

Rise of religious diversity may sharpen conflicts

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The American workplace, like the rest of U.S. society, is becoming more religiously diverse, which is raising concerns about employers' accommodations for believers—and increasing the odds of uncomfortable moments happening around the water cooler.

One potential flashpoint among workers does not involve new immigrant faiths but rather two indigenous communities: white evangelicals and unaffiliated Americans who constitute one of the fastest-growing segments of the population.

A major factor contributing to workplace conflict, according to a survey released August 30, is that evangelicals—whose religious identity is tied to sharing their beliefs—are much more likely to talk about their faith at work than other religious and nonreligious groups.

In fact, half of white evangelical Protestants said they share their beliefs with coworkers, compared to 22 percent of workers overall, according to the 2013 Survey of American Workers and Religion, sponsored by the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding.

And one-third of evangelicals said they discuss religion frequently, compared to 14 percent of non-Christian believers, 10 percent of Catholics and 7 percent of white mainline Protestants. Moreover, nearly nine in ten white evangelical employees say they are somewhat or very comfortable when the issue of religion comes up in the workplace.

Conversely, the research found that nonbelievers are reticent about discussing religion and 43 percent of them say they feel somewhat or very uncomfortable when the topic comes up. “This suggests the potential for workplace clashes between atheists and evangelical Protestants,” the report says.

The survey was conducted in March and April by the Public Religion Research Institute, which questioned more than 2,000 American adults in both English and Spanish. The poll has a margin of error of 2.8 percentage points. —RNS