

ARTICLE

AGEISM IN THE WORKING LIFE CONTINUUM OF UNIVERSITY FACULTY¹

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ABSTRACT: Intergenerational interaction, including in the workplace, is a reality that has implications for people's lives. In this context, it is necessary to recognize generational diversity among workers, bring ageism to light and foster discussion about it. Accordingly, this article aims to analyze ageism throughout the career continuum of university professors at a community university. To this end, an exploratory-descriptive study with a qualitative approach was conducted. Data were collected through life histories, a focus group, and documentary research, enabling triangulation in the thematic analysis. Positive and negative stereotypes were identified as antecedents of ageism throughout the participants' working lives, confirming its recurrence, particularly during the early and later stages of their academic careers. The findings are considered to offer theoretical contributions, particularly through their engagement with a decolonial perspective and the analysis of professionals' experiences across their careers; practical contributions to higher education institutions, especially the institution under study; social contributions by making stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination visible; and methodological contributions, given that the topic has predominantly been addressed through quantitative research and that life history and thematic analysis have been relatively underused as data collection and analysis techniques, respectively. Thus, the study highlights the potential impact of this research on individuals' personal and working lives and on society as a whole.

Keywords: Ageism, stereotypes, intergenerational relationships, work life, professor.

IDADISMO NO CONTINUUM DA VIDA LABORAL DE PROFESSORES UNIVERSITÁRIOS

RESUMO: O convívio intergeracional, também no ambiente laboral, é uma realidade e traz implicações para a vida das pessoas. Nesse contexto, torna-se necessário reconhecer a diversidade geracional entre os trabalhadores, desnudando e discutindo o idadismo. Assim, este artigo tem como objetivo analisar o idadismo ao longo do continuum da vida laboral de professores universitários em uma universidade

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comunitária. Para tanto, realizou-se uma pesquisa exploratória-descritiva, de abordagem qualitativa. Os dados foram coletados por meio de história de vida, grupo focal e pesquisa documental, possibilitando sua triangulação na análise temática. Foram identificados estereótipos positivos e negativos como antecedentes do idadismo ao longo da vida laboral dos participantes, confirmando sua recorrência, sobretudo nos anos iniciais e finais da carreira docente. Considera-se que os resultados da pesquisa oferecem contribuições teóricas, especialmente pela interlocução com a perspectiva decolonial e pela análise ao longo da carreira dos profissionais; contribuições práticas para as instituições de ensino superior, em especial para a instituição pesquisada; contribuições sociais, ao explicitar estereótipos, preconceitos e discriminações; e contribuições metodológicas, tendo em vista que o tema é predominantemente abordado por meio de pesquisas quantitativas e que a história de vida e a análise temática são pouco utilizadas, respectivamente, como técnica de coleta e de análise de dados. Assim, destaca-se o potencial de repercussão desta pesquisa na vida pessoal e laboral das pessoas e na sociedade.

Palavras-chave: idadismo, estereótipos, relações intergeracionais, vida laboral, professores universitários.

LA DISCRIMINACIÓN POR EDAD EN EL CONTINUO DE LA VIDA LABORAL DE LOS DOCENTES UNIVERSITARIOS

RESUMEN: La convivencia intergeneracional, también en el entorno laboral, es una realidad que tiene implicaciones para la vida de las personas. En este contexto, resulta necesario reconocer la diversidad generacional entre los trabajadores, visibilizando y problematizando el edadismo. Así, este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar el edadismo a lo largo del continuum de la vida laboral de profesores universitarios de una universidad comunitaria. Para ello, se realizó una investigación exploratoria-descriptiva, de enfoque cualitativo. Los datos fueron recopilados mediante historias de vida, grupo focal e investigación documental, lo que permitió su triangulación en el análisis temático. Se identificaron estereotipos positivos y negativos como antecedentes del edadismo a lo largo de la vida laboral de los participantes, confirmando su recurrencia, especialmente en las etapas iniciales y finales de la carrera docente. Se considera que los resultados de la investigación ofrecen contribuciones teóricas, especialmente a través de la interlocución con la perspectiva decolonial y del análisis de las trayectorias profesionales a lo largo de la carrera; contribuciones prácticas para las instituciones de educación superior, en especial para la institución investigada; contribuciones sociales, al visibilizar estereotipos, prejuicios y discriminaciones; y contribuciones metodológicas, considerando que el tema ha sido abordado predominantemente mediante investigaciones cuantitativas y que la historia de vida y el análisis temático son poco utilizados, respectivamente, como técnicas de recolección y análisis de datos. Así, se destaca el potencial de repercusión de esta investigación en la vida personal y laboral de las personas y en la sociedad.

Palabras clave: Edadismo, estereotipos, relaciones intergeneracionales, vida laboral, profesores universitarios.

INTRODUCTION

Reflecting on the contemporary world of work requires attention to intergenerational interaction, as different generations increasingly share the same work environments. These intergenerational relationships have implications for people's lives. Young and aging workers share workspaces where various intersectional factors, such as gender, race, sexual orientation, and religious affiliation, are also present. Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge the diversity among workers, including

generational diversity. From this perspective, age-based prejudice, also known as ageism, must be exposed and discussed.

Ageism refers to prejudice or discrimination based on age group (Butler, 1969; Palmore, 1999). According to Palmore (1999), such prejudice or discrimination can be directed either against or in favor of a specific age group, although negative aspects predominate. The author also states that this prejudice can manifest in ways that are more or less subtle. França et al. (2017) observe that it often manifests silently, affecting people in various contexts, including the workplace.

This article discusses workplace ageism, a phenomenon that some groups question. They argue that individuals may be favored due to their skills and competencies, suggesting that meritocracy, rather than stereotypes and discrimination, drives decisions. However, Tonelli et al. (2020), Silva and Helal (2022), and Mozzato and Mendes (2023) indicate that ageism is prevalent in the workplace and could be alleviated if organizations implemented effective age management practices.

Investigating ageism throughout the working life continuum is important, as this phenomenon can affect different age groups. In this regard, we adopt a working-life perspective grounded in life-span theories, which suggest that development is a psychosocial process occurring across the entire lifespan (Kanfer & Ackerman, 2004). This approach assumes that successful aging is directly linked to individuals' active participation in various life domains and involves continuous processes of adaptation to age-related changes (Baltes, 1987; Baltes & Baltes, 1990). In the work context, this perspective examines how individuals can sustain their health, motivation, performance, and productive participation throughout their career trajectories (Kooij et al., 2020; Zacher et al., 2019; Zacher & Rudolph, 2024). As highlighted by Zacher et al. (2019), organizational leaders must recognize that aging at work is a heterogeneous, dynamic, and multidimensional process influenced by individual, social, and contextual factors across the life course.

