

# **A Conceptual Discussion of Ageism as a Mechanism of Discrimination in the Workplace**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Over 50 years ago in the United States, the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (AEDA) was approved by the legislature. However, researchers and survey participants report age discrimination continues to be a problem in the U.S. workplace; and coworkers and management turn a blind eye to the problem. There is a growing concern that within the workplace bias exists toward older employees often connected to the stereotype that older employees are no longer competent to complete their tasks and responsibilities. Additionally, the stereotype of the older worker includes the belief that they are slow, not willing to learn new technology, and cost the company too much money as a result. These stereotypes and biases against the older worker are often accepted and go unchallenged in the workplace. The purpose of this paper is to raise awareness regarding the continued practice of age discrimination in the workplace.*

**Keywords:** *Age discrimination, ageism, older workers, mature workers, stereotypes, equal employment*

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While age discrimination is illegal (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 1967), research shows it is still persistent in the American workplace and researchers argue executives believe they are justified in discriminating against older workers because the company benefits financially (Rabl, 2010). According to the Age Discrimination in Employment Act (ADEA) of 1967, the purpose of this act is to promote employment of older workers based on their ability instead of some arbitrary age (EEOC, 1967). The EEOC (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2015) has further delineated specific policies and practices which are considered prohibited in the workplace. The prohibited practices include age discrimination of those workers who are 40 or older, along with any type of discrimination because of race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, disability or genetic information" (EEOC, 2015). The ADEA implemented the policy in which age discrimination is illegal and the EEOC is the organization which enforces the Act (Rabl, 2010). This conceptual paper explores the ongoing prejudice of age discrimination in the workplace and suggests that the age component of diversity and inclusion may provide the pathway to eliminate this intolerable behavior.

### Review of the Literature

#### Defining Ageism

Racism and classism are often discussed issues in the U.S. due to highly publicized events which have drawn attention to such concepts (Butler, 1969). However, a critical aspect of equal employment and rights to all employees which has been continually overlooked in research and the mass media is ageism (Butler, 1969). Butler (1969) argued prejudice continues between different age groups and ageism is a "serious national problem." Ageism reflects the strong distaste of young and middle-aged individuals at the prospect of being old (Butler, 1969). Butler elaborated on the severe reaction towards ageism as those who have a revulsion for getting old, the idea of being disabled, thoughts of becoming powerless, sickness and disease, and ultimately death. Individuals who discriminate against others because of their age have an entrenched anxiety when considering the prospect of getting old (Butler, 1969).

Butler (1969) developed the term *ageism* and defined it as "discriminatory beliefs, attitudes, and practices regarding older adults." The purpose to develop a clear concept of *ageism* was to attempt to show the direct relationship to other prejudices, such as racism and sexism, which are equally unfounded (Butler, 2005). Butler (2005) stated age discrimination needed to be understood as the unacceptable bigotry it is. Ageism is demonstrated in everyday life in the U.S. and the attitudes

of individuals in American society simply reinforce negative feelings against those who are older (Butler, 1969).

According to the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, age discrimination is defined as "treating an applicant or employee less favorably because of his or her age" (EEOC, 2015). Another term for age discrimination is ageism, which mirrors the definition provided by the EEOC (Ageism, 2015). Rabl (2010) defined older employees as those individuals over the age of 50 and argued the additional attributes of health, experience, and qualifications are related to the aspects of age. Age discrimination is allowed to take place when employees are treated differently simply based on a more advanced age, in comparison to another employee, without any consideration being given to a person's merit, achievements, credentials, or performance (Rabl, 2010). The lack of promotions, refused employment, termination, lower pay, and denied access to training are all examples of age discrimination (Rabl, 2010).

#### Historical Development

Historically, individuals 65 and older face burdensome barriers when trying to find employment (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Forty-eight years after the enactment of the ADEA, discrimination against older workers continues to be a profound handicap to remaining employed and ensuring financial security for ones later years in life (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Rothenberg and Gardner (2011) argued the ADEA policy is flawed and is inadequate in its attempts to address ageism for older employees. The ADEA, in enacting the anti-age discrimination legislation, operated in the interest of what was best for the economy instead of the overall best interest of older workers (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Congress thought eradicating age discrimination would increase the level of skilled workers and improve the overall productivity of the workforce in an effort to continue economic growth for the U.S. (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). The proponents of the legislation believed instituting educational programs and training in businesses would eliminate the problem of age discrimination (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). However, the focus of the policy failed to recognize the bureaucratic nature of this type of discrimination and the direct link to the development of capitalists and wages paid to laborers (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011).

