Organizational Value for Age Diversity and Potential Applicants' Organizational

Attraction: Individual Attitudes Matter!

The final publication is available at Springer via:

 http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007%2Fs10551-013-1729-8

Abstract. Using diversity climate theory and research, this paper examines the relationships among an organization's actions which indicate a value for age diversity and potential applicants' reactions toward that organization. Specifically, we investigate the interactive effects of an organization's age diversity, an organization's age diversity management practices, and potential applicants' individual attitudes toward age diversity on two outcome variables, organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination. We conducted an experimental survey study with a sample of 244 German employees likely to be in the job market again in their careers. Organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices were positively related to organizational attractiveness and negatively related to expected age discrimination. Results also support a three-way interaction of an organization's age diversity, an organization's age diversity management practices, and potential applicants' attitudes toward age diversity on both dependent variables. The findings demonstrate the importance of considering individual attitudes toward age diversity in assessing the effectiveness of an organization's age diversity and age diversity management practices.

Keywords. Age diversity; Age diversity management practices; Attitude toward age diversity; Expected age discrimination; Organizational attractiveness; Organizational value for diversity

Introduction

Current population surveys indicate that workplaces are becoming more diverse on various dimensions, including age (Mosisa and Hipple, 2006; Müller and Hoffmann, 2006). Studies have used terms such as "demographic time bomb" to describe how developed countries are facing an aging workforce due to decreasing birth rates and increased life expectancies (Tempest, Barnatt, and Coupland, 2002). Over half of the United States' workforce is 40 years of age or older (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2008). By 2018, the percentage of employees aged 55 or older in the United States is expected to be 24% (Toossi, 2009). In the 27 member states of the European Union, the workforce participation rate of people aged 55 to 64 was 47% in 2011 compared to 71% for the people aged 15 to 64. These workforce participation rates are projected to be 57% for the 55 to 64 age group and 73% for the 15 to 64 age group in 2020 (Medeiros & Minty, 2012). In Germany's population, both the 50 to 64 age group and the 80+ age group will increase by 24% and 48%, respectively, by the year 2020, while the number of people younger than 50 years will decrease by 16%. Between 2017 and 2024, the percentage of people in the German workforce aged 50 to 64 will be as large (40%) as the percentage of people aged 30 to 49 (also 40%; Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009). Moreover, beginning in 2012, the retirement age was raised from 65 to 67 years for the 1947 to 1964 cohorts and the retirement age is 67 for the cohorts born in 1964 or later (Deutsche Rentenversicherung, 2013). This further increases the workforce participation rate of older people in Germany.

Given these demographic changes in the workforce, organizations are becoming more age diverse. Very young employees must work together with considerably older colleagues and vice versa. Thus, there is increasing demand for organizations to effectively manage this age diversity. Research attention has been paid to the effectiveness of diversity management programs (e.g., Kalev et al., 2006) and the impact of employee perceptions of diversity

climates on individual reactions (e.g., Kossek and Zonia, 1993; McKay et al., 2007; Mor Barak and Levin, 2002; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Stewart et al., 2011; Triana et al., 2010). While several diversity climate studies have investigated diversity climate with respect to race of prospective applicants (Avery, 2003; Highhouse et al., 1999), employees (McKay et al., 2007; McKay et al., 2009), and customers (McKay et al., 2011), what has been relatively ignored in the diversity climate literature is the demographic of age (e.g., Kunze et al., 2011). This is a very important demographic variable to consider based on the demographic changes in the workforce outlined above.

In particular, research has not yet explored how an organization's demonstrated value for age diversity reflected by its workforce's age diversity and its age diversity management practices influences potential applicant attraction. Moreover, we do not know how potential applicants' attitudes toward age diversity interact with the organization's age diversity and age diversity management practices to influence potential applicants' attitudes toward the organization. Knowing about the person-organization interaction is necessary if organizations are to attract talent of all ages in times of labor shortages and demographic change. As Lawrence (1996, p. 1) pointed out, although "scholars have consistently stated that age plays a critical role in social life … research typically relegates the topic to peripheral status."

In this study, we examine the effects of organizational age diversity, organizational age diversity management practices, and potential applicants' attitudes toward age diversity on two outcome variables: organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and potential applicants' expected age discrimination. We rely on diversity climate theory as represented by Cox's (1994) Interactional Model of Cultural Diversity (IMCD) and diversity climate research (e.g., McKay et al., 2007; McKay et al., 2008; Mor Barak et al., 1998). The IMCD proposes that organizational-level factors constituting diversity climate influence individual affective outcomes including employees' satisfaction and organizational identification, which

in turn affect organizational effectiveness. Diversity climate refers to the extent to which a company is perceived as using fair employment practices and integrating members of underrepresented groups in the work setting (Mor Barak et al., 1998). We extend this to age diversity and define a positive age diversity climate as one where employees of all ages are welcomed and valued in the workplace. Organizations that value age diversity have an inclusive age diversity climate (see van Dijk et al., 2012) that can be expressed by an age diverse workforce and strong age diversity management practices.

Age diversity reflects the distribution of differences among an organization's members with respect to age, and can be conceptualized as separation, variety, or disparity (Harrison and Klein, 2007). As we are interested in the age structure of organizations and the composition of organizations in regard to members from different age categories, we focus on age diversity as variety in this paper, which reflects the "composition of differences in kind, source, or category of relevant knowledge or experience among unit members" (Harrison and Klein, 2007, p. 1203).

Following the distinction between affirmative action plans and equal employment opportunities on the one hand and diversity management programs on the other hand (Avery and McKay, 2006; Thomas, 1990), we define organizational age diversity management practices as the organization's approach for dealing with age diversity. Weak age diversity management practices reflect an organization's mission to conform to anti-discrimination legislation with regard to age. Organizations may not value diversity per se (Demuijnck, 2009). Instead, they conform to employment laws to avoid lawsuits or a bad public image. Strong age diversity management practices reflect an organization's value for diversity because its mission is to create a climate wherein employees of all ages are valued and allowed and encouraged to reach their full potential (see Avery and McKay, 2006; Demuijnck, 2009; Thomas, 1990).

Potential applicants' attitudes toward age diversity are defined as the degree to which individuals of different ages like working or interacting with others who are dissimilar from themselves in regard to age in work contexts (Nakui et al., 2011). Organizational age diversity management practices and potential applicants' attitudes toward age diversity are important moderators to investigate because both organizational diversity practices (Kossek and Zonia, 1993; McKay et al., 2007; Mor Barak and Levin, 2002; Mor Barak et al., 1998; Triana et al., 2010) and individual attitudes toward age diversity (van Knippenberg and Haslam, 2003; van Knippenberg and Schippers, 2007) can impact employee attitudes toward organizations.

