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Burnout and burnout shame: A moderated mediation model of age and age discrimination

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Resumo

O burnout tem sido um tópico chave de investigação importante durante muitos anos, tendo sido obtidos conhecimentos relevantes nos últimos anos. No entanto, o facto do burnout poder envolver respostas emocionais ainda não foi suficientemente esclarecido, especialmente no que diz respeito à variável vergonha. O foco desta pesquisa é particularmente a idade e a discriminação percebida em relação à idade, essencialmente porque a força de trabalho está a ficar cada vez mais sénior, este tópico tem vindo a ganhar ainda mais relevância. Este estudo testa a forma como o burnout se encontra relacionado com a vergonha do burnout através da perceção de discriminação etária e como esta relação é moderada pela idade. Para testar estas relações foi desenvolvido um modelo de mediação moderada com base numa amostra de 280 participantes da Alemanha. Os resultados mostram que a idade atua como moderador na relação entre o burnout e a discriminação etária percebida, bem como na relação entre a discriminação etária percebida e a vergonha, enquanto a discriminação etária percebida serve de mediador entre o burnout e a vergonha do burnout. Esta investigação realça a importância de considerar a idade e a discriminação etária na pesquisa sobre o burnout e amplia a pesquisa sobre um tópico importante, a vergonha do burnout. Para além disso, a vergonha do burnout é analisada em ainda analisada através de uma comparação intercultural entre a Alemanha, Portugal e os Estados Unidos.

Palavras-chave: Burnout, Vergonha, Discriminação etária, Idade
Classificação JEL: M12, I31

Abstract

Burnout has been a key topic of research for many years and important insights have been gained in many respects. However, the fact that burnout can involve emotional responses has not yet been sufficiently clarified, especially in the area of shame. The focus of this research is particularly on age and the discrimination based on it, which is becoming increasingly relevant as the workforce ages. This study examines how burnout is related to burnout shame through age discrimination and how this relationship is moderated by age. A moderated mediation model is developed based on a sample of 280 participants from Germany. The results show that age acts as a moderator in the relation between burnout and age discrimination, as well as in the relationship between perceived age discrimination and shame, while age discrimination serves as the mediator between burnout and burnout shame. This research highlights the importance of considering age and age-based discrimination in the research of burnout and extends insufficient research on an important topic, burnout shame. Furthermore, burnout shame is examined in more detail through an intercultural comparison between Germany, Portugal and the United States.

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CI – Confidence interval

COR – Conservation of Resources

EFA - Exploratory factor analysis

KMO - Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin

US - United States

SD – Standard deviation

SE - Standard error

1. Introduction

In today's performance-oriented society, individuals often try to keep up with highly demanding workloads, and one way to do this is to extend their availability from work into their leisure time (Thörel et al., 2022). Technology enables individuals to access work e-mails outside of regular working hours and remote work becomes increasingly popular, blurring the boundaries between the private and professional spheres. 66% of the European population experience an 'unhealthy' level of stress at the workplace (Start, 2021), which can become the predecessor of burnout. Becoming burned-out is a long-term result of stress. It is defined as ''a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion that results from long-term involvement in work situations that are emotionally demanding'' (Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001, p. 501). Job stress is associated with various risk factors, which can be classified as either job demands or job resources (Bakker et al., 2003b; c; Demerouti et al., 2001a, b). It is theorized that job demands initiate a process in which employees, in their persistent efforts to meet perceived job requirements, experience rising psychological and physiological costs, that deplete their energy, such as a high level of work pressure (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). It is well-known that these requirements are connected to the psychological well-being of employees (Karasek, 1979). In contrast, job resources are the aspects of a job that support individuals in reaching work-related goals, diminish job demands, and arouse an individual's development, such as supervisor support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). If employees find it consistently challenging to cope with job demands due to a lack of resources, these demands can transform into stressors (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Thus, by experiencing job stressors over a long time, the risk to suffer from burnout increases. An appropriate ratio between job resources and job demands should be one of the organizations' priorities because of the negative effects burnout can have: Employees experiencing burnout often exhibit a diminished level of motivation and a decreasing performance (Humborstard et al., 2007). The ramifications of burnout extend beyond an employee's motivation and performance, contributing to increased rates of absenteeism, intentions to quit the job, as well as the real turnover rates (Maslach et al., 2001). Furthermore, burnout can impair the working environment, leading to heightened engagement in conflicts and disruptions to established working flows (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2000). These disruptions are particularly decisive in departments where employees with burnout interact with clients, given the distorted views that employees with burnout may have towards them, including deep negative feelings and a decline in morale (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Beyond that, the crucial

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client relations have broader implications for the overall reputation of the organization.

Within the domains of occupational psychology and mental health research, burnout has long been a subject of great interest. However, a facet that did not receive enough attention in recent years is the intersection of burnout and shame. The primary emphasis of research has typically centered on the observable symptoms and origins of burnout and less on its emotional effects which should hold equal importance (e.g., Schaufeli et al., 2017, Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000). Shame can play a significant role, when examining burnout (Ferreira, 2022). Understanding its relationship to burnout is the first step towards developing effective strategies to mitigate it. It is defined as an uncomfortable emotion which "[…] humans experience if they fail to meet central social or moral standards" (Orth et al., 2006, p. 1608). Many individuals suffer from stress and still, some may conceal feelings of burnout due to the fear of social rejection from important individuals (Van Vliet, 2008). Organizations should pay particular attention to the relationship between burnout and burnout shame, as this relationship can lead to an even worse experience of burnout symptoms. A negative spiral can occur, leading to a deterioration of the individual's well-being and a reduced productivity (Ferreira, 2022).

To clarify the relationship between burnout and burnout shame and explore how this connection can be influenced, the roles of age and age discrimination are examined more closely. The association between age and burnout has been a topic of ongoing debate, and a meta-analysis conducted by Brewer and Shapard (2004) has shed light on this relationship. Their findings indicated a negative correlation between age and burnout. However, as recent research suggests that shame associated with burnout can exacerbate the effects of burnout (Ferreira, 2022), it becomes increasingly relevant to examine the role of age in the relationship between burnout and burnout shame. Individuals of different ages possess different experiences, perspectives, and reactions to diverse situations (e.g., Kogan & Wallach, 1961), including those related to burnout. Based on their age, individuals can be categorized into different age groups accompanied by age stereotypes, with most researchers categorizing these age groups as young, middle-aged and old (Wilkinson & Ferraro, 2002). If burnout occurs and its effects do not match the characteristics that are associated with the stereotype of a member of a certain age group, it may be a trigger for age discrimination. This is because standards set by others are not met, which can lead to individuals trying to hide burnout to avoid social rejection. Given that age stereotypes often contribute to negative biases to older employees (Cuddy et al., 2005), they may experience even greater shame when disclosing a burnout, as they may fear more severe social repercussions. Therefore, it is important to examine how age moderates the relationship but also which mediating role age discrimination plays in it.

To gain a better understanding of the development of burnout shame across different national cultures, this study examines a comparison between Germany, Portugal, and the United States (US). Based on Hofstede's dimension (1980, 2011), these three countries have different cultures, including different values. National culture is relevant because it influences the behaviors and attitudes of its members (Taras et al., 2010). Different cultures are expected to exhibit varying levels of burnout shame, as cultures also affect how individuals cope with burnout and feelings of shame. The comparison focuses on the burnout shame dimension of exhaustion, which is most closely linked to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001) and contributes significantly to a better understanding of the concept of burnout shame across different cultures.

Overall, the aim of this research is to deepen the understanding of the relationship between burnout and burnout shame and its interplay with age as a moderator and age discrimination as a mediator. Furthermore, this thesis examines burnout shame by comparing the cultural attitudes towards burnout in the US, Portugal and Germany. This thesis closes a research gap that provides an important foundation for further research, as the intersection between burnout and shame will be explained better and the new concept of burnout shame will be researched in relation to culture.

The thesis begins by providing an explanation of the conceptual background of burnout and burnout shame. Following this, a conceptual model is constructed to understand the different roles of age and age discrimination in this relationship. The next section examines burnout shame by comparing its exhaustion dimension across three different cultures. Then, the study's methodology and results are described. Finally, the thesis presents theoretical and practical implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research and finishes with a conclusion.

2. Burnout

2.1 Stress

In the contemporary work landscape, achieving a job that is entirely free from stress has become an elusive goal. The combination of heavy workloads, prolonged working hours due to the work-related extended availability, and the ever-blurring lines between professional and personal life have made it increasingly challenging for individuals to avoid persistent stress (Thörel et al., 2022). The concept of stress is widely recognized. Stress can be viewed through three interrelated but not competing lenses: firstly, as an external environmental factor

impacting an individual; secondly, as the individual's psychological, physiological, and behavioral responses to environmental demands, threats, and challenges; and thirdly, as the intricate interplay between both of these aspects (Ganster & Perrewé, 2011).

This conceptualization highlights the significant impact of an individual's environment on their stress levels, explaining why the workplace often serves as a source of stress. Work involves numerous factors that shape an individual's external environment, and given the typical five-day workweek, these factors can exert considerable intensity. As noted by the researchers LePine et al. (2005), work-related stress can result from various sources, such as repetitive tasks, workplace pressure, administrative obstacles, and role conflicts, all of which are areas where organizations can mostly exert an impact. Therefore, organizations should not overlook the consequences of long-term stress among their employees and understand the impact they have in it.

Although stress is often linked to negative emotions, it is important to distinguish between positive and negative stress, which is one of the key distinctions when examining work stress. Not all types of stress have a negative influence on the organization. Positive stress, also known as eustress, can lead to increased engagement in everyday work in a corporate context (Crawford et al., 2010). According to Nangia (2015), eustress can increase employee performance and effectiveness up to a certain level. It is important to note that this positive impact is limited to the point where employees can handle stress well.

In contrast, negative stress, or distress, has a detrimental impact on both physical and psychological health and promotes a negative work environment. Distress becomes problematic in two ways: Either the stressor occurs too frequently, leaving the individual insufficient time to recover, or the stressor is too substantial for the individual to cope with (Nangia, 2015). This type of stress can negatively influence productivity (Arends et al., 2017), as this type of stress impacts the employees' health (Nangia, 2015).

Thus, this literature is based on distress. If this negative type of stress persists and an individual lacks coping mechanisms to deal with it, the individual can develop burnout (Maslach et al., 2001).

2.2 The conceptual development of burnout

Burnout is known as a condition of vital exhaustion (Fridberg, 2009). The first use of the construct "burnout" was made by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974. Given that burnout was often associated with the context of the human service sector, he emphasized particularly the

significance of striking a balance between self-care and helping others. A relationship was found between jobs involving interpersonal interactions and burnout. Overtime, various research models and theories were developed. Maslach and Jackson (1981) were among the first researchers distinguishing the concept of burnout from other related phenomena, thereby establishing a fundamental theoretical basis. They explained burnout as a result of work-related chronic stress, which is accompanied by exhaustion and depersonalization. Also, the relationship between the burnout-affected individual and their client may change, as burnout can lead to a different negative and malicious view on the client. The change in the employee's attitude towards clients can have disadvantages for the organization, as crucial client relationships are at risk (Maslach & Jackson, 1981).

