

# Discrimination still exists in the workplace sociology essay



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## **Introduction**

This paper aims to take a critical look at the practices which are rampant in the job market today. There is a common belief that racism and discrimination are two problems which are rampant all over the world. The racism which is being referred to here is of giving one race preference over the other. Although this term can be used for any race in general, the term racism has become synonymous with racism against dark skinned people. Discrimination, on the other hand is either related to age or gender usually, but it can also mean discrimination against people of a specific sexual orientation, country or cast. The extent to which racism and discrimination still plays a role in one being chosen or not chosen for a job, borders on immoral. If a candidate is eligible and there is no reason to turn him away, an employer is morally and lawfully bound to give him the job.

There are laws which protect a person from being unjustly treated depending on his skin color or sex, in addition to theories which dictate that an organization which has diversity in its employees in the case of gender, race and age is more successful in the global market than those which discriminate; despite these, discrimination and racism is still in practice. Not only do laws and theories dictate that racism is wrong, a person is also morally bound to not judge another on the basis of his cast, creed or gender.

Despite discrimination and racism being wrong on so many levels, these are practices which are still in vogue. This paper would aim to take a look at the previous literature which has been written on the subject, the laws and

theories which are anti-racism and the effects of discrimination and racism on the people who are singled out.

## **Objectives**

To study the racist and discriminatory practices in vogue in the job market and the workplace.

To gauge the effects of the racism and discrimination on the people being victimized.

To study the laws and the theories designed to discourage racism and discrimination.

## **Background**

Racism basically means that biological make up; nationality and ethnicity are factors which make a person superior or inferior to the other. Where usually, racism is seen as an absolutely evil thing, it is not always so. Most of the time, racism is not evil, rather it is an institutional ideology, like believing that more money is better than less, some believe that white is better than black, man is better than woman and so on. In cases like these, racism is not something which is malicious; rather it is a learned behavior, being transferred from generations to the next. That said, in some cases, racism and discrimination are deliberate and malicious. Despite the fact that racism is usually met with fierce criticism and dislike, there are still people who staunchly believe that that one human race could be better than the others.

The earliest examples of resistance to racism have been seen in the Montgomery Bus Boycott which took place in December 1955. The student

sit-ins in the 60s, the Selma March in 1965 which was famously lead by Martin Luther King and the Voting Rights Act that President Johnson signed.

It has been famously believed that racism was decreasing, but a closer look testifies to the fact that racism has not lessened other than minutely, rather it has branched out. Initially, racism was limited to black and white, now racism is multi dimensional. Not only black people, but brown, Asians and Chinese are famously subjected to racism.

Discrimination is the differentiation of one person from the other based on his or her qualities and attributes, like gender, sexual orientation and/or cast. Some might say that discrimination is more rampant than racism, while these two terms merge at one point, it can be said that racism is the discrimination based on color and nationality. Discrimination is believed to be more rampant because simply put, there are more options to discriminate in. People can be discriminated on the basis of cast, creed, nationality, color, gender, age and sexual orientations.

While there are no known beginnings of racism and discrimination in the work place, it can be safely believed that the practice of racism in the work place is as old as society and racism itself.

## **Previous Literature**

Racism has been reported not only in the black people, but also in Indians, Pakistanis, Chinese and Asians in general. Most of the brown or black people or those living in the Middle East report some form or the other of racism in the workplace, whether it is related to gaining a job or to the attitudes faced in the job.

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In most cases, it has been reported that CVs with Muslims, Chinese or Black names are overlooked deliberately whereas the ones which have white names are given more importance. If a person does get a job, he is usually treated in ways which are unethical, subjected to ridicule or refused a good pay and promotion (Mooney, 2007).

Some job advertisements have been known to clearly state that a specific gender or cast is preferred, as in the case of a Singaporean company which stated in their advertisement, ' non Indians preferred' (Datta-Ray, 2007).

This is a case of blatant racism and discrimination in the case of Indians who are being singled out in the Singaporean job market. While this is one company which was naïve enough to put their discriminative thinking into print, there are others which are not so blatant yet just as bent upon hiring only a specific sect of people.

There are more women in the United States of America than there are men, and there are more poor women in the United States of America than there are poor men, the basic reason behind this is the discrimination women face in the job market. On an average, women are considered to be poorer because they are less likely to gain a respectable job if they are in contention against men (Mooney, 2007).

