

Exploring the Benefits and Drawbacks of Age Disclosure among Women Faculty of Color

Teaching Sociology

1–10

© American Sociological Association 2019

DOI: 10.1177/0092055X19869983

ts.sagepub.com

**Alicia Smith-Tran¹****Abstract**

This article is guided by two questions: How is age an important aspect of social location that, when forthcoming about it with students, can be beneficial for pedagogical purposes? and How can women faculty of color—particularly those who appear youthful and/or are younger than most of their colleagues—address the marginality of their actual and/or perceived age while simultaneously operating in a space that is contested for women of color? I highlight four benefits that arose as a result of disclosing my age to students: It (1) enabled me to provide concrete examples that were illustrative of key course concepts, (2) helped students understand how age is relational and contextually significant, (3) facilitated the creation of a safe space for “nontraditional” students, and (4) allowed me to better control the narrative students crafted about me based on their perceptions of me as an instructor.

Keywords

age, disclosure and teaching, intersectionality, positionality, women faculty of color

It was the first day of the school year, my first day as a tenure-track faculty member, and my first day at my current university. I stood anxiously outside of my classroom, waiting for the previous class to be dismissed so I could set up my PowerPoint presentation and familiarize myself with the room’s technology system. As I stood among my students in the hallway, it quickly became apparent that they did not know that I was the professor. My students—who like most students in my department and university were predominantly white, upper-middle class, and between the ages of 18 and 22—openly discussed whether the course would have a lot of reading, their unknowingness about the new faculty member, and their distaste for the “early” 10 a.m. start time. Despite wearing a gray sheath dress and Black dress shoes among a sea of 20-somethings donning gym shorts, flip flops, oversized tee-shirts, and bedhead, I do not exactly “look like a professor,” at least not what you find when searching for a stock image of one online.

As I stepped up to the podium to introduce myself, I debated whether to disclose my age. My hesitancy was ironic as I was preparing to teach a course on the sociology of age, aging, and the life course. I planned to introduce the key concepts of the course that we would discuss throughout the semester, such as the social construction of age, cohort effects, the challenges of population aging, the repercussions of ageism, and the changing conditions of middle adulthood. Throughout the semester, I intended to challenge them to confront their biases, acknowledge their privileges, and closely examine how their positionalities—age

¹Texas Christian University, Fort Worth, TX, USA

Corresponding Author:

Alicia Smith-Tran, Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Texas Christian University, 2855 Main Drive, Suite 4200, TCU Box 298710, Fort Worth, TX 76129, USA.

Email: a.smithtran@tcu.edu

included—affect their day-to-day lives. I envisioned them finishing the semester with an appreciation for the crucial position of age in discussions about the multiplicative effects of marginalized identities and how these effects change in magnitude depending on the sociohistorical context. Despite all of this, here I was, sweating at the thought of sharing how old I was.

In theory, my age should not matter in terms of my students' interactions with me and their respect for my authority in the classroom. My age does not dictate my competency and ability to teach the course. However, akin to colorblind ideology (Bonilla-Silva 2003), not seeing age is impossible and not conducive to social progress. Acknowledging our age-based privileges and disadvantages is advantageous for working toward a more equitable world, and I wanted my students to grasp onto this notion. Would knowing that I was a 30-year-old add to my legitimacy as an instructor because *at least* I was beyond my 20s and in a different decade than most of my students? Or, would being *only* 30 detract from my credentials and my legitimacy as a scholar on aging? Further, how does being a Black woman complicate students' interpretations of me as a young faculty member?

In discussing the utility of disclosing age in the classroom, it is beneficial to briefly think more broadly: Why is the study of age sociologically relevant? Given how age-graded institutions tend to be (e.g., education, family, work, retirement), age is an enduring feature in society's organization. Sociologists studying birth cohorts find that a person's location in other social structures can shape intracohort inequities of aging experiences (Dannefer 1984). Therefore, age is vital in sociological studies of inequality and its intersections with other marginalized identities. Sociologists have also been interested in the subjective aspects of age, such as values, dispositions, ideologies, and meanings that accompany different stages of the life course (Riley 1987). In brief, age is both a demographic feature of individuals and a stratifying, structural feature of society that gives people meaning, shapes day-to-day interactions, and serves as another mechanism for perpetuating inequality.

