Career Success and Minority Status: A Review and Conceptual Framework

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In recent years, the management field has witnessed a surge in studies examining career success among workers from historically marginalized minority groups. However, to date, insights gained from this research remain fragmented and have not been integrated into the existing career success frameworks. We aim to complement career success scholarship and contribute

to its inclusivity by conducting a systematic review that synthesizes the factors and pathways contributing to the career success of four historically underrepresented minority groups: women, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. Evidencing that career success disparity can be attributed to minority status, we propose a framework that highlights the career advancement and human and psychological resources associated with minority groups' career success, as well as the systemic barriers limiting access to and use of such resources. We suggest hypervisibility, invisibility, and managed visibility as distinguishable forms of identity-based mechanisms that offer theoretical explanations for the influence of marginalized identity status on career success. Our framework integrates manifestations of subjective career success—accounting for survival, the collective good, and adjustability in addition to what extant literature has shown—emphasizing that membership in marginalized groups, communities, and other identity-relevant contexts shapes the subjective meaning of career success. Our review has practical implications for decision makers and organizations intending to bridge minority and nonminority groups' career success disparity.

Career success, the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from one's work experiences (Seibert & Kraimer, 2001), is a universally valued outcome for individuals and organizations (e.g., Arthur, Khapova, & Wilderom, 2005; Gunz & Heslin, 2005). Therefore, management scholars have devoted substantial attention to understanding career success and factors contributing to it. An extensive body of academic work on career success has been informed by the resource management framework (Spurk, Hirschi, & Dries, 2019), emphasizing the individual's role in acquiring, maintaining, and utilizing resources needed to succeed (Hirschi, Nagy, Baumeler, Johnston, & Spurk, 2018). Such understanding assumes career success to be primarily contingent on individuals' adeptness in managing resources, as manifested by strategic behaviors and attitudes geared to optimize career outcomes (e.g., Haenggli & Hirschi, 2020). Although the resource management framework identifies personal and environmental resources as predictors of career success (Spurk et al., 2019), it does not account for the barriers tied to minority status that restrict individuals' access and ability to effectively leverage resources for career advancement.

Careers scholars, particularly those adopting critical and qualitative approaches, have noted that career success frameworks have originated from the experiences of dominant groups, reflecting their societal privilege and advantages, which do not necessarily represent the experiences of minority groups or those with intersectional identities (e.g., Frear, Paustian-Underdahl, Heggestad, & Walker, 2019). Also, diversity scholarship has drawn attention to the underrepresentation of people from minority groups in senior positions and to the persistent disparity in advancement to leadership roles (e.g., Tomaskovic-Devey & Avent-Holt, 2019). The common thread across this literature is an emphasis on systemic barriers and contingencies, often beyond individual control, which influence minority groups' career success. These barriers include stigmas and biases at the social level, discriminatory practices and policies at the organizational level, and human and social capital at the individual level (e.g., Taser-Erdogan, 2022). In the past few years, we have witnessed a surge in studies examining career success among workers from historically marginalized minority

groups and unpacking the nuances of their relevant experiences (e.g., Smith, Watkins, Ladge, & Carlton, 2019). However, to date, insights gained from this line of research remain fragmented and have not been integrated into the existing career success frameworks. While the existing reviews and meta-analyses on career success include studies with samples from minority groups, their inclusion criteria (excluding qualitative studies) and the theories informing them (historically not grounded in diversity perspectives) do not accommodate such conceptualization (e.g., Guan, Arthur, Khapova, Hall, & Lord, 2019; Ng & Feldman, 2014; Ng, Eby, Sorensen, & Feldman, 2005; Spurk et al., 2019). Therefore, it is inevitable that the existing career success theories and frameworks only partially reflect and account for the lived experiences of minority groups and hence lack the power and inclusivity to explain their pathways to success.

