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FEDERICA PREVITALI

Dynamics of Age and Ageism in Strategic Workplace Encounters

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ABSTRACT

In the global context of population ageing, organisations face two challenges: managing the ageing of their workers and limiting age stereotypes and prejudices in their practices. This dissertation investigates age and ageism at their roots in and through the social interactions happening at work. Instead of assuming that age is relevant for certain groups of workers, I shed light on how age is discursively mobilised by the workers themselves during strategic workplace encounters. Instead of measuring ageist attitudes or experiences, I expose how workers orient to possible prejudicial notions of age groups as relevant to the interactional and organisational business at hand.

This research was placed in a discursive realm. I consider age and ageism to be constructed in and through language and conversation in the workplace. Two aims structure the overall research. The first is to map the contribution of exploring ageism from a discursive point of view. The second is to pinpoint how age and ageism are mobilised in strategic workplace encounters and how they become relevant for accomplishing these encounters from the interactants' perspective. I zoom in on two types of strategic workplace encounters. The data comprised video recordings of performance appraisal interviews (12 encounters) and job interviews (24 encounters) from two Italian companies. These practices are strategic because they define access and progress in working life and hence are arenas for discriminatory assessments of the fit between job position and workers' age. The analyses of strategic workplace encounters are based on membership categorisation analysis, applied conversation analysis and applied discursive psychology.

This dissertation consists of an integrative chapter and three published papers. The two described aims are addressed by, first, a scoping review (Article 1) and, second, two empirical analyses of strategic workplace encounters (Articles 2 and 3). First, I present the results of the review, which scientifically defines my research's niche, details the main themes of discursive analyses of ageism in working life, and

showcases the gap in the knowledge that I address. Second, I focused on age categorisation in performance appraisal interviews. I show how age is discursively co-constructed by managers and employees in three different ways in relation to the organisational category under discussion. Third, I delved into job interviews. I detail how mobilising prejudicial categorisation based on age group can function as an interactional resource in maintaining a favourable impression between job applicants and recruiters. In the analysed strategic encounters, shared social identities are resources to build solidarity, manage workers' favourable impressions and avoid personal shortcomings.

The construction of age and possible ageist accounts is done collaboratively by managers-employees and recruiters-job applicants and it is functional to accomplish the business at hand. First, age is more than a number inside the workplace, and it assumes a functional meaning linked to the action being performed. Second, prejudicial references to age are not oriented to as morally accountable by workers, even in practices that are supposedly unbiased and inclusive. Third, the methodological focus on categories is crucial to unveiling how shared and institutionalised age norms, even if not directly ageist, reinforce a normative understanding of ageing in working life.

This work contributes to re-shed light on age and ageism in workplace encounters. The methodological focus on interactional practices highlights the advantage of studying policies in their social contexts to determine how they are actualised in everyday life. Hence, I suggest that age management in companies needs to be contextualised not only in the organisational culture, but also in the specific practices and their institutional goals. This dissertation unpacks the idea that ageism is unconsciously and silently spreading in our society by pointing to how it reproduces in social interactions. In conclusion, I propose a new way to educate on age and ageism in an organisational context by not only focusing on the cognitive components of biases, but also by including a discursive understating of age, group membership and identities, and moral accountability from an interactional stance. I include advice for improving the diversity and inclusion agenda in companies. The proposed guidelines include accountability, education about age and ageism, creation of policies and training based on interactional practices.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Väestön ikääntyminen on globaali ilmiö, jonka myötä työyhteisöt kohtaavat kaksi suurta haastetta: työntekijöiden ikääntymisen huomioimisen johtamiskäytännöissä sekä työpaikkakäytäntöihin vaikuttavien, ikään perustuvien ennakkoluulojen ja stereotypioiden aktiivisen haastamisen. Tämä väitöskirja lähestyy ikää ja ikäsyrjintää (ageismia) niiden alkujuurilla, työpaikkojen vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Tutkimus valottaa miten ikää mobilisoidaan diskursiivisesti tietyissä toiminnallisissa tilanteissa ja miten iän ja ikääntymisen merkityksiä rakennetaan yhteisesti. En oleta iän olevan merkityksellinen tietyille työntekijäryhmille, tai ageismin olevan aina läsnä. Pikemminkin tutkin, mitä tapahtuu, kun työntekijät mobilisoivat oman tai toisten iän strategisten työpaikkakohtaamisten aikana ja ovatko ikäryhmiin kohdistuvat ennakkoluulot perusteltuja.

Kehityskeskusteluihin ja työhaastatteluihin keskittyen, tutkimukseni käsittelee

1. miten, milloin ja mitä vuorovaikutuksellista tai työpaikan tavoitetta varten ikää mobilisoidaan;
2. mitä jaettuja ja itsestään selviä tapoja ymmärtää ikä ja ikääntyminen osapuolet rakentavat yhdessä;
3. ovatko ennakkoluuloihin perustuvat ikäkategorisoinnit perusteltuja ja mitkä ovat ne vuorovaikutukselliset dynamiikat, joiden avulla kategorisointeja tehdään strategisissa työpaikkakohtaamisissa.

Lähestyn näitä kysymyksiä, analysoimalla kehityskeskusteluiden (N= 12) ja työhaastattelujen (N= 24) videotallenteita. Nämä kohtaamiset ovat työyhteisön näkökulmasta strategisia, sillä niiden myötä työyhteisöt edistävät liiketoimintaansa, johtavat työntekijöitään, ja portinvartijoiden tavoin uudelleentuottavat institutionaalisia normeja ja kulttuuria. Työntekijöille nämä kohtaamiset ovat strategisia, sillä ne määrittävät pääsyn ja etenemisen työelämässä, ja työntekijää koskevat vaikutelmat ja sopivuus työyhteisön odotuksiin neuvotellaan näissä tilanteissa.

Tämä väitöskirja koostuu yhteenvedosta ja kolmesta tieteellisestä julkaisusta. Ensimmäiseksi esitän ageismin/ikäsyrjinnän diskursiivista tutkimusta käsittelevän kirjallisuuskatsauksen tulokset Tämä katsaustutkimus avaa makro- ja mikrodiskurssien välistä yhteyttä suhteessa iän ja ageismin rakentumiseen työelämän eri tilanteissa. Toiseksi näytän miten sekä työntekijät että esihenkilöt osana kehityskeskusteluita rakentavat ikää diskursiivisesti kolmella eri tavalla: ilmaisemalla työvuosien määrää, kuvailemalla "työpaikan kanssa ikääntymistä" ja ikäkategorioita hyödyntämällä. Lisäksi tuon esille, miten erilaiset diskursiiviset käytännöt linkittyvät suorituskyvyn eri aspekteihin näissä tilanteissa. Kolmanneksi työhaastattelujen vuorovaikutusta tarkastelemalla, näytän miten ennakkoluuloihin pohjautuva ikäkategorisointi voi toimia vuorovaikutuksellisena resurssina, jonka avulla ylläpidetään myönteistä vaikutelmaa, ja miten haastateltavan ja haastattelijan välinen yhteinen ikäjäsenyys selittää ikään perustuvien ennakkoluulojen mobilisaatiota. Analyysit perustuvat jäsenkategoria-analyysiin, sovellettuun keskusteluanalyysiin ja diskursiivisen psykologian käyttöön vuorovaikutuksellisten sosiaalisten identiteettien ja ennakkoluulojen tutkimuksessa.

Väitöskirjani tarjoaa yksityiskohtaisen kuvauksen siitä, milloin, miten ja millaisten vuorovaikutuksellisen tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi ikäpuhetta mobilisoidaan strategisissa työpaikkavuorovaikutuksissa. Tutkimus osoittaa, että ikään liittyvät dynamiikat nousevat esiin strategisten työpaikkakäytäntöjen aikana, ja ikää käytetään vuorovaikutuksellisena välineenä vuorovaikutuksellisten ja työyhteisöllisten tavoitteiden saavuttamiseksi. Autenttisten vuorovaikutustilanteiden analysointi paljastaa, että ihmiset rakentavat yhdessä kategorisoinnin ja jaetun jäsenyyden suhteessa ikään. Esihenkilöt ja työntekijät, kuten rekrytoijat ja työnhakijat, toisin sanoen tuottavat yhdessä iän ja ikääntymisen osa-alueita arkisissa käytännöissään. Lisäksi työntekijät ja työnhakijat mobilisoivat kulttuurisesti jaettuja ja itsestään selviä ymmärryksiä ikääntymisestä myönteisen vaikutelman luomiseksi, samalla paljastaen miten institutionaaliset ikänormit muuntautuvat resursseiksi heidän vuorovaikutuksessaan. Mahdollisia ikäsyrjiviä selontekoja perustellaan vuorovaikutuksessa ja oman tiettyyn ikäryhmään kuulumisen osoittaminen on diskursiivinen tapa ratkaista vaikeita vuorovaikutuksia ja ylläpitää hyvää vaikutelmaa.

Tämä tutkimus osallistuu tieteellisiin keskusteluihin iästä ja ageismista työpaikalla näyttämällä, että ikä ja ennakkoluuloiset käsitykset iästä ja ikääntymisestä muokkaavat

strategisia työyhteisökäytäntöjä hienovaraisesti. Tämä alleviivaa yhtäältä tarvetta tutkia ikään ja ikäsyrjintään liittyviä käytäntöjä, tapoja, ja sosiaalipsykologisia ilmiöitä niiden sosiaalisissa konteksteissaan. Toisaalta huomio kiinnittyy siihen, miten ikäsyrjintä toteutuu sosiaalisessa vuorovaikutuksessa. Lisäksi ikäkategorioihin keskittyminen auttaa avaamaan iän ja muiden sosiaalisten identiteettien, kuten sukupuolen, risteyskohtia, ja kehittää uusia lähestymistapoja tutkia sosiaalisen identiteetin dynamiikan yksityiskohtia strategissa vuorovaikutustilanteissa. Tutkimus, jossa tutkitaan, miten iästä tulee diskursiivisesti merkityksellinen institutionaalisissa kohtaamisissa tuottaa samalla käytännön ohjeita esihenkilöille ja henkilöstöhallinnon ammattilaisille siitä, miten työpaikoilla voidaan harjoittaa ikäjohtamista ja inkluusiota. Ehdotan, että ikäkäytännöt tulisi sitoa niitä koskeviin työyhteisön konteksteihin ja tapoihin. Ageismin haastamiseksi työpaikoilla on päästävä yli yksinkertaisesta ajattelusta iästä vain numerona ja koulutettava ammattilaisia ymmärtämään ikää ympäröiviä dynamiikkoja työyhteisöissä.

CONTENTS

1 Introduction 19
  1.1 The context of the study 22
    1.1.1 Ageing as an organisational problem 22
    1.1.2 Ageism as an organisational problem 24
  1.2 Engaging in a dialogue: key concepts and positioning 26
  1.3 The problem formulation and the aims of the study 30
  1.4 Disposition of the book 31

2 Understanding age 33
  2.1 Age as organising principle 34
  2.2 Older worker as an identity 36
  2.3 Age in interaction 37

3 Understanding category-based groups, prejudices and their morality 40
  3.1 Social identities and categories: from cognition to discourse and conversation 40
  3.2 Categorisation, order and morality 44
    3.2.1 Morality and stages of life 44
    3.2.2 Moral accountability in professional practice 46

4 Strategic interactions in the workplace 48
  4.1 Workplace practices as strategic institutional interactions 49
  4.2 Gatekeeping and impression management 51
  4.3 Performance appraisal interviews 53
  4.4 Job interviews 54

5 Data, methods, analytical process and research ethics 56
  5.1 Data 56
    5.1.1 Published scientific papers 56
    5.1.2 Strategic organisational interactions 57
  5.2 Approaches and methods 60
    5.2.1 Scoping review 60
    5.2.2 Discursive psychology as an approach to identity and -ism 62
    5.2.3 Membership categorisation analysis 63
    5.2.4 Conversation analytically informed analysis 66

5.3 Analytical process and research questions 67
5.4 Ethical concerns 71

6 Results of the articles 74
6.1 Discursive themes of ageism in working life and the gaps 74
6.2 The construction of age and age-related discursive practices....77
6.3 Possible ageist accounts, their warrantability and the role of co-membership for solidarity and impression management 79

7 Discussion....81
7.1 From micro to macro and back: A conceptual and methodological discussion....82
7.2 Revisiting age and ageism in interaction....84
7.3 Implications for policies and practices 87
7.4 Limitations of the study and ideas for future research 89

8 References....92

List of Figures

Figure 1. Example of PAI, taken from dataset 2. 58

Figure 2. Example of JI, taken from dataset 3. 59

Figure 3. Organisation of job interviews and performance appraisal interviews between macro (institutional/organizational) and micro (interactional/practical) levels. 84

List of Tables

Table 1. Description of the video recordings of strategic interaction and age-focused sequences. 57

Table 2. Data Usage, Methods, Focus and Results for Articles 1, 2 and 3. 73

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1 INTRODUCTION

In a progressively older society, understanding the dynamics through which age becomes a strategic category that creates division, similarities and groups is essential to ensure an equitable and inclusive future. It might seem paradoxical, but in a world where older persons are increasing in number, one out of two persons is ageist against them (World Health Organisation, 2021). Examples of ageism are part of our everyday experiences. For example, during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, older persons were often labelled and treated as dispensable, and policies were designed on solely chronological age (Previtali et al., 2020). Considering the labour market, older workers (conventionally considered over 50 years old[1]) are becoming the largest share of the active workforce in Western countries. At the same time, despite age discrimination being legally banned in the European Union's workplaces (2000/78/EC), age discrimination is more frequently reported than sexism or racism by workers of all ages (European Commission, 2020). These ongoing trends leave space to question our current understanding of the dynamics of age and ageism and the efficacy of ongoing practice and policies directed towards managing them.

This dissertation focuses on age as a category that creates barriers, similarities and groups inside organisations. Most of the research on age in the workplace has focused on older workers as a category for which age is inherently relevant due to their chronological age. This use of chronological age might collide with a current shared understanding that age is also a socially constructed category that goes beyond the mere counting of years since birth (Coupland & Nussbaum, 1993). Moreover, previous studies have mostly looked at how perceived age discrimination can be

[1] For more information surrounding the discussion around the definition of older workers, please see the introduction to my first article ('Ageism in Working Life: A Scoping Review on Discursive Approaches').

measured and reported. The quantification of ageist experiences is beneficial to show its impact; however, it does not delve into how ageism is reproduced as a social practice in the workplace. Current studies and policies agree that ageism is widespread and it operates in hidden and discreet ways (Snellman, 2016). Therefore, research needs to dig deeper than reportable ageist experiences to understand how this phenomenon is normatively produced in our social lives. The lack of research on how age and ageism are also products of social construction happening in workplace interactions is extremely evident compared to the amount of research done on other social categories, such as gender or race. This comparison raises some questions about whether developing our understanding of age and ageism as social and interactional accomplishments might shed new light on this field.

To fill these gaps, I decided to investigate how age and ageism shape workplace encounters by examining how workers themselves invoked, worked up or played down reference to age-related categories and age groups. I focus on encounters where employers (managers or recruiters) and employees (supervisees and job applicants) interact to investigate how age category practices pinpoint organisational norms that might be collaboratively accomplished. Moreover, the interaction allows the analyst to show whether workers are made accountable for mobilizing possible age prejudices.

Theoretically, this research focuses on discourse as a media of action and presents the contribution of looking at ageism from a discursive point of view and the future directions for this approach. The empirical investigation is based on a long-standing tradition of ethnomethodology that considers social order as analysable by looking at actual forms of language use and social practice (Garfinkel & Rawls, 2002). Moreover, I stand on previous work on discursive psychology as an approach to investigating psychological phenomena as managed and accountable in discourse (Wiggins, 2017). Also, as done by institutional conversation analysis, I refer to organisations as institutions that take place in and through the social interactions happening within them (Drew & Heritage, 1992b). This approach allows me to shed light on how age-inclusive or ageist policies are accomplished in and through the organisational interactions that perform them.

The initial and inspirational research questions in this dissertation are how discursive research can contribute to analysing and reducing ageism, how age shapes organisational interactions and how ageist or age-inclusive practices unfold in interactions. These research questions are the standing point for the research, have shaped the choice and analysis of data and have been redefined multiple times during the project, as explained in Section 1.3 and 5.3 . To answer the research questions, I designed a study that has two steps: first, a review of published research papers (Article 1) and then an analysis of social interactions (Articles 2 and 3). In the first, I produce for the first time a review that focuses solely on discursive research, which shows the contribution of this field in investigating ageism in working life and identifies research gaps. In the latter, I focus on two strategic workplace encounters: performance appraisal interviews and job interviews, which are settings that have been largely researched as arenas of ageism (Harris et al., 2018; Murphy & DeNisi, 2021; Naegele et al., 2020; Solem, 2016). In this dissertation, I label these two processes as strategic encounters because of the crucial role they play in both organisations and workers' lives. The analysis of strategic encounters is based on video recordings of authentic job interviews and performance appraisal interviews held in two organisations in Italy. For the video-recorded data, the methods used were membership conversation analysis and, to a less extent, applied conversation analysis.

The main contribution of this thesis lies in the analysis of age and ageism in authentic workplace interactions. This investigation allows us to first explore how, when and towards what organisational and interactional action age-related categories become relevant. The analysis of age categorisation as discursive practice in specific workplace encounters shows how age references are linked to the unfolding context in multiple ways. Placing the analysis of age biases in their social context can show how taken-for-granted and stereotypical notions about age shape the conversation, amount to organisational norms and values and whether workers are held morally accountable for them. From a practical point of view, looking at real practices is a way to investigate how policies that are supposed to be inclusive are translated into practices by workers in their everyday jobs. As such, this research has an aspiration to be of use in professional settings and, therefore, I developed advice for recruiters, human resources practitioners and managers about age-inclusive workplace and practices (a policy brief is included in the Annex).

In the following pages in the Introduction, I first provide the general context for this research: a) ageing as an organisational problem and b) ageism as an organisational problem. Second, I define the key concepts for this doctoral dissertation and their relationships. This glossary will guide the readers in the upcoming chapters, show the reasoning behind involving multiple concepts in my research, and show my positioning about macro concepts, such as age or ageism. Third, I state the problem formulation and the aims of this integrative chapter as an overarching project based on three published papers. Fourth and last, a description of the book is presented.

1.1 The context of the study

In this chapter, I will briefly place my research in the realm of ageing and ageism in the field of workforce-related studies. In Section 1.1.1, I introduce how ageing is managed as an organisational issue inside companies. In Section 1.1.2, I introduce the topic of ageism, its definitions and its impact on working life, especially job interviews and performance appraisal interviews. In both chapters, I conclude by highlighting the approach that I took in my research compared to the outlined context.

1.1.1 Ageing as an organisational problem

Over the last decades, ageing has become a political, academic and organisational issue. The extension of life expectancy has raised questions about how national governments will be able to sustain a growing number of older persons on retirement benefits and with increasing health care needs. In Western society, this concern is accelerated by the nativity rate constantly decreasing and fewer younger workers entering the labour market. Increasing the retirement age and promoting extended working life policies and discourses are political responses to the ageing problem (Ni Leime et al., 2019). Consequently, ageing has become an organisational matter companies have slowly started to manage.

In the context of the workforce, employers and organisations are the intermediate ground between macro trends and single individuals; hence, they play a crucial role in endorsing policies and transforming them into actions (Boehm et al., 2021; Eppler-Hattab et al., 2020). Human resource management, as an organisational

function, is the middle ground between political and legal trends and individual workers and HR professionals are the ones who actualise these trends in their daily jobs. Accordingly, policies dealing with ageing in the workplace are at the crossroads of macro-, meso- and micro-dynamics, meaning that they are nested in societal, organisational and personal factors.

Boehm and colleagues (2021) outline three main approaches to age in management: age-neutral, age-focused and age-inclusive. *Age-neutral* policies include HR guidelines that do not consider age a key antecedent or outcome at either the organisational or individual level. *Age-focused* policies focus not on age but on older workers to manage ageing. An age-focused approach protects older workers and ensures recruitment, lifelong learning, training, career development, flexible hours and tasks, health promotion, ergonomic adaptation, support in the transition to retirement and redeployment for older workers (Naegele & Walker, 2011). Age-specific policies bring positive effects to firms and individuals and over time, the number of companies implementing them has increased. For example, in the Netherlands, the percentage of companies actively managing age increased from 19% to 52% between 2009 and 2017 (Turek et al., 2020). In opposition to these approaches, the label '*age inclusive*' has been introduced to point out that HR policies should enhance the knowledge, skills, capacities, motivation and opportunities of all age groups, rather than just concentrating on older workers. Age-neutral hiring and promotion, equal access to training opportunities, training on age diversity and the promotion of an age-inclusive corporate culture are examples of age-inclusive management (Boehm et al., 2021).

In sum, the described management approaches originate from one of the following assumptions: (1) age is not relevant for employees' management (age-neutral); (2) age is relevant only when a certain threshold is crossed, e.g. 50 years old (age-focused); and (3) age is a diversity category that needs to be managed to ensure equity and inclusion (age inclusive). Nevertheless, these approaches assume that chronological age is the category to be managed and that its meaning and dynamics are the same for every worker in every organisation during every set of encounters. Hence, some questions may arise; for example, how can we manage age in practices if we do not have a proper understanding of its diverse and contextualised dynamics?

This dissertation reverses the conventional approach to age in the workplace by examining the moments when age becomes relevant in workplace encounters from an emic perspective. In this research, I do not overlook the importance of studying ageing as a biological phenomenon and its natural process of decreasing abilities in daily life and at work. However, I fill a gap in the knowledge about understanding age in the organisation as a performative, relational and social category and identity. As I will show later, this type of approach is possible only by introducing new methodologies in the studies of age in the workplace that look at age as interactionally achieved in the institutional context of work.

1.1.2 Ageism as an organisational problem

Ageing alone is not a political and managerial issue but also ageism. In an ageing world, discrimination based on age is slowly but progressively becoming a problem to tackle. In fact, the World Health Organization (World Health Organization, 2021) launched a global campaign to combat ageism in 2020, and the United Nations declared 2021–2030 a decade of healthy ageing.

This dissertation is especially timely in reviewing research linked to ageism, as it started in 2019 exactly 50 years after the first introduction of the term (R. N. Butler, 1969). Ageism was introduced as a concept in 1969 by R. N. Butler, an American gerontologist, with a piece aimed at putting discrimination against older persons on the map of the academic field of gerontology. Since then, the concept has expanded (Iversen et al., 2009) and now entails positive and negative attitudes (Palmore, 1990), as well as self-directed attitudes or self-ageism (Levy & Myers, 2004). There is an active discussion in the field of ageism research about the multiple definitions of the concepts and the lack of a shared agreement about them (an extensive review of current definitions of ageism is presented in Article 1). In academic discourse, the lack of agreement on a definition is often linked to the difficulty of measuring the phenomenon and tackling it. Today the most common definition of ageism is that it entails 'prejudice', 'stereotypes' and 'discrimination' towards all ages, not only older persons (World Health Organisation, 2021).

In the context of work, there is increasing awareness, confirmed by substantial research, that ageist attitudes are an obstacle to Human Resources Management (HR) and reduce the possibility of effectively supporting the prolongation of working life

policies and effective age management (Chiesa et al., 2016; Mirza et al., 2021; van Dalen & Henkens, 2020). Regarding *recruitment*, older job applicants face more challenges in finding a job and remain unemployed for longer than younger workers (Berde & Mágó, 2022). Posthuma and Campion (2009) show that stereotypes about older workers as slow, less productive and less healthy are widespread, although they are inconsistent with research evidence. Despite some positive changes in managers' attitudes (van Dalen & Henkens, 2020), research confirms the pervasiveness of age stereotypes in recruitment (Levy, 2017; Vickerstaff & Van der Horst, 2021; Cadiz et al., 2022). Psychological studies that delve into explicit and implicit age biases show that recruiters display explicit favouritism towards younger job applicants and negative implicit stereotypes towards older job applicants (Zaniboni et al., 2019). In a similar vein, Principi et al. (2014) detail that HR managers judged workers of a similar age more positively.

Compared to the research on recruitment, fewer studies have investigated biases in *performance appraisals*. By studying focus groups and interviews with Scottish employers, Loretto and White (2006) show that employers felt that performance generally declined beyond age 50, especially in physical tasks. Moreover, managers reported ageist attitudes, although they officially sustained equal opportunity policies about age (Loretto & White, 2006). Performance is a debated topic in ageing studies because of the contested link between age and performance. Previous studies have shown that work performance does not decrease with age on a general level (Posthuma & Campion, 2009), but that this relation is dependent on various factors, such as workability (Ilmarinen, 2019) and the measurement used to assess performance (Bal, 2020). Research, based on surveys and pre/post assessment of performance, highlights that, on the one hand, the negative link between performance and chronological age is inconsistent (Ali & French, 2019; Kunze et al., 2013, 2015, 2021), and on the other hand, age stereotypes still influence managers' decisions (Harris et al., 2018; Paleari et al., 2019). Nevertheless, these studies assessed performance without looking at how it acquires meaning during the social interaction and organisational practices where it is assessed or how workers make sense of their age and ageing during these assessments.

Overall, previous research has focused on the quantitative or qualitative measurement of ageism. When based on experiments, researchers often propose

unrealistic settings and tend to overestimate the effect of age (see the critique by Murphy & DeNisi, 2021). When based on qualitative methods, research is predominantly performed on interviews, where the recollection of detailed episodes is problematic. To my knowledge, no study has demonstrated in detail how ageism is practically accomplished in workplace encounters, such as job interviews or performance assessments. These interactional practices are the focus of this dissertation. The focus on interactions and strategic encounters is a way to connect the macro discourses about ageism to the micro level of everyday work practice.

1.2 Engaging in a dialogue: key concepts and positioning

This dissertation is placed in three major fields: ageing studies, social psychology and work-related studies. It is also positioned in a very clear methodological space: a discursive and interactional approach to social psychological matters (Tileaga & Stokoe, 2017). In the previous Section (1.1), I reviewed the general background of the research, placing it in a political and managerial discussion. Here, I clarify my theoretical position and my understanding of the key concepts involved in my research and I detail my positioning in a populated and troubled academic discussion. The definitions provided below will be revisited in the chapters dedicated to each specific topic. I want to introduce a caveat: the following explanations and personal positions are the results of my personal and academic growth during my doctoral studies. Therefore, in the three published papers included in this integrative chapter, the reader might find different nuances.

My interest in developing this research was double-sided and involved both age as a social category and ageism as forms of stereotypes and prejudices based on age. Theoretically, the first cannot exist without the latter, and practically, the latter cannot be managed if there is a lack of knowledge of what the first is. Despite being placed in ageing studies, I do not talk extensively about ageing. This is because I have focused on categories in talk and as such, I have also theoretically focused on the construction of meaning related to the category of age. This focus on age does not aim to dissociate this research from the theoretical development that ageing is a process, and a life course approach should be emphasised. In contrast, the Results

and Discussion (Chapter 6 and 7) will show that approaching age as a discursive category enriches our understanding of how ageing is discursively constructed inside the workplace. At the same time, my intention is not to argue for a pure social construction assumption about age, which neglects its chronological and biological features. On the contrary, I argue that understanding how age and related groups and identities are discursively accomplished allows us to detangle prejudices from the biological and natural processes of ageing.

Before talking about age, it might be beneficial to explain my understanding of *category*. I consider categories as a live resource for members in the accomplishment of reasoning, sense-making and social organisation in their conversations and interactions (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009). The analysis of categories in talk allows the research to show the ways in which the sense of the world is built. Alternatively, categories that pinpoint cultural knowledge function for building a world where we relate to each other's. Categories in talk pinpoint common-sense knowledge, and they must be treated as such by the analysts (Jayyusi, 1984). Therefore, categories relate to both the micro elements of interaction and shared understanding, as well as macro elements, such as culture, norms and even organisational structure.

In explaining how categories are treated in this dissertation, I necessarily engage with a long-standing debate between structuralist, critical discourse analysis, ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (for discussion, see Augoustinos & Every, 2007; Kitzinger, 2009). It is not my intention to review the positions of these different approaches, but I will state mine. In this dissertation, I align with previous researchers who sustain how categorisation is an inherently interactive and discursive activity, but it also generates shared notions that accumulatively build the culture that is externalised, outside the single interactions, as well as is built on shared notions that members of society can refer to (e.g. Mäkitalo, 2016). Thus, the norms related to the 'categorisation machinery' (categories, related attributes, membership, etc.) are accountable for by speakers in the interaction (E. Stokoe, 2015). Participants are accountable for their actions in institutional activities that go beyond the conversation in situ. In this way, categorisation is also linked to the morality of professional practices. Participants who took part in my data were socialised in the ways of their organisations when they started their encounters.

In the long debate between structuralists, for which social structure pre-exists social interaction, and agnostic conversation analysts, for which nothing that pre-exists the interaction should be taken into consideration, I put myself in the middle. I do not deny that normative assumptions about age and stages of life shape organisations, lives inside organisations and organisational practices. However, in my empirical research, I aim to show not what age is, but how it is done in relation to what organisational and interactional action. Some linked questions are how these age notions are oriented to in situ, how age is constructed in different ways, how age groups can be negotiated promptly according to the ongoing action and how stereotypical notions are treated as accountable or not, also depending on the discursive and relational construction of shared group membership.

When referring to *age*, I approach it as an identity matter and a socially constructed category that acquires meaning in social relations and whose meanings are dependent on the context and the situation (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007; Nikander, 2002). Hence, age was not treated as a number or a demographic measure. Previous scholars have beautifully reviewed how age is many things in the workplace: chronological, calendar, stage of life, organisational, etc. (De Lange et al., 2021). Age has several meanings, but it is not until workers use it in the situated action that it gains a specific sense. Moreover, I also consider age as an embodied feature, which is always perceptually available in face-to-face relations and, as such, might have a 'hidden' influence on them. Age is also a category that constructs group membership. As age can be discursively constructed, age group membership can also be discursively constructed, and this co- (shared) or cross- (not shared) membership can influence ongoing interactions, especially the achievement of common goals.

The discursive construction of age can be approached as members' categorisation practices based on the category of device *stages of life*. In this dissertation, I discuss age as a broader concept because my intention is to communicate to a broader public who might not be familiar with the concept of stages of life. However, both theoretically and analytically, I approach age as based on references to stages of life as a discursive and organisational device. I extensively describe this categorisation device in Section 3.2.1 and 5.2.3. The distinction between age and stages of life allows the analyst to untangle stages of life from a mere conceptualisation of age as a biological variable. In fact, stages of life refer to the ordered passages that the

modern life course assumes. As such, stages of life display an ingrained orientation towards a normative and sequential order. This order is also a moral order that makes people accountable for following it or not (Nikander, 2000). Moreover, in the analysis, I broadly refer to diverse age references as linked to certain stages of life.

I consider *ageism* to be a discursive accomplishment and a social practice. In this dissertation, I consider ageism a realm of 'constitutive practices which are permeated with our experiences of the chronological, social, biological and psychological life course' (Snellman, 2016, p. 149). As such, ageism is not only related to old age or older persons, but is also linked to the normative notions of life stages and institutionalised life course (Holstein & Gubrium, 2007; Mortimer & Moen, 2016). I will refer to 'everyday ageism'. Everyday ageism does not take the form of a single discriminative action but is a complex nest of cumulative practices that are often perceived as normal (Bytheway, 2005). At the micro level, approaching ageism as a set of discursive practices (Nikander, 2009) in which we are all to some extent involved (Bytheway, 2005; Snellman, 2016). This is in line with a discursive approach to psychology (Billig, 1985), where persons are not blindly responding to cognitive mechanisms but are accountable actors for, for example, the use of prejudicial notions. Moreover, in my analysis I refer to 'possible ageism'. The focus is not on overt discriminatory action, but instead on sequences in which parties formulate potentially ageist turn (Stokoe, 2015). The analysis does not rely on how people talk about their experience of ageism, but instead how possible ageism creeps into organisational activities, in the private room of strategic workplace encounters.

'Strategic workplace encounter' is the last key term appearing in the title. During the writing of the thesis, I decided to define the settings of my data, job interviews and performance appraisal interviews as strategic. This definition has different meanings in relation to age and ageism. I explain this term in Chapter 4. Cultural norms attached to age, ageing and life stages are especially influential in organisational processes with a gatekeeping function, where decisions are made about who 'fits' the organisation. Ageism can influence strategic practices by obscuring an inclusive process and hindering the equal performance of both recruitment and performance assessments. However, the analysed encounters are also strategic because they are institutional interactions. Maintaining intersubjectivity is one goal of everyday social interaction (Drew & Heritage, 1992b). However, in organisational interaction, this

goal is juxtaposed with organisational goals, which are performing the business activity at hand. Also, the practices analysed in this dissertation are collected in companies that follow policies of inclusion and diversity; hence, one theoretical goal of the analysed interaction is inclusivity.

The described concepts will be revisited multiple times throughout the integrative chapter. This initial glossary is presented to place the following chapter about problem formulation and the aim of the study in a more theoretically informed space.

1.3 The problem formulation and the aims of the study

I have briefly described in Section 1.1 the rapidly growing body of research concerning age and ageism in the workplace. I have briefly pointed out that previous studies deal in various ways with mapping, from one side, who the older workers are, how they can be managed, on the other side, who holds ageist stereotypes and when age discrimination manifests. Limited studies have tried to take the perspective of a detailed study of face-to-face interactions between employers and employees in the workplace as a starting point to research age and ageism. Studies of age-related dynamics in social interaction have focused on everyday encounters and health care settings, but not workplace encounters, as I review in Section 2.3. In the same way, discursive and interactional approaches to -isms have been used to analyse sexism and racism, but very scantly ageism, as reviewed in Section 3.1.

Therefore, this dissertation can be seen as an attempt to fill these gaps by accomplishing two aims. The first is to *map the contribution of exploring ageism from a discursive point of view*. The second is *to investigate how age and ageism are mobilised in strategic workplace encounters and how they become relevant for accomplishing these encounters from the interactants' perspective*. These two aims explain why the overall research is designed in two phases: first, a scoping review (Article 1) and second, the two empirical analyses (Articles 2 and 3).

The problem formulation is two consecutive steps and is a product of the journey that this doctoral dissertation represents. My intention was to delve into the grassroots of ageism in working life by first scratching the surface and examining the

already published literature and then delving deep into the scaffolding of all social phenomena: social interactions. The analytical process and research question formulation are better explained in Section 5.3.

The described formulation of the research problem is linked to the wider research project in which I conducted my doctoral studies. This research was possible thanks to my participation in the Innovative Training Network EuroAgeism, funded by the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under the Marie Skłodowska-Curie grant agreement No 764632. As part of a funded project interested in looking at ageism, my analysis explored this phenomenon. Hence, my first look at the practices under investigation was not naïve but informed by the project interest to investigate age-inclusive or ageist practices. For some researchers in the field of ethnomethodological studies or in membership categorisation and conversation analysis, this might be a limitation, considering that these approaches privilege an 'agnostic' exploration of data and advise the researcher to be surprised by what members are doing. I acknowledge the possible clash between these different standings, and I will more exhaustively discuss the creation of the research questions in Section 5.3.

Nevertheless, being part of an internationally funded network was inspirational and enriched my research. The Innovative Training Network was aimed at bridging research and policies. This was an opportunity to link research programmes and agendas that are conventionally distant and challenged me to show the contribution of micro-discursive research to policymaking. This resulted in a theoretical and methodological challenge to standing policies in organisations, which overlooked the micro level of social interaction both in the design and in the assessments. This challenge translated into a policy brief, which is included in the Annex.

1.4 Disposition of the book

The integrative chapter that you are about to read consists of seven chapters. In the Introduction, I outlined how this research relates to the socio-demographic phenomenon of ageing and is placed within the discussion of age management and fighting ageism in the workplace. I also detailed my positioning in the academic filed

where this doctoral research is placed. Chapter 2 places the dissertation within the relevant literature age in discourse and interaction. In the third chapter, I present the development of research on stereotypes and the most recent discursive psychology (DP) approach to them. I described the link between categories, social identities, morality and professional practices. The fourth chapter reviews the literature on institutional conversation analysis and job interviews and performance appraisal interviews as interactional practices. Therein, I described the link of my research to impression management and gatekeeping. The fifth chapter reviews the data and methods, analytical process, research questions and ethical concerns. Chapter 7 presents the dissertation's unique contributions, outlines its limitations and proposes new research directions.

