Workplace biases are a severely common ethical issue that countless people of varying backgrounds, ethnicities, and genders deal with each day. What is workplace bias though? Workplace bias can occur between employee and employer, employee and employee, and even customer and employee. These are considered ethical issues because they focus on morality, and whether a person may be treated unprofessionally. Kantianism will be used to analyze some sources concerning the aforementioned workplace biases. Kantianism, as defined by [1], believes in a certain moral duty and specifies whether one will obey hypothetical and categorical imperatives. The first of which details that one should follow a moral code to obtain desires. The latter states that one will follow a moral code as it is one’s duty. Kantianism also deters the use of another human for sheer personal benefit or gain. These workplace biases exist in numerous environments, affect numerous people, and occur through numerous methods.

Out of the time a person is an adult, he or she will spend several hours in his or her position of employment. While the workplace is supposed to be considered a friendly environment, an employee may be greeted with discrepancy. Whether one works in video game development or software engineering, the environment may be filled with ethical misconduct nonetheless. In [2], Susan Wu is an entrepreneur and investor. The article details how Wu is told she will “need to spend ‘intimate time’” with the founder of a startup before she can be included in the project. The startup founder breaks the second formulation when he begins attempting to use Wu as an object. [2] continues to describe how the startup founder will not be the last time someone attempts to do the same to Wu. Despite being a potential supporter and investor of the project, the founder follows no ethical duty in his actions. Kantianism views this as a moral wrong-doing. In 2019, the video game development company Riot Games, creators of League of Legends and Valorant, had a walkout of approximately 150 workers according to [2]. The article in [2] proceeds to provide a statement from those who walked out saying, “that the company was not doing enough to respond to repeated allegations of sexism”.

Not all workplace biases may be based solely on the position of work. Several may be focused solely on the person in question. In the tech and computer science industry, these biases are focused mainly towards one’s gender or race. Referring back to [2], Bethanye Blount is a higher-up at Second Life, the company that she works for. Despite being important in the hiring process, Blount was face-to-face with a source of intolerance and disrespect of an applicant. In this case the applicant goes against the hypothetical imperative of his desire for a job at Second Life. Similarly, the applicant also disregards the categorical imperatives as well. Understanding that Blount in [2] is a key person in the process of getting hired, the applicant continues to overlook doing the right thing. Kantianism is interested solely in duty rather than end goals or emotions. In an ideal world that lives by Kantianism, the applicant in [2] would be respectful to the female employer without contempt. Kantianism is known for a couple of categorical imperatives. One of the categorical imperatives involves the act of considering a general rule when taking an action. Looking back to Riot Games in [2], the walkout occurred due to the company “not doing enough to respond to repeated allegations of sexism”. To be in line with Kantianism, Riot Games should have dealt with previously-stated sexism allegations as it would have been the morally correct thing to do in such a case. [2] goes on to discuss how Riot Games responded to the walkout by addressing the morally correct thing to do. The rebuttal appears to lean more towards a hypothetical imperative by the company only acknowledging the issue after facing revolt. The second formulation in Kantianism views humanity and not using them as mere means. This means that people should not only be used for their benefits or discarded due to their lack of benefits. Riot Games from [2], as previously stated, only addressed sexism after a walkout occurred. Riot Games saw they were losing a benefit and took action only as a method of holding onto aforementioned benefit. Still following the idea of mere means and going back to Wu in [2], Wu is seen as a mere means when she is asked for “intimate time” in order to join the project. [2] also states how the founder of the startup will not be the last time someone attempts to do the same to Wu.

When looking at the ethical conduction of action in the workplace, generally what methods count are overlooked. The obvious would be of course the hiring process as seen in [2]. [3] furthers this idea by contributing this quote from a survey participant on the matter of women in the video game industry, “‘When talking about the disproportionate number of women working in gaming, higher-ups seem to be a little nervous about openly admitting some of the reasons why there might be such hostility directed towards women in gaming’”. Some of these reasons may include cultural issues, walkouts, petitions, and government rules. The article in [3] continues to elaborate by stating “‘Due to the candidate pools available to us, if we’re not consistently diligent at pushing forward diversity candidates we go from being diverse to a pile of white dudes in three months,” said one participant’. While going out of one’s way to purposefully not hire a non-cis,white male would be categorized under the categorical imperative, pushing diversity would raise the question: is pushing for diversity an appropriate method during the hiring process? Kantianism suggests that doing such would support both imperatives; albeit Kantianism can also view the benefits of an employer selecting a best candidate without contributing to a program on behalf of diversity.

While bias in the workplace can seem like an ethical problem, it is not always the case. Morality is based on each person. Not everyone will hold the same standards so sometimes biases can even be biased ironically. Being on the receiving end of such examples such as Blount from [2] or the staff from Riot Games in [3] can and are considered to go against the imperatives of Kantianism.

[1] CrashCourse. “Kant & Categorical Imperatives: Crash Course Philosophy #35,” YouTube, Nov 14, 2016. (video file). Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8bIys6JoEDw&feature=emb_title>. (accessed Sep 21, 2020).

[2] L. Mundy. “*Why Is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women?,*” The Atlantic. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2017/04/why-is-silicon-valley-so-awful-to-women/517788/> (accessed Sep 18, 2020).

[3] A. Semuels. “*'Every Game You Like Is Built on the Backs of Workers,' Video Game Creators Are Burned Out and Desperate for Change.*” TIME. <https://time.com/5603329/e3-video-game-creators-union/> (accessed Sep 18, 2020).

[4] T. Martens. “*Long hours and ‘a pile of white dudes’: Annual survey looks at game industry working conditions,*” Los Angeles Times. <https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-01-24/game-developers-survey-work-conditions> (accessed Sep 18, 2020).