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their relationship to organizational justice perceptions

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Resumo

Discriminação e estereótipos relacionados com a idade no local de trabalho ainda é um tópico pouco estudado, na medida que estudos que concernem ao idadismo contra jovens empregados são ainda mais escassos (North & Fiske, 2012). O escopo desse estudo é investigar os impactos dos estereótipos prescritivos no que tange às percepções de justiça no ambiente de trabalho. Estereótipos prescritivos descrevem expectativas de comportamento que podem levar a discriminação, ao passo que indivíduos que violam as prescrições de seus grupos sociais podem ser tratados de forma negativa (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman, 2012). No estudo, falantes da língua alemã foram expostos a um cenário que descrevia uma situação onde um trabalhador mais jovem, ou mais velho, aderia ou violava uma prescrição, culminando em um resultado negativo para o trabalhador. A partir disso, levantou-se a hipótese de que participantes perceberiam os resultados como mais justos se o protagonista fosse um trabalhador mais jovem que violasse os estereótipos prescritivos. Contudo, a interação esperada não foi confirmada pelos dados. Não obstante, observou-se que a anuência dos participantes com respeito aos estereótipos prescritivos que tinham como alvo trabalhadores mais jovens aparenta ter afetado suas percepções de justiça distributiva quando foi apresentado o cenário que descrevia um trabalhador jovem violando prescrições. Portanto, o intuito do estudo é expandir a pesquisa sobre as diversas facetas da justiça organizacional. E, potencialmente contribuir com fatores culturais sobre a percepção da justiça.

Palavras-chave: idadismo, discriminação por idade, estereótipos prescritivos, justiça organizacional, discriminação no trabalho, hierarquia, cultura

Códigos de Classificação da APA:

3020 Processos Grupais e Interpessoais

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Abstract

Age-related stereotypes and discrimination in the workplace remain an underresearched topic, and studies about ageism against younger employees are even more scarce (North & Fiske, 2012). For this reason, the current study investigated the impact of prescriptive stereotypes on justice perceptions in the workplace. Prescriptive stereotypes describe behavioral expectations that can lead to discrimination, as individuals who violate prescriptions for their social group are met with backlash (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman, 2012). In the study, German-speaking participants were administered a scenario exercise that described either a younger or an older worker adhering or violating a prescription, resulting in a negative work outcome. It was hypothesized that participants would perceive the outcome to be fairer if the protagonist was a younger employee who acted in contrast to the prescriptive stereotype. However, the expected interaction was not confirmed by the data. Nevertheless, it was found that the participants' endorsement of hierarchy-related prescriptive stereotypes targeting younger workers affected their distributive justice perceptions when presented with the scenario that described a young employee violating prescriptions. The study therefore expands research about organizational justice facets and also highlights potential contributions of cultural factors on justice perceptions. Further research about ageism against younger individuals is needed to better comprehend the influence of prescriptive age stereotypes in the workplace as well as understand how age discrimination affects people from different age groups.

Keywords: ageism, age discrimination, prescriptive stereotypes, organizational justice, discrimination at work, hierarchy, culture

APA Classification Codes:

3020 Group & Interpersonal Processes

3040 Social Perception & Cognition

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List of Acronyms

APA	American Psychological Association
SCM	Stereotype Content Model
SIC	Succession, Identity, and Consumption scale
SIT	Social Identity Theory
WAYS	Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale

Introduction

Age is one of the most important and easily noticeable social categories to guide us in our day-to-day interpersonal interactions. Different from sex or race, age is the only major social category in which group membership changes for everyone over the course of their lives (North & Fiske, 2012). Nevertheless, negative age-related stereotypes and prejudices are widespread and in Europe, every third person reports to already have experienced age-based discrimination, also called ageism (Achenbaum, 2015; Mikton et al., 2021). While there is increasing acknowledgment that ageism can affect people in all areas of their lives, including the workplace, the topic is still underresearched in comparison to sexism or racism. This is especially true regarding age discrimination against younger individuals. For the past decades, ageism research has mostly focused on negative stereotypes, prejudices and discrimination against older people (North & Fiske, 2012). However, more recently, scholars have drawn more attention to the fact that people from all age groups can experience ageism and that adolescents and young adults are actually one of the main groups affected by this type of discrimination (Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Mikton et al., 2021).

The demographic change in Western societies is having a significant impact on our economies and work contexts: Fertility rates are low and the countries' populations are growing older. It is estimated that by 2050, one-third of the European and North American inhabitants will be 60 or older (Goldstone, 2010). This emphasizes the importance of creating policies that help retain older workers in the workplace (North & Fiske, 2015). Notwithstanding, many employers hold ageist stereotypes, which affect their decisions in the hiring process, when distributing training opportunities or regarding granting promotions (Finkelstein et al., 2013; North & Fiske, 2015). Furthermore, ageist stereotypes are also commonly held by employees (North & Fiske, 2015). For this reason, several countries, such as the United States, Germany, Spain and France, have passed laws and policies that prohibit age discrimination in the workplace (Adnett & Hardy, 2007; Bibby, 2008; Finkelstein et al., 2013). Nevertheless, these laws and policies disregarded ageism targeting younger employees until recently and, as can be seen e.g., in Spain or the United States, are still often not effective in preventing age discrimination in the work context (Lahey, 2010). In addition, compared to developing countries, where the younger generation composes a large part of a country's population, Western societies are dominated by middle-aged and older individuals, making younger people a minority (Goldstone, 2010). This may affect their interests and needs, as is exemplified by

the rising numbers of youth unemployment and the negative representation of the younger generation in the media (Francioli & North, 2021; North & Fiske, 2015). Hence, it is necessary to develop strategies that prevent ageism and improve work outcomes for both younger and older employees.

A better understanding of how stereotypes affect different work outcomes can help to identify strategies to counteract ageism in the workplace. Previous research has shown that hostile forms of discrimination occur when people do not display the behaviors and/or characteristics that are expected from them based on prevalent stereotypes associated with their social group (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman, 2012). Studies also show a connection between organizational justice perceptions and prescriptive stereotypes (Caleo, 2016, 2018). With prescriptive stereotypes influencing what people perceive to be fair or unfair in the workplace, there is a higher possibility of unfavorable outcomes for employees targeted by these stereotypes. For example, based on the prescription that older individuals should not consume too many resources and step aside to make way for the younger generations (North & Fiske, 2013a, 2013b), denying older employees the opportunity to participate in trainings will be perceived as fair.

This thesis aims to contribute to the research body about (age-related) prescriptive stereotypes, ageism, and organizational justice by presenting a study targeting prescriptions for younger employees and their impact on organizational justice perceptions. The current study is part of a larger research project, *Age@Work*, which has the goal of contributing to advancements in the literature about age discrimination in the workplace. Thus, the guiding question for this paper is: How does the adherence to or violation of prescriptive age stereotypes targeting younger workers affect people's justice perceptions regarding work outcomes for those younger workers? Specifically, the present study will look at the adherence to/violation of the prescription that younger workers should accept and respect the workplace hierarchy (Schmitz et al., 2021). It is assumed that a violation of this prescriptive age-related stereotype will lead participants to view negative work outcomes as fairer when they concern a younger as opposed to an older employee. First, previous research and relevant literature about the topic will be reviewed, and current gaps in the literature will be identified (see Chapter 1). Next, the study method and hypotheses will be explained, and the statistical results will be presented (see Chapter 2). In the following, the results will be discussed, taking into consideration the limitations of the current study and implications for future research (see Chapter 3).

CHAPTER 1

Literature review

1.1. Ageism

“Age is one of the first characteristics – along with sex and race – that we notice about other people when we interact with them” (World Health Organization, 2021, p. 2). Cuddy and Fiske (2002) pointed out that age – or more precisely, the perceived age of a person – leads us to draw many assumptions about them, including, amongst others, their cognitive, social, and physical abilities. On the other hand, age is also an important part of our own social identity, since we see ourselves as members of specific age groups (Desmette et al., 2019). To make sense of the world, we rely on self-categorization and social categorization: Based on our own characteristics (like the above-mentioned sex, race and age), we self-categorize and perceive ourselves as belonging to specific social groups (Stets & Burke, 2000). Depending on the social context, different aspects of the self become salient and reinforce our self-categorization as a member of a specific group. For example, a young person will become especially aware of their age when surrounded by other-aged individuals (Desmette et al., 2019; Francioli & North, 2021). Additionally, we rely on social categorization to understand others as members of different social groups. Other individuals that are seen as being similar to oneself (e.g., people with the same profession, of the same nationality, etc.), make up our ingroup, whereas people that are seen as different are part of the outgroup (Stets & Burke, 2000).