In 1980, only 10% of claims filed with the EEOC were age-related (Macnicol, 2006). By 1991, the number of age-related complaints rose to 25% (Macnicol, 2006). Rothenberg and Gardner (2011) argued the shift in the nation moving more to the political right and neo-liberal economics are the two key factors in the rise of ageism. In 1980, the U.S. economy started to slow and corporate restructuring and mergers were responsible for

extensive layoffs, leaving many older workers displaced (Smith, 2006). With advancements in technology, the manufacturing industry was significantly impacted with massive layoffs where employees had worked their entire working life and most of them had no higher education to rely upon as they re-entered the job market (Horvath, 1987). Older workers comprised an inordinate amount of the manufacturing jobs and had higher salaries coupled with excellent health benefits (Horvath, 1987).

It is much more difficult for older workers to find re-employment after they have been laid off or after they have chosen to retire but decide they prefer to work (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). In 2008, workers over 45 looked for employment an average of 22 weeks while those under 45 found a job in 16 weeks or less (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2009). The agency can only pursue so many cases and, therefore, they choose those cases which the agency believes they can win. This requires complainants to be willing to dedicate the time and resources to challenge the wrongful termination and the group of individuals who can typically “afford” this pursuit are professionals, leaving the lower echelon positions without any representation.

The EEOC (2009) reported approximately 15,000-20,000 cases of age discrimination cases are filed every year. The number of age discrimination cases filed between 1998 and 2008 continued to rise, with the highest level reaching over 24,500 cases (EEOC, 2009). The International Longevity Center (ILC) argued the actual number of age discrimination cases is most likely much higher than reported by the EEOC when you consider all of the cases which go unreported (International Longevity Center [ILC], 2006). The majority of the cases filed with the EEOC are closed because they are deemed to be “administrative” or a decision is made that there is “no reasonable cause” (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). No reasonable cause is defined as lacking enough evidence to support the claims of the person submitting the complaint (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Of the total claims resolved in 2009, the EEOC stated 62% had “no reasonable cause,” 17% of the cases were withdrawn or resolved without the assistance of the EEOC, 17% were closed as “administrative,” and 4% were found to be reasonable of age discrimination and moved to the next phase in the process known as the “conciliation phase.” Of the 4% of the claims which were thought to have a reasonable argument where age discrimination had taken place, only 1% of the claims were resolved in which the claimant was compensated for the loss of employment (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011).

The number of older adults who need to work is growing because retirement is on average not an option which the older worker can afford (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). The American Association of Retired Persons (American Association of Retired Persons [AARP], 2009) conducted a survey of 767 individuals

over the age of 45. The results of the survey showed 22% of individuals between the ages of 45-54 and 27% of individuals between the ages of 55-64 postponed retirement due to the economic recession, declining home values, lack of a pension plan, and declining values of investments (AARP, 2009). Even though the ADEA (1967) implemented a policy to disallow the discrimination against any person based on their age, the organization has failed to protect the civil and economic rights of a vulnerable population (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011).

### **Human Capital Theory**

Kogovsek and Kogovsek (2013) argued that a businesses’ growth can no longer be dependent on improving efficiency, but must instead focus on the capabilities of the workforce. In particular, human capital is a key component in generating economic growth for any organization. Smith’s (1790) human capital theory stated that human capital is your most valuable commodity (Erhenberg & Smith, 1997). It is essential through the human capital theory lens to determine employee needs, provide ongoing support, and maintain a high level of training and development. The workforce is aging and Kogovsek and Kogovsek (2013) cited a shortage of knowledge-intensive skills within the employee base of businesses will require employers to reevaluate their current perceptions regarding mature workers. Terminating older workers based on stereotypes and bias leaves a knowledge-gap within the organization and threatens the firm’s competitive advantage (Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013). An employee who possesses knowledge-intensive skills is a “knowledge worker” and commands problem solving abilities which require a high level of intellectual capital (Mitchell & Meacham, 2011). At some point, the shortage in skills will become a paramount issue within many organizations (Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013).

