Racial stereotypes, cultural differences, and employment segregation research pap...

Literature, Russian Literature

The aspect that stands out is the uniformity that overrides the workplace environment. In matters of gender, both men and women usually work in places where their gender is more dominant; in terms of number. That concept permeates to race as well. We find that African-Americans and White-Americans tend to work in organizations in which a majority of the workers in similar jobs are from their respective race (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). As a human services professional, I face a variety of these incidences in the work environment. I deal with and observe cases where segregation as a result of race, sex, culture and disability persist as the norm with black men, black women and white women earning substantially less than white men. The disabled, aged, Muslim and different individuals lack the same advantages accorded to other people. For example, opportunities at prestigious jobs, positions of authority over other workers, independence in the workplace (autonomy), promotions and other opportunities to climb the career ladder. In order to curtail the idea of women's work and minority position, key advances both in policy and mental framework are necessary. The notion that individuals who appear different in skin color, gender, culture, physical abilities and age are somehow less than, is invalid and retrogressive. Surmounting the issue of segregation, inequality and discrimination is not a herculean task, but still requires a unified single-minded effort.

Invidious comparisons are offensively discriminating comparisons that point to the supposed existence of particular differences between the different races and genders. It arises mainly from a political ideology designed to segment a particular type of people within a particular sphere of influence

(Cole & Stewart, 2001). I had a case of racial discrimination, where an African-American lady applied for an opening in the Accounts Department. She was still in school doing her CPA and worked on contract as a sales assistant. A white male superior at the company she went to for the job, without shame or fear, alluded that her skills best suited positions of manual and supervised tasks. He downplayed her ambition pointing to the demanding nature of the position. He claimed that she would not have time to take care of her family. Furthermore, he pointed out that the job entailed a lot of calculations that even challenged some men. In this case the lady is a victim of both gender discrimination and racial stereotype. In another instance, an American practicing Muslim applied for a position in management, as a Head of Department. He had all the necessary qualifications. He failed to get the position, but a white man succeeded in getting it. On paper, their competency and qualification were matched, which means the company used another criterion in the selection process. His religious and cultural beliefs undoubtedly factored in the decision-making process of the organization. Given the fear and distrust around Islamic people, it was only a matter of time until he became a victim of this prejudice. In another case, the employer failed to secure a promotion because of his disability. The management justified their decision on the basis of capability to carry out the tasks involved. They told him that the position required considerable travel, hence it would be inconsiderate of them to place him in that uncomfortable and demanding situation. Invidious comparisons limit people's potentials and capacity to enjoy life. Poor pay, nasty work environment, inadequate support systems and

harassment at work are some of the consequences of these distasteful limitations. There are, however, ways to challenge them to evoke the necessary changes in the workplace. One way to stop them is through reeducating managers, employees and co-workers who indulge in the offensive culture of discrimination (Tomaskovic-Devey, 1993). Seminars and forums on good work ethic, where desensitization, acknowledgement and awareness of the issues get discussed are key. They should engage in practical exercises where they learn to interact with each other and accord due respect to one another. Another way is through changing the structure of the organization from a particular inclination. By diversifying the workforce through transfers, new hires and promotions, they will ensure that no unhealthy groups form. Any status quo that is intolerant should get disrupted by shaking up the organization. Individuals who encourage such insulting behavior should get dealt with immediately. Hence, disciplinary action against the behavior will prove effective. Finally, the organization should exercise team building exercises where the coworkers get to know each other outside the work environment and interact with each other as people. The strategy will deepen appreciation and respect and most of all trust in your fellow man or woman, regardless of any differences.

Our social nature as human beings connects us in a sociobiological manner. The implication of this connection is that when we witness another person's suffering, we become traumatized. These secondary symptoms usually affect those in positions of immediate assistance or observation. These people are police officers, journalists, physicians, psychologists, family members, social workers, clergy, nurses and bystanders or witnesses to disasters. Therefore,

vicarious trauma is the emotional impact of another person's traumatic event through empathy mainly an occupational hazard of social workers (Bloom, 2003).

I had a case where a man got relegated to another bathroom on another floor simply because of his skin color. He had repeatedly used the other bathroom and then one day it became an executive bathroom. Surprisingly, even staff of lower rank than him still used it, but they were all white. He did not argue or cause a scene, but quietly made his way to the other bathroom. In another situation, a cleaner came crying to me. She had accidentally sprayed a little water on the shoes of a visiting manager of a certain company. She received a series of condescending insults and rebukes that devalued her and her existence. She made her feel worthless and unfit to share the same space as her. The manager then made her kneel down and clean the water droplets from her shoes. Both situations moved me. A mix of anger, contempt, violent thoughts, sympathy and retribution, filled my mind. However, my role was to console and enable her to move on.

Other strategies include a proper diet and sleep, engaging in physical activity like yoga, identifying trauma inducing triggers and either avoid or eliminate them. I can also read a book, play a game, listen to music, or go for a nature walk to allow my mind to let go of the trauma and replace it with pleasant things.

In conclusion, racial stereotypes, cultural differences, gender inequalities and other forms of workplace segregation have both direct and indirect victims. Counsellors and social services in these situations, are a stop gap measure; they treat the symptoms. We help victims come to terms with their

experiences and grow and learn from them, but our main target should be the perpetrators. By rehabilitating the instigators, we can avoid the trauma that affects the victims and the social workers. Emphasis should be on developing support systems for social workers as they face a slew of traumatizing accounts and, hence require a way to relieve themselves of any issues so that they can help the next person.

References

Bell, H., Kulkarni, S., & Dalton, L. (2003). Organizational Prevention of Vicarious Trauma. Families in Society: The journal of Contemporary Human Services, 84(4), 464-469. Retrieved from www. vawnet. org/Assoc_Files_VAWnet/PrevVicariousTrauma. pdf

Bloom, S. L. (2003). Caring for the Caregiver: Avoiding and Treating Vicarious Traumatization. In A. Giardino, E. Datner, and J. Asher (Eds.), Sexual Assault, Victimization across the Lifespan (pp. 459-470). Maryland Heights, MO: GW Medical Publishing. Retrieved from www. sanctuaryweb. com/PDFs_new/BloomCaringforCaregiver. pdf

Cole, E. R., & Stewart, A. J. (2001). Invidious Comparisons: Imagining a Psychology of Race and Gender Beyond Differences. Political Psychology, 22(2), 293-308. Retrieved from http://sitemaker. umich. edu/cole. qsort/files/invidious. pdf

Tomaskovic-Devey, D. (1993). Gender and Racial Inequality at Work: The Sources and Consequences of Job Segregation. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.