

MONOGRAPH

Do You See Me? An Inductive Examination of Differences Between Women of Color's Experiences of and Responses to Invisibility at Work

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Intersectional invisibility is a salient experience for women of color in the workplace and stems from their nonprototypicality in gender and race. We expand research and theory on intersectional invisibility to propose that women of color vary in their degrees of nonprototypicality, and thus in their social power and their experiences of and responses to invisibility at work. We present an inductive interview study of a diverse sample of 65 women of color in the United States and Canada, who work in traditionally white and male professions. We examined how differences in race, immigration status, age, and organizational rank informed the types of invisibility they experienced and their responses to invisibility. Four forms of invisibility (erasure, homogenization, exoticization, and whitening) and three response pathways (withdrawal, approach, and pragmatism) emerged from our findings that differed according to women of color's social power. Women with less social power experienced the most invisibility and were more likely to engage in withdrawal tactics that intensified their invisibility and marginalization at work. Women with more social power experienced less invisibility and were more likely to engage in approach tactics that risked backlash. Women who understood their invisibility to be rooted in structural causes responded more pragmatically to invisibility, occasionally engaging in radical honesty to connect with others who treated them as invisible and to change their behavior. We discuss the implications of our research for intersectionality theory, directions for future research, and organizational practice.

Keywords: intersectionality; intersectional invisibility; women of color; qualitative; equity, diversity, and inclusion

I had become invisible to white Americans, and it clung to me like a bad habit. ... To finally recognize our own invisibility is to finally be on the path towards visibility. Invisibility is not a natural state for anyone.

—Mitsuye Yamada, *Invisibility is an Unnatural Disaster: Reflections of an Asian American Woman* (1979, p. 40)

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When she was the First Lady of the United States, Michelle Obama was standing in line with her daughters to get ice cream at a soccer game when a white,¹ woman cut in line in front of them. Obama confronted the woman, saying, "Excuse me? You don't see us four people standing right here? You just jumped in line?" Recalling the incident in her podcast, Obama explained, "When I'm just a Black woman, I notice that white people don't even see me ... we were that invisible" (Obama, 2020). Recounting another experience of being invisible, an East Asian immigrant woman in Canada told us that when she is in meetings with her boss and colleagues, she offers her opinion, but it is if she is not even there: Her colleagues do not seem to hear or pay attention to what she has to say. "I feel like I say something, but then it kind of disappears. Or fades out." Reflecting on this recurring experience, she noted, "I don't have energy to fight it. ... I just stay quiet."

Being treated as invisible is a salient experience for women of color, who are significantly more likely than men and white people to be unseen, unacknowledged, and forgotten, as documented by prior research (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). This invisibility is an intersectional phenomenon (Crenshaw, 1989; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Smith et al., 2019), rooted in the fact that women of

¹ We use lower-case "w" for white in keeping with the recommendation by critical race scholars, to whom capitalizing white conveys alignment with and legitimacy to white supremacists, who have a longstanding practice of capitalizing white.

color are nonprototypical as women, because they are not white, and are nonprototypical as people of color, because they are not men (de Leon & Rosette, 2022). Being nonprototypical in both gender and race means lacking social power (Fiske & Berdahl, 2007) and being viewed as relatively inconsequential and unfamiliar, unworthy of attention, and difficult to remember (Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Fiske, 1993; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008).

Extant research, however, provides little insight into the nuances and complexities that exist within women of color's experiences of and responses to invisibility due to differences in their identities and social power at work. As suggested by the examples above, racial identity, immigrant status, organizational rank, and age are likely to affect how women of color experience and respond to invisibility. Some women of color are successful senior executives, while others are entry-level employees; some women of color are fluent in "white" culture and language, while others are not (e.g., Ghavami & Peplau, 2013); some women of color are stereotyped as outspoken and assertive, while others are stereotyped as quiet and submissive (e.g., Hall et al., 2019; Livingston et al., 2012; Rosette et al., 2016). In these and other ways, women of color differ in their proximities to social power through their varying distances from white male prototypes (Abdulle, 2017; Ahmed, 2007; Hochschild & Weaver, 2007).

To expand the current understanding of intersectional invisibility, we build upon prior research and theory to consider how variations in nonprototypicality within women of color shape their social power and thus their experiences of and responses to invisibility in the workplace. Specifically, we argue that women of color, who are typically treated as a homogenous group in research and theory on intersectional invisibility, hold complex identities that create salient differences in their experiences of invisibility. We investigate how such intracategorical complexity, or differences within the social group "women of color" (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008), shapes their intersectional invisibility, asking "How does the complexity of women of color's identities affect their experiences of and responses to invisibility at work?" For definitions of key concepts used throughout this article, see Table 1.

To answer this question, we conducted an inductive grounded theory study of a diverse sample of 65 women in Canada and the United States who work in prototypically white and male professions and differ in racial identity, immigration status, age, and organizational rank. In analyzing their experiences, we considered how these differences shaped the severity and forms of their invisibility, their interpretations of and responses to invisibility, and how these processes exacerbated or mitigated their invisibility at work. Based upon these findings, we develop a response pathway model that illustrates how women of color's interpretations of an invisibility event shape their affective reactions and behavioral responses to the event.

This study makes several key contributions to understanding and theorizing intersectional invisibility in the workplace. First, it offers a more theoretically complete understanding than currently exists of the experiences of intersectional invisibility for a variety of women of color. By interviewing a diverse sample of women of color, we identified four forms of invisibility that made them feel unseen for their true selves, three of which have been largely overlooked in the literature to date. Women of color experienced these types of invisibility with different frequencies and intensities depending on their identities and access to social power. Second, this study reveals cycles of invisibility experiences that lead us to develop a

Table 1
Definitions of Concepts

Concept	Definition
Intersectional invisibility	The failure to recognize, acknowledge, or accurately see nonprototypical members of social categories (e.g., women of color who hold intersecting marginalized identities of race and gender).
Prototypical	Members of a social category who are considered the center and neutral standard of that category, and whose experiences are privileged for that category (typically members of multiple dominant groups, e.g., white men for the social category "white").
Nonprototypical	Members of a social category who are considered peripheral and non-standard for that category, and whose experiences are made invisible for that category (typically members of multiple marginalized groups, e.g., Black women for the social category "women").
Intracategorical complexity	Similarities and differences of the complex identities and experiences within a social group that is usually treated as homogenous (e.g., women of color).
Social power	Relative control over valued outcomes stemming from one's proximity to dominant identities and structural power.

response pathway model of invisibility. Our model shows how women of color's attributions of invisibility relate to their affective reactions and behavioral responses to invisibility, which, in turn, tend to exacerbate or mitigate their invisibility at work. Specifically, repeat exposure to intersectional invisibility triggered a learning process that helped women of color move from self-blame to other blame to structure blame, which, in turn, moved them from shutting down to active resistance to pragmatic responses, depending on their social power at work.

We also advance theory on intersectional invisibility by conceptualizing prototypicality as graded rather than categorical, with women of color differing in their distances from gender and racial prototypes, influencing their access to social power at work (Rosch, 1988). Theorizing women of color's differences in nonprototypicality sheds light on their intracategorical complexity, an important goal of intersectionality theory and research (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008), and provides a new lens with which to examine multiple identities in the workplace more broadly. Finally, our research reveals what are often subtle and unintentional forms of discrimination against women of color at work, contributing to organizational equity, diversity, and inclusion efforts by showing the complex ways that intersectional invisibility manifests and unfolds. This, in turn, can aid women of color and their allies in making more conscious choices to prevent or combat this subtle but destructive form of discrimination.

Next, we review scholarship on intersectional invisibility and provide a theoretical framework for our research before presenting our inductive phenomenological study of in-depth interviews with working women of color. We conclude with a discussion of the implications of our findings for theory, research, and organizational practice.

Intersectional Invisibility

Despite its many strengths, intersectionality theory is relatively nascent in organizational scholarship (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2020;

Rosette et al., 2018; Settles et al., 2020). The term “intersectionality” was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to draw attention to Black women’s experiences at the margins of race and gender and to theorize the unique oppression they experience. Intersectionality theory takes marginalized intersectional identities as an analytic starting point for studying the ways that multiple identities interact to shape people’s experiences (e.g., Bowleg, 2013; Buchanan & Settles, 2019; McCluney & Rabelo, 2019; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Rosette et al., 2016; Shields, 2008; Smith et al., 2019).

Intersectionality praxis moves beyond simplistic understandings of difference, such as “adding up” the number of marginalized identities a person has to compare quantitative outcomes (cf. Beale, 1970; Berdahl & Moore, 2006), to study the unique qualitative experiences common to particular constellations of identity and context (Buchanan & Wiklund, 2021). Intersectionality theory is rooted in the premise that multiple structures of power and oppression coexist to affect the experiences of individuals based on their memberships in, or exclusion from, different social groups (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1989). More recently, intersectionality theorists have called for the critical examination of intracategorical complexity—of the differences and similarities within a social category—to reach the potential of the theory (Nash, 2008). Consistent with this, we examine the differences and similarities in invisibility experiences within the social category of women of color.

Intersectionality scholars have noted the importance of studying intracategorical complexity in reaching the potential of the theory (Collins, 2015; McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008). As intersectionality scholarship has grown, so too has the need to move beyond treating Black women as homogeneous and prototypical subjects of intersectionality research (Nash, 2008). Black women’s experiences differ from each other in important ways, such as by class and by immigration status (e.g., Adichie, 2014; Brewer, 1999), and Black women may experience oppression differently than non-Black women of color (e.g., Rosette et al., 2018; Yoshioka et al., 2003). Studying the similarities and differences among women of color’s experiences, as we do here, can help advance intersectional theory and its applications.

Prior scholarship has theorized and documented the phenomenon of intersectional invisibility, that women of color are invisible compared with white people and men of color (Buolamwini & Gebu, 2018; Collins, 1986; Crenshaw, 1989; de Leon & Rosette, 2022; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Remedios & Snyder, 2018; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). A study of facial recognition software showed that the software identified the faces of white men correctly over 99% of the time, of White women 93% of the time, of dark-skinned men 88% of the time, and of dark-skinned women only 65% of the time (Buolamwini & Gebu, 2018). Like the software, Americans fail to recognize Black women’s faces and voices compared with the faces and voices of Black men, white women, and white men (Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Yet little is known about how women of color themselves experience, interpret, and respond to their relative invisibility. Understanding impactful experiences from the perspective of those living them is important, and this lack of understanding limits a theoretical understanding of how these experiences manifest and affect women of color in context.

To date, only two studies have interviewed women of color about their experiences of intersectional invisibility in the workplace (Settles et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2019). Smith et al. (2019) interviewed senior Black women executives and found they experienced two forms of invisibility: “benign” invisibility, or being treated as

unfamiliar and thus unbound by stereotypes, and “hostile” invisibility, or being subjected to compounded negative stereotypes associated with their gender and race. The Black women executives described using agentic visibility tactics to counteract their invisibility and to gain credible visibility; these tactics included strategically deploying their invisibility to avoid unwanted scrutiny (Smith et al., 2019). Settles et al. (2019) interviewed men and women faculty of color at a research university and found they experienced hypervisibility when the university used them to represent diversity at the institution, and invisibility when they felt unrecognized for their work. Faculty of color responded in different ways to these experiences, including working harder to prove themselves, disengaging from their colleagues, and disengaging from their work. This study did not focus on women of color’s experiences per se, however, and though faculty had different racial identities, their experiences were analyzed as a homogenous social group.

One online survey used an open-ended question to prompt women of color who were graduate students in science, technology, engineering, & mathematics to recall a classroom or lab situation in which the issue of their race and/or gender was involved (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). The students wrote about feeling simultaneously hypervisible and invisible as the result of microaggressions, which included having their competence and belongingness in science, technology, engineering, & mathematics questioned, and being ignored. The students said they would advise other women of color in science, technology, engineering, & mathematics to adopt agentic strategies for developing their social and personal fortitude for success. Though women students differed in their racial identities and other ways, these differences were not analyzed. This study yields insights into problems faced by women of color in traditionally white male domains, but like other studies, treated women of color as a homogenous group.

