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The youth of today: the effect of ageists prescriptive stereotypes on justice perceptions

Marta Nunes Marinha

Master's in Social and Organizational Psychology

Supervisor:
Doctor Miriam Rosa, Integrated Researcher, and Invited Auxiliary Professor
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Abstract

Ageism is recognized as a prominent negative attitude, but has been primarily focused on descriptive stereotypes of older people. Instead, we investigated prescriptive stereotypes (should-based expectations) towards younger workers. Adherence to a prescriptive stereotype is perceived positively, whereas violation is perceived negatively. It can also impact perceptions of justice, with members of discriminated groups reporting unfair treatment. The primary goal of this study was to examine the effect of workers violating or adhering to ageist prescriptive stereotypes on distributive justice perceptions. For this, participants (N= 357) read a scenario about a work situation in which the character was either a younger or older worker who either violated or adhered to a prescriptive stereotype. A negative outcome to the situation was also depicted in the scenario. The results showed no significant effect of either the character age (i.e., young, or old) or behaviour (i.e., adherence or violation) on distributive justice perceptions. Additional analyses revealed that the participants' own age was a moderator of the relation between character's behaviour and age on distributive justice perceptions. Younger participants considered the scenario as more unfair when the character was young and adhered to the stereotype, whereas older participants considered the scenario more unfair when the character was older and adhered to the stereotype. These findings expand on the literature of prescriptive stereotype and ingroup favouritism. Organizational policies (e.g., diversity training) that enable workers' knowledge regarding these cognitive biases and its consequences become important to combat ageism.

Keywords

Ageism; Stereotypes; Workplace; Distributive justice

APA Classification Codes

3020 Group & Interpersonal Processes

3040 Social Perception & Cognition

Resumo

O idadismo é uma atitude negativa proeminente, mas tem sido principalmente centrado nos estereótipos descritivos das pessoas mais velhas. Em vez disso, investigámos estereótipos prescritivos de jovens trabalhadores. Aderir a um estereótipo prescritivo é percebido positivamente, enquanto que violar é percebido negativamente. O idadismo pode também afetar perceções de justiça, com membros de grupos discriminados a denunciarem tratamento injusto. O principal objetivo deste estudo foi examinar o efeito de violar ou aderir a estereótipos prescritivos idadistas nas perceções de justiça distributiva. Para tal, os participantes (N= 357) leram um cenário em que o personagem era um trabalhador mais jovem ou mais velho que violava ou aderia a um estereótipo prescritivo e o resultado era sempre negativo. Não existiu qualquer efeito significativo quer da idade do personagem (jovem ou mais velho) quer do comportamento (adesão ou violação) nas perceções da justiça distributiva. Análises adicionais revelaram que a própria idade dos participantes moderou a relação entre o comportamento do personagem e a idade nas perceções de justiça distributiva. Os participantes mais jovens consideraram o cenário mais injusto quando a personagem era jovem e aderiu ao estereótipo, enquanto que os participantes mais velhos consideraram o cenário mais injusto quando a personagem era mais velha e aderiu ao estereótipo. Estas conclusões expandem a literatura sobre estereótipos prescritivos e favoritismo endogrupal. Políticas organizacionais (e.g., formação em diversidade) que permitam maior conhecimento sobre estereótipos prescritivos e as suas consequências tornam-se importantes para combater o idadismo.

Palavras-Chave

Idadismo; Estereótipos; Organizações; Justiça distributiva

Códigos de Classificação da APA

3020 Processos Grupais e Interpessoais

3040 Perceção Social e Cognição Social

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List of Acronyms

APA	American Psychological Association
FFMS	Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos
POJ	Perceived Overall Justice
WAYS	Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale

Introduction

Age is an intriguing topic to research because of its inclusive nature; as a social category, age operates on a continuum, which means that all people eventually join each group (North & Fiske, 2013b). Therefore, ageism - "age discrimination or age-ism, prejudice by one age group toward other age groups" (Butler, 1969, p. 243) - can harm individuals at any point in their lives.

Why should we be concerned with researching ageism? Ageism is gaining prominence and is recognized as one of the most common forms of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination (WHO, 2021). Age stereotyping can result in workplace age discrimination in areas such as hiring, training, reemployment, performance evaluation, and interpersonal treatment (Truxillo et al., 2015). Efforts have been made to combat age discrimination and protect workers. For example, the European Union has had a directive since 2000 - Council Directive 2000/78/EC – that aims to battle different types of discrimination, including age discrimination in the workplace. It states, for example, that workers are protected by law if they face age discrimination in hiring, promotion, and training situations, as well as mistreatment by co-workers (European Commission, 2000). Nonetheless, in many countries, younger workers in particular are not legally protected from discrimination (Truxillo et al., 2015).

Within a rapidly ageing population, young adults are increasingly becoming a minority whose life outcomes may be inferior to those of previous generations and their interests may be underrepresented (Francioli & North, 2021). Today's young adults are the first generation in modern history to be expected to perform worse financially than their parents (International labour organization, 2022). The economic and employment consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic have disproportionately affected young people, and the rate of recovery of youth labour markets in many countries is lagging when compared to the older workers' labour market. Additionally, in the labour force, young workers are twice as likely as adult workers to be impoverished, and they are also far more likely to be employed informally (International labour organization, 2022). Aside from the media's negative portrayal of the millennial generation, condescension in speech has been reported by young adults (Giles & Williams, 1994), implying that the behaviours aimed at this group may have negative real-world consequences for its members. Thus, with a greater number of barriers for younger workers in the workplace, studying ageism is more important than it has ever been.

In comparison to its main counterparts, racism and sexism, ageism remains relatively under-researched and overlooked as a prejudice (North & Fiske, 2012). Ageism is also often associated with young people expressing negative attitudes towards the old. Thus, most of the literature on this topic

focuses on ageist perceptions/behaviour that younger people have against older people, therefore only including younger individuals to serve as a comparison group (e.g., North & Fiske, 2013a; North & Fiske, 2013b). However, studies show that young people also face significant discrimination and stereotypes (e.g., Protzko & Schooler, 2019; Raymer et al 2017), prompting more research and actions concerning ageism toward younger individuals. Taking all of this into account now is an especially good time to fill this gap in the literature.

In Portugal, particularly, literature on ageism regarding young individuals is still very scarce. Due to this, Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos (FFMS) has funded a project – Age@Work - with the objective of better understanding this phenomenon within the Portuguese population. The current study is associated with this project and aims to examine the effects of ageist stereotypes on justice perceptions within the workplace setting, focusing on Portuguese younger workers.

The present thesis is organized in four chapters. The first chapter will focus on the relevant literature on the main topics and variables of the study and the proposed hypotheses. The second chapter will describe the sample's characterization, as well as the methodology used to measure the variables and collect data. The third chapter will present the main results of the study and additional analyses conducted to further understand the data. Finally, the fourth chapter will discuss the results and present final considerations and theoretical and practical implications, highlighting potential limitations of the study as well as suggestions for future research on this topic.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

The categorization of people into groups is very common, being considered an automatic and overall adaptive behaviour (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). It is a natural process that occurs spontaneously in our everyday perception, and it has advantages such as reducing cognitive demands (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005; Trepte & Loy, 2017). Upon first contact with someone, we categorize them based on three primary dimensions in social perception: age, race, and gender (Nelson, 2015).

According to the social identity theory, people form two main identities - individual identity and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Personal identity is how people define themselves as individuals in their distinct ways. People's self-perception based on their memberships in social groups is referred to as social identities, as they attach emotional significance to these memberships (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Leaper, 2011). The group with whom we shared similar characteristics or experiences is considered the ingroup. In opposition, there is an outgroup, which are members of groups outside of ours (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). When social and individual identities are compared, it appears that social identities have a greater influence on behaviour than personal identities, implying that social identities have a powerful influence on social thought and behaviour (Leaper, 2011).

Social identity theory suggests that a person's social identity influences their attitudes and behaviours toward both their ingroup and the outgroup. This means that when people regard membership in a particular group as central to their self-concept and have strong emotional ties to the group, their social identities are more influential (Leaper, 2011; Spears, 2021). When people share a social identity, they also share similar feelings, attitudes, perceptions, and values (i.e., shared reality; Hogg & Rinella, 2018). Furthermore, when social identity is prominent, social comparisons, group stereotyping, and prejudice are more likely to occur (Bigler & Liben, 2006; Correia, 2010). This arises as a result of intergroup bias, which occurs as a by-product of social identity in that we tend to positively evaluate our ingroup while negatively evaluating our outgroup (Leaper, 2011). Furthermore, individuals are motivated to gain positive distinctiveness for their ingroups by favourably comparing them to other groups (Abrams, 2011). As a result, they may be less likely to identify with groups to which low social value is assigned. The degree to which people identify with their group reveals something about their perception of that group's societal standing (Abrams, 2011).

Consistent with this notion, evidence suggests that people have a strong ingroup bias, and a tendency to favour their group over outgroups (e.g., Brewer & Kramer, 1985). Taking this into account,

people frequently make sense of others by categorizing them, and as a result, people's impressions of others can be frequently based on stereotypes and prejudices about social groups (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). This implies that this cognitive process of social categorizing can lead to miscategorizing someone, leading to negative consequences (Nelson, 2015).

1.1. Ageism

Age, like gender and ethnicity, is a primary perceptual cue used by people to categorize one another. People tend to make implicit inferences about people's abilities, competencies, and skills when they categorize one another into broad categories such as "young" and "old" (Abrams, 2011).

Ageism refers to the thoughts (stereotypes), feelings (prejudice) and behaviours (discrimination) that we have with others based on their age (Abrams, 2011; WHO, 2021). It reflects the categorization of people in groups based on their age and like other forms of discrimination, is considered as a bias in the treatment of outgroup members by ingroup members (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). It can be directed at others or oneself, it can be positive or negative and it can manifest both explicitly and implicitly (e.g., Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017; Baumeister et al., 2001; Iversen et al., 2009; Malinen & Johnston, 2013). In addition, ageism can operate without conscious awareness or malice, which highlights its pernicious facet (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007; Levy & Banaji, 2002).

