Chapter 2
Older Workers, Stereotypes, and Discrimination in the Context of the Employment Relationship

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It is imperative that scholars and practitioners with aspirations of helping to craft an employment relationship that ensures that older workers are able to lead longer, happier, healthier, and more productive working lives recognize the challenges posed by age biases. Negative attitudes toward older workers may foil attempts to negotiate maximally and mutually beneficial employment relationships. Age bias is certainly not inevitable; some contexts may exacerbate it while others may reduce it.

The goal of this chapter is to elucidate the conditions under which age biases may be more or less likely to influence the development and character of the employment relationship, and conversely describe potential events in the course of the employment relationship that may trigger or reduce age biases. It draws on research from each domain – age bias at work and the employment relationship – to present examples of these reciprocal connections, and suggests areas where new research is needed to further our understanding of age bias throughout the lifecycle of the employment relationship.

The chapter proceeds as follows. First, an overview of the age bias in employment literature, including discussion of some newer approaches, is provided. Next, the context of the employment relationship, as it will be considered throughout this chapter, is briefly described. The remainder of the chapter traces the course of the stages of an employment lifecycle, drawing from literature to suggest ways that age bias may intersect in two example employment relationships.

It is important to clarify up front that this book contains many excellent chapters that focus on aging and all the psychological, physical, and cognitive changes that often accompany advancing in chronological age, and how these real age-related differences may play a role in various aspects of the employment relationship. The present chapter is about *perceptions*. I do not wish to be redundant with these other authors in discussing actual age-related issues, but rather strive

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to raise awareness about how people may have misperceptions or make faulty assumptions (and sometimes, consequently, poor decisions) based on *biases* or unsubstantiated beliefs about individual older workers in the context of employment relationships that may or may not be true of those specific workers.

2.1 Age Bias in the Workplace: A Brief Review

Many have remarked that the investigation of age bias in general (e.g., North & Fiske, 2012), and age bias in the workplace in particular (e.g., Finkelstein, Burke, & Raju, 1995), has traditionally taken a back seat to the more popularly studied race and gender biases. Fortunately, there appears to be an increased flourish of research activity around age biases in the workplace in the last several years in the fields of organizational psychology and gerontology, particularly in the U.S. and Europe (Finkelstein & Truxillo, 2013).

2.1.1 Age Bias at Work: The Components

Before reviewing this research, it is helpful to clarify some terminology that is often used in inconsistent ways in the literature. I will be following a distinction of terms that I first described in Finkelstein and Farrell (2007). Borrowing from the tripartite model of attitudes (e.g., Fiske, 2004), I will be using the term age bias as the general attitudinal term reflecting a (usually) negative orientation toward an age group. This is most parallel to a prejudice. There are three distinct components of an age bias reflecting cognition, affect, and behavior. The cognitive component is comprised of our age stereotypes – beliefs and expectations applied to members of an age group solely based on their membership in that group and not on knowledge of their individual characteristics. The affective (emotions) component reflects our feelings about members of an age group based on group membership; do we dislike them? Do they spark positive or negative emotions in us? Finally, the behavioral component – which may be ultimately of most concern in the workplace – is discrimination; do we treat people differently or provide more or fewer privileges to people solely based on their age membership? The interplay of these components is addressed below.

2.1.2 Stereotypes and Discrimination – Hand in Hand?

Older worker stereotypes are often a focus of research inquiry, and presumed to be a mediating mechanism linking the age of a target employee to discriminatory behavior. In essence, it is thought that upon exposure to the age of a worker/candidate/trainee/etc.,

stereotypes about older workers can be triggered, and these beliefs, when negative, lead to decisions that do not favor the older worker, regardless of his/her actual capabilities.

Posthuma and colleagues (Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Posthuma, Wagstaff, & Campion, 2012) pared down the common older workers stereotypes into six main categories – poor performance, resistance to change, lower ability to learn, shorter tenure (i.e., will retire and thus not worth the investment), more costly, and more dependable. Finkelstein, Ryan, and King (2013) examined stereotypes of older workers from the perspective of younger and middle aged workers separately, and found that about 60 % of the descriptors generated by younger workers and about 85 % generated by middle-aged workers were positive. The most common trait endorsed in trait ratings and also generated spontaneously (in open-ended responses) was "experienced." Still, consistent with Posthuma and colleagues' literature review, the themes of being resistant to change and unable/unwilling to learn still remained prominent among the negatively valenced beliefs. This also supports earlier work by Warr and Pennington (1993), who found two higher-order dimensions appearing among descriptors of older workers. Characteristics such as experience and dependability fall under "work effectiveness" – this represents some of the positive beliefs about older workers. However, the second factor, "adaptability," which includes things described above such as resistance to change and to technology, appears more persistently, as recently reported by Iweins, Desmette, Yzerbyt, and Stinglhamber (2013). Along these lines, Ng and Feldman (2012) found that the only common negative stereotype with some "support" (meaning actual group differences) was less willingness to engage in training and development among older workers as compared to younger –but a point to be emphasized strongly throughout this chapter is that this actual statistical group difference cannot be interpreted to mean that all older workers are uninterested in training.

