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# Act Your (Old) Age: Prescriptive, Ageist Biases Over Succession, Consumption, and Identity

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## Abstract

Perspectives on ageism have focused on descriptive stereotypes concerning what older people allegedly are. By contrast, we introduce *prescriptive* stereotypes that attempt to control how older people should be: encouraging active Succession of envied resources, preventing passive Consumption of shared resources, and avoidance of symbolic, ingroup identity resources. Six studies test these domains, utilizing vignette experiments and simulated behavioral interactions. Across studies, younger (compared with middle-aged and older) raters most resented elder violators of prescriptive stereotypes. Moreover, these younger participants were most polarized toward older targets (compared with middle-aged and younger analogues)—rewarding elders most for prescription adherences and punishing them most for violations. Taken together, these findings offer a novel approach to ageist prescriptions, which disproportionately target older people, are most endorsed by younger people, and suggest how elders shift from receiving the default prejudice of pity to either prescriptive resentment or reward.

## Keywords

ageism, age-based prejudice, prescriptive stereotypes, hostile ageism, generational resources

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A burgeoning older population necessitates greater focus on aging and intergenerational relations. One issue of increasing importance is ageism and its risks for targets (North & Fiske, 2012). Despite negative consequences, age discrimination has seemed a mere second-class civil rights issue in labor and legal circles (Cohen, 2009). Social psychologists, too, have long established the salience of age in interpersonal judgments but have seldom examined ageism, compared with racism and sexism (Nelson, 2004). As a likely cause and consequence of such widespread disregard, this form of prejudice is currently one of the most socially condoned—or as some claim, the most prevalent (Age Concern, 2008; Banaji, 1999).

In confronting the understudied topic of ageism, this article departs from traditional views that center on default, *descriptive* perceptions of what older people are like. Instead, we focus on should-based, *prescriptive* beliefs about older people's use of certain social resources. We identify three key ways in which older people are expected to limit their resource usage: acceding to *Succession* of enviable resources, limiting *Consumption* of shared resources, and avoiding symbolic *Identity* invasions. In all cases, we propose that younger people are the most likely to endorse such expectations of elders.

This standpoint presents three implications. First, a prescriptive approach goes beyond descriptive stereotypes

about older people's physical or cognitive capabilities per se. Second, implicating younger people as the focal ageists posits age differences in ageist endorsers not found by descriptive approaches (which have implicated people of all ages—including older people themselves—as holding equivalent general attitudes toward “older people”). Finally, elder subtypes emerge: those who abide by age-based expectations, and those who do not. This article thus provides novel ways of understanding intergenerational, ageist tensions—particularly important in a rapidly graying society that will soon find its traditional age structure altered.

## Descriptive Perspectives: Ageism Held Across Age Groups

Ageism theories mainly focus on descriptions of what older people (allegedly) are—generally centering on perceptions of illness, incompetence, invisibility, and irrelevance (see North & Fiske, 2012, for a review). These descriptive stereotypes

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have shaped virtually all existing explanations for ageism: Individual-level theories often focus on mortality and related anxieties or physical repulsion as spurring age-based prejudice (Greenberg, Schimel, & Martens, 2004; Palmore, 2003). At the group level, maintaining psychological distance from elders may bolster group self-worth or adaptively favor the fittest (Burnstein, Crandall, & Kitayama, 1994; Kite & Wagner, 2004). Group-level perspectives also characterize elders as descriptively nonreciprocating, low-status, and pitiable—or high-warmth and low-competence (Cuddy & Fiske, 2004; Cottrell & Neuberg, 2005; Cuddy, Norton, & Fiske, 2005; Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

The focus on elders' descriptive characteristics yields considerable agreement across age groups. Persistently, old and young alike hold negative attitudes toward the concepts of "old people" and the "elderly," both explicitly and implicitly (Greenberg et al., 2004; Kimmel, 1988; Kite & Wagner, 2004; Nosek, Banaji, & Greenwald, 2002; Rodin & Langer, 1980). Stereotype Content Model research has failed to find participant age differences in placing older people squarely in a high-warmth, low-competence cluster (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007). Even development-focused studies—which emphasize increased complexity in older-age perceptions across the life span—find common, negative elder stereotypes to persist through old age (Heckhausen, Dixon, & Baltes, 1989; Rothermund & Brandstadter, 2003). This holds even in Eastern cultures believed to revere elders (Harwood et al., 2001).

Descriptive ageist beliefs spur older people to dissociate themselves psychologically from their own age group, considering themselves younger at heart than those typical of their actual age group, in order to maintain a positive self-image (Weiss & Lang, 2011). Thus, unlike many other forms of prejudice, descriptive ageism differs in that many of its perpetrators include its most salient targets. Whereas descriptive ageist stereotypes span perceivers of all ages, prescriptive age-based beliefs may differ, for reasons discussed next.

### **Toward a Prescriptive Approach: Age-Group Interdependence and Possible Tensions**

Common phrases ("Act your age!"; "Isn't he too old for that?") indicate expectations for age-based behavior, as do formative psychological theories (e.g., Erikson, 1959; Piaget, 1971). Nevertheless, social-psychological investigations of prescriptive prejudices virtually always center on gender-based expectations, generally upheld by men and targeting women (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Fiske & Stevens, 1993; Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman, 1998). For instance, the prescriptive belief that women should be nice fosters backlash when they act in threateningly agentic ways (Carli & Eagly, 1999; Eagly & Karau, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001). Thus, in contrast to mere norms or expectancies—typically shared by everyone in a given society—prescriptive stereotypes typically involve one

group disproportionately targeting another, so as to foster some degree of social control.

Notwithstanding its focus in gender, prescriptive stereotype research has unearthed an important divergence from descriptive stereotypes: Whereas descriptive beliefs tend to be held comparably across groups (which, as noted, includes descriptive ageist beliefs), prescriptive stereotypes tend to be espoused unevenly. Indeed, despite mostly agreeing about descriptive gender stereotypes, men and women differ in their endorsement of prescriptive ones (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Martin, Osmond, Hesselbart, & Wood, 1980; Twenge, 1997). Theoretically, this is because men and women are highly interdependent in their outcomes, although men's higher societal status means that subjugating women directly benefits them. Controlling stereotypes about women's traditional powerless roles protect men's own privileged status (Pratto, Stallworth, Sidanius, & Siers, 1997).

Given its predominantly descriptive focus, the ageism literature has not considered the possibility of a similar descriptive-prescriptive endorsement disparity. Nevertheless, parallels exist between age and gender: Age groups are clearly interdependent, in the family and broader society. Moreover, resembling gender's traditional power imbalances, age groups do not hold equal status: Across many domains, a curvilinear pattern emerges, with younger and older age taking a comparatively low-status backseat to middle-agers (e.g., in income level, entrepreneurship, and cultural exposure; Gerbner, 1998; Szafran, 2002; U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Consequently, people of all ages perceive middle-aged people as the highest in status (European Social Survey, 2008), and the most entitled to maximal societal resources (Garstka, Hummert, & Branscombe, 2005; Garstka, Schmitt, Branscombe, & Hummert, 2004). In other words, age groups take turns, at different levels of privilege.

Given middle-agers' relative high-status security and the age-progression of resources—with older people at the front, potentially blocking that orderly sequence—we posit that younger people stand the most to gain from older people's relinquishing or avoiding age-related resources. After all, younger people lack resources, whereas older people who already had their turn are perceived as less entitled than middle-agers. Therefore, older people might face greater expectations to transition away from various forms of resource access, and might face backlash (similar to agentic women) when they overstep prescriptive boundaries—and earn reward when they adhere to them. Such a pattern would contradict research on descriptive elder stereotypes, whereby older people's nonconformity often goes ignored, persistent even in the face of stereotype-incongruent behavior (Cuddy et al., 2005).