A systematic review by Marques et al. (2020), identified a total of 14 determinants associated with ageism against older people that can be organized into three levels: intrapersonal (e.g., ageing anxiety and fear of death) interpersonal/intergroup (e.g., quality of contact with older people) and institutional levels (e.g., economic resources). Most determinants were other-directed ageism (i.e., directed at others), and only one on self-directed ageism (i.e., directed at oneself) (Marques et al., 2020), entailing that ageism toward older people is heavily influenced by how others perceive them. Regarding ageism towards younger people, also known as youngism, some researchers believe there is a more generational component at the root of this type of ageism, that is, people attribute negative characteristics to today's youth that they believe did not exist in previous generations at the same age (Francioli & North, 2021; Raymer et al., 2017). In a study of this phenomenon, Protzko and Schooler (2019) found that someone from a previous generation who excelled in a domain (e.g., intelligence, reading) was more likely to incorrectly assume that all members of their generation excelled in that domain when they were young, and did it better than the current youth, creating the illusion of a generational decline. In line with this, Francioli and North (2021) found that older participants reported colder feelings toward people that are currently in their twenties than towards people of previous generations in their twenties. To summarize, people whinge about "old people" in general

when it comes to ageism towards older individuals, but they whinge about "kids these days" when it comes to youngism (Francioli & North, 2021).

Individuals' behaviour, organizational regulations, and cultural values, all encompass elements of ageism (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2018). Since ageism is presently one of the most common forms of prejudice experienced in the workplace, and it is considered more pervasive than sexism and racism because it is more insidious and institutionalized (e.g., Abrams et al., 2009; Nelson, 2005), the organizational scenery has been a focus of this type of research. Although most research on ageism has focused on ageist beliefs about older workers (Finkelstein, et al., 2015), young workers, contrary to popular belief, face age discrimination at rates comparable to, if not higher than, those reported by older workers, particularly during the hiring process, promotions, and layoffs (Snape & Redman, 2003).

We live in a time when age diversity in the workplace and teams is on the rise (Paleari et al., 2019). This means that generations with extremely different backgrounds need to interact in the workplace more often than before (Nelson, 2005). Considering social categorizing and workplace diversity, research suggests that differences between individuals may lead to subgroupings within a team that separate members of groups people belong to (i.e., ingroups) from members of - often dissimilar – other (i.e., outgroups; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). People typically prefer working with their respective ingroups, are more willing to cooperate with their respective ingroups, and trust their respective ingroups more than with their outgroup (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). This way, team diversity regarding age, that is, having older and younger workers together, does not guarantee that they will have positive interactions with one another. In actuality, this may represent intergenerational tensions (North & Fiske, 2015b), where relational frictions between colleagues of different ages, exacerbated by ageist attitudes, weaken identification with multi-age teams and organizations (Paleari et al., 2019). Age-based stereotyping is more likely to be activated and prevalent in age-diverse teams and workplaces (Jungmann et al., 2020), and age-based stereotyping can also help explain these intergenerational tensions (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007). Stereotypes can set the stage for ageist discrimination in the workplace, which can manifest as job termination, refusal to hire, lower pay, and denial of promotions or training (Warr, 1994).

All of this results in unfair treatment and decision-making in the workplace (Raymer et al., 2017), leading to negative employee outcomes. For example, workers who are the target of age discrimination experience decreased job satisfaction, organizational commitment and engagement, work involvement, less support and respect from colleagues, less psychological well-being, and more job insecurity and anxiety (e.g., Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Orpen, 1995; Paleari et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2013). In addition, age-based discrimination can negatively affect employee attitudes and

motivations (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). The negative consequences associated with ageist bias highlight the importance of understanding this type of attitudes and behaviour in the workplace.

1.1.1. Ageist Stereotypes

As previously stated, stereotypes are one way to express ageism and can lead to age discrimination. Defining a stereotype can be difficult because there are numerous ways to describe it. According to Nelson, "Stereotypes represent the traits that we view as characteristic of social groups, or of individual members of those groups, and particularly those that differentiate groups from each other." (2015, p. 4). Due to stereotypes, people develop certain expectations about others' behaviour and feel, think, and behave toward them accordingly to those stereotypes. Therefore, stereotypes are likely to influence judgments and behaviours towards members of other social identity groups (Finkelstein et al., 2013).

A generalization about a category or group of people can in principle be either good or bad (Baumeister et al., 2001), but because stereotyping is an emotional reaction to the cognitive process of categorizing, it can be a source of ageist prejudice (Abrams, 2011). So, although stereotypes can be favourable, the majority of them display negative and pejorative connotations and are inaccurate or distorted opinions of others (Baumeister et al., 2001; Fiske & Neuberg, 1990; Francioli & North, 2021). As a result of this, conducts toward stereotyped groups and individuals are skewed and frequently incorrect and problematic perceptions of others (Nelson, 2015). Furthermore, negative stereotypes form faster and are more resistant to disconfirming than positive stereotypes (Baumeister et al., 2001).

As above-mentioned, the majority of ageism research focuses on older people (e.g., North & Fiske, 2013a; North & Fiske, 2013b). However, more research on ageism, particularly, ageist stereotypes toward younger people is being conducted (Finkelstein et al., 2013; Francioli & North, 2021). Concerning general societal stereotypes of older people, they are regarded as frail, ill, inactive, dependent, forgetful, old-fashioned, and incompetent (Raymer et al., 2017; Swift et al., 2018). On the plus side, they are regarded as experienced, wise, and more moral than younger adults (Abrams et al. 2011a). Regarding younger individuals, in a recent study, Francioli and North (2021) reported some ageist perceptions towards younger adults, which were of both positive and negative nature. On the one hand, perceptions of young adults included good cognitive skills (i.e., intelligence) and energy (i.e., ambition), adaptability and technologically knowledgeable. On the other hand, the negative stereotypes described young adults as naïve, disrespectful, radically progressive, rebellious, and overly reliant on previous generations (i.e., being coddled; Francioli & North, 2021).

In the workplace, people frequently hold age stereotypes, and age stereotypes have been shown to influence the outcomes of motivation, satisfaction, performance, social interactions and employment-related decisions (Kite & Wagner, 2002; Kleissner & Jahn, 2020). For example, when older workers hold ageist stereotypes, they are more likely to relegate younger employees to minor projects or routinely office tasks rather than devoting time to mentoring younger co-workers (Raymer, et al. 2017).

It is important to note that there is no concrete agreement among researchers as to what constitutes an older worker or a younger worker. For the purpose of this study and to contextualize these groups, we followed the parameters of 18–30 years old for younger workers, 31–50 years old for middle-aged workers, and > 51 for older workers (Finkelstein et al., 2013). In general, there appears to be social awareness that negative stereotypes about older workers are incorrect and inappropriate, while negative stereotypes about younger workers (often referred to as millennials) appear to be more acceptable, making them more dangerous and prevalent (Truxillo et al., 2015).

Older workers are seen as less comfortable with technology, less flexible, more cautious on the job, slow, narrow-minded, and out of touch (Finkelstein et al., 2013; McCann & Keaton, 2013). A literature review by Posthuma and Campion (2009) identified various negative stereotypes about older workers, such as poor performers, resistance to change, inability to learn, and being more costly than younger workers. They were also perceived as having less mental/physical ability, being uninterested in training, and being less productive, motivated, adaptable, and innovative (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Despite this, positive stereotypes about older workers are also common, such as being more dependable, stable, trustworthy, loyal, committed to the job and less likely to miss work or turnover quickly (McCann & Keaton, 2013; Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Additionally, they are perceived to be knowledgeable, mature, hardworking, responsible, patient, organized and intelligent (Finkelstein et al., 2013)

Similarly, to general stereotypes, there's less research concentrated on stereotypes regarding younger workers (Deal et al., 2010). Finkelstein et al. (2013) identified a mix of negative and positive stereotypes about young workers. Younger workers were regarded as inexperienced, lazy, immature, unreliable, irresponsible, selfish, uncommitted, arrogant, and not punctual. In terms of positive stereotypes, they were perceived to be extroverts, enthusiastic, ambitious, hardworking, and technologically savvy (Finkelstein et al., 2013). Additionally, when compared to older workers, younger workers are seen as more work-motivated and capable of quick learning (Bertolino et al., 2013).

Stereotypes can be classified into three types: descriptive, prescriptive, and metastereotypes. Descriptive stereotypes, the ones previously described and the most common form, concentrates on

the traits we attribute to others (e.g., young people being perceived as ambitious) and metastereotypes are the expectation that the ingroup believes the outgroup holds about their group (e.g., young people believe that middle-aged people see them as entitled; Finkelstein et al., 2013). Lastly, prescriptive stereotypes refer to the expectations we place on others about characteristics they should have, and how they should act (North & Fiske, 2013a). Prescriptive stereotypes can have a controlling nature by attempting to impose their will on the behaviour of other groups to benefit ingroup outcomes (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman & Gick, 2001). Therefore, prescriptive stereotypes, as opposed to simple social expectations, usually involve one group disproportionately targeting another to promote some level of social control (North & Fiske, 2013a). Studies on prescriptive stereotypes are still scarce in the literature and focus mostly on older individuals. According to North and Fiske (2013b), prescriptive stereotypes about older individuals can be organised into three main forms: succession, consumption, and identity. Succession refers to the expectations placed on older people to relinquish desirable resources and societal positions (e.g., retirement, which creates jobs for the young). Consumption is concerned with the passive depletion of currently shared resources, where there should be a fair share of societal resources and older individuals should not use them up before others get a chance to take advantage as well (e.g., health care money). Finally, identity encompasses resources more symbolic than the previous one, where it is expected of older individuals to not engage in activities that are typical of the youth (e.g., frequenting youth hangouts or trying to appear "cool"; North and Fiske, 2013b).

