When ageism leads to performance deficit and to early exit from work

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CIRTES
CERISIS

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Aging and work

- Low employment rate of workers over 50 (OCDE, 2003, 2007)
- High rate of (voluntary) early retirement (Vandenbroucke & vander Hallen, 2002)
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Chronological age

(Barnes-Farrel, 2003; Sterns & Miklos, 1995)
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Chronological age

Functional age

(Barnes-Farrel, 2003; Sterns & Miklos, 1995)
Tâche de vitesse de traitement (temps de réaction) *(Van der Linden et al., 1999)*
Un exemple de « compétences sur la tâche » : analyse des motifs de déplacement (auto-contrôleurs en sortie de laminoirs) (Pueyo, 2000)
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Chronological age
Functional age
Organizational age

(Barnes-Farrel, 2003; Sterns & Miklos, 1995)
Déficits auditifs (aux fréquences aiguës) et exposition au bruit (Mollat & Bonneau, 1996)
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Aging and work

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Chronological age
Functional age
Organizational age
Psychosocial age?

« Older workers »

(Barnes-Farrel, 2003; Sterns & Miklos, 1995)
Ageism at work?

**Stereotypes about older adults:** Ambivalent content *(Cuddy et al., 2005; Gaillard & Desmette, 2007; Shore & Goldberg, 2005)*

- **A few positive stereotypes:** Older workers are perceived as *more experienced, more loyal, and more reliable* than younger workers.

- **Prevalence of negative stereotypes** about their motivation and ability to work: Older workers are perceived as *waiting for retirement, less motivated to remain up-to-date in their jobs, less flexible, slower at processing information, and less able to keep up with new technological developments* than younger workers.
Ageism and its outputs

- **Stereotypes legitimate discrimination** (Jost & Banaji, 1994)
  
i.e. OW are viewed as less productive, less able to learn
  
  => *lower offer for hiring and training*

  => **Ageism** (Butler, 1987): *stigmatisation and discrimination of individuals because they are old*

- **Stereotypes influence targets’ behavior** (Steele & Aronson, 1995)
  
i.e. OW are viewed as waiting for retirement
  
  => *behavioral norm* (« early retirement culture », Guillemard, 2003)

  ⇒ *What is the impact of ageism on older workers’ attitudes and performance?*
General model

Individual variables
age, gender, health, wealth, education, ...

Organisational variables
sector, work load, autonomy, ...

Attitudes

Performance
General model

**Individual variables**
- age, gender, health,
- wealth, education, ...

**Organisational variables**
- sector, work load,
- autonomy, ...

What happens when workers self-categorise as « older »? (study 1)

PSYCHOSOCIAL AGE

Attitudes

Performance
General model

Individual variables
age, gender, health, wealth, education, ...

Organisational variables
sector, work load, autonomy, ...

What happens when workers self-categorise as « older » ? (study 1)
- Attitudes

What happens when workers are categorised as « older » ? (study 2)
- Performance
General model

**Individual variables**
- age, gender, health, wealth, education, ...

**Organisational variables**
- sector, work load, autonomy, ...

What happens when workers self-categorise as "older"? (study 1)
- Attitudes

What happens when workers are categorised as "older"? (study 2)
- Performance

How to explain the effects of being a member of the "older workers" group? (study 3)
General methodology

❖ **Participants**: workers
- from 45 to 64 years old
- males and females
- white- and blue-collar

❖ **Field**: organisations
- in the private sector
- with no financial difficulties (e.g., no downsizing) and with a working convention allowing for early retirement

❖ **Procedure**: 
- self-fulfilled questionnaires
- likert scales from 1 (totally disagree) to 7 (totally agree)
When workers self-categorise as « older »
(study 1)

- **Procedure**: surveys in companies, N = 352; workers 50+
- **Results**: attitudes towards early retirement and work

Self-categorisation as « OW »
e.g. « I see myself as an older worker »

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Results: attitudes towards early retirement and work*

Self-categorisation as « OW »

e.g. « I see myself as an older worker »

Early exit intention

e.g. « I would retire early if I can afford it. »

* Controlling for individual and organisational variables

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![Diagram]

Self-categorisation as « OW »
- e.g. « I see myself as an older worker »

Early exit intention
- e.g. « I would retire early if I can afford it. »