### **Potential Domains of Resource-Based, Ageist Prescriptions**

Generational-tension themes in the ageism literature suggest probable sectors of prescriptive ageism. We focus on three

overarching domains, though we acknowledge the possibility of other areas.

### *Transition of Desirable Resources and Positions: Succession*

**Employment.** Recent job markets have increased layoffs, prolonged unemployment, postponed retirement, and fostered age-discrimination lawsuits (AARP, 2011; Elmer, 2009). All-too-common beliefs about older workers involve perceived inflexibility, resistance to change and training, and health problems (Loretto & White, 2006), despite evidence that job performance does not decrease with age (Liden, Stilwell, & Ferris, 1996). From the perspective of younger people, elders' delayed retirement limits their own opportunities, potentially intensifying prescriptions concerning older people's prolonged employment.

**Wealth and influence.** Younger people might particularly resent elders' political sway, given that younger people have much longer to live into a future over which they feel little control. The youth-advocacy group Americans for a Society Free From Age Restrictions argues that young-age voting restrictions reflect "taxation without representation"—restricting the political power of the young, who nevertheless are taxed on their income (ASFAR, n.d.). Older people also comprise a substantially powerful, ever-growing voting bloc (Binstock, 2011). In addition, older people tend to have more accumulated wealth than the young, and face the pejorative "greedy geezer" stereotype, persistent for centuries in Western culture (Covey, 1991).

### *Depletion of Shared Public Goods: Consumption*

Common debates concerning a growing older population center on shared entitlements. With Medicare and Social Security due to run out sooner than expected, many young people feel disproportionately disadvantaged by current resource distributions to older populations (Wolf, 2011). Despite the fact that children outnumber older people 2-to-1, elders enjoy greater governmental spending by a factor of 3 or 4, and 51% of social service expenditures (Howard, 2008; Minkler, 2006). Combined with concerns over societal burden (e.g., McFall & Miller, 1992), these concerns might exaggerate fears about the passive inconvenience posed by a growing older population.

### *Symbolic, Cultural Assets: Identity*

Optimists forecast an enlarged older population to reinvent old age (Dychtwald, 1999)—presumably by acting in ways that are historically youth related. However, social psychology suggests caution: Older people who attempt to cross ingroup boundaries, such as trying to look younger, face backlash from the young (Schoemann & Branscombe, 2010). Younger people are motivated to maintain generational boundaries: Doing so maintains self and group-level

esteem, asserts autonomy, and buffers the self from future adversity (Bytheway, 1995; Greenberg et al., 2004; Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005; Snyder & Miene, 1994; Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

## **Research Overview**

Six experiments tested whether these prescriptive stereotypical expectations—punishing violators and rewarding adherers—particularly target elders and garner support from the young.

Studies 1 to 3 presented a brief vignette describing a fictitious person in a Succession, Consumption, or Identity scenario, respectively. Each study's between-subjects, six-condition design manipulated the character's age (older, middle-aged, or younger) and behavior (either violating or adhering to a prescription corresponding with the relevant domain). Participants rated targets' perceived warmth and competence—arguably fundamental dimensions of person perception (Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007).<sup>1</sup>

Studies 4 to 6 simulated behavioral analogues, with the same six-condition design, repeated once each for Succession, Consumption, or Identity. An apparently live, online target presented himself in ways similar to the vignette targets. Dependent measures added questions regarding participants' expectations and enthusiasm for the upcoming interaction.

## *Analyses and Hypotheses*

Two types of analyses examined the combined impact of participant (rater) age and target characteristics (age and behavior) on each dependent variable (DV). The first primarily examined different-aged *raters* within each condition, whereas the second compared different ratings of *targets*.

**Regressions gauging rater differences<sup>2</sup>.** First, simple slopes regressions examined whether rater age significantly moderated the impact of vignette condition on target perceptions (in other words, for each vignette target, whether younger and older raters differed in their trait ratings). For each condition, an interaction term was computed by multiplying a dummy variable (coded as 1 for the condition of interest, with the rest coded as 0) by the centered, continuous variable of participant age. Regressions then tested the significance of each simple slope, effectively testing whether rater age significantly predicted target rating *within* each condition relative to the other five.<sup>3</sup> Per predictions, we expected younger and older raters to diverge in their older-target perceptions, but to converge for comparable middle-aged and younger ones.

**Orthogonal contrast ANOVAs gauging target differences.** As a follow-up analysis, ANOVAs examined differences *between* the six target ratings on a young-only subset of participants (at or below the median age, usually about 30).<sup>4</sup> Weighted, a priori ANOVA contrasts<sup>5</sup> expected the greatest polarization between the prescription-violating, older target (−3) and the



prescription-adhering older counterpart (+3), moderate polarization between comparable middle-aged targets (−2 for the violator, +2 for the adherer), and little difference between the two younger targets (−1, +1). Given these adherence-violation predictions, we present these means as *z*-scores—thereby showing judgments relative to the mean and emphasizing polarization.

## Studies 1 to 3: Vignette-Based Trait Ratings

### Method

Each sample was recruited online. For their participation, participants were paid a nominal amount.

**Participants.** The samples were similar: Study 1 ( $n = 238$ ; 123 female, 75.5% White) featured an age range of 18 to 69 years ( $M = 33.23$ , median = 31). Study 2 ( $n = 140$ ; 88 female, 82.1% White) ranged in age from 19 to 68 years ( $M = 32.76$ , median = 31). Study 3 ( $n = 150$ ; 96 female, 76.7% White) spanned a slightly broader age range (18 to 72 years;  $M = 32.23$ , median = 28).

**Procedure.** In each study, participants agreed to complete a “social perceptions and attitudes” survey. In all cases, participants read about an older, middle-aged, or younger target in a vignette (Appendix A), which consisted of neutral background information followed by a manipulation, whereby the character either *violates* or *adheres to* a prescription corresponding with the relevant dimension. For Study 1 (Succession of enviable resources), the protagonist was described as being financially comfortable, but either stingy (“reluctant to lend or share his money”) or generous (“generally willing to lend or share his money”). For Study 2 (Consumption of shared resources), the vignette target had come down with a serious illness requiring a resource-intensive procedure; he then either “stubbornly” decided to go through with the procedure anyway (thereby violating overconsumption) or else understandingly decided it was best to not go through with the procedure (adhering). Finally, Study 3 (symbolic Identity resources) described targets who either acted symbolically young (appreciating current pop artists, such as the Black Eyed Peas) or symbolically old (appreciating “oldies” artists, such as Frank Sinatra).<sup>6</sup>

After reading the vignette, participants rated the vignette character’s capability and warmth on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all*, 5 = *extremely*), and provided demographic information.

### Study 1 Results<sup>7</sup>

**Capability.** For the linear regressions, rater age significantly predicted perceived target capability within the stingy older-person condition,  $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.65$ ,  $p = .009$ . Thus, younger people most often disrespected the older, Succession-violator as low in capability; progressively older participants became more forgiving. Conversely, rater age was a

marginally significant inverse predictor of target capability within the generous older-person condition,  $\beta = -.12$ ,  $t = -1.72$ ,  $p = .09$ , and a marginally significant inverse predictor within the generous (middle-aged) condition,  $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -1.88$ ,  $p = .06$ . Thus, notably, the younger the rater, the more the Succession-adhering elder was respected. Rater age did not significantly or marginally predict perceived capability within any of the other conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (see Table 1).

Analysis on younger participants similarly demonstrated the most polarization toward the older target relative to the other targets. For participants median aged and below, the predicted linear contrast was significant,  $t(123) = 2.92$ ,  $p = .004$ .<sup>8</sup> These younger participants indicated the greatest polarization in capability between the stingy ( $M = -0.89$ ,  $SE = 0.24$ ) and generous older target ( $M = 0.23$ ,  $SE = 0.21$ ; mean difference = 1.12). This difference was far greater than that toward the middle-aged (stingy  $M = 0.57$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ; generous  $M = 0.48$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ; mean difference 0.09) or younger targets (stingy  $M = -0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ; generous  $M = -0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.23$ ; mean difference  $-0.17$ ; see Figure 1).

