

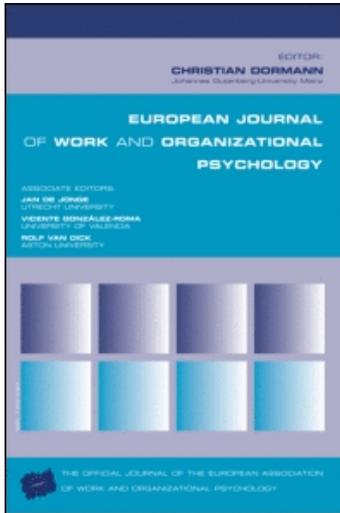
This article was downloaded by: [Gaillard, Mathieu]

On: 5 November 2008

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 905086348]

Publisher Psychology Press

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title-content=t713684945>

Intergroup predictors of older workers' attitudes towards work and early exit

Mathieu Gaillard ^a; Donatienne Desmette ^a

^a Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

First Published on: 01 April 2008

To cite this Article Gaillard, Mathieu and Desmette, Donatienne(2008)'Intergroup predictors of older workers' attitudes towards work and early exit',European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology,17:4,450 — 481

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/13594320801908564

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13594320801908564>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

Intergroup predictors of older workers' attitudes towards work and early exit

Mathieu Gaillard and Donatienne Desmette
Catholic University of Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium

This study investigated the role of intergroup processes in older workers' attitudes towards work and early exit from the workplace. Specifically, the relationships between four intergroup variables (cognitive and affective identification with older workers as a group, permeability of retirees' group boundaries, and permeability of younger workers' group boundaries) derived from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and four older workers' attitudes (early exit intention, affective organizational commitment, psychological disengagement, and competition with younger workers) were examined using a sample of 152 45- to 59-year-old Belgian workers. Hierarchical regression analyses indicated that intergroup predictors accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in each of the four older workers' attitudes after some personal and organizational variables had been held constant. Most notably, cognitive identification with older workers as a group was found to be positively related to early exit intention, whereas permeability of younger workers' group boundaries had a positive relationship to affective organizational commitment, and a negative relationship to psychological disengagement and to competition with younger workers. Implications of these findings and directions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Older workers; Early retirement; Work-related attitudes; Social identity.

Correspondence should be addressed to Mathieu Gaillard, Catholic University of Louvain, Division of Social and Organizational Psychology, Place Cardinal Mercier, 10, 1348 Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium. E-mail: mathieu.gaillard@uclouvain.be

This research benefited from a fund by the "Institut wallon de l'Evaluation, de la Prospective et de la Statistique" (IWEPS), another fund by the "Communauté Française" ("Ministre de l'Enseignement supérieur, de la Recherche scientifique et des relations internationales"), and European Social Funds (ESF) for "Objectif 1-Hainaut" to Mathieu Gaillard and Donatienne Desmette. We would like to thank Pierre Feyereisen, Mike Friedman, Tim Potter, Brigit Schyns, and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and suggestions on an earlier version of this article. We also thank David Bourguignon, Ginette Herman, and Georges Liénard for their great help throughout this research, and Michel Renard and his colleagues of the Belgian trade union CNE for their assistance in data collection.

Nowadays, like other Western societies, Belgium is characterized by a decreasing workforce participation rate among the elderly. Figures from the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2003) show Belgium to be one of the countries with the lowest proportion (41%) of 50- to 64-year-olds working. This is in part due to the strong trend among 50- to 64-year-olds to take voluntary early retirement (Vandenbroucke & vander Hallen, 2002). In order to maintain the financial viability of the social security system, many governments are trying to keep this age group in the labour force for longer by reducing, if not abolishing, early exit opportunities such as early retirement. This policy raises the potential problem of forcing some 50- to 64-year-olds who want to leave the labour force to continue working until the legal retirement age. Keeping people who want to stop work but are not allowed to do so in the labour force may be detrimental not only to the individuals themselves (i.e., their well-being), but also to the organization (i.e., its efficiency). Thus, in considering reforms of the ways in which careers can be ended, it is important to understand the reasons why some people over the age of 50 wish to retire early, and to investigate the attitudes and behaviours of those who keep on working.

Past literature on the causes of voluntary (early) retirement has mainly focused on personal and organizational variables (e.g., Barnes-Farrell, 2003). However, while there are a great deal of negative stereotypes about the elderly in organizations (e.g., Chiu, Chan, Snape, & Redman, 2001)—which suggests, from a social psychological perspective such as Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), that workers described as “older” are members of a social group that may be devalued—no study of the retirement decision has incorporated variables derived from this theory of intergroup relations into its design. The purpose of the present study is to examine, after controlling for some personal and organizational variables, the role of intergroup variables derived from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in predicting older workers' attitudes not only towards early exit but also towards work.

SOCIAL CONTEXT OF THE PRESENT STUDY: EARLY EXIT IN BELGIUM

In most definitions of voluntary retirement (Barnes-Farrell, 2003; Beehr, 1986; Feldman, 1994), it has been suggested that withdrawal from the workforce can take various forms including complete (i.e., total and permanent) retirement and some kind of bridge employment (i.e., some continuing level of activity such as a part-time job after full-time employment ends). In Belgium, there are several possible ways of withdrawing from the workforce before the legal retirement age (currently 65 for men and 63 for women) in both the public and the private sector.

Specifically, complete or partial early retirement is specific to workers who are over 58 (55 in some sectors), and career breaks (which are not restricted to older workers) are sometimes used by them to give up their jobs or to reduce their working hours before being eligible for retirement. In the present study, we will use the term “early exit” to denote all these different types of withdrawal from the workforce before the legal retirement age.

International comparisons of public policies suggest that Belgium, like France and Germany, is characterized by an “early exit culture” (Guillemard, 2003). In these countries, the welfare system is such that there are several ways in which workers can withdraw from the labour market early, while receiving generous welfare benefits. Moreover, unlike countries such as Sweden and Japan, employment policies in Belgium, France, and Germany include relatively few provisions for integrating, or reintegrating, 50- to 64-year-olds into the workforce. In the United Kingdom and the United States, employment policies aimed at keeping older workers in the labour market are also very limited, but the welfare system does not provide such generous benefits for early exit from the workforce (Guillemard, 2003).

In short, in Belgium, the early exit scheme is relatively homogeneous across organizations and quite generous. However, while many older workers make use of early exit opportunities as shown by the effective retirement age (58 for men and 57 for women; OECD, 2003), other older people decide to work up to, or even beyond, the legal retirement age. Such individual differences in late career choice may be explained by the life-span approach to older workers (see Sterns & Miklos, 1995), which holds that career decisions are influenced not only by normative, historical factors which affect most members of a cohort in the same way (such as the early exit culture in Belgium), but also by personal characteristics, work-related factors, and nonwork-related factors (Sterns & Kaplan, 2003).

EARLY RETIREMENT DECISION: TRADITIONAL BEHAVIOURAL APPROACH

Most behavioural research on the decision to retire (early) is based on models developed by Beehr (1986) and Feldman (1994), which provide insights into both the nature and the timing of the retirement process, and the variables that may be involved in the decision to retire. Beehr’s model suggests that retirement is a process composed of three linked events. How people think about retirement (i.e., the preferences they have regarding retirement) depends on some personal and environmental (family- and work-related) variables. These preferences may then influence their intentions with regard to retirement. Finally there is a behavioural component to the retirement decision-making process (i.e., the actual act of retiring). Most behavioural research on the factors that influence the

decision to retire has used either “planned retirement age” or “retirement intentions” as the dependent variable, two constructs related to the preferences or intentions about retirement (Barnes-Farrell, 2003; Shultz & Taylor, 2001). The prospective nature of these variables is relevant both theoretically and empirically. At a theoretical level, the conceptualization of retirement as a process justifies the focus on the precursors of the retirement decision (the preferences or the intentions) instead of on the actual act of retirement (Barnes-Farrell, 2003; Beehr, 1986). At an empirical level, some studies have demonstrated a strong consistency between retirement intentions and actual retirement behaviour 1 and 2 years later (Henkens & Tazelaar, 1994; Prothero & Beach, 1984). In what follows, we report on findings of behavioural research—mostly based on models developed by Beehr (1986) and Feldman (1994)—on the variables involved in the decision to retire (early). This research has mainly focused on variables related to the worker him/herself and to his/her professional life.

