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Abstract:

Age and gender discrimination in the workplace are two forms of prejudice actions that have been in existence and observed in the lives of many for a substantial amount of time. Workplaces of every kind have displayed favoritism and preference towards one gender or another causing a toxic workplace environment for many people in the workforce. Similarly, many workplaces for years have also shown a liking towards a certain age of eligible workers which also creates tension and disparity in a workplace. Laws adopted, like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, have made an effort to stop all forms of discrimination in the workplace. During this time, women and older workers specifically were looked at as inferior, and discriminatory actions towards these groups is what put this law into motion in the United States. Some progress has been made, but this problem has not been completely eradicated, and it is unlikely that it will ever be solved completely. Women still endure lower salary pay and assumptions due to family-work relations, and older and younger workers are still faced with doubt of what their capability in the workplace may be. Ethics comes into question as well when speaking about these forms of discrimination in the workplace. Ethical culture can be created in the workplace only when specific terms and conditions are stated about how all employees and superiors are expected and required to act. However, toxicity in the workplace caused by gender and age discrimination puts the ethics of any workplace into question, along with inviting unethical decision making into the workplace.

I. Introduction:

When people think about the word “discrimination”, they may believe that it is something that is narrow and specific to one area of human life. However, discrimination falls into more parts of human life than most people tend to think. Right from the start, many people form prejudices and inferior feelings about others in terms of what they look like, how they act, what they believe in, and a plethora of other things. Discriminatory feelings can also originate from things that we are born into this world with: gender, race, age, etc. Throughout many years in the past, discrimination has been seen in the workplace of many, and this has been known to cause issues for not only the workplace culture, but the employers, employees, and overall success of the workplaces as well. Diving deeper into specifics, age and gender discrimination is something that has been observed and endured for quite some time in workplaces everywhere, some bring more severe than others. It is incredibly interesting to see the major differences of how men and women are treated in a workplace setting along with seeing how older workers and younger workers are treated, and it is easy to see why such issues come from discriminatory actions that happen amidst these two groups.

Being a part of society and the work force as adults, it is clear to see that even in 2021, there are male dominated and female dominated jobs. However, there has been much improvement in this area compared to how jobs were delegated in the past. With their being gender bias, this also leads to how and why certain decisions are made regarding who receives certain positions in the workplace and how employees/employers are treated by the rest of the staff. Switching gears to speaking about age discrimination, there have been some severe implications in workplaces due to the desire for older/younger workers and how age can sometimes be a factor as to why someone is hired or not. Ageism causes people to make

assumptions about an employee/employer that may not necessarily be true, but is assumed because of their age. This type of behavior can cause an immense amount of tension in a workplace and cause performances of all people at work be incredibly low and unsuccessful. Ethics is another thing that comes into question when people are not being treated fairly in their jobs. Ethical policies must be specified in the workplace as well as enforced and followed by all in order to limit the discriminatory actions that can occur. Strong leaders and top management within the workplace have the power as well to set the precedent on how to act ethically in the workplace by never taking part in any form of discriminatory activities. Upholding a workplace that is highly diversified in terms of age and gender aid in protecting workplaces from any kind of discriminatory behaviors or accusations. Therefore, age and gender discrimination that has been present in the workplace for decades induce a toxic workplace culture and if not corrected, have the power to negatively affect aspects of the workplace such as attitudes of the employees, productivity of the workplaces, and ethical decision making.

II. Historical Gender and Age Discrimination

Discrimination is not new to our society; these feelings of prejudgment and inferiority have been present in all aspects of life for over one hundred years. “As enacted by Congress, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 would play an indispensable role in the implementation and enforcement of the right guaranteed to all Americans to labor in a workplace free of discrimination by reason of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin” (Raymond X). This act was prevalent at this time because before 1964, discrimination in the workplace was overly present. Decades before the year of 1964, women were located at the very bottom of the employment ladder and only 10 percent of management type roles and 15 percent of professional type jobs were upheld by women. Discrimination of women in the workforce was evident but,

unfortunately, accepted at this time in history. Other forms of discrimination were being discussed at this time also, so gender injustice was not something that was a main priority. This problem only really came to head with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 when it enforced dissolution of gender discrimination (Raymond 39-40).