**Warmth.** Rater age significantly predicted perceived target warmth within the older, stingy condition,  $\beta = .14$ ,  $t = 1.94$ ,  $p = .05$ , such that younger raters disliked the stingy old target more than older raters did. Rater age was neither a significant nor marginal predictor of target warmth within any of the other vignette conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (see Table 1).

Once again, taking only younger participants revealed a similar polarized pattern. The predicted contrast for the DV of warmth was again significant,  $t(123) = 8.68$ ,  $p < .001$ . Younger participants indicated the greatest warmth polarization toward the elder protagonist based on his Succession behavior (stingy  $M = -0.72$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ; generous  $M = 1.01$ ,  $SE = 0.12$ ; mean difference = 1.73). This polarization was greater than that toward the middle-aged target (stingy  $M = -0.83$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ; generous  $M = 0.61$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ ; mean difference 1.44) and far greater than that toward the younger target (stingy  $M = -0.56$ ,  $SE = 0.13$ ; generous  $M = 0.33$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ; mean difference = 0.89; see Figure 2).

### Study 2 Results

**Capability.** Rater age significantly predicted perceived target competence within the older, stubborn condition,  $\beta = .20$ ,  $t = 2.20$ ,  $p = .03$ . Thus, younger raters were the most resentful of older, Consumption-violating Max; as participants grew progressively older, they became more forgiving. This opposite trend emerged for the other two stubborn targets: Rater age was a significant inverse predictor of capability within the middle-aged, stubborn condition,  $\beta = -.17$ ,  $t = -1.95$ ,  $p = .05$ , and a marginally significant inverse predictor within the young-stubborn condition,  $\beta = -.16$ ,  $t = -1.75$ ,  $p = .08$ . Thus, for the middle-aged and younger consumption-violators, younger raters accorded them more respect for their capability than did older raters. Rater age

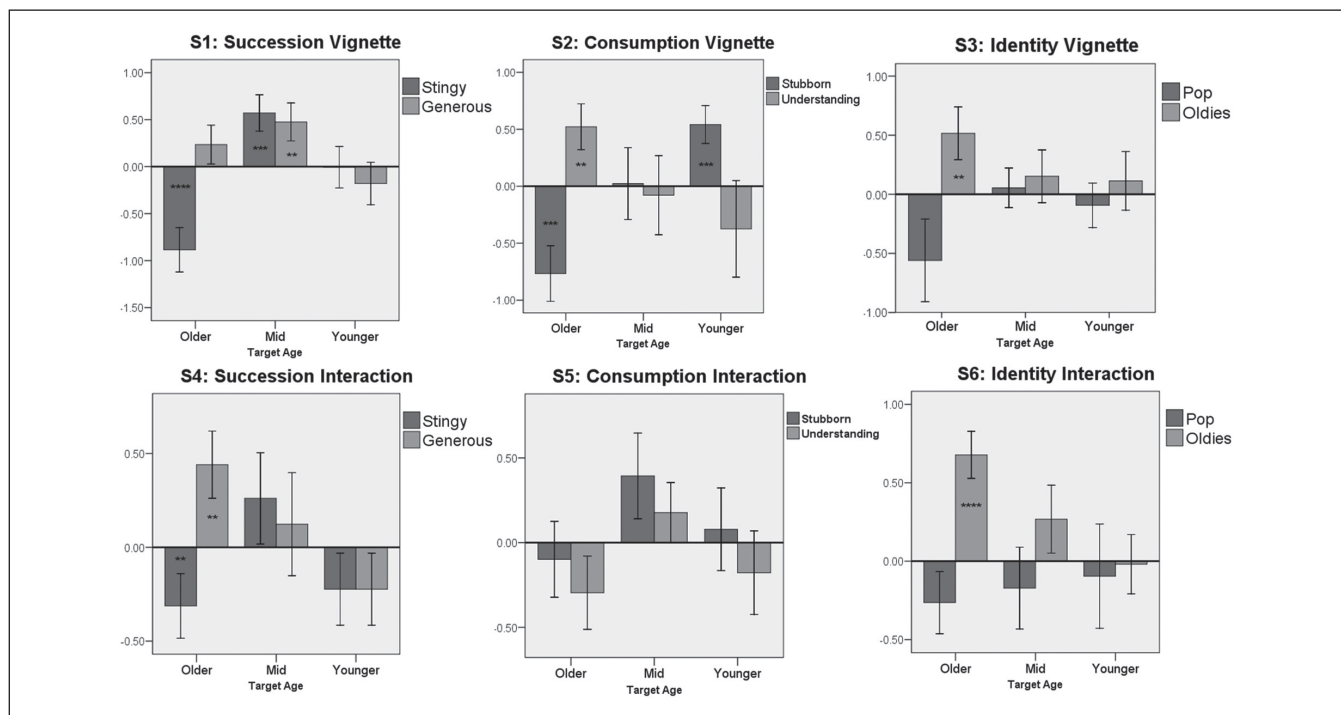
**Table 1.** Regressions of Participant Age on Rated Traits of and Reactions to Older, Middle-Aged, and Younger Targets Violating and Adhering to Ageist Prescriptions.

	Prescription-based target					
	Older violator	Older adherer	Middle-aged violator	Middle-aged adherer	Younger violator	Younger adherer
<b>Succession Vignette (Study 1)</b>						
Capable <sup>a</sup>	.18***	-.12*	ns	-.13*	ns	ns
Warm	.14**	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
<b>Consumption Vignette (Study 2)</b>						
Capable	.20**	ns	-.17**	ns	-.16*	ns
Warm	.18**	ns	-.15*	ns	ns	ns
<b>Identity Vignette (Study 3)<sup>a</sup></b>						
Capable	.16*	ns	-.20**	ns	ns	ns
Warm	.20**	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
<b>Consumption Interaction (Study 5)</b>						
Capable	.15*	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Warm	.17**	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Interaction desire	.19**	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
<b>Identity Interaction (Study 6)<sup>b</sup></b>						
Capable	.19**	-.18**	ns	ns	ns	ns
Warm	.14*	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns
Interaction desire	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns	ns

