toossi, 2002).

most frequently discussed and studied, due to the pervasive and persistent nature of these biases (Fiske, 1998).

Age discrimination refers to behaviors that disfavor people due to their age, and frequently, older adults.<sup>2</sup> In the workplace, the ascription *older* is generally determined on the basis of a worker's chronological age. In the United States, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA), which provides the legal basis for age discriminatory litigations, defines older workers as members of the labor force age 40 or older. Although researchers frequently use this often arbitrary inflexion point to provide empirical evidence—and recommendations—that matches this legal framework, researchers must nonetheless acknowledge the wide variation that exists among individuals of such a broad age range (North, 2019).

Many developed countries have put in place specific legal frameworks to protect older workers (Lahey, 2010). Enacted by the Congress in 1967 and enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), the ADEA constitutes the primary legal arsenal protecting older workers in the United States, stipulating that it is illegal for employers to treat older job applicants and workers differently than younger ones—with only a few exceptions, such as for jobs that require great stamina or quick reflexes (Johnsons & Gosselin, 2018).

Despite these legal frameworks, accounts from older workers suggest that age discrimination is alive and well at the workplace. In a recent AARP national survey of adults over age 45, 64% of female respondents and 59% of male respondents indicated having either seen or experienced age discrimination at work, and 38% of all respondents believed that the practice was “very common” (Perron, 2018). Paralleling these survey appraisals, more than one out of five charges received by the EEOC in 2018 included age discrimination, a figure relatively stable since the institution started tracking the data in 1992 (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2019).

According to these accounts, age-based workplace discrimination takes a plurality of forms. Of all respondents of the AARP survey (Perron, 2018), 24% reported having been personally subject to negative comments from a colleague or supervisor due to their age, 16% not getting hired, 12% being denied upward mobility, 7% being laid off or forced out of a job, and 7% being denied access to career development opportunities.

Discrimination against older workers therefore seems to permeate all stages of organizational life, from hiring, to firing, to on-the-job treatment and investment (North & Fiske, 2015).

In the remainder of this section, we show how older workers may face discrimination at all stages of the organizational life, that is, when (1) joining, (2) working at, and (3) exiting the organization. We describe the consequences of discriminations for these individuals, as well as for organizations.

### Hiring discrimination

At a time where governments of industrialized nations are progressively realigning retirement incentives to encourage people to keep working until later in life, the injunction to stay in the workforce can be particularly difficult to follow for unemployed older workers. In the United States, for instance, while older workers tend to endure a lower official unemployment rate than the national average (e.g., 2.7% for 55-year-old and above against 3.9% across age in the fourth quarter of 2018; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019b), these figures hide great disparities between younger and older workers in the experience of unemployment (Chan & Stevens, 2001) and do not include older workers pushed or pressured into retirement.

Although older workers are less frequently unemployed than the rest of the workforce, those who are unemployed tend to encounter more difficulties when trying to reenter the labor force. A series of audit studies—in which researchers send fictitious applicant profiles to recruiters, manipulating candidates' age while keeping other job-relevant features constant—revealed that the number of recruiter callbacks significantly declines as workers age (Albert, Escot, & Fernández-Cornejo, 2011; Lahey, 2005), an effect even stronger for older female workers (Neumark, Burn, & Button, 2015, 2016, 2017). These findings help explain why the duration of unemployment increases with age. In 2018 the average period of unemployment for US jobless workers between age 25 and 34 was 21 weeks; in comparison, it was respectively seven and 12 weeks longer for their 45- to 54- and 55- to 64-year-old counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2018).

Importantly, the increased difficulty for older workers to find a new job following job separation may also lead to an underestimation of the unemployment rate for this population. In many professional fields in

<sup>2</sup>Although the present chapter focuses on bias against older workers, it is important to note that age discrimination against the young does exist (Francioli & North, 2019), including in work-related settings (Loretto, Duncan, & White, 2000; Van Dalen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2010).

which the number of available positions is limited, the significantly higher number of applications to send before obtaining a job may be critical not only in accounting for differences in time to find a new job, but also to whether one will actually find one or simply give up. A more in-depth survey of unemployed workers revealed that older workers were roughly as likely as younger ones to not actively seek a job (Heidkamp, Corre, & Van Horn, 2010); however, among the nonactive seekers, jobless workers 55 and above were 69% more likely to report that they had in fact given up because they were tired of looking or because they got discouraged, a percentage more than two times higher than that of the nonactive job seekers below 55. Contrary to their younger counterparts, older workers who “gave up” may identify themselves as *early retirees*, a less stigmatizing label than *unemployed*, but also one that is not accounted for by unemployment statistics (Chan & Stevens, 1999; Rones, 1983).

The difficulty of older jobless workers to regain employment pushed some labor market researchers to call this population the “new unemployables,” and the long-term consequences of their predicament can be dreadful (Heidkamp et al., 2010). Among the unemployed 55 years and above, 67% reported using money from their savings since being unemployed, 51% reported cutting medical care for them or their family, 37% reported selling some of their possessions, and 35% reported increasing their credit card debt (Heidkamp et al., 2010). Penalties may be even more severe for those who counted primarily on their last years of work to save for retirement, or those who have no additional resources to pay their rent or mortgage and may be at risk of losing their homes. Although public assistance (e.g., welfare and unemployment services) alleviates some of these issues, they fall short of solving the financial distress of this population. These financial hurdles may help explain how, studying male older workers, Sullivan and Von Wachter (2009) found that mortality rate increases by 50%–100% the year following job displacement, a trend that remains at a 10%–15% increase even 20 years later.

In addition, among older unemployed workers who do find a job, the situation remains precarious. A large survey of workers age 45–70 who experienced unemployment within the 5 prior years pointed out that

many of them ended up accepting jobs at lower pay, with fewer hours, and more limited benefits (Koenig, Trawinski, & Rix, 2015). Furthermore, 3 out of 10 of the long-term unemployed workers surveyed expected to never fully recover financially from their period of unemployment, further highlighting the damages of joblessness during preretirement years.