2 UNDERSTANDING AGE

This chapter approached the first major topic of the dissertation: *age*. Age matters in organisations; it structures *power relations* and shapes *identities* and *social interactions* (Fineman, 2014), and the following chapter will follow these three major subthemes. The reviewed literature is selected in the realm of an analysis of age, ageing and related dynamics in discourse. However, discourse can include multiple and sometimes opposite ontological positions. Here, discourse is understood as producing particular kinds of knowledge about a topic and creating a notion of the world for its inhabitants, giving it meaning that generates experience and practices (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2007).

In the literature interested in age and discourse, I identify three traditions: 1. age as organising principle; 2. older workers as an identity; 3. age in interaction. The first two points are limited to the literature on working life, which is quite extensive in these domains. In the third point, I will review the literature that investigates age as a category in social interactions within the methodological fields of membership categorisation analysis and CA (the methods are explained in Chapter 5). 'Age in interaction' is a rather limited body of literature and it is mostly related to everyday interactions or health care settings; hence, I will expand beyond work-related study in the related Section 2.3.

I selected these three bodies of knowledge to point out their contributions, but also to show their gaps. The three main gaps are as follows: a) in the analysis of age as an organising principle, there is an overestimation of the victim-perpetrator duality between employer and employee, which overlooks the extent to which notions are co-produced in interaction. b) In the analysis of older workers as an identity, there is an interest in solely older persons, which neglects other age groups, but also the relational nature of age, which might differ depending on the business at hand. c) In the analysis of age in interaction, there is a lack of application to work-related settings. My dissertation aims to fill these gaps.

2.1 Age as organising principle

Previous research concerning age as an organising principle is rooted in a Foucauldian analysis of discourse as power (Foucault, 1981). Compared to other identity classifications, such as race, gender, ethnicity and disability, age has not been extensively explored as a divisive element in organisations (Thomas et al., 2014). Traditionally, age norms structure organisational hierarchies and careers are expected to progress according to institutionalised and normative life stages (Lawrence, 1996). Within this body of literature, scholars question the construction of age as a 'natural' and 'normal' organising principle and expose the normative notions surrounding ageing (Bowman et al., 2017; Krekula, 2009, 2019; Krekula & Vickerstaff, 2020; Riach et al., 2014; Riach & Kelly, 2015; Spedale, 2019; Spedale et al., 2014).

The contribution of this field is summarised in four main points: a) age is silenced in the workplace and materialises only as problematic old age; b) marginalising age group based on chronological age sustain a homogenic and discriminatory construction of the age groups, also in intersection with other power systems; c) a superficial discourse about age inclusive policies does not equal age equality.

First, Thomas et al. (2014) show that age is usually silenced inside the workplace and it materialises only when it is interpreted as problematic, which happens mainly in reference to old age. For example, discourses of ageing in the workplace target only older workers who, after bypassing a certain chronological age, move from being a 'normal' member of the organisation to being an 'older worker' (Thomas et al., 2014). The engrained preference for youthfulness and the discourse of ageing as decline structures specific power relations that systematically marginalise older workers in the workplace. Therefore, in the workplace, older age emerges as problematic against the backdrop of youth construed as normal. Consequently, workplace practices reify the exclusion of older workers. For example, Krekula (2019) shows how, in a Swedish foundry, the on- and off-time of older workers was constructed as abnormal by managers because mobility was normatively assigned to younger workers.

Second, marginalising and labelling older workers sustains a homogenic construction of this group. Homogenisation of age groups also shows how age silently operates as an organising principle, which is visible in the simplistic managerial discussion

about generations in the workplace (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014). Generational talk sustains a process of homogenisation within age groups, which overlooks diversity and other intersecting marginalisation, such as gender, race and sexuality (Calasanti & Giles, 2017; Krekula et al., 2018; Moore, 2009; Robinson-Wood & Weber, 2016; Van Der Horst & Vickerstaff, 2020). The imposition of supra-existing generational features on age groups materially limits their possibility (Pritchard & Whiting, 2014). For example, Riach (2014) has shown that older workers, due to their description as flexible, were offered only low-paid positions. Furthermore, previous studies have emphasised how age as a power system intersect with other power structures as gender or race. Gender expectations intersect and define gendered ageism, exacerbating experiences of discrimination against older women (Spedale et al., 2014).

Third, a superficial understanding of inclusion might produce a levelling of rights while overlooking marginalisation caused by power systems, such as age. In fact, the introduction of age-inclusive policies does not equate with the achievement of age equality (Martin & North, 2021). New ageism enables the individual to maintain a veneer of egalitarianism and promote inclusion while simultaneously justifying difference (Hopf et al., 2021; McVittie et al., 2003). Moreover, a limited understanding of diversity and how to 'do' inclusion in practice might inhibit the implementation of the same age-inclusive practices.

Overall, these critical analyses of age as an organising element reveal that the apparent absence of age from managerial discourses and practice does not mean that they are age-neutral. On the contrary, discourses related to age act as silent players. However, to some extent, the described studies reinforce the traditional idea that there is a victim and a perpetrator at the opposite side of the age-based power dynamics. The victims are usually older workers, older women, younger workers, and the perpetrator are employers and managers. This duality overlooks the collaborative and relational dynamics embedded in the performative aspect of age as discourse and social construction (Gergen, 2009). Therefore, in my dissertation I investigate how age shapes organisational encounters by exposing how age is co-constructed by co-interactants. More specifically, a detailed and language-grounded analysis of how workers refer to age-related categories and how this mobilisation is

jointly produced in the conversation sheds light on the fact that both employers and employees engage in re-producing possible ageist assumptions.

2.2 Older worker as an identity

Age not only structures power relations but also creates available identity paths for persons (J. Coupland, 2009a; Holstein & Gubrium, 2007; Nikander, 2002).

The analytic interest in age identities in the labour market has been primarily empirically achieved by concentrating on old age and analysing older workers' accounts. Numerous studies address 'older workers' as a discursive subject (Krekula & Vickerstaff, 2020; Loretto & White, 2006; McVittie et al., 2003; Niska et al., 2020; Porcellato et al., 2010; Riach, 2007; Spedale, 2019; Taylor et al., 2016). This tradition contributes to show that the tag 'older worker' is not a status assigned by biological stage, but is an identity continuously rejected, invoked and managed by individuals in a nest of organisational, political and power relation.

Often, inside organisations, 'older worker' is a tag that is not constructed by the members of the group; instead, due to its negative features, it is assigned by others through the discursive practices of 'othering' (Riach, 2007). Previous research shows that through discourses, older workers can reject the assigned marginalised identity and frame themselves either as 'heroes' that keep working despite being considered too old (Romaioli & Contarello, 2019) or as 'retirees', thus embracing this new identity when work becomes problematic (Berger, 2006). This research has grounded the analysis of discourse into the detailed analysis of how practices of talk can be used to negotiate identities.

Discursive construction of group identity takes place also at macro level. In policies, the older worker's identity is constructed in opposition to the identity 'ideal worker', which is adult, healthy, productive and male (Krekula, 2009; Krekula & Vickerstaff, 2020; Rudman & Molke, 2009). Within a neo-liberal society, the prototype of an 'ideal worker' is rooted in the ideology of constant productivity and economic contribution (Bowman et al., 2017). Therefore, policies about extending working lives may create a new norm of the 'ideal worker' that is unachievable in the

individual embodied experiences of ageing bodies and influence identity construction.

These studies demonstrate that age is not merely a chronological variable, but rather it is an identity and workers can negotiate, reject, and assign it to themselves and others. Moreover, discursive research has shown that identities in the workplace are constructed in an arena shaped by policies and societal discourses.

Despite the wide interest in discourses, academic attention towards a fine-grained analysis of the timely and in situ negotiation of age-based identity in social interaction happening within the workplace is scares. Moreover, the reviewed discursive studies limit their interest to older workers complying, to some extent, with the idea that age is relevant only when it is old age. In this dissertation, I detail how age-based group identity negotiation emerge in social interaction during strategic workplace encounters. I will not limit my interest to older workers, but I will investigate how age serve as membership identity device in talk.

2.3 Age in interaction

Compared to the body of literature in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, research here labelled as 'age in interaction' is methodologically grounded in membership categorisation analytical or conversation analytical approaches. In the following studies, language delivers actions, not meaning; therefore, words need to be understood in the social and linguistic context of their delivery, not outside of it (Levinson, 2012). Hence, the papers discussed below are based on analysis of authentic social interactions. I create this division to emphasise how these methodological lenses have advanced the sometime blurred idea that 'old' identities are discursively negotiated, and age is mobilised as an organising principle also in and through the structuring of conversation.

Previous studies on age in interaction cover a variety of settings. Studies have addressed institutional settings, such as healthcare settings (Näslund, 2017; Nikander, 2007), helpline services (Cromdal et al., 2018; Tennent, 2020), travel agencies (Ylänne-McEwen, 2006), call centres (Flinkfeldt et al., 2021) and service

providers (Day & Hitchings, 2011). While other studies have focused on everyday settings, including hairdresser appointments (Heinrichsmeier, 2018, 2019a, 2019b), reality shows (Poulios, 2009), online chats (Andersen & Rathje, 2019) and conversation about life stage changes, such as birthdays (Nikander, 2009), becoming parents (Ylänne & Nikander, 2019) and living in a community-dwelling facility (Pirhonen et al., 2016).

In more details, previous studies have shown that the inference-rich feature of age and stages of life (SOLs), as discursive resources, allow speakers to use them for their organising and moralising power in social life (Jayyusi, 1984; Nikander, 2002). Interestingly, SOLs work in settings where people are face to face as well as where people do not see each other, such as online forums. Puolios's (2009) analysis of reality show interaction presents that SOLs were used as part of the argumentation to win discussion. Similarly, in the analysis of online Facebook group discussion, Andersen and Rathje (2019) point out that SOLs are used as resources to negotiate social norms and moralise conduct in media conflict. Interestingly, the latter study is based in an online setting where age is not visually or otherwise available to participants. In both studies, age and SOLs appear to explain conduct through linked expectations, rights and obligations (Andersen & Rathje, 2019).

In institutional settings, the inference-rich nature of age and SOLs becomes a resource for accomplishing institutional actions. Compared to everyday interactions, institutional interactions are encounters in which an institutional goal is set and needs to be reached (Arminen, 2017). For example, Tennent (2020) shows that, during helpline calls, the categorical age relationships among help-seekers, help-recipients and potential help-providers were consequential in determining whether help could be provided. Therefore, membership in age categories was a resource to manage psychological matters of entitlement, obligation and opportunity to receive help. Similarly, Thell and Jacobsoon (2016) analyse telephone conversations between a psychotherapist and people seeking help. They find that therapists used reference to callers' ages to position them in SOLs categories, which invoked expectations of the categories and their reasons for calling. Especially in health-related settings, life stages serve as interpretative resources for negotiating an understanding of patients' troubles. For example, Näslund (2017) shows that the castings of the patients into the category 'old' served as a discursive resource for health professionals to

normalise medical projects for older persons. Nevertheless, age ascription can be a source of problems for patients, and they accept, modify, interrupt or reverse them. Therefore, ascription to age categories is negotiable, and even stereotypical notions of age can be used by the same older persons to their advantage, for example, to receive attention to medial issues (Näslund, 2017).

The age in interaction literature ground the identity negotiation in the unfolding of turns of conversations. For example, Nikander (2002) interviewed baby boomers when they were turning 50 and shows that they rhetorically balanced talk about ageing, change and continuity of their identity before and after the infamous threshold. Similarly, in the analysis of interviews with older first-time parents, Ylänne and Nikander (2019) demonstrate that 'older parents' engaged in significant discursive activity to manage their identity as parents against the backdrop of normative expectations regarding their old age. Their analysis shows that the adoption of a SOLs membership is an elaborated matter and engrains taken-for-granted notions of age and time.

To sum up, the literature on age in interaction shows that age is something we do rather than are. Age and SOLs function as interpretative devices for and in everyday and institutional actions. Nevertheless, this approach has scantly been used inside organisations. We do not have full knowledge about how age functions as a discursive device in the specific context of the workplace.

3 UNDERSTANDING CATEGORY-BASED GROUPS, PREJUDICES AND THEIR MORALITY

After having reviewed the literature on age, I now turn to the second important topic of this dissertation: *age-ism*, or how age become a base for the creation of groups, stereotypes and prejudices.

To introduce the reader to ageism, as a psychological phenomenon, I review the foundation of social psychological studies. I then describe the shift in paradigm proposed by discursive and rhetorical psychology. This discursive shift is foundational to my approach to ageism as a set of discursive practices, which are relationally, dynamically, and conversationally accomplished. Most importantly the discursive psychology shift is the theoretical foundation for studying 'authentic' encounters in the workplace, instead of interviews, surveys or laboratory experiments. I conclude this Chapter with a section on morality because it is relevant in the examination of the dynamics that warrant the use of prejudices in social interactions, and especially, in a professional context.

3.1 Social identities and categories: from cognition to discourse and conversation

The issues of social identity and membership in social groups are at the core of social psychology as the study of selves, groups and their inter-relations. The analyses of the dynamics of social groups and identities are deeply linked to the human interest in understanding why divisions are formed in society: how negative attitudes towards 'the others' and positive attitudes towards 'the us' emerge, how these develop into violent discrimination, as history has shown, and how we can change them.

In social psychology, one of the most classic and widely used theories about intergroup relations and formation of social identities is Tajfel and Turner's social

identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The theory main principle is that people act both as individuals and as members of a group (Brown, 2020). In the latter case, they think, feel and act in terms of their social identity, as members of various groups, whether implicitly or explicitly. These identities, when engaged, have an impact on how people perceive themselves and others on cognitive, evaluative and affective levels.

Tajfel (1981) initiated a cognitive revolution in social sciences, where the goal was to assess the cognitive dynamics between group identification, attitude formation and prejudices, stripped from any possible bias. Therefore, social processes were stripped from their social context and reproduced in controlled laboratory settings, where participants were 'free' to express prejudices, free from external influences and desirability biases (Van De Mieroop, 2015).

The mere theoretical focus on cognition and the methodological focus on laboratory experiments started to be criticised in the 1980s by researchers who initiated the tradition of rhetorical psychology and discursive psychology (DP) (Billig, 1985, 2002; Potter & Wetherell, 1987, 1988). In opposition to the cognitive model, researchers who started the field of DP argued that cognitive social psychology analysed social identities and categorisation as mental and perceptual when they are an inherently social and discursive process (Potter, 2006; Billig, 2002). From a social constructionist perspective, social knowledge and identities are discursive accomplishments and are primarily approachable in and through the social interaction where they are constructed (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The second criticism raised concerns about the overreliance on experimental methods and the paradoxical analysis of social life in a social vacuum. Criticism targets the fact that social categories are defined by the experimenter and are proposed as obvious to the participants so that the analysts can prove a priori cognitively linear relations among variables. Within the language-based analysis of social and psychological issues, identities and categories are considered discursive accomplishments achieved in social interactions and, as such, are analysable through the study of discourses and social interactions in real lives, outside the laboratory settings.

In discursive psychology, there is a shift from an etic to an emic perspective, inspired also by an ethnomethodological understanding of social problems, as analysable by

how people make sense of them in their everyday actions (Garfinkel, 1964). This methodological shift was influenced by Sacks (Sacks et al., 1974) and the introduction of conversation analysis (CA) as the backbone to systematically investigate social interactions. In fact, according to Potter (2006), researchers should focus on data that exist independently of researchers (natural occurring talk[2]), rather than data that are contrived by researchers.

Considering group-based categories, the re-thinking of categories outside the cognitive realm, located inside participants' heads, paved the way to a discursive analysis of categorisation, membership in social groups and social identities (Edwards, 1991, 2012). Compared to a cognitive perspective, in DP, 'the semantic membership boundaries of categories are fuzzy and the fact that the use of language permits multiple and even contrasting possibilities of descriptions suggests that categories do not simply function for organising the world, but for talking about it in ways that are adaptable to the situated requirements and to put words to work in the pragmatics of social interactions' (Edwards, 1991, p. 523). Categories, as members' resources, are context-dependent, situated and oriented to interactional purpose. Hence, the analysts' goal should be to study the occasioned relevance of categories in social life (Fitzgerald & Rintel, 2016).

Considering prejudices, in the cognitive model, prejudices are inevitable because they derive from the cognitive need to stereotype groups. On the contrary, a DP analysis of prejudice overcomes traditions that link prejudices cognitive shortcuts based on unwarranted generalisation (Allport, 1954). Billig (1985) argues that humans are not mindless actors, on the contrary they are prone to categorisation as much as they are able to particularisation. Hence, rhetorically prejudicial categorisation is more an argumentative device than a cognitive imperative (J. Coupland, 2009b; Dixon, 2017; Durrheim et al., 2015; Speer, 2015; Stokoe, 2015; Weatherall, 2015; Whitehead, 2015).

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[2] Naturally occurring data are defined as spoken languages produced entirely independently of the actions of the researcher (Potter, 2004).

Considering social identities, the focus is on members' actions and how social identities are members' concern that emerge in social interactions. Therefore, the goal of social psychology is to analyse the discursive practices that actively construct a version of reality, through which speakers assign identities to themselves and others (Augoustinos & Every, 2016). Therefore, analysts should show how membership is attended to and achieved in talk.

Previous studies have applied this approach to race and gender, as base for social identities, group membership and prejudices. There are growing number of papers analysing racism (e.g. Wetherell & Potter, 1998; Durrheim et al., 2015; Potter & Wetherell, 1988; Robles, 2015; Whitehead, 2015) and sexism (e.g. Joyce et al., 2021, Whitehead & Stokoe, 2015, Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003) in social interaction or from a CA/DP perspective. For example, feminist-informed CA (e.g. Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2003) and DP on gender (Stokoe, 2010a, 2010b) show how individuals 'do' their gender and membership in gendered categories in talk. In the analysis of 'race' talk, Wetherell and Potter (1998) found that the social category could be used to argue for both prejudicial (other vs us) and tolerant (we are all the same nation) attitudes depending on the occasion, showing how categories acquire meaning in their discursive environment. To sump up, previous studies show that everyday prejudice is accomplished using linguistic resources and rhetorical arguments that are combined flexibly to justify social inequalities and existing 'normal' social relations in ways that publicly may deny prejudicial identities (Whitehead, 2015).

Considering the flourishing tradition of DP and the growing body of research interested in -isms in interaction, it is surprising that ageism has not been extensively analysed through these lenses. This is surprising especially if we consider the body of research that approach age as discursive construction, as shown in Chapter 2. Only Heinrichsmeier (2019a) explicitly analysed ageism in authentic social interactions during hairdressers' encounters. She highlights that systemic routinised patterns of interactions and expectations over a long interactional history amount to forms of ageism, which are subtly engrained in our conversations. The subtle link between age-group prejudices and conversational patterns has been exposed also by Flinkfeldt et al. (2021) in a fine-grained analysis of recipient-design question in call centres. They discover that the design of questions in call centres was bound up with categorial considerations about the age of recipients, even when age was not directly

revealed. In more detail, callers would assume that young persons would have an email address, whereas they would expect older persons to not have one.

The lack of research on ageism in interaction might be related to ageism research as a rather new field. It might also be related to a lack of critical field politically determined to debunk how normative assumptions about age are engrained in our conversation. Lastly, it is also difficult to link age-based categorisation in talk to ageism if it is conceptualised as an explicit form of discrimination. This dissertation aims at creating an academic space to study ageism in interaction. I do it by analysing how, when and towards what action prejudicial categorisation based on age is occasioned and warranted in social interactions inside the workplace.

3.2 Categorisation, order and morality

Historically, one of main assumptions in psychological research is that prejudices are morally wrong, as such morality is engrained in the study of prejudices. I describe morality as relevant in this dissertation for two reasons. First, morality is pivotal in the literature on age categorisation, especially the categorisation device SOLs, as morally ordered (Jayyusi, 1984; Nikander, 2002), as briefly touched upon in Section 2.3. Second, morality and moral accountability are also problems for professionals who need to account for equitable management of institutional processes. Hence, morality links age, ageism and their dynamics in professional practices.

3.2.1 Morality and stages of life

The connection between morality and membership categorisation is based on the members' rights and obligations related to their belonging to social groups and as holders of certain social identities. Jayyusi (1984) illustrates that morality is deeply linked to membership categorisation. Social categories are tied to conventional expectations for their members, from which the practical applicability of moral ascription, description and inferences are drawn (Jayyusi, 1984).

From an ethnomethodological perspective, interactions can be 'understood by references to unspoken assumptions and presuppositions that each party attribute

to the other' (Heritage, 1984, p. 94). Membership categories are stocks of common-sense knowledge about what people are like, and, as such, they scaffold assumptions and presuppositions in interactions (Sacks, 1974). When people tie attributes and actions to categories, they indicate that social norms are category-based (Rossi & Stivers, 2021). Therefore, when individuals 'do' categorisation in social interaction, they reproduce a shared understanding of what is moral and normal in our society (Stokoe, 2003). To show these dynamics with an example: 'being a parent' is normatively tied to the assumptions of 'caring for children'. These shared notions can be used in a discussion to tie other expected actions, such as 'caring for the environment', as a discursive consequence of 'caring for the health of children', implied by simply 'being a parent' (Reynolds & Fitzgerald, 2017).

Among the various social categories available, SOLs have been studied as especially subject to moralisation. The critical element that makes SOLs hearable as moral is the orderliness of this specific category device, for which each category is perceived as either preceding or succeeding another, following the 'natural' progression of ageing. People utilise a social measurement system that classifies people in relation to one another when they give their age as the number of years they have lived (Sacks, 1994; Stokoe, 2012). This orderliness, defined as chrononormativity, is accountable as a moral logic that establishes possibilities and obstacles for age groups (Jolanki, 2004; Nikander, 2002; Riach et al., 2014; Ylänne & Nikander, 2019). Moreover, expectations related to life stages are especially relevant in the workforce, where careers are organised based on age hierarchies (cf. career and life-span development theory; Super, 1980).

Within a discursive perspective, categories are usable depending on the indexicality and rhetorical orientation of their use. Age has the peculiarity of being a visually available category in face-to-face interactions, hence age can be used even if it is not known or explicitly mentioned. Therefore, being accountable for one's own age is especially relevant in face-to-face interactions, where attending to norms and moral order on the basis of age becomes an accountable matter. In fact, breaching category-based norms is considered a face threat in social interactions (Clifton, 2012; Goffman, 1959). For this reason and for the normativity of life course, breaching or deploying age norms is especially delicate in face-to-face strategic workplace interactions and might be subject to moralisation.

Previous studies have shown that age is used as a resource to manage norm negotiations in a variety of settings (Andersen & Rathje, 2019; Cromdal et al., 2018; Nikander, 2000, 2002, 2009; Ojala et al., 2016; Tennent, 2020; Ylänne & Nikander, 2019). For example, Jolanki (2004) details the ways in which people aged 90 or over construct and negotiate meanings of health. Her analyses reveal that older people managed the face threat posed by questioning about health by applying various rhetorical devices. Although they challenged the ideology of old age as decline, they aligned themselves with the category 'old' to make their ill health and inactivity legitimate and adhere to moral obligations.

3.2.2 Moral accountability in professional practice

Moral accountability is a delicate matter in institutional interactions. The morality of professional practices refers to the concept that professionals are set to pursue institutional goals, which often entail respect for moral and ethical standards. In professional practice, managing the mobilisation of prejudicial attitudes can also be seen as morally accountable for two reasons. First, prejudice is socially reproachable, Second, being fair – not letting personal attitudes transpire – is part and parcel of professional practices. The display of solid professionalism is a moral issue per se, of which, for example, unbiased assessments and non-emotional decision-making (Nikander, 2007) are examples.

Interactional research on morality has the distinctive feature of analysing it in interactions instead of assuming it as a personal feature of individuals (Asmuß, 2011; Cromdal & Tholander, 2012; Heinrichsmeier, 2018; Jolanki, 2004; LeCouteur & Oxlad, 2011; Nikander, 2000; Potter & Hepburn, 2020; Stokoe, 2003). This approach analyses how professional members in their everyday job accomplish a sense of morality. For example, Stokoe and Edwards (2009) explore audio-recordings of neighbourhood disputes as part of a professional mediation service. They find that cultural notions attached to the 'family' membership category device were used to invoke duties linked to 'being a mother' as natural and hence moral. They argue that complainers were making mothers – just because they are such – accountable for maintaining good relations in the neighbourhood, implying a social and moral order.

A modest body of research has examined institutional discourse with an emphasis on sequences where participants make potentially discriminatory turns due to race, gender, age or other factors, called ‘potential -isms’ (Stokoe, 2015). While in public settings, such as interviews and radio shows, displaying prejudicial attitudes can be deemed unacceptable and opportunities to withdraw are offered (Whitehead, 2015), behind closed doors, the discursive use of prejudices to obtaining a business goal might be tolerated. Institutionally and professionally, the challenge for all recipients, when faced with possible -isms, is whether to agree with the -ism, respond to it or just ignore it. However, disaffiliating threatens any rapport between the participants and risks conflict. In an analysis of mediation services for neighbourhood disputes, Stokoe (2015) details that explicitly bringing up the prejudicial characterisation might cause mistrust and end the conversation. Consequently, rephrasing the ‘possible -ism’ was the most effective practice.

Morality in organisational interactions has not been widely explored, but one study analysed it in PAIs (Sandlund, 2014). In PAIs, evaluating bad behaviour is connected to moralising working procedures. Even though evaluations of employee performance are at the heart of appraisal discussions, managers tend to view giving negative evaluations as socially awkward. A discursive technique to carry out moral work in interaction is to illustrate acceptable or undesirable conduct, which makes evident what would be undesirable in each setting.

This dissertation explores how the moral order embedded in SOLs category is used in workplace interactions and whether interactants are considered morally accountable for using it. Therefore, the problem is not whether professionals are, for example, ageists, but rather how they manage possible ageism in their organisational practices.

4 STRATEGIC INTERACTIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

In this Chapter, I describe the third main concept in this doctoral dissertation: strategic workplace encounters, namely performance appraisals interviews (PAIs) and job interviews (JIs)[3].

In the following chapter, I review how I approach JIs and PAIs as primarily interactional practices (Section 4.1). The literature on institutional interaction gives me the theoretical and methodological tools to unfold the reciprocal link between organisational norms (age norms, assumptions about an ideal fit between workers' age/stages of life and job position, values of inclusion and equality) and their enactment in the selected practices.

I then present the concepts of gatekeeping and impression management and their function in the strategic workplace interaction (Section 4.2). The concepts of gatekeeping and impression management are relevant because linked to the discursive and in situ construction of shared group membership. This Section highlights an additional gap in the literature, such as a lack of studies about how age categories function to create co-membership and solidarity in professional interactions.

Lastly, I describe the main studies regarding each of the selected strategic encounters, first PAIs, in Section 4.3, and second, JIs, in Section 4.4.

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[3] Performance appraisal interviews (PAIs) are also called appraisal interviews (AIs), development interviews or feedback processes. Job interviews (JIs) are also called employment interviews or recruitment interviews.

4.1 Workplace practices as strategic institutional interactions

Institutional interactions are considered the means through which many professionals and organisational representatives go about their daily business. They can be analysed by using the 'institution of talk' (conversations) to investigate the operation of social institutions 'in talk' (Arminen, 2017; Drew & Heritage, 1992; Heritage & Clayman, 2010). They differ from mundane and everyday interactions because they take place in formal institutional settings. Therein interactions are embedded in an agenda defined by shared and agreed-upon structures, which involve, for example, pre-allocations of turns according to specific institutional roles. For example, in a job interview, the tasks of opening the conversation and asking questions are reserved for the recruiters.

According to Levinson (1992), the specificity of institutional interactions is based on three dimensions:

1. an orientation of the parties to institutional tasks, functions and identities;
2. the presence of restrictions on the kinds of contributions to the talk that are, or can be, made by the parties;
3. the orientation to inferential frameworks and procedures that are specific to the institutional context.

In these settings, the analyst's task is to examine 'how specific practices of talk embody or connect with specific identities and institutional tasks' (Heritage & Clayman, 2010, p. 22).

Compared to everyday interactions, which are methodically built on tacit and taken-for-granted cultural knowledge, in institutions, parties also orient to resources and constraints specific to the institution in question, which become available and procedurally consequential (Drew & Heritage, 1992).

In this dissertation, it is relevant to understand how values such as equality and inclusion can be actualised in and through institutional interaction because non-ageist practices are supposedly inclusive practices. Previous studies have analysed

how equality and inclusion are beliefs that structure PAIs and JIs in a manner that ensures that workers are listened to, appreciated and fairly evaluated in these practices (Asmuß, 2013; Lipovsky, 2008). These studies show that the values of equality and inclusion construct a distinct mode of organising the interactions based on symmetry, collaboration, solidarity and support.

At the same time, despite the practice are designed to be inclusive, also alternative and maybe contrasting sets of norms can be oriented to by participants in situ. For example, recruiters and managers are the appraisers that hold the specialised knowledge to assess whether either the employees' performance evaluation or the candidates' profile fit specific requirements (Asmuß, 2013; Lipovsky, 2008). This knowledge can be labelled as person-job fit. The person–job fit is a set of norms that recruiters and managers hold and that structures the encounters. Age plays a part in the definition of workers' and applicants' fit, hence age–job fit is an integral part of the person-job fit.

The sequence structure of the encounters is the conversational infrastructure through which norms can be actualised. For example, both PAIs and JIs are interactionally organised as a series of questions and answers[4], which might differ from everyday question-and-answer sequences. In a job interview, the interviewer may not only refuse to answer to a question posed by the job applicant but, by not answering, may also attribute the miscommunication, thus constituted, to the interviewee (Button, 1992). This digression from everyday practices gains a specific institutional relevance against the backdrop of the described specified knowledge, both of equality and of power relations. In fact, Button (1992) argues that this interactional pattern is a demonstration of a mechanism of how job interviewers use their institutional power; hence, interviewees are responsible for all replies, regardless of the actual role the interviewer may have had.

Not only values and norms, but also categories and social identities can shape and be shaped by institutional interactions. The structural features of institutional talk

[4] Although in theory PAI and JI are supposed to be a discussion, they are most often actualised as a series of questions and answers.

proceed and give meaning to the investigation of how social identities (e.g. gender, class, ethnicity and age) may shape interactional dynamics and are consequential for institutional goals (Heritage & Clayman, 2010). Therefore, analysing the dynamics of age and ageism, which shape and are shaped by both interactional and institutional contexts, allows us to respecify the institutional and interactional relevance of age identity and age norms.

Moreover, since interactants accomplish institutional actions in and through talk, categories are relevant for the lexical choices they carry. Lexical choices are relevant matters because they invoke and infer specific reserved actions and shared notions (as explained in Chapter 3). To be more specific, choosing to call a co-worker 'old' instead of 'experienced' carry a specific meaning, which can be explored and exploited in the structure of interaction.

To sum up, the placement of age categorisation practices within the structure of institutional interactions allows us, first, to unveil how speakers are accountable for orienting to organisational norms, social and institutional identities in the unfolding of talk, second, to pin point how interactants co-construct references to norms in the interaction.

4.2 Gatekeeping and impression management

I here present, first, the concept of gatekeeping and, second, the concept of impression management, from an interactional point of view. The concept of gatekeeping and impression management are discussed as theoretically connected to group membership. In fact, establishing solidarity and liking in interaction are proven to be grounded in construction of shared group membership.

Recruitment and performance assessments have a gatekeeping function because they structure who enters and advances in the workplace (Melander Bowden & Sandlund, 2019; Tiitinen & Lempiälä, 2022; Van De Mieroop, 2022; Van De Mieroop & De Dijn, 2020). Previous research has highlighted the exitance of an age-job fit assumption, or the assumption that workers' life stages critically define the fit between them and the company, including work teams (Cadiz et al., 2022).

Recruitment and performance appraisal interviews are arenas where stereotypical assumptions about the fit between a worker's age and a job position might influence ongoing assessment. Hence, workers might need to strategically manage their impressions and identities to adhere to certain age norms inside organisations (Lipovsky, 2010).

Gatekeeping is performed in and through the negotiation of which social identities fit the organisation and, in PAIs and JIs, the person–organisation fit is weighted against the image of an ideal employee (Sandlund et al., 2011). Previous studies have highlighted that PAIs and JIs are arenas where the notion of an ideal employee is constructed and reinforced (Sandlund et al., 2011), also in reference to age norms (Krekula & Vickerstaff, 2020; Rudman & Molke, 2009). Moreover, age–job fit is researched to be one ideology that reproduces ageism in organisation and HR practices (Naegele & Walker, 2011; Posthuma & Campion, 2009; Walker, 2012).

From the perspectives of job applicants and employees, PAIs and JIs are strategic steps to access the job market and, within the organisation, career development opportunities and training. Therefore, making a good impression and negotiating the image of a 'good worker' is necessary to build trust with gatekeepers, who are recruiters and managers. Notwithstanding, for the gatekeepers, maintaining a favourable impression is strategic because they do not want to compromise the relations with their interactants, who are future or actual colleagues (Asmuß, 2013; Lipovsky, 2008, 2010).

Previous studies have investigated impression management in experimental settings to show which are the most effective tactics to impress their counterparts (Peck & Levashina, 2017). In these studies, the best techniques were profiled in a laboratory setting, which neglects the role of social interaction in the negotiation of favourable impressions and overlooks the fact that interaction and, hence, negotiating a good impression is also a collaborative achievement.

Here, I consider impression management for its interactional relevancy and as a social practice, drawing from ethnomethodology and Goffman's (1959) work. According to Goffman (1959) and his dramaturgical conceptualisation of social life, impression management is the process through which an individual in ordinary

situation presents themselves and their activities to others to elicit and confirm positive inferences from the audience. The positive impression concerns both the momentary interactional identity (face) and the more enduring social identity.

Goffman (1959) shows that each social interaction involves the staging of characters and actively managing their positive impressions by the interactants. Staging a character is particularly delicate during PAIs and JIs, where identities are negotiated against an ideal fit in terms of personality, professional skills, competencies and personal features, including age (Lipovsky, 2010; Van De Mieroop, 2019; Van De Mieroop et al., 2019; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2018). Previous studies have shown that membership categorisation is used in impression management during JIs and discursively establishing co-membership on culture, hobbies, origins and gender supports solidarity and trust with the recruiters (Lipovsky, 2010; Van De Mieroop et al., 2019). Nevertheless, consistent literature is lacking on the role of age and stages of life in building co-membership and sustaining impression management during strategic organisational practices.

4.3 Performance appraisal interviews

Yearly discussions about performance are strategic practices for both employers and employees. They provide an interesting setting for this dissertation because are traditionally considered one of the key arenas where workers' age and ageing might influence managers' evaluation (Cadiz et al., 2022; McNamara et al., 2016; Murphy & DeNisi, 2021; Posthuma & Campion, 2009; van Dalen & Henkens, 2020). Therefore, age norms can play a role in the assessment during PAIs.

Previous studies, that explored PAIs as interactional practices, through natural occurring data, clearly show that performance discussions are built to assess the workers against an ideal employee's model (Sandlund et al., 2011). Sandlund and colleagues (2011) analysed extracts where employees mobilise experiences of stress during PAIs and show that a hidden curriculum about organisational norms is talked into being during these practices. Some studies find that PAIs contribute to reinforcing certain moral assumptions about being a good employee, which, consequently, limit the possibility of raising and solving personal and structural

issues (Asmuß, 2013; Clifton, 2012; Melander Bowden & Sandlund, 2019; Nyroos & Sandlund, 2014; Sandlund et al., 2011). AsmuB (2013) investigates how the ideal of equality is lived up in PAIs conducted in Denmark. Applying conversation analysis, the author found that interactional symmetry, but also, asymmetries arise, and they are negotiated and collaboratively agreed upon by managers and employees in situ (AsmuB, 2013).

Existing research shows that managers and employees need to manage competing projects during PAIs, such as evaluating performance and showing emotional support (Asmuß, 2011; Johanna Ruusuvuori et al., 2019; Sandlund et al., 2011). This negotiation is shaped by power positions and institutional roles. Hence, for example, managers can mobilise their institutional role to obtain answers and steer the conversation (Melander Bowden & Sandlund, 2019; Van De Mieroop & Vrolix, 2014). At the same time, employees are managing their positive impression and actively staging a character that suits the expectations of the organisation. This complicates the taken-for-granted idea that PAIs are discussions between equal partners and that equality and inclusion are the beliefs that scaffold these institutional interactions.

To sum up, nothing is straightforward when the turn-by-turn unfolding of interaction is analysed. Hence, it is interesting in this dissertation to study how age plays a role in the assessment of an 'ideal employee'.

4.4 Job interviews

Recruitment is a key practice for employers to select the best talents and for workers to access the job market. The gatekeeping function of JIs makes them appealing for research on ageing and ageism in the workforce, especially due to the higher perceived age discrimination in recruitment (Harris et al., 2018; Naegele et al., 2020).