Our research is motivated by the aging workforce (Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística [IBGE], 2022) and the lack of studies on ageism within the field of Applied Social Sciences, particularly in Administration. This is evident from recent searches in national databases (SciELO and SPELL) and international ones (Web of Science and Scopus), as well as at national scientific events (EnANPAD, EnGPR, and SemeAd). Furthermore, recent studies, such as the one conducted by Gajowiak (2024), highlight the need to investigate age-based discrimination and the barriers to intergenerational relationships and cooperation in the workplace. In this context, the systematic review by Marrero Vega et al. (2026) shows that workplace ageism negatively impacts the well-being of older workers. It also emphasizes the importance of expanding research across different cultural contexts, especially in Latin America. The authors also emphasize the need for organizational practices that

promote inclusive work environments and positive intergenerational relationships, pointing to significant opportunities for research on age management and age diversity.

As noted by Helal and Viana (2021) and Fraga et al. (2022), ageism remains an understudied topic in Brazil, within the Portuguese language, and in the field of Administration. Although it is now part of the Brazilian research agenda, there is still a continuing need to expand studies on this subject. This is especially important given that international scientific output is significantly larger than domestic output, as highlighted by Fraga et al. (2022). The limited representation of studies from Latin America is not an empirical gap; from a decolonial perspective, it problematizes the asymmetries in the production and dissemination of scientific knowledge. In this context, the concept of the coloniality of knowledge (Mignolo, 2007; Quijano, 2005) helps us understand why certain geopolitical contexts and their scientific contributions may remain underrepresented or receive less recognition in global scholarship on work and aging, while frameworks from historically hegemonic contexts are prioritized.

Boehm et al. (2021) also state that ageism must be analyzed by considering the macro-context in which organizations operate, including political, social, and cultural issues. This means that each reality has its particularities, a principle that applies to the Brazilian context too. Thus, acknowledging that it is inappropriate to study the subject in isolation from its context, this article adopts this approach by considering the specificities of the national reality and engaging with a decolonial perspective.

Although the decolonial perspective does not constitute the central analytical axis of this research, it contributes to problematizing the predominance of frameworks produced in specific geopolitical contexts and reinforces the need to understand ageism based on Brazil's historical, social, and institutional specificities. This situated understanding also guides the selection of the empirical setting, given that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are spaces characterized by distinct dynamics regarding knowledge production, professional recognition, and the construction of academic trajectories. Therefore, the choice of an HEI as the research site is further justified by the scarcity of studies conducted in this context within the field of Administration, as noted by Nascimento et al. (2016), Viana and Helal (2023), and Hanashiro and Helal (2023).

The originality of this research lies in its consideration of ageism throughout the working lives of university professors, rather than restricting the focus to ageism directed at older individuals, as in much of the existing literature on the subject. Thus, this study contributes to theoretical and empirical inquiries into ageism, aiming to help mitigate the phenomenon. Aligning with Previtali et al. (2022), who highlight the need to investigate ageism using methods distinct from traditional approaches, the adoption of a qualitative approach offers a valuable contribution, given its relative scarcity in research on this topic. Both the life history method (for data collection) and thematic analysis (for data analysis) are less frequently employed in this field of study.

Thus, this article is guided by the following research question: **How does ageism manifest across the working life continuum of university professors at a community university?** Thus, the objective is to analyze ageism throughout the working life continuum of university professors at a community university. Following this introduction, the theoretical approach to the topic is presented. Next, the methodological procedures are described, and subsequently, the data are presented and analyzed. Finally, the study's conclusions are outlined.

AGEISM IN THE WORKPLACE

The Brazilian context is diverse, particularly when it comes to age, a dimension shaped by extensive social construction. This process leads to the creation and dissemination of stereotypes, which can result in prejudice and discrimination against different age groups, a phenomenon known as ageism. From this perspective, Palmore (2015) states that ageism is “a type of 'social disease' that spreads from person to person and from generation to generation” (p. 874), deeply rooted in each country's culture. Since age-based prejudice is socially constructed and largely driven by the societal pursuit of eternal youth and beauty (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019; Romaioli & Contarello, 2019; Spedale, 2019; Spedale et al., 2014), ageism manifests in various settings, including the workplace (Silva & Helal, 2024). Consequently, ageism becomes normalized (Hanashiro & Pereira, 2020), leading to widespread and concerning repercussions.

Although the term ageism is a subject of debate, this study adopts the understanding of it as prejudice associated with different age groups, while acknowledging, consistent with Butler (1980) and Hanashiro et al. (2020), that the phenomenon is directed more specifically at two groups: the youngest and the oldest. Stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination are extremely detrimental to workers, particularly those at the ends of the age spectrum, the youngest and the oldest (Wu, 2019). Palmore (2001) addressed prejudice related to all ages, though he maintained that the prejudice directed at older people is the cruelest, noting that they are also the most disrespected.

As stated by Loth and Silveira (2014), the concept of old age is linked to social constructs, possesses a biopsychological and sociocultural nature, and intersects with other social dimensions, such as gender, social class, and historical period, among others. Thus, as Spedale (2019) points out, research needs to demonstrate greater sensitivity to the complexity of age-related inequalities. Along these same lines, Zacher et al. (2024) argue that the relationship between age and workplace behavior is multifaceted and cannot be understood only through chronological age or oversimplified stereotypes. According to the authors, individual, contextual, and life-trajectory factors significantly influence work experiences, reinforcing the need for approaches that are more comprehensive and sensitive to the heterogeneity of the aging process.

Under these considerations, it is necessary to acknowledge that ageism does not necessarily manifest explicitly; it can occur silently (França et al., 2017). Palmore (1999) previously noted that this prejudice can be subtle. Teixeira et al. (2018) state that ageism generally manifests in subtle and covert ways. The authors also highlight that, although positive stereotypes associated with different ages exist, negative ones prevail and can lead to serious emotional consequences for individuals.

Among the positive stereotypes associated with older workers, Loth and Silveira (2014) and Cepellos and Tonelli (2017) highlight greater experience, maturity, respectability, good judgment, emotional balance, thoughtfulness, capacity for self-criticism, credibility, and the ability to diagnose problems. Various negative stereotypes are associated with older people, such as stubbornness, loneliness, bad temper, forgetfulness, complaining, slowness, illness, isolation, and physical and social decline (Barros & Muniz, 2014; Schwartz & Simmons, 2001; Siqueira et al., 2007).

Positive and negative stereotypes are also observed regarding younger workers. According to the Global Report on Ageism - *Relatório mundial sobre o idadismo* (2022), positive stereotypes directed at younger workers include ambition, technological proficiency, and energy; negative ones include narcissism, disloyalty, laziness, lack of motivation, distractibility, a sense of entitlement, and materialism. However, stereotypes often prevail due to a lack of critical perspective. Regarding technology specifically, adopting a more critical view, as proposed by Lunardelli and Maia (2024), is more important than simply judging whether or not people of different ages use it. The authors acknowledge the potential of technology in education and the new devices found in educational settings, yet they warn of the contradictions involved: those related to uncritical consumption, without analyzing the content, and those stemming from the intensification of teaching work.

Faced with several stereotypes, people often seek strategies to combat ageism. While these strategies can help to reduce its impact, they may not always be effective and can be experienced in a painful way. Brodmerkel and Barker (2019) mention the search for a youthful appearance as a strategy. The adoption of this strategy demonstrates the incorporation of the ideology of eternal youth and the search for a normative life course, as noted by Romaioli and Contarello (2019).