We aim to complement career success scholarship by synthesizing the factors and pathways that contribute to minorities' career success. Our systematic review is informed by career success scholarship, particularly the resource management framework (Spurk et al., 2019), and diversity scholarship, specifically the "bodies out of place" theoretical perspective (Puwar, 2004).[1]

We seek to answer the following research questions: (a) How is career success disparity between minority and nonminority groups reflected in the extant literature? (b) What are the key contributing factors to career success when accounting for minority status? (c) What pathways link minority status to career success?

We synthesize the existing empirical literature, encompassing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-method approaches. We use the term *minority groups* in this article to refer to members of underrepresented communities in societies or sectors where individuals work; this term includes but is not limited to the demographic, socioeconomic, and health-related experiences typically marginalized in mainstream accounts (i.e., women, race and ethnicity, individuals with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community). While acknowledging the variety of experiences across diverse groups, we consider minority status an extreme case of an outsider in spaces traditionally reserved for the dominant group, which allows us to explore new pathways to career success (Pettigrew, 1990). New observations are most visible in extreme cases in which individuals face pronounced limitations in resources and structural constraints (Blair-Loy, 1999; Sewell, 1992). Minority groups share the common threads of historical and persistent restrained access to resources, power, authority, and voice (Banerjee, 2022) while navigating structures of oppression, discrimination, and other inequality regimes (Muzanenhamo & Chowdhury, 2023).

Our review contributes to the current career success scholarship in several ways. Evidencing that career success disparity can be attributed to minority status, we set forth a minority-inclusive framework that identifies and maps factors and pathways linking minority status to career success. Our proposed framework highlights career advancement and the human and psychological resources associated with minority groups' career success, as well as systemic barriers that limit access to such resources. We suggest hypervisibility, invisibility, and managed visibility as distinguished forms of identity-based mechanisms that offer theoretical explanations for the influence of marginalized identity status on career success. By acknowledging the role of complex visibility, we introduce to the resource management perspective identity-based mechanisms mediating the access to and use of resources, which underscores the paradoxical experiences of minorities in career advancement. In addition to what extant literature has shown, our framework integrates manifestations of career success,

such as accounting for survival, the collective good, and adjustability, emphasizing that membership in marginalized groups, communities, and other identity-relevant contexts shapes the subjective meaning of career success.

Unpacking minority status from an outsider-within position (Puwar, 2004), we broaden the scope of identity-related antecedents discussed in the resource management framework (Spurk et al., 2019). Also, we elaborate on the uniqueness of minority experiences and how minority status could shape career success. Our focus on socially marginalized identities—individuals who do not belong to the dominant group and are perceived as outsiders or "different" (Puwar, 2004)—sheds light on how dominant groups and gatekeepers perceive, interpret, and assign value to the identities of minority groups (Buchanan & Settles, 2019). By synthesizing these factors into a coherent framework, we move beyond fragmented discussions of barriers to offer a structured understanding of how career success disparity could be explained. By integrating complex visibility into the resource management framework on career success, our review underscores the systemic barriers that perpetuate disparities and offers a nuanced lens for understanding the challenges faced by minorities. It points out the underlying formal and informal mechanisms that reinforce exclusionary practices. The "bodies out of place" framework (Puwar, 2004) underscores the relational and systemic nature of inequality. It shows that achieving diversity is not merely about increasing representation but also about transforming spaces to become more inclusive and equitable. This perspective emphasizes the need for structural changes to reduce the barriers faced by "outsiders within" and foster genuine inclusivity. Our findings have practical implications for decision makers and organizations intending to bridge the disparity between minority and nonminority groups' career success and create an inclusive culture for all career actors.