Although the assumption is strong that if decision-makers hold negative age stereotypes, they will make discriminatory decisions about older workers, the connection between stereotypes and behavior is not always so simple. Posthuma et al. (2012) pointed out, however, that in discrimination lawsuits, plaintiffs demonstrations that defendants have expressed negative age stereotypes is seen as evidential of the age discrimination claim. And, several studies have empirically demonstrated a link between endorsed stereotypes and decisions about an older vs. a younger candidate or employee, most often though not always in laboratory situations (cf. Bal, Reiss, Rudolph, & Baltes, 2011, for a recent meta-analysis).

Contrary evidence does exist, however, that challenges the connection between stereotypes and behavior. For example, in a study of the beliefs and behaviors of a group of line managers in several industries, Leisink and Knies (2011) found no relationship between endorsed beliefs regarding older workers and their behaviors in support of them. Morgeson, Reider, Campion, and Bull (2008) argued that the existing literature on age discrimination in the employment interview was too heavily reliant on laboratory studies and student samples, and that in actual interview situations, decisions had accountable consequences and were less likely to be explained by or connected to stereotypes. There are myriad reasons, not only

in our work lives but also in all social circumstances, where our behavior does not reflect our true attitudes. Social pressures and norms, laws, fear of consequences and retaliation, are just a few contextual variables that may temper the role of attitudes (both cognitive and affective components) on our behaviors (Baron & Branscombe, 2012).

Researchers have indeed acknowledged that many contextual factors may either enhance or reduce the likelihood that discriminatory behavior will occur. An earlier meta-analysis (Finkelstein et al., 1995), for example, considered the roles of age salience, age of the rater, amount of job-relevant individuating information available to the rater, and type of job in question. Based on theoretical reasoning from both social cognitive and social identity approaches, stereotypes should have more of an influence on behavior when they stand out more to a rater, when the rater doesn't have much else to go on, and when the rater's identity group will be favored by the decision. Findings, however, remain inconsistent and are still based more on lab than field investigations.

Recently, Posthuma and colleagues (2009, 2012) proposed a framework for future research to consider what they call "upstream" moderators – those that influence whether age triggers age stereotypes, and "downstream" moderators – those that influence whether stereotypes trigger discriminatory decisions. Their framework is helpful in sorting out this distinction which has not been made quite so clearly before, and also emphasizes that some potential moderators are naturally occurring (for example, individual characteristics of raters and ratees, the type of job in question), while others are more under the control of organizational agents (for example, training, policies, amount of information provided to raters, accountability).

2.1.3 What About Affect?

Finkelstein and Farrell (2007) reported that by far the least studied component of age bias is affect – we still do not know much about how our feelings about (or triggered by) older workers impact intergroup behaviors at work. Different outgroups may trigger different types of affect in us, and it can sometimes ignite without conscious consideration of our specific beliefs about the group (Fiske, 2004). Older people, for example, may trigger dislike or disgust or fear, perhaps prompted by our own fears of decline and disease, as would align with the tenets of terror management theory (Martens, Goldenberg, & Greenberg, 2005).

Cuddy, Fiske, and Glick's (2007) work on the BIAS map ("behaviors from intergroup affect and stereotypes") expands on their earlier work on the stereotype-content model (where stereotypes about several social groups are typed along the two dimensions of warmth and competence) to more directly consider the role of affect independent of stereotypes. Indeed, in a set of experimental and field studies, they found support that certain types of affect corresponded

to certain types of stereotypes, and importantly, that affect was a stronger predictor of behavioral intentions than stereotypes. This is an interesting finding given the lack of relative attention to affect in the age bias at work literature (Rupp, Vodanovich, & Credé, 2005).

It is important to make the distinction, however, that Cuddy and colleagues' work looking at older age has characterized this group as "the elderly," and does not specifically consider older people in a work context. That term "elderly" may elicit very different stereotypes and emotions than the term "older worker" or "older employee." Although there is variability in the ages chosen in research to depict an older worker (and this is likely to change by occupation, or perhaps by culture), there seems to be some consensus for using ages over 50 or over 55 (Finkelstein et al., 2013). Fifty-five year olds probably do not conjure up images of the "elderly" for most people. Moreover, warmth and competence may not be entirely independent dimensions in a working environment. For example, looking not at affect but at stereotypes of warmth and competence, Krings, Sczensy, and Kluge (2011) argued that the two dimensions may not be so clear-cut in a workplace environment where interpersonal skill (typically a warmth dimension) is actually an indication of one's competence on the job.