We examine organizational attractiveness to potential applicants as an outcome variable because it is related to an organization's ability to attract talented individuals that can help the organization succeed (Highhouse et al., 2003; Rynes and Barber, 1990). It is "an attitude or expressed general positive affect toward an organization, toward viewing the organization as a desirable entity with which to initiate some relationship" (Aiman-Smith et al., 2001, p. 221). Even after employees are hired, organizational attractiveness relates to healthy employee attitudes because attraction is an important component of organizational commitment (Mowday et al., 1982). Finally, potential applicants' expected age discrimination is also an important outcome to assess because employee attitudes toward prospective employers are related to expected discrimination (Foley and Kidder, 2002). Potential applicants' expected age discrimination represents their expectations regarding an organization's behavior that excludes certain people and disadvantages them relative to others because of their age (McMullin and Marshall, 2001). Because of the signaling effect that an organization's diversity practices can have (Rynes and Boudreau, 1986; Thorsteinson and Highhouse, 2003; Wanous, 1992), organizations should watch the messages they send regarding age diversity in order to show that they value employees of all ages.

This study makes a theoretical contribution to the diversity literature. It extends diversity climate theory (i.e., Cox's (1994) IMCD) and research by exploring age diversity and identifying potential applicants' individual attitudes toward age diversity as an important moderator that influences their reactions to an organization's age diversity and age diversity management practices. Beyond this, we also extend the IMCD by examining organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination as outcome variables. Moreover, this study contributes to management practice. As the workforce continues to age (Mosisa and Hipple, 2006; Müller and Hoffmann, 2006) and employees of various age groups are represented in organizations, it is important for organizations to know how to effectively manage this age diverse workforce in order to be attractive.

Theory and Hypotheses

Main Effects of Organizational Age Diversity and Age Diversity Management Practices

Diversity climate theory (i.e., Cox's IMCD; 1994) and research (e.g., McKay et al., 2007; McKay et al., 2008; Mor Barak et al., 1998) provide a framework for understanding how organizational value for diversity as illustrated by actions including the employment of an age diverse workforce or having age diversity management practices influences individual attitudes. Although the IMCD refers to cultural diversity in its title, the model is meant to apply to other types of diversity including age, racial/ethnic diversity, and sex diversity, among others (Cox, 1994). The IMCD maintains that experiencing a positive diversity climate at work should lead to healthy individual outcomes such as satisfaction with the organization and job involvement (Cox, 1994). Consistent with diversity climate literature, we expect that if potential applicants see that an organization is age diverse or exudes strong age diversity management practices that welcome and value employees of all ages, they will perceive the organization as more attractive and will be less likely to expect age discrimination.

Empirical studies show that age discrimination can affect all age groups (Hassell and Perrewé, 1993; Wood et al., 2008). Complaints of age discrimination are the highest among the oldest and youngest age groups (Duncan and Loretto, 2004; Garstka et al., 2005). Older employees may feel underestimated or marginalized if they have to face negative attitudes or are denied training or promotion opportunities. Younger employees may feel that they are not taken seriously at work due to their lack of experience. The literature argues that age group boundaries are permeable (Ellemers et al., 1988; Garstka et al., 2004) so that, over the lifespan, individuals perceive being a member of different age groups. Thus, even if employees are in the middle-aged group that tends to experience the least age discrimination, they will remember what it was like to be seen as too inexperienced at work when they were young and, likewise, they can anticipate what it may be like in the future when they will be seen as older employees. For these reasons, we propose that employees of any age group should react positively to an age-diverse organization or to an organization with strong age diversity management practices. In their study, Tsui et al. (1992) measured differences in age within work groups and found a small but significant positive correlation of age differences with psychological commitment to the organization. Thus:

> *Hypothesis 1:* Organizational age diversity is *(a)* positively related to organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and *(b)* negatively related to potential applicants' expected age discrimination.

> *Hypothesis 2:* Organizational age diversity management practices are *(a)* positively related to organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and *(b)* negatively related to potential applicants' expected age discrimination.

Organizational Age Diversity Management Practices as a Moderator

While diversity climate theory and research would predict that inclusive practices which value diversity result in positive reactions of potential applicants, the literature does not

address interaction effects between organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices. McKay et al.'s (2008) results demonstrate the need to extend diversity climate theory and research by considering both social identity group membership and diversity climate. Drawing on social identity theory (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1986), they argue that strong diversity climates are more affirming of respective identity groups than weak diversity climates. Following their call for the need to consider interactions, we propose an interactive effect of organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices on organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and potential applicants' expected age discrimination.

Our rationale is that having one of these characteristics without the other may make the organization appear hypocritical (i.e., that they do not really value age diversity) or ineffective in managing age diversity. Instead, having both characteristics may send a strong and consistent signal about the organization's values and age diversity practices. For example, if an organization strongly espouses values that promote age diversity but its workforce is highly age-homogeneous, potential applicants may wonder whether the diversity-oriented message is truthful and whether they will find representatives of their own identity group in the organization (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). As individuals derive their self-esteem from their respective identity group, they appreciate environments that value their identity group (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; McKay et al., 2008; Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). Therefore, if an organization is age diverse but seems to have weak age diversity management practices, potential applicants may believe that the organization is not valuing the diversity it has in its workforce and not appreciating their respective identity group. Conversely, if a prospective employer has both strong age diversity management practices and a highly age diverse workforce, potential applicants should be more confident that they will be valued in the organization regardless of their age, thereby

promoting positive feelings toward the prospective employer. This rationale is consistent with recruiting research stating that employers must give consistent messages during recruiting for ethical reasons and to avoid perceived impropriety (Finkelman, 2010). Thus:

> *Hypothesis 3:* There is a two-way interaction of organizational age diversity and organizational age diversity management practices on *(a)* organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and *(b)* potential applicants' expected age discrimination. The relationship between organizational age diversity and the respective outcome variable is stronger when organizational age diversity management practices are strong.

Potential Applicants' Attitudes Toward Age Diversity as a Moderator

We also propose a three-way interaction between an organization's age diversity, an organization's age diversity management practices, and potential applicants' attitudes toward age diversity on organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination. The relationships presented in Hypotheses 3a and 3b should be further modified by an individual's attitude toward age diversity (Nakui et al., 2011). People with positive attitudes toward age diversity should react in a more positive manner to organizational age diversity and age diversity management compared to those with negative attitudes toward age diversity (Mor Barak and Levin, 2002; Mor Barak et al., 1998; van Dick et al., 2008; van Knippenberg et al., 2007).

