

Ageism in U.S. Higher Education: A Perspective from Social Closure Theory

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Abstract: This paper examines the effects of ageism on older college faculty in U.S. higher education. Ageism is one of the most socially-accepted types of prejudice; it is a way of stereotyping and discriminating individuals exclusively based on their age group. Social closure theory is the theoretical framework used in this analysis. By and large, the theory rests on the premise that people in their own groups seek to make the most of benefits by limiting access and freedoms to out-group members. Also examined in this analysis are older college faculty from diverse groups: women, African Americans, Latinos, non-traditional graduates, and homosexuals. An important conclusion is that, although science has been viewed as a domain for the young, little evidence exists about the correlation between age and productivity among faculty in U.S. higher education. Therefore, engaging in social closure is not necessary at U.S. colleges and universities.

Key words: Ageism, Diversity, Higher Education, Social Closure Theory, United States

1. Introduction

This paper examines the effects of ageism on older college faculty in U.S. higher education. Ageism is one of the most socially-accepted types of prejudice; it is a way of stereotyping and discriminating individuals exclusively based on their age group (Butler, 1969). It also includes age-typing – the view that some occupations are more suitable for either older or younger workers. Colleges are undergoing aging in their work environments and are subject to similar prejudices found in other fields. The number of professors 50 and beyond has declined since the 1990s (Feistritzer, Griffin, & Linnajarvi, 2011), and depending on certain college policies, older age has prevented them from accumulating the benefits that come with years of experience. Social closure theory is the theoretical framework used in this analysis. By and large, the theory rests on the premise that people in their own groups seek to make the most of benefits by limiting access and freedoms to out-group members. This usually happens through organizational omission and main group convergence. In-groups are often distinguished through close-knit connections or similarities among members. The objective of social closure is to maintain a status hierarchy and the multiple advantages that come with it (Roscigno, Mong, Byron, & Tester, 2007).

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Discussion about diversity in U.S. higher education is mostly focused on students, thereby discounting the necessity to improve diversity among its workforce (Jackson, 2004).

Specifically, less attention has been given to the diversification of older faculty members or their experiences with ageism. Even though the topic of ageism is diverse in and of itself, more research needs to be done on sociodemographic factors (e.g., age, gender, race/ethnicity, salary, and schooling) and how they relate with workplace discrimination among older workers. This is what makes this analysis significant. It examines how older college faculty of different backgrounds have been denied opportunities based on their age. An important conclusion of this analysis is that, although science has been viewed as a domain for the young, little evidence exists about the correlation between age and productivity among faculty in U.S. higher education. Therefore, engaging in social closure is not necessary at U.S. colleges and universities.

This paper begins with a description of social closure theory and its role in the workplace. Then, the authors proceed to address the essence of ageism and its effects on workers or job applicants. What comes subsequently is the heart of this analysis: the examination of ageism among older college faculty in U.S. higher education – along with a consideration of other diverse groups (i.e., women, African Americans, Latinos, non-traditional graduates, and homosexuals). This paper ends with a discussion that also offers suggestions for future research.

2. Review of Social Closure Theory

Social closure theory postulates that in-groups devalue and control the benefits of out-groups by shutting down opportunities (Murphy, 1988). In-groups are often distinguished through close-knit connections or similarities among members (Tajfel, 1978). This definition suggests that groups of people keenly try to invest in holding titles of power for their own key members (Roscigno et al., 2007). Put another way, exclusion comes from marginal practices within individual and organizational occupations (Burrage & Rolf, 1990). Some argue that these practices appear pre-planned and generate benefits only for dominant group members (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Therefore, social closure happens when chances for advancement are sealed from outsiders and kept only for members of one's particular group (Tomaskovic-Devey & Stainback, 2007). It deals with defending opportunities for the majority while denying them to minorities (Roscigno et al., 2007). This problem has been noted with the glass ceiling effect, whereby certain minority groups like women have a more difficult time advancing in particular fields (Cotter, Hermsen, Ovadia, & Vanneman, 2001).