Thus, the need to deconstruct the ideology that views aging negatively becomes evident. Prejudice exists and is culturally reproduced across various social spheres (Erickson, 2019), including the workplace. However, as Romaioli and Contarello (2019) point out, this deconstruction is not simple, particularly because individuals are driven to perceive themselves as too old for work. The Global Report on Ageism - *O Relatório mundial sobre o idadismo* (2022) also highlights the need to deconstruct the language people use, given that words, such as “old” and “young”, can reinforce misconceptions that foster ageism. These words can evoke stereotypes representing older adults as “disposable,” frail, and dependent.

Studies by Kooij et al. (2020), Zacher et al. (2019), and Zacher and Rudolph (2024) shift the discussion on aging at work from a focus on a decline-oriented view to a more dynamic, development-

oriented approach. This perspective highlights workers' ability to adapt to changes that come with aging, allowing them to maintain productive participation throughout their careers. While it recognizes the losses associated with the biological aging process, it emphasizes the coexistence of both gains and losses across the course of life. This perspective aligns with the life-span perspective, emphasizing the value of the capabilities, resources, and adaptive strategies that enable continued, positive, and meaningful work participation (Zacher & Rudolph, 2024; Zacher et al., 2024).

Continuing with this perspective of deconstruction, it is important to recognize that both young people and older adults are diverse, particularly when considering intersectionalities related to various factors such as gender, race, disability, and sexual orientation. As noted by Spedale (2019) and Previtali et al. (2022), there is a need to expand research conducted through the theoretical lens of intersectionality.

The intersection of ageism and gender increases the possibility of suffering due to stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination. This is a situation that can be further exacerbated when combined with other intersecting factors (Allen et al., 2006; Beltramini et al., 2022; Duncan & Loretto, 2004). Fineman (2014) states that women face a double disadvantage, experiencing age discrimination earlier than men. Allen et al. (2006) add that these challenges are compounded for women working in the information technology (IT) sector. Cepellos and Tonelli (2022) note that the organizational environment is associated with men and that age discrimination persists even when women hold leadership positions. The authors identify the existence of an age-related glass ceiling, which hinders women's career progression due to an invisible barrier linked to aging.

It is not surprising that workers of different ages adapt to the prejudiced discourses present in society (Previtali et al., 2022). However, in line with Palmore (2015), Romaioli and Contarello (2019), and Spedale (2019), it is considered possible to combat ageism in the workplace. To this end, it is essential to create favorable organizational environments where people are not excluded based on age, a process that entails deconstructing the ideology that aging is negative.

To mitigate ageism, Firzly et al. (2021) emphasize the importance of raising public awareness about the different forms of discrimination. Organizations should play a proactive role in addressing this issue and should not ignore the need to implement public policies aimed at combating ageism. Addressing ageism in the workplace is essential due to its negative impact on individuals, as noted by Lagacé et al. (2019).

Given the aging process throughout the teaching career, it is essential that educational policies address age diversity in higher education by incorporating strategies that value professional trajectories, recognize accumulated knowledge, and foster academic environments free from age discrimination. This need aligns with international recommendations for combating ageism, which emphasize the importance of institutional and social policies aimed at promoting age equity (World

Health Organization [WHO], 2021), as well as with literature on organizational age management, which highlights the relevance of practices that acknowledge the contributions of workers at various career stages (Boehm et al., 2021).

Several studies advocate for the inclusion of workers of all ages in addressing ageism (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2017; Firzly et al., 2021; França et al., 2017; Hanashiro et al., 2020; Lagacé et al., 2019; Tonelli et al., 2020), including from the perspectives of intergenerational learning (Colet & Mozzato, 2021; Hanashiro et al., 2020) and knowledge sharing (Fossati & Mozzato, 2023; Lagacé et al., 2019). Lagacé et al. (2019) state that when mature workers perceive a positive intergenerational work climate and participate in knowledge sharing, feelings of being targeted by age-related discriminatory practices are reduced.

In a study involving university professors, Geeraerts et al. (2018) point out that intergenerational learning occurs through the interaction between professionals of different ages. In another study with university professors, Geeraerts et al. (2021) found that younger professors show greater interest in technological changes, the use of ICTs, and creative and innovative ideas, while older professors more readily assume leadership roles, demonstrate classroom management skills, and are more confident and conservative. These results allow us to understand generational differences not as elements of opposition, but as potential sources of complementarity. Barros et al. (2025) highlight that age diversity in the university context entails challenges related to intergenerational relationships and the need to address ageism, requiring institutional practices that promote inclusion and value the diverse experiences found within the academic community.

Nascimento et al. (2016) also conducted research with professors and highlighted the importance of retirement preparation programs, which can facilitate a smoother transition to this stage of life. The authors note that, although professors over the age of 60 may experience some age-related decline, ageism can marginalize them and label them as incapable. According to the authors, this discrimination is linked to social representations of aging. It is also necessary to consider ageism affecting older university faculty, given that continuing to work after retirement or past the age of 60 is common. Although Brazil lacks a public policy like the one adopted in North Carolina, which encourages retirees to return to teaching (Jarrold-Grapes & Mahler, 2023), the return to work or continued employment of Brazilian university professors is a reality.

The results of the study conducted by Kunze et al. (2011) reveal that age discrimination affects the performance of both workers and organizations. Lagacé et al. (2019) highlight that maintaining a positive and healthy intergenerational work climate reduces both job dissatisfaction and ageism.

In addition to raising awareness about ageism and maintaining intergenerational relationships within organizations, other age management initiatives are important for mitigating the issue. According to Hanashiro et al. (2020), Mozzato and Mendes (2023), Silva and Helal (2022, 2024), and Tonelli et al.

(2020), actions aimed at inclusion and the promotion of concrete, constructive interactions among workers of all ages are effective in reducing ageism, a phenomenon that compromises people's well-being and quality of life, as noted by Marrero Vega et al. (2026).

Renzetti and Hanashiro (2021) emphasize the importance of reinventing management to adopt a more inclusive approach that acknowledges the different stages of workers' lives. Additionally, retirement deserves significant attention. Helal et al. (2021) highlight its importance and the challenges for both workers and people management (PM), noting that retirement is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon.

In this context, managerial and people management practices that prioritize the individual, as well as their development and well-being, are becoming increasingly necessary. This entails establishing human-centric strategies alongside transformative, inclusive, and humanized practices and policies (Neiva et al., 2020; Zerbini & Veiga, 2019). Aligning with Cepellos and Tonelli (2017) and Tonelli et al. (2020), managerial practices are considered fundamental to breaking down age-related barriers and reducing prejudice. In this light, age management becomes essential (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2017; Hanashiro et al., 2020; Locatelli et al., 2023; Mozzato & Mendes, 2023; Silva & Helal, 2022, 2024; Tonelli et al., 2020).