The acquisition of human capital is an ongoing process and requires continual professional development of the entire workforce, young and old (Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013). Therefore, to deny the older worker training in an effort to force someone out of the organization is not only a detriment to the worker but also the overall business (Kogovsek & Kogovsek, 2013).

### **Self-efficacy**

The concept of *self-efficacy* suggests that there is a foundation from which humans become motivated and operate in relation to cognitions and effective processes (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy beliefs influence how we think and such thoughts can be beneficial or harmful to us, thus, cognitive results can take on different forms (Bandura, 1989). Self-efficacy effects how we assess or evaluate our own capabilities, while self-efficacy also impacts the development of and aspiration to reach goals.

The stronger the self-efficacy, the more task oriented and confident in their abilities an individual will be. According to Bandura (1989) “self-efficacy beliefs usually affect cognitive functioning through the joint influence of motivational and information-processing operations” (p. 1176). Consequently, an individual’s motivation and their information-processing are interconnected and are influenced by the self-efficacious beliefs. The result then becomes that self-efficacy beliefs heavily impact an individual’s motivation, in that they may have extensive or little incentive or reason to participate in a task. Lastly, Self-doubt can negatively impact an individual’s level of confidence and persistence in completing a task. According to Bandura (1989) the speed at which someone recovers from failure, will result in keeping faith in their capabilities and maintaining a “resiliency of self-belief,” which can keep their sense of worth intact (p. 1176). The issue then becomes that is aging or matured employees feel as if they are not viewed as a value to the organization, then they become susceptible and likely fall into the belief that they are no longer an asset and have less-than worth in comparison to younger workers. It is essential for mature workers, and all workers for that matter, to have feelings of value and self-worth in the organization stemming from and modeled by co-workers especially in management roles.

### **Stereotypes Linked to Ageism**

“Ageism is pervasive in modern American society” (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Snape and Redman (2003) argued older workers are viewed as lazy and unmotivated. The one key element in the discrimination of people because of their age is every individual will ultimately face this same discrimination if they live long enough (Rippon, Kneale, de Oliveira, Demakakos, & Steptoe, 2014). According to Ortman, Velkoff and Hogan (2014), the U.S. Census Bureau projected 15% of the population will be 65 or older by 2015 and this will double to over 30% by the year 2050. The U.S. Census Bureau projected by 2040, there will be more people over the age of 65 than under the age of 18 (Colby & Ortman, 2015).

Younger employees are more likely to believe negative stereotypes regarding older workers and older workers are thought to have undesirable traits (Rabl, 2010). When comparing the attitudes of older and younger workers, there is a notable bias against the older workers’ abilities, appearance, and behavioral intentions (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Additional stereotypes include such labels as senile, feeble, slow, inflexible, and untrainable (Roscigno, Mong, Byron, & Tester, 2007).

Butler (1969) argued elderly adults who are poor are viewed by the young and middle-aged individuals as “undeserving,” giving little or no credence to the person’s long work history and ignoring individual circumstances which may have contributed to being poor late in life. As

a rule, Americans are unwilling to recognize the poverty of older adults (Butler, 1969).

### **Ageism in the Workplace**

Roscigno (2010) discussed the growing problem of ageism in the workplace and the lack of protection for aging workers who are being pushed out of employment, although legislation exists to ensure employees are treated fairly despite their age. Since the 1990s, ageism has been on the rise in America (Rosigno, 2010). Roscigno (2010) argued the reasons the problem continues to persist is America is a country consumed by youth and the desire to remain youthful is carried into the workplace. Managers, younger colleagues, and customers of the firm have a negative stereotype toward older employees and the illegal discrimination has been allowed to continue because businesses believe they are justified in eliminating the older worker in order to protect the financial interests of the business (Rosigno, 2010).

Roscigno (2010) pointed out the devastating effects on those individuals who are the sufferers of ageism in the workplace and argued there are tangible costs, emotional scarring and a feeling of injustice for these individuals. In his research, Roscigno (2010) cited many employees had been with their respective company for a number of years. These individuals stated they believed they were “part of the family” within the company. They also highlighted their high level of job satisfaction as related to their position.

Maslow’s (1954) hierarchy of needs can be used to explain the negative impact of age discrimination on individuals suffering from ageism. The senior individuals view themselves as dependable, responsible, and committed to their job and their employer. These mature adults have benefited from self-actualization according to the hierarchy of needs as defined by Maslow (1954). When older workers are released from their positions, mocked while at work, or bullied because of their limited understanding with current technology, their self-esteem suffers, they feel as though they no longer belong in the workplace they have enjoyed for years, and their financial safety is threatened with worries they may lose their job.

