Through a Glass, Darkly: The Hidden Injury of Ageism in the Academy

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This piece follows the format of a lyric essay, which blends memoir, research, and essay in a way that emphasizes the sharing of deeply felt emotions over and above the verifiable accuracy of information. Such a format allows a new path of inquiry: not only does it shed light on how I perceived and processed my experiences, but also on how I shaped and gave meaning to those experiences. What the reader finds in this lyric essay is a rumination, a meditation of sorts that attempts to make sense of an interlocking web of circumstances by suggesting, rather than expounding on, conclusions. To the extent that this lyric essay dismisses objectivity in favor of intimacy, this essay may leave the reader with lingering questions. In this process of sharing fragments of my experiences that are meant to tether the reader's attention, this uncertainty is acceptable, even expected.

In this lyric essay, I tell my own story of adversity in action at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota, and I rely on a narrative voice to incorporate my identity as a former faculty of practice with over two decades of writing program service at a workplace dominated by a strongly established white male hierarchical power structure with deep religious overtones, which may have had an impact on the marginalization I experienced. I write this lyric essay with the hope that readers will gain a new, more grounded, and more personal perspective of marginalization and will reflect upon their own experiences of laboring in the programs, departments, and, to a larger extent, the universities where they work.

My Experience of Disenfranchisement
The text messages kept coming. *Are you okay? How are you taking the news? What does this mean?* I wasn't sure how to reply to my long-time colleagues who seemed as shocked by the news as I was. I was numb, confused, overwhelmed. All I could answer was, *I'm okay, but the changes*

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came out of left field, and I'm not sure how I feel.

I thought back on that meeting a week earlier. There were no hints, no murmurs of changes afloat regarding the operating structure of the campus's academic writing support programs, so the news that Tuesday afternoon last fall came to me as a shock. I learned that after devoting almost 25 years as the Writing Studio and then Writing Across the Curriculum program director at Saint Mary's University of Minnesota undergraduate campus, my title was being demoted to associate director, even though my work responsibilities would remain the same. During the brief meeting that Tuesday, I learned that while the writing programs at the undergraduate and graduate campuses were not being streamlined, the reporting lines were being shifted: no longer would writing programs and services on the undergraduate campus be housed under Student Success but would instead be housed under University Writing Initiatives. The Writing Center director of the graduate campus was chosen to oversee writing platforms at both campuses. While both directors held the same Ph.D. degrees, the younger, less experienced director had less than four years at the institution and less familiarity in shaping and developing new writing programming. No reason for the change in reporting lines was given, nor was there an explanation for the demotion in my job title. Despite my gently imploring emails requesting feedback and an explanation for the choice of new leadership and for the decision to reconfigure my title from director to associate director, reasons were not provided, and emails went unanswered.

Richard Starcher labels this "the chilly climate," or a work environment in which biases "chill the air" (206), pitting the dominant culture against its lesser laborers. I was feeling "chilled out" by college administrators, and while I recognized the tell-tale signs (lack of support, age bias, and isolation, especially toward those in low-status positions), the inability to get answers left me reeling. I realized that if I were to arrive at some sort of depth of understanding of this troubling issue, it would require some dissection. What was at stake? What harm was caused? I sensed that my low status as a non-tenure-track faculty of practice, combined with my gender, played a role in my demotion at the private institution where I spent my career. But those two factors—gender and low-status position—didn't tell the whole story. At over 55 years old, I realized a significant—perhaps the most significant—third factor might be at play: my age.

Making Sense of Marginalization: A Critical Framework

In this lyric essay, I argue that the complex issue of ageism, a much-hidden injustice on college campuses, may be one of the most difficult injustices to fight and overcome, especially when compounded by gender and powerlessness. Perhaps because combating this triple jeopardy requires rich inner resources, not only to battle diminished influence in the academy but also to minimize psychological damage caused by poor

treatment in the workplace, I incorporate a narrative approach interwoven with research to shed light on my own experiences of injury regarding age, class, and gender.

In their research on gendered ageism, Gee et al. found that discrimination involving gendering and ageing is linked to diminished well-being (267). In arguing that gendered ageism (especially of laborers with low standing) has shaped the college workplace culture in harmful and contradictory ways and that responding to injustice with self-awareness is essential to forming an honest cultural critique, this study contributes to the important examination of institutional power structure and its impact on laborers in marginalized positions. At a time when many universities face budget constraints, which may reduce the availability of full-time faculty and faculty of practice altogether or may lead to the elimination of the most senior non-protected laborers (with higher earnings), the issue of ageism, most notably among women who hold limited workplace status, must be addressed if we are to navigate changes in the 21st century university. Calling attention to the harm of gendered ageism of low-status laborers might encourage meaningful action and dialogue to ensure that modernizing initiatives are not shutting out the very voices that could be the most valuable.

I spend significant time in the following sections deciphering the issues of gendering, ageism, and classism as they exist at higher education institutions today, the harm these issues cause not only to women but to the future of institutional communities, and why we need to pay attention. When colleges and universities of all types and locations are facing serious problems in today's educational climate, especially regarding issues of diversity and inclusion, enrollment declines, and the reimagining of how education is delivered, the hidden injuries caused to older women with low standing in the academy, may seem trite—to the point of being ignored, dismissed, or denied altogether. But as I show in the following pages, there is a need for greater understanding of the "othering" caused by the intersection of sexism, ageism, and classism in academia and how gendered ageism impacts low-status women's livelihoods, including their sense of self. This topic is especially important given the fact that women in the academy remain over-represented in low-status positions (Granleese and Sayer 513; Gander 109; Sargeant 2), which acts to minimize women's agency in advocating for improved working conditions.

