

Ageist attitudes remain remarkably steadfast even when confronted with the realities of global aging. The population of older men and women is expanding. At the same time, ageist beliefs and practices are also increasing. Older workers increasingly find themselves battling negative and ageist stereotypes.

In a recent survey of people over sixty, nearly 80% reported experiencing ageism (Barnett, 2004). Many workers feel that their age prevents them from being taken seriously. Despite the 40-year-old Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) that prohibits employers from making employment decisions based on age, discrimination remains a pervasive force in the workplace. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has reported a more-than-24% increase in the number of age-discrimination complaints filed this year compared to the previous two years.

Older employees, even those in their fifties, are all too often considered too “old,” outdated, and not able to learn new information. Older workers report being denied the same opportunities and support that younger colleagues enjoy (Barnett, 2005). Although most blatant forms of ageism like mandatory retirement and maximum hiring ages are distant memories, more subtle forms of discrimination still exist. The increased incidence of this subtle age discrimination suggests that, while employers may overtly attempt to comply with the law, stereotypes about aging continue to taint their practices.

Gerontologist Robert Butler (1975) defined and discussed the term “ageism” as a form of prejudice that results from a widespread and deep-seated fear of the aging process. For Butler, ageism encompasses prejudicial attitudes and discriminatory practices toward older adults. These attitudes and practices lead to fear of your own aging and a general distancing from older people.

Ageism is maintained and promoted by institutional, social, and cultural values that lead people to denigrate age. Attitudes about age are bolstered through metaphors of disability, decline, and death. Ageist media portrayals are so prevalent that they are often not even recognized. The common denigration of age prompts older adults to denigrate themselves. Ageism is ever-present in many Hollywood films. In Judd Apatow’s recently made film, *This Is 40*, young people confront their fear of aging. In the film, older people are depicted as insensitive and selfish. Through their desperate actions, they attempt to deny aging. This happens even in well-made, age-sensitive films such as Michael Haneke’s *Amour*, a 2012 Oscar-winning film about caregiving. In the film, Georges and Anne, both in their 80’s, are living a cultivated life in Paris. Then Anne suddenly has a stroke, which begins her slow decline and ultimate end. During this decline, George, like millions of other adults of all ages, becomes his wife’s caregiver. What is even more tragic about this film is that during the film we learn little about George. He is simply depicted as an old man caring for his ailing wife. We are not introduced to his passions, details of his past, the nature of his work, or to his own state of health. In becoming a caregiver he has lost all other aspects of who he was and is. Clearly an analysis of media depictions of aging leaves little doubt as to why ageism and age discrimination are quietly on the rise?

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## Why Psychologists Should Care About Aaron Swartz, Hacktivists, and the CFAA



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By the time you read this, Aaron Swartz’s death will no longer be newsworthy. But I am writing this article several days after his January 11 suicide, and all my online networks are currently flooded with grief.

Keely Kolmes

For those unfamiliar with Swartz, he was a computer hacktivist who fought for free speech and information ethics. He was involved in the development of RSS and Creative Commons (Boyle, 2013). In 2011, Swartz downloaded academic articles from the digital library JSTOR. Nobody was hurt by the crime and JSTOR suffered no loss of money. However, Swartz was charged with two counts of wire fraud and eleven violations under the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act (CFAA), carrying penalties of up to \$1 million in fines and 35 years in jail. After the stress of two years spent fighting these charges, he hanged himself at age 26.

Swartz devoted his short life to fighting for issues close to home for psychologists, scientists, and academics. My professional identity and work are focused on online culture. I publish papers and speak at conferences. But as someone straddling a digital cultural divide, I wrestle with the inherent classism and privilege that segregates access to academic information, particularly information that has been gleaned from human volunteers donating their time but who do not gain access to it.

For this reason, I publish summaries of my research findings on my website as soon as I am able so I can make this information accessible to everyone *before* I begin the arduous process of preparing it for publication—a process which can delay access for years and place it behind a pay wall. I try to make articles I write available to all readers, which entails negotiating with publishers. I find it objectionable that many of our professional conferences prohibit us from recording our own presentations while they ask us to sign contracts allowing them to record and sell our work for their sole profit. Why should our intellectual property be made the exclusive income-generating property of another entity? I regularly cross out the lines in contracts allowing my talks to be recorded and sold by others.

As Malamud (2013) eloquently expressed at Swartz's memorial:

Sequestering knowledge behind pay walls—making scientific journals only available to a few kids fortunate enough to be at fancy universities and charging \$20 an article for the remaining 99% of us—was a festering wound. It offended many people. It embarrassed many who wrote those articles that their work had become somebody's profit margin, a members-only country club of knowledge.

Politics aside, the laws that led to the charges against Swartz affect everyone on the Internet. Many Internet freedom fighters are trying hard to change the CFAA due to its vague language and heavy-handed penalties. The Electronic Frontier Foundation is pushing to extend the protections of a proposed legislative fix called "Aaron's Law" to eradicate prison time for violating Terms of Service, having punishments that better fit the crimes, instituting no penalties for actions intended to protect privacy and security, and other proposed improvements (EFF, 2013). While online activists like Aaron would have been protected by such changes, it is not just online activists who are affected by these laws. EFF points out that under the current CFAA laws, teenagers reading online news sites could be engaging in criminal activity (Maass & Timm, 2013). Wu (2013) notes that Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak committed crimes in the 1970's that were similar to Swartz's—crimes resulting in greater economic damages—while neither was ever prosecuted. Jobs and Wozniak simply moved on to amazing, long careers.

Regardless of where you stand in the debate about access to information, it is indisputable that hacktivists are becoming part of a growing digital subculture (Skelton, 2012). Due to the risks and pressures involved in their activities, they may be at higher risk when it comes to depression, anxiety, and other mental health issues. They are human rights and information ethics activists who suffer severe consequences for fighting for their beliefs. They may also be showing up in our psychotherapy offices. However, there is little data available to understand all of the issues unique to these communities. Recently, Violet Blue (2012) gave a talk on

"Hackers as a High Risk Population" at an annual hacker conference with the goal of bringing concepts of harm reduction to the hacker community. The literature that does exist mostly looks at cybercriminals (Bachman, 2010), with the exception of one psychological study done on non-incarcerated hackers which looked at their scores on a test for autism (Schell & Melnychuk, 2010).

For those interested in media psychology and technology, mental health issues and the legal and political ramifications of hacktivism may be a compelling new line of research and service.

For more information on CFAA issues, look at EFF's site: <https://www.eff.org/issues/cfaa>

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