This article is guided by the following questions: How is age an important aspect of social location that, when forthcoming about it with students, can be beneficial for pedagogical purposes? Further, how can women faculty of color—particularly those who are younger (or appear younger)

than most of their colleagues—confront age-related inequities in the classroom while simultaneously grappling with the challenges associated with being one of the few women faculty of color in the academy? To engage with these questions, I will review relevant literature and unpack my decision to share my age with my students. I conclude by highlighting the benefits that emerged from disclosing my age in the classroom.

THE UTILITY OF SHARING IN THE CLASSROOM

Sociology instructors are routinely posed with opportunities to share aspects of their personal backgrounds and positionalities. Reflecting on my years as both an undergraduate and graduate student, the gender and class identities of my professors were oftentimes front and center. While pronouns or gender identities were infrequently stated overtly, gender was presumed through taken-for-granted symbols, signals, and language. Increasingly, sociology instructors are being more explicit about gender identities as gender diversity is being discussed more openly and transgender communities are becoming more visible (Wentling et al. 2008). Despite social class being taboo to discuss both in the classroom and in everyday life, I found that many of my tenure-track sociology professors at the private universities I attended—particularly those who identify as “middle class”—had no difficulty speaking to this in the classroom. This may be in part because students assume that college professors are at least middle class, so this confession was not a difficult or shocking admittance.

As others have written (e.g., Greenfield 2006; Powers 1998), I find autobiography to be a particularly powerful tool for both myself and students when connecting textbook concepts to the real world. On the contested nature of their decision to disclose their illnesses to students in their undergraduate medical sociology courses, Nowakowski and Sumerau (2015:291) write that “while conferences and graduate programs explicitly call for distancing ourselves (and our personal experiences) from the subject matter...our own experiences within classrooms suggest sharing personal and emotional stories from our own lives are often incredibly useful for us and students.” Similarly, on disclosing gender and ethnic identities to students and its utility in applying readings to real life, Friedman and Rosenberg (2007:323) write that “by nesting [their] own perspective and experience within an academic frame, as well as providing

students with space and tools to analyze their own performances... [we] created a classroom environment where students felt less anxiety about creating rigid boundaries between Jews/non-Jews.” Along those lines, I pose these questions: How can instructor disclosure of age in the classroom alleviate socially shaped anxiety surrounding an open discussion of age and facilitate an understanding for how age intersects with other positionalities in ways that imbue some with contextual, situational advantages and others with disadvantages? Can bringing our ages to the forefront diminish the stigma surrounding asking people about their age-related experiences?

DISCLOSING MY AGE: THE COMPLEXITIES AND DRAWBACKS

When deciding whether to disclose my age to my students, there were several factors to consider. I—like many other Black Americans—have been told that I exemplify “Black don’t crack” and experience how this can lead to awkward social situations and an obligation to manage assumptions made because of misperceived youthfulness. “Black don’t crack” is an adage that refers to the tendency for darker skin tones to wrinkle less than lighter skin tones, causing some Black Americans to appear younger than they are (Bailey and Miller 2015; Cook 2014). This gives the perception that some Black Americans are “seemingly defying the aging process” (Belgrave and Abrams 2016:725). My father routinely recommends (half-jokingly) that my 57-year-old mother start disclosing her age to others when she tells new acquaintances that she has a grandchild due to the number of people who have responded with quizzical glances. “No, I was not a teen mother, and neither is my daughter,” she routinely injects at the sight of their shocked non-verbal responses.

Just as my mother engages in impression management in a society where adolescent mothers are unjustly stigmatized, I too must repeatedly manage how others discern of my presence in light of my oftentimes misperceived age. I consciously perform my status via the way I speak with others, the way I dress, and the information that I share with students. My decision to display my doctoral diploma in a prominent place in my office is another example of engaging in impression management. Despite being a married, 30-year-old mother of a toddler, who graduated from college

nearly a decade ago, I am routinely mistaken for an undergraduate student. During graduate school, undergraduate students were often surprised to hear that I was the instructor of their class and not one of their classmates or an undergraduate student serving as the teaching assistant. As a nearly newly minted PhD, I was once asked if I was an incoming freshman. Now as a tenure-track faculty member, I have been addressed as “kiddo.” Others in similar status positions have asked me if I have a PhD or if I adjunct at other universities. On numerous occasions, undergraduate members of on-campus student organizations have asked if I would like to join, to which I swiftly respond “no thanks” to avoid embarrassment for the students and myself rather than going into an explanation as to why I am not eligible to rush a sorority, vote for student body president, or go on a student-led mission trip. While looking young is highly sought after in American society and I acknowledge its benefits in terms of perceived competence, attractiveness, and social desirability, it can also be accompanied with unwelcome judgments and naïve interactions, particularly in the workplace.