Prescriptive stereotypes against younger individuals or workers are still relatively unresearched and it should be noted that many researchers have mentioned the relevance of examining prescriptive stereotypes in-depth, not only in general but also in specific settings such as the workplace (e.g., Gill, 2004; Truxillo et al., 2015). As a result, Schmitz et al. (2021) developed and validated a scale for prescriptive stereotypes about younger workers: Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale (WAYS). According to this scale, there are eight prescriptive stereotypes:

1. Accept and respect the hierarchy: reflecting how younger workers should not question directions from superiors, challenge the organization's hierarchical order and question the organizational status quo.
2. Recognize inexperience and accept menial tasks: younger employees should not assume that they know everything about how to do their job and that they are too good to do menial tasks.
3. Prove their organizational belonging: younger workers should demonstrate that they can be trusted to follow rules, make efforts to be socialized into the organization, and strive to fit in the organization.

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4. Loyalty towards the organization: younger workers should display loyalty towards the organization, and long-term support for their organization and should not view their job as merely stepping stones to other opportunities.

5. Technological competence: younger workers should know how to use new technologies, be good with the latest technologies and learn new technologies quickly and easily.

6. Dynamic work attitude: younger workers should recover quickly from periods of intense work, have stamina, not tire easily and be able to execute tasks more quickly than older workers.

7. Creativity: emphasizing how younger workers should be creative and bring new perspectives, be inventive and open to new things and ideas.

8. Taking an active role: younger workers should actively look for ways to improve, find ways to overcome obstacles, show and take initiative and seek and ask for training.

These stereotypes are structured in three second-order factors, those being humility-deference (that includes accepting and respecting hierarchy, acknowledging inexperience, and accepting menial tasks), loyalty-belonging (which includes proving to belong in the organisation and loyalty towards the organisation) and finally vitality-innovation (includes technological competence, dynamic work attitude, creativity, and taking an active role; Schmitz et al., 2021).

In the first test of prescriptive stereotypes applied to ageism, North and Fiske (2013a) examined how the violation or adherence to prescriptive age stereotypes for older people (succession, consumption, and identity) was perceived by others in terms of warmth and competence. Vignettes were shown in which the targets either violated or adhered to stereotypes concerning older people. It was expected that older individuals who violated the prescriptive stereotypes would be punished (i.e., lower rating in warmth and competence) while those who adhered to prescriptive stereotypes would be rewarded (i.e., higher rating in warmth and competence). The results precisely showed that: when targets adhered to the stereotype, they were perceived better than the ones that violated the stereotype. Given this, it appears that with prescriptive stereotypes, a violation is more likely to be labelled as negative and adherence as positive. In addition, their vignettes manipulated their target age (with three levels: younger, middle age and older target). Because the stereotypes described were specific to older people, it was expected and supported by their findings, that older targets experienced the most extreme reactions when compared to other aged targets who behave similarly (North & Fiske, 2013a).

The current study will be based on the premise that adherence to and violation of prescriptive stereotypes leads to different perceptions, but the focus will be solely on ageism against younger people in the workplace. For this study purpose, only one prescriptive stereotype will be analysed:

acceptance and respect for the hierarchy. This choice was made due to its consensual nature assessed in the development of the WAYS (Schmitz et al., 2021) that is, younger people expected themselves to be at the bottom of the hierarchy, while older people expected themselves to be at the top.

1.2.   Organizational Justice

When it comes to the organizational setting, decision-makers such as managers are subjected to making constant decisions. These decisions can include hiring people, dealing with salaries, making promotions, and so on. All of these decisions have both economic and socioemotional consequences (Cropanzano et al., 2001). As a result, they are important for employees, causing them to evaluate the decision-making processes they encounter critically. When confronted with these decisions, a very common perception emerges – fairness (Colquitt, 2011). Employees are motivated at work when they believe they are treated fairly (Cojuharenco et al., 2011), thus this construct is critical for organizations.

Organizational justice refers to people's perceptions of justice within organizations (Colquitt et al., 2005). Individuals require guidelines or standards to make judgements about what is fair or unfair treatment of others. People must be able to evaluate results, procedures, and interpersonal behaviour to behave fairly (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2015). Thus, the literature emphasizes three main dimensions of organizational justice: distributive, procedural, and interpersonal (Cropanzano & Ambrose, 2015) and more recently the construct of overall justice is also relevant (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). People's perceptions of the fairness of outcomes distribution such as compensation and benefits are referred to as distributive justice. The perceived fairness of the decision-making procedures that lead to those outcomes is referred to as procedural justice. And the nature of the interpersonal treatment received from others is central to interpersonal justice (Colquitt et al., 2005). Finally, overall justice denotes a global assessment of the fairness of an entity, resulting in a more holistic judgment based on the individual's experiences (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Greenberg, 2001). The distributive justice pillars are well received and understood by decision-makers and those affected by these decisions (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006).

Any social system is marked by the existence of resource distribution mechanisms that have a certain value for communities, and organizations are no exception. Distributive justice, like others, has as its initial presupposition the tendency of individuals/groups to compare themselves with third parties (Tyler et al., 1997). As previously stated, several variables or decisions (e.g., rewards, salaries, hiring process, etc.) within organizations are targets of comparison by the individuals involved. Thus, distributive justice is concerned with the perception of the justice of resource distribution, or the outcome of resource distribution, whether positive or negative (Törnblom, 1992 cited in Correia,

2010). Following the emergence of this type of justice, Adams (1965) developed the theory of equity (*cit in* Correia, 2010). This follows the principle of merit, which states there must be a balance in the ratio between inputs and outcomes. Inputs refer to personal contributions that are involved in an exchange with another individual, group, or third entity. The outcome corresponds to the positive (benefits) or negative (costs) consequences that come from an input. Iniquity is felt when, compared to the other, there is a marked discrepancy between outcomes and contribution ratios (Correia, 2010). However, if there is proportionality in the ratios the distribution is seen as fair.

In general, research on distributive justice has revealed that the equity principle is preferred by both decision-makers and those affected by these decisions (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). Furthermore, studies show that when it comes to workplace fairness or unfairness, employees are more likely to focus on distributive justice (Cojuharenco & Patient, 2013). Layoffs and dismissal from jobs or training, promotion, hiring, pay raises, and other workplace benefits are frequently mentioned in age discrimination literature as areas commonly affected by it (e.g., Abrams et al., 2016; Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Snape & Redman, 2003; Stypinska & Turek, 2017; Zaniboni et al., 2019). These areas require decisions involving the distribution of organizational resources (e.g., money), benefits (e.g., promotions), or even disadvantages (e.g., job dismissal); thus, distributive justice is not only prevalent in organizations, but it is also greatly mentioned in age discrimination literature. Due to all of this, this type of justice will be the focus of this study.

According to research, decision-makers may consider group membership (e.g., age) when making decisions, which means that factors with no direct relationship to work performance have an influence, opening the door to biased decision-making or outcome distribution (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). As previously stated, when social identity is prominent, social comparisons, group stereotyping, and prejudice are more likely to occur, according to the social identity theory (Bigler & Liben, 2006; Correia, 2010). Decisionmakers can be influenced by stereotypes about other groups, particularly their outgroup, and base their decisions on them (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). When decision-makers have negative stereotypes about an outgroup to which an individual belongs, they are more likely to expect poor performance and make negative attributions for the observed behaviours (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). Given this, workplace discrimination can emerge, with favouritism toward the ingroup and a lack of equal favouritism toward outgroups (Brewer, 1999). When making equitable decisions in terms of distributive justice, decision-makers then consider that ingroup members have better contributions, therefore are more deserving of positive outcomes than outgroup members (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006; Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). Therefore, a violation of the principle of equity occurs because the contributions are not being judged fairly but based on group membership biases. This leads decision-makers to distributive outcomes in the workplace based

on stereotypes and discrimination against the outgroup (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). In these cases, people belonging to the discriminated group may perceive organizational policies or decisions as unfair (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006). In this manner, perceptions of justice can be skewed and affected by stereotypes and discrimination, which can lead to unfair treatment of individuals where factors unrelated to context harm them (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005).

In sum, it can be argued that the objective of the current study is to examine the effects of a worker's age and violation or adherence to prescriptive stereotypes on distributive justice perceptions. We note that when it comes to distributive justice the outcome of distributions can either be positive (benefits) or negative (costs), for this study, only a negative outcome will be analysed. Considering this, we hypothesize that, within a distributive justice paradigm, the outcome for prescriptive stereotype violation will be perceived more fairly than adherence (H1). Additionally, the outcome for younger targets will be perceived more fairly than for older targets (H2). Finally, an interaction between age and stereotype behaviour is expected, where the outcome for violation will be perceived even more fairly when the target is young (H3).

Methods

2.1. Participants and Design

Convenience sampling, a non-probabilistic sampling technique, was used for sample collection because it occurred based on the accessibility and availability of the individuals. The questionnaire was shared on social platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram), between July 20th and September 3rd, 2022. As inclusion criteria, it was defined that the participants should be older than 18 years and be workers. In total, 637 accesses to the survey link occurred, but 280 individuals were excluded because they early dropped the questionnaire and/or did not meet the inclusion criteria. Thus, the final sample consisted of 357 participants, with an age range of 18 to 67 years (M = 41, SD = 10.84), where 292 were women (81.8%). Participants were mainly Portuguese, with just one participant being Brazilian. The working set of the participants was diverse, ranging from IT, education, public and private sector, health sector, and psychology to law.

The experimental conditions were randomly distributed by the participants, having a factorial design of 2 (age of the target in the scenario: old or young) X 2 (target behaviour: stereotype adherence or stereotype violation), where both variables followed a between-subjects design.

2.2. Procedure

The questionnaire was created and administered online using Qualtrics (Provo, UT) software. The above-mentioned questionnaire was preceded by an informed consent form, in which participants were informed of the general objectives and duration of the study, confidentiality, and anonymity of their responses, ensuring their voluntary participation and the right to withdraw at any time, in this case, without any consequences of their refusal or exit. As a result, after agreeing to the terms of the study, participants began.