## On-the-job discrimination

### **Work accommodation**

Important developmental changes occur throughout the adult life span. At a physical level, capacities tend to diminish (see Crawford, Graveling, Cowie, & Dixon, 2010 for a detailed review) and health risks increase (Knopman, et al., 2001; Niccoli & Partridge, 2012; Stern, 2012). At a mental level, personality changes greatly (see Costa, McCrae, & Löckenhoff, 2019 for a detailed review) and so do cognitive skills—although importantly much recent evidence points to an evolution of cognitive performance rather than a decline with age (Hartshorne & Germine, 2015; Salthouse, 2004).<sup>3</sup> These developmental changes may affect not only older workers’ capacity or way to perform certain jobs—particularly physically demanding ones—but also their preferences in terms of roles and work arrangements (Rothe, Lindholm, Hyvönen, & Nenonen, 2010). For instance, older workers are often more open to working part time or working fewer hours to set up a smoother transition to retirement (AEGON Center for Longevity and Retirement, 2018; Bond, Galinsky, Pitt-Catsouphes, & Smyer, 2005).

In addition, some evidence also points to the existence of gender differences in aging processes that may be relevant to job design at the workplace. On the one hand, physiological changes might be more pronounced for women than men (Kirchengast, 2010; Lepers & Maffioletti, 2011; Moodithaya & Avadhany, 2012; Parsons, Rizzo, Zaag, McGee, & Buckwalter, 2005). On the other hand, certain cognitive capacities may be declining earlier in life for men than women (Gur & Gur, 2002; McCarrey, An, Kitner-Triolo, Ferrucci, & Resnick, 2016). Taken together, these results suggest that, on average, men may be better equipped to cope with physical labor and women with

<sup>3</sup>Recent research conducted in the lab suggests that the age at which cognitive capacities peak varies significantly with the type of cognitive tasks examined. Performance on skills such as speed–accuracy and reasoning, related generally peaks in one’s early 20s, only to decline steadily and relatively homogeneously across individuals as they age (Salthouse, 2004). In contrast, performance in skills such as vocabulary and general knowledge tend to peak later in life, often reaching their zenith at mid-life (Hartshorne & Germine, 2015).

cognitive intensive labor longer than their counterparts from the opposite gender.

As the workforce is aging, organizations face an increasing impetus to rethink the design of jobs and work processes to accommodate older workers and best tap into this growing segment of the labor. Yet, employer surveys suggest that little is done to tackle this pressing organizational issue (e.g., [Society for Human Resource Management, 2014](#); [Van Dalen et al., 2009](#)). Although public authorities observe practices and encourage organizations to transition to more *older-friendly* workplace arrangements (e.g., Australia: [SafeWork, 2019](#); Europe: [Etuc, Uaepme, & Ceep, 2017](#); United States: [Special Committee on Aging, 2017](#)), which can include better applications of ergonomics in working areas, targeted recruitment strategies, more adapted compensation schemes, or increased flexibility in work schedule and location, little is done, most often, to legally enforce these recommendations.

Employers should be careful not to assume that all workers over a certain age inevitably want or need these accommodations; that said, they should consider making them available part of their responsibility. Beyond potential missed opportunities of mutual benefits for workers and employers, the lack of adaptation from organizations may exacerbate discriminations against older workers: decision-makers may find it easier to turn their back on this resourceful labor (e.g., avoiding hiring them and pushing them to early retirement) than to redesign their work environment to maximize the use of this segment of workers. In this sense, work accommodation may play a nonnegligible role in the process of discrimination against older workers.

### **Training and development**

Evidence suggests that the amount and quality of learning experiences at the workplace decline significantly with age ([Maurer & Rafuse, 2001](#)). For instance, a study examining expenditures on occupational training in the United States found that younger employees participated in 37 hours of employer training per year on average, compared with only 9 for those age 55 and above ([Mikelson & Nightingale, 2006](#)), see also [Frazis, Gittleman, & Joyce, 2000](#); [Frazis, Gittleman, Horrigan, & Joyce, 1998](#)). Beyond formal training and development events, older workers are also less likely to receive social support, career and educational development, or mentoring and feedback from their supervisors ([Maurer, 2001](#)). Finally, they are more often assigned to positions that involve familiar situations

and rely on established routines, providing little opportunities for growth ([Tourigny & Pulich, 2006](#)).

In a context of intensifying technological progress, an ongoing shift toward a knowledge economy, and an increasing need for labor adaptability, mid- and late-stage careers—once focused on the maintenance of formerly acquired competences—now require the continuous update of existing skills and the regular acquisition of new ones ([Maurer & Rafuse, 2001](#); [Yeatts, Folts, & Knapp, 1999](#)). As such, learning opportunities have become crucial to one's professional trajectory, and differences in their access may represent a significant factor of inequalities between younger and older workers. In this regard, surveys of older workers reveal a general dissatisfaction with regards to their access to training ([Taylor & Urwin, 2001](#)). These impressions of older workers therefore support to some degree the potentially discriminatory nature of age disparities in learning exposure at the workplace.

### **Career advancement**

A recurrent grievance of older workers is that decision-makers often pass over them when it comes to promotion, reserving upward mobility primarily for younger employees ([Perron, 2018](#)). A small body of work provides correlational evidence consistent with this impression. [Shore, Cleveland, and Goldberg \(2003\)](#) found that supervisors' ratings of employee promotability was negatively correlated with age. Consistent with these supervisors' ratings, a large study on income dynamics revealed that age and experience were negatively related to promotion likelihood ([McCue, 1996](#)).

That said, not all employees are predestined (or always express the desire) to make it to the top of the organizational ladder, and older workers may be more likely than younger ones to have already reached their peak, which could explain the above correlational results. However, a few findings raise doubt about this claim. First, in a lab study providing minimal organizational context, [Rosen and Jerdee \(1976\)](#) found that, all things equal, business undergraduates were less likely to recommend an older worker for promotion than a younger one (see also [Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995](#)). Second, examining the issue of age and promotability with more granularity using a panel of new firms, [Machado and Portela \(2013\)](#) found evidence that older hires experienced both lower likelihood of and longer time to promotion, regardless of their initial echelon in the organization. Although employees 45-year-old and above were evenly spread across the organizational ladder at hiring, they were awarded only 10% of the 91,214 subsequent

promotions examined, compared with more than 70% for those hired at 34 or below—an affliction even more severe for older female workers than for their male counterparts.