The racist discrimination against black men has also come to light in many ways. While many believe that racism is diminishing, when a closer look is taken at the hiring practices of the people in a variety of jobs, it becomes increasingly clear that young white males are far more liable to get a job in contrast to black males and males belonging to minorities (Edwards, 2007).

Researchers have presented studies which show that when a variety of applications and the call backs received on them were studied, there was a marked difference in the hiring trend, with males being given preference over women, white males over black males and Western males over Asians (Edwards, 2007). As disturbing as these facts and figures are, they are a testimony to the fact that racism and discrimination are social evils which are not being eradicated in the society despite the extent to which they are condemned.

While women face discrimination in the workplace on its own, it has been reported that colored women face even more discrimination because they are fighting not one but two opposing forces, that is, one they are female, which automatically makes people under estimate them and secondly, they are black which makes them the target for racism. In the United States, the Glass Ceiling Commission, a government-funded group, stated that “ Over half of all Master’s degrees are now awarded to women, yet 95% of senior-level managers, of the top Fortune 1000 industrial and 500 service companies are men. Of them, 97% are white” (Godbole, 2010). These statistics show that while women may work just as hard as men or in certain instances, even harder than men, they still are not provided with the same opportunities and are not treated in the same manner as men are.

While obtaining a job is hard enough, when a person does obtain a job, if he or she belongs to a minority or a group which is targeted for racism, the job becomes even more difficult because that person may face racism and discrimination from colleagues and the boss in addition to which he may be refused promotion or maybe working on a salary lower than what he or she

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deserves. In the case of women, they may face vulgarity and pointed sexual or verbal harassment. They are denied maternity leaves, not given tasks which would let them explore their full potential and in the case of working mothers, they are not given the special benefits which they are entitled to (Borkar, 2011).

1 out of 5 working women, who are working in general jobs, reported that they have face some kind of racism or discrimination, the forms of which were reported as low pay, verbal and sexual harassment, short unpaid maternity leaves and derogatory treatment from male colleagues (Gregory, 2003).

While the discrimination against people of a specific sex, gender and age is very common and in some instances even a learned behavior, but the most disturbing form of discrimination is the one against people who have disabilities. While it is the employer's right to refuse a person who he thinks is not physically fit for the requirements of the job, it is an entirely discriminatory action if an applicant is refused a position on the basis that a physical disability would ' look bad' (Mooney, 2007).

## **Theories, Laws and Moral Obligations Regarding Racism and Discrimination**

Apart from the fact that there are several theories and laws which discourage racism and discrimination and encourage equality in the workplace, both in the hiring practices and the post hiring phases, there are still instances which hold testimony to the fact that discrimination is still prevalent. If the laws and theories are put aside for a moment, the fact still

remains that singling a person out on the base of his cast, color, creed or gender is an act which is morally and ethically wrong. While the moral and ethical ideas and notions cannot be put into any sort of measure, the laws and theories can.

### **The business case for diversity**

The business case for diversity basically states that if a company, an organization or a business venture is open in their hiring practices and hire people of every cast, color, creed and gender, they will be more successful in the global market (Brief, 2008). The business case for diversity means that the only criteria for the hiring or not of an applicant should be his or her achievements and the capabilities. This theory also states that if there is a diverse range of employees in the workplace, the employees will be better satisfied and more motivated in addition to the fact that it gives the company a liberal façade. Most of the cases in which the organizations are hiring diverse employees, they are also increasing their creativity and productiveness (Theiderman, 2008).

### **Legislation and Laws**

The first law which was introduced in relation to the discrimination in the workplace was The Equal Pay Act in 1963. This law made it mandatory for women and minorities to get the same pay as the male employees (Gold, 2001). After that act, many others like The Civil Rights Act and Age Discrimination in Employment Act were introduced and are still in use (Baer, 2007). These are the laws which are in practice in the USA; other countries too, have introduced laws which protect an applicant or an employee from being a victim of racism or discrimination.

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The catch with the anti discrimination laws is that they cannot be put into effect unless a matter is taken into court. Even when the matter is taken in to court, the cases are highly difficult to prove and take a lot of strength and time.

## **Evaluation of the Practices of Employers with Respect to Discrimination**

The literature which was reviewed and the practices of the employers which have been studied prove the fact that the society is not rid of the discrimination or racism, rather, racism has taken diverse forms and people are unaware that they are being racist in some instances as well.