The processes of self-categorization and social categorization play an important role in our everyday life: By building on previously established categories, we can make judgments about people without having to process complex, individuating information. Since we have to operate in a complex world with limited mental resources, relying on cognitive short-cuts is essential to save energy and still be able to make sense of our environment. In addition to reducing the cognitive efforts required in interpersonal interactions, mental short-cuts make available information that we use when interacting with people from different social groups and serve as cues to guide our behavior towards these people (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002). Nevertheless, although social categorisation allows us to process information about another person quickly and without much effort, it often results in overgeneralizations and unjustified assumptions about their abilities and character. Depending on the beliefs we hold about a certain group, this can then prompt us to adopt negative attitudes towards others and discriminate against people from other social groups (Dovidio et al., 2010).

As stated in the introduction, age is the only major social category in which group membership eventually changes for everyone, as people age and thereby move from being young to being old over the course of their lives (North & Fiske, 2015). Nevertheless, members of society are constantly exposed to age-based stereotypes and internalize those, they adopt prejudices against other-aged individuals, and may (intentionally or unintentionally) discriminate against other people due to ageist stereotypes and prejudices. Since stereotypes – i.e., the beliefs people hold about the characteristics of a social group – affect our thoughts, feelings, and behavior towards members of that group, negative age-related beliefs have the potential to result in discriminatory treatment of individuals based on their age (Nelson, 2009). The combination of prejudices, stereotypes, and discrimination associated with age is called *ageism* (World Health Organization, 2021). The term was coined by Robert Butler in 1969 and was initially exclusively used to describe stereotypes of, and prejudice and discrimination against older individuals (Achenbaum, 2015; Francioli & North, 2021). However, recently there has been increasing acknowledgment that ageism can affect people from all age groups (Loretto et al., 2000; Duncan & Loretto, 2004; North & Fiske, 2015).

Ageism is a phenomenon that seems to be occurring across cultures: It has been found that, on a global level, “at least one in two people hold ageist attitudes against older adults” (Mikton et al., 2021, p.1333). This expresses itself in many different ways on the individual, interpersonal, and institutional level, e.g., through discriminatory jokes (during interpersonal interactions) or lack of employment opportunities (due to institutional ageism) (Achenbaum, 2015; World Health Organization, 2021). But although it has been acknowledged that age might impact people in a similar way as sex or race, the role of age regarding people’s advantages or disadvantages in different areas of their lives remains largely unexplored (Finkelstein et al., 2013). In addition, the research and reports that exist exclude, for the most part, low-income countries and ageism against younger people. However, data from Europe shows that every third person has already been a target of ageist discrimination and the numbers are actually the highest among adolescents and young adults, which highlights the importance of researching ageism against the young (Mikton et al., 2021). Furthermore, depreciation of younger people is a recurring topic at different times in history, i.e., it is not a new phenomenon, and it is likely to be experienced by future generations as well (Francioli & North, 2021). Ageism can have a detrimental impact on people by affecting their mental and physical health and may diminish access education or employment (Mikton et al., 2021). Consequently, it is highly relevant to

attribute more attention to the topic of ageism in general, and ageism against the young in specific.

One exception to the focus on ageism against older people is the work of Francioli and North (2021), who investigated ageism against younger adults, which they term *youngism*. They argue that although youth is generally associated with positive connotations like attractiveness, contemporary young adults are also often the target of criticism and negative descriptions. For example, the authors found that the media often portrays millennials as “narcissistic, lazy, and entitled” (p.2) and studies conducted in the United States revealed that contemporary youth is perceived as being “undisciplined, disrespectful, unfriendly, irresponsible, and lacking moral values” (p.2). Therefore, the authors propose a dual perspective on age as a social category. On the one hand, ageing leads to changes in one’s group membership over the course of one’s life, on the other hand, there are impermeable generational boundaries which divide people into different age cohorts. It is important to consider both life stage-based and generational categorizations to understand the origins of age-based discrimination. Ageism against older people, as a life stage-based approach, is generally associated with people trying to distance themselves from ageing and becoming old, despite the fact that everyone with a sufficient life span will eventually grow old (Francioli & North, 2021). Several theories aim to explain this paradox: For example, terror management theory assumes that older individuals remind people of their own mortality, which causes discomfort and therefore increases the wish to draw boundaries between oneself and the older person (North & Fiske, 2015).

In contrast, ageism against younger people is linked to beliefs about their specific generation in comparison to other (older) contemporary generations (Francioli & North, 2021). Social Identity Theory (SIT) posits that our personal identity is connected to our group identity, which is why we have the necessity to feel good about our ingroup. In other words, our self-esteem is affected by our evaluation of our ingroup. When our social identity is salient, we focus on our similarities with ingroup members as well as highlight our differences to outgroup members, i.e., we do not pay a lot of attention to individuating factors and potential similarities with outgroup members. We compare our own group to others to determine our status and by seeing our ingroup in a more positive light than the outgroup(s), our own self-esteem increases (Stets & Burke, 2000). Based on the SIT, when older generations compare themselves to younger ones, they will focus on attributes that make them see their own social group as more favorably. This will contribute to the belief that their own generation was better when they were at the same age as the current younger generation and create the impression of a generational

decline. This, then, results in a negative bias towards younger individuals. Conclusively, the factors that lead to ageist prejudices and the content of these prejudices differ depending whether one looks at ageism against older or against younger people (Francioli & North, 2021).

1.2. Prescriptive vs descriptive stereotypes

As previously mentioned, ageism, as well as other “-isms” (e.g., sexism, racism, heterosexism) has an attitudinal, a cognitive, and a behavioral component. The attitudinal component refers to prejudices we hold about other social groups, the cognitive component encompasses stereotypes, and the behavioral component describes the resulting discrimination (David & Derthick, 2017). *Stereotypes* are defined as “cognitive schemas used by social perceivers to process information about others” (Dovidio et al., 2010, p.7). They comprise beliefs about characteristics and behaviors that are assumed to be applicable to all members of a social group. Hence, there is an overgeneralization of believed similarities and a disregard of individual features of different people that belong to the same social group (e.g., based on sex, race, religious beliefs, or age). Negative stereotypes can therefore lead to discriminatory behavior towards members of a specific social group (Dovidio et al., 2010).

In general, stereotypes can entail both negative and positive assumptions about a certain social group, for example different age groups. According to the Stereotype Content Model (SCM; Cuddy & Fiske, 2002), stereotypes can be evaluated along two main dimensions, which are competence and warmth. Members of groups that are well-regarded (e.g., white, educated people from the middle-class) will score high on both dimensions and will therefore be seen as both competent and warm. These people are admired by others. Groups with a lower societal status (e.g., people of color) are targets of ambivalent evaluations, i.e., they might be perceived as competent but not warm, or vice-versa. Competent, but cold individuals are envied, whereas warm, but incompetent people are pitied. Finally, the groups that are targeted with negative evaluations on both dimensions, i.e., as lacking both competence and warmth, have the lowest status within society (e.g., homeless persons) and elicit contempt in others (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002).

Regarding the category of age, we know that middle-aged people have the highest social status and societal influence of all age groups, due to, amongst others, their income level, their access to employment opportunities, and representation in leadership positions (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002; North & Fiske, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). Consequently, based on the SCM, they are expected to score high on both warmth and competence. In contrast, younger and older people hold a

lower social status and are therefore more likely to be targeted with ambivalent evaluations. Based on survey data from the United States, older individuals seem to be perceived as warm, but incompetent, whereas young people received medium scores on both dimensions. The lower scores on warmth and/or competence increase the risk of younger and older people being disliked and/or disrespected (Cuddy & Fiske, 2002). As described above, our evaluations of a social group's warmth and competence results in one of four intergroup emotions: Admiration, envy, pity, or contempt. These emotions have been found to be predictive of behaviors that people engage in when they interact with members of the social group in question. In other words, younger and older people are more likely to encounter negative behaviors from others towards them due to the prevalent stereotypes about their age groups (Cuddy et al., 2007).

Different types of stereotypes have been identified by scholars: descriptive stereotypes, prescriptive stereotypes, and metastereotypes (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Finkelstein et al., 2013). Metastereotypes are “the expectations that people believe [outgroup members] hold about their own [social] group” (Finkelstein et al., 2013, p.634). In other words, metastereotypes do not necessarily describe the actual stereotypes held by another person, which means that people might think that they are perceived better or worse by others than is actually the case. Finkelstein and colleagues explored the metastereotypes held by workers of different age groups and found that older workers believed that especially younger workers would perceive them very negatively, which was proven to be untrue. On the other hand, younger workers also thought that older and middle-aged employees would see them in a negative light. However, the scholars found that the older workers in the study held mostly positive beliefs about the younger group. Nevertheless, middle-aged workers were found to hold largely negative stereotypes about younger employees. The authors pointed out that the anticipation of prejudice can negatively affect a person's performance and emotional well-being, and assume that negative metastereotypes can disrupt interactions between different age groups, as people fear to be judged unfairly and adopt defensive and avoidant behaviors (Finkelstein et al., 2013).

