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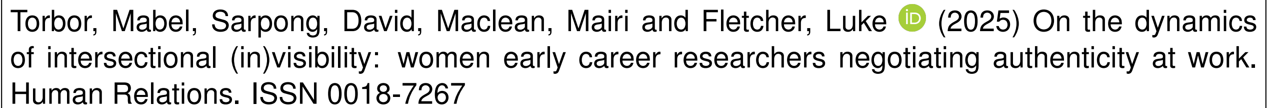

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On the dynamics of intersectional (in)visibility: Women early career researchers negotiating authenticity at work

Abstract

How do women negotiate and express authenticity in professional contexts where their presence and identities are largely rendered (in)visible? We draw on intersectional invisibility as our conceptual lens to explore how women early-career researchers subjectively negotiate authenticity given prevailing conditions of visibility, invisibility and hypervisibility at work. Based on semi-structured interviews with recipients of the Organisation for Women in Science from Developing countries (OWSD)-Elsevier award, we illuminate how (in)visible conditions shape the subjective negotiation of authenticity, informing the agentic capacity of women researchers to express themselves authentically in professional settings. Our findings reveal the negotiation of authenticity as closely tied to the performance of gender in a manner that aligns with perceived professionalism. This entails compartmentalising personal values when feeling invisible, experiencing heightened awareness of context-specific boundaries when visibility increases, and enacting adaptive agency when hypervisible. We thus posit authenticity as a continuous process of ongoing identity construction and negotiation rather than a static ideal.

Keywords: Authenticity, intersectional invisibility, early-career researchers, masculinisation, performance of gender, professionalism, visibility

Introduction

Authenticity may be construed as an alignment between one's external actions or behaviours at work and one's internal sense of self (Van den Bosch and Taris, 2014; Van den Bosch et al., 2018). Given this, we acknowledge the contemporary workplace as presenting a challenge to the minority worker who may feel disadvantaged and thus find their authenticity undermined or suppressed (Fletcher et al., 2024; Martinez et al., 2017). Indeed, existing scholarship

highlights how the intersecting identities of marginalised employees often limit their agency to navigate tensions between the competing social needs of belonging and standing out as distinctive (Brewer, 1991; McCluney and Rabelo, 2019). Yet, despite authenticity's association with better psychological health and related benefits, including its potential to enhance work engagement (Cha et al., 2019), little is known about how individuals conceive of and experience it (Thomaes, 2019), particularly those with marginalised characteristics. How these marginalised individuals negotiate and express authenticity in professional contexts where their presence and identities are largely rendered (in)visible provides the focus of this article. To this end, we ask, how do marginalised women in early career scientific research authentically express and negotiate authenticity in environments dominated by masculine norms?

In the literature, minority group members (e.g., women in masculine careers) are known to hide their stigmatised identities to conform with the dominant group (Barreto et al., 2006; Bennet et al., 2019; Clair et al., 2005). Bennet et al. (2019) describe how differentiation strategies enable women composers, for instance, to feel authentic and to change stereotypes. Moreover, the evaluation of minority groups through conditions of visibility, defined by states of invisibility, visibility, or hypervisibility (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019; Settles et al., 2019), intensifies the internalisation of experiences which in turn can heighten emotional and psychological distress (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019), and also result in their denial of recognition, legitimacy, and voice (Lewis and Simpson, 2010; Simpson and Lewis, 2005).

In this context, invisibility manifests as unacknowledged distinctiveness from dominant group members; visibility leads to recognition based on identity while often disregarding individual experiential uniqueness; and hypervisibility arises when numerical underrepresentation amplifies scrutiny of one's distinctiveness (Kanter, 1977; Lewis and Simpson, 2012; McCluney and Rabelo, 2019). These insights point to how being conditioned along a spectrum of visibility is important for individual self-determination and authenticity,

and for organisational outcomes such as commitment and a general sense of belonging (Buchanan and Settles, 2019; Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). While extant studies acknowledge this correlation, there is an inherent dearth of research on how authenticity as a desirable state of being is negotiated and enacted.

In this paper, we aim to extend the workplace authenticity literature by focusing on the accounts of 35 women early career researchers (ECRs) from 13 developing countries across the globe. We adopt Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach's (2008) notion of intersectional invisibility as a lens to explicate how women ECRs as non-prototypical members of the scientific research community negotiate authenticity under varying conditions of visibility. Intersectional invisibility as a lens enables us to capture the experiences of these women who remain largely invisible given their status as relative newcomers to the profession, their contextual situatedness, and gendered positions as women in science. A focus on early career life thus becomes crucial to recognise the nuanced nature of intra-group experience, since not all individuals in the same social group experience identical forms of (dis)advantage (Nazzal et al., 2024). For instance, accounts of women's experiences of work in masculinised environments often centre around those positioned at the pinnacle – individuals who have amassed considerable experience and have ostensibly 'overcome' prevailing obstacles (Bennett et al., 2019; Clair et al., 2005; Jamjoom and Mills, 2023; McCluney and Rabelo, 2019; Settles et al., 2019). This emphasis on the experiences of seasoned professionals, however, leaves a void in understanding how conditions of visibility manifest for those in the nascent stages of their career trajectories, possessing limited or no experiential grounding in their respective fields. This is an unfortunate oversight as nuanced understanding is pivotal to avoid the risk of unwarranted generalisations of experiences (Buchanan and Settles, 2019).

We hope that directing attention to women from developing countries will compensate for the frequent neglect of polyphonic voices and perspectives within such contexts in

mainstream academic discourses (Boje, 2001; Sarpong and Maclean, 2017; Sarpong et al., 2024). Our aim in this study is therefore to explore how conditions of visibility shape women ECRs' agentic capacity to experience and express themselves authentically in their professional settings. We theorise this as emerging through invisibility and inauthenticity; visibility and situated authenticity; and hypervisibility and hyper (in)authenticity. Our central argument is that authenticity is fluid and process-oriented, evolving and modifying under varying conditions of visibility, and involving the strategic adoption of mechanisms designed to achieve legitimacy. Our novel contributions in this paper are threefold. First, we extend research on the experiences of marginalised groups (Harris, 2017; Mitra, 2015; Nazzal et al., 2024) by exploring how women who possess additional subordinate identities as early-career researchers and professionals in developing countries with entrenched patriarchal norms, make sense of their experiences, and how this in turn shapes the negotiation of authenticity at work. Second, we shed light on how conditions of visibility (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019) continue to reflect and reify the persistence of inequities in organisations. In doing so, we respond to calls for more research on (in)visibility at work (Buchanan and Settles, 2019). Third, we help paint a more holistic picture of the contextually contingent nature of authenticity, which captures the notion that subjective feelings of authenticity vary across time and place.