The "silencing" of women without status or power in academia is compounded for women who find themselves younger than 35 and older than 45, or what Jacqueline Granleese and Gemma Sayer refer to as outside of the "golden decade" (512). It should be noted that this lyric essay on gendered ageism is itself ageist: it addresses women who have aged beyond the golden decade and does not include those who have not yet reached the golden decade, most notably because this older age group, especially those from age 50 on, faces significantly more hurdles in a society obsessed with youth and appearance and which embraces the myth

that competency and vibrancy decrease with age (Jyrkinen and McKie 65; Sargeant 2).

It must also be noted that different configurations of inequality occur in different contexts, so the intent of this lyric essay is not to assume outcomes, but to explore the nature and extent of inequality at one particular academic setting, with a specific focus on age inequality, which has received relatively scant attention. While my own experience of gendered ageism does not replicate or represent any other person or group's experiences of inequality, Leslie McCall's research indicates that my experience may suggest there are common conditions among academic settings that may exacerbate (or reduce) gender, age, and class inequality (1777). While structural conditions of academic institutions are dynamic and complex, they also can provide some explanation of the broader issues of social injustice that middle-aged women laboring in non-secure positions in the academy may face.

The Institutional Response to Inequality

Perhaps because academic institutions are dynamic and complex, complications arise regarding the issue of gendered ageism of low-status laborers. Many institutions take a position that is at odds with those laborers who experience marginalization: the position that acts of injustice don't exist at their university. The changing identity and mission of the modern university centers on entrepreneurship, key performance indicators, and number-crunching (Chou), so institutions may not regard their practices of restricting or eliminating female ageing laborers in low-status positions as unjust and, in fact, may cite their targeted hiring and promotion of women in mid-status and high-status positions as evidence. This practice occurred at the institution where I worked: perhaps because the majority of the institution's top-level administrators were male, the institution made the deliberate decision to hire more women in mid-level dean and low-level director positions, to the point where most mid- and low-level positions across the institution were held by women. While top administrators pointed to a more gender-balanced administration, they failed to remark on the result of such decision-making: a stronger and clearer status delineation between top administrative positions, the great majority of which were held by males, and mid-level and low-level administrative positions, the great majority of which were held by females. And in times of budget-crunching, those low-to-mid-level administrative positions held by women were cut first. In the last round of budget cuts stemming from issues related to the coronavirus pandemic, for instance, not one top (male) administrative position was eliminated, while several low-level (mostly female) administrative positions were permanently cut.

While institutions cite their good faith attempt at growing their female administrative rosters, they also defend their right to eliminate all positions that no longer serve the good of the institution, regardless of the gender, age, or class of laborers. Jasper McChesney and Jacqueline Bichel

not only support this right but go a step further: they believe institutions should regard the trend of the ageing university workforce as an opportunity for institutions to shift their resources where they are able, so they can refine and reshape a more diverse workforce to better meet the changing needs and declining enrollments of the university (11). In other words, McChesney and Bichel believe institutions have an obligation to do what is best for the evolving 21st century university and the students they serve, which may require getting rid of some longstanding contingent, non-tenure-track faculty of practice laborers (the great majority of whom are women) who place a burden on the institution's budget or no longer fit the curricular needs of students. What McChesney and Bichel fail to mention is that determining which positions to eliminate "for the good of the university" requires subjective rather than objective problem solving. I am reminded of one talented, dynamic, longstanding female laborer who led the institution's web design team. Rather than retain the high skills of this laborer, the institution chose to eliminate her position and keep a far less experienced and younger laborer under contract. "The good of the university" appeared to be defined by eliminating unprotected higher-wage positions.

Certainly no one in the academy would disagree with an institution's choice to incorporate efficiency and much needed diversity measures or to embrace and uphold those colleagues who potentially can offer the institution different, more innovative thought and insight. As Mark Chou explains, in this age of high competition, institutions most want laborers who are high performers and who will advance the status of the institution. The error exists in prejudicing one group of laborers over another, for valuing the contributions of some as greater than the contributions of others, and for refusing to consider the prospective harm that can result from endorsing one group at another's expense.

Margaret Morganroth Gullette's work on ageism in the academy is especially important to note here. Gullette says employment practices that disparage experience are a form of age shaming, all done in an effort to bring in more innovative ideas (193). This shortsightedness on the part of institutions results in the development of in-groups and out-groups, with newer faculty members rising to the top while ageing faculty are left at the bottom. This practice, as Gullette explains, may ultimately have a negative impact on an institution's productivity (6). When one segment of a university community is not only treated as deficient but is also used as a scapegoat for the institution's woes, the laborers as a whole become distant to one another. They sense a silencing of their respected elders, which results in increased polarization among faculty and staff, weakened governance over curriculum, and a loss of trust in the administration's willingness to offer protection (2).

At the institution where I worked, the removal over a number of years of well-respected, longstanding laborers in the name of budget cutting changed the institutional climate for the worse. The move fostered

fear in laborers at all operational levels, so much so that employees, most notably females, in especially unprotected positions chose to avoid giving input that was considered disagreeable rather than risk having their name added to the "in danger of losing a job" list. In one situation when the group of staff I worked with was asked to give anonymous feedback on our supervisor's job effectiveness, I gave what I believed was constructive criticism. The supervisor became privy to my comments and determined to make me pay. Over the next few years, the supervisor made false statements about me, painting me as an outcast and troublemaker. In a position with no status and no protection, I was defenseless. Others who were just as powerless, especially those who were newer laborers at the institution, witnessed the harmful treatment and were fearful of the same, so they refused to voice viewpoints that went against the company line. What transpired was a strongly divisive climate in which difference and disagreement were admonished and obedience and like-mindedness were promoted.