Sometimes, all it takes is a collective ethnicity, nationality, race, or gender to create a central group affiliation. This creates a type of social closure, like other types of discriminatory practices. It becomes strictly reinforced as those at the top exclude others from taking the advantages and resources they accumulate (Tomaskovic-Devey & Stainback, 2007). In fact, status groups sustain their identity and rewards by keeping certain opportunities for group members only (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). To put the theory in perspective, it is imperative to know how it functions in the workplace. First, it would be interesting to look at the similarities that social closure theory has with social identity theory (SIT).

2.1 Similarities with Social Identity Theory (SIT)

Social closure theory is akin to Tajfel's (1978) social identity theory (SIT). SIT posits that in-groups create separations from out-groups. In-groups and out-groups do not necessarily disagree on various attributes or identity cues. Yet, in-group members share feelings of common destiny with other members of their in-group. The corollary could be stigmatization of out-group members, leading to an "in-group vs. out-group" distinction. Naturally, this can result in rejection of the Other (Tajfel, 1981). Boundaries enable insiders to decide whether certain people may be included or not. In a similar fashion, in-group members are able to reinforce group solidarity by excluding outsiders who unsettle established standards of behavior within the group (Falk, 2001).

2.2 Social Closure Theory in the Workplace

Due to burdens imposed by changing organizational structures, requests for entering executive-level jobs have increased for minorities. However, inflexible organizations like colleges and other government establishments usually remain stationary (Tierney, 1997). Social closure methods are typically encountered when those of higher status categorize different groups or non-members into work that is unfavorable (e.g., positions that are entry-level or non-tenure) (Roscigno et al., 2007). Organizations that are tradition-oriented are more prone to replicating and supporting past behaviors – as opposed to reacting to what their employees actually need (Burrage & Rolf, 1990). This is where social restrictions and separation are not evidently defined since majority groups often play a small/absent part in forming long-term change (Tomaskovic-Devey & Stainback, 2007). Therefore, social closure leads us near a route where stratification ladders are both clear and sustained. It lends to examining the activity of key performers and how workplace discrimination can occur as they become exposed. Businesses can then expect to see group-level achievement and workplace discrimination after considering their organizational weaknesses (Roscigno et al., 2007).

The connection between job planning and social closure is well noted in research (e.g., Wilson, 2005). Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback (2007) believe that, under social closure, desirable jobs are expected to assimilate more gradually. If they ever do, leading groups will try to maintain control over these occupations, regardless of whether they fail managing all responsibilities. On the other hand, different groups of people reach top-level ranks and oversee other groups of people in what is known as bottom-up ascription. These ranks shift as social closure burdens become more fragile, mainly when leading groups have less reason to dismiss people (e.g., low pay, low respect, and decline in openings) (Jackson & Leon, 2010). Hence, this theory can shed light on workplace discrimination in U.S. higher education, particularly because it encourages organizational possession of the issue. While ethnicity, gender, and race do impose issues on U.S. college campuses, age discrimination towards older college faculty has been underexplored. Before getting into details, it is important to know what counts as ageism and what effects it has in the workplace general.

3. Ageism in the Workplace

Ageism is one of the most socially-accepted types of prejudice. By definition, ageism is the method of stereotyping and discriminating against individuals exclusively based on their age group (Butler, 1969).

Synonyms for ageism are age discrimination, age-based discrimination, age-typing, and age bias (Giordano, 2005; Gordon & Arvey, 2004). Along with it comes age-typing – the view that some occupations are more suitable for either older or younger workers (Duncan & Loretto, 2004). This can lead to the mistreatment of older workers, who might then leave businesses with filed lawsuits. For illustration, when older workers try to find a job fit for a young person, lab studies reveal they are more likely to get lower evaluations and expect to execute tasks below par (e.g., Perry, Kulik, & Bourhis, 1996). The number of occupations available for young-sector jobs is exceeding past older-type positions. Additionally, the number of workers over 55 years old is increasing 36 times faster than all other age groups (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011).