Authenticity at work: Definitions, conceptualisations, and outcomes

Although multiple conceptualisations exist in the literature, modern psychological perspectives have long posited authenticity as a *trait* locating the personality as consistent across situations (Van den Bosch and Taris, 2014; Wood et al., 2008). In prevailing perspectives, authenticity is also conceptualised as a *state* (Sedikides et al., 2017), emphasising authenticity as situational, occurring if there is a match between an individual's enduring propensities (e.g., attitudes, values, beliefs, and personality) and their cognitions or actions in that situation (Lenton et al., 2013). Thus, authenticity is both state-like and trait-like, in that although there are some more

stable, enduring elements, authenticity is likely to fluctuate and ebb and flow over time and across different situations (Fleeson and Wilt, 2010). There is nevertheless a broad consensus that authenticity involves being aware of one's internal states (e.g., thoughts and feelings), subjectively experiencing them as one's own, and choosing to act in alignment with them (e.g., Fleeson and Wilt, 2010; Harter, 2002; Kernis, 2003; Tang et al., 2023). At work, authenticity is construed as the subjective experience of feeling that one can behave and act in one's workplace in ways that are congruent with one's true self (Fletcher and Everly, 2021). Yet, some scholars have questioned which 'self' we talk about when it comes to authenticity (Chen, 2019), since it is difficult, if not impossible, to really know one's self (e.g., Nisbett and Wilson, 1977). The self, indeed, is comprised of a collection of selves, and the self that is operating at any given moment is contingent at least in part on the prevailing context (Chen et al., 2006).

Thus, in understanding authenticity at work, it may be more apt to refer to the working self-concept (Markus and Wurf, 1987) – the particular subset of a person's array of stored self-knowledge that is active in the current context – than to use a term that connotes a single, monolithic self (Chen, 2019). This perspective of the working self goes in tandem with notions of authenticity work (Peterson, 2005), where individuals continuously work on appearing and remaining authentic and thus derive that authenticity as subject to continual change. Nonetheless, extant research has shown that experiencing authenticity at work breeds intrapersonal and interpersonal benefits for both organisation and employees (Deci and Ryan, 2012; Schlegel and Hicks, 2011). For the latter, people whose true sense of self is highly accessible report greater job satisfaction (Bhave and Glomb, 2016), and higher personal accomplishment, with negative consequences for those suppressing authenticity as they tend to experience emotional exhaustion (Grandey, 2003), burnout (Grandey et al., 2005), de-personalisation, low job satisfaction, and organisational withdrawal (e.g., Hulsheger and Schewe, 2011; Kruml and Geddes, 2000). From the organisational standpoint, Roberts et al.

(2009) argue that employees behaving authentically contribute more fully to employers, as fewer cognitive resources are devoted towards guarding against such issues as stigmatisation. Moreover, organisations may see benefits from employee authenticity via increased retention, since those presenting authentically are more satisfied and express lower turnover intentions.

Related literature likewise advances persistent but subtle arguments about power dynamics and their correlation to the expression of authenticity at work. Kifer et al. (2013) find that social power enhances subjective well-being by encouraging people to feel more authentic. Since high power liberates individuals to pursue rewards and be less vigilant against threats, it is linked to a greater likelihood of expressing state and trait consistent behaviours, while low power activates inhibitory tendencies (Keltner et al., 2003). Rickly-Boyd (2013: 684) argues that 'existential authenticity is not created in isolation within the individual, but occurs in fleeting moments, informed by social, cultural, and physical encounters'. Hence, authenticity becomes a culturally informed process of negotiation (Vannini and Williams, 2009) given the inherently subjective, dynamic characteristics of what constitutes truth, genuineness, and significance (Canavan and McCamley, 2021). It becomes clear that what is authentic and what is not depends on, and is shaped by, available discourses and the cultural habitat of images and narratives that inform the desires and ideas of people inhabiting a particular culture (Beerends and Aydin, 2021). As societal changes unfold, so too do the parameters defining authenticity (Vannini and Williams, 2009). The negotiation of authenticity becomes not merely a personal endeavour, as authenticity negotiation occurs in a social and commercial context (Moulard et al., 2021). Thus, in the contemporary workplace characterised by an imbalance of power relations, employees with socially devalued identities may feel pressure to conform to contextual factors even when their true selves do not align with the organisation's contextual norms (Cha et al., 2019; Summerville, 2022). The negotiation of authenticity assumes a multidimensional, performative aspect (Vannini and Williams, 2009), where understandings of

authenticity intertwine with self-presentation (Lehman et al., 2019). Authenticity is conceived as a reflection of internal coherence and integrity, while also encompassing adherence to the norms associated with a particular identity group (Moulard et al., 2021).

While extant research underscores the significance of experiencing and projecting authenticity (Ryan and Ryan, 2019), achieving congruence between personal authenticity and external perception is complex. Individuals navigate through various identities in response to contextual exigencies, yet discord arises when an identity diverges from the prevailing norms within a given social milieu (Stryker, 1968). To shed light on the above manifestations, intersectional invisibility provides a useful framework within which to view how authenticity is negotiated for women ECRs. ECRs possess additional subordinate group identities (given their positionality in the nascent stages of their career and, in our study, situatedness as developing country professionals), whose day-to-day experiences typically involve navigating complex challenges including discrimination and biases which emerge from conditions of (in)visibility. Here, we assume a constructionist perspective on authenticity, as human nature is understood as something that needs to be adjusted, corrected, or even defeated (Beerends and Aydin, 2021). As such, authenticity must be constructed, developed, or created instead of found or preserved, something people ‘do’ rather than something they ‘have’ or ‘are’. Being construed as ‘authentic’ hinges on maintaining a coherence between what you feel and what you say or do, depending on varying roles or situations (Ibarra, 2015). Thus, we argue that the conditions of invisibility (visibility, hypervisibility, and/or invisibility) which ostensibly emerge as a result of socio-organisational power dynamics, shape the doing of authenticity as (in)visible conditions actively change the way individuals navigate and interact with their environment. We therefore follow the logic of authenticity as non-static, but rather as a time- or context-specific state of being (e.g., Roberts et al., 2009; Sedikides et al., 2017), contingent upon variations in a person’s environment (Schmid, 2005; Van den Bosch and Taris, 2014).

Intersectional (In)visibility and the negotiation of authenticity under conditions of visibility

Intersectionality theory provides a framework for examining how systems of power and oppression such as gender, race, and class combine to produce unique forms of disadvantage (Crenshaw, 1991). More specifically, intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008) highlights the additive effects of holding multiple subordinate group identities, which generate distinct experiences of marginalisation compared to those with a single disadvantaged identity (Wilkins-Yel et al., 2019). This suggests that people holding two or more subordinate identities, in this case early career women from developing contexts, are neither prototypical representations of women in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) (who are typically presumed to be white), nor prototypical representations of scientists (who are typically presumed to be men). As a result, they often experience intersectional invisibility, as their identities are eclipsed by those of dominant groups.

In STEM research careers, women ECRs are reported to face heightened marginalisation due to their non-prototypical status of scientist, a phenomenon which undermines their credibility, competence, and sense of belonging (MacLachlan, 2006). Moreover, they are confronted by various conditions of visibility (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019), including states of invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility. In this regard, invisibility manifests as an unacknowledged distinctiveness from dominant group members; visibility results in recognition based on identity but often neglects the individual's unique experiential qualities; and hypervisibility occurs when numerical underrepresentation magnifies scrutiny of one's distinctiveness (Kanter, 1977; Lewis and Simpson, 2012; McCluney and Rabelo, 2019). In examining the experiences of microaggressions, subtle manifestations of aggression, among graduate women of colour in STEM, Wilkins-Yel et al. (2019) show that the non-prototypical status of gender and race in STEM disciplines renders these individuals as both hypervisible

and invisible, a condition which exposes them to implicit and explicit microaggressive acts of exclusion. On such occasions, individuals may simultaneously confront the tensions of being acknowledged for their identity, yet marginalised or stereotyped due to the perceived mismatch with the dominant norms. Likewise, Settles et al. (2019) found that while academics of colour are highly visible, their token status paradoxically leads to feelings of invisibility, as their accomplishments are often disregarded and their sense of belonging undermined. Concurrently, they are subjected to hypervisibility, where their actions and behaviours are subjected to intense scrutiny. These and related studies emphasise how the visibility of marginalised individuals does not necessarily translate into true recognition or integration but can contrastingly result in a simultaneous erasure and overexposure.