Lower opportunities for upward mobility can have both significant financial and psychological consequences. Financially, promotion accounts for a substantial part of wage growth (McCue, 1996; Lima & Pereira, 2003), and although older workers are generally better off financially than are younger workers—in the fourth quarter of 2018, full-time US workers age 20 to 24 earned \$594 per week, compared with \$1037 for workers age 55 to 64 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019c)—wage disparities due to longer work tenure need not negate the detrimental financial effects that upward mobility discrimination may have on the financial outcome of older workers, especially for those who count on their later corporate years to prepare for retirement. Psychologically, employees denied upper mobility may perceive promotion as unattainable, reducing their motivation for their work (Vroom, 1964), feeding perceptions of injustice that reduce one's commitment to the organization (Ceylan & Kaynak, 2010; Tyler & Blader, 2013), and generating negative affects toward promoted workers (Schaubroeck & Lam, 2004). As such, age discrimination at promotion may not only affect older workers who fall victim of it, but also the organizations who employ them, in the form of decreased worker productivity.

### Discrimination at job separation

Motivated by a desire to stay active, an interest for the work, but most importantly, concerns over their retirement income, older workers increasingly wish to stay in the labor force past the customary retirement age. In a recent global survey including 14,400 workers from 15 countries, 75% feared not being able to reach the retirement income they needed, and 57% envisioned continuing some form of work past traditional

retirement age (AEGON Center for Longevity and Retirement, 2018).<sup>4</sup>

Despite a legal framework stressing that older workers should retire on their own terms (Roberts, 1986),<sup>5</sup> evidence suggests that a nonnegligible portion is in fact pushed out. In the United States, a recent Health and Retirement Study estimated that, across all industries, ethnic background, and level of education, past age 50, approximately 56% of stable, longtime US employees were laid off or pushed to quit their job at least once, a risk that equally afflicted men and women but increased greatly with age (Johnson & Gosselin, 2018). Furthermore, older employees are often the first targeted during organizational downsizes, decision-makers often explaining it away by the higher wages of this working population (Armstrong-Stassen, & Cattaneo, 2010).

Exclusion from job opportunities has significant financial consequences for the workers who experience it (Lassus, 2015). Johnson and Gosselin's (2018) analyses reveal that workers who experience an employer-related involuntary job separation past 50 saw their median household income fall by 42% and remain 14% lower at age 65 than that of similar workers who did not experience such a separation. Furthermore, were they to find a new job, these workers were frequently much less well paid and became subsequently much more vulnerable to new employment loss. These incidents can severely impact their ability to reach their retirement goal, an even gloomier perspective in a context where state support is progressively deteriorating.

### Why does discrimination against older workers occur?

Evidence suggests that older male and female workers can face obstacles and discrimination at all stages of organizational life, from recruiting to exiting the organization. Why does this discrepancy in treatment between older workers and the rest of the workforce occur?

<sup>4</sup>The growth of the population in age to retire and its higher longevity prospect puts a financial strain on state-funded support geared at older adults (e.g., Social Security, Medicare) and pushed firms to cut back on their employee retirement benefits. As a result, workers are progressively left responsible to finance their own retirement, leading them to remain in the workforce longer (Collinson, 2014).

<sup>5</sup>Legally, workers are allowed to keep working past traditional retirement age. Under US law, mandatory retirement age has been prohibited since 1986 and retirement must result from a knowing and voluntary decision of the employee. Although an employer may inquire an employee whether she has plans for retirement, pursuing the conversation past a negative answer can be looked at as harassment, especially if the topic is regularly brought up (Greene, 2009). Pressure to retire can indicate a hostile workplace and be legally classified as age discrimination. However, although these practices are illegal, they are hard to bring to court in practice. It can be hard for employees to provide evidence that their performance is objectively at par with that of other employees, and that unfavorable treatment is due to age discrimination. Furthermore, a US Supreme Court ruling increased the standard of burden of proofs for plaintiffs, thereby raising the bar for older workers to make their case (Savage, 2009).

In a context where governments push individuals to stay in the workforce longer, organizational members—and in particular employers and supervisors—may often be the primary economic agents taking actions detrimental to this target group. Importantly, however, these actions need not be systematically ill-intended: pragmatic concerns may help explain some of the difficulties faced by older workers. Because valued organizational resources such as jobs, promotions, and pay raises are limited, employers may try to strike a balance between the conflicting needs of various generations. In this regard, delaying retirement of or massively hiring from the growing segment of older workers—instead of promoting younger ones—may create a bottleneck that prevents upward mobility for younger generations and hinders their motivation. In support of such a claim, preliminary research found that a higher proportion of older workers in organizations reduces younger workers' probability of receiving a wage increase (Berg et al., 2019; see also Bovini & Paradisi, 2019).<sup>6</sup> These results are consistent with the beliefs held by organizational members: some surveys indicate that both employers and employees think older staff members should retire so younger workers can have a genuine chance of promotion (Groom, 2013; Willis Towers Watson, 2018). The workplace may therefore be the battleground of broader intergenerational tensions around scarce resources (North & Fiske, 2013a), in which employers and managers become the designated referees.

Some researchers have also invoked perverse effects of age discrimination laws to explain some of older workers' difficulties to regain employment (Lahey, 2008, 2010). Employers may be reluctant to hire older workers because, contrary to nonprotected segments of the workforce, they can sue their organization under the age discrimination act if they subsequently feel unfairly treated as employees (e.g., being let go or not promoted). In this regard, not hiring older workers represents a convenient way to avoid legal risks—it is even more so when proving age bias at the recruiting stage can reveal much more difficult than on-the-job.

The scarcity of valued organizational resources and the perverse effects of antidiscrimination laws constitute two examples of pragmatic concerns which—justified or not—may affect employers' and managers' behavior toward older workers. These

concerns acknowledged, evidence also underscores the detrimental effects of managers' endorsement of negative stereotypes about the older fringe of the workforce and their enforcement of prejudicial age norms.