Reviews of the literature on the predictors of retirement preferences, intentions, and behaviours conclude that wealth and health show the most consistent relationships with the decision to retire (Barnes-Farrell, 2003; Beehr, 1986; Shultz & Taylor, 2001). More precisely, people are more likely to retire when they expect to have sufficient financial resources in retirement and when they are in poor health. Other personal characteristics such as age, education, and gender have been found to influence the decision to retire. Research has shown that age is positively related to retirement intentions (Adams & Beehr, 1998; Adams, Prescher, Beehr & Lespito, 2002): The older you are, the more willing you are to retire in the near future. Shultz and Taylor (2001) reported that more educated workers generally intended to retire later. They explained this finding in terms of a proximity between education and other variables influencing retirement decisions (such as health and autonomy in job tasks). As to the effect of gender on retirement decisions, no consensus has emerged. For example, while Talaga and Beehr (1995) found that men were more likely to retire early than women, Reitzes, Mutran, and Fernandez (1998) reported the reverse pattern of results. Moreover, it has been suggested that the role of gender in retirement decisions has to be examined in relation to the spouse's health, financial, and work/retirement status (Talaga & Beehr, 1995). Likewise, recent studies (Pienta & Hayward, 2002; Szinovacz, DeViney & Davey, 2001) have found evidence that individual retirement planning is part of a process of couple retirement.

Within this literature, it has also been suggested that some organizational variables play a role in the decision to retire when personal characteristics (demographic variables, health, and wealth) are controlled. For example, research has shown that the retirement decision is positively associated with some job characteristics such as high physical demands (Blekesaume &

Solem, 2005; Hayward, Grady, Hardy, & Sommers, 1989), and low autonomy (Blekesaume & Solem, 2005; Schmitt & McCune, 1981). Job satisfaction and organizational commitment have also been examined as possible influences on the decision to retire. Hanisch and Hulin (1990, 1991) reported that job satisfaction was negatively related to the desire to retire, but several studies have failed to replicate this finding (Adams, 1999; Adams & Beehr, 1998; Taylor & Shore, 1995). There is little evidence that organizational commitment is negatively related to retirement intentions (Adams & Beehr, 1998; Adams et al., 2002).

In summary, behavioural research on the predictors of the decision to retire (early) indicates that personal and organizational variables are relevant in predicting retirement intentions. However, none of these approaches has taken into account the current use of the adjective "older" to describe workers over the age of 50, or even 45 in Belgium. It has been suggested that this social label refers to a psychosocial definition of older workers based on social perceptions such as ageist stereotypes (Sterns & Miklos, 1995).

STEREOTYPES ABOUT OLDER WORKERS

In Western societies, stereotypes about the elderly consist of both positive (e.g., warm) and negative (e.g., slow-thinking) traits of personality and cognitive functioning (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002; Hummert, 1999). Similar ageist stereotypes seem to exist in organizations. Numerous studies have reported that, although older workers are subject to a few positively stereotyped assumptions about their experience, reliability, loyalty, and interpersonal skills, negative beliefs are prevalent (Chiu et al., 2001; Hassell & Perrewe, 1995; McCann & Giles, 2002; Taylor & Walker, 1994). Older workers are perceived as waiting for retirement, having low physical capacity, being in poor health, with outdated skills, slower, less creative, less trainable, less motivated to remain up to date in their jobs, and more resistant to change and to new technologies than younger workers.

According to social psychological theories of stigmatization (Crocker, Major, & Steele, 1998), individuals targeted by negative stereotypes (e.g., older workers) may be confronted with prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory behaviours (e.g., from employers, colleagues, or customers). There is substantial evidence that prejudice and discrimination are harmful to their targets (i.e., the stigmatized individuals) on multiple levels (see Crocker & Major, 1989). On the basis of stress theories (e.g., Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), Miller (Miller & Kaiser, 2001; Miller & Major, 2000) conceptualized prejudice and discrimination as stressors in the lives of the stigmatized individuals and assumed that they usually attempt to cope with their predicament. Following this idea, it seems plausible to assume that early exit

intention is a coping strategy used by older workers to avoid prejudice and discrimination that they may encounter in the workplace, and to investigate other coping strategies displayed by them. According to Branscombe and Ellemers (1998), Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is a valuable framework to understand stigmatized people's coping reactions.

SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND OLDER WORKERS

The fundamental assumption of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) is that an individual needs to achieve a positive self-image, that is, either a positive personal identity or a positive social identity. Personal identity refers to my uniqueness as an individual, by focusing on the attributes that make me different from other individuals, whereas social identity is a self-definition in terms of some social category membership and emphasizes both similarities between me and members of my group (the ingroup) and differences between us (ingroup members) and members of another group (the outgroup). Depending on the social situation, enhancing either the salience of the ingroup/outgroup categorization or that of distinctions based on individuals' unique characteristics, either the social (group) component of the self or the personal (individual) one is activated (see Turner, Oakes, Haslam, & McGarty, 1994). Because they convey the idea that the ingroup is less valued than the outgroup, negative stereotypes of, and prejudice and discrimination towards, ingroup members are commonly considered as sources of an unfavourable self-evaluation, that is a negative social identity (Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998). According to Tajfel and Turner (1979), people may display a range of possible cognitive and behavioural responses, called identity management strategies, to cope with and overcome a devalued social identity, and thus achieve a more positive identity. These coping strategies may be individualistic (i.e., an individual's attitudes and behaviours aimed at enhancing his/her personal situation) or collective (i.e., an individual's attitudes and behaviours aimed at enhancing the value of the ingroup as a whole). Individual mobility, where the aim is to leave or dissociate oneself from the devalued ingroup in order to join a more valued group, is a typical example of individualistic strategy. An illustration of collective strategy is social competition with the outgroup, which is intended to reverse the relative positions of the ingroup and the outgroup on the stereotypic dimension on which the ingroup is devalued.

According to this theory of intergroup relations, the current use of the label "older" to describe workers over the age of 50, along with the age-related stereotypes, may cause a 50- to 64-year-old worker to think of him/herself as an older worker. In terms of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), the comparative content of these stereotypes, which indicate

that older workers are perceived as more experienced but less willing than younger workers to remain in the labour force, and as ready to retire (e.g., Chiu et al., 2001), suggests that younger workers and (early) retirees are two salient and relevant outgroups for older workers. Whereas people's age is the distinctive attribute for "older/younger workers" categorization, the "older workers/retirees" categorization is based on people's work/retirement status. Further, because the prevalence of negative stereotypes about older workers may devalue this social identity, an older worker may adopt some individualistic and/or collective strategies to cope with that potentially negative group self-image. In what follows, based on the literature derived from Social Identity Theory (e.g., Branscombe & Ellemers, 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998; Mummendey, Kessler, Klink, & Mielke, 1999), we investigate several attitudes that may be held by older workers to cope with their potentially negative social identity.

Older workers' attitudes

The first two attitudes may be seen as individualistic strategies aimed at avoiding the association between the self and the potentially unfavourable image of the group (i.e., social category) of older workers. In terms of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), early exit intention may be understood as a plan to leave the older workers' group by using an early exit opportunity (such as early retirement or a reduction in working hours) and thereby gaining complete or partial entry into the community of retirees. Given that both retirees and older workers are subject to negative stereotyped assumptions about their competence, one could argue that the social category of "retirees" is not more valued than the one of "older workers". However, Quadagno and Hardy (1996) documented increasingly positive societal views of retirement. Consistent with this idea, whereas the elderly are positively stereotyped with respect to their warmth (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002), research has shown that related attributes (i.e., generous, supportive, and sociable) are mostly used to describe grandparents or golden agers (Hummert, 1999), that is, older adults whose behaviour reflects some positive views of retirement (McCann & Giles, 2002; Sterns & Kaplan, 2003). In other words, it seems that retirees are more likely to be perceived as generous or sociable than older workers. This speaks to the fact that early exit intention may be seen as an individualistic coping strategy, which is directed towards leaving the older workers' group and joining the retirees' group.

The second attitude of dissociation from the older workers' group reflects a wish to remain in the workforce without being perceived as an older worker. This individualistic coping strategy may consist in defining the self in terms of a social category membership that is valued in the workplace and

that does not refer to workers' age. In line with this idea, an older worker may display affective organizational commitment (see Meyer & Allen, 1991) to be perceived in terms of his/her membership of the organization instead of in terms of his/her age-group membership, i.e., as a worker attached to the organization instead of as an older worker. Thus, whereas a few studies have seen affective organizational commitment as a predictor of the (early) retirement decision (e.g., Adams et al., 2002), we argue that, from a Social Identity Theory point of view (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), it may be understood as an individualistic coping strategy directed towards remaining in the workforce.

While withdrawal from the workforce may be "physical" through early exit, it has been suggested that it may also operate at a more psychological level (see Major & Schmader, 1998). According to Major and Schmader (1998), stigmatized people may achieve a positive self-image through psychological disengagement, defined as "a detachment of self-esteem from external feedback or outcomes in a particular domain, such that feelings of self-worth are not dependent of successes or failures in that domain" (p. 220). These authors assume that this subjective withdrawal from a domain characterized by negative stereotypes of an individual's social identity may be understood as a reduction of the centrality or importance of that domain to his/her self-concept. In this sense, an older worker may protect his/her self-image from the negative stereotypes about ageing in the workplace by reducing the importance of his/her personal successes and failures in that domain.