Figure 1: Cases of discrimination reported between 2006 and 2007 (Meyer, 2008).

As the above figure indicates, the racism and discrimination practices in all areas like race, gender, age, nationality and disability are rising. Despite the beliefs that racism is ending, statistics indicate that it is rising. The rise is alarming because it not in small numbers, rather it is rapidly rising and in the near future, it has been predicted that racism would continue to rise in the workplace.

Racism in the work place is majorly faced by two kinds of people, women and the minorities. Women who belong to a minority are even more susceptible to the phenomenon and have to fight not one but two kinds of prejudices, of gender and of color. Even if the women are white and not part of a minority, they are usually treated in a manner which is not the same as men (Hersh, 2007). They are given lesser responsibilities; their strengths are not used to

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the best advantage and are paid less than the average man. Other than the fact that they are not treated like equals, they are also subject to mental and physical harassment and are sometimes asked to do favors which are not moral or ethical. Pregnant women are often laid off or not given a paid maternity leave.

Figure 2: Gender pay gap in the European Union (P. A. P Blog, 2008).

Between 1994 and 2004, there was a 125% increase in gender discrimination cases in the workplace. The basic complaints which were filed by the women were sexual and mental harassment by male bosses and colleagues, pay which is less than the deserved amount, being laid off and being refused promotions (Mohanty & Biswal, 2007).

Figure 3: Discriminatory attitudes towards women (P. A. P Blog, 2008).

More and more women are reporting that companies use the recession as an excuse to fire them when they are pregnant or planning to start a family. Some women report that they were asked to perform sexual favors in response to which they would get promotions or pay rises.

The proof of discrimination against women can be seen in the fact that more women than men graduate with a master's degree yet lesser women are holding positions which are befitting with degree (Meyer, 2008).

In the case of race discrimination, the major bias is against black people with respect to white. While it was initially believed that the bias is only related to black people because of their history of slavery to the white, it is now coming

to light that the bias is expanding to Asian, South Asians and Hispanic people as well.

It has been seen in businesses that only 1% of the people belonging to ethnic minorities are in the senior positions or in the management sector, whereas, 99% of the people, who might be equally or more qualified than the majority are doing jobs which are below their qualifications.

In the year 2008, EEOC received 33, 937 charges of race discrimination, a fact which proves that there is still widespread discrimination in the workplace related to a person's color and gender (Hersch, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

The literature which was reviewed and the statistics which have come forward in this report have proven the fact that despite all the moral and ethical obligations, the laws and the theories which have been put into effect against racism, it is still a practice that is widely in vogue.

All of the facts which have been discussed above prove the notion that racism and discrimination are still widely practiced in the workplace. Despite popular belief, the discriminatory practices are not becoming less; rather they are increasing with time. In the past decade, the cases reported of racism in the work place have increased.

The most disturbing aspect of racism and discrimination is that, the boundaries of the phenomenon, which were previously confined to specific genders and races, are not becoming wider. More and more races are being

victimized (Baer, 2007). The reasons for discrimination now include, cast, color, nationality, sexual orientation, gender and disabilities.

The ethnic minorities which are targeted include black people, South Asians, Chinese, Hispanic and Muslims. Religious discrimination is also becoming rampant. There is a 50% increased chance of a white male getting a job when he is in contention with a black male and both hold the same qualifications.

Women are being targeted in the workplace with sexual innuendos, the asking of sexual favors in return for promotion or increase in the pay and mental harassment, while these are factors related to the gender of the worker, women are also treated in a manner which is not the same as men, in some instances they are paid less than the male employees and in others they are given menial chores which are not equivalent of the education which they have received (Mohanty & Biswal, 2007).

While there are laws which are in place to protect the victims of racial and social discrimination, the incidences of discrimination are still increasing. Despite the proof that a racially diverse workplace is evidently better, more successful and more valuable in the global market, employers still continue to subject applicants and workers to discrimination whether intentionally or unintentionally.

As it is evident that the laws which have been introduced have not had much effect on the attitudes of people and the incidences discrimination, there is a need to found another way out of this situation (Brief, 2008). Since

discrimination is a social evil, the only thing which might lessen the impact <https://assignbuster.com/discrimination-still-exists-in-the-workplace-sociology-essay/>

and the occurrence of discrimination in the workplace might be education of the people from a base level in the lessons of equality and just behavior.