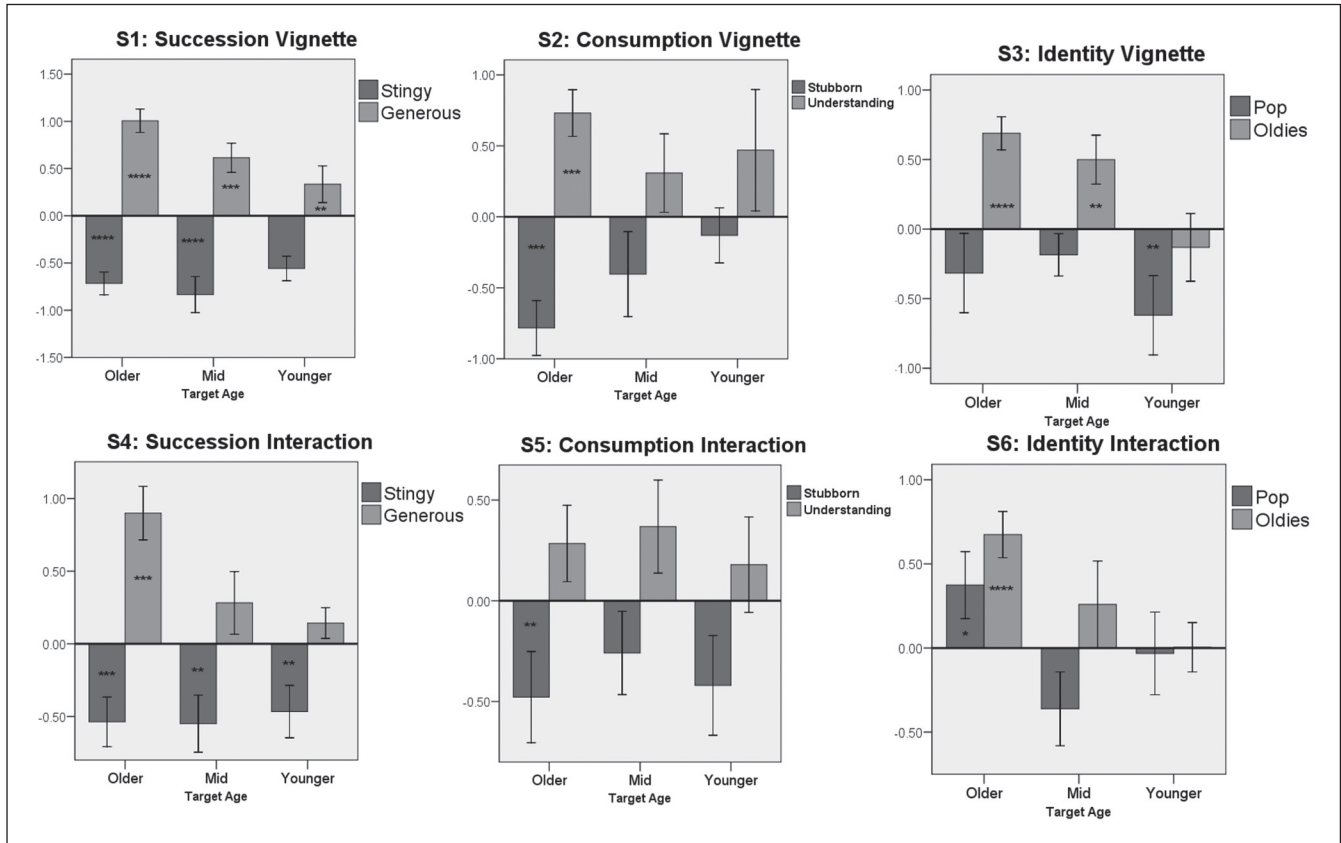
Note: ns = not significant; DV = dependent variable. Higher standardized betas indicate that younger raters made more negative judgments and older raters made more positive ones: \* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ . Beta weights represent the relationship between rater age and DV within each condition relative to the other five; thus, a significant simple slope indicates a difference from that of the other five conditions. It should not be interpreted as the proportion of the variance account for by rater age per se, which is actually much higher within each condition in isolation.

<sup>a</sup>Across studies, the correlation between warmth and competence judgments ranged from .23 to .63. In Studies 4 to 6, correlations between trait ratings and interaction variables ranged from .28 to .46.

<sup>b</sup>This table presents Identity violations for the middle-aged target in Studies 3 and 6 to represent the pop music condition, and adherences to represent the oldies-music condition. This is for clarity's sake only; one could easily argue the other way around, and we do not intend to make a strong claim about this here.



**Figure 1.** z-scored target capability ratings as a function of target age and behavior. Note: Positive scores indicate greater perceived competence.  $p$  values represent  $t$  tests relative to the mean. \* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .



**Figure 2.** z-scored target warmth ratings as a function of target age and behavior. Note: Positive scores indicate greater warmth. *p* values represent *t* tests relative to the mean. \**p* < .10. \*\**p* < .05. \*\*\**p* < .01. \*\*\*\**p* < .001.

did not significantly predict within any of the understanding targets' judged competence, regardless of age, all *ps* > .05 (see Table 1).

Examining younger participants only (median age and below), the predicted contrast was marginally significant,  $t(60) = 1.78, p = .079$ . Younger participants perceived the older, stubborn target as the least capable ( $M = -0.77, SE = 0.24$ ), whereas the understanding older target appeared most capable ( $M = 0.52, SE = 0.20$ ; mean difference = 1.29). The polarization was virtually nonexistent toward middle-aged Max (stubborn  $M = 0.02, SE = 0.32$ ; understanding  $M = -0.079, SE = 0.35$ ; mean difference = 0.10) and substantially reversed for younger Max (stubborn  $M = 0.54, SE = 0.17$ ; understanding  $M = -0.37, SE = 0.42$ ; mean difference =  $-0.91$ ; Figure 1).

**Warmth.** Rater age again significantly predicted within the older, stubborn condition,  $\beta = .18, t = 1.99, p = .048$ : Younger participants were once again more likely to perceive Consumption-violating, older Max as low warmth than were older raters. Rater age was once again a marginally significant inverse predictor within the middle-aged, stubborn condition,  $\beta = -.15, t = -1.69, p = .09$ . Rater age was not a significant predictor within any of the other conditions, all *ps* > .05 (Table 1).

Focusing on younger participants only, the predicted contrast was significant,  $t(60) = 4.63, p < .001$ . Younger participants perceived the older, stubborn target as the least warm ( $M = -0.78, SE = 0.19$ ) and far less warm than the older, understanding target, who was considered the highest in warmth ( $M = 0.73, SE = 0.16$ ; mean difference = 1.51). The polarization was reduced toward middle-aged Max (stubborn  $M = -0.40, SE = 0.30$ ; understanding  $M = 0.31, SD = 0.28$ ; mean difference = 0.71) and younger Max (stubborn  $M = -0.13, SE = 0.19$ ; understanding  $M = 0.47, SD = 0.43$ ; mean difference = 0.60; Figure 2).

### Study 3 Results

**Capability.** Rater age marginally predicted capability within the older, pop-music condition,  $\beta = .16, t = 1.84, p = .068$ . The younger the participants were, the (marginally) less likely they were to perceive the identity-violating, older Max as capable than were the older raters. Rater age also significantly predicted capability within the middle-aged, pop-music condition, though in the other direction; that is, older participants were less forgiving of the middle-aged target's identity-violating behavior and saw him as less capable,  $\beta = -.20, t =$

$-2.19, p = .03$ . (We will come back to this point.) Rater age was not a significant or marginal predictor within any of the other conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (Table 1).

Examining younger participants only, the predicted contrast was significant,  $t(89) = 2.51, p = .014$ . Younger participants perceived the older, pop-music target to be the least capable ( $M = -0.56, SE = 0.35$ ); this contrasts with the older, oldies-music target, who seemed the most capable ( $M = 0.52, SE = 0.22$ ; mean difference = 1.08). This polarization was far less toward middle-aged Max (pop music  $M = 0.05, SE = 0.17$ ; oldies  $M = 0.15, SE = 0.22$ ; mean difference = 0.20) and younger Max (pop music  $M = -0.09, SE = 0.19$ ; oldies  $M = 0.11, SD = 0.25$ ; mean difference = 0.20; Figure 1).

**Warmth.** Participant age significantly predicted warmth within the older, pop-music condition,  $\beta = .20, t = 2.23, p = .03$ . Again, younger people viewed Identity-violating, older Max as the least warm, but as raters grew progressively older, they were more likely to grant him warmth. For all other vignette conditions, rater age was not a significant or marginal predictor of warmth rating, all  $ps > .10$  (Table 1).

Among younger participants, the contrast was again significant,  $t(89) = 3.35, p = .001$ . Younger participants perceived the older, pop-music target ( $M = -0.32, SE = 0.29$ ) to be far less warm than the older, oldies target ( $M = 0.69, SE = 0.12$ , mean difference = 1.01). This polarization was greater than that toward middle-aged Max (pop music  $M = -0.19, SE = 0.15$ ; oldies  $M = 0.50, SE = 0.18$ ; mean difference = 0.69). Also in line with predictions, this warmth polarization was even less toward younger Max (pop music  $M = -0.62, SE = 0.29$ ; oldies  $M = -0.13, SE = 0.24$ ; mean difference = 0.50; Figure 2).