In addition to these three individualistic approaches, which do not aim at changing the negative value attached to the "older workers" label, the over-50s may also adopt a collective attitude such as competition with younger workers in order to improve their group self-image. In accord with the definition of social competition provided by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), older workers may cope with the stereotype that there are less competent than younger workers by asserting the reverse idea, i.e., that older workers are more competent than younger ones. Mummendey et al. (1999) have argued that, in addition to the social form of competition which aims at gaining evaluative superiority for the ingroup, a material form of competition should also be considered. This refers to an attempt to gain some material advantages for the ingroup over the outgroup. For example, an older worker may enhance the group self-image not only by reversing the relative positions of the older and the younger workers' groups on a stereotypic dimension (e.g., competence), but also by asserting that older workers should be prioritized over younger workers for advantages such as pay or promotion.

On the basis of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), we highlighted four attitudes that may be hold by older workers to cope with

their potentially negative social identity. According to this theory, an individual's preference for coping strategies depends on his/her perceptions of different properties of the relations between the ingroup and the outgroup(s), called sociostructural characteristics of the intergroup relation (e.g., permeability of group boundaries), and on the intensity of his/her identification with the ingroup.

Prediction of older workers' attitudes

Permeability of group boundaries has been shown to be the most crucial determinant of strategy preferences among the sociostructural characteristics of the intergroup relation (Ellemers, van Knippenberg, & Wilke, 1990; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994; Wright, Taylor, & Moghaddam, 1990). This refers to the perception that it is possible for an individual to move from the ingroup to the outgroup. Given that both retirees and younger workers seem to be relevant outgroups for older workers, the permeability of the two group boundaries has to be taken into account to predict older workers' attitudes. The first is the perception that it is possible for an older worker to gain membership of the retirees' group by using an early exit opportunity such as early retirement or a reduction in working hours. We will use the term "retiree permeability" to refer to this idea. The second permeability variable refers to the boundaries between the older and the younger workers' groups. Situations where ingroup/outgroup categorization is based on a distinctive attribute such as race, gender, or age render the initial meaning of permeability of group boundaries problematic because such attributes make an objective or physical transition from one group to another always impossible. Research has suggested that, in such intergroup situations, permeability of group boundaries refers to the perception that the social system allows for individual advancement or recognition that an individual deserves regardless of his/her group-based identity (Ellemers, 1993), and that it is possible for an ingroup member to be regarded or treated as an outgroup member (Kessler & Mummendey, 2002; Mummendey et al., 1999). In line with this extensive definition, the permeability of boundaries between older and younger workers' groups may represent the perception that the organization allows for individual recognition, regardless of age-group membership (i.e., that access to recognition at work is not restricted for older workers). We will use the term "age-related permeability" to refer to this idea.

As for social identification with the ingroup, it has been demonstrated that this concept is composed of at least two related but distinct dimensions: cognitive and affective identification (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwkerk, 1999). Cognitive identification refers to an individual's awareness of belonging to a particular social group (i.e., his/her knowledge of his/her

own group membership), whereas affective identification reflects a commitment to or an emotional involvement with the group, and is very similar to the concept of private acceptance of one's social identity developed by Luhtanen and Crocker (1992). Accordingly, we suggest that identification with older workers as a group may be conceptualized in terms of these two dimensions: An older worker may or may not acknowledge that he/she belongs to the group of older workers (cognitive identification), and at the same time, he/she may or may not feel emotionally involved with this group, being glad (or not) to be an older worker (affective identification).

Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) specifies how, when social identity is negative, permeability of group boundaries and ingroup identification can lead to either individualistic or collective coping strategies. Specifically, the extent to which group boundaries are permeable limits the feasibility of an individualistic strategy aimed at dissociating the self from the ingroup (to join the outgroup or to be perceived in terms of some group membership unrelated to the ingroup/outgroup categorization). The strength of identification with the ingroup determines people's desire to enhance the group self-image. Thus, people are more inclined to seek membership of the outgroup or to be perceived in terms of a group membership unrelated to the ingroup/outgroup categorization when group boundaries are seen as permeable and/or when they identify weakly with the ingroup (Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997; Mummendey et al., 1999). Conversely, impermeable group boundaries and/or high identification with the ingroup induce people to engage in collective strategies such as competition with the outgroup.

Based on these assumed causal relationships (which were supported by research using experimental designs; Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers et al., 1997) between permeability of group boundaries, ingroup identification, and preferences for coping strategies, we suggest four hypotheses about the links between older workers' attitudes (early exit intention, affective organizational commitment, psychological disengagement, and competition with younger workers) and intergroup variables derived from Social Identity Theory (retiree permeability, age-related permeability, cognitive identification, and affective identification) (see Figure 1).

First, we assume that early exit intention (individualistic strategy directed towards leaving the older workers' group and joining the retirees' group) will be positively related to the permeability of retirees' group boundaries (retiree permeability) and negatively related to both cognitive and affective identification with older workers (Hypothesis 1).

Second, we expect that affective organizational commitment (individualistic strategy directed towards remaining in the workforce without being perceived as an older worker) will be positively linked to the permeability of younger workers' group boundaries (age-related permeability) and

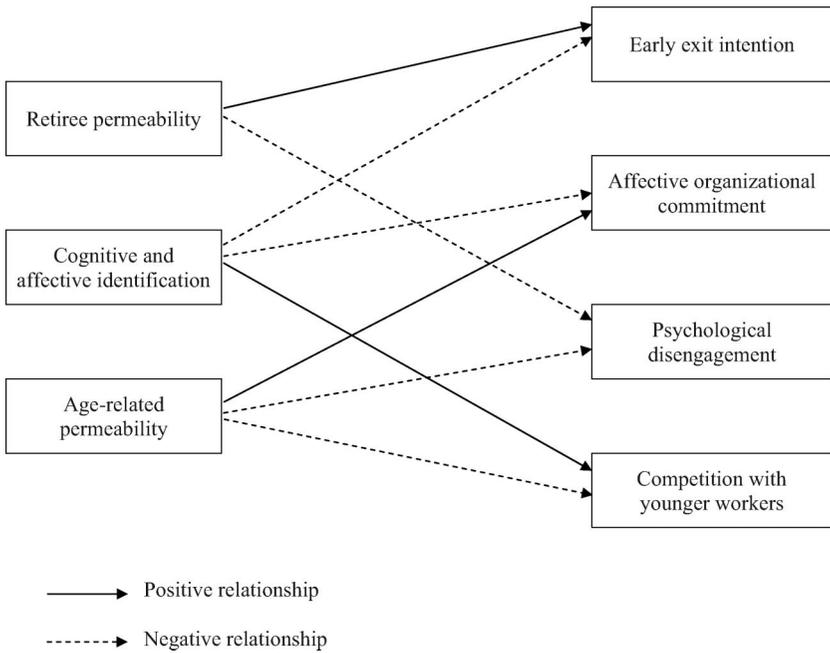


Figure 1. Assumed relationships between intergroup predictors and older workers' attitudes.

negatively linked to both cognitive and affective identification with older workers (Hypothesis 2).

Predictions are less obvious for psychological disengagement because this does not arise directly from Social Identity Theory. However, based on theories of stigmatization (e.g., Crocker et al., 1998; Major & Schmader, 1998), we suggest that psychological disengagement will be negatively related to both retiree permeability and age-related permeability (Hypothesis 3). More precisely, we expect that when older workers' group membership is perceived as an obstacle to individual recognition in the organization and/or when physical exit from work (such as early retirement or a reduction in working hours) is perceived as impossible, one solution for an older worker is to distance him/herself psychologically from work, for example by reducing the importance of his/her personal successes and failures in the workplace.

Finally, we hypothesize that competition with younger workers will be negatively associated with age-related permeability and positively associated with both cognitive and affective identification with older workers (Hypothesis 4).

Because some personal and organizational variables have proved to be significant predictors of the decision to retire (see earlier), and more recently of the decision to return to work (Singh & Verma, 2003), these hypothesized relationships between intergroup predictors and older workers' attitudes have to be examined after statistically controlling for some personal (age, gender, marital status, education, health, and wealth) and organizational (physical job strain and autonomy in job tasks) factors.

In summary, the purpose of the present study is to extend our understanding of the decision to retire by examining the relationships between intergroup variables and early exit intention, and the ability of these variables to increase the predictability of the retirement decision-making process beyond that afforded by personal and organizational variables. This study also investigates other work-related attitudes (affective organizational commitment, psychological disengagement, and competition with younger workers) suggested by an intergroup approach to ageing at work, and intergroup predictors of these attitudes.