Career aspirations
- e.g. « I would like to learn new work-related things. »

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When workers self-categorise as « older » (study 1)

- **Procedure**: surveys in companies, N = 352; workers 50+

- **Results**: attitudes towards early retirement and work*

  - Early exit intention
    - e.g. « I would retire early if I can afford it. »
  - Career aspirations
    - e.g. « I would like to learn new work-related things. »
  - Intergenerational competition
    - e.g. « Older workers should be given some advantages over younger workers. »

* Self-categorisation as « OW »
  - e.g. « I see myself as an older worker »

* Controling for individual and organisational variables

Conclusion
(study 1)

« Older worker » identity

Disengagement from work
Conflict between generations
But …

« Older worker » identity

Disengagement from work
Conflict between generations

=> Studies 2 & 3 : testing the causal link between « OW » identity and performance/attitudes at work
When workers are categorised as « older »
(study 2)

❖ **Context**: Contrat pour la solidarité entre les générations

« (...)*The belgian government will require organisations to investigate the future prospects of their workers who are over 45 years every two years. »
When workers are categorised as « older » (study 2)

- **Context**: Contrat pour la solidarité entre les générations
  « (...) The belgian government will require organisations to investigate the future prospects of their workers who are over 45 years every two years. »

- **Procedure**: experimental design, N = 63 workers 45+

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**Dependent variable**: performance in the « Wonderlic Personnel Test »
Results: test performance*

\[ F(1, 59) = 4.20, p < .05 \]

* Controlling for individual and organisational variables

How to explain the deleterious effects of the age-based category?

Negative stereotypes
How to explain the deleterious effects of the age-based category?

- Negative stereotypes

Stereotype threat
**Stereotype Threat Theory** *(Steele et al., 2002)*

A situation where negative stereotypes associated with one of my own group membership are relevant to interpret my behavior

Awareness and concern that I risk being judged by, or treated in terms of, those stereotypes

Reduction of my performance and/or aspirations in any alleged stereotype-relevant domain (i.e., domain avoidance reactions)
How to explain the deleterious effects of the age-based category?

Negative stereotypes → Stereotype threat → Commitment to work Performance
Stereotype Threat reduction

The activation of positive stereotypes may improve stigmatized individuals’ intellectual performance:

Research has suggested that negative stereotypes about another group lead to a performance boost (‘stereotype lift’ effect, Walton & Cohen, 2003)

A few studies (i.e., Hess et al., 2003) have demonstrated that performance is better following exposure to age-related positive stereotypes than following exposure to negative stereotypes
How to explain the effects of the age-based category?

- Negative stereotypes
- Positive stereotypes

Stereotype threat

- Reduction of the stereotype threat

Commitment to work
Performance

- +
Method (study 3)

Activation of age-related stereotypes

either

Negative stereotypes

or

Positive stereotypes

Early retirement intention

Gaillard, M., & Desmette, D. (submitted). (In)validating stereotypes about older workers influence their intentions to retire early and to learn and develop.
Procedure

Manipulation of stereotypic information about older workers’ ability to work by the means of a newspaper-type article:
- discussing findings of an extensive study on European workers’ ability
- comparing ability of OW (45-59 year-old) with YW (25-39 year-old)
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| Negative stereotypes| **Supported**
“OW are slower than YW” |                                          |
| Positive stereotypes| **Invalidated**
“OW are not more able than YW to solve difficult problems” |                                          |

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Control condition : No article
Results

Impact of stereotypes on early retirement intention *

\[ F_{(1, 55)} = 5.373, \ p < .01 \]

* Controlling for individual and organisational variables
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*Impact of stereotypes on early retirement intention*

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- **positive condition**
- **negative condition**
- **control condition**

* Controlling for individual and organisational variables
Conclusion

- **Social perceptions of age influence older workers’ work aspirations**
  - Negative stereotypes increase early retirement intention
  - Positive stereotypes reduce early retirement intention (and increase work commitment, study 4)
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- The activation of age category = activation of negative stereotypes
  - Pervasive negative stereotypes
  - Implicit activation of stereotypes
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  - Pervasive negative stereotypes
  - Implicit activation of stereotypes

- **Social challenge: fighting against ageism**
  - Promoting positive stereotypes on “older workers” group
  - Reducing prejudice by the intergenerational contact
Thank you for your attention