

# Bringing Social Identity to Work: The Influence of Manifestation and Suppression on Perceived Discrimination, Job Satisfaction, and Turnover Intentions

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In the current article, we explored whether manifesting or suppressing an identity (race/ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, or disability) at work is related to perceived discrimination, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. Participants included 211 working adults who completed an online survey. The results showed that efforts to suppress a group identity were positively (and behavioral manifestations of group identity negatively) related to perceived discrimination, which predicted job satisfaction and turnover intentions. These results suggest that diverse employees actively manage their nonwork identities while at work and that these identity management strategies have important consequences.

*Keywords:* diversity, discrimination, social identity, workplace

Data from the U.S. Census Bureau (2010) suggests that the workforce is comprised of an increasing proportion of individuals from diverse social identity groups, including ethnic/racial minorities, women, gay individuals, religious minorities, people with disabilities, and older people. Such diversity can be problematic given that social identities that are devalued or stigmatized in the context of the workplace give rise to negative perceptions and experiences (e.g., Hebl, Madera, & King, 2007; Hogg & Terry, 2000). Individuals from such social identity groups often engage in social identity management to reduce these negative experiences (Goffman, 1963; Roberts, 2005). This process of social identity management can include attempts to suppress or conceal an identity as well as decisions to openly manifest or reveal that identity (Clair, Beatty, & Maclean, 2005).

Although preliminary evidence has suggested that individuals do use various identity management strategies (e.g., Button, 2004), the extent to which these behaviors improve the interpersonal and job experiences of diverse employees is unclear. Thus, the purpose of the current article is to explore the influence of workplace social identity management on perceptions of discrimination, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. By examining a wide range of social identity groups, we extend existing research on the psychological experience of identity management as a predictor of discrimination, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions.

## Literature Review

Past research has examined how perceptions of discrimination from coworkers influence identity management decisions (e.g., Ellison, Russinova, MacDonald-Wilson, & Lyass, 2003; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007). This research suggests that employees who perceive discrimination or afraid of receiving discrimination are more likely to suppress their identity or concealing an invisible identity. For example, Ellison et al. (2003) reported that employees with disabilities did not disclose their disability at work because they believed that their disclosure would lead to discrimination from coworkers.

However, contradictory findings in the literature suggest that identity management strategies can also influence perceived discrimination. For example, Kaiser and Pratt-Hyatt (2009) showed that group identity management could also lead to discrimination. In fact, according to Goldman, Gutek, Stein, and Lewis (2006), perceived workplace discrimination requires that the perceivers of discrimination recognize two social elements prior to perceiving discrimination: (a) being a member of a group and (b) comparing treatment of their group relative to other groups. As such, group identification plays an important role in the perception that discrimination in the workplace has occurred.

When individuals manifest their social identity in the workplace, other coworkers might be more sensitive to their behavior and treatment to those belonging to the manifested social identity group. This could be because the display of formal workplace discrimination is prohibited by laws, such as Title VII and the Americans with Disabilities Act. In fact, research shows that people are more careful of what they say in interactions involving members of an out-group than with members of their own group (Hebl, Heatherton, & Tickle, 2000). In a field experiment of the employment process, ethnic minority job applicants received more positive interpersonal treatment when they wore hats identifying their social identity group (e.g., "Black and

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Proud") than when they did not behaviorally manifest their identity (Barron, Hebl, & King, 2011).

In addition, the management of one's social identity at the workplace can also influence important work attitudes, such as job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). For example, Griffith and Hebl (2002) found that gay and lesbian employees who disclosed their sexual orientation to coworkers experienced higher job satisfaction and less anxiety about turnover than gay and lesbian employees that did not disclose their sexual orientation. Thus, we predicted (Hypothesis 1) that the manifestation of social group identities would be negatively related to (a) perceived discrimination and (b) turnover intentions and positively related to (c) job satisfaction.

Not all individuals manifest their social group identity; in fact, some individuals might suppress their social group identity at work (Ragins, 2008; Pryce, Munir, & Haslam, 2007). Suppressing group identity might include concealing signs (e.g., pictures, objects) of an identity in a workspace and refraining from talking about an identity group with coworkers (Clair et al., 2005). By suppressing their group identity, employees might be exposed to coworkers' discriminatory behavior toward other members of the suppressed group identity. Coworkers might be more open to saying prejudicial statements or acting in discriminatory ways when they are not aware that members of the targeted group are present. For example, White individuals tend to be more concerned about being perceived as prejudiced when interacting with racial minorities than when interacting with other White individuals (Shelton, 2003; Shelton & Richeson, 2005). Likewise, suppressing an identity will have a negative impact on job satisfaction and turnover intentions (Griffith & Hebl, 2002). Thus, we expected (Hypothesis 2) that the suppression of social group identities would be positively related to (a) perceived discrimination and (b) turnover intentions and negatively related to (c) job satisfaction.