Theoretical Background

Careers, defined as individuals' work experiences over time, encompass objective and subjective dimensions (Gunz & Heslin, 2005). Building on this definition, career success has traditionally been evaluated by objective measures, such as salary and promotions, and subjective criteria, such as career satisfaction (Judge, Cable, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1995). The literature has been marked by various competing theoretical perspectives aimed at predicting objective and subjective career success (see online supplement for summaries of past literature reviews, Table 1). For example, scholars have applied human capital theory (Becker, 1962), tournament theory (Lazear & Rosen, 1981), and contest mobility theory (Turner, 1960) to determine factors that contribute to the attainment of objective career success. Also, researchers have used calling theory (Dik, Duffy, & Eldridge, 2009), kaleidoscope career theory (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), protean career theory (Hall, 1996), trait theory (Fletcher, Major, & Davis, 2008), stress theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), and social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986) to identify antecedents of subjective career success. Sponsored mobility theory (Turner, 1960) and role and identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989) have been employed to predict objective and subjective career success.

In a systematic literature review, Spurk et al. (2019) synthesized these divergent perspectives into an encompassing resource management framework. This framework posits that achieving objective career success depends on the application of personal and environmental resources. Personal resources, including personal key resources (e.g., stable traits), human capital (e.g., education, mental ability, socioeconomic status), and roles and identities (e.g., gender,

continuous identity, and family and work responsibilities), have been found to be important for obtaining objective career success. Equally important for subjective career success are individual resource management behaviors and attitudes (e.g., exercising career agency, political skills, career adaptability, boundaryless mindset, self-directed career management, feedback-seeking behavior, and coping with stress) and resource accumulation and dynamics (e.g., person-environment interactions and career transitions). Environmental resources predict objective and subjective career success and encompass social environmental resources (e.g., network structure, leader-member exchange, and types of mentoring) and macro-environmental resources (e.g., national culture). Work environment resources (e.g., procedural justice, perceived effectiveness of human resource management practices, firm type, and job autonomy) have been predominantly associated with objective career success.

Drawing on Puwar's (2004) "bodies out of place" theoretical perspective, we approach minority status as an extreme case of an outsider in spaces traditionally reserved for the dominant group. Being an outsider necessitates additional efforts to legitimize presence (Puwar, 2004). Depending on the social context, it leads to complex visibility—paradoxical experiences of marginalized individuals being hypervisible and simultaneously rendered invisible—highlighting how their identities are often perceived through the lens of stereotypes and leading to the multifaceted and often contradictory experience of being seen and unseen within society (e.g., Glass & Cook, 2020a; Puwar, 2004). Being an outsider also requires individuals to manage their visibility, if possible, to overcome systemic barriers and stereotypes, counter prejudices, and navigate implicit and explicit biases. Informed by the resource management framework (Spurk et al., 2019) and "bodies out of place" theoretical perspective (Puwar, 2004), we provide a more inclusive framework for factors and pathways contributing to career success among minority groups. Specifically, our framework acknowledges the role of complex visibility mechanisms, including hypervisibility, invisibility, and managed visibility, in shaping career resources.

Methods

We adopt a systematic literature review methodology to search, select, and synthesize the articles included in our review. This approach synthesizes research findings in a transparent manner to enhance extant knowledge and inform subsequent research and practice (Higgins & Green, 2008; Tranfield, Denyer, & Smart, 2003).

Database Search and Article Selection

As our first step, we conducted a systematic search of the peer-reviewed academic literature published in management and its neighboring fields (i.e., business, industrial relations, sociology, social psychology, women's studies, interdisciplinary social sciences, and public administration). We searched the Social Sciences Citation Index (Core Collection) database, which indexes all journals with an impact factor using career, success, and minority-related keywords and Boolean operators (see online supplement for a detailed list of keywords, Table 2). To achieve a comprehensive understanding of the literature, we did not impose timeline limitations on our search.