Sociologists have spent substantial time investigating age bias in the workplace—particularly against the oldest and youngest workers (e.g., Duncan and Loretto 2004; McMullin and Marshall 2001). As the U.S. population is growing older and retiring later, this area of inquiry is especially significant. Stereotypes about older workers, such as the presumption that older workers have lower job performance (Avolio and Barrett 1987; Finkelstein, Burke, and Raju 1995), can lead to age bias, prejudicial attitudes toward certain employees, and discrimination against older workers (Posthuma, Wagstaff, and Campion 2012). Similar stereotypes about younger workers—such as presumed incompetence and immaturity—can negatively affect younger workers’ reputations, job performances, and professional trajectories (e.g., Deal, Altman, and Rogelberg 2010; Finkelstein 2013). In my case, my social position as a younger, new professor made bringing my age to the forefront potentially problematic as it could have undermined my authority and led students to perceive me as unskilled compared to my older colleagues.

In addition to the possible consequences that could result from students knowing my relative youthfulness compared to most other faculty members, revealing my age could be insult to injury in light of research on workplace discrimination on the basis of race. The experience of this can be

distinctive for middle-class Black Americans who often find themselves as one of few people of color in professional workspaces (e.g., S. M. Collins 1983, 1997; Feagin and Sikes 1994; Jackson and Stewart 2003; Lacy 2007; Pager and Sheperd 2008). Race-based workplace discrimination manifests itself in the form of unfair evaluations of job quality (Hughes and Dodge 1997), unequal pay (Cancio, Evans, and Maume 1996), and negative repercussions for Black workers' sense of mastery, resulting in psychological distress (Broman, Mavaddat, and Hsu 2000).

Academia is not immune to racial disparities in workplace discrimination and its consequences. To use Kanter's (1977) term, being a racial "token" in a social setting—or one of the "only ones" in a particular group—can lead to heightened visibility and feelings of isolation (Wingfield 2010), so disclosing age can add a layer of complexity to navigating these spaces as a young woman of color on the faculty at a predominantly white institution (PWI). In Turner's (2002:77) study of racial tokenism in academia, one interviewee stated: "Dealing with the senior, [mostly white] males in my department has been a huge challenge. . . . I don't know if they tend to discount my contributions because I'm new, female, Latina, young, or what. Perhaps a combination of all of the above." For women of color in academia, repercussions of workplace assumptions and discrimination can lead to imposter syndrome, or feelings of self-doubt despite one's education, experience, and intelligence (Clance and Imes 1978; Trotman 2009). Social mobility is perhaps "a double-edged sword" for Black, white-collar workers who have worked their way up in status but "continue to face racist attitudes in their workplaces" (Jackson and Stewart 2003:444).

Despite college instructors oftentimes holding terminal degrees in their fields, women of color in academia continue to experience racist attitudes in the workplace. It is well documented that women faculty of color tend to be evaluated more poorly by students (Fries and McNinch 2003; Hamermesh and Parker 2005). Based on in-depth interviews with women faculty of color, Pittman (2010) reported that her participants repeatedly experienced being challenged by white male students. In particular, students challenged their authority, questioned their teaching competency, and disrespected their scholarly expertise (Pittman 2010). In addition, research shows that women faculty of color tend to be burdened with heavier teaching responsibilities (Allen et al. 2002; Johnson, Kuykendall, and Laird 2005) and disproportionately hold lower

ranking positions at colleges and universities (Hamilton 2004). Knowing the age of women faculty of color can potentially lead to them being underappreciated and taken advantage of further.

As I and others experience, women of color in academia are sometimes mistaken for students in a way that can be problematic in professional settings (Gutiérrez y Muhset al. 2012; Johnson-Bailey and Lee 2005), which highlights how "perceived youthfulness creates problems that can undermine authority" (Bailey and Miller 2015:176). In a work setting where the majority of those in a similar status position are white males who are older than I am, my age and youthful appearance problematize my already marginalized position.