### From stereotypes of, to discrimination toward older workers

The term *stereotypes* commonly refers to *descriptive stereotypes*: probabilistic generalizations about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of a group or class of people (Hilton & Von Hippel, 1996; Judd & Park, 1993; Weber & Crocker, 1983). Often based on hearsay, preconceived ideas, or unsubstantiated assumptions, stereotypes are generally negative, simplistic, and one-sided (Ford & Stangor, 1992; Judd & Park, 1993; Jussim, 1991), such that, endorsed and applied to a target, they constitute a bedrock for prejudice and discrimination (Allport, 1954; Fiske, 1998).

Multiple comprehensive reviews and meta-analyses identified a long list of both positive and negative stereotypes associated with older workers, from friendly to inflexible, and knowledgeable to outdated (see Ng & Feldman, 2012, and Posthuma & Campion, 2009, for a review). In fact, some of these stereotypes may be learned very early on in life: examining more than 650 children's books, Ansello (1978) found that the elderly were generally portrayed as secondary characters, without jobs, creating problems. Our personal appraisal of the literature suggests that most of the negative stereotypes surrounding older workers can be clustered around three broad themes: their supposed lower performance, lack of adaptability, and higher cost. After describing the nature of these three stereotype domains, we discuss their consequences on organizational members' attitudes and behaviors.

#### **Descriptive stereotypes of older workers**

*Lower performance.* Performance can be broadly defined as the outcome of a worker's motivation and competence (Ferrari, 2010; Maier, 1955), two dimensions on which older workers are frequently perceived as lower than their younger counterparts. From a motivation standpoint, they are viewed as less dedicated, more frequently absent, and more focused on their personal life (Feldman & Ng, 2007; Fritzsche, DeRouin, &

<sup>6</sup>As a noteworthy counter point, economists examining this question at the aggregate (rather than firm) level generally report that older workers' employment does not affect, or in some cases, may even boost younger people's chance of work by enlarging the workforce and in turn stimulating the economic demand (e.g., Munnell & Wu, 2013). Therefore research seems to find somewhat contradicting results based on the lens used (i.e., market or firm).

Salas, 2009; Gordon, Whelan-Berry, & Hamilton, 2007), implying that they invest less time and energy into their work. From a competence standpoint, they are seen as slower and less intelligent, as well as possessing outdated skills (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007; Kite, Stockdale, Whitley, & Johnson, 2005; Raza & Carpenter, 1987), implying that they are not as efficient as their younger counterparts (i.e., they “get less done” in a given amount of time). As a result, older workers are viewed as less productive and performant at their job than the rest of the workforce (Appelbaum, Wenger, Pachon Buitrago, & Kaur, 2016; Avolio & Barrett, 1987; Cuddy & Fiske, 2002; Hedge, Borman, & Lammlein, 2006), an impression exacerbated by people’s tendency to attribute poor performance to stable, internal factors for older more than younger workers (Dedrick & Dobbins, 1991).

But are these perceptions accurate? Taken together, evidence tends to rebuff these stereotypes. Most researchers found no relation between age and performance (e.g., Ferris & King, 1992; McEvoy & Cascio, 1989; Prenda & Stahl, 2001; Reio & Sanders-Reio, 1999). The claim of a negative relationship seems even more tenuous when examining performance comprehensively, going beyond core tasks to include components such as organizational citizenship behavior (i.e., positive discretionary behaviors performed by employees in addition to their job requirements), at which older workers tend to do better than younger ones (Ng & Feldman, 2008).

*Lack of adaptability.* Older workers are frequently depicted as less adaptable than the rest of the workforce. From a personality standpoint, they are viewed as more rigid and dogmatic (Rosen & Jerdee, 1976; Vrugt & Schabracq, 1996; Weiss & Maurer, 2004), as well as less creative (Metcalf & Thompson, 1990; Rosen & Jerdee, 1976). From a capability perspective, they are seen as possessing outdated skills and deemed less willing and able to update them than the rest of the workforce (Brooke & Taylor, 2005; Greller, 2006). In particular, they are described as having less potential for development, being more difficult to teach, and having less capacity to learn new material (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007; Wrenn & Maurer, 2004). This perception is particularly exacerbated in the domain of technology, in which older workers are seen as less willing to embrace and less persistent in implementing new technology (Morris and Venkatesh, 2000), making them bottlenecks to improved organizational efficiency.

Taken together, the perception that older workers are less open to change, creative, trainable, and technologically savvy contributes to a general impression that

they cannot adapt to modern, fast-changing workplace environments. But are all these beliefs supported by facts? In sharp contrast with these stereotypes, a large metaanalysis found a positive relationship between age and change-oriented behaviors, and no significant relation with attitudes toward organizational changes, risk taking, creative self-efficacy, and innovative behaviors (Ng & Feldman, 2012). Claims regarding technological inaptitude are also not strongly supported (Friedberg, 2003; Mitzner et al., 2010; Peterson & Spiker, 2005). Finally, although some evidence suggests that older workers may be generally less interested in career development and training activities than their younger counterparts (Greller, 2006; Ng & Feldman, 2012)—a finding consistent with developmental research pointing out that young adults tend to be oriented toward growth while older adults put more emphasis on preventing losses (Freund, 2006; Heckhausen, Wrosch, & Schulz, 2010)—these age differences may also be due to the nature (e.g., topics, goals) and format of the training currently offered in organizations. In addition, the claim that they are harder to train finds mixed support (Kubeck, Delp, Haslett, & McDaniel, 1996). Furthermore, training still seems to represent an effective way to improve job performance for older workers (Sterns & Doverspike, 1987). In this regard, choices of training and delivery method may play an important role in ensuring the effectiveness of career development for the more senior fringe of the workforce (Beier & Ackerman, 2005; Callahan, Kiker, & Cross, 2003; Posthuma, & Champion, 2009; Warr, 1993).