Our broad but focused range of keywords retrieved an impressive 6,570 records (as of June 2023), which we exported to Zotero reference management software for further

screening. We read the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the retrieved publications and screened them according to the following questions: (a) Does the article report an empirical study (not conceptual or descriptive)? (b) Does the article focus on career success (e.g., research purpose, questions, or findings related to career success or positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from careers)? (c) Does the sample consist of workers or employees from minority groups (e.g., women, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, or other minority groups)? Articles that did not meet one or more of the three inclusion criteria were not short-listed for the review. To ensure that we captured all potential articles (see online supplement for the journal list, Table 3), we also used our keywords to search 27 selected journals in the management field that historically pioneered in publishing career success literature. This search and screening led to 337 articles, which we further examined and included in the review (see online supplement for an overview, Table 4). We include a diagram informed by PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; Higgins & Green, 2008) describing our article selection process (Figure 1).
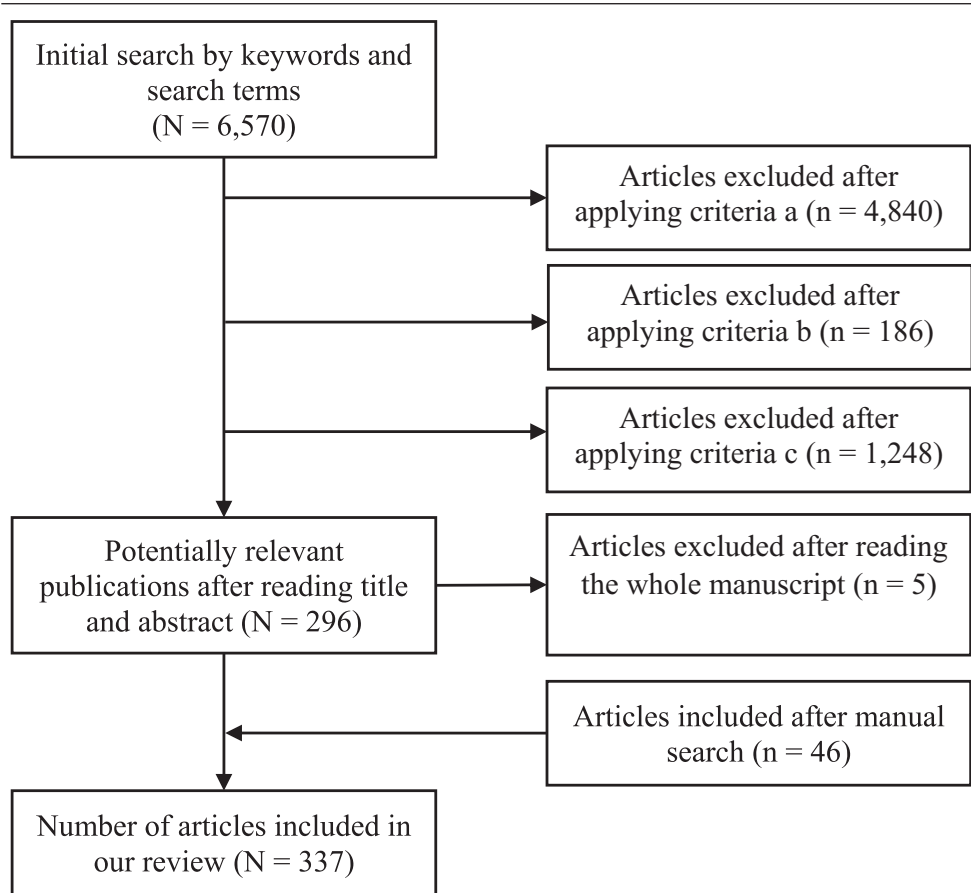
Coding and Data Analysis

We coded each article into a literature review matrix (Garrard, 2020) and extracted detailed information relevant to our research questions (e.g., research sample's minority status and factors associated with career success). In quantitative studies, we documented hypotheses exploring career success measures and their significant determinants. For qualitative studies, we treated the findings section as qualitative data and extracted the text describing connections between career success and factors associated with it. Upon reading the articles, we noticed that some of the qualitative studies provided new categories of career success. After consultation as a team, we acknowledged the importance of such information and decided to categorize it.

All members of our research team worked in pairs to code articles into the matrix and check one another's work. The whole team met weekly during the coding period and discussed points of confusion and cases of disagreement until it reached a clear conclusion or complete agreement.