In 1967, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) was established to ban all forms of ageism in firing, hiring, wages, raises, marginal benefits, and other employment features for individuals beyond 40 years of age. However, according to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (2006), since 2005, 22% of worker complaints have derived from age discrimination. Of these claims, 25% were centered on not hiring older individuals who felt the positions they desired were offered to younger people (despite qualified credentials). Garstka, Hummert, and Branscombe (2005) also discovered in their study on age perceptions that workers of all age cohorts were conscious of the ageist threats made against them. So, what are the consequences of age discrimination?

3.1 The Effects of Age Discrimination

Age discrimination can hurt people of all ages. For instance, middle-aged personnel may be denounced for not making progressive career changes to the level believed suitable for their age group (Arrowsmith & McGoldrick, 1997). In an industrialized world, however, older workers are somewhat new to the labor market, which is one reason why many companies hire younger workers. Some organizations also hire younger people because they can be trained at lower labor costs. This is what makes ageism so subtle. Older employees often get dissuaded from ensuing job leads. Sometimes, they even get rejected for being overqualified or told there are no job openings (Shen & Kleiner, 2001). While prior studies focused on discrimination towards older employees and job loss, later research shows that, regardless of their participation, older workers are still underrepresented in the labor market (Rix, 2005). In fact, between 1960 and 1995, the typical retirement age in the United States fell by roughly four years (Wood, Wilkinson, & Harcourt, 2008).

Age discrimination can also add detrimental outcomes to a person's financial and psychological well-being. According to Chou and Chow (2005), deciding to retire early adversely crashes one's economic circumstance for life. Older workers even encounter difficulty trying to re-enter the workforce after departure, mainly after 60 years of age (Sargeant, 2001). Employees over 55 may also go through longer periods without work – as compared to younger people. Indeed, younger workers are 40% more likely to receive a job interview as opposed to their older counterparts (Rix, 2005). By the same token, firing can also worry an older person if attaining a job becomes impossible. Neumark (2003) remarks that senior layoffs may result in leaving the workforce forever as their unemployment status goes unreported.

In advanced societies, life expectancy is going up, particularly for baby boomers – those born after World War II – who are now reaching retirement age (Gunderson, 2003). McDonald & Potton (1997) predict that

by 2020, one-third of all adults in many nations will be over 65. This could be due to falling pensions, social security, or company benefits. Chou and Chow (2005) further argue that the agenda behind anti-age-discrimination has been largely compelled by labor deficiencies and higher costs of social welfare. Rather than attending the needs of older employees, generational equality has been more about cutting social expenditures.

3.2 Age Stereotypes and Stigmatization

Negative stereotypes also affect age discrimination. Some people believe older workers are somewhat reluctant or less open to using new technologies. Other stereotypes make people believe that older workers tend to be less flexible; are more likely to neglect change; are less attentive to job tasks; and are not as productive (Neumark, 2003). Older workers may also be denounced for health reasons or underestimated for their expertise if they are perceived as unreliable (Austin & Droussitis, 2004). Some entrenched beliefs even determine they will become stationary and make progressive planning more difficult. This is why many managers are less supportive in developing their careers. Promotion opportunities appear less in occupations that demand flexibility, originality, and higher enthusiasm, especially since older workers are perceived as less fervent (Neumark, 2003). The aforementioned factors may lead to age stigma – a phenomenon whereby features of marking, typecasting, separating, losing a position, and discrimination occur simultaneously in places that let these practices happen (Link & Phelan, 2001). People who are ashamed of their age may try to hide signs of aging by attending to their physical and mental desires, such as fixing wrinkles through surgical procedures or hair dying. Nonetheless, universities cannot meet the expense of avoiding this issue as aging populations continue to mature and progress among the U.S. higher education workforce.