In our study, these conditions are shaped by intersecting subordinate identities of early-career status, situatedness in developing contexts, and dominant gender identity as women. By extension, these ECRs are rendered invisible due to their divergence from the prototypical scientist identity, while simultaneously maintaining visibility due to their gender. Furthermore, they are subjected to hypervisibility, experiencing heightened scrutiny and a magnification of perceived otherness-based failures (Brighenti, 2007; Kanter, 1977; Lewis and Simpson, 2010). This dualistic nature of their identities – as women ECRs from developing countries – results in various aspects of their experiences being either obscured or highlighted, contingent upon the contextual interpretation of their identities, as they neither fully benefit from recognition nor entirely evade scrutiny. Consequently, understanding the experiences of this group of women cannot be fully captured by analysing gender in isolation to other, less visible characteristics which co-construct one another within broader systems of power.

In accounting for identities, we recognise that intersectionality is deeply embedded within fields of social power, acknowledging the structural inequalities that shape the lived experiences of marginalised women in specific contexts (Cho et al., 2013). As Crenshaw

(1991) highlights, debates within intersectional studies should move beyond a focus on categories and identities themselves, emphasizing instead how these categories are shaped by the particular dynamics under investigation. This shift entails transcending simplistic notions of difference, such as merely tallying the number of marginalised identities a person holds, to examine the unique qualitative experiences that arise from specific configurations of identity and context (Bhattacharyya and Berdahl, 2023; Buchanan and Wiklund, 2021). Accordingly, this study considers the relationality between structure and identity (MacKinnon, 2013) by illustrating how social power relations within STEM research careers impose identities that structurally marginalise certain groups. Thus, we conceptualise both identity and power structures as co-existing and mutually reinforcing, perpetuating inequalities for members of intersectional groups in competition with dominant groups over resources (Verloo, 2013).

Drawing on this intersectional invisibility framework, we acknowledge that individuals with multiple subordinate group identities have different interaction experiences at work than those with dominant differences (Clair et al., 2005). This intragroup categorisation (McCall, 2005) is essential, prompting critical inquiries into the structural dynamics that perpetuate power imbalances and inequities within scientific research communities. Such experiences have implications for the ways in which individuals are able to 'be themselves', influencing how authentic they can be in masculinised spaces. Indeed, past research has identified the extent to which women in male-dominated spaces adapt their behaviours to 'fit in' (Clair et al., 2005), often shifting identities and employing tactics of concealment and fabrication to mitigate the negative consequences associated with visible and invisible experiences and assert their legitimacy as professionals (Bennett et al., 2019; Dickens et al., 2019; Wasserman and Frenkel, 2020) within their context of practice (Marlow and McAdam, 2012) and indeed broader social networks (Watson, 2012). The existence of masculine micro-politics within organisations indicates that women who are adept at navigating these dynamics are more likely to achieve

success within such contexts (Marlow, 2013; Olutayo, 2021). However, radical strategies of assimilation and 'fitting in' pose significant challenges and barriers to career progression (Acker, 2009), since those who are unable to 'play by the rulebook' may either leave these industries entirely or experience impediments to career advancement, contributing further to the phenomenon of the leaky pipeline (Arifeen and Syed, 2020).

As women, especially in male-dominated fields, continue to report experiences of being misidentified in their careers (Bullock, 2019), they must assess whether the rewards (in terms of money, power, and status) of maintaining their role are sufficient to compensate for the detrimental impacts to their other identities (Meister et al., 2017). Following this rationale, the negotiation of authenticity at work can be regarded as being among the various approaches individuals employ to adjust to the work milieu, aiming to achieve desirable outcomes including subjective job satisfaction (Bhave and Glomb, 2016), higher personal accomplishment, and overall well-being. Notably, existing studies have not adequately explored the contextual implications of invisible conditions, particularly pertaining to those from the Global South. There is thus a critical need to shift the focus towards this area given its significant importance in elucidating social and organisational inequalities.

Drawing on international invisibility as a conceptual lens, we lay emphasis on women in early-career research who remain largely invisible for myriad reasons. These include a lack of experience relative to more seasoned colleagues, the desire to 'fit in', and the continued existence of gendered inequities within the academic career community (Huang et al., 2020). We contend that since women ECRs possess multiple subordinate identities and do not typically conform to the prototypes of their constituent dominant groups (Tu et al., 2019), the doing and subjective experience of authenticity will involve the strategic adoption of mechanisms that aim to find a balance between fitting in and standing out, and are intended to

achieve recognition as legitimate, competent, valuable, and valued members of the scientific research community (Castro and Collins, 2021).

Methodology

We conducted an exploratory study with women ECRs from 13 developing countries, all of whom are past recipients of the Organisation for Women in Science from Developing countries (OWSD)-Elsevier award for women in scientific research. We aimed to understand how women ECRs from developing countries, which exhibit shared characteristics of underdevelopment, weak institutions, and entrenched patriarchal norms, navigated their nascent careers to gain success and international recognition through their work, and overcame challenges associated with working in such contexts. We were especially keen to understand their experiences of the conditions of visibility (invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility) and how these shape the felt and expressed forms of authenticity in their daily lives as researchers.

Research context

Given our aim to understand how marginalised women negotiate authenticity at work, we were attracted to a unique empirical context, women in STEM research careers who have been historically known to face gendered inequalities that persist within the scientific career community (Huang et al., 2020). In particular, we were drawn, as mentioned, to previous award recipients of the OWSD-Elsevier foundation awards for Early-Career Women Scientists in the Developing World. The award programme initially began in 2010 with prizes being given annually on a rotating basis among the disciplines of Biological Sciences, Engineering Sciences, and Physical Sciences to recognise young women scientists from developing countries. Each year, winners are selected from the following five regions: the Arab region; Central and South Asia; East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific; Latin America and the Caribbean; and Sub-Saharan Africa. Each of the five winners wins prize money (US$5,000 in 2023) and is afforded the opportunity to present their papers at the annual conference of the

American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS), attended by leading scientists, engineers, educators, and policymakers from around the world.

Our lay understanding of authenticity as 'staying true to oneself' and knowledge of women from resource constrained countries in male-dominated careers provides a valuable context for examining how authenticity manifests in their daily professional lives. Succeeding in the competitive world of science is challenging under the best of circumstances, but early career women scientists in countries with scarce resources and competing cultural expectations face significant additional obstacles as they strive to excel at careers in science. The stories of these exceptional women, who are breaking through the glass ceiling and achieving remarkable success in their scientific fields, present a rich empirical foundation for exploring how authenticity is negotiated and expressed in their professional journeys.

Procedures

Extant literature shows how the representation of women and minorities in scientific careers is not only a matter of equality but is also essential for meeting workforce demands (Gabster et al., 2020). Generally, developing countries are known to be particularly lacking in data pertaining to gender equity, but the above-mentioned regions have been identified as having the lowest numbers of women in science careers (Beintema, 2017). Women ECRs from developing countries thus represent a highly invisible group not particularly engaged in ongoing scholarly discourses. For these reasons, the recruitment strategies employed follow the criterion sampling technique (Patton, 1990), as participants were purposefully selected because they met the following inclusion criteria. First, they self-identified as women early-career scientists from, and based in, a developing country, and second, they were a former recipient of the OWSD-Elsevier Foundation Award for Early Career Women Scientists.