Therefore, new perspectives and successful people management practices are needed within organizations to enhance inclusion, well-being, and quality of life for individuals. This human-centric approach can drive positive transformations within organizations and society as a whole. As Hanashiro and Pereira (2020) point out, research on ageism in organizational contexts is essential and can offer significant contributions to other sectors of society, given that age-based prejudice and discrimination in the workplace both impact society and are simultaneously shaped by it.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

This study is characterized as applied social research aimed at understanding the behavior of individuals and society through an empirical method (Flick, 2009). From this perspective, the subjectivity, symbolic elements, and intersubjectivity inherent in social relations are analyzed and recognized as dimensions that help incorporate, into the analysis, the inextricable intertwining of subject and object, and of facts and meanings (Yin, 2016).

The research is characterized as exploratory-descriptive and uses a qualitative approach (Flick, 2009; Yin, 2016). Given this framework, and following the perspective of Previtali et al. (2022), who emphasize the need to investigate ageism through a lens that differs from traditional approaches, each participant was interviewed to share their individual experience in the workforce. This allowed participants to recount their experiences and encounters with age-based prejudice across the continuum of their professional lives as university professors. The qualitative approach proved appropriate precisely

because it enabled the exploration and understanding of meanings related to human and social dimensions (Yin, 2016).

Regarding the technical procedure, this research is characterized as a single case study, involving data collection from multiple sources of evidence and in-depth analysis (Yin, 2001). The empirical research setting was a community university located in the northern part of the state of Rio Grande do Sul. This institution was selected due to its size and importance to the region, as well as the accessibility it offered for conducting the study. The Higher Education Institution (HEI) has a history spanning over 55 years and acts as the governing body for three educational entities, covering secondary education, higher education, and foreign language instruction. At the time the research was conducted, the HEI had a faculty of approximately 760 members.

Twenty-one professors participated in the study, following the data saturation criterion (Fontanella et al., 2008). Four criteria were adopted to determine the inclusion of faculty members in the study: (1) holding a permanent faculty position; (2) having worked at the respective Higher Education Institution (HEI) for at least ten years, with preference given to those with longer tenure; (3) not being on vacation, medical leave, or any other type of leave; and (4) agreeing to participate in the study by signing the Informed Consent Form (ICF). Ethical safeguards were observed throughout the research process. The project was submitted to and approved by the Research Ethics Committee (REC) under Opinion No. 2,650,635.

Age was used as an exclusion criterion for participation in the empirical research; participants could not be younger than 40. This criterion was established because ageism was investigated across the entire working life, covering key milestones ranging from the time when the educators were younger to the stage when they were older. This approach enabled the researchers to gain multiple perspectives from professionals of varying ages and at different stages of their teaching careers.

Data collection used life histories, focus groups, and documentary research, enabling triangulation across sources, a procedure that contributes to the validation of qualitative research (Flick, 2009).

A review of documents from the higher education institution's human resources department provided the professors' sociodemographic profiles, enabling the selection of participants from a pool of nearly 300 faculty members based on established inclusion criteria. The human resources department sent an invitation to all of them in compliance with the General Data Protection Law (LGPD—*Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados*), Law 13.709/2018. Only 22 responded to the invitation, and of those, 21 participated in the study. The document review also included an analysis of the university's statutes governing faculty hiring and dismissal, as well as those governing faculty compensation and career progression.

The life history method was chosen because it allows for the consideration of subjectivities and the expression of feelings and emotions, aiding in the understanding of both objective and subjective

aspects of the various dimensions of human life (Flick, 2009; Yin, 2016). Thus, personal narratives about the participating faculty members' lives were collected based on the following initial question: “Describe your life as a university professor throughout your career, focusing on whether or not your age played a role.”

A focus group was also conducted. All interview participants were invited, but only eight participated. The approach followed Flick (2009), in which a focus group relies on group interaction to generate insights that would be less accessible without such interaction. Thus, participants explored different points of view through reflection on the topic. To stimulate discussion, excerpts from the film *The Intern* were used. Subsequently, the following opening question was posed: “Do these film scenes remind you of any similar situations you experienced during your university career?”

Thematic analysis was used as the analytical technique for data analysis (Souza, 2019). The main objective was to understand the subjective meanings of the professors' experiences by interpreting the phenomena and the significance attributed to them, an approach that is characteristic of qualitative research. These interpretations were informed by data triangulation (Flick, 2009; Yin, 2016).

Thematic analysis was chosen because it is a qualitative method designed to “identify, analyze, interpret, and report patterns (themes) within qualitative data” (Souza, 2019, p. 52). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), this technique provides the necessary flexibility for qualitative data analysis. While the themes for analysis were defined a priori, those that emerged during data collection and analysis phases were considered.

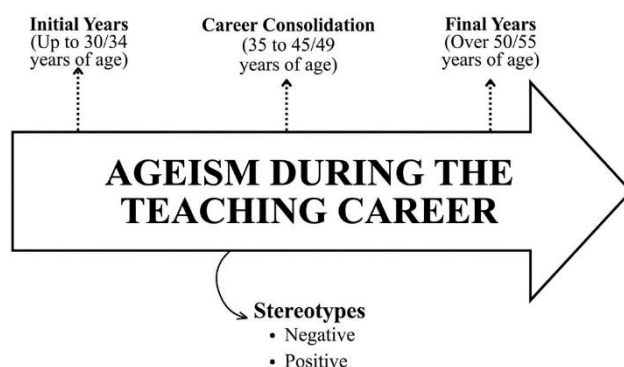
All collected data were transcribed following the guidelines of Braun and Clarke (2006). To this end, the six phases of thematic analysis presented in Table 1 were adopted, based on Souza (2019), from the propositions of Braun and Clarke (2006, 2013, 2014) and Clarke and Braun (2013).

Table 1
Six phases of thematic analysis

Phase	Nomenclature	Description
1	Familiarize with the data	Transcribe the data; review; read and reread; note down insights; develop any frameworks that emerge.
2	Generate initial codes	Code the data systematically; gather relevant parts under each code.
3	Search for topics	Group the codes into pre-defined themes or create others that emerge; link all data within each theme.
4	Review the topics	Verify that the themes align with the generated excerpts and the database as a whole; generate a thematic map of the analysis.
5	Define and name the themes	Refine each theme and the related analyses; generate clear definitions and nomenclature for each theme.
6	Produce the report	Conduct the final analysis of the selected excerpts in relation to the research question, objectives, and literature; prepare the scientific report of the analysis, including examples.

In phase 5 of the thematic analysis, the themes presented in Figure 1 were defined.

Figure 1
Themes for thematic analysis



Based on the organization shown in Figure 1, an analysis of ageism across the professors' working life continuum was conducted, by categorizing their age groups into three cycles: (1) early years (up to 30–34 years of age); (2) career consolidation (ages 35 to 45–49); and (3) final years (over 50–55 years of age). This analysis of ageism considered both negative and positive stereotypes, as these serve as antecedents to such prejudices.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Context of the reality under study

The empirical context of the research is presented with careful consideration of its specific characteristics to the analysis. The higher education institution (HEI) under examination is a community university located in northern Rio Grande do Sul. It boasts an extensive infrastructure and is defined by a hierarchical, bureaucratic structure and a traditional culture. The institution operates based on the triad of teaching, research, and outreach across various fields of knowledge and educational levels, offering both *lato sensu* and *stricto sensu* graduate programs.