The institution where I worked is not the only institution that has overlooked the harm a crushingly divisive work environment can cause. Yet these negative impacts seem to hold little importance for corporate-model institutions in which ageing laborers are not only considered a liability but are also are seen as being out of touch, out of date, uncreative, and unproductive (Gullette xi; Gander 123; Jack).

It must be noted that perspectives regarding the relationship between injustice and injury may be very differently understood between low-status laborers and administrators of the programs and departments they serve. Much depends on an institution's views and values of gendered ageing laborers, which can influence an institution's decisions regarding those laborers (Sargeant 10). It is precisely because institutions rarely see the "othering" of ageing female low-status workers that conversations about marginalization are so important and valuable in our efforts to promote a fair and inclusive work climate that recognizes the contribution of all laborers, especially contributions from longstanding laborers who offer the institution high intellectual and resource capital. Telling our stories of marginalization may be one of the best ways we can humanize injustice and promote human dignity.

Literature Review

Positionality
Change and renewal typically do not happen without conscious reflection and analysis, and I address that issue throughout this lyric essay by accessing my inner perceptions, sharing those perceptions in a wider context, and reflecting on those perceptions in order to deepen and broaden my own understanding of the marginalization I faced (Reed-Danahay 144; Weick 146). In her perceptive work on positionality, Jennifer Enoch explains that combining the persuasiveness and narrative features of

positionality creates and advances a pedagogical argument (4). But positionality does more than that: it permits me as the author to use agency in a way that can promote my personal well-being and, in the process, teach others about the negative outcomes of low-status gendered ageism. Scholars of positionality Paz Ortiz et al. would agree. The researchers believe positionality has the capability of expanding perspectives by challenging negative universalist ideas on issues of injustice (110). Positionality allows me to navigate my own vulnerability within my story in a way that gives readers (as well as myself) access to information that can foster within them (and me) a change of heart and renew their dedication to work toward social justice.

Finally, because positionality seeks to understand the social conditions that undergird issues of injustice, I use sensemaking as a guide. Sensemaking theory, a longstanding interdisciplinary research format mediated through research and written discourse, enables scholars to give meaning to their experiences by collecting, analyzing, and reflecting on data (Weick 150). Positionality, when combined with sensemaking theory, permits me to negotiate my position as a cultural insider as well as a reflexive outsider. Paz Ortiz and her co-authors insightfully claim it is essential that we not only must examine the marginalized parts of our identities, but that we go further by recognizing and reflecting on the ways we have internalized those structures of power and how those power structures have influenced our perception of self (112). In this way, we make sense of our experiences of marginalization.

It is important to make the point here that positionality, with its emphasis on reflection and narration, is as critical to the evolution of higher education institutions as it is to the evolution of the self. Starcher's discussion on diversity efforts in higher education is valuable in unpacking this point. Starcher says that because institutions often fail to see their own bias, they perpetuate norms and preferences that exclude or disadvantage certain groups of people without realizing they do so. Institution leaders believe themselves to be well-intentioned, so they may have difficulty identifying themselves as oppressors who cause harm to marginalized laborers (210). For this reason, Starcher, who strongly advocates for a diversified work environment, suggests that institutions acknowledge they do not deliberately exclude groups but that their actions may result in some groups not being included (202). Starcher believes if institution leaders regard themselves as good people who are simply unaware of their actions that disadvantage certain groups, they may begin to acknowledge the harmful outcome of their actions and then work to change by establishing the purpose, goals, structure, readiness, and implementation of an institution-wide diversity program.

Positionality theorists, however, may take issue with Starcher's argument. Starcher's reasoning may prove deficient in terms of implementing real change across institutions because it fails to deepen leaders' understanding of the injury they've caused. Positionality gives

voice to inequality; through reliance on personal story, positionality persuades readers of the injury caused by exclusivity and marginalization, something that implementing a diversity program for the right reasons cannot do. Positionality boldly calls out inequality in a way that should rankle leaders to the point that they realize the negative impact their privilege has had on outsider groups. For that reason, applying the lens of positionality is absolutely essential in bringing gendered ageism and classism to light in a way that may affect real change in programs, departments, and the university as a whole.

Intersectionality

Gendered ageism, especially among the institution's low-status positions, is complex and multi-layered, and as such requires significant unfolding; I use a framework of intersectionality to serve that purpose. Intersectionality might be most simply visualized as separate chords braided together: the multiple dimensions of marginalized selves act as chords that entwine to form one fuller dimension, or category, of analysis. Scholar Kimberle Crenshaw provides a valuable metaphor of intersectionality as roads converging at an intersection: multiple marginal identities (each a separate road) meet within a single group (intersection). Like chords, these roads, or categories, are social constructs that govern behavior and expectations, and when we fail to conform to socially prescribed norms in each of these categories, our marginalization broadens and deepens because the categories are mutually formed (Breslin et al. 164). Those experiencing single or double jeopardy, for instance, face fewer threats and trauma from categories of inequality than those experiencing triple or quadruple jeopardy. In essence, the inequality experienced in one category is entangled with and reinforces the inequality experienced in the other categories, resulting in a significant restriction of opportunities.