Recently, Iweins et al. (2013) observed this absence of focus on the affective side of age bias described above, and purposefully looked at the connection between older worker stereotypes, emotions, and behaviors, They took an optimistic approach and looked at how positive beliefs could relate to admiration emotions, which in turn might relate to positive facilitation behaviors (e.g., helping and cooperation) toward older workers. This proposition was supported (though in a cross sectional study), and with a strong relationship between emotions and supportive behaviors (measured as a self-reported tendency).

There is a lot of room for future studies to help better sort out the connection among beliefs about, emotions about, and behaviors toward older workers. It is time for a concerted effort among researchers toward the thoughtful design of studies that can examine emotions and behaviors (not just reported tendency) in real time and among employees with real consequences to their interpersonal interactions. Lord, Diefendorff, Schmidt, and Hall's (2010) model of self-regulation at work can provide guidance in this area, as it stresses the interplay of affect and cognition in the pursuit of goal-directed behavior at work. This model could be especially useful in explaining changes in the nature of the employment relationship over time (within-person and within-relationship changes) as well as for comparing the unfolding process of different relationships. As the purpose of this chapter is to look at age bias in the employment relationship, and relationships by definition are affect-laden entities, specific instances where each of these components, and potential contextual moderators, are more likely to emerge will be suggested, and Lord et al.'s (2010) framework will be used as a guide where applicable. Before those examples are introduced, however, there remain a few newer ideas of in this research realm to be described, as they will also emerge in our discussion of the employment relationship.

2.1.4 Emerging Ideas in Age Bias at Work

This discussion is not meant to exhaust the interesting new ideas that have appeared in the literature in the recent years, but covers some that might particularly suit our current purposes. First is the notion of age metastereotyping at work (Finkelstein et al., 2013). In brief, Finkelstein and colleagues describe how the notion of metastereotypes (what a group member believes that another group thinks about his/her own group; Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998) may be a neglected and important aspect of the cross-age interaction process in the workplace. As we are often even more concerned with how *we are viewed by others* in an intergroup situation than we are concerned with our perceptions of those others, our feelings and behaviors could be driven as much or more in reaction to what we think others believe about us. For example, an older worker may think that a younger worker is applying a stereotype to them that they cannot learn new technology, and this older worker may experience feelings (embarrassment, anger) and behaviors (bragging about technological prowess) in response to their metastereotype, rather than entering that situation thinking about what he/she believes about younger worker's qualities. In their initial study, Finkelstein et al. examined stereotypes and metastereotypes generated by three age groups (younger, middle aged, and older workers) about those same age groups and did find some distinctions between what people believed others endorsed about their group (metastereotypes) and what those others actually did endorse. In some cases the actual beliefs were more positive, and in others more negative. The metastereotyping process relates closely to the more widely known phenomenon of stereotype threat (e.g., Steele, 1997), where performance decrements can be triggered by merely making ones group salient in a performance context and thereby triggering a fear of confirming a stereotype, *if* individuals are aware of the relevant metastereotype. Thus, metastereotype awareness is the initial part of the process, though sometimes the terms have been used interchangeably in the literature (Gomez, 2002). New work is beginning to show that perception of age metastereotypes held by co-workers by older workers relate to lower job attitudes work-related mental heath (von Hippel, Kalokerinos, & Henry, 2013). Though further empirical work is needed to better understand the conditions under which metastereotypes will be activated and the effects they will have on emotions and behaviors at work, especially in comparison with stereotypes, it is worth keeping in mind how metastereotypes could impact the employment relationship. Examples will emerge throughout the chapter.

The second new concept is prescriptive age stereotypes. Most stereotypes are *descriptive* – they describe what characteristics we believe group members have. *Prescriptive* stereotypes, on the other hand, describe the characteristics we think people ought to have, presumably to be considered "normal" and to maintain their group's order in society. Though most work looking at prescriptive stereotypes has focused on gender, North and Fiske (2012) suggest that age is an important future area of investigation, due to an increased threat younger people may feel with older people infringing on what has been their territory (financially and culturally), as

people are remaining in the workplace longer, and remaining active longer and thus taking part in more traditionally youthful activities. In their most recent work (North & Fiske, 2013), they provide initial validation evidence for a three-factor measure of prescriptive age stereotypes, tapping into prescriptive beliefs concerning consumption, succession, and identity. Designed in regard to older people in general, the scale does home in on some issues (particularly in terms of succession) directly relevant to older *workers*; others seem indirectly relevant in terms of their connection to affect and social connections to older workers. Investigations of prescriptive age stereotyping at the workplace are strongly encouraged.

Third, there is no clear consensus on what an "older worker" actually is, and even if we find a majority of studies using a particular cut-off age (say 50 or 55), it is unlikely the same stereotypes are applied at the same rate to a 56-year old as to a 73-year old at work. Moreover, the application of age biases could depend on other factors about the worker, including such things as their appearance, health, life events they have experienced, and relative age to others in their environment, among others (Pitt-Catsouphes, Matz-Costa, & Brown, 2010; Segers, Inceoglu, & Finkelstein, 2014). Throughout the chapter, the potential of some of these factors to affect the employment relationship will be discussed.