Document analysis revealed that different statutes govern faculty members covered by the institution's career plan. While these documents have specific characteristics, they share a common feature: explicit criteria for faculty entry, retention, advancement, and separation. Entry occurs through a selection process that does not guarantee tenure but enables professional growth, which impacts remuneration. There is a linear vertical career plan divided into nine levels: a professor begins as Assistant 1 and may advance to Assistant 2 and 3; subsequently, they may be promoted to Associate 1, 2, and 3, eventually reaching the rank of Full Professor, which also comprises three tiers. Career advancement is based on explicit point-based criteria, and age is not a requirement. Regarding the professional development plan, however, age acts as a barrier, with a limit of 50 years for potential investment by the

higher education institution. Furthermore, faculty members may retire and continue working, with mandatory retirement occurring at age 70.

Table 2 shows the identification of the research participants.

Table 2*Identification of research participants*

Identification	Age	Gender	Time teaching	Age when started teaching	Academic qualification	Field Knowledge of
E1	51	M	28	23	Ph.D	Biology
E2	58	M	21	37	Master's degree	Social Science
E3	61	M	38	23	Ph.D	Engineering
E4	42	M	14	28	Master's degree	Engineering
E5	61	M	31	30	Ph.D	Arts
E6	52	M	28	24	Master's degree	Technology
E7	51	M	21	30	Ph.D	Agrarian
E8	58	M	26	32	Master's degree	Health
E9	44	M	11	33	Ph.D	Engineering
E10	58	M	35	23	Master's degree	Health
E11	63	M	38	25	Master's degree	Health
E12	55	M	31	24	Ph.D	Humanities
E13	56	F	29	27	Ph.D	Health
E14	50	F	20	30	Ph.D	Health
E15	53	F	12	42	Master's degree	Communication
E16	47	F	24	23	Ph.D	Agrarian
E17	40	F	16	24	Master's degree	Health
E18	45	F	15	30	Ph.D	Health
E19	56	F	31	25	Master's degree	Social Science
E20	42	F	12	30	Ph.D	Communication
E21	49	F	24	24	Ph.D	Social Science

Table 2 shows that most participants are male (12 faculty members) and hold a Ph.D (12 faculty members). All professors have been working at the higher education institution (HEI) for at least 11 years, and 15 of them have 20 or more years of teaching experience at the institution. Various fields of knowledge are represented among the research participants.

Most of the faculty members (11) fall within the 50–59 age range; seven are between 40 and 49 years old; and three are over 60. Most of the surveyed faculty (11) began their careers before the age of 28, with a large proportion starting at 23 or 24. Only one faculty member began her career after the age of 40, specifically, at 42. Almost all of them began their teaching careers at a young age. Document analysis confirms that the faculty profile described here represents the entire group of professors over the age of 40 working at the HEI.

Academic career experiences focused on age group

Early years of the teaching career – up to age 30–34

The start of the teaching career was described as smooth regarding age, although many interviewees admitted to feeling insecure. The professors reported feeling welcomed by both coworkers and students.

The participants reported that the closeness in age facilitated their relationships, precisely because they “spoke the same language”, and that they sometimes sensed a certain admiration from the students. E12 stated that “the students admired the fact that I was so young yet possessed so much knowledge.” It was also mentioned that maintaining a serious demeanor in interactions with students helped overcome the age barrier, as noted by E3 and E19, respectively: “maintaining a serious attitude, without becoming overly familiar with the students, helped a lot”; “I would even use a certain degree of authoritarianism to assert myself; later, things changed, and respect was gradually earned.”

Seeking to minimize the impact of age in the classroom and other university settings, E12 used a strategy of wearing more formal attire, high heels, and makeup to project credibility, as she said: “I used to wear suits to look older and convey a sense of seriousness and credibility. It’s so silly (laughs), but it works; I realize it was necessary, perhaps for my self-confidence, but... it worked.” E6 reports something similar: “I tried to act older; I even wore different clothes. Nowadays, by contrast, I wear T-shirts (laughs).”

Empirical data reveal the positive and negative stereotypes regarding younger professionals, consistent with the understanding that workers adapt to socially constructed prejudiced discourses (Previtali et al., 2022), a view also supported by Palmore (2015), Romaioli and Contarello (2019), and Spedale (2019). When they were younger, professors perceived that characteristics associated with youth, which fostered identification with students, helped bridge the gap and facilitate relationships. However, their lack of experience and low self-confidence led them to seek strategies to appear older to gain respect and recognition.

Many participants also reported experiencing ageism due to their youth, coming from fellow professors and, once again, linked to social constructs (Previtali et al., 2022). The following accounts illustrate this:

I could observe my coworkers thinking: “What is this girl doing here?” (E19)

Early in my career, I noticed a lack of recognition from the professors—my coworkers. (E14)

The Deans held the floor and commanded respect; they wouldn't let the younger ones speak. But I didn't feel excluded; even though I didn't have a voice, that was just how things were. (E2)

For a long time, I didn't get opportunities because I was new and hadn't been there long; my coworkers and professors never thought of me for anything, not even parties (laughs). (E13)

There was a lot of ageism; young people worked like slaves. I was a secretary, a mere executor of tasks. In reality, the senior professors had the mindset of having us work for them, rather than with them. It's very different! That's not how I operate; my team, these young people, work with me. I do things differently. (E16)

Some participants took on management roles before turning 30, subtly highlighting ageism. Participant E1 reports noticing looks and attitudes suggesting that older faculty members were thinking,

“Who are you?!” E20 states: “In management, I did experience prejudice for being younger. In fact, I would sometimes hear coworkers say, ‘When you get to our age, you’ll see that we get tired.’”

E20 is an IT professional, a finding that aligns with Allen et al. (2006), who highlight the increasing difficulties women face in this field. On the other hand, the data also indicate gender-based differences in management-related experiences. Participant E5, from the field of Engineering, for instance, assumed management roles at various stages of their career and reports never having faced issues due to age, and certainly not due to gender. Such evidence reinforces the link between the intersectionality of ageism and gender (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2022; Duncan & Loretto, 2004; Vieira & Cepellos, 2022), including women as they age and their aging bodies (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2022; Vieira & Cepellos, 2022).

The data collected from the female faculty members reveal a close association between ageism and gender, albeit often in a covert manner. The following statements illustrate this relationship:

Being a woman was always a reason for facing discrimination from male coworkers, especially when I was younger. (E16)

It wasn't so much my age that held me back, but the fact that I was a woman, especially in a management role. (E20)

I started teaching at a very young age, but that wasn't my biggest challenge; being a woman was. (E21)

While intersectionality is not the primary focus of this research, it has not been overlooked and is evident in the gender marker, as noted by Cepellos and Tonelli (2022), Previtali et al. (2022), and Spedale (2019). Duncan and Loretto (2004) previously established that ageism predominantly affected women, who faced greater career challenges, a perspective also shared by Fineman (2014), Vieira and Cepellos (2022), and Cepellos and Tonelli (2022). The testimony from E20 supports the findings of Cepellos and Tonelli (2022), reinforcing the existence of an age-related glass ceiling.