Our analysis of the content of the studies' findings[2] unfolded in the following three stages, as informed by the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the first stage, two authors led the analysis and immersed themselves in the data by reading all the codes. Then, they open-coded the reviewed articles' findings, using as often as possible text labels that came verbatim from the articles (Charmaz, 2006). Following constant comparative method principles (Charmaz, 2014; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), they constantly compared newly analyzed data with previously coded data while accounting for different codes that did not exist in the previous codes (Charmaz, 2014).

At the second stage, all team members reviewed the codes and, in a reflective discussion, provided feedback and shared their observations of common patterns across the codes. We observed that most of the codes concerned a lack of or insufficient access to career advancement or individual resources that hindered minority groups' career success. We also realized that many studies explained these findings by referencing the minority status and negative experiences associated with it, such as stereotypes, biases, and exclusion. Then we referred to the career success literature to identify relevant theoretical anchors and concluded that we

Figure 1
Article Search and Selection Process

Initial search by keywords and search terms (N = 6,570)

Articles excluded after applying criteria a (n = 4,840)

Articles excluded after applying criteria b (n = 186)

Articles excluded after applying criteria c (n = 1,248)

Potentially relevant publications after reading title and abstract (N = 296)

Articles excluded after reading the whole manuscript (n = 5)

Articles included after manual search (n = 46)

Number of articles included in our review (N = 337)

Note: (a) Does the article focus on career success (e.g., research purpose, questions, or findings related to career success or positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from careers)? (b) Does the article report an empirical study (not conceptual or descriptive)? (c) Does the sample consist of workers or employees from minority groups (e.g., research methods describe women, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ+ individuals, or other minority groups)?

could link our findings to the resource management framework, even though the narratives associated with the resources were unique. Some of the categories that emerged in our data did not map to the resource management framework. We then engaged with diversity scholarship and identified the "bodies out of place" theoretical perspective (Puwar, 2004), which helped us explain our categories regarding the barriers to access to and use of resources consistently noted in the reviewed articles. Accordingly, we discerned that minority status in our review matched the definition of an outsider position within spaces traditionally reserved for the dominant group. To further explain why and how minority status influenced career success in our review, we centered our analysis on complex visibility and barriers to career

success that resulted from outsider-within standing. Turning to diversity scholarship, we realized that the concepts of hypervisibility, invisibility, and visibility management (e.g., Glass & Cook, 2020a; Puwar, 2004) fit our observations in the data. However, since organizational literature on visibility is relatively new, we drew on the core ideas of these concepts (i.e., "forms of identity-based mistreatment that are in opposition to visibility for marginalized groups"; Buchanan & Settles, 2019: 1). We refined and expanded them to align with the scope and depth of our comprehensive data from the literature. The combination of these theoretical anchors enabled us to integrate and make sense of our findings and bring them together into a framework.

The third stage of analysis encompassed a process of adding, removing, combining, and renaming the codes (Merriam, 2009). Through an iterative process of referring to our data and theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2013), we merged, labeled/relabeled, and organized/reorganized the subcategories under overarching categories. Our research team met several times to discuss the subcategories and categories that emerged from the data and to calibrate our interpretations of them. We were able to finalize a set of 18 subcategories of factors contributing to the career success of minority groups, which we organized under six major categories (see online supplement: Table 5 for contributions of each article and Table 6 for sample direct excerpts). Subsequently, we reached an agreement on how subcategories and categories were distinct from or related to one another. At the final stage, we developed a coding guide, which included descriptions of the main categories and their corresponding subcategories. Using this guide, seven team members reviewed all the codes and compared them with the full text of the articles to ensure accuracy. All authors met and discussed the discrepancies until reaching complete agreement. We have depicted the data structure in Figure 2, which demonstrates our progression from broad statements capturing recurring open codes in the data to more refined subcategories and ultimately to higher-level and main categories. This data structure served as the foundation for the framework discussed in the next section.