*Higher cost.* An additional albeit less commonly studied domain of descriptive stereotypes targeting older workers is their perceived higher cost. This belief is not only formulated explicitly (Capowski & Peak, 1994; Munnell, Sass, & Soto, 2006), referring to higher salaries and health care usage, but also implicitly. For instance, older workers may be seen as having a higher level of absenteeism (Ng & Feldman, 2013), implying that they might be remunerated more for fewer hours spent at the office. Closer to retirement, they may also be seen as having shorter tenure (Ng & Feldman, 2009), such that employers will not recoup—or will benefit less from—any investment they put in them (e.g., training and development) (Gray & McGregor, 2003). Combined, these claims suggest that older workers cost more to the organization than other workers. But how true is it?

The idea that older workers are more expensive may be somewhat a myth (Cappelli & Novelli, 2010). Older workers are undeniably paid more on average than



younger ones. However, they are not paid more by virtue of their age, but rather, because of their experience—a valued resource for employers. Furthermore, although they use health care more frequently than do younger workers, the latter are more likely to have dependents (i.e., young children) whose medical costs are often high and covered by employers too (Cappelli & Novelli, 2010). In addition, older workers have a lower level of nonmedical-related absenteeism than other workers (Ng & Feldman, 2008), and certain studies suggest that they may actually also call in sick less often (Broadbridge, 2001; Farrants, Kjeldgård, Marklund, Head, & Alexanderson, 2018; Ng & Feldman, 2013; RIAS, 2015). Finally, the idea that investing in them is less profitable to organizations also finds little support (Gray & McGregor, 2003; Ng & Feldman, 2009). Indeed, organizations do not typically collect the data necessary to assess the return on training investments and compare their effects on the productivity of younger and older workers. In addition, the life span of skills is generally short, such that companies training employees a few years before retirement may still derive most of the benefits of the acquired skills. That said, even for skills with longer life span, training older workers may actually reveal a better long-term payoff than for younger workers, for voluntary turnover of older workers is low in contrast to that of younger workers who are more likely to be poached by competitors or search for more highly remunerated jobs outside the organization. Therefore the idea that older workers are costlier may *sound* right more than it *is* right.

### **Consequences of stereotypes on older workers' outcomes**

Taken together, the stereotype triad—according to which older workers are less performant on current organizational tasks and less able to adapt to new ones, all the while being more expensive—conveys the message that older workers mostly represent a burden for organizations. Although many of these claims do not seem to find scientific support, they nonetheless have real consequences for the segment of the workforce they target.

In a study of nearly 800 managers, endorsement of stereotypes toward older workers predicted attitudes toward later retirement, above and beyond organizational characteristics (e.g., industry) and respondent's demographics (e.g., age and gender) (Henkens, 2005; see also, Karpinska, Henkens, & Schippers, 2013). Conducting a survey across the United Kingdom and Hong Kong, Chiu, Chan, Snape, and Redman (2001) found similar effects on professionals' attitudes toward the training, promotion, and retention of older

workers, as well as on their willingness to work with and support positive discrimination in favor of the older fringe of the workforce. Yet these studies examined behavioral *intentions*, and to our knowledge, scant research to date has linked the effect of age stereotype beliefs to actual workplace behaviors.

Age stereotypes may also negatively affect older workers' own beliefs and behaviors. In particular, they may experience stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995; see Schmader, Johns, & Forbes, 2008 for a review), by which older workers, aware of others' perceptions of them, may adapt their behaviors by fear of confirming a stereotype about their age group. Von Hippel, Kalokerinos, and Henry (2013) found that older workers' belief that they may be the target of demeaning stereotypes negatively affected their job attitudes and work mental health, ultimately increasing their intention to resign or retire.

Beyond the fear of other people's attitude, older workers can themselves endorse the stereotype content associated with their group, leading to a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. Stressing the partly socially constructed nature of aging, work around *stereotype embodiment* has particularly explored this issue (see Levy, 2009 for an overview). This body of literature proposes that age stereotypes, omnipresent in our surrounding culture, are internalized throughout the life span, operate unconsciously, gain salience from self-relevance, and ultimately affect one's self-definition and functioning—or even one's health. Evidence in work settings suggests that stereotype embodiment by older workers may hurt their performance (Hess, Auman, Colcombe, & Rahhal, 2003; Kang & Chasteen, 2009; Levy, 2009; Meisner, 2011), and hinder their intention to retire later or pursue additional training and development that would help them achieve that goal (Desmette & Gaillard, 2008; Finkelstein, King, & Voyles, 2015; Greller & Stroh, 1995; Maurer, Barbeite, Weiss, & Lippstreu, 2008).

Despite a lack of research demonstrating that descriptive age stereotypes influence real on-site managerial practices, accumulating evidence shows that endorsement of demeaning beliefs about older workers negatively affect the attitudes and behavioral intentions of organizational members, including those of in-group members themselves.

### **The powerful prescriptive effects of age norms**

By and large, stereotyping constitutes the primary cause of discrimination against older workers studied by organizational researchers. However, other important mechanisms may be at play and help cast light on

unfair behaviors toward this target group. Age norms, in particular, represent a promising avenue for further investigations.

Age norms reflect a type of social norm—shared, obligatory behavioral rules enforced by positive or negative sanctions (see [Blake & Davis, 1964](#)) formulated as prescriptions (i.e., what people *ought* to do) or proscriptions (e.g., what people *ought not* to do)—that define what is age-appropriate ([Neugarten, Havighurst, & Tobin, 1961](#); [Peterson, 1996](#); [Rook, Catalano, & Dooley, 1989](#)). Powerful determinants of behavior ([Cialdini, Reno, & Kallgren, 1990](#)), social norms can reveal particularly useful to set common grounds that ease social life in community. However, their binding role can have perverse effects, particularly when they unjustifiably target a group or unreasonably constrain someone's options and opportunities.