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## **What are the main differences between the Equal Opportunities**

**approach and the Managing Diversity approach? Critically discuss each**

**one, making references to different social groups' experiences in each**

**approach.**

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### **Introduction**

It has been recently noticed that despite all the measures which have been taken to promote the equality of women and minority groups in the workplace, there are still many ways in which inequality still exists. The

measures which have been taken to promote equality include legislations, social initiatives and the introduction of a specific code of practice.

The two measures which are being discussed in this paper are equal opportunities law and the managing diversities approach. These two measures are in their own rite instrumental in bringing about a change in the attitudes of the people and in decreasing discrimination based on gender, cast, sexual orientation or nationality. These measures have been introduced because contrary to popular belief that discrimination is decreasing, it has been seen that discrimination has increased tenfold in the past decade (Green & Kirton, 2010). Since we are constantly claiming to be a civilization, the fact that someone would be judged on the color of his skin or his gender in this day and age holds testament to the fact that we might still be illiterate, uncivilized beings for some of us see no shame in singling out people from our own race.

The discrimination in the workplace has seen an all time high. While some people are aware of their actions regarding discrimination, in some cases, people are blissfully unaware of the fact that they are judging someone based on what he look like, who he is attracted to and what is gender is. Since a job is an important milestone in any person's life, it would be a sad incident if we cannot stop work place discrimination in this day and age.

## **Equal Opportunities Legislation**

This act declared that on no grounds will one employee be discriminated from another. This act included aspects such as gender, age, race,

pregnancy status, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, marital status or family status (Chandler, 2003).

The equal opportunities act was a law which aimed to eliminate the discriminatory practices in the workplace by declaring it unlawful to give one employee preference over the other on any ground. While this act in itself was very thorough, the implementation of it was not so because most of the discriminatory cases either go unreported or unproved by the victim.

## **Managing Diversity**

This notion or approach as it may be called is not a law. This is rather an approach which aims to not nail in a point by making it a law, rather it aims to make a matter rational by looking at it from several different perspectives. The managing diversity approach is one which has not set rules; rather it gives some guidelines which teach how to treat each person who is different from you in a manner which is neither offensive nor derogatory (Greene & Kirton, 2010). While some believe in the fact that treat others as you want to be treated yourself, it is commonly noticed that the notions of respect, value or privacy vary from gender to gender, person to person and race to race. Thus one man's idea of respect might not match with the others, in cases like these; managing diversity is an approach which is ideal (Young, 2000). It teaches the manager and the employees to treat others in a way which would be respectful from the other person's perspective.

The first act which was introduced to fight this rising trend of discrimination was the Equal Opportunity legislation. This legislation declared that singling out people on the basis of their color, race or religion is a criminal act and



would be dealt with as such. The problem with equal opportunity legislation was that it gave a very narrow view of the discrimination and an even narrower view of the types of discrimination and the ways in which they are manifested. When it was observed that the equal opportunity legislation was not having the desired effect, another notion was introduced.

This notion was called 'managing diversity'. This approach to diversity takes a very broad view of the problem of discrimination and aims to deal with it in the same manner (Malik, 2003). While in the case of equal opportunities legislation, there was only a law which taught to refrain from discrimination of others on the basis of color, race, sexual orientation or gender, the approach of managing diversity aims to teach people to be more tolerable towards the differences in the human race.

This approach aims to make people more accepting and open minded towards the different kinds of diversity. It also aims to teach people how to act in a proper way towards people of other races and genders (Torrington, Hall, Taylor, 2002). Overall, this approach aims to promote tolerance and acceptance.

This paper aims to take an in depth look into the two approaches and find out how they differ from each other, what are their advantages and disadvantages and how they have helped in decreasing the instances of discrimination.

Both of these approaches have seen a lot of criticism and support. Some claim that one is better than the other and some claim that both need to be used side by side.

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## Previous Literature

The process of the development of anti discrimination laws is one which developed slowly over the period of time and went through a number of phases which helped to give it the form in which it exists today. The earliest known examples are from the 1940s when the war veterans were rallied with so that they are given the same opportunities in the jobs, this practice then expanded and met with other forms of discriminations and in the mid 90s, the legislation was formed. While these legislations were formed not very long ago in the past, they have not had much effect in the workplace because of the dubiousness of their nature (Bagilhole, 1997).

In the development of the law, there were several complications, which acts should be included, which should not, with different countries having different values and systems had different notions of how the workplace discrimination should be tackled (Young, 2000).