Maslach & Jackson (1981) were also the first researchers to define burnout as a syndrome characterized by a collection of different symptoms and clinical signs that can be collectively distinct from other states (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Burnout has multidimensional symptoms, with the main ones known as "mental dysfunctions". These can manifest as disruptions in concentration and memory, diminished drive, and alterations in personality. At a more severe level, these disturbances can develop anxiety and depressive symptoms, ultimately reaching a critical point that may lead to suicidal thoughts or actions. Burnout can also occur in physical forms which can include headaches, gastro-intestinal issues or cardiovascular disturbances (Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000).

In 1993, Maslach and Schaufeli expanded the burnout concept of exhaustion and depersonalization by adding a third characterization: the diminished personal accomplishment. With ongoing research, it was found out that burnout is no longer strictly connected to the human services sector. Instead, it was found that it occurs in other occupations and independent of the profession, so that burnout can be found in jobs, such as managerial roles or military positions (Maslach et al., 2001; Schaufeli et al., 2009). But indeed, the World Health Organization (2022) stated that burnout is a work-related concept and not classified as a medical condition. It is more likely to occur later in the career than earlier (Maslach et al., 2001), but the effects of burnout are not limited to the individual experiencing it. In 2018, it was estimated that 13-25% of the working population is influenced by the costs associated with burnout (Puolakanaho et al., 2018). Therefore, it is important for organizations and their members to understand this work-related concept.

The three dimensions that describe burnout – exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment – have remained unchanged to this day. Exhaustion refers to the feeling of being overstretched beyond one's limits and lacking emotional and physical

energy. This dimension is the most strongly associated with burnout and is also the most commonly reported out of the three dimensions (Maslach et al., 2001). According to Maslach et al. (2001), the basic individual stress is represented by this dimension. Depersonalization describes the interpersonal state of experiencing a negative, empty or overly detached feelings towards one's job (Maslach et al., 2001). The researchers Kristensen et al. (2005) even characterized depersonalization as a coping strategy to deal with stress, which is mostly reflected in the dimension of exhaustion. While exhaustion arises due to being highly involved in the job, depersonalization is an emotion to create distance to it. Last, diminished personal accomplishment refers to the feelings of being not competent or productive enough for the job. Consequently, burnout is the result of long-term stress and inadequate ways of dealing with it (Maslach et al., 2001).

Burnout is a concept that is not only known for its three dimensions but can also occur in three subtypes with different levels of intensity (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). These subtypes can be interpreted as stages that represent a gradual decline in employees' commitment to their job (Montero-Marin et al., 2014). It is helpful to understand the concept of burnout as a developmental process in which the intensity of engagement decreases and enthusiasm turns into apathy as burnout worsens (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022). Figure 1 displays a graphical representation of the developmental process. Individuals experiencing burnout for the first time were usually highly engaged in their work. However, this high level of involvement cannot be sustained in the long term without resulting in exhaustion, which is reflected in the frenetic subtype of burnout. To overcome this exhaustion, individuals may create a distance to protect themselves from excessive levels of activity. They may distance themselves from both their job and the high level of exhaustion, resulting in a relief but also in frustration. This frustration can lead to the development of the under-challenged subtype. However, being frustrated over a long period of time can foster higher levels of cynicism and negative thoughts about one's efficacy, so that burnout in its developing process passes into its final subtype, the worn-out subtype. This type is considered as the developmental stage with the lowest dedication to work. Individuals experiencing burnout with low dedication levels perceive themselves as lacking the competence to perform their jobs. This subtype is associated with feelings of hopelessness and a lack of control over work outcomes (Edú-Valsania et al., 2022).
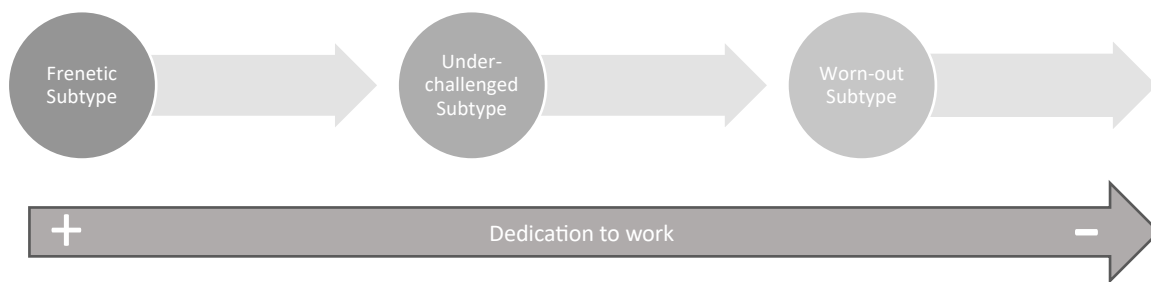
Figure 1. *Subtypes of Burnout.*

Note: Figure based on Edú-Valsania et al. (2022)

2.3 The job-demands resources model

The development and intensity of stress at work and the resulting burnout can be influenced by a number of factors. In all occupational sectors, there are risk factors for work-related stress that can be categorized as either job demands or job resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). As confirmed by the World Health Organization (2022), burnout is a work-related concept, which is why the job demands-resources model is very crucially connected. Understanding how job demands are related to strains and how this relationship can be weakened can help reduce employees' stress and the risk of burnout. Job demands are the job characteristics that impose psychological or physiological strains, as they require additional effort and capabilities (Demerouti et al., 2001). In contrast, job resources are the job characteristics that contribute to achieving work objectives, alleviating job demands, or fostering an individual's learning, development, and growth. Whereas job demands can lead to strains, job resources have the potential to be motivational factors. The interplay between job resources and motivation can contribute to work engagement, while the job demands associated with job strains may lead to burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). The researchers Bakker et al. (2003c) noted that these two relationships are not entirely independent of each other, but can influence each other through buffer effects. By having a higher number of resources, such as social support or job control, a dual benefit can be achieved: While engagement is promoted, burnout can be avoided (Schaufeli, 2017). Conversely, decreasing job demands, such as conflicts and job insecurity, would only affect burnout without positively affecting work engagement, as Schaufeli (2017) suggests. Therefore, it is equally important to look at the demands of the job as it is to look at the resources to better understand burnout.

The combination of excessive job demands, and inadequate job resources is resulting in psychological and physiological costs, such as a strong decrease in employees' energy

(Schaufeli, 2017). The exhaustion dimension of burnout is particularly reflective to this lack of energy (Maslach et al., 2001). Individuals who do not have access to their full range of energy and experience mental fatigue are limited in their ability to perform tasks (Hopstaken et al., 2015). These job demands can lead to employee burnout and result in sickness leave, low performance, limited workability, and poor commitment to the organization (Schaufeli, 2017). Thus, it is important to address these issues to ensure the well-being of employees and the success of the organization.

However, if the company ensures that enough job resources are available so that employees are not simply overwhelmed with the demands of the job, this can have a positive impact on the organization performance. By a high and, more importantly, an abundant number of resources, the employees develop not only higher work engagement, but also the organizations will recognize higher commitment to the organization. Employees who intend to remain with the organization, exhibit extra-role behavior, resulting in improved safety, and an overall higher organizational performance (Schaufeli, 2017).

3. Burnout shame

3.1 Shame

Shame is classified as a self-conscious emotion as it relies on an individual's capacity for self-reflection, a critical skill for making evaluative judgments. When experiencing shame, individuals adopt the perspective of others and assess a specific aspect of themselves negatively (Tracy & Robins, 2004). Shame is also considered a social emotion as it is linked to the expectations set by the social environment and the scrutiny of how individuals present themselves to others. It should be noted that shame can arise regardless of whether social standards are objectively required by others or merely perceived to be so by the individual who violates them (Leary, 2007). Either way, shame can be considered as a moral emotion as well. It can be experienced as a motivation to act in normative ways and to meet the morale standards. When individuals believe they have acted in a way that goes against social or personal moral values, they may experience shame, which can lead them to want to keep their actions hidden or secret (Tangney et al., 2007). Thus, shame can have an impact on how individuals behave in certain situations when feeling shame. But also, it can influence general feelings and behaviors, as shame is typically associated with a rising distrust, a feeling of insignificance and powerlessness (Ducan & Cacciatore, 2015).

Just as shame can be characterized by different types of emotion, it can also be categorized. More specifically, shame can be divided into four categories, as noted by Van Vliet (2008). However, a situation or event characterized by shame does not necessarily fit into just one category. One of these categories is the violation of social, moral and personal standards. An example for this is a person who is caught stealing, which is against social or moral standards. Secondly, there is the category of personal failure, which, for example, includes having to repeat one's Bachelor thesis twice. Thirdly, ostracism and rejection in the social field is a category. One of the examples for this category of shame is being ostracized by committing a crime that gained a lot of attention in the media, leading to public social rejection. Fourthly, there is the category of trauma. Shame can occur in this category by, for example, being a victim of domestic violence (Van Vliet, 2008).

Shame can occur in all four categories, not only privately but also in a professional context. Therefore, it also plays a role in the organizational life and is known in this context as organizational shame. According to Daniels and Robinson (2019), there are two types of organizational shame: direct organizational shame, which the individual experiences based on their own failure. The second type of organizational shame is vicarious organizational shame, which occurs when individuals feel ashamed in the organizational context due to the faults of others. If organizational shame occurs in one of the two types, then the following two processes are involved. The first process involves evaluating a negative deviation from a significant standard linked to an individual's work-related identity (Daniels & Robinson, 2019). This means that organizational shame is distinct from general shame, as it is based on the context of the workplace and the identity that the individual assumes and builds in that setting. Work-related identities are activated and built in the workplace, and the workplace plays a crucial role in shaping this type of identity (Ashford & Johnson, 2001). Daniels and Robinson (2019) highlight a second intrapsychic process in which individuals attribute deviations from a specific standard to their own fault. However, the deviation does not have to be realistically dependent on or triggered by the individual, but rather by others, attributed by the individual to themselves. So, both direct and vicarious organization shame include both two processes (Daniel & Robinson, 2019).

3.2 The intersection of burnout and shame

Burnout and shame are not necessarily separate concepts. In fact, a new term, 'burnout shame', has been developed to describe the feeling of shame that can be associated with burnout.

Burned-out individuals may try to hide their burnout under certain conditions. Burnout shame is context-dependent, and is particularly prevalent in environments with high presenteeism cultures and strong stigma (Ferreira, 2022). To comprehend the emergence of burnout shame, a closer look is taken at shame in organizations. Organizational shame, a specific type of shame that exists in the corporate context is particularly relevant here, as it can contribute to the development of burnout shame through its two included processes. Both processes of organizational shame, namely the deviation from the standard of the work-related identity and the tendency to blame oneself instead of external factors (Daniels & Robinson, 2019) can be applied to the shame of experiencing a burnout. Firstly, experiencing a burnout can negatively deviate from the standards set by the work-related identity, affecting an individual's behavior and work style. As a result, the standards set before the burnout can be easily failed and shame may arise from the deviation between an individual's behavior and these standards. Secondly, feeling ashamed of having a burnout is mostly associated due to personal expectations rather than external sources. Thomason (2015) suggests that individuals may feel shame for aspects of themselves that are beyond their control. Burnout is often beyond an individual's control and can lead to feelings of shame and impact behavior. The lack of control over burnout can therefore exacerbate feelings of shame. Although the roots of this shame are internal, individuals still fear external social rejection from those who are important to them (Van Vliet, 2008). The existence of shame is rooted in its function as a safeguard against social exclusion, motivating individuals to take actions that keep interpersonal relationships (Usoof-Thowfeek et al., 2011). It protects an individual's sense of belonging, social status, and self-esteem, as noted by Van Vliet (2008). Whether an individual is affected by burnout or not has an impact on how they are perceived by others: Individuals experiencing burnout are often unfairly stereotyped as less capable and more vulnerable compared to their non-burned-out counterparts (May et al., 2010). To prevent others from undervaluing their abilities and linking them to weakness, individuals may try to conceal their burnout. This is connected to the dimension of the diminished personal accomplishment. Individuals want to conceal their own perception of not being professionally competent enough, not reaching their goals, and not being productive on the job. Burnout shame can be present in all three dimensions of burnout. Individuals may feel ashamed of their emotional exhaustion and lack of energy. They may also experience shame regarding their depersonalization towards their job, as they may not want to reveal that they are no longer as attached to their job as they once were. The social consequences of mental health challenges can be a major issue (May et al., 2020), which is why burnout is often not disclosed.