### **Assertion of Double Standards**

Hatch (2005) noted that within the workplace there in fact exists a double standard regarding age discrimination and how it is applied differently to men as opposed to women, not only in the workplace but also in the medical community. Hatch (2005) stated age discrimination, although illegal, is alive and well and has been for decades. Hatch (2005) also argued men and women are treated differently in the workplace simply based on their gender; however, when the additional characteristic of age is included in the comparison, the aging woman is

viewed in a negative light while men retain (and sometimes improve) their standing because they are recognized for what they do.

Hatch (2005) cited the devaluation of both men and women as they age. However, ageism is worse for females because of the added social bias in the media, social policies currently in place, and deferential treatment of women in healthcare encounters. Hatch (2005) acknowledged other areas also add a negative impact to ageism such as ethnicity, social status, and sexuality. Men and women should evaluate how they perceive themselves as they age and whether they accept the prescribed stereotypes as presented in the media and in society at large or run the risk of being pigeonholed (Hatch, 2005).

To illustrate the point regarding the media's negative impact on society's impressions of aging adults, Hatch (2005) referenced the lack of elderly men and women represented in advertisements, films, and television programs compared to younger adults. Furthermore, older women are yet again less likely than older men to appear in advertisements, movies, and on television (Hatch, 2005). There are examples of older women being portrayed in a more "positive" image in some commercials, but the eventual message in the advertisement still conveys some stereotypical aging reference (Hatch, 2005).

Hatch (2005) stated the connection between ageism and sexism intersects at the interactions with healthcare providers. The ADEA is designed to protect the aging individual in the workplace (ADEA, 1967). However, ageism persists outside the boundaries of the office building. Hatch (2005) argued the stereotypes are oftentimes presented in a subtle manner but they have significant implications on the older woman's health. Elderly patients reported healthcare workers ignore them and treat them as unimportant (Hatch, 2005). Many times, medical personnel do not consult directly with the elderly patient regarding his or her care, but instead a younger family member or friend (Hatch, 2005). Hatch (2005) cited a research study where doctors were audiotaped during appointments with elderly female patients. The results of the study revealed doctors trivialize the health concerns of older women and frequently interrupt them as they are expressing their concerns (Hatch, 2005). This type of bias results in different medical treatment for men and women. Hatch (2005) also stated men are twice as likely to receive a kidney transplant in every age category over women. When it comes to cardiovascular disease, men are treated sooner than women, giving women a much higher mortality rate (Hatch, 2005).

Rabl (2010) argued motivation is an interaction between the person and the situation. Older workers may experience a lack of motivation for two reasons identified as "stressors" (Rabl, 2010): (1) The perception of age

discrimination in the workplace, and (2) The perception of minimal or no organizational support. A stressor is the perception of the potential to experience harm, threats, or challenges as they related to age discrimination and prejudice in the workplace (Rabl, 2010). As the employee ages, the perception of age discrimination also increases (Rabl, 2010). The organizational support of a company is viewed as the extent to which a company values the contributions of employees and cares about the well-being of the employees. When employees are treated positively, the behavior of the employees is also positive (Rabl, 2010). Employees view the positive or negative treatment from a manager to be the same reflection of the overall company's perception of that employee (Rabl, 2010).

Rippon et al. (2014) stated ageism has a serious impact on the overall well-being of an individual. Individuals who perceive they are being discriminated against because of their age also experience heightened responses to physiological and psychological stressors (Rippon et al., 2014). Continual exposure to the ongoing stressor over time will eventually lead to the deterioration of the person's mental and physical health (Rippon et al., 2014). Ageism not only displaces an individual from the workplace but also ultimately removes them from society due to the withdrawal from society, refusal to engage with others, and an intolerance to seek medical attention (Rippon et al., 2014).