For this reason, we expect that the positive effects of organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices on both organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination are accentuated for those with positive attitudes toward age diversity compared to those with negative attitudes toward age diversity. Potential applicants with positive attitudes toward age diversity will report higher attraction and expect less age discrimination from organizations that are age diverse and have strong age diversity management practices compared to potential applicants with negative attitudes toward age diversity. Likewise,

potential applicants with positive attitudes toward age diversity will report lower attraction and expect more age discrimination from organizations that are less age diverse and have weak age diversity management practices compared to potential applicants with negative attitudes toward age diversity.

People with positive attitudes toward age diversity are likely to see an organization that is highly age diverse and uses strong age diversity management practices as practicing what it preaches. This should be an indication for those with positive attitudes toward age diversity that the organization will not discriminate against them on the basis of age. This is consistent with research showing that those who value diversity at work the most also pay a considerable amount of attention to diversity and place importance on diversity practices (Mor Barak et al., 1998). Those with negative attitudes toward age diversity are more likely to see age diversity as a problem rather than an opportunity (Cox, 1994; Thomas and Ely, 1996). Therefore, people with negative attitudes toward age diversity will be less likely to see the benefit of organizational age diversity management practices than those with positive attitudes. Thus:

> *Hypothesis 4:* There is a three-way interaction of organizational age diversity, organizational age diversity management practices, and potential applicants' individual attitudes toward age diversity on *(a)* organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and *(b)* potential applicants' expected age discrimination. The two-way interactions posited in Hypotheses 3a and 3b are further modified by potential applicants' individual attitudes toward organizational age diversity such that those with positive attitudes toward age diversity have stronger reactions than those with negative attitudes toward age diversity.

Method

Research Context

This research was conducted in Germany in the spring of 2010. Germany constitutes an appropriate context in which to study age diversity. Over the years, the German workforce has become increasingly age diverse because the labor participation of people aged 60 to 64 doubled from 1999 to 2009. Moreover, the transitional phase to retirement has shifted from a range of 56 to 62 years to a range of 58 to 64 years during that time. These developments in the workforce have been accompanied by a governmental decision to extend the legal retirement age from 65 to 67 years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2010).

In the first quarter of 2010 (i.e., at the time the study was conducted), the employment rate for the 50-64 age group was 44.9% compared to 50.4% for the 15-64 age group. 53.5% of the 50-64 year olds were male and 95.1% were Germans. The share of unemployed people aged 50 to 64 was 9.2% compared to 8.5% for people of all ages with only minimal changes compared to the year before (Bundesagentur für Arbeit, 2010).

Due to the demographic changes in the German population, the ratio of retired to employed people has increased. While this ratio was 34% in 2008, it is expected to reach 67% by 2060 assuming a retirement age of 67 years (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009). This is a strong burden for the German social security systems because there are fewer employed people supporting more and more retired people (Börsch-Supan, 1991). The increase of the legal retirement age to 67 in Germany from 2012 on (Deutsche Rentenversicherung, 2013) may help to at least partly buffer this imbalance so that a retirees/employees-ratio of 59% (instead of 67%) is expected by 2060 (Statistisches Bundesamt, 2009).

The age structure of the workforce and the societal implications of demographic changes such as the impact on the social security system may shape the age images in German society (i.e., the individual and societal beliefs about age, ageing, and older people) (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2010). The Elderly Report of the German Federal Government (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und

Jugend, 2010) reports results from a number of studies that show an ambiguous attitude of younger people toward older people. They judge the relationship between the two generations as strained, although favoring the view that children and grandchildren should take over the care for parents and grandparents. On the one hand, younger people appreciate the experiences of older people from whom they can learn. On the other hand, younger people are afraid of distributional conflicts and negative consequences on the labor market because of the increasing number of older people. Such age images shape behavior in organizations toward people of different ages as well as social interactions between younger and older people (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2010). Thus, they are likely to have an impact on organizations' actions with regard to age diversity and individuals' attitudes toward working in age diverse environments.

Sample

To test our hypotheses, we examined a group of potential applicants to organizations that cover a broad age range, namely currently employed people likely to be in the job market again in their careers. We randomly selected 1,000 employees working in private organizations from a German online career network and invited them to participate in the study. The network represents an appropriate sampling source for this study for several reasons. First, it is a social network of business professionals and the primary networking resource for employees in Germany. Second, it allows researchers to select members according to specific sampling criteria. Third, it enables us to recruit employees from different companies across industries all over Germany to avoid organization-specific effects.

The final sample included 244 employees (24% response rate) from different companies, with a mean age of 40.50 years ($SD = 9.84$; $MIN = 22$ years; $MAX = 62$ years) and a mean job experience of 16.93 years ($SD = 10.84$; $MIN = 1$ year; $MAX = 42$ years). Sixty-eight percent of the participants were male. Sixteen percent of the participants were lower-

level employees, 35% belonged to lower management, 28% to middle management, 17% to

upper management, and 4% to top management. The sample was also diverse regarding

qualifications: 9% of the participants had industrial training, 3% had off-the-job training, 16%

had training at a vocational school, 25% had a degree from an applied science university

(practice-oriented), 43% had a degree from a research-oriented university, and 5% had a

Ph.D.

Study Design

      We used a two-by-two (2 x 2) between-participant design that included the following

factors: Organizational age diversity (high versus low) x organizational age diversity

management practices (strong versus weak). The four experimental conditions were presented

in German via an online questionnaire as four different extracts from the homepage of a

fictitious company. These extracts included information on the company's age structure

(representing the organizational age diversity factor) and the company's mission statement

regarding age diversity management practices (representing the organizational age diversity

management practices factor).

      The age diversity manipulation was based on the conceptualization of age diversity as

variety (Harrison and Klein, 2007). Following Harrison and Klein (2007), we used Blau's

index, which ranges from 0 to 1 (Harrison and Sin, 2006) to create the age structures for the

fictitious homepage extracts (see Figure 1). High age diversity was represented by Blau's

index = .80, low age diversity by Blau's index = .51. The low age diversity scenario appears

highly realistic given the development of the German workforce: Within the next ten years,

the average age of the German workforce will increase to 43 years (Börsch-Supan, 2004).

>> Insert Figure 1 about here <<

      The organizational age diversity management practices manipulation reflected the

distinction between affirmative action plans/equal employment opportunities and diversity

management programs (Avery and McKay, 2006; Thomas, 1990). Weak age diversity management practices demonstrated an organization's mission to conform to anti-discrimination legislation with regard to age, while strong age diversity management practices demonstrated an organization's mission to create a climate wherein employees of all ages are valued and are allowed and encouraged to reach their full potential (see Avery and McKay, 2006; Thomas, 1990). The manipulations were created from examples we found for strong and weak organizational age diversity management practices as part of the mission statements on the homepages of German companies. The weak age diversity management practices description was focused on meeting employment law requirements:

"When dealing with different age groups, we apply the respective legal regulations. The regulations of the General Act on Equal Treatment (Allgemeines Gleichbehandlungsgesetz, AGG) are anchored in our mission statement and in our company agreements. Moreover, our employees are informed about the most recent legal developments and requirements in this area."