To gain a better understanding of when burnout shame arises, it can be analyzed through the theoretical lens of the four categories of shame (Van Vliet, 2008). Burnout shame falls under the category of violation of social, moral, and personal standards; the category of the feeling of personal failure; and the category of ostracism and rejection. The category of trauma is not related to burnout shame, as burnout is not considered a concept that causes trauma, but rather belongs to all other categories. Firstly, individuals having burnout may feel that they failed social and moral standards because they have the perception that burnout is something that does not conform to these standards. But not only external standards can be affected, also personal standards. Coming back to organizational shame, an individual's work identity has built up standards that cannot be met by the individual themselves (Daniels & Robinson, 2009), resulting in the failure of meeting personal standards. Secondly, the burnout dimension of diminished personal accomplishment leads to a negative perception of oneself. This dimension is strongly connected to the category of shame that includes feelings of personal failure, since this dimension includes strong self-doubting feelings (Maslach et al., 2001). Thirdly, burnout can alter an individual's personality (Weber & Jaekel-Reinhard, 2000). It can lead to behavior that is less socially acceptable and others may judge this behavior. This can even result in ostracism of an individual suffering from burnout, leading to shame. They may attempt to conceal their condition to avoid social rejection and remain part of a group.

The desire to avoid this social rejection can be attributed to the stigma associated with burnout. Stigma is defined as any characteristic, trait, or condition that distinguishes an individual as deviating in an unacceptable manner from the perceived norm of the individual they interact with, leading to some form of community sanction (Scambler, 1998). Burnout can be perceived as a condition that does not align with norms and standards. This can lead to stigmatization of employees experiencing burnout by their colleagues, resulting in a fear of being penalized and developing shame (Ferreira, 2022). Stigma may be more common when burned-out individuals work directly with others, as the effects of burnout can be more noticeable, resulting in negative evaluations of the affected employees. It can negatively affect the relationship between colleagues (Krupa et al., 2009). Negative behavior towards burned-out employees, based on stigma, may cause individuals to feel ashamed of their burnout. This can further complicate relationships between colleagues (Maslach et al., 2001). Under certain conditions, shame can cause individuals to behave more withdrawn, especially when they are unable to rebuild their positive self-image after a shameful situation. Withdrawal can make it difficult for colleagues to maintain a good working relationship with burned-out employees,

ultimately negatively impacting the workflow (De Hooge et al., 2010). This highlights that while stigma may be a contributing factor, the behavior of burned-out employees can also weaken their relationships among coworkers. Furthermore, exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal accomplishment can have a detrimental impact on the task at hand. These employees may disrupt the workflow and are more likely to be involved in interpersonal conflicts (Maslach et al., 2001). This can further reinforce colleagues' perceptions of burnout and the associated stigma, which unfortunately undermines the availability of social support.

Social support, however, is an important job resource that can help balance job demands and buffer the effects of stressors. The buffer effect is crucial because burnout can be prevented or weakened by job resources, such as social support (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Social rejection resulting from stigma may restrict the needed support. The job demands-resources model is relevant to the intersection of burnout and burnout shame because the balance between demands and resources not only affects burnout (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007), but individuals who experience burnout shame search for less resources (Ferreira et al., 2022). According to the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), individuals strive to preserve their valuable job resources during uncertain times and aim to acquire new ones. When experiencing burnout, demands exceed resources (Schaufeli, 2017). To prevent further loss, such as the potential loss of social support due to rejection stemming from burnout, individuals may develop a sense of shame. This, in turn, may cause them to seek fewer resources. This exacerbates their loss and makes it even more difficult to balance the excessive demands that initially led to burnout, resulting in a negative burnout spiral (Ferreira, 2022). The job demands-resources model is a relevant framework for understanding the relationship between burnout and burnout shame. The exacerbation of burnout due to burnout shame can be challenging, as shame is considered as one of the emotions that are difficult for people to regulate (Elison et al., 2014). A meta-analysis by Mazur-Socha & Przepiórka (2021) has shown that burnout and shame are only moderately correlated with negative mood regulation expectancies. Negative mood regulation expectancies refer to an individual's beliefs about their ability to mitigate negative emotions through their mindset or actions. This correlation suggests that controlling feelings of shame is not a simple task (Mazur-Socha & Przepiórka, 2021). Regulatory processes are crucial because controlling both key concepts can be challenging. This can make the relationship between burnout and burnout shame even more challenging to alter. Therefore, it is essential to understand the roots of this relationship.

Burnout can have unpleasant consequences, such as social rejection (Van Vliet, 2008), a negative stereotype (May et al., 2010), and the inability to fulfil one's own set standards (Daniels

& Robinson, 2019). Individuals may try to avoid the consequences of burnout by developing a sense of shame associated with burnout. Thus, burnout can be the trigger for burnout shame and is therefore related to it.

Hypothesis 1*:* Burnout is positively related to burnout shame.

4. The mediator role of age discrimination

4.1. Age stereotypes

Social categories significantly influence how individuals perceive others and the expectations placed on them. When an individual connects specific information with a particular social category, it is called a stereotype (Gilmour, 2015). These stereotypes often involve generalized beliefs about an entire social group (Le Pelley et al., 2010). The formation of stereotypes is typically unconscious (Gilmour, 2015) and they can be divided into descriptive and prescriptive ones. Descriptive stereotypes portray what members of a social group are usually like ("Older employees are experienced") and prescriptive ones are describing how members of the group should behave to prevent social rejection and judgement ("Older employees should be experienced") (Gill, 2004).

Stereotypes can categorize different types of individuals into groups, including individuals of the same age. Age-specific classifications are commonly referred to as age stereotypes. They are used as a measure to classify the skills, competencies, and experience of others. Also, these classifications are often used to make assumptions about individuals' reactions, for example, to physical appearance, language, and employment (Ferraro & Wilkinson, 2002). Unfortunately, research does not provide a standardized demarcation of age groups. In most cases, however, age groups are divided into young, middle-aged and old (e.g., Finkelstein et al., 2013). Age stereotypes associated with an individual not only set out certain expectations, but also prejudices. A prejudice refers to a negative bias towards an individual, influenced by their perceived association with a specific group (Paluck et al., 2021). One of the notable characteristics that sets age prejudice apart from other prejudices, such as racism or sexism, is that it is socially accepted. Age prejudice is often not questioned due to its unconscious and highly implicit origin (Officer & de la Fuente-Núñez, 2018). Thus, individuals that experience this type of prejudice are more likely to be openly confronted by this than by other types. Open

communication about age prejudice may include negative bias towards tasks performed by individuals of different age groups. Levy and Banaji (2002) discovered that negative stereotypes can increase stress levels when employees are assigned tasks that are labeled as challenging for people of a certain age. Therefore, discriminated employees may experience increased stress levels.

In their 2009 study, the researchers Posthuma and Campion analyzed age stereotypes presented in 117 books and scientific articles. Their findings revealed that older employees are often perceived as less capable, less motivated, and less productive than younger age groups. Additionally, they are often seen as less adaptable and resistant to change. The stereotype asserts that older employees are less likely to learn and develop, yet are more likely to cost the organization more due to salaries and benefits (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Older employees are perceived as technophobic (Finkelstein et al., 2013) and also, older age is associated with a decline in cognitive abilities (Salthouse, 2011). Conversely, the older stereotype is perceived as dependable, trustworthy, loyal, and less likely to leave the organization quickly (Posthuma & Campion, 2009), as well as knowledgeable and experienced (Finkelstein et al., 2013).

Young employees are often stereotyped as inexperienced, lazy, energetic, and enthusiastic, while middle-aged employees are typically viewed as experienced, family-related, reliable, and knowledgeable stable (Finkelstein et al., 2013).

The negative stereotypes towards older employees as well as the social acceptance of age prejudice makes it even more important for organizations to focus on potential age-based discrimination.

4.2. Age discrimination

Negative discrimination is the act of rejecting an individual, based on their social category (Weyant, 2013). Age-based stereotypes and prejudices serve as a catalyst for age discrimination, a pervasive issue that has long been prevalent in the workplace. The term used to describe discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes towards older employees is ageism (Angus & Reeve, 2006). Two thirds of employees over the age of 50 believe that generally, older employees are discriminated against based on their age (Moran, 2023). Nonetheless, individuals from other age groups also face discrimination, including negative behaviors and attitudes directed at them, just based on their age group membership (Kunze et al., 2011).

The researchers Volpone and Avery (2013) defined perceived discrimination as a job demand that increases psychological and physiological stress. This is particularly relevant in

the context of burnout, where an imbalance between job demands and job resources can lead to burnout (Demerouti et al., 2001). Individuals experiencing burnout may struggle to cope with additional demands, such as age discrimination, since they lack sufficient resources to manage the demands contributing to burnout. Therefore, it is crucial to address burnout before addressing other demands, such as age discrimination. Burnout and burnout shame may be related through age discrimination, as age discrimination adds to the already existing job demands that contribute to burnout and intensify feelings of shame in line with the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory underlines that individuals may try to conceal their burnout even more, as displaying burnout could further jeopardize their resources and increase the risk of experiencing discrimination.

Furthermore, age discrimination can act as a mediator, as burnout could influence age prejudices. Some individuals may wrongly associate the effects of burnout with the individual's age group. For example, exhaustion and lack of energy could be associated with young employees violating their prescriptive age stereotype by not being energetic and enthusiastic (Finkelstein et al., 2013). When an individual experiences burnout, external observers may connect the effects of burnout to the age group of the affected individual. Consequently, this may lead to discriminatory behavior if the expected stereotype does not align with the employee. As prescriptive stereotypes dictate how group members should behave to avoid social rejection and judgement (Gill, 2004), individuals may develop shame towards burnout. They may also believe that hiding burnout is the only way to reduce social rejection, as burnout hinders coping mechanisms for dealing with age discrimination directly: Individuals often adopt a problem-focused orientation to cope with discrimination, which can actually help them feel more in control (Matheson & Anisman, 2009). Burnout includes the dimension of depersonalization and diminished personal accomplishment, leading to feelings of job detachment and missing competence. This can make it harder for the individual to focus on the problem, and feel in control. Thomason's (2015) research suggests that individuals experience shame when they have limited control over circumstances, such as age discrimination. This finding highlights why age discrimination acts as a mediator. Also, a study by Matheson & Anisman (2009) support the relationship between discrimination and shame, as it shows a correlation between these two concepts. Female participants reported greater levels of shame when they encountered discrimination as opposed to situations where their failure was attributed to personal performance. So, individuals who experience age discrimination at work are in a situation where they are judged, socially penalized, and experience prejudice by other individuals just in response to their age. They already get the external response of

discrimination and thus, to not receive even more rejection, they try to hide burnout, resulting in a higher value of burnout shame.