These and other studies have identified agentic strategies for combating invisibility at work (Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Kang et al., 2016; Rabelo & Mahalingam, 2019; Ryland, 2013; Settles et al., 2019), but many targets of invisibility may be unwilling or unable to engage in agentic tactics to combat their invisibility (McCluney & Rabelo, 2019). For example, organizational rank is likely to play a role in an employee’s ability and willingness to deploy agentic tactics, with senior executives and tenured faculty, for example, more able than entry-level employees and graduate students to use such tactics. Furthermore, different stereotypes of women of color from different racial and ethnic backgrounds may affect the nature and degree of their invisibility and how they combat it. For example, East Asian women are stereotyped as submissive (Chin Evans & McConnell, 2003; Livingston et al., 2012; Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and experience penalties for exhibiting agentic behavior at work (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Rosette et al., 2016). Black women, on the other hand, are stereotyped as assertive (Rosette et al., 2016) and do not experience the same penalties for exhibiting certain forms of agency in the workplace (Livingston et al., 2012). These differences highlight the importance of studying the intracategorical variation in the experiences of women of color at work. An intersectional lens is especially suitable for this endeavor, as it allows for studying similarities and differences within social categories to understand how variance affects experiences (Cole, 2009).

We build and expand upon prior research to propose that women of color’s experiences, interpretations, and responses to their intersectional invisibility vary as a function of their identities and stereotypes. We theorize that women of color with backgrounds, roles, and

other characteristics that lend them relatively more social power in professional spaces experience less invisibility than women of color whose backgrounds, roles, and other characteristics lend them less social power in these spaces. We also expect that women of color experience, not just different intensities and frequencies, but also different forms, of invisibility. For example, research on hostile sexism and reactions to women with power (e.g., [Berdahl, 2007](#); [Connor et al., 2017](#); [McLaughlin et al., 2012](#); [Okimoto & Brescoll, 2010](#); [Phelan & Rudman, 2010](#)) finds that more powerful women experience more hostile forms of mistreatment (e.g., negative compounded stigmas; [Smith et al., 2019](#)), whereas less powerful women experience more neglectful forms of mistreatment (e.g., being discounted or ignored; [Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019](#)). How women of color respond to being invisible is also likely to differ depending on their social positions and identities. Women who occupy more powerful roles (e.g., older women, senior women) may respond in more assertive ways to invisibility than women who occupy less powerful roles (e.g., younger women, junior women). In sum, how women of color's degrees of nonprototypicality and related social power shape their levels and forms of invisibility is an important theoretical question we investigate with our research.

Method

Transparency and Openness

We describe our sampling plan and our data collection and analysis below. We adhered to the *Journal of Applied Psychology* methodological checklist for design and analysis transparency of qualitative research. Interview audio recordings and transcripts are not made available due to consent and confidentiality requirements. The study was not preregistered due to its inductive nature. Our institutional review board approval was granted by the University of British Columbia's Office of Research Services Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Protocol Number H17-00383, Study Title "Invisibility").

Sample

The first author conducted 65 in-depth, semistructured interviews with women of color from varied backgrounds living in Canada and the United States. Forty-five participants were recruited through purposeful and snowball sampling ([Miles & Huberman, 1994](#)) from the researchers' own networks and then from participants' networks to get "information-rich cases" ([Patton, 1990](#)). Twenty additional participants were recruited through advertisements posted on a Facebook page for racialized professionals in a large Canadian city.

The diversity of our sample highlights one of the key strengths of our study, allowing us to identify differences in invisibility experiences and responses by race, immigrant status, organizational rank, and age. Fifteen participants identified as South Asian, 15 as East Asian/South-East Asian, 15 as Black, 10 as Latina, 6 as Middle Eastern, and 4 as Indigenous. Just over 40% of them (28) identified as immigrants, and the rest (37) as born and raised in the United States or Canada (see [Appendix A](#) for sample details). Forty-seven participants worked in junior to mid-level roles, and 17 worked in senior ones. Most (56) were between the ages of 22 and 39; nine were 51 or younger. Just over 40% (27) of the participants worked in the corporate sector (consulting, engineering, management, finance, law, or technology), and the rest (38) worked in the public sector (universities, education, nonprofits, or healthcare).

Data Collection and Analysis

Seven interviews were conducted by phone, 16 by video, and 42 in person. The interviews lasted 1 hr on average and ranged from 40 min to 3 hr. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim, generating 78 hr of audio and 1,015 pages of transcribed data. [Figure 1](#) outlines our research process, showing the concurrent and iterative process of data collection, data analysis, and coding and how our analysis evolved over time, drawing from [Harrison and Rouse \(2014\)](#) template.

We adopted an inductive grounded theory approach to collecting and analyzing our data ([Charmaz, 2006](#); [Glaser & Strauss, 1967](#)), conducting in-depth semistructured interviews with women of color to capture the insider's perspective of this phenomenon ([Marshall & Rossman, 2014](#)). Inductive qualitative research is particularly suited for studying processes and relationships that are relatively understudied and for building theory, and encourages focusing on the primary population of interest to gain insight on the phenomenon of interest ([Locke, 2001](#); [Strauss & Corbin, 1998](#)).

We iteratively moved between data collection, analysis, and the literature to build and develop our overall theoretical model. Iterativity is an integral part of theory building in qualitative research, which allowed us to rethink assumptions that exist in the current literature and examine possible differences that arose in our data ([Locke & Golden-Biddle, 1997](#); [Pratt et al., 2020](#)). Furthermore, the authors' different positionalities helped to inform and strengthen our analysis and study design. Based on the first author's own identity as a younger immigrant woman of color in Canada and the second author's identity as an older white woman born and raised in the United States, we were able to leverage the benefits of insider/outsider team research ([Bartunek & Louis, 1996](#)).

We also followed the principles of triangulation to strengthen the trustworthiness of our findings ([Denzin, 1978, 1989](#); [Hesse-Biber, 2012](#); [Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007](#); [Lincoln & Guba, 1985](#); [Pratt et al., 2020](#)). Although we relied on one data source (in-depth interviews with women of color), we engaged in other strategies of triangulation (investigator and descriptive) used by qualitative research experts. [Table 2](#) documents in more detail how we upheld the trustworthiness of our data and analysis, and the key tenets of grounded theory.

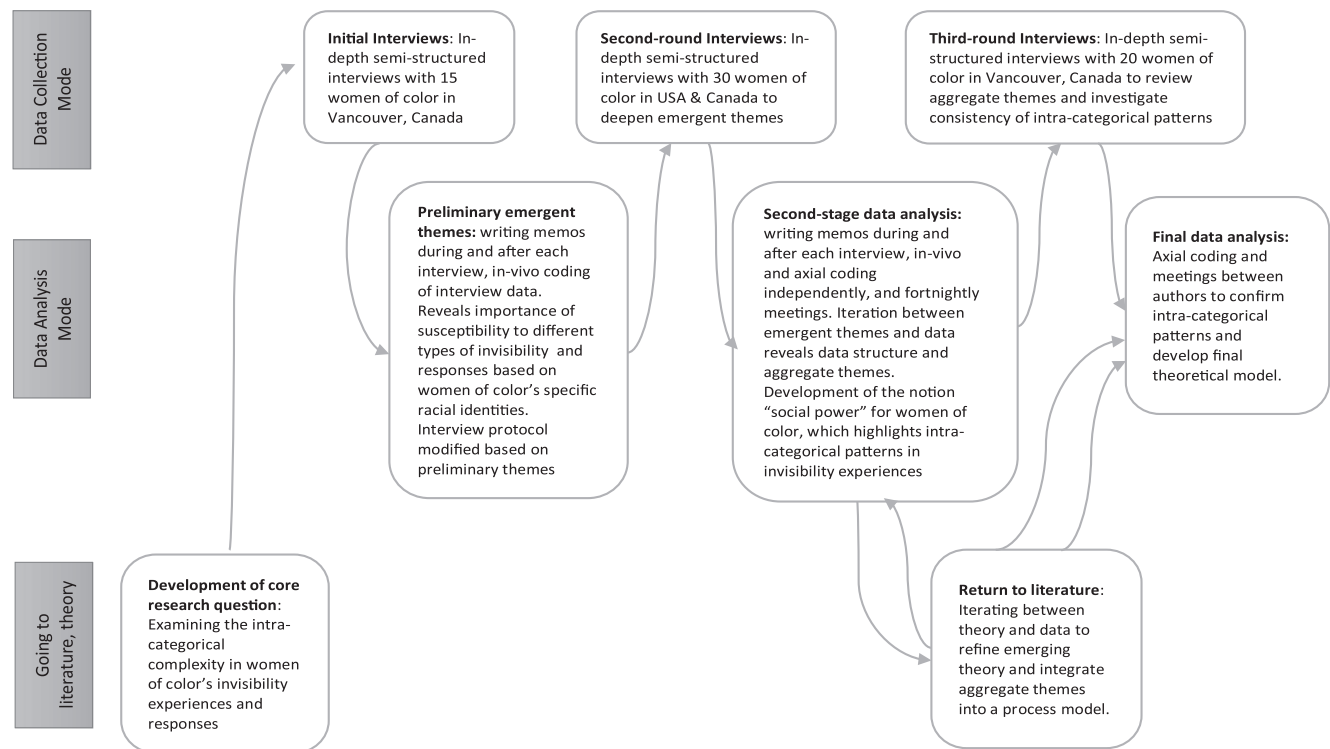
To minimize any distortion of the data ([Pratt, 2008](#)), summary tables as well as in-line quotations are provided to accurately present the accounts of participants' experiences of invisibility. Below, we provide a "thick" description of how we coded and analyzed our data to demonstrate our iterative analysis and processes of triangulation.

Our research question, "How does the complexity of women of color's identities affect their experiences of and responses to invisibility at work?," directed the development of our interview protocol (see [Appendix B](#)). The protocol was designed to be as neutral as possible, free from words such as "racism," "sexism," "invisibility," and "discrimination," to avoid influencing the participants and to allow us to focus on how they characterized their experiences.

First Set of Participants and Preliminary Data Analysis

We conducted our data collection in three phases. We began our study with 15 in-depth semistructured interviews of women of color in a large Canadian city. The interviewer began by asking the participant her name and background information. She then asked

Figure 1
Research Process



the participant about her current job, what a regular workday looks like for her, and experiences of feeling different (if any). Next, she asked the participant about her feelings of belongingness at work, whether she had ever felt unnoticed, and what this looked like and how she responded. When the participant shared an experience, the interviewer would ask her to provide a specific example. Once the participant recalled a relevant incident, the interviewer asked questions about how it made the participant feel, how she responded, and whether she had experienced similar incidents at work. These questions were asked to chart the trajectory of similar episodes in her life and to identify whether any patterns existed in such experiences within and across participants. These interviews were purposefully detailed in scope to gather broad data.

After the first 15 interviews were conducted and transcribed, the authors independently analyzed them for explicit or implicit mentions of invisibility and then met to discuss preliminary analysis and emerging codes. We conducted our initial coding on NVivo, a qualitative analysis software. At this stage, invisibility emerged as a salient and painful experience, but in different forms (e.g., being ignored, being confused with other women of color). Twelve of the 15 participants explicitly noted that they felt "invisible" at work. This was typically in response to the questions, "have you ever felt different at work?" or "have you ever felt unnoticed at work?" Different participants described responding to invisibility differently, highlighting that there were not only different forms of invisibility but also different responses to it. Subsequently, the interview protocol was modified to incorporate the initial themes that had emerged and to add questions about the specific types of

incidents that the participants were describing as invisibility, as well their responses to these experiences (see [Appendix B](#)).

Second Set of Participants and Second-Stage Data Analysis

In the next stage of data collection, the first author conducted an additional 30 semistructured in-depth interviews with 25 women of color from Canada and five from the United States using the modified interview protocol. These interviews focused on gathering detailed data about the unfolding processes involved in invisibility, from the specifics of invisibility events to participants' reactions to interpretations of and responses to those events.

At this stage, we identified distinct types of invisibility events, ranging from the literal to the symbolic. We also identified common interpretations of and affective reactions to invisibility: uncertainty and shame, and offense and anger. Open coding also revealed specific first-order concepts regarding behavioral responses to invisibility events, ranging from staying quiet to angrily speaking up. We paid attention to patterns among different women of color, finding that certain identities outside of gender and the homogenous racial category "of color" were repeatedly emerging in description of invisibility experiences. We also noticed that certain types of invisibility events and responses seemed to occur more frequently among certain participants.