Studies that have approached JIs as social interactions have shed important light on the discreet dynamics of membership as a discursive practice and members' accomplishments (Lipovsky, 2008, 2010; Reissner-Roubicek, 2012; Van De Mieroop, 2019; Van De Mieroop et al., 2019; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2018).

The negotiation of social identities is linked to impression management (Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2017) and the construction of co-membership is a strategy to manage impressions in JIs (Lipovsky, 2010). For example, similarities in gender, geographical provenience and shared hobbies can be mobilised by interviewees to build solidarity with the interviewers (Lipovsky, 2010).

Previous research has suggested that establishing co-membership in interactions is strategic to build on identity-based trust and thus save face in delicate situations (Van De Mieroop, 2019). CA studies have detailed that impression management and co-membership are delicate interactional tasks and their deployment to construct employability is done through different interactional trajectories (Reissner-Roubicek, 2012; Van De Mieroop et al., 2019; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2018). For example, Tiitinen and Lempiälä (2022) examine the negotiation of job fit for intermediate labour markets and showed that the 'fit for the job category' and the candidate's membership in it are collaboratively constructed by the interviewers and interviewees as a positive matter. Additionally, the authors suggest how the use of this 'fit' as an institutional resource, or logic, jeopardises recruitment transparency by placing candidates in a challenging interactional situation due to conflicting and unclear expectations about the fit with the ideal candidate (Tiitinen & Lempiälä, 2022).

To sum up, PAIs and JIs are situated between two different discourses. On the one hand, the macro discourses of age norms and inclusion, which structure institutional interactions. On the other hand, the micro level of social interaction, where the SOL categories and age co-membership are collaboratively constructed and are consequential for institutional goals, such as assessments of employees and job candidates, and individuals' goals, such as impression management. Empirically, this intersection is not taken a priori but needs to be demonstrably relevant and a consequential aspect of the institutional context. This thesis in its empirical analyses (Article 2 and 3) unfolds these dynamics and aim at contribution to detangle the intricated strategic links among age, ageism, institutions and workers through fine-grained analysis of social interactions in the workplace.

5 DATA, METHODS, ANALYTICAL PROCESS AND RESEARCH ETHICS

In this dissertation, I designed the research on two levels to accomplish the two diverse and consecutive research aims, as presented in Chapter 1. The first level is a scientific review of the literature, and the second level is an empirical analysis of strategic workplace interactions.

In this chapter, the reader will first go through the data, second the methods, third the analytical process and research questions and finally ethical concerns. This outline resembles the one that I followed in my research. The approach selected for the empirical analysis of social interactions prioritises an inductive analysis of the data, in which research questions play, to some extent, a secondary role. I will discuss this process in Section 5.3.

5.1 Data

I use data from three different datasets. The first dataset is a collection of published peer-reviewed papers, which constitute the base for the first article (Article 1). The second and the third data set contain the video recordings of strategic workplace encounters. The second is a collection of video recordings of PAIs, used for Article 2. The third data set is a collection of video recordings of JIs, used in Article 3.

5.1.1 Published scientific papers

The first article included in this dissertation is a scoping review. The data are peer-reviewed papers published in international journals in English and available online in the following datasets: PsycINFO, Web of Science, Social Science Premium Collection, Sage Journals, Wiley Journals, Academic Ultimate Search [EBSCO], and Scopus. The search was conducted in March 2019.

The search was restricted to papers that clearly addressed ageism because my colleagues and I were interested in the development of the field 50 years after the introduction of the term (R. N. Butler, 1969). The search was limited to peer-reviewed papers published in English after 1969 (date of publication of the first paper using the word 'ageism') and with a clear discursive approach. A total of 851 papers met the selection criteria. The results from the scoping review are described in Section 6.1.

5.1.2 Strategic organisational interactions

The choice of video-recordings of strategic workplace interactions is motivated by the interest in being consistent with an emic approach to investigate how age and ageism shape social interaction in the workplace from the members' perspective.

The second and third data are presented table 1.

Table 1. Description of the video recordings of strategic interaction and age-focused sequences.

Strategic Interactions	Performance appraisal interviews	Job interviews
Organisations	Labour Union, Unit of services for citizens, Italy	Private recruitment centre, Italy
Participants (role, N)	HR manager (1), general officer (2), service managers (10), assistant (1).	Recruiters (3), job applicants (24)
Type of encounters	Dyadic/Triadic Manager and general officer in the role of the appraiser (in 3 encounters both are present).	Dyadic. One recruiter and one job applicant were present.
No. of encounters	12	24
No. of sequences where age/SOL are mobilised	7	17

I collected the video-recordings of PAIs and JIs in Italy between 2019 and 2021. These data were collected by placing cameras in the rooms where participants are having PAI or JI, without the presence of the researcher in the room. The two

companies were selected through personal contacts and were chosen because they endorsed policies of equality and inclusion. The data were collected in Italy for two reasons: (1) I am originally from Italy, and I master the language and (2) the Italian population is one of the oldest in the world (United Nations, 2021), with very low employment of older workers, indicating a need to understand the dynamics of age and ageism in Italian workplaces.

Figure 1. Example of PAI, taken from dataset 2.

The PAI data comprise 12 encounters. The data were collected from a labour union in Italy. The participants were, in the role of the appraiser, HR managers and general officers, while 11 employees from middle management were appraisees. Upon the company's request, only middle management was involved. The encounters were dyadic or triadic, with either one or both appraisers present. One example of PAI's participant display is Figure 1. According to internal guidelines, PAIs aim to involve the manager and employee in an equal discussion about the employee's performance, assess the employee's strengths and weaknesses and define development goals for the next year. The encounters lasted one hour on average and were based on an evaluation questionnaire that both the appraiser and appraisee had during the encounter. The questionnaire included 10 items that were evaluated by both parties, and I gained access to copies of them. A list of items used to discuss and assess

performance is included in the Article 2. In general, the encounters were structured as follows: first, a self-evaluation by the employee (following the questionnaire structure), and second, an evaluation by the manager (following the questionnaire structure). The selected PAIs were developed following a structure that makes them assimilable to any other appraisal interviews in a private company; hence, in the analysis, I do not concentrate on the specificity of the labour union as an institution.

Figure 2. Example of JI, taken from dataset 3.

The JI data comprise 24 encounters. The data were collected in a private recruitment centre in Italy. Recruitment centres are companies that offer the service of recruiting applicants for third companies. All recorded JIs were held to fill a vacant position. The participants were three recruiters and 24 job applicants. The job applicants were headhunted. Each interview lasted approximately one and a half hours. The encounters were dyadic, with one recruiter and one job applicant, as shown in Figure 2. The recruiters followed internal policies in structuring the interviews and all interviews had a similar schedule of questions and answers. According to internal policies, the organisation's goal was to find the perfect match between companies and applicants and help both to develop their potential through unbiased selection. The JIs are assimilable to JIs held in other companies. However, the role that

recruitment centres have as gatekeeper between job applicants and employers makes them an even more interesting setting for analysis.

The second and third dataset contain highly delicate data with diverse biomarkers and personal information of participants. The nature of the data renders them difficult to be easily available for open access, if not previously completely anonymised. Anonymisation processes are highly time and cost intensive. However, the data were collected under a European Commission MSCA grant, which supports and encourage open access of research and data. To comply, participants were asked for permission to store their data in an open access database. I also firmly believe that data should be re-used, especially video-recordings. These types of data are costly for the participants and for the researcher to collect, hence it is important that they are used for their maximum capacity. Moreover, they are very rich and allow for multiple and varied analyses. For these reasons and to comply with the founder, I posted an open access description of my data and metadata in Zenodo [5] (DOI 10.5281/zenodo.6524060). From this open access platform, researchers can get in contact with me, and we can evaluate the possibility to share part of the dataset or transcript, previously anonymised.

5.2 Approaches and methods

Here, I review the methods used for the analysis of data, first in the scoping review and second in the analysis of the collected video recordings. I selected DP as the approach and MCA and applied CA as the methods used to analyse the institutional interactions.

5.2.1 Scoping review

A scoping review is a scientific approach to reviewing literature that maps the relevant published research in a field of interest (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). It is

[5] https://zenodo.org/record/6524060

distinguished from a simple, self-organised review of the literature because it follows an internationally agreed upon protocol and, by systematically analysing published papers, produces new results and knowledge. Moreover, a scoping review is used to explore a field that has not yet been established, such as a discursive analysis of ageism, and to identify the gap in the knowledge therein.

This flexible approach is suitable for my field of interest because discursive approaches refer to a wide range of theoretical traditions and methodologies (Nikander, 2000) and, besides residing within qualitative research, this tradition does not have clear boundaries among methods, data, participants and academic fields. Reviews that are interested only in qualitative studies and discursive approaches are rare, yet they can produce new insights and problematise mainstream approaches.

A scoping review applies a rigid protocol for the retrieval, selection and analysis of papers to ensure methodological rigour (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). The steps include:

1. identifying the research question,
2. identifying relevant studies,
3. selecting the study,
4. charting the data,
5. collocating, summarising and reporting the results.

The protocol was iterative, and the objectivity of the review was ensured through continuous confrontation with the coauthors. The keywords used were (Ageism OR Agism OR Ageis* OR Agis*) AND (discours* OR communication* OR 'social interaction*' OR narrative*). The analysis of the retrieved papers was based on a qualitative thematic analysis (Levac et al., 2010) that critically exposes common themes, gaps in the knowledge and the political and academic consequences of the studies.

5.2.2 Discursive psychology as an approach to identity and -ism

In Chapter 3, I discussed the theoretical and historical development that surrounded the linguistic turn in the social sciences and the genesis of DP. In this Section, I expand on DP approaches to data analysis. Wiggins (2017) defined three core features of DP, which is a study of discourse, as

1. simultaneously constructed and constitutive,
2. situated within a social context,
3. action-oriented.

Therefore, first, participants in social interactions draw from cultural resources, for example, social categories, to accomplish psychological phenomena, such as social identity or prejudice. Concurrently, social interactions construct the same cultural resources and individuals collaboratively build a version of the world that has implications for each other (Wiggins, 2017).

Second, and consequentially, participants' actions shape the social context and are shaped by it (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). Therefore, discourse and psychological issues mobilised are analysable in the same context through which they are performed and cannot be detached from it (Stokoe, 2020). This has consequences for the settings where phenomena should be investigated. DP prioritises data that are not produced by researchers, also called naturally occurring data, such as video or audio recordings of conversations, texts and media interactions (Wiggins, 2017).

Third, discursive practices are always mobilised to accomplish an action in interactional settings (Wiggins, 2017). Hence, psychological concepts, such as identities and prejudices, are relevant to the implications they have in pursuing a certain action, such as complaining and making a good impression (Augoustinos & Every, 2016).

Through these three basic principles, DP sets an agenda to re-specify psychological phenomena as produced by individuals in their social interactions (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Tileaga & Stokoe, 2017). In DP, participants accountable for their social actions and for the issues they mobilise through their talk. Accountability is a

key concept in this dissertation and a critical matter for analysing norms linked to morality about ageing as they are constructed in the workplace (Wiggins, 2017).

5.2.3 Membership categorisation analysis

MCA is an ethnomethodological approach that analyses members' categorisation practices as they unfold in social interactions (Housley & Fitzgerald, 2009; Sacks, 1974; Stokoe, 2012). MCA has its roots in ethnomethodology; thus, it studies how people organise and make sense of social order and intersubjectivity in their everyday lives through their everyday actions and reciprocal interactions (Garfinkel, 1964). This approach, together with CA, was developed from Harvey Sacks's legacy (Sacks, 1974; Sacks et al., 1974; Schegloff, 2007). Sacks et al. (1974) gave structure to the analysis of social interactions as systematically organised and produced through individuals' collaborative achievements.

The main feature that allows the analysis of social organisation at the grass-roots level is the fact that if a person is ascribed, or can be heard as ascribed, to a category then, consequentially, the person is bound to all the features that are known about that category, in each linguistic culture (Sacks, 1979). The essential feature of categories is to be inference rich and to mobilise shared notions about certain social groups (Jayyusi, 1984). The normative link between members, categories and bounded features, as done in social actions, makes MCA a relevant approach for exploring morality, norms and culture as oriented to individuals. In what follows, I review:

1. membership category devices (MCDs),
2. category-bound activities and attributes,
3. positioned category,
4. standardised relational pair (SRPs),
5. partition consistency and inconsistency,
6. consistency rule,
7. viewers' and hearers' maxims.

Categories are organised into systemic collections known as MCDs. For example, the categories 'mother' and 'son' can belong to the same MCD 'family', but they can be heard to belong to another MCD, such as 'stage of life' (SOL). Thus, a single category belongs to different MCDs and in given situations is heard as belonging to a certain MCD via the rules of applications. Sacks exemplified the link between members and category in his 1979 paper, 'Hotrodder: a revolutionary category': 'Any person who is a case of a category is seen as a member of a category, and what's known about that category is known about them, and the fate of each is bound up in the fate of the other' (1979, p. 13).

Each category has activities that are bound to them in situ; these activities are called *category-bound activities*. For example, in the famous example 'the baby cried, the mommy picked it up', the activity of cry is bounded to the category baby, while the activity 'picking up' is bounded to the category 'mommy'. Both mommy and baby belong to the same MCD device and family, and this membership structures their reciprocal category-bound activities (Sacks, 1974).

Certain activities are *incumbent* for the members of a category, meaning that descriptions related to a category are implicitly selected by the ascription of an individual to a category and the descriptions delimit certain activities. In the example before, we hear that the 'mommy' is the 'mommy' of the 'baby' and she ought to pick them up (Sacks, 1974). Further, if a person is categorised as a 'young worker', then co-selected features are 'being enthusiastic', 'being active', 'working with technology', etc.

Positioned categories belong to an MCD that comprehends an ordered collection of categories with reciprocal hierarchical relationships. SOL is an ordered MCD: the category 'teenager' normatively precedes 'mother' and follows 'baby' in a normative manner. Within positioned categories, the breach of the hierarchical order is heard as disrupting the norms and moral expectations, for example, if a 50-year-old woman feels like a 'little girl' (Nikander, 2002).

SRPs are pairs of categories that carry reciprocal duties and, in each culture, moral obligations, such as 'mommy–baby' and 'manager–supervisee'. The mobilisation of one party of the pair makes the existence of the second party relevant. This feature

can also be applied to bound attributes: if someone is categorised as 'young', implicatively someone else is 'older' than the categorised person.

Partitioning consistency describes the feature of MCDs as being able to partition two members of the population identically and assign comembership. For example, two people may be co-members by reference to a gender category (e.g. men) as well as to an SOL category (e.g. younger workers). Gender and SOL MCDs have partitioning constancy for these people. On the other hand, MCDs have partitioning inconstancy if they partition two people differently. For example, the MCD's gender and SOL may have partitioning inconstancy for a 20-year-old man and a 20-year-old woman. In this case, MCD age establishes a co-membership and MCD gender establishes a cross-membership.

I now turn to the rules of the application of MCDs. The *consistency rule* entails that if a member of a group is categorised with a category from a certain MCD, then categories from the same device may be used to categorise the remaining members of the group. Categories are incumbent on participants. The *viewers' maxim rule* entails that if a member sees a category-bound activity being done and the actor can be seen as a member of the category to which the activity is bound, it should be seen in that way. Hence, category-bound activities are sufficient and relevant to define members' membership, which is relevant for identity and category incumbency. However, the *hearers' maxim* says that 'if two or more categories are used to categorise two or more members of the same population, and those categories can be heard as categories from the same collection, then: Hear them that way' (Sacks, 1974, p. 333), as shown in the example of mommy and baby (Sacks, 1974).

Individuals may be categorised in several categories in each situation and the action of categorisation is not casual; it mobilises certain notions attached to the chosen category. Hence, categories are constructed and constitutive of social interactions. Nevertheless, categories are not relevant a priori, but they are bounded in situ, in a situated stretch of text or talk and their boundedness is achieved in the ongoing negotiation among members (Hester & Eglin, 1997).

5.2.4 Conversation analytically informed analysis

If the basic feature of MCA is categories, in CA, the focus turns to actions or the interactional accomplishment of a particular social activity (Drew & Heritage, 1992). Through utterances organised and accomplished interactionally, we perform actions and interpret others' actions (Heritage, 1984). The structure of conversation is based on turn-taking, repairs and sequence organisations that participants actively manage (Schegloff, 1991). As per MCA, CA is an approach for analysing social organisations from members' perspectives. The basic feature of turn-taking defines the possibilities and restrictions to participating in the social arena.

In this approach, the conversation is constituted by utterances (the conversational flow that a speaker produces) instead of sentences (the abstract entities that serve as the focus of linguistic research). Utterances are understood as forms of situated action. They are interactive products of what was projected by a previous turn or turns at talk and what the speaker of the utterance of interest does (Goodwin & Heritage, 1990). Hence, the simple turn at talk is also an action, and it is analysable as part of a sequence of turns of talk produced in interactions.

Each current conversational action is context-shaped and context-renewing (Drew & Heritage, 1992). They are context-shaped because they depend on the local configuration of preceding turns and activities, as well as on the larger environment where the activity occurs. They are context-renewing because, as they shape the local context for the next action, the interactional context is continually developed. For example, the formulation of a question makes relevant, and expected, the production of an answer as the following turn. If an answer is not produced, this is an accountable action for the interactants, and they must negotiate the consequential dynamics in situ. The context is both the project and the product of conversational actions; it is not only locally produced but is transformative at any moment.

Another feature of CA is the analysis of embodied actions. Social interactions do not rely solely on the production of utterances to accomplish an action but also on gestures, postures, gazes, eye movement, vocalisations and other sounds. Research using CA has been prolific in showing the strategic roles of embodied actions (e.g. Cekaite & Mondada, 2021; Goodwin, 2000; Katila et al., 2020; Mondada, 2016, 2019;

Ruusuvuori, 2001; Tiitinen & Ruusuvuori, 2012). In my analysis, I rely mostly on talk as one type of embodied action, due to the predominant focus on categories produced in talk. Nevertheless, I use the insights from previous research on embodiment, such as nodding, as a resource to show affiliation (Stivers, 2008).

5.3 Analytical process and research questions

In the Introduction, I have outlined the aims of my doctoral dissertation as follows. The first aim is to map the contribution of exploring ageism from a discursive point of view. The second aim is to investigate how age and ageism are mobilised in strategic workplace encounters and how they become relevant for accomplishing these encounters from the interactants' perspective.

The analytical process to achieve the first aim entails a scoping review of the published literature, as explained in the previous sections. The research questions that the scoping review addresses are as follows:

1. What is the contribution of discursive research about ageism in working life since the term ageism was coined in 1969? (Article 1)
2. What are the main themes of this body of literature and how have they advanced our understanding of the topic?
3. What is the gap in researching ageism through discursive approaches?

The results are presented in Section 6.1.

The analytical process to achieve the second aim started by inductively looking at the data in the second and third datasets (PAIs and JIs). This inductive look was informed by the problem formulation and aims of the overall research: interest in age and ageism.

In applying MCA, I gave primary interest to the categorical (age) rather than sequential issues (as per CA) in the data. MCA aims at producing case studies of distinct interactional settings by looking at turn-generated 'identities for interaction', morality and culture.

In the analysis of the second and this data set, I followed the steps suggested by Stokoe (2012, p. 60):

1. Build a collection of explicit mentions of categories, membership devices and category-resonant descriptions.
2. Locate the sequential position of each categorical instance with the ongoing interaction.
3. Analyse the design of action orientation of the turn in which the category, device or resonant descriptions appear.
4. Look for evidence that and how recipients orient to the category, for the interactional consequences of a category's use, for co-occurring component features of categorical formulations and for the way speakers withing and between the turns build and resist categorisation.

The above points are then grounded in the key aspects of methodology presented in Section 5.2.3. Once the 'age category instances' were collected, I explored what activities were performed by the interactants through membership categorisation and then applied CA as a tool to unfold the 'sequentiality' of the selected categories.

To contextualise the analytical process, I briefly engage in the debate about the risk for analysts to overemphasize the relevancy of categories and engage in 'wild and promiscuous analysis' (Schegloff, 1992; 2007a). Senior scholars have participated in this discussion before me, and my position mostly aligns with Stokoe's (2012) reflections. I consider that the 'fuzziness' of MCA will remain because the most relevant features of categories are 'fuzzy' and 'inference-rich'. Speakers might not need to spell out these 'inferences', but they use them as relevant to do some activity (Sacks, 1992). Hence, MCA remains a unique methodological way to analyse the constructed reality of culture, identity and morality, of inference and meaning in an ethnomethodological spirit.

As Stokoe (2012, p. 12) states, 'I focus on speakers' explicit and largely unambiguous uses of' age categories across the first and second datasets. I am to identify and unpack 'the' category-generated features (Jayyusi, 1984) 'that get tied to them; the actions they accomplish; the local and cultural meanings they acquire (I add, also considering ageism), maintain or transform, and the overarching patterns in their use' (Stokoe, 2012, p. 12).

During the research process, I approached the two datasets separately, as they included different practices. In fact, the goal of the practices, which are different in JI and PAI, is influential in the analysis of social interactions.

The analytical process to analyse the video recordings started by watching the data multiple times. I collected the instance where MCD stages of life/age, related predicated and attributes were mobilised. I transcribed all the extracts. In the transcription, I followed the Jeffersonian convention (Jefferson, 2004). The analyses were discussed and revised during multiple data sessions with colleagues at Tampere University, my supervisors and my co-authors. These collaborative data sessions, which allowed me to test my ideas and strengthen my claims, contributed immensely to the development of my research.

The research questions in this type of analysis have a diverse role compared to other approaches. I engaged with the selected sequences and, during their analysis, formulated the relevant research questions that could lead to the writing of Articles 2 and 3.

In the analysis of the PAIs, I became interested in looking at how diverse discursive practices contribute to the co-construction of age in the workplace and also related to diverse 'organisational categories', or the performance items under discussion. Moreover, I was interested in showing how managers responded to these formulations, possibly aligning with shared age stereotypes. Hence, the research questions for Article 2 are as follows:

1. How, when and by whom are SOL MCD and related attributes and formulations mobilised? (Article 2)
2. On the basis of these discursive practices, how is age discursively constructed differently?
3. In relation to what performance categories are diverse discursive constructions of SOL used and what are the consequences for the ongoing organisational and interactional business?

In this analysis, I relied solely on the MCA methodology. I was at the beginning of my learning process in EMCA, and for this reason, interactional analysts might find the use of next-turn proof procedures rather limited and the 'sequential aspect' lacking in Article 2. This is a limitation of my analytical process.

As per PAIs, for JIs, I collected all the relevant instances where SOL/age MCD and related features were mobilised. The idea for Article 3 became concrete when I noticed that young job applicants uttered prejudicial categorisation towards absent third parties based on age, and they received affiliation from recruiters. In the same setting, very similar interactional dynamics based on gender were not warranted by the recruiters. This analysis relates SOL membership categorisation to a specific action: complaining. In Article 3, I used only four out of 17 age-focused segments because they included a complaint about an absent third party. The research questions addressed are as follows:

1. How are prejudicial notions related to SOL mobilised and what is the type of action mobilised through them? (Article 3)
2. What is the role of discursively building co-membership on the basis of SOL and age compared to other social identities? (Article 3)

Moreover, complaints in JIs have previously been a topic of analysis, and my research adds innovative information to this body of literature by unpacking the role of co-membership on social identities, age and gender (Van De Mieroop et al., 2019). The third paper uses MCA, and compared to Article 2, introduces a more sounding analysis of 'sequentiality' through applied CA. I also include a limited analysis of nodding and gazes.

The analysis focuses on discourse as words in action. Nevertheless, age poses an additional analytical challenge because of its face validity, meaning that it is available to interactants' perceptions, such as gender or ethnicity. In my analysis, I rely on participants' mobilisation of SOL-bound attributes, predicates and descriptions. However, I also discuss the membership categorisation practice in contrast to the apparent age of the participants in the room, especially in relation to the age group membership identification and its role in allowing possible ageist complaints.

Table 2 presents the three articles included in this dissertation. For each article, I list the data used, the method, the focus of the analysis and the main results.

5.4 Ethical concerns

The research was approved by the Tampere University Humanities Ethics Committee of the Tampere Region (Statement 31/2019). For the scoping review, no specific ethical concerns need to be discussed, as the data are published and openly accessible documents. Regarding the generation of video recordings, diverse ethical concerns need to be addressed.

I contacted the companies involved in the data collection directly and negotiated with their management regarding access to their premises. All participants received information about the aim of the research and voluntarily participated in the study. Although approval for data collection was granted by the company, every participant had the right to decline participation. Participants were informed that their participation in the research was completely voluntary and that their decisions had no influence on the encounters they were undergoing. The participants were informed about the management of the data (FAIR), their storage, open access availability and the reporting of the results. They were reassured that the companies had no access to the data, if not in an anonymised manner.

PAIs and JIs are highly relevant and delicate moments for both companies and participants. Due to the delicacy of PAIs and JIs, the negotiation of access to these kinds of data is difficult and it limited the number of companies and participants willing to engage with the research. Only two companies agreed to participate in the study (one for PAIs and one for JIs), and even in these companies, some participants refused to be video recorded. Moreover, due to the high sensitivity and stakes involved in these processes, I pondered and discussed the risks involved in participating in the research with the participants. It was made clear that the participants would not have experienced any different treatments had they taken part in the study. Moreover, the study was designed to support both participants and companies in advancing and improving practice studies.

The use of video recordings of naturally occurring interactions often raises ethical concerns. Questions may be asked about whether the cameras have influenced the practices and affected the participants in the long term. During my data collection, I was aware of these possible constraints. However, I widely discussed the function of

the camera and the use of the data with companies, managers and workers. Moreover, I was personally present in the organisations, and I had the opportunity to talk with participants about how they perceived the presence of the cameras and whether they felt it had influenced their discussion. Participants did not raise concerns and acknowledged that they forgot about being video recorded very soon after engaging in the conversation. Participants had personal contact and had the possibility of deleting data afterwards.

Despite the possible constraints, from a scientific point of view, video recording is one of the main methods used to gather data for interactional analysis. As such, research has shown that the presence of video cameras is not experienced as omnirelevant or problematic for participants (Sidnell, 2013).

Table 2. Data Usage, Methods, Focus and Results for Articles 1, 2 and 3.

Article 1: 'Ageism in working life: A scoping review of discursive approaches'	
Data used	39 peer-reviewed published papers
Method	Scoping review
Analytical focus	Contribution of discursive approaches to the study and construction of ageism in working life
Main results	Three themes: 1. experiences of ageism, 2. social construction of age and ageism, 3. strategies to tackle ageism. Need for further development in the variety of data and methods and construction of age groups in data collection.
Article 2: 'Doing age in the workplace: Exploring age categorisation in performance appraisal interviews'	
Data used	PAIs (7 segments)
Method	MCA
Analytical focus	Discursive ways in which age and SOL membership categorisation is done.
Main results	Three discursive ways: 1. quantification, 2. ageing within the organisation, 3. age-group membership identification. Used by managers and employees.
Article 3: 'Ageism in job interviews: Discreet ways of building co-membership through age categorisation'	
Data used	JIs (4 segments)
Method	MCA, applied CA
Analytical focus	Mobilisation of prejudicial categorisation and ageism by job applicants and recruiters' sequential interactional dynamics.
Main results	Job applicants resort to age co-membership with recruiters to achieve affiliation – or remedy misalignment – by complaining about older workers.

6 RESULTS OF THE ARTICLES

In the overall project of this doctoral dissertation, the three included papers can be seen as a progressive in-depth analysis of dynamics of age and ageism in working life and workplace interactions.

Article 1 scratches the surface by looking at published discursive literature. The published papers can be considered as natural occurring data, as non created by me as, researcher. Their analyses show the main themes and the gaps in the knowledge, as well as unfold, to certain extent, how analysts before me have constructed the 'discourse of ageism' in working life. Article 2 digs deeper and unpack the dynamics of age in PAIs. Article 3 takes up one discursive practice analysed in Article 2 'age-group membership identification' and detangle its interactional dynamics. The last article more finely harvests 'possible ageism' in interaction and the role of shared identities in strategic interactions for impression management.

I here report the results of the individual papers.

6.1 Discursive themes of ageism in working life and the gaps

The scoping review critically summarises the published discursive studies in the field of ageism in working life over the last 50 years since the introduction of the term ageism in 1969 by R. N. Butler (1969). Following the scoping review protocol (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005), 851 studies were retrieved, and after the screening, 39 studies were included in the article. The results of this paper are of two types: 1) a scientific overview of the published literature that show its trends, limitations and gaps, 2) the main themes found by performing a qualitative thematic analysis of the papers.

Regarding the first type of result, although the search included the years from 1969, the studies included were relatively recent: 15 were published after 2015, 7 between

2010 and 2015, 11 between 2005 and 2019, and 6 between 1995 and 2005. This result is coherent with the rise of the discursive and linguistic turn in social sciences and gerontology (Potter & Wetherell, 1988). The included papers were mostly published in Europe (21), of which 15 were published in the UK. This highlights the Eurocentric development of discursive studies on working life and the overwhelming predominance of English in language-based analysis.

Another striking predominance is the type of data used: 36 papers were based on analysis of verbal communication and 3 on texts. Among the 36 on verbal communication, 24 were based on research-generated interviews with single participants. Moreover, a significant majority of the studies used descriptive or thematic analysis, while other methods included narrative and discourse analyses. A relevant issue was the selection of participants: 16 out of 39 studies selected participants representing older workers and the age varied from 40 to 80 years old.

Regarding the second type of result, three main themes were identified through qualitative thematic analysis of the 39 included papers:

1. Experiences of ageism.
2. Social construction of age and ageist ideologies.
3. Strategies to counteract ageism.

The first theme refers to studies that investigated ageism as experienced and reported by the participants themselves. These studies expose the meaning-making of ageist experiences, as reformulated by individuals, and some attribute ageism to health or decreased ability. The studies show that workers adapt to ageist discourses in their working lives. The second theme includes studies that investigate the roots of ageism in macro-level discourses. Here, discourse is understood as ideology (Billig, 1999), and four main ageist ideologies are found: a) ageing as a hindering process, b) normative construction of life course, c) othering older workers and d) organisational ageist discourse. The underlying assumption is that these ageist discourses exist and have an impact on the experiences of workers and the development of organisations. Notably, the studies found that 'team fit' and 'inclusive policy labelling' are two ideologies that sustain ageism. The third theme includes studies that scrutinised the coping strategies used by participants to dilute ageism in their working lives.

Discursive strategies were identified, which included rhetoric counternarratives and identity negotiation. These are studied as ways in which workers can counteract ageism. These papers investigate how the ageist discourse existing in society is diluted in the talk of individuals.

Article 1 included in this dissertation is the first review that focuses on the specificity of discursive approaches and embraces the challenge of identifying the boundaries of discursive literature. Although limited compared to quantitative approaches, the included papers provide innovative information on the construction of ageism in the workforce. It identifies ageist discourses that connect micro, meso and macro levels, or participants, organisations and society. The review demonstrates that work-based discourses engender ageism for both younger and older workers and are rooted in societal ideologies that influence organisational practices. Analysing the discursive reproduction of ageism, the review points out that some policies fail to fight ageism because they stem from the same ideologies that they want to combat.

The study defines a clear gap in the knowledge, among which are (1) methodological limitations, (2) problematisation of age and (3) deconstruction of ideologies.

First, too many studies interested in discourse rely on interviews and thematic or content analysis. This approach describes ageist discourse as uttered by participants but is not equipped to unpack how the discourse of ageism originates and is accomplished in society. There is a division between discourse and interactions, which may be addressed through naturally occurring data, whether text or talk. Second, very few papers deconstruct the category 'older workers'; instead, various authors sample their participants based on chronological age, starting from over 50 years old, which does not allow for an analysis of the surface of age dynamics when age is not a matter directly sought after by the researchers. Third, studies point out ageist ideologies as being reified in the workforce and able to shape everyday workers' experiences and decisions. This macro approach to discourse inhibits researchers' ability to lay out how ageism is achieved as a social practice by members of society.

6.2 The construction of age and age-related discursive practices

Article 2 shows that, even if age is an always perceptually available category, and thus an always-available resource for interaction, it is mobilised in specific moments by interactants when they discuss specific organisational categories, or performance items. Moreover, age is not merely mobilised, but this mobilisation is achieved through three different discursive practices:

1. Quantification of the number of years on the job or within the organisation.
2. Ageing within the organisation.
3. Age-group membership identification.

These are three different ways in which interactants 'do', or enact in situ, age(ing) in strategic workplace interactions.

The first discursive practice is *quantification*. Quantification entails the mobilisation of the number of years spent inside the company. The discursive practice is based on the mobilisation of experience as a category-implicative descriptor of age. Among the items, quantification is used as a discursive resource to account for positive performance on professional authority, decision-making and sense of belonging by employees. Previous research investigated the disclosure of the number of years in mundane conversation and showed that it legitimates the subjective sides of claims (Coupland & Coupland, 1993; Nikander, 2002). Quantification refers to the taken-for-granted cultural link between numbers, accumulations and value. Employees build on this strategy to justify positive performance on items that are stereotypically and culturally linked to age as the accumulation of experience.

The second discursive practice is '*ageing within the organisation'*. This is achieved by mobilising, for example category-implicative descriptors as 'passing of time'. These descriptors are different from quantification because they prompt the idea of ageing as a process, more than its results, or the quantification of the numbers of years. This way of doing age was mobilised by the employee when justifying negative performance about innovation or 'being open to others' ideas. 'Ageing within the organisation' might mobilise two ageist stereotypes which are used to achieve either positive or negative assessments. First, as an inference for routinisation, it is used by

older workers as a barrier to being innovative; second, as an inference for wisdom, it is used to attribute a positive value to older workers' participation in the workplace.

The third and final discursive practice is '*age-group membership identification'*. The previous two practices were used only by the employees and did not include a comparison with a third party. Membership in age groups within the organisation is used by both employees and managers and entails the creation of a co-membership between the interactants via comparison to either older or younger absent third parties. 'Younger' and 'older' workers are inference-rich SOL categories that mobilise cultural notions about age groups, not only in the context of the workforce but also in the specific organisational context. Managers use this discursive practice to support employees' positive performance on a 'sense of belonging'. By building a co-membership on the social and organisational identity of 'older workers', managers place the employees and themselves in the category of older and loyal employees. The same strategy is used to create co-membership among 'younger workers'. However, in this case, it is used by managers to praise employees for their ability to change. This praise is achieved through complaints about the opposite standardised relation pair: 'older workers', as stereotypically unable to change. Age-group membership identification is relative to the interactants and the context of the talk (here, performance item), and accomplish specific organisational action (discussion of performance).

Overall, managers align with the described practices and do not question the employees' accounts, and vice versa. Shared knowledge is demonstrated to be called upon to pursue agreement in asymmetric interactions, such as PAIs (Asmuß, 2011). Here, the manager and employee use shared knowledge about seniority and call upon shared cultural knowledge about organisational age groups to achieve an agreement and avoid further need to substantiate the assessments.

In sum, Article 2 demonstrates that age and SOL are available resources to negotiate performance, also thanks to their possibility to build co-membership in age groups. Moreover, the article sustains that SOL membership and age identity are relative to the interactants, the context of the talk, the performance item to be managed in practice. They are used fluidly and discursively linked to the institutional actions that interactants are accomplishing.

6.3 Possible ageist accounts, their warrantability and the role of co-membership for solidarity and impression management

To paraphrase the research questions, Article 3 unpacks 'If possible ageist categorisation is mobilised, how are age prejudices un/warranted in and through strategic organisational interactions?'. Here, I investigate in more detail the dynamics of co-membership established through the discursive practice previously called 'age-group membership identification'.

The analysis is built on segments in which younger job applicants mobilise complaints, based on prejudicial characterisation, about an older absent third party. By assigning a third party to the social identity 'old age', job applicants resort to constructing co-membership as 'not old' or 'younger workers' with recruiters. The paper focus on 'possible ageist accounts' uttered by the speakers, while it does not analyse ageism as an experience reported by the participants. Possible -ist accounts are the ones where a prejudicial notions of social category and identity are used to strengthen a complaint (Whitehead & Stokoe, 2015).

The analysis shows that mobilising a complaint on the basis of old age about an absent, and unknown to the recruiter, third party is a discursive strategy to sustain a favourable impression. Detailed analysis of conversation demonstrates that recruiters show alignment towards this prejudicial categorisation about age, and, in some cases, show affective affiliation (e.g. through collaborative turn construction). The analysis shows three ways in which co-membership through age categorisation is effectively established, from a more blatant ageist assessment to more discreet management of SOL categories, such as father and son.

