

Between Silence and Revelation: Invisible Disabilities, Professional Identity, and Decent Work in Services Marketing

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Resumo

This study investigates the strategies employed by service workers with invisible disabilities to manage the disclosure and concealment of their professional identities. We develop a theoretical framework to assist workers in effectively navigating their roles. Additionally, this study offers recommendations to service institutions to mitigate disparities and promote social justice. Drawing on vulnerability and professional identity literature, we conducted 21 in-depth semi-structured interviews with service workers with invisible disabilities. We analyzed 1,170 minutes of data using reflexive thematic analysis, both manually and with the aid of MAXQDA software. We identified three strategies with associated emotional costs and outcomes: i) isolation: individuals withdraw from interactions to avoid stigma, which can lead to emotional exhaustion; ii) performance and productivity adaptation: workers attempt to compensate for perceived limitations by increasing their effort, often at a significant emotional cost; and iii) activism in service work: some professionals channel their experiences into awareness-building, institutional transformation, and disability advocacy. However, these pathways are not mutually exclusive and may vary under specific conditions.