The first author contacted the OWSD foundation to request information that would be relevant to the research. The feedback suggested that, although the foundation was happy to

hear about the study, they could not provide personal information from previous awardees without their consent. However, the OWSD foundation stated they were happy to put in a word with former award recipients prior to their being contacted. The sample size was determined according to the guidelines specified by Charmaz (2008) and Bell et al. (2022), who recommend following the principles of saturation until no new insights emerge from the data, and theoretical sampling, which focuses upon obtaining an adequate sample size to facilitate saturation (Bowen, 2008). This study relied on the qualitative collection and analysis of primary and secondary data. Table 1 summarises the data collected for the study.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Data collection concluded at 35 interviews. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted by the first author and, given the geographical dispersion of respondents, interviews were conducted remotely in the UK via zoom. Each interview lasted around 60 minutes. Interview protocols focused on addressing the core research question regarding how invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility manifest, and how this shapes the negotiation of authenticity. Due to a lack of fluency in English on the part of some participants, participants agreed to supplement the interviews with written responses to the interview questions to help fill any gaps that may have resulted from difficulties of expression.

Likewise, secondary data, in the form of archival documents and digital footprints, were collected to supplement primary data obtained from the interviews. This concerned data pertaining to the career profiles of the research participants, as available in public domain websites such as the Elsevier webpage, YouTube, ResearchGate, LinkedIn, personal blogs, and reference sheets made available to the researchers by the OWSD foundation (Thompson et al., 2021). This secondary data allowed for the corroboration and substantiation of the primary semi-structured interview data to ensure its trustworthiness (Harris, 2001).

Participants

Biodata obtained showed that participants were between five and seven years post PhD at the time of receiving the award. The eldest participant at the time of interview was 58 years old and the youngest 33 years old, with an average age of 44 years. Overall, 15 participants (42.8%) were married, 17 (48.5%) were mothers, two (5.7%) were unmarried and childfree, and 10 (28%) chose not to disclose their age, marital or parental status. Five participants hailed from the Arab region, eight from Central and South Asia, four from East and Southeast Asia and the Pacific, six from Latin America and the Caribbean, and seven from Sub-Sahara Africa. Respondents capture a range of diversity in scientific research domains (synthetic and nano chemistry, epidemiology, nuclear medicine, atomic energy, bioengineering, parasitology, applied mathematics, and atmospheric physics). To protect participant identities for the purposes of confidentiality, we categorise these more broadly as physics, biology, engineering, mathematics, and chemistry, since interviewees might easily be identified under their niche areas due to the exclusivity of the award scheme. All participants were accorded pseudonyms.

Data analysis

Data analysis followed in the fashion of a constructionist thematic analysis (Byrne, 2021) to discern and report key themes and categories (Clarke and Braun, 2013). A constructionist approach rejects the idea of objectively understanding the meaning and interpretations of our social world (Atewologun, 2018). On the contrary, it recognises that meaning making and interpretation are constructed through social processes and interaction (Young and Collin, 2004). In approaching the data through the lens of intersectional invisibility (Purdue Vaughns and Eibach), our primary objective was critically to examine how conditions of visibility unfold for this sub-group embedded in masculinised organisational settings. The analytical methodology involved deliberate coding to capture participants' interpretations. A thorough review of interviews was conducted to identify statements reflecting participants' perceptions and arguments concerning their experiences of (in)authenticity in the workplace, with a specific

focus on contextualising these experiences within the dynamics of (in)visibility. Throughout this analytical phase, a deliberate openness was maintained to emergent themes that might not have been previously outlined in the existing literature (Locke, 2001).

Thus, during our analysis, we discerned two notable aspects. Firstly, women ECRs reported intensively about experiences of feeling unseen, seen, and overly seen in their career trajectory. Secondly, their negotiation of authenticity drew heavily on these instances of being seen or unseen. These discourses helped our general understanding of how women ECRs perceive authenticity as well as what is considered authentic expression in their contexts of practice. In our coding we focused on distinct concepts, phrases, and words (Creswell and Poth, 2016) that were used to refer to these conditions of visibility and the negotiation of authenticity. Transcribed data was constantly read and discussed between the authors in multiple meetings to create a shared sense of the data. The next stage involved discerning connections among and between the initial first-order codes, ultimately giving rise to the formation of higher-order conceptual codes. This advancement extended beyond the initial descriptive delineation of data, characteristic of first-order coding, and marked a transition to a heightened level of abstraction. During this phase, a more profound exploration was undertaken, leading to the conceptualisation of coherent and meaningful themes (Corbin and Strauss, 1990). Finally, a deliberation among all authors ensued, with the objective of identifying recurring patterns which echoed our interpretation of the analysed data. Subsequently, three overarching aggregate dimensions were generated, as shown in Figure 1.

Throughout the analysis, we were mindful of participants' archival data which provided valuable context, especially regarding participants' backgrounds and the challenges they faced at that time. By corroborating and aligning these earlier narratives with the stories shared during our interviews, we were able to enhance consistency and mitigate potential biases associated

with retrospective accounts. This approach was particularly useful, given that most participants are now in mid-career and therefore relying significantly on retrospective memory.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

The process of data collection and interpretation is significantly influenced by the perspectives of both researchers and participants (Van den Brink and Benschop, 2012). The first author, a woman ECR originally from a developing country, brought a nuanced understanding of such contexts, thereby shaping a research position characterised by ‘engaged subjectivity’ (Dhamoon, 2011: 239). This positioning fostered a sense of partial common ground that facilitated a reciprocal exchange of experiences at interview. Nevertheless, acknowledging the potential for bias introduced by the first author’s background and familiarity with developing country dynamics, all other authors, seasoned scholars who are less familiar with such contexts, assumed the role of ‘devil’s advocate’. Their primary responsibility involved posing critical questions and presenting alternative interpretations of the dataset. This approach was implemented to counterbalance potential biases and ensure a rigorous analytical procedure (Clarke and Braun, 2013). Thus, this insider-outsider approach (Smets et al., 2015) ensured the reliability and trustworthiness of our research findings and interpretations.

Findings

Our findings, captured in three distinct but durationally indivisible themes highlight how the negotiation of authenticity emerges under different visibility conditions. By durationally indivisible, we mean that these themes should not be viewed as a sequential series of events, but rather understood as a whole. Our findings reveal that these women experienced a profound sense of inauthenticity at the early stages of their careers, particularly when perceiving themselves as inconspicuous. Their anticipation was that their authentic self would emerge as their visibility increased, expecting that professional recognition – rather than characteristics such as gender, experience, or geographical location – would shape their identity. However,

despite occasional moments of authenticity arising with greater visibility, participants expressed ongoing concerns about fully 'being themselves.' Increased visibility often brought heightened scrutiny, leading to feelings of both authenticity and inauthenticity. We thus find through the narratives of women ECRs, particularly those from developing and patriarchal contexts, that authenticity is not a monolithic experience. Instead, it involves a continuous (re)negotiation depending on where one finds oneself on the visibility spectrum. Our findings are organised according to three key themes: *Invisibility and Inauthenticity*, which addresses how participants experienced inauthenticity, often through strategic conformity, as a necessary adaptation and a means to achieve broader career goals; *Visibility and Situated Authenticity*, which explores how authenticity emerged through acts of resistance and the navigation of intersectional marginalisation; and finally *Hypervisibility and Hyper (In)authenticity*, which examines how (in)authenticity was shaped by stereotype threat, highlighting the fluid and context-dependent nature of authenticity. We highlight participant voices through the use of direct quotations.