METHOD

Participants and procedure

Four hundred questionnaires were distributed by Belgian trade unions to workers aged from 45 to 59 years old. Of these, 152 (38%) were returned. The participants were all French speakers working in private (e.g., chemical industry, large stores) or public (e.g., teachers, home helps) Belgian organizations with no financial difficulties (e.g., no downsizing) and with a working convention allowing for early exit opportunities such as early retirement or a reduction in working hours. Most of the participants (97%) were Belgian and 62% were females. Some 36% of respondents had some university education, 46% had completed high school, and 18% had not finished high school. In addition, 80% identified themselves as married or living with a partner, whereas 20% identified themselves as single, separated, or divorced. As for age, 32% of respondents were from 45 to 49 years old, 46% were from 50 to 54, and 22% were from 55 to 59.

The questionnaire was accompanied by a covering letter, which was signed by the researchers and which indicated that the purpose of the study was to examine "people's attitudes towards the relationships between work, age, and quality of life". A stamped addressed envelope was provided so that completed questionnaires could be sent directly to the researchers at their office.

The questionnaire addressed the personal and organizational variables first, followed by the intergroup variables and the criterion variables. Before responding to the intergroup variables, participants read a short text on the

meaning of the expression “older workers”: “In recent years, some workers, both men and women, who are 50 or more, have been called ‘older workers’. In the following sections of the questionnaire, the expression ‘older workers’ is used to refer to workers who will soon be 50 years old or who are already 50 or more.”

Measures

Except for the demographic variables (age, gender, marital status, and education), the French items used in the present study and the English translation of these items are presented in the Appendix. These items were rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“disagree strongly”) to 7 (“agree strongly”) and were scored so that a higher score indicated higher standing on the measure.

Personal and organizational variables. Gender, age, marital status, and education were each measured using single items. Gender was scored 1 for males and 2 for females. Age was indicated using a scale with eight categories ranging from under 35 to over 65 in 5-year increments. Given that no participant was less than 45 or more than 59, workers aged from 45 to 49 were coded 1, those aged from 50 to 54 were coded 2, and those aged from 55 to 59 were coded 3. Marital status was measured by asking participants to indicate their current marital status¹ (married or living with a partner = 1; divorced, separated, or single = 2). Education was measured on a scale with three response options: (1) “Did not finish high school”, (2) “Completed high school”, and (3) “University study”. Perceived health was measured by two items such as “Lately, I have been feeling very healthy”. Expected financial resources were measured by four items reflecting satisfaction with expected early exit remuneration such as “If I were to retire, I would have enough income”. Physical job strain was measured by two items such as “My job requires a lot of physical effort”. Autonomy in job tasks was measured by two items such as “I feel free to decide how to do my job”.

Intergroup variables. Retiree permeability was measured by three items adapted from Kessler and Mummendey (2002) such as “In my organization, it is not difficult for an older worker to retire early or to reduce his/her working hours”. Age-related permeability was measured by three items

¹As suggested by previous research (e.g., Talaga & Beehr, 1995), the partner’s work/retirement status was measured. Only 13 participants out of the 121 who were married or living with a partner indicated that their partner was retired. The low amount of participants whose the partner was retired made impossible to conduct any meaningful analyses including this variable.

adapted from Kessler and Mummendey such as "In my organization, it is not difficult for an older worker to be considered in the same manner as a younger worker". Cognitive identification was measured by three items adapted from Ellemers et al. (1997, 1999) and from Kessler and Mummendey such as "I see myself as an older worker". Affective identification was measured by three items adapted from Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) such as "I am glad that I am an older worker".

Criterion variables. Early exit intention was measured by five items reflecting the intention to retire early or to reduce working hours such as "I would like to retire early if I can afford to". Affective organizational commitment was measured by three items adapted from Stinglhamber, Bentein, and Vandenberghe (2002) such as "This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me". Psychological disengagement was measured by four items adapted from Major and Schmader (1998; Schmader, Major, Eccleston, & McCoy, 2001) such as "How I do on occupational tasks has little relation to who I really am". Competition with younger workers was measured by five items adapted from Kessler and Mummendey (2002) such as "Older workers have to be given some advantages (financial or otherwise) over younger workers".

Statistical analyses

Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and, when appropriate, internal consistency estimates were computed for all variables. Then, to examine the ability of each type of predictor to explain the four criterion variables, a hierarchical multiple regression was computed for each criterion variable. In this procedure, personal and organizational variables were entered in the first step and intergroup predictors were entered in the second step (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). This order of entry, which is consistent with the order of measurement, allowed the relationships between the intergroup predictors and the criterion variables to be examined after statistically controlling for the personal and organizational variables. Moreover, because of some potential significant relationships among the intergroup predictors (e.g., Ellemers, 1999; Mummendey et al., 1999), entering these variables as a block (and not separately) allowed their respective relationships to each of the criterion variables to be examined after controlling for the other intergroup predictors.

RESULTS

Because the criterion variables and the predictor variables were assessed using a self-report measure from the same source, a Harman's one-factor

test (Podsakoff & Organ, 1986) was run to examine the potential impact of common method bias in the present study. This test assumes that a single factor emerging from the factor analysis or a general factor explaining the majority of the covariance in the measured variables indicates the presence of common method variance. The resulting factor analysis (which was performed on items related to 12 predictor or criterion measures²) produced 12 factors with Eigenvalues greater than 1, with the first factor explaining 13% of the variance and the other factors explaining an additional 58%. Moreover, the (12) predictor and criterion variables came out as independent factors. These findings indicate that potential concern about common method bias was minimized in the present study.

Descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and alpha coefficients are presented in Table 1. As can be seen, all the multiple-item measures had an acceptable level of internal consistency (with all alpha coefficients > .65). Table 2 presents the results of the regression analyses: The proportion of the variance accounted for by each block of predictors, and the betas for individual predictors in the final step are reported.

Early exit intention

The personal and organizational variables block accounted for a significant portion of the variance, $R^2 = .19$, $p < .01$, in early exit intention. An examination of the betas revealed that perceived health, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$, and expected financial resources, $\beta = .23$, $p < .01$, were significant predictors of early exit intention, whereas the relationship between autonomy in job tasks and early exit intention was marginally significant, $\beta = -.15$, $p = .07$.

The second block of predictors, intergroup variables, explained an additional 8% of the variance in early exit intention, Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .08$, $p < .01$. This significant increment in R^2 stemmed from the predictive power of cognitive identification, which had an unexpected positive relationship with early exit intention, $\beta = .26$, $p < .01$. This means that the more a 45- to 59-year-old worker thought of him/herself as an older worker, the more (and not the less as hypothesized in terms of Social Identity Theory) willing he/she was to retire early or to reduce his/her working hours. Moreover, contrary to our hypotheses too, neither retiree permeability nor affective identification was linked to early exit intention. Thus, although the intergroup variables accounted for a significant proportion of the variance in early exit intention, the first hypothesis was not supported.

²These measures were perceived health, expected financial resources, physical job strains, autonomy in job tasks, retiree permeability, age-related permeability, cognitive identification, affective identification, early exit intention, affective organizational commitment, psychological disengagement, and competition with younger workers.

TABLE 1
Means, standard deviations, intercorrelations, and, internal consistency estimates¹ among study variables (N=152)

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
(1) Age ²	1.91	0.73	—															
(2) Gender ³	1.62	0.49	-.06	—														
(3) Education ⁴	2.18	0.71	.07	-.23**	—													
(4) Marital status ⁵	1.20	0.40	-.01	.11	.04	—												
(5) Perceived health	4.92	1.40	.17*	.04	-.14	-.15	.85	—										
(6) Expected financial resources	2.94	1.46	.06	-.03	-.09	-.13	.15	.88	—									
(7) Physical job strain	4.30	1.42	-.17*	.22**	-.24**	.08	-.28**	-.19*	.74	—								
(8) Autonomy in job tasks	4.60	1.32	.11	-.22**	.22**	-.16*	.07	.12	-.34**	.66	—							
(9) Retiree permeability	4.74	1.01	.15	-.08	-.15	-.01	.03	.12	-.12	.18*	.65	—						
(10) Age-related permeability	4.78	1.11	-.02	.20*	-.03	.08	.19*	-.01	.11	.05	-.04	.72	—					
(11) Cognitive identification	4.45	1.17	.31**	-.10	.03	.05	-.09	.12	-.10	.03	.27**	.06	.73	—				
(12) Affective identification	4.67	1.14	.24**	-.13	.01	-.04	.17*	.03	-.09	.14	.13	.20*	.48**	.77	—			
(13) Early exit intention	4.99	1.26	-.04	-.07	-.03	.07	-.30**	.20*	.13	-.16*	.12	-.13	.31**	.07	.81	—		
(14) Psychological disengagement	2.91	0.94	-.06	-.05	.06	.01	-.28**	.03	.04	-.07	-.18*	-.23**	.04	-.08	.30**	.71	—	
(15) Affective organizational commitment	4.93	1.23	.08	.14	-.14	-.05	.36**	.10	-.01	.01	.11	.28**	-.10	.05	-.27**	-.46**	.83	—
(16) Competition with younger workers	3.92	0.99	-.05	-.05	-.02	.13	-.10	-.10	.20*	-.19	-.09	-.39**	.00	-.24**	.11	.06	-.13	.65

¹Elements in main diagonal are alphas.