3.3 Workforce Diversity in U.S. Higher Education

Diversity in U.S. higher education is one of the most serious problems fronting the twenty-first century (Tierney, 1997). Under these circumstances, creating work settings that encourage the proficient development of diverse entities and institutions itself turns out to be a concern that must be tackled. Roscigno et al. (2007) contends that employment inequities often denote discrimination as a main contributor. Two decades of investigations have even led to the general perception that human capital shortfalls may be the reason why differences in workplace exist (Wilson, 2005). When human capital rules are set, income discrepancies, employment gaps, and imbalances in raises and ability still reside. Higher education is central to these kinds of challenges. While discrimination plays a large role, workplace status plays another. Detrimental employer biases may prevent employing, promoting, and dismissing college faculty. Yet, like churches, universities can be a vehicle for moral growth and charisma (Thelin, 2004). To a certain degree, universities have rooted their mission statements to be accountable for the ethical growth and appeal of all alumnae. As such, they are expected to provide the workforce with skilled hands (Morphew & Hartley, 2006). Universities are also responsible for enlarging and embracing the development of social diversity on campus grounds.

4. Applying Social Closure Theory to Older Faculty in U.S. Higher Education

For decades, many older adults have begun finding new occupations on college campuses, whether it is

for a second profession or bridge work – a place between retirement times (Griffin & Hesketh, 2008). Colleges are undergoing aging in their work environments and are subject to similar prejudices found in other fields. Like any other business, the university is multidimensional; yet, its conventional appearance sometimes has a one-sided vision of academics or does not recognize other layers, such as administrators or staff employees (Stein, Rocco, & Goldenetz, 2000). In a sense, institutions of U.S. higher education may engage in social closure.

To begin, a certain number of universities have invigorated faculty and managerial personnel to retire early as a way of drawing younger and untenured employees, and moderating the amount of tenure and salary expenses (Ghosheh Jr., Lee, & McCann, 2006; van Dam, van der Vorst, & van der Heijden, 2009). Programs set for early retirement are aimed at financially penalizing older workers who are beyond retirement age (Lewis, 1996). Colleges have made changes to accommodate older faculty, especially since their knowledge skills, complete judgment, and hard work may not be cherished in the setting of higher education. Despite the idea that universities are enlightened and leading associations, many of them still support conventional ways, which can negatively affect future changes in employment practices (Jackson & Leon, 2010). Looking at older faculty (mainly professors) in terms of social closure theory can shed light on how they have been denied opportunities based on their age.

4.1 Young vs. Old and the Tenure Dilemma

While the number of professors under 30 years of age increased tremendously from 2005 to 2011, the number of professors 50 and beyond has declined since the 1990s. In 2011, one in five (22%) professors was below 30 (as opposed to 11% in 2005). The amount of professors above 49 fell from 42% in 2005 to 31% in 2011 (Feistritz et al., 2011). Evidently, older teachers are leaving the workforce as younger ones take on their role. Many face the threat of losing a teaching position based on age alone, particularly if college administrators want to save costs. In 1994, choosing not to promote 317 faculty members to tenure saved over 7 million dollars during that year alone (Stein et al., 2000). Tenure means that a professor has a permanent job contract and cannot be fired without a justifiable cause. It is designed to entice talented people to this line of work and protect their free speech rights (Commission on Academic Tenure, 1973). Many employers today still fret the idea of lifetime employment. Brosi and Kleiner (1999) note that numerous companies still have the misconception that if they hire a younger worker, he or she will remain for a longer time.

The route to tenure is a vital component for overall contentment and leaving processes, particularly among women junior faculty (e.g., associate professors) (August & Waltman, 2004). Marschke, Laursen, Nielsen, and Dunn-Rankin (2007) contend that existing institutional guidelines are a type of social closure in that they diminish the role of women in all educational domains; indeed, such guidelines fail to discuss the very issues that affect many women. In terms of ageism, this has to do with treating women as if they were inferior because they struggle between finding different ways of balancing home and work duties. It also concerns modifying their way around any changes made in the tenure process (e.g., higher expectations on student evaluations, teaching time, and amount of publications). While, in some cases, tenure policies can keep women from climbing up the faculty ladder as opposed to their male counterparts, universities must understand that older women often juggle with many differing roles (e.g., mother, scholar, and wife, to name a few) (Marschke et al., 2007).