In contrast to metastereotypes, descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes do not describe what members of specific social groups believe outgroup members think about them, but rather refer to the actual stereotypes held by the outgroup members (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Burgess and Borgida explored the differences between the two components regarding their content and their impact on discrimination by looking at cases of sexism. The descriptive component of stereotypes consists of assumptions about how members of certain social groups act, what

characteristics they share, or what roles they usually occupy. In summary, descriptive stereotypes consist of beliefs about how members of certain social groups purportedly *are* (Burgess & Borgida, 1999).

Descriptive stereotypes serve to help process the amount of information an individual faces in everyday life by simplifying and grouping people together who share a salient characteristic like age. Hence, they play an important role in the process of social categorization. As stereotypes are internalized and not consciously activated, discrimination based on descriptive stereotypes can happen unintentionally. The prescriptive component of stereotypes, on the other hand, refers to the expectations about how members of certain social groups *should* behave, what roles they *should* take, and what characteristics they *should* display. Different from descriptive stereotypes, prescriptive stereotypes lead to discriminatory behavior when a person does not behave according to the expectations linked to their social group membership. In contrast to descriptive stereotypes, which serve to organize the masses of information one is confronted with on a daily basis, prescriptive stereotypes seem to reinforce the status quo by referring to mandatory expectations that are used to maintain the power inequalities that are found in institutions, the workplace, or society at large (Burgess & Borgida, 1999).

1.3. Ageism and prescriptive stereotypes in the workplace

Considering that adults spend a large share of their daily lives at the workplace and that different work outcomes (e.g., employment opportunities) can be influenced by ageist beliefs, investigating workplace ageism is crucial (Chasteen & Cary, 2015; Loretto et al., 2000). The workplace is a major social context in which people of different age groups can become targets of discrimination, because of the stereotypes and prejudices associated with their age (Chasteen & Cary, 2015; Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Richardson et al., 2013). Furthermore, as Duncan and Loretto (2004) pointed out, “individuals may be both victims and perpetrators of ageism, or can be discriminated against by those of a similar age” (p.97).

Drawing on the information about descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes that was presented above, we can make several assumptions about their impact in the workplace. Descriptive stereotypes lead to discrimination because people are perceived in stereotypical ways and therefore are treated in a way concordant with the content of these stereotypes (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Therefore, older workers might generally be perceived as less trainable, which would lead hiring managers to prefer other applicants in the recruiting process. On the other hand, younger workers could be seen as inexperienced and therefore might not

trusted with challenging tasks. Regarding prescriptive stereotypes, when a person acts against the prescriptions associated with their social group, they will experience a backlash (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman, 2012). For example, older workers who want the same amount of training as their middle-aged and younger colleagues might be met with hostility, because their behavior violates the succession-related prescriptions (succession refers to the expectation that older people should make way and pass enviable resources on to the younger generation, e.g., give up a job position to create room for a younger person) (North & Fiske, 2015). On the other hand, younger workers who speak up against an older co-worker might be perceived as being brazen and equally prompt a negative reaction.

Research about sex stereotypes gives important insights about the impact that violations of prescriptions have on how people are treated and perceived. These findings are also beginning to be replicated in studies about age stereotypes (e.g., North & Fiske, 2013b). Hence, it is relevant to look at studies regarding sexism at the workplace to get an impression of how social categories and associated stereotypes affect work outcomes for different people. The violation of stereotypic prescriptions has been shown to have negative implications for both men and women: For example, a study by Caleo (2018) showed that male managers who allocated resources in a way that violated a gender norm for men were rated more negatively than women who did not violate gender norms by allocating resources in the same way. Furthermore, Heilman (2012) pointed out that women are perceived more negatively when they adopt traditionally masculine leadership styles. The problem associated with these findings is that individuals might be punished for behaviors that would actually help their careers, e.g., adopting self-advocating behaviors during salary negotiations or applications for promotions. More concretely, and for the example just presented, the paradox is that in traditionally masculine roles, masculine characteristics are expected from applicants, but women are punished for displaying them (Heilman, 2012). Similar findings might be revealed when investigating violations of age-related prescriptions. When it comes to age, it is assumed that young people will experience the most difficulties with stereotypic prescriptions in traditional workplaces, whereas modern areas like IT businesses are more likely to be more open to younger rather than older workers (Truxillo et al., 2015).

Despite all of the above mentioned, compared to sex and race, age has received limited attention in research so far. Additionally, existing research has also mainly focused on older workers (North & Fiske, 2012; Finkelstein et al., 2015). Nevertheless, and taking into account what was previously discussed, it is of high importance to extend the body of research and

include studies that involve workers from different age groups. In general, there is evidence that employers expect an “inverted ‘U’ type of relationship between age and job performance such that workers both older and younger than this ‘zone of best contribution’ [are] seen as inferior in terms of work performance” (Richardson et al., 2013, p.37). In the same line, according to North and Fiske (2015), intergenerational conflict is a problem found in the most workplaces (at least in the United States, where their studies were conducted) and does not exclusively target older employees. A vast number of older workers are critical about their younger colleagues’ skills, while at the same time, almost half of the younger workers do not trust their older co-workers’ abilities (North & Fiske, 2015).

Due to the demographic change towards ageing in Western societies, there is an increasing number of older workers participating in the labor market (Malinen & Johnston, 2013). Despite the importance of retaining older employees, age-based discrimination is a widespread problem (North & Fiske, 2015). Because of age-based stereotypes, older individuals often face unfair treatment in different work situations, e.g., in job application processes, and access to training opportunities (North & Fiske, 2015; Richardson et al., 2013). Although studies have shown many negative assumptions about older workers to be unfounded, employers still need to learn how to accommodate the needs of older employees and to look past their stereotypical beliefs (North & Fiske, 2015). To protect older people and to ensure their participation in the labor market, some countries (including the United States and European Union membership states) have issued policies and laws that outlaw the discrimination of older workers (Achenbaum, 2015; Adnett & Hardy, 2007; Duncan & Loretto, 2004). Nevertheless, since age discrimination can affect people from all ages, these policies and laws need to become more inclusive towards younger employees (Duncan & Loretto, 2004).

North and Fiske (2013a, 2013b, 2016) have investigated prescriptive age-related stereotypes to better understand the underlying mechanisms of discrimination against older workers. They identified three categories of ageist prescriptions: First, there is succession, which entails that older people should step aside and make room for the younger generations. In the workplace, this means that when older individuals retire, new jobs become available for the young. The second domain is identity, which means that younger people are highly sensitive to older people who adopt behaviors or activities that are perceived to be typical or exclusive of younger people. Finally, the domain of consumption draws attention to scarce shared resources, e.g., healthcare. When older individuals are seen as consuming an unfair amount of these resources, a violation of prescriptive stereotypes takes place. Based on these three

domains, the authors developed a scale (SIC scale) through which age-related prescriptive stereotypes towards older people can be measured (North & Fiske, 2013a, 2013b). In different studies, the authors presented participants with different vignettes and simulated interactive scenarios in which the character's age and behavior were manipulated. They found that younger participants cared the most about whether older people adhere to age-related prescriptions. In the case of a prescription violation, younger participants rated older people as less capable and warm, and therefore as less likeable. The authors point out that prescriptive stereotypes violations turn benevolent ageism into hostile ageism (North & Fiske, 2013b). Benevolent ageism refers to interactions in which people mean well (i.e., have positive attitudes towards the older/younger person), but act condescendingly (e.g., by engaging in patronizing behavior). Hostile ageism describes behavior that is motivated by negative attitudes towards the younger/older person, e.g., insulting an individual because of their age (Døssing & Crăciun, 2022).

Similar research about prescriptive age-related stereotypes against younger workers is needed. While some studies targeting ageism against older individuals also mention the existence of age discrimination against younger people, there is a lack of work focusing on this age group (Francioli & North, 2021; North & Fiske, 2012). Francioli and North (2021) have highlighted the prevalence of ageism affecting young adults and explored which causes contribute to age discrimination towards different age groups. In the same vein and taking into account the development of the SIC scale (North & Fiske, 2013a), the Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale (WAYS) was created to assess age-related prescriptive stereotypes against younger employees (within the scope of the project *Age@Work*, Schmitz et al., 2021). This scale is based on three higher-order prescriptions: Humility-Deference, which refers to the acceptance and respect for the hierarchy, as well as the acknowledgment of inexperience and acceptance of menial tasks, Belonging-Loyalty, referring to proving belonging to the organization, and loyalty towards the organization; and Vitality-Innovation, which refers to technological competence, dynamic work attitude, creativity, and taking an active role (Schmitz et al., 2021).

1.4. Organizational justice

Organizational justice is a key topic in the field of organizational behavior and motivational theories (Cojuharenco & Patient, 2013). The term describes people's perceptions of justice at the workplace (Colquitt et al., 2005). During the past decades, scholars have identified different justice dimensions: distributive justice, procedural justice, and interactional justice. The first

dimension – distributive justice – is associated with the perceived fairness of decision outcomes (Colquitt & Zipay, 2015). Colquitt (2001) writes that people perceive an allocation of resources as fair if the allocation followed implicit norms, such as distributing resources equally or based on individual contributions (i.e., equity). The concept of distributive justice goes back to Homans, who formally introduced it in the early 1960s as the expectation of receiving outcomes that are proportional to one's input in an exchange situation (Colquitt et al., 2005).