Finally, based on the empirical evidence from this study and consistent with the findings of Geeraerts et al. (2021), which were also obtained from university professors, we observed that professionals across different age groups share certain characteristics and attitudes, even though younger professors demonstrate greater interest in technological changes, the use of ICTs, and creative, innovative ideas. Within the framework of human and professional development, professors also grow and become established over the course of their careers.

Consolidation of the teaching career – ages 35 to 45/49

The idea of being established in a teaching career differs from person to person and cannot be solely defined by age. However, there is a general social belief that professionals often reach the peak of their careers and experience a sense of stability between the ages of 30 and 45, during which they typically have a well-consolidated career.

Due to social norms and the desire for eternal youth (Spedale, 2019; Spedale et al., 2014) on the one hand, and the fear of aging on the other, professionals often face various dilemmas. For instance, E17 states: “I started teaching when I was very young, but now I think I’m actually already old (laughs).” This professor is 40 years old and is already experiencing this socially imposed dilemma of viewing herself as old. A similar statement from E18 also stands out, highlighting internalized prejudice. She shows a certain disdain for her own age and appearance, which she does not consider youthful, reinforcing socially imposed norms: “Here I am today at 45; now I want to look younger (laughs), I’m already old, so I try to dress in a more youthful way; I want to be accepted by young people. Just imagine when I’m close to retirement, wow, it’s hard, how will the students see me? I’ll be so far removed from them.” Both professors have internalized ageism and the ideology of eternal youth, which is linked to the pursuit of a normative life course (Brodmerkel & Barker, 2019; Romaioli & Contarello, 2019).

Some participants admitted, either explicitly or implicitly, that it is often the professors who display prejudice toward young students, highlighting the age gap between them. However, a minority acknowledges that this gap is to be expected and that professors need to seek professional updating and new ways of interacting to prevent the distance from widening. Participant E13 illustrates this: “You don’t want to act like a young girl, but you do want to maintain good interpersonal relationships with students, using empathy, being approachable, using humor, and valuing them. That way, you can maintain the necessary dialogue, and you even end up seeming younger. Being around young people keeps us feeling younger.” Participant E11 states: “You need to have patience and understand that things change; that’s how it’s always been. We can’t let the age gap widen; we have to adapt. I interact well with the students.”

On the other hand, some professors report that having teenage children who are similar in age to their students enhances their ability to build rapport. E15 states: “Having children the same age as the students helps; the connection becomes very good.” E6 notes: “When I started, I was close in age to the students; now I have children of similar or the same age. That helps me relate to them.” However, as the years go by, children grow up, and the professors’ age and time increase, giving rise to other issues that are analyzed below.

This is the most tranquil period. Empirical evidence indicates that this intermediate age group experiences the least ageism, consistent with the perspectives of Butler (1980), Hanashiro et al. (2020), and Wu (2019), who suggest that the phenomenon is primarily directed at younger and older individuals. This career-establishment phase proves to be more tranquil precisely because of the stereotypes associated with the period: stability, productivity, knowledge, and responsibility.

While more positive than negative stereotypes were highlighted at this stage of the professional career, prejudiced discourses affect workers of various ages (Previtali et al., 2022), precisely because they are socially constructed (Palmore, 2015; Romaioli & Contarello, 2019; Spedale, 2019). In

the subsequent stage, unlike what has been observed, empirical evidence reveals a higher incidence of ageism, driven by the prevalence of negative stereotypes regarding older professors.

The final years of a teaching career – over 50/55 years old

A consensus among researchers, such as Butler (1980) and Hanashiro et al. (2020), states that ageism directed at both younger and older individuals ranks among the most common forms of this prejudice. However, Palmore (2001) notes that ageism directed at older people is more severe. Without intending to debate or quantify the intensity of the prejudice, this subsection focuses its analysis on older individuals, the group most frequently cited by participants in the context of ageism. This evidence comes from individuals with a recognized “standpoint” (or lived experience), given that 14 of the 20 study participants are over 50, and nine of those are over 55.

As previously observed, the career-establishment period is calmer: faculty members are perceived as experienced professionals, not yet too far removed in age from their students, while simultaneously feeling more secure and self-confident. However, as they age and approach the age of 50, the ideology of youth becomes reified (Spedale et al., 2014), consistent with the understanding of ageism as a social construct and its naturalization, as highlighted by Hanashiro and Pereira (2020).

As individuals age, they tend to be more strongly associated with negative stereotypes such as being slow, stubborn, ill, and a tendency to complain. This phenomenon has been investigated by Schwartz and Simmons (2001) and Siqueira et al. (2007). Ultimately, they may be perceived to the belief that older individuals are incapable. Research indicates that these negative stereotypes become more pronounced as faculty members approach retirement or exceed the age of 60.

The empirical data also reveal that the professors are aware of the growing gap between themselves and their students. The participants perceive this difference due to variations in language, ways of thinking, and other factors that go beyond chronological age. E13 comments: “Sometimes mutual understanding isn't so easy; younger generations use different terms, and mind you, I'm not talking about technology, but rather slang and the like.” Similarly, E14 states: “As we get older and the students stay young, a gap emerges.”

Faculty members also report noticing being observed and imagining what students say to one another. E6 states: “When I was in college, I remember my classmates and I thought professors approaching 40 were old. We thought they were ancient (laughs). So, I imagine it's the same now. But that's fine; I'm at ease, I stay up to date, and I have an established career.” E10 reports: “I feel good about my age; among coworkers, we're practically the same age, and with the students, even though there might be looks, or the unspoken implication that you're old or out of touch, I don't feel any prejudice coming from them.” Such accounts confirm that ageism often manifests in silent, subtle, and hidden ways (França et al., 2017; Palmore, 1999; Teixeira et al., 2018).

Professors in the career consolidation phase are not always sensitive to the difficulties faced by older professionals, as if they were still far removed from reaching an advanced age. Some of their statements also reveal prejudices regarding older coworkers:

I don't have an issue with age, but I notice there are issues regarding older workers. Things have changed a lot; in the past, those with more time were in a comfort zone, but now it's different. (E4)

I don't see prejudice among coworkers, and I've never had a problem with age. But some older coworkers just don't care anymore. (E6)

I think there is a more implicit kind of prejudice, dismissiveness, or looks that suggest you're outdated. In my field, that happens early on. (E20)

I don't have a problem with it, but between the lines, there's that underlying sense of being outdated or old. (E10)

Nothing bothers me; I've never felt prejudice, maybe a bit from management, but I come up with coping strategies, so it's all good. (E1)

I don't have a bias against mandatory retirement; it's really just a personal stance; I don't want to retire. My main criterion is simply feeling good about what I'm doing. (E12)

In addition to the age gap, some participants point out that the student profile has changed. The following statements shed light on this:

I had a very good time at the university. But I confess that now, as I get older, I'm losing my enthusiasm; I've grown weary of the students, my coworkers, and the institution. Lately, it's been a daily source of frustration. The student profile has changed, and institutional and management issues contribute to that frustration. (E3)

It's not just about age; there's also the current cultural context. The student profile has changed, especially after the pandemic. (E10)

Students today are different, though it has always been this way; there are differences between younger and older ones. But Millennials think they're the center of the universe; when they're crossed, they create situations, come up with justifications... That's why communication is so important, being able to connect with their age group, their language, and their mindset. In other words, communication has to be tailored to that specific audience. (E11)

However, the faculty members do not deny the negative influence that age can have on relationships, an effect felt more intensely with younger coworkers than with students. E3 reports: "As you get older, students start to see you differently; it affects relationships. But with students, it doesn't bother me; with coworkers, though, it's not quite the same; you end up being sidelined, completely isolated. Yet I understand that it's not intentional by younger coworkers; it's just that the interaction is no longer organic." Regarding the growing distance from younger coworkers, E8 states: "There's been a shift in relationships among coworkers these days; I've gradually been left out by my peers, I eat lunch alone, I rarely talk in the staff room, and so on; everything is different."

