OER Stigma:
Its contributing factors and impact on faculty involvement in the open movement

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Agenda

• OER Stigma/Lack of faculty OER advocates

• Theoretical framework

• Results from faculty in-depth interviews

• Implications and moving forward
Dr. Rex Koontz,  
University of Houston Art History

Mary Sterenberg, M.A.  
The Ohio State University  
School of Communication
• Erving Goffman (1963)
• Social construction
  • “Stigma is embedded in social relationships”
• Defies normative expectations which consequently leads to negative labeling.
• Micro and macro context
Investigative Questions

• Why is there a lack of faculty who are *visible* open education advocates?

• How are OER stigmatized at various universities?
• Convenience sampling

• In-depth interviews

• 4 faculty/1 instructor/1 department head

• All full-time, 3 tenured, 2 tenure-track, 1 nontenure, 50% female

• All from R1 institutions in the United States
• Discuss your interest in OER.
• Why did you not choose to adopt OER in your classroom?
• Discuss OER efforts in your respective department.
• Why do you think there is a lack of visible faculty involvement in the open movement?
Results

- Slightly negative associations between adopters and OER
- Critical of OER vetting process
- Research vs. teaching institutions
- Professional identity and image management
“I [can] see nontenure or associate faculty who have teaching-intensive role as strong open ed[education] advocates because OER directly impacts teaching and learning.

But for tenure-track or tenured faculty who work in settings where research is a priority, the perception about OER is very different. It’s not taken as seriously as other work. Your scholarly contributions would be called into question (if you regularly advocate for openness).”

–Speech Communication Associate Professor
“We do have some OER early adopters at my institution who are really excited about open education. But they are typically nontenure faculty, such as lecturers or even graduate students. And, unfortunately, because of their perceived value at a research institution, OER is further stigmatized because of those who get involved in this type of work.

If more research/tenure faculty expressed and showed interest in open education, we might be having a completely different conversation.”

- Chemistry Assistant Professor
“For regular faculty, good teaching, curriculum development and other activities related to teaching are awarded as teaching on the dossier. But writing research articles for publication and producing creative work is privileged above all else, at least at R1 institutions…OER are regarded to have pedagogical benefits, not a major contributor to serious scholarship.”

-Lecturer in the Department of Education
“I actually discourage faculty to spend the time to create OER. I’m very suspicious about that type of work, as it not considered serious scholarly inquiry at a research institution. I will admit, however, that I can see the value of motivating faculty at a community college to create and adopt OER give that institution‘s unique population and needs.”

-Physics Department Head
Vetting process of OER

“OER are usually disregarded as research or creative (design) work because they are seen as lacking the vetting process that comes with peer-reviewed articles. There would have to be some changes in the way that kind of work is vetted”

-Political Science Assistant Professor
“To be candid, I certainly would not become heavily involved in what is referred to as the ‘open movement’ or publish in open access journals. It challenges much of the current research and academic publishing model.

Yet it is this very model that is still the standard, if you will, in my department. To go against that as a professional, even as tenured faculty member, would cause my colleagues and department head to scrutinize my work.”

-Speech Communication Associate Professor
“Thinking it over again, I’d be cautiously open to using OER in my lower-level undergraduate classes. But certainly not for my graduate seminars. I don’t want the perception that the seminars are not rigorous or scholarly because of the use of openly-licensed materials.”

English Associate Professor
“Philosophically, I actually agree with many of the ideals expressed among open education advocates. But my department culture is in direct contrast with those ideologies. I just don’t see a strong enough argument for why any faculty member [at my institution] would sacrifice their career to push for a complete cultural change in order to make openness the norm.”

-Political Science Assistant Professor
“Faculty are to contribute to their respective field. So it would be beneficial for OER advocates to adopt a more micro approach and illustrate the effect(s) of OER in specific disciplines.”

-Chemistry Assistant Professor
“It is critical to consider how the open education movement contributes to discipline-specific literature. For instance, how, if possible, can open education help advance current discipline-specific theories? These are questions faculty are motivated to answer.”

-English Associate Professor
Moving Forward

- Think more critically of how open advocates are communicating to faculty

- Key open advocates attend discipline-specific conferences and professional gatherings

- Target specific faculty/instructors

- Connect faculty who are using and creating OER in order to normalize openness in academia as well as faculty involvement in the open movement