In addition to combatting the multiplicative effects of having a marginalized age and racial identification for my status position, teaching a course that is specifically *about* age—particularly as substantial course material is dedicated to understanding the experiences and challenges of older adulthood—one might argue that disclosing your age when you are 30 years old may be a risk as students may perceive the instructor as an outsider lacking real-world experience with the course material. In Greenfield's (2007) article titled, "What's the Deal with the White Middle-Aged Guy Teaching Hip-Hop? Lessons in Popular Culture, Positionality, and Pedagogy," he reflects on his experience teaching a hip-hop course at a historically Black university. Greenfield writes that there is a "powerful underlying assumption in the typical learning environment that the teacher represents the standard of knowledge for the particular subject being addressed" (p. 232). Therefore, despite his academic expertise on the subject matter and years of experience teaching the course, his presence as the authority on this topic gave him anxiety. However, unlike in his situation where he writes that "teaching popular culture subverts dominant paradigms by positioning students as emerging 'experts,' and thus, successful implementation requires educators to be open to learning from and with their students" (p. 242), the study of older adults is not popular knowledge among most 18- to 22-year-olds, and none of my students positioned themselves as experts on the subject matter or embodied the experiences of older adults themselves. The complexities of navigating my performance as an expert on this topic while simultaneously ensuring that my students perceived me as a competent professor and scholar—despite possible assumptions to the contrary due to my race, age, and gender—sometimes caused internal struggles with how to best approach

students in the classroom and project a cool-and-approachable yet authoritative-and-serious persona.

MY DECISION: THE BENEFITS OF AGE DISCLOSURE

Despite the potential complications that could arise from instructor-disclosed age, I shared my age with my students and do not regret it. There are four main benefits that I experienced: It (1) enabled me to give more concrete examples that were illustrative of key course concepts, (2) helped students understand the relational nature of age and embrace that the issues presented in a course on age and aging are not solely relevant to older segments of the population, (3) facilitated the creation of a safe space for “nontraditional” students, and (4) allowed me to better craft a narrative of myself as the instructor. In sum, age became part of a broader pedagogical toolkit I employed in which I used my positionalities as a mechanism for explaining important ideas and cultivating a comfortable classroom climate. These benefits are more fully described in the sections that follow.

Benefit 1: Facilitation of Concrete Examples

Revealing multiple selves and aspects of my biography eased my ability to give concrete examples that helped students understand key concepts in the sociology of aging and the life course. By sharing my age, it embedded my experiences within a particular context and placed me in a cohort—a key concept in life course sociology that I wanted my students to understand. As an example, I explained to students how I was in one of the first cohorts who adopted Facebook, so my experiences with social media and perception of its continued utility differ greatly from most of them, who frequently reminded me that Facebook is outdated, uncool, and for an older segment of the population. As another example, I was in eighth grade on September 11, 2001. I told students how I can recall exactly where I was when I learned about the events as they unfolded and how this shaped my contemporary understandings of this historical moment. This experience differentiated me from most of my students, who were newborns or toddlers that day, and allowed me to talk about how belonging to a cohort who lived through an event is affected by it differently than cohorts who learned about it in history books. As a byproduct, students repeatedly remarked in my teaching evaluations how they felt that I created a

classroom that was conducive to sharing and discussion. Simultaneously, I was able to maintain social distance between myself and students, indirectly reiterating that even though they may perceive me as young, I am not “one of them.”

Benefit 2: Helps to Convey the Relational Nature of Age

By giving examples of how age affects my day-to-day decision making, I was able to make it clear that age is relational and relevant to everyone in ways that many students had not considered. This idea was particularly important as most students were enrolled in the course to fulfill a graduation requirement and did not have significant prior interest in the subject matter. Age is similar to race in that race can be framed in an absence/presence model (Lucal 1996), the belief that just as only people of color have a relevant race, only older people have an age that affects daily life in conscious ways. Acknowledging my age and discussing its relevance to my day-to-day life throughout the semester was beneficial in getting students to think about the topic of age—like race—as relevant to and inclusive of everyone. For example, I discussed how my youthful appearance, race, and professional position shape my workplace clothing choices. Unlike some of my white male peers who are older than I am, I perceive that I must more consciously consider how I style my natural hair and the formality of my apparel to explicitly differentiate myself from my students who wear more casual attire and perform professional legitimacy for my faculty peers. From this anecdote, students not only come to appreciate the intersections of age, race, gender, and status but also the relational nature of age. Fritschner (2001:110) writes that a relational approach to race emphasizes “the advantages and privileges that membership in the dominant cultural group bestows,” making “whiteness visible by calling attention to the privileges that whiteness confers.” In this vein, students can consider how being a 50- or 60-year-old college professor can be bestowed with advantages those in their early 30s do not yet possess and how these advantages are exacerbated or diminished depending on the person’s gender and race.