The availability of age as a resource for perceptually younger job applicants to build solidarity with recruiters in JIs is also sustained by analysing how age-based complaints resolve misalignment caused by gender-based complaints when interactants share the same age group but not the same gender. In this case, age and gender are investigate for their face value in social interactions. Irrespective of whether gender-based complaints are perceived as morally accountable by recruiters, mobilising descriptions of stereotypical older persons is not perceived as morally accountable, and it builds solidarity in situ.

These results shed critical light on JIs where age is not made relevant—the ones with older applicants. I hypothesise that in job interview with older job applicant, their position as 'older workers' is not a resource, due to the cultural notions attached to old age in the workforce. Hence, old age, as a social category, is not an interactional resource to manage personal impressions in JIs. This lead to consider how old age is silenced and, therefore, older workers might be silenced and excluded also in discursive and more hidden ways in workplace interactions.

In sum, Article 3 shows that age prejudice is used as an interactional resource to sustain or remedy impression management and, effectively, to construct solidarity with younger recruiters. Age prejudices are used as discursive practices to establish co-membership and are not morally challenged, although the institutional goal is to provide unbiased personnel selection.

7 DISCUSSION

This doctoral dissertation has dealt with three major concepts: age, ageism and strategic workplace encounters. Its major contributions are linked to all three concepts. The overarching aim of this dissertation was to contribute knowledge on (1) how ageism can be analysed through a discursive perspective and (2) the ways in which age and ageism emerge and influence strategic workplace encounters. Regarding the second aim, the detailed research questions touched upon the co-construction of age, culture and age norms, the actions that age categorisation supports in strategic interaction, the morality of using possible ageist accounts, the role of shared identities and group membership in warranting possible ageism and implementing inclusive and unbiased practices.

The first major overall contribution of this doctoral dissertation is methodological regarding how age and ageism can be explored in and through social interaction. The second major overall contribution is conceptual and it relates to being able to answer the question 'for what' when discussing the 'doing' of age. The third major relates to ageism as a social and discursive practice. Taken together, these contributions are relevant for improving the development and implementation of the selected strategic encounters but, more generally, to advance age-inclusive workplaces. Hence, the fourth contribution is practical and relates to the usefulness of considering policies, norms, values and prejudices as interactional accomplishments. This stance leads to some useful pieces of advice for practitioners, organisations and workers. I have collected these suggestions in the included policy brief 'Age(ism), diversity and inclusion in the workplace: A practical guide to age-inclusive practices and job interviews' (Annex).

7.1 From micro to macro and back: A conceptual and methodological discussion

One of the overall contributions of this research is to attempt to link the macro-social and psychological phenomena of age construction and ageism in the workplace to a fine-grained analysis of micro-interactions. In this discussion, I want to use my research as a starting point to propose a framework to analyse age and ageism in HR practices in the workplace as interactional accomplishments. This framework attempts to close the loop between macro, meso and micro levels in policy making and discursive analysis.

The use of an interactional lens to analyse practices and promote change in institutions is not new (Antaki, 2011; Asmuß, 2011), however not much work has been done from this perspective in studies addressing age and ageism in the workplace. For example, different models have been presented to make sense of the diverse levels (micro: personal and individual, meso: organisation, macro: society, laws and culture) that interact in the assessment of age-related and ageist dynamics inside organisations (Boehm et al., 2021; Eppler-Hattab et al., 2020; Turek et al., 2022) and in working life (Naegele et al., 2020; Swift et al., 2017). Often, these models include everyday practices as embodied places where soft age discrimination (not legally banned) is evident (Turek et al., 2022), but these contributions rarely start from an inductive analysis of these practices.

In addition to these other models, I present Figure 1, where macro 'discourse' is locked into places in detail of micro interaction. This framework expands the contributions of my dissertation and proposes a guide for moving forward the analysis of inclusion and ageism as interactional accomplishments. This also moves forward micro-discursive studies by giving them a theoretical and wider breath.

My intention here is to challenge fields that are methodologically far apart. For example, research on age stereotypes in personnel decisions has been prolific, especially in the cognitive and experimental tradition, but the results are rather inconclusive. Hence, some researchers have questioned the utility of investigating age stereotypes in organisational decisions (Murphy & DeNisi, 2021). One of the critiques of the utility of analysing stereotypes is that it is still unknown how they

play out in real life, where variables are not controlled, as in laboratory settings. This criticism shares some similarities with the ones that DP has historically pointed out (Edwards, 2012). They both define the analysis of inherently social practices in laboratory settings as inadequate and inconclusive. Nevertheless, despite the acknowledgement of the difficulty of understanding real-life dynamics through pure cognitive terms, the possibility of integrating research with a discursive and situated perspective is thus far not considered a way to overcome the 'unrealistic' feature of experiments outside the field of DP.

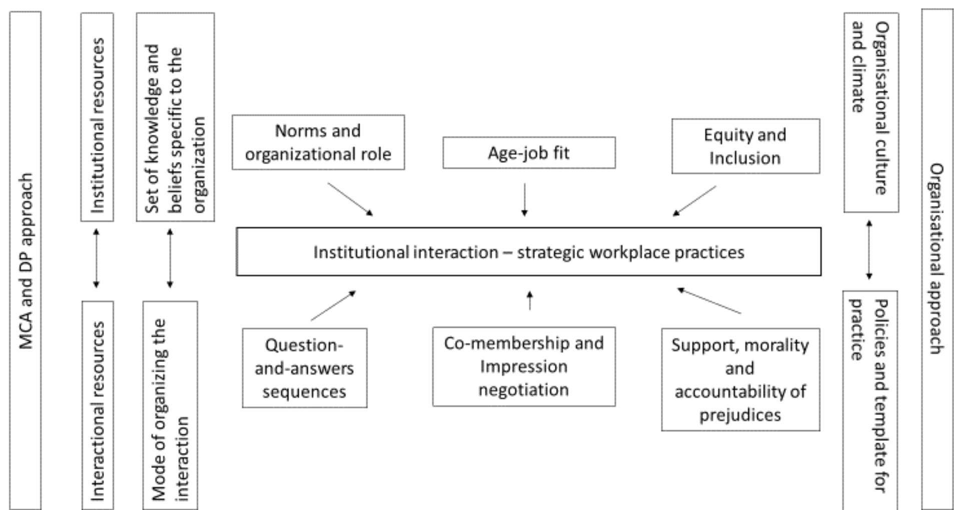
Figure 1 shows that, in institutional interactions, organisational norms and roles can be actualised by a specific use of the question-and-answer sequence (Button, 1992). The job–age fit can be actualised by co-membership and impression management negotiation (Articles 2 and 3). The values of equality and inclusion can be actualised through an interaction that is symmetric and supportive, aligning and/or affiliative (Sandlund, 2014; Sandlund et al., 2011). More features can be added, and these features intersect and are reciprocal. In fact, institutional interactions are shaped and shaped by both interactional and institutional resources (Arminen, 2017).

To give a concrete example, in Article 1, I describe the themes related to ageism as discursively analysed in working life. Among them, one theme is the 'social construction of age and ageist ideologies'. Within these themes, ageist organisational discourses emerge, such as 'age–job' fit, which limits possibilities for certain age groups to access new positions in the labour market. Age–job fit can be assumed to refer to a discourse of age as organising principle and 'super' fact, as detailed in Section 2.1 (Fineman, 2014). By using an interactional perspective on the age–job fit, we can detail its construction and untangle the blurrier idea that it is 'socially constructed'. For example, in Articles 2 and 3, workers orient to the notion that certain age groups are fitted or not fitted for certain activities.

The organisational discourse of age–job fit is discursively mobilised as recourse in strategic encounters, and the inferences tied to this mobilisation are shared by interactants that, in the moment, align with a certain version of the world being constructed. This is an example of how possible ageist discourses are done in the interaction and sustained by discursive accomplishments, such as the building of co-membership in the group 'not old' (Article 3). The interactional lens unpacks 'the

discourse' and shows when it is mobilised (age–job fit to complain about older workers), for what it is mobilised (the complaint avoids exposure to personal shortcomings), and how it is mobilised (it is collaboratively constructed).

Figure 3. Organisation of job interviews and performance appraisal interviews between macro (institutional/organizational) and micro (interactional/practical) levels.



7.2 Revisiting age and ageism in interaction

In this Section, I detail my contribution to understanding age and ageism as interactional accomplishments.

The main contribution to the study of age as 'done' in interaction is the specification of 'for what' age is done and that the 'doing' of age is a collaborative accomplishment between employer and employee. This specification might not be new to academics in the field of EMCA, which focuses on actions as socially accomplished in situ. However, I consider them rather new in the field of age in the workplace.

In performance assessment, diverse age-based categorisation practices are linked to diverse performance items, and this link is somewhat coherent with normative assumptions about stages of life. 'Passing of time' is a justification for not being open to innovation and change; seniority is a support for being a leader (Article 2). In job interviews, age-based complaints function to answer challenging questions and resolve delicate interactions. Largely, the 'inference-rich' feature of stages of life, which can be paraphrased as 'no-more-need-to-be-said-here-about-this', is functional to support impression management.

Previous studies have focused on the victim-perpetrator paradigm between employer and employee (K Riach & Kelly, 2015). Articles 2 and 3 show that age-related categorisation is jointly done in interaction, and employees or job applicants especially mobilise stereotypical notions of age, both about themselves and others. A clear co-construction is detailed using collaborative turns, for example, in Extract 1 of Article 3. However, on a general level, managers and recruiters do not clearly question the mobilisation of age-based discursive practices, aligning with them. Furthermore, one might consider that by accepting the common knowledge component and collaboratively partaking in the categorisation practice, managers and recruiters lose the possibility to personalise their assessment, ask for more details and understand the dynamics behind age categories. Hence, age norms are collaboratively accomplished and reproduced in situ and workers might align with institutional expectations about age.

Considering age identities, previous research has focused on the discursive construction of older workers as identities (Section 2.2). Interactional research about age (or age in interaction) has significantly shown how individuals move in and out of predefined labels, depending on the context, understood not only as an environment but also as an interactional action accomplished (Jolanki, 2004; Näslund, 2017; Nikander, 2000). My results align with those of previous research. In Article 2, the same workers can position themselves as 'the most expert', hence older, and then as 'not old', in comparison with even older persons and retirees. This confirms that age is relational and age identities discursively accomplished in multiple ways along the same interaction. As previously explained, this negotiation is related to the action that needs to be accomplished. In the previous example, first the worker

defends the indisposition to listen to others' ideas, and then he sustains the ability to use technology.

Furthermore, the presented results show that negotiation of age identities is most often done in relation to 'not being old'. When constructing their identities as old, workers never label themselves as such, but instead refer to experiences, time, not belonging to the 'younger' workers group (in this case constructed as negative). This reinforces the idea that positive age identities are negotiated against the avoidance of being labelled old (Krekula et al., 2018; Nikander, 2002).

I want to move the discussion to the theoretical advancement of analysing ageism in interaction. Article 1 shows that there is an extensive body of literature that details experience of ageism. My research does not address how workers report perceived ageism, while it focuses on how ageism creeps in private strategic workplace encounters through possible prejudicial use of age in speakers' turn. Previous studies have emphasised that a shift is needed in the psychological field of age stereotypes and prejudices. An extensive academic tradition has delt with these topics and lately arguments seem to run in circles (Cadiz et al., 2022; Dixon, 2017). Dixon (2017) clearly suggests that new information can be found if analysts transcend the accuracy-inaccuracy dualism and focus on when 'thinking ill of others' is warranted without justification.

In this dissertation, I want to contribute to this shift by mapping how and when 'thinking ill of other age groups' become sufficiently warranted. Stereotypical references to groups are used in complaint, and this is not new information (E. Stokoe, 2015). Previous discursive research on -isms has found that interactants in public spaces, tend to orient to a set of relatively contemporary norms restricting the open expression of discriminatory talk (for example, on racism, e.g. Whitehead, 2015b, 2018). Compared to this research, I show that in the private room of HR practices, possible ageist accounts are not withdrawn from by interactants, and professionals do not display moral accountability towards them (Article 3). Stokoe (2015) showed similar results in the analysis of neighbours' mediation conversation. Previous studies highlight that often workers do not explicitly reject possible -isms in talk to not disrupt the conversation (E. Stokoe, 2015; Tadic, 2023). Disrupting the conversation by exposing prejudices might hinder the business at hand, for example

in my data, the flow of the job interview. This is a possibility in my data; however, it is questionable whether in professional practices managers and recruiters should reject possible ageist accounts.

I add that age co-membership is relevant in warranting prejudices about age in strategic interactions. As expressed by Jayyusi (1984), age is always available in face-to-face social interactions. Although the interactional approach dictates that categories need to be occasioned in the conversation and interactionally consequential for the analyst to claim their relevancy (Schegloff, 2007), I also argue that there is an influence of the face value of age in strategic face-to-face workplace interactions. Consequentially, I find that in face-to-face interactions where interactants share membership in stages of life but not gender, building a complaint on gender (directed towards men) does not work, while age categorisation saves the interaction by re-establishing co-membership and resolving solidarity (Article 3). Whether recruiters or managers are ageists might not matter if the analyst can pin potin to when ageism becomes functional to organisational actions.

Lastly, these results contribute to the most recent discussion about the role of similarity and attraction in the selection process and their connection with ageism (Cadiz et al., 2022). Interactional research has shown that similarity is not only a matter of demographic diversity, but can also be discursively accomplished by establishing co-membership on categorisation devices (Lipovsky, 2010; Poulios, 2016; Van De Mieroop & Schnurr, 2018). The similarity in stages of life is not only a matter of having the same chronological age, but it is also a matter of discursively positioning interactants in the same category, which, as explained before, is situated and relational.

7.3 Implications for policies and practices

The aspiration of this research is to be of use to practitioners in companies dealing with diversity and inclusion policies, as well as to manage age or perform job interviews and performance appraisal interviews. Therefore, some implications for policies and practices are translated into practical suggestions for HR professionals in the policy brief included the Annex in this integrative chapter.

Context is relevant, but this umbrella word needs to be detailed in order to create tailored policies. Context is organisation (culture, norms, climate, etc.), organisational process (JIs or PAIs) and interactional settings (the action performed and the persons doing it). Considering all the listed types of 'contexts' can provide critical and cultural nuance to overcome the one-size-fit-all policymaking. For example, Article 3 shows that the social identities of interactants influence impression management and gatekeeping, even when the equality of process is ensured by using structured interviews, or by posing the same questions to all candidates. Hence, diverse committee, formed by more than one person and man, women, younger and older, might ensure more diverse talent acquisition.

Previous studies have pointed out that the effectiveness of institutional practices depends on the institutional goals to be achieved are (Toerien et al., 2011). In strategic organisational interactions, professionals might be faced with competing goals, such as time efficiency, organisational norms and economic gain, which might be in contrast with the values of respecting and promoting diversity, inclusion and ensuring equality. Public commitment to fighting ageism or inclusion is key, but it is vital to ensure that workers have the resources to put it into practice. Accountability at the macro level can translate into accountability at the micro level and vice versa. Organisations can engage in discussion about how the effectiveness of their practices is also accounted for as inclusiveness. To allow the translation between macro and micro levels, training and education are necessary.

Diversity is a delicate matter and making our identities relevant in interaction is sensitive. This delicacy can result in workers not knowing how to best manage diversity in their social interactions or how to handle it when it surfaces. Previous studies have pointed out that training on diversity is ineffective, often too focused on teaching that implicit biases are omnipresent and stereotypes are wrong, but lacking tools for everyday practices (Olson & Gill, 2022). Most of the actions and training about diversity and inclusion in organisations, also regarding age, are based on the ubiquitous and uncontrollable nature of hidden biases. These trainings are based on research that tests stereotypes through implicit association tests (IATs) (Nosek et al., 2007), which demonstrate that people have a negative association with certain targets (e.g. older persons) despite their cognitive awareness of it. Consultants and trainers still blindly rely on these assumptions, although recent psychological

research has questioned the reliability of IATs and their utility in real-world scenarios. Most of these interventions build on the assumption that the 'good will' of individuals to reject biases inherited by living in an unjust society will be enough to cause change. I suggest that adding an interactional take on training can provide workers with useful tools to manage age and ageism in their jobs.

There is a growing body of training and interventions based on the analysis of authentic interactions. These trainings have been successfully applied to a wide range of settings, such as crisis negotiation, suicide helplines and neighbourhood mediation (Stokoe, 2014)[6]. Analysis and training on ageism in interaction provide new insights on "coping strategies" for dealing and diluting ageism, as identified in Article 1. Analysing not whether people are ageist or self-ageist, but rather how they discursively use age in interactions, provides instruments on how to counteract ageism in practice. The results of this research can be used in planning training for HR professionals and workers in general.

7.4 Limitations of the study and ideas for future research

The overall dissertation is the product of my personal and academic journey over the four years of doctoral studies; as such, limitations and constraints are an integral part of this product. The individual limitations of my papers are already described in the publications; here, I review the overall limitations of the integrative chapter.

The interpretations of the findings are somewhat constrained by the data employed in this investigation. I understand that the phenomena I examined have components outside of the data I utilised, such as shared knowledge of prior events in performance reviews or the possibility that recruiters use tactics to test job applicants during job interviews. However, these contextual factors do not dispute the findings, as the aim is to describe interactional practices in situ. I do not claim that recruiters

[6] A training model based on CA for professionals is called Conversation Analytical Role Play Model (CARM). It was created by Prof. Elizabeth Stokoe and colleagues; for more information, see https://www.carmtraining.org/.

or managers are ageist, but that paying attention to the discursive ways in which age is produced provides an opportunity to see how age is constructed in specific institutions and how presuppositions of age are invoked and relevant for certain institutional actions.

The database employed in this study was somewhat limited. More instances could have strengthened the claims and exposed recurrent patterns. Data with more diverse participants (for example, older recruiters) would have allowed me to support the claim that co-membership is relevant. Nevertheless, the interactional strategies described in this study—turn allocation, invoking aged presupposition through accounting and complaining, and the role of employers/employees or recruiters/job applicants—are generalisable as potential strategies in these institutional encounters (Perakyla, 2011).

The methodology I employed could have led to much more detailed and nuanced findings. However, I gained a great deal of knowledge throughout my doctoral studies, which might be shown in the finer-grained analysis in Article 3. Ageism could have been explored as accumulated in interactional practice along extended interactional sequences. For example, further studies can give more attention to question design and the relevancy of category in that, as well as normative orientation to age in talk.

Regarding the data, a limitation is the use of multiple datasets. First, the inclusion of the scoping review might seem incoherent in the overall interest of emphasising an emic perspective. However, it was functional for the multi-layered investigation of age and ageism. Second, I consider that the use of two diverse types of practice, job interviews and performance appraisal interviews, diminished the precision of the analysis. However, the use of the two practices strengthens the claim that age is an interactional resource, as similar discursive practices were found in both settings.

The limitations of these studies translate into future directions of research. For example, could be analysed by looking at the overall structure of the encounters to see if, as claimed, ageism is an accumulation of presuppositions and behaviours that are systematically different due to the way that age structures our interactions. While I focused on small pieces of data to find patterns across encounters, future analyses

could investigate the encounters in length and apply a conversation analytical longitudinal approach. Overall, the investigation of ageism in interactions is an open avenue for future research and can move forward a field such as ageism in working life that, despite extensive research, has a limited impact in developing new theoretical understanding.

Moreover, my results show that age membership is linked to solidarity and emotional affiliation. I did not extensively analyse affect and emotions and how they relate to solidarity and co-membership. This analysis would be welcomed because it could extend the theoretical knowledge about the affective component of prejudices and social identities.

One interesting discursive practice that would need further exploration is 'ageing inside the workplace'. Ageing inside an organisation as a transition and embodied transformation has not been extensively analysed as a topic in research, and its investigation could benefit the political goals of extending working life and ensuring sustainable careers. The introduction of longevity as a lens through which to study ageing in the workplace could benefit both academic and managerial audiences.

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ANNEX

Age(ism), diversity and inclusion in the workplace. A practical guide to age-inclusive practices and job interviews.

Federica Previtali

Self-published policy brief in the Innovative Training Network EuroAgeism
available at www.euroageism.eu

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Executive Summary

The problem

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is a topic of interest for an increasing number of organisations, private or public, and Human Resources (HR) professionals. DEI policies enable workers' full potential and advance companies' social sustainability. Inclusivity boosts work engagement and a growing number of employees expect their management to support DEI policies and implement them in practice. Within DEI, age is slowly being introduced as a social category to be better understood and managed in the workplace.

The United Nations have declared 2021-2030 the Decade of Healthy Ageing and companies and HR professionals can play a major role in making organisation a place to age healthily. The attention toward age, as a social category and identity, is strategic for companies, not only because the workforce is ageing, but also because, ageism is the most experienced form of discrimination across all ages in Europe (Eurobarometer, 2019).

This policy brief addresses two issues: 1. a gap in the knowledge about age and ageism in the workplace, and 2. a gap between policies and practice in DEI and fighting ageism. First, age is considered a chronological variable to be managed, but it is often neglected as an identity matter. Second, DEI policies' effectiveness is unclear, and professionals are left alone in translating public commitment into everyday practices.

To close these gaps, tips and recommendations are listed, among others, a guide to age-inclusive job interviews and training based on the social and interactional dynamics in the workplace. There is much more to say about age and ageism in the workplace, this brief focuses on understanding age and ageism, making DEI an accountable goal, diversity training and age-inclusive job interviews. For a more coherent discussion, please see the policy report by Varlamova et al. (2021).

The recommendations

1. INSTITUTIONAL GOALS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The first step to creating a change is to engage in an ethical and political discussion at the management level about putting DEI and the fight against ageism at the core of efficient organizational practices. Management can foster diversity, inclusion, and equity by setting it as an accountable goal in internal practices, not only as a public commitment. Once accountability for DEI is defined, then training and guidelines about defining and tracking it can be put in place.

2. KNOWLEDGE OF AGE(ISM)

To actively fight ageism, professionals must gain more knowledge about age and ageism itself. Age is more than chronological age, and ageism is more than overt discriminatory actions. Educate yourself, your workers and your managers about age and ageism. Age and ageism are situational and relational, so a one-size-fits-all explanation is not enough. To understand age and ageism involve your workers in a discussion about them: how do they experience them? Where? When?

Policies are more accepted if they are co-created, and they are more successful if they are shaped to the context. Including minorities workers, that experience multiple discriminations in their daily jobs is fundamental to fostering inclusion and unfolding what are the taken-for-granted norms in your company. Analyse your company, and track your internal data about diversity, age distribution, age in teams, promotions and recruitment.

3. TRAINING ABOUT BIASES IN WORKPLACE PRACTICES

Training is a necessary part of age-inclusive actions to educate professionals and guide them towards creating a more inclusive environment. Training is more effective if tailored around workplace practices. Biases, also on age, are used by professionals on certain occasions and to achieve certain goals at work. To be effective and have an impact, consider implementing training including actual examples of workplace interactions and based on workplace practices (e.g., recruitment). Offering such training to all workers at the beginning of their position and throughout their careers will support the creation of an inclusive environment and the actualisation of equal processes.

Definition of main concepts

AGE

Age is a social category on which groups can be formed and identities are defined. It is often conceived as chronological age, or calendar age (when you were born), but it is more complicated than that. Age is relational, context-dependent, and accomplished in interaction. It entails psychological age (the self-perception or social perception of age), subjective age (how old an individual feels depending on the context, and the age group with which they identify), organisational age (ageing inside the organisation), life stage (the changes associated with moving through different stages of life and expectations related, e.g., from working life to retirement) (Previtali, et. al, 2020; De Lange, et al., 2021)

AGEISM

Ageism is defined as stereotypes (how we think), prejudices (how we feel), and discrimination (how we act) based on age towards ourselves or others (WHO, 2020). It concerns every age. It relates to feeling the "wrong age" or being considered "too young" or "too old" for something or being someone. Ageism is linked to the normative notions of life stages, or what are we expected to be at a certain age. In our daily life, ageism is a set of discursive practices in which we are all to some extent involved. Everyday ageism is very common, and it does not take the form of only a single discriminative action but is a complex nest of cumulative practices, which are often perceived as normal (e.g. complaining about older/younger colleagues). Ageism is more discreet than overt and liable age discrimination.

AGE DISCRIMINATION

In the EU, workers are legally protected against age discrimination. Age discrimination entails being treated unfairly when applying for a job because of age, colleagues treating someone badly (calling names or making jokes) because of their age or refusing to be promoted or receive training because of age. Age discrimination refers to legally reportable behaviours.

DIVERSITY

Diversity is more than a headcount matter. Diversity of identities is the diverse intersection and belonging of social categories, including gender, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, language,(dis)ability, age, religious commitment, or political perspective.

INCLUSION

Inclusion is about everyone. It means that persons with different identities feel and are valued, leveraged, and welcomed within a given setting. It entails understanding the complex shaping of identities, the intersection of social categories, and tracking the power dynamics that minority groups face in the workplace.

Introduction

Working in an inclusive environment that does not discriminate against personal diversities is a commitment by an increasing number of organisations, and a new goal for HR professionals. Age is the most common ground for harassment and discrimination in the workplace: 35% of workers between 50

and 64 years old and 42% of workers over 64 years old experience it (OECD, 2020; Varlamova et al., 2021). Workers feel discriminated against because they are either “too young” or “too old” when looking for a job and, in the workplace. Moreover, in Europe, employees feel that not enough is done to support age inclusion in their workplace (Eurobarometer, 2019).

The ageing of the workforce is a demographic change that is currently reshaping the look of the labour force. The increase in longevity and the related increase in retirement age led to the prolongation of working life. Prolonging careers also means that people of different chronological ages are cohabiting in the workplace. Ageism does not only concern older workers (whether considered older than 40, 50 or 60 years old) but everyone. Age-related workplace policies consider ageing and older workers (Bohem & Bal, 2020) but lack a focus on ageism.

Age stereotypes are barriers, especially to inclusive recruitment (Abrams et al., 2016). In addition, due to the subtle ways through which ageism operates, an ageist culture might be reproduced without HR professionals and managers acknowledging it. Diversity Equity and Inclusion (DEI) is a concept that has taken a central role in businesses, governments, non-profits, and other organizations. DEI is a tool that can be used to create a more age-inclusive workplace and address the widely spread, though overlooked, phenomenon of ageism. Ageism, as a form of inequality, is often overlooked. Even equality advocates report prejudices towards older persons and may sustain certain types of ageism, such as defending the necessity that older persons should step back to leave space for younger generations (Martin & North,2021).

1) The gap between policy and practice in the workplace

The challenge: Putting the manifesto into action

At the European level, one of the main initiatives promoted to fight discrimination in the workplace is the Diversity Charter (European Commission, 2020). In 2010, the European Commission launched the EU Platform of Diversity Charters to sustain enterprises, public institutions and NGOs in promoting and valuing diversity, inclusion, and solidarity in their activities. Organisations can sign the charter and publicly commit to creating and maintaining an inclusive work environment for all their employees, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, or sexual orientation. This type of charter is signed by higher management and often implemented, in practice, by HR professionals through DEI initiatives.

Usually, DEI is a set of spot-on interventions implemented by the HR team. It is still a challenge for HR professionals to raise awareness around DEI and encourage commitment across all functions. Sharing the ownership of DEI actions can help raise commitment in the workplace.

A recent review paper about discourses and ageism shows that certain managerial discourses about diversity can be even counter-beneficial for organisations (Previtali et al. 2020). When equality policies are in place, but their use in local workplace practices is not clear, managers might fear behaving inappropriately towards workers. This leads to avoiding the delicate matter and further excludes, for example, older workers and reinforces ageism (Phillipson et al., 2019). The gap between signing “the DEI manifesto” and actualizing it in practice is detrimental to the effective promotion of diversity and the realization of equality and inclusion on an everyday level.

The challenge: Accountability and effective workplace practices

Research investigating effective institutional practices shows that the effectiveness is dependent on the institutional goal towards which these same practices are directed (Torien et al., 2011). When we ask whether HR practices are effectively inclusive, we might question which are the institutional goals towards which these practices are directed. For example, a DEI policy is to perform diverse and inclusive recruitment. Nevertheless, in daily practice, recruiters are meant to achieve competing goals,

such as being time-efficient and expediting decisions. Time efficiency might hinder the inclusivity of the process and push workers to use some short-cuts or biases in their decisions, such as age-job fit.

A recent review on ageism in working life demonstrates that one of the most widespread ageist discourses, which also influence recruitment practices, is the “age-job fit” or “team fit” (Previtali et al., 2020). Workers are denied positions because their age would not fit the organisation. Hence, in their daily practices, HR professionals might be uncertain if they should follow a time-efficient, may be biased, process or an inclusive, not routinised one. Incoherent and unclear definitions of values and goals empty DEI policies of their efficacy and, therefore, make unclear who is accountable for what in workplace practices.

The solution: Set DEI and fighting ageism as institutional goals and define accountability

Policies are put into practice in everyday working life by employees through their social interactions. Defining the institutional goals of workplace processes and practices is a political and ethical question. Considering the tension within this question will help management create a lasting change in their organisation. A clear and public commitment will support the accountability of DEI values in policies and practices.

Start, support, and perform a continuous, integral and inclusive discussion about whether DEI is an organisational goal, for which workers are always accountable, regardless of other competing objectives. This will support the moral accountability of local actions and achieve a general commitment. Moreover, this definition can help workers to feel safe in promoting DEI values also when they might compete with other organisational goals. If the organisation is accountable for DEI, then it becomes part of workers’ organisational identity. When committing to diversity and inclusion, do not only publicly endorse the charter, but make sure to create a culture that supports it. This is possible by defining which organizational goal each process supports and making sure that this is not in contrast with fighting ageism and is diverse and inclusive, also regarding age.

2) Age and ageism in the workplace

The challenge: Understanding diversity and age

Diversity is often treated as a headcount matter (e.g., how many workers are over 50 years old?). A more critical understanding of diversity, and social identities, including age, support more effective implementation of DEI (Koellen, 2019). Diversity is more complex than a rainbow representation of external features. It entails understanding the complex shaping of identities and tracking the power dynamics that minority groups face in the workplace.

Age is more complex than chronological age (De Lange et al., 2021). Coherent and comprehensive policies about age will stem from a coherent understanding of what age is and how it is perceived at work by workers themselves. Age is situational and contextual, as are all identities. People do not embrace only one identity per time and across all situations, but identity is flexible and can be negotiated based on interactional goals and situations.

Recent research based on analysis of real performance appraisal reviews showed that workers can invoke their age, in the form of their experience or in the form of the passing of time within the organisation, to accomplish different goals (Previtali & Spedale, 2021). Therefore, not only workers can resume different types of age identities depending on what their goal is, but they can employ age stereotypes to achieve the business at hand, such as justifying their performance. Managers accept these accounts, which are in line with shared age stereotypes, in the workplace, and lose opportunities to look behind the “age” and better understand the real motives that hinder or support performance.

The solution: Take a bottom-up approach and engage in a discussion about age and ageism

Understanding age involves a discussion about age, age identity and ageism. Policies are more effective and more accepted if they are context sensitive. Inspire your internal policies through a discussion with your workers and HR professionals that will put them into practice. Moreover, the discussion can include and give room to the minorities that are representing diversity.

Age intersects with gender, origin, and sexual orientation. Ageism intersects with racism, sexism, etc. Actions that for the majority are perceived as non-discriminatory can be perceived as prejudicial by minorities, so their point of view can not only be included but listened to and represented. Age is more complex than chronological age, and if policies address ageing and ageism, they will be more effective if deriving from a coherent understanding of what age is and how it is perceived at work by workers themselves.

Strat and support an open discussion to produce a joint understanding of what diversity is, how it is lived in the organisations, what stereotypes, prejudices and discriminations are, and how they are perceived by workers from all levels. To uncover hidden biases, the discussion can address the assumptions and taken-for-granted norms in the workplace (e.g., what is the taken-for-granted age, are measured in place only for younger or older workers, who are the talents?). Often ageism is more hidden than blatant discrimination, and it can be silent and hidden behind taken-for-granted norms, actions, and guidelines.

3) Diversity training

The challenge: Effective training on biases

In the list of examples of good practices introduced by the Diversity Charter signatories, there are "training sessions on unconscious bias put in place for recruiters and human resources professionals" (European Commission, 2022). The underlying assumption is that good intentions are not enough, and we are vulnerable to the habits of our minds and to our culture, which is embedded with prejudice (Cox & Devine, 2019). Research has proven that age biases do affect organisational decisions: older workers are less favourably employed (Ahmed, Andersson & Hammarstedt, 2012; Berde & Lazlo Mago´, 2022; Zaniboni et al, 2019) and managers believe that older workers have fewer physical stamina, less ability to learn technologies (Van Dalen & Henriksen, 2019).

Nevertheless, even among researchers, there is no agreement that people are acting in a biased way due to the mental construct called implicit biases. One criticism is that real life is different from experimental settings, where implicit biases are tested. The goal is to properly handle biases in interaction, empower professionals to be, and make others, accountable for them, instead of deleting them.

Studies on video recordings of real job interviews have found that age stereotypes are used in talk to construct solidarity with recruiters (Previtali, Nikander, Ruusuvuori, 2022). There is always a reason for which people employ prejudicial views and stereotypes, as there is always an institutional goal in workplace practices. Alongside training on implicit biases, training based on social and interactional dynamics will be beneficial to give HR professionals and workers tools to act inclusively in their daily job.

The solution: Promote training on biases based on workplace practices

Diversity is a delicate matter. This delicacy can result in workers not knowing how to best manage it in their social interaction and how to handle it when it surfaces. Educational intervention is one of the key actions to advance the DEI agenda at an organisational level. Not only HR professionals, but each worker can take advantage of DEI training in their daily work.

Providing mandatory DEI training at the beginning of each position, not as a spot-on initiative, ensures participation in a coherent and inclusive organisational culture. When the institutional goal is

to promote and ensure diversity and inclusion, including fighting ageism, employees can act on this goal to respond to the possible use of stereotypes during practices, without disrupting the processes and the conversation. Hence, training on diversity and inclusion can not only deconstruct the myths that biases entail but also be practice-oriented.

Training based on social interactional dynamics can foster an understanding of the “real” situations where biases are used in the workplace and develop strategies to respond to them. Reversing the training from a top-down to a bottom-up approach, and focusing on the practices, can contribute to reducing the gap between policies and practice by showing the real-life situation and giving centrality to social interactions. There is an increasing movement of communication training based on authentic examples of what happens during workplace interaction, which is proved beneficial e.g. crisis negotiation, and cold sell calls (Stokoe, 2020).

A guide to age inclusive job interview

Recruitment and hiring are the key areas of intervention to ensure an inclusive workplace and fight ageism. Here are some practical suggestions for inclusive communication during job interviews, putting into practice the recommendations that are listed above. The tips are based on scientific analyses of real job interviews.

1. DEFINE WHAT YOU ARE LOOKING FOR, ALSO TO THE CANDIDATE. One of the main obstacles to an inclusive recruitment process is the belief that there is an “ideal person-job fit” which is based on an appropriate candidate’s age or stage of life. This job-fit ideal should be dismissed at the organisational level to prioritise competencies. Likewise, candidates should have a clear idea of what competencies are needed.
2. USE A LONGER SHORT LIST OF CANDIDATES. Adding more persons to the short-list (for example from 3 to 5) is a way to include people that usually are not considered the “perfect fit” and increases the representation of minorities, women and different ages.
3. USE A PANEL OF RECRUITERS/HIRING MANAGERS. To prevent the influence of similarity on the decisions, also the recruiters’ panel should be diverse regarding gender, age, origin etc.
4. USE A SET OF QUESTIONS BUT ALLOW FOR INTERACTIONAL DIVERSITY. Having a set of questions can prevent asking different questions to different candidates because of their features. Nevertheless, job interviews are primarily an interactional process, so recruiters can allow interactional dynamics to emerge.
5. USE NARRATIVE QUESTIONS AND NOT CATEGORY-BASED QUESTIONS. Ask questions that invite job applicants to narrate their personal and work experiences, to create an inclusive process where the stereotypes linked to categories are not relevant. When possible prejudicial use of categories is mobilised in talk, a recruiter can always go back to ask about personal experience to avoid the “group-based” talk. Possible questions that can trigger stereotypical use of categories are: “what type of worker are you?” “What type of workplace do you work in?”; “Why are you the right person?”. Instead, use narrative questions, such as “tell me about your workday”, “walk me through an episode where you were under pressure”, or "tell me what you did in X situation".
6. REFRAME AND DELETE THE POSSIBLE PREJUDICES. Ageist attitudes can emerge also during job interviews. Research has shown that the direct challenge of stereotypes might disrupt the conversation and the trust among speakers. Instead, re-formulating the stereotypical use of age, by focusing on the problem instead of the category is a way to “delete” the stereotypes from the conversation and focus on the topic (Stokoe, 2015). For example, if a job applicant argues that they would be a good candidate thanks to their age, a recruiter could focus on the matter of “being a good candidate” and ask for an example for

which he would be one of them, instead of agreeing or making the young a relevant criterion for selection.