Lastly, it has been noted that not all age discrimination is captured in the big decisions made at work, like whom to hire, train, or promote. Our everyday, interpersonal behaviors that make up our work life have the potential to be fair or to be age discriminatory (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007). How we talk to others, include or exclude others from conversations or events, act on or ignore others' ideas – all of these behaviors could be affected by age biases. Indeed, some new work has argued that selective incivility at work, targeting certain social groups, is one tool of discrimination in the modern workplace (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huerta, & Magley, 2013). Although their initial studies have found more incivility reported by minorities and women, but not more reported by older people, they note that their samples were relatively young and their theory may not yet be adequately tested for age. Perhaps in some instances it is the younger workers who are targeted for incivility, and the effects could be washing out. In any event, these ideas are important to explore when we look at age bias in the employment relationship, as it is indeed a relationship, comprised of people and their interpersonal perceptions and interactions.

2.2 The Employment Relationship: A Context of Expectations and Perceptions

The employment relationship, at its essence, refers to the relationship between an employee and that employee's organization (Coyle-Shapiro, Shore, Taylor, & Tetrick, 2004). That may sound fairly simple, but it is a complex social relationship embedded in context and dynamic across time. Researchers studying the psychological

contract, organizational socialization, justice, perceived organizational support, and organizational change, and even retirement are all scholars of the employment relationship, as these content areas represent the formation, maintenance, adjustment, and eventual demise of this relationship.

A key, unifying factor among these issues is that there is more than one party involved in some ongoing social and economic exchange. Unlike other social relationships, though, it is not as easy to pin a face on the parties, as "the organization" may sometimes seem an amorphous entity. But, any employee's relationship with his/her organization is a relationship with other people. There are multiple agents in the organization that an employee may see as "the face of" the organization, and thus that employment relationship is not comprised of only one dyad, but may be an amalgamation of several different dyads (Shore, Porter, & Zahra, 2004). Moreover, the context in which a focal employment relationship is embedded is comprised of other organization members with their own employment relationships who interact with and influence the focal relationship over time (Liden, Bauer, & Erdogan, 2004).

Any human relationship is comprised of perceptions, feelings, communications, and other actions. The perceptions and feelings may be shared – both parties think and feel the same way about the other, and each are aware that these perceptions and feelings are mutual. However, there are many opportunities in the context of a relationship for misconstruals, miscommunications, and damaged feelings. These may be present from the beginning of a relationship, which is a time ripe for misunderstandings that can form a faulty foundation, or can come about through interactions with other organizational members, external changes occurring in the organization, or development and changes in the needs of an employee over time.

2.3 Age Bias and the Employment Relationship: Looking for Intersections

By now it should be clear that there are common themes in the topics of age bias and of the employment relationship. Age biases in the workplace are comprised of cognitions, feelings, and/or behaviors directed toward others (or perceived from others) one encounters in ones workplace, and can be more likely to emerge under certain conditions. Employment relationships are social exchange relationships occurring over the course of ones tenure with an organization, and like any human relationships, are impacted by each party's cognitions, feelings, and/or behaviors toward the other, and can develop and change in nature over time and under certain conditions.

In the sections that follow, I invite the reader to take a look at several sub-foci of the employment relationship (e.g., psychological contract formation, perceptions of/reactions to psychological contract breach, perceptions of organizational support) as they may occur at different points in a typical (though not necessarily standardized) course of an employment lifecycle. After a brief review of the focal topic,

Table 2.1 Jack and Fred

Jack is a 61-year-old male. He was an engineer for much of his career, and then later in midlife switched to a management career and joined a new organization when he was 59. Jack looks about his age – most people would guess "early sixties". He is divorced, no children, and moved to a new city to take this job.
Fred is a 61-year-old male. He has been with the same organization most of his career and has moved up the management ranks from an early management fast track program right out of college many years ago. Most people would guess that Jack is in his late forties, no more than 50. He is married with four children and three grandchildren. One of his daughters and her son has moved in recently with Jack and his wife.

I will integrate what we have come to learn about age bias and propose how it could color the progression of that stage of the employment relationship. The converse will also be considered: how can that stage of the employment relationship create conditions that could serve to amplify or quell age biases? In some places there is already research from which to draw; in others, logical inferences and suggestions are made that await empirical support.

These examples are brought to life through two hypothetical characters: Jack and Fred. Jack and Fred can be considered older workers; they are both 61 years old. They are both currently in management positions at a company we'll call Techland. This is where the similarity ends, however. Please see Table 2.1 for a short biographical sketch of each of these employees. Jack and Fred will appear throughout this chapter to illustrate the interplay of age bias and the employment relationship, and to further highlight one of the most essential points of the chapter: all older workers are not alike. These portraits highlight the importance of a person-centered perspective to research understanding the experience of older workers (Finkelstein, Truxillo, Fraccaroli, & Kanfer, in press).