McCall says that when we study these interlinking categories of social inequality, we shine a light on our own unique experiences as persons who inhabit multiple categories of marginalization. We then can analyze how these simultaneous dimensions interact to cause harm—often to the point of tragic consequences (1780). Take, for example, my own experience of a title demotion and lowered status without fewer work responsibilities, which I referenced in the narrative scene that opens this lyric essay. Through the lens of intersectionality, I see that my experience of marginalization was not simply a result of being female, nor was it a result of my long-term laboring in a low-status position, nor was it the result of being more than a decade past the golden age. Harmful consequences resulted from the relationship among all three of these interlinking categories at the specific and unique institution where I worked, an institution which supported the male over and above the female, which favored the relatively young versus the ageing, and which valued those with status much more than those with little standing.

In her scholarship, McCall aptly describes intersectionality as a tool that helps us piece our various selves together in a way that gives us meaning and helps us reach a clearer understanding of those distinctive yet connected parts of ourselves (1794). It must be noted that none of these single categories of gender, age, and class, nor the relationship among these categories, neatly fits the wide range of experiences of people to the point that they can be regarded as clear-cut master categories. But a framework of intersectionality gives me the ability to provisionally rely on master categories in order to deconstruct my experiences in a way that may contribute to changes in perspectives—at the very least, my own.

The role of intersectionality first guides us in understanding how the interplay of various identities defines our personal experience with oppression and domination at our institution and second, positions us in how best to respond and address oppression and domination at our institution. This response requires us to carry out conversations with one another about how our lives are impacted by structural power and how we might disrupt that structural power, and the last portion of this lyric essay attempts to guide readers in starting these critical conversations. Scholar Lorena Garcia says those who are oppressed must take risks to act from an oppositional position, driven by the need to disrupt or, at the very least, call out instances of injustice. Ultimately, intersectionality is a tool that allows us to "hold ourselves accountable for the work of social justice" (106). This lyric essay attempts to do just that.

How Low-Status Laboring is Affected by Gender and Ageing

In their work on gendered dynamics in the university setting, Briodo et al. explain that injustices involving women often are overlooked in the modern university setting because, in ordinary circumstances, people typically "play nice" (599). Interactions involving women are generally regarded as positive in feeling and tone and tend to draw out self-disclosure and helping behavior, even as covert stereotypical attitudes of women are sustained and reinforced.

Take the simple interactions, for instance, at the institution where I worked. During the brewing of a winter storm, the male in our suite of offices (all of us non-tenure-track academic staff) made sure to inform his female co-workers when they should consider leaving the office, so they could avoid the worst of the weather and get home safely. Our male co-worker took on the responsibility of protecting his female colleagues, who generally appreciated their male counterparts watching out for them. In fact, the office worked well under traditional gender role expectations: the social capital of the male colleague rose in his protective role, and the social capital of female colleagues rose as well, so long as they accepted their submissive position.

Another instance of gendering, much less simple, occurred in an office suite not far from mine and involved a male tenured faculty member who had a crush on a female student support staff member. He dropped by

her office on a regular basis, and while the conversations were mildly flirtatious but benign, they satisfied his need for attention. While the female had begun to question what felt like intrusive visits, she didn't want to hurt his feelings by telling him she felt uncomfortable. Both parties had fortified traditional gender role expectations, pitting him as the pursuer and her as the fellow conspirator. In this case, both parties acted out traditional gender roles, which reinforced power imbalance.

Instances like these in which traditional gender roles are accepted and reinforced in everyday interactions are much more common in an institution's low-power and low-status positions (Gander 116), and while these two examples noted above appear tame and fairly harmless, their insidious nature belies the suppression of opportunities for women to take on roles in which they are encouraged to use authority to guide, direct, and influence matters of the institution, even social ones. Instead, because laborers at all levels benefit—at least to some degree—from dominant-submissive gender dynamics, even in personal arenas, they do little to fight against the harm caused by such dynamics. However, the injury caused by traditional gender roles becomes exacerbated in higher-power and higher-status positions, where laborers may recognize a gender imbalance and its implications yet feel unable or powerless to stop it.

A prominent circumstance of gendering at the institution where I worked, much more complex and impactful in scope than the examples noted above, concerns the invisible voices of women in essential decision-making regarding the university's structure and operations. I think of one particularly important administrative committee that had the authority to decide the direction of the institution as well as the responsibility of ensuring not only its survival but the degree of its prosperity. At one committee meeting, the male provost brought forth a plan to develop new hybrid bachelor completion programs, which the mostly male committee members unanimously voted to accept. While the decision itself was innovative and forward thinking and was lauded by all factions of the institution, especially the top administration, it failed to include a broader array of voices, namely those of women who could offer a more comprehensive range of intellectual, social, and institutional capital.

What is revealed in all three of these gendered examples mentioned above is an interlocking system of covert oppression. Briodo and her co-authors characterize these dominant-submissive, intimacy-seeking, and pro-social helping behaviors as "benevolent" sexism (622), which regards women in stereotypical and restricted terms despite the fact that they aren't considered to be overt expressions of sexism. Even though most laborers see themselves as well-intentioned, they may not realize their behaviors and attitudes are indicative of gendering, and they may not fully grasp to what extent and degree benevolent sexism is ongoing throughout the university. Benevolent sexism in institutions, especially those with strong hierarchical structures like the institution where I worked, is injurious. When an institution promotes a patriarchal status

quo, it preserves gender inequality, limits power roles available to women, and perpetuates the practice of hiring more women in low-status positions, where they are already significantly over-represented. In this structure of injustice, male laborers are overvalued, and female laborers are undervalued across all lines of an institution's workforce.