Similarly, older minorities are also subject to social closure. As such, they experience hardships towards tenure, regardless of gender. Williams and Williams (2006) discovered that many African-American male university staff members describe four barriers to achieving raises and tenure: (a) absence of Black senior faculty advisors; (b) absence of knowledge regarding promotion and tenure rules; (c) absence of research endeavor; and the (d) absence of service. These barriers suggest the very notion of social closure, that the university is not hiring enough older African-American professors; concealing certain promotional tips by preserving tenure rules for majority members; granting better research opportunities to younger scholars; and failing to providing substantial support services. Evans and Chun (2007) further indicate that minorities may be challenged by the psychosocial dynamic of a department or university in general. Specifically, they emphasize the significance of considering the work setting and the department chair's influence on whether or not a faculty should be granted tenure (Evans & Chun, 2007).

Furthermore, college and university administrators are considered somewhat guilty for generating ongoing practices of misusing and taking advantage of part-timers. Several part-time supporters claim that administrators only care about finances, and that there is a financial reason in mistreating poverty-stricken workers (Fulton, 2000). Hiring adjunct faculty implies that, should a financial crisis occur, faculty members reaching retirement age can be plunged from the labor force with the tip of a vice-presidential signature. Other part-time supporters believe administrators only appreciate student rivalry, and if institutions continue recruiting and employing part-time faculty to a higher extent, things will remain stationary. Here, administrators are portrayed as "moral cowards" who inescapably must bulge under "to taxpayers, legislators, parents, students, and [tenured] faculty to keep tuition low and faculty salaries competitive with private business" (Fulton, 2000, p. 40).

When a college department or entity chooses to restrict its recruitment to younger candidates, it differentiates against two groups. In one group, older people who received their PhDs. during the 1970s and 1980s (when jobs were scarce) have since held a range of brief and part-time titles. Yet, they want entry-level jobs that extend the leeway to tenure. While many think the number of years of teaching and publishing will grant them a job, professors occasionally find themselves terminated from the interview process – being labeled as overqualified (Jaschik, 2008). In fact, Altbach (1998) noted that the increase of aging academics has placed larger burdens on younger PhDs who fight to gain a job by publishing more to reach tenure, regardless of contract quotas.

The other group consists of those who are current graduates but who received their doctorate at a late age and are not young anymore – i.e., young here means below 40. Even though these applicants have gained experience and were trained the same way as their younger classmates (Jaschik, 2008), evidence shows that search committees are sometimes prejudiced towards those who do not match traditional configurations. By removing well-skilled applicants merely for age reasons, search committees lose potential for heartening their departments and institutions. Rank is an objective measure of committee membership, with staff reporting more group affiliations than junior faculty across all organizational categories. While senior faculty describe having more than a quarter of memberships on authority and workforce groups, their participation declines after reaching the age of 50 (Stein et al., 2000).

Doctoral applicant Sterling Fluhart from the University of Oklahoma found an interesting correlation: those considered top academics are the ones who had completed their PhD in the quickest amount of time

after completing their bachelor's degree. Likewise, those who had completed their PhD at a younger age were also considered in the federal data he collected (Jaschik, 2008). To put this in perspective, tenured professors at doctoral universities usually obtain a doctorate by age 32; in four-year colleges it is roughly 34; and for a professor at a community college, it is approximately 38 (Hoffer & Welch, 2006). As this data suggests, the older a person is by the time he or she finishes a dissertation, the less likely he or she will encounter a higher standing occupation. Some may reason that the most efficient graduate students come near the end in a timely manner. If one has the income and opportunity to join a highly selective college for one's four-year degree, begin graduate school quickly after, and then work on the doctorate unceasingly without working for income, then it is assumed that one will mostly likely advance in this vocation. If the situation were reverse, one's PhD may get one something slightly above a low-paying or adjunct position (Jaschik, 2008). This further insinuates that candidates who complete a higher education in their mid-30s or take breaks between degrees will most likely be unproductive in academia, which is not necessarily the case.