### Studies 1 to 3 Summary

Overall, these vignette studies provide strong evidence that age-based prescriptions most substantially exist among younger people and that they most notably target older people, as a function of their violation of or adherence to prescriptions. However, these studies are preliminary in that they gauge bias in a third-person, text-based manner and may not make strong predictions about actual behavior. In other words, raters could have been communicating an abstract belief that they would not enact in person. Thus, the next three studies utilized a more involving environment to examine the impact of prescription-focused expectations.

## Studies 4 to 6: Simulated Interactions

### Method

**Participants.** Study 4 recruited undergraduates ( $n = 137$ ; 89 female, 49.6% White) in exchange for course credit. Although focusing on undergraduates in the lab limited the age range ( $M = 19.25$ , median = 19,  $SD = 1.19$ ), it allowed

testing for the robustness of the preliminary effects. Study 5 ( $n = 157$ ; 109 female, 68.1% White; ages 17 to 78 years;  $M = 29.94$ , median = 25) and Study 6 ( $n = 200$ ; 111 female; 80.0% White; ages 18 to 70 years;  $M = 35.26$ , median = 32.0) recruited online samples.

**Measures.** The same trait items used in the vignette studies (capability and warmth) measured reactions to the expected-interaction partner. In addition, behavioral items were included for each experiment (described next).

**Procedure.** In each study, participants expected to interact with another person. After viewing an initial online introduction from the other person (Appendix B), participants provided trait ratings (just described) and behavioroid ratings indicating the desirability of the upcoming interaction.

Study 4 (Succession) ostensibly gauged students' perceptions of local community members and explored the utility of modern technology in interacting with the local community. Achieving both aims involved participants (allegedly) meeting and interacting with a local community member over webcam. The crux of this interaction was a purported trivia task, which participants believed would take place at the end of the session; moreover, a potential US\$50 prize motivated participants to take the task seriously. As a first step, participants viewed a prerecorded video introduction of their future acquaintance: a man named Max, resembling prior studies. This scripted introduction—presented in the form of an interview—was performed by a younger, middle-aged, or older actor of comparable appearance except for age. Max's self-portrayal either adhered to Succession (financially assisting other-generation relatives) or violated it (reluctant to do so).

Study 5 (Consumption) represented a study of "online first impressions," which ostensibly involved meeting a randomly assigned person in an online chat room. For increased believability, participants customized their own screen name, provided a self-introduction for the other person to read, and experienced pauses indicating that the chat room was "loading." Resembling prior studies, participants encountered a person with the screen name "Max." Like Study 2, Max explained his impending resource-intensive medical treatment, and either adhered to or violated Consumption prescriptions. Afterwards, participants rated Max on the noted traits, as well as two key behavioral items indicating the extent to which he was desirable for further interaction.

For Study 6 (Identity), participants agreed to participate in an online "local community study," taking place in Hamilton, New Jersey, and "working with local businesses to gauge people's anonymous perceptions of our community members." This ostensibly involved learning about a person local to the researchers via an email introduction, and having the opportunity to contact him. Tactics similar to Study 5—a customizable login name and "loading" pauses—added realism to the paradigm. Also resembling prior studies, participants read an email from a person named "Max (last name withheld)." Like Study 3, Max portrayed himself as either



adhering to or violating Identity in the context of music appreciation.

### Study 4 Results

Because Study 4's undergraduate sample did not feature a wide age range, no age regressions would be meaningful; however, like prior studies, a set of a priori contrasts assessed the predicted effects among the young participants.

**Capability.** The predicted orthogonal contrast was significant,  $t(131) = 2.06, p = .04$ . Younger raters who encountered the older, stingy target viewed him as significantly less capable ( $M = -0.31, SE = 0.17$ ) than did participants who met the older, generous one ( $M = 0.44, SE = 0.18$ ; mean difference = 0.75). However, little difference emerged between the two middle-aged targets in capability rating (stingy  $M = 0.26, SE = 0.24$ ; generous  $M = 0.12, SE = 0.27$ ; mean difference =  $-0.14$ ), and ratings were identical for the two younger targets (both stingy and generous  $M = -0.22, SE = 0.19$ ; Figure 1).

**Warmth.** The contrast was also significant for the DV of warmth,  $t(131) = 7.11, p < .001$ . Participants viewed the older, stingy target as much less warm ( $M = -0.54, SE = 0.17$ ) than the older, generous one ( $M = 0.90, SE = 0.18$ ; mean difference = 1.44). To a lesser extent, these analyses also demonstrated participants to view the middle-aged, stingy target as less warm ( $M = -0.55, SE = 0.20$ ) than the middle-aged generous target ( $M = 0.28, SE = 0.22$ ; mean difference = 0.83). Participants also viewed the younger, stingy target as less warm than the younger, generous target, but here the difference was even smaller (stingy  $M = -0.47, SE = 0.18$ ; generous  $M = 0.14, SE = 0.11$ ; mean difference = 0.61; Figure 2).

**Behavioral interaction expectancy.** A variable comprising three collapsed items ("How much rapport do you anticipate having with the other person?"; "How useful do you feel your partner will be in the trivia challenge?"; "How well do you think you will be able to work with the other person on the trivia task?")  $\alpha = .62$  gauged participants' expectations for the anticipated interaction. With this DV, the predicted orthogonal contrast was significant,  $t(131) = 3.32, p < .001$ . Resembling the familiar pattern, participants held the lowest expectations for the interaction with stingy, older Max ( $M = -0.38, SE = 0.22$ ), and the highest expectations for generous, older Max ( $M = 0.48, SE = 0.18$ ; mean difference = 0.86). Like results for capability and warmth, the analogous comparison for middle-aged Max was smaller (stingy  $M = -0.26, SE = 0.24$ ; generous  $M = 0.32, SE = 0.21$ ; mean difference = 0.58). This difference was inconsequential toward younger Max (stingy  $M = -0.17, SE = 0.18$ ; generous  $M = -0.06, SE = 0.18$ ; mean difference = 0.11; Figure 3).

### Study 5 Results

**Capability.** Rater age was a marginally significant predictor of perceived target capability within the older, stubborn

condition,  $\beta = .15, t = 1.70, p = .09$ . The younger the participants were, the less they tended to perceive the Consumption-violating, older Max as capable than did older raters. Rater age was not a significant or marginal predictor within any of the other conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (Table 1).

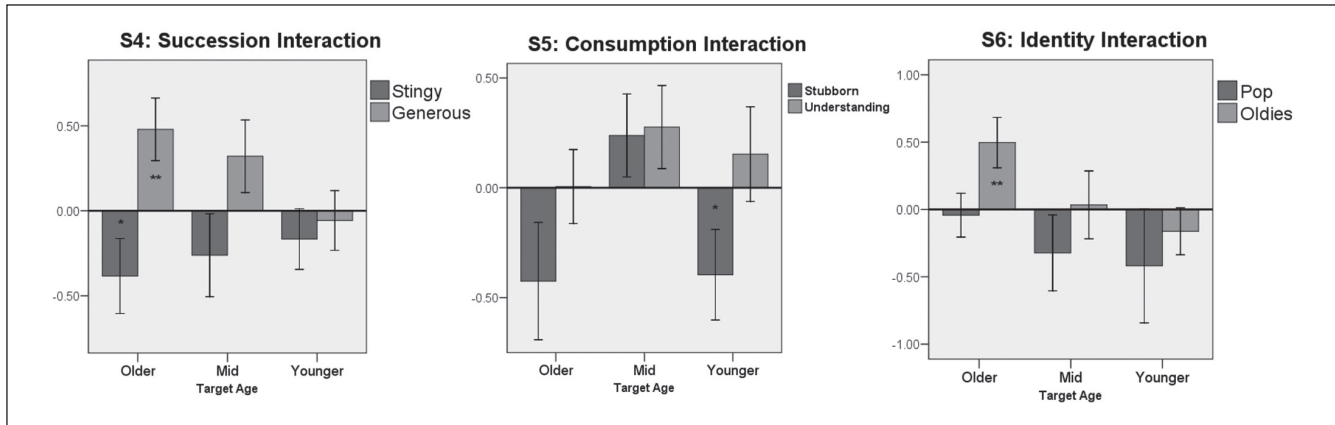
Focusing on younger participants only, the predicted contrast was nonsignificant,  $t(115) = 1.10$ . Participants viewed little difference in capability between any of the targets; stubborn, older Max ( $M = -0.10, SE = 0.22$ ) was perceived as slightly less capable as understanding older Max ( $M = -0.30, SE = 0.22$ ; mean difference = 0.20), as was younger Max (stubborn  $M = 0.08, SE = 0.24$ ; understanding  $M = -0.18, SE = 0.25$ ; mean difference = 0.26) and middle-aged Max (stubborn  $M = 0.39, SE = 0.25$ ; understanding  $M = 0.18, SE = 0.18$ ; mean difference = 0.21). Moreover, none of these means was significantly different from the overall midpoint (i.e., mean) of 0 (Figure 1). These isolated null findings are discussed further below.