Perhaps the greatest injury of an institution's embracing of benevolent sexist behaviors is that gender imbalance becomes a normal and natural function of its operational structure, even as its laborers may not recognize acts that devalue, demean, and discriminate against women (Briodo et al. 599). When both female and male laborers accept a covert sexist climate, they agree to a diminished sense of teamwork and collaboration and uphold the right of a few select men to guide the direction of an institution. More than that, the practice of advancing male laborers increases their opportunity to accumulate greater intellectual, social, and resource capital while at the same time it diminishes female laborers' opportunity to accumulate the same capital.

One particular situation at the institution where I worked involving faculty mentoring offers an unfortunate but insightful example of the advancement of male laborers at the expense of female laborers. The new faculty mentoring program, the brainchild of two tenured faculty members, one male (within the golden decade) and one female (beyond the golden decade), had been one of the most successful programs at the campus for almost a decade. The leaders of the program dedicated many hours each year to developing and implementing effective programming for faculty who were new to the campus, and the team worked seamlessly together. That relationship collapsed last summer when the new administration declared it wanted a change in leadership. Even though the team members received only a small stipend for their work with new faculty, a stipend they typically refused, the administration decided the mentoring program only needed one faculty leader—so the ageing female faculty member's role was eliminated while the male faculty member's role was elevated. The administrative decision was made without input from either of the team members or from faculty who had previously gone through the new faculty mentoring program.

By granting more power, influence, and status to male laborers at every level of the organization, an institution significantly limits the potential of its female laborers to play a prominent, instrumental, and guiding role in shaping the institution's legacy.

Low-Status Laboring
Michelle Gander's work on symbolic capital provides enormous insight into the role status plays in an institution's gendering attitudes and behaviors. Gander argues that the injustice of gendering is significantly compounded by classism: while female laborers across all levels are held to different (unequal) standards compared to their male counterparts, female laborers are especially vulnerable to marginalization when they

hold position titles that represent little in terms of status (117). Gander's explanation of symbolic capital (or lack of) is essential in gaining an understanding of the role institutional power dynamics plays in the diminishment of female voices and influence across the board, and especially those in low-standing positions.

Gander explains that all laborers accumulate symbolic capital, or access to power, when they share the values, perspectives, and behaviors of those in the highest status group (119). When laborers meet the standards of the highest status group, they gain social advantage, which grants them easier and more direct access to power. But those laborers whose values, perspectives, and behaviors are different from the highest status group experience not only a deflation in social advantage but face reinforced barriers that reproduce power inequalities. Daniel Griffith says those with social advantage are treated as golden children who receive greater career development opportunities, which often leads to greater chances for advancement. Those with less social advantage find themselves falling further behind as a result of inadequate support. Female laborers at all levels of the corporate-model, hierarchical university hold less social advantage than their male counterparts simply because of their gender, and Gander purports that the injustice female laborers experience is compounded by low job status.

The demarcation of social advantage among laboring groups and the barriers in place that prohibited elevation of social standing, especially women in low standing positions, was prominently displayed at the institution where I worked. Across the institution, laborers who were most eager to gain social advantage—or realized its necessity in terms of job security—began to avoid laborers whose independence was seen as radical because they were determined to maintain their image of being supportive of the administration. I'm reminded of one ageing female academic staff person who chose to stop attending meetings of the diversity and inclusion committee because it was well known that the new administration deeply frowned upon the group's agenda. While she agreed with the committee's philosophy and yearned to have conversations that mattered—to voice her concerns over issues of harm and to be part of bettering the campus culture—she knew she had to be mindful of the lack of power inherent in her position and her relatively low accumulation of social capital as a single, non-Catholic female. After all, the institution was comprised of a conservative, hierarchical administration that regarded healthy disagreement as betrayal and who saw female laborers, especially older ones, as dispensable.

Gander likens the accumulation of symbolic capital, or access to power, in the modern university to a competitive sports game, with players competing for the highest amount of social advantage (108). Female laborers in low-status positions are forced to play the game at a disadvantage because their positions of power differ so radically from those at the top. In order to gain any social advantage, female laborers in

low-status positions must wholeheartedly support the values, beliefs, and actions of those in high power positions or risk being relegated to bottom-class status. However, they face a roadblock: because of the disadvantage of their low-status position, they will never be awarded enough social standing to disrupt or overturn power relations (113). Further, they can only maintain social advantage so long as they adhere to and abide by the norms and standards of the institution, which means they must do their part in reinforcing the power inequalities that exist.

At the institution where I worked, social advantage and access to power were accorded more often to both female and male laborers who were Catholic and who adhered to traditional role expectations (Briodo et al. refer to this as "good-ol'-boys clubs" that reinforce non-members' second-class status 609). The "Catholic crowd" on campus was composed mostly of males in higher status positions, although both female and male laborers in mid- to low-status positions were allowed entrance if they supported the beliefs and values of those in power. I recall one faculty meeting at which the newly installed president spoke of the many laborers who had shared with him their relief that they could now openly express themselves as Catholic without feeling as though they had to hide their faith beliefs. The unspoken message to laborers was loud and clear: embrace Catholicism or risk losing favor. A secondary message was also clear: a hierarchical structure, with male Catholics at the top, was here to stay.

Griffith explains that many institutions, such as the one where I worked, outwardly champion an inclusive workplace culture, but behind closed doors their decisions regarding laborers are often based on their preferences. While many institutions may not realize they've awarded some groups "teacher's pet" status, other institutions may openly do so; in fact, Griffith says some administrators may not care if one group is openly favored over another. Worse yet are administrators who are committed (consciously or subconsciously) to fostering favoritism. And results of favoritism are dire for those not in the chosen group: their opportunities to influence the institution's decision-making dry up at all levels, their contributions to the institution are mostly ignored, and they are denied full access to resources for professional advancement.