Research shows that discrimination has a negative impact on job satisfaction. In a study of Hispanic employees, perceived discrimination contributed to decreased job satisfaction and organizational commitment (Sanchez & Brock, 1996). Similarly, perceived discrimination was negatively related to job satisfaction among frontline employees (Ensher & Gran-Vallone, 2001). Thus, it was anticipated (Hypothesis 3) that perceived discrimination would mediate the relationship between group identity management (i.e., manifestation and suppression) and job satisfaction.

Additionally, employees who are dissatisfied on the job are more likely have intentions to leave than those who are satisfied (Allen & Griffeth, 2001; Nyberg, 2010). In particular, Price and Mueller (1981) found that job satisfaction has an indirect influence on turnover through its direct influence on formation of turnover intentions. Thus, we predicted (Hypothesis 4) that job satisfaction would mediate the relationship between perceived discrimination and turnover intentions.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

Undergraduate students at a large mid-Atlantic university received course credit in exchange for their nomination of an adult currently working more than 25 hours per week to complete an

online survey. The sample consisted of 211 individuals (62 men, 149 women) with ages ranging from 18 to 63 ( $M = 25.23$ ,  $SD = 9.70$ ) who had completed some college or technical school (73%) or advanced degrees (17%). Approximately 10.4% were African American, 16.4% Asian, 12% Hispanic, and 61.2% Caucasian.

## Measures

**Group identification.** To capture a range of identity groups, participants indicated the group (if any) to which they most strongly identified according to the following response options: "my racial or ethnic group," "my gender," "my age group," "my religious group," "my sexual orientation," "my disability," "I do not identify with any group," or "other."

**Manifest group identity.** We developed 10 items based on past research to assess the degree to which participants manifested their identities at work (Clair et al., 2005; De la Garza, Newcomb, & Myers, 1995; Phinney, 1992); see the Appendix. A principal components analysis with varimax rotation revealed that one factor (eigenvalue = 4.99) accounted for 50% of the variance. Factor loadings for all 10 items were greater than .50. Thus, a composite of all 10 items was created ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

**Suppressed group identity.** We developed 10 items to measure suppressed group identity based on past research (Clair et al., 2005; De la Garza et al., 1995; Phinney, 1992); see the Appendix. A principal components analysis with varimax rotation revealed that one factor (eigenvalue = 6.70) accounted for 67% of the variance. Factor loadings for all 10 items were greater than .50. Thus, a composite of all 10 items was created ( $\alpha = .94$ ).

**Perceived discrimination.** We used Phinney's (1992) measure of perceived workplace discrimination against one's identity group anchored by 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly Agree*). A sample item is "People of my identity group have been victims of discrimination in my company." This scale had an alpha of .96.

**Job satisfaction.** Job satisfaction was measured using a scale with three items by Cammann, Fichman, Jenkins, and Klesh (1983). The scale was anchored by 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly Agree*). A sample item is "All in all, I am satisfied with my job." The alpha reliability was .88.

**Turnover intentions.** Three items from Cammann et al. (1983) were used to measure turnover intentions. The scale was anchored by 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) and 7 (*Strongly Agree*). A sample item is "I often think about quitting." The scale had an alpha of .87.

## Results

### Common Method Variance

To address common method bias concerns present in self-report measures, we followed the procedural recommendations developed by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, and Podsakoff (2003) and used confirmatory factor analysis. We first tested a congeneric measurement model, in which the items were loaded onto their respective latent variables. The fit of this model was satisfactory: comparative fit index (CFI) = .92, non-normed fit index (NNFI) = .91, root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) = .065. The standardized parameter estimates ranged from .60 to .95 and loaded onto their corresponding latent variables. An alternative measurement model in which all items were specified to load on a

single latent variable (i.e., the Harman 1-factor test; Podsakoff et al., 2003) did not provide a good fit to the data (CFI = .41; NNFI = .39, RMSEA = .14).

**Test of Hypotheses**

As shown in Table 1, participants indicated identifying with a range of social identity groups. Because a number of factors could influence perceived discrimination, we used gender, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, and job tenure as control variables. We also coded the type of social identity group as concealable or visible and used it as control variable. As shown in Table 2, the partial correlations with the control variables showed that the manifestation of social group identities was negatively related to perceived discrimination ( $r = -.17, p < .05$ ), positively related to job satisfaction ( $r = .18, p < .05$ ), but not significantly related to turnover intentions ( $r = -.13, p > .05$ ), thereby partially supporting Hypothesis 1. Suppression of social group identities was positively related to perceived discrimination ( $r = .47, p < .05$ ) and negatively related to job satisfaction ( $r = -.35, p < .05$ ) and was positively related to turnover intentions ( $r = .19, p < .05$ ), thereby partially supporting Hypothesis 2.