In my course, one of the major writing assignments requires students to conduct a life story interview. Subsequently, students must use a life course framework to analyze the events of their participant’s life. While others teaching this type of course may require that students interview an older

adult, I tell my students that interviewing an adult at any point in the life course is acceptable. By doing this, I can emphasize to students that all ages and life stages come with privileges, challenges, important milestones, turning points, and outcomes that can be analyzed using a sociological imagination. Students interviewed individuals at various stages of the life course, ranging from 20-year-old roommates to 80-year-old grandmothers. As they wrote their papers, students reflected on the contextual advantages and disadvantages that their participants had throughout the life course based on age and its intersections with other positionalities. I pushed students to think critically about how the historical context shaped their interviewees' lived experiences as well as how their participants interpreted and narrated their own life events. My students' analyses made clear that the relevance of a person's multiple identities—age included—is central to their experiences no matter where they are in the life course and that it is important to think about how a person's age is present in both storytelling and the life stories themselves.

Benefit 3: Fostering a Safe Space

As the semester progressed, sharing my age with students had the unintended consequence of creating a "safe space" (hooks 1994), particularly for nontraditional students who were attending college "off-time." The changing demographics of college students should spur instructors to consider how to foster comfortable learning spaces for students of a more diverse age set. While the majority of students at most U.S. universities are between the ages of 18 and 22, the number of students over the age of 25 recently peaked (National Center for Education Statistics 2017). This is a particularly important consideration for instructors at institutions such as the one where I work. Unlike community colleges or lower-ranked regional universities, private institutions are less likely to have had notable numbers of nontraditional students in the past. Nontraditional students outside of the 18 to 22 age bracket oftentimes feel like outsiders because they are at a different life stage, which poses challenges for social integration (Sorrey and Duggan 2008). Entering college with a variety of life experiences and family obligations that traditional students are less likely to enter college with can also make students over the age of 25 feel different than their peers (Yorke 1999). At my present university, where there is a notable contingent of military veterans and university staff members

among the student body who entered college at varied points in the life course, I found on several occasions that I am closer in age to these students than they are to most of their classmates, which can serve as a point of connection. For some of these students, I perceive that knowing how old I am makes them feel more comfortable approaching me privately after class to talk about their age-related experiences, particularly the moments in which they feel othered on campus. As an example, one of my students was a 30-year-old military veteran who routinely talked to me after class after I disclosed my age. He often alluded to the fact that we were in the same cohort and enjoyed discussing pop culture references from our childhood that most of his classmates would not understand. For other students, I believe that establishing my classroom as a space where biographical information can be shared freely led to more mature students openly disclosing their experiences with the class in ways that were fruitful and added diverse voices to classroom discussions. As an example, another one of my students in her 40s approached me after class during the semester and disclosed how she felt like she stood out among her classmates because of her age. I encouraged her to use that as a strength because she had a unique perspective that no one else in the room shared. Throughout the semester, she progressively contributed more to classroom conversation in ways that her classmates often affirmed verbally and through body language was enlightening. As hooks (1994:21) writes:

I do not expect students to take any risks that I would not take, to share in any way that I would not share....It is often helpful if professors take the first risk, linking confessional narratives to academic discussions so as to show how experience can illuminate and enhance our understanding of academic material.

By sharing my age on the same day that I explained the goals of the course, handed out the syllabus, and introduced myself, I set the stage for the importance of talking about age by attempting to remove the taboo nature out of openly discussing it. I took the first risk by confessing my own age and framing it as an important part of who I am as a person, scholar, and instructor. In addition, by laying the groundwork and sharing my age on the first day of class, I aimed for students in the 18 to 22 age group to more fully appreciate the importance of hearing about the experiences of those whose age differs

from theirs in order to work toward having a campus culture that is inclusive of students from all backgrounds and with different life experiences.

Benefit 4: Steering My Narrative and Shaping Perceptions

By being forthcoming with my age, I aimed to take control of how I presented myself and show students that age does not matter when it comes to being an expert on a particular topic. It is inevitable that on the first day of class—and in every class meeting throughout the semester—students attempt to make sense of the instructor’s presence and curate judgments based on their self-presentations. As a young, woman of color faculty member at a PWI, I find that being as forthcoming as possible allows me to better craft the narrative that students internalize about my ability to teach the course and any generalizations they draw about women of color faculty members based on my classroom performance. For many students, I was the first (and for some, may be the last) Black woman that they have as a course instructor, so it was important for me to share personal experiences to demonstrate the differences between us—particularly in terms of experiencing microaggressions and unequal treatment at various stages of my life—but also to show students that we have much in common despite coming from different backgrounds. While there is no guarantee that this can combat the documented biases against women faculty of color in student evaluations, I found that sharing my age made students perceive me as approachable and relatable and that my ability to make the personal academic by applying course concepts to my age and cohort-based experiences enriched their perceptions of my competency.