The second justice dimension is called procedural justice and is related to the perceived fairness of processes that influence the decision about the allocation of rewards (Colquitt, 2001). According to Colquitt, processes are seen as being fair when employees are given a voice, can influence the outcome or understand that the process followed certain criteria like absence of bias. Leventhal (1980) confirms that allocative procedures are perceived as just when certain rules are met and identified different criteria that help to determine if a procedure is fair, such as consistency, absence of bias, and correctability.

The third justice dimension is the one of interactional justice, which refers to the perceived fairness of interpersonal treatment (Colquitt, 2001). Interactional justice can be divided into interpersonal justice, which refers to whether respectful treatment is taking place, and informational justice, which captures the aspect of providing explanations for organizational decisions (Patient & Skarlicki, 2010; Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). While distributive and procedural justice are related to organizational structures, interactional justice is linked to the interpersonal interaction between individuals. Interactional justice perceptions therefore tend to be more unstable as they are based on experiences of day-to-day interactions (Cojuharenco & Patient, 2013).

Next to the specific justice facets, overall justice has received increasing interest over the recent years (Nicklin et al., 2014). Multiple scholars have argued that people tend to form a holistic justice judgment instead of focusing on a specific justice type and that overall justice perceptions should be considered as another approach to measuring organizational justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Nicklin et al., 2014). Different studies suggest that overall justice can be predicted by specific justice facets and affects various work-related outcomes, including, amongst others, job satisfaction, task performance and turnover intentions (i.e., overall justice is acting as a mediator). Therefore, this research encourages including both overall justice assessments and measures for specific justice dimensions when studying organizational justice (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009).

1.4.1. Why is it important to assess organizational justice perceptions in the workplace?

Previous research highlights the importance of justice concepts as a basis for decision-makers' actions. By looking at the underlying justice concepts, we can get a better understanding of why people might see discriminatory actions as justified, but also gain insights into how workers respond to experiencing discrimination (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). As mentioned previously, age discrimination is found in the hiring process, as well as in the treatment of people on the job (Richardson et al., 2013; North & Fiske, 2015). The distribution of resources, decision-making processes and interpersonal interactions are expected to be influenced by what employers perceive as being fair, and if fairness perceptions are affected by ageist stereotypes, they might lead to discriminatory behaviors and decisions (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). For example, the belief that younger workers should accept menial tasks (which is a prescriptive age-related stereotype identified by Schmitz et al., 2021) might justify the decision to allocate a disproportionate number of these tasks to a younger employee, even though they might have the skills to work on more demanding assignments). Therefore, it is relevant to investigate organizational justice perceptions of employers and superiors. On the other hand, it is equally important to look at the fairness perceptions of workers. By assessing the organizational justice perceptions in the workplace, we can draw conclusions about the satisfaction of people with organizational procedures as well as about their well-being at work. Organizational justice affects how employees perceive work relationships and in turn, will impact their behavior at work, including their dedication to their job and organization, their willingness to cooperate or to engage in counterproductive work behaviors (Colquitt & Zipay, 2015; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001).

The different justice dimensions have been linked to different work-related outcomes. For example, distributive justice plays a role when it comes to resource distributions like pay, trainings or promotions (Colquitt et al., 2005). Unfair allocation of resources can lead to dissatisfaction and to employees questioning the legitimacy of the authority (Caleo, 2016). Procedural justice relates to the fairness of procedures that result in the previously mentioned outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2005). If the procedures are consistent and unbiased, and employees are able to contribute with their own points of view, procedures will be perceived as being fairer than if they are repeatedly changed or if some employees are included in the process whereas others are excluded. Regarding interactional justice, employees will be sensitive to how they are treated at work. Disrespectful treatment and omission of information will be perceived as unfair (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). If employees feel that they are discriminated at work

because of unfair allocation of resources, unjust decision-making procedures or unfair interpersonal treatment, their performance at work as well as their health might suffer in consequence (Gee et al., 2007). On the other hand, if distributions, procedures and interpersonal treatment are perceived as fair, this can increase respect for authorities and reduce turnover intentions and the willingness to engage in counterproductive behaviors (such as putting less effort into work, doing tasks wrong, and similar) (Colquitt et al., 2005; Cohen-Charash & Spector, 2001).

1.4.2. What does research about stereotypes and organizational justice show us?

As mentioned previously, stereotypes can affect how people are perceived and in consequence, are treated. Therefore, it is relevant to look at the connection between stereotypes in the workplace and organizational justice perceptions. Research shows that, when it comes to distributive justice, stereotypes impact who is regarded as being the most deserving when it comes to the allocation of resources. Group membership plays a role in deciding how to allocate outcomes, and ingroup members will be favored in allocation decision, even if outgroup members display the same work performance (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). Regarding age discrimination against younger employees, this finding might be relevant when it comes to workplace settings in which the most of the employees and authorities belong to the middle-aged and older age groups, and the younger employees are perceived as an outgroup. This could affect the way outcomes and resources are distributed. On the other hand, when it comes to workplaces that predominantly hire young people, like start-ups or IT companies, the outgroup will probably mainly comprise older workers, who are then likely to face disadvantages due to their group membership.

With regard to procedural justice, Stone-Romero and Stone (2005) showed that outgroup members are disfavored in the allocation procedures as these procedures are created to benefit ingroup members. This could mean that, if procedures are set up in a way that favors middle-aged workers, younger as well as older workers might feel that they cannot influence decision-making processes. Based on stereotypes like young people being unreliable or older people being resistant to training, procedures are assumed to disfavor them when it comes to the distribution of challenging tasks or access to training opportunities.

Furthermore, the interpersonal justice dimension will be influenced by stereotypes, as they are linked to assumptions about what kind of interpersonal treatment is appropriate for members of a certain social group (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). On the one hand, this could mean that

employers and middle-aged and older employees believe that they can behave in a discriminatory or condescending way (e.g., through paternalization) towards their younger colleagues, based on stereotypes that the younger generation is incapable. On the other hand, when interpersonal treatment is influenced by negative stereotypes about younger workers, this is expected to be perceived as being unfair by the affected group. This can then affect their willingness to invest in their work. Additionally, when people are aware of negative stereotypes of their group, they may perform worse than their actual capabilities would imply (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). This phenomenon is called stereotype threat and describes the confirmation of a negative stereotype about the own social group when the stereotype is salient. In other words, when an individual suspects being judged on the basis of a negative stereotype, they are more likely to act in a way that actually coincides with the stereotype, thus creating a self-fulfilling prophecy (Steele & Aronson, 1995).

Finally, research targeting prescriptive gender stereotypes and organizational justice shows that prescriptions affect the importance that people place on justice rules and the severity with which they condone justice violations. For example, studies suggest that interactional justice rule violations are less acceptable when they are committed by women rather than men, as this also entails a violation of prescriptive gender stereotypes (Caleo, 2016). Moreover, male managers have been found to be evaluated more negatively than female managers when violating distributive justice rules, when the rules are linked to gender norms (Caleo, 2018). These studies offer interesting insights into the connection between prescriptive stereotypes and organizational justice perceptions, which still need to be explored in the context of age discrimination. This will be done in the following study, which focuses on prescriptive age-related stereotypes against younger workers.

CHAPTER 2

Study

In order to examine the impact of prescriptive age-related stereotypes against younger workers on justice perceptions in the workplace, a study targeting a German-speaking audience was conducted. The focus of this study was on stereotypes targeting younger employees based on the lack of existing research about this age group (Francioli & North, 2021). During the study, a scenario exercise was administered to the participants. The scenario described a situation in which a younger or older worker either adhered to ageist prescriptions or displayed a behavior that violated the age-related prescription. Drawing on the three prescriptions posited by WAYS (Schmitz et al., 2021), the scenarios referred to the prescription of Humility-Deference (specifically to the acceptance and respect for the hierarchy in the workplace). In both versions of the scenario, the protagonist received a negative outcome. The participants were asked to indicate how fair they perceived this treatment to be, considering the prescriptive age-related stereotype condition.

In general, it was hypothesized that the participants would see the organizational treatment as more unfair if it concerned an older employee as opposed to a younger one. Moreover, it was predicted that participants would see the organizational treatment as more unfair in the condition in which the worker complied with the rules set out by his supervisor. The adherence situation was assumed to be judged as being even more unfair if it concerned an older worker rather than a younger one. On the other hand, it was believed that participants would view the treatment of the worker as fairer in the condition in which he decided to question his supervisor's instructions, as the negative outcome was expected to be viewed as an appropriate punishment for the deviant behavior of the worker. It was hypothesized that this would be especially true for the condition in which the worker is younger. Drawing on previous literature (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Heilman, 2012; North & Fiske, 2013b, 2016) the violation of prescriptive stereotypes – in this case that younger employees should not question directions from their supervisors (Schmitz et al., 2021) – would be viewed as not appropriate by the participants and in their eyes justify the negative consequences that the younger employee faces.