The strong age diversity management practices description reflected that the organization valued age diversity:

"Age diversity is an important strategic factor for our company's success. Therefore, the cooperation of different age groups is an important aim for our company. We respond to the different needs of all our employees and actively encourage exchange and collaboration between different age groups. We achieve this through, for example, the following measures: workshops on making use of the potential of age diverse teams, age-specific career models, mentoring programs for younger employees, and work groups on the topic of 'Live age diversity.'"

Procedures

We conducted a pretest with 126 university students majoring in business administration using online questionnaires to check the manipulations of organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices following a between-participant design for each manipulation.

To check the organizational age diversity manipulation, 22 of the recruited university students were randomly assigned to either the low ($n = 12$) or high age diversity condition ($n = 10$). Participants were presented with the respective age structure and asked for their judgment regarding perceived age diversity ("How diverse regarding age do you perceive this company to be?") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "very low age diversity" (1) to "very high age diversity" (7).

To check the organizational age diversity management practices manipulation, 104 of the recruited students were randomly assigned to either the weak ($n = 59$) or strong age diversity management practices condition ($n = 45$). Participants in each experimental group were presented with the respective mission statement regarding age diversity management practices and asked for their judgment regarding the company's age diversity management practices ("In your opinion, which attitude does this company have toward age diversity?") on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from "very negative attitude" (1) to "very positive attitude" (7).

T-tests on the manipulation check measures revealed statistically significant differences between the high ($M = 5.40$, $SD = 1.27$) and the low age diversity condition ($M = 2.42$, $SD = .90$) ($t_{20} = 6.45$, $p < .01$) and between the strong ($M = 5.58$, $SD = 1.23$) and the weak age diversity management practices condition ($M = 4.20$, $SD = 1.10$) ($t_{102} = 6.00$, $p < .01$). Therefore, we used those manipulations for our four experimental conditions. Employees were randomly assigned to one experimental condition. They received an e-mail with an invitation to take part in the survey and a link to the respective online questionnaire.

Measures

To measure our variables, we selected suitable and reliable items from US-American questionnaires, which were translated into German using a translation/back-translation procedure (Brislin et al., 1973). Participants indicated their level of agreement on five-point Likert-scaled items (1 = "does not apply at all" to 5 = "fully applies").

We assessed *organizational attractiveness to potential applicants* with three items (α = .82) from Highhouse et al. (2003). A sample item is "This place is attractive to me as a place for employment."

To measure *potential applicants' expected age discrimination*, we used five items (α = .82) from the Workplace Prejudice/Discrimination Inventory by James et al. (1994), which we modified for the context of age. A sample item (reverse scored) is "I think that in this company, all employees are treated the same regardless of their age."

We assessed the moderator variable *potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity* with three items (α = .81) from the Attitudes toward Diverse Workgroup Scale by Nakui et al. (2011), which we adapted to age diversity. A sample item (reverse scored) is "I am more motivated when working with people who are similar to my own age."

We controlled for *age* and *tenure*, which were assessed as continuous variables, as well as *sex*, which was dummy-coded. Men were coded 0 and women 1.

Analysis

We used hierarchical multiple regression following Cohen and Cohen (1983) and Aiken and West (1991). The variables were entered into the regression equation in four steps. The control variables were entered in the first step, followed by the independent variables and the moderator variable in the second step. The two-way interaction terms were entered in the third step, and the three-way interaction was added in the fourth step. As suggested by Cohen et al. (2003, p. 358) for 2 x 2 experimental designs, we contrast-coded the dichotomous

predictor variables used in the interaction terms, organizational age diversity and organizational age diversity management practices.

Results

We ran a confirmatory factor analysis in LISREL (8.80) to show the discriminant validity of the measures. A three-factor solution (organizational attractiveness to potential applicants, potential applicants' expected age discrimination, and potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity) was an adequate fit for the data (Hu and Bentler, 1999; Kline, 2005) ($\chi 2 = 88.73$, $df = 41$, $CFI = .97$, $IFI = .97$, $SRMR = .05$). A three-factor solution was a better fit than a two-factor solution in which organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and potential applicants' expected age discrimination were merged onto one factor ($\chi 2 = 127.36$, $df = 43$, $CFI = .95$, $IFI = .95$, $SRMR = .06$; $\Delta \chi 2 = 38.63$, $df = 2$, $p < .05$). A three-factor solution was also a better fit than a one-factor solution ($\chi 2 = 378.93$, $df = 44$, $CFI = .80$, $IFI = .80$, $SRMR = .14$; $\Delta \chi 2 = 290.20$, $df = 3$, $p < .05$).

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and correlations for all variables. Results of the hierarchical regression analyses are shown in Table 2. Our demographic control variables age, tenure, and sex were not significant in any of the regression analyses.

>> Insert Tables 1 and 2 about here <<

Our Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 2a, and 2b, which proposed a positive main effect of organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices on organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and a negative main effect of organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices on potential applicants' expected age discrimination, were supported. We found no support for the two-way interactions of organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices stated in our Hypotheses 3a and 3b.

In contrast, the three-way interaction of organizational age diversity, organizational age diversity management practices, and potential applicants' affective attitude toward age

diversity was statistically significant for both potential applicants' reported organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination. We plotted these interaction effects for high and low levels of each variable, defining the low level as minus one standard deviation from the mean and the high level as plus one standard deviation from the mean (Aiken and West, 1991). Figures 2 and 3 show the three-way interaction plots (see Dawson, 2011).

>> Insert Figures 2 and 3 about here <<

We performed a simple slope analysis (Aiken and West, 1991) for each regression line to test whether its slope was significantly different from zero. Table 3 shows the results. To further probe the three-way interaction effect, we also employed a slope difference test (Dawson and Richter, 2006) that examines whether differences between pairs of slopes were significantly different from zero (see Table 3).

>> Insert Table 3 about here <<

We observe a significant interaction between an organization's age diversity and age diversity management practices on potential applicants' ratings of both organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination when they have a positive attitude toward age diversity. However, there is no such interaction effect when people have a negative attitude toward age diversity. For potential applicants with positive attitudes toward age diversity, the relationship between organizational age diversity and both organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination is significantly stronger when an organization's age diversity management practices are weak. For people with negative attitudes toward age diversity, age diversity is similarly related to both organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination no matter whether an organization's age diversity management practices are strong or weak. This supports our predictions in Hypotheses 4a and 4b that people with positive attitudes toward age diversity show stronger reactions than those with negative attitudes toward age diversity. However, the interaction effect for individuals with positive

attitudes toward age diversity is not as expected. While we expected a stronger relationship between age diversity and both organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination when an organization's age diversity management practices are strong, we found a stronger relationship when an organization's age diversity management practices were weak. Thus, Hypotheses 4a and 4b are only partially supported.