### **Embracing the Mature Workforce**

With the number of older workers out of a job continuing to rise, entrepreneurs are taking advantage of the situation and creating a new recruiting market in an effort to help mature workers find employment ("Age discrimination", 2008). Websites like [www.matureaccountants.com](http://www.matureaccountants.com), [www.seniorjobbank.org](http://www.seniorjobbank.org), and [www.workforce50.com](http://www.workforce50.com) allow recruiting professionals to focus on the benefits of representing an experienced worker who can immediately be productive the first day on the job ("Age discrimination", 2008). Placing a mature worker in a new position provides assurance for the company the employee has a long work history, is dependable, and has the capacity to be responsible ("Age discrimination", 2008).

Mature workers bring expertise to the organization as well as improving the overall economy (McCarthy, 2012). While individuals continue to earn a paycheck, they are also spending money in the economy and benefiting a multitude of other businesses to include both local businesses and businesses outside of the immediate area due to personal and professional travel (McCarthy, 2012). McCarthy argued these employees are not "seniors," but mature workers who bring dedication, commitment and skilled knowledge to the organization. Individuals who want to work beyond the

age of 50 include those people who need to supplement retirement income, they want to initiate a new career path, or they want to start a home business (McCarthy, 2012). McCarthy (2012) argued the mature workers who are able to find employment show a strong desire to work, to be productive, and are grateful for the new opportunity because it allows them to feel hopeful about the future. Employers who have hired mature workers report they are pleased with the performance of the employee(s) and elated to see the benefits the mature worker adds to the overall organization (McCarthy, 2012).

The employment of mature and experienced individuals provides a resolution for businesses to the disappointment with the Generation Y segment ("Age discrimination", 2008). The young adults presently graduating from school have less than a basic education ("Age discrimination", 2008). Businesses can turn to the mature worker with ample experience to fill the skills breach because employers are recognizing the younger generation cannot meet the requirements of the job ("Age discrimination", 2008).

The majority of mature workers say they have experienced at least one instance of age discrimination during their career and many report multiple occurrences (Ory, Hoffman, Sanner, & Mockenhaupt, 2003). Rippon et al. (2014) argued of the research respondents who participated in the survey, a total of 37% of the adults over 62 reported they have experienced age discrimination in the workplace. For participants over 50, a total of 23% of respondents reported they had experienced age discrimination in the past year.

Mature workers benefit immensely by remaining in the workforce or returning to the workplace after retirement ("Benefits of engaging", 2010). The enhanced physical and mental of older workers is greatly improved and mortality rates are lower because the productive elements of performing a job improves ones self-identity, personal image, and diminishes the desire to isolate oneself ("Benefits of engaging", 2010). Additional benefits realized by these workers is the added financial security, the ability to continue saving money for the time when they choose to retire, and the continued accrual of Social Security ("Benefits of engaging", 2010). As long as mature workers are in the workforce, they can continue to provide for themselves as opposed to being a drain on the federal and state public assistance programs ("Benefits of engaging", 2010).

### **Moving Forward**

The population of the world is continuing to age, due to a rise in life expectancy over the last few decades (Rippon et al., 2014). Ageism is expected to continue to escalate in the years ahead and this issue will have repercussions not only in the workplace but in social safety, access to services (health and public), and the protection of human rights (Rippon et al., 2014). Discrimination based on race,

religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender or disability is a poor business move for any company because the media has proven such behavior will not be tolerated by any business, large or small (Thornton & Luker, 2010). Additionally, these types of discrimination are morally wrong (Thornton & Luker, 2010). Tolerating discrimination of any type also has a negative effect on the economics of a society (Thornton & Luker, 2010). While there are laws in place to prevent discrimination, including age discrimination, the ADEA has fallen short in protecting the rights of older, mature workers (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011).

Australia has implemented a program to encourage small businesses to hire older workers, paying each business \$1000.00 incentive for each older worker hired (Speranza, 2013). On average, 23 grants have been issued per month to those businesses who have implemented the plan since the initial launch of the program (Speranza, 2013). Speranza (2013) argued the most lucrative incentive for small businesses to hire older workers will be realized when the Australian government offers to provide training and "up-skilling" of the older workers. At that time, businesses will benefit from hiring someone who arrives already trained to perform the work (Speranza, 2013).