Invisibility and Inauthenticity

Inauthenticity as strategic conformity. As participants recounted their experiences, an initial observation revealed their need to 'perform' certain roles or embody alternative, often inauthentic identities when beginning their careers, though these performances were not anticipated to endure. At this stage, manifestations of inauthenticity were framed as 'strategic' adaptation to conform to normative expectations, particularly through the performance of gender roles that facilitated integration into the organisational milieu. This behaviour appeared to be shaped by preconceived notions about how women navigate male-dominated fields, particularly within patriarchal structures. This internalised perception led participants, albeit unconsciously, to engage in their own marginalisation (Hein and Ansari, 2022), viewing such self-subjugation as a necessary means to achieve a degree of visibility within such

environments. Crucially, narratives surrounding early career experiences expressed a profound sense of illegitimacy. This feeling of being perceived as illegitimate arose not solely from their gender as women but was further compounded by their status as early-career women in male-dominated disciplines, as well as the socio-cultural contexts in which they were situated. Participants internalised the belief that they bore personal responsibility for establishing themselves as legitimate scientists. Consequently, they regarded any activity that could facilitate this legitimacy as desirable, even when such actions were incongruent with their personal values or sense of fulfilment. The following excerpts vividly capture these dynamics:

> ‘I made peace with the fact that if I wanted to be seen, I needed to bend a little…or a lot as I soon found out. I wasn’t thinking about my own values or personal happiness back then. I was trying to prove that I belonged.’ (Grace, Physics)

> ‘There were days I had to blend in and be one of the guys. There were days I played up my femininity. Be more agreeable, less assertive. It felt unnatural sometimes, but I convinced myself I will be judged differently if I didn’t do these things. If this is what it took to be seen as someone they could work with and potentially support, then so be it.’ (Aminah, Chemistry)

The use of emotional labour characterised by the regulation of feelings to align with expected norms (Brotheridge and Grandey, 2002) to present oneself as professional emerged as a crucial mechanism through which these women managed their identities and interactions. This emotional regulation often served to present a professional façade, yet simultaneously concealed aspects of their authentic selves. The feeling of invisibility in their professional spaces propelled them to seek visibility, leading to a presentation of selves frequently masked and distanced from their personal realities. In environments where patriarchal norms were deeply embedded in socio-organisational life, the apparent lack of voice and recognition that early-career women experienced necessitated the subordination of personal identity in favour

of fulfilling institutional and social expectations. This was exacerbated by prevailing social practices within the scientific community, compounded by weak relational networks with male colleagues and the scarcity of senior women mentors who might provide critical guidance and support. As a result, these women felt compelled to conform to masculinised professional norms, which often involved the suppression of certain dimensions of their identity. When questioned about this expectation, participants highlighted the challenges of manoeuvring within these gendered dynamics. They spoke of the internal conflict between their personal values and the professional roles they felt pressured to inhabit, indicating a pervasive sense of isolation and the psychological toll of constant emotional regulation. These insights reveal the broader implications of identity management for women in male-dominated fields, where professional survival often hinges on conformity to established gendered expectations, even at the expense of individual authenticity. The following excerpts are illustrative:

> 'The hardest part for me was, I started feeling like I don't belong, like I'm just filling a quota or something. The guys bonded over many things. I always felt isolated and there wasn't even a colleague I could speak to that I thought could understand me. I hate being called emotional by these guys, so I try not to show too much disappointment or even enthusiasm' (Mae, Physics)
>
> 'I am only one of two women in this lab. It's all men, and the way they do stuff is just…different. We wanted to be here, and we know sometimes you have to play by their rules if you want to get ahead, although I admit it comes at a cost to myself. Mostly emotionally and psychologically. But it gets better with time.' (Zuri, Physics)

Narratives such as these emphasised the emotional and psychological costs involved in reconciling professional survival and individual authenticity, revealing a persistent struggle to reconcile personal values with systemic norms.

Inauthenticity as means-end. Additional narratives revealed that conformity extended beyond the use of emotional labour, encompassing intellectual self-censorship. This involved the suppression of intellectual and creative expressions, alongside the adjustment of research interests to align with the agendas of senior colleagues. Such forms of self-regulation were driven by the need to secure legitimacy, avoid professional marginalisation, and maintain favourable relationships with influential figures who could facilitate career advancement. While these practices perpetuated existing power structures and limited the diversity of thought within scientific discourse, most participants viewed them as a necessary compromise. They expressed the hope that, after consolidating their status within the field, they would eventually gain the autonomy to realise their intellectual potential, as the following example demonstrates:

> 'Our labs run on funding and, being an early-career researcher, it's extremely challenging in this country to even secure funding if you're in a senior post. I work with a senior academic who has the money to run the lab. And I've had to realign my research because, you know, I want to work with him. Having his name on my CV will take me far. I think this is a trade-off many of us are willing to make. It is how we survive. You can't be headstrong and do things your own way.' (Sara, Chemistry)

Sara's insight highlights the dynamics of power, survival, and compromise that women ECRs navigate in the scientific research community, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Such accounts reflect the reality that access to funding and senior academic support are essential components of career advancement. The necessity to realign research agendas with the priorities of senior colleagues or labs with financial resources illustrates the power asymmetry that ECRs often face. For Sara, working under a senior academic who controlled funding offered not only financial stability for her research but also a significant career advantage, as having a renowned academic's name on her CV enhanced credibility and marketability. This alignment, while providing short-term professional benefits, often led to a

loss of intellectual agency and the suppression of personal values or innovative research trajectories. The pressure to conform to dominant norms, combined with the precarious nature of funding in early career stages, exacerbated these compromises. Thus, we see that at the onset of the early career life, issues of invisibility led to the compartmentalisation of personal values which invariably induced the sentiment and expression of inauthenticity.

Visibility and Situated Authenticity

Authenticity as resistance. Participants believed that gaining some form of visibility facilitated new forms of subtle resistance against the marginalisation they previously encountered. In their earlier experiences when they felt largely invisible, they were often constrained by the need to conform to hegemonic norms, in terms of both gender and professional conduct. However, as they gained visibility – through their publications, networking, or collaborative projects – they were able to assert more authentic identities. Their narratives reveal that this process involved strategic and selective self-expression, where participants identified opportune moments in which they felt sufficiently empowered to assert their genuine positions on key issues, thereby subverting prevailing norms and expectations. Thus, this engagement with authenticity was not constant. Rather, participants emphasised the importance of seeking moments where they could express their authentic selves. In this context, authenticity was deployed as a symbolic tool of resistance, manifesting through subtle rather than overt display of defiance. The overarching aim was to reach a point where women ECRs could contest certain entrenched elements of the dominant discourse by voicing authentic opinions or engaging in behaviours that are typically discouraged. Zuri and Aminah expressed this sentiment:

> 'Previously I just wanted to be recognised for my competence and not because I'm a woman. Now I have some recognition around here. That makes it easier to express myself more – carefully of course. You know, we will always be judged differently so one cannot be too careful. For instance, when I first started, I would laugh at the

> inappropriate jokes some of my colleagues make, even though I don't find them funny. They called me 'mummy' of the lab. I didn't like that, but went along with it. These days, I don't laugh when such jokes are made, and I politely told the guys I'm too young to be a mum. I think they got the message.' (Zuri, Physics)
>
> 'It depends on who's in the room and how much trust I have in the people around me. If I feel supported, I can take more risks with what I say, but that's not always possible.' (Aminah, Chemistry)

Such statements illustrate how the gradual acquisition of visibility enabled women ECRs like Aminah to strategically engage in subtle forms of resistance. Authenticity thus became a symbolic tool with which women ECRs exhibited defiance, selectively asserting authenticity to challenge norms and expectations.

