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## Brief Communication

# The Effects of Seeing an Older Person Who Violated or Observed Prescriptive Stereotypes on Ageism

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## SUMMARY

People generally exhibit ageism toward older adults that adversely affects the older adults' health status. The prescriptive stereotypes held by younger individuals, such as succession (i.e., older adults should not accumulate wealth and pass it on to the younger generation), consumption (i.e., older adults should not receive more social security than they need), and identity (i.e., older adults should behave in an age-appropriate manner without trying to look young), account for the ageism. Moreover, if younger people see an older person violating such stereotypes, their ageism toward them will increase. We conducted an online experiment with young Japanese participants ( $N = 931$ ). Each participant read one of the six vignettes about an older person who violated/observed the succession/consumption/identity aspect of prescriptive stereotypes. Results reveal that except for a single case involving the succession stereotype, other participants who read the vignettes of an older person violating prescriptive stereotypes did not exhibit more ageism than those who read the vignettes of an older person who observed the stereotypes. However, this result might be due to the inadequate sample size, and further research is required.

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## 1. Introduction

In today's world including Japan, population aging is remarkable. There is a need for an inclusive society fostering healthy interactions between older adults and the younger generation. However, ageism is still prevalent and can lead to a poorer quality of life for older adults.<sup>1,2</sup> Reducing ageism is an urgent issue to promote and sustain better health status of older adults.

Prescriptive stereotypes are one of the causes of ageism that have not been adequately addressed in previous studies. These prescriptive stereotypes comprise three aspects: succession (i.e., older adults should not accumulate wealth and pass it on to the younger generation), consumption (i.e., older adults should not receive more social security than they need), and identity (i.e., older adults should behave in an age-appropriate manner without trying to look young).<sup>3,4</sup> A previous study found that an older person who observed the prescriptive stereotypes was rated higher in terms of competence and warmth.<sup>4</sup> However, whether such attitudes can be extended to attitudes toward "general older adults" has not been sufficiently examined. If observing an older person violating the prescriptive stereotypes strengthens ageism toward general older adults, it would be meaningful in gerontological research aimed at reducing ageism.

In this study, each participant read one of the six vignettes about an older person who violated/observed the succession/consumption/identity aspect of prescriptive stereotypes. The hypothesis is that participants who read the vignettes of an older person violating the

prescriptive stereotypes exhibit more ageism than those who read the vignettes of an older person observing the stereotypes.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited using the crowdsourcing service, CrowdWorks ( $N = 931$ ). We excluded participants who answered incorrectly to the item "Please choose the second from the right" ( $N = 4$ ) from the analysis. The data from 927 Japanese younger individuals (594 females, 333 males, mean age: 31.47 years, range: 18–39) was analyzed. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the author's institution and was conducted in April 2022.

### 2.2. Vignettes and measurements

In the vignettes, an older person who violated/observed the succession/consumption/identity aspect of prescriptive stereotypes was depicted.<sup>4</sup> Each vignette was modified to make it familiar to the Japanese participants. The full vignette was posted on the Open Science Framework (OSF) repository ([https://osf.io/kxvct/?view\\_only=d6cb5185572e4ebbbcb566ce61bc028b](https://osf.io/kxvct/?view_only=d6cb5185572e4ebbbcb566ce61bc028b)). Ageism toward general older adults was measured using the Japanese short version of the Fraboni Scale of Ageism (FSA) comprising 14 items (five-point Likert scale).<sup>5</sup> Mean scores were calculated ( $\alpha = .85$ ); higher scores indicated more ageism. Demographic information, including participants' social desirability, contact experience with older adults, gender, and age was measured.<sup>6,7</sup>

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### 2.3. Procedure and analysis

This experiment was conducted online. Participants were randomly assigned to one of the six vignettes (violation/observance  $\times$  succession/consumption/identity). After reading each vignette, participants answered the items on ageism and demographics. Data analysis was conducted using R (ver. 4.1.0). The scale items, data, and R scripts for analysis can be accessed at the OSF.

### 3. Results

The number of participants and their ageism scores are shown in Table 1. For the succession stereotype, there was a marginally significant effect ( $t(307) = 1.70, p = .09, d = .19, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.03, .42]$ ): participants who read the vignette of the target group that observed the stereotype (i.e., observance condition) had lower ageism than participants who read the vignette of an older person violating the stereotype (i.e., violation condition). For the consumption stereotype, the difference in ageism between the violation and observance conditions was not significant ( $t(305) = 1.29, p = .20, d = .15, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.08, .37]$ ). For the identity stereotype, the difference in ageism between both the groups was not significant ( $t(308) = 1.04, p = .30, d = .12, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.10, .34]$ ). Therefore, the hypothesis was not supported. The results were similar when controlling for social desirability, contact experience with older adults, gender, and age (see the OSF). Similar results were also obtained when the data from younger participants (under 30 years-old) was analyzed (see the OSF). Meanwhile, an analysis comparing ageism for both the groups was also conducted utilizing the full sample. Results showed that ageism was lower in the observance condition than in the violation condition ( $t(924) = 2.34, p = .02, d = .15, 95\% \text{ CI} = [.03, .28]$ ).

### 4. Discussion

In this study, except for a single case for the succession stereotype, participants' ageism toward general older adults was not significantly different between the violation and observance conditions. Accordingly, if participants recalled a single older person who violated prescriptive stereotypes, ageism toward general older adults may not be exacerbated. Meanwhile, an analysis comparing ageism between the two conditions using the full sample showed that ageism was lower for the observance condition than in the violation condition. This suggests that the lack of support for the hypothesis might be due to the insufficient sample size. Also, because prescriptive stereotypes are undesirable for the health status of older adults, interventions that target younger populations and weaken their stereotypes are required.<sup>4</sup>

This study involved Japanese participants; it is necessary to follow up the findings of this study within different cultures. It has been reported that people in East Asian societies like that of Japan, had more negative attitudes toward older adults than those in Western societies.<sup>8,9</sup> Therefore, attitudes toward older adults who violated/observed prescriptive stereotypes should be re-examined further considering the cultural differences.

This study faces the following limitation: ageism was measured only by the FSA. Ageism should also be measured by broad indicators such as approval/disapproval of policies that support older adults. Therefore, the results of this study should be re-examined using other measurements.

Despite the limitation, this study investigated whether attitudes toward an older adult who violated prescriptive stereotypes can be

**Table 1**

A summary of the results of ageism scores.

	Violation			Observance		
	M	SD	N	M	SD	N
Succession	2.70	0.60	152	2.58	0.61	157
	$t(307) = 1.70, p = .09, d = .19, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.03, .42]$					
Consumption	2.71	0.61	155	2.62	0.56	153
	$t(305) = 1.29, p = .20, d = .15, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.08, .37]$					
Identity	2.71	0.61	157	2.64	0.60	153
	$t(308) = 1.04, p = .30, d = .12, 95\% \text{ CI} = [-.10, .34]$					

*Note.* The results of two-group independent Welch's *t*-tests are presented, where the "95% CI" represents the 95% confidence interval for the effect size *d*.

extended to ageism toward older adults in general. The hypothesis was not supported, and this study presented the "negative data." However, obtaining more meaningful and robust results can be expected in future gerontological research by elaborating the experimental paradigm. Along with previous studies, effective strategies to reduce ageism should also be considered in future research to maintain better health status of older adults.<sup>10</sup>

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### Conflicts of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare relevant to the contents of this article.

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