One situation at the institution where I worked involving employment contracts sheds valuable light on injustices toward out-group laborers. Administrators wanted the 10-month contracts of faculty of practice, including myself, to be extended to 12 months without any wage increase. Our several requests for a written explanation of the non-paid contract extension all went ignored. We had not been given a voice in the discussion, nor had we been told what motivated the decision, especially when other departments did not face similar realignments. While the contract dispute was ultimately resolved in our favor, we were temporarily "chilled out" by administration as punishment for self-advocacy and for not putting the administration's needs and wants before our own.

There are other instances in which administrators' actions prevent low-status laborers from gaining social advantage and symbolic capital. Administrators may limit opportunities for low-status laborers to serve on university committees, may dictate which working groups they can serve on, or may deny them access to professional development. I recall my own instance of being denied professional research and conference presentation opportunities by a new administration that embraced the institution's corporate, hierarchical structure, a denial that kept me locked in a disadvantaged position. Administrators were eager to endorse only those laborers whom they believed could best position the institution to reach its goals. I was not one of those laborers. The new dean informed me I would not be allowed to publish or present my academic research because it was not listed as a job responsibility on my employment contract. If I wanted to pursue writing, research, and conference presentations, the work involved would have to be completed fully on my own time, a decision that the supervising vice president supported.

It is clear that administrative priorities may induce what Gander calls social closure, or giving an insider group—those with social advantage—a monopoly on professional ascendancy by closing off opportunities to an outsider group (116). Not only does the practice of social closure weaken the social advantage and symbolic capital of low-status laborers like myself, but it reinforces their limits in career advancement, demands that they fit the mainstream organizational culture, and provides little opportunity for them to contribute to the advancement of the institution.

Administrators may believe their (conscious or subconscious) actions to quash low-status laborers are in the best interests of the institution and therefore are not unjust; support exists for that perspective. Griffith says institutions may feel justified in generously rewarding those laborers who can help the institution grow, despite the fact that giving more to those laborers may mean other laborers will receive fewer, or no, rewards. Those with this mindset argue that low-status laborers are not in positions that have the potential to significantly advance the institution's goals or its reputation. Seen this way, institutions may have little control over rejecting low-status laborers (the majority of whom are women) if they want to remain competitive in the higher education market. Under this corporate-model, competitive mindset, inequalities in power relations are reproduced and reinforced, all under the banner of "doing what's right for the institution." What results is administrative action that diminishes its laborers by dividing them into in-groups and out-groups, silences low-status laborers by refusing to acknowledge their essential worth and value to the whole, and instates real barriers to low-status laborers' personal and professional growth—all subversive actions of gendered classism taken so that the institution may shine. My own experiences reflect the injustices inherent in the advancement of in-groups and oppression of out-groups

and underscores institutions' reliance on and reinforcement of bias and prejudice in order to cement its hierarchical, corporate structure.

Ageing

Perhaps nothing screams out-group quite as loudly as those laborers whose very stage of personhood fails to meet the social standards and expectations normalized by hierarchical institutions: the female ageing laborer whose social advantage and access to power has slowed each year she ages past the golden decade. Times of austerity have demonstrated that ageing in university settings is not neutral: it is the institution's gendered ageing laborers who not only are shunned most (Pritchard and Whiting 510) but are used as a managerial strategy for cost-cutting measures and financial viability (Granleese and Sayer 510; Gullette 210). To come to a greater understanding of the extent to which an institution reinforces age bias and prejudice requires examining those laborers whose position at the institution is perhaps the most fragile: those females over 50 in low-status academic posts. They experience the most negative perceptions regarding age and, in some circumstances, face discrimination that is more prominent than other types of discrimination at an institution (Gee et al. 267). Gullette believes ageism to be the most difficult discriminatory practice to overcome (5) because, for the most part, it remains hidden or denied, is spoken of in hushed tones, if at all, and lacks a passionate movement behind it (no #MeToo movement, for instance). Gullette says the real problem of ageism is the human victims it ensnares and the costs involved, most especially the loss or diminishment of professional livelihood (xvii). In other words, when institutions sidestep their ageing workers, refusing to acknowledge their lifetime achievements and contributions (Whitbourne and Montepare 249), they create a distinct win-loss organizational structure—a zero sum game.

In their research on gendering and ageing, Marjut Jyrkinen and Linda McKie argue that values toward ageing play a huge role in age bias. They say the ongoing discrimination women face on the basis of age, especially those women at the later stages of their careers, exists less because of the social categories of gendering, ageing, and low-status laboring and more because of the values attached to those social categories (65). In other words, older women in non-protected positions do not face discrimination *because* of their gender, age, or position; rather, they face discrimination because of the *values* attached to gender, age, and class. Gee et al. explain that these values are represented by the institution's attitudes and perceptions toward gender, age, and class (281). These values shape attitudes and perceptions that (re)create social hierarchies and power relations that sustain inequalities and privileges, as well as promote and maintain negative stereotyping of older people and of the ageing process (Sargeant 2; Gee et al. 282; Whitbourne and Montepare 270).