2.3.1 Anticipatory Stage: Pre-entry

Our perceptions of the organization, feelings about it, and actions toward it start as soon as we even consider employment with an organization and begin to interact with it, its media, and its agents in the recruitment and selection process. As we commit to joining an organization, our initial psychological contract forms based on early impressions we receive from the organizational agents we encounter during recruitment and selection. Although its formation begins early, it will continue to function as a source of information and a driver of behavior over the course of the relationship (and thus we return to it again throughout the discussion). The psychological contract is not a written or legal contract (though that may be present as well), but rather is a schema made up of an employee's perceptions about the mutual exchange agreement that exists between him/her and the employing (or pending employing) organization (Rousseau, 2001). Rousseau

notes that, like other schemas, it is resistant (though not impervious) to change. Obligations in the psychological contract can be both economic and socioemotional (Bal, de Lange, Zacher, & Van der Heijden, 2013). The contract includes perceptions and metaperceptions, because it is concerned not only with what the employees believe about the reciprocal obligations, but also with what they *think* that the organization believes as well.

At this anticipatory stage, how might age biases affect the development of the psychological contract? The age bias literature provides theory to build some grounded reasoning for their possible effects. Biases may be motivated out of a desire to gain a sense of control or understanding of our situation (Fiske, 2004). Rousseau (2001) suggests that existing schemas the employee and the organizational agents hold at this early stage will contribute to the details of the psychological contract in the absence of more concrete information. To the degree that the employee and the agent(s) differ in age, age could be a salient factor and associated stereotypes about age could factor into expectations of the other party.

Let's consider both Jack and Fred at the anticipatory stage. Recall that Jack left his company and job to come to the current organization, joining only 2 years ago. That means that Jack was an older job seeker and obtained this job as an older worker. However, if we consider Jack's age from the multiple perspectives discussed earlier (Pitt-Catsouphes et al., 2010), we see that he is older chronologically and generationally, but his occupational and organizational age is quite young – he is new to his current career and his organization. It could be argued that in some ways his life-events age can be considered younger than many in his chronological age group in that, although divorced, he did not experience parenthood. Socially, he is a single man with few family ties, qualities more normatively found in younger men.

Jack noticed that, on their website, most of the stock photos used to depict the workers at Techland had young-looking people in them. That combined with a lot of the adjectives that described the work environment – fast paced, cutting edge – seemed to imply that this was a climate that valued youth (Greenberg, Schimel, & Martens, 2004; Posthuma et al., 2012). Jack was enthusiastic about the job and loves fast-paced environments, but he was wary when his recruiter was very young, raising the concern that he was perhaps being seen as an "old dinosaur" through her eyes. This was not enough to discourage Jack from taking the job when offered, but this triggered metastereotype (Finkelstein et al., 2013) put him on alert that he would have an uphill battle proving himself to be someone who could keep up and add value. His initial schema, then, was that he could expect to keep this job and receive rewards as long as he went over and above to counter the age stereotypes he would face. Considered through the lens of self-regulation (Lord et al., 2010), this may create a goal standard not always reasonable to achieve, and these self-presentational concerns and associated anxiety are likely to draw attention away from tasks at hand.

Fred has been at Techland for most of his career, so it has been over 30 years since Fred was in the anticipatory stage. He came onboard at this company when he was in his late twenties, as a younger worker. Although Jack and Fred are now the

same age and at the same company, the potential effects of age biases on the initial development of Fred's contract would have been likely quite different. Indeed, he may have experienced metastereotypes of being a young manager and feeling inexperienced (Finkelstein et al., 2013), and may have been conscious of proving himself worthy of a management position. However, when Fred started there were many other young recruits joining Techland, a company in relative infancy at the time, and Fred felt like he fit into the culture they were trying to create.

2.3.2 Newcomer Socialization Stage

During the first 6 months to year of employment, employees are in a transition stage where they are not only recipients of organizational tactics to indoctrinate the procedures and culture of the organization, but are also active seekers of information on the way things really work (Miller & Jablin, 1991). New employees also begin to forge relationships with coworkers and start to build a network at this stage (Ashford & Black, 1996). The psychological contract is still developing; information garnered at this stage from official representatives of the organization, veteran employees, and other newcomers with their own first impressions is merging to shape the formation of the contract (Liden et al., 2004). All information seeking is not done directly – sometimes newcomers seek information more indirectly by subtle questioning, testing limits, etc. (Miller & Jablin). People also process information socially by observing what others do. How they react to the organization becomes a meaningful source of information.

A key topic of interest under the general umbrella of the employment relationship is perceived organizational support (POS; Aselage & Eisenberger, 2003). POS is thought to be a more generalized (and not promise-bound) perception of the socioemotional treatment by the organization, encompassing perceptions of care, goodwill, and fair treatment. It develops through ones own experiences with the organization and its agents as well as through interacting with and observing the treatment of other organizational members. It may not yet be fully developed during the socialization stage as opportunities to witness all organizational procedures may not have yet occurred, but an employee should start to have a good idea of how things are done, the conditions under which people work, and how people are treated at this stage.