Participants were first informed that they would be required to complete two scales. The first scale presented was the Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale (Schmitz et al., 2021), followed by a shortened version of Schwartz's Value Survey (Lindeman & Verkasalo, 2005). After the completion of the two scales, participants were informed that they would read a scenario and then answer questions about it. These scales were first considered potential moderators; therefore, they were presented before the manipulation (i.e., scenario).

Moving forward, participants would be randomly assigned to conditions in a scenario where the age and behaviour of the target were manipulated. The scenario described a fictional worker in a common organizational situation. In this case, João, our target, was categorised as either a 27 or a 57-year-old worker. Some additional neutral background information was depicted followed by the description of the work setting – João is assigned a task by his supervisor and given instructions on how preferably it should be completed it. This is followed by the second manipulation, using the same scenario, in which the character either violates or adheres to a hierarchy stereotype. The description for the manipulation was based on the WAYS statements related to the hierarchy prescriptive stereotype.

In the violation condition, the target not only questioned their supervisor's instructions but also refused to follow them. This behaviour was described as habitual since João frequently questioned his superiors' instructions and how things are usually executed within the organisation and did not follow orders from his superiors (see appendix A). In the adherence condition, the protagonist did not question their supervisor's orders and followed them. Like before, this behaviour was described as habitual, because João did not question his superiors' instructions and how things are usually carried out within the organisation and followed orders from his superior (see appendix B). Finally, a negative work outcome (i.e., the decision to not give an annual bonus) was presented in every condition. The outcome was negative because it was deemed more realistic to have a scenario where the target does what is expected and still does not get an annual bonus, rather than the target doing what is not expected and getting an annual bonus and thus being rewarded for it. Participants could read the scenario for as long as they wanted.

After reading the scenario, participants were presented with the Overall Justice Scale (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009) and Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001), and asked to express their opinion regarding the scenario they had read. Following the completion of the justice-related items, socio-demographic data such as age, gender, nationality, work activity/sector, and length of employment were requested. Finally, the manipulation check questions and additional questions regarding variables of interest for the Age@Work project were presented. After concluding the questionnaire, participants were informed about the objectives of the study and thanked for their participation.

2.3. Measures

2.3.1. Justice Measures

Although the initial focus of this work was to address distributive justice, two types of justice were measured: overall and distributive justice. For overall justice, three items that assess individuals'

personal justice experiences were adapted from Ambrose and Schminke's (2009) Perceived Overall Justice (POJ) scale. The original items are in first person, but due to the nature of the study, they were converted to third person view, such as "Overall, João was treated fairly by the organization", "In general, João can count on the organization to be fair" and "In general, the treatment João receive was fair". For distributed justice, four items from Colquitt's (2001) Organizational Justice Scale were used. As before, the items were converted to a third-person view, for example, "Does João's outcome reflect the effort they have put into their work?" and "Does João's outcome reflect what they have contributed to the organization?" (see appendix C for full items). Both scales used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).

These two scales were not validated for the Portuguese population; therefore, both underwent a translation and back-translation process. Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) for overall justice items were .88 and for distributive justice were .89. Both values indicated that these scales and their items were very reliable (Kline, 2011).

To determine whether both justice scales could be combined into a single scale, an exploratory factor analysis with a varimax rotation was used. This analysis suggested two factors, one of which precisely encompassed the items for the overall justice scale, (explaining 43.19% of variance) and the other of which encompassed the items for the distributive justice scale (explaining 35.40% of variance). Thus, these scales were not combined but rather treated separately.

2.3.2. Manipulation Checks

The specific objectives of the study were not made clear to the participants until the debriefing. A manipulation check was required to ensure that they paid attention and recalled the information provided in the study, most notably target age and behaviour. Thus, for the target behaviour manipulation check, a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (small extent) to 6 (great extent) was used, where participants were asked about the target's behaviour "To what extent did João follow the supervisor's instructions?". Then, for the age manipulation check, a subjective assessment of João's age was used, where participants were required to classify João as either a young, middle-aged or older worker.

2.3.3. Additional Measures Not Used

As previously stated, some questions and scales were presented in this study because they were relevant to the Age@Work project. However, in the end, they were not analysed in this study.

Firstly, the current study had the intention of being culturally sensitive. For that purpose, we included Schwartz's Value Survey, a measure that would allow us to make country-level comparisons.

When constructing the questions in Qualtrics we tried to be as faithful to the original written version as possible. However, after analysing the responses it was determined that the scale was not as clear for the participants as we had hoped, so the data was not used.

A short version of the Workplace Ambivalent Youngism Scale (WAYS) was also used to assess how much participants agreed with prescriptive stereotypes about young workers, with each item rated on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 strongly agree (Schmitz et al., 2021). Reliability (Cronbach's alpha) for the WAYS items was .89 which indicated that this scale and its items were very reliable (Kline, 2011). This scale was presented as a potential moderator, but was not used for this study.

Finally, some additional questions were presented where participants were first asked to indicate the target's age. Subsequently, while evaluating the targets' behaviour based on their age, they were asked to express their opinions on three fronts "How surprising is João behaviour at work, given his age?", "How typical is João's behaviour at work, given his age?" and "How expectable is João's behaviour at work, given his age?". A 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all) to 4 (very) was used for these. Lastly, participants were asked to classify themselves as either a young, middle age or older worker.

CHAPTER 3

Results

3.1. Manipulation Check

An ANOVA 2x2 (target age x target behaviour) between subjects was used for the manipulation checks.

For the age manipulation check, only a main effect of the target age condition was expected. The analysis revealed that the main effect of the target's age was statically significant, $F(1, 352) = 149.88$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .30$: in the young condition the target was significantly perceived as younger ($M = 1.32$, $SD = 0.66$) than in the old condition ($M = 2.20$, $SD = 0.71$). However, there was also an unexpected main effect of the target behaviour, this was considerably lower in magnitude but also statistically significant, $F(1, 352) = 10.40$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .030$: in the adherence condition the target was perceived as older ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.84$) than in the violation condition ($M = 1.64$, $SD = 0.77$). The interaction between the effects of the target behaviour and target age was not statistically significant, $F(1,352) = 0.002$, $p = .97$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. In sum, the manipulation check was partially successful.

Considering the target behaviour manipulation check, only a main effect of the target behaviour condition was expected. The target's behaviour had a statistically significant main effect $F(1, 353) = 1471.50$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .81$: in the adherence condition the target was significantly more perceived as adhering ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 0.92$) than the target in the violation condition ($M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.93$). There was no main effect of the target age, $F(1, 353) = 0.01$, $p = .91$, $\eta^2_p = .00$, or an interaction between target behaviour and target age, $F(1,353) = 0.43$, $p = .51$, $\eta^2_p = .001$. In conclusion, the target behaviour manipulation was successful.

3.2. Hypotheses' Testing

As mentioned in previous sections, we hypothesized that within a distributive justice framework, the negative outcome would be perceived more fairly when the target violates the prescriptive stereotype than when it adherences to it (H1); the outcome for younger targets would be perceived more fairly than for older targets (H2); an interaction between age and stereotype behaviour was expected, where the outcome for violation would be perceived even more fairly when the target is young (H3). To test our hypotheses an ANOVA 2x2 (target age x target behaviour) was used.

The analysis revealed no statically significant main effect of target behaviour on distributive justice, $F(1, 353) = 0.77$, $p = .38$, $\eta^2_p = .002$. The main effect of the target age had no statistically significant effect on distributive justice as well, $F(1, 353) = 0.45$, $p = .83$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. At last, the interaction

between the effects of the target behaviour and target age on distributive justice was not statistically significant, $F(1,353) = 0.37$, $p = .54$, $\eta^2_p = .001$. This way, no hypotheses were supported.

Because the study measured two justice constructs and there were no statistically significant effects on distributive justice, overall justice was also examined. The analysis revealed a statically significant main effect of target behaviour on overall justice, $F(1, 353) = 40.43$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .10$, where participants perceived the decision to be fairer in the stereotype violation condition ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 0.94$) than the adherence condition ($M = 2.33$, $SD = 1.08$). In this manner, within an overall justice paradigm, our first hypothesis (i.e., the outcome for prescriptive stereotype violation will be perceived more fairly than adherence) was supported. The main effect of the target age had no statistically significant effect on overall justice, $F(1, 353) = 0.003$, $p = .96$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. Finally, the interaction between the effects of the target behaviour and target age on overall justice was not statistically significant as well, $F(1,353) = 0.01$, $p = .93$, $\eta^2_p = .00$. Considering this, the remaining hypotheses were found to be unsupported.

3.3.   Additional Analyses

In our manipulation check for age, the analyses reflected a main effect of both target age and target behaviour. Due to the additional main effect of the latter on the age manipulation, further analyses were conducted, focusing on the participants' age. For this purpose, model 3 from Andrew Hayes' PROCESS macro, which corresponds to a three-way interaction, was used to analyse the data (Hayes, 2018). As recommended by the author when more than one dichotomous variable is used, both target age and target behaviour conditions were contrasted coded into two categories, with -1.00 referring to the young target and +1.00 referring to the old target, and -1.00 referring to violation and + 1.00 referring to adherence respectively.

For the distributive justice variable, the model explained 7% ($R^2 = .07$) of the variation and was significant, $F(7, 349) = 3.53$, $p = .001$. The age of the participants was positively related to distributive justice, $B = 0.01$, $t(355) = 2.94$, $p = .004$, where the older the participants the more they thought the decision was fair. The two-way interaction between the effects of target age and participant age significantly affected the perception of distributive justice, $B = -0.01$, $t(354) = -2.46$, $p = .015$. Moreover, the three-way interaction between target age, participant age, and target behaviour significantly affected the perception of distributive justice, $B = -0.01$, $t(353) = -3.04$, $p = .003$. The remaining effects were not significant ($p_s > .24$). The three-way interaction explained an additional 2% ($R^2_{change} = .02$) of the variance and it was significant, $F_{change}(1, 349) = 9.27$, $p = .003$. More precisely, the conditional effects of target age and target behaviour interaction at different levels of participants' age revealed that when the age of the participants is lower (-1 SD), there was a positive and significant

effect, $F(1, 349) = 4.17$, $B = 0.16$, $p = .04$. This interaction was also negative and significant when the age of the participants was higher (+1 SD), however, it was less intense, $F(1, 349) = 5.77$, $B = - 0.18$, $p = .02$.

