

At work, bosses express religion more than subordinates, study says

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How much individuals express their religious beliefs in the workplace depends on how much power they hold there, according to new research from the Boniuk Institute for the Study and Advancement of Religious

Tolerance's Religion and Public Life Program at Rice University.

The study, which utilized survey data from a nationally representative sample of employed U.S. adults, was published in a recent edition of the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Expressions of [religion](#) that were measured included displaying faith with symbols, feeling comfortable talking about faith and speaking up when observing unfair work practices that conflicted with the respondents' [beliefs](#).

According to Robert Thomson, the study's lead author and a former postdoctoral fellow at Rice University, "expression at work is influenced by more than simply a person's religious enthusiasm or identity."

"Leaders who are free to express their faith would do well to recognize that subordinates may suppress their religious identity at work to avoid alienation, obtain promotion or manage job insecurity," said study co-author Elaine Howard Ecklund, Rice's Herbert S. Autrey Chair in Social Sciences and director of the Boniuk Institute.

Most prior research on religious expression in the workplace has focused primarily on the impact of such expression on managing stress, increasing job satisfaction and improving performance. The researchers say the new study can help leaders, managers and human resource officers evaluate how their workplace culture and policies facilitate or constrain religious expression for those at different levels of the organization.

"We found that those at the bottom of their organizations may have more limited ability to draw on the resources of religion to cope with the stresses of work," said study co-author Denise Daniels, the Hudson T. Harrison Professor of Entrepreneurship at Wheaton College.

"It would be helpful for organizational leaders to recognize how this can

impact worker health, well-being and productivity," according to Daniel Bolger, a former graduate student at Rice University.

The article is based on data collected through the Rice-Wheaton project "[Faith at Work: An Empirical Study](#)." Ecklund was principal investigator and Daniels was co-principal investigator. Additional co-authors are Daniel Bolger, a postdoctoral fellow at Princeton University who earned his doctoral degree at Rice, and Robert Thomson, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Alabama in Huntsville.

More information: Robert A Thomson et al, The Relationship between Workplace Status and Workplace Religious Expression, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2023). [DOI: 10.1111/jssr.12828](https://doi.org/10.1111/jssr.12828)

Provided by Rice University

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