Authenticity as navigating Intersectional marginalisation. Participants further revealed what we construe as authenticity gaps, that is, moments where professional roles demanded actions that conflicted with their intrinsic sense of self. Although many described the dissonance that arose from role boundaries as resulting in a perceived loss of agency, participants felt compelled to do these things. Despite this, some participants noted that awareness of authenticity gaps enabled them to seek opportunities for more authentic self-expression, although such moments were often fleeting. One participant reflected on her experiences:

> 'I find myself deliberately trying to be more assertive in meetings. Then at social gatherings, I am careful to not be too loud or over the top. It is not about changing who I am, but rather about presenting different aspects of myself that resonate with the specific demands of each situation.' (Leila, Biology)

These themes capture the contextual sensitivity that visibility brings in negotiating authenticity, with participants revealing a heightened consciousness of the varying demands posed by different professional contexts. Thus, the extent to which women ECRs feel they can

express their true selves is constrained by the socio-cultural and professional boundaries of the environment in which they operate. In many instances, participants felt that prevailing patriarchal norms, combined with traditional expectations of deference to authority, constrained their capacity to fully voice opinions even with visibility as legitimate scientists. Relatedly, several participants reported that their respectability as women was undermined in their societies due to close proximity to members of the opposite sex. For instance, Emi expressed feeling significantly constrained in her ability to network, even within her own work group, as her efforts to establish professional relationships could be misinterpreted. Consequently, despite her increased visibility, the socio-organisational environment restricted her ability to freely engage with many of her male colleagues. She explained:

> 'Here, women are not expected to get too close with members of the opposite sex. Even if you decide to network with men, there's always that limit as to the extent to which it can go. But we all know the importance of building networks in this profession. It would be unheard of to ask a male colleague to go sit down for tea or coffee to talk about work. I have to resort to emails in most cases. When you are at work, you have to be conscious of these things or else your you might lose your respect as an honourable woman' (Emi, Biology)

Importantly, these findings underscore acquired visibility not as synonymous with unbridled authenticity, but as an avenue to a higher awareness of contextual boundaries that affects the doing of authenticity. While increased visibility through publications, networking, and academic collaboration offered women ECRs a platform to assert themselves, it also exposed them to scrutiny and the rigid expectations of socio-organisational norms. As a result, visibility became a double-edged sword, where opportunities for self-expression were available, but were tempered by the awareness of professional, socio-cultural, and institutional limitations. Women ECRs are thus often compelled to manoeuvre within a precarious

environment where asserting their true identities can carry professional risks, such as alienation from colleagues, or reputational harm, particularly in environments that enforce strict gender norms or hierarchical power structures. Consequently, authenticity becomes a strategic, calculated endeavour, where women ECRs must weigh the benefits of self-expression against the potential fallout of transgressing deeply entrenched expectations. Thus, visibility, while empowering, also amplifies the awareness of the socio-cultural and geopolitical constraints that shape the boundaries of authentic engagement in their academic and professional lives.

HyperVisibility and Hyper (In)Authenticity

(In)authenticity as temporal fluidity. Throughout participants' narratives, it became apparent that the enactment of authenticity revolved around issues of conformity, gender performance, and subtle resistance to some aspects of their marginalisation under specific contexts or situations. Consistently needing to adapt their professional identity in response to varying academic environments became a necessity. Driven by contextual demands, the *temporal fluidity of authenticity* emerged as a crucial theme. Participants described a continual process of adaptive identity negotiation, emphasising the need to navigate professional environments dynamically. The fluidity of authenticity was evident as participants adjusted their expressions to align with diverse contexts, demonstrating a keen awareness of the situational nuances that surround their professional lives. One participant, reflecting on her experiences, observed:

> 'When you start on this career path, you must understand that you need to prove yourself to gain respect. I don't know if the guys worry about that too, but I know for us women, we have to be extremely good at what we do to be taken seriously. It's almost as if there's no room for error. Now with my experience and some successes, I'm letting myself go a bit more. I am human, after all. I can't be perfect, even in my career. But that was hard to do in the beginning.' (Maya, Engineering)

The success that Maya mentioned relates to winning the internationally recognised OWSD-Elsevier award. Yet, as corroborated by many participants, despite the opportunities this afforded by way of increased visibility, life in the spotlight also came with its own challenges. Here, Maya alluded to the paradox of heightened visibility further amplifying her freedom to express herself, as the expectations intensified due to international recognition:

> ‘I remember after winning the award, I received many invites to programmes and had some TV interviews. It felt good, but with it came intense scrutiny. The more visible I became, the less freedom I felt to express myself without judgment or heightened expectations.’ (Mina, Physics)

The above quote demonstrates the temporal and situational fluidity of authenticity, revealing how increased visibility and heightened expectations shape authenticity through intensified pressures of professional performance.

(In)authenticity as response to stereotype threat. This reduced freedom that accompanied great accomplishments, according to participants, largely stemmed from the threat of being stereotyped. The fear of being judged based on preconceived notions about being a woman and being from a developing country was a recurrent theme. According to participants, this intersection amplified the pressure to overcome not only gender-related biases but also preconceived notions tied to their nationality. Participants narrated instances where they felt at risk of confirming negative stereotypes about their social group, and the impact this might have on their career progression (Sarpong and Maclean, 2021).

This duality of stereotypes resulted in an additional layer of scrutiny, rendering self-expression challenging, as one ECR clarified:

> ‘I always feel this pressure, you know? Like people are expecting me to behave in a particular manner. It’s always there, in the back of my mind whenever I travel outside the country for a conference, or anything work related.’ (Giselle, Biology)

Our findings unveil the impact of this stereotype threat on participants' self-confidence and self-efficacy. Stereotypes concerning the capabilities of women from developing countries create internalised pressure, inducing self-doubt, leading ECRs to question their own competence:

> 'You start questioning your abilities, wondering if your achievements are seen as genuine or if people think you're just an exception. It's hard to fully embrace your success when you know there's this stereotype lurking in the background.' (Lucia, Mathematics)

Yet, this very hypervisibility also afforded them increased opportunities to assorted situations where there could fully 'be themselves'. For instance, one participant recounted how the visibility from winning the award had allowed other researchers to reach out to her, from both home and abroad, to collaborate on projects that she felt very passionate about. In a related instance, the heightened visibility enabled these women to join supportive networks and spaces where it was easier to 'be themselves', such as being part of the network of past awardees of the award. Consequently, while hypervisibility may amplify exposure to intense scrutiny (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019) – and as a result heightened feelings and expressions of inauthenticity – it simultaneously enhances prospects for professional advancement and personal empowerment in spaces that promote greater authenticity. Thus, opportunities for both authenticity and performativity are magnified at this hypervisible stage in their careers.