Furthermore, the effect of target behaviour on distributive justice was conditional to a younger target and younger participants of our sample (− 1 SD) with this effect being negative and significant, $B = - 0.25$, $t(353) = - 2.22$, $p = .03$, where younger participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was young and adhered the stereotype than with the other constellations (older target who adhered to the stereotype, or younger target who violated the stereotype). The abovementioned effect was also conditional to an older target and older participants of our sample (+1 SD), with this effect being also negative and significant, $B = - 0.22$, $t(353) = - 2.04$, $p = .04$. In this case, older participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was old and adhered the stereotype than with the other constellations (younger target who adhered to the stereotype, or older target who violated the stereotype; Figure 3.1).
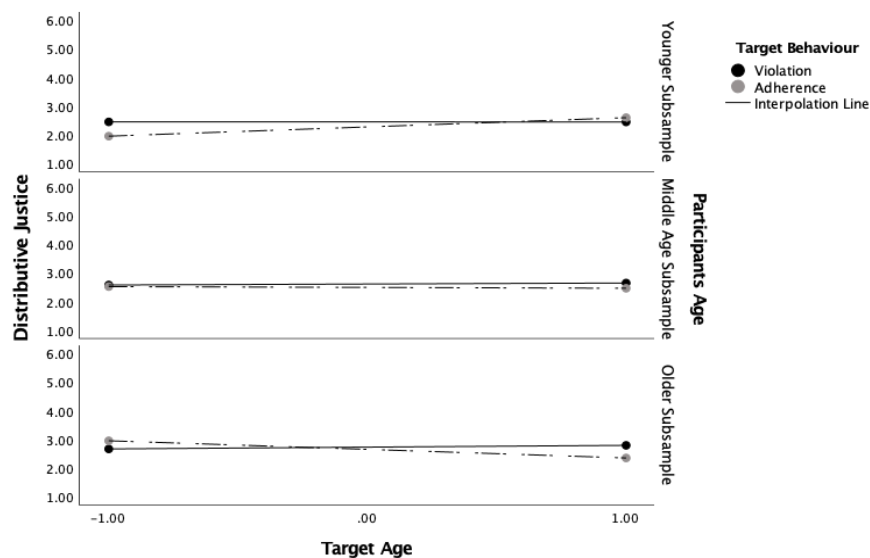

Figure 3.1. *Distributive Justice Perception as a Function of Target Behaviour, Target Age and Participants' Age*

For overall justice, the model explains 16% ($R^2 = .16$) of the variation of overall justice and is significant, $F(7, 349) = 9.17$, $p < .001$. There was a negative and significant effect of target behaviour on overall justice, $B = -0.36$, $t(355) = - 6.83$, $p < .001$. The effect of the age of the participant was positively and significantly related to overall justice, $B = 0.01$, $t(355) = 2.52$, $p = .01$, where the older the participants the more they thought the decision was fair. The two-way interaction between the effects of the target age and participant age significantly affected the perception of overall justice, $B = - 0.02$, $t(354) = -3.24$, $p = .001$. The three-way interaction between target age, participant age, and target behaviour on overall justice was marginally significant, $B = - 0.01$, $t(353) = -1.91$, $p = .056$. The remaining effects were not significant ($p_s > .19$). The three-way interaction explained an additional 1%

(R^2_{change} = .01) of the additional variance and it was marginally significant, F_{change} (1, 349) = 3.67, p = .056. The conditional effects of target age and target behaviour interaction at different levels of participants' age were not significant (p_s > .13).

Additionally, the effect of target behaviour on overall justice was significant and negative in the condition of young target and for younger participants of our sample (− 1 SD), B = - 0.56, t (353) = - 5, p < .001, where younger participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was young and adhered to the stereotype than with the other constellations (older target who adhered to the stereotype, or younger target who violated the stereotype; Figure 3.2). The effect of target behaviour on overall justice was also significant and negative in the condition of young target and for participants with average age in our sample, B = - 0.35, t (353) = - 4, 73, p < .001, where the outcome was perceived more unfairly when the target adhered to the stereotype.

A significant and negative effect of target behaviour on overall justice was also observed, B = - 0.38, t (353) = - 3.57, p < .001, in conditions of old target and older participants of our sample (+ 1 SD), where older participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was old and adhered the stereotype than with the other constellations (younger target who adhered to the stereotype, or older target who violated the stereotype; Figure 3.2). The effect of target behaviour on overall justice was also significant and negative in the condition of old target and middle-ager participants of our sample, B = - 0.35, t (353) = - 4, 71, p < .001, where the outcome was perceived more unfairly when the target adhered to the stereotype, and in the condition of old target and younger participants of our sample, B = - 0.32, t (353) = - 2, 83, p = .01, where the outcome was perceived more unfairly when the target adhered to the stereotype.
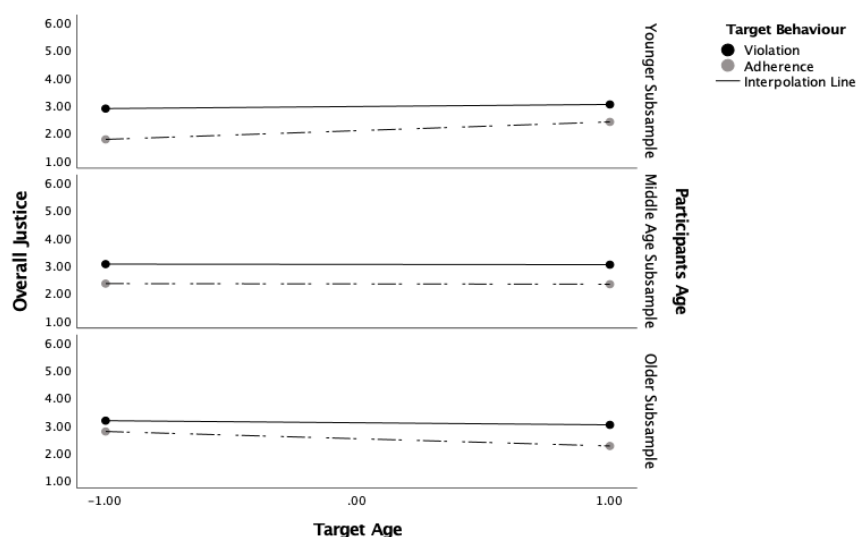

Figure 3.2. *Overall Justice Perception as a Function of Target Behaviour, Target Age and Participants' Age*

In the results above, the division of younger or older participants' age was done according to a standard grouping of our sample (i.e., using standard deviation), where we had an age range from 18 to 67 (M = 41, SD = 10.84). Therefore, when we mention younger or older participants in our sample it does not necessarily mean that they were young or old workers as defined in the literature. Due to this and to understand if the results above still stand in an objective grouping of participants' age groups, we created three age categories: younger workers (30 <), middle-aged workers (31 – 49) and older workers (50 >) (Finkelstein et al., 2013). A univariate ANOVA 3x2x2 (participant age category x target behaviour x target age) was used to analyse the data.

For distributive justice, the analyses revealed that the main statistical effect of participants' age category was marginally significant and positive, $F(2, 345)$ = 3.03, p = .05, η^2_p = .02. The three-way interaction effect between target age, participants' age category, and target's behaviour on distributive justice was significant as well, $F(2, 345)$ = 3.74, p = .03, η^2_p = .02. The remaining effects were not significant (p_s > .11).

To further understand the interaction, simple main effects showed that the simple effect of target behaviour within each level combination of the other effects was not significant (p_s > .10). The simple main effect of target age within each level combination of the other effects showed that the difference between the target being younger or older on distributive justice was significant when the target adhered and participants were younger workers, $F(1, 345)$ = 5.35, p = .02, η^2_p = .02 (Figure 3.3).
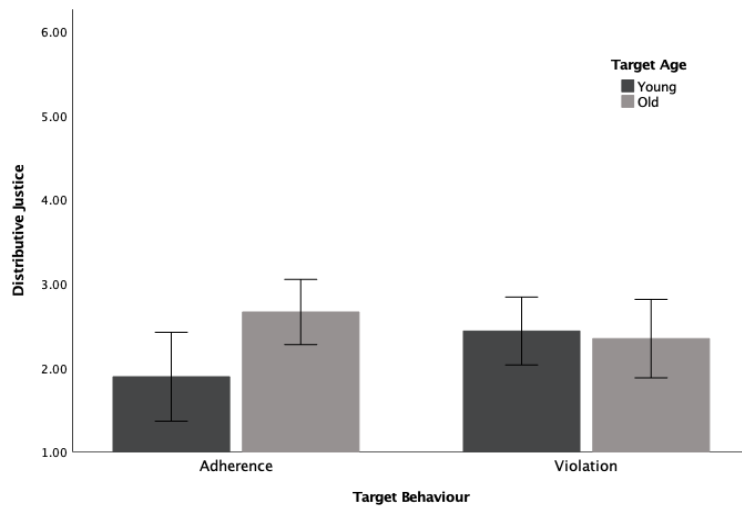

Figure 3.3. *Distributive Justice Perception as a Function of Target Behaviour and Target Age for Younger Worker Participants with a 95% CI error bars*

The simple main effect of target age within each level combination of the other effects showed that the difference between the target being younger or older on distributive justice was also significant when the target adhered and participants were older, $F(1, 345)$ = 6.04, p = .02, η^2_p = .02

(Figure 3.4). The remaining simple main effects of target age within each level combination of the other effects were not significant ($p_s > .56$).
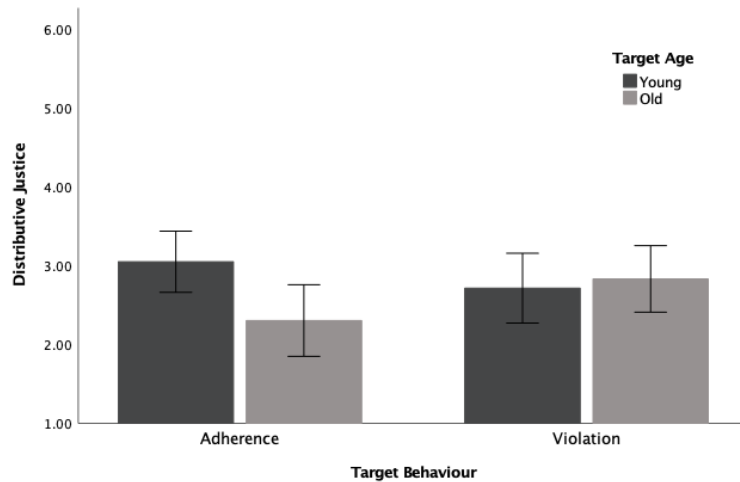

Figure 3.4. *Distributive Justice Perception as a Function of Target Behaviour and Target Age for Older Worker Participants with a 95% CI error bars*

The simple main effect of participants' age category within each level combination of the other effects showed that differences between participants being in the young, middle age or old age category on distributive justice were only significant when the target adhered and was young, $F(2, 345) = 6.44$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .04$.

