



Tackling 'Hidden' Age Discrimination

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Where are we in the fight against ageism?




- *We commit ourselves to eliminate all forms of discrimination, including age discrimination...persons, as they age, should enjoy a life of fulfilment, health, security and active participation in the economic, social, cultural and political life of their societies*

(Article 5, *International Plan on Ageing*, 2002)

- A significant shift in attitudes towards older workers?


- Widely recognised that law is not enough
- Legislation driven stereotypes and prejudice ‘underground’
- Can also emerge through other forms of discrimination (such as gender or ethnicity)

What is 'Hidden' age discrimination?



Age diversity and equality is promoted in talk or text

But at the same time



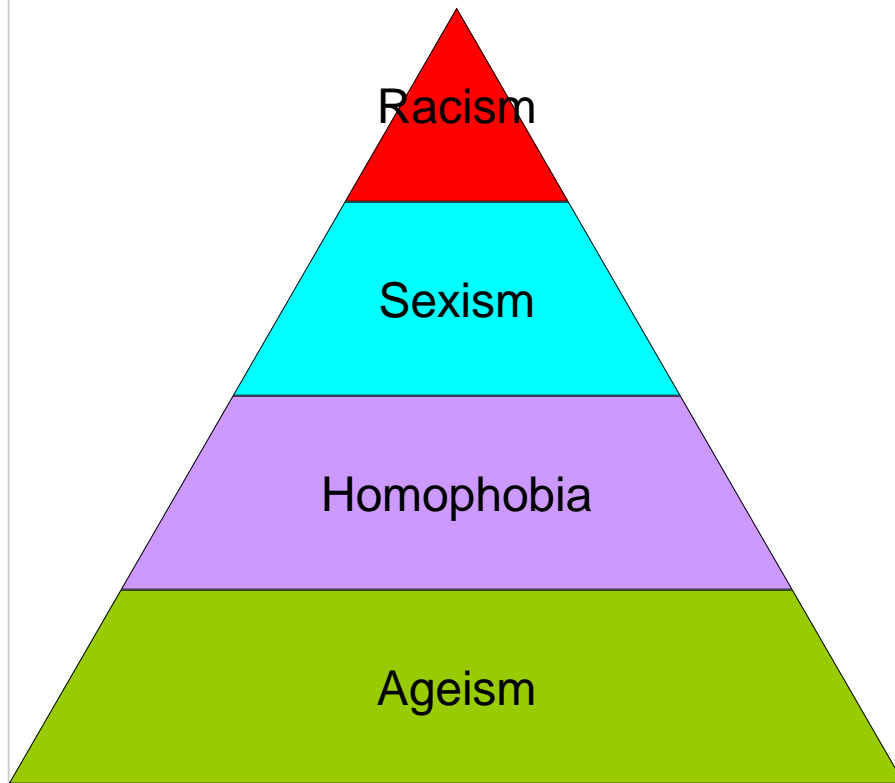
(Un) conscious biases that shape work processes or management practices

1 of 3 Life Cycle Norms



- Stereotypes relates to career-related expectations
- Career trajectories: ‘Rising stars’ and ‘grazers’
 - Signs of discrimination as ‘young’ as 35
 - *You have to make your impact by your early 30’s, otherwise you begin to be put to one side (Tom, Government)*
- Contradictions in organizational systems
 - payroll, pensions
 - *It’s hard to say to someone, ‘look we don’t see you as ready for the scrap heap’ when in fact the pensions office have contacted them already enquiring about their future plans. (Jackie, Civil Service)*
- Shift from career decisions to retirement decisions

2 of 3 A Hierarchy of 'isms'



*That's not to say that age discrimination is not important ... this might be wrong, that I would take it more serious if someone claimed racism, just because, well, if the press got hold of it would be *** (name of company) branded a racist, or whatever, you know. But I don't think that would happen if we were accused of discriminating against older or younger people*

(Anne-Marie, Call Centre)

3 of 3 Neophilia and the 'worship of newness'



- Org culture as favouring or privileging the young
- Focus on 'Fresh blood' = younger workers
- Supported by models of 'renewal' and 're-birth' in organizational change
 - *Is it important people work up until retirement age?
I would say minimum maybe 60. but I think you've got to allow for new fresh people coming through. It's all very well keeping a hold of your older, experienced workforce but you've got to allow for young fresh blood coming through. (Amy, Communications)*
 - *(in our company) it's just been very much a fresh blood coming in, people wanted to develop, whereas with someone of a slightly more mature age they're happy to just let their career float along without being overly ambitious, you know, it gives them a life style. (Tara, Finance)*

Avoiding hidden age discrimination: 'Age-proofing' your organization



- Offer (and promote) schemes to all ages
 - Career breaks, flexible working, training
- Consider whether common language used assumes age or trajectory
 - For example: what does 'experience' mean?
- Ensure both work spaces and social activities are 'age neutral'
- Considering whether all attributes are written into formal job descriptions
 - For example: mentoring, quality control procedures, knowledge transfer



Final Comments

- Consider process of ageing, not older workers
 - Not just about how we view older workers, but how we view ageing
 - The workplace is a microcosm of larger social norms
- Active Ageing: Shift of emphasis from discrimination to 'individual choice' marginalises ageism
- Beware of 'accidental' ageism = still illegal!

Useful Sources



- OECD (2006) *Live Longer, Work Longer* (www.oecd.org/els/employment/olderworkers)
- Council Directive 2000/78/EC: establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation
http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/news/2001/jul/directive78ec_en.pdf
- Cotter, A. (2008) *Just a number : An International Legal Analysis on Age Discrimination*. Aldershot : Ashgate.
- Riach, K. (2007) “ ‘Othering’ Older Worker Identity in Recruitment”, *Human Relations*. 60, 1, 1701-1726
- Riach, K. (2009) 'Managing Difference: Understanding Age Diversity in Practice', *Human Resource Management Journal*, 19(2).