Discussion

Following Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach's (2008) notion of 'intersectional invisibility', we have empirically explored how women ECRs, as non-prototypical members of the scientific community, encountered unique challenges that complicated their experience and expression of authenticity. These complications arise and manifest through varying conditions of visibility under which they are perceived and evaluated (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019). We have argued

that for women ECRs, particularly those who share similar socio-collective identities from developing countries, these experiences often remain obscured and subsumed within dominant narratives given their dual positionality as both early career professionals and women situated in patriarchal socio-organisational contexts. Thus, for early career women in such contexts, negotiating authenticity lies in strategically aligning self-presentation within the socially constructed gendered expectations and idealised images of a 'scientist.' For participants, the negotiation of authenticity emerges through conditions of (1) invisibility and inauthenticity necessitating compartmentalisation of personal values when they felt invisible, leading to increased feelings and expression of inauthenticity; (2) visibility and situated authenticity that triggered an awareness of context-specific boundaries when visible, leading to some moments of authenticity; and (3) hypervisibility and hyper in/authenticity which encouraged the enactment of adaptive agency when hypervisible, leading to magnified opportunities for both authenticity and inauthenticity. Authenticity thereby emerges as a process of ongoing identity construction and negotiation rather than a static, enduring ideal. Moreover, the suppression or alteration of aspects of identity to avoid or reduce invisibility at work and strategically remain visible despite professional progress played out as unconsciously participating in their own subjugation (Hein and Ansari, 2022). Gender performativity emerges as the conduit through which women ECRs craft their own narratives of authenticity. By recognising their contextual embeddedness and its attendant socio-organisational expectations, individuals situate themselves as authentic subjects within their self-constructed narratives (Banet-Weiser, 2021).

This paper offers three main contributions to the workplace authenticity literature. First, we contribute to scholarship on individual-level authenticity, namely the subjective experience of alignment between one's internal sense of self and its external expression (Van den Bosch and Taris, 2014; Van den Bosch et al., 2018). We do so by theorising the role of intersectional invisibility, considering the implications of possessing subordinate group identities through the

margins of intersectionality (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach, 2008). By explicating the strategies individuals employ to navigate tensions between being true to themselves and meeting expectations, we uncover the complexity of achieving an authentic self for individuals or groups whose marginalised statuses often lead to a lack of agency in navigating competing social needs (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019), but who nonetheless are able to demonstrate some agential capacity through adaptation of self-expression based on situational demands while still attempting to remain aligned with their core values. Authenticity, in this sense, is not just a matter of individual expression, but also a site of resistance against dominant narratives in ways that mitigate the effects of marginalisation, hence, a form of agency and resistance against limiting environments. Following Lenton et al. (2013), our study explicates the subjective experience of (in)authenticity as being calibrated in relation to external pressures. These pressures emanate from a lack of autonomy, not merely from the discrepancy between feelings and behaviours. By extension, our study highlights the active agency of women ECRs, as non-prototypical members of the scientific research community, in performing their authenticity.

Second, viewing authenticity through the lens of intersectional invisibility necessitates an acknowledgement of the role of conditions of visibility (invisibility, visibility, and hypervisibility) therein (McCluney and Rabelo, 2019). While prior research has identified the extent to which women in male-dominated spaces adapt their behaviours to ‘fit in’ (Bennett et al., 2019; Clair et al., 2005; Dickens et al., 2019; Wasserman and Frenkel, 2020), relatively scant attention has been devoted to the processes through which this behavioural adaptation shapes the negotiation of authenticity, particularly as marginalised employees grapple with feelings of being unseen, seen, or excessively seen. Our study thus offers a fine-grained but comprehensive analysis of how such conditions affect the doing of authenticity. Our contention is that the negotiation of workplace authenticity is revealed as unfolding as a dynamic, adaptive process across assorted visibility contexts. Thus, authenticity becomes not an absolute or

monolithic construct but emerges rather as a fluid, contextually contingent experience, which captures the notion that subjective feelings of authenticity vary across time and place (Fleeson and Wilt, 2010; Sedikides et al., 2017). Our study recognises authenticity as a continuous and evolving process (Ibarra, 2015), fundamentally emanating from the adjustment of self-expression to align with diverse contexts, demonstrating a keen awareness of the situational nuances that surround authenticity at work. This captures Dammann et al.'s (2021) developmental aspect of authenticity, helping us to further understand how individuals' continuous work on appearing and remaining authentic is subject to persistent change.

Third, we contribute to ongoing theorising on trait and state authenticity (Roberts et al., 2009; Sedikides et al., 2017) by demonstrating how state-like authenticity can manifest even in the absence of trait-like authenticity. This conceptualisation aligns with the notion of authenticity as contingent upon context-specific selves (Chen, 2019). In such gendered contexts, early career women not only face the challenges of being new to their professional roles, but must also contend with the discursive power structures that privilege masculinised modes of interaction, performance, and behaviour (Morley, 2013). These hegemonic structures impose constraints that significantly delimit the possibility of expressing trait-like authenticity, as the occupational roles these women exercise are often marked by professional boundaries (Hung and Victor Chen, 2007), which inhibit the expression of trait-like authenticity. Nonetheless, despite the rigid structures, moments of state authenticity emerge as these women engage in strategic identity negotiation, balancing their internal sense of self with the normative demands of the workplace. Thus, in taking stock of the extent to which the workplace is conducive to authenticity, we highlight the role of professional boundaries which include practices and systems reflecting the beliefs, attitudes, norms, and roles of members.

Understanding how authenticity is negotiated under various conditions of visibility for a marginalised group whose experiences are subsumed within a larger marginalised group and

whose negotiation of authenticity is linked to gendered performance undoubtedly has implications for practice. First, our article raises important questions about the long-term implications of the compromises that early career women have to make to feel seen. What is the implication of such trade-offs for the diversity and innovation of scientific research, as well as the ways in which institutional support systems might be reformed to promote greater autonomy and inclusivity for ECRs, particularly women in underrepresented fields and from less developed countries? A central assumption of the intersectional invisibility literature is that it creates a 'paradoxical effect', manifesting in both advantages and disadvantages simultaneously. Regarding our participants, these intersecting invisible characteristics (age, experience, gender, and situatedness) emerged as both a source of agency and a means of resistance in their negotiation of authenticity, highlighting the complexity of such negotiations for women ECRs as these conditions hinder the potential to develop social capital which underpins networked forms of work (Bennet et al., 2019). A potentially more promising solution may lie in organisational commitment to formal mentoring and sponsoring of women ECRs by mature or senior women, as well as allies in such environments who are better placed to understand the female ECR condition. After all, the opportunity of being oneself at work holds the promise of uniquely benefiting the organisation by fostering intrinsic motivation (Kernis and Goldman, 2006), enhancing individual well-being (Ménard and Brunet, 2011), and integrating diverse views (Morrison and Milliken, 2000). Organisations that care about their employees' engagement and well-being cannot ignore their members' need for authentic self-expression (Cable et al., 2013; Deci and Ryan, 1995). This implies that generic interventions may not suffice, necessitating tailored implementation of inclusion initiatives that manage diversity in beneficial ways and which aim to account for intra-group differences among women in non-traditional professional contexts (Butler, 2004; Wong et al., 2022).

