

Hiding true self at work can result in less job satisfaction, greater turnover

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Hiding your true social identity -- race and ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation or a disability -- at work can result in decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover, according to a new study from Rice University, the University of Houston and George Mason University.

"The workplace is becoming a much more diverse place, but there are still some individuals who have difficulty embracing what makes them different, especially while on the job," said Michelle Hebl, Rice professor of psychology and co-author of "Bringing Social Identity to Work: The Influence of Manifestation and Suppression on Perceived Discrimination, Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions." The paper appears in the [Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology](#) journal.

"Previous research suggests that employees who perceive discrimination or are afraid of receiving discrimination are more likely to fall into this category of individuals who feel the need to suppress or conceal their identity," Hebl said.

The study examined the behavior of 211 working adults in an [online survey](#) and measured factors such as identity, perceived discrimination, [job satisfaction](#) and turnover intentions.

"This research highlights the fact that people make decisions every day about whether it is safe to be themselves at work, and that there are real consequences of these decisions," said Rice alumna Eden King, study co-

author and associate professor of psychology at George Mason University.

The study also showed that suppressing one's true identity might result in exposure to co-workers' discriminatory behavior, as people are less likely to care about appearing prejudiced when they are not in the presence of an "out" group member. On the contrary, the research finds that expression of one's true identity in a workplace can have positive impact on their [interpersonal relationships](#).

"When individuals embrace their [social identity](#) in the workplace, other co-workers might be more sensitive to their behavior and treatment of individuals like them," said Juan Madera, a University of Houston professor, Rice alumnus and lead study author. "And quite often, what's good for the worker is good for the workplace. The employees feel accepted and have better experiences with co-workers, which creates a positive working environment that may lead to decreased turnover and greater profits."

The authors hope their research will encourage the general public to be accepting of people with diverse backgrounds and become allies to them and encourage employers to implement policies that foster a positive organizational culture.

"I think this study really demonstrates that everyone can have a role in making the workplace more inclusive," Hebl said. "Individuals tell co-workers, who can act as allies and react positively, and organizations can institute protective and inclusive organizational policies. All of these measures will continue to change the landscape and diversity of our workforce."

More information: The study is available online at psycnet.apa.org/journals/cdp/18/2/165.pdf

Provided by Rice University

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