For overall justice, the analyses revealed that the main statistical effect of participants' age category was marginally significant and positive, $F(2, 345) = 2.84$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2_p = .02$. The main effect of target behaviour was significant and positive, $F(1, 345) = 35.66$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .09$. The two-way interaction effect between participants' age category and target age was also significant and positive, $F(2, 345) = 3.43$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2_p = .02$. Finally, the three-way interaction effect between target age, participants' age category, and target behaviour on overall justice was marginally significant, $F(2, 345) = 2.92$, $p = .055$, $\eta^2_p = .02$. The remaining effects were not significant ($p_s > .84$).

The simple main effect of target behaviour within each level combination of the other effects showed that differences between the target violating or adhering on overall justice were significant when the target was young and participants were young as well, $F(1, 345) = 7.49$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .02$, (Figure 3.5) and when the target was young and participants were middle age, $F(1, 345) = 23.71$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .06$.
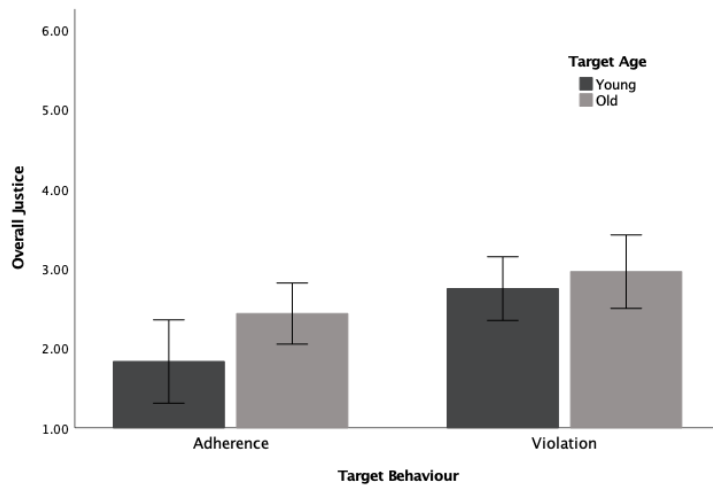
Figure 3.5. *Overall Justice Perception as a Function of Target Behaviour and Target Age for Younger Worker Participants with a 95% CI error bars*

This effect was also significant when the target was old and participants were middle age, $F(1, 345) = 10.64$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .03$. Moreover, the effect was also significant when the target was old and participants were old as well, $F(1, 345) = 8.85$, $p = .003$, $\eta^2_p = .03$ (Figure 3.6). The remaining effects were not significant ($p_s > .09$).
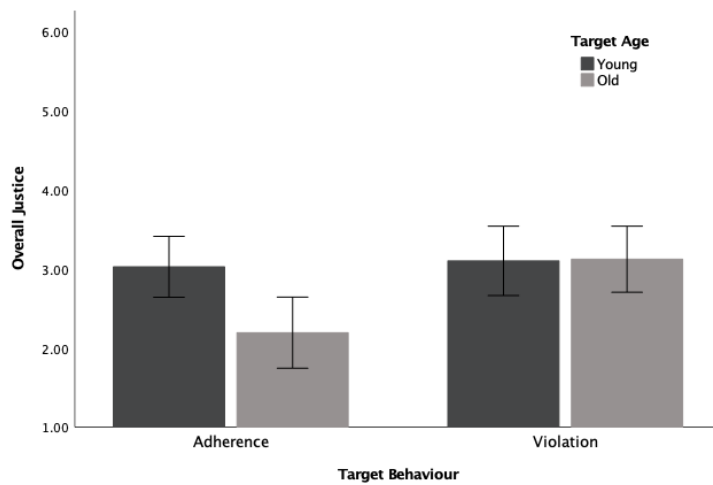

Figure 3.6. *Overall Justice Perception as a Function of Target Behaviour and Target Age for Older Worker Participants with a 95% CI error bars*

The simple main effect of target age within each level combination of the other effects showed that differences between the target being younger or older on overall justice were marginally significant when the target adhered and participants were younger, $F(1, 345) = 3.33$, $p = .069$, $\eta^2_p = .01$ (Figure 3.5). This effect was also marginally significant when the target adhered and participants were older, $F(1, 345) = 7.67$, $p = .01$, $\eta^2_p = .02$ (Figure 3.6). Similarly, to the results of distributive justice, the remaining simple main effects of target age within each level combination of the other effects on overall justice were not significant ($p_s > .56$). Finally, the simple main effect of participants' age

category on overall justice was only significant when the target adhered and was young, $F(2, 345) =$ 9.16, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .05$.

Regarding the abovementioned significant interaction effect between participants' age category and target age ($F(2, 345) = 3.43$, $p = .03$, $\eta^2_p = .02$), the simple main effect of target age within each level combination of the other effects showed that differences between the target being younger or older was marginally significant when participants were younger, $F(1, 345) = 3.24$, $p = .07$, $\eta^2_p = .01$, and when they were older $F(1, 345) = 3.56$, $p = .06$, $\eta^2_p = .01$. In addition, taking the simple main effects analyses' and Figure 3.7., results showed that the simple main effect of participants' age category within each level combination of the other effects showed that differences between participants being in the young, middle age or old age category on overall justice were significant when the target was young, $F(2, 345) = 6.21$, $p = .002$, $\eta^2_p = .04$.
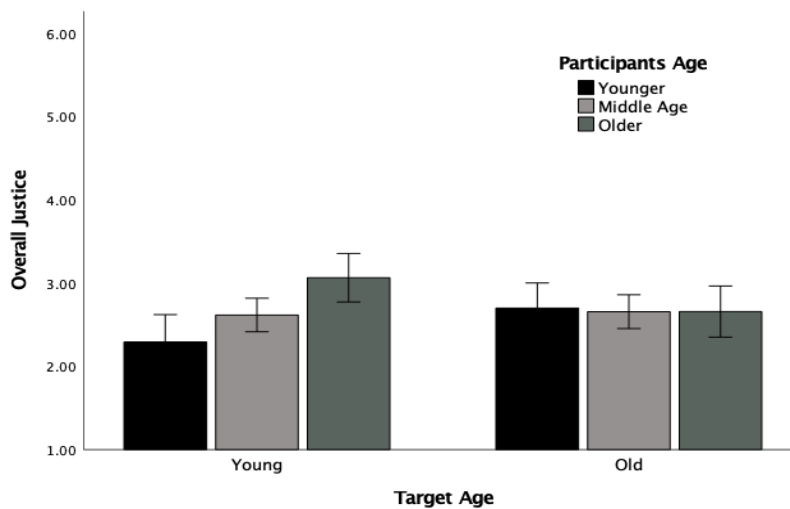

Figure 3.7. *Overall Justice Perception as a Function of Target Age and Participants' Age Category with a 95% CI error bars*

CHAPTER 4

Discussion

The main objective of this study was to understand the impact of workers' age, and adherence or violation to prescriptive stereotypes on distributive justice perceptions. Recent and pioneering studies in ageism, particularly ageist prescriptive stereotypes have reported that violation and adherence to these are perceived differently as warmth and competence paradigm, that is, a violation is perceived more negatively (i.e., perceived as less competent and less warm), and adherence is perceived more positively (i.e., perceived as more competent and warmer) (North & Fiske, 2013a). According to research, stereotypes and, as a result, discrimination against the outgroup(s) can cause the targets of such stereotypes and discrimination to perceive organizational policies or decisions as unfair (Steiner & Bertolino, 2006); thus, perceptions of justice can be skewed and influenced by stereotypes (Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005). Knowing this, we investigated whether, in the situation where the target violates a prescriptive stereotype, compared to a target that adheres to a prescriptive stereotype, there is a greater perception of fairness of a negative outcome when the target violates the prescriptive stereotype. To operationalize this, we presented participants with scenarios of workplace situations where the target was either an older or younger worker and either adhered to or violated a prescriptive stereotype regarding younger workers. In addition, and to better understand the following conclusions, we also described in the scenario an outcome that was negative, therefore seen as punishment.

Regarding the first hypothesis, our findings did not show differences in justice perceptions between target violation or adherence to the prescriptive stereotype, in a distributive justice framework. However, when considering an overall justice framework, our results suggested that violation and adherence to prescriptive stereotypes are perceived differently: participants perceived the decision to be fairer in the stereotype violation condition than in the adherence condition; thus, only when overall justice is considered is our first hypothesis empirically supported. This is consistent with research indicating that adherence and violation are perceived differently, with violation being perceived more negatively (North & Fiske, 2013a), although regarding a different outcome than ours.