Employees who experience age discrimination may find it difficult to cope due to burnout, which can result in a lack of resources (Demerouti et al., 2001) and control (Thomason, 2015). Some individuals may attempt to conceal their burnout as a means of managing it and avoiding social exclusion. As discrimination can also lead to higher levels of shame (Matheson & Anisman, 2009), burnout can be linked to burnout shame through age discrimination.

Hypothesis 2: Burnout will be indirectly related to burnout shame via age discrimination.

5. The moderator role of age

The demographic structure of the labor market is evolving as the population ages and works for more years (Ramos et al., 2016). In many countries, the retirement age is already being postponed and the trend suggests that both the future standard retirement age and early retirement ages will steadily rise. If we consider an individual entering the labor market at the age of 22 in the year 2020, the average normal retirement age across the OECD countries is projected to reach 66.1 years for men and 65.5 years for women. This marks a significant increase compared to the respective retirement ages of 64.2 years for men and 63.4 years for women in the year 2020 (OECD, 2021). The change in retirement age has implications for organizations, particularly because it widens the age gap among employees. The age distribution in the workplace becomes important when considering burnout, burnout shame and age discrimination.

Age may moderate the relationship between burnout and burnout shame through age discrimination, as the strength of the relationship may vary depending on age. Burnout can affect an individual's behavior (Maslach et al., 2001), which may exacerbate age discrimination by reinforcing negative age stereotypes. Especially, older employees may be affected by the resulting age discrimination, as they are already subject to a more negative stereotypes regardless of burnout, unlike their younger and middle-aged counterparts (Cuddy et al., 2005). Although older employees may be viewed positively as experienced and knowledgeable (Finkelstein et al., 2013), burnout may distort these perceptions. This may be particular related to the dimensions of depersonalization and negative personal accomplishment. The burnout dimension of depersonalization allows individuals to clearly develop a more indifferent attitude towards work. In addition, the diminished personal accomplishment dimension is important

because individuals experiencing burnout perceive themselves as less productive and effective at work (Maslach et al., 2001). Both dimensions may contribute to the violation of the stereotypical image of older employees. They may not be perceived as knowledgeable, and their experience may be questioned, which contradicts their prescriptive stereotype. Thus, older employees may fear that they will not be able to maintain their stereotypical image and that they will be penalized through age discrimination (Gill, 2004). This may lead to burnout shame. They may fear that they fail the other individuals' standards about their experience and knowledge, and they try to avoid social rejection, so individuals of advanced age perceive a higher need to hide their burnout.

In addition, the individual's power, status, roles as well as social responsibilities can be associated with the membership of an age group (Tajfel, 1982). While individuals who are part of the middle-aged group are viewed as holding the highest social status, they are also part of the age group that experiences the least negative age discrimination. In contrast, those in the younger or older age groups perceive themselves as belonging to lower-status groups. (Garstka et al., 2004). The research on burnout and burnout shame highlights the importance of an individual's status, as those in age groups associated with lower status are often perceived as less competent (Olmeadow & Fiske, 2007). The dimension of personal accomplishment in burnout may cause individuals to doubt their competencies (Maslach et al., 2001). If an individual's age-related status is used to evaluate their competence by others, it may increase age discrimination. Others may confirm the individual's own negative view of their competence based solely on their age. Consequently, individuals may try to conceal their burnout to mitigate this perception and develop burnout shame.

Another example that helps to explain age as a moderator is the decline of cognitive abilities. Gavelin et al (2022) found that burnout had a negative impact on cognitive performance in several cognitive domains. However, a reduced cognitive ability is also associated with employees of advanced age (Salthouse, 2011). The decline in cognitive abilities triggered by burnout can therefore also be stereotypically attributed to age by others, reinforcing age-related prejudice and potentially increasing age discrimination. Employees may feel ashamed of their burnout, leading them to conceal its possible role in cognitive decline. Older employees who experience cognitive decline due to burnout may therefore perceive higher levels of age discrimination, leading to higher levels of burnout shame. However, reduced cognitive ability can also have other consequences beyond those mentioned. It can widen the gap between job demands and resources, especially in tasks with time pressure and a high workload (Rauschenbach et al., 2013). It affects the working memory and learning ability of

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older employees (Salthouse, 2011), making it more challenging for them to balance job demands and resources. According to the Conservation of Resources theory, lost resources are a decisive factor for arising stress. Individuals aim to maintain the quantity and quality of their resources and avoid situations that may put them at risk (Hobfoll, 1988, 1998). Aging is an inevitable process that results in the loss of resources, making their preservation difficult. This is relevant to the relationship in three ways. Firstly, to prevent and manage burnout, it is important to balance job demands and resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007); secondly, age-discrimination can be seen as a demand and resources are irrevocable to cope (Volpone & Avery, 2013); thirdly, the loss of resources, such as social support, can have a negative influence on the development of burnout shame (Ferreira, 2022).

Additionally, the relationship may be moderated by age, as the goals and values of individuals vary with age (e.g., Kogan and Wallach, 1961). Older and middle-aged employees may combine family roles with their personal identity, driven by a need for job security to support their families. Research by Reitzes and Mutran (2002) underlines this connection between family roles and individual identity, supporting the need for job stability. Thus, middle-aged and older employees are more likely to conceal their burnout in order to maintain their job and financial stability. In addition, they often have a better view on their workplace and on their job, they are more advanced in their careers and report higher levels of job satisfaction than their younger counterparts. As a result, they are more likely to want to stay in their jobs (Ng & Feldmann, 2010). They are more inclined to remain in their current positions and try to avoid a job loss through burnout. In general, older employees may already experience higher job pressure due to age discrimination in the hiring process (e.g. Wanberg et al., 1996). This is another reason why employees develop higher levels of burnout shame with increasing age.

Another explanation why age may moderate the relationship burnout and burnout shame through age discrimination is stereotype threat. Individuals' selves develop primarily within their social groups and families (Hobfoll, 2001), emphasizing that age group as a categorized social group has an influence on the individual's self. Stereotype threat is the pressure an individual feels when they feel responsible for perpetuating negative stereotypes (Steele, 1998). The effects of burnout could partly correspond to the characteristics of the age stereotypes and therefore confirm or even reinforce them outwardly, leading to age discrimination. However, stereotype threat may lead individuals to try not to confirm the stereotype further (von Hippel et al., 2013) and develop a need to hide burnout through burnout shame. It is noteworthy that older employees are more susceptible to experiencing the negative effects of stereotype threat. Reducing the perception of stereotype threat among older employees could lead to improved

job attitudes and better mental health at work (von Hippel et al., 2013). Therefore, employees may be more inclined to conceal their burnout symptoms as they age. Stereotype threat demonstrates the need to reduce both external stereotypes and those held by the individual. It arises when individuals experience lower self-worth (Wheeler & Petty, 2001), which is linked to the diminished personal accomplishment dimension of burnout. Diminished personal accomplishment can cause affected individuals to doubt their competencies (Maslach, 2001), making them more susceptible to experiencing stereotype threat when experiencing burnout.

Age discrimination, negative stereotypes, and prejudice can also affect younger employees. While age stereotypes also impact middle-aged and younger employees, they tend to be less pronounced, as these groups are generally viewed more favorable (Cuddy et al., 2005). However, it is important to note that younger employees may be able to outgrow their stereotypes, as they move into middle-aged and later older age groups with increasing age. As a result, younger employees may experience less shame, recognizing that their age stereotype is only temporary. Younger employees may be more accepting of negative thoughts about their age, while older employees may feel trapped by age stereotypes (Garstka et al., 2004) and perceive age discrimination as a permanent obstacle in their career. Since there is no way out of stereotype-based age discrimination for older employees, their age group is more likely to develop a higher level of burnout shame to avoid any further rejection than younger age groups who are still growing out of their stereotypes.

Hypothesis 3a: Age moderates the relationship between burnout and age discrimination to the extent that it is more negative for older employees.

Hypothesis 3b: Age moderates the relationship between age discrimination and burnout shame to the extent that it is more negative for older employees.
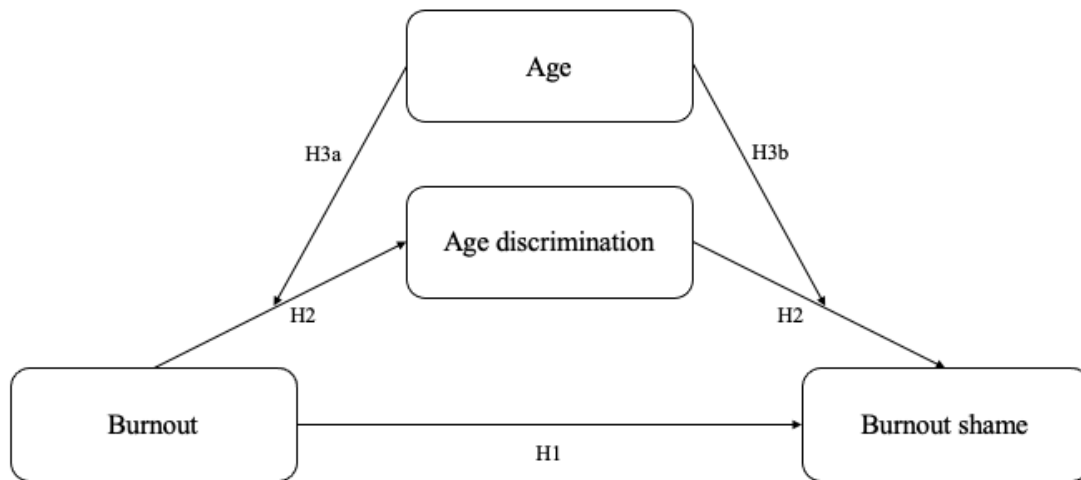
Figure 2. *Hypothesized model for the effects of burnout, age, age discrimination, and burnout shame.*

6. Culture

6.1. Hofstede's culture dimensions

Culture can be defined as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another" (Hofstede, 1994, p.1). Therefore, individuals from different cultures may react differently to the same situation, including the experience of stress. The national culture can influence stress coping mechanisms (Hobfoll et al., 2018). which are important factors in the occurrence of burnout. While burnout is perceived as a universal concept across different countries (Schaufeli et al., 2017), the value systems of collective groups should be examined in detail regarding the relationship between burnout and burnout shame.

Hofstede (1980, 2011) defined six dimensions to measure a country's culture which are power distance, individualism versus collectivism, masculinity versus femininity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term versus short-term orientation, and indulgence versus restraint. The dimensions are important for the development of burnout shame because they are connected to behaviors and attitudes (Taras et al., 2010). Therefore, how individuals deal with burnout and what attitudes they have towards it, is related to their cultural backgrounds. When individuals

feel they are not meeting social or moral standards, they are essentially evaluating themselves from an external standpoint during the experience of shame (Tracy & Robins, 2004). The perspective the individual takes and the evaluation of specific situations are related to what the person has already experienced in their cultural environment and how they therefore assess the situation (Taras et al., 2010).