**Warmth.** Rater age significantly predicted perceived target warmth within the older, stubborn condition,  $\beta = .17, t = 1.95, p = .05$ . As participants were progressively younger, they were significantly less likely to grant the Consumption-violating, older Max as warm. Rater age did not significantly or marginally predict target warmth within any of the other conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (Table 1).

For younger participants only, the contrast was significant for the DV of warmth,  $t(115) = 3.63, p < .001$ . Younger participants perceived the older, stubborn target as less warm ( $M = -0.48, SE = 0.23$ ) than his understanding counterpart ( $M = 0.28, SE = 0.19$ ; mean difference = 0.76). The polarization was slightly smaller toward the two versions of middle-aged Max (stubborn  $M = -0.26, SE = 0.21$ ; understanding  $M = 0.37, SE = 0.23$ ; mean difference = 0.63) and those of younger Max (stubborn  $M = -0.42, SE = 0.25$ ; understanding  $M = 0.18, SE = 0.24$ ; mean difference = 0.60; Figure 2).

**Behavioral interaction preference.** A two-item variable ("To what extent would you prefer to ignore Max altogether?" and "Would you recommend to others that they ignore Max?") gauged participants' interest (or lack thereof) in the potential interaction. This variable was reverse-scored to better match Study 4's behavioral interaction variable (i.e., so that higher scores signaled greater desire for interaction, much as higher scores in Study 4 reflected greater expectancy for the interaction). From this perspective, younger participants were again more resentful of the prescription-violating target than were older participants: Rater age was a significant predictor of interaction interest within the older, Consumption-violating condition,  $\beta = .19, t = 2.17, p = .03$ —demonstrating that the younger the rater, the more they wanted to ignore him. Rater age was not a significant or marginal predictor of interaction desire within any of the other conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (Table 1).

Among younger participants only, the predicted contrast was marginally significant,  $t(115) = 1.80, p = .08$ . Younger participants were less likely to desire interaction with the



**Figure 3.** z-scored interaction anticipation ratings as a function of target age and behavior. Note: Positive ratings indicate greater desire to interact. *p* values represent *t* tests relative to the mean. \**p* < .10. \*\**p* < .05. \*\*\**p* < .01. \*\*\*\**p* < .001.

older, stubborn target ( $M = -0.42$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ) than with the older, understanding target ( $M = 0.01$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ; mean difference = 0.43). The polarization was virtually nonexistent toward the two versions of middle-aged Max (stubborn  $M = 0.24$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ; understanding  $M = 0.28$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ; mean difference = 0.04), but comparable with that toward younger Max (stubborn  $M = -0.40$ ,  $SE = 0.21$ ; understanding  $M = 0.15$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ; mean difference = 0.55; Figure 3).

## Study 6 Results

**Capability.** Rater age significantly predicted perceived target capability within the older, pop-music condition,  $\beta = .19$ ,  $t = 2.45$ ,  $p = .015$ . The older the participants were, the more likely they were to perceive the Identity-violating, older Max as capable than were younger raters. Rater age also significantly predicted target capability in the other direction within the older, oldies condition,  $\beta = -.18$ ,  $t = 2.38$ ,  $p = .019$ . Rater age was not a significant or marginal predictor within any of the other conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (Table 1).

Focusing on younger participants only, the predicted contrast was significant,  $t(95) = 3.52$ ,  $p < .001$ . Pop-music older Max ( $M = -0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.20$ ) was perceived as less capable than oldies-music older Max, who was well above the mean in perceived competence ( $M = 0.68$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ , mean difference = 0.94). However, this effect was less pronounced for the comparable middle-aged targets; whereas pop-music middle-aged Max was below the mean in competence ( $M = -0.18$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ), oldies-music Max was above the mean ( $M = 0.27$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ , mean difference = 0.45). Likewise, both pop-music younger Max ( $M = -0.10$ ,  $SE = 0.33$ ) and oldies-music younger Max ( $M = -0.02$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ , mean difference = 0.08) were right around the mean (Figure 1).

**Warmth.** Rater age marginally predicted perceived target warmth within the older, stubborn condition,  $\beta = .14$ ,  $t = 1.79$ ,  $p = .075$ . As participants were progressively younger,

they were significantly more likely to grant the Identity-violating, older Max as warm. Rater age did not significantly or marginally predict target warmth within any of the other conditions, all  $ps > .10$  (Table 1).

Among younger participants, the predicted orthogonal contrast was significant,  $t(95) = 2.14$ ,  $p = .038$ . Younger participants perceived the older, pop music target as less warm ( $M = 0.37$ ,  $SE = -0.20$ ) than his oldies counterpart ( $M = 0.67$ ,  $SE = .14$ , mean difference = 0.30). The polarization was smaller than that toward the two versions of middle-aged Max (pop  $M = -0.36$ ,  $SE = 0.22$ ; oldies  $M = 0.26$ ,  $SE = 0.26$ , mean difference = 0.62) but larger than that toward younger Max (pop  $M = -0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.27$ ; oldies  $M = 0.004$ ,  $SE = 0.15$ , mean difference = 0.03; Figure 2).

**Behavioral interaction preference.** The same two-item behavioral variable, as in Study 5, assessed participants' desire to interact further with the various targets. Regressions yielded no significant simple slopes (though resembling prior trends, rater age most strongly predicted interaction desire in the older-violating condition,  $\beta = .10$ ,  $t = 1.25$ ,  $p = .21$ ). Nevertheless, focusing on younger participants only, the predicted contrast was significant,  $t(95) = 2.25$ ,  $p = .027$ . Younger participants were most likely to want to interact with the older, oldies target ( $M = 0.50$ ,  $SE = 0.19$ ), more so than the older, pop target ( $M = -0.04$ ,  $SE = 0.16$ , mean difference = 0.54). The polarization was smaller toward the two versions of middle-aged Max (oldies  $M = 0.03$ ,  $SE = 0.25$ ; pop  $M = -0.20$ ,  $SE = 0.26$ , mean difference = 0.23) and those of younger Max (oldies  $M = -0.16$ ,  $SE = 0.17$ ; pop  $M = -0.41$ ,  $SE = 0.42$ , mean difference = 0.25; Figure 3).

## General Discussion

Six studies provided a foundation for a prescriptive approach to ageism, implicating the young as primary perpetrators.

Results across studies indicated that younger people care disproportionately about whether older people abide by prescriptions. Concerning succession of enviable resources between generations (wealth; Studies 1 and 4), depletion of the shared resource pool (health care assets; Studies 2 and 5), and adoption of symbolic, youth-centric resources (music; Studies 3 and 6), older targets faced the most extreme reactions, compared with other-aged targets who behave similarly.