Findings

Our review (a) examined career success disparity between women, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ employees (hereinafter, minority groups) and nonminority groups; (b) highlighted career advancement and individual resources associated with minority groups' career success; and (c) identified key factors that limit their access to and use of such resources. Our findings are integrated in a conceptual framework (Figure 3), which suggests two pathways that explain the disparity between minority and nonminority groups' career success. Before we proceed to describe our framework, we provide a summary of what our review showed in terms of career success disparity among minority and nonminority groups; then, we go through the components of our integrated framework. Our framework comprises two types of resources, namely career advancement and individual resources, that were shown to play a key role in career success among the four minority groups. It also includes complex visibility as a barrier—comprising hypervisibility, invisibility, and managed visibility—that is experienced by those having a minority identity and constrains minority groups' access to and use of the aforementioned resources. Our framework depicts that experiences of complex visibility are less intense in organizations with inclusive practices.

Figure 2
Overview of the Data Structure

Open Codes	Subcategories	Main Categories
An outsider, different, other, not fitting the stereotyped image, deviant from the norm. Treated as a token (perception that minority groups are employed as symbolic effort of inclusivity, to give the appearance of gender equality), stigmatized, stereotyped, marginalized	Outsider-within status	Minority status
Networking's importance for career success or advancement of minority groups including informal, formal, and inclusive networking and socializing opportunities, activities, events, and behaviors	Networking	Career Advancement Resources
Mentoring's importance for career success or advancement of minority groups including formal, informal, and inclusive mentoring at work, and offered by supervisors and colleagues. Developmental relationships, sponsorship, and coaching as sub-functions	Mentoring	
Importance of having role models including those from similar minority background in senior leadership, Supervisors acting as role models	Role models	
Importance of training and development programs or opportunities such as employer-sponsored leadership or executive training or professional and competency development, workshops, seminars, conference opportunities	Training and development	
Importance of support from organization, supervisor, peers, personal and administrative support or commitment of leadership to advancement of minority groups	Workplace support	
Education: educational level, knowledge, attending college, advanced degrees. Skills: technical and non-technical/soft, communication, negotiation, leadership, listening skills and competencies. Work experience: organizational tenure, international experience, proven results	Human capital	Individual Resources
Resilience: no pin no gain attitude, grit, withstand challenges, nonacceptance of rejection, push through, keep fighting. Slef-confidence and efficacy: the struggle with self-promotion and lack of self-confidence, lack self-belief. Career advancement optimism: having a plan for advancement, forward-thinking, willingness to take risks, passion	Psychological capital	
Systemic exclusion from/barriers to participation in networking, mentoring, training & development opportunities. A lack of representative role models or tailored or inclusive networking, mentoring, and training & development. Being treated differently when support or resources are needed	Access to resources	Access to and Use of Ressources
(Under)utilization of networking, mentoring, training and development, and support opportunities available. (Limited) instrumental (e.g., guidance, sponsorship, information sharing about progression and development opportunities) or psychological (e.g., motivation, emotional support, positive encouragement, recognition, validation) applications of resources, Diminished confidence, resilience, hope and optimism for advancement or possibility to use resources	Use of resources	
Tokenism, stereotypical assumptions that minority groups are expected to bear the burden of dealing with diversity-related issues in ways that non-minority counterparts are not, Hyperscrutiny and surveillance, legitimacy and credibility challenges stemming from stereotypes by colleagues. Devaluating or not recognizing or appreciating or questioning about competence, abilities, performance, worth, commitment, and contributions by peers and managers, doubts about leadership capabilities	Hypervisibility	Complex Visibility
Not being seen, overlooked for opportunities, exclusion from work meetings, social activities, and conversations, disenfranchized and demotivated to pursue progression, less acknowledgement, recognition, or praise for contributions or potential, Not being heard, absence of voices, voice silenced, interrupted and ignored, discouraged from being out	Invisibility	
Distancing from authentic self, code switching, trying to act masculine or straight, change behaviors based on context to fit in, gaining compliance because they would be displaying traits that are not traditionally assigned to them. Concealing or hiding identity, passing as dominant group, putting up a mask	Managed visibility	
Lack of or unenforced equal opportunity policies/standards in HR processes especially in hiring, promotion, and appraisal, lack of policies and procedures (even if policies exist), the discrepancy between HR policies & practices, Lack of infrastructure/procedure to support minority groups (e.g., appropriate languages in policies and accommodation)	Equal opportunity	Organizational Inclusvity
Supportive minority-sensitive climate, colleagues demonstrating awareness and understanding versus conservative, unsupportive and hostile work environments discouraging (minority status) disclosure, lack of understanding and awareness. Engagement in advocacy, support, proactive addressing needs of minority groups, and transparent adopting EDI policies	Workplace culture	
Ideal worker model and extreme work model expectations including full-time, constant availability (e.g. responding and working all hours of the night, extensive travel, 24/7 availability, willing and able to relocate, being physically present in the workplace, working long, awkward, & unpredictable hours), sacrifice other aspects of life and be married to the job, Work expectations created by dominant groups for dominant groups (e.g., Men for Men) making minority groups as non-ideal	Ideal worker expectations	