Axial coding revealed four second-order themes about invisibility experiences. For example, being confused with other women of color and having one's name forgotten indicated a common experience of "homogenization," or being treated as part of a homogenous

Table 2
Steps Taken to Ensure Trustworthiness and Rigor of Our Data and Analysis

Criteria	Steps taken in the study
Credibility	<i>Author positionalities:</i> Based on the first author's own identity as an immigrant woman of color and psychological closeness to the phenomenon of intersectional invisibility and the second author's identity as a White woman born and raised in the United States and Canada, we were able to leverage the benefits of insider/outsider team research (Bartunek & Louis, 1996). The first author's perspective on invisibility experiences as an "insider" contrasted with the perspective offered by the second author, which broadened the scope of interpretation we brought to our data analysis and theorizing.
Transferability	<i>Thick description:</i> We provided thick descriptions of our data in the form of in-line participant quotations throughout our findings section to illustrate our theorizing. We also provide summary tables with quotations for all our themes.
Dependability	<i>Interrater reliability:</i> An undergraduate research assistant was trained by the second author and coded the entire dataset independently. This also allowed us to improve the reliability and validity of the model. We calculated interrater reliability (IRR) for 10 randomly selected interviews to examine the replicability of the results across coders. IRR was calculated in NVivo using Cohen's kappa, an established measure of IRR in qualitative data (McDonald et al., 2019). Kappa values above 0.75 indicate high levels of agreement between coders and therefore high reliability. The Cohen's kappa for 10 double-coded transcripts (the first author and the RA) using the codebook was 0.88, indicating high reliability between the coders. <i>Independent and joint data analysis:</i> Throughout each stage of data analysis and after conducting our independent coding of the data, we met to review our codes, identify similarities and emergent themes, resolve differences and disagreements, and revisit the literature and the data when useful. The authors discussed each identified theme in detail and how they related to one another. Representative passages from the data were used to support the development of relationships between themes and theory building. During this stage of analysis, we reread our memos and revisited specific representative passages to deepen our interpretations and develop our aggregate themes. <i>Triangulation:</i> We followed principles of investigator triangulation (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007), which relies on triangulation among multiple researchers and consistency in their interpretations (Denzin, 1978, 1989) by having multiple researchers code the data. We did this by independently coding the data and meeting regularly to agree on our analysis and interpretations. Next, we undertook descriptive triangulation, which calls for triangulating interpretations of researchers and participants for consistency through member checks. We sent a case report of our findings from the study to a random sample of 10 women from our original sample of participants to solicit their feedback on our findings and interpretations of their experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Pratt et al., 2020). This helped to further improve the trustworthiness of our theoretical model.
Confirmability	<i>Audit trail:</i> We kept track of all major decisions during our research and wrote detailed memos after each interview and throughout the data analysis process <i>Transparency:</i> We report all major steps taken and techniques used in the Methods sections and this table
Sampling	<i>Purposeful and snowball sampling.</i> We recruited the first 45 participants through purposeful and snowball sampling to get information-rich cases on the experience of invisibility. We recruited the final 20 participants through a Facebook page for racialized professionals, to review aggregate themes, investigate the consistency of emergent patterns, and develop our final theoretical model.
Reflexivity	<i>Reflexive memoing.</i> The first author wrote in-depth reflective memos during and after each interview about emerging ideas and key insights (Charmaz, 2006), in all three stages of data collection and analysis. The second author wrote reflexive memos during the final data analysis stage. This formed part of our data analysis and allowed us to compare emergent findings with our developing theoretical model at every stage.
Iterativity	<i>Moving between data collection, data analysis, and literature.</i> In the first stage of data analysis, consisting of 15 interviews, each author read through the interviews to independently generate preliminary in vivo codes (codes that stayed close to the data). At this stage, the interview protocol was modified to incorporate the initial themes that had emerged. The modified interview protocol was used to conduct the next set of interviews. In the second stage of data analysis, the authors (a) independently open-coded the data (staying close to the data, often in the exact words of participants), keeping an eye out for descriptions of invisibility to develop first-order concepts and identify overarching descriptive themes, (b) independently conducted axial coding (moving across first-order concepts) to identify thematic relationships and reveal differences (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), and then (c) met to review our codes to identify similarities and emergent themes and resolve differences and disagreements. Open coding began with descriptive categorizations of concepts, which were reexamined and grouped based on their similarities and differences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Next, during axial coding, we compared and contrasted these first-order concepts, aiming to find linkages between them. First-order invisibility concepts theoretically mapped onto four second-order themes. At this stage, we created a detailed codebook based on our final codes and definitions. In the final stage of data analysis, each author coded the additional interviews using our previously developed codebook.
Theoretical saturation	<i>Subsequent data provided no new information:</i> We did not find any new codes in the data after the 55th interview. <i>Negative case analysis:</i> We conducted negative case analysis (Emigh, 1997) to confirm theoretical saturation. Negative case analysis involved analyzing cases in which outcomes expected based on our model did not occur. For example, our initial emergent theoretical model of intersectionality invisibility suggested that that Asian women were more

(table continues)

Table 2 (continued)

Criteria	Steps taken in the study
	likely to experience the form of invisibility we called "erasure." But we noticed that certain Asian women did not experience erasure. Upon further analysis, we found that when Asian women had enough seniority at work, they were able to escape erasure. Negative case analysis helped us systematically understand contexts in which the processes in our theoretical model broke down and were disrupted and to integrate these disruptions into our model. In particular, we identified participants whose experiences contradicted explanations and predictions of our model at each stage and refined our model to make sense of these contradictions and integrate them into our findings. For example, our emergent theory suggested that when women of color attribute an invisibility event to the person who perpetrates it rather than to themselves (i.e., blaming the other instead of the self), they experience anger and respond with active resistance. Yet, we noticed that certain women did not engage in active resistance after anger. Analyzing those cases allowed us to see that women of color who were low in access to social power shut down and remained silent, even when angry. We integrated this finding into our model to strengthen our theory in a way that holistically captured the experiences of our participants. Negative case analysis also highlighted that certain participants were not experiencing anger or shame after an invisibility event, which allowed us to identify and develop a third response pathway to invisibility.

out-group. We also identified two second-order themes based on first-order concepts involving attributions given to invisibility events, along with two second-order themes involving behavioral responses to these invisibility events, described in our findings below. These themes suggested a process model of invisibility events, with two unique invisibility response pathways. We developed our theoretical model and understanding of each response pathway linking our second-order themes by comparing the pathways to one another. We present our data structure in Figure 2.

Finally, we closely examined similarities and differences in the invisibility experiences of women of color with different racial identities, immigrant statuses, organizational levels, and ages, focusing on differences within the overall sample. We found emergent patterns relating specific invisibility experiences and responses to participants' proximities to social power.

Third Set of Participants and Final Data Analysis

In our final round of data collection, the first author conducted an additional 20 interviews with women of color who worked in Canada. These final 20 interviews were conducted to review aggregate themes, investigate the consistency of the intracategorical patterns identified thus far, further validate and develop our theoretical model, and see if new pathways emerged. After conducting 10 interviews, we identified a third response pathway that women of color engaged in by integrating the data analytic strategies of splitting and contrasting categories of responses (Grodal et al., 2021) in our theory-building process. We investigated consistency of patterns by comparing our intracategorical findings about different groups of women of color with the participants in this final sample. We also conducted negative case analysis (Emigh, 1997) to look for counterexamples where our processes broke down to strengthen the validity of our model and ensure theoretical saturation. At this point, we were confident that we had reached theoretical saturation. We had conducted a total of 55 interviews, with a minimum of 10 participants for Black, South Asian, East Asian, and Latina women. No new themes about invisibility experiences were emerging, and each theme's properties were well developed (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). We also felt that our overall theoretical model sufficiently explained the data. We conducted 10 more interviews to ensure we had reached saturation, and confirm that no new themes or pathways would emerge. None did. Upon this

confirmation of theoretical saturation, we ceased data collection, bringing our total number of interviews to 65.

Findings

Intersectional invisibility was a salient and recurring experience for the women of color we interviewed. Participants described feeling invisible at work in a variety of ways, including feeling unseen, perceived as faceless members of a homogenous out-group, and objectified or inaccurately recognized as individuals. At its core, invisibility seemed to involve the experience of feeling dehumanized. As Tessa, a 33-year-old Black research assistant explained,

As a Black woman, I'm invisible. I think it's that thing where people don't look at each other. You don't acknowledge the other person ... Not necessarily acknowledging my humanity or my individuality. I feel like when people discriminate against you, they just erase your humanity. You don't exist in front of them.

Invisibility as an Intersectional Experience

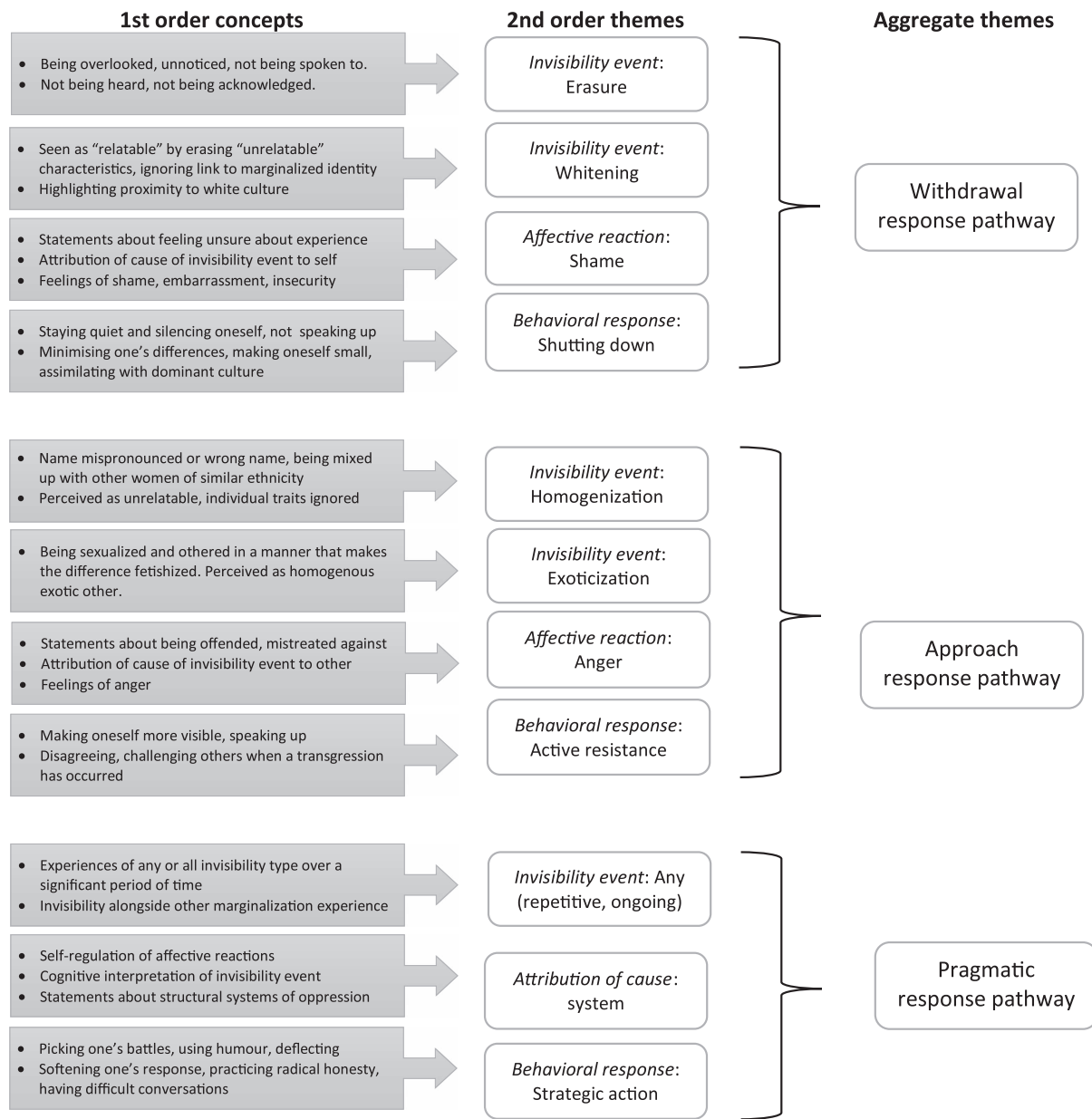
Our participants experienced invisibility as both gendered and racialized and described it as different from overt prejudice or hostility. Brinda, a 30-year-old South Asian consultant, spoke about her experience of being invisible:

It wasn't about disliking what I did or being judgmental of what I did. It was a different kind of problem that I'd faced, to not be acknowledged. They didn't care. There was no curiosity. They didn't give a f***. We were invisible. It was a very interesting struggle for me. ... There's two levels, right? One is gender; the other is ethnicity. Forget judging you as good or bad, people were like, we don't give a s*** about you.