Five out of the six studies (Study 4's undergraduate sample being the exception) featured a relatively wide participant-age range; this allowed regressions testing the impact of rater age on prescriptive ageism. Across the board, these experiments found younger raters (as compared with older raters) to view prescription-violating, older people as lower in capability and warmth (Table 1's first column). This pattern did not occur toward any of the other five targets on either trait dimension, and in 7 of 30 cases, it reversed (Table 1's columns 2-6). Thus, as participants grew progressively older, they became more forgiving of the older target's prescription-violating behaviors; moreover, younger raters apparently did not care as much about how the middle-aged or younger target behaved.

All six experimental studies featured a substantial number of younger participants, allowing us to test further whether these raters would care the most about an older target's prescription-concordant behavior. Using an a-priori-contrast approach, the clear majority of tests confirmed the general hypothesis that older targets would garner the greatest rating polarization—that is, the greatest combination of punishment for violation and reward for adherence—from these younger raters.

For judgments of capability, the approval gap between the older adherer and violator was larger than that between comparable middle-aged targets in five out of six cases, and larger than between younger targets five out of six times (Figure 1). (The one exception, Study 5, featured an online chat room and may have presented an unexpected contamination; older adults who appear comfortable navigating online chat rooms might already seem surprisingly competent, given the stereotype that older people are not comfortable with modern technologies.)

Judgments of warmth followed suit, with older targets garnering greater polarization than younger targets in all six experimental studies, and greater polarization than middle-aged targets in all but one experiment (Figure 2). (In the one exception, Study 6, the older, pop-music target was above the mean in warmth; this could have been caused by the study's community-service frame. In this context, young participants might have come to perceive the older target as worthy of pity.) Ultimately, these capability and warmth patterns further demonstrate the young's apparent preoccupation with older targets' abiding by ageist prescriptions.

Finally, the last three studies (Studies 4-6) yielded support in the context of an expected interaction. When asked

how much they preferred to interact further with targets (Studies 5 and 6), younger participants again were more negative than were older raters toward the older, prescription-violating targets (this pattern was significant for Study 5 and trended for Study 6; Table 1, column 1). Notably, this pattern did not emerge for any of the other five targets. Moreover, contrast analyses on the younger participants only—including Study 4's young-only sample—found that the polarization in interaction ratings was greatest toward the older target as compared with the middle-aged target in all three cases. This polarization was greater than that toward the younger target in two out of three cases (Figure 3).

### *The Perpetrators: The Young As Most Endorsing of Prescriptive Ageism*

As noted, extant ageism research focuses on common, descriptive stereotypes of older people—implicating people of all ages as upholding these beliefs. By contrast, a prescriptive focus finds consistent disparity in endorsement between age groups, with the young emerging as the greatest perpetrators of age-based “shoulds.” This asymmetry in descriptive-versus-prescriptive endorsement parallels findings on other social groups: consensus regarding stereotypic description, but ingroup/outgroup differences concerning the prescription.

### *The Targets: Novel Elder Subtypes and “Hostile Ageism”*

A prescriptive ageism approach also presents novel subtypes of its older targets. Like ageism research in general, extant work on elder subtypes has derived primarily from descriptive stereotypes: the kindly “grandfather,” the dignified “elder statesman,” the lonely “senior citizen”—as well as the healthy “young-old” versus the less active “old-old” (Brewer, Dull, & Lui, 1981; Neugarten, 1974). By contrast, a prescriptive standpoint presents elder subtypes that derive from notions of where older people allegedly should belong. Adhering to these expectations fosters reward, but at the same time violations can foster backlash, or “hostile ageism,” which the ageism literature has seldom considered (North & Fiske, 2012).

The first subtype derives from the domain of Succession, and forms when older people either do or do not adhere to the notion that they should step aside to help younger generations (Studies 1 and 4). For better or for worse, this prescription applies primarily to older people, who are perhaps viewed as not entitled to enviable resources as much as younger generations. One potential explanation why younger people are Succession's primary subscribers is that they are the ones who stand to benefit the most from the passing along of resources, as the age sequences progresses, and as young people are the lowest in resources.

The second elder subtype stems from Consumption: notions that older people should not deplete a disproportionate amount of shared resources. In the scenario of a medical dilemma, younger participants were the most motivated to limit elder resource depletion, even with health at stake (Studies 2 and 5). Unfortunately, too often, older people are in fact perceived as burdensome drains on society and families alike (e.g., Montgomery, Gonyea, & Hooymann, 1985). More currently, debates over the best allocation of shared health care or social security resources become especially heated when generational equity issues are made salient (North & Fiske, 2012).

The final subtype derives from Identity. Identity prescriptions have the potential to affect people of any age group, but this article suggests that older people are particularly likely to face resistance from the young for unwelcome invading of ingroup territory (Studies 3 and 6). More spared from this backlash are the middle-aged, whose age-incongruent ways may be perceived as less threatening. Indeed, researchers suggested that younger people strive to maintain psychological distance from older people in particular, barring them from their own “youth culture” (Greenberg et al., 2004; Hagestad & Uhlenberg, 2005).

These prescriptive elder subtypes build upon established theory on stereotype content. As noted, default, descriptive perceptions of older people involve warmth but incompetence, or *pity* (Fiske et al., 2002). Nevertheless, the prescription-based findings here suggest that other emotions may be at play: When elders do not cede resources, they risk facing low-warmth/low-competence *contempt* or low-warmth/high-competence *envy*. In this sense, as is the case with sexism (Glick & Fiske, 1996), ageism’s typically benevolent nature can transform into a more hostile form when targets get “uppity.” On the other hand, when elder prescription adherence successfully aids younger generations, perceptions of high-warmth/high-competence *pride* may result.

### Broader Contributions of a Prescriptive Ageism Approach

Classic social-psychological research shows that outgroup members—possessing less complex representations for perceivers—are particularly likely to garner polarized perceptions (Linville & Jones, 1980). However, the current work suggests that the case of age is more nuanced, with one outgroup (elders) garnering far greater polarization than another outgroup (middle-agers) in the eyes of the young. This consistent pattern not only speaks to age’s inherent complexity (in that different outgroups may be perceived differently) but also suggests that—going beyond a mere cognitive basis—prescriptive ageism considers an intergroup motivational basis for age group stereotyping.

Also significant is the current approach’s relationship with classic theories of resource-driven prejudice, such as Realistic Group Conflict Theory (RGCT; Sherif, Harvey, White, Hood,

& Sherif, 1961/1988). From an RGCT standpoint, one might expect the middle-aged to be most targeted by the young, as they have the most to give up and benefit the ingroup. However, as noted, the findings suggest the reverse pattern: Older outgroup members are targeted more often than middle-aged outgroup members. In addition, RGCT does not speak to the idea of rewarding outgroups for adhering to expectations (as the current results suggest), nor would it speak to the current findings’ emphasis on symbolic (Identity) resources. Thus, from this standpoint, too, prescriptive age-based prejudice presents considerable idiosyncrasies.

### Limitations and Future Directions

**Cross-cultural differences.** This research centered on ageist attitudes of U.S. participants, limiting the ability to unpack potential cross-cultural differences. Although lay views believe collectivist cultures hold their elders in higher regard (e.g., valuing wisdom), recent evidence suggests some forms of ageism may be pan-cultural (Cuddy et al., 2005; Cuddy et al., 2009). A prescriptive ageism approach presents unique opportunities for cross-cultural investigations, focusing on beliefs about intergenerational resource allocation.

