

Ageism and the Workplace



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Google



November 17, 2010

Reid v. Google: Stray Remarks May Be Considered Evidence of Discrimination

Ageism In Silicon Valley Is So Bad People In Their 20s Are Getting Cosmetic Surgery

LISA EADICICCO MAR 24, 2014, 9:24 AM 10,284 17

Roadmap: Issues & Solutions

1. **Older Workers Face Perceptions of Disability:** Even for those who aren't "old," age(ing) drives beliefs about presumed (in)ability;
2. **Perceptions Yield Discrimination:** Presumed ability perceptions lead to disparate treatment and resource denial;
3. **Proposed Solutions:** What we can do to disrupt misguided perceptions.



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Ageism and Disability

2 Major Stereotype Forms

Descriptive

Prescriptive

Descriptive Stereotype Roots

Societal Attitudes

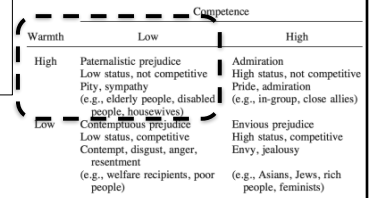
Older age stereotypes:

- Mortality reminder (Greenberg et al., 2004)
- Nice but incompetent (Fiske et al., 2002)
- Useless burden (Nelson, 2005)
- Societally invisible (Thompson, 2007)

Employer Attitudes

Older employee beliefs:

- Too costly (Burtless, 2013)
- Not worth training investment (Dychtwald & Morrison, 2004)



North & Fiske, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 2015

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old people should

old people shouldn't

Prescriptive

"Succession"
◆ active inconvenience
◆ step aside, pass along

"Consumption"
◆ passive inconvenience
◆ don't be a burden

"Identity"
◆ symbolic inconvenience
◆ act your own (old) age

Prescriptive Stereotypes

Succession
(should actively step aside)

"...too old to matter..."

Consumption
(should minimize passive resource depletion)

"...lost stock options valued at millions of dollars when he lost his job."

Identity
(should avoid "young territory")

"not a good cultural fit'..."

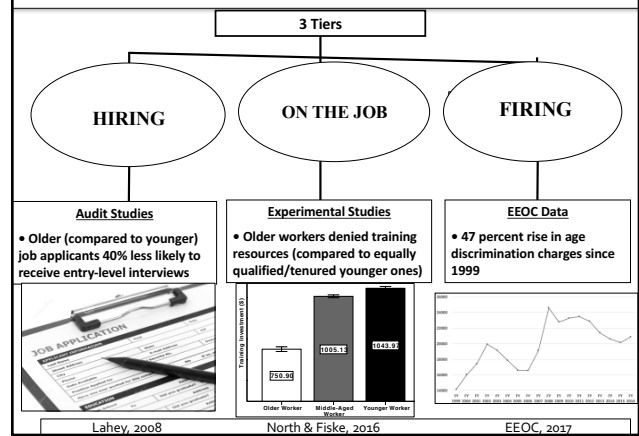
North & Fiske, *PSPB*, 2013

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Multi-Level Barriers



Subtle Consequences

Coded Language

Job descriptions:

- **"Fit in with a young team"** (McGoldrick & Arrowsmith, 1993)
- **"New"** or **"recent"** college graduates (Kopytoff, 2014)
- **"New blood"** (Cardinali & Gordon, 2002)
- **"Willingness to learn,"** **"high ambition"** (Kulik, 2014)

On the job:

- **"Over-qualified"** or poor **"cultural fit"** (McGann et al., 2016)

Older Worker Self-Handicapping

"Stereotype threat":

- **"Memory task"** undermines performance...
- ...**"reading comprehension"** or **"impression formation"** enhances performance (Chasteen et al., 2005; Kang & Chasteen, 2009)

North & Fiske, *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 2015

Generational Resentment

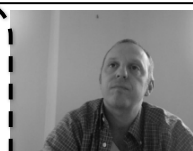
Simulated Workplace Interactions



Violating (Obstructive):
Sticks around; blocks resources for younger generations

VS.