This statement mirrored those of other participants, who highlighted their racial and gender identities as inseparable rather than referring solely to their race or gender to interpret their experiences. Echoing this intersectional understanding of the experience is a quote from Tara, a 29-year-old South Asian software engineer:

I've been paying attention to the Indian women and seeing how they're treated. Because I'm trying to see if I'm crazy. In general, Indian women are not treated super well. They're not treated poorly, they're just not respected at the same level. ... I've seen that a senior white woman and a senior Indian woman will be treated differently. Also senior Indian men [are treated better]. The Indian woman gets talked over a lot more because she's not yelling, right? And a white woman doesn't have to. And obviously men don't have to.

Figure 2
Data Structure



Despite recognizing their experiences as shaped by their multiple marginalized identities, feeling invisible was nonetheless a confusing experience for the participants, who described being unable to classify the experience as overt mistreatment yet finding it very painful. Feeling invisible fostered uncertainty, rumination, and anxiety. As Tara went on to explain,

It’s like death by a thousand cuts. But it’s a very intense accusation after noticing just a few things. So it’s hard to be honest about what I’m experiencing. I try to stand up for myself. But it’s so exhausting. I feel like I spend 20% of my time at work figuring out how to interact with people around me, instead of actually doing work. It’s so tiring.

The pain of invisibility expressed by women of color is understandable. As the psychoanalyst Winnicott (1957) once explained, to be seen is to exist. Thus, to not be seen is to not exist. As another researcher explained, “trauma almost invariably involves not being seen, not being mirrored, and not being taken into account” (Van der Kolk, 2014, p. 59).

Forms of Intersectional Invisibility

Our interviews revealed that intersectional invisibility is a multifaceted experience. We identified four forms of invisibility that women of color experience at work: (a) erasure, (b) homogenization,

(c) exoticization, and (d) whitening. These ranged from the literal (erasure) to the symbolic (homogenization, exoticization, whitening; see Table 3, for more details). Each form, described below, made women of color feel unseen and marginalized at work.

Erasure

All but three of our 65 participants described erasure at work, making it the most common form of invisibility reported. Erasure is invisibility in its most literal sense: being unheard or unseen. When describing erasure, women of color recounted feeling like they did not exist to others in their work environments. Nearly all of the participants experienced erasure in some form or another, from not being seen or heard to being left out of social interactions to being repeatedly ignored. Eve, a 31-year-old East Asian nonprofit employee, narrated her experience of feeling erased at a networking event:

I feel very invisible sometimes. Last week I was at this women's networking event. It was all these big investment companies and lawyers and everyone was very power-dressed and suited to the nines. In a room of 50 people, maybe four or five women of color. I am short, and especially if I'm not wearing heels, a lot of these women tower over me. I feel like naturally their gaze is towards each other. They straight up ignore me.

Targets of Erasure. Although almost all women reported erasure at work, East/Southeast Asian women experienced erasure the most (and the most repetitively), with all of them reporting frequent erasure. This pattern is consistent with the stereotype of East Asian women as passive, submissive, and perennial foreigners (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Rosette et al., 2016). Participants who were young and low in organizational status also experienced relatively high rates of erasure, with all participants under the age of 39, and those in junior roles, reporting erasure (see Tables 4 and 5, for more details).

Homogenization

Fifty-six out of 65 women reported homogenization, making this the second most frequent experience of invisibility. Homogenization involves being treated like a homogenous and interchangeable member of an unrelatable out-group. Women of color described being treated as virtually indistinguishable from other women of color, frequently being confused with other women of color, and having their names mistaken. This reinforced the sense that they were not seen as individuals but rather as faceless and interchangeable. Kiara, a 29-year-old Chinese Canadian manager, explained,

There's been a couple of times when they would call me another name. And even wrong emails to me. And you could tell it was to another Asian woman. There's definitely instances of that, and it's always a non-Asian person [who does it].

Similarly, Nevaeh, a 30-year-old Black program coordinator, described how she was often confused for another Black colleague:

We are all not the same. I am always mixed up with other Black women. My colleague, who is from Senegal, we always get mixed up for each other. People think they're talking to her when they're talking to me or vice versa. Or they think they met me, when they actually met her. It's ridiculous.

The participants reported feeling that they were treated as part of a homogenous out-group that was different from the dominant in-group. For example, Bella, a 31-year-old Latina researcher,

said "all brown women look the same to [my colleagues]" and explained that she and her female Mexican colleague at work were regularly called "the Mexicans," including by their boss. Nevaeh, the 30-year-old Black program coordinator, described being misnamed at work:

People have a lot of trouble with my name. Which I have become forgiving about. I'm like, okay it's an unfamiliar name, it's fine. But what really gets me is when people don't even make an effort to say it. They will not even try to pronounce it. It's like, this is so different and alien to me that I can't even engage with it. That makes me feel like an outsider. It really makes me angry. At least make an effort, say something, it's okay if you pronounce it incorrectly.

Targets of Homogenization. Every Black woman we interviewed mentioned experiences of homogenization, and though they made up less than one-fifth of our sample, they represented a third of those who experienced frequent homogenization. This finding is consistent with research showing that darker skinned women are less likely than lighter skinned women to be recognized and remembered (Buolamwini & Gebru, 2018; Sesko & Biernat, 2010). Every East/Southeast Asian woman also mentioned homogenization, consistent with perceptions of them as interchangeable members of a foreign outgroup. We also found that women experiencing relatively high rates of homogenization tended to hold mid-level positions at work—higher than those experiencing erasure and lower than those experiencing whitening (below), which suggested that others may have felt the occasional need to refer to these participants by name, but they did not bother to remember them correctly (see Tables 4 and 5).

Exoticization

Exoticization was the third most common form of invisibility. Fifty-one of the 65 women described experiencing unique race- and gender-based sexualization that made them feel reduced to foreign objects of fascination and fetishization. Often, exoticization directly referenced their specific ethnic identity and gender. One might thus assume they were "seen," or even hypervisible, but women of color reported feeling unseen and objectified through this form of invisibility. Elena, a 44-year-old Indigenous Professor, explained,

I've always had this hyperawareness that how do I be in this body and not see the way that whatever their fantasies are about Pocahontas, the ways that they saw me in those instances. So just trying to make sure that I wasn't presenting myself in a way that would entice that attention. It was definitely something you learned to manage. Just trying not to attract attention or make sure I wasn't enticing people to behave badly. I learned very quickly that that [femininity] wasn't going to be very comfortable for me to express at all times. You had to tone it down. And definitely, even my own community, Indigenous [men] scholars seeing me as the next conquest or the next person that they could say that they were with.

Similarly, Nevaeh, a 30-year-old Black immigrant from Kenya and a junior staff member (program coordinator), noted:

They have this curiosity about you. Which was everything from wow your skin, or your hair, or your accent, it's so interesting. So there was that. I found it more like a fascination. Which was interesting but can also get tiring. Because it makes you feel like, wow I'm really not the standard.

Although being exoticized made women of color visible in the literal sense, it made them feel invisible in the figurative sense.

Table 3
Representative Quotes for Forms of Invisibility

Types of invisibility	Illustrative quotes
Erasure Being unseen and unheard	<p>They would ignore me. They would straight up ignore me sometimes. We would be in the same room slicing brains on the same day. They would talk to her [White female peer], but not meaningfully engage at all with me. Here were literally two brain slicing stations, and they would always huddle around her and talk to her and how are you doing and are you watching Stranger Things, and I was just so fed up with it. I think they just looked at me across the room, and like, you're kinda different, you don't fit in our little clique. When you're physically on a lab bench and you're sitting at this end of the station and three other women are sitting at the other end of the station talking and chatting to this other person, I don't know if there is a signal stronger than that. [Fatima, 22, Middle Eastern, researcher]</p> <p>I wanted to apply for medical school and needed something on my resumé. I took the first job I got, selling guide books at Expo 86. I remember being at the kiosk and this person came up. I asked him, "Can I help you?" And he literally looked past me. And I said, "Excuse me, Sir, can I help you?" And he still didn't acknowledge me at all. And he spoke to the person behind me. I didn't know how to react. And this still sticks in my mind. That was probably the worst sense of discrimination. They didn't say anything to you, they just didn't acknowledge you. It's like you don't exist. [Nidhi, 51, South Asian, doctor]</p> <p>Actually this one professor ... we have brown bags for everyone on Fridays. We all go to the talk, we all ask questions. I've had multiple experiences where I ask the presenter a question and then he [the Professor] will ask the same question I asked, but in a very different way. And I'm looking around, like that's just crazy to me. When I opened my mouth, it's like, ears off. Like I didn't hear you. I'm like, I just asked a question, the person answered, and then you say, "well what about this?" But I'm like, I just said that. [Erika, 26, Black, researcher]</p>
Homogenization Treated like an interchangeable member of a homogenous group	<p>In meetings, he would go around the table asking everyone for their opinion. But then he passes by me and Annie [other woman of color]. He just conveniently says something else when he comes to us. It's happened more than once. [Keya, 31, South Asian, manager]</p> <p>One Professor called me by another name for one whole semester. I feel like they could pay more attention, because if I can pronounce [difficult name of professor], then you could probably do it too. [Saba, 27, South Asian, researcher]</p> <p>People have a lot of trouble with my name. I remember one colleague would always call me [different name] even though I pointedly wrote my correct name in emails and I'm sure he heard others call me by the right name [Naomi, 30, Latina researcher]</p> <p>I was getting my lunch, and some guy comes up to me and starts like, "why don't you call me anymore?" Went on and on. And I'm looking blankly. And then the shock registers on his face. Because all female Asians look the same. The look of shock on his face, maybe we all do look the same! [Kathy, 46, East Asian engineer]</p> <p>It's kind of weird, because I don't think I work with anyone that looks like me. It's someone who's significantly shorter than me or of a different ethnicity than me. So yeah, that's happened. That's happened for sure ... she's Indonesian and at one point, someone was trying to get my attention. And instead of my name, they said this person's name. She's like, maybe a head and a half shorter than I am. [Chloe, 25, East Asian assistant]</p> <p>They would just assume they understand what I think about something because I'm Black. I actually had a student tell me that all Black people are raised the same. And I was like [makes a shocked face] And she was like, "yeah that's why you all get along with each other, because you're all raised the same!" I was like, "are all White people raised the same?" And she said, "no." But we just assume minority groups are homogenous for some reason you know. [Erika, 26, Black researcher]</p>
Whitening Similarities to White culture assumed and cultural/ethnic differences ignored	<p>One of the things my colleagues said to me was that I was super easy to work with because I was familiar with their culture, that they didn't even see me as different. It was just the soft aspects. That was the feedback I got in comparison with the other Indian women. One of my colleagues was talking about how her kids are going to daycare now. [She said] the daycare is so bad that her three-year-old son doesn't know how to use a fork and knife to eat, and uses his hands. And she said, "he uses his hands like a savage." She said that in front of me and another colleague. And I'm Indian, we use our hands to eat at home. You are in a vulnerable place. You're scared of showing and sharing and saying that this is normal for us Indian folks. It is hard to do. Where it's like, I'm ashamed of this. [Padma, 31, South Asian manager]</p> <p>I was in a class and the professor was trying to tell me I'm not Black. Like race isn't a thing and I'm not Black. And he was like, your nose is actually a Caucasian nose. In front of the entire class, I was an object lesson. [Beth, 23, Black associate]</p> <p>People are sometimes surprised when I say I was born elsewhere. Like, we thought you were born here. It's the, "you're almost one of us." I would often get interviewed on television. My neighbor who was a CBC journalist told me I was the perfect voice on CBC because I have enough of an accent that says I wasn't born in Canada, but I call Canada home. [Bina, 38, Middle Eastern manager]</p>

(table continues)

Table 3 (continued)

Types of invisibility	Illustrative quotes
Exoticization Unique race- and gender-based sexual objectification and fetishization	<p>And what happens all the time is, "Black people are so loud and obnoxious. But don't worry, it's not you. It's just other Black people." It happens all the time. And people just think it's a normal thing to talk about. Normal thing to say. It's totally socially acceptable. [Beth, 23, Black, associate]</p> <p>Or exoticizing me in a lot of ways. How often it was about ... you're different, you're exotic. As opposed to seeing me for who I am. And that led to a further rejection of my own culture, my own language. [Naina, 30, South Asian teacher]</p> <p>There was this one male professor who was really big in our field. I had taken a course with him in my undergrad. He was giving this lecture in the university I was doing my Masters in, and I went to meet him, and I said to him, "I don't know if you remember me, I was in your class." And he said, "yeah I remember you." And I was saying, "yeah I used to sit in the back and. ..." And he stopped me and said, "I remember you." And I don't know if he touched my hair or he said something about my hair. ... I've totally blocked out that whole part. ... I remember I've been called exotic. I think it's one of those, it's supposed to be a compliment. [Bina, 38, Middle Eastern manager]</p> <p>I'm also considered very ... exotic. People have said that to me so many times. ... A Caucasian man came up to me and goes, "you're so exotic." And I was like, "I come from a tropical forest? I'm a fruit?" [Tania, 30, South Asian teacher]</p>

Note. CBC = Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Being reduced to a foreign sexual object felt dehumanizing. As Tessa, a 33-year-old Black research assistant, said,

It's very complex. You're invisible, but you're also hypersexualized at the same time. So, you're invisibilized within your hypersexuality in a society that has hypersexualized you.