²1 = 45–49 years old; 2 = 50–54 years old; 3 = 55–59 years old.

³1 = male; 2 = female.

⁴1 = less than high school; 2 = high school; 3 = university study.

⁵1 = married or living with a partner; 2 = divorced, separated, or single.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

TABLE 2
Regression of attitudes towards work and early exit on predictor variables

	Early exit intention			Affective organizational commitment			Psychological disengagement			Competition with younger workers		
	Beta at final step	R ² at final step	ΔR ²	Beta at final step	R ² at final step	ΔR ²	Beta at final step	R ² at final step	ΔR ²	Beta at final step	R ² at final step	ΔR ²
Step 1: Personal and organizational predictors		.19**	.27**		.18**	.24**		.10*	.17*		.09	.30**
Age ¹	-.09			.06			-.02			-.04		
Gender ²	-.05			.11			.01			-.04		
Education ³	.01			-.03			-.01			.02		
Marital status ⁴	.04			-.03			-.01			.14		
Perceived health	-.24**			.29**			-.24**			.15		
Expected financial resources	.23**			.05			.08			-.06		
Physical job strain	.11			.04			-.02			.26**		
Autonomy in job tasks	-.15			-.02			-.02			-.03		
Step 2: Intergroup predictors		.08**			.06*			.07*			.21**	
Retiree permeability	.07			.14			-.21*			-.09		
Age-related permeability	-.10			.21*			-.19*			-.42**		
Cognitive identification	.26**			-.14			.10			.20*		
Affective identification	.04			.01			-.02			-.22*		

¹1 = 45–49 years old; 2 = 50–54 years old; 3 = 55–59 years old.

²1 = male; 2 = female.

³1 = less than high school; 2 = high school; 3 = university study.

⁴1 = married or living with a partner; 2 = divorced, separated, or single.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Affective organizational commitment

The personal and organizational variables block accounted for 18% of the variance in affective organizational commitment, $R^2 = .18$, $p < .01$. Only perceived health had a significant (positive) relationship with affective organizational commitment, $\beta = .29$, $p < .01$.

The second block of predictors, intergroup variables, explained an additional 6% of the variance in affective organizational commitment, Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .06$, $p < .05$. This significant increment in R^2 stemmed from the predictive power of age-related permeability, which displayed the expected positive relationship with affective organizational commitment, $\beta = .21$, $p < .05$. However, contrary to our assumptions, neither cognitive identification nor affective identification proved to be significant predictors of this individual work-related attitude. Thus, the second hypothesis received only mixed support from the data.

Psychological disengagement

The personal and organizational variables block explained 10% of the variance in psychological disengagement, $R^2 = .10$, $p < .05$. Perceived health was the only significant predictor of psychological disengagement, $\beta = -.24$, $p < .01$.

The second block of predictors, intergroup variables, accounted for an additional 7% of the variance in psychological disengagement, Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .07$, $p < .05$. An examination of the betas revealed that the third hypothesis was supported, that is, both retiree permeability, $\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$, and age-related permeability, $\beta = -.20$, $p < .05$, had significant negative relationships to psychological disengagement.

Competition with younger workers

The first block of predictors, personal and organizational variables, accounted for a marginally significant proportion of the variance in competition with younger workers, $R^2 = .09$, $p = .10$. Physical job strain was the only significant predictor of competition with younger workers, $\beta = .26$, $p < .01$.

The second block of predictors, intergroup variables, explained an additional 21% of the variance in competition with younger workers, Step 2: $\Delta R^2 = .21$, $p < .01$. An examination of the betas revealed that age-related permeability, cognitive identification and affective identification were all significant predictors. Consistent with the fourth hypothesis, age-related permeability was negatively related, $\beta = -.42$, $p < .01$, and cognitive identification was positively related, $\beta = .20$, $p < .05$, to competition with

younger workers. However, contrary to the fourth hypothesis, affective identification was negatively (and not, as hypothesized, positively) associated with competition with younger workers, $\beta = -.22$, $p < .05$. Thus, the fourth hypothesis received mixed support from the data.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the role of variables derived from Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) in predicting early exit intention and other work-related attitudes (affective organizational commitment, psychological disengagement, and competition with younger workers) among older workers. The results supported the efficacy of the intergroup variables as a set in predicting each of the four attitudes after controlling for personal and organizational variables. Nonetheless, the results for our specific hypotheses on the links between intergroup predictors and older workers' attitudes were more mixed.

According to the first hypothesis, early exit intention should have been predicted by retiree permeability and both cognitive and affective identification with older workers as a group. In fact only cognitive identification with older workers predicted early exit intention after personal and organizational variables had been controlled. However, the direction of the beta for cognitive identification was not negative as expected but positive, indicating 45- to 59-year-old workers were more willing to retire early or to reduce their working hours when they thought of themselves as older workers. An explanation for this positive link between cognitive identification with older workers and individualistic strategy directed towards leaving the older workers' group and joining the retirees' group, which was not predicted by Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), may be found in another theory of intergroup relations, Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1999; Turner et al., 1994). According to this theory, when people define themselves as members of some social group, they stereotype themselves in terms of the group (i.e., they see themselves, think, and behave as prototypical representatives of the group). Research has shown that individuals use more stereotyped traits of the ingroup to describe themselves when they categorize themselves as ingroup members (Hogg & Turner, 1987; van Rijswijk, Haslam, & Ellemers, 2006). Given that a stereotyped belief about older workers is that they are waiting for retirement (e.g., McCann & Giles, 2002), early exit intention may be seen, in terms of Self-Categorization Theory, as a prototypical attitude of older workers. As such, it may be the case that individuals who define themselves as older workers adopt stereotypic attitudes and behaviours attributed to older workers, such as early exit intention. Given this alternative explanation, more research is needed on the relationships between age-based self-definition and displaying

attitudes and behaviours which are believed to be prototypical of older workers.

Contrary to the first hypothesis, affective identification with older workers was not a significant predictor of early exit intention. This may be explained by the conceptualization of early exit intention as a prototypical ingroup attitude. Indeed, according to Self-Categorization Theory (Turner, 1999), self-stereotyping is related to the cognitive definition of self as an ingroup member, but not to the approval of ingroup membership (affective identification). As for the nonsignificant relationship between retiree permeability and early exit intention, it suggests that the possibility of early exit does not per se trigger the wish to retire early or to reduce working hours. This may be due to the fact that age-related identification processes such as self-perception of being "older" play a crucial role in determining workers' readiness to become retirees. The finding that early exit intentions do not reflect options for early exit may also be due to the fact that the possibility of early exit would be less important in predicting early exit intentions than the desirability of early exit. Indeed, research has suggested that expecting to have alternative attractive leisure activities in retirement is positively related to the decision to retire (Beehr, 1986; Henkens & Tazelaar, 1994). Accordingly, future research should take account not only of options for early exit but also of the desirability of early exit to predict workers' willingness to become retirees.

Consistent with our second hypothesis, age-related permeability predicted significantly affective organizational commitment after personal and organizational variables had been controlled. This positive relationship suggests that older workers displayed attachment to their organization when they perceived it to be possible for an older worker to be regarded or treated in the same way as a younger worker within the organization. Since many Western governments are trying to encourage older workers to stay in the workforce for longer, this finding may be interesting for organizations which are faced with the problem of enhancing those workers' affective organizational commitment. Indeed, research has shown that affective organizational commitment is positively associated with some work behaviours such as job performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, and attendance (see Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Additional research is needed to examine the links between age-related permeability and such behaviours among older workers, and the extent to which these links might be mediated by affective organizational commitment.

Contrary to the second hypothesis, neither cognitive nor affective identification with older workers proved to be a significant predictor of affective organizational commitment. One reason why identification with older workers failed to predict affective organizational commitment may be

that age-related permeability is sufficient to elicit an individualistic strategy that is directed towards remaining in the workforce. Indeed, research has shown that permeability of group boundaries is the most crucial determinant of the adoption of an individualistic strategy (Ellemers, 1993; Lalonde & Silverman, 1994; Wright et al., 1990).

As suggested by the third hypothesis, psychological disengagement was negatively related to both retiree permeability and age-related permeability after controlling for personal and organizational variables. That is, older workers were more likely to distance themselves psychologically from work when they perceived few opportunities in terms of early exit or individual work recognition for older workers in their organization. This finding suggests that the reduction or elimination of early exit opportunities, which many Western governments intend to implement or have already implemented, may lead some older workers to reduce the importance of the work domain for their self-concept, particularly if the difficulties some of them may encounter in being treated as well as younger workers are ignored. Therefore, the current political debate about career ending, which aims to maintain older workers at work for longer, should take account not only of the reduction of early exit opportunities, but also of the promotion of equal work opportunities in the actual practices of organizations, so that all workers can obtain recognition or advancement they deserve without age-related restrictions. This has already been proposed by Taylor and Walker (2003) for the United Kingdom.