Research has only begun to scrutinize the role of age bias in the newcomer socialization process. For example, Finkelstein, Kulas, and Dages (2003) explored the role of age of the newcomer in information seeking strategies and relationship building activities. They theorized that older workers might be hesitant to use more overt information seeking strategies as it could be perceived as risking positive perceptions of them as experienced, but they actually found a lower endorsement of covert strategies as newcomers got older (though very few in the sample could actually be considered older workers, limiting the complete test of this idea). They found mixed evidence that newcomers would find relationship building activities

less important as they aged. Though not yet explored, this may well depend on the life events and socioemotional age of the newcomer as well.

Jack had just recently gone through this socialization phase as an older worker – he joined the Techland at 59. Recall that Jack's experience in the anticipatory stage triggered age metastereotypes; he is concerned he may need to prove that he doesn't possess negative qualities he fears may be associated with older workers in this young environment. As such, Jack may be someone who would be loath to expose lack of knowledge about his new position or the organizational processes. Indeed, Jack holds some younger worker stereotypes too, and he sometimes questions whether the younger, less experienced people in high positions at Techland have a lot to teach him. Taken together, these may pose consequences for the development of the employment relationship, as Jack may resist open engagement in the learning component of the socialization process, and not put full trust in organizational agents that he does not entirely respect. Misinformation, then, is likely to be built into the foundation of the relationship.

On the other hand, recall that Jack does not have many social ties at this new location, and lives alone. Although socioemotional selectivity theory (e.g., Lang & Carstensen, 1994) argues that as we age we are more likely to prefer close and established personal ties to new relationships, there seems an assumption that those ties necessarily exist at a more advanced age. In Jack's case, though, he is forging a new social life and would like to form new relationships. The expectation of others may be that he is not interested, and some groups of young recruits may not like the idea of an older guy engaging in the same social activities (North & Fiske, 2013). Jack struggled to fit in socially at Techland during socialization, leaving him feeling less networked and connected than others in his cohort as he phased out of socialization. Although research is not clear on whether Jack would ascribe blame to the organization for this situation (Eisenberger, Jones, Aselage, & Sucharski, 2004), his level of perceived organizational support following this socialization experience could suffer if he was not feeling as if he had the same opportunities as others. Moreover, Liden et al. (2004) note the importance of the socialization stage for fostering feelings of acceptance, a key component of positive organizational relationships.

These are some examples of how age biases impacted Jack's employment relationship early on, but what about the reverse? At this point we see that Jack's POS is weak and his contract includes obligations to constantly prove himself. We can infer that at this point Jack's employment relationship is not ideal, and it may work in a cyclical fashion to make perceptions of age bias more prominent going forward. From Jack's perspective, he may interpret ambiguous information or actions from the organization as being unfair to older workers even if not intended in that way, as the expectation for age discrimination is built into his higher order beliefs about the norms of the organization (Lord et al., 2010; Rousseau, 2001). Organizational agents that Jack encounters, particularly younger ones, may sense Jack's mistrust of them and begin to dislike being around him (negative affect).

It has been many years since Fred's newcomer experience. Fred went through socialization experiences with a cohort similar to him in age and experiences. He formed strong social bonds with other managerial trainees at the time, and fully embraced the Techland culture and experienced a high degree of POS early on.

This strong foundation at the anticipatory and socialization stages, we will see going forward, has served to buffer Fred, at least for a while, from perceiving biases as he has aged within the Techland community. His higher order schemata regarding the organization includes norms of fair treatment and his memories of fair treatment over time, and any ambiguity in the treatment by organizational agents that Jack might react to as biased (as discussed earlier) is less likely to appear that way to Fred (Lord et al., 2010; Rousseau, 2001).

2.3.3 Maintenance: Business as Usual

Although this is not a discrete stage per se, there will be times during the course of the employment relationship where things are fairly stabilized. Employees believe that they know what is expected of them and what to expect from their organization and from their day-to-day experiences with their job and their coworkers. If there are no major changes in the environment, and no major internal changes occurring in workers' needs and priorities, then likely whatever psychological contract they have established during earlier stages will continue to drive their interpretations of what is expected. Likewise, their perceptions of the supportiveness of the organization have been established, and thus general organizational events and policies will be interpreted through this existing lens.

Although it may seem as if there is not much to talk about regarding these ordinary times, if age biases had already created more negative expectations, wariness, and distorted perceptions of obligations, these are likely to remain – built into the higher-order schemata of the relationship (Rousseau, 2001) – even if no clear instances of age bias or discrimination are occurring in the current day to day environment. These neutral, non-threatening events could actually cause reactance in those who have already been put on high alert that age biased behaviors are a real possibility in that organization. Motivation to remain fully engaged in a job where one feels he/she is not being treated fairly is likely to wane. Whereas Fred emerged into a maintenance stage with a strong employment relationship foundation, Jack did not, and thus during ordinary times Jack is generally less satisfied and committed to Techland than is Fred.