Age norms often take the form of prescriptive rules defining the timing of major life events (e.g., at what age one ought to get married, become a parent, retire, and so on). Together, these rules define a *social clock* against which individuals evaluate themselves and others ([Neugarten & Danan, 1973](#); [Neugarten et al., 1961](#)). Individuals who deviate from this social clock may face undesirable outcomes ([Elder, 1975](#); [Neugarten, 1979](#); [Neugarten, Hagestad, Binstock, & Shanas, 1976](#)), suffering stigma and negative social sanctions from others, receiving less social support—for people of the same age or life stage may not relate to their experience—and engaging in unflattering social comparisons with those who are “on-time,” which can threaten their self-esteem. Importantly, the social clock may have particularly strong effects on women's careers, pressuring female workers into devoting additional time to their personal or family life at key moments of their professional life, digging a gap in career progression between them and their male counterparts that they will not get the opportunity to close in later years of their career (e.g., [Kleven, Landais, & Sogaard, 2018](#)).

[Lawrence \(1984, 1988\)](#) showed that implicit timetables regiment not only people's personal life but also career milestones in organizations. Presenting data from managers at a large electric utility company, the author reported that people who find themselves as “behind time” in their careers had more negative attitudes toward work than other managers—even when their perceptions of falling behind were inaccurate. In addition, employees behind the normative age career schedule received lower performance ratings, suggesting that they may incur a penalty from their managers for deviating from the organizational norm. Age norms therefore influence not only the timing and

well-being of our personal life, but also that of the workplace.

These norms have important implications for older workers. First, those who fall “behind schedule”—which is more likely to occur as one grows older and reaches the peak of his vertical ascension on the corporate ladder—may receive lower performance ratings (above and beyond objective performance), as suggested by Lawrence's data. Second, social norms surrounding retirement age ([Joulain & Mullet, 2001](#); [Radl, 2012a](#)) may serve as a coercive tool to push older employees out of the organization ([Karpinska et al., 2013](#)). Third, they may guide job candidate selection, as the minimum number of years of experience required may serve not only as a filter for candidates with too few experiences but also as an indicator that one might have too much.

Furthermore, age norms inform a social hierarchy of age, according to which one ought to respect and defer to one's eldest. Such a prescription may make young supervisors uncomfortable in the presence of a subordinate older than them, making them reluctant to hire or manage older workers ([Cappelli & Novelli, 2010](#)). In line with this assertion, ([Smith & Harrington, 1994](#)) reported that participants in their 20s believed they would face more resistance from subordinates in their 40s than did participants themselves in their 40s. In addition, surveys of subordinates and supervisors provide early evidence that age-incongruent vertical dyads—in which supervisors are younger than their subordinates—may be more at risk of dysfunctional dynamics, with supervisors reporting subpar performance from older subordinates ([Pearce & Xu, 2012](#)) and subordinates reporting lower level of support and leadership from their younger supervisors ([Collins, Hair, & Rocco, 2009](#)), compared with age-congruent vertical dyads. That said, so far, studies examining this issue were all correlational in nature, and additional work is needed to ensure that these findings are not the result of a reverse causality: employees who moved up the hierarchy at a slower pace due to lower performance end up managed by supervisors younger than them (in which case employees' lower performance is the triggering factor leading to their being supervised by younger, more successful managers).

Research on age-related prescriptive stereotypes (i.e., beliefs about what a target age group ought or ought not to do) provides further evidence that age norms influence attitudes and behaviors toward older targets. [North and Fiske \(2013a, 2013b\)](#) have identified three types of prescriptive stereotypes ascribed to older adults: succession (i.e., encouraging older adults to actively transfer envied resources to younger generations), identity (i.e., pushing older adults to avoid

using symbols attributed to younger age groups), and consumption (i.e., preventing older adults from passively consuming collective resources). Held more strongly by younger than older adults, these prescriptive rules may easily transfer to the work domain (see [Martin, North, & Phillips, 2019](#)); within a corporate setting, older workers are expected to limit their consumption of common organizational resources such as training or medical support (i.e., consumption), not to apply to technology-focused jobs reserved to the young (i.e., identity), and to retire early, so as to make way for a new generation of workers (i.e., succession).

Age norms define a timeline of important career transitions that inform the perceptions that organizational members have of older workers, and impact the decision employers and older workers make with regard to recruiting, promotion, development and training, or retirement, which ultimately affect the set of options and opportunities of the older fringe of the workforce.

### At the intersection of age and gender: the case of female older workers

Although research often considers older workers as a monolith, this population can be divided into subgroups whose experience of older age at the workplace may be drastically different. Of particular interest to this chapter, does older workers' gender affect the way they are treated and the level of age discrimination they face at work?

Surely, there seems to be a gender difference in *perceptions* of age discrimination at the workplace. Surveying over 1000 employees from a large UK financial services institution, [Duncan and Loretto \(2004\)](#) found that women above 40 were more likely to report having experienced age-related discrimination than employees of any other age/gender group. Similarly, a survey of Americans age 45–74 found that 64% of women believed people faced age discrimination at work, five percentage points higher than men in the same age range ([Perron, 2018](#)). While it is possible that this differential results from a more acute sensitivity of women to discriminatory situations, it may also reflect a stronger age discrimination for older female workers.

Despite the paucity of research on the matter, available data suggest that the situation of older female workers looks more precarious. After summarizing this evidence, we examine the potential psychological mechanisms which, combined with nongendered ageism, may help explain this difference.

### Do older female workers have it worse?

Although older workers generally find themselves in a more insecure situation than the rest of the workforce, the case of older female workers specifically seems even more concerning. Older women are at greater risk for living in poverty than are older men ([Gornick, Munzi, Sierminska, & Smeeding, 2009](#)). A report conducted for the US Senate reported that the median incomes of American women age 65 and over were approximately 25% lower than their male counterparts, a phenomenon heightened for single women, minorities, and women above age 80 ([Government Accountability Office, 2012](#)). According to this same report, in 2010 the poverty rate for men age 65 and above was 5%; it reached 9% for women.