Hypothesis 1: The organizational treatment of the employee will be viewed as more unfair in the adherence condition than in the violation condition.

Hypothesis 2: The organizational treatment of the employee will be judged as being more unfair if the scenario targets an older worker as opposed to a younger one.

Hypothesis 3: An interaction between prescriptive stereotype condition and age condition is expected. More precisely, in the violation condition, the treatment will be considered fairer if it targets a younger worker as opposed to an older one.

Furthermore, it was assumed that the participants' endorsement of prescriptive stereotypes related to hierarchy, as measured by WAYS (Schmitz et al., 2021), would moderate the effect of the age-related prescriptive stereotype condition and age of the protagonist in the scenario on the justice perceptions that participants have. More precisely, the participants' endorsement of prescriptive age stereotypes related to hierarchy moderates the effect of the age-related prescriptive stereotype condition and the protagonist's age on justice perceptions, such that:

Hypothesis 4a: a stronger agreement with the hierarchy items will lead to the organizational treatment being perceived as fairer, especially in the violation condition.

Hypothesis 4b: the organizational treatment will be judged as fairer in the violation condition, when the protagonist is a younger worker, and more so the higher participants' endorsement of age-related prescriptive stereotypes.

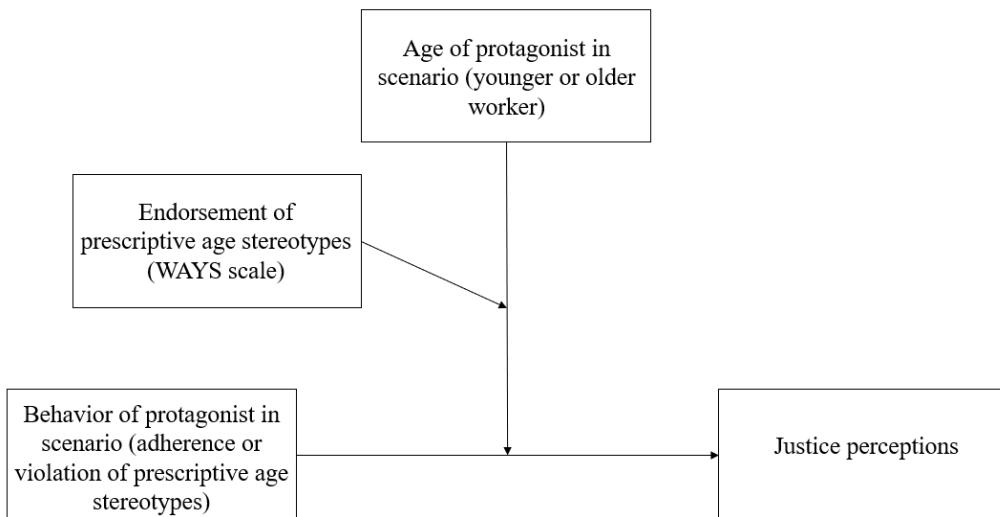


Figure 2.1: Proposed moderation model

2.1. Method

2.1.1. Participants and design

A survey was prepared and conducted online through the platform Qualtrics (Provo, UT). A total of 142 responses to the survey were registered. German-speaking participants were recruited through personal contacts and social media (i.e., convenience snow-ball sample). The data of 36 participants was discarded as the participants did not complete the survey. The final sample contained 106 participants (39 male and 66 female, one answer missing). The age of the participants ranged from 18 to 62 and the mean age was 31.59 ($SD = 12.09$). Ninety-five participants indicated that they were German, whereas ten stated that they had different nationalities, such as Austrian or Swiss. Participants also provided information about their professional background, which revealed the sample to be diverse in this aspect: The sectors that the participants worked in included, but were not limited to, the automotive industry, research, financial services, IT and retail. The study had a 2 (age of the employee in the scenario: young or old) \times 2 (prescriptive age stereotypes: adherence or violation) factorial between-subjects design. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the conditions.

2.1.2. Procedure and manipulations

The participants were invited to take part in a study about fairness perceptions in the workplace. After informing them about the purpose of the study and their consent to process their data in an anonymized way being requested, they were presented with the WAYS scale, which was used to access their endorsement of prescriptive age stereotypes towards younger employees. This was followed by a scale that assessed the personal values of the participants (this scale was measured as variable of interest for the project *Age@work*, but not used in the analyses). Next, the scenario exercise was administered to the participants: In the scenario, a worker is given instructions for a task by his supervisor. In one condition, he follows the instructions, whereas in the other condition, he questions his supervisor's directions. In both conditions, the worker does not receive his bonus. In addition, the age of the worker in the exercise was manipulated to either present a younger (27-year-old) or older (57-year-old) worker. The gender of the worker was always the same (male) in order to exclude potential confounding effects of gender on justice perceptions. The participants were then asked questions related to the justice of the situation portrayed in the scenario. Finally, they provided their demographic data and answered manipulation checks to ensure that they had carefully read the scenario. Following this, they were thanked and debriefed.

2.1.3. Measures

The measures used for this study included demographic measures, manipulation checks, the Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale (WAYS; Schmitz et al., 2021), and the Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001). Back-translation was used to create a German version of the scales.

2.1.3.1. Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale (WAYS) (Schmitz et al., 2021)

The participants' endorsement of prescriptive age stereotypes towards younger workers was assessed through the Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale (WAYS; Schmitz et al., 2021). The scale consisted of a total of 25 items that were divided into three higher-order dimensions with eight subdimensions: the dimension of Humility-Deference (including the subdimensions accept and respect hierarchy, and acknowledge inexperience and accept menial tasks), was assessed with six items; Loyalty-Belonging (including the subdimensions prove belonging in organization, loyalty towards the organization), was assessed with six items and Vitality-Innovation (including the subdimensions technological competence, and dynamic work attitude, and creativity, and taking an active role), was assessed with 13 items. The participants were asked how much, on a scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), they agreed to statements like "younger workers should not question directions from superiors" (Humility-Deference prescription). This study focused only on the three items assessing the accept and respect hierarchy subdimension from the Humility-Deference dimension. The internal reliability of the subscale was very good with a Cronbach's alpha of .80.

2.1.3.2. Justice measures (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Colquitt, 2001)

Justice perceptions were assessed by adapting items from Colquitt's Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001) targeting distributive justice and the Perceived Overall Justice Scale (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009) targeting overall justice perceptions. The overall justice perceptions were examined through three items (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). An example of the items is: "In general, I can count on this organization to be fair". The scale showed a good reliability ($\alpha = .78$). The distributive justice scale contained four items and had an excellent reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of .91. An example for an item from this scale is: "Does your outcome reflect the effort you have put into your work?". Both scales were answered on a 5-point scale (from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)).

2.1.3.3. Demographic measures

In order to assess the demographics of the sample, the participants were asked to provide information about their age, nationality, employment status (area of work and duration of employment) and gender.

2.1.3.4. Manipulation checks

To confirm that the manipulations worked as anticipated, and to examine whether the participants had thoroughly read and understood the presented scenario, they were asked questions about its content. More precisely, they were asked which age group (younger, middle-aged or older) they thought the protagonist of the scenario belonged to, and they were asked, on a 1 to 6 bipolar scale the extent to which the protagonist ignored the supervisor request (1) or followed it (6). Other questions of interest for the project *Age@work* were included, but not used in the analysis, such as whether the behavior was typical, was surprising, and was expected for a worker of that age.

2.2. Results

2.2.1. Statistical analysis

The data from the survey was analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 28. The moderation analysis was conducted with the SPSS macro PROCESS v4.1 by Hayes (2022).

2.2.2. Manipulation checks

A 2×2 ANOVA was used to test whether participants perceived the 27-year-old protagonist as a younger worker and the 57-year-old protagonist as an older employee, including both manipulations (age of the employee and prescriptive age stereotype) as factors. The expected main effect of the age condition was statistically significant, $F(1, 97) = 113.97, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .54$. As expected, those participants that read the scenario about the younger worker indicated that they perceived him as younger ($M = 1.12, SD = 0.33$) than participants who read the scenario about the 57-year-old worker ($M = 2.35, SD = 0.74$). As anticipated, there were no other significant effects (all $p > .05$).

The same was true for the manipulation check regarding the extent to which the protagonist had followed the instructions of his supervisor, $F(1, 97) = 238.09, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = .71$. Likewise, as expected, the participants perceived the protagonists' behavior as more conforming in the conditions in which he followed the instructions ($M = 5.63, SD = .96$), than in the scenarios in which the protagonist talked back to his supervisor and did not follow the instructions ($M = 2.34, SD = 1.17$). There were no other effects (all $p > .05$).