Conclusion

This brief reflects on possible ways to bridge workplace policies and practices about diversity and inclusion, with an emphasis on ageism. The focus is on the obstacles that workers and HR professionals may face in their practices and how they can be resolved. Creating an inclusive environment is a complex, holistic process, but more importantly, a collaborative one where accountability is defined and shared.

To resolve the gap between policies and practices, defining diversity & inclusion and fighting ageism as institutional goals is a key step. In this way, workers will feel empowered to act upon them in their practices. To empower workers to operate towards an inclusive workplace, training about diversity and inclusion is crucial, already at the stage of employees' onboarding. This training, to be effective, stems from a bottom-up discussion about what diversity, age, and ageism are. This discussion gives voice to older and younger workers, as well as minorities. Training can cover implicit biases and they can be practice-oriented to provide a concrete reflection on what happens when biases are used in work-life. Finally, the brief provides concrete advice for developing inclusive communications in job interviews, derived from an analysis of real recruitment practices.

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Review Article

Ageism in Working Life: A Scoping Review on Discursive Approaches

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Abstract

Background and Objectives: This review investigates the contribution of discursive approaches to the study of ageism in working life. It looks back on the 50 years of research on ageism and the body of research produced by the discursive turn in social science and gerontology.
Research Design and Methods: This study followed the 5-step scoping review protocol to define gaps in the knowledge on ageism in working life from a discursive perspective. About 851 papers were extracted from electronic databases and, according to inclusion and exclusion criteria, 39 papers were included in the final review.
Results: The selected articles were based on discursive approaches and included study participants along the full continuum of working life (workers, retirees, jobseekers, and students in training). Three main themes representing the focal point of research were identified, namely, experiences of ageism, social construction of age and ageism, and strategies to tackle (dilute) ageism.
Discussion and Implications: Discursive research provides undeniable insights into how participants experience ageism in working life, how ageism is constructed, and how workers create context-based strategies to counteract age stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. Discursive research on ageism in the working life needs further development about the variety of methods and data, the problematization of age-based labeling and grouping of workers, and a focus on the intersection between age and other social categories. Further research in these areas can deepen our understanding of how age and ageism are constructed and can inform policies about ways of disentangling them in working life.

Keywords: Aging policies, Discourses, Older–younger workers, Workforce

Background

This scoping review explores the contribution of discursive approaches to the analysis of ageism in working life. Robert N. Butler coined the concept of ageism in 1969, defining it as "prejudice by one age group towards other age groups" (Butler, 1969, p. 243). Fifty years later, ageism has gained primary importance in the field of gerontology, as well as in work-life studies (de Medeiros, 2019). Currently, ageism still goes unchallenged, compared to other forms of discrimination, and is socially accepted, both at explicit and implicit levels (Levy, 2017).

Ageism, as a concept, has expanded and a common agreement exists today that ageism is (a) directed toward all ages; (b) composed of affective, cognitive, and behavioral

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components, which can be distinguished between personal, institutional, and societal levels; and (c) either positive or negative (Palmore, 2015). The phenomenon has raised major attention in policy organizations, and in 2016, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018, p. 295) instituted a campaign to fight ageism, defining it as "the stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination towards people on the basis of age." Previous research shows that negative age attitudes influence individual daily life, for example, lowering the possibilities for social integration (Vitman et al., 2014). Ageism also affects national economies: it might cause an estimated loss of 63 billion USD per year to the U.S. health system (Levy et al., 2020). The cost of ageism is computable also for employers and employees and it was estimated that, in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries, the Gross Domestic Product would increase 3.5 trillion USD if the employment of persons aged older than 55 would increase (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe [UNECE], 2019).

Discursive Approaches to Ageism in Working Life

Over the past 50 years of research, the scientific literature on ageism has shifted in emphasis and approaches adopted. In the 1980s and early 1990s, the qualitative turn in social gerontology (Gubrium, 1992), rise of critical gerontology, and discursive turn in social science (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) contributed to the creation of a new corpus of research. On the one hand, the rise of critical approaches in gerontology challenged the mainstream practices of research and questioned the normative conceptualizations of the life course; the intersection of age, gender, and ethnicity; and the overreliance on quantitative analysis. On the other hand, the discursive turn encouraged social scientists to examine the role of language in the construction of social reality (Willig, 2003). Within this framework, discursive approach is an "umbrella term" that includes an extensive diversity of methods to analyze text and talk (Nikander, 2008). These approaches are often divided into macro and micro. Whereas macro approaches are interested in power relations and focus on the implications of discourses for subjective experiences (Willig, 2003), micro approaches examine how people use language in everyday life, not to "mirror" reality but to accomplish things (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In this article, our focus is on both micro and macro approaches, as long as the study design reflects the understanding that the use of language, whether text or talk, plays an active part in the construction of reality. In the past few decades, the much broader, theoretically grounded qualitative turn in gerontology was rapidly followed by the diversification of strategies within the qualitative inquiry, discursive gerontology framing one such tradition. Not all discursive research is qualitative by nature and not all qualitative research is discursive by nature, quantitative data sets can also be used within this tradition. Mere focus on text and talk does not make a study discursive. The purpose of the discursive inquiry is firmly grounded in the theoretical assumption that language does not reflect reality but rather constructs it and is part and parcel of all meaning making in social interactions.

In aging research, there is a growing body of literature interested in the relational and discursive nature of ageism in the context of working life (Spedale, 2019). These types of approaches have received scant attention and still need formal recognition, especially compared with research that uses age as a mere chronological and background variable (Taylor et al., 2016).

Literature Reviews

Wide-ranging reviews have been published on ageism. Most of them are centered on variables and quantitative methods. Although some of these reviews have included qualitative studies, to the best of our knowledge, no review exists with a specific focus on discursive approaches in the field of ageism and working life. Summarizing the previous literature, Levy and Macdonald (2016) published an extensive review on ageism, while Nelson (2016) focused on ageism in health care and the workplace. Harris et al. (2018) analyzed stereotypes, prejudices, and discriminative behaviors associated with older workers. Regarding older workers' retention, reviews exist on age diversity and team outcomes (Schneid et al., 2016); the ability, motivation, and opportunity to continue working (Pak et al., 2019); workplace interventions (Truxillo et al., 2015); and workplace health promotion for older workers (Poscia et al., 2016).

These studies demonstrate that ageism is present in the workforce, produces barriers in recruitment, career advancement, training opportunities, retirement decision, and in the relations between managers, or employers, and employees (Harris et al., 2018). Although the focus of research in this area is primarily on older workers, age discrimination is experienced along all life stages and is especially reported by employees younger than 35 and older than 55 years old (UNECE, 2019). Older workers have gained the most attention, as this age group is a policy target for the national goal of prolonging working life. In this context, ageism may hinder wide-ranging policy efforts by guiding the perception of specific age groups as problematic.

Objective

Looking back at 50 years of research since the term *ageism* was introduced, and focusing on the growing interest in ageism as a relational and discursive phenomenon, the aim of this review is to highlight the contribution of discursive studies and to discuss potential gaps in knowledge and directions for future research in the field of ageism and working life. The review focuses on work-related studies, as discursive approaches have been previously utilized in

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this area and they have proven able to problematize open questions, such as the social construction of older workers as a group, the hidden ideologies in the labor market, and the strategies that workers use in everyday lives to counteract ageism.

Research Design and Methods

This scoping review follows Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) protocol (see Supplemetary Material for Prisma Checklist). This typology was chosen because it allows for the investigation of gaps in knowledge in a field of research that is not clearly established. The review strictly follows the five-step framework, which comprises the following: (a) defining the study purpose, (b) study identification, (c) screening process, (d) data extraction, and (e) summarizing the retrieved data. After the completion of the screening process, a qualitative thematic analysis (Levac et al., 2010) of the selected paper was carried out to examine ways in which overarching topics were conceptualized. This review follows an established protocol and discussions regarding review methodology are beyond the scope of the study.

Step 1: Study Purpose

The guiding research question was: What are the contributions of discursive approaches to the literature on ageism in the working life, since the coinage of the term in 1969, and what insights are provided by different types of discursive approaches? Through this work, we acknowledge the ability of this approach to enhance our understanding of participants' experience, meaning making, and negotiation strategies regarding age stereotypes in working life. Through a comprehensive synthesis, we show possible further directions for research and gaps in knowledge. According to the scoping review protocol, our research question was open and the process data driven. Moreover, the open issue of defining ageism (Palmore, 2015) led the reviewers to analyze which definitions are utilized by researchers.

Step 2: Study Identification

To identify the relevant papers for our review, terms related to ageism and discursive perspective were used to search seven electronic databases (PsycINFO, Web of Science, Social Science Premium Collection, Sage Journals, Wiley Journals, Academic Ultimate Search [EBSCO], and Scopus). The keywords used were as follows: (Ageism OR Agism OR Ageis* OR Agis*) AND (discours* OR communication* OR "social interaction*" OR narrative*). The search string linked to the discursive approach was intended to capture types of discourses and not to retrieve specific methodology and/or methods at this stage. The decision of using only "ageism" as a search term, and not its synonyms, was made to retrieve only papers that clearly contribute to the knowledge around this specific concept and not related phenomena, such as social exclusion or age discrimination. Moreover, no search terms were defined regarding "working life," but this was used as an inclusion criterion in the next step to ensure that no relevant paper was missed. Likewise, no limitation was defined regarding the participants' age, hence the review does not focus solely on older workers but addresses ageism across all stages of working life.

The databases were selected with the help of an information specialist as relevant for contributions in the field of Social Sciences. The search was carried out in March 2019. A record of all the results in each database was kept allowing the reproduction of the review strategy. During the process, the reviewers consulted senior experts and information specialists to optimize the quality of the search method.

Step 3: Screening Process

First, an agreement on the general inclusion and exclusion criteria was reached by the reviewers (Table 1). This helped define the relevant studies for the first step of the screening based on titles and abstracts. Contributions were included if they were published in English in peer-reviewed, international journals and available electronically in full text. The papers chosen focused on working life, including all types of transitions—from study to work, work to retirement, work to unemployment, unemployment to reeducation, and unemployment to employment/self-employment. All work settings were accepted and papers were included in case they analyzed work-related experiences, practices, and contexts. Therefore, health care settings were also included as one type of workplace where ageism unfolds, along with companies, job centers, recruitment agencies, and educational environments. The review focuses on 50 years of research hence the time limit for publication year and data collection was set to 1969, the coinage year of the term *ageism* (Butler, 1969). Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method papers on the text and spoken communication were included if they demonstrated the adoption of discursive study design and a discursive understanding of language.

However, the screening process quickly ran into problematic cases due to the variety of definitions of

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Written in English	Review
Peer-reviewed articles	Intervention study
Discursive approach	Self-reflection/biography
Data source not older than 1969	No focus on ageism
Papers published after 1969	
Focus on working life	

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"discourse" and "discursive approach." For example, some authors consider the methodology of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) part of discursive approaches (McKinlay & McVittie, 2009) because it is utilized to study not only subjective experiences but also the construction of shared meanings and social reality (Smith, 1996; Starks & Trinidad, 2007). Hence, to make the review inclusive rather than exclusive, studies that represented IPA were accepted.

An objective screening was used, as shown in Figure 1: Retrieved papers were screened separately by two reviewers, while the third one resolved conflict when an agreement was not reached. First, the reviewers screened papers by the title and abstract: of 851 papers, 202 passed this step. Second, the reviewers screened the full texts, and a resulting 25 papers were selected. Third, an independent screening process of the references was conducted from the final group of selected papers. The reference lists of the retrieved papers were screened to ensure that all papers of interest were included. Fourth, senior scholars were consulted for recommendations on missing papers. After the third and fourth steps, 14 papers were added. The papers added through hand-screening of references suggest that, within gerontology, discursive approaches are used by a rather small-scale group of authors who tend to cross-reference each other. The addition of papers from experts demonstrates the challenge to pinpoint discursive studies within literature databases via electronic search. Given that defining discourses has proven problematic in the empirical and theoretical literature within the discursive tradition, the same problem is reflected by challenges in the review process at hand. We trust, however, that the final steps taken as an integral part of the scoping review protocol endure its comprehensiveness.

Finally, 39 articles were included. Discussions were held throughout the process to ensure a common understanding, and senior scholars were involved to examine complex scenarios. The reviewers used Covidence (www.covidence.org) as software to facilitate the screening process.

Step 4: Data Extraction

A template was defined through which data were extracted from selected papers. A descriptive-analytic method was chosen to report and collect standard information of the selected studies. The data were charted through the Excel database program, including the following attributes: authors, year of publication, study location, study population, aim of the study, research design, and main results. Per the protocol, a trial extraction was conducted by all reviewers on three randomly selected papers. This procedure ensures the clarity of the template and a common understanding of the categories. Then, the contributions were evenly divided among the reviewers, and each extracted data independently. Once the procedure was complete, reviewers compared results and discussed incongruences.

Step 5: Collocation, Summarizing, and Synthesis

Once the final group of papers was defined, a qualitative thematic analysis of the paper was performed, according to the scoping review protocol (Levac et al., 2010). Here, the analysis employed a data-driven approach to answer the research questions presented, similar to other published scoping reviews (Grenier et al., 2019; Harris et al., 2018). The aim of the present review is to highlight and discuss the contribution of discursive studies to ageism in working life, to highlight the main contents, and to demonstrate the gaps in the knowledge, with no interest in comparing evidence and results. Therefore, papers were not submitted to quality evaluation. The researchers used an iterative approach to perform the analysis. Each of them reviewed one third of the papers and developed categories and themes. The themes were presented and discussed, then presented to a senior expert, after which divergences were debated and final themes defined (Figure 2). Once the reviewers reached an agreement, they reviewed together all the papers to assure the representativeness of the themes. As given in Table 2, papers can include more than one theme. The thematic analysis was the foundation for suggesting gaps in the knowledge, implications, and future lines of research. This method aligns with the qualitative thematic analysis proposed by the protocol (Levac et al., 2010).

Results

Descriptive Summary

Thirty-six papers used a qualitative design, and three used mixed methods. The data sources were as follows: verbal communication (36) and textual material (3). In the articles using spoken communication, the most prevalent method of data collection was interviewing single participants (24 studies), while among the articles using textual material, one paper analyzed a collection of articles and promotional texts, one used newspaper articles, and one investigated a tribunal judgment report. Table 2 presents a description of the selected papers. Although we focused on discursive studies, there was a significant variation in the methods of analysis adopted in the papers. The methods of analysis ranged from descriptive content analysis and thematic analysis to detailed analysis of membership categorization.

Despite the time limit for publication was set to 1969 as an inclusion criterion, studies were published relatively recently: 15 of 39 studies were published after 2015, 7 in 2010–2015, 11 in 2005–2010, and the remaining 6 in 1995–2005. The publication dates are consistent with the discursive turn that happened in the early 1990s in social science and gerontology. Most of the studies were developed in Western world regions: Europe, 21 (of which 15 were in the United Kingdom); Canada, 7; the United States, 4; Australia, 2; Hong Kong, 1; India, 1; Israel, 1; New Zealand, 1; and South Korea, 1.

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Table 2. Descriptive Characteristics of Included Studies ($N = 39$)

First author (year), country	Setting and participants (age, if reported)	Research design: Method of generating data	Research design: Approach/method of analysis	Themes
Allen (2006), the United States	Headquarters of a U.S. manufacturing company; 39 (all women) IT employees, 30 to older than 40 years	Focus group	Descriptive approach and revealed causal mapping (RCM)	1
Ben-Harush (2017), Israel	Health care setting; 20 physicians, 5 nurses, 4 social workers	Focus group	Thematic analysis	
Berger (2006), Canada	Employment office; 30 unemployed individuals actively searching for jobs; 45–65 years old	Semi-structured interviews	Symbolic interactionist perspective	1, 2, and 3
Billings (2006), the United Kingdom	Health care setting; 57 staff members and volunteers been working with older people for at least 3 months	Focus group	Thematic analysis	1
Bowman (2017), Australia	80 unemployed or underemployed people with different occupations (blue and white collar), 45–73 years old	Interviews	Narrative approach	1
Brodmerkel (2019), Australia	Creative advertising agencies, 32 workers, 32–53 years old	In-depth interviews	Discursive approach	1, 2, and 3
Crăciun (2018), Germany	23 unemployed Russian and Turkish immigrants, 40–62 years old	Episodic interviews	Thematic analysis	1
Dixon (2012), the United States	60 workers with different occupations, 19–65 years old	Active interviews	Hermeneutic phenomenology and thematic analysis	2
Faure (2015), France	140 recruiters, mean 41 years old	Mixed method, written statements about job applicants	Discursive psychology	2
George (1998), the United Kingdom	Educational setting; 11 women training to be teachers, 33–50 years old	Interviews	Thematic analysis	1
Gould (2015), Canada	Educational setting; 20 nursing students (third year)	Focus group	Thematic analysis	2
Granleese (2006), the United Kingdom	Academia; 48 academics aged younger than 30 to older than 50 years	In-depth interviews	Content and interpretative phenomenological analysis	1
Grima (2011), France	Several sites of the same company in the field of production of studies; 12 managers and 40 employees, older than 45 years	Biographical narrative interviews	Case study on organizations and descriptive analysis	1 and 3
Handy (2007), New Zealand	Recruitment agency; 12 unemployed women and 5 recruiters, 50–55 years old	Interviews	Feminist studies and thematic analysis	1 and 2
Herdman (2002), Hong Kong, China	Health care setting; 96 nursing students, 19–22 years; 9 professional nurses, 24–36 years old	Mixed method, interviews	Content analysis and discourse analysis	3
Higashi (2012), the United States	Health care setting; 10 teams of physicians-in-training	Semi-structured interviews, group discussion, participant observation, and auto-ethnography	Narrative analysis	1 and 2
Kanagasabai (2016), India	Print media and TV company; 17 (all women) journalists in their 20s, 30s, and 40s	Interviews	Feminist studies and descriptive approach	1

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Table 2. Continued

		Research design		
First author (year), country	Setting and participants (age, if reported)	Method of generating data	Approach/method of analysis	Themes
Klein (2010), Canada	Health care settings; 16 occupational therapists, 2–28 years of work experience	Focused written questions and semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis and constant comparative analysis	1
Laliberte-Rudman (2009), Canada	72 newspaper articles on work and retirement	Textual material	Critical discourse analysis	2
(Laliberte-Rudman 2015a), Canada	30 workers and retirees, 45–83 years old	Interviews	Narrative analysis	2
Laliberte-Rudman (2015b), Canada	17 retirees, mean age 58.6 years	Two-step narrative interviews	Critical narrative analysis	1 and 3
Maguire (1995), the United Kingdom	Educational setting; 7 older women working in education	Unstructured interviews (5) and written accounts (2)	Descriptive approach	1
Maguire (2001), the United Kingdom	Educational setting; 7 women teachers, 49–65 years old	Biographical narrative, in-depth interviews	Descriptive approach	1
McMullin (2001), Canada	Garment industry; 79 individuals, retired, displaced and employed workers, age not defined	Focus group	Thematic and categories analysis	1
McVittie (2003), the United Kingdom	12 human resources managers or recruitment managers of 23 medium to large enterprises operating on a U.K.-wide basis, in their 20s–50s	Semi-structured interviews	Discourse analysis	2
McVittie (2008), the United Kingdom	Employment office; 15 unemployed or nonemployed people, aged older than 40 years	Interviews	Discursive psychology	1 and 2
Moore (2009), the United Kingdom	33 workers (all women) or unemployed, older than 50 years	Interviews	Intersectional and narrative approach	1
Niemistö (2016), Finland	9 Finnish companies in growth sectors; 53 workers at different levels	Survey and interviews, qualitative fieldwork	Case studies, discursive approach	2
Noonan (2005), the United States	37 workers or actively seeking jobs; 56–77 years old	Interviews	Thematic content analysis	1
Ojala (2016), Finland	23 working-class men, 50–70 years old	Sequential thematic personal interviews	Discourse and membership categorization analysis	2
Phillipson (2019), the United Kingdom	Local government and train operating company; 82 participants, including human resources professionals, line managers, and older employees (aged 50 to older than 65 years)	Documentary evidence, focus group, semi-structured interviews	Case study approach, thematic analysis	3
Porcellato (2010), the United Kingdom	56 economically active and inactive people, whether voluntarily or involuntarily, older than 50 years	Semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	1 and 2
Quintrell (2007), the United Kingdom	Educational setting; 30 teacher trainees, older than 35 years	In-depth and semi-structured interviews and questionnaire	Thematic analysis	1
Riach (2007), the United Kingdom	8 articles and promotional texts of one company's recruitment campaign	Textual material	Critical discourse analysis, interpretative repertoire analysis	2 and 3
Romaioli (2019), Italy	78 economically active and inactive adults, 18–85 years old	Episodic interviews	Narrative and content analysis	2 and 3
Samra (2015), the United Kingdom	Health care setting; 25 medical students and doctors	In-depth and semi-structured interviews	Thematic analysis	1 and 2

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Table 2. Continued

First author (year), country	Setting and participants (age, if reported)	Research design: Method of generating data	Research design: Approach/method of analysis	Themes
Spedale (2014), the United Kingdom	Employment tribunal's final judgment statement on age discrimination case	Textual material	Critical discourse analysis	2
Spedale (2019), the United Kingdom	1 male teacher in late career life	Interview	Intersectional approach and deconstruction analysis	2
Yang (2012), South Korea	34 workers (bridge workers) and nonworkers (permanent retirees), 50–70 years old	Semi-structured and in-depth interviews	Descriptive approach	1 and 2

The organizational contexts vary from health settings, to private companies, to public job centers. The age of participants selected varied greatly (see details in Table 2). In 16 of 39 studies, participants were selected on the basis of age to represent the older workers' group. Age thresholds varied greatly among these studies, with a range between 40 and 80 years old. The fact that most papers were not just about older workers is coherent with the definition of ageism (to be noted that all participants were older than 18 years). Nevertheless, the amount of papers interested in setting an age limit shows how the field is still primarily oriented toward older workers.

In the following sections, the main findings of the analysis are presented: first, an outline of how the term ageism is defined in the accepted papers is provided, followed by the results of the qualitative thematic analysis.

Table 3. Definition of Ageism

Ageism (n. 6)	Prejudice of one age group towards another.
Tripartite ageism (n. 1)	Stereotypes, prejudice and discriminatory behaviors on the basis of age.
Gendered ageism (n. 9)	Age and gender are regarded as systems that interact to shape life situations in ways that often discriminate against women.
New ageism (n. 4)	Discursive strategy in policies that, while promoting inclusion of older people, tend to marginalize and categorize them.
New ageism (n. 1)	The shift from fear of aging toward fear of aging with disability, stressing the fear of functionality loss often associated with aging.
Social ageism (n. 1)	Systematic stereotyping leading to age discrimination.
Organizational ageism (n. 1)	A less visible form of gendered ageism that is linked with the different features of generations in the work context and management's difficulties to acknowledge them.

Note: 17 papers of 39 do not present a clear definition of ageism.

Definitions of Ageism

Definitions of ageism easily influence researchers' perspective, which is especially important when dealing with discursive approaches, as reflecting the meaning-making process of social phenomena. The definitions presented in the papers are given in Table 3, warning that not all authors explicate it. Synthesizing the definitions of ageism also contributes to the open discussion on the phenomenon, which is still largely subject to disagreement.

Butler's (1969) original definition of *ageism* was cited in 6 of 39 papers (Bowman et al., 2017; Grima, 2011; Higashi et al., 2012; Laliberte-Rudman, 2015b; McMullin & Marshall, 2001; Ojala et al., 2016). However, even when the researchers did not specifically cite Butler, they often defined ageism as stereotypical beliefs and discriminating behavior based on age (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019; Faure & Ndobo, 2015). The tripartite definition of ageism promoted by the WHO (2018), comprises "stereotypes, prejudice and discriminatory behaviors on the base of age," was utilized only by Ben-Harush et al. (2017, p. 40).

Nine papers focused on gendered ageism (Granleese & Sayer, 2006; Handy & Davy, 2007; Kanagasabai, 2016; Maguire, 1995, 2001; Moore, 2009; Niemistö et al., 2016; Ojala et al., 2016; Spedale et al., 2014). This term was introduced to prevent the discursive dominance of ageism over sexism in the analysis of stereotypes toward women (Spedale et al., 2014). It is noteworthy that only one paper refers to gendered ageism by analyzing a specifically male perspective (Ojala et al., 2016). Niemistö et al. (2016) define the concept in the organizational context and call it "organizational ageism"—one of the less visible forms of gendered ageism that is linked with the different features of generations in the work context and management's difficulties to acknowledge them.

New ageism is another extension of the ageism concept (Laliberte-Rudman, 2015a; Laliberte-Rudman & Molke, 2009; McVittie et al., 2003; Riach, 2007), which is utilized with two different meanings. First, it refers to a discursive strategy of marginalization based on age that increases inequality under the apparent cover of egalitarianism (McVittie

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et al., 2003). Under this concept, authors show that diversity policies, which are produced to promote older workers' inclusion, have a side effect of categorizing and separating this age group from others, highlighting its perceived homogeneity and negative common features. Second, (Laliberte-Rudman 2015a) described new ageism as the shift from fear of aging toward fear of aging with disability, stressing the fear of functionality loss often associated with aging.

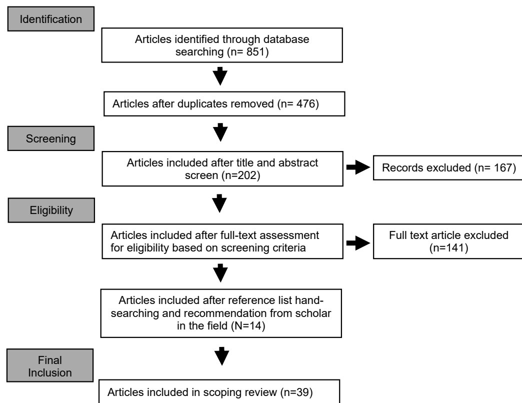

Figure 1. Flow chart of the screening process.

Qualitative Thematic Analysis

The analysis revealed three main themes, which are as follows: (a) experiences of ageism, (b) social construction of age and ageist ideologies, and (c) strategies to counteract (dilute) ageism. Each paper presents one or more of these themes, as given in Table 2. A representation of themes and subcontents is shown in Figure 2.

Experiences of ageism

This theme includes papers where researchers give voice to participants to describe their experiences of stereotypical treatment and discrimination because of their age. These studies document how ageism takes place in participants' accounts of their everyday working life. The subcontents included in this theme are context, subjects and intersectionality, and causes accounted by participants (individual meaning-making process).

Context.—Thirteen studies reported that workers experience ageism in various contexts, including access to training and promotion opportunities compared with younger colleagues (Grima, 2011) and reeducation and job search (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019; George & Maguire, 1998; Maguire, 2001; McVittie et al., 2008; Moore, 2009; Noonan, 2005; Porcellato et al., 2010; Quintrell & Maguire, 2007; Yang, 2012). Two studies specifically looked at the environment of the unemployment agency (Berger, 2006; Handy & Davy, 2007) and one focused on

1. Experiences of ageism

1.1 Context :
- Training and promotion (n.1)
- Re-education and job search (n.9)
- Unemployment agency (n.2)
- Near retirement trajectories (n.1)

1.2 Subject and intersectionality :
- Younger women (n. 1)
- Older women (n. 5)
- Men (n.1)
- Class and ethnicity (n.1)
- Loss of functionality (n. 3)

1.3 Causes (personally reported):
- Slowing body (n.1)
- Decreased work ability (n.1)
- Health problems (n.1)
- Low skills (n. 2)
- Loss of functionality (n. 3)
- Over qualification (n. 2)
- Resist authority (n.2)
- Clients' age (n.2)

2. Social construction of age and ageist ideology

2.1 Aging as a hindering process:
- Ageless society and perpetual beauty (n. 6)
- Ideology of youthfulness (n.2)
- Active ageing (n.1)

2.2 Normative construction of life course:
- Failing to achieve expectations for age group (n. 4)

2.3 Othering older workers:
- Downgrading older workers (n.4)
- Labelling older workers (n.1)
- Structural barriers (n.1)

2.4 Organisational ageist discourse:
- Stereotypes against senior employee (n.4)
- Inclusive policies labelling (n.1)
- Team fit (n.1)
- Generations (n.1)

3. Strategies used to counteract, or dilute, ageism

3.1 Coping st rategies:
- Social support (n.2)
- Positive aspect outside work (n.1)
- Maintain youthful appearance (n.1)

3.2 Discursive strategies:
- Rhetoric counternarratives based on willpower, denial of aging, potentiality of aging (n.1)
- Identity negotiation (n.2)
- Resigned resilience (n.1)
- Positive representation (n.1)

3.3 Organisational strategies:
- Equality policies and counter-effect (n.1)

Figure 2. Description of themes.

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the occupational possibilities near retirement age (Laliberte-Rudman, 2015b).

Subjects and intersectionality.—Women's experiences receive major attention in the selected papers because the intersection between gender and age increases the vulnerability of the group to stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. Experiences of ageism are reported by women of all ages: Young women report being perceived as incompetent by male colleagues in information technology jobs (Allen et al., 2006), while older women sustain that looks and unattractiveness represent a major reason for discrimination (Granleese & Sayer, 2006, Handy & Davy, 2007; Kanagasabai, 2016; Maguire, 1995; Moore, 2009). Regarding male experience, Ojala et al. (2016) analyzed how men are not totally immune to ageism, but rather, experiences and interpretations of ageism are structured by the interactional context in question. Acts and expressions interpreted as discriminative in one context become defused in others, for example, in family contexts, positive ageism represents a naturalized order of things within intergenerational relations. The intersectional perspective on ageism highlights that, besides age and gender, class and ethnicity also influence people's working lives (Bowman et al., 2017; Moore, 2009). In health care settings, the intersection of ageism and loss of functionality is referred by participants as an incentive to stereotypical treatment (Billings, 2006; Higashi et al., 2012; Samra et al., 2015).

Causes.—In the work-life accounts, research participants often explain ageism with reference to their personal attributes, such as slowing bodies (Bowman et al., 2017), decreased work ability (McMullin & Marshall, 2001), increased health problems (Crăciun et al., 2018), and low skills and ability to learn new things (Crăciun et al., 2018; McMullin & Marshall, 2001). Beyond these negative attributes, research participants have explained ageism in relation to their overqualification and the expensiveness that comes with experience (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019; Noonan, 2005) or expertise that enables them to resist management's authorities (Bowman et al., 2017; Moore, 2009).

Working life experiences of ageism are not only related to workers' age but also the age of the clients that professionals encounter. In health care settings, professionals report a shared stereotypical perception of older patients as low value, difficult, and boring. This results in professionals working with older people experiencing structural ageism in resource allocation among patient groups (Klein & Liu, 2010; Samra et al., 2015).

Social construction of age and ageist ideologies

Discourses and ideologies regarding age are collaboratively constructed in our society, and they become tangible in social interaction. In this section, the included papers are synthesized regarding the type of construction researchers provide about age, workers, and ageism in society. The grounding of this theme is in the social constructionist perspective (Burr, 2015), through which age—and consequently, ageism—is understood as socially constructed through discourses and social interactions. The contents included in this theme represent different types of ideologies and social construction regarding ageism in the working life: aging as a hindering process, the normative construction of the life course, the "othering" of older workers, and the organizational ageist discourses.

Aging as a hindering process.—Numerous papers claim that ageism derives from the social construction of aging as a hindering process and the obsession of our society to be ageless and aspire for perpetual youthfulness and beauty (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019; Laliberte-Rudman, 2015a; Laliberte-Rudman & Molke, 2009; Romaioli & Contarello, 2019; Spedale, 2019; Spedale et al., 2014). Spedale et al.'s (2014) analysis of an age discrimination case law report from a U.K. tribunal showed that youth ideologies are reified in the workplace and used to justify rejuvenation discourses and practices. Handy and Davy (2007) showed that the internalized ideology of youthfulness sustains female recruiters' fear of growing old and provokes repulsion toward older jobseekers. Through a discourse analysis of recruiters' accounts, Faure and Ndobo (2015) found that, if professionals rate applicants similarly on a scale, their discourses unfold gender- and age-based discrimination, although these phenomena are overtly condemned. Through an analysis of Canadian newspaper articles, Laliberte-Rudman and Molke (2009) showed that governmental policies related to "active aging" contribute to the idea that older persons need to be perpetually active and healthy; this will help meet neoliberal governments' economic need. In health care settings, negative beliefs about age influence career trajectories of nurses, doctors, and therapists, who become reluctant to specialize in gerontology (Gould et al., 2015; Higashi et al., 2012; Samra et al., 2015).

Normative construction of life course.—Another societal discourse that fosters a negative attribution of aging is the normative construction of the life course and the connected fear of failing to meet the career stages that society has established for each social group. Failing to achieve the expectations associated with each age group (education, work, family, and retirement) or trying to deviate from a fixed pattern (e.g., starting education in older age) engenders feelings of self-exclusion, marginalization, and negative self-identity (Berger, 2006; Dixon, 2012; McVittie et al., 2008; Romaioli & Contarello, 2019).

"Othering" older workers.—The social construction of the normative life course contributes to the construction of older workers as a specific category, "othered" from alternative age and work groups. Older workers who have lost their jobs face greater difficulties in reentering the job

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market because they deviate from the traditional career path that assumes an uninterrupted progression until retirement. To facilitate the transition from unemployment to employment, job centers' professionals group and label older workers, attributing to them features that would make them, supposedly, more appreciable by employers. According to Berger (2006), older workers are depicted as calm, elastic, and loyal. These features match the types of positions available for them in the present job market, which are entry-level soft jobs that require no expertise. This characterization is used strategically to downgrade older workers to these types of jobs; however, it contradicts common stereotypes related to older people, who are usually described as inelastic and not prone to change (Berger, 2006; Handy & Davy, 2007; Laliberte-Rudman & Molke, 2009; Riach, 2007). In unemployment center practices, professionals reify negative stereotypes when they create separate training for seniors (Berger, 2006). Through the discursive strategies of depicting older workers as calm, flexible, and loyal, organizations and institutions justify the downgrading of precarious jobs in late career stages. Therefore, ageism creates structural constraints for older people, reducing their actions and choices within labor markets (Yang, 2012). This analysis sustains that labor force policies, especially in the Western world, are generally constructed for healthy, White, middle-class men, which problematizes the intersections of age with gender, disability, and social class.

Organizational ageist discourses.—In organizations, ageist ideologies are reified in the systematic preference of younger groups in training and promotion, as discussed in the previous section. This imbalance reinforces the discourse proposed by management that senior employees are less creative and physically and cognitively unable to keep up with firms' dynamics (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019; Faure & Ndobo, 2015; Porcellato et al., 2010; Yang, 2012). Even when organizations have inclusive policies in place, these can be used to "other" older workers (McVittie et al., 2003). In recruitment, the preference for younger workers is justified by the "team fit" discourse, through which older workers are denied access to jobs because they would not fit the young climate of organizations (Riach, 2007). The social meaning and construction of age and generations in the work context were analyzed by Niemistö et al. (2016). It was found that workers use different discourses to talk about age and generations at work: older workers emphasize physical hindrance due to age, retirement trajectories, missing generations within the workplace and age gaps, and organizational silence about age diversity. Inside the studied organizations, age was collectively constructed with both positive (experience) and negative (embodied physical difficulties) features. Likewise, generations were mental states built both on personal experiences and collective features of memory as organizational groups.

Strategies used to counteract, or dilute, ageism

This theme synthesizes the strategies that individuals, as well as organizations, implement to counteract ageism. In the previous themes, structural barriers and societal ageism were addressed while here, we emphasize the negotiation that might happen at a more intrapersonal and interpersonal level. Nevertheless, systemic ageism is present, and personal strategies take place within a workplace that enables or hinders them. The micro and macro levels are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, discursive approaches are always context based and influenced by the societal discourse and ideologies, presented in Theme 2. The contents analyzed in the included papers comprised the following: coping strategies that participants proposed as their solution to fight ageism; discursive strategies used in interaction, through which participants negotiated ageism and rejected negative attribution in talk; and organizational strategies that addressed the phenomenon.