CONCLUSION

We live in a culture of oversharing that is characterized by blurring the line between public and private life and facilitated by the ubiquitous nature of social media (Agger 2015). In this social context, instructors may be increasingly confronted with decisions concerning where to draw the line between professional and personal life. No instructor owes any student an explanation of their positionalities. Being able to share my age, especially so early in the semester, was a privilege and was likely an easier experience than other instructors with different positionalities may have. In Adams’s (2016) writing about coming out as gay in his

classrooms, he writes that while he used to come out at the beginning of the semester, he now waits until midsemester or does not come out at all because of informal criticisms he received about when and whether he comes out. I do not anticipate that I will receive threats or complaints about whether I reveal my age or the timing of this disclosure. This article is written from the perspective of a middle-class, Black, biracial, cisgender woman, heterosexual, tenure-track faculty member who is employed by a private university, and the viewpoints expressed are shaped by the privileges, disadvantages, and experiences that accompany my social position. While my discussion of disclosure in the classroom is relevant to multiple aspects of an instructor’s identity, it is important to acknowledge the differences in degrees of difficulty depending on the type of disclosure and classroom context.

Without getting into a debate about whether age is as important as other positionalities, this article makes clear that age and its intersections with other identities matter in the classroom for instructors and students at all points in the life course, particularly for instructors who value an intersectional perspective. An intersectional framework argues that “gender and race are not separate and additive but interactive and multiplicative in their effects” (Ray 2014:782) and strives for taking interlocking matrices of oppression into account when understanding the social world (P. H. Collins 1986; Crenshaw 1989, 1991). In this vein, more explicit attempts to explain to students how age plays into this equation is important, particularly for women of color in the academy. For women faculty of color, sharing personal experiences that integrate age with these other aspects of social location can help students understand marginality on a deeper, more nuanced level.

Even in courses that are not centered on age as the primary area of inquiry, instructor disclosure of age can aid in the learning process. When I taught an undergraduate course on race and ethnicity as a graduate student, I was forthcoming with my students about my racial background *and* my age. This was not solely because it was a course on race and ethnicity and I was self-conscious about my age as a 28-year-old graduate student instructor. I have become accustomed to sharing my racial identity because I am somewhat ambiguous looking as a Black and white biracial woman. After disclosing my racial identity with the class, I shared personal experiences on several occasions that illustrated the continued relevance of race in day-to-day life.

For example, when I was in kindergarten, one of my white classmates told me that I could not sit with her at the lunch table because I was Black. I have a distinct memory of an instance that occurred a couple of years later when someone yelled at my father (who is white) in the grocery store while my brother and I were with him because she disapproved of his apparent choice to have children with a Black woman. Students are oftentimes surprised to hear these anecdotes as they did not happen in the South during the 1960s when we often think about the height of race relations in American history textbooks. Rather, they occurred in the 1990s in racially diverse, liberal, Midwestern cities. Despite my relatively young age and having grown up at a time of great racial progress, race shaped some of my earliest memories and continues to shape my daily choices and social interactions. Emphasizing my age along with my race better contextualized these experiences, highlighting both the continued salience of race in the United States and the ways in which cohort and race intersect. Openly sharing my cohort membership became a tool for making the continued importance of addressing racial inequality *that* much more apparent to students.

While sharing age with students is a complex and vulnerable experience and the implications will likely change as I progress through the life course and my career, reflecting on its varied effects is beneficial for myself and my students. Age can be thought of as an additional mechanism for explaining the importance of social context and merging marginalities to students with expanding sociological imaginations. I challenge instructors to think critically about the presence and absence of age in the classroom and why it may be beneficial to have more explicit discussions of age that begin with ourselves.

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reviewers for this manuscript were, in alphabetical order, Kathie Friedman, Katrina Hoop, and Jason Sumerau.