Dimensions that are particularly relevant for the development of burnout shame are uncertainty avoidance, individualism versus collectivism, and masculinity versus femininity. Uncertainty avoidance is relevant because burnout can be seen as a very complex concept (Maslach et al., 2001), which, with its various dimensions and subtypes, can potentially lead to uncertainties. Uncertainty is not interchangeable with risk, but can be understood as the extent of the individuals' comfort in unstructured situations. This also means that individuals of cultures with a lower uncertainty avoidance index are expected to handle uncertain situations more easily (Hofstede, 2011). This dimension can be linked to Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) theory, which suggests that individuals experiencing burnout may try to conceal their condition to preserve job resources. Individuals may try to distance themselves from uncertain situations in order to avoid circumstances, where they could lose their resources. Burnout may be perceived as one of these circumstances. It can be viewed as a complex, and unstructured situation and although it may occur in all cultures equally, cultures with a higher index of uncertainty avoidance are more likely to show their burnout and develop less shame. Cultural values play an important role in the COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989), as different cultures classify situations at varying levels of risk to jeopardize resources. According to Hofstede (1991), members of cultures with a high uncertainty avoidance index experience higher stress and have less control over their emotions. Depending on the culture, individuals may develop a sense of shame or not.

The individualism versus collectivism dimension is important because in collectivistic cultures, the use of shame as a disciplinary tool is widespread and the importance of adhering to social norms and expected standards of behavior is taught from an early age (Fung, 1999; Mascolo et al., 2003). For collectivistic cultures, relationships have a higher priority than tasks and since burnout is a work-related concept, the implementation of work-related tasks is not seen as important as maintaining relationships with other employees. Because burnout can deviate from the norms and jeopardize relationships at work (Maslach et al., 2001), members of more collectivistic countries try to maintain harmony and avoid conflict within the group by hiding their psychological problems, including burnout (Hofstede, 1980, 2011).

The masculinity versus femininity dimension described the extent to which cultures are focusing on masculine values like assertiveness, performance, success and competition or on feminine values like quality of life, personal relationships, care for the weak and solidarity. Countries with more masculine values are also considered as a performance society (Hofstede, 1994). This is in particular relevant for the burnout shame concept, because of its relation to the work (World Health Organization, 2022). In cultures that prioritize masculine values, individuals may be more inclined to conceal burnout, as it could be perceived as a weakness that could hinder their performance or success in competitive environments. Conversely, in more feminine cultures, burnout is often viewed as a concern for the well-being of individuals and solidarity among peers, and therefore may be more openly acknowledged and addressed.

6.2 The comparison between Germany, Portugal, and the US

Given that burnout is approached differently across cultures, a comparison between Germany, Portugal, and the US can aid in comprehending how it is handled in these cultural contexts. As work-related stress is a significant factor in the development of burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), it is important to understand the sources and levels of stress in various cultures. In 2021, work and high self-demands were identified as two main causes of stress in Germany (Die Techniker Krankenkasse, 2021). However, according to the European stress ranking (Pardo, 2023), Portugal ranks higher than Germany, with the highest value for anxiety and the third highest value for depression, placing it in third position. It is important to note that stress is not limited to Europe, as it affects individuals worldwide. In the 2022 global comparison, the US ranks 13th, with a higher stress level than Portugal (ranked 41st place globally) and Germany (ranked 92nd place globally) (Boots, 2023). How different cultures address burnout resulting from prolonged stress (Maslach et al., 2021) varies based on their values, as explained by Hofstede's dimensions (1980, 2011). The disclosure of burnout is more prevalent in certain cultures than in others, with some cultures experiencing more shame associated with burnout than others. To gain a better understanding of the differences in the burnout shame dimension of exhaustion between Portugal, the US and Germany, the three burnout shame-relevant culture dimensions of Hofstede (1980, 2011) are examined.

Portugal exhibits a notable high score of 100 on the Uncertainty Avoidance Index, indicating a strong inclination among the Portuguese towards avoiding situations characterized by ambiguity. This emphasized the cultural importance placed on certainty within the country. In contrast, Germany has a lower score of 65. Therefore, the country values certainty but

to a lesser extent than Portugal. The US has the lowest score on uncertainty avoidance with 46. Thus, in this cultural comparison, the US is the culture that feels most comfortable around uncertainty. Portugal's score can be seen as an extreme in the uncertainty avoidance dimension. As also seen in figure 3, this dimension is the most pronounced dimension in the Portuguese culture. In cultures with a high uncertainty avoidance index, it is more socially acceptable to express emotions, such as aggression, while in cultures with a lower index of uncertainty avoidance, individuals tend to show fewer emotional expressions (Hofstede, 1994). This cultural difference has implications for how burnout is perceived. Burnout exhaustion can be seen as an uncertainty, as it is not formalized or standardized and is not part of cultures' rules. Individuals with a low index do not like rules, formalization and standardization (Hofstede, 1994). Therefore, it may not be well-received in German or American culture if individuals express too much emotion regarding burnout as an uncertainty, as these cultures accept and embrace uncertainty. Thus, if someone in one of these two cultures struggles to cope with uncertainty, such as burnout exhaustion, they may experience a greater sense of shame. In the Portuguese culture, uncertainty is generally avoided and it is more acceptable to falter when faced with it. Therefore, if an individual suffers from high levels of stress for a long time, it is more acceptable to develop burnout and to exhibit its effects.
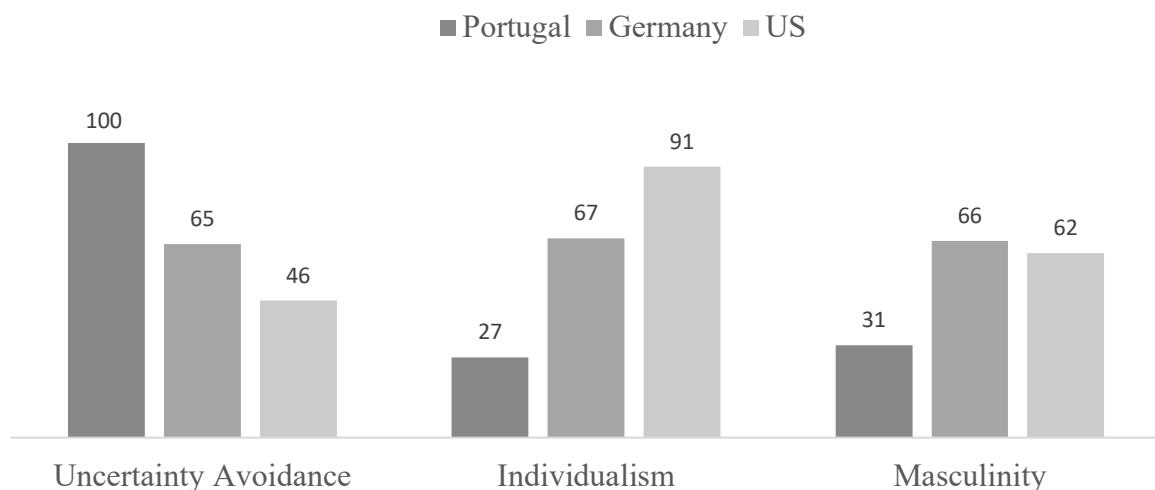
Figure 3. *Cultural Comparison between Portugal, Germany, and the United States based on Hofstede's Dimensions relevant for Burnout Shame.*

Note: Figure based on Hofstede's culture dimensions (1980, 2011). Values adapted from Country Comparison Graphs – Geert Hofstede (2021).

Portugal has a low Individualism index of 27, indicating a more collectivistic culture. Loyalty and relationships are highly valued by the Portuguese population. In contrast, Germany, on the other hand, has an index of 67 and is therefore considered as a more individualistic country with a stronger focus on the individual and their families rather than on society as a whole (Hofstede, 1994). Nevertheless, in comparison to the US, Germany's score is relatively low. With a score of 91 the US is the most individualistic country in this comparison. The cultural characteristics of individualism play an important role on how people deal with the disclosure of burnout and the resulting burnout shame. Members of more individualistic cultures have a higher focus on the individual needs and individual opinions and decisions are really are gladly welcome (Hofstede, 2011). This means that members of individualistic cultures are more likely to take care of themselves and their close families before they take care of society. Hofstede (1994) already stated three of the obligations of collectivistic countries are harmony, respect and shame. This is also confirmed by a more recent study, showing that collectivistic countries are more likely to feel shame than individualistic countries (Liyanage & Usoof-Thowfeek, 2023). Since burnout exhaustion deviates from the standards, members of more collectivistic countries try to keep the harmony and avoid in-group conflicts by concealing their mental health challenge with burnout. Burnout exhaustion is often concealed by members of collectivistic countries in order to maintain harmony and avoid in-group conflicts. This is due to the fear of violating group norms and feeling shame towards their mental health challenges.

Also, Portugal is considered as a culture with more feminine values as reflected in its low Masculinity index of just 31. The country prioritizes quality of life and solidarity. According to Hofstede (1994), feminine countries can view assertiveness as ridiculous. In contrast, the US and Germany, with scores of 62 and 66 respectively, focus on success and performance, and view burnout as a weakness and an obstacle to achievement. Thus, for individuals to be considered as competitive, Germans and Americans are more likely to hide their burnout exhaustion and develop higher scores of burnout shame.

Although Portugal is a culture that values the collective group and commonly experiences shame when violating group values. However, weaknesses are more accepted and people are more likely to take care for each other. Performance is considered as secondary in this culture. The society aims to avoid uncertainties, but negative feelings towards them are more accepted (Hofstede, 1994). Members of the German or the American cultures are expected to handle uncertainties better and focus more on the individual and avoid weaknesses that could influence

their performance (Hofstede, 1994, 2011). Given that Germany and the United States have rather similar scores in the three dimensions compared to Portugal, it can be assumed that they develop a greater sense of shame towards burnout exhaustion than Portugal.

Hypothesis 4: Portugal has a lower value of burnout shame exhaustion than Germany and the United States

7. Method

7.1 Sample and Design

In total, 280 participants from Germany took part in the quantitative study. The study was conducted cross-sectionally and consisted of a questionnaire that was completed voluntarily by the participants. The questionnaire started with a short introduction, then the demographic data of the participants were requested and after that, it was possible to move on to the main part where the different variables of age discrimination, burnout and burnout shame could be measured. Data was collected using an online survey link via Qualtrics. This link was distributed through my personal network, social media, and the survey exchange website SurveyCircle. By using this recruitment strategy, a data set of participants with different backgrounds and different perspectives should have been collected. It was assured that all responses could be kept confidential and that participants could answer anonymously to increase the likelihood of honest and complete responses. Of the participants, 62,5% were female, 37,1% were male, and 0,4 % were non-binary with an average respondent age of 28,8 years (SD = 9,38). Most participants have a Bachelor's degree (47,5 %), followed by a Master's degree (22 %). Furthermore, most respondents work in large organizations with more than 100 employees (30,9 %). Hypotheses 1, 2, 3a and 3b are tested using the data from German participants.