Many participants recounted exoticization in ways that drew upon stereotypes and sexual tropes about their race and gender, such as "spicy" Latina or "China doll" East Asian women. Kathy, a 46-year-old East Asian engineer, described being exoticized in ways that related to her Chinese and female identity, saying, "It's like yellow fever, right? There are definitely some guys who're excited by that. And you can feel it."

Targets of Exoticization. Although most of our participants reported exoticization, every Latina woman and all but one Black woman mentioned being exoticized. Half of the women who experienced repeated exoticization were Black, even though Black women made up less than one-fifth of our sample. South Asian and Middle Eastern women were less likely to report exoticization, possibly due to stereotypes of them as conservative and/or religious (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). We also found that exoticization was disproportionately experienced by younger women and those low in organizational status (see Tables 4 and 5).

Whitening

Finally, about half (33 of 65) of the women reported experiencing "whitening," which consisted of having their similarities to white

people complimented and having their non-white racial/ethnic identities and cultural backgrounds discounted or ignored. Whitening was confusing for participants because it was framed by the perpetrators as inclusion and praise, but it undermined the women's racial and cultural identities, making them feel invisible and unseen. Being whitened made women of color feel unseen for who they actually were, ignoring their unique identities, experiences, and backgrounds. Bina, a 38-year-old Middle Eastern director, said,

I was in this backroom, and I could just overhear the conversation. And the conversation was about a shooting in Sweden. There was this discussion about how it must be Muslims, or all these immigrants that Sweden is letting into the country. And one person said, "yeah they don't even celebrate Christmas." It was like, these awful immigrants don't even celebrate Christmas. ... I don't think they would say directly about me things that they would say about women of color. So almost like, I think it's not obvious to them that I am [a woman of color]! If that makes any sense. I can't be that different. I'm not the scary immigrant. Somehow, they've resolved it for themselves. I don't think they realize that their stereotypes and judgements would apply to me.

Many of the participants experienced having their similarities with white culture praised while receiving backhanded compliments about "fitting in." Natalie, a 28-year-old Latina who spent most of her life in Canada, explained this as follows:

I always think people compliment me on assimilating. Because I've been to elementary school here. I've adjusted very well. Like, Oh, wow, you couldn't even tell you're not white.

Table 4
Numbers of Women Who Mentioned Experiencing Each Form of Invisibility by Racial Identity

Participants by racial identity	Erasure	Homogenization	Exoticization	Whitening
Black women (<i>N</i> = 15)	14 (93%)	15 (100%)	14 (93%)	3 (20%)
South Asian women (<i>N</i> = 15)	13 (87%)	11 (73%)	9 (60%)	4 (27%)
East/Southeast Asian women (<i>N</i> = 15)	15 (100%)	15 (100%)	12 (80%)	6 (40%)
Latina women (<i>N</i> = 10)	10 (100%)	9 (90%)	10 (100%)	3 (30%)
Other (<i>N</i> = 10)	10 (100%)	5 (50%)	6 (60%)	4 (40%)

Table 5
Numbers of Women Who Mentioned Experiencing Each Form of Invisibility by Immigrant and Occupational Rank/Status

Participants by immigrant and occupational rank/status	Erasure	Homogenization	Exoticization	Whitening
Immigrant (<i>N</i> = 28)	27 (96%)	23 (82%)	18 (64%)	6 (21%)
Nonimmigrant (<i>N</i> = 37)	35 (95%)	32 (86%)	33 (89%)	17 (46%)
Younger (39 and younger; <i>N</i> = 56)	56 (100%)	49 (88%)	43 (77%)	19 (34%)
Older (40 and older; <i>N</i> = 9)	4 (45%)	7 (78%)	1 (11%)	4 (45%)
Junior/low status (<i>N</i> = 48)	48 (100%)	43 (90%)	38 (79%)	15 (31%)
Senior/high status (<i>N</i> = 17)	14 (82%)	12 (70%)	10 (59%)	9 (53%)

Similarly, Chloe, a 29-year-old Chinese Canadian executive assistant, explained how others downplay her Chinese identity:

People don't tend to categorize me as ethnically Chinese. "Oh you're entirely Canadian," "I don't see any Chineseness in you." Also because I don't have an accent. So, yeah there's definitely a bit of denial of my Chineseness. The inability to recognize I can be Chinese as well as Canadian. I think it comes with the fact that ... English is my first language.

Whitening made the participants feel pressure to conceal or minimize their differences from white people and to mirror white culture and lifestyles. Beth, a 23-year-old Black associate, recounted pressure to "whiten" herself so that others would respect her at work:

You'll get comments like, "You look so much better with straight hair, or oh you look so mature." It'll never be words that have anything to do with race or gender, but it will always be words that tell you that you look better. If I want to relate to a white person, and every Black girl has had this talk, put on your white voice. Straighten your hair. Every job interview I've ever had, I've had my hair straight. Every single one. I come across as more capable. I actually wait until I bring my natural hair to work.

Prior research has shown that racial minorities often "whiten" their job applications by concealing or downplaying racial cues to avoid discrimination (Kang et al., 2016). Beth's example illustrates that women of color experience unique pressures to downplay their intersectional identities, such as Black women being expected to straighten their hair to look "professional."

Targets of Whitening. A few women from every racial and ethnic group we interviewed mentioned experiencing this form of invisibility, with no discernable pattern forming across these identities. What did stand out, however, was that most women who reported being whitened by others had grown up in the United States or Canada were older, and/or had relatively high status at work, such as being in management or a partner in a law firm. Fluency and conformity in white male spaces, then, appear to increase the likelihood that a woman of color is treated at work by others "as if" she is "white" (see Tables 4 and 5).

A Response Pathway Model of Intersectional Invisibility

We also analyzed our data to identify patterns of affective reactions and behavioral responses to women's experiences of invisibility. Specifically, we coded the emotions mentioned with each invisibility event, as well as behaviors the participants reported engaging in after the event. Then, we examined whether certain types of events elicited certain emotions and responses. We also looked at whether there were patterns in how the participants

reacted and responded to these events based on their racial and ethnic identities, immigrant statuses, ages, and organizational rank. Through our analysis, we identified two salient response pathways to invisibility based on the affective reactions of shame and anger (Table 6) and their corresponding behavioral responses of shutting down and active resistance, respectively (Table 7). These pathways were typically triggered by the type of invisibility experienced (see Table 8). Upon further analysis, we found that the pathways could be disrupted based on a participant's access to social power.

Attributions and Affective Reactions

Our participants noted that it was difficult to discern why invisibility events that were more ambiguous, like erasure and whitening, had occurred. Ambiguous events often prompted participants to wonder if their own behaviors or perceptions were to blame, and this self-blame tended to elicit shame. For example, Eve, a 31-year-old East Asian nonprofit employee, described the difficulty of understanding the reason for her erasure at a work event and how this made her question whether being overlooked by others was her fault:

I feel very invisible sometimes. I wonder if they think I'm just not worth their time or their focus. I wish I just knew, because if I knew how other people perceive me, I would be able to address it, maybe project myself differently. I don't want to feel like a victim constantly and not know why people treat me a certain way. Is it me or is it something external?

Invisibility events that were less ambiguous and more clearly the cause of bias, such as homogenization or exoticization, made it easier for the participants to blame the perpetrator, eliciting anger. Ria, a 30-year-old South Asian school teacher, narrated her anger in response to homogenization:

People get my name wrong all the time. Even now, I have worked with a coworker for two years, and she still says my last name wrong. C'mon. It's on the announcements every Tuesday. I hate it when they get my name wrong. And there's one other brown woman that works in my school, and they mix us up all the time. I've been there for four years, and it always happens. I'm like, "wrong brown person." They're super embarrassed afterwards. They better frikkin' be super embarrassed! It makes me angry.

Prior research has shown that women of color experience "attributional ambiguity"—difficulty discerning whether a negative workplace experience is due to their membership in a particular marginalized group or due to their own behavior (Remedios & Snyder, 2015). Having multiple marginalized identities makes it difficult to identify the cause of mistreatment, especially when it

Table 6
Representative Quotes for Affective Reactions to Invisibility

Affect	Illustrative quotes
Shame Negative evaluation of the self with respect to invisibility experience	<p>I felt very insecure. I felt embarrassed. I knew that I felt uncomfortable, but I didn't know why. I couldn't find out why. Why I couldn't ... I couldn't ground the reasons why I was feeling so anxious at certain times, and why I wasn't able to do this or do that. I wasn't equipped. [Janelle, 34, Black researcher]</p> <p>It's this constant performing that people of color that want to be taken seriously. That want to occupy space. There's a performance there, that is unnatural. And rooted in shame. Where it's like, wait I'm ashamed of this. And I think the shame comes in the moments of the microaggressions. [Naina, 30, South Asian teacher]</p> <p>There's a bit of a baggage that one carries around. Our names, there's more of a shame there. Like you're apologizing for who you are! Even anger is a privilege. Seriously. Even to feel angry is a privilege. [Taraji, 24, Latina researcher]</p>
Anger Negative evaluation of another with respect to invisibility experience	<p>I hate when they get my name wrong. And ... in school, I hated it when they got my name wrong, all the time, in school. When I had a substitute, I was like, "yeah that's me." They were like, "uh. ...". And I would be like, "yup that's me." I hated it. It's like a point of contention in my heart ... it makes me angry. [Ria, 30, South Asian teacher]</p> <p>You have your skin color to fall back on. I don't! I don't! [angrily] [Tessa, 33, Black researcher]</p> <p>You have this internal battle that goes on. You're offended, to be honest. You're angry. Someone just sat there and pretty much said that your entire family and your history, your ancestors, they are all one way and it's only one way. And it's not positive. [Beth, 23, Black manager]</p>

comes to something as subtle as erasure. This ambiguity was salient in women of color's experiences with, and responses to, invisibility. The more ambiguous an invisibility event, the more likely the participant was to interpret it as her own fault. The less ambiguous an invisibility event, the more likely she was to interpret it as a transgression by someone else. For instance, not being heard in a meeting or receiving a compliment about fitting in did not necessarily indicate overt bias when considered in isolation, but being mixed up with another woman of color or being called a "spicy Latina" were more obviously instances of bias.

Behavioral Responses

Next, we analyzed patterns of behavior related to the emotional reactions of shame and anger in our data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). We found that shame and anger tended to lead to "shutting down" and "active resistance," respectively. In this way, we identified two affect-based response pathways, withdrawal and approach, based on the participants' attributions to an invisibility event (see Figure 3).

