Power, (in)visibility, and hypervisibility in the context of work

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Managing (In)visibility and hypervisibility in the Workplace

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“I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me… When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination, indeed, everything and anything except me.”

~ Ralph Ellison, Invisible Man
VISIBILITY

- Definition: The extent to which one is fully regarded and recognized by others (Brighenti, 2007; Simpson & Lewis, 2005)
- Typically conceptualized as positive
- Visibility → credibility, self-definition, & authenticity (Roberts, 2005)
- Implies one is seen in a manner that is consistent with how s/he want to be seen rather than group stereotypes

Hypervisibility

- Definition: the state of being extremely visible.
  - For the marginalized: Stereotypes + Difference = Deviant
  - Hypervisibility + deviance → increased surveillance, stereotype confirmation, & erasure of individual personal identity
Invisibility

- Definition: State or condition where one is not fully recognized or valued
  - Typically conceptualized as a negative negative
  - Context specific
  - Those are rendered invisible are disadvantaged
  - The invisible are denied recognition, power, & voice

Visibility Conditions Framework
(Buchanan & Settles, this volume)

Invisibility and hypervisibility are:
- Contrasts to visibility
- Embedded in power relationships
- Asymmetric and strategically used by powerful others
- Manifested differently for privileged v. marginalized
- Reflect and reify social hierarchies and boundaries
- Distortions of visibility
- Socially constructed
Visibility Conditions Framework: Extending current theory

- Challenging invisibility as uniformly negative
  - Strategic visibility (Settles, Buchanan, & Dotson, this volume)
  - Benefits of invisibility (Rabelo & Mahalingham, this volume)
- Influencing perceptions via social identity-based impression management (From this volume: Bennett et al.; Fernando et al.; Kallschmidt & Eaton; Settles et al.)
- Persevering with hope about creating new visibility narratives about one’s group (From this volume: Bennett et al.; Block et al.; Fernando et al.; Settles et al.; Wilkins-Yel et al.)

Future Directions for (In)visibility Theory Research

- Further examination of strategic invisibility (Settles, Buchanan, & Dotson, this volume)
  - e.g., alienating invisibility v. self-protective invisibility (Rabelo & Mahalingham, this volume)
- Increase understanding about motivations of and processes used by dominant group members (e.g., Kim et al., this volume)
- Deepen understanding of unique experiences across groups prior to attending to generalizability (e.g., From this volume: Corrington et al.; Dickens et al.; McCluney & Rabelo; Tu et al.)
- Use results to develop effective organizational interventions
THANK YOU!

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