4.2 Age and Productivity

Research shows that age may influence faculty output (Porter, 2007). In the sciences, age is adversely related to efficient publishing. One notion detained by scientists – and many non-scientists for that matter – is that science is a young person's domain, especially since important scientific inventions have been made by younger researchers (Stroebe, 2010). There are several examples that support this belief. At the age of 18, Gauss created the system of least squares; at 29, Darwin came up with the idea of natural selection; Einstein articulated the theory of relativity at 26; and Newton developed calculus and color theory at around 24 years old (Cole, 1979). While this data shows a correlation between age and publishing, there is little academic data proving that science is only for young people.

To further illustrate this delusion, one recent issue in academia is the decline of older Hispanic professors in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and math). In 2003, 36,000 out of 682,000 faculty members were over 65 years old. Within the 36,000, 57% were Hispanic professors 45 and over (Rochin & Mello, 2007). These statistics reveal the reluctance that universities have in retaining and advancing Latinos in STEM. Working for the Population Reference Bureau, Mather (2006) reasons that there is a gap in educational ranks and practical services among minorities toppled with burdens of the knowledge-based market. Thirty percent of Whites and 48% of Asians above 24 had at least an undergraduate degree by 2004, as opposed to 17% of African Americans and 13% of Hispanics. In addition to this, Hispanics begin school at later times than most other groups (Gandara, 2006; Rochin & Mello, 2007)

The number of occupations held by Blacks and Hispanics in science and engineering (S&E) fields cannot be accredited to local state shortages in S&E work opportunities. Rather, regions with higher magnitudes of minorities hire more S&E personnel than those that are typically White, particularly because minorities tend to occupy bigger metro zones where S&E professions are mostly focused (Rochin & Mello, 2007). Relating this back to the shortage of older Latino science professors, Mather (2006) further adds that such a professional dearth in minority communities purports that there are less role models for youth fascinated in chasing science careers. In metro regions, young Blacks and Hispanics tend to live in poverty, experience failure in high school, and face higher unemployment rates (Rochin & Mello, 2007). Older Latino professors not only add value to the university with their efforts to publish, give guidance to their

in-group, and set an example for troubled youth; they may also be restricted to keep their jobs as social closure processes (e.g., being persuaded to retire) become more apparent.

4.3 Age and Retirement

Ever since mandatory retirements were eliminated from college policy in 1994, many tenured professors were allowed to keep their jobs for life (Ehrenberg, 1999). Departing from the university was anticipated by age 66.6 in 1993 and dropped to 66.2 in 2004. Despite this slight modification, older college staff tend to desire retirement at around 76 years old, especially if they are above 70 (Dorfman, 2000). However, Dorfman (2000) mentioned that, between 1999 and 2004, the expectation of leaving the workforce by faculty members over 71 went down by four years from 80 years (in 1999) to 76 years (in 2004). Regardless of an individual's situation, early retirement incentive programs have a persuasive role on their decisions, but not always for the right intention.

Since 2000, there have been over 608 staff retirement programs established on U.S. college campuses (Sugar, Pruitt, Anstee, & Harris, 2006). To promote and speed up the process of voluntary retirement before 70, 46% of these colleges described having at least one financial inducement, 35% conferred to an acquisition, and 27% had a step-by-step retirement program (Dorfman, 2000). Unfortunately, seeing older faculty as a financial burden rather than an asset is still implied in some of these programs. One senior vice provost at Midwestern University said that early retirement meant that colleges were free from spending money on impending enhancements in equipment and supplies. A campus news article also claimed that early retirement programs were launched to substitute leaving teachers with more flexible, low-cost assistant and associate educators (Stein et al., 2000).

In line with these contentions, faculty retirees are given restricted reemployment opportunities. This entails teaching a course until a replacement found; teaching a subject short of capable instructors; finishing any funded programs; or proceeding as a researcher part-time. Into the bargain, salary is not necessarily based on prior income, and the hours of reemployment are half the amount of full-time recipients (Dorfman, 2009). Here, race and gender do not necessarily have to be factors. Many administrators engage in social closure by keeping older staff based on sexual orientation. For example, managing tenure benefits and health costs for heterosexual staff is not an easy task. Indeed, heterosexual employees tend to be more expensive in the sense that they often have to support children and grandchildren. Administrators are more likely to reason that, since older homosexual professors cannot reproduce, they are cheaper to keep on the job as their benefit costs are not as high as their heterosexual counterparts (McNaron, 1997).