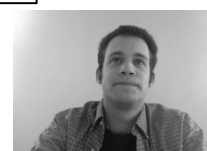
Adhering (Facilitating):
Steps aside; makes way for younger generations



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North & Fiske, *PSPB*, 2013

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Resolving the Issues

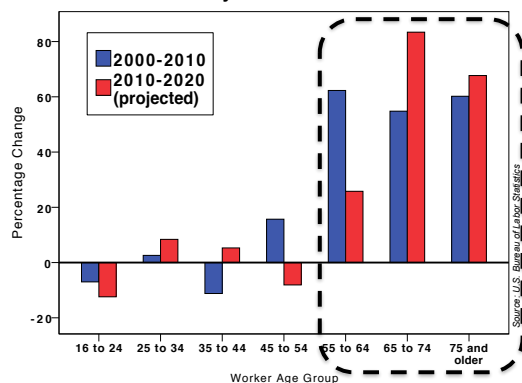
2 Major Imperatives

Demography

Theory

Demography

Recent and Projected Labor Force Growth



Theory

Age is the only social category identifying subgroups that everyone may eventually join.

North & Fiske, *Psychological Bulletin*, 2012

Recognize Truths about Abilities

Domain	Age Trend	Source
Fluid Intelligence (cognitive speed, novel processing)	↓	Horn & Cattell, 1967
Crystallized Intelligence (knowledge, experience)	→/↑	Horn & Cattell, 1967; Bugg et al., 2006
Agreeableness	↑	Helston et al., 2002
Company loyalty	↑	Pitt-Catsoupes et al., 2007
Conscientiousness	↑	Helson et al., 2002
Emotional Stability	↑	Blanchard-Fields, 2007
Emotional Well-being	↑	Carstensen & Mikels, 2005; Williams et al., 2006
Language Complexity	↑	Pennebaker & Stone, 2003
Neuroticism	↓	Loehlin & Martin, 2001
Positive Emotional Experience	↑	Carstensen et al., 2000
Reasoning	↑	Tentori et al., 2001
Wisdom	↑	Grossman et al., 2010

Recognize Truths about Abilities

Source	Study Participants	Finding
Kunze et al., 2013	• 30,061 employees from 93 different German firms	• Younger, rather than older workers are the most resistant to change
McAvoy & Cascio, 1989	• 38,983 total workers (spanning 96 organizational studies over 22 years)	• No overall relationship between age and job performance
Ng & Feldman, 2013	• 9,779 total workers (spanning 98 field studies from the 1980s through 2012)	• No evidence that older workers are less innovative than younger workers
Pitt-Catsoupes et al., 2007	• 578 non-governmental organizations, each with 50 or more employees	• Older workers preferred to younger workers in terms of reliability, loyalty, professional network, skill level relative to job requirements, and productivity

Accommodate Older Workers



- 1) **Flexible**, half-retirement options
- 2) Prioritizing older worker **skill sets**
- 3) Creating **new positions** or adapting old ones
- 4) Changing workplace **ergonomics**

Accommodating Generations | x
www.ageatnyu.org

Accommodating Generations in Employment (AGE) Initiative
NYU Stern School of Business

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PEOPLE ARE LIVING & WORKING LONGER THAN EVER. TRADITIONAL RETIREMENT IS INCREASINGLY OBSOLETE. GENERATIONS ARE BUMPING INTO ONE ANOTHER AT RECORD RATES. OUR RESEARCH UNCOVERS HOW BUSINESSES, POLICY, AND SOCIETY SHOULD BEST ADAPT TO THESE FAR-REACHING TRENDS.

ABOUT
What we do and who we are

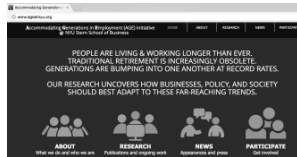
RESEARCH
Publications and ongoing work

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Take Home Points

1. **Age-based stereotypes** = Disability-ism;
2. **Age-based discrimination** reduced older worker opportunity, which contradicts demographic realities and economic needs;
3. **To disrupt these perceptions:** The conversation must focus on ability and value—not disability and cost.



Thanks!

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