REFERENCES

- Adams, Tony E. 2016. *Narrating the Closet: An Autoethnography of Same-Sex Attraction*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Agger, Ben. 2015. *Overshaing: Presentations of Self in the Internet Age*. Routledge: New York, NY.
- Allen, Walter, Edgar G. Epps, Elizabeth A. Guillory, Susan A. Suh, Marguerite Bonous-Hammarth, and Martha L. A. Stassen. 2002. "Outsiders within: Race, Gender, and Faculty Status in U.S. Higher Education." Pp. 189–220 in *The Racial Crisis in American Higher Education*, edited by W. A. Smith, P. G. Altbach, and K. Lomotey. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Avolio, Bruce J., and Gerald V. Barrett. 1987. "Effects of Age Stereotyping in a Simulated Interview." *Psychology and Aging* 2(1):56–63.
- Bailey, Moya, and Shannon J. Miller. 2015. "When Margins Become Centered: Black Queer Women in Front and Outside of the Classroom." *Feminist Formations* 27(3):168–88.
- Belgrave, Faye Z., and Jasmine A. Abrams. 2016. "Reducing Disparities and Achieving Equity in African American Women's Health." *American Psychologist* 71(8):723–33.
- Bonilla-Silva, Eduardo. 2003. *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States*. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Broman, Clifford L., Roya Mavaddat, and Shu-Yao Hsu. 2000. "The Experience and Consequences of Perceived Racial Discrimination: A Study of African Americans." *Journal of Black Psychology* 26(2):165–80.
- Cancio, A. Silvia, T. David Evans, and David J. Maume, Jr. 1996. "Reconsidering the Declining Significance of Race: Racial Differences in Early Career Wages." *American Sociological Review* 61(4):541–56.
- Clance, Pauline Rose, and Suzanne Imes. 1978. "The Impostor Phenomenon in High Achieving Women: Dynamics and Therapeutic Intervention." *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, and Practice* 15(3):241–47.
- Collins, Patricia H. 1986. "Learning from the Outsider within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought." *Social Problems* 33(6):S14–32.
- Collins, Sharon M. 1983. "The Making of the Black Middle Class." *Social Problems* 30(4):369–82.
- Collins, Sharon M. 1997. *Black Corporate Executives: The Making and Breaking of a Black Middle Class*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press.
- Cook, Sarah Gibard. 2014. "Helping Black Women to Navigate Troubled Waters." *Women in Higher Education* 19(5):18–19.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal* 1989(8):139–67.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review* 43(6):1241–99.
- Dannefer, Dale. 1984. "Adult Development and Social Theory: A Paradigmatic Reappraisal." *American Sociological Review* 49:100–106.
- Deal, Jennifer J., David G. Altman, and Steven G. Rogelberg. 2010. "Millennials at Work: What We