Multiple societal factors help explain this gender differential ([Duncan & Loretto, 2004](#); GAO, 2012). First, because they are more likely than men to take time out of the workforce to care for family members (i.e., children and elderly parents), they generally have shorter period of active professional life during which they can accumulate savings ([Quick & Moen, 1998](#)). Second, and partly resulting from the higher burden of family obligations, they are more likely than men to occupy lower-income and part-time jobs, restricting their ability to save ([Blau & Kahn, 2017](#)). This effect is further exacerbated by gender-based salary inequalities at equivalent position and level of competence, a phenomenon well-documented by economists (e.g., [Altonji & Blank, 1999](#); [Lazear & Rosen, 1990](#)), sociologists (e.g., [Mandel & Semyonov, 2005](#); [Reskin & Bielby, 2005](#)), and management scholars alike (e.g., [Blau & Kahn, 2007](#); [Roos & Gatta, 1999](#)). Third, women tend to live longer, and must therefore plan for a longer period of postretirement. Finally—and acknowledging that this list is not comprehensive—because men still frequently remain the primary breadwinner, older women's household income and total assets incur a more severe hit than that of men after a late divorce or widowhood. Most of the gap between older men's and women's likelihood to live under the poverty line is driven by older single women; for instance, a US Senate report on the topic found that, following widowhood, men's income fell by 22%, compared with 37% for women (GAO, 2012).

Yet, although women may be in higher need to stay in the workforce longer to prepare for retirement, evidence suggests that they might also be at higher risk of being pushed out of the workforce early ([Cabrera, 2007](#); [Stone, 2008](#)). Examining retirement data from 11 Western European countries, [Radl \(2012b\)](#) found that, controlling for family situations (e.g., married,

divorced, number of children), women's lower social class position led to gender differences in likelihood of involuntary retirement. Specifically, women were over-represented in professional activities that entailed high employment risks, low old-age income, and frequent patterns of early retirement. They are also more likely to work in part time jobs—to accommodate career and family life—a factor that further increases vulnerability to a forced exit from the labor force in later life (Van Solinge and Henkens, 2007). In addition, evidence from large audit studies suggests that older female workers face worse age discrimination during rehiring than do older male workers, raising the bar to regaining employment (Neumark et al., 2015, 2016, 2017). Taken together, these findings highlight the plight of older female workers specifically.

### Gendered ageism and “Lookism”

The above section highlights significant differences in financial outcomes and career success for older male and female workers. Undeniably, these disparities result (at least in part) from an accumulation of gender differences throughout the professional career (e.g., gender discrimination, accommodation of stronger family expectations for women) which, summed up at the end of a career, only become more salient.

Yet the question remains of whether older female workers, above and beyond the negative effects of gender inequalities, face stronger age discrimination than older male workers. In other words, do we observe not only ageism but also gendered ageism at the workplace? The literature on intersectionality suggests that members of this subpopulation, as both women and older individuals, combine two subordinate-group identities, a particularity that may affect the way they are treated compared with their same-age male counterparts (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Two competing hypotheses prevail with regard to how these two dimensions may interact (see Martin et al., 2019 for a detailed discussion). The double jeopardy hypothesis suggests that members of two stigmatized groups suffer the effects of both group-affiliations. Following this logic, age and gender should lead to additive or multiplicative discriminatory consequences, such that older female workers face a worse treatment than their male counterparts. In contrast, the intersectional escape hypothesis proposes that dominant members of a subordinate group (e.g., older men), seen as more prototypical of their group identity (e.g., older adults) and therefore perceived as more threatening of the established relation of

dominance, will more heavily bear the burden of discrimination targeting their group. Along these lines, non-dominant members (e.g., older women), less visible, may evade part of the negative consequences endured by dominant members of their subordinate identities.

In exploring issues of intersectionality, researchers have primarily focused on gender and ethnic identities—garnering evidence in support of both hypotheses (see Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008 for a review). Comparatively, little research has examined the effects of age and gender intersectionality. Quantitative studies that did, however, often found evidence consistent with the intersectional escape hypothesis. Lab studies examining global evaluations of older targets from both genders reported more positive attitudes toward older women than men (Laditka, Fischer, Laditka, & Segal, 2004; Narayan, 2008). Consistent with these findings, a meta-analysis found that older female targets were judged as more competent than older male targets (Kite et al., 2005). Finally, exploring the question in a work domain through a series of seven lab and archival studies, (Martin et al., 2019) found that female older workers, seen as less threatening than older males to the interests of the rest of the workforce, were somewhat spared of not only gender prescriptive agentic stereotypes—according to which female professionals ought not to exert dominance and authority—but also succession stereotypes tied to their age group—according to which they should “make way” for the younger generation. These results suggest that older female workers, less prototypical than their older male or younger female counterparts, might face less penalty for their age or gender. However, Kornadt, Voss, and Rothermund (2013) examined people's perceptions of older men and women across eight life domains and reported more favorable attitudes toward older female targets for all domains *except* work and finance, in which male targets were seen more favorably. Further research is therefore needed to better delineate the factors and conditions that positively or negatively affect perceptions of older women at the workplace.

Offering a somewhat more complex picture, qualitative work examining the experience of older female workers reports that women might be subject to triple jeopardy, being victims of not only age and gender biases, but also “lookism” (i.e., prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of someone's appearance; e.g., Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Broadbridge, Granleese, & Sayer, 2006; Jyrkinen, 2014; Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012; Itzin, Phillipson, & Taylor, 1993). Organizations often set implicit expectations regarding workers' physical

appearance, a demand that generally falls upon women more than men (Jyrkinen & McKie, 2012). Some researchers have argued that these expectations toward women constitute an extra burden for older women, who must attempt to conform to the same standard of elegance, attractiveness, and fitness as younger women in a society that often equates beauty with youthfulness (Krekula, Nikander, & Wilińska, 2018; Pritchard & Whiting, 2015; Spedale, Coupland, & Tempest, 2014). These expectations can in turn eclipse the experience and knowledge that older women gained through years of work, especially in comparison with their male counterparts, who do not experience the same pressure to “keep their look” in order to remain successful in their careers. This burden may be compounded by the fact that women are perceived as “old” earlier than men (Deutsch, Zalenski, & Clark, 1986; Harris, 1994; Itzin et al., 1993), and that they are often overrepresented in jobs with higher standards of appearance, especially in low-skilled jobs (Neumark et al., 2017). In line with this argument, Lovaglia, Soboroff, Kelley, Rogalin, and Lucas (2017) found evidence that people perceived women’s value at the workplace to peak and decline at an earlier age than that of men, a pattern consistent with the idea that people may see women’s appearance as part of their work contribution, an asset that depreciates earlier as they age.