There are three types of models of equality, the formal equality, which is directed at the direct discrimination of one kind of race or a specific group at the hands of another. The second kind is the liberal equality of opportunity which is directed at the discrimination of specific areas and the underdevelopment and usage of resources. The third kind is the positive action which is directed at reaching only a select group of people in advertisements or job opportunities (Young, 2000).

When these approaches towards equality and their range of reaching out to people are studied, it is seen why there is a trend leaning toward putting managing diversity into action. The law is now considered to be one which

cannot be put into practice because it is an old law which was formed while keeping in mind the incidents and the happenings of the 1960s (Briar, 1997). These laws, while noble in their notions and the target they reached to achieve, were ones which focused more on groups of people, rather than individual.

In the current era, we see an increasing trend towards individuality and the notion that each human is a separate isolated individual. When these notions are put into perspective and then thought over, it becomes more and more evident why it was considered important to come up with an approach like managing diversity rather than the existing laws.

In this innovative approach towards discrimination, the managing diversity notion aims to protect not only people belonging to minorities, but rather it aims at managing diversity in any form. The forms may refer to any characteristic of an individual who may or may not belong to a minority. In this way, the managing diversity approach is aiming to not only lessen discrimination against minority groups; rather it is aiming to lessen discrimination against any diversity which might be found in a person.

## **Differences between Managing Diversity and Equal Opportunities**

There are obviously a number of differences in the two notions, while the equal opportunities act is a law and is considered a punishable offence, the managing diversity notion is an approach which aims to manage diversity as the name suggests. This is only a surface difference in the manner that it has nothing to do with the way the two ideas are implemented; rather this is a

difference in the forms in which the two notions were introduced (Greene & Kirton, 2010). In the case of the equal opportunities act, the people who might be affected from it in a positive way are the minorities which are usually targeted like the black people, females, homosexuals and people with disabilities. This law protects or claims to protect only those people who belong to a minority. The managing diversity approach on the other hand protects any and everyone who might be discriminated on the basis on any attribute or characteristic that he or she might have.

The second difference in between managing diversity and equal opportunities is that the two are intrinsically focusing on different things, where the notion of equal opportunities bases itself on the fact that the mannerism and attitudes of humans which might negatively harm others can be changed from external forces, the notion of managing diversity proclaims that the basic encouragement to change ones attitude and mannerism needs to come from within rather than from some external source. In the case of equal opportunity, the need to change one's attitude springs from being bound by law, which in most cases is not a healthy persuasion. On the other hand, the persuasion which stems from within is one which lasts longer, and is healthier for the person who is changing his or her attitude (Chandler, 2003). When these two kinds of persuasions are implemented, they have different effects on different people. In the case of the equal opportunities, the employer may treat the employee or the applicant in a just manner when he is at the workplace but as soon as the job confinements are over, the employer might revert back to his discriminatory ways. In this case, the discriminatory behavior of the employer is not fixed; rather it is only

temporarily curbed (Shakhray, 2009). In the case of the notion of managing diversity, the people who are in charge are bringing about a positive change in their overall behavior regardless of the circumstances in which they are living and the implications of that behavior.

The most important difference between the two perhaps is the goal towards which the two are headed. In the case of the equal opportunity law, the goal is mainly to correct the wrongs of the society and restore balance to a system which is fast leaning towards a single thing. While it is a most noble aim to have, it is also slightly irrational. Irrational in the way that the wrongs of the society can seldom be corrected by giving people rules and laws to follow, especially laws in the case of aspects like discrimination which stem from severe beliefs and long fixed ideas in the minds of people (Torrington, Hall, Taylor, 2002). The notion of managing diversity on the other hand has the goal that the humans need to believe in the fact that nearly everyone around them is different and would need to be treated differently. The goal of managing diversity is not correction of a system; rather it is the recognition of individuality. The effect of these two goals on people is different but not entirely different from what has already been stated above. Evidently, the law would temporarily change the attitudes of people whereas managing diversity may bring about constant change.

Where equal opportunities law aims to construct a society where male and females are treated in the same way without any inequality or difference, the notion of managing diversity aims to teach people how to make peace with this difference.

In the case of ethnic minorities, the equal opportunities law has protected them from being violated and treated unjustly in the workplace but the attitudes of people against them can only be changed by implementing the managing diversity approach, the approach which would not only change the attitudes of people in certai