- Know and What We Need to Do (if Anything)." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 25(2):191-99.
- Duncan, Colin, and Wendy Loretto. 2004. "Never the Right Age? Gender and Age-Based Discrimination in Employment." *Gender, Work and Organization* 11(1):95-115.
- Feagin, Joe R., and Melvin P. Sikes. 1994. *Living with Racism: The Black Middle-Class Experience*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Finkelstein, Lisa M. 2013. "What Do the Young (Old) People Think of Me? Content and Accuracy of Age-Based Metastereotypes." *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 22(6): 633-57.
- Finkelstein, Lisa M., Michael J. Burke, and Nambury S. Raju. 1995. "Age Discrimination in Simulated Employment Contexts: An Integrative Analysis." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 80(6):652-63.
- Friedman, Kathie, and Karen Rosenberg. 2007. "Performing Identities in the Classroom: Teaching Jewish Women's Studies." *Teaching Sociology* 35:315-33.
- Fries, Christopher J., and R. James McNinch. 2003. "Signed Versus Unsigned Student Evaluations of Teaching: A Comparison." *Teaching Sociology* 31(3):333-44.
- Fritschner, Linda Marie. 2001. "Lessons about Race in Introductory Sociology." *Teaching Sociology* 29:110-15.
- Greenfield, Derek. 2006. "Understanding Social Structure through Personal Experience: The Creative Use of Status and Role as Explanatory Factors." *Teaching Sociology* 34(4):404-11.
- Greenfield, Derek. 2007. "What's the Deal with the White Middle-Aged Guy Teaching Hip-Hop? Lessons in Popular Culture, Positionality, and Pedagogy." *Pedagogy, Culture and Society* 15(2):229-43.
- Gutiérrez y Muhset, Gabriella, Yolanda Flores Niemann, Carmen G. González, and Angela P. Harris, eds. 2012. *Presumed Incompetent: The Intersections of Race and Class for Women in Academia*. Boulder, CO: University Press of Colorado.
- Hamermesh, Daniel S., and Amy M. Parker. 2005. "Beauty in the Classroom: Instructors' Pulchritude and Putative Pedagogical Productivity." *Economics of Education Review* 24(4):369-76.
- Hamilton, Kendra. 2004. "Faculty Science Positions Continue to Elude Women of Color." *Black Issues in Higher Education* 21(3):36-39.
- hooks, bell. 1994. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.
- Hughes, Diane, and Mark A. Dodge. 1997. "African American Women in the Workplace: Relationships between Job Conditions, Racial Bias at Work, and Perceived Job Quality." *American Journal of Community Psychology* 25(5):581-99.
- Jackson, Pamela Braboy, and Quincy Thomas Stewart. 2003. "A Research Agenda for the Black Middle Class: Work Stress, Survival Strategies, and Mental Health." *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 44(3):442-55.
- Johnson, Susan D., John A. Kuykendall, and Thomas F. Nelson Laird. 2005. "An Examination of Workload of Faculty of Color by Rank." Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE), Philadelphia, PA.
- Johnson-Bailey, Juanita, and Ming-Yeh Lee. 2005. "Women of Color in the Academy: Where's Our Authority in the Classroom?" *Feminist Teacher* 15(2):111-22.
- Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. 1977. "Some Effects of Proportions on Group Life: Skewed Sex Ratios and Responses to Token Women." *American Journal of Sociology* 82(5):965-90.
- Lacy, Karyn R. 2007. *Blue-Chip Black: Race, Class, and Status in the New Black Middle Class*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Lucal, Betsy. 1996. "Oppression AND Privilege: Towards a Relational Conceptualization of Race." *Teaching Sociology* 24:245-55.
- McMullin, Julie Ann, and Victor W. Marshall. 2001. "Ageism, Age Relations and Garment Industry Work in Montreal." *The Gerontologist* 41(1):111-22.
- National Center for Education Statistics. 2017. "The Condition of Education 2017." <https://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch/pubsinfo.asp?pubid=2017144>.
- Nowakowski, Alexandra C. H., and J. E. Sumerau. 2015. "Should We Talk about the Pain? Personalizing Sociology in the Medical Sociology Classroom." *Teaching Sociology* 43(4):290-300.
- Pager, Devah, and Hana Sheperd. 2008. "The Sociology of Discrimination: Racial Discrimination in Employment, Housing, Credit, and Consumer Markets." *Annual Review of Sociology* 34:181-209.
- Pittman, Chavella T. 2010. "Race and Gender Oppression in the Classroom: The Experiences of Women Faculty of Color with White Male Students." *Teaching Sociology* 38(3):183-96.
- Posthuma, Richard A., Maria F. Wagstaff, and Michael A. Champion. 2012. "Age Stereotypes and Workplace Age Discrimination." Pp. 298-312 in *The Oxford Handbook of Work and Aging*, edited by J. W. Hedge and W. C. Borman. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Powers, Rosemary F. 1998. "Using Critical Autobiography to Teach the Sociology of Education." *Teaching Sociology* 26(3):198-206.
- Ray, Rashawn. 2014. "An Intersectional Analysis to Explaining a Lack of Physical Activity among Middle Class Black Women." *Sociology Compass* 8(6):780-91.
- Riley, Matilda White. 1987. "On the Significance of Age in Sociology." *American Sociological Review* 52(1):1-14.
- Sorrey, Kellie Crawford, and Molly Harris Duggan. 2008. "Differential Predictors of Persistence between Community College Adult and Traditional-Aged Students." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice* 32(2):75-100.
- Trotman, Frances K. 2009. "The Imposter Phenomenon among African American Women in US Institutions of Higher Education: Implications for Counseling."

- Pp. 77–87 in *Compelling Counseling Interventions: VISTAS*, edited by G. R. Walz, J. C. Bleuer, and R. K. Yep. Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.
- Turner, Caroline S.V. 2002. "Women of Color in Academe: Living with Multiple Marginality." *The Journal of Higher Education* 73(1):74–93.
- Wentling, Tre, Elroi Windsor, Kristen Schilt, and Betsy Lucal. 2008. "Teaching Transgender." *Teaching Sociology* 36:49–57.
- Wingfield, Adia Harvey. 2010. "Are Some Emotions Marked 'Whites Only?' Racialized Feeling Rules in Professional Workplaces." *Social Problems* 57(2):251–68.
- Yorke, Mantz. 1999. *Leaving Early: Undergraduates Non-completion in Higher Education*. London: Taylor and Francis.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Alicia Smith-Tran is an assistant professor of sociology at Texas Christian University. Her research focuses on issues related to race, class, and gender; age and aging; health; and the sociology of sport.