2.2.3. Overall justice perceptions

To test the impact of the prescriptive stereotype condition and the protagonist's age on the participants' general justice perceptions, another 2×2 ANOVA was conducted. As stated in the hypotheses, we expected both the protagonist's age and the prescriptive stereotype condition to individually affect the participants' justice perceptions, such that the organizational treatment would be viewed as more unfair in the adherence condition than in the violation condition (Hypothesis 1), and as more unfair in the scenario targeting an older worker rather than a younger worker (Hypothesis 2). In addition, an interaction between the age and prescriptive stereotype condition was expected, such that the organizational treatment of the employee in the violation condition would be considered fairer if it targets a younger rather than an older worker (Hypothesis 3).

In contrast to the expectations outlined in Hypothesis 3, the interaction between the protagonist's age and the prescriptive stereotype condition turned out to have no statistically significant effect on the participants' overall justice perceptions, $F(1, 102) = .83, p > .05, \eta_p^2 = .01$. Taken individually, the age of the protagonist (H2) also did not show a significant effect on general justice ($F(1, 102) = .10, p > .05, \eta_p^2 < .01$), however, the prescriptive stereotype condition (H1) did affect the general justice perceptions significantly, $F(1, 102) = 6.70, p < .05, \eta_p^2 = .06$, *as expected*. Thus, in the adherence condition, the organizational treatment was perceived as more unfair than in the violation condition. This supports the first hypothesis, whereas the second and third hypothesis were not supported by the data.

It was also shown that neither the age of the protagonist ($F(1, 102) = .01, p > .05, \eta_p^2 < .01$), nor the prescriptive stereotype condition ($F(1, 102) = .27, p > .05, \eta_p^2 < .01$) had a statistically significant effect on how participants perceived the denial of the yearly bonus in terms of distributive justice. The interaction effect was also not significant, $F(1, 102) = .63, p > .05, \eta_p^2 < .01$.

2.2.4. Moderation effects

To assess the overall model including the assumed moderation effect of the WAYS hierarchy dimension, a moderation analysis was conducted using PROCESS, model 3 (Hayes, 2022). For this analysis, the conditions were contrast-coded (protagonist age: -1 = young vs. 1 = old, and prescriptive stereotype condition: -1 = violation and 1 = adherence). In order to interpret the moderation, the endorsement of the WAYS subscale was split in low (one SD below the mean), mean value, and high (one SD above the mean). The overall model was statistically significant

$(F(7, 97) = 2.13, p < .05)$ and accounted for 13% of the variance in overall justice perceptions ($R^2 = .13$). With a p-value of .06, the effect of the WAYS dimension on the participants' overall justice perceptions was marginally significant ($B = .19, SE = .10, 95\%, CI [-.01, .39]$), such that a higher endorsement of the items corresponded to perceiving the organizational treatment as fairer. Also, the effect of the prescriptive stereotype condition was significant at $p < .05$ ($B = -.21, SE = .08, 95\%, CI [-.38, -.05]$), with the organizational treatment being perceived as more unfair in the adherence condition than in the violation condition. Nevertheless, there was no statistically significant interaction effect, $B = .05, SE = .10, 95\%, CI [-.15, .25]$, which means that Hypothesis 4a was only partially supported for the overall justice perceptions.

In order to test whether there was a moderation effect on distributive justice perceptions instead of the overall justice measure, the same analysis was run, this time using distributive justice as the outcome. The model was statistically significant, $F(7, 97) = 2.22, p < .05$, and accounted for 14% of the variance in distributive justice perceptions ($R^2 = .14$). This second moderation analysis revealed that the WAYS subscale had a statistically significant effect on distributive justice perceptions, $B = .29, SE = .11, 95\%, CI [.06, .50]$ and that there was a statistically significant two-way interaction between the endorsement of the WAYS dimension and the prescriptive stereotype condition, $B = -.26, SE = .11, 95\%, CI [-.49, -.04]$. This means that a higher endorsement of the WAYS subscale corresponded to participants perceiving the organizational treatment as fairer, especially in the violation condition, which supports Hypothesis 4a for distributive justice perceptions. However, the expected three-way interaction between the protagonist's age, the prescriptive stereotype condition and the participants' endorsement of the hierarchy items of the WAYS scale was not statistically significant, $B = -.01, SE = .11, 95\%, CI [-.24, .21]$.

Considering that there were no significant effects of protagonist age on perceived overall and distributive justice, further analyses tested a moderation model without this variable. More precisely, a moderation model using the prescriptive stereotypes condition as the predictor and the WAYS subscale as a moderator was conducted. The moderation model having overall justice as outcome was statistically significant ($F(3, 101) = 4.70, p < .05$) and accounted for 12% of the variance in general justice ($R^2 = .12$). As in the previous analysis, there was no statistically significant interaction effect on general justice, $B = -.15, SE = .09, 95\%, CI [-.33, .04]$. However, the moderation model using distributive justice as the outcome variable showed, again, a significant interaction between the prescriptive stereotypes condition contrast and the WAYS subscale, $B = -.23, SE = .11, 95\%, CI [-.44, -.02]$ (see Figure 3.2).

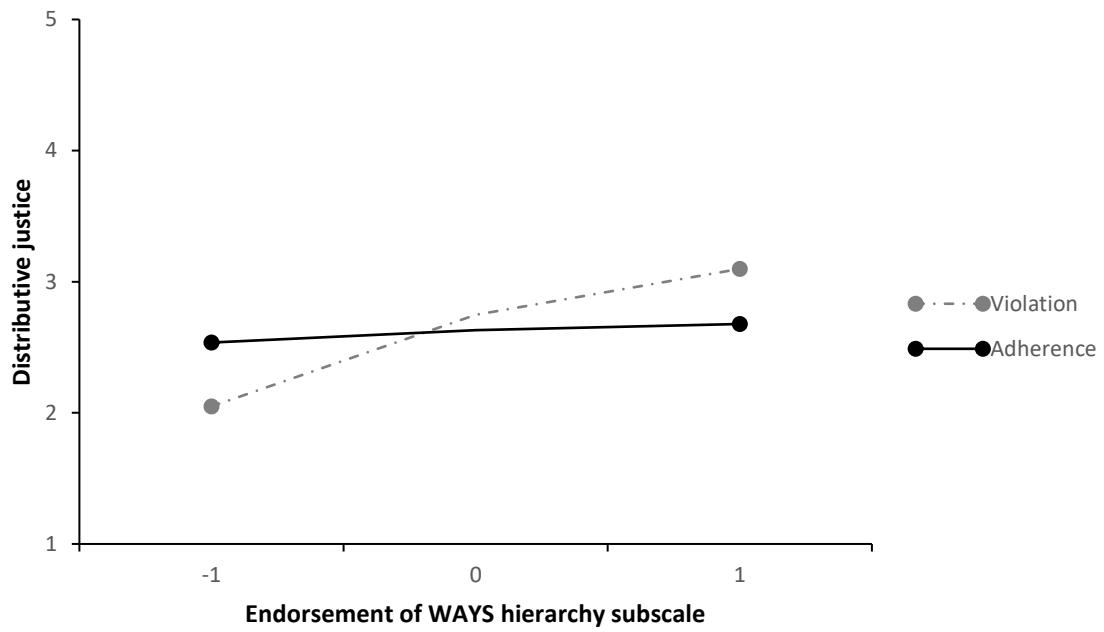


Figure 2.2: The effect of the prescriptive stereotype condition on distributive justice perceptions moderated by endorsement of the WAYS hierarchy dimension

This moderation model was also statistically significant ($F (3, 101) = 4.41, p < .01$) and accounted for 12% of the variance in distributive justice ($R^2 = .12$). It showed that in the adherence condition, the endorsement of the WAYS dimension did not affect distributive justice perceptions, whereas in the violation condition, there was an effect that illustrated that a higher endorsement of the WAYS hierarchy dimension was linked to perceiving the denial of the yearly bonus as fairer. Nevertheless, the found interaction effect was only marginally significant, $p = .09$.

CHAPTER 3

Discussion

3.1. Summary of findings

Despite the prevalence and importance of ageism, the topic continues to be understudied, especially regarding age-based discrimination against younger individuals (Finkelstein et al., 2013; Mikton et al., 2021). Age is a major social category that allows people to make sense of their environment but is also associated with multiple stereotypes (Francioli & North, 2021; North & Fiske, 2012). Prescriptive stereotypes are a type of stereotypes that describes expectations about how members of social groups *should* be, act, behave, etc. (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). Previous research has shown that when members of a certain social group (e.g., older people, women) do not adhere to prescriptions, they experience (hostile) backlash and are seen as less likeable and/or capable (Heilman, 2012; North & Fiske, 2013b). In other words, prescriptive stereotypes can foster discriminatory behavior and maintain power inequalities in different settings, including the workplace (Burgess & Borgida, 1999). While there are studies that have looked at prescriptions for older individuals, there is a general lack of research examining ageist stereotypes and resulting discrimination targeting the young (Francioli & North, 2021; North & Fiske, 2012). Therefore, this study investigated the effect of prescriptive age-related stereotypes against younger workers on the German-speaking participants' justice perceptions in the workplace. The aim was to add to the existing body of research about ageism by focusing on age-based discrimination against younger individuals in the workplace. Based on previous research looking at prescriptive age stereotype violations for older individuals (North & Fiske, 2013b), it was expected that the participants in the study would be more accepting of unfair organizational treatment of younger employees if they did not conform to stereotypical expectations targeting their age group.