2.3.4 Change: Shocks Sparked by Organization

Most of our workdays are probably similar to the day before, but sometimes there is a shock to the system, using the terminology of Lee and Mitchell (1994), that is sparked by some kind of change occurring in an organization, department, or work group. Perhaps a new CEO takes the reins, or there is a merger. At a more proximal level, perhaps a key contributor leaves a team, or a new reporting policy is implemented. Anything that makes ones day-to-day work life different than expected is likely to make ones contract and relationships to the organization more salient.

Shocks of all sorts can bring about perceptions of violations to the psychological contract and potentially weaken the employment relationship (Schalk, 2004).

Psychological contract breach occurs when there is a perception of a party (usually the organization) not satisfying a perceived obligation, or demanding more from the employee than was expected in exchange for fulfillment of that obligation. Sometimes this reflects an objective event where a change occurs in an organization, and treatment of the employee is verifiably different than what was promised. Other times, however, there can be an incongruence between the understandings employee and employer each have of their obligations due to miscommunications (Morrison & Robinson, 2004). Research has shown that the thoughts and feelings accompanying perceived contract violation have several problematic implications to the organization, including lowered job attitudes and in- and extra-role performance, though these outcomes could be tempered by strong foundations of trust and POS, among other things (e.g., Robinson, 1996; Taylor & Tekleab, 2004).

A shock just occurred for the employees at Techland. Due to financial losses following a failed product line launch, the executive board has made a decision to cut some product lines and refocus on developing and marketing the strongest lines. This will result in some restructuring of teams, new cross-functional teams, and advanced technological training needed for managers. It is not made clear to employees if layoffs are looming or not.

Jack's shaky trust in the organization is further reduced with this event, and he expects the worst and "fills in the blanks" with negative information. He wants to keep this job, however, and continues to (over) emphasize how his competencies fit Techland's culture, while at the same time his frustration is wearing on him making him less satisfied and unpleasant to work with.

Fred, on the other hand, is buffered at first from the shock due to his POS, but he has become used to the status quo at Techland and starts to feel shaken from his comfort zone. He expects that he will be offered training immediately so he can seamlessly merge into the new system. The organizational agent involved in assigning the first round of tech training, however, is choosing among many managers and in doing so his stereotypes about older workers being less interested in training and poorer investments are triggered. Additionally, at times of potentially scarce resources, intergroup biases can become heightened, and younger workers may believe older workers should step aside and give them their turn (North & Fiske, 2013). The supervisor decides to start training on those managers that seem closer in fit to the high tech image that is being emphasized so strongly in this new climate at Techland. Fred is passed over for this early opportunity, and begins to feel breach for the first time in his tenure.

2.3.5 Change: Shocks Sparked by the Employee

Not all changes to the status quo are introduced by the organization. Sometimes employees will experience a shock to their work lives because their needs, interests, or other non-organizational demands change. These could be sudden

changes, such as the death of a spouse or a health scare, or they could be gradual, perhaps occurring just naturally with time and maturity and ultimately reaching a point where the current situation is no longer acceptable.

An employee experiencing these types of changes could be prompted to seek out different kinds of solutions. A bored, unchallenged employee may look for ways to utilize a wider variety of skills (Zaniboni, Truxillo, & Fraccaroli, 2013), while an employee with health problems may want to job craft to make an existing job suit changing physical capabilities (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). An employee with increased personal demands, on the other hand, may seek out a more flexible schedule (Sharpe, Hermsen, & Billings, 2002). All of these things require change to the psychological contract from the employee's side of the deal. New needs and strategies to address them must be clearly communicated (Morrison & Robinson, 2004) to the organization so that the organization's perception of the contract is not violated.

In addition to the external shock described above that has hit all employees, Fred is also experiencing a non-work life change. His daughter and grandchild are moving in with Fred and his wife. Fred's daughter plans to work hard to get her family back to independence quickly, and so Fred has decided he'd like to adapt a more flexible schedule to allow him to pick up his granddaughter from school. In years past he may not have hesitated to present a plan for this change to his supervisor, but now that his POS was somewhat shaken by changing circumstances, he is on high alert. And, it turns out his supervisor is taken aback by the request as one expectation that she had of Fred, as compared with the mostly 30-something managers she supervised, is that he would be stable and dependable and not have the family demands of those other workers. She assumed that in the face of changes of the organization, an older employee would be especially grateful to have a job and would not make special requests. She may or may not grant him his request, but the unexpected nature of it coming from an older employee may lead her to question her understanding of their psychological contract.