When this distance between coworkers of different generations happens, it not only compromises socialization but can also hinder or even prevent intergenerational learning, as noted by Geeraerts et al. (2018). Interaction is precisely one of the fundamental principles for such learning to take place (Colet & Mozzato, 2021). From this perspective, the participants report:

There was always mutual support among coworkers, regardless of age. (E9)

I was warmly welcomed at the start of my career. I had an older coworker who guided me, sort of like a father figure. (E19)

I never felt rejected; there was always an exchange; we'd help each other with things we didn't know. We keep learning. Just because I'm not so young anymore doesn't mean I have nothing left to learn; there's always something to learn. (E18)

You know, I miss having a more open relationship with coworkers of all ages, since we learn from everyone. I always take advantage of opportunities, but there aren't many here. I don't think age is the only factor involved. (E13)

Professors actively strive to minimize the age gap with their students through their words and actions. They do this in various ways, such as wearing more youthful clothing, adopting the language of younger generations, keeping up with technology, and participating in social media. Their efforts to connect with students and avoid feeling alienated due to age are evident:

I don't have trouble relating to coworkers who are older or younger. Of course, being close in age to the students makes things easier, but we can't let an age gap create a chasm between us. (E5)

Everything is different, but we have to adapt to the language of this new generation. (E7)

Generations change over time; it's always been that way, and we need to be aware of it. There are paradigm shifts; everything moves so fast, but we have to realize that there must be an exchange; the relational aspect is fundamental. (E11)

The age gap keeps widening; they are digital natives, and there are behavioral differences in how they relate to others, but I'm learning as I go. (E4)

I'm always trying to keep up with technology, but there are things students really like that just don't appeal to me, YouTubers, for example. Sorry, but I don't have the patience for it; there's so much rubbish out there. I notice that students often realize the content is rubbish, yet they keep consuming it... (E19)

The final statement by E19 is similar to the point raised by Lunardelli and Maia (2024) regarding the need for a more critical perspective on certain technologies used by young people. Technology is not, nor should it be, reviled; the authors specifically draw attention to its uncritical consumption.

Although ageism in the workplace predominantly comes from younger people (North & Fiske, 2012), one cannot overlook the prejudice that originates from the aging individual, whether consciously or unconsciously, directed at others or at themselves. Loth and Silveira (2014) concluded that even when aging individuals claim not to condone discriminatory practices against older people, the fact that they share certain stereotypes regarding older adults and aging contributes to the perpetuation of ageism.

Empirical data show that educators perceive characteristics associated with seniority, such as maturity, experience, and confidence, as valued in the labor market, particularly within the teaching profession. However, one cannot overlook the point raised by Barros and Muniz (2014): aging workers are also subject to prejudice and a failure to recognize their potential. Thus, as Hanashiro and Pereira (2020) note, ageism is normalized.

Throughout the university teaching career, it is common to seek qualifications through master's degrees and doctorates, which provide greater recognition for professors, especially when they

are part of postgraduate programs. On the other hand, there is often an increase in work demands, which makes it difficult for professors to reduce their workload. A dichotomy is evident: sometimes professors receive recognition for the knowledge they have built and their professional career, and sometimes they are discriminated against based on their age group. This tension appears in E13's report:

I would certainly like to slow down a bit at work; after all, my vitality, shall we say, isn't what it used to be. I'm healthy and all, but I'm 56; that's not 40, let alone 30. The thing is, I know that right now is when I have so much to contribute, especially through my research. I feel confident and accepted by the students because of the knowledge and career I've built, but... I'm getting tired, and I also know that before long, I'll be judged for my age, for not keeping up with technology as much, and so on.

This statement aligns with the reflections of Viana and Helal (2023) regarding the positive aspects associated with faculty members who are aging while participating in graduate programs. However, as observed by Nascimento et al. (2016), the empirical evidence from this study demonstrates that faculty members at the peak of their careers must fully meet their workload requirements and manage numerous activities and demands, particularly when affiliated with graduate programs. This is the reality of a community-based higher education institution, which differs from the experience at public institutions.

Although faculty members at the surveyed higher education institution may continue working after retirement, which typically occurs around age 60, ageism directed at professionals aged 60 and older is evident, as also noted by Nascimento et al. (2016). The authors highlight that this discrimination is linked to social perceptions of aging. They point out that, while age-related limitations may exist, ageism can marginalize these professors by treating them as incapable. None of the participants reported currently experiencing health issues, yet some expressed fear of falling ill due to the perception that their workload is increasing. The following accounts illustrate this concern:

Faculty members are falling ill; it's not a matter of age, but rather the accumulation of tasks and the lack of support from administrators. It's really tough. I don't know how much longer I can hold out. (E7)

You know, I don't feel sick or like I'm falling ill, but I hear that all the time in the hallways and the faculty lounge. Those kinds of comments come from the older faculty, but it seems to be more tied to institutional issues and higher education as a whole. (E13)

From a life-span perspective, these statements demonstrate that aging at work cannot be understood solely in terms of the decline or maintenance of work capacity, but rather as a dynamic process in which gains and losses coexist throughout one's professional trajectory. While E13 acknowledges a decline in physical vitality, they also highlight the strengthening of resources derived from accumulated experience, professional maturity, and the consolidation of their academic identity, aspects that provide the confidence needed to conduct research and mentor students. This finding supports the understanding that human development occurs across the entire life course, involving continuous processes of adaptation to changes associated with aging (Baltes, 1987; Baltes & Baltes, 1990; Kooij et al., 2020; Zacher et al., 2019).

At the same time, the results reveal a significant contradiction within the organizational context. Although experience, knowledge, and academic background are recognized as valued attributes, age-related expectations and stereotypes coexist, particularly regarding the ability to keep pace with technological transformations and the growing demands of academic work. This tension reinforces the argument made by Zacher et al. (2019) and Zacher and Rudolph (2024) that workplace aging is a heterogeneous and multidimensional phenomenon, influenced not only by individual changes but also by organizational conditions, management practices, and the meanings socially attributed to age.

It is also worth noting that E7 and E13 reveal that the fear of falling ill is less associated with advancing chronological age and more with the contemporary working conditions experienced by professors. This finding aligns with the life-span approach, highlighting that maintaining health, motivation, and productive participation throughout one's working life depends on the interaction between individual resources and favorable contextual conditions (Kooij et al., 2020; Zacher & Rudolph, 2024). Therefore, successful aging at work comes not only from workers' characteristics but also from the ability of organizations to create conditions that foster continuous adaptation, value accumulated experience, and minimize ageist practices.