Career Success Disparity Among Minority and Nonminority Groups

Promotion to high-level positions within organizations is one of the most prevalent manifestations of objective career success (Dries, Pepermans, Hofmans, & Rypens, 2009). Minority groups are significantly underrepresented in senior and leadership positions in the world of work. For example, based on statistics collected across Europe and North America in 2024, women represent only 9% of CEOs and 30% of board members, despite raised awareness and efforts to increase these numbers (Spilsbury, Sonnabend, & Clark, 2024; Women Business Collaborative, 2024). In politics, just 29 countries have women heads of

Figure 3
An Inclusive Career Success Framework
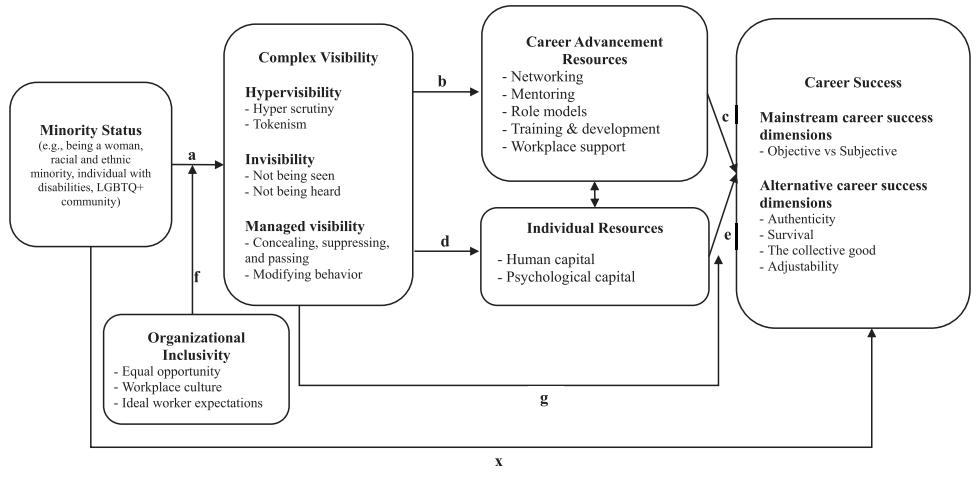
Note: This model is embedded within and influenced by broader macrocontextual systems, including systemic forms of oppression such as sexism, ableism, racism, and homophobia.

state and/or government, and only 23.3% of cabinet members and ministers are women (UN Women, 2024). For racial and ethnic minorities, these percentages drop further. For instance, although racial and ethnic minorities constitute around 40% of the population in the United States, 18% in the United Kingdom, and 26% in Australia, their representation in the corporate boardrooms is just 19%, 12.5%, and 9%, respectively (Governance Institute of Australia, 2024; Spencer Stuart, 2024; Spilsbury et al., 2024). While there is no precise account of these percentages for individuals with disabilities or the LGBTQ+ community, because many do not feel safe to disclose such identities when not visible (Follmer, Sabat, & Siuta, 2020), their percentages are <1% (e.g., Association of LGBTQ+ Corporate Directors, 2024; Spilsbury et al., 2024; Upadhyay & Triana, 2021).