Rothenberg and Gardner (2011) suggested the implementation of major revisions to the ADEA on the issues related to enforcement and revising the wording to more directly address age discrimination. The removal of "reasonable factor other than age" (RFOA) from the current legislation is also a move in the right direction to eliminate ageism in the workplace (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Presently, employers use this exemption to circumvent the age discrimination actually taking place within the organization (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). The current process for filing a claim under the ADEA regarding an age discrimination complaint is arduous and protracted, and is further hampered by the stringent timelines required in order to meet the filing deadline (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). As the law is presently written, the employer is positioned to prevail in most every instance making the pursuit of a case extremely difficult, and intimidating, for any person who believes they have been discriminated against (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Modifications to the filing process, limiting deadlines, and language predisposing the claimant to defeat in an age discrimination case would be beneficial to greatly improving the current legislation (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011).

The EEOC should implement effective instruments to oversee employment processes in order to detect any discriminatory practices being used during the hiring process (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). All adults over the age of 40 should be encouraged to take part in ADEA education classes and programs to ensure the aging community is aware of their employment rights and

civil rights (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). Rothenberg and Gardner (2011) also stated the lack of a single-payer national healthcare program discourages employers from keeping older employees due to the rising cost of medical expenses incurred by the business. To correct this situation, health insurance must be disassociated from businesses altogether (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011).

#### Future Research

Given our understanding of ageism in the workplace it is critical to further explore and identify aspects of ageism and the negative factors that impact mature employees resulting in workplace discrimination. In particular, it is essential for research to provide a platform to those who have been or currently are victims of age discrimination. Perhaps a qualitative methods design involving focus groups and individual interviews could better clarify older workers' experiences in connection to ageism. What are the key signs of discrimination toward older workers? Are females and males equally experiencing discrimination due to age in the workplace? Are females more often targeted as a result of age discrimination? How can employers better serve the mature workforce and avoid incidents of age discrimination?

Future research designs could also incorporate the conceptualization of the *need to belong* as noted by Baumeister and Leary (1995). The *need to belong* is the conceptualization that within every human across all cultures there exists an individual need to belong (Baumeister and Leary, 1995). Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggested that "belongingness can be almost as compelling a need as food and that human culture is significantly conditioned by the pressure to provide belongingness" (p. 498). A study guided by the need to belong framework coupled with the concept of human capital would include the collection of qualitative data from those who hold positions of authority and those who are considered matured workers. The study would seek to bridge the gap in understanding the matured workers' needs in addition to the importance of feeling a sense of belonging within the organization and how feeling a sense of belonging contributes to motivation and productivity. Further the study could examine how to develop a work environment in which the need to belong can be fostered and achieved through top-level management. Driving further exploration of this topic rests solely in the hands of future researchers.

#### Conclusion

It is difficult to find any justification for denying older workers employment or for insisting on mandatory retirement (Rothenberg & Gardner, 2011). The number of older individuals in the workplace has been steadily increasing since mid-1990 (Mosisa & Hipple, 2006). One of the most difficult losses which come with age is the loss of choice and older workers being pushed out of the

workforce, regardless of their desire to continue working, is taking away an individual's right to choose (Butler, 1969).

While age discrimination in the workplace is illegal, regardless of whether the worker is young or old, the older worker is forced to deal with discrimination. Mature workers are being replaced with younger workers; therefore, the older person is faced with discrimination at the previous employer, as well as with potential employers while looking for a new position.

In this global economy where businesses around the world are embracing diversity as it relates to race, religion, sex, national origin, disability or sexual orientation, age is purposefully missing from the diversity discussion. We as a society have a social obligation to expose the continuance of age discrimination and hold employers responsible for breaking the law and Roscigno (2010) suggested individuals must fight ageism in the workplace. Social science can play a significant role in this issue by exposing the human toll which is at the heart of the ageism problem. Human resources and top level management must be better informed regarding the benefits received from the talent and experience of mature workers, and the cost savings derived in eliminating the need for hiring and training for new, replacement employees. Businesses benefit from a healthy economy and the research shows the economy is stronger when older workers are working.

There are plenty of individuals who look forward to retirement and many people will retire this year. However, there are also people who don't want to retire, as well as those who can't afford to retire. If the true purpose of the ADEA is to protect employees from being mistreated for being too old to work, the ADEA needs to be reformed to ensure the legal language is clear and understandable to the courts in how cases should be decided. Businesses should no longer be allowed to dismiss an older employee due to the financial hardship of the business. Presently, the ADEA does not protect older workers and for everyone who lives to be old enough to be considered an "older worker," anyone over the age of 50 will be potential recipients of age discrimination. Ageism is an equal opportunity bigotry.

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