In order to establish a cultural comparison (hypothesis 4), external data from Portugal was incorporated, in which the burnout shame dimension of exhaustion was measured. 258 Portuguese participants were included and data were again collected via a link to an online survey shared on social networks, such as LinkedIn or Facebook. The average respondent age of the Portuguese participants was 39,03 years (SD = 9,77). 29,8% were female and 70,2% were male. In addition, data from the United States is included with 175 participants who responded to an online-survey via Prolific. The data of the American participants was collected during two

phases: the first one at the end of January 2023 and the second at the beginning of February 2023 witch a response rate of 59,6%. Both the Portuguese and US datasets were provided by my supervisor. The average age of the American participants is 27,97 (SD=8,5) with 46,1% male participants, 51,1% female participants, 0,6% non-binary participants, and 0,6% who prefer not to answer which gender they are. Three values were missing for gender in the US. These data from Portugal and the United States, as well as those from the German participants are used to test whether Germany, the United States or Portugal has a higher value for burnout shame exhaustion.

7.2 Measures

Burnout. Burnout was measured by using the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory by Kristensen et al. (2005). Personal burnout is captured with six items and work-related burnout with seven items rated on a 5-Point Likert-scale ranging from 1 to 5. Sample items included: "How often do you feel tired?" and "Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?". An answer of 1 represents "never almost never", while 5 represents "always". The measure presents a good internal consistency ($\alpha = .87$).

Burnout shame. Ferreira (2022) developed a number of items to create a foundation for a new burnout shame scale, including subscales for emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and depersonalization. The scale was adapted and developed by the same researcher using his example items. Emotional exhaustion is measured by nine items, cynicism is measured by six items and depersonalization is measured by five items. Sample items include: "I try to hide my tiredness from colleagues when I go to work exhausted and without energy" and "I don't want others to see that I can't maintain the same levels of productivity due to exhaustion". All subscales were rated on a 5-Point Likert-scale starting with 1 (strongly disagree) and ending with 5 (strongly agree). The measurement of burnout shame included the opportunity to response with 0 for "does not apply". Additionally, a general item is included to assess the construct. This item is based on the definition of shame by Orth et al. (2006) and states: "If I would experience a burnout, I would have failed to meet the central social or moral standards." This item is measured by a 5-Point Likert-scale in which 1 is representing "totally disagree" and 5 is representing "totally agree". The internal consistency of burnout shame shows a general good value of .84 as well as a good value for the dimension exhaustion (.86), which is the focus of the cultural comparison.

Age discrimination. To measure age discrimination, the Nordic age discrimination scale by Furunes & Mykletun (2010) is used. Sample items include: "Elderly workers do not have equal opportunities for training during work time" and "Younger workers are preferred when new equipments, activities or working methods are introduced". It includes six items rated on a 5-Point Likert-scale from "totally disagree" (1) to "totally agree" (5). The internal consistency is acceptable (.78).

Culture. In order to establish a cultural comparison of the burnout shame dimensions exhaustion between Portugal, Germany, and the US, a single-item question was asked about the nationality of the participants asking, "Where are you from?".

Age. Participants' age was measured with a single-item question asking "How old are you?".

8. Results

To present a structured overview, the results begin with the exploratory factor analysis procedure. Following this, hypothesis testing is conducted, and the cultural comparison of the dimension of exhaustion in burnout shame is analyzed across Germany, Portugal, and the US.

8.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

In order to analyze the validity of the data, an exploratory factor (EFA) analysis was conducted in SPSS. The variable burnout was the first variable analyzed with EFA. Based on high cross-loadings, three variables had to be excluded ("Do you feel worn out at the end of the working day", "Are you exhausted in the morning by a thought of another working day", and "Do you feel that every working hour is tiring for you"). The resulting Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure showed a value of 0.908, which shows that a very adequate value for factor analysis. Additionally, the Bartlett's test (p<0.001) proved that the correlations between the items are statistically significant. Based on the Kaiser criterion, only the factors with a variance higher than the average variance (Eigenvalue > 1) are extracted. For the variable burnout, two factors are meeting this criterion. Since the variable's scale measured burnout in terms of personal and work-related burnout, the factor structure underlines the variable's validity. With two factors, 58.77% of the variance is explained and the variable has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.874. The identical procedure is carried out for the variable burnout shame. After conducting the EFA,

items with high cross-loadings are extracted again. Six items had to be excluded ("I try to hide from others that fatigue doesn't let me maintain the same levels of productivity", "I try to hide my inability to finish my tasks", "I am ashamed that I feel I lack the energy I had before because of what I experienced during a difficult time in my life", "For me it is a personal failure to be exhausted and out of energy and not be able to turn it around", "When I show signs of emotional fatigue I am perceived as someone who is weak and not productive", and "For me it is a personal failure not being able to accomplish my goals due to this lack of energy and fatigue"). After this extraction, the KMO measure registered a value of 0.848, considered as meritoriously adequate for factor analysis, and a Bartlett's test that showed statistic relevance ($p<0.001$). With the Kaiser Criterion three factors can be extracted, explaining 55.47% of the variance. Since burnout shame can emerge in all of the three burnout dimensions, this factor structure is aligned with the scale used to measure the variable and confirms its validity. The Cronbach's alpha measured a reliability of 0.842. Finally, an EFA was conducted for the variable perceived age discrimination. One of the six items had to be extracted based on a low communality value, which was "Elderly workers are not expected to take part in change processes and new working methods to the same degree as their younger peers". After the extraction, the KMO showed a value of 0.792 and the correlations between the items were statistically significant based on the Bartlett's test ($p<0.001$). One factor was extracted with the Kaiser criterion, explaining 53.94 % of the variance and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.783.

8.2 Hypothesis testing

Table 1 shows the means, descriptive statistics, intercorrelations, and the reliabilities of the variables. To test if burnout is related to burnout shame (hypothesis 1), the Pearson correlation analysis is used. The analysis revealed a moderate positive relationship between burnout and burnout shame ($r=0.62$, $p<0.01$). The correlation was statistically relevant at the 0.01 level, supporting hypothesis 1. Further, burnout had a positive significant relationship to age discrimination ($r=0.26$ $p<0.01$) but the relationship to age was not significant. In addition, burnout shame was also positively related to age discrimination ($r=0.416$ $p<0.01$) but showed no significant relationship to age as well.
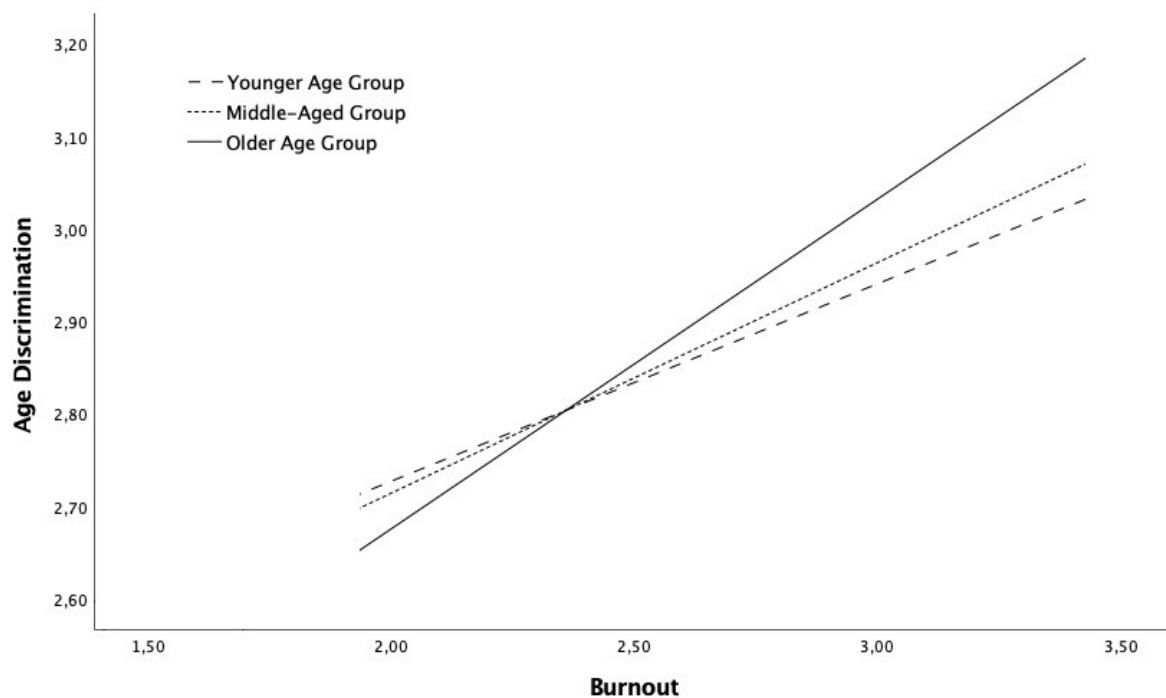
Figure 4. *The interaction between burnout and age on age discrimination.*

To test whether or not age discrimination is a mediator between burnout and burnout shame (hypothesis 2), the PROCESS macro version 4 by Hayes (2022) was used. This software generates bootstrap confidence intervals for both the overall and the indirect effect of the independent variable on the outcome variable through the mediator variable. The difference to alternative mediation analyses is that bootstrapping offers more precise inferences, since the irregularity of the sample distribution is better taken into account, and enables additional calculations that are not automatically performed by conventional regression routines in just one single analysis (Hayes, 2018). As age discrimination is examined as a mediator within a moderated mediation framework, Hayes' model 58 is the appropriate model for this analysis and is applied. The results show that age discrimination has a mediating effect between burnout and burnout shame. This effect was significant for all age groups (table 2): The youngest age group (b=0.039, SE=0.021, 95% CI [0.050, 0.087]), the middle-aged group (b=0.057, SE=0.023, 95% CI [0.019, 0.109]), the older age group (b=0.131, SE=0.035, 95% CI [0.073, 0.211]). Thus, the findings support hypothesis 2.

To further test if the model shows a moderated mediation, the same model is used for testing age as a moderator with the same software: PROCESS macro by Hayes (2022) in SPSS. Age as a moderator was tested between both the independent variable and the mediator, as well as

between the mediator and the dependent variable. Age positively moderates the relationship between burnout and age discrimination (p=0.048), as seen in table 3. The moderator effect of age on the relationship between burnout and age discrimination is significant (b = 0.012, 95% CI [<0.001, 0.024]). Age also positively moderates the relationship between age discrimination and burnout shame (p=0.001). The indirect effect is significant as well (b = 0.014, 95% CI [0.004, 0.024]).

To illustrate the interaction between burnout and age on age discrimination, the regression of age discrimination on burnout was plotted at young, middle-aged and older age of the participants (figure 1). It can be seen that older employees are more likely to have higher age discriminations when experiencing burnout (b = 0.356, SE=0.074, p<0.001, 95% CI [0.211, 0.502]) than middle-aged (b = 0.249, SE = 0.0698, p<0.001, 95% CI [0.112, 0.387]) and younger employees (b = 0.213, SE=0.077 p=0.006, 95% CI [0.061, 0.366]). The effects are statistically significant based on the confidence intervals. Additionally, the same procedure was implemented to illustrate the relationship between age discrimination, age, and burnout shame. Again, the regression of burnout shame was plotted for the three mentioned age groups of participants (figure 2). Burnout shame resulting from age discrimination is higher for people of advanced age (b = 0.367, SE=0.056, p<0.001, 95% CI [0.258, 0.476]) than middle-aged (b = 0.229, SE=0.054, p<0.001, 95% CI [0.122, 0.336]) and younger employees (b = 0.183, SE=0.061, p=0.003, 95% CI [0.063, 0.303]). The moderation is significant for all age groups based on the confidence intervals.