Limitations and avenues for future research

The current study is part of a larger project which specifies that sample inclusion criteria be limited to women ECRs from developing countries. Despite the significance and implications of our findings to theory and practice, a further interesting question pertains to the experience of non-women ECRs, especially members of the LGBTQ community in academic careers and their experiences of authenticity at the early stages of their careers. How do non-women professionals experience conditions of visibility from their intersecting identities and negotiate authenticity at work, and how might this differ from or complement the narratives of women ECRs? Based on extant literature and our own analysis, we speculate that strict adherence to the 'masculine' *modus operandi* in various organisations affects the various ways in which different genders distinctively perceive and experience work. Hence, it is possible that the use of such organisational policies may have negative influences on the long-term career outcomes of ECRs. A study into policies used by organisations and their consequences for employees over time could yield insight into this matter. Furthermore, our study suggests that there may be significant differences in the requirements of women ECRs in STEM fields *vis-à-vis* senior women researchers in different domains. Examining the distinctive experiences of these various groups may provide an interesting sphere of research.

The kaleidoscope career model presented by Sullivan and Mainiero (2007) may prove particularly useful in undertaking such a study. This argues that over a career span, career choices are bound by the three parameters of authenticity, balance, and challenge. Individuals may seek one parameter more than another at different times during their career, while the influence of other parameters lessens in intensity (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2008). When a woman has children, for example, her quest may be more for balance than authenticity or challenge as she engages with her maternal role. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine the complexity of women's careers in greater detail at each stage of the career ladder. Furthermore, although it may be inferred that the narratives of 35 women ECRs from 13

countries may not reflect the experiences of all women ECRs, nevertheless our findings are disarmingly relatable. Future researchers may conduct additional studies to determine whether the experiences of women ECRs from developing countries, as seen in this study, are applicable to women ECRs in other domains. While this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of authenticity under conditions of visibility, several methodological limitations should be acknowledged. First, the use of a cross-sectional design, which captures data at a single point in time, restricts our ability to examine the processes of authenticity negotiation across different temporal contexts. Longitudinal studies, in contrast, would permit a more nuanced understanding of how these experiences evolve over time, particularly in response to changing socio-cultural or institutional factors. As a result, the findings presented here reflect participants' experiences at a specific temporal moment, which may not fully account for shifts that occur in longer trajectories of identity and visibility management.

Conclusion

Women ECRs often find themselves in a state of relative invisibility within academia. Their accomplishments may not have reached the zenith of recognition, obscuring them from view. This obscurity, rooted in the early stages of their careers, sets the stage for a unique negotiation of authenticity as they strive to establish their footing in an environment where visibility is often equated to legitimacy. Yet, we find in our study that visibility and hypervisibility did not lead to a better expression of self, but to a strategic negotiation of authenticity hinged on finding balance and making adjustments to harmonise values with socio-organisational expectations. Such negotiations do not negate institutional constraints but highlight the agency of women ECRs in shaping their authenticity in varying conditions of visibility.

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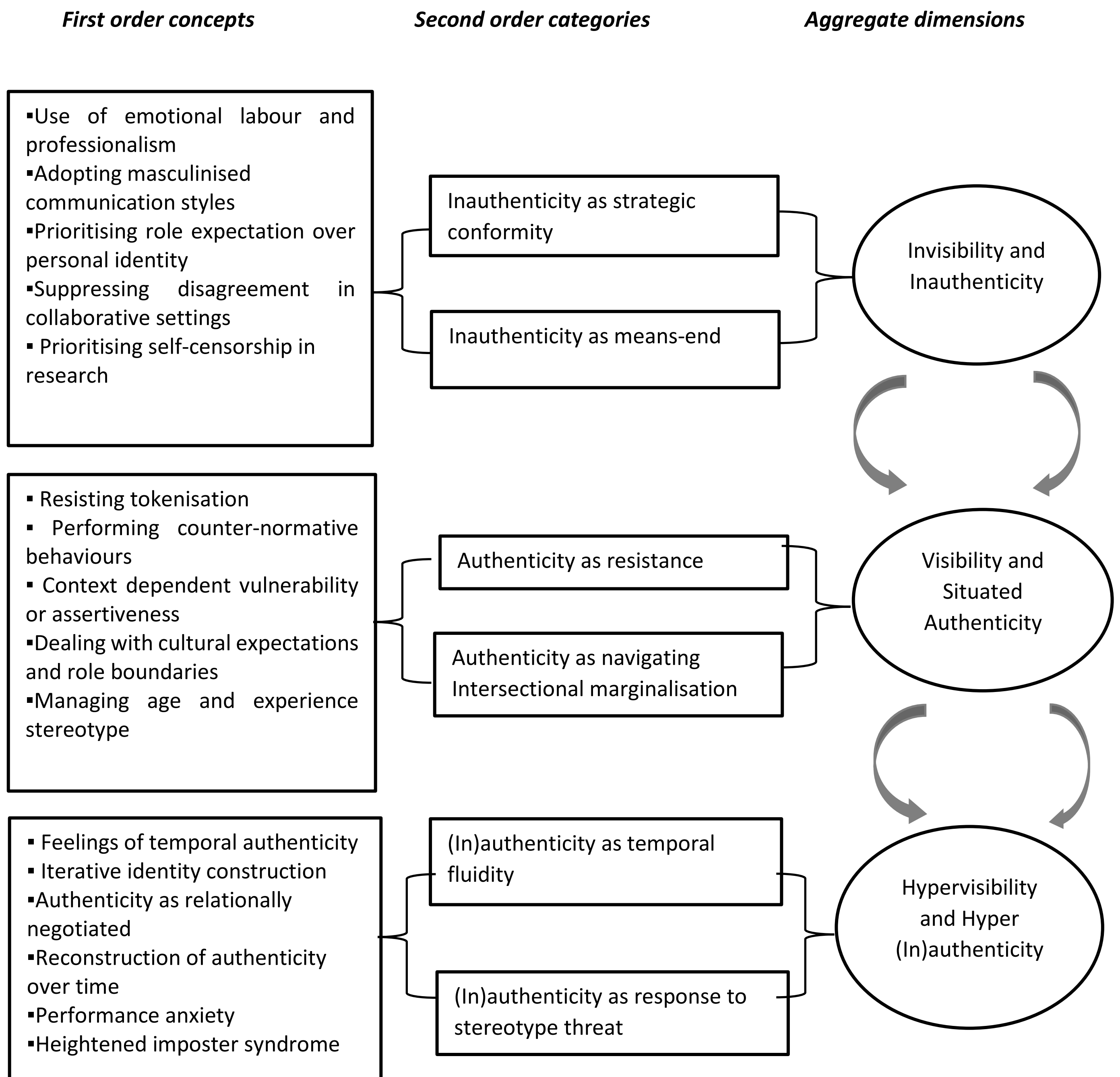
Figure

Figure 1. Data structure



Source: Authors

Table

Table 1. Data sources

Data Type	Information on collected data	Use in analysis
Semi-structured interviews with female ECRs (June–December 2021)	Respondents purposefully selected for their gender, geographic location, and career. 35 interviews – interviews conducted until saturation	- Development of the historical account of participants' career trajectory - Analysis of (in)visible conditions and how they manifest - Analysis of the female ECRs' perceptions of authenticity at work - Developing insight into how (in)visible conditions shape the doing of authenticity
Archival Data and digital footprints (Jan 2021–Dec 2021)	Theoretical sampling of publicly available records from OWSD website and social media platforms LinkedIn, Twitter, Blogs, Facebook, Youtube	- Examining participants' digital footprints - Cross-checking socio-demographic and biographical sketches of participants - Examining media reportage on participants - Analysing other publicly granted interviews to OWSD and Elsevier and other media outlet

Source: Authors