Gendered Ageism and Disablism and Employment of Older Workers

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Gendered discrimination based on age and disability is a pressing issue, because this discrimination can interfere with the goal of lengthening work lives, especially for older women. In the United States, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act prohibit age and disability discrimination in employment, while Title VII of the Civil Rights Act bars discrimination against women. However, because gender and age (and disability) discrimination fall under different statutes, these laws may be inadequate to protect against discrimination based on gendered ageism and disablism. Legal rulings in the United States generally do not recognize intersecting claims – discrimination based on two or more protected characteristics – when those characteristics are covered by separate statutes. This may help explain the evidence that age discrimination is worse for women than for men.  
We discuss the theory and methods we can use to analyze these issues, and the relevant laws and their failure to protect women from gendered ageism. We review evidence on gendered age discrimination, and evidence on the effects of discrimination laws and how well they protect from intersectional discrimination. Finally, we discuss potential changes in policies that could better protect against gendered age discrimination.