Discussion

Results show that an organization's age diversity and age diversity management practices are positively related to potential applicants' reported organizational attractiveness and negatively related to their expected age discrimination, which supports our predictions. Contrary to our expectations, we did not find support for a two-way interaction of organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices on potential applicants' reported organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination. Our findings show that both organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices matter and that these effects are not conditional upon each other. Nevertheless, the three-way interaction shows that potential applicants' individual attitudes toward age diversity matter when investigating the effects of an organization's age diversity and age diversity management practices on organizational attractiveness and expected age discrimination.

For potential applicants with positive attitudes toward age diversity, the relationship between an organization's age diversity and applicant evaluations of the organization was significantly stronger when an organization's age diversity management practices were weak. This suggests a substitution effect for individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity: If an organization demonstrates low age diversity but has strong age diversity management practices, those with positive attitudes will feel better about the organization. The same is true if an organization shows little commitment to age diversity management practices but has an age diverse workforce. Thus, organizations signaling strong age diversity management

practices while having an age-homogeneous workforce and organizations demonstrating a highly age diverse workforce while signaling weak age diversity management practices seem to be able to buffer negative evaluations from individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity to a certain degree.

For individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity, an organization's age diversity and diversity management practices do not seem to substitute for each other. Inconsistent signals on age diversity and age diversity management practices may make the organization seem hypocritical to individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity. This is similar to previous research showing that employees report cynicism toward their organizations (because the organization is saying one thing but doing another) if they believe that the organization has not fulfilled its diversity promises (Buttner et al., 2010; Chrobot-Mason, 2003).

Theoretical Implications

Why do organizational age diversity and age diversity management practices make up for each other for individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity but not for individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity? Social psychological research on attitudes (see Stroebe et al., 1996) may provide an explanation. Cognitive consistency theories (e.g., Festinger, 1957), theories of social evaluation (e.g., Sherif and Hovland, 1961), and schema theories (e.g., Fiske and Taylor, 1991) suggest that attitudes determine how we perceive and judge information that is relevant to our attitudes. As Fazio and Towles-Schwen (1999) state:

> "A positive attitude that has been activated is likely to lead the individual to notice, attend to, and process primarily the positive qualities that the object is exhibiting in the immediate situation. Likewise, a negative attitude will direct attention to negative qualities of the object" (p. 98).

If individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity notice a negative signal regarding an organization's age diversity or age diversity management practices but a positive signal regarding the respective other characteristic, they are likely to direct their attention to this positive signal when making their judgments. This is because people with positive attitudes toward diversity may look for any sign that the organization values diversity. Thus, positive signals may make up for negative signals to a certain degree.

The same mechanism should apply to individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity. However, we observe a different mechanism for these individuals. Attitude research also shows that individuals with greater knowledge on the attitude object tend to react in a much more biased way to attitude-relevant information (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 1982; Wood, 1982). Because individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity demonstrate more positive reactions to diversity in general (e.g., van Dick et al., 2008; van Knippenberg et al., 2007), they may also show a stronger interest in age diversity issues. Thus, we may assume that they have more knowledge about diversity issues than those with negative attitudes toward age diversity. Consequently, they should have a stronger intent than those with negative attitudes to seek attitude-confirming information. This may explain why attitude-consistent information can partly substitute for attitude-inconsistent information for individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity but not for individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity.

Our findings extend diversity climate theory and research to the realm of age diversity. We also demonstrate that the relationship between an organization's age diversity and potential applicants' attitudes toward the organization is modified by both the organization's age diversity management practices and by potential applicants' individual attitudes toward age diversity. Uncovering these moderators extends diversity climate theory (i.e., Cox's IMCD; 1994) and research by illustrating how organizational value for age diversity

expressed by actions such as having an age-diverse workforce and/or strong age diversity management practices can lead to positive attitudes among potential applicants. Our study further suggests that individuals' attitudes toward age diversity are important predictors that shape how people react to age diversity and age diversity management practices in their workplace. This implies that theoretical models of employee reactions to organizational diversity and diversity climate such as the IMCD (Cox, 1994) should include individual attitudes toward diversity that may moderate employee reactions.

Managerial Implications

Our findings are of practical relevance because research findings on the business case for diversity have been mixed (e.g., Kochan et al., 2003). Our results suggest that age diversity and age diversity management practices may be beneficial for organizations, which is consistent with research stating that organizational values are a key component in the business case for diversity (van Dijk et al., 2012). Especially in cases of age-homogeneous organizations and of potential applicants with positive attitudes toward age diversity, it is important for organizations to communicate as well as demonstrate strong age diversity management practices to be attractive as an employer. This can be realized by age diversity programs, which are becoming more popular to support employees of various generations (Catalyst, 2008). As an organization's age structure cannot be as easily changed as its age diversity management policies, organizations may aim to enforce their age diversity management efforts to attract employees with positive attitudes toward age diversity.

Our results provide evidence that potential applicants' attitudes toward age diversity matter when they judge organizations regarding their attractiveness as prospective employers. This is important for companies to know because potential applicants who care the most about diversity will be watching the organization's age diversity and age diversity management practices and reacting accordingly (Mor Barak et al., 1998). Individuals with positive attitudes

toward age diversity look for any evidence that the organization values diversity. If the organization's age diversity is low, they especially consider the organization's age diversity management practices in their evaluations of organizational attractiveness. If the organization's age diversity management practices are weak, they direct special attention to an organization's age diversity in making their judgments. Positive levels of one characteristic could make up for negative characteristics in the other. However, this is not the case for individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity. For these individuals, it is important that organizations send consistent signals about the value they assign to age diversity in both what they preach and what they do. Otherwise, they may show cynicism (Buttner et al. 2010; Chrobot-Mason, 2003), which could affect organizations' productivity and their likelihood of being sued for discrimination.

Societal Implications

Because of the demographic change in the German society and the increasingly age diverse work environment, it may become more important to critically rethink the age images in the society which are likely to influence individuals' attitudes toward age diverse work environments. In order to create positive associations with people from other age groups (Bittner and Wippich, 2011) and therefore positive attitudes toward age diversity, societies should aim to create environments where people interact in age diverse settings throughout the lifespan. This may be realized, for example, by encouraging volunteering in intergenerational settings, which is receiving increasing attention in Germany. Students may regularly visit older people in hospitals or retirement homes or give computer courses to seniors. Older people may regularly tutor students or train junior sports groups. Through these age diverse interactions, people get a deeper understanding of other age groups. The Elderly Report of the German Federal Government (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend, 2010) reports empirical results showing that younger people who have frequent

contact with older people in different areas of life tend to have a more positive image of older

people. Efforts to create positive age images should be enforced and supported politically and

made public by the media (Bittner and Wippich, 2011). Moreover, a stronger public

dissemination of the findings of expert reports such as the regular Elderly Report of the

German Federal Government (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend,

2010) and empirical research on age-related changes and differences in work behavior and

attitudes may create a greater sensitivity to people of other age groups. Such societal efforts

may also contribute to positive age diversity climates in organizations.