It was hypothesized that, in general, the organizational treatment of the employee in the scenario would be viewed as more unfair in the adherence condition (i.e., conforming to the prescriptive stereotype) than in the violation condition (i.e., not conforming to the prescriptive stereotype: Hypothesis 1). This was supported by the data, which showed that the participants' overall justice perceptions were affected by the prescriptive stereotype condition in the scenario. It was also hypothesized that the organizational treatment of the employee would be regarded as more unfair if it targeted an older rather than a younger worker (Hypothesis 2), and that there would be an interaction between the protagonist's age and the prescriptive stereotype condition, such that the organizational treatment of the employee in the violation condition

would be considered fairer if it targeted a younger rather than an older worker (Hypothesis 3). Nevertheless, there was no evidence supporting these three hypotheses. Further analyses also showed that neither the age of the protagonist nor the prescriptive stereotype condition affected the participants' distributive justice judgments. In addition, there was no significant interaction effect between the age condition and the prescriptive stereotype condition.

Furthermore, it was expected that the participants' endorsement of prescriptive age stereotypes related to hierarchy would affect justice perceptions by moderating the effect of the prescriptive stereotype condition. A stronger agreement with the hierarchy items was expected to lead to more acceptance of the organizational treatment of the employee, especially in the violation condition (Hypothesis 4a). This hypothesis was only supported partially for overall justice perceptions, as a higher endorsement of the WAYS hierarchy dimension corresponded with perceiving the organizational treatment as fairer, but there was no significant interaction effect with the prescriptive stereotype condition. In contrast, regarding distributive justice perceptions, the expected interaction was significant.

In addition, the organizational treatment was expected to be judged as fairer when targeting a younger employee in the violation condition, the higher the participants' endorsement of the hierarchy dimension (Hypothesis 4b). However, the expected interaction between the protagonists' age, the prescriptive stereotype condition, and the participants' endorsement of the WAYS dimension was not supported by the data. This was true both for overall justice perceptions and distributive justice perceptions.

3.2. Interpretations

3.2.1. Cultural influences

The results showed that it was clearly important to the participants how the protagonist acted in the work-related scenario, i.e., there was an expectation regarding the protagonist's behavior. When the protagonist violated that expectation, it affected the participants' overall justice perceptions. Nevertheless, and contrary to what was hypothesized, the expected behavior did not seem to be related to the protagonist's age. Instead, both the 27- and the 57-year-old worker were expected to portray the same behavior, namely, to follow the supervisor's instructions. Even when controlling for the participants' agreement to the hierarchy dimension of the WAYS scale, there was no significant interaction between the prescriptive stereotype condition and the protagonist's age. This could potentially mean that the participants were not embracing prescriptive age stereotypes regarding Humility-Deference as much as anticipated. On the other

hand, hierarchy based on the supervisor-employee relationship rather than on the employee's age still seemed to be important to the participants, as their justice perceptions were affected by the prescriptive stereotype condition. Hence, there appears to be support for hierarchical structures within organizations, but it is possible that the prescription to accept and respect hierarchy applies to (German) workers across different age groups. In other words, the same respect for hierarchy seems to be expected from a younger worker as from a middle-aged or older worker.

Since the sample consisted of people with German nationality and German-speaking individuals living in Germany, who are therefore significantly influenced by the local culture, it is relevant to consider whether cultural factors could explain these findings. Culture has a big impact on people's behaviors, their beliefs and on how they relate to themselves and others (Markus & Kitayama, 2010). The scholar Geert Hofstede has conducted in-depth research about cultural differences and the influence of culture on people's values and showed that countries differ on four dimensions: power distance, individualism-collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and masculinity-femininity (Hofstede, 1991). Power distance describes how members of a cultural group relate to hierarchies and power inequalities within their society. Germany scores relatively low on this dimension, which means that within German culture, a flat hierarchy is preferred over a vertical hierarchy. As opposed to countries that score high on this dimension (e.g., China), the acceptance of power inequalities is moderately low and superiors are not immune from criticism. The domain of individualism-collectivism is characterized by the extent to which members of society are interdependent. While individualist cultures prefer smaller intimate circles (the nuclear family) and emphasize personal agency and responsibility, collectivist cultures emphasize group loyalty and reciprocity. Germany is a more individualist country, which is illustrated by the preference for self-actualization and direct communication. Germans tend to not hold back on their honest opinions, which might make them seem rude to people from more collectivist cultural backgrounds (Hofstede Insights, n.d.).

At first, when looking at Germany's scores on the power distance and individualism-collectivism dimension, the findings from the current study seem to contradict German cultural values. With a low power distance and an emphasis on individualism, the participants should not have been as concerned with the protagonist speaking up against his supervisor. Instead, based on these two dimensions, the protagonist's behavior in the violation condition should have been perceived as being fairly normal. However, there is another aspect of German national and organizational culture that might explain why this was not the case. Germans are well-known for their appreciation for rules and regulations. They expect adherence to rules and

judge people who are breaking them negatively (Wallenburg et al., 2010). This factor might have been the most salient to the participants, making age less relevant to their justice judgments. Unsurprisingly, Germany scores relatively high on the dimension of uncertainty avoidance. This dimension concerns a society's stance towards ambiguity, which justifies the establishment of rules. While countries like Sweden, that score relatively low on this dimension, have higher tolerance for deviance from norms and want to limit the number of rules, Germans perceive regulations as a way to exercise more control over the future (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). Therefore, the participants' negative reaction to the protagonist's behavior in the violation condition might have resulted from them perceiving it as an infringement of the organizational rules.

3.2.2. Hierarchy

Despite there being no effect of age, the participants' endorsement of the WAYS subdimension affected distributive justice perceptions both independently and in interaction with the prescriptive stereotype condition. For overall justice, agreement with the hierarchy dimension was marginally statistically significant as a predictor of overall justice perceptions and there was no significant interaction effect with the protagonist's age and/or the prescriptive stereotype condition. Nevertheless, the *p*-value for the interaction effect was close to 0.1. Since the sample was quite small (N=106), it is possible that there could have been a (marginally) statistically significant interaction effect for both distributive and overall justice judgments with a larger sample, as a bigger sample size offers stronger evidence in opposition to the null hypothesis (Tintle et al., 2021). As was discussed in the section about cultural norms, Germany leans more towards flatter hierarchies (Hofstede Insights, n.d.). However, from the results of the current study it seems that individuals who agree with prescriptive age stereotypes related to Humility-Deference generally deem it more important that hierarchies in the workplace are respected. To better understand the impact of the endorsement of (age-related) hierarchical norms on organizational justice perceptions, further research targeting these topics is suggested. Theories that were not considered in this paper because they were not within the scope of prescriptive age stereotypes might deliver a better explanation for this finding.

3.2.3. Overall justice and distributive justice perceptions

While the study did not provide statistically significant evidence for the expected relationship between prescriptive age stereotypes about young employees and people's justice perceptions, this study still adds to the literature investigating the connection between overall and specific

justice judgments. The current study focused on overall justice in order to measure participants' holistic justice judgments. In addition, distributive justice was assessed to see whether the specific justice facet would allow for a better understanding of the participants' justice perceptions. Since the chosen scenario focused on aspects linked to distributive justice – i.e., the fairness of distribution of rewards (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006) – this specific justice facet was measured as it was expected to give relevant insights. In terms of results, the participants' overall justice perceptions were affected by the prescriptive stereotype condition in the scenario, but there was no significant interaction with the protagonist's age or the participants' endorsement of the WAYS dimension. In contrast, distributive justice perceptions were only related to the prescriptive stereotype condition when the participants showed a higher endorsement of the WAYS hierarchy dimension. This is an interesting finding: Given that overall justice describes general perceptions of fairness, and distributive justice is a specific justice facet concerned with decision outcomes (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Colquitt, 2001), one could intuitively expect more similarities between the participants' overall and distributive justice perceptions. Notwithstanding, based on the results, it might also be the case that the participants relied on other justice aspects to form their overall justice judgment.