Withdrawal Response Pathway: Self Blame → Shame → Shutting Down. Shame was a consistent affective reaction to an invisibility event attributed to the self, which typically consisted of erasure or whitening. Forty-two of our 65 participants reported feeling shame in response to invisibility. Feelings of shame led to behaviors focused on protecting the self from further feelings of shame. This is consistent with research on shame, which defines shame as a painful emotion that arises when an individual experiences a threat to the self (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Shame involves a negative evaluation of the self (e.g., there is something wrong with me), is often related to perceptions of one's own shortcomings (real or imaginary), and can elicit motives to protect oneself from further threat (Daniels & Robinson, 2019; Rodriguez Mosquera et al., 2008). We found that shame triggered by an invisibility event led to shutting down, which we define as withdrawal tactics used to protect oneself and alleviate negative emotions. These tactics included speaking up less, staying quiet in meetings and other

work-related gatherings, and minimizing or hiding one's differences. Naina, a 30-year-old South Asian high school teacher, described how she experienced erasure in meetings, which led her to feel self-anger and shame and shut down:

[I am] not always being taken seriously. And my evidence to that is oftentimes what I say is not even on the minutes of the meeting. And I'm like, I think I spoke or I think I said something. I'm included in emails where I agree with something that I didn't even talk about. To which I fundamentally actually disagree with. I shut down. And I get mad at myself. There's shame attached to it. More often, I shut down. That's the thing I'm constantly negotiating. I don't speak up enough. I have things to say, but I don't always say them, and this goes back to the self-anger.

Naina's reaction of shame to her experience of erasure led her to speak up less and to shut down, making her even more invisible. Whitening similarly caused feelings of shame and led to shutting down. Whitening implied that one was worthy of attention and acceptance because one was proximal to white characteristics and culture as opposed to one's own ethnic identity and cultural heritage. In response to whitening, participants further minimized their racial and ethnic differences from white people, and tried to draw less attention to themselves and blend in. This was frequently done by hiding important aspects of their identities, such as not sharing their cultural differences in lifestyle and food, not speaking in their first language, and altering their appearance. For example, Kiara, a 29-year-old East Asian manager, explained,

I don't want to sound too Chinese. You can't help but feel that sometimes. Where people assume that we just speak Chinese to each other. You don't want to add to that image.

Despite feeling like a safer choice, shutting down and erasing one's identity meant that women of color continued to go unseen, unheard, and unacknowledged for who they were. This, unfortunately, reinforced and reproduced their invisibility at work. As a result, the response pathway of withdrawal reinforced women of color's marginalization in the workplace.

Table 7
Representative Quotes for Behavioral Responses to Invisibility

Behavioral responses	Illustrative quotes
Shutting down Withdrawal tactics to protect oneself and alleviate negative emotions	<p>I think I do feel like, in terms of food, when I bring my lunch, I don't bring a lot of Korean food to my workplace, because I don't want the smell to ... I remember doing that on purpose, I remember cutting myself off completely from Korean media. I was only reading Canadian newspapers, I was only reading local news. That kind of helped me. [Gemma, 33, East Asian analyst]</p> <p>It's just easier to talk about other things that people will get. And maybe that is sort of an unintentional whitewashing. I have experiences that are different and they're not going to be valued in a way that I want them to be valued. So I don't share them [Eve, 31, East Asian nonprofit employee]</p> <p>I feel like a lot of that was because I didn't feel safe to be seen. I felt like I'm not really showing myself. I remember playing into the role of either the super quiet or making myself unnoticed. So that being quiet showed up in a lot of different ways. Just the not saying, or the hiding in the back. [Naina, 30, South Asian teacher]</p>
Active resistance Approach tactics to signal a transgression has occurred	<p>Very often I feel the moment when I'm going to become more visible. I think I have to make a strong intervention. Sometimes I feel like I need to make my point a couple of shades more strongly in order to be heard I need to make it a little bit more extreme. [Bina, 38, Middle Eastern director]</p> <p>They tell me, "You're so different from a Turkish person." Or, "You don't look like a Muslim." That's the best. You're so different as a Muslim. And I'm like, "What does this even mean?" They have such a stereotypical idea in their head, and they're trying to put me in a box. When they see that I don't belong to that box, they give me credit by saying that I overcome those things. It's a compliment. Who's going to decide what a Muslim looks like? I say, I'm Muslim. This is what Muslims are like. [Hazel, 27, Middle Eastern researcher]</p>
Radical honesty Pragmatic tactics to build connection and resist invisibility	<p>When I talk about when I'm going to Kenya. They say, oh that's great, you'll see your family your friends. And then depending on what they've read in the news about Africa, Africa as a "country," they'll ... oh I was reading about an accident, I hope you're safe. It's usually like, this is where she's from, and then they remark about something terrible and negative that happened. And you have to keep reminding them that that's not the norm. Like that incident was surprising or this has never happened before. Otherwise, you have this misconception that Africa is poor and because your African you're probably poor and because you're going to a poor African country, something might happen. There's always that cyclical thinking and somehow you need to break that circle. So just removing some of those stereotypes. Having a conversation. [Sandra, 34-year-old Black program coordinator]</p> <p>That pressure kind of comes upon you subconsciously, I feel. I try to look past that, because I try to present ... I try to be true to who I am, whoever that is. I happen to be born with Indian skin ... I just speak my mind when something happens. I try to push the stereotypes a little bit. And I just try to present who I am. [Ria, 30, South Asian teacher]</p> <p>The other one is when people say, where are you from? Canada. No, where were you born? British Columbia. No like, what's your background. And I will make them work for that. So when we get to the fact that my parents are from India. And then I ask, where are you from? I'm Canadian. I say, you don't look aboriginal to me. *laughter* That one happens quite a bit. It's my way of having fun with the situation. Challenge their assumptions in some way [Romi, 48, South Asian manager]</p>

Approach Response Pathway: Other Blame → Anger → Active Resistance. Anger was a consistent affective response to low-ambiguity invisibility events, which typically involved homogenization and exoticization. Fifty of our 65 participants reported feeling anger in response to invisibility. Anger is a discrete emotion defined as "an appraisal of responsibility for wrongdoing by another person" (Gibson & Callister, 2010). It sometimes includes a desire to correct the perceived wrong, especially when the individual feels they have been treated unfairly (Adams, 1965). We found that when invisibility led to anger, it elicited behaviors focused on calling out and correcting the transgression, which we term "active resistance." We define active resistance as approach tactics designed to signal that a transgression has occurred. Active resistance included speaking up, asking questions, and challenging or correcting the transgressor. Camila, a 33-year-old Latina financial analyst, described her anger after being confused with another Latina woman:

One time, they mistook my name. I was like, are you serious? She is this small, I'm tall. I don't even look like her. This person clearly made a mistake, deliberately. I'm an outspoken person; I'm not afraid to speak

up. I think I'm doing it in a professional manner. I'm not doing it to make you feel bad.

Active resistance typically occurred as a behavior designed to get others to acknowledge that a transgression had occurred following an invisibility event, but it incurred the risk of backlash or denial from others. As Erica, a 26-year-old Black researcher, described,

We're not always allowed to have the same human emotions like anyone else. Cause then it's looked at as, "oh it's too much" or "oh you're just hypersensitive." If someone says something offensive and you just bring it up, then it's like, "oh you can't say anything around her." You don't want that.

These withdrawal and approach response pathways show that limited options exist for women of color when it comes to responding to invisibility. The withdrawal pathway reproduces their invisibility and marginalization at work by making them more likely to stay quiet, hide, and avoid drawing attention to themselves and their identities. The approach pathway provides an opportunity to reduce their invisibility but runs the risk of

Table 8
Linking Affective Reactions to Behavioral Responses

Link	Illustrative quotes
Shame and shutting down	<i>Erasure</i> : "I feel like I'm not taken seriously in workshops. I'm doing a stage play, I'm taking writing classes this year. And it's such a weird dynamic. I would be raising my hand, like, hello, I want to say something! And then, other people will cut in, other people will talk over me. It's like, okay, I'm not even going to talk. I just shut down. I just don't want to talk anymore, coz you guys aren't taking my comment seriously, even though I slaved hours and hours over thinking of something thoughtful to say ..." [Constance, 27, South-East Asian nonprofit employee]
	<i>Whitening</i> : "I remember a colleague once telling me, a male colleague 'you're really beautiful for a Black woman, you're so articulate and you always care about what you wear.' And I was like, there's lots of smart Black people. Also, it's not really a compliment if you compliment me and then bash Black people in general. I wish I had had the courage to say, 'that's weird, that's wrong, don't do that.'" [Nevaeh, 30, Black nonprofit employee]
Anger and active resistance	<i>Homogenization</i> : "I had this one experience, which happened in Montreal. We were at a competition in Montreal. It was me, my Pakistani friend, and another girl from Iran. All of us looked foreign. And then this French Quebecois girl came to our table. She asked us, 'Where are you from?' We told her. And she was like, 'Are you refugees?' I got mad, so I told her, 'Where are you from?' She said, 'I'm from Quebec.' I was like, 'yeah, but where are you originally from?' And obviously her family had come from somewhere in Europe. I really wanted to make a nasty comment. I was mad, so I did make a comment about killing the Natives." [Saba, 27, South Asian researcher]
	<i>Exoticization</i> : "I'll ask them, 'What do you mean? What does that mean?' I guess it also depends on who the other person is, in what context a thing is being said, how I'm feeling at that point of time. I do get mad." [Tania, 30, South Asian teacher]

increasing their marginalization at work if their resistance incurs retaliation and backlash, such as others accusing them of overreacting, denying or invalidating their experiences, or engaging in more overt forms of reprisal.

Not all responses to invisibility fit neatly into these two response pathways, however. To further establish the robustness of our findings and understand the conditions under which our theoretical model explains and does not explain women of color's responses to invisibility, we conducted a negative case analysis and considered how social power affected these pathways.

Social Power and the Disruption of the Response Pathways. Examining cases that deviated from our response pathway model helped identify two disruptions to the response pathways of withdrawal and approach. First, we found that certain participants overwhelmingly attributed invisibility events to the self, irrespective of the type of invisibility event. Second, despite blaming the perpetrator(s) of invisibility and feeling anger, certain participants did not engage in active resistance but rather shut down, even in the absence of feelings of shame.

Upon further analysis, we identified certain groups of women of color who were more likely to follow these disrupted pathways. In particular, we found that women of color who were relatively low in access to social power were more likely to blame themselves for invisibility and/or to withdraw, even if they blamed the perpetrator(s) and felt angry. Immigrant women, younger women, and women who were lower in organizational rank were more likely to attribute their invisibility to something they did wrong, and to shut down and withdraw in response. Furthermore, even when they did recognize that an invisibility event was not their fault and felt angry, their relative lack of social power made active resistance seem like a risky option. Potential risks included losing one's job, social backlash, being accused of overreacting, being too sensitive or paranoid, and otherwise having their experiences denied and invalidated. Gemma, a 33-year-old Korean immigrant working in a junior operations role, described her experience of being unable to actively resist her invisibility:

When you categorize people by demographics, from the physically strongest, and mentally strongest to physically and mentally weakest, I'm the very weak ... me being a foreigner, female, Asian girl. Everybody just assumes that I don't speak English, I'm just so freaking nice, I'll do anything for them. Or they can boss me around. It's not only men. It's women as well. You just feel that they feel they can talk more down to me than other people. Or just ignore me. Even if I feel angry, I can't react. I can't say anything. I just stay quiet.