On the other hand, age discrimination is widely known for being the act of employers/employees assuming that a worker of a particular age, whether that is of a seemingly older age or a particular younger age, cannot perform as efficiently as someone at a different age. This too, has been present for decades. Even though younger workers definitely can endure some forms of age discrimination in the workplace, age discrimination affects older workers more than younger workers, because when a person gets older, they are seen by many as mentally and physically inferior to a younger person. Older workers are subject to two separate issues: actually becoming too old and incapable of performing the job well, and being subject to assumptions of inferiority even though they are still mentally and physically strong and capable. In terms of historic background, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was a legislative outlawing of age discrimination in the workplace, but the discussion of this started much earlier in 1903 in Colorado. This started a trend and had other states following suit, but, of course, did not end this form of discrimination because there was no such urgency in getting a federal legislation forbidding this discrimination because of a lack of public support on the issue. Similar to gender discrimination, age discrimination took a back seat to many other forms of injustices in the workplace. "Previous studies had shown that approximately 55 percent of all job openings were closed to applicants over age fifty-five, and even workers as young as forty-five were barred from 25 percent of those positions (Raymond 62). This information drives home the point that assumptions being made about the older working class is where the source of discrimination is

coming from, and that older people were a big reason why unemployment rates were very high at times. Discrimination of older workers was also found to be inhumane and cruel (Raymond 61-63).

When returning to the conversation of whether these forms of discrimination are still present, many people believe that in terms of gender, women are much better off because many women all over the world uphold high professional positions and continue to advance in the workforce. However, pay differences are still observed, and although this may not be as trivial as harsher forms of gender discrimination, it proves that this form of injustice still exists in our world today. Also, young women face prejudices when trying to find jobs because of the assumption of their becoming pregnant and starting a family and how this will affect their performance in the workplace. (Raymond 95-96). It seems that there has not been as much progress made when speaking of the age issues, and this still remains a problem in our current workplaces. There have been many failure-to-hire lawsuits brought up to fight this type of discrimination, but there have been many reasons why employers fight to not employ older workers. Many valid questions arise for an employer when hiring an older employee which deters them from giving them this position (Raymond 199-201). Overall age and gender discrimination cause a division in any workplace they exist in, and this divide deters all workers from performing their jobs at the best of their abilities, causing their workplaces to suffer in terms of successfulness.

III. Gender Discrimination and Corresponding Workplace Culture

It is important to understand the origin of discrimination and where it stems from. A person or group of people will feel as though they have been discriminated against if they have been treated poorly and differently than someone else. Therefore, it is safe to believe that in terms of gender discrimination, workplace environments that include a supportive culture among all

employers and employees are very likely to not have issues surrounding sex discrimination. People will not associate any differences in treatment to anything work-related because of the healthy environment within the workplace. Discrimination accusations and discriminatory behavior become an issue when the workplace is not functioning at its best, and once these problems arise, the workplace deals with even more struggle and loss of high performance among employees (Stainback 5). Also, speaking in terms of women specifically, a workplace environment that is supportive of work-family relations will also cause less issues with the women in workplaces because this is a big source of gender inequality. Women are susceptible to gender discrimination because they are the ones who become pregnant and must be out of work for a certain amount of time. Therefore, workplaces who embrace equal opportunity by supporting starting families will reduce the chance that sex discrimination will become an issue to be thought about.

Composition of a workplace in terms of sex will also have a major impact on whether sex discrimination is present in a workplace. “Sex composition can influence the likely experience of sex discrimination in two important ways: 1. by inducing a sense of threat and competition between status groups once a particular compositional threshold is reached, or 2. by creating visible tokens in a given workplace that are easily targeted for abuse and hostilities (Stainback 3). For example, if a workplace is made up of mostly women employees, the small portion of male workers may feel like they need to work harder or even better to prove themselves in this workplace because of the competitive nature created by one gender being more popular than the other. Also, stereotypes can be formed among the genders that can lead to abusive behaviors, unethical decisions, and preconceptions of workers. Therefore, to work to eliminate gender discrimination in this sense, it is important to compose a workplace with these equality factors in

mind and to uphold them. The sex of the manager and supervisor can also play a role in this as well. The sex of a superior can be seen as one sex not being capable of the work that a higher position requires, so this is another aspect to take into account when promotions come along and in choosing who is the best candidate for the positions (Stainback 3-4).

Among the many things discussed surrounding gender discrimination, the mental health status of those who are subject to this injustice also is an important thing to touch on. It has been researched and studied that discrimination, in general, is directly associated with depressive symptoms. However, a study was conducted on women in South Korea to see if these depressive symptoms were present in them after being subjected to gender discrimination. This study came back to show that women who endured gender discrimination while in the workplace had higher chances of experiencing depressive symptoms. Further studies could be conducted maybe containing different variables and using men as the subjects, but this information is crucial to helping people realize the effect this form of discrimination has on people. Not only does this form of discrimination cause a divide between workplace culture and employees, but now it is clear that it also can severely affect the mental health of people, and this fact should encourage everyone to want to eliminate this problem all together (Kim).