We examined Hypothesis 3 using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) tests of the indirect effects, Sobel test, and bootstrapped formula of the indirect effects with a 95% confidence interval. Manifestation was negatively related to perceived discrimination ( $\beta = -.35, p < .05$ ) and perceived discrimination was negatively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.36, p < .05$ ). The direct effect of manifestation to job satisfaction ( $\beta = .33, p < .05$ ) was reduced with the mediator in the model ( $\beta = .21, p < .05$ ), and this reduction (indirect effect) was significant,  $Z = 2.88, p < .05$ , with a statistically significant 95% confidence interval (.044 to .228). Similarly, suppression was positively related to perceived discrimination ( $\beta = .61, p < .05$ ) and perceived discrimination was

Table 2  
Means, Standard Deviations, and Partial Correlations

Variables	M	SD	Variables				
			1	2	3	4	5
1. Manifest group identity	4.2	1.1					
2. Suppressed group identity	2.7	1.2	-.38*				
3. Perceived discrimination	2.8	1.7	-.17*	.47*			
4. Job satisfaction	4.9	1.5	.19*	-.35*	-.45*		
5. Turnover intentions	3.8	1.7	-.13	.19*	.29*	-.58*	

Note. Control variables were gender, ethnicity, age, sexual-orientation, job tenure, and social identity group type (i.e., visible or concealable).  
\*  $p < .05$ .

negatively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.34, p < .05$ ). The direct effect of suppression to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.36, p < .05$ ) was reduced with the mediator in the model ( $\beta = -.15, p > .05$ ), and this reduction (indirect effect) was significant,  $Z = -4.08, p < .05$ , with a statistically significant 95% confidence interval [-.329, -.111]. Thus, Hypothesis 3 was supported by the results.

Hypothesis 4 was also tested using Preacher and Hayes' (2008) tests of the indirect effects. Perceived discrimination was negatively related to job satisfaction ( $\beta = -.39, p < .05$ ), and job satisfaction was negatively related to turnover intentions ( $\beta = -.68, p < .05$ ). The direct effect of perceived discrimination to turnover intentions ( $\beta = .36, p < .05$ ) was reduced with the mediator in the model ( $\beta = .09, p < .05$ ), and this reduction (indirect effect) was significant,  $Z = 5.38, p < .05$ , with a statistically significant 95% confidence interval [.178 to .386]. Thus, Hypothesis 4 was supported by the results.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 involved a series of related mediation models, and therefore, we used path analysis via AMOS 18.0 to test the complete mediation model. We first tested our hypothesized model, specifying the role of both mediators simultaneously. As shown in Table 3, the hypothesized mediation model demonstrated adequate fit (see Figure 1). Following recommendations for mediation (James, Mulaik, & Brett, 2006), we tested alternative models (Models 2 and 3). As shown in Table 3, the alternative models did not demonstrate better fit than the hypothesized model, thereby supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4.

**Discussion**

The purpose of the current article was to examine the influence of social identity management (i.e., to manifest or suppress an identity) on perceptions of discrimination and subsequent important job-related outcomes. The results suggest that the extent to which employees suppressed and manifested group identities had unique relationships with perceived discrimination. Manifesting group identity was negatively related to perceived discrimination, whereas suppression was positively related to perceived discrimination. These results suggest that the expression of identity in a workplace context can have positive implications for interpersonal interactions. A possible reason for this finding is that people are more careful of what they say in interactions involving members of an out-group than with members of their own group (e.g., Hebl et al., 2000; Shelton, 2003).

Table 1  
Participant and Group Identification Descriptive Statistics

Variables	Percentage
Participant gender	
Male	29.4
Female	70.6
Participant ethnicity	
African American	10.4
Asian	16.4
Hispanic	12
Caucasian	61.2
Other	0
Participant age	
M = 25.23, SD = 9.70	
Job tenure	
M = 3.99, SD = 4.79	
Group identification	
Race	19.7
Gender	17.7
Age	35.4
Religion	8.1
Sexual orientation	2.5
Disability	0.5
Other	0
No identity	16.2

Table 3  
*Mediation Model: Comparisons and Path Coefficient of Structural Equation Models*

	Hypothesized model	Model 2	Model 3
Manifestation → perceived discrimination	-.04	-.04	
Suppression → perceived discrimination	.43*	.41*	
Perceived discrimination → job satisfaction	-.44*	-.44*	
Job satisfaction → turnover intentions	-.63*	-.65*	
Manifestation → turnover intentions		.04	
Suppression → turnover intentions		-.03	
Perceived discrimination → manifestation			-.19*
Perceived discrimination → suppression			.43*
Manifestation → job satisfaction			.16*
Suppression → job satisfaction			-.24*
Job satisfaction → turnover intentions			-.63*
$\chi^2$	10.41	9.4*	47.63*
df	5	3	5
CFI	.97	.94	.78
NNFI	.95	.93	.77
RMSEA	.05	.08	.15

*Note.* Results are for an omnibus test where two mediators are specified simultaneously in a model. df = degrees of freedom; CFI = comparative fit index; NNFI = non-normed fit index; RMSEA = root-mean-square error of approximation.