Yet, the idea that older women may suffer from “lookism” more than younger women—or that it adds an extra layer to their age and gender identity that further penalizes them compared with their male counterparts—is still debated. For instance, other qualitative researchers have suggested that older age may free professional women from the pressure of meeting unattainable beauty and attractiveness ideals (Isopahkala-Bouret, 2017). No longer judged by male supervisors, colleagues, and clients for their looks, they can finally be valued for their competence, and gain in professional authority and credibility. Therefore although promising, research on the role of lookism in gendered ageism at the workplace deserves further investigation. In particular, former research has primarily relied on qualitative methods to document the experience of older female workers. The introduction of a more pluri-methodological approach (e.g., quantitative studies) as well as male comparison sets (to get a sense of men’s experience in this domain) may help clarify the current discrepancies in this literature.

Taken together, these results suggest that, on the one hand, older female workers might benefit from more positive general attitudes and be somewhat freed of the agentic prescriptive stereotypes that younger women and older men face. On the other hand, these

relative benefits may be offset by increased difficulties to meet the high expectations of physical appearance imposed upon women in general, regardless of their age. These perceptions, in turn, may affect their work and career prospects, particularly in a context where women hold jobs in which appearance tends to matter more.

## Conclusion and opportunities for future research

Despite calls for organizations to adapt to the inevitable aging of the workforce, evidence suggests that older workers still face a significant amount of hardship at the workplace. These obstacles, most often stemming from organizational members’ age perceptions and beliefs, have serious implications for the mental and financial well-being of this population. In a context where workers are increasingly left to their own devices to achieve financial security for retirement, extended time in the workforce becomes an indispensable route for many, and the age barriers they must overcome to remain in it and be fruitful contributors can severely impede this goal. Importantly, multiple indicators paint an even gloomier picture for female older workers, who tend to earn less than men throughout their careers and are often more vulnerable to involuntary retirement. These gender specific plights put female older workers at higher risks of financial distress when they exit the workforce, especially for those who are the sole earner of their household (i.e., single women, widows, and divorcees). In addition, early evidence highlights gender differences in the experience of age discrimination; although women may be freed of negative prescriptive agentic norms targeting younger women and older men, they are still burdened by societal and organizational demands of physical appearance—often centered around youthfulness—which become increasingly harder to meet as one ages.

Nonetheless, the relative lack of action on the employers’ side should not obscure the fact that solutions do exist to those who want to better support—and even benefit from—the demographic changes of the labor force (International Labour Organization, 2011). In particular, employers can implement more deliberate strategies and policies to recruit and retain older workers, including better suited compensation schemes, more flexible work arrangements (e.g., additional telecommute and specific work schedules), creating positions suited to experience-based skills, and improving job and workplace design using ergonomics principles (Berg, Dutton, &

Wrzesniewski, 2013; Garg, 1991; North & Hershfield, 2014). Organizations can also develop mentoring programs to increase intergenerational interactions and maximize likelihood that important know-hows and business acumen remain in the organization past older age cohorts' retirements. In addition, as the workforce is aging, more and more employees will work under the supervision of younger supervisors; early evidence highlighting the potential discomfort of younger supervisors toward older-worker–younger-boss dyads suggests that organizations may want to put in place special training to alleviate younger managers' concerns and facilitate age-incongruent vertical interactions in organizations. Finally, organizations have a role to play in improving transitions to retirement; efforts may include allowing older workers not only to climb *up* but also climb *down* the corporate ladder (which would also reduce the risk of bottlenecks for younger workers' advancement) and educate employees on—and encourage them to think about—financial planning for early retirement (a US survey revealed that 83% of middle-income baby boomers did not receive any training on this matter; Bankers Life Center for a Secure Retirement, 2014). Employers who took some of these initiatives have already reaped great benefits (see North & Hershfield, 2014 for a list of examples). One can only hope that the successful initiatives of these pioneers create the impetus for a broader paradigm shift across employers.

In this effort, scholars have a role to play, too. In particular, the present chapter highlights four domains in need for further academic contribution. First, although a large body of research has examined the stereotypes associated with older workers, comparatively little work has measured the effects of their endorsement on important workplace outcomes nor captured their real behavioral consequences within organizations. As a result, it remains unclear how beliefs about older workers really contribute to negative work-related outcomes, above and beyond other factors such as employers' attempt to conciliate the needs of both younger and older generations. More research is needed to link stereotypes to real-world outcomes and assess the magnitude of their impact given additional constraints motivating organizations' decisions relevant to older workers.

Second, the large amount of research on stereotyping also masks a lack of research examining complementary psychological mechanisms affecting age discrimination at the workplace. In this regard, age norms constitute a promising area for future research. In particular, much work is needed to better understand the nature and effects of interactions in age-incongruent vertical dyads,

and how to maximize their effectiveness for both the older subordinates and the younger supervisors.

Third, departing from a uniform conceptualization of ageism and building toward a more *gender*-specific understanding of age bias at the workplace, future research should further attempt to tackle how age and gender interact to affect the opportunities, career trajectory, and outcome of older female workers. In particular, quantitative researchers may want to examine how “lookism” differentially affects male and female workers over time.

Fourth and finally, given the importance and time-sensitive nature of the topic for the business world at large, researchers should further examine the factors moderating age bias, and offer practical solutions and interventions to better manage an increasingly age-diverse workforce. For instance, consistent with the contact hypothesis, according to which intergroup contact (under appropriate conditions) can help reduce prejudice toward minorities, Henkens (2005) found that employers who interacted more frequently with older workers tended to hold a more positive view of older workers' productivity and had more favorable attitudes toward later retirement. Future research should further explore how intergroup contact and other maneuvers (e.g., perspective taking, Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000; and projection into one's older self, Bryan & Hershfield, 2012) can be leveraged to reduce age bias and alleviate its negative consequences.

As societies and their labor keep aging, these research avenues offer scholars a busy but promising agenda for the years to come.

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