Extant research comparing minorities and nonminorities demonstrated that minority groups were less likely to be promoted to managerial positions or considered for higher levels in organizational hierarchies (Amis, Mair, & Munir, 2020), especially when firms are constrained by external environments and cultures (Ng & Sears, 2017). For instance, even after controlling for factors such as performance and education level, minorities were seen as less suitable for managerial positions, and they received significantly fewer opportunities for training and development and fewer challenging assignments compared to nonminorities (Adamovic & Leibbrandt, 2023; Hoobler, Lemmon, & Wayne, 2014). Research based on archival data also showed that women and ethnic minorities were more likely to be promoted to high-risk managerial positions when firm performance was declining (e.g., Glass & Cook, 2016; Morgenroth, Kirby, Ryan, & Sudkämper, 2020), a phenomenon known as the "glass cliff" (Ryan & Haslam, 2007). There are two prominent explanations for this phenomenon: either minorities are offered these opportunities when others are not willing to take the lead (e.g., Morgenroth et al., 2020), or minorities seize these opportunities hoping to succeed during a challenging time to gain legitimacy in the eyes of the majority (e.g., Glass & Cook,

2016). In addition, when firm performance declined during the tenure of minority managers, those managers were more likely to be replaced by White men, a phenomenon termed the "savior effect" (Cook & Glass, 2014).

A few studies highlighted delayed promotion among minorities by comparing minorities and nonminorities in the pace of career advancement to managerial positions, indicating that, worldwide, certain groups stagnated within organizations and were not promoted to higher levels (e.g., Ingram & Oh, 2022). Our review provided examples of minorities experiencing such stagnation and attributing it to their invisibility (e.g., Glass & Cook, 2020b; Treanor & Marlow, 2021), among other factors. In countries where stakeholder and institutional pressures for diversity were present, although the career advancement of minorities with outstanding qualities was relatively faster, as soon as one minority member was present on a managerial level, this advantage diminished for the promotion of future minorities (Bonet, Cappelli, & Hamori, 2020).

Salary, the other extensively accepted signifier of objective career success (Dries et al., 2009), has been reported to be substantially less for minority groups compared to their nonminority counterparts, despite the fact that both groups have been shown to put effort into negotiating for their salaries (Kray, Kennedy, & Lee, 2024). The gender pay gap continues to be a reality all over the world and in various industries (e.g., Dowd & Park, 2024; Whitehouse & Smith, 2020), with some reports indicating pay gaps of up to 30% in certain countries (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2023) and a global average of 20% (International Labour Organization, 2022). The pay gap tends to be even wider for racial and ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community (Bryson, 2017; Drydakis, 2015; Schur, Han, Kim, Ameri, Blanck, & Kruse, 2017). Our review highlighted that even though practices such as pay formalization are intended to bridge the pay gap, informal pay bonuses and base salaries still play a significant role in minority pay gaps, especially when managers and decision makers were from nonminority groups (Abraham, 2017).

Findings regarding subjective career success, widely operationalized and measured as career satisfaction (Seibert, Kraimer, Holtom, & Pierotti, 2013), were not entirely aligned with those focusing on objective career success. The majority of previous research on career satisfaction concluded that demographic variables, such as gender and ethnicity, were unrelated to career satisfaction (Ng & Feldman, 2014). As Byington, Felps, and Baruch (2019) speculated, this might be a result of minority workers lowering their career-related expectations or comparing themselves with role models from similar historically disadvantaged groups.

The differences that we observed between objective and subjective career success measures among minority groups might be attributed to the fluid nature of subjective career success (e.g., Koekemoer, Fourie, & Jorgensen, 2019). In addition to career satisfaction, which was widely used to