Coping strategies.—The main coping resource reported by research participants is social support (Berger, 2006; Grima, 2011). Grima (2011) shows that older employees use social support to increase the sense of membership to the work community and personal value. Unemployed adults use social support outside work, from family or unemployment classes, as a resource to fight ageism: It reduces the stress associated with the loss of a job and social contacts (Berger, 2006). Hence, the author suggests that the creation of support groups is strategic for unemployment offices. In their everyday work, older workers claim to use three different strategies—accepting the discrimination and focusing on positive aspects of life outside work, overtly fighting the discrimination in the workplace, and valuing their contribution to the organization (Grima, 2011). Another coping strategy reported by research participants is maintaining a youthful appearance (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019).

Discursive strategies.—Regarding discursive strategies, Romaioli and Contarello (2019) mentioned rhetorical strategies used by people at different ages to counteract the detrimental narrative of being "too old for." They described three counter-narratives based on willpower, denial of aging, and discovering the potentiality of aging. Through these measures, dominant discourses on ageism may be adapted, negotiated, or resisted. In the employment center, negotiating a new identity is another strategy to counteract ageism used by people when they perceive that they are getting older or others label them as such. Berger (2006) shows that, when faced with age stereotypes in retiring, older workers either maintain their work identity and reinforce its value or tend to shift toward a new identity, that of retirees. Laliberte-Rudman (2015b) looked at how older people position themselves regarding their age and noted that internalizing ageism changes older workers' relation to work, facilitating labor market detachment. These studies highlight how identity negotiation might be affected by

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internalized and subconscious ageist attitudes, which are reinforced by the institutions.

Brodmerkel and Barker (2019) studied older workers in the advertising industry and found that, to combat ageism in the field, older workers developed "resigned resilience." Older workers continued to try to make a living in the advertising industry while acknowledging the ageist structures of their field. Employing discursive strategies, they positioned themselves as having "mature strategic experience" compared with the youthful creativeness of younger workers.

People who work with older people also use strategies to dilute ageism. Herdman (2002) showed that nursing students can challenge ageist discourses by portraying themselves and their career choices in ways that value positive features associated with aging and the value of working with older patients.

Organizational strategies.—Organizations develop strategies to counteract ageism in the workplace. In contrast, equality policies can have a detrimental effect as they may increase managers' fear of behaving inappropriately toward older workers, and therefore, enhance their exclusion (Phillipson et al., 2019), sustaining and reifying ageist ideologies. Managers can be too afraid of acting in the wrong way toward older workers, not enacting the values of respect and inclusion; as a result, they prefer to avoid managing such employees.

Discussion and Implications

This scoping review set out to synthesize the distinct contributions made by discursive studies on ageism in working life. The analysis pronouncedly highlighted the selected approach's ability to advance knowledge in the field of ageism and the gaps in the knowledge on two levels, namely, topic and research approach.

Despite some existing reviews published on ageism and work, this is the first, to the best of our knowledge, to zoom in on the specificity of discursive approaches along the continuum of working life. Most studies in the field of ageism in the workforce have given major attention to quantitative research and older workers. Within the tradition of discursive research, the papers selected provide additional and innovative information on the construction of age and ageism as a social category and how this construction is embedded in the social practices within and outside the workplace. The discursive investigation unfolds the hidden ideologies in working life which constituted the grassroot of ageism; these ideologies connect the organizational level to the societal one, demonstrating the interlinks among micro, meso, and macro levels. This connection is especially visible in Theme 2, while the reification of ideologies and discourses is visible in Themes 1 and 3, in the application to experiences and strategies. Theme 1 is more descriptive, but, compared to previous reviews, still interestingly emphasizes the portrayal of ageism solely as perceived by workers, highlighting the importance of giving voice to participants. Thanks to this point of view, this study brings to light how workers create a justification for ageism and how they give both external and internal attribution to age discrimination, demonstrating the impact of internalization of ageism also in the labor market. Compared to other reviews, this study demonstrates how work-based relations and discourses engender ageism and its reproduction at a personal as well as organizational level and how discourse is rooted in societal ideologies. This finding is valid both for younger and older workers; in fact, it is supported by the diversity of participants' age, underscoring that ageism affects all persons. Moreover, chronologically old as well as young participants use the discursive strategies, presented in Theme 3. This finding shows that age and ageism are contextual, and feeling old or young is not defined by year of birth but is a part of personal identity, which is fluid and influenced by social relations, environments, and actions. Persons do things with words, they can do ageism as well as undo and challenge it: These dynamics can be studied mainly through discursive approaches, as this review highlights.

Implications

The included papers are part of a stream of research that supports a shift in analyzing the phenomenon of ageism and provides novel insight into policymaking. On the one hand, the mainstream literature often considers older workers as an assigned category based on chronological age and a group victim of a perpetual process of discrimination enacted by employers. On the other hand, the discursive approach carefully unpacks the dynamic connection between age and identity, looking at how workers reject or negotiate age-based labels. In this field, researchers view ageism as enacted in the social process—how it is created, maintained, and reproduced in interactions, considering the use of age and its meaning in the work context (Spedale, 2019).

The review showed that workers, of all ages, adapt to ageist discourses available in society. These are rooted in a youthfulness ideology and reinforced by a normative life course (Romaioli & Contarello, 2019). This study highlighted how some policies that aim at fighting ageism fail in their mission because they originate from the same ideology which they want to combat (Laliberte-Rudman, 2015a, 2015b; Laliberte-Rudman & Molke, 2009). In working life, persons are labeled as older or younger when they enter a certain chronological age. This labeling attaches a predefined identity to a single person and thus reinforces negative age self-stereotypes.

This review yields views on how negative attitudes attached to age are both enforced and challenged in and through situated interactions. The analysis of discourses sheds light on the negotiation of positive age identity in

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the work context and shows how persons can respond to ageism in their everyday lives, freeing themselves from the normalized life stages and focusing on the positive aspects of aging. The contribution of the discursive approach is to highlight how persons do and undo ageism in situ, with no intention of neglecting macro- and meso-dynamics, while bridging macro and micro approaches in gerontology (Nikander, 2009). The results will inform policymakers and practitioners that counteracting ageism in the everyday accounts of working life is possible, but it is important to create an enabling environment that does not exclude people based on their age and that deconstructs the ideology that depicts aging as negative. To achieve this goal, further research is needed that engages in different approaches and methods. In the next section, future directions for research are outlined.

Gaps in the Knowledge

Our review shows that the field clearly needs to continue tackling the notion of ageism in novel and inventive ways while remaining reflective on the choice of methodology and limitations therein. We identified areas that we suggest need improvement, which are as follows: studies on intersectionality beyond female gender and age; heterogeneity of age groups, from young workers to different subgroups in older workers; definitions of ageism; and deconstruction of the ageist ideology. Studies focusing on the first theme, "experiences of ageism," report the ability of discursive studies to give voice to participants and unfold the situated dynamics of individually encountered aspects of ageism in working life. One aspect that clearly needs further research is intersectionality, including a wide range of social categories. Whereas the double jeopardy of age and gender faced by women has been extensively analyzed, male perceptions of ageism in the workforce form the core of just one paper in this review (Ojala et al., 2016). While social dimensions such as ethnicity, culture, class, ability, functionality, and their intersection with age and gender do, to a degree, feature in the selection of papers studied here, future research could enhance our understanding of the diverse and increasingly aging workforce.

One further point concerns the clear need for a more detailed problematization of the category age itself. It is noteworthy that even when the approach is discursive, very few papers deconstruct the category "older workers" itself (Spedale, 2019). Various authors, following the standard research process, sample their participants based on chronological age, labeling the ones older than 50 years old as older workers. This is congruent with the literature and policies on old age in the workforce (starting at 50 or 55 years old), but it does not allow us to understand how organizations or individuals construct this categorization. Subsequently, there is a lack of research on ageism and younger workers, or even more, studies that investigate age along its continuum. This is incoherent and inconsistent with the definition of ageism—a phenomenon directed toward all age groups—but it is consistent with previous critiques about the conceptualization of older people as an open-ended category in gerontology (Bytheway, 2005). Hence, further studies in this vein could tap into the complexity of the phenomenon of ageism on different levels (individual, group, organization, and society) and elucidate its different features (cognitive, affective, and behavioral).

Within research methods, the main gap we identified was the lack of diversity in data generation and analysis in the discursive field. The accepted papers predominantly utilized interviews (24 of 39 papers). Hence, inside the discursive perspective, there is clearly room for research based on a wider range of data, such as naturally occurring encounters (recordings, video recordings, and textual material) or quantitative discursive studies. For example, the analysis of talk in interaction would enhance the understanding of ageism not as a natural category but as accomplished in situated social communications (Krekula et al., 2018). This approach has received recognition in the study of age and aging (Aronsson, 1997; Krekula et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2014), but empirical studies on ageism in everyday work encounters are still rare.

From a methodological standpoint, there is a clear absence of longitudinal studies. Although qualitative longitudinal data sets are not traditionally approached from a discursive perspective, this is an open direction for further research. It has already been highlighted that investigations based on longitudinal studies are needed to understand how ageism can be experienced in transitions in later life (Bytheway, 2005; Harris et al., 2018; Levy & Macdonald, 2016).

Limitations

This scoping review has carefully followed a systematic step-by-step approach, but some limitations need to be acknowledged. First, the definition of search terms, which are always limited as is the nature of a scoping review, sets an initial barrier to the certainty of retrieving all the relevant contributions. Accordingly, the screening of reference and consultation with senior experts are a fundamental integrative step that helped to include relevant literature. Second, the choice of databases sets an objective limitation on the retrieval of published papers. Third, the inclusion of only electronically accessible papers in English is a constraint for the review regarding the publication date, as older publications may not be uploaded in electronic databases, and the country of origin, as relevant papers may have been published in languages other than English. Nevertheless, to the best of our knowledge, this is the first review focusing on the discursive approach in the field of ageism and working life. The retrieved papers clearly show the substantial contribution of the discursive turn in social science and of the cultural turn in gerontology (Twigg & Martin, 2015), as well as the ability of the included approaches to

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expand the understanding of the nuances of ageism while challenging some of the mainstream conceptualizations.

In conclusion, ageism research has clearly flourished since the coinage of the term, and the discursive turn helped produce a notable shift in approaches, data sets, and analytic stances. Numerous research areas, topics, and fresh research designs remain to be developed and taken up. Further problematization of age, its intersectional aspects, and the difference between chronological and socially constructed age—young or old—remains a beneficial framework that yields nuanced knowledge on the everyday conceptualization and meaning making related to age and ageism in the work context.

Supplementary Material

Supplementary data are available at *The Gerontologist* online.

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Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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Doing age in the workplace: Exploring age categorization in performance appraisal interviews

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Research Paper

Doing age in the workplace: Exploring age categorisation in performance appraisal

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ABSTRACT

Ageism in the manager–employee relationship is one of the main obstacles towards an age-inclusive workplace. Ageism in the labour market is rooted in the use of age as an organising principle of employment relations. This article contributes to the study of ageism in the workplace by investigating how stages of life, as normalised age categories, are mobilised through discursive practices in performance appraisals. Based on the analysis of video recordings of actual performance appraisal interviews at an Italian labour union, three discursive ways of 'doing age' – or of how age, as a constructed social category, is performed and enacted – were identified: quantification (e.g. number of years in the organisation), 'ageing within the organisation' and age-group membership identification (e.g. 'young' vs. 'old'). The analysis suggests that stages of life categories and age attributes are 'done' in social interactions and employed by both employees and managers as shared culture to sustain ongoing organisational activities, thereby reproducing discriminatory age norms and stereotypes. The study demonstrates how the ordering power of the stages of life categories is situated in organisational culture and challenges the implementation of equal and inclusive workplace policies.

Introduction

In the work context, age has been identified as an ordering element that influences transitions, workplace hierarchies and career stages (Fineman, 2014). Age also has divisive power in that it leads to the construction of age-based groups whose organisational features are rooted in stereotypical views of ageing as an impairing process (Thomas, Hardy, Cutcher, & Ainsworth, 2014). These ordering and divisive properties of age shape employer–employee relationships: for example, Loretto and White (2006) found that Scottish managers employed general negative stereotypes about older workers in making decisions about recruitment and performance evaluation. In line with Taylor and Walker (1998), they also argued that employers' attitudes towards older workers do not relate to specific characteristics of the work context itself but are, instead, based on the negative attributes socially attached to older persons as a homogenous group.

With policy makers and legislators advocating for interventions to prolong working life, research has analysed which age stereotypes are present in the labour force (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2007; Harris, Krygsman, Waschenko, & Laliberte Rudman, 2018; Solem, 2020), how they influence managerial processes, such as recruitment (McVittie, McKinlay, & Widdicombe, 2003; Riach, 2007), and which anti-ageist management practices can increase older workers' employment prospects (Clark & Ritter, 2020). From the perspective that advocates overcoming stereotypical views of older workers and gaining better understanding of the relational and discursive nature of ageism (Spedale, Coupland, & Tempest, 2014), several scholars have directed attention to the role of discourse and discursive resources in constructing 'older workers' and in the maintenance and reproduction of ageism and ageist practices (for a review on ageist discourses in working life, see Previtali, Keskinen, Niska, & Nikander, 2020). Within this strand of research, scholars have also focused on critically investigating and challenging the production of the 'natural' and 'normal' in organisational life by studying the normative notions of age (Krekula, 2019; Romaioli & Contarello, 2021).

Past research has significantly increased our understanding of how ageist ideologies play out in the construction of older age, both in general and in the context of work. This has fed scholarly interest in investigating the 'othering process' of older workers and in exposing how age as a category is constructed – often in intersection with gender (Krekula, Nikander, & Wilińska, 2018; McVittie et al., 2003). Attention

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has also been directed to exploring how policies supporting longer working life tend to homogenise older workers (Krekula & Vickerstaff, 2020), such as showing a privileged view of ageing, neglecting growing differences in longevity and widening inequalities.

Despite these research efforts, how age as a social category is constructed in the workplace at the micro level of interactions between managers and employees remains a largely unexplored topic. Extant studies focusing on mundane or medical social encounters have shed some light on the mechanisms underpinning the in-situ construction of older age, mostly relying on a fine-grained analysis of talk and bodies. For example, by analysing the everyday conversations of older women at a hair salon, Heinrichsmeier (2018) demonstrated that older age can be resisted or, indeed, invoked in the same conversation in relation to different interactional business: older women would use 'being old' to invite sympathy and justify claims about lack of energy in daily life but resist this very same categorisation by others when accounting for injuries in later life. The possibility that individuals can both adhere to and resist stereotypical views of ageing in the same conversation indicates the complex nature of the active negotiation of older age as identity in discursive encounters (Kaufman, 1986). More specifically, we suggest that although social interactions have been identified as the setting where ageist discourse and practices are situated, very little attention has been directed to investigating how they actually – indeed, agentically – shape the construction of age at work and their consequences for the construction of older workers' identity and equal employment relations.

Accordingly, our study draws from ethnomethodology and a discursive approach in applying the analytical framework of membership categorisation analysis (MCA) to investigate how the managers and employees of an Italian labour union 'did' age in the situated interaction of performance appraisal interviews (PAIs). Our findings are threefold. First, different categories of age – namely, the quantification of years on the job/in the organisation, 'ageing within the organisation' and age-group membership identification (e.g. 'old' vs. 'young') – are mobilised in the negotiation of different aspects of job evaluation. Second, age categorisation is done differently to account for positive or negative evaluation depending on the performance item under discussion and on the role of the appraiser or appraisee. Third, age categorisation is rooted in the shared culture of the social and organisational setting under study. Overall, our study contributes to the literature on ageism in the workplace by moving beyond the notion of social interaction as 'context' to reveal the complex dynamics of 'doing age' as a process of social construction.

Theoretical framework: the discursive construction of age groups in the workplace

Interest in ageing as a socially constructed phenomenon is one of the most enduring threads within social and cultural approaches to age studies (Coupland & Coupland, 1993). Discursive gerontology and studies that fall under this umbrella term (e.g. Heinrichsmeier, 2018; Nikander, 2009) challenge previous empiricism and support the notion that age should be conceptualised as an 'ongoing performance' (Cromdal, Danby, Emmison, Osvaldsson, & Cobb-Moore, 2018; Poulios, 2009) and as a social process informed by cultural knowledge (Nikander, 2002; Paoletti, 2020). At the intersection of social psychology and the discourse analysis tradition lies discursive psychology, the perspective adopted for this study (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). This theoretical and analytical approach 'treats talk and text as an object of study itself, and psychological concepts as socially managed and consequential in interaction' (Wiggins, 2017, p. 4). This means, in this approach, attitudes towards age(ing) are only accessible to researchers as actions in text and talk, whereas they would be regarded as reflections of inner psychological processes or states within cognitivist approaches.

The cultural connotation of age in the workplace is rooted in the organising power of this category (Fineman, 2014); this is typically disregarded by professionals on the bases that age is a natural, biological feature of the workforce and that organisational processes are age-neutral. The ordering power of chronological age is, instead, constituted in the institutionalisation of the life course and through the normativity of life stages (Kohli, 2007). The standardisation power of life stages within organisations has been conceptualised as chrononormativity (Riach, Rumens, & Tyler, 2014). Chrononormativity is a critical way of 'exploring the temporal orders inscribed in organisational life' (Riach et al., 2014, p. 1678) and is grounded in the socially accepted idea that there is a 'right' time for clearly identifiable life and work stages, including partnering, parenting and caring and, respectively, career progression, promotion and flexible working. Krekula (2019) showed how the 'socio-temporal order' (p. 2290) in a Swedish foundry reduced the on and off time of older workers as an abnormality because mobility was normatively assigned to younger workers. This reveals how organisational practices and cultures are situated in wider societal age norms that are reflected and reinforced, as also shown by Spedale et al. (2014) in their investigation of the ageist use of broadcasting routines in a British television channel.

The discursive construction of older and younger workers is ideologically biased and materially affects those targeted by this labelling as well as those excluded – hence everyone (Ainsworth & Hardy, 2007). Stokoe and Edwards (2009) argued that identity categories, including age, are used by individuals to accomplish social actions and produce self-identities in everyday life. In organisations, categories such as 'older' or 'younger' workers become impersonal or supra-personal: they label a group of individuals with distinguishing characteristics and assign to them a specific set of rules, expectations and organisational purposes (Curchod, Patriotta, & Neysen, 2014). Berger (2006) highlighted how older workers often react to this degrading categorisation striving to maintain a positive self-image for the assigned category (e.g. older workers are wiser and are the repository of key organisational knowledge and expertise) or by embracing a new identity as, for example, 'retirees'. Younger workers are similarly discursively reproduced, as suggested by Pritchard and Whiting's (2014) study on how generations are enrolled as explanatory devices in online discussions in the UK about entitlement and responsibilities in the job market.

Overall, this extensive body of research has shed significant light on how age is socially constructed through discourse. This has, however, come at the expense of a more in-depth appreciation of the active role that situated social interactions play in the construction of age at work. We suggest that the interactional dimension of the process of the social construction of age is largely unexplored and, more specifically, that we could redress this gap by drawing from extant scholarship on categorisation work, stages of life (SOL) categories and age-in-interaction (i.e. 'doing age'), as these are particularly sensitive to interaction dynamics.

Analytical framework: 'doing age'

According to Nikander (2009), 'chronological age, lifespan categories and other interactional formulations of age surface and are made relevant for and by us, implicitly or explicitly, as we position each other or describe and account for our own and other's actions in various everyday settings' (p. 864). Interaction analysis in the form of conversation analysis and MCA has been successfully employed in exploring how age is interactionally constructed (Heinrichsmeier, 2018; Jolanki,

2004; Näslund, 2017; Nikander, 2000, 2009; Poulios, 2009; Thell & Jacobsson, 2016). Researchers have investigated age-in-interaction in different types of settings and showed how people negotiate different notions of age or age groups in interviews on ageing (i.e. turning 50 years old; Nikander, 2009), radio counselling (Thell & Jacobsson, 2016) and travel-booking (Ylänne-McEwen, 1999). However, the workplace as a site for 'doing' age remains under-explored. Studies on the micro-dynamics of interactions have uncovered how different interactants perform age differently despite sharing the same goal. For example, Coupland and Coupland (1994) showed that the mobilisation of older age may lead to a more attentive focus on health issues in medical settings; in contrast, Näslund (2017) revealed that patients may reject older age categorisations to draw attention to their medical case.

From an analytical viewpoint, studying the categories in interaction reveals the speakers' culture and, overall, their understanding of reality. In many work-related situations, individual organisational actors engage in interaction sequences whereby they select specific categories – including, potentially, age – from a range of culturally available membership devices and use them to generate their own subjective interpretation of the world. In conversational turn-taking patterns, observers of these interaction sequences may align themselves with the proposed subjective positions by deploying the same (age) categorisation resources or, alternatively, may diverge from this interpretive line and select others (Stokoe, 2012). Past research on age-in-interaction has used the analytical tool of SOL categorisation to investigate how the life course is normatively perceived and persons share taken for granted understanding of stage of life: age categories are used to construct interpretations of individuals' experiences (Gubrium, Holstein, & Buckholdt, 1994). Thell and Jacobsson (2016) explored how, in the context of a psychological helpline, explicit inquiries about callers' age were used to ascribe them to specific SOL categories, which served as ground for interpretation about help-seekers' expectations and behaviours.

Overall, this above-mentioned literature suggests that 'doing age' in conversations can be used as a magnifying glass to unveil the insidious workings of culturally dominant age stereotypes in the workplace and to investigate the agentic role of social interaction in the maintenance and reproduction of ageism at work. As an analytical lens, 'doing age' shares some similarities with ethnographic methods, as shown by Heinrichsmeier's (2019) account of the subtle web of routines and expectations that constitute everyday interactions in older age. Both aim to expose the mundane, commonplace ageist assumptions towards older persons. Moreover, the fine-grained analysis of social interactions upon which 'doing age' is based disentangles ageism from the sheer insensitivity to age (e.g. 'rude comments') and reconnects discourse to the body: embodied age shapes interaction patterns based on dominant ageist views of both the young and the old.

Past research on 'doing age' has privileged medical or mundane settings, but we argue that there is significant potential for a more nuanced understanding of age and ageing in the workplace. Hence, we developed a study of social interactions in the context of PAIs at an Italian labour union. More specifically, we directed attention towards how managers and employees, in their situated encounters, utilised the category of age while taking turns in discussing performance at work.

Analytical settings: performance appraisal interviews

In line with our focus on 'doing age' at work and on the micro-dynamics of social interaction, we drew from the traditions of discourse and MCA (Nikander, 2002) and analysed the video recordings of PAIs at an Italian labour union. Fine-grained analysis of video recordings of naturally occurring data is, in fact, especially suited to investigating the construction of social categories in talk (Stokoe, 2012). In the analysis, we directed particular attention to how SOL categories were mobilised through the naturally occurring sequence of turns.

PAIs are yearly, usually dyadic, questionnaire-based meetings between a manager and an employee. From a conceptual perspective sensitive to the sequential analysis of conversations, PAIs constitute a particularly salient interactional arena where organisational norms and culture are actively enacted (Sandlund, Olin-Scheller, Nyroos, Jakobsen, & Nahnfeldt, 2011). Moreover, past research has shown that older workers experience ageism during performance review – especially regarding promotion and development evaluation (Harris et al., 2018) – and that managers disproportionately rely on age stereotypes to assess older workers' performance (Loretto & White, 2006). Therefore, the institutional agenda of assessing performance may increase the salience of age or the category-bounded attributes as a reasoning tool available in conversation to both the appraiser and the appraisee. The conversational business of agreeing on the notions mobilised by categories is fundamental to establish common ground upon which performance evaluations can be justified and legitimated. The maintenance of this agreement is a key element of performance appraisal and, as demonstrated by Ruusuvuori, Asmuß, Henttonen, and Ravaja (2019), is of particular interest in this setting characterised by asymmetry between the manager and employee at both power and knowledge levels.

The organisation selected in the study was an Italian labour union, heretofore referred to as Workers United (WU). The choice of WU was especially poignant, as labour unions are organisations typically imbued with values and symbolic references that tend to be politically oriented (Skarlicki & Latham, 1996). Values of diversity, social inclusion, respect and anti-discrimination are usually founding ones: these should characterise a labour union as having an inclusive working environment where age is not a discriminatory factor. The PAIs were based on a template form commissioned to an external human resources (HR) consultancy firm, as shown in Table 1. WU's employees were requested

Table 1
Description of the participants of the performance appraisal interviews (PAIs). (*There are only two supervisors.)

Number of PAIs	Employee (pseudonym, role, gender, age)	Supervisor(s)* (pseudonym, role, gender, age)
1	Emilia, Director (woman centre), female, 48	Mario, HR manager, male, 45
2	Giorgio, Director (social policies), male, 40	HR manager
3	Corrado, Director (immigration office), male, 61	HR manager
4	Bruno, Director (insolvency proceeding office), male, 59	HR manager
5	Valentino, Director (organisational practices), male, 55	Gennaro, General officer, male, 49
6	Mario, HR manager, male, 45	General officer
7	Davide, Director (fiscal practices), male, 50	HR manager
8	Silvio, Responsible for local area, male, 59	HR manager, General officer
9	Luca, Responsible for local area, male, 53	HR manager, General officer
10	Lorenzo, Responsible for local area, male, 51	HR manager, General officer
11	Gianni, Director (dispute office), male, 46	HR manager
12	Veronica, Staff (HR assistant), female, 27	HR manager

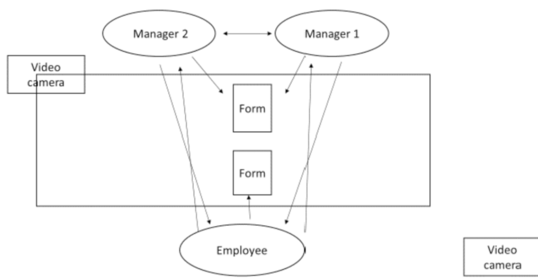

Fig. 1. Disposition of the interactants in the performance appraisals interviews.

to individually self-evaluate according to this form, and their line managers performed their own independent evaluations on the same basis. The form included ten distinct evaluation categories and used a five-point scale. Previous studies on PAIs suggest that fixed performance evaluation categories produce the blocks on which the 'ideal employee' for a given organisation/workplace is constructed. Sandlund et al. (2011) highlighted that employees constantly need to portray themselves in a favourable light to adhere to organisational norms and expectations, as they seek confirmation by managers. Hence, the diverse mobilisation of age by employees and managers, and the likely tension between ideal identity and age identity for employees, makes performance appraisal an interesting institutional setting to investigate ageism.

Materials

The first author visited WU and negotiated access for the study, including permission to video record the performance appraisals. The study was approved by the Ethics Committee of Tampere Region. The first author was able get familiar with the work environment at WU and collected background information on the PAI practices (e.g. forms used in the evaluation and guidelines given to employees and managers) as well as interviewed the HR manager. These data sources allowed us to develop insights into WU's work practices, organisational culture and performance appraisal system, which informed our entire analytical and interpretive process. As a workplace, WU is profoundly rooted in its institutional function of being a labour union. Accordingly, its espoused values privilege the respect and protection of workers' rights, social inclusion and the maintenance and respect of a long-standing socialist tradition. Data collection took place at the service branch of WU – that is, the department within the union that offers services to private citizens, whether union members or not. As service providers, WU's employees are asked to engage with a productivity-based management system to enhance organisational efficiency and revenues. This expectation is linked to an ongoing process of restructuring and managerial reorientation of WU's practices: in this context, the PAIs as studied below were introduced only two years prior to the data collection.

In line with our ethnomethodological approach, we recorded 12 PAIs that took place in June 2019 at WU. Overall, data collection generated 15.5 h of video recordings. Two managers were involved as appraisers: the HR manager and the political secretary, a leadership role typical in labour unions. Some interviews were conducted by one manager and some by both appraisers. In our data, we did not find any significant differences based on the presence of one or two evaluators, as when both were present, only one led the interview. Fig. 1 illustrates the recorded interactions. The employees were all 'white collar' and were responsible for a service. Table 2 describes the participants. Two video cameras were positioned in the interview room to acquire both the appraiser's and the appraisee's side of the interaction. Video cameras were employed with the aim of observing non-verbal interactions, such as gazes and body movement, but the focus of the analysis for this study was the verbal interaction among the interactants and their use of categories in conversation. For data collection, the first author set the video cameras in the interview room prior to the PAIs but was not physically present during the interviews. All study participants were informed about the study, its aims and the methods of data collection prior to the PAIs and signed an informed consent form regarding future data use. Participants were informed that the focus of the study was the use of age and other personal categories in formal interactions at work. They were assured of confidentiality and that they could withdraw at any time and interrupt the recording without consequence. The researcher also clearly stated that the participants and their talk, gestures and behaviours were not under trial or subject to judgement and evaluation other than for the stated purposes of the study.

Analytical method

In line with our chosen approach and our focus on interactional micro-dynamics, we adopted MCA as our key analytical method (Sacks, 1972). First developed as a participant-oriented investigation of social relations in everyday interactions, MCA is increasingly used in the social sciences to investigate the constitutive relationship between social

Table 2
Categories of performance evaluation obtained from the form provided to employees and managers.

N	Category	Description
1	Professional leadership	Ability to be reliable and recognised as a professional reference point by colleagues and managers.
2	People management	Ability to adapt the management style to fit the people and the situations that need to be managed.
3	Decision-making	Ability to take prompt and fitting decisions within your competency and your mandates while respecting the normative and organisational limits and the relations with your supervisor.
4	Results orientation	Ability to address your working activities towards the achievement of your goals
5	Planning and programming	Ability to identify and organise your activities, define priorities and develop actions.
6	Flexibility and innovation	Ability to respond to organisational complexity through a flexible approach and to be open to modifying your behaviours and innovating working strategies.
7	Communication and management of information	Ability to conveniently filter information, thus effectively transferring content without ambiguity, and to modulate your communication style on the basis of the context and of the speakers.
8	Development orientation	Ability to recognise the gaps that affect your own role and the openness to develop actions towards the development of your own knowledge and professional skills.
9	Systemic view and integration	Ability to create integration inside the organisation based on the situation, your behaviours and your role in the wider organisational context.
10	Sense of belonging and engagement	Ability to transfer images and content to share the knowledge of the activities developed inside the organisation and to spread the political and civic orientation of the organisation.

action and language (Cromdal et al., 2018). Sequentially examining interactions allows investigations into the performative aspects of discourse: in MCA, discourse becomes talk-in-interaction. Membership categories are descriptors organised in systematic collections called ‘devices’. For instance, ‘stages of life’ is considered a membership categorisation device that entails an ordered collection of subcategories, such as ‘senior’, ‘adult’ and ‘teenager’, which are perceived as ordered along institutionalised life course trajectories.

According to Sacks (1972), categories have features that are crucial to their functioning in that each category is culturally linked to a set group of practices and activities (i.e. category-bound activities) or attributes (i.e. category-bound attributes). For instance, the category ‘adult’ is culturally linked to activities such as working and taking care of children, whereas the category ‘teenager’ relates to enjoying free time and breaking rules. Therefore, category-bound activities and category-bound attributes constitute powerful discursive resources in interactions: the mere act of uttering a category-bounded activity or predicate is sufficient for the participants to establish an association with the paired categorisation device because members of the same culture share the same domain of cultural knowledge and vocabulary.

In accordance with MCA, we directed our analytical efforts towards exploring how WU’s managers and employees ‘did age’ (Nikander, 2009; Sandlund et al., 2011) by mobilising SOL categorisation devices in interactions in their PAIs. WU’s employees and managers share both the wider cultural norms of Italian society and the specific organisational culture of their workplace: they are, therefore, likely to share a deep-rooted cultural understanding of the notions mobilised by SOL categorisation devices in-situ. Moreover, by agreeing or resisting to be ascribed to such categories, employees accomplish social actions linked to performance negotiation – for example, they account for negative or positive performances on different tasks. This means that in addition to constructing situated meanings of age-related categories in their conversations, WU’s employees agree or disagree on a specific ‘doing’ of age and engage in social action (e.g. explaining, justifying and corroborating) accordingly.

Data analysis involved several stages. The first author initially watched the video recordings and transcribed them according to standard MCA using Jefferson’s (2004) transcription symbols. The same author then engaged in repeated viewings and readings of the entire dataset with the objective of identifying all the extracts where the speakers – that is, WU’s managers and employees – mobilised categories related to age and SOL. Finally, the authors collaboratively reviewed the extracts and identified the three modalities presented in the results below.

Results: ‘doing age’ in performance appraisal interactions at WU

Our analysis identified three main ways in which SOL categories were used during PAIs at WU: quantification of the number of years on the job/within the organisation, ‘ageing within the organisation’ and age-group membership identification.

Quantification

Quantification entailed the mobilisation of numerical labels and, more specifically, the overt quantification of age or seniority in the PAIs. This pattern is shown in Extract 1a below that reports the conversation between a male employee – Giorgio (GIO), a manager – and his direct superior – Mario (MAR), the HR manager. This part of the conversation referred to the section in the performance evaluation form dedicated to professional authorship and decision-making. The extract starts with Giorgio explaining his self-evaluation to Mario:

```
1 GIO: ↑but I think I am: >also compared to the team that
2      I manage< (.) it is acknowledged to me
3      >I feel that< it is acknowledged to me the author-
4      the professional authority
5      ↑also considering the experience (.) that I have
6      mm: (.) that I have developed (.)
7      as director (.01) of Division One
8      (.03)
9      ee: (.) also about the decision making
10     I think (.01) I reach (.) a high level
11     mainly because I evaluate >I have learned<
12     after twenty years [that I am in this organisation
13                        [((MAR starts nodding))
14     I have learned to evaluate
15     every single aspect
```

Giorgio initiates this interaction round by reporting his self-evaluation. Lines 1–3 exemplify a recurring pattern in WU’s PAIs: if positive, self-evaluations are always reported as a feeling or a thought and are never delivered as objective statements. Here, Giorgio changes his initial phrase ‘it is acknowledged’ to ‘I feel that it is acknowledged’, and this change from impersonal/objective to personal/subjective marks the surfacing of moral considerations into the ongoing performance evaluation. Giorgio characterises his positive self-evaluation in terms of ‘professional authority’ (line 4) and corroborates his statement by appealing to age as experience (i.e. ‘also considering the experience that I have’). Here, experience – a category-implicative descriptor (Stokoe, 2012) for age – is used to justify a positive evaluation on professional authority.

Giorgio deploys the same line of argumentation in relation to decision-making (line 9). Here, Giorgio utilises the explanatory remark ‘after twenty years that I am in this organisation…I have learned’ (lines 12–14). Giorgio’s disclosure of the exact number of years of experience at WU follows several indirect references to a lengthy process of experience accumulation. Giorgio relies on quantification as a discursive resource to legitimate (Nikander, 2002) his subjective positive self-evaluation as manager. Quantification, in fact, directs the interactants’ attention to a taken-for-granted cultural link between accumulations, numbers and value. In turn, Mario accepts this through silent nodding, showing support for his interpretation. Note that Giorgio frames his self-evaluation ‘also in comparison to the theme that I manage’ (lines 1–2), thereby suggesting an interpretive context for Mario’s sense-making. Giorgio’s subsequent references to his accumulation of experience and quantification are more meaningful and carry greater value when compared to younger, less experienced colleagues.

Quantification also appears below in Extract 1b that shows another male employee – Davide (DAV), a manager and team leader – discussing his performance with Mario, WU’s HR manager. This excerpt features near the end of the self-evaluation report, in relation to the item ‘sense of belonging’ in the evaluation form.

1 DAV: about the rest (.02)
2 the systemic vision is what I have::
3 limited to my (.) capacity
4 >the sense of belonging
5 instead I feel it greatl[y]<
6 MAR: ° [well] of cours[e] °
7 DAV: [eh] you
8 know: I have spent a life
9 you know a part of my life inside here
10 and you know
11 MAR: ° <how many years in total in Workers United?> °
12 DAV: since '88 so we are talking about 31 years well::
13 MAR: dang 31 years.
14 DAV: like almost like a home
15 but a:n important part of you
16 and >from this point of view<
17 I have never had: (.)
18 second thoughts doubts, (.) demotivation,

Davide frames this section by stating he 'feels greatly' the 'sense of belonging' (line 4), and Mario vocally affiliates with this self-evaluation by means of the expression 'of course' (line 6). Davide, in turn, feeling the support of the manager, further elaborates and provides additional explanations using 'life' (line 8) as a category-implicative descriptor for the years spent at WU. By means of this descriptor, Davide can convey both the 'length' of his work experience and the importance that it has for him. This statement is, however, immediately tempered when Davide switches from 'life' to 'part of my life' (line 9), suggesting the need to soften the description. Mario's response to Davide's rephrasing is to ask a direct question that elicits the explicit quantification of the number of years Davide has spent at WU (line 11). In the following exchange, Davide's quantification (i.e. '31 years'; line 12) and Mario's reiteration of it (line 13) reveal how both share the same cultural norm that attributes positive value to higher number of years in terms of experience, which is associated with a higher sense of belonging.