IV. Age Discrimination and Corresponding Workplace Culture

Among the many kinds of the discrimination that can take place in the work force, age discrimination is one type that can tend to be overlooked and seen as not as pressing as some other types. According to a specific study surrounding discrimination in the workplace, a hypothesis was made that age discrimination would be quite high in the 20s, decrease in the 30s, and then progressively rise again from there at around the age of 40. This hypothesis was formed from several factors that were researched. Coming as no surprise to anyone, it is known that

employers favor younger workers compared to older workers simply because the work is expected to be better produced by a younger worker. However, how young is too young? Some workplaces believe that younger workers right out of school do not have enough experience and are not competent for very important jobs and would prefer to higher people in their 30s with more experience in the field. This hypothesis also leaves room for variation among fields of work, but for the most part, is accurate in every work setting (Gilbert 267-269).

When speaking about how age discrimination affects the feelings and mental status of an older employee, this type of discrimination has been known to cause people to experience low self-esteem and have feelings of powerlessness and uselessness. These feelings can be caused by stereotyping. Assumptions made about older workers much of the time include them being less productive, much harder to train, less flexible, less creative, lacking physical ability, and many more. These stereotypes create an all-around negative attitude in the workplace, which can cause more negative effects on the workplace as a whole. Also, through studies done by many, older workers have been known for being “high on warmth” meaning that they are more tolerant and sincere in comparison to younger workers. However, in comparison, they were seen as “low on competence meaning low independence, low competitive nature, and lower intelligence” in comparison to younger workers. Therefore, when it came down to seeing what some of the causes of discrimination are, it is easy to see that the competence area of older employees is a key aspect as to why they are often denied certain opportunities within the workplace (*Discrimination* 203-205).

Despite the notion that older workers are less capable in all areas of work in comparison to younger workers, it is widely neglected that there is evidence that older people, for example, people over the age of sixty, are more active and fit than they ever have been in the past. The

longer life expectancy of humans is in direct relation to the bettering of healthcare throughout the last few years. Something that could potentially be less known to the general public is that sometimes age discrimination can be driven by financial and market conditions and not for personal reasons like many may assume. An older worker who has been in the workforce for quite some time most likely expects to be paid a certain amount due to seniority. Hiring younger workers comes with the leisure of being able to pay them less because they do not have the same seniority or expectations that an older worker may have. However, even though the hiring of younger workers may seem more appealing and cost beneficial, older workers and many others believe that they should not be overlooked simply because of their age. When older employees are overlooked, workplaces can suffer the consequences simply because they did not hire a competent employee that could potentially bring success to the workplace (Santora 103).

When age discrimination is thought and spoken about, it is assumed that this takes place when hiring an older employee and creating assumptions about their work or even the consideration of terminating an employee because of their old age, and not because of their job performance. However, age discrimination can have a mental effect on older workers which causes them to voluntarily quit because of the way they are being treated in the workplace. The cross-national Ageism Survey shows that 84 percent of Americans who are over the age of 60 experienced and reported at least one or more incidents of disrespect, insulting jokes, and patronizing behavior. This behavior presented by younger workers is degrading to the older workers. "Ageist attitudes and discrimination result in lower levels of overall organizational commitment for older workers, and a "push" out of a particular workplace or full-time employment" (Vincent 315). The word "push" is used to show that the older workers were not voluntarily ready to leave the work force but felt obligated to do so because of the way they were

treated. This kind of conduct also proves to create a toxic workplace environment by making certain employees feel unworthy because of something they cannot control. In this case, employers or anyone in the workplace who has a high up position has the duty and obligation to eliminate ageism attitudes in order to keep the workplace from becoming worse off (Vincent 314-317).

V. Ethics

Ethics, in general, along with ethical decision making, is a topic in which all people are exposed to in the workforce no matter what that field of work they may be in. However, it is imperative that all workers within a workplace share a common understanding of workplace ethics in general in order to create an effective ethical culture. Many people think of ethics just as “the right thing to do,” but it goes much further than this. “Another key feature of ethics is that it does not apply only to oneself – it also applies to others” (Cynthia 2). Everyone within a workplace is affected by ethics, and this is not something that should be looked at singularly, but wholistically for every person in the workplace. Ethics within a workplace is decided based on how things are run and what decisions are made within top management, along with the behaviors and attitudes of all employees. Any ethical choice is reflected to people within the workplace, but also outside the workplace through actions, words, and behaviors, and any of these things can display the ethical stance that any workplace upholds (Cynthia 1-6).