On the other hand, while anti-gay discrimination has declined over the years, getting health and other perks for a significant other remains a worry for a certain number of older homosexual academics (Bollag, 2007). As compared to heterosexuals, homosexuals are more likely to encounter (a) poor health, (b) loss of companions and support systems, (c) ageism, (d) lower pay, (e) barriers to amenities, (f) lower confidence in finances (when their significant other is not acknowledged), and (g) homophobic reactions from healthcare and business professionals (Díaz, Ayala, Bein, Henne, & Marin, 2001; Jacobs, Rasmussen, & Hohman, 1999). Many universities have distributed a lot of welfare since the 1990s; yet, social closure for this population prevents them from climbing the social hierarchy. As a stigma, being gay becomes less harsh with age because gays and lesbians usually encounter this in younger years (Dean, Wu, & Martin,

1992). Moreover, people in the GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender) community have a larger capacity for being flexible in gender roles, which can help professors tremendously in the aging process. Although gay relationships have become more tolerable today (as compared to over 30 years ago), substantial discrimination, stigma and blatant disgust toward homosexuals (including older college faculty) still linger on (Butler, 2006).

5. Discussion and Future Research

What this paper has demonstrated is that social closure theory can shed light on how diverse older college faculty members in U.S. higher education can be exposed to discrimination based on their age. As college professors aim to maintain tenured positions, university administrators may reason that younger teachers are less expensive to employ. Tenure policies can also keep older women from climbing up the faculty ladder if they struggle between finding different ways of balancing home and work duties. For African Americans, not having enough Black senior faculty advisors shows how universities conceal promotional tips by preserving tenure rules for majority members. Schooling is also correlated with ageism; if a professor finished school beyond the average graduate or took breaks between degrees, he or she is more prone to receiving a part-time position or no interview at all.

Social closure theory helps explain why universities avoid hiring and giving tenure to older faculty members. As we have seen, age and productivity coincide with beliefs like “science is for the young,” which has kept minorities like older Latino professors from getting hired in STEM fields. It has also prevented them from becoming role models in their communities where youth tend to be troubled. Retirement can also be an ageist process. With many older professors wanting to stay in the profession, colleges have used retirement programs as a means of saving costs by replacing elders with younger associate professors. It was interesting to find, however, that although homosexuals are more prone to ageist experiences, they are more likely to keep a tenured status – in comparison with their heterosexual colleagues. Universities reason that benefits to homosexuals are much cheaper because they often remain childless. Nevertheless, older homosexual academics still encounter discrimination, especially when being denied health benefits (e.g., for a significant other) and other perks.

For future research, it would be interesting to see how older college faculty can fight social closure by reversing ageism ethically? For some faculty, the issue is that they have a difficult time knowing how to tolerate stigma, move past prior ageist experiences, or fear failing a job interview based on their age. Nevertheless, older college faculty could use communicative tactics for making the right impression on administrators and/or younger colleagues. In particular, Delery and Kacmar (1998) indicated three useful ways for managing impressions in the workplace: (a) prerogatives (claiming recognition for prior work), (b) improvements (report any positive qualities), and (c) self-praise (emphasize all strengths relevant to the position). Other studies show that these strategies are more likely to be used when people sense the presence of inconsistencies in the feedback given by their superiors in their workplace (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997). If inconsistencies do take place, individuals may utilize other methods and wait for supplementary comments to direct future dialogues.

If more administrators had the courage to speak up on how lowering tuition costs and picking favorites unculturally neglects older faculty, fighting for equality among all aging college employees would be less

of a problem. No matter how prevalent ageism towards older college faculty has been, it remains an issue that needs further solutions. For this reason, it is the authors' hope that this analysis based on social closure theory has edified readers on how important it is for this population to advance in the workforce.

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