Consistent with the fourth hypothesis, competition with younger workers was negatively related to age-related permeability, and positively related to cognitive identification with older workers. That is, older workers were more likely to attempt to gain collective material or evaluative advantages over younger workers when they felt that, in their organization, older workers were regarded or treated less well than younger ones, and/or when they thought of themselves as older workers. This finding has important implications for age management in organizations. For example, it suggests that, while workers who define themselves as older workers may be willing to assert that they are more competent than younger workers and that they should be given advantages in pay and/or promotions, the implementation of provisions for the individual recognition of older workers may reduce the likelihood of such intergenerational conflicts.

However, contrary to the fourth hypothesis, older workers were less inclined to compete with younger ones when they identified affectively with older workers (i.e., when they held favourable opinions about their age-group membership). An explanation for this unexpected negative relationship between affective identification with older workers and competition with younger workers stems from the distinction between internal and external social identities (Barreto & Ellemers, 2003). Internal social identity

is a self-chosen identity, whereas external social identity is assigned to the individual by other people. In the light of this distinction, the social identity of "older workers" may initially be seen as an external one, imposed upon them by governments and organizations. According to Barreto and Ellemers (2003), an individual may accept (i.e., identify affectively with) an external identity for "socially instrumental reasons" (p. 146) such as belonging to a socially valued group. In the present study, age-related permeability was positively related to affective identification with older workers, $r = .20$, $p < .05$. This suggests that an older worker may accept age-group membership if it provides him/her with attractive outcomes such as the possibility of being treated as well as a younger worker. Based on this finding, we assume that affective identification can be seen as both a predictor of competition with the outgroup and an identity negotiation strategy (see Deaux & Ethier, 1998) prompted by external categorizations that are imposed upon individuals. Specifically, it might be the case that individuals who are reluctant to accept their assignment to the older workers' group (because it does not provide them with social advantages such as being regarded as well as younger workers) might attempt to gain evaluative and/or material superiority for older workers over younger workers. Future research is needed to explore this alternative conceptualization of affective identification with older workers as an identity negotiation strategy.

In the present study, the intergroup predictors were examined relative to a number of personal and organizational variables. Consistent with the literature on the decision to retire (Barnes-Farrell, 2003; Beehr, 1986; Feldman, 1994; Shultz & Taylor, 2001), in the regression analysis, perceived health and expected financial resources proved to be significant predictors of early exit intention. However, unlike earlier research on the decision to retire, neither other personal variables (i.e., age, gender, marital status, and education) nor organizational variables (i.e., physical job strain and autonomy in job tasks) proved to be significant predictors of early exit intention in the regression analysis. The finding that age was not related to early exit intention may be due to how this variable was measured. Instead of indicating their precise age, as has usually been required in research on the decision to retire, in the present study participants were asked to choose one of eight categories. Entering the age variable into the regression analyses as a categorical rather than continuous variable might have reduced its predictive power. As in Adams's (1999) study, the present findings for gender and marital status may be the result of relationships between these variables and others as suggested by previous research (Pienta & Hayward, 2002; Szinovacz et al., 2001; Talaga & Beehr, 1995). Whereas some of these variables (e.g., traditional gender role attitudes) were not measured in this study, the partner's work/retirement status was measured. However, because of the low amount of participants whose the partner was retired,

we did not control for this variable in the regression analysis. The finding for education may also be the result of its relationship with other variables. According to Shultz and Taylor (2001), it is not education per se that plays a role in retirement decisions but other variables related to educational level such as health or autonomy in job tasks. In the present study, both perceived health, although marginally, $r = -.14$, $p = .07$, and autonomy in job tasks, $r = .22$, $p < .01$, were correlated with educational level. The small, negative, relationship, $\beta = -.15$, $p = .07$, between autonomy in job tasks and early exit intention in the regression analysis supports the argument advanced in previous research (Blekesaume & Solem, 2005; Schmitt & McCune, 1981) that this job characteristic influences the decision to retire. However, unlike earlier research (Blekesaume & Solem, 2005; Hayward et al., 1989), we found no evidence that physical job strain was related to early exit intention. The finding for physical job strain may be the result of its negative correlation with perceived health, $r = -.28$, $p < .01$.

Among personal and organizational variables, only perceived health was significantly related to affective organizational commitment and psychological disengagement. More precisely, older workers in poor health were not only more willing to retire early or to reduce their working hours but also tended to display lower attachment to their organization and less self-esteem invested in their work. Moreover, it appears that, unlike early exit intention, neither affective organizational commitment nor psychological disengagement was linked to financial concerns. Among the personal and organizational variables, physical job strain was the only significant predictor of competition with younger workers. That is, older workers who describe their job as physically demanding were more inclined to attempt to gain collective superiority over younger workers. Thus, physical demands in jobs may be seen as an argument used by some older workers to obtain material (i.e., pay and promotion) and/or evaluative (i.e., positive image of ageing in the organization) advantages on the grounds of age. Given these significant relationships between personal and organizational variables on the one hand, and older workers' work-related attitudes (affective organizational commitment, psychological disengagement, and competition with younger workers) on the other hand, this would appear to be an important area for future research on ageing at work.

The present study had several potential limitations. The first concerns the measures used in this study. These were either shortened versions of well-established measures, measures composed of items stemming from various well-established measures, measures developed specifically for this study, or measures composed of a mixture of such items. This concern must, however, be at least partially allayed by the fact that all measures displayed acceptable levels of internal consistency.

A second limitation involves the possibility of common method bias. Although the results of Harman's one-factor test were reassuring, care

should be taken when interpreting the results of the present study since this technique does not statistically control for common method variance in the regression analysis (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003).

A third limitation has to do with the correlational nature of the data, which does not allow causality to be established. Although the assumed causal order between intergroup predictors and older workers' attitudes was supported by previous research, which used experimental designs to demonstrate causal relationships between permeability of group boundaries and ingroup identification on the one hand and identity management (or coping) strategies on the other hand (e.g., Ellemers, 1993; Ellemers et al., 1997), future research could use longitudinal designs to overcome this limitation. Another way to address this concern could be the use of experimental designs, as suggested by some social psychological research that manipulated the activation of particular social identities to influence one's behaviour (e.g., Shih, Pittinsky, & Ambady, 1999).

Fourth, early exit intention rather than actual behaviour was measured. Although retirement intentions have been shown to be a precursor of actual retirement behaviour (Henkens & Tazelaar, 1994; Prothero & Beach, 1984), future research should determine whether factors that play a role in predicting early exit intention in the present study also influence actual early exit behaviour. Another concern about the measure of early exit intention used in the present study is that it mixed items concerned with early retirement and those covering a reduction in working hours. Research has suggested that different types of early exit behaviour (such as complete retirement, part-time retirement, and some kind of bridge employment) should be distinguished (Barnes-Farrell, 2003; Sterns & Kaplan, 2003). A principal components factor analysis was conducted on the five items comprising the early exit intention variable in order to provide some post hoc evidence on the construct validity of this variable. This analysis extracted only one component with Eigenvalue greater than 1, which accounted for 59% of the variance. This suggests that these five items were all tapping the same construct. Nonetheless, future researchers are encouraged to use measures that separate early retirement from other kinds of early exit.

Finally, because this study was conducted in Belgium where social norms towards ageing at work involve an "early exit culture" (Guillemard, 2003), care should be taken when generalizing the results to other contexts. For instance, it is plausible to assume that the positive relationship between self-definition as "older worker" and early exit intention reflects the Belgian "early exit culture". In countries such as Japan or Sweden where organizations provide many more incentives to keep older workers in the labour market, other social norms towards ageing at work are prevailing (Guillemard, 2003). This suggests that, in such countries characterized by an age culture that reflects employment policies aimed at (re-)integrating the

elderly into the workforce, voluntary early exit is less likely to be a prototypical attitude held by workers who define themselves as “older”, i.e., cognitive identification with older workers might be less strongly related, or even unrelated, to early exit intention.

In summary, the present study indicates that intergroup variables derived from the social identity perspective (see Turner, 1999) play a role in older workers’ attitudes towards both work and early exit after controlling for personal and organizational variables. While early exit is prompted by cognitive identification with older workers as a group, the perception that an older worker can obtain individual advancement or recognition in one’s organization may lead older workers to display positive work-related attitudes, both individualistic (i.e., less psychological disengagement and more affective organizational commitment) and collective (i.e., less competition towards younger workers). These findings are relevant to the governmental aim of retaining older workers in the labour force for longer. Brotherton (1999, p. 102) asserted that “there are no studies of older workers from a social identity perspective”, and our findings emphasized the importance of this new domain of variables to our knowledge of ageing at work and the retirement decision-making process.