Age management becomes fundamental (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2017; Hanashiro et al., 2020; Silva & Helal, 2022; Tonelli et al., 2020), aiming to improve intergenerational interaction and contribute to mitigating ageism (Locatelli et al., 2023; Mozzato & Mendes, 2023). The results also reinforce the relevance of Gajowiak's (2024) proposals, which highlight the need to expand research on age discrimination and barriers to intergenerational relationships and cooperation in the workplace. Studies, including those conducted in Brazil, point to the need for management and people management policies and practices tailored to different age groups (Cepellos & Tonelli, 2017; Hanashiro et al., 2020; Helal & Viana, 2021; Locatelli et al., 2023; Mozzato & Mendes, 2023; Silva & Helal, 2022, 2024; Tonelli et al., 2020).

Based on the document analysis, we found that the higher education institution (HEI) studied lacks policies and practices for managing age diversity, and initiatives aimed at fostering intergenerational interaction. No institutional measures regarding faculty retirement preparation were identified. These findings contrast with the consensus in the literature regarding the need to reinvent management through a more inclusive approach, grounded in a humanized perspective on the working life continuum that also addresses the transitions associated with the end of a career (Neiva et al., 2020; Zerbinini & Veiga, 2019). In this context, various studies highlight the importance of institutional retirement preparation policies that facilitate a more planned and healthy transition process (Helal et al., 2021; Nascimento et al., 2016; Renzetti & Hanashiro, 2021).

The concept of retirement plays an important role in the context of preparing for the end of one's career. Two faculty members over the age of 50 express that they do not wish to retire, while others of

different ages discuss retirement and share concerns about feeling unprepared for that stage of life. E18 states: “I’ll retire when the time comes, but it’s scary; I don’t know what my life will be like, stopping just like that, all of a sudden. I know so many stories of people who retired and then fell ill or became depressed.”

A central idea that emerged from the focus group was the perception that the higher education institution should focus on policies and practices related to age management. Many faculty members nearing the end of their careers expressed anxiety about leaving the institution:

Companies ought to prepare for an aging workforce, but that doesn't happen in companies. It's not happening here. (E7)

I believe there should be an appreciation of people's experience. It's no use for People Management to have a fancy name and nothing else. There should be a longevity perspective, truly human-centric management. That is ignored. (E11)

I feel powerless when talking to people about these age-related issues; retiring, reaching the end of one's career, is a painful experience. Topics like retirement should be discussed more openly. People get sick when they retire. There should be an institutional policy; HR departments ought to give this some thought. At the retirement ceremony for some professors, they sang *sapato velho* (laughs) (E20)

When E20 mentioned the music played at a ceremony marking the end of a career, everyone laughed, but they did it to express disapproval and to affirm the need for greater sensitivity regarding both this type of career-ending event and retirement. In this regard, retirement preparation programs are important, as stated by Nascimento et al. (2016). As E11 notes, “there should be more humane management.”

Retirement is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Helal et al., 2021). For this reason, participants advocate for people management practices that are attentive to these issues, given that the cessation of work activities entails fears, expectations, and challenges for both workers and organizations. This perspective reflects a quest for more human-centric management, as advocated by Neiva et al. (2020), and highlights the importance of strengthening intergenerational relationships. Such relationships foster the sharing of knowledge, experiences, and learning among workers of different age groups, a fundamental aspect for valuing age diversity and preserving organizational knowledge (Fossati & Mozzato, 2023; Lagacé et al., 2019).

Ultimately, the empirical evidence gathered from this study, aligned with the findings of Geeraerts et al. (2021) based on insights from university professors, reveals that both younger and older professionals share certain characteristics and attitudes. However, younger professors tend to show greater interest in technological changes, the use of ICTs, and creative, innovative ideas. In contrast, older professors are more inclined to assume leadership roles, demonstrate classroom management skills, and are often perceived as more confident and conservative. As Geeraerts et al. (2018) point out, it is precisely in this complementarity that intergenerational learning among professors occurs.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the presence of ageism throughout the professional lifespan of educators, a phenomenon influenced by social constructs and stereotypes. Consistent with existing literature, the findings reveal that ageism is most common during the early and later stages of a teaching career; however, it was also observed, though to a lesser extent, during the career consolidation phase. Specifically, regarding the aging process of educators, there is a clear need for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to establish transparent policies related to the conclusion of teaching careers. Additionally, it is important to redesign programs that prepare faculty for their transition away from the institution.

The results of this research show theoretical, practical, social, and methodological implications. Regarding theoretical contributions, the study expands the body of research on ageism in Brazil by adopting a decolonial perspective, problematizing universalizing understandings of aging and age, and examining ageism across the continuum of the teaching career. The study also focuses on university professors at a higher education institution, a context that remains under-researched, particularly concerning this topic.

Beyond its theoretical contributions to the academic community, this work makes significant practical contributions, particularly for higher education institutions. It also addresses social issues by exposing stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination. The methodological contribution is also noteworthy, as the topic is predominantly addressed through quantitative research; thus, the qualitative approach adopted enables to explore various aspects, especially subjective ones. Furthermore, within the scope of qualitative research on this subject, both life history (as a data collection technique) and thematic analysis (as an analysis technique) are used less frequently than traditional interviews and content analysis, respectively.

The findings of this research also point to the need to rethink the construction of negative stereotypes regarding groups of people of different ages, particularly within the Brazilian context, in order to foster a less negative social construct. The results indicate that public policies concerning aging and work need to incorporate the perspective of ageism as a relevant dimension of working life. In the context of higher education, this entails formulating guidelines to direct institutions in promoting intergenerational academic environments, valuing the knowledge accumulated by faculty members, developing age-management programs, and preparing for retirement. Thus, addressing ageism requires the coordination of educational policies, aging policies, and institutional practices.

It is important to acknowledge some limitations of this research. First, it was conducted at a single higher education institution, which means that experiences related to ageism may vary across different institutional contexts and regions of the country. Additionally, since the study relies on narratives of professional trajectories, it is recognized that the experiences reported are shaped by memory, as well as the interpretations participants have developed over time and the meanings they

attribute to their own stories. As such, these narratives may not fully encompass every event experienced. Another limitation is the exclusion of participants under the age of 40; their experiences regarding the early years of their teaching careers were reconstructed retrospectively, rendering them subject to interpretations and recollections of earlier stages in their professional journeys.

With this research concluded, the need for further studies on ageism is reiterated to broaden the understanding of the phenomenon and advance knowledge on the subject. We suggest future studies delve into the intersections between age and gender regarding the experience of ageism throughout a teaching career.

Finally, we expect this article to help raise awareness among researchers, managers, leaders, people management professionals, and, ideally, public agencies regarding the complexity of ageism, fostering organizations and a society that are more humanized and attentive to the specificities of aging within the Brazilian context.

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The content of the research text is within the manuscript.

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Author 1 – Responsible for the project, active participation in data collection and analysis, and in the final writing.

Author 2 – Responsible for reviewing the project and the analyzes carried out, participation in the final writing.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest with this article.