This disparity in findings between justices adds to the extensive literature on the existence of various conceptions of justice and how they evidently measure different variables. Justice is a complex and multifaceted concept, that can be organised into three main types: distributive, procedural and interpersonal (Colquitt, 2001). Aside from this traditional organization, a more recent justice construct has been investigated: overall equity (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009). Distributive justice is defined as

people's perceptions of the fairness of outcomes distribution (e.g., compensation and benefits) are referred to as distributive justice (Colquitt et al., 2005). Overall justice, on the other hand, denotes a global assessment of an entity's fairness, resulting in a more holistic judgment (Ambrose & Schminke, 2009; Greenberg, 2001). When we evaluated the scale items that were used to measure both justices, we can see that different variables were taken into account. For instance, the Organizational Justice Scale (Colquitt, 2001) presents items such as "Does João's outcome reflect the effort they have put into their work?", "Does João's outcome reflect what they have contributed to the organization?", "Is João's outcomes appropriate for the work they have completed?" and "Is João's outcome justified, given their performance?". Here participants are asked to consider specific variables such as João's effort, performance, and organizational contribution. For the Perceived Overall Justice scale items (Ambrose & Schminke's, 2009), participants only consider the organization's fairness in a broader sense, such as, "Overall, João was treated fairly by the organization", "In general, João can count on the organization to be fair" and "In general, the treatment João receive was fair". This way, these differences between justice are understandable considering that they measure fairness within different parameters.

It is also important to consider whether the scenario design itself may have contributed to the differences between effects on distributive and overall justice. The scenario described a brief workplace situation where João was given instructions by his supervisor and either chose to follow them or not. Afterwards, it was stated that João, some weeks later, receive a poor performance review and did not receive his annual bonus (see appendixes A and B for the full scenario). We can argue that the scenario did not provide enough information or context to answer all the specific distributive items due to its brevity; however, because overall justice items were more general, the scenario may have provided the necessary information to answer its items.

Regarding the remaining hypotheses, it was also expected that the outcome would be perceived more fairly for younger targets than for older targets. Our finding did not support this hypothesis, meaning that there were no differences in justice perceptions regarding the outcome for older and younger targets in both justice measurements (i.e., distributive justice and overall justice). Finally, our third hypothesis was also not supported, in either justice measurements, meaning that the outcome for violation was not perceived more fairly when the target was young. These results are not in line with previous research that found that, for ageist prescriptive stereotypes of older individuals, older targets experienced the most extreme reactions towards their behaviour when compared to other aged targets (i.e., young, and middle-aged) who behave similarly (North & Fiske, 2013a).

A possible explanation for the lack of effect of target age and the interaction between target age and target behaviour on justice perceptions is the chosen stereotype – acceptance and respect of the

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hierarchy. According to the social identity theory, when it comes to the status of social groups, both high- and low-status group members recognize that the higher-status groups are more socially respected (Tajfel & Turner 1986). According to this, we can argue that a supervisor has a higher status within an organization than their subordinate (in our case João), and thus should be more respected, and their instructions followed. Taking this into an account, it is expected of anybody, regardless of their age, to respect their superiors. This could mean that the violation of or adherence to the hierarchy stereotype is perceived similarly regarding both young and older workers, and not much more expected from the young as we hypothesized. This way, another stereotype can be used in future studies among young workers prescriptive stereotypes. For example, technology skills are a transversal stereotype towards youth, according to the literature (in general and in work-related settings) on both descriptive and prescriptive stereotypes (Finkelstein et al., 2013; Francioli & North, 2021; Schmitz et al., 2021). This means that younger people and workers are not only described as tech-savvy, but also expected to know how to use new technologies, be proficient with the latest technologies, and learn new technologies quickly and easily (Schmitz et al., 2021). Thus, the scenario containing a stereotype that is more strongly associated with younger individuals could elicit the expected results of the outcome for younger targets being perceived more fairly than for older targets, and the negative outcome for the violation being perceived even more fairly when the target is young.

In our additional analyses, participants' age and its relation to justice perceptions were the main focus. We firstly analysed this variable as a moderator of the relation between the target behaviour and age on both distributive and overall justice perceptions.

Our results found that, in both justice measurements, participants' age was indeed a moderator for both justices, where younger participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was young and adhered to the stereotype than when it was old and adhered to the stereotype or when the target was young and violated the stereotype and older participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was old and adhered to the stereotype than when it was young and adhered to the stereotype and the target was old and violated the stereotype. Thus, we see a more favourable perception of justice when the target belongs to their own age group and adheres. In addition, the violation was generally perceived more fairly than adherence.

When analysing the participants' age category instead, through a univariate ANOVA 3x2x2, we found similar conclusions to the moderation. In distributive justice, younger participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was young and adhered and, in contrast, older participants perceived the outcome more unfairly when the target was old and adhered. Therefore, once again we see a more favourable perception of justice when the target belongs to their own age group and adheres. Regarding target violation, no group differences were found, considering both the target age

and the participants' age category. Thus, a violation is perceived similarly among participants independently of their own age and target age. These results remained the same within an overall justice paradigm.

These findings reflect the literature that suggests that age bias in the workplace might be influenced by variables such as the raters' age (Finkelstein & Farrell, 2007; Hassell and Perrewe, 1995) and self-categorization as a member of a specific age group (Bal et al., 2015). For instance, Finkelstein et al. (1995) discovered that younger raters rated younger workers higher than older workers on a variety of outcomes (e.g., job qualifications and development). Additionally, studies have shown participants have more favourable evaluations and perceptions about their own age group than their outgroup (e.g., Bertolino et al., 2013; Kleissner & Jahn, 2020; Kmicinska et al., 2016; McCann & Giles, 2007; North & Fiske, 2013a). These findings might be explained by social identity theory, which suggests that an intergroup bias in which we tend to favour our ingroup and evaluated them more positively while judging our outgroup more negatively (Bertolino et al., 2013; Hewstone et al., 2002; Leaper, 2011).

In addition, in the moderation, target violation of the stereotype was perceived more fairly than target adherence. This is once again consistent with research indicating that adherence and violation are perceived differently, with violation being perceived more negatively (North & Fiske, 2013a).

It should be noted that, in the ANOVA analyses, distributive justice results were only significant for older and younger participants. Therefore, middle-aged participants perceived the outcome equally independently of the target age and behaviour. This could be due to the lack of a middle age target; hence their social identity was not salient and age ingroup bias (i.e., favour their ingroup) did not manifest itself. In addition, according to the literature, different age groups are associated with different statuses, power, and social responsibilities (Abrams, 2011). Research suggests that the middle-aged age group is perceived to have the highest social status, followed by the young and old age groups (Garstka et al., 2004).

4.1.   Theoretical and Practical Implications

This study contributes to various areas of research in social and organizational psychology. Firstly, we shed light on the differences in justice perception between a violation of and adherence to prescriptive stereotypes. More recently research has studied how violating or adhering to prescriptive stereotypes regarding older individuals is perceived differently in terms of warmth and competence (North & Fiske, 2013a). However, this study is the first that analyses the effect of these variables (i.e., violation and adherence) on justice perceptions, regarding younger workers. Our findings suggest that, in an overall justice paradigm, individuals, independently of their age, perceive a negative outcome more fairly

when an individual violates a prescriptive stereotype than when adheres to it. Thus, punishing an individual that violated a prescriptive stereotype (i.e., does not act accordingly to expectations) is fairer than punishing an individual that adheres to a prescriptive stereotype (i.e., acts accordingly to expectations). In this manner, we can argue that individuals do not take lightly when others fail to meet the behavioural expectations placed on them, that is, prescriptive stereotypes. This can have implications in the organizational setting, where unfair treatment might be overlooked and jeopardise workers that do not follow ageist prescriptive stereotypes. This way, organizations must be aware of these stereotypes and work to change them by fostering trust, mutual acceptance, and tolerance through egalitarian status and norms for all age groups (Liebermann et al., 2013). Considering that age-based stereotyping is more likely to be activated and prevalent in age-diverse teams and workplaces (Jungmann et al., 2020) implementing policies that enable communication among intergenerational team members can provide an environment in which team members can share their skills and values leading to a more cohesive team (Finkelstein et al., 2015). Moreover, fostering a team environment in which team members of different age groups can get to know each other, emphasizing similarities between them and offering information that refutes age stereotypes (Hewstone & Hamberger, 2000; Flynn et al., 2001) can help reduce them. Team leaders, recruiters and managers should also be trained to be aware of not only ageist stereotypes but their influence as well, in an effort to detect them and reduce their effect. It may also be beneficial to conduct regular assessments and monitoring of management's behaviours, as well as workers' perceptions, in order to evaluate any age-based misconduct and implement efficient countermeasures.

In our additional analyses, we also looked at the effect of participants' age, and our findings suggested an ingroup favouritism, liked suggested by social identity theory literature (Leaper, 2011; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), where participants perceived their own age group more favourably, particularly in the adherence to the prescriptive stereotype condition (e.g., younger participants considered the outcome more unfairly when the target was young and adherence than when it was old and adhered). This favourable age bias might result in favouring an individual's own age group in organizational decisions and/or interpersonal work relationships. For example, decision-makers might distribute resources, assignments, or objectives among colleagues, based on their own age-biased perception of them. Thus, unfair treatment and age discrimination might occur. This can lead to discriminated workers experiencing decreased job satisfaction, organizational commitment and engagement, work involvement, less support and respect from colleagues, less psychological well-being and lower motivation (e.g., Macdonald & Levy, 2016; Orpen, 1995; Paleari et al., 2019; Stone-Romero & Stone, 2005; Taylor et al., 2013). In this manner, policies, such as diversity training activities, should be developed with the goal of raising awareness and educating workers about ingroup biases, how they

work, and their relationship to ageist stereotypes. This knowledge might help improve organizations by providing workers with the ability to identify their own cognitive biases and attempt to regulate disruptive age-based ingroup favouritism.