Extract 1b also shows how Davide used an interactional resource –the expression 'you know' in lines 7–10 – to suggest implicit agreement. The expression 'you know' is recognised as a marker of a speaker's epistemic stance (Landgrebe, 2012) – that is, the rhetorical use of knowledge or how knowledge is oriented as an accountable matter (Melander Bowden & Sandlund, 2019). As highlighted by research on institutional meetings (Asmuß, 2011), speakers use 'you know' to suggest shared knowledge when they are intent on pursuing agreement. Here, Davide assumes a knowing stance when talking about his 'life' at WU and before engaging in exact quantification: this discursive move prompts Mario to inquire further and, in turn, gives Davide the opportunity to articulate and legitimise his positive self-evaluation by quantification.

Overall, our analysis shows that quantification is used as age categorisation only when discussing specific items of the PAI form – namely, professional leadership, decision-making and sense of belonging. This suggests that at WU, employees mobilise age in the discussion of performance items in a fashion that aligns with commonly held positive stereotypes of older workers, who are often viewed as experienced, highly committed and reliable (Truxillo, Finkelstein, Pytlovany, & Jenkins, 2016).

Ageing within the organisation

Appraisees also utilised the categorisation 'ageing within the organisation' to support their self-evaluation on the item 'openness to novelty' in the performance evaluation form. In particular, WU's employees used this categorisation that conveys the idea of the passage of a significant length of time – a category-implicative descriptor (Stokoe, 2009) – to justify their lack of openness to innovation. Extract 2a below shows Bruno (BRU) – a male employee – addressing 'flexibility and innovation' with Mario, the HR manager:

1 BRU: and so well. >on flexibility and innovation<
2 =also here: e: how to say (.03)
3 mmm I could improve >a bit probably<
4 with the passing of the years maybe
5 maybe also hhh an(h) a a disposition
6 let's say so t- to be less
7 how to say less (.) .hhh
8 ready here to to we:lcome the things .hh
9 and so also this let's say
10 this could be improvable.
11 >this said however< e:
12 I don:t d- don't have a
13 °↓pre-established idea° ↑no
14 so e .h I am (.) I think to be ↓°welcoming°
15 in the moment that
16 I receive an input [that]
17 MAR: [of c]ourse of course
18 BRU: that comes >maybe from others<
19 e: that could be in some way helpful
20 for everybody here.

By openly admitting that he 'could improve' (line 3) on 'flexibility and innovation' (line 1), Bruno directs Mario's attention to a professional weakness and then uses the categorisation 'with the passing of years' (line 4) as justification for his negative performance. The reiteration of expressions such as 'how to say', 'let's say', 'here' and 'maybe' (lines 5–7) emphasises the delicacy of the exposing negative performance evaluation. In this epistemic arena, Bruno's use of the age categorisation 'passing of years' to justify negative performance aligns with wider societal, taken-for-granted norms and stereotypes about older peoples' lower interest and ability to be innovative and flexible (Truxillo et al., 2016). Bruno tries to dissociate himself from these negative stereotypes by suggesting that he 'however' does not have 'pre-established ideas' and 'is welcoming'. Bruno distinguishes between two dimensions of 'flexibility and innovation': 'welcome the things' (line 7) – an action descriptor – and 'not have pre-established idea' (line 10) – a trait descriptor. Through this verbal construction, he suggests that the 'passing of time' at WU has affected his routines and behavioural patterns at work and, therefore, engendered lower openness to novelty, whereas his personal traits – including open-mindedness – are unaltered.

Mario, in turn, verbally agrees with Bruno's accounts ('of course of course'; line 17), and his lack of reaction when faced with a negative self-evaluation based on ageist stereotyping suggests that he shares the

same norms. In line with extant research suggesting that younger managers favour employees of the same age (Principi & Fabbietti, 2015), it could be argued that the age difference between Mario and Bruno may be at issue here: as a younger manager evaluating an older employee, Mario is using negative stereotypes about older workers (Truxillo et al., 2016) in his work practice.

Extract 2b below shows a male employee, Corrado (COR), discussing the item 'welcoming others' ideas' listed in the performance evaluation form with two appraisers, Mario (MAR), the HR manager, and Gennaro (GEN), the general political officer:

1 COR: >so< about the management of complex issues
2 I think I can do it. (.01)
3 I am open to welcome others' idea (01.)
4 I have put generally exactly because (.) and
5 >how to say< being (.) thinking to be
6 the person most informed on the topic (.)
7 how to say I am open but not <not always>(.)
8 <not always>.

In earlier parts of the PAI, Corrado repeatedly emphasised his experience and wisdom, linking both qualities to the passing of years – an age categorisation (see Extract 2a) – at work within WU as well as outside of the workplace. Here, Corrado continues in the same vein and links being the person 'most informed on the topic' – a category-implicative descriptor for age and ageing within an organisation – with his performance in terms of openness to other people's ideas. As observed in Bruno's case above, Corrado also utilises various verbal expressions ('how to say'; lines 5 and 7) and repairs ('being' – 'thinking to be'; line 5) to articulate a negative self-evaluation on openness. The sequencing of his argument moves from an initial reference to the performance item under discussion to an explanatory account of behaviour at work (lines 4–6), which results in a fundamentally negative overall evaluation. This is followed by an attempt at toning down the negativity (line 7): Corrado describes himself as 'open', albeit 'not always-not always'. The reiteration of 'not always', however, has the opposite effect.

Unlike Bruno – who associated lack of openness to a routinisation of behaviour at work owing to the time spent at WU – Corrado links his own lack of openness to other people's inexperience: because of the comparatively short time they have spent at WU, Corrado's colleagues are less experienced, lack good-quality ideas and ultimately affect his performance as well as their own. During this short interaction, Corrado 'does' age by using the length of time spent at WU as a proxy for experience and by deploying this categorisation to construct a complex justification for his poor performance. This involves the combination of two ageist stereotypes: on the one hand, Corrado mobilises the positive stereotype that links experience with older workers' wisdom (against younger workers' 'bad ideas'); on the other, he reinforces the negative stereotype about older workers' scarce innovativeness and flexibility.

Overall, our analysis shows that age, as the passing of years working at WU, is typically linked to the accumulation of experience in a linear progression with positive qualitative and quantitative connotations. Accumulated experience may, however, result in both negative and positive outcomes, depending on its characterisation: as a proxy for routinisation, it is used by older workers as a barrier to being innovative; as a proxy for wisdom, human capital or knowledge (Backes-Gellner et al., 2011), it is mobilised to attribute positive value to older workers' participation in the workplace.

Age-group membership identification

The third categorisation identified in our analysis entails the explicit identification with a specific age-group – namely, 'younger' or 'older' workers; by assigning to themselves or others a membership category based on age, the interactants ascribe age and all the stereotypical features of the referenced group as interpretative resources for performance evaluation. Interestingly, membership ascription is done differently by managers and employees: in the case of WU's PAIs, our analysis shows that age-group categories were used by managers to praise good employees' performance and by employees for both positive and negative self-evaluation. In Extract 3a below, Mario (MAR) – the HR manager – is evaluating a female employee, Emilia (EMI), about her 'sense of belonging' to WU, a specific item in the union's performance evaluation form:

1 MAR: ↑you have (.) as I see you
2 a strong sense of organisation
3 you were saying it also before
4 when you go around saying I am *Workers United*
5 this awareness is rooted in you.
6 a thing that maybe la:cks
7 e:: more for example if I think
8 >about the younger colleagues
9 that have started in our organisation recently<
10 .h this thi:ng <lacks even> ↑right
11 also in the older ones

Using the comparative 'to the younger colleagues' (line 8), Mario assigns himself and Emilia to the 'the older workers' age group, an inference-rich category that mobilises stereotypical characteristics commonly associated with the group (Nikander, 2002). More specifically, this attribution mobilises different SOL as positioning categories that allow members to express positive or negative evaluations based on shared social norms and expectations about life course trajectories (Sacks, 1972). Mario refers to age groups to support his positive evaluation of Emilia's performance on the item 'sense of belonging' (line 2), and this categorisation aligns with employers' stereotypical views of older workers as more loyal and committed (e.g. Bal, Reiss, Rudolph, & Baltes, 2011). Mario's use of the verb 'rooted' is indicative of a taken-for-granted link between age and 'sense of organisation'. Through a generalisation discursive device ('more for example if I think'; line 7), Mario positions himself and Emilia in the same age group and, ultimately, in the same positive evaluation as loyal WU employees. Perhaps aware of the danger of explicit age stereotyping at work – given that workplaces are supposedly regarded as age-neutral environments – Mario ends his speech by making an explicit reference to 'older' colleagues who might also lack a deep sense of the organisation (line 11).

In Extract 3b below, the general officer, Gennaro, refers to older workers as an out-group to emphasise the atypical positive performance of WU's HR manager, Mario, here in the role of appraisee. Gennaro and Mario discuss one of the items of the evaluation form, the ability to take responsibility for one's own action as part of 'professional leadership':

1 GEN: <u>you</u> take <u>complete</u> responsibility
2 for your actions. (.)
3 >taking responsibility also
4 for what i:s not< yours.
5 one of the biggest <u>defects</u>
6 of the labour union workers (.)
7 >°it would be nice to explain
8 why this happens°
9 especially to the ones of a certain age<=
10 is that sometimes
11 they are very tie to their competencies
12 but they find it <u>difficult</u> (.)
13 to recognise their mistakes.

Here, Gennaro uses the same discursive strategy as shown in Extract 3a, but the object of appraisal and evaluation is older workers, who are generally perceived as unable to take charge of their actions. The deployment of a double set of stereotypes – whereby ageism is compounded by the belief that labour unions' organisational culture is typically anti-meritocratic – allows Gennaro to boost his positive evaluation: Mario is distinctly unique as an effective leader in two respects: as both a younger worker and a member of a labour union organisation.

In Extract 3c below, Corrado – the same employee that appears in Extract 2b – uses age-group membership categories to support his positive self-evaluation on 'communication', another item of WU's evaluation form for PAIs.

1 COR: most of the staff in the area
2 is is retired
3 so <with the BIG heart that
4 you can recognise to them>
5 but sometimes
6 I have difficulties let's say to organise them.
7 (...)
8 <<u>it's not enough</u>> <<u>it's not enough</u>>
9 the massive communication
10 let's say that with some type o:f of workers
11 >generally< with people with another age
12 and with another <↑technological> education
13 absolutely would be enough

Corrado, who is 59 years old, uses the age-group category and life-stage device 'retired' (line 2) to set a comparison with an out-group he does not belong to (Nikander, 2002). Despite having previously attributed to himself some of the positive qualities stereotypically associated with older workers – for instance, accumulated knowledge and competence – in this interactional segment, Corrado distances himself from the old-age group 'retirees'. The membership category 'retiree' is described as 'having a big heart' (line 3) but also as difficult to organise and as lacking competence (lines 6 and 10, respectively). This attribution aligns with dominant organisational and societal norms that stereotype and discriminate against older workers (e.g. Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005). Corrado is using language to separate himself and his positive performance from 'older colleagues' that he shares the same chronological age category with but that he now stereotypes to set himself apart. His excerpt entails more than simply assigning age stereotypes to a category (Nikander, 2009; Stokoe & Edwards, 2009) and encompasses legitimising such claims by mobilising discursive resources as an extreme case formulation ('absolutely' in line 11; see Pomerantz, 1986). Interestingly, the use of an age-group category such as 'of another age' (line 9) mobilised the notion that the old worker stereotype stands for and indeed summarises a whole host of undesirable behaviours and attitudes at work. The manager does not take an open stance towards the use of age stereotypes in this interactional arena, which suggests at the bare minimum a shared cultural understanding of ageing and age at work.

Overall, our analysis shows that age-group membership is used in PAIs at WU to infer (Jayyusi, 1985) and mobilise cultural notions about age that are fundamentally associated with positive and negative stereotypes about older/younger workers (Stokoe & Edwards, 2009). The interactional analysis shows how such norms operated at the broad level of society but were also influenced by, and embedded in, the situated organisational culture of WU as a labour union.

Discussion

Our study investigated how age is 'done' at the micro level of conversations during PAIs and explored the use of SOL as an interpretative device. Overall, our analysis shows that in the case of WU, age was mobilised as an argumentative resource during PAIs in three different ways: quantitatively as a number, as passing of time and as an oppositional 'young'/'old' membership category ascription. More specifically, three findings emerge as especially notable. First, different forms of age categorisation are associated with different items/sections of the performance evaluation form used at WU. Second, age categorisation is used differently to argue for positive or negative evaluation depending on the performance item being discussed and the role as appraisee or appraiser taken by the participant 'doing' it. Third, age categorisation is rooted in the specific setting of WU and its organisational culture.

First, our findings show that age categorisation is done differently depending on the performance item under discussion as articulated in the evaluation form adopted for the PAIs: quantification of employment is mobilised by WU's employees to account for leadership and sense of belonging, 'ageing within the organisation' (e.g. the passing of time) is mobilised by WU's employees in connection with openness to innovation, and older and younger workers' membership identification is mobilised by managers to appraise the sense of belonging and leadership and by employees to discuss communication and technology use. In other words, WU's performance evaluation form pre-structures the interaction that occurs during the face-to-face interviews and can be regarded as agentic in the complex process of the social construction of age at work. Our study therefore adds to previous research showing that institutions and institutional actors are constructed by documents (Alasuutari, 2015) and that their texts are activated by their readers. According to Smith (2005), texts enter and coordinate people's doing: WU's performance evaluation form is age-neutral in that it does not overtly incorporate age as an evaluation category, but it shapes interactions in a way that engenders the stereotypical 'doing' of age through talk by the participants. The evaluation form is, in other words, modelled on the ageless notion of an ideal worker (Nyroos & Sandlund, 2014; Ruusuvuori et al., 2019) but actively contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of ageist stereotypes: this sheds light on the difference between age-equal and age-blind work practices, whereby micro-dynamics based on stereotypical notions of age can be accepted despite the nominal equality of the workplace. This finding also contributes to the study of PAIs as an institutional practice. The link identified between given age categorisations and specific performance

dimensions – as expressed by the items of the evaluation form – suggests the need for the critical analysis of the guidelines used in HR practices that incorporates the micro-dynamics of power. In the interactional arena of a performance appraisal, templates might reproduce the existing asymmetries of power rather than promoting inclusivity.

Second, our analysis shows how WU's employees and managers 'did' age and acted socially to support and legitimise positive and/or negative performance evaluations. Further, different types of age categorisation transferred the positive or negative character of their underlying age-based stereotype to the positive or negative character of the performance evaluation (Ng & Feldman, 2012). This suggests that age categorisation constitutes an argumentative resource that can be mobilised at work to negotiate an acceptable role identity as an ideal worker and/or fair (that is, 'neutral' and objective) manager. This finding complements previous studies on the difference between chronological age and perceived age at work (Krekula, 2019; Kunze, Boehm, & Bruch, 2021) suggesting that chronological age is not an objective criterion in employees' evaluation and categorisation, whereas personal age, based on age identity at work, has more influence on job and organisational outcomes. It also aligns with discursive studies on age that highlight the role of the micro-dynamics of power in the construction of age-based identity (e.g. Krekula, 2009; Spedale, 2019). On the one hand, this finding contributes to problematising the victim–perpetrator paradigm that dominates mainstream literature on ageism at work and casts managers as perpetrators and older workers as victims of discrimination (Riach & Kelly, 2015). On the other hand, it sheds light on the complexity of these dynamics by showing how interaction actively shapes the dynamics beyond its usually recognised function as a context for dynamics of identity and power. Furthermore, these considerations are potentially extended beyond verbal interactions to encompass non-verbal communications, highlighting the role that the body play (Streeck, Goodwin, & LeBaron, 2011) in interactions and, ultimately, in the 'doing' of age at work.

Finally, our analysis shows how 'doing age' during PAIs at WU was rooted in broader cultural references and norms – such as dominant societal stereotypes about older and younger workers – as well as in those specific to WU's situated organisational and institutional culture. This corroborates previous studies that show how practice is influenced not only by organisational actors' chronological age (Principi & Fabbietti, 2015) but also by the 'age' and history of the organisation they inhabit (Lawrence, 1996). For instance, Lawrence (1996) maintained that age profiles are linked to age norms in institutional settings, which, consequently, construct expectations, sanctions and grouping. This expectation is deeply tied to the notion of ideal employees and, consequently, to the managerial agenda driving PAIs. Hence, organisational practices and acquired routines can reproduce age as a significant organising principle, which makes age norms shared knowledge and, therefore, allows for the use of ageist reference in interaction to find common ground and foster interactional alignment.

Conclusion

Our study explores how age is 'done' in organisations when individuals mobilise stage-of-life and age-related categories during conversational micro-interactions such as PAIs. Besides contributing to the literature on age and ageism as a discursive and relational phenomenon (e.g. Spedale et al., 2014) and on organisations as done in interactions (e.g. Schoeneborn, Kuhn, & Kärreman, 2019), our study expands the field of discursive gerontology and the methodological toolkit (Heinrichsmeier, 2018; Krekula, 2009; Näslund, 2017; Nikander, 2009; Thell & Jacobsson, 2016) available to scholars interested in investigating age and ageism at work. Furthermore, our research has several pragmatic implications, mostly related to how interaction processes reflect and reinforce organisational norms.

First, understanding how societal age norms interact with situated organisational norms is useful for bringing age management into everyday use. HR professionals are responsible for constructing work environments that are inclusive and diverse. By showing how ageism at work is reproduced in and through interactions between employers and employees and by linking these dynamics to elements of evaluation, we direct attention towards ageism as a tripartite phenomenon of prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination (Officer, Thiyagarajan, Schneiders, Nash, & de la Fuente-Núñez, 2020). Our analysis will be fed back to the participants and to WU in general to promote a more nuanced understanding of how interaction shapes, or indeed constructs, age at work. Similar lines of inquiry could be followed to promote and enable greater diversity and inclusion in other workplaces.

Second, our study has implications for performance appraisal as a specific managerial practice. For example, the use of apparently neutral forms that surreptitiously foster the reproduction and maintenance of discriminatory stereotypes – whether based on age or other categories of marginalisation – should be subject to critical scrutiny. A more nuanced appreciation of the interactional dynamics of 'doing age' at work may overcome some of the limitations of the current age-blind practices and enhance equal career progression. Educational/developmental needs are usually discussed in performance appraisal interactions and biased processes may endanger their outcomes and, for example, reduce the access to training that has been identified as a strategic element for older workers' retention (Lazazzara & Bombelli, 2011). This calls for an approach to performance evaluation that recognises heterogeneity in the social construction of age and ageing (Previtali et al., 2020) and moves beyond the simplistic dynamic of victimisation.

Our analysis, grounded in a social constructionist approach to working life, does not limit the study but poses organic constraints. Generating data and performing analysis with a specific focus on ageism might lead to an overestimation of this phenomenon. Our collaborative approach to analysis and interpretation has, however, promoted reflexivity and contributed to the credibility and overall validity to our findings through continuous discussions and reciprocal cross-validation. Note also that the study does not intend to locate and isolate 'guilty' parties. On the contrary, it aims to highlight the co-construction of the stereotypical use of age in job performance appraisal and evaluation. The chosen ethnomethodological approach, while allowing for direct focus on interactional dynamics, poses constraints in terms of the size of the available dataset, which is limited owing to the complexity of the recording logistics and the requirements of detailed conversation analysis. Similar studies could be conducted in the same type of organisational setting with a larger group of participants to validate our outcomes and the identified interaction patterns. In addition, our analysis focuses on age as a potential category of discrimination at work while excluding others, particularly gender. Although the gender composition did not allow for gender-related dynamics to clearly emerge from our analysis, we acknowledge that gendered ageism is inherently linked with ageing in the workplace. Future research should strive to include more women as well as different organisational settings and national contexts to expand our understanding of how age norms operate in the workplace and in performance evaluation. Finally, we recognise the difficulties and demands entailed by our proposed approach, including access and ethical approval. Adhering to ethical guidelines requires informing participants of the subject of the study: when investigating stereotypes and prejudices at work, this might expose them to risk and enhance their vulnerability. Although the presence of video cameras can alter the natural flow of conversation, this was not observed during the PAIs analysed in this study. Further, the strength of interactional analysis lies precisely in its being in situ and, consequently, shedding light on age and ageism at work as a fundamentally contextual and situational phenomenon.

Overall, we believe that our analysis showcases the power of MCA as an overlooked approach for the study of ageing and working life. We call for future research to be conducted from a critical perspective towards organisations, age and ageism and to move beyond experimental designs and researcher-generated data to naturally occurring data when

studying employer–employee relationships. Future research might benefit from the observational ethnographic methods in the exploration of actual work practices to shed light on the discursive construction of age in mundane everyday interactions as well as to raise consciousness of the implicit and explicit ways in which ageism is socially constructed in the workplace.

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Appendix A. Transcription symbols (Jefferson, 2004)

Symbol	Description
(.)	A micropause
(0.2)	A timed pause (seconds)
[]	Speech overlaps
(())	Comments or annotations of non-verbal actions
> <	The pace of speech has quickened
< >	The pace of speech has slowed down
word	A raise in volume or emphasis
↑	Rise in intonation
↓	Drop in intonation
(h)	Laughter in the conversation
:::	Stretched sound
°word°	Quieter than surrounding speech by the same speaker
hhh	In-breath
.hhh	Out-breath
whord	Aspiration/breathiness if within a word
w(*h*)ord	Laughing while talking

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PUBLICATION 3

Ageism in job interviews: Discreet ways of building co-membership through age categorisation.

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Ageism in job interviews: Discreet ways of building co-membership through age categorisation

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Abstract

This article investigates how age categorisation and prejudicial use of age are mobilised in talk by job applicants during job interviews and how recruiters affiliate with these. The institutional goal of recruitment is to ensure an unbiased process and evaluation, nevertheless, ageism against older workers emerges as unchallenged and culturally acceptable in authentic job interviews. In line with the discursive psychology (DP) approach, the analysis focuses on -isms as discursively constructed and categories as resources to accomplish social actions. A case study is conducted based on video recordings of 24 real job interviews held at an Italian staffing agency and analysed through membership categorisation and conversation analysis. The analysis provides evidence of how job applicants resort to age co-membership with recruiters to achieve affiliation – or remedy misalignment – by complaining about older workers. The study contributes to DP's re-specification of prejudices as interactional practices and links microanalysis to macro phenomena, such as ageism, through categorisation practices.

Keywords

ageism, conversation analysis, discursive psychology, job interviews, membership categorisation analysis

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Introduction

Combating ageism has been defined as one of the policy targets to be reached by 2030 during the United Nations (UN) Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021–2030) (World Health Organization, 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) has called for more research addressing the phenomenon of ageism, which is considered one of the key obstacles to a society for all ages. The ageing of the global population is acknowledged as the biggest demographic change in our century, and an inclusive society can be achieved only by ensuring that age is not a discriminant in institutional practices. Work life is a topic of interest here because the highest level of perceived age discrimination has been reported in this context. For example, 'being too old or too young' is considered the most disadvantageous criterion of discernment in recruitment, even when job applicants have equal skills (Special Eurobarometer 2019, 493).

In their latest global report, WHO refers to ageism as 'the stereotypes (how we think), prejudice (how we feel) and discrimination (how we act) directed towards people based on their age' (World Health Organization, 2021: XV). This definition stems from a cognitive psychological tradition and an Allportian conceptualisation of prejudices, which are understood as an aversion to a group/category based on an incorrect and rigid generalisation of its negative features (Allport, 1954). In this theoretical tradition, there is a causal link between perception (stereotypes), belief (prejudices) and behaviour (discrimination). Research in psychology has explored this link by proving its causality in experimental settings where category-based perceptions could be accurately manipulated. Consequently, stereotypes are examined as detached from their social and professional environments and the specific social and institutional relations therein. Extant studies on age stereotypes and recruitment have analysed the impact of job applicants' age on recruiters' decisions by evaluating resumes where only the age variable was changed (Ahmed et al., 2012; Zaniboni et al., 2019). However, these studies often include non-professional recruiters and analyse the practice strapped from their social context.

In this paper, we re-contextualise the study of age dynamics and ageism in hiring processes by analysing them as social practices constructed in and through social interactions. By analysing prejudices as discursively accomplished in social interaction, this research contributes to the agenda of discursive psychology (DP) and the enterprise of analysing psychological phenomena in their social setting and carried out in, through and for social interactions (Wiggins, 2017). The analytical focus is on the interactional dynamics surrounding the mobilisation of possible ageist utterances towards absent older third parties by job applicants and the consequential recruiter's (mis)affiliation. The results will show how prejudicial use of age towards older parties is discursively accomplished and warranted when interactants construct co-membership on (younger) age in situ. Moreover, age is a resource, or interactional currency, to overcome misalignments caused by other category-based practices, in our case study, gender. The study adds ageism to the literature of -isms as discursively accomplished, which concerns predominantly sexism and racism (Weatherall, 2015; Whitehead, 2018). In discussing equality in the hiring process, we show that, despite the endorsement of inclusive policies, everyday ageism goes unnoticed in work-related settings and (younger) job applicants can use ageism to maintain a favourable impression and build solidarity with (younger) recruiters.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review relevant literature around DP and -isms, as well as co-membership and solidarity in job interviews, showing the existing gap about ageism and age as a relevant category. Second, the data and method of the case study are presented. The data are video recordings of authentic job interviews collected in an Italian recruitment centre; this data is innovatively used to analyse ageism in recruitment. The implications of this institutional settings for the practice of hiring are thereafter discussed. Third, we present the results: four extracts that show different degrees of possible ageist prejudices, from more explicit to less, and the role of discursively establishing co-membership on age. Fourth, we conclude that this study empirically shows that ageism is still culturally accepted and co-membership on age is relevant to warrant prejudicial use of age, as well as, to construct affiliation and 'save face' in difficult interactions. In the conclusive discussion, we emphasise that, as shown by other researchers before (e.g. Rivera, 2012), exploring similarities in recruitment, besides surveys and experiments, provides new information to advance equality and diversity in hiring practices.

Discursive psychology and social categories

Discursive psychology (DP) proposes a re-specification of psychological concepts as 'shaped for the functions they serve, in and for the nexus of social practices in which we use languages' (Edwards, 2012: 427). DP has established an alternative approach to studying attitudes and stereotypes by situating them in discourse practices (Huma et al., 2020; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Wiggins and Potter, 2003), and to understanding the moral accountability of -isms in discourse and conversation (Stokoe, 2020). The re-theorisation of attitudes is a foundational string of research in DP and stems from the idea that stances towards groups, and the related prejudicial attitudes, are shaped by the sequentiality of conversation and cannot be analysed as separate from it.

The re-specification of stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes is linked to the discursive study of identity, social categories and categorisation practices. The overall positioning of DP is that language is a tool for achieving social actions and that 'categories are for talking' (Edwards, 1991: 515). Categorisation in talk – the process of assigning a member to a category – is a discursive practice and is motivated by an interactional purpose at a particular time and with certain stakes (Fitzgerald and Rintel, 2016). Furthermore, DP questions the concept that categories are merely labels attached to objects because of our cognitive need to ease the perception of the social world. According to Billig (1987), people can not only generalise but also particularise; hence, categorisation is not independent of situations. In DP, categories are flexible, even fuzzy, and thus need to be analysed in naturally occurring situated cases to understand how members make use of them and what social action they accomplish. Compared with other psychological traditions, DP allows for an investigation of how people negotiate membership to social categories in situ and how they flexibly assign or reject membership to categories depending on the ongoing social actions.

In the context of the workforce, research has shown that shared cultural notions about age in the labour market allow for certain attributes and predicates to be heard as coherent with certain age groups (Ainsworth and Hardy, 2007; McVittie et al., 2003; Previtali

and Spedale, 2021). The consequences that the interactional use of age norms, and related stereotypes, might have on exclusion and inclusion and on making institutional practices ageist have received scant attention; to our knowledge, no studies focused on age have been performed on real encounters in the workplace. Ageism has not been extensively addressed as an interactional practice (Heinrichsmeier, 2018, 2019), although ethnomethodologically and conversation-analytically informed research has highlighted how -isms are done and managed in interaction (Whitehead and Stokoe, 2015), including sexism (Stokoe, 2010, 2015; Stokoe and Edwards, 2009; Weatherall, 2015) and racism (Durrheim et al., 2015; Whitehead, 2015, 2018). To bridge this research gap, the current article studies the systematic, recurrent, familiar practices of age categorisation and how they are related to warranting age stereotypes and ageism in talk through the analysis of video-recorded job interviews.

This article contributes to DP's agenda; it focuses on negotiation and membership categorisation of age by job applicants and recruiters during real, or 'naturally occurring', job interviews. In exploring how members make sense of this categorisation, the study addresses how prejudicial attitudes towards age categories are mobilised, how participants sequentially take a stance towards these assessments and whether they are held morally accountable for warranting possible -isms in interaction. This study breaks new ground by investigating age stereotypes as discursive practices in job interviews and ageism as socially accomplished instead of considering them as possible causes or outcomes of unfair recruitment practices. Simultaneously, the focus of the analysis shifts from what happens before and after the job interview to what happens during this institutional interaction. Furthermore, the participants' categorisation practices are prioritised over the analysts' predefined schemas. In the results section, we show that co-membership in a young(er) age category, which is an always-available resource because of the face validity of age (Jayyusi, 1984), warrants the use of older age as grounds to complain about an absent third party. Recruiters show affiliative stances towards this stereotypical topic of complaint. The interpretative power of age in the context of work makes it a relevant interactional currency that job applicants can spend in their favour if they share a similar stage of life (SOL) category with the recruiter.

Looking at age and social categories in job interviews through co-membership

Discursive research has investigated how age as a social category is mobilised, achieved, rejected, and negotiated in interaction and thus has consequences for situated identities (Nikander, 2009; for a review, see Previtali et al., 2022]). Discursively, age is more than the mere revelation of one's date of birth. Age-related categorisations include all SOL categories – for example, child, teenager, adult and senior as well as group labelling as old or young people – that are ordered along the chronologically organised life course. The normative element rooted in the expectations related to each SOL category can be used in interaction to construct social practices. The dynamics of age categorisation have been studied in diverse settings, such as helpline calls (Cromdal et al., 2018; Tennent, 2020; Thell and Jacobsson, 2016), customer service (Flinkfeldt et al., 2021), health care (Näslund, 2017), reality shows (Poulios, 2009) and research interviews (Nikander, 2009;

Ylänne and Nikander, 2019). For example, studies have shown how SOL is used as an interpretative device by professionals to make sense of help-seeking by clients and decide whether to provide the desired help (Cromdal et al., 2018; Tennent, 2020; Thell and Jacobsson, 2016). Our article focuses, first, on age as an interpretative resource and, second, age prejudices as culturally shared notions available to interactants for managing positive self-presentation in job interviews.

The analysis of categorisation practices during job interviews is especially interesting owing to the inference-rich feature of job interviews (Sacks, 1992; Schegloff, 2007) and how they invoke cultural norms that embed certain behaviours. Analysing how SOL categories are used, assembled, deployed, negotiated and managed during job interviews by recruiters and job applicants is a medium to understand their notions of age-related expectations and warranted mobilisation of culturally accepted stereotypes about age. Recruitment practices are especially appropriate for the investigation of categorisation and related prescriptions and proscriptions of attributes because job applicants are engaged in the action of impression management (Goffman, 1959).

Various analytical studies focusing on institutional interactions have demonstrated that impression management is the interactional work in which job applicants engage throughout the interview to negotiate identities that fit with recruiters' presumed expectations in terms of personality, professional skills and competence (Lipovsky, 2010; Van De Mieroop, 2019; Van De Mieroop et al., 2019; Van De Mieroop and Schnurr, 2018). This identity work is moulded into the agenda set by the recruiters (Button, 1987), which ensures that they achieve the institutional goal: selecting the best job applicant for the position. According to Goffman (1959), each social interaction involves the staging of characters and actively managing their positive impression by the interactants. Our analysis shows how during job interviews, the staging of 'being a good employee' by job applicants can be discredited by the challenging questions by recruiters. This makes relevant the need to remedy the staging. Van De Mieroop et al. (2019) showed that negative remarks about a third party are more effective in job interviews than common sense. Job applicants can start complaining after having discursively renegotiated the rules of the interview game. We expand on the use of negative remarks in job interviews, focusing on complaints about non-present third parties (see, e.g. Ruusuvuori et al., (2019) on complaining about others at work). Complaining is a possible source of dissonance that can endanger the goal of making a good impression as a future employee (Goffman, 1959); hence, investigating complaint episodes allows us to analyse the sequential managing of good impression by job applicants and the (re)negotiation of co-membership on age to sustain it.

Within DP and according to Sacks (1992), categorisation is understood as a regular action mobilised by members to achieve social organisation and display local sense-making to each other. As previously described, categorisation, or how people categorise and describe themselves or others, is always occasioned; moreover, the display of one alternative over others is based on the ongoing action and orientation. In our analysis, we focus on *co-membership* as a resource to manage and mend the rupture in staging a good impression. We see building co-membership with other participants as a technique that creates trust and prevents the damage caused by possible disruptions (Lipovsky, 2010; Van De Mieroop, 2019). Co-membership during job interviews is defined by Erickson

and Schultz (1982: 17) as ‘an aspect of performed social identity that involves particularistic attributes of status shared by interviewers and job applicants’. They showed that in counselling sessions between students and counsellors, shared demographic features, common interests or shared experiences are used to highlight co-membership and can smooth social encounters and interactions.

Our study broadens the investigation on co-membership by looking at age as a social identity feature and by unfolding how prejudices about age discursively function to create co-membership. Certain social categories are always perceptually available categories to the members of interactions because of their face value (they can be identified by looking at the person) (Jayyusi, 1984). In our study, age (showing normatively old or young persons’ features) and gender (showing normatively female or male features) categories are available resources for job applicants to construct co-membership with the recruiters based on their situational identities, regardless of their identification with the age and gender categories that might be relevant outside the interview room.

We present three different extracts where the prejudicial use of age, towards older third parties, is employed in descending explicit manner to unfold how age functions as an interpretative resource and ageism is tolerated in hidden ways. Thereafter, we show how an applicant, identifying as female, uses age to remedy co-membership with a male recruiter after reference to the male group as a complainable matter. In line with the DP perspective, categories are made relevant and established in talking, and through them, social identities are asserted or resisted and shared membership can be negotiated. The flexibility of categorisation allows to resort to different social group memberships according to the interactional goal and to resolve possible cross-membership (belonging to the opposite group) by re-negotiating identities in situ.

Materials and methods

The current article presents a case study based on a corpus of 40 hours of video-recorded real job interviews at an Italian staffing agency. The job interviews were recorded between June 2019 and February 2020 and were conducted in Italian. All the job applicants featured in the excerpts were headhunted and, hence, called by the recruiters for open positions in different companies The data extracts in the current study were transcribed using detailed conversation analytical conventions (Hepburn and Bolden, 2017). For more, see the transcription keys in the appendix A. The study received approval from approval from the Humanities Ethics Committee of the Tampere Region (statement 31/2019), and all the participants consented to their conversations being recorded and used for scientific purposes.

The staffing agency sells its recruitment services to external companies to secure for them the selection of job applicants for open job positions and, due to the dynamics of job markets, often they headhunt candidates instead of waiting for candidate to apply voluntarily. The role of the selected recruitment centre is to publish the open job positions, collect and screen candidates to be interviewed, interview the selected candidates (one or more times depending on the need) and propose to the client company a short list of candidates. The recruiters have previously discussed with the client company the job positions, the profiles and the skills and requirements of the ‘ideal’ candidates. The job

interviews held at the selected recruitment centre are in line with the job interviews usually held by employers or internal recruiters in private companies because they include the presentation of the job applicants' experiences and a set of pre-defined questions about hard and soft silks, which the employer listed. Recruitment centre represents, but are not, the employers. Therefore, although recruiters have been briefed, they do not have a deep knowledge of employers' culture and climate.