Jyrkinen and McKie say the dominant value attached to ageing is the false belief that a reduction of skills and energy occurs in the ageing

process, most notably beginning at or around the age of 50 and even as early as the age of 40 (69). Yet this value of declining ability isn't typically applied to people in high-status positions, which are most often male-occupied. In high-status positions where laborers are male and older, Jyrkinsen and McKie found, the category of age is actually valued for offering security and stability (73). But because ageing females in low-status positions often occupy social categories (powerlessness, older age, and womanhood) that are considered as "less suitable" than more masculine categories of power and status, they face subtler and hidden forms of discrimination. Susan Krauss Whitbourne and Joann Montepare suggest that because institutions may regard gendered ageing laborers as stuck in the past or on their way out because of their diminishing physical and mental capacities (250), administrators may exclude them from strategic planning discussions and high-profile committees and relegate them to service on less desirable planning groups or, worse yet, exclude them from service work entirely (Gullette 5).

Perhaps more devastating than being shunned by an institution is to be regarded as without merit, which for many ageing non-protected laborers means job elimination. At the institution where I worked, ageing laborers on non-protected continual contracts, the great majority of whom were women, were the first casualties of cutbacks related to the financial slide from the sudden coronavirus pandemic. Doubt about long-term financial stability required many institutions, especially small privates, to eliminate extra spending and decrease payroll expenses. At the institution where I worked, almost two dozen non-protected laborers (most female and most past the golden decade), including non-tenure-track faculty and academic staff, saw their positions eliminated almost overnight. I was one of them. My long-term professional work in writing programming was cut short, a casualty of "redundancy." One low-level director position was cut, only to be reopened at a much lower salary and title demotion. While seniority at most institutions is a valued commodity, with newer laborers being eliminated first, administrators at the institution where I worked seemed to regard the salaries of long-standing non-protected laborers as over-ripened, so their positions were the first to be eliminated. Women, already over-represented in non-protective positions, were thus over-represented in this round of deep cutbacks. Younger non-protected laborers, insecure about the security of their positions, breathed easier knowing they had heightened status than their more experienced counterparts who were past their prime in the eyes of the institution, and they supported the status division accordingly because it served them professionally.

Whitbourne and Montepare explain that the marginalization of gendered ageing workers based on the perception of their diminished competency has been heightened, especially in recent years, due to the economic fragility of higher education institutions (247). This operational mode of resource threat and scarcity pits groups of laborers against one

another with harmful outcomes: ageing laborers lose significant social advantage garnered from years of institutional wisdom and professional contributions, and they find themselves the target of tension and backlash from younger generations of laborers who fear being denied access to university job opportunities and promotions because ageing laborers won't leave (272). What results is the creation of an "us-versus-them" distinction that blocks workers from interacting in ways that could help overcome ageist divisions.

Robert Zaretsky's research shows that despite being relegated to out-group status by administrators and younger colleagues, ageing laborers want to hold on to their jobs because they want to stay active and productive, and they enjoy their position too much to leave it. Jyrkinen and McKie would agree. They found that gendered laborers over the age of 50 believe they've entered the "best phase of their life" at the institution because of the "knowledge and multifaceted experience" they have gained from decades of employment (70), a perception that may be quite at odds with the institution's mindset. Administrators generally perceive ageing laborers to be less active, less productive, and less relevant than their younger counterparts. Not surprisingly, say Granleese and Sayer, administrators are motivated to offer their ageing workers enhancement deals to quit employment, so that institutions can find younger, cheaper and more productive laborers to replace them (512). Most troubling in this scenario is that ageing gendered laborers feel the most confident and capable in their professional life after the age of 50, the age when administrators have begun to earmark them as potential casualties in the institution's fight to stay relevant (514). When administrators regard ageing laborers as burdens to the institution, they promote the perception that the work lives of ageing laborers are less worthy than the work lives of any other age group.

At the institution where I worked, a hiring situation involving prejudice against ageing comes to mind. During an especially tight job market, the selection committee for a mid-level administrative position discovered that the older female candidates who had applied were by far the most qualified, and many committee members were disgruntled by the lack of a younger hiring pool. I still recall the committee members' comments expressing dismay at the candidates' older appearance and lack of vigor, which they feared wouldn't connect well with students. Needless to say, the selection committee's hiring announcement lacked excitement, and they never shed their negative attitude toward the new administrator's age, nor their belief that she wasn't quite competent in the job.

Gullette labels these perceptions of ageism as institutional macroaggressions. She says the more gendered ageing laborers are perceived as weak, unattractive, and incapable of contribution, the more vicious and injurious the tension (xvii). What has resulted is a systemic problem in which administrators freely violate the very personhood of ageing laborers because they are perceived as not adhering to the norms

and standards of the institution. When that occurs, Zachary Jack says, both institutional governance and worker morale suffer because a valuable collective voice is lost. Its replacement is younger laborers who say yes to intense, performance-based advancement in order to establish a place at the table, knowing themselves to be replaceable (Chou). What is perhaps most striking in the many situations of ageism, according to Gullette (3), is administrators' blatant systematic practice of discrimination—without apology or reflection on the consequences that impact their own institution.

What administrators fail to see in situations of gendered ageism is the emotional, psychological, and physical health impacts on ageing low-status laborers as a result of feeling dismissed and of witnessing their standing in the academy being undermined and weakened. Gullette points to chronic stress as a significant outcome associated with workplace harm (3). Chronic stress may increase the risk of chronic disease, mortality, and other adverse physical health outcomes because it does violence to the body and undermines the need of feeling safe. David Wygant believes one of the most harmful outcomes of falling out of institutional favor is emotional distress (that is, being emotionally "beaten up") because it changes the perception one holds of oneself. When gendered ageing laborers find themselves marginalized, they engage in negative thoughts of themselves, feel powerless in most aspects of life, become frustrated and angry with themselves, and may eventually spiral out of control. Wygant points out that these negative responses are a normal outcome of feeling emotionally assaulted or mistreated, yet these negative responses can permanently alter one's sense of belonging and self-worth.

