

Ageism: The Underrated Form of Discrimination

People use language to motivate, inspire, persuade, and even to discriminate. Hurtful comments or opinions uttered can offend the targets we give the comments to, even though we may not be aware of the effects they cause as we say them. People from around the world encourage that we stop discriminating against certain races, religions, genders, and sexual orientations. They have started to campaign the abolishment of discrimination from many means, including language. However, discrimination against ages is not discussed as much as other types of discrimination. This certain type of discrimination is called ageism. Ageism, or ageist language if it is done verbally or in writing, is often taken as a prevalent issue. On the contrary, age discrimination can be as serious as other types of discrimination. In fact, ageism occurs even more frequent in our daily lives, from home to workplace.

Ageism can take place almost everywhere: at home, school, even workplace. At home, it happens because of several factors such as to maintain discipline in the family. Parents often say, "I'm your parent" to show that they have more power and their children will listen to them. At times, ageist comments are given to prevent children from questioning parents' decision. "You're just a kid" is a common statement that parents tell their kids when asking them to explain their decision. Because ageism is common in family environment, we tend to take it to other environments like school or workplace. Ageism occurring at the workplace indicates stereotyping of ages. This stereotype, according to McCann and Giles (2002, p. 164), leads to ageist attitudes, discourse, and behaviours which are common at the workplace. At the workplace, it can happen to either older or younger employees.

Many people think that ageism only targets older people. As a matter of fact, ageist stereotyping is also directed at younger employees. Not only is ageism done to senior staffs, but it is also directed at junior employees. Ageist discourse can clearly be seen when companies set up age limit in hiring employees. They do not want either too young or too old workers. The age limit specifies that being too young is inexperienced; while being too old is no longer productive. Besides being implemented by companies, ageism happens regularly between employees.

Ageism among colleagues seems to be inevitable. Ageist comments given to older colleagues by juniors implicitly state that the elders are less qualified and productive to work, despite being uttered in humourous ways. For example, Indonesians like to jokingly say, "*Mungkin faktor U(sia)*" or "It might be the age factor" when one of their senior colleagues forgets to do something. On the other hand, it is also not uncommon that seniors at the workplace implicitly belittle their juniors as 'incompetent' or 'inexperienced' by saying, "*Kamu masih muda, masih harus banyak belajar*" or "You're still so young, there's still many things to learn". Adolescents are often underrated simply because they have fewer experiences than the seniors, they like to act spontaneously, they do not possess wisdom, and they like to take risks (Irawanto, 2013, p. 201). Both seniors and juniors are not only targeting each other in being ageist; they sometimes discriminate themselves.

It is not unusual to see older or younger employees at the workplace age-discriminate themselves. Ageism towards oneself and towards others is caused by internalised age stereotypes (Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017). There are many contributing factors in self-ageism. First, they self-discriminate themselves because they wish to be compromised by the opposite age. When a junior makes a mistake, he sometimes excuses himself by saying, "I'm still new and have a lot to learn". In contrast, older employees often excuse themselves from taking the responsibility of something by saying, "I'm too old for this" before handing it over to the juniors. The second factor that might cause self-ageism is confidence. In certain cultures, there are certain stereotypes regarding age. When one decides to do something not supposedly to his age, he is bound by the culture he stays in, which makes him feel guilty if he does it. Going to a rock concert, for instance, is stereotyped as a 'youth activity' in Indonesia. If a middle-aged man wishes to watch a concert, he will reconsider his intention because he might feel insecure that people will judge his wish to be age-inappropriate. Levy *et al.* (2009) claim that self-ageism might increase morbidity and mortality (in Ayalon & Tesch-Römer, 2017). Age discrimination towards oneself can even be more serious than that towards others.

To sum up, even though age discrimination occurring on a daily basis can be as serious as other forms of discrimination, people still think little of it. Ageism has similar impacts to racism and sexism. Therefore, we need to prevent the impacts from happening by firstly watching our language.

References

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