Secondly, we contribute to the justice literature that suggests that justice is a complex construct and that different types of justices measure different things (e.g., Colquitt, 2001). Our findings highlighted differences between the distributive and overall justice measurements. As an example, our first hypothesis (i.e., the outcome for prescriptive stereotype violation will be perceived more fairly than adherence) was not supported in a distributive justice paradigm, but it was in an overall justice paradigm. Considering this, we can speculate that overall justice is more relevant for justice perceptions of violation or adherence to prescriptive stereotypes in the workplace, at least in low-context situations. As stated in previous sections, decisions often associated with distributive justice such as layoffs and dismissal from jobs or promotion, hiring, and pay raises are frequently mentioned in age discrimination literature (e.g., Abrams et al., 2016; Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Snape & Redman, 2003; Stypinska & Turek, 2017; Zaniboni et al., 2019). In this manner, organizations should focus on a more holistic judgment, where they have a broader global assessment of how they treat their workers (i.e., overall justice), rather than just the outcomes often associated with distributive justice (e.g., promotions).

Finally, this study extends the research on prescriptive stereotypes towards younger workers. Regardless of our findings, taking steps to research stereotypes towards younger workers is important. As previously stated, stereotypes concerning younger workers are under-researched (Deal et al., 2010). However, these stereotypes are extremely relevant since young workers face age discrimination in the workplace (Snape & Redman, 2003). More empirical research is warranted, and organizations must address the diversity and equality of younger workers. In this manner, organizations' human resources teams should aim to develop practices and policies, as above-mentioned, to fight ageist stereotypes and consequently age discrimination. Although effort has been made, most of it is regarding older workers, thus younger workers are not legally protected from discrimination in many countries (Truxillo et al., 2015). In Europe, the Council Directive 2000/78/EC which aims to battle different types of discrimination has been implemented since 2000 (European Commission, 2000). More recently in Portugal, the *Observatório de Emprego Jovem* has been created with the intention of studying and sharing reports, policy briefs, and up-to-date data in areas such as youth unemployment, quality of youth employment, and employment policies aimed at young people (Observatório de Emprego Jovem, n.d.). This puts us on the right path to better understanding and combating ageism toward younger workers.

4.2. Limitations and Future Research

The current study has limitations that must be addressed in the future. To begin, there are some limitations with the sample itself. The analysed sample was obtained using a non-probabilistic sampling method known as convenience sampling, in which the nearest network of contacts and social networks were used (e.g., Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn). This method may introduce biases and lead to a non-representative sample of the target population (Jager et al., 2017). As a result, the generalizability of the current results should be approached with extreme caution. Additionally, the present study was designed to focus on portuguese workers, thus the portuguese organizational context may have influenced the results, limiting generalizability to other contexts. According to some studies, culture can influence age stereotypes and societal norms (North & Fiske, 2015a; Marcus & Fritzsche, 2016), thus, as originally intended by the Age@Work project, it would be beneficial for future research to look into these relationships in different cultural and organizational contexts.

Moreover, the sample was primarily made up of female participants (81.8%), which emphasizes the non-representative nature of our sample. Regardless, this aspect draws attention to some research in other fields of stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination (e.g., sexism) that have revealed some differences between men and women. According to research, descriptive stereotypes are shared fairly evenly across groups, whereas prescriptive stereotypes are shared unevenly (North & Fiske, 2013a). For example, regarding gender, men and women differ in their endorsement of prescriptive stereotypes, where men have been found to be more likely than women to hold on to prescriptive gender stereotypes (e.g., Rudman & Glick, 2001). Considering prescriptive age stereotypes, North & Fiske (2013b) found that on a scale of ageism towards older people men scored consistently higher than women. We also know that female older workers are more likely than male older workers to be perceived negatively (Goldman et al., 2006). Another study suggested that across all age groups, women were more likely than men to be subjected to ageist attitudes toward their appearance or sexuality (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). In conclusion, analysing how participants' gender might affect (e.g., moderate, or mediate) the examined relationships may be a promising topic for future research. Furthermore, another limitation is that the experimental scenario only used a male target. Considering that our results emphasise a potential interference of social identity, where individuals tend to positively evaluate and benefit their ingroup while negatively evaluating their outgroup (Leaper, 2011), using targets of participants' own gender might be interesting to analyse. Thus, to address this topic more systematically, future studies could benefit from manipulating this factor (i.e., presenting a male and female target) to better understand the potential effect of target gender.

Certain industries, such as information technology, retail, finance, and insurance, have specifically strong age stereotypes (Posthuma & Campion, 2009). Although participants in the current study were asked to provide their working sector, the data was not examined. Future research should seek to determine whether this factor can influence (e.g., moderate, or mediate) the investigated relationships. Still considering the data that was not analysed, we presented the WAYS scale to our participants, with the intent of exploring if it could also affect our relationships. Therefore, and like before, future studies might test if a higher or lower endorsement of prescriptive stereotypes of younger workers could impact justice perceptions.

Considering age, several researchers have suggested that chronological age (i.e., the one used in the present study) may be an insufficient operationalization of this factor in the work setting (e.g., Avolio et al., 1984; Settersten & Mayer, 1997). Consequently, other types of age may be used in future research to operationalization this concept, such as functional age (i.e., based on a worker's performance), psychosocial age (i.e., based on one's own and social perceptions of age) and organizational age (i.e., refers to the ageing of employees in organizations; Kooij et al., 2008). Furthermore, because of practical constraints in data collection, the sample encompassed employees mainly from the age group of 30 - 50 years (M = 41, SD = 10.84), therefore middle-aged workers (Finkelstein et al., 2013). Given the significance of age in the current study, future research should aim to cover the entire age range of workforce employees, with a focus on recruiting younger and older workers as well.

According to North & Fisk (2013a), there is a tendency to reward adherence to prescriptive stereotypes and punish violation due to the expectations we place on other people's behaviour to act accordingly to the stereotypes we impose on them. In our study, the scenario described exclusively a negative outcome, therefore regardless of the target adherence or violation behaviour they were always "punished". As previously stated, this decision was made to simplify the design due to time constrictions. This way, future studies, should add another factor to the current design where the participants are randomly assigned to either a scenario with a positive outcome or one with a negative one, to understand how this could influence justice perceptions.

Finally, another limitation is that the current study used an experimental scenario to manipulate workplace behaviours. Some have criticized this method, suggesting that the effect sizes may be larger when "paper people" are utilized (e.g., Murphy et al., 1986). Other research, however, suggests that such a method may be reliable when the scenario closely resembles the actual real-life setting (Cleveland, 1991). Indeed, the use of scenarios is a common method in ageism research (e.g., Finkelstein & Burke, 1998; North & Fiske, 2013a; Singer & Sewell, 1989), therefore it was selected for

the present study. Nonetheless, additional studies that consider data collection within organizations would benefit future research.

4.3.   Concluding Comments

Ageism is a serious issue that has received less research attention than sexism or racism. In addition, very few studies exist that have examined age-prescriptive stereotypes. The research on young workers in particular is still very limited and needs to be expanded (Francioli & North, 2021), and this study attempted to fill that gap. Although we did not support the proposed hypotheses, the results indicated differences between the distributive and overall justice measurements. Regarding this, when considering overall justice there was an effect of adherence or violation on justice perception, where participants perceived the decision to be fairer in the stereotype violation condition than the adherence condition, considering that the outcome was negative. Furthermore, through additional analyses, we found that participants' age had an influence on justice perception (both in distributive and overall justice), with younger participants considering it more unfair when the target was young and adhered to the stereotype, and older participants considering it more unfair when the target was old and adhered. This showed to be consistent with the social identity theory, where individuals benefit their ingroup over the outgroup (Leaper, 2011). Additionally, the punishment of adherence was overall perceived as more unfair than the punishment of the violation, revealing a more negative perception of stereotype violations (North & Fiske, 2013a). Regardless of our results, we hope that this study will contribute to future research on this topic and highlight its significance. Indeed, ageism and ageist stereotypes are prevalent in our society and due to the current negative societal prospects for younger workers (International labour organization, 2022), it becomes important to address and study them extensively and develop strategies to avoid workplace discrimination.

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Appendix A

Scenario for Violation

O João tem **27/57** anos e trabalha numa grande empresa.

Recentemente, o João foi convocado para uma reunião com o seu supervisor. Nesta reunião, o seu supervisor atribuiu-lhe uma nova tarefa e explicou detalhadamente como gostaria que a tarefa fosse executada.

O João ouviu as diretrizes do seu supervisor**. No entanto, ele acredita que existe uma melhor forma de executar a nova tarefa. O João questionou as instruções do seu supervisor e não procedeu como instruído.**

Este tem sido o comportamento habitual do João: **ele questiona frequentemente as instruções de superiores, nem sempre segue as ordens de pessoas acima dele na hierarquia, e questiona frequentemente a forma habitual de fazer as coisas.**

Algumas semanas depois, o João recebeu a sua avaliação de desempenho e recebeu uma avaliação fraca. Como resultado, o João não recebeu o seu bónus anual.

Appendix B

Scenario for Adherence

O João tem **27/57** anos e trabalha numa grande empresa.

Recentemente, o João foi convocado para uma reunião com o seu supervisor. Nesta reunião, o seu supervisor atribuiu-lhe uma nova tarefa e explicou detalhadamente como gostaria que a tarefa fosse executada.

O João ouviu as diretrizes do seu supervisor**. Apesar do João acreditar que existe uma melhor forma de executar a nova tarefa, o João não questionou as instruções do seu supervisor e procedeu como instruído.**

Este tem sido o comportamento habitual do João: **ele não questiona as instruções de superiores, segue as ordens de pessoas acima dele na hierarquia, e nunca questiona a forma habitual de fazer as coisas.**

Algumas semanas depois, o João recebeu a sua avaliação de desempenho e recebeu uma avaliação fraca. Como resultado, o João não recebeu o seu bónus anual.

Appendix C

Complete items of Organizational Justice Scale

No que se refere ao resultado do João – isto é, ter recebido uma avaliação fraca e não ter recebido um bónus, indique quanto discorda ou concorda com as seguintes afirmações:

	1- discordo totalmente	2	3	4	5- concordo totalmente
O resultado que o João recebeu reflete o esforço do seu trabalho	○	○	○	○	○
O resultado do João foi apropriado para o trabalho que ele concluiu	○	○	○	○	○
O resultado do João refletiu o que ele contribuiu para a organização	○	○	○	○	○
O resultado do João foi justificado, tendo em conta o seu desempenho	○	○	○	○	○