\* $p < .05$ .

Suppression of a group identity at work has negative consequences. Not only was suppression positively related to perceived discrimination, but it was also related to job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Group identities play an important role in peoples' self-concept (Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001), self-esteem, and self-evaluations (Avery, McKay, & Wilson, 2008; Hogg, 2000; Tsui & O'Reilly, 1989). As such, suppressing an identity can be a negative experience. In addition, employees might be exposed to coworkers' discriminatory behavior because people are less likely to monitor or care about appearing prejudiced when they are not in the presence of out-group members (Hebl et al., 2000; Shelton, 2003). Thus, if a person is not aware of being in the presences of an out-group member, then they are less likely to monitor their behavior.

### Limitations and Future Research

Although the current study advances the literature about diversity and discrimination in the workplace, the use of a cross-sectional, correlational design limits the research leaving uncertain whether the management of group identities leads to perceived discrimination or if perceived discrimination causes people to either suppress or manifest their identity at work. It is also likely that group identity management and perceived discrimination have a reciprocal relationship. For example, as people manifest their identity, they might receive negative feedback from coworkers and therefore might lead them to suppress rather than continue manifesting their identity. Therefore, future re-

search should conduct stronger tests of causality and the possibility of reciprocal relationships.

In addition, the majority of the participants identified with a visible identity (i.e., age, race, and gender), which is a strength of the article considering the fact that the majority of research examining manifestation of an identity has focused on invisible stigmata, such as gay and lesbian employees (e.g., Clair et al., 2005). Future research might examine other methods to suppress not measured in the current study that employees with visible identities use at work.

The current research also suggests that when individuals manifest their social identity in the workplace, coworkers might be more sensitive to their behavior and treatment to avoid discriminatory behavior. However, changing behaviors to reduce discrimination does not necessarily change attitudes (Chrobot-Mason & Quinones, 2002). Future research might examine the dynamics of suppressing discrimination and harboring prejudice and stereotypes.

### Conclusion

The current article examined how group identity management influences perceived discrimination, job satisfaction, and turnover intentions. The results suggest that manifesting a group identity in the workplace is related to less perceived discrimination and that suppressing a group identity is related to more perceived discrimination. Group identity management was also related to job satisfaction and turnover intentions directly and indirectly through perceived discrim-

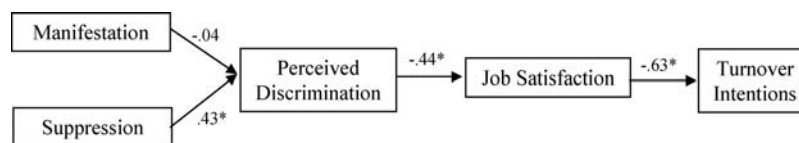


Figure 1. Mediation model. *Note.* Standardized beta-weights are shown. Control variables were gender, ethnicity, age, sexual-orientation, job tenure, and social identity group type (i.e., visible or concealable). \* $p < .05$ .

ination. Perceived discrimination was related to less job satisfaction and higher turnover intentions. Future research could build on these results by testing theoretical mechanisms that may explain what motivates people to manifest or suppress their group identity at work.

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## Appendix

### *Manifest and Suppress Group Identity Items*

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#### Manifest group identity

1. I discuss this part of my identity with my coworkers.
2. I display signs of this identity in my workspace (e.g., pictures, objects).
3. I wear clothes or emblems (e.g., jewelry, pins) that reflect this identity at work.
4. I celebrate meaningful dates or holidays related to this identity at work.
5. I talk about this identity with my supervisor.
6. Everyone I work with knows how important this identity is to me.
7. I express this identity at work.
8. I use the language, vernacular, or speech style of this identity at work.
9. I listen to music associated with this identity at work.
10. I consume food or drinks associated with this identity at work.

#### Suppressed group identity

1. I refrain from talking about my identity with my coworkers.
  2. I conceal or camouflage signs of this identity in my workspace (e.g., pictures, objects).
  3. I hide emblems that would reflect this identity at work.
  4. I try to keep meaningful dates or holidays related to this identity secret.
  5. I try not to talk about this identity with my supervisor.
  6. No one I work with knows how important this identity is to me.
  7. I suppress this identity at work.
  8. I try not to use the language, vernacular, or speech style of this identity at work.
  9. I make a point of not listening to music associated with this identity at work.
  10. I refrain from consuming food or drinks associated with this identity at work.
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