Variable	N	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	280			-									
2. Professional Experience	280			-.17**	-								
3. Seniority	280			-.18**	.80**	-							
4. Habilitation	280			-.19**	.16**	.09	-						
5. Company Sector	280			.02	-.15*	-.06	.03	-					
6. Company size	280			-.03	.04	-.07	-.14*	-.12	-				
7. Burnout	279	2.66	0.66	.37**	.02	.03	-.05	.04	-.02	(.87)			
8. Burnout Shame	260	2.77	0.78	.23**	-.04	-.07	-.08	-.02	-.02	.62**	(.84)		
9. Age Discrimination	269	2.87	0.73	.14*	.03	-.02	-.16**	.03	-.08	.26**	.42**	(.78)	
10. Age	279	29,1	9,66	-.16**	.83**	.80**	.21**	-.07	-.02	.02	-.04	.01	-

Note: ** $p < .01$, two-tailed; * $p < .05$, two-tailed

Table 1. *Means, standard deviation, correlations, and reliabilities.*

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	b	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
Younger age group	.039	.021	.005	.087
Middle-aged group	.057	.023	.019	.109
Older age group	.131	.035	.073	.211

Table 2. *Mediation effect of age discrimination between burnout and burnout shame.*

Variables	b	se	t	p	LLCI	ULCI
			Outcome variable: Age Discrimination			
Constant	2.947	.502	5.869	<.001	1.958	3.936
Burnout	-.061	.189	-.319	.749	-.434	.312
Age	-.028	.016	-1.772	.078	-.059	.003
Burnout x Age	.0119	.006	1.99	.048	.000	.024
			Outcome variable: Burnout Shame			
Constant	1.737	.479	3.629	<.001	.794	2.679
Burnout	.625	.056	11.095	<.001	.514	.736
Age discrimination	-.170	.151	-1,127	.261	-.468	.127
Age	-.049	.014	-3.435	<.001	-.977	-.024
Age discrimination x Age	.015	.005	3.25	.001	.006	.025

Table 3. *Moderated Mediation of Age*
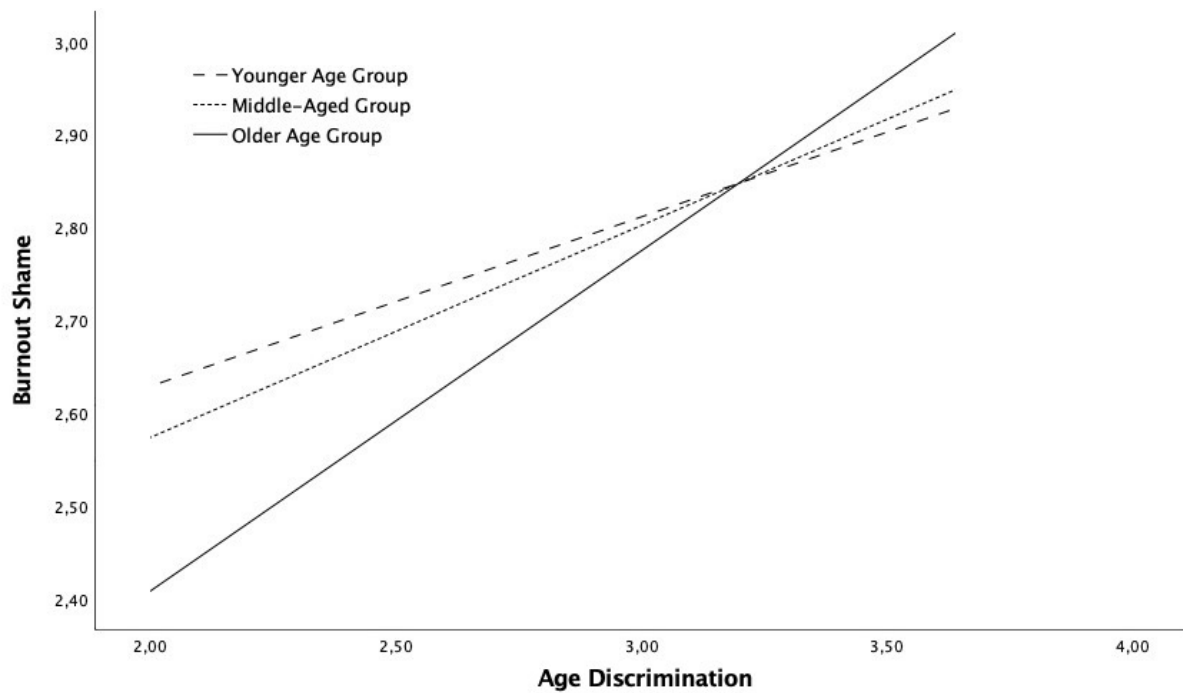
Figure 5. *The interaction between age and age discrimination on burnout shame.*

8.2.1 Cultural Comparison

The cultural comparison of the burnout shame dimension of exhaustion is made between Germany, Portugal, and the US. The dimension differs in its reliability for the three cultures. While the Portuguese sample has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.888, the US sample has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.825 and the German sample has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.864. The cultural comparison of the Exhaustion dimension of burnout shame is carried out with the robust test of equality of means. Table 4 shows that a one-way ANOVA test was not appropriate due to unequal variances ($p<0.05$) among the three respondent populations representing different cultures. By using the Welch test, it was shown that the mean of burnout shame exhaustion is different for at least 2 populations of respondents. Based on this result, a multiple comparison test is made and since the assumption of equal population variances is violated, the Dunnet C test is used in particular. The results in table 5 show that there is a significant mean difference of burnout shame exhaustion of 0.643 between Germany and Portugal (95% CI [0.465, 0.822]). Germany has a higher value of burnout shame than Portugal. Furthermore, the comparison between Germany and the United States shows that these countries also have a significant mean difference of burnout shame exhaustion of -0.221 (95% CI [-0.397, -0.046]). The United States has a higher value of burnout shame exhaustion than Germany. When comparing the Portuguese

			Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig
Burnout shame – exhaustion		Based on Mean	8.61	2	682	<.001

Table 4. *Test of Homogeneity of Variances.*

	(I) Country	(J) Country	Main Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Dunnet C	Germany	Portugal	.643*	.076	.464	.822
		United States	-.221*	.074	-.397	-.046
	Portugal	Germany	-.643*	.076	-.822	-.466
		United States	-.865*	.047	-1,036	-.694
	United States	Germany	.221*	.074	.046	.397
		Portugal	.865*	.0724	.694	1.036

Table 5. *Multiple Comparisons Test.*
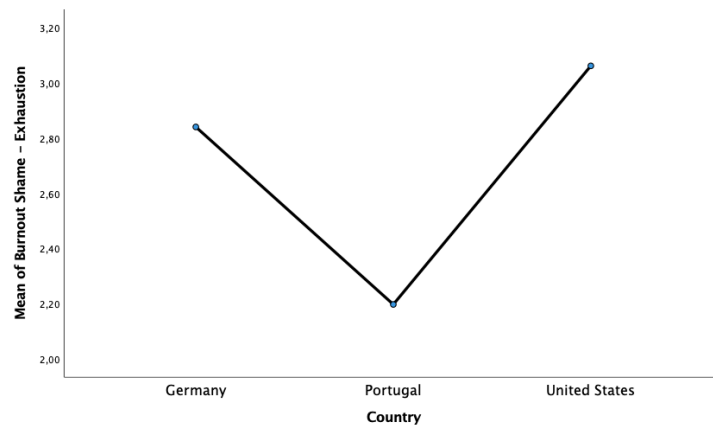
Figure 6. *Means Plot of Burnout Shame – Exhaustion.*

and the American respondents, it was shown that there is also a mean difference of the burnout shame dimension of -0.865 (95% CI [-1.036, -0.694]), which means that the United States has also a higher value of burnout shame exhaustion than Portugal. The results support hypothesis 4 since both Germany and the United States show higher values of burnout shame exhaustion than Portugal (figure 3).

9. Discussion

9.1 Theoretical Implications

The results of the study imply an important theoretical contribution, as the relationship between burnout and shame can be better explained, especially in relation to age. The study was conducted to shed more light on the relationship between these two variables, on which there is otherwise very little literature. Mazur-Socha & Przepiórka (2021) showed that burnout and shame have in common that both are moderately correlated with negative mood regulation expectancies but they did not explore the relationship between the two variables further. In contrast, there is a fundamental scientific chapter by Ferreira (2022) who developed a multi-level conceptual model of how the demands connected to Covid-19 predict the relationship between burnout and burnout shame. The findings of this new study extend the rare research with quantitative results. As expected, and shown by correlational analysis, there is a relationship between burnout and burnout shame. Theoretically, this result makes it clearer that there is a significant overlap between burnout and a subsequent feeling of shame. These findings underline the importance of examining not only the concept of burnout itself, but also the emotional effects that burnout provokes.

Age discrimination was examined as a mediator in the relationship between burnout and burnout shame, and age was examined as a moderator in two aspects: first, as a moderator of the relationship between burnout and age discrimination, and second, as a moderator of the relationship between age discrimination and burnout shame within a German sample. Both mediator and moderator effects were confirmed by the results. Individuals experiencing burnout may perceive higher levels of age discrimination, which in turn increases levels of burnout shame. This can be clearly seen in the results as the strength of the mediation increases with age. The fact that older individuals who experience higher levels of burnout also experience higher levels of age discrimination supports the literature that the older age group struggles more with their negative stereotypes compared to the other two age groups (Cuddy et al., 2005).

As a result, they develop higher levels of burnout shame. A study by Matheson & Anisman (2009) showed that participants developed higher levels of shame when they encountered discrimination than when they were responsible for the failure themselves. Thus, this new study supports their findings by showing a significant correlation between discrimination and shame, and extends them by specifying discrimination based on age.

Age is a moderator in the relationship between burnout and age discrimination, to the extent that it is higher for employees of advanced age. Younger employees with high levels of burnout experienced the least age discrimination, while middle-aged employees were in the middle. A study by the researchers Ramos et al. (2016) found that younger employees with more tenure were particularly susceptible to the demands of the job and lack of resources. Older employees in leadership positions were more resilient. However, the new findings contradict the belief that older employees are more resilient towards demands when they are already burned-out. This study shows that older employees who reported higher levels of burnout experienced higher levels of age discrimination. It is important to note that this new study does not show a correlation between burnout and age, as many other studies, such as Brewer and Shapard's (2004) meta-analysis, have shown. Instead, it reveals a non-significant relationship between the two variables. The study highlights the importance of age as a moderator, thus, providing a new perspective on the relationship between age, burnout, age discrimination and shame. This study fills a gap in research as it appears that no other study has examined this moderated mediation.

In addition, this study has revealed how different cultures can react to burnout and thus develop different levels of burnout shame depending on their culture. Not only an international, but also an intercontinental comparison was made, as the burnout shame's dimension of exhaustion was compared between Portugal, Germany and the United States. It shows that different cultures have significant differences in how their members deal with burnout shame's exhaustion, extending the literature that the national culture influences how members of different cultures cope with stress (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Nevertheless, this study examines more westernized cultures and in order to further develop the intercultural differences on burnout shame, it would be useful to carry out a comparison with non-western cultures in future research. With these results, another part of burnout shame could be uncovered: cultures play an important role in the development of burnout shame.