Several scholars have looked into the relationship between overall justice and specific justice facets (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Nicklin et al., 2014). Initially, organizational justice research focused on distributive justice, whereas now, researchers have shown that there is more to justice than outcomes and have proposed a multidimensional model for organizational justice (Colquitt, 2001). Multiple studies found evidence for a full or partial mediation model with overall justice acting as a mediator between specific justice facets and various organizational outcomes (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Nicklin et al., 2014). Nicklin and colleagues (2014) highlighted that overall justice is an independent factor and also showed that it can be predicted from the specific justice facets rather than vice versa. Since the results of the current study were different for overall and distributive justice, this supports the assumption that aspects of procedural and/or interactional justice might have been more important for the participants of the current study to form their overall justice judgments. Therefore, similar studies in the future should consider to not only measure overall and distributive justice, but also include other specific justice facets. A meta-analysis by Cohen-Charash and Spector (2001) further supports this suggestion, as the authors state that outcome characteristics are not only linked to distributive justice, but often also related to procedural justice.

3.3. Implications and further research recommendations

Although the study did not allow for the confirmation of the hypothesized relationship between prescriptive age-related stereotypes against younger people and organizational justice perceptions, this does not imply that younger employees are not affected by negative effects of prescriptive stereotypes. Further research is needed to uncover what kind of prescriptions are endorsed by people of all ages within society in general, and the workplace in particular, and what impact they have on younger individuals' treatment, work perspectives, etc. In addition, the connection between prescriptive stereotypes and justice judgments should be further studied in order to understand how differential treatments within organizations might be justified based on age-based behavioral expectations. This means that future studies should consider all of WAYS' dimensions and develop various scenarios related to those different dimensions (for example, reactions to young employees displaying technical competence/incompetence).

The results from the current study suggest that the behavioral prescriptions for the employee in the scenario are not based on age, contrary to what was expected. Instead, these prescriptions seem to rather stem from cultural factors or personal beliefs about hierarchies within the workplace. Therefore, similar studies should be conducted with cross-cultural samples to account for influences of cultural differences. This will help to comprehend how culture might affect the endorsement and effects of specific prescriptive age-related stereotypes. Furthermore, when comparing different samples and taking into account personal values (which were excluded from the current analysis but will be considered as part of the project *Age@work*), a better understanding of general and age-based hierarchical beliefs can emerge.

Regarding organizational justice, the study complements findings from previous research by Ambrose and Schminke (2009) and Nicklin and colleagues (2014), which showed that there is an added value in considering overall justice as an additional measure, even when studying a specific justice outcome. It also highlighted that the role of overall justice and distinct justice facets is not always the same. For that reason, future research should explore the process of making general and specific justice judgments in different workplace situations as well as further examine the role of distinct justice facets for the development of overall justice perceptions.

3.4. Limitations

There are several limitations in the current study that might have affected the results. First and foremost, the small sample size is an important limitation, as it led to the study having limited

statistical power. It is possible that a larger sample size could have contributed to more statistically significant results. Additionally, most participants were younger or middle-aged, and a more balanced sample in terms of age might have yielded different findings. Secondly, the current study only considered two justice facets. Including other justice facets apart from overall and distributive justice could have allowed to further explore the relationship between prescriptive age-related stereotypes and organizational justice perceptions. Thirdly, even though most of the sample was of German nationality, there were some participants who were German speakers but had different backgrounds. They were not excluded for the purpose of not reducing the sample size even further, but for the exploration of cultural factors, a mono-cultural sample would have been ideal.

Conclusion

Ageism is a widespread problem that can affect people from all age groups (Mikton et al., 2021). Negative age-related stereotypes can lead to discrimination in the workplace and cause intergenerational tensions (Finkelstein et al., 2013; North & Fiske, 2015). Nevertheless, compared to racism and sexism, ageism remains an underresearched topic, especially age discrimination against younger individuals (North & Fiske, 2012). The current study aimed to contribute to the literature about prescriptive age-related stereotypes against younger workers and their impact on organizational justice perceptions, to show how ageist prescriptions might adversely affect work outcomes for younger employees. The guiding question of the paper was: How does the adherence to and violation of prescriptive age-related stereotypes towards younger workers affect people's justice perceptions regarding work outcomes for younger employees? Although the study's findings did not support the hypotheses that younger individuals would be judged more negatively for disrespecting hierarchies in the workplace, it delivered some interesting insights in regard to different justice facets and the potential impact of cultural values on organizational justice judgments. In addition, it is possible that future studies with larger samples or focusing on other age-related prescriptions or justice facets will find evidence of a negative effect of prescriptive age-related stereotypes on organizational justice perceptions.

In the current study, the participants seemed to be more concerned with the general disregard of rules, such that the age of the protagonist in the scenario became less relevant. Germans are known for emphasizing adherence to rules and regulations (Hofstede Insights, n.d.; Wallenburg et al., 2010), which might have been the main factor influencing the participants' organizational justice perceptions. Furthermore, the results highlighted the relevance of assessing both specific justice facets and overall justice judgments. More research is needed to better understand which prescriptive age-related stereotypes affect organizational justice perceptions and how cultural values impact this relationship. Finally, future studies should examine how specific and overall justice judgments are developed in different workplace scenarios. This will allow for a better comprehension of discrimination in the workplace, specifically related to age-based stereotypes, and hopefully lead to the development of strategies to reduce unjust ageist treatment at work.

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Appendix A

Scenario exercises

Adherence condition

Johannes ist ein 27-jähriger (57-jähriger) Angestellter in einem großen Unternehmen. Vor kurzem hatte Johannes ein Meeting mit seinem Vorgesetzten. In diesem Meeting hat der Vorgesetzte ihm eine neue Aufgabe zugewiesen und detailliert erklärt, wie er die Aufgabe gerne bearbeitet haben möchte. Johannes hörte den Anweisungen seines Vorgesetzten zu. Obwohl er glaubte, dass es einen besseren Weg gäbe, die neue Aufgabe zu bearbeiten, stellte Johannes die Anweisungen seines Vorgesetzten nicht in Frage und ging wie angewiesen vor. Das entspricht dem üblichen Verhalten von Johannes: Er hinterfragt die Anweisungen seiner Vorgesetzten nicht, sondern befolgt die Anweisungen von Leuten, die in der Hierarchie der Organisation über ihm stehen und stellt die übliche Vorgehensweise nicht in Frage.

Ein paar Wochen später erhielt Johannes seine Arbeitsleistungsbeurteilung und bekam eine schlechte Bewertung. Infolgedessen erhielt er seinen Jahresbonus nicht.

Violation condition

Johannes ist ein 27-jähriger (57-jähriger) Angestellter in einem großen Unternehmen. Vor kurzem hatte Johannes ein Meeting mit seinem Vorgesetzten. In diesem Meeting hat der Vorgesetzte ihm eine neue Aufgabe zugewiesen und detailliert erklärt, wie er die Aufgabe gerne bearbeitet haben möchte. Johannes hörte den Anweisungen seines Vorgesetzten zu. Er glaubte jedoch, dass es einen besseren Weg gäbe, die neue Aufgabe zu bearbeiten. Daher stellte Johannes die Anweisungen seines Vorgesetzten in Frage und ging nicht wie angewiesen vor. Das entspricht dem üblichen Verhalten von Johannes: Er hinterfragt häufig die Anweisungen seiner Vorgesetzten, befolgt nicht immer die Anweisungen von Leuten, die in der Hierarchie der Organisation über ihm stehen und stellt die übliche Vorgehensweise oft in Frage.

Ein paar Wochen später erhielt Johannes seine Arbeitsleistungsbeurteilung und bekam eine schlechte Bewertung. Infolgedessen erhielt er seinen Jahresbonus nicht.

Appendix B

WAYS: Humility-Deference prescription (German translation)

Jüngere Arbeitnehmer(innen) sollten die Anweisungen von Vorgesetzten nicht in Frage stellen

Jüngere Arbeitnehmer(innen) sollten die hierarchische Ordnung der Organisation nicht anfechten

Jüngere Arbeitnehmer(innen) sollten den Status Quo der Organisation nicht in Frage stellen

Jüngere Arbeitnehmer(innen) sollten nicht annehmen, dass sie alles darüber wüssten, wie sie ihren Job zu tun haben

Jüngere Arbeitnehmer(innen) sollten Fragen stellen, anstatt anzunehmen, dass sie alles wissen

Jüngere Arbeitnehmer(innen) sollten nicht denken, dass sie „zu gut“ dafür sind, niedere Aufgaben zu erledigen

Appendix C

Justice scales (German adaptations)

Overall justice items from the Perceived Overall Justice Scale (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009)

Wurde Johannes in der dargestellten Situation fair von seiner Organisation behandelt?

Konnte sich Johannes in dieser Situation darauf verlassen, dass seine Organisation fair zu ihm sein wird?

War Johannes' Behandlung in der Situation fair?

Distributive justice items from Colquitt's Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001)

Die Entlohnung, die Johannes erzielt hat, entspricht seinem Arbeitsaufwand

Johannes' Entlohnung war angemessen für die von ihm durchgeführte Arbeit

Johannes' Entlohnung spiegelt wider, was er zur Organisation beigetragen hat

Johannes' Entlohnung war unter Berücksichtigung seiner Leistung gerechtfertigt