REFERENCES

- Adams, G. A. (1999). Career-related variables and planned retirement age: An extension of Beehr’s model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 55, 221–235.
- Adams, G. A., & Beehr, T. A. (1998). Turnover and retirement: A comparison of their similarities and differences. *Personnel Psychology*, 51, 643–665.
- Adams, G. A., Prescher, J., Beehr, T. A., & Lespito, L. (2002). Applying work-role attachment theory to retirement decision making. *International Journal of Aging and Human Development*, 54, 125–137.
- Barnes-Farrell, J. L. (2003). Beyond health and wealth: Attitudinal and other influences on the retirement decision making. In G. A. Adams & T. A. Beehr (Eds.), *Retirement: Reasons, processes, and results* (pp. 159–187). New York: Springer.
- Barreto, M., & Ellemers, N. (2003). The effects of being categorized: The interplay between internal and external social identities. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 14, 139–170.
- Beehr, T. A. (1986). The process of retirement: A review and recommendations for future research. *Personnel Psychology*, 39, 31–55.
- Blekesaume, M., & Solem, P. E. (2005). Working conditions and early retirement: A prospective study of retirement behavior. *Research on Aging*, 27, 3–30.
- Branscombe, N. R., & Ellemers, N. (1998). Coping with group-based discrimination: Individualistic versus group-level strategies. In J. K. Swim & C. Stangor (Eds.), *Prejudice: The target’s perspective* (pp. 243–266). New York: Academic Press.
- Brotherton, C. (1999). *Social psychology and management: Issues for a changing society*. Buckingham, UK: Open University Press.
- Chiu, W. C. K., Chan, A. W., Snape, E., & Redman, T. (2001). Age stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes towards older workers: An East-West comparison. *Human Relations*, 54, 629–661.

- Cohen, J., & Cohen, P. (1983). *Applied multiple regression/correlation analysis for the behavioral sciences*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- Crocker, J., & Major, B. (1989). Social stigma and self-esteem: The self-protective properties of stigma. *Psychological Review*, *96*, 608–630.
- Crocker, J., Major, B., & Steele, C. (1998). Social stigma. In D. T. Gilbert, S. T. Fiske, & G. Linzey (Eds.), *Handbook of social psychology* (4th ed., pp. 504–553). New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Cuddy, A. C., & Fiske, S. T. (2002). Doddering but dear: Process, content, and function in stereotyping of older persons. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Ageism: Stereotyping and prejudice against older persons* (pp. 3–26). Cambridge, UK: Bradford Books.
- Deaux, K., & Ethier, K. A. (1998). Negotiating social identity. In J. K. Swim & C. Stangor (Eds.), *Prejudice: The target's perspective* (pp. 301–323). New York: Academic Press.
- Ellemers, N. (1993). The influence of socio-structural variables on identity management strategies. *European Review of Social Psychology*, *4*, 27–57.
- Ellemers, N., Kortekaas, P., & Ouwerkerk, J. W. (1999). Self-categorization, commitment to the group, and group self-esteem as related but distinct aspects of social identity. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *29*, 371–389.
- Ellemers, N., Spears, R., & Doosjes, B. (1997). Sticking together or falling apart: In-group identification as a psychological determinant of group commitment versus individual mobility. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *72*, 617–626.
- Ellemers, N., van Knippenberg, A., & Wilke, H. (1990). The influence of permeability of group boundaries and stability of group status on strategies of individual mobility and social change. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *29*, 233–246.
- Feldman, D. C. (1994). The decision to retire early: A review and conceptualization. *Academy of Management Review*, *19*, 285–311.
- Guillemard, A.-M. (2003). *L'âge de l'emploi: Les sociétés à l'épreuve du vieillissement*. Paris: Armand Colin.
- Hanisch, K. A., & Hulin, C. L. (1990). Job attitudes and organizational withdrawal: An examination of retirement and other voluntary withdrawal behaviors. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *37*, 60–78.
- Hanisch, K. A., & Hulin, C. L. (1991). General attitudes and organizational withdrawal: An evaluation of a causal model. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *39*, 110–128.
- Hassell, B. L., & Perrewé, P. L. (1995). An examination of beliefs about older workers: Do stereotypes still exist? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *16*, 457–468.
- Hayward, M. D., Grady, W. R., Hardy, M. A., & Sommers, D. (1989). Occupational influences on retirement, disability, and death. *Demography*, *26*, 393–409.
- Henkens, K., & Tazelaar, F. (1994). Early retirement of civil servants in the Netherlands. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *24*, 1927–1943.
- Hogg, M. A., & Turner, J. C. (1987). Intergroup behaviour, self stereotyping and the salience of social categories. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, *26*, 325–340.
- Hummert, M. L. (1999). A social cognitive perspective on age stereotypes. In T. M. Hess & F. Blanchard-Fields (Eds.), *Social cognition and aging* (pp. 175–196). San Diego: Academic Press.
- Kessler, T., & Mummendey, A. (2002). Sequential or parallel processes? A longitudinal field study concerning determinants of identity-management strategies. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *82*, 75–88.
- Lalonde, R. N., & Silverman, R. A. (1994). Behavioral preferences in response to social injustice: The effects of group permeability and social identity salience. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *66*, 78–85.
- Lazarus, R. S., & Folkman, S. (1984). *Stress, appraisal, and coping*. New York: Springer.
- Luhtanen, R., & Crocker, J. (1992). A collective self-esteem scale: Self-evaluation of one's social identity. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *18*, 302–318.

- Major, B., & Schmader, T. (1998). Coping with stigma through psychological disengagement. In J. K. Swim & C. Stangor (Eds.), *Prejudice: The target's perspective* (pp. 219–241). New York: Academic Press.
- McCann, R., & Giles, H. (2002). Ageism in the workplace: A communication perspective. In T. D. Nelson (Ed.), *Ageism: Stereotyping and prejudice against older persons* (pp. 163–199). Cambridge, UK: Bradford Books.
- Meyer, J. P., & Allen, N. J. (1991). A three-component conceptualization of organizational commitment. *Human Resource Management Review*, *1*, 61–89.
- Meyer, J. P., Stanley, D. J., Herscovitch, L., & Topolnitsky, L. (2002). Affective, continuance and normative commitment to the organization: A meta-analysis of antecedents, correlates and consequences. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *61*, 20–52.
- Miller, C. T., & Kaiser, C. R. (2001). A theoretical perspective on coping with stigma. *Journal of Social Issues*, *57*, 73–92.
- Miller, C. T., & Major, B. (2000). Coping with stigma and prejudice. In M. R. Hebl, J. G. Hull, T. F. Heatherton & R. E. Kleck (Eds.), *The social psychology of stigma* (pp. 243–272). New York: Guilford Press.
- Mummendey, A., Kessler, T., Klink, A., & Mielke, R. (1999). Strategies to cope with negative social identity: Predictions by Social Identity Theory and Relative Deprivation Theory. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *76*, 229–245.
- Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development. (2003). *Ageing and employment policies—Belgium*. Paris: OECD.
- Pienta, A. M., & Hayward, M. D. (2002). Who expects to continue working after age 62? The retirement plans of couples. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences*, *57B*, S199–S208.
- Podsakoff, P. M., MacKenzie, S. B., Lee, J.-Y., & Podsakoff, N. P. (2003). Common method biases in behavioral research: A critical review of the literature and recommended remedies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *88*, 879–903.
- Podsakoff, P. M., & Organ, D. W. (1986). Self-reports in organizational research: Problems and prospects. *Journal of Management*, *12*, 531–544.
- Prothero, J., & Beach, L. R. (1984). Retirement decisions: Expectation, intention, and action. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, *14*, 162–174.
- Quadagno, J., & Hardy, M. (1996). Work and retirement. In R. H. Binstock & L. K. George (Eds.), *Handbook of aging and the social sciences* (3rd ed., pp. 307–327). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.
- Reitzes, D. C., Mutran, E. J., & Fernandez, M. E. (1998). The decision to retire: A career perspective. *Social Science Quarterly*, *79*, 607–619.
- Schmader, T., Major, B., Eccleston, C. P., & McCoy, S. K. (2001). Devaluing domains in responses to threatening intergroup comparisons: Perceived legitimacy and the status value asymmetry. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *80*, 782–796.
- Schmitt, N., & McCune, J. T. (1981). The relationship between job attitudes and the decision to retire. *Academy of Management Journal*, *24*, 795–802.
- Shih, M., Pittinsky, T. L., & Ambady, N. (1999). Stereotype susceptibility: Identity salience and shifts in quantitative performance. *Psychological Science*, *10*, 80–83.
- Shultz, K. S., & Taylor, M. A. (2001, August). The predictors of retirement: A meta-analysis. In K. S. Shultz & M. A. Taylor (Co-chairs), *Evolving concepts of retirement for the 21st century*. Symposium conducted at the 109th annual meeting of the American Psychological Association, San Francisco, CA.
- Singh, G., & Verma, A. (2003). Work history and later-life labor force participation: Evidence from a large telecommunications firm. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, *56*, 699–715.
- Sterns, H. L., & Kaplan, J. (2003). Self-management of career and retirement. In G. A. Adams & T. A. Beehr (Eds.), *Retirement: Reasons, processes, and results* (pp. 188–213). New York: Springer.