Final Thoughts

I recall the email that Tuesday in May 2020 requesting a Zoom meeting with the human resource director the following afternoon. The message gave no agenda, nor any indication of the meeting's purpose. Most likely another addition to my growing workload, I told myself. Perhaps because my direct supervisor did not indicate any change in our department, I was completely unprepared for the shock of that brief meeting: my position was eliminated. No warning, and no sign of appreciation for years of dedicated service. No room for negotiation. No answers as to why my position was chosen for elimination while other positions in the department were kept. Calls, text messages, and emails from colleagues across the institution came. *Are you okay? How are you feeling? I'm so sorry. So sorry. How can I help?* The jolt was so monumental I didn't know how to answer.

Griffith says the most glaring evidence that institutions are treating gendered low-status ageing laborers unfairly is the level of attention, resources, time, and support administrators give to younger laborers at all levels while ignoring or giving significantly less attention, resources, time, and support to ageing laborers. Griffith suggests that if

ageing laborers have made attempts to get open and honest feedback on decisions that appear to be biased or prejudiced, but administrators have not responded to emails or have refused to acknowledge the issue, this may be a red flag that discrimination is at play. And discrimination has harmful effects. Administrators who exclude ageing laborers by taking away their agency, treating them with indifference or condescension, or eliminating their positions altogether are causing injury not only to those laborers but to all persons who witness their reproof (Gullette 6).

The end of my career at the institution was a stunning loss, most notably because of the way it was handled. I felt insignificant, my work invisible, disregarded, and unappreciated. A large piece of my identity for over two decades had been shattered. As Gullette says, there is pain associated with being treated as helpless and weak. That pain must be channeled, not suppressed, in order to dislodge those who feel demoted "from a state of dumb acceptance" (195). While a large part of me felt deep relief from being cut loose from an unhealthy work climate, I also struggled with feelings of loss, uncertainty, and grief. All laborers need to feel recognized as persons of equal worth; this lyric essay has shown that isn't necessarily the case for gendered ageing non-status laborers who may feel that lack of recognition as a significant loss. Gullette believes the best response to that loss is not wilting, not denying feelings, not becoming silent, not becoming invisible (193). The response to that loss must be owning our feelings, however deeply negative, and having the courage to be honest about our place in the modern university. The power that comes from being truthful with ourselves and others forms the foundation of resilience and motivates us to take steps toward action.

A Call to Action: Overcoming Gender, Age, and Class Disenfranchisement

A valuable point in intersectional studies is the crucial need to examine both the social location, or the intersection of marginalized categories, as well as the social context of the institution, or where the marginalization takes place. By focusing on social location and social context, we call attention to the problematic dominant categories (such as masculinity, relative youth, and power) normalized at an institution as part of its typical functioning. We see how these norms produce forms of oppression and privilege, and we witness the tendency within institutions to sustain rather than eradicate biased treatment. The strength of intersectional analysis derives from exploring and naming the social context in which the intersection of these dimensions of inequality exist.

Part 1
In order for gendered ageing laborers in low-status positions to overcome disenfranchisement, it's essential to assemble the voices of those with grievances, so we can begin to change the narrative of our institutions and tackle the task of creating an institutional culture of advocacy so that all

laborers at institutions can prosper. It's a worthy goal. Following are reflective questions for group dialogue that can guide disenfranchised ageing workers in coming to a greater sense of what they need their institutions to be and become. Consider asking these questions in a group discussion:

1. How can we advocate for opportunities that allow disenfranchised laborers to talk openly about their concerns?
2. How do we ask honest questions that will deepen our understanding of our institution's operations model, and how can we advocate for changing the operations model in a way that dignifies the work of all laborers?
3. How can we create and grow peer communities centered on issues of disenfranchisement in our effort to help our institution evolve?
4. How can we overcome academic isolation? How can we encourage conversations that center on lived experiences, ideas, and questions?
5. How do we use conversations with administrators to educate them about harmful practices and advocate for ethical decision-making?

Part 2
The first step in taking action toward institutional healing requires us to own our feelings of disenfranchisement as traumatic and diminishing; the next step is to challenge institutional biases by explaining our feelings in direct and open conversations with people in power. By doing so, we can begin to modify and humanize our institutions. In your conversations with people in power at your institution:

1. Discuss your expectations of basic entitlements, including a safe and supportive workplace for all laborers, including those who are marginalized.
2. Describe acts of suppressive and discriminatory behaviors in detail in an attempt to reconstruct your work life, including its traumas and struggles. Share with administrators the lived experiences of disenfranchised group members.
3. Advocate for ethical decision making. Ethical institutions should seek to identify and correct discrimination, especially as they learn about the devastating trauma it causes.
4. Request that administrative teams be transparent in their motivation behind changes, be willing to consider the voices of those who may be harmed, and be open to providing needed support for those drawing the short stick.
5. Advocate for change in leadership behaviors that seem dismissive and cruel so that the whole of the institution can prosper.

Of course, administrators may choose not to consider potential harmful consequences of their decisions, or they may choose not to implement the support necessary for those who are in distress. They may choose to continue to act unethically, and if that's the case, they should be exposed to judgement. However, institutions may choose to listen to the voices of those who give witness to the destructiveness of gendered ageism of low-status laborers. In those circumstances, recovery can begin, and community relationships can be restored. The task at hand, to fight against issues of gendered age and class discrimination, will require reflection, resilience, and hope, even during times that seem hopeless, in order to advocate for our future.

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