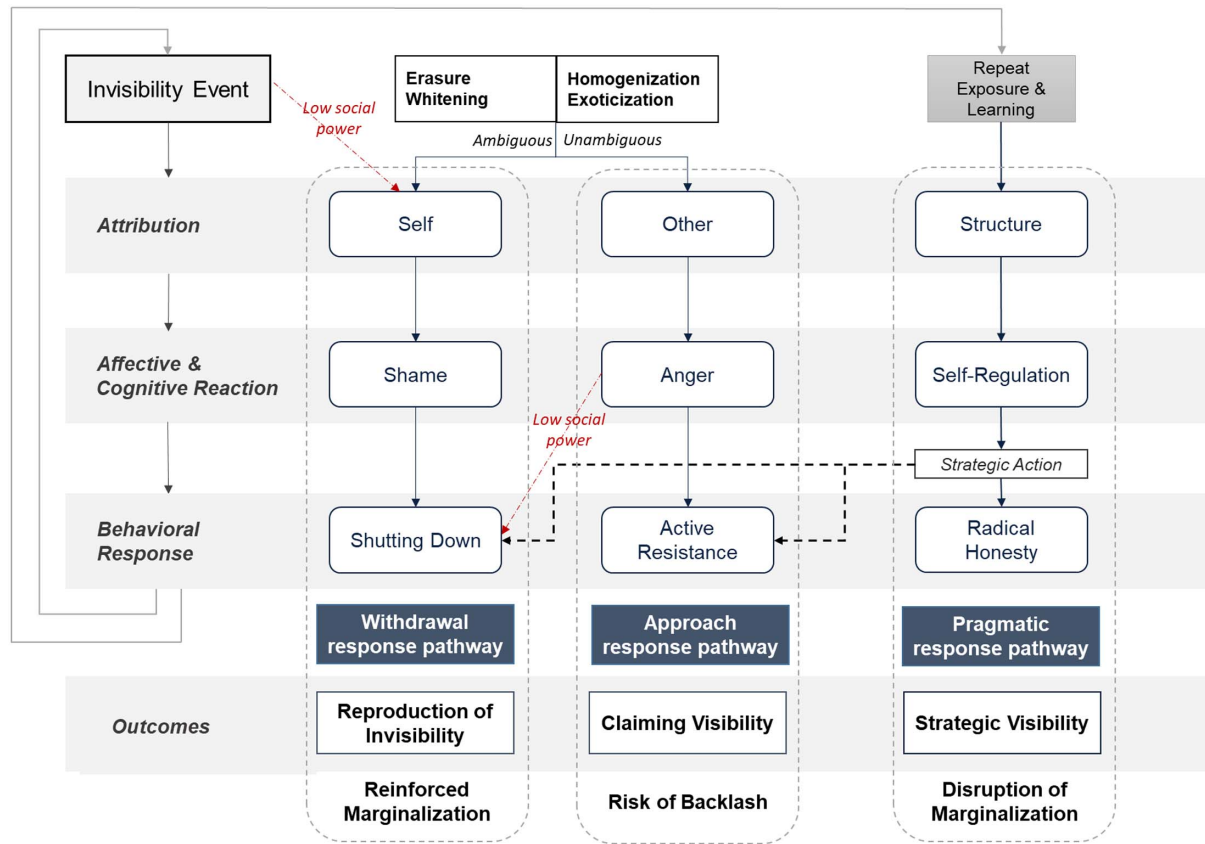
Thus, some of the participants who felt anger in the face of invisibility reported feeling resigned to withdrawal and shutting down. Participants who were farthest from white male prototypicality (e.g., immigrant women, petite women, Asian women, young women) were especially likely to feel that they lacked the social power required for active resistance. Their responses deviated from expected behaviors that tend to emerge from anger according to prior research and theory (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996).

Pragmatic Response Pathway: Structure Blame → Self-Regulation → Strategic Action. In our final set of interviews, we recognized a theme that had begun to emerge in earlier interviews but became clearer with additional examples. For just over one-fourth (18) of the women in our sample, invisibility was not merely an ad hoc or repeatedly confusing experience; rather, it was recognized as a pervasive pattern with structural causes in their lives at work. As women of color experienced invisibility over and over again, they underwent a process of learning as they made sense of what was going on. This affected how they interpreted their invisibility and their consequent responses to specific events. Based on their repeated exposure to invisibility and a process of learning, we identified a third pathway in our final round of theorizing: structural attributions and pragmatic responses.

After multiple invisibility events and feeling shame and/or anger over and over, some participants had actively reflected on the repeated patterns and systematic nature of their experiences. As Erica, a 26-year-old Black researcher, explained,

I used to just freeze up. I didn't respond. I didn't talk about it. I would see it, I would feel some tension or some discomfort, and I wouldn't do

Figure 3
Response Pathway Model of Intersectional Invisibility



Note. See the online article for the color version of this figure.

or say much. Or I would react. I would fight all the battles. Now that it's happened so often, I think I've developed a little bit of tougher skin in terms of that invisibility thing. I've definitely learned it. I went through phases of like, "you can't say that!" Or I was taking on all the battles and I was like, "You know what, no." It will drive me crazy, and they won't care. I've become much more choosy about where I invest my energy. I've learned to pick my battles. Like if it was something that was important to me, then I would feel the need to say, "let's pause. You're completely not acknowledging this about me, or that I'm not an option or whatever." But in many situations I've experienced, it's been so not worth it to me. So I haven't gone to say, "you will not ignore me" in those cases.

As women repeatedly experienced invisibility, they started attributing it to larger structures of oppression. When they attributed their invisibility to structural causes, they began to engage in self-regulation processes that tempered their affective reactions. Although a particular invisibility event may have triggered negative affect, they would regulate their emotions and switch to a cognitive evaluation, leading to strategic action. We define strategic action as tactics that resist invisibility while protecting the self. As Tessa, a 33-year-old Black researcher explained,

Navigating these spaces as a Black woman, you learn that this is a racist and sexist subsystem that we're living in. The social environment that we're living in. You have to be gracious in the face of disrespect, invisibility, people whitewashing you. You always have to dial it down.

You have to go and check yourself. You always have to take the high road. Black women are not allowed to have the same human emotions like anyone else. I've definitely learned to pick my battles and realize what would have a positive impact. When to speak up. When to stay quiet. When to go and use humor. When to be honest.

Strategic action included the previously identified behavioral response options of shutting down and active resistance, depending on the circumstances and what was required to protect the self. As noted earlier, active resistance did not always feel like a safe option, especially for women low in social power. After repeated exposure to invisibility, however, senior women described regulating their responses and being vigilant about the context and their own safety, speaking up when it was meaningful and safe to do so. As Kiran, a 45-year-old South Asian partner in a law firm, explained,

When I was younger, I would suck it up. But now, if something happens, I actually come back with some response. But I do still have to regulate myself. Sometimes I like to be a little bit more vocal. But being vocal, sometimes is not necessarily a good thing. Depending on who you're working with or your audiences.

This illustrates that, for women of color, active resistance to invisibility is never unequivocally available as an option. Instead, after repeated exposure to and experiences with invisibility, women of color wisely analyzed their environments before choosing a

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response. Participants described evaluating the presence or absence of social support, the benefits and risks of speaking up, the odds of others responding well to speaking up, and whether there was potential for positive outcomes. These evaluations influenced their choices to speak up or stay quiet. Speaking up sometimes involved using humor, to acknowledge that a transgression had occurred, but in a way that others could hear and be open to.

Occasionally, strategic action led to what we refer to as radical honesty. Radical honesty was qualitatively different from shutting down and active resistance. We define it as a response focused on building connection and sharing one's thoughts and opinions honestly and openly with the perpetrator(s) of invisibility. This involved approaching the perpetrator(s) with compassion and trust and being open about one's feelings. Women of color engaged in radical honesty when they felt there was an opportunity to build a connection with the perpetrator(s), and in doing so, disrupt patterns of invisibility and marginalization at work. Sofia, a 30-year-old Latina employee in a nonprofit organization, explained how she engaged in radical honesty:

I've been trying to be more true to myself. Just being like, "when you ignored me and my cultural differences, I felt confused and upset. You're choosing not to recognize that I'm a woman of color that has all these experiences that come with it." When I say that, people are like, "oh wow I didn't mean it at all. I just meant that everyone should be treated equally." And I'll say, "well let's unpack that. What does equal mean? What's equal for you might be different from what's equal for me because I'm a brown woman and you're a white woman." Usually having conversations like that go really well and it helps build emotional connections. But the emotional labor is always mine.

Thus, we identified a third pathway of response to invisibility for women of color which offered them the opportunity to be pragmatic about their response to invisibility, and resist their invisibility and marginalization in ways that felt safe. Radical honesty, however, involved being vulnerable and open, and therefore required the presence of social support and the receptiveness and openness of the other person(s).

We conducted a negative case analysis to examine which groups were less likely to engage in certain response pathways and how they moved from affective to cognitive response pathways. We confirmed that women of color who were low in social power were less likely to switch from self to structural attributions for invisibility, even in the face of repeated exposure to invisibility events. They often found themselves stuck in the withdrawal response pathway, exacerbating their invisibility and marginalization at work. A smaller group of women, who were relatively high in social power, were more likely to have switched over to structural attributions and the pragmatic response pathway, strategizing how to respond to invisibility. This allowed women of color to make themselves visible when and how they chose, creating the option of strategic visibility. In particular, radical honesty provided an opportunity to disrupt marginalization and challenge structural systems that create invisibility for women of color.

Discussion

This inductive study of intersectional invisibility identified ways that women of color from different racial, immigrant, and professional backgrounds and statuses experience and respond to their invisibility at work. We theorized that different identities and positionalities

would shape women of color's experiences and responses, and found that invisibility was a common, painful, and dehumanizing experience for women of color from a variety of backgrounds. We also identified differences in invisibility experiences depending on women of color's racial, immigrant, and organizational identities and status at work. Erasure (being unheard or unseen) cuts across identities but was most recurring for women who were East Asian, young, and/or low in organizational rank; exoticization (being sexually fetishized) was most commonly experienced by women who were Black, Latina, young, and/or low in organizational rank; homogenization (being confused for other women of color) was most recurring for women who were Black, East Asian, and/or of moderate organizational rank; and whitening (having one's racial/ethnic identity ignored) was aimed at women of color born and raised in Canada or the United States, older, and high in organizational rank. In general, women with less social power at work felt more invisible than those who had more social power at work.

These findings move beyond a literal definition of invisibility and the related concept of hypervisibility to identify more symbolic forms of experience, such as homogenization, exoticization, and whitening. The fetishization of Black women (Buchanan & Ormerod, 2002; Collins, 2000) and the practice of whitewashing (Kang et al., 2016; Rabelo et al., 2021) have previously been identified as phenomena affecting women of color, but not specifically as treatment that makes them feel invisible at work. Though whitening and exoticization involve receiving social attention, they nonetheless made women of color feel unseen for who they are as unique and inherently valuable individuals within their social environments.

Women of color varied in their affective reactions and behavioral responses to different types of invisibility at work. How a woman attributed the cause of her invisibility combined with her social power to shape whether she engaged in shutting down (an attribution of self-blame and/or low social power), active resistance (an attribution of other blame and/or high social power), or strategic action (an attribution of structural blame). The pragmatic pathway was least common and evolved from women's recurring experiences with invisibility and awareness of its structural causes. It guided them to look beyond individual (self or other) blame for invisibility toward structural causes instead. When circumstances were judged to be favorable, the pragmatic pathway even empowered them to engage in radical honesty with those who had made them feel invisible in order to let others know how it made them feel and why. Our theoretical model demonstrates the cyclical nature of invisibility and how it occurs in different ways for different women of color, often with the result of reinforcing their invisibility and marginalization in the workplace.

Our findings advance scholarship on intersectional invisibility at work (Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008) and contribute to theory on the intracategorical complexities in women of color's experiences (McCall, 2005; Nash, 2008) by articulating ways in which different social identities are associated with different invisibility experiences and responses. Women of color experience unique forms of oppression in white male spaces based on their unique histories and stereotypes in these spaces (Hurtado, 1989). Black women are racialized as most distant from "whiteness" (Abdulle, 2017; Ahmed, 2007; Hirschfeld & Weaver, 2007; Rabelo et al., 2021), which may explain their relative homogenization and exoticization at work. At the same time, the recent spate of violence against Asian American women

(e.g., Chang, 2021; Hong et al., 2021; Jonas et al., 2021) highlights the challenges that Asian women face in white and male spaces, in which they are seen as submissive and perennial foreigners (Berdahl & Min, 2012; Fiske et al., 2002; Rosette et al., 2016; Sue, 2010; Sue et al., 2007). Our study found that Asian women experienced all four forms of invisibility, but relatively more erasure and homogenization, suggesting they often fell into a category deemed unworthy of notice or recall. Junior women low in organizational rank also experienced relatively high rates of erasure and homogenization, reinforcing the idea that these forms of treatment are targeted at those perceived to be especially low in social power. Although we had low numbers of women from other racial backgrounds in our study, our findings offer noteworthy insights into how their experiences of invisibility may differ in the workplace. An important step for future research will be to more fully examine and compare the experiences of invisibility among Middle Eastern women (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013), Latina women (Cortina, 2001; Ghavami & Peplau, 2013; Villalón, 2010), and Indigenous women (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018; Razack, 2016) in workplaces defined by white men.