Limitations and Future Research

Our participants were all from Germany. Because of different institutional factors in

different countries that affect diversity and discrimination issues, country-specific

investigations of questions relating to age diversity are useful (Müller-Camen et al., 2011).

Thus, to examine the degree to which our findings for German employees generalize to

employees of other nationalities, our hypotheses should be re-tested with other country

samples.

Although we investigated currently employed potential job seekers and based our

manipulations on realistic scenarios and real company descriptions, participants were reacting

to a vignette. This may limit the psychological realism of the study (Colquitt, 2008). Ideally,

our findings could be replicated in a real-world setting to improve generalizability.

Moreover, our study focused on age diversity. However, there are other types of

surface-level characteristics (Harrison et al., 1998; Harrison et al., 2002; Riordan, 2000) that

can be easily ascertained by visiting an organization (e.g., sex, race). Future research may

replicate our findings with other forms of diversity to explore how our results generalize to

these forms.

The age images present in a society may influence organizations' actions with regard to age diversity and individuals' attitudes toward working in age diverse environments. Future studies should aim to empirically examine the relationships between age images and organizational and individual attitudes toward age diversity. Research may also consider gender differences and differences between people from different cultures.

Another limitation of our study is that we do not measure whether the presence of elders in an organization may affect potential applicants' reported organizational attractiveness or expected age discrimination. Research on age discrimination has found that age stereotypes against older workers are the most prevalent (Posthuma and Campion, 2009), although employees of all ages can perceive age discrimination (Snape and Redman, 2003). Organizations tend to have age norms, or shared beliefs about the standard ages of individuals having a certain role or status (Lawrence, 1988). The presence of organizational elders, especially if they are the founders (Schein, 1983), may serve to elevate the status of older employees. In such a case, younger employees may be more likely to expect age discrimination, particularly if age diversity management practices are weak. As Lawrence (1988) explained, employees observe age distributions in various occupations within an organization, and this develops shared norms about standards of behavior for people of different ages. Future research should measure the presence of elders in organizations to empirically test these ideas.

A final limitation of our study is that we did not experimentally manipulate the size of the organization in our study. Therefore, we are not certain how our results would generalize to different organizational sizes. For example, the presence of one or two elders (particularly if they are founders; Schein, 1983) in an organization may have a larger impact on an organization's age diversity management practices in a small organization compared to a large one. Horwitz (2005) proposed that the effects of team diversity on team performance

should be more strongly positive for smaller teams than larger ones because smaller teams are more efficient. Kanter (1977) applied a similar logic in her research on tokenism. She defined tokens as individuals comprising 15% or less of a group. Individuals numbering 15% to 35% of a group would be considered minorities and would have an easier time forming coalitions that may gain power. Similarly, the presence of a higher proportion of elders in an organization, especially influential ones, may more easily influence organizational policy. This does not guarantee the acceptance of policies, but it makes it more likely. Future research may examine the effects of different proportions of elders in organizations of various sizes in the field to determine how our results generalize to other settings.

Conclusion

In conclusion, our study demonstrates the moderating influence of individual attitudes toward age diversity in the relationships linking an organization's age diversity, an organization's age diversity management practices, and potential applicants' evaluations of organizations. More research is necessary to arrive at a deeper understanding of why individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity react differently from individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity.

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Table 1

Descriptive statistics and correlations

Variables	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Control									
1. Sex	-	-							
2. Age	40.50	9.84	-.24**						
3. Tenure	16.93	10.84	-.25**	.91**					
Independent									
4. Organizational age diversity	-	-	-.01	.00	-.03				
5. Organizational age diversity management practices	-	-	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.02			
Moderator									
6. Potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity	3.50	0.82	-.15	.33**	.33**	-.03	-.10		
Dependent									
7. Organizational attractiveness to potential applicants	3.62	0.95	.07	.06	.03	.42**	.21**	.02	
8. Potential applicants' expected age discrimination	2.49	0.79	-.03	-.01	.02	-.43**	-.12	-.02	-.67**

Note. $N = 244$. Means and standard deviations are only reported for interval-scaled variables. Correlation coefficients are calculated according to their respective scale levels.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 2

Results of hierarchical regression analyses

for organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and potential applicants' expected age discrimination

Variables	Organizational attractiveness to potential applicants				Potential applicants' expected age discrimination			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
Control								
Sex	.09	.11	.11	.14	-.03	-.04	-.05	-.07
Age	.15	.07	.09	.06	-.13	-.04	-.04	-.02
Tenure	-.08	-.01	-.02	.02	.13	.05	.04	.01
Independent and Moderator								
Organizational age diversity		.42**	.44**	.43**		-.43**	-.45**	-.43**
Organizational age diversity management practices		.22**	.23**	.23**		-.13*	-.13*	-.13*
Potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity		.05	.04	.05		-.06	-.04	-.05
2-way interactions								
Organizational age diversity x organizational age diversity management practices			-.06	-.06			.09	.09
Organizational age diversity x potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity			.10	.11*			-.05	-.06
Organizational age diversity management practices x potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity			.12*	.09			-.07	-.05

Table 2 (continued)

Results of hierarchical regression analyses

for organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and potential applicants' expected age discrimination

Variables	Organizational attractiveness to potential applicants				Potential applicants' expected age discrimination			
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4
3-way interaction								
Organizational age diversity								
x organizational age diversity								
management practices								
x potential applicants' affective								
attitude toward age diversity				-.16*				.15*
Total R^2	.01	.24**	.26**	.29**	.00	.20**	.22**	.24**
ΔR^2		.22**	.03*	.02**		.20**	.02	.02*

Note. $N = 244$; standardized beta are reported.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Table 3

Simple slopes in the three-way interaction

for organizational attractiveness to potential applicants and potential applicants' expected age discrimination

Regression	Organizational attractiveness to potential applicants			Potential applicants' expected age discrimination		
	Simple slope	t	Slope difference test t	Simple slope	t	Slope difference test t
Reactions of individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity			-2.76**			2.96**
AD at high DM and high ATA	0.54	2.52*		-0.36	-1.92	
AD at low DM and high ATA	1.39	6.52**		-1.15	-6.18**	
Reactions of individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity			1.28			-0.74
AD at high DM and low ATA	0.82	3.45**		-0.69	-3.25**	
AD at low DM and low ATA	0.43	2.26*		-0.49	-2.99**	