We inductively approach data and look at how members make use of their age categories in talk, how they construct co-membership based on categorisation practices and how they account for and warrant the prejudicial and occasioned use of categories. The analysis of the prejudicial use of categories in talk can address possible -isms in interaction. Possible -isms can be oriented to and constructed in and through the 'content' of talk, such as references to and descriptions of social groups (Durrheim et al., 2015), or the 'machinery' of interaction, such as turn-taking or recipient design (Flinkfeldt et al., 2021; Heinrichsmeier, 2019). In this study, we focus on references to and the description of age categories and social groups to explore possible ageism in interaction and how solidarity, co-membership and moral accountability are oriented to.

The full corpus of 24 interviews was explored through membership categorisation analysis (MCA) and conversation analysis (CA) for the occurrence of SOL categorisation. Two recruiters participated in the recordings: a 29-year-old male and a 40-year-old female (self-identified). Instances of SOL categorisation occurred in approximately 14 interviews, providing 17 relevant extracts. In this study, we focus on the use of SOL categories in complaining about older workers, which occurred in 6 out of the 17 retrieved instances of SOL categorisation and in the interactions with the male recruiter. Thus, given the presence of only one institutional setting and one recruiter in the available data, we consider this a case study.

Membership categories are descriptors that are organised in systematic collections or membership categorisation devices (MCDs) such as SOL (Sacks, 1992). Within each device, certain practices and activities are heard as coherent to a membership category, even when they are not explicitly mentioned. Such elements are called category-bound adjectives or predicates, and they are powerful resources in talk because their mention may suffice to infer the proper MCD (Jayyusi, 1984). The mobilisation of category-bound adjectives and predicates infers culturally shared norms affording a prejudiced orientation to certain groups or individuals (Stokoe, 2015). In the case of age, revealing age in talk invokes inferences about what someone belonging to a certain age should look like.

We draw on CA and MCA to examine the interactional trajectories that follow SOL categorisation here in the context of answering the recruiters' challenging questions by mobilising a complaint about colleagues or employers. In addition, we examine how the recruiters received these answers. Analysis results describe how job applicants resorted to SOL categorisation for constructing co-membership in situations where the staging of 'a good employee' was threatened. Analysis results indicate the dynamics through which constructing co-membership is a joint activity, with a focus on the endorsement of the job applicant 's perspective or affiliation by the recruiter that warrants certain stereotypes; hence, certain social categorisations become the basis for shared social identity. By exploring the interactional trajectories that follow SOL categorisation in this setting, we also show how using gender categorisation as grounds for a complaint in a similar situation functions differently.

Analysis

In this section, we examine how job applicants answer a recruiter's challenging question by mobilising a complaint about their colleagues or employers. The following analysis, which comprises three examples, presents how by referring to absent parties' older age, the applicants suggest co-membership with the recruiter by building on the incumbency of SOL categories. Thus, the applicants mobilise SOL categorisation as acceptable grounds to complain and conceal personal shortcomings. Thereafter, an additional example is presented where a job applicant first mobilises a gender categorisation and then uses a SOL categorisation as grounds for a complaint about her workplace. As previously mentioned, all extracts feature a 29-year-old male recruiter named Saverio (pseudonym). The job applicants in the first three examples are younger males, whereas the one in the last example is a younger female.

Complaining about older workers: Age categorisation to build co-membership and manage a favourable impression

We provide three examples from interviews wherein the applicants employed SOL categorisation to answer critical questions by the recruiter, who asked the job applicant to give a negative evaluation of their present workplace and then explain their role in mending the criticised situation. The job applicants used a SOL category to respond, complaining that their current employers' older age is the main obstacle to organisational improvement.

In Extract 1, Saverio asks Giorgio, a 21-year-old male job applicant, the question: 'What do you dislike in your workplace?' This question is part of the interview agenda and is asked to all job applicants employed at the time of the interview. The topic is delicate because it implies complaining about their current workplace and, as such, may endanger the applicant's ability to make a good impression. Here, the job applicant is entitled to start a complaint (Ruusuvuori et al., 2019). Giorgio answers that he does not like the disorganisation in current workplace because it causes moments of haste followed by instances when employees have nothing to do and 'stay still'. The recruiter challenges Giorgio by recycling the 'stay still' assessment and asks what his active contribution is towards fixing this disorganisation. Here, the following interaction starts (Figure 1).

The recruiter formulates a question challenging the job applicant and asking about the applicant's input in dealing with the situation regarding his complaint (line 1). In the context of a job interview, the job applicant is most likely expected to make a good impression on the recruiter, and Giorgio does this by claiming that he tries to improve the disorganisation by 'in quotes' inciting his boss (lines 2 and 3).

The recruiter does not take a stance towards the applicant's complaint but lowers his head and starts to take notes. At this point, the applicant mobilises a SOL category in lines 5–6 by saying 'but however my boss is a person quite old, (he) is 70 years old', he is ascribing his employer to the SOL category in which neither the recruiter nor himself belongs. This ascription of the employer into an old age category uses old age depicts old age as a warrant for being inefficient at work.

```
1  SAV:   e lei:,       che fa,          sta fermo anche lei?
          and you:,     what do you do,     do you stay still  as well?

2  GIO:   no io comunque cerco di
          no I  anyway try    to

3         [tra virgolette >incitare il mio titolare<
          [in quotes      >incite    my     boss<

4  SAV:   [((lowers heads and takes notes))

5  GIO:   >pero´ comunque il mio titolare< e´ una persona (.)
          >but   anyway  my boss<         is a person (.)

6         abbastanza anziana ha settant'anni. (.)
          quite old he is seventy years old. (.)

7  SAV:   mm hm,
          mm hm,

8  GIO:   e non       [ha
          and does not[have

9  SAV:               [qu]indi ha i   suoi     tempi anche
                      [ s]o    he needs his own time

10 GIO:   esatto  poi     [non e´- non ha    neanche più   tanta vogli[a
          exactly so      [he hasn't got the will            anymore[e

11 SAV:                   [((raises head and looks at GIO))

12
                                                                    [mm hm,
                                                                    [mm hm,

13 GIO:   di mettersi li eh (.)
          to be there  eh   (.)

14        lo capisco       anche pero´: spesso cerco di: diciamo
          I understand him even  but:   often  I try to: let's say

15 SAV:   stimolarlo=
          stimulate=

16 GIO:   =stimolarlo un po'
          =stimulate a bit

17 SAV:   ° [(hhh) okahy. °
          ° [(hhh) okahy. °
          [((laughs, brings hand to the mouth, and lowers head))
```

Figure 1. Extract 1.

The recruiter's continuer 'mm hm' (line 30) makes relevant the applicant's continuation. However, when the applicant starts a new turn of talk, the recruiter formulates an interpretation of the mobilised SOL categorisation through an upshot (Heritage and

Watson, 1979) in line 9. In the upshot with an early onset in overlap, the recruiter spells out the relationship between the employer's age and his slowness or sloppiness (line 9, 'so he needs his own time'). According to Heritage and Watson (1979), the introduction of a formulation as an upshot enables co-participants to settle on one of many possible interpretations of what they have been speaking. Here, the recruiter volunteers the interpretation that older age is the cause of the employer's disorganisation, which overlaps with Giorgio's turn onset (lines 8–9). By making this connection between old age and slowness, Saverio can also be heard as distancing himself from the complainable older age – as expressing that he does not belong to that category. Giorgio starts his next turn by agreeing with Saverio's upshot and upgrades his complaint about his employer, stating that 'he hasn't got the will anymore' (line 10). At the end of the extract, Giorgio restates that he understands his employer's difficulties: 'I understand him even'; he continues by stating that 'I often try to. . .' (line 14). Here, the recruiter completes the applicant's utterance with the verb 'stimulate' (line 15), which echoes the verb 'incite' that was mobilised by the applicant earlier (line 1). Collaborative completion is an analytical cue of affiliation with the previous speaker's stance (Lerner, 2004). Saverio supports Giorgio's argumentation and, like Giorgio, can be heard as treating the category of old age as something he does not belong to and as a category that entails inefficiency at work. Giorgio accepts Saverio's completion and softens his account, managing the subjective side of the complaint. Saverio's laughter token in line 40 ends the sequence with an additional affiliative cue (Glenn and Holt, 2013). With his 'okay' (line 17), which is uttered with a finishing intonation, he shows that he has received a satisfactory answer and can move on to the following question (Beach, 1995). Thus, ascribing a third party (the employer of Giorgio) to the older age group through SOL categorisation functions as a warrant for complaining about him. Furthermore, the SOL MCD provides a viable ground for building a favourable impression and providing an answer about why Giorgio cannot resolve the disorganised company. The complaint makes it relevant for the recruiter to take a stance towards the complainable matter: old age. Hence, the recruiter shows affiliation with the applicant's mobilisation of older age as a complainable matter, and as a way of opposition, he ascribes himself to the category of younger workers, together with the job applicant.

We can rely on Stokoe's (2015) work to show that categorisation work can be heard as stereotypical in complaints about absent third parties. The interactional cues include the use of a category as a basis for generalisation to enhance the complainability of the problem (Potter and Wetherell, 1987) and the use of a disclaimer (Edwards, 2005). Disclaimers routinely precede talk that is heard as prejudicial and can help in managing the hearability of a complaint from the subject side so that it is heard as non-prejudicial. Both discursive resources mentioned can be found in the first extract: first, the use of SOL categorisation to enhance the complainability about the employer and, second, the disclaimer in line 14, where Giorgio claims his understanding of the employer ('I even understand him') while mobilising a prejudicial attribution of him as old and slow.

The next case (Extract 2, Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2) shows the use of the SOL categorisation device in answering the same question by Saverio: 'What do you dislike in your workplace?' The extract features Andrea (AND), a 40-year-old male job applicant who was headhunted for the position of a mechanical designer. Similar to Giorgio in the previous extract, Andrea replies that he does not like the disorganisation of his company,

```
1  SAV: >per quanto     riguard[a=<
                       >abou   [t= <

2  AND:                        [eh
                               [eh

3  SAV: >=per quanto riguarda< la disorganizzazione lei ha::
        >=about               < the disorganisation you have::


4       mh, ha   pensato come      eventualmente risolverla
        mh, have thought  about how to eventually solve it

5       ne ha parlato   coneh:  ↑ con  il capo,
        have you talked witheh: ↑ with the boss,

6  AND: no e:h (.) no eh niente [abbiamo fatto questo discorso ogni tanto
        no e:h well  no         [we have talked about this sometimes

7  SAV:                         [((lowers head and starts writing

8  AND: cona:  con lo  Fernando
        witha: with Fernando

9       con il figlio. abbiamo la stessa età [a-]
        with the son.  we are of the same age [a-]

10  SAV:                                     [si`]
                                             [yes]


10 AND: >ci dividono un paio di mesi<
        >a couple of months divide us<

12      e::: (.) pero´c'e´ poco   da fare proprio: perche´
        a::nd (.)but there is little to do precisely: because

13      ma e´  improntato cosi     l- lui:  m.
        but he is      like this h- he:  m.

((lines 14 to 47 omitted to save space. Andrea explains that the boss
should delegate more to his employees, so he could have more time for other
things))

48 AND: eh non c'e´ ↑bisogno di andare da lui
        eh there is no ↑need to go to him

49 SAV: ((starts nodding))


50 AND: >@ti va bene, non ti va bene, lascialo perdere,@
        >@are you ok with it, are you not, forget about  him,@
```

Figure 2.1. Extract 2, part one.

although the two job applicant applicants were employed by different companies. We join the conversation when the recruiter challenges him by asking what he does to improve the issue.

Similar to Extract 1, in Extract 2, old age is used as a basis to warrant a complaint about Andrea's employer and avoid another possible topic to be accounted for. The job

```
51      tornare indietro, valutare,
        go back,          evaluate,

52      studiare, e   [@no non mi     piace@]<
        study,    and [@no it is not good@]<

53 SAV:               [certo.             ]
                      [of course.         ]
                      [((stop nodding, move backwards and
                         and looks at AND))

54 AND: invece  e:h lui: d- [de] ve essere lui a decidere,
        instead e:h he:  ha- [ha] s to be   him to decide,

55 SAV:                     [(.h)]
                            [(.h)]
                            [((nods while laughing))

56 AND: [se non va ben,  se va bene, [ee queste cose che: rallentano.]
        [what is not right, what is right, ee these things that slow down.]

57 SAV: [((nods))


58 SAV:                                [chiaro conosco un po:      mm]
                                       [sure I know a bi:t    mm]

59 AND: ee e´    di stampo vecchio ee::
        ee he is old fashioned     ee::

60 AND: [questo rallenta un po´tutta l'azienda
        [this slows down a bit all   the company

61 SAV: [ ((nods))

62       mm hm.
         mm hm.
```

Figure 2.2. Extract 2, part two.

applicant takes some time to build his account (55 lines), which shows the delicacy of the interaction. First, he evokes an SOL categorisation by saying that he is not able to talk to the boss about the disorganisation and can only to the boss's son, who is as old as Andrea. At this point, it already becomes explicit that the boss is assigned to a different SOL category than Andrea and the boss's son. Thus, the category 'old' is implicitly evoked by the chronologically ordered device of father and son. Nevertheless, here, the chronological relevance of the categorisation, instead of family lines, is underlined by the remark 'we are of the same age' in line 9. Through this categorisation work, Andrea starts to build the employer's character; in fact, he says, 'there is little to do' and 'he is like this' (lines 12–23). The description of the employer as a fixed character who is unable to

listen, compared with the son, is why Andrea cannot do something about the disorganisation.

Thereafter, starting from line 48, the applicant upgrades the complaint and continues building the character in ways that infer that the employer is stubborn and inefficient by employing inference-rich actions that can be seen as coherent with the 'older' boss's character. Andrea mentions a long list of actions, also through reported speech (lines 50 and 52), that have the interactional function of building a caricature. The recruiter shows affiliation with this caricature by claiming to understand ('of course', line 53) and by laughing (line 55), thus taking the description as comical. Accordingly, in line 58, the recruiter acknowledges the employer's caricature by stating that surely 'he knows the type', which explicitly shows that they partner up in the recognition of a stereotypical typology and shared knowledge of it.

As in the previous extract, the job applicant engages in the interactional work of characterising his employer in a stereotypical way, which is concluded by the upshot in line 59 that categorises the boss through an explicit SOL attribute: 'he is old fashioned'. Saverio displays growing affiliation to the topic of the complaint – the older employer – throughout the sequence (nodding, lines 49 and 61; agreement, lines 53 and 58; laughter, line 55). Further, as in the previous extract but less explicitly, the interactants co-construct a stereotypical characterisation and warrant the use of age as grounds to sustain a complaint, which supports the maintenance of a favourable impression by the job applicant. They also negotiate in situ their co-membership with the younger worker group in contrast to a complainable, old-fashioned and absent third party.

The next case (Extract 3, Figure 3) features the same question by Saverio: 'What do you dislike about your workplace?' Thereby, the same action is expected by the job applicant: he is entitled to start a complaint about his workplace and maintain a good impression. Pietro (PIE) is a 32-year-old male job applicant. He was headhunted for the job position of a mechanical designer like the previous job applicants, but he currently works at a different company. Before Extract 3 starts, Piero has said that he does not like the location of the company, which is too far from his home. We join the conversation when Saverio asks for further elements that the applicant does not like, thus making it possible to complain more.

Lines 2–5 feature the second part of Pietro's answer to Saverio's question. The hedging in lines 2 and 3 (extended vowels, expirations, pauses and circumlocution) once again shows the delicacy of complaining about the workplace while maintaining a good impression. The topic of the complaint is featured in lines 4 and 5: 'I don't like. . .to work. . . where I am told always 'it is done this way''. Saverio leaves the floor to Pietro to continue the complaint, with a continuer in line 6 showing interest in hearing more. Consequently, Pietro elaborates and clarifies that he does not like to follow the directions given by certain 'characters'. The labelling of 'some characters' constructs a group of people subjected to stereotypical characterisation (Jayyusi, 1984). Through this expansion, Piero manages his positive impression as an employee by restricting the types of people from whom he does not accept receiving instruction. He manages his side of the complaint in lines 12–14 by underlining that he tries to find a solution, thus restating his positive identity as an employee. This expansion also works as a disclaimer towards the prejudicial characterisation coming up. Pietro concludes the description of these 'characters' by

```
1 SAV:  cosa altro le piace meno?
        what else do you like less?

2 PIE:  .h ma e:: allora pfhh (.02) diciamo che (.04) .hh
        .h but e:: so    pfhh (.02) let's say that (.04) .hh

3       allora io e:: personalmente
        so     I e::  personally

4       mm mi trovo male a lavorare in un contesto in cui
        mm I don't like to work     in a context    where


5       mi viene detto   @si fa sempre cosi´@.
        I am told always @it is done in this way@.

6  SAV: ↑m[m,
        ↑m[m,

7  PIE:   [>nel senso<    che quando   mi trovo di fronte a dei personaggi
          [>meaning< that when I find myself in front of some characters

8       che (.01) sono e:: troppo (.)
        that (.01) a:re eh (.) too much (.)

9       °come dire°
        °how to say°

10      indirizzati verso un'unica soluzion[e
        directed towards  only one solution [n

11 SAV:                                    [mm mm,
                                           [mm mm,
12 PIE: c- cioe´   >io cerco di spaziare
        t- that is >I try to find new solutions

13      se non si puo´ fare cosi´
        if it is not possible to do it in this way

14      troviamo un altro modo< invece .hh
        we find another way<  instead .hh


15 PIE: mi e´ capitato spesso e volentieri
        it happened to me often and willingly

16      che quelli comunque con u:n
        that the ones anyway with a:

17      un'esperienza maggiore ovviamente
        a greater experience  of course

18        siano improntati verso    (.) s[empre
          are   inclined   towards  (.) a[lways

19 SAV:                                [certo.
                                       [of course.

20 PIE: quindi e: no:ne: (.) >diciamo che a me non piace
        so     e: no:t: >let's say that I do not like

21      che mi si impongano le cose senza darmi un motivo<
        that things are imposed to me without giving me a reason<
```

Figure 3. Extract 3.

ascribing them to older age and mobilising a SOL attribution 'the ones with a greater experience'. The previously cited characters are now explicitly ascribed to the older age category. This ascription is presented by Pietro as obvious ('of course', line 17),

and the previous descriptors can be seen as coherent with the assigned age group. The recruiter shows an affiliative stance towards the characterisation with an ‘of course’ (line 19), as we saw in Extract 2. This agreement overlaps with Pietro’s turn; thus, the interactants display shared knowledge of these older ‘characters’, and Pietro does not need to elaborate further and proceeds with closing (‘so’, line 20) his complaint.

Pietro uses SOL categorisation as a basis for grounding and enhancing the complainability of the problem. The recruiter warrants this use and affiliates himself with the topic of the complaint, hence expressing a shared notion of older workers and their traits, who here are shown as resistant to change. The prejudicial use of the older third-party characterisation produces a stereotypical image of a ‘man of a certain experience’, as we have seen in Extract 2. Also, in this case, the participants build a co-membership as younger workers in opposition to the complainable absent older colleagues.

The three extracts show how in a delicate situation where the recruiter (who identifies himself as a young male) has asked the applicants to criticise their present workplace, job applicants use SOL categories to warrant the delicate business of complaining about their employer or colleagues. In this extract the mobilisation of possible -isms and age categorisation are less explicit. In the case presented, age categorisation ranges from ‘he is 70 years old’ (extract 1) to ‘he is old fashioned’ (extract 2) and, lastly, ‘the ones with great experience’ (extract 3). To concurrently warrant the complaint and make a good impression, they rely on the stereotypical attributes attached to older workers. Based on this shared knowledge, the recruiter shows affiliation and joins in the construction of stereotypical characterisations. SOL categorisation sustains the construction of co-membership by making it relevant that both the job applicant and recruiter are younger than the complainable third party. This co-membership supports the interactional dynamics, allowing the job applicants to maintain a positive identity while complaining about their workplace or employer.

Re-establishing co-membership: The use of age categorisation to remedy impression

In this section, we show how SOL as an MCD is used to remedy a difficult case of impression management. Compared with the previous extracts, here the job applicant initiates a complaint about her work on the grounds of gender categorisation and, only at a later stage, on the grounds of SOL categories. In this additional case, a 21-year-old female job applicant, Carmela (CAR), is being interviewed by Saverio, the recruiter. She was headhunted for a position in internal sales. This position is an office job that does not entail active involvement in product manufacturing. In Italy, this job is mostly performed by women, which feeds the stereotype that women are more fitted for administrative and assistant positions than men.

Immediately before the extract begins (Figure 4.1), Saverio asked Carmela what she liked about her job. Carmela answered that she liked the variety of tasks. We join the conversation at a point where Saverio invites her to list other positive aspects, and she volunteers a complaint about her workplace. Although she starts the complaint without being asked to, in a job interview setting where the job applicants are headhunted, they may be expected to report negative remarks about the workplace that they are interested

```
1  CAR: PRIma:  era  l'ambiente a piacermi. (.)
        BEFore I liked the environment (.)

2  SAV: mm hm,
        mm hm,

3  CAR: poi::  ↑No  >perché´ molte cose  sono cambiate<
        then:: ↑Not >because many things  have changed<

4       perché::  diciamo che nel mio lavoro
        because:: >let's say that  in my work

5       sono molto sessisti.
       (they) are very sexist. <

6  SAV: [mm.
        [mm .
        [((gaze down and keeps writing))

7  CAR: questa cosa:: (.) come le dicevo prim[a:
        this thing   (.)as   I said    befo[re:

8  SAV:                                     [°sì°,,
                                            [°yes°,

9   CAR: n:on mi è mai piaciuta
         I ne:ver liked it

10       ma in ogni   ambito.=
         but in every context.=

11 SAV:                    = [↑ in cosa  si verificava questo sessismo?
                           = [↑ in which ways did this sexism take place?
                             [((looks up to candidate))

12 CAR: nel fatto che:    la maggior parte dela:: dei lavoratori
        in the fact tha:t the major part ofa:     of the workers

13      >sono prettamente uomini<.
        >they are mainly men<.

14 SAV:                         mm hm,
                                mm hm,
                               ((SAV lowers his gaze and writes))

15 CAR: e quindi le donne::    (.) @sì ok@ (.)
        and so    the wome::n (.) @yes ok@ (.)

16      mentre invece (.) non è proprio così        >nel senso< (.)
        while instead (.) it's not really like this >I mean<     (.)

17      mm sono una donna e   non dico      che .hh
        mm I am a   woman and I do not say that .hh
```

Figure 4.1a. Extract 4.1., part one.

in leaving. Similar to the job applicants in the previous extracts, she is in the position of maintaining a favourable impression while complaining and of preserving a trusting relationship with the recruiter. To help the readership better understand this analysis, the extract is shown in two parts (Extract 4.1, Figures 4.1a, 4.1b and Extract 4.2, Figures 4.2a and 4.2b).

The extract starts with Carmela stating that she used to like 'the environment' (line 1) but not anymore; without any prompt by the recruiter, she volunteers a complaint about

```
18        prendo e   [vado a fare il lavoro in officina
          I take and [I go to do   the work in the factory

19 SAV:              [((raises gaze and look at CAR))

20 CAR:  >anche se l'ho fatto< (.)
          >even if I have done it< (.)

21        però non per questo io valgo meno di un  uo[mo:=
          but not for this    I'm worth less than a  ma:[n=

22 SAV:                                                [certo
                                                       [of course

23 CAR:  =o non posso fare quello che fa un uomo.
          =or I cannot do    what a man do:es.
```

Figure 4.1b. Extract 4.1, part two.

her workplace being sexist (line 5). The link between complaint and affiliation has been studied in performance appraisal interviews: employees volunteering a complaint anticipate a non-affiliation by the superior (see Ruusuvuori et al., 2021). Here, the importance of receiving affiliation when mobilising a complaint becomes clear; in the beginning, Saverio does not immediately take a stance towards this complaint and leaves her the floor to continue by providing vocal continuers in lines 6 and 8. As previously stated, complaining is a delicate activity and complaining about one's workplace in a job interview further increases this delicacy because it may damage the positive image of the job applicant as a trustable future employee. Complaining about sexism may notably be an even more delicate business because it is a condemnable topic and it makes relevant the gender identity of the interactants. In this case, the complaint may even be heard as an accusation because sexism refers to discrimination and the complainant has identified as female, whereas the recruiter represents the opposite gender category (Edwards, 2005). Saverio challenges Carmela to give concrete examples of this discrimination (line 11); his question latches onto the previous turn, leading Carmela back to the proposed topic of complaint – 'in my workplace (they) are very sexist' – while she was elaborating on the comment to show that she is against inequalities in every context (line 10). Carmela answers by providing an explanation grounded on quantification – 'the majority of the workers they are mainly men' (lines 12 and 13) – and through this, she explicitly mobilises the gender category for the first time.

As described in the previously, gender, much like SOL, is always a perceptually available category to speakers; therefore, when Carmela labels the number of males as the reason for sexism, she makes gender membership relevant for Saverio. Saverio lets Carmela continue (line 14) without taking a stance. In line 16, Carmela starts a reformulation of her account ('I mean'). In her reformulation, Carmela first restates her membership in the female category ('I am a woman', line 17); she gives a concrete example of

why she is valued less than a man is (she does not do production work, line 18) and then provides new grounds for the complaint based on personal worth (line 21). At this stage, Saverio first displays affiliation towards the assessment about her value (assessment in line 21; affiliation with 'of course', line 22). Carmela's categorisation work did not successfully conclude the interaction. Compared with the first three extracts that employed SOL categorisation, in this extract, Saverio continues his line of questioning (four questions) on the topic of the complaint. This underlines that the mobilisation of gender does not sustain impression management and does not create a shared understanding of the topic of the complaint between the interactants. The second challenging question by Saverio is at the start of Extract 4.2 (Figures 4.2a and 4.2b) which is the direct continuation of the previous conversation.

Here, the analytical focus is on the use of categories and on building categorical consistency between job applicants and recruiters. The delicacy of talking about sexism in a job interview surfaces, and instead of accepting the account, Saverio continues his questioning, showing that the account will not be accepted as grounds for a complaint and that further evidence needs to be produced. Saverio challenges the account provided by Carmela three times (in lines 24, 31, 39 and 41), showing that he does not share the notions provided in support of the complaint.

Pushed by the tight questioning, Carmela narrows down the complainable category from 'men' in general to 'some' of them (line 40) and then to 'some of the old-fashioned blokes' (line 43). The SOL categorisation of the complainable third party as older (line 43) is the final interpretative resource that Carmela employs to manage her side of the complaint and to save the relationship with the recruiter, who might have been under accusation as part of the sexist male group. After the SOL categorisation, the recruiter does not engage in affiliative stances but rather gives a minimal response and leaves the floor to Carmela, who continues with her explanation after line 54. The last means through which Carmela narrows down the topic of her complaint is by attributing it to only one person ('this person', line 48) and by including men in the group that is insulted by this old-fashioned person. This demonstrates that, as argued by Billig (1987), people can generalise as well as particularise depending on the interactional situation and goal. This progressive narrowing of the complainable category and the related categorisation negotiation between gender and SOL leads to the conclusion of the sequence in line 54 (for 'okay' as a closing sequence, see Beach, 1995]). The recruiter leaves the complaint about sexism unaddressed, and the job applicant who faced discrimination is emotionally unsupported. Moreover, the recruiter affiliates the topic of the complaint with laughter in line 52, when the complaint is attributed to one person who does not care about anyone. This shows some shared understanding of this characterisation.

As we have seen earlier, Carmela employs negative remarks about a third party, presumably in the service of impression management. Like the ones before, this case is built on complaining about, strictly speaking, an old-fashioned colleague and hence uses SOL as a form of warrant. Carmela constructs a character in contrast to herself and ascribes him to a specific SOL membership category. The categorisation is heard as prejudicial because Carmela brings her personal experience as objective evidence. The SOL categorisation, in contrast, implicitly creates a co-membership between the job applicant and recruiter as part of the younger group. Previously, Carmela had already separated Saverio from the sexiest and old-fashioned men (lines 33–36), making the first effort to establish

```
24 SAV: ma lei dice         appunto   che c'è      sessismo
        but you are saying precisely that there is sexism

25      ah soltanto(.) per un fatto a:h
        ah only    (.) for a fact    ah
       ((looks at camera))

26     ↑nuMErico    [o anche per qualcos'altro]
       of ↑nuMbers  [or also for some others reasons]

27 CAR:             [NO           NO         ] per- > proprio perché´<
                    [NO           NO         ] bec- >exactly because<

28 CAR: gli uomini sono visti in un diverso modo
        the men    are seen  in a different way

29      io ho visto come trattano   e:  i miei   colleghi uomini
        I have seen how  they treat  e:  my male colleagues

30      ho visto come trattano     me.
        I have seen how they treat me.

31 SAV: per esempio ?che   differenza c'è?
        for example ? what difference is there?

32 CAR:  per esempio >che se     parlano con     un uomo
        for example >that if they speak with    a man


33      parlano in      un modo come io sto parlando con  lei
        they speak in a    way    as I   am talking   with you

34 SAV:                                               [mm mm
                                                      [mm mm

35 CAR:  lei sta parlando con me
        you are talking with me

36      quindi< (.)  pari livello. .h   m:h
        so<       (.) same level.    .h  m:h

37      se stanno parlando  con una donna la trattano    praticamente
        if they are talking with a woman  they treat her basically

38      come una (.) >cretina< (.) se posso.
        as      (.) >stupid<   (.) if I may.

39 SAV: ↑si´?
        ↑ really?
        ((smiles))

40 CAR: si alcuni       fanno cosi.
        yes some  (of them)do this.
```

Figure 4.2a. Extract 4.2, part one.

```
41 SAV: ↑anche se (.) conoscendo lei? conoscendo il fatto che [(..)
        ↑even if   (.) knowing you?  knowing the fact that    [(..)

42 CAR:                                                      [↑sì  no ma
                                                             [↑yes no but

43      alcuni: di vecchio[ stampo       sì=
        some:   of the old   [fashioned blokes  yes=

44 SAV:                     [((writes down))

45 CAR: =>sì sì      [  sì]<
        =>yes yes    [  yes]<

46 SAV:              [mm hm,]
                     [mm hm,]

47 CAR: ma si   eh è capitato   anche che
        but yes eh has happened also that

48      questa persona insultasse   (.) me o:
        this person    has insulted (.) me o:r

49 SAV:                                  [((raises gaze))

50      anche gli uomini >va be
        even men          >well

51      lui non fa molta differen  [za<
        he does not make any differ[rence<

52 SAV:                                 [(hh)
                                        [(hh))
                                        ((laugh))

53 CAR: non gli interessa di nessuno    [ (.) se posso ↑pero´(.)
        he does not care   about anyone [ (.) if I may ↑but (.)

54 SAV:                                      [£o(h) okehy£
                                             [£o(h)  okhey£
                                                         [ ((smiles))
```

Figure 4.2b. Extract 4.2, part two.

a co-membership with him. This discursive negotiation excludes the recruiter, as a younger man, from the accused group and might function as a resource to restore the trust between the two. The cultural idea mobilised is that older men are not respectful towards both women and men (lines 50 and 53).

In our case study, we have shown that the construction of good employee identity and impression management through identity categorisation and co-membership is an established practice employed by job applicants. Furthermore, we suggest that gender and SOL categorisation require different interactional work to warrant a complaint and are not equally morally accepted.

Discussion

In the current article, we have shown how job applicants mobilise prejudicial age categorisation and establish co-membership with recruiters as grounds to maintain a favourable impression in challenging job interview sequences. In line with the DP approach, this study shows that mobilising possible ageist remarks is not the goal of the interactants but rather something they do to achieve the interactional business at hand: making a favourable impression. Moreover, we showed how specific discursive dynamics sustain the mobilisation of possible ageism in interaction: prejudicial notions about older third parties, often discreetly mobilised, are tolerated in practice and do not hinder solidarity or favourable impression in job interviews. Our analysis suggests that in situations where recruiters and job applicants share membership in a SOL category (younger age), job applicants may resort to age categorisation as a resource to achieve support from recruiters and save face in delicate situations.

A clear strong point of our analysis is that is has been performed on video recordings of real job interviews. These provide a live social context to the dynamics of biases, similarity and solidarity and show how age and ageist notions influence and surface in recruitment practices. As shown from previous research, similarity is a key element in job interviews and it is interactionally relevant (Rivera, 2012, 2015). Here, we have shown that discursively constructing similarity on age not only warrants mobilisation of everyday ageism, but also, sustains the remedy of impression management. Moreover, the affiliation, or lack of rejection, showed by the recruiter confirms that age prejudices towards older workers are shared notions in work-related settings.

In contrast to dominant social psychological approaches about age stereotypes in recruitment that focus on the cognitive component of ageism stripped of any social context, we have examined age membership in a minute-by-minute unfolding in real interactions between job applicants and recruiters. We have provided evidence of how job applicants decide which social identity category to use to make and sustain a good impression. MCDs, such as SOL, have the property of partitioning members and establishing co-membership in talk (Sacks, 1992). In our data, the SOL categorisation of a complainable absent third party (older employer) establishes a constant partitioning between the job applicant and recruiter. As stated by Schegloff (2007), the negotiation of partition constancy and inconstancy on MCDs, such as SOL, serves as a resource to move from one set of categories to another at the members' convenience. We have shown this possibility of moving between different categories in Extract 4, where a female job applicant resorts to establishing age co-membership – as opposed to gender cross-membership – while looking for the recruiter's affiliation with her mobilised complaint.

For job applicants and recruiters, age prejudices are interactional resources that they can draw upon in producing social actions, such as complaining. Van De Mieroop et al. (2019) have demonstrated that complaints about absent third parties do not disrupt the

job applicant's good impression if they are performed in a small talk frame. In contrast to these findings, our analysis has demonstrated that complaints about absent third parties, if grounded on older age, do not need to be made within a small talk frame and do not compromise the institutional role of the interactants when participants share a membership in the category 'young age'. We might argue that older age is an accepted complainable matter and that the recruiter can display affiliation towards it without endangering his role as an unbiased interviewer. This warrantability of mobilising complaints about older parties reveals the taken-for-granted age stereotypes about older workers in the cultural settings of our case study. The acceptability of complaining about old age – here considering the recruiter's young age – reveals the subtle dynamics that place older workers at a disadvantage in job interviews.

Future research avenue is the moral accountability of mobilising stereotypical categorisation considering the institutional goal of the interaction during recruitment processes. The institutional goal of recruitment practices is to find the best-fitting job applicant; nevertheless, different recruitment centres and employers endorse inclusion and diversity as an organisational value. In a study on job interviews, although not on -ism and age, Van De Mieroop and Schnurr (2018) showed that an interactional possibility for recruiters is to invoke their institutional identity and orient to the moral accountability of the category practice invoked by a job applicant while not disrupting the interaction. More studies are needed to understand how categorisation practices based on demographics (such as age, gender and ethnicity) are made relevant in interaction and whether these practices are targeted as morally accountable by participants, considering the institutional goal and the building of co-membership.

The limitations of the presented case study need to be addressed. The small number of job interviews recorded in only one recruitment agency does not allow us to argue further on co-membership dynamics. Nevertheless, the phenomenon described reoccurred in our data, shedding new light on the construction of co-membership. We suggest continuing this promising line of research by investigating these dynamics in data collected from different countries, cultures and diverse participants. In line with the literature (Flinkfeldt et al., 2021; Heinrichsmeier, 2019), we argue that the application of MCA and CA on a wider database reveal how less explicit conversation patterns are a manifestation of stereotypes and how these micro-level interactions can be linked to the macro-level reproduction of inequalities and ageism.

The presented discursive approach to stereotypes has important practical implications for everyday recruitment practices. Our data show that age co-membership supports affiliation towards age-based complaints, endangering the institutional goal of unbiased applicant selection. A practical application of our study concerns the training of recruiters. Using examples from actual conversational dynamics may reveal how stereotypes unfold in talk and how participants could prevent this from happening by adhering to their institutional role.

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Data availability statement

Due to the nature of this research, participants of this study did not agree for their data to be shared publicly, so supporting data is not available.

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Appendix A. Transcription symbols (Jefferson, 2004).

Symbol	Description
(.)	A micropause
(0.2)	A timed pause (seconds)
[ ]	Speech overlaps
(( ))	Comments or annotations of non-verbal actions
> <	The pace of speech has quickened
< >	The pace of speech has slowed down
word	A rise in volume or emphasis
↑	Rise in intonation
↓	Drop in intonation
(h)	Laughter in the conversation
=	No pause between sentences
:::	Stretched sound
°word°	Quieter than surrounding speech by the same speaker
hhh	Inbreath
.hhh	Outbreath
whord	Aspiration/breathiness if within a word
w(h)ord	Laughing while talking
@	Reported speech