This study contributes to growing research on multiple identities in organizations (e.g., Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Creary et al., 2015; Hall et al., 2019; Ramarajan, 2014; Rosette et al., 2018) and echoes other studies showing that multiple social identities lead to different outcomes, even when individuals share an identity (e.g., Black women and white women, Livingston et al., 2012; old and young Black employees, Kang et al., 2014). We add to this by drawing attention to women of color's heterogeneous experiences of invisibility and developing a theoretical lens to understand differential access to social power for those with multiple marginalized identities. Our findings differ from what would be predicted by double jeopardy models (Beale, 1970) and suggest that differences between women of color cannot be explained by additive models of marginalization alone (as pointed out by Hall et al., 2019).

Our findings also expand our understanding of reactions and responses to affective events at work (affective events theory; Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996). Prior research has shown that perceptions of injustice or unfairness elicit anger, which produces attempts to correct the injustice through social action and voice (Lavelle et al., 2007; Lazarus, 1991; Wang et al., 2011), and that perceptions of deserved mistreatment elicit shame, which leads to the avoidance of conflict and acceptance of injustice (Gilbert, 1997). Yet, as our findings show, women of color do not always follow these neat response pathways of anger or shame: they may not raise voice against a transgressor when angry, and may instead stay quiet, which is a typical response to shame. They may also perceive injustice but respond not in anger but with self-regulation and pragmatism. Thus, integrating an intersectional lens with affective events theory is necessary for understanding women of color's event-affect-behavior pathways, which differ depending on their interpretation of an invisibility event and their social power at work and from what extant research and theory would predict.

Promisingly, these findings lend insight into how intersectional invisibility and marginalization might be disrupted at work. Many of the women of color we interviewed found it difficult to escape the marginalizing and painful effects of invisibility. Consequently, invisibility appears to generally reinforce normative hierarchies for marginalized group members, though in different ways: It diminishes the voices of those who are particularly susceptible

to invisibility and creates risks of backlash and invalidation for those who have some power and exercise voice in response to their invisibility. At the same time, our findings show that when women of color are able to attribute their invisibility to structural, rather than to personal causes, they are able to adopt a pragmatic response pathway that protects them from some of the negative psychological and social effects of self-blame and shutting down and other blame and active resistance. Importantly, when women are able to recognize structural causes for their invisibility and follow a pragmatic response pathway, they are able to make safer choices. When they understand their experiences and feel safe enough in their work environments, they are even able to engage in radical honesty as way of having themselves and their experiences understood and seen, with the potential for disrupting their invisibility and marginalization at work.

Finally, our findings offer novel insights for organizational practices around diversity and inclusion by highlighting the complexity that exists within women of color's experiences at work. Some are more "invisible" than others, and women of color experience, attribute, and respond to invisibility in different ways depending on their identities and positions. Our framework offers a lens into this variance in processes of marginalization and illustrates how most women of color have limited options to exercise voice (and to have it heard) at work: Either they feel they cannot speak up about a transgression because it is too ambiguous, and/or they are afraid of backlash and invalidation. This lived experience is in contradiction to advice often given to marginalized employees to "lean in" (Sandberg, 2013) and be bold and confident (Webber & Giuffre, 2019) in order to succeed at work. Our research highlights the need to design more sophisticated practices around equity, diversity, and inclusion at work to create climates and conditions for dialogue, where radically honest conversations can occur in psychologically and socially safe environments that recognize structural barriers to women of color's centrality and visibility in organizations. Systemic changes are needed to remove the burden of claiming power and being seen and heard from those rendered invisible in such environments, and to enlist everyone in developing an awareness of, and constructive interventions for, what are often unintentional results of the structural marginalization of women of color at work.

Limitations and Future Directions

We purposefully focused our research on women of color to flesh out the construct of intersectional invisibility, which women of color disproportionately experience in culturally and normatively white and male spaces. Such a focus on those most affected by a social phenomenon is typical when identifying understudied social phenomena and developing new theoretical constructs around them. For example, sexual harassment theory and research started with studying the experiences of women targets of sexual harassment by men because this was, and is, the predominant form of sexual harassment in the workplace, even though all along people knew that some men are sexually harassed and that some sexual harassers are women. As such, the types of invisibility we identified in our study may also be experienced by men of color and white women, white men. Men of color may be exoticized as sexual objects, homogenized, and whitened at work, and white women may sometimes be erased and homogenized.

Future research should empirically assess the relative rates of these forms of invisibility for other groups. As with constructs grounded in

the experiences of groups most likely to have them, measures will need to be adapted to reflect the particular forms manifested for each group. Researchers may also find that these experiences manifest in different ways for other social groups, and members of such social groups may respond differently to them due to their greater (or lesser) access to social power. We studied in-depth the narratives of 65 women of color, necessitating relatively small numbers of women from each racialized group, and within those, variations in immigrant history, age, and organizational rank. We stopped our interviews once the themes emerging were theoretically saturated. A strength of qualitative research is that we can study patterns and processes of complex social phenomena in a way that quantitative research cannot. However, a limitation of qualitative research, by design, is the relative lack of generalizability compared with quantitative research. That is beyond the scope and purpose of the current project and would be worth exploring in future research.

Another promising direction for future research would be to more systematically examine different forms of social power in predicting the frequency and forms of, and responses to, experiences of intersectional invisibility in the workplace. To the extent that women of color differ from one another in being perceived as more proximal or distant from Whiteness (Abdulle, 2017; Ahmed, 2007; Anderson, 2015; Hirschfeld & Weaver, 2007; Rabelo et al., 2021), or more proximal or distant from masculinity (Berdahl et al., 2018; Butler, 1990; Connell, 2013), their experiences of invisibility should also differ. These racial and gender identities are what help to define women of color's nonprototypicality and thus intersectional invisibility at work, so these axes are the ones along which they might gain or lose social power. Future work should both theorize and more systematically study differences in invisibility experiences along these dimensions of difference.

Conclusion

Women of color are invisible compared with others because they are nonprototypical in both gender and race. We advance theory and research into this phenomenon of intersectional invisibility by studying differences among women of color in their experiences and responses to invisibility. Our study builds upon prior intersectional theorizing and invisibility research, buttressing this important and growing area of research by developing its intracategorical and theoretical complexity.

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(Appendices follow)

Appendix A

Participant Details

Pseudonym	Age	Residence	Nationality	Nationality of origin	Ethnicity	Profession
Zoya	20	Canada	Immigrant	Syria	Middle Eastern	Nonprofit fundraising
Sadie	22	Canada	Immigrant	Hong Kong	East Asian	Operations
Fatima	22	Canada	Canadian	Iran	Middle Eastern	Researcher
Beth	23	Canada	Canadian	Canadian	Black	Managerial
Ulani	23	Canada	Canadian	Canada	Black	Managerial
Aaliya	24	Canada	Immigrant	Uganda	Black	Tech
Taraji	24	Canada	Immigrant	Mexico	Latina	Tech
Bianca	24	Canada	Immigrant	Philippines	East Asian	Healthcare
Brianna	25	Canada	Canadian	El Salvador	Latina	Nonprofit lead
Chloe	25	Canada	Canadian	China	East Asian	Executive assistant
Lucy	25	Canada	Immigrant	Canada	East Asian	Nonprofit community engagement
Laila	26	Canada	Immigrant	Philippines	East Asian	Research assistant
Erika	26	United States	United States	United States	Black	Research assistant
Saba	27	Canada	Immigrant	Bangladesh	South Asian	Research assistant
Bahira	27	Canada	Immigrant	Bangladesh	South Asian	Nonprofit community engagement
Constance	27	Canada	Canadian	Philippines	East Asian	Nonprofit marketing
Thea	27	Canada	Canadian	Canada	East Asian	Environmental management
Blanca	28	Canada	Immigrant	Turkey	Middle Eastern	Researcher
Trisha	28	United States	Immigrant	Bangladesh	South Asian	Marketing
Natalie	28	Canada	Canadian	Ecuador	Latina	Operations
Kiara	29	Canada	Canadian	China	East Asian	Managerial
Tara	29	United States	United States	India	South Asian	Tech
Ria	30	Canada	Canadian	India	South Asian	Teacher
Mahira	30	Canada	Immigrant	Pakistan	South Asian	Nonprofit manager
Brinda	30	United States	Immigrant	India	South Asian	Consulting
Tania	30	Canada	Canadian	India	South Asian	Teacher
Naina	30	Canada	Canadian	India	South Asian	Teacher
Samantha	30	Canada	Canadian	Canada	Indigenous	University staff
Zoe	30	United States	United States	United States	Latina	Professor
Sofia	30	United States	United States	Mexico	Latina	Nonprofit
Kat	30	Canada	Canadian	Jamaica	Black	Teacher
Nevaeh	30	Canada	Immigrant	Kenya	Black	University staff
Freida	31	Canada	Canadian	Singapore	East Asian	Managerial
Eve	31	Canada	Canadian	China	East Asian	Nonprofit marketing
Serena	31	Canada	Canadian	Hong Kong	East Asian	Teacher
Keya	31	Canada	Canadian	India	South Asian	Hospitality
Brittany	31	Canada	Canadian	China	East Asian	Managerial
Bella	31	Canada	Immigrant	Mexico	Latina	Researcher
Padma	31	Canada	Immigrant	India	South Asian	Managerial
Kashaf	32	Canada	Canadian	Egypt	Middle Eastern	Finance
Mariah	32	Canada	Canadian	Puerto Rico	Latina	Researcher
Tyra	32	Canada	Immigrant	Taiwan	East Asian	Managerial
Valerie	32	Canada	Immigrant	Mexico	Latina	Consulting
Faiza	33	Canada	Immigrant	Turkey	Middle Eastern	Operations
Tessa	33	Canada	Immigrant	South Africa	Black	Research assistant
Camila	33	Canada	Immigrant	Columbia	Latina	Operations
Gemma	33	Canada	Immigrant	Korea	East Asian	Operations
Janelle	34	Canada	Immigrant	South Africa	Black	Researcher
Sandra	34	Canada	Immigrant	Kenya	Black	Managerial
Naomi	34	Canada	Immigrant	Mexico	Latina	Researcher
Emilia	35	Canada	Canadian	Costa Rica	Indigenous	Nonprofit manager
Tina	36	Canada	Canadian	Canada	Black	Healthcare
Liliana	36	Canada	Canadian	Chile	Indigenous	Nonprofit lead
Demi	37	Canada	Canadian	Canada	Black	Education
Viola	38	Canada	Canadian	Canada	Black	Government
Bina	38	Canada	Canadian	Iran	Middle Eastern	Managerial
Regina	40	Canada	Canadian	Canada	Black	Managerial
Daisy	41	Canada	Immigrant	Rwanda	Black	Accounting
Diana	43	Canada	Immigrant	Jamaica	Black	Wellness
Elena	44	Canada	Canadian	United States	Indigenous	Professor
Kiran	45	Canada	Canadian	India	South Asian	Lawyer
Kathy	46	Canada	Canadian	China	East Asian	Managerial

(Appendices continue)

Appendix A (continued)

Pseudonym	Age	Residence	Nationality	Nationality of origin	Ethnicity	Profession
Rita	48	Canada	Canadian	India	South Asian	Tech
Tooba	49	Canada	Immigrant	Bangladesh	South Asian	Tech
Nidhi	51	Canada	Canadian	India	South Asian	Doctor

Appendix B**Interview Protocol**

- Can you tell me how old you are and where you were born?
- Can you tell me about the first time you felt different from those around you? How did it make you feel? How did you respond, if at all?
- Have you ever felt like that again? Can you talk about similar experiences in your adulthood?
- Could you tell me about your current job? What does a regular workday or workweek look like for you?
- Do you feel comfortable at your workplace? Why/why not? How do you manage the discomfort?
- Do you feel like you belong at work? Why/why not? How does that make you feel? How, if at all, do you deal with or respond to it?
- Have you ever felt unnoticed at work? Can you give me an example? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
- How do you manage or deal with these experiences?
- What role do you think your identity plays in these workplace experiences? What about your race? What about your gender? Why?
- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Question added after 15 interviews

- Have you ever felt that people do not acknowledge you at work? Why/why not? Can you give me an example? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
- Have you ever felt that people don't see you accurately? Why/why not? Can you give me an example? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?

Question added after 30 interviews

- Have you ever felt invisible at work? Can you give me an example? How did it make you feel? How did you respond?
- How do you make sense of these experiences?
- How do you make decisions about how to respond to such experiences?
- Have your reactions and responses changed or evolved over time? What do you think has led to these changes? How do these changes affect how you make sense of experiences of invisibility?

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