2.3.6 Disengagement

Eventually all employees leave their organization, one way or another. Some may be let go for poor performance or due to unavoidable layoffs. Voluntary turnover can occur suddenly (in the face of one of the shocks described above), or gradually, even moving into a stage of bridge employment before complete retirement from the organization (Zhan, Wang, & Yao, 2013). Putting involuntary turnover aside, how can age biases impact the employee's decision to remain in ones position longer, to take on bridge employment, or to leave the organization early?

If the employee perceives unfair treatment at work – lack of growth opportunities, inflexibility, etc., that he/she attributes this to stereotypes and negative affect towards older workers, commitment to the organization and motivation is likely to wane (Kanfer, Beier, & Ackerman, 2013; Walker, 1999). Economic pressures may, however, deter an employee from actually leaving (Zhan et al., 2013), but psychological

disengagement could occur nonetheless. In the absence of economic necessity, employees may deny bridge employment opportunities that would be of great advantage to their organization (e.g., retaining organizational knowledge) if the organization is not seen as supportive of an older workforce.

What will become of Jack and Fred as they approach these decisions? In their stories thus far, the two men have had quite different employment relationships. Jack, starting at Techland as an older worker, had a less positive early experience than did Fred, and that shaped the nature of the relationship over time so far. Fred, on the other hand, began perceiving age biases only after some shocks to the status quo, and these perceptions and associated negative affect in turn have impacted the new nature of that relationship. Fred's organizational self-identity (Lord et al., 2010) as a respected key player at Techland has been challenged by his perceptions of recent treatment. Although at this point hopes for a long and happy employment relationship for each of these men well into older age may seem grim, all hope is not lost. Techland may be able to put policies in place (and human action to back those policies) to repair damaged relationships and increase the likelihood that Jack and Fred's individual changing needs are met, and in turn the organization could capitalize on what they each have to offer for many years ahead (see Chap. 14 of this volume for further information on extending working intentions).

2.4 Conclusions: Research to Do, Lessons to Learn

2.4.1 Research Needs

This chapter considered how the perceptual and interpersonal nature of both age biases and of the employment relationship could come together and impact one another. Hypothetical examples were derived from a consideration of research in both these areas, but there is currently no direct research examining the various types of age biases *specifically* in terms of employment relationship effects, nor have the contexts of the employment relationship been examined directly with age bias perceptions as outcomes. There is a host of possibilities that could be garnered from the hypothetical scenarios above to design research to more directly test these relationships.

Researchers inspired to embark on this task should seriously consider multiple methodologies. For example, careful qualitative research to more deeply understand the age bias experiences of older people in the context of their employment relationships would be extremely useful, particularly if it could be conducted longitudinally, or even over a short period of time but one where the employees are moving through different stages (e.g., before and after a shock). Organizational researchers should also not shy away from experimental laboratory designs that could mirror different employment relationship conditions and look at how people respond to older and younger workers with different characteristics. As Posthuma and Campion (2009) pointed out, more research looking at the effects of up and

down stream moderators is needed. In particular, I would stress the importance of intervention studies to evaluate exactly what type of organizational policies, training, or other programs can have an impact on reducing age stereotyping and metastereotyping and/or reducing its impact on the development and maintenance of employment relationships.

2.4.2 Practical Implications

Although some of the proposed outcomes of the interplay between age biases and the employment relationship await direct empirical test, there are certainly implications that can be drawn at this time. A person-centered approach to not just research, but practice, is one actionable take-away message. When training employees (managers, recruiters, etc.) about the nature and dangers of age biases at work, the variance present in characteristics, experiences, lifestyles, and so on among the population of older workers should be emphatically recognized. Additionally, it has been suggested that HR avoid adopting one-size-fits-all policies, and take into account changing needs, interests, and capabilities of older workers. This advice should go one step further so that age-related changes found in research are not blindly assumed to apply to *all* older workers without a consideration of their individual situations; that in itself could produce a form of (well-intended) age bias.

2.4.3 Concluding Thoughts

This chapter journeyed across major phases of work life within an organization and integrated what we know about age bias into aspects of the employment relationship overtime. Through examples of the lives of two hypothetical older workers, Jack and Fred, plausible situations of age bias affecting the employment relationship and the employment relationship impacting age bias were suggested. Jack and Fred are two fictional older men in the same occupation and same organization with different experiences, life events, and personal characteristics. They were introduced to demonstrate a point that cannot be overemphasized: Older workers are not all alike.

There are in fact many statistically reliable changes that occur as one ages, or that distinguish large groups of older and younger workers, and studying and applying the lessons of the research that uncovers them is certainly important in the quest for longer, healthier, and happier working lives. But we must never forget that when it comes down to the person, the Jack or the Fred that we supervise or work alongside, we will be remiss to ever assume that what we "know" about older workers automatically applies to Jack, Fred, or anyone else. Understanding the perceptions and motivations of the people we work with and resisting the urge to put them in an "older worker box" will surely improve the chances that we can do our part to improve and lengthen the work lives of us all.

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