Note. $N = 244$. AD = Organizational age diversity. DM = Organizational age diversity management practices. ATA = Potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity.
* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

High organizational age diversity:

So sind wir strukturiert:

Altersgruppe ≤25	
♟♟♟	18%
Altersgruppe 26-35	
♟♟♟	21%
Altersgruppe 36-45	
♟♟♟♟	22%
Altersgruppe 46-55	
♟♟♟	21%
Altersgruppe 55+	
♟♟♟	18%

Low organizational age diversity:

So sind wir strukturiert:

Altersgruppe ≤25	
♟	1%
Altersgruppe 26-35	
♟	4%
Altersgruppe 36-45	
♟♟♟♟♟♟♟♟♟♟	64%
Altersgruppe 46-55	
♟♟♟♟	28%
Altersgruppe 55+	
♟	3%
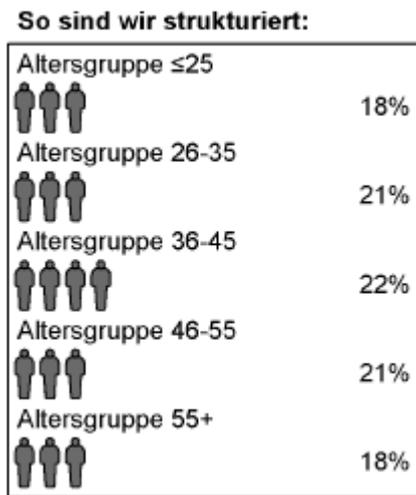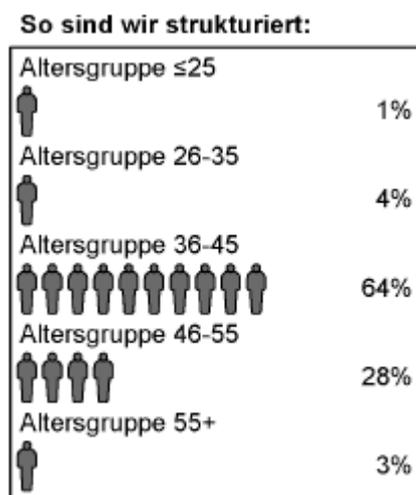
Figure 1 Original organizational age diversity manipulation in German. "So sind wir strukturiert" = "This is our age structure"; "Altersgruppe" = age group.

Reactions of individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity:
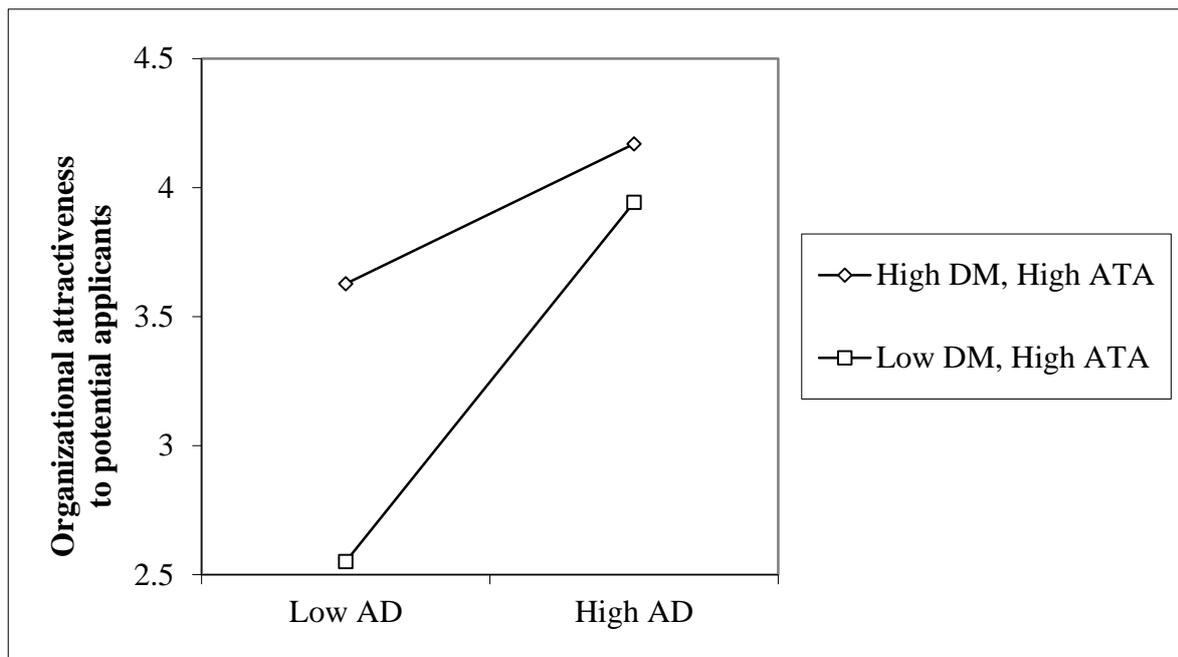
Reactions of individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity:
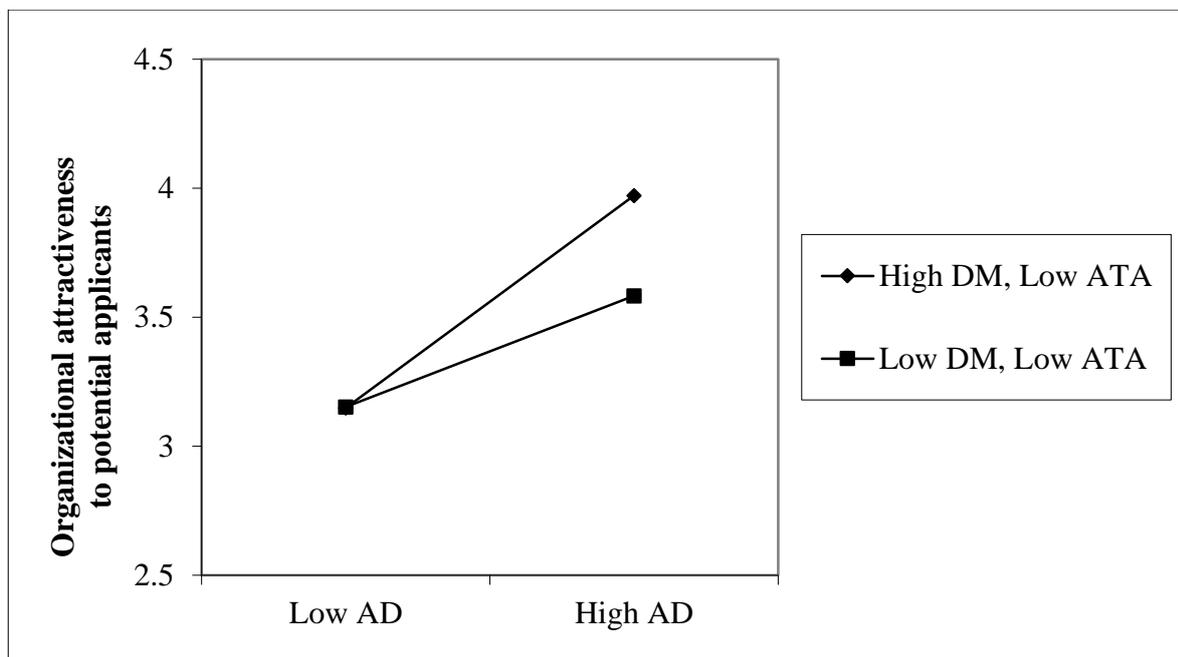
Figure 2 Three-way interactions of organizational age diversity (AD), organizational age diversity management practices (DM), and potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity (ATA) on organizational attractiveness to potential applicants. Plotted using unstandardized regression coefficients.