9.2 Practical Implications

These findings provide relevant practical implications for managers, especially as burnout is considered as a work-related concept (World Health Organization, 2022). The fact that the workforce is aging (Ramos et al., 2016), and that older employees are more likely to face age discrimination (Cuddy et al., 2005), reflects the importance of an age-inclusive workplace climate. Particularly, human resources managers should emphasize the role of age in the organizations' policies and practices, as an age-inclusive climate should focus on training and development opportunities for older employees (Boehm et al., 2021). Training and development can also provide individuals of advanced age with important job resources that are urgently needed to better deal with both burnout and age discrimination. On the other hand, an age-inclusive climate should support the equal and fair treatment of employees of all ages (Rudolph & Zacker, 2021). With the right diversity training in the workplace, discrimination can be reduced and this means that managers' practices can support a non-discriminatory working environment (Boehm et al., 2021). In particular, Human resources management should ensure equal opportunities for all age groups and offer all employees, regardless of demographic characteristics, the same job resources and job opportunities. The organization's focus on promoting and living its diversity and inclusion policy, as well as providing training and education to reduce prejudice and discrimination, can reduce employees' urge to hide their burnout. This is particularly relevant, as employees who have been assigned a task that was has previously been labeled as challenging for individuals of this age, can increase their stress levels (Levy and Banaji, 2002). When managers pay attention to equality and fairness, including the prevention of labeling, individuals of all ages can change their attitudes to different tasks and be less stressed when doing them. Preventing labels can also be relevant to burnout and its disclosure. Managers should help to create an open communication climate, so that employees can openly talk about their burnout. An open communication climate would reduce the risk of developing burnout shame, as it would be more common to talk about any problems. A climate and organizational culture where failure is accepted and communicated will lead to employees who are less ashamed of their personal weaknesses. Mental health is getting more attention in organizations, and so should burnout. Managers should always be aware of the balance of demands and resources in the workplace and offer additional mental health resources, such as stress management, to help deal with burnout and the subsequent age discrimination. The researchers Munz et al. (2001) have shown that a comprehensive worksite stress management program improves the well-being of employees, and also, the researchers Yung et al. (2004) showed that both stretch-release relaxation and cognitive relaxation improved the mental health

status. Organizations wishing to decrease employees' burnout shame should implement interventions to reduce both burnout and age discrimination. A reduction in burnout does not only lead to lower levels of age discrimination and burnout shame, but has also positive impacts on the organization, such as lower rates of absenteeism, less intentions to quit the job, and fewer real turnovers (Maslach et al., 2001).

Furthermore, the significant difference between Portugal, Germany, and the US shows that different cultures deal with burnout shame differently. In international companies and especially in international teams, this can to lead to different employees having a different need to hide burnout. Employees should be made aware of this in the aforementioned diversity training sessions, so that their team members have greater understanding of how different cultures deal with burnout.

9.3 Limitations and Future Research

There are some limitations to this study. Firstly, age is a crucial variable, as it moderates the relationship between burnout and burnout shame through age discrimination. Nevertheless, there is a limitation in relation to burnout that has already been mentioned in theory: the survival bias (Maslach et al., 2001). Although these findings show that individuals of advanced age with higher levels of burnout also experience higher levels of age discrimination, and older employees with higher levels of age discrimination also develop higher levels of burnout shame, the survival bias must be taken into account. Employees who experience burnout at an earlier point of their career are more likely to leave their jobs at younger age (Maslach et al., 2001). This phenomenon may bias the data to the extent, that older employees show higher levels of both discrimination and shame because these are the employees that did not leave their career due to lower levels of burnout at younger age (survival bias). Therefore, it is suggested that in a future study, it may be very interesting to look more closely at seniority when investigating its effects on burnout and burnout shame, as it would take into account the time spent in a specific position.

Secondly, the average age of the participants in the study in Germany is 28,8 years. Only 6,79 % of the participants have an age above 50 years, which is the age that some researchers consider to be the lower limit for categorizing employees in the age group of older employees (e.g., Liebermann et al., 2013). Therefore, the findings that older employees who have higher levels of burnout perceive higher levels of age discrimination and that older employees who perceive higher levels of age discrimination show higher levels of burnout shame, may have

different results if a higher percentage of the participants were above 50 years. In future research, this limitation can be addressed by collecting data in more dispersed study samples, focusing on collecting a balanced amount of data across all age groups. Further, the work context should also be considered, as individuals may perceive age stereotypes in varying degrees, depending on the work context. For example, in the finance, retail, insurance, and IT industry, age stereotypes are particularly pronounced compared to other industries (Posthuma & Campion, 2009).

Thirdly, as this study is one of the first quantitative studies to link burnout and shame to age, it is imperative that more research is conducted on this topic to confirm validity and reliability. Future studies should aim to replicate these findings to establish their generalizability. Despite this, the current results provide a strong foundation for future research.

It is also important to note that the study was conducted in a cross-sectional manner, rather than in a longitudinal manner. Longitudinal studies are more valid for establishing cause-and-effect relationships because they collect data on different measurement points over time, thereby preventing the result from being a one-off finding (Caruana et al., 2015). Ganster and Perrewé's (2011) definition of stress has highlighted the influence of external factors on individual stress levels. A longitudinal study can therefore include the observation that burnout is a consequence of long-term stress (Maslach et al., 2001), thereby highlighting the relation to changes in the external environment. As an excess of job demands relative to resources can lead to burnout (Schaufeli, 2017), it is also particularly important to understand why burnout shame can be better explained by a longitudinal study. Individuals who experience burnout shame are less likely to search for job resources, which may exacerbate burnout (Ferreira, 2022). A longitudinal study would be more likely to collect data that more accurately represent the concepts under examination, as the negative spiral of burnout shame could be shown statistically by measuring points over a longer period of time. Furthermore, it would be highly informative to conduct a longitudinal study over years, as a transition between age groups could be captured. It would be interesting to follow a group of participants to understand the experiences of different age groups regarding the increase of age discrimination and burnout shame over time.

Fourthly, the cultural difference in burnout shame exhaustion is an important finding but still, this is just one of three dimensions that is examined. In order to build a coherent picture of cultural differences in burnout shame, all three dimensions should be measured in each of the cultures being compared. Although exhaustion is the dimension most associated with

burnout (Maslach et al., 2001), the other two dimensions are necessary for the whole picture. There is already research that burnout is best explained by all three dimensions (e.g., Maslach et al., 2001), so burnout shame should be measured with each of its dimensions and compared culturally for an overall picture.

It is also interesting to take a closer look at the study samples from the different countries and ascertain their comparability. While the German and US samples are more similar, the Portuguese sample differs in its demographic characteristics. The German sample has an average age of 28.8 years, with 62.6% of the participants being female. Given that the average age of the American sample is 27.97 years with 51.1% female participants, the German and American samples have similar average ages and the majority of the participants in the study are female. In contrast, the Portuguese sample has an average age of 39.03 years, with only 29.8% of the Portuguese participants being female. It can be clearly seen that the average age is considerably higher, and that the proportion of female participants is not the majority in this study sample. It is crucial to consider the comparability of the data, as the observed difference in burnout shame-exhaustion levels between the Portuguese and other cultures may be attributed to demographic factors. In light of these considerations, future research should aim to ascertain whether the observed results are indeed attributable to cultural differences or whether they are, in fact, influenced by the differing ways in which burnout shame is experienced across age groups or by the gender of the participants.

10. Conclusion

Burnout is a prevalent issue in the organizational environment. The workplace is a major source for stress (Die Techniker Krankenkasse, 2021) and prolonged stress in the workplace can lead to burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). Despite 50 years of research, there is still a need for further investigation. Specifically, more research is required to understand the emotional responses that can trigger burnout, including shame. This dissertation addresses the relationship between burnout and burnout shame by providing quantitative results. It contributes to the burnout-shame literature by highlighting the significance of age as a factor in this relationship, both as a demographic variable and as a basis for discrimination. As the workforce ages due to demographic structural change, age becomes increasingly relevant. A questionnaire was used to measure burnout, burnout shame, age, and age discrimination in a German sample. The results showed that at low levels of burnout, younger employees perceive more age discrimination than other age groups and develop higher levels of burnout shame. At high levels

of burnout, older employees perceive more age discrimination and develop more burnout shame. It is important to understand that the need to conceal burnout may vary across cultures especially in intercultural collaborations. These quantitative findings provide an important basis for further theoretical research.

Managers should ensure an age-inclusive climate by paying special attention to their older employees. They should emphasize various training and practices, such as diversity training and stress management programs, and enforce a diversity and inclusion policy to reduce burnout, age discrimination and burnout shame. Intercultural teams should be made aware that the feeling of shame towards the burnout dimension of exhaustion can vary culturally. Therefore, managers should ensure a high level of understanding within the team.

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12. Annex

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.932
Bartlett's Test of Spherity	Approx. Chi-Square	1672,095
	df	78
	Sig.	<.001

Table 6. *KMO and Bartlett's Test of Burnout.*

	Component	
	1	2
How often do you feel tired?	.807	.075
How often are you physically exhausted?	.749	.188
How often do you feel worn out?	.738	.360
How often do you feel weak and susceptible to illness?	.729	.144
How often do you think "I can't take it anymore"?	.706	.433
How often are you emotionally exhausted?	.694	.400
Does your work frustrate you?	.206	.760
Is your work emotionally exhausting?	.209	.721
Do you feel burnout out because of your work?	.423	.695
Do you have enough energy for family and friend during leisure time?	.066	.469

Table 7. *Rotated Component Matrix of Burnout.*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.905
Bartlett's Test of Spherity	Approx. Chi-Square	2465,853
	df	210
	Sig.	<.001

Table 8. *KMO and Bartlett's Test of Burnout Shame.*

	Component		
	1	2	3
I try to hide from others the tiredness I feel at the end of my work day.	.787	.045	.101
I try to hide my tiredness from colleagues when I go to work exhausted and without energy.	.771	.022	.222
I feel that when I show signs of fatigue and exhaustion, it is a clear sign of weakness for some colleagues.	.673	.046	.280
When I show that I am physically and psychologically exhausted I feel that I give my colleagues a sign of weakness that deserves total repudiation.	.639	.281	.135
I feel like I am failing when I feel like I am in burnout at work.	.621	.176	.316
I feel discrimination when I show sign of exhaustion.	.577	.340	.109
I feel ashamed that I cannot treat other people with respect and dignity.	.001	.824	.084
I feel shame for treating people as if they were objects.	.059	.768	-.121
I am ashamed to know that all this fatigue has made me more insensitive towards others.	.204	.741	.127
I get sad and try to hide from others because stress has made me more insensitive towards others.	.171	.666	.323
It is a failure and a cause for shame to treat other people as if they were numbers.	.151	.488	.071
Talking about certain moments in my life leaves me feeling distressed and ashamed.	.208	.131	.784
If I would experience a burnout, I would have failed to meet the central social or moral standards.	.183	.037	.685
I get frustrated that I can't be that person with immense energy.	.290	.116	.672

Table 9. *Rotated Component Matrix of Burnout Shame.*