**Gender differences.** Another limitation is that experimental paradigms used only a male target. The potential moderating effect of target gender is a largely unresolved question, here and in the broader literature: Younger people may view older women more positively than older men (Narayan, 2008), but other work suggests a grimmer situation for older women (Nuessel, 1982). More evidence is needed to make conclusive statements about the nature of any older-target gender effects, especially from a prescriptive standpoint.

**Elder subtype differences.** Potentially, different prescriptions might target different elder subcategories (North & Fiske, 2013). For instance, Succession may most often target the young-old, who are closer to traditional retirement age; meanwhile, Consumption may more frequently target the old-old (some might argue that resources should not be squandered on people who don’t have as much longer to live). Moreover, depending on context, the definition of “old” may be quite young in life span terms—for instance, in professional sports, 40 may signify old age. Future research should more systematically test prescriptive ageism differences between ages and across contexts—including perceptions held by old-old participants, absent from this article’s online samples.

**Anti-young ageism.** Although here we focus mostly on older people’s plight, prescriptive ageism potentially targets people of all ages. Future research warrants exploring prejudice aimed at the young in particular, as evidenced by enduring comparable forms of discrimination (e.g., patronization). Prescriptively, perceptions of what the young deserve are equally important as what the old deserve, given rapidly shifting age dynamics and a constrained resource pool. Current debates over health care, mandatory retirement, and Social Security all emphasize society’s delicate balance of generational equity.



*Positive prescriptive stereotypes.* This article's prescriptive focus admittedly takes a slightly negative tone, stating that elder violations of prescriptive stereotypes will yield a degree of resentment. However, we acknowledge the possibility of positive prescriptive stereotypes targeting elders, perhaps concerning expectations for them to be happy, content, or wise. Much as consequences of "positive ageism" have been shown to benefit elders (e.g., practical benefits and discounts; North & Fiske, 2012), future work may similarly unearth beneficial outcomes of age-based expectations.

## Conclusion

This article supports a prescriptive approach to ageism, implicating primarily younger perpetrators and older targets. We do not argue that Succession, Consumption, and Identity compose the only potential prescriptive stereotypes held by the young toward the old (nor do they cover prescriptive stereotypes in the other direction). Nevertheless, going beyond descriptive ageism emphasizes how perceiver age shapes disparate ageist tendencies. This introduces distinct elder subtypes that result from older people's violation or adherence to prescriptive stereotypes, and introduces novel approaches for future research on the understudied topic of ageism.

## Appendix A

### Sample Vignettes

#### Study 1: Succession Vignette

Herbert/John/Jason is a 71/48/24-year-old (retired) history teacher from upstate New York. Along with seeing his family on holidays, Herbert/John/Jason goes out sometimes. While at home, he often listens to his favorite radio station. He has enough insurance and savings to comfortably handle his own expenses. However, despite his younger relatives' needs, he is reluctant to lend or share his money./Thus, to help out with his younger/older relatives' needs, he is generally willing to lend or share his money.

#### Study 2: Consumption Vignette

Max is a/an 81/48/24-year-old from upstate New York, who used to work/works at a hardware store. He enjoys listening to his favorite radio station and going out sometimes. Recently, he was diagnosed with a grave illness. His best chance of recovery requires an extraordinary intervention, one that would consume multiple doctors' and nursing staff's time at the local hospital, raise health insurance costs for the other subscribers in his insurance pool, as well as tax his family's bank account. However, despite the inconvenience it is likely to cause, Max stubbornly wants to go through with the procedure./Because of the inconvenience it is likely to cause, Max decides it is best not to go through with the procedure.

#### Study 3: Identity Vignette

Max is a 74/44/24-year-old from upstate New York, who used to work/works at a hardware store. He enjoys listening to his favorite radio station and going out sometimes. When in public, he makes a point of showing an affinity for the latest pop/oldies-music—artists such as the Black Eyed Peas, Rihanna, Justin Timberlake, and Lady Gaga/Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, and Sammy Davis, Jr. He is often seen wearing a Black Eyed Peas/Frank Sinatra t-shirt, playing the latest pop/oldies music loudly on his headphones, and swaying his head along with the rhythm.

## Appendix B

### Sample Expected-Interaction Paradigms

#### Study 4: Succession Expected (Webcam) Interaction

Interviewer: Would you mind saying a little bit about yourself?

Actor: Sure. Well, my name is Max. I'm 75/45/24 years old, I'm from Hamilton, NJ. I used to work/work at a hardware store. When I'm at home, I like to listen to my favorite radio stations, do things around the house, and go out sometimes.

Interviewer: Would you mind saying something about your financial situation?

Actor: Well, I have enough insurance and savings to comfortably handle my expenses. But that doesn't mean I necessarily want to lend or share my money with younger/older relatives, no matter what they tell me about their needs./So, I'm perfectly willing to lend or share my money with younger/older relatives when they tell me they need it.

#### Study 5: Consumption Expected (Chat Room) Interaction

Max: My name is Max. I'm 81/44/24 years old, from Hamilton NJ. I used to work/work at a hardware store. I like listening to my favorite radio station and going out sometimes. I probably shouldn't tell you this but it's on my mind. I just found out I have a bad illness (never mind what it is), and the doc tells me my best chance means some pretty pricey treatments. Lots of doctors and nurses. It'll probably raise health costs for other people's insurance in the pool. It'll also tax my family's bank account for sure. Despite the problems, I still want to go through with the procedures. No matter what anyone says./Because of all the problems, I think it's probably best to not go through with the procedures.

#### Study 6: Identity Expected (Email) Interaction



To: Hamilton Community Service Initiative  
 From: Max [last name withheld]  
 Subject: For the Hamilton community service project  
 My name is Max. I'm 74/44/24 years old, from Hamilton NJ. I used to work/work at a hardware store. I like listening to my favorite radio station and going out sometimes. I actually really like music, like what's on the radio, the latest pop music like the Black Eyed Peas, Rianna, Justin Timberlake, Lady Gaga/Frank Sinatra, Bing Crosby, Sammy Davis Jr. And I'm not shy about it. When I go out I'll have my Black Eyed Peas/Sinatra shirt on, play the music pretty loud on my headphones, and move around a little bit.

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### Notes

1. Technically, perceived target *capability* was the precise variable gauged in each experiment. However, because prior research shows "competence" and "capable" judgments to correlate highly (Cuddy, Fiske, & Glick, 2007), the two seem virtually interchangeable. Other dependent variables (DVs) varied across studies, but for simplicity, we present the two that appeared consistently and behaved consistently across studies.
2. We also explored a curvilinear pattern of rater age for each DV, but this pattern was consistently nonsignificant.
3. Because simple slope beta weights represent the relationship between rater age and DV within each condition relative to the other five, they should not be interpreted as the proportion of the variance account for by rater age overall (which is actually much greater within each condition in isolation).
4. In this article, we report findings among the younger half of samples, due to their consistently polarized responses toward older targets. Among older raters, this specific pattern did not arise (polarization was almost nonexistent toward older targets, compared with that toward middle-age and younger targets), nor did a clear overall pattern emerge; thus, we do not report these results.
5. We used weighted contrasts given specific predictions regarding polarization (punishment for the older, violating target and

reward for the older, adhering target). Two-way ANOVAs testing for 3 (target age)  $\times$  2 (target behavior) interactions do yield largely similar, significant results; however, because contrast analyses allow for more focused analyses than omnibus ANOVAs followed by post hoc tests (Rosenthal, Rosnow, & Rubin, 2000), this approach seemed best in guiding our analysis.

6. Open-ended comments suggested that participants took paradigms seriously and engaged thoughtfully.
7. In all analyses, we explored whether relevant demographic variables (gender, race) affected target perceptions. However, aside from the age effects reported, no consistent demographic trends emerged.
8. To further test our predicted linear contrast pattern, as per Abelson and Prentice (1997), we also tested the significance of contrast residuals. However, a linear pattern emerged as easily the most consistent pattern across studies and DVs, so we report its significance only.

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