- Sterns, H. L., & Miklos, S. M. (1995). The aging worker in a changing environment: Organizational and individual issues. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 47*, 248–268.
- Stinglhamber, F., Bentein, K., & Vandenberghe, C. (2002). Extension of the three-component model of commitment to five foci: Development of measures and substantive test. *European Journal of Psychological Assessment, 18*, 123–138.
- Szinovacz, M. E., DeViney, S., & Davey, A. (2001). Influences of family obligations and relationships on retirement: Variations by gender, race, and marital status. *Journal of Gerontology: Social Sciences, 56B*, S20–S27.
- Tajfel, H. (1978). Social categorization, social identity, and social comparison. In H. Tajfel (Ed.), *Differentiation between social groups: Studies in the social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 61–76). London: Academic Press.
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1979). An integrative theory on intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. Worchel (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Talaga, J. A., & Beehr, T. A. (1995). Are there gender differences in predicting retirement decisions? *Journal of Applied Psychology, 80*, 16–28.
- Taylor, M. A., & Shore, L. M. (1995). Predictors of planned retirement age: An examination of Beehr's model. *Psychology and Aging, 10*, 76–83.
- Taylor, P., & Walker, A. (1994). The ageing workforce: Employers' attitudes towards older people. *Work, Employment and Society, 8*, 569–591.
- Taylor, P., & Walker, A. (2003). Age discrimination in the labor market and policy responses: The situation of the United Kingdom. *Geneva Papers on Risk and Insurance, 28*, 612–624.
- Turner, J. C. (1999). Some current issues in research on social identity and self-categorisation theories. In N. Ellemers, R. Spears, & B. Doosje (Eds.), *Social identity: Context, commitment, content* (pp. 6–34). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.
- Turner, J. C., Oakes, P. J., Haslam, S. A., & McGarty, C. (1994). Self and collective: Cognition and social context. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 20*, 454–463.
- Vandenbroucke, G., & vander Hallen, P. (2002). Active strategies for older workers in Belgium. In M. Jepsen, D. Foden, & M. Hutsebaut (Eds.), *Active strategies for older workers in the European Union* (pp. 141–170). Brussels: European Trade Union Institute.
- Van Rijswijk, W., Haslam, S. A., & Ellemers, N. (2006). Who do we think we are? The effects of social context and social identification on in-group stereotyping. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 45*, 161–174.
- Wright, S. C., Taylor, D. M., & Moghaddam, F. M. (1990). Responding to membership in a disadvantaged group: From acceptance to collective protest. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 58*, 994–1003.

Original manuscript received March 2007

Revised manuscript received January 2008

First published online April 2008

APPENDIX

The original French items and the English translation of these items are presented here for all the variables included in the present study (except for the demographic variables). A minus sign in parentheses indicates item-scale reversal. The response format for all items was a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (“disagree strongly”) to 7 (“agree strongly”).

TABLE A1

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Original French items</i>	<i>English translation of the items</i>
Perceived health	Ces derniers temps, je me sens en très bonne santé	Lately, I have been feeling very healthy
	Ces derniers temps, je ne me sens pas bien (-)	Lately, I have been feeling ill (-)
Expected financial resources	J'ai les moyens financiers de prendre une prépension	Financially, I can afford to retire early
	J'ai les moyens financiers de réduire mon temps de travail	Financially, I can afford to reduce my working hours
	Si j'étais pensionné, j'aurais assez d'argent pour vivre confortablement	If I were to retire, I would have enough income
	Si je réduisais mon temps de travail, j'aurais assez d'argent pour vivre confortablement	If I were to reduce my working hours, I would have enough income
Physical job strains	Mon travail demande beaucoup d'efforts physiques	My job requires a lot of physical effort
	Je dois travailler chaque jour dans des positions inconfortables ou fatigantes	I have to work in uncomfortable or tiring positions every day
Autonomy in job tasks	Je peux généralement organiser mon travail moi-même pendant la journée	I can usually plan my tasks during the day
	Je me sens libre de décider comment réaliser mon travail	I feel free to decide how to do my job
Retiree permeability	Dans mon organisation, un travailleur âgé ne rencontre aucune difficulté pour prendre une prépension ou pour réduire son temps de travail	In my organization, it is not difficult for an older worker to retire early or to reduce his/her working hours
	Dans mon organisation, il est courant pour un travailleur âgé de prendre une prépension ou de réduire son temps de travail	In my organization, it is usual for an older worker to retire early or to reduce his/her working hours

(continued overleaf)

TABLE A1
(Continued)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Original French items</i>	<i>English translation of the items</i>
Age-related permeability	Dans mon organisation, on incite souvent un travailleur âgé à prendre une prépension ou à réduire son temps de travail	In my organization, an older worker is often encouraged to retire early or to reduce his/her working hours
	Dans mon organisation, un travailleur âgé ne rencontre aucune difficulté à être considéré de la même manière qu'un travailleur plus jeune	In my organization, it is not difficult for an older worker to be considered in the same manner as a younger worker
	Dans mon organisation, il est possible pour un travailleur âgé d'être regardé de la même manière qu'un travailleur plus jeune	In my organization, for an older worker it is possible to be regarded in the same manner as a younger worker
Cognitive identification	Dans mon organisation, malgré ses efforts, un travailleur âgé ne sera jamais considéré de la même manière qu'un travailleur plus jeune (-)	In my organization, no matter what effort one makes, an older worker will never be thought of in the same way as a younger worker (-)
	Je me vois comme un travailleur âgé	I see myself as an older worker
	J'ai beaucoup de choses en commun avec les autres travailleurs âgés	I have a lot in common with other older workers
Affective identification	Je considère que je fais partie des travailleurs âgés	I consider myself as being longing to the older workers
	Je suis content d'être un travailleur âgé	I am glad that I am an older worker
	Cela ne me plaît pas d'être un travailleur âgé (-)	I do not feel good about being an older worker (-)
Early exit intention	Cela ne me dérange pas d'être considéré comme un travailleur âgé	I do not mind being thought of as an older worker
	Si j'en avais les moyens, j'aimerais prendre une prépension	I would like to retire early if I can afford to

(continued overleaf)

TABLE A1
(Continued)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Original French items</i>	<i>English translation of the items</i>
	J'aimerais arrêter de travailler dès que possible	I would like to stop working as soon as possible
	Si j'en avais les moyens, j'aimerais réduire mon temps de travail	I would like to reduce my working hours if I can afford to
	J'aimerais continuer à travailler sans réduire mon temps de travail (-)	I would like to continue working without reducing my working hours (-)
	J'espère prendre une pré pension ou réduire mon temps de travail dans un proche avenir	I expect to retire early or to reduce my working hours in the near future
Affective organizational commitment	J'éprouve un réel sentiment d'appartenance à mon organisation	I really feel that I am part of this organization
	Cette organisation représente beaucoup pour moi	This organization has a great deal of personal meaning for me
	Je suis fier d'appartenir à cette organisation	I am proud to be part of this organization
Psychological disengagement	Connaitre le succès au travail n'est pas très important pour moi	Occupational success is not very important to me
	Bien faire mon travail est quelque chose de très important pour moi (-)	Doing my job well is very important to me (-)
	Je considère que le travail est une partie importante de ma vie (-)	I consider work to be a very important part of my life (-)
	La personne que je suis vraiment n'a rien à voir avec ma réussite dans mes tâches professionnelles	How I do on occupational tasks has little relation to who I really am
Competition with younger workers	Le but des travailleurs âgés n'est pas de recevoir de leçons des travailleurs plus jeunes, mais de leur apprendre des choses	Older workers' goal is not to be taught by younger workers, but to teach them
	Les travailleurs âgés doivent être prioritaires pour les promotions par rapport aux travailleurs plus jeunes	Older workers have to be given priority for promotions over younger workers

(continued overleaf)

TABLE A1
(Continued)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Original French items</i>	<i>English translation of the items</i>
	Les travailleurs âgés doivent avoir plus d'avantages (financiers ou autres) que les travailleurs plus jeunes	Older workers have to be given some advantages (financial or otherwise) over younger workers
	L'âge procure un atout pour le travail	Age contributes positively to work
	Les travailleurs âgés sont vraiment différents des travailleurs plus jeunes	Older workers are really different from younger workers