Values and rules are used to create a code of conduct within a workplace as well. However, does every person believe in the same values and rules? The simple answer to this question is no, but employees must act a certain way and have similar enough beliefs to colleagues in order to be ethical and successful in any job. Rules and values are subject to change, but not in the way that they put the ethics of a workplace into question. It also helps to be very authentic in

creating rules and values for a workplace. Begin by “defining it” by explaining what these rules and values may be very clearly. Then, “live it” by being as authentic as possible and make the best effort to follow every rule and value that was implemented. Lastly, “color it in” by inspiring others in the workplace and setting a good example for all in order to maintain a healthy workplace culture that all stems back to authenticity (Patti 15). Therefore, it is essential that every workplace organization makes it incredibly clear what is and is not acceptable in the workplace based on the values upheld by the workplace as a whole. When this is not taken into consideration, problems are likely to arise in many areas of the workplace (Cynthia 4-5).

The conversation and knowledge about ethics can be directly spoken about in terms of age and gender discrimination, but also more broadly in terms of all other types of discrimination as well. Speaking about ethics in a more general sense, any workplace that has issues in ethical decision making with employees/employers who struggle with the important concept of ethics will have issues being successful. Along with discrimination, there are other things that go on within the workplace like unethical leadership, harassment, and unrealistic and conflicting goals that all potentially contribute to discriminatory actions. The person in the workplace that is considered “top management” or just superior in any sense is someone that people in the workplace tend to admire, look up to, and strive to impress. However, if people within this role are taking part in unethical behavior, such as discriminatory actions, manipulating reports, or simply not acting as an admirable figure, problems will most certainly arise in the workplace. This type of unethical behavior can happen very noticeably, but also can be more discrete and may be difficult to notice at first. Regardless, unethical leaders are a main reason why discrimination of age and gender in the workplace occur because of the poor management that

are providing a poor example that they are setting for those they surround themselves with within the workplace.

There are laws set in place in order to maintain diversity in all workforces and to fight against discriminatory activity. However, many workplaces find their way around this. With these laws set in place, it is clear to see that not only are important laws being broken, but these workplaces are also crossing the ethical line as well. These aspects of the workplace can then lead to even further issues. Some workplaces may have certain goals and expectations that may not be attainable to reach, so reports and other things may be fabricated in order to reach set goals. Employees feel that they can act in this unethical way because of the potentially already toxic workplace they are surrounded by because of things like unethical leadership and unethical practices of discrimination. This can be seen as a domino effect; once one unethical act or behavior is put into question, the workplace can begin to fall apart and become unethical in every aspect of their work. Regardless of how big or small the action is, it will always be wrong and play a hand in the demise of any workplace (Michigan).

VI. Conclusion

Any discussion surrounding discrimination of any and every kind can lead to much controversy and many questions. In terms of this kind of behavior in the workplace, it is something that is incredibly degrading and causes more problems than can be seen by people outside the workplaces, and this goes for every kind of workplace as well. Every form of discrimination within the workplace is most certainly unethical, unfair, and inhumane, but age and gender discrimination are very likely to be undermined compared to other forms that are present within workplaces. Age and gender discrimination deserve much more attention in order to solve the problems that still exist in this area. Efforts that have been made in the past have

helped make some progress in this area of workplace discrimination, but in reality, there are still many discriminatory actions and thoughts that circle around every workplace in the present day. Many jobs are still labeled predominantly male or predominantly female, and many jobs still tend to hire based on this stereotype even though every profession has male and female employees nowadays. Similarly, many jobs will only hire people if they are a certain age because of assumptions made surrounding the fact of mental and physical capability of an older or younger person, and these actions show that people can struggle mentally, and workplaces can suffer many consequences from this as well.

A main reason why discrimination of age and gender is so degrading is because many times, positions and opportunities are granted or denied in the workplace to employees because of assumptions that are made about sex and also stem from ageism thoughts. Actual capability and performance are not even always taken into account much of the time. There are also many ethical concerns surrounding this kind of behavior in the workplace. It is very likely that discrimination claims will not be made if the workplace culture and workplace environment in general is a healthy one with strong and diligent leaders who are good influences for every employee. Authenticity and transparency in any workplace will set the tone for every employee and create an atmosphere where ethical decisions are promoted and supported. If ethical decision-making is encouraged, discrimination will most likely not occur because of a healthy atmosphere within the workplace. Overall, a toxic workplace culture can and will be seen in a work environment where age and gender discrimination exist, but most importantly, can be avoided altogether or corrected with ethical leadership and ethical decision making that will also ensure the success of every workplace.

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