Reactions of individuals with positive attitudes toward age diversity:
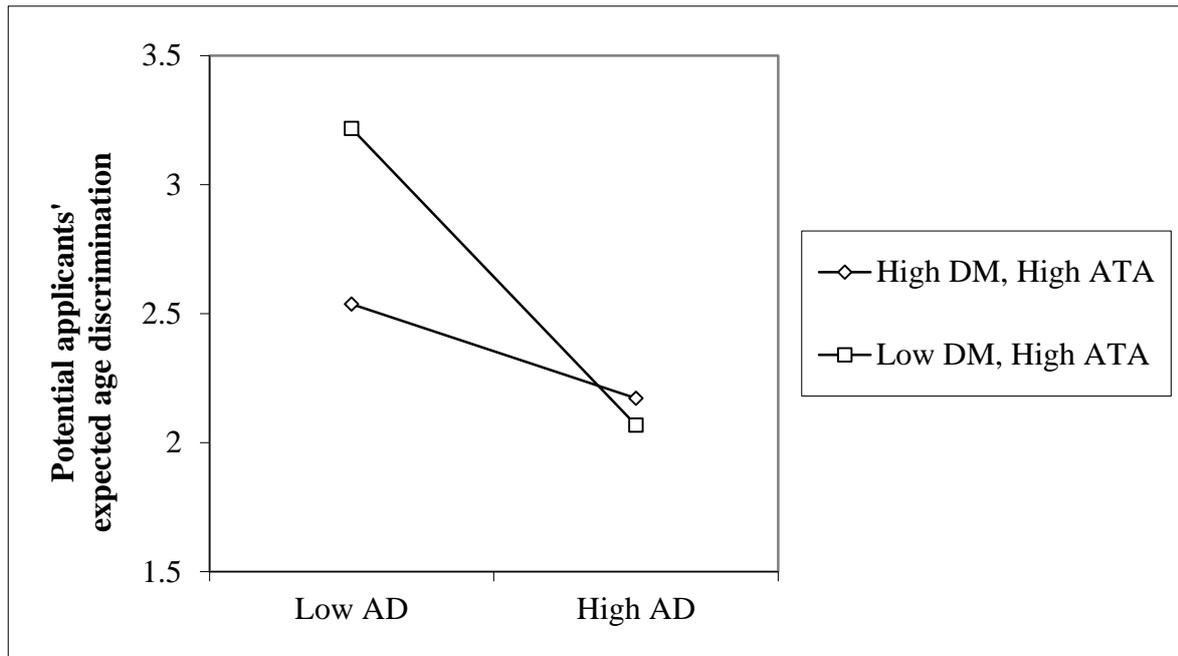
Reactions of individuals with negative attitudes toward age diversity:
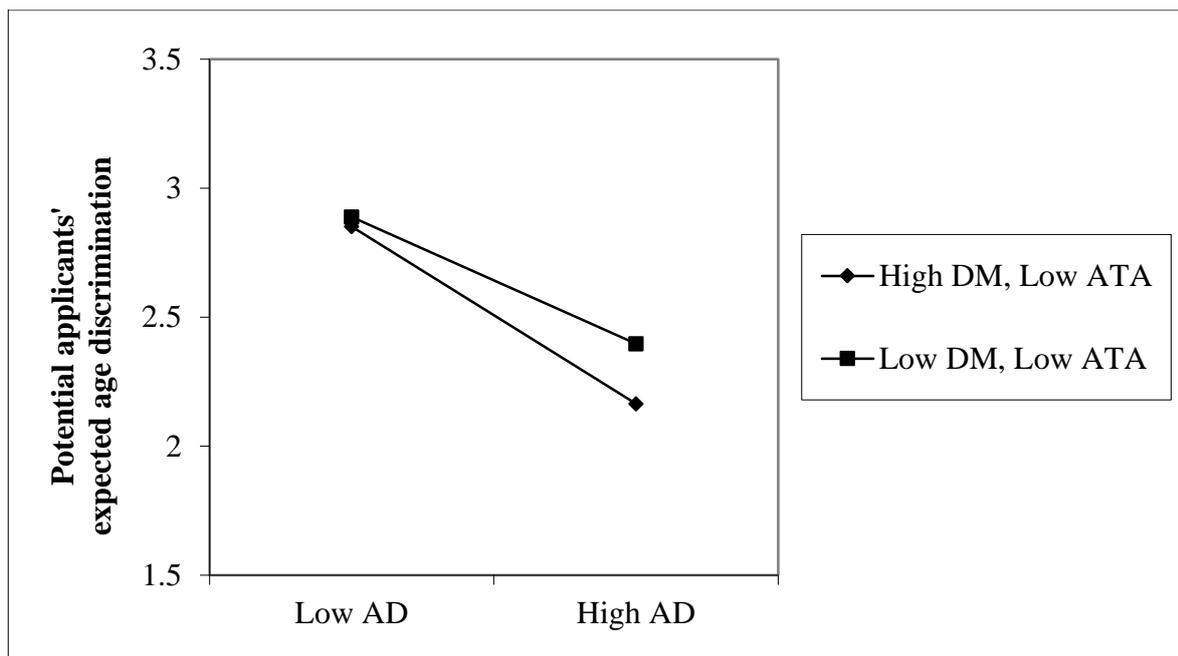
Figure 3   Three-way interactions of organizational age diversity (AD), organizational age diversity management practices (DM), and potential applicants' affective attitude toward age diversity (ATA) on potential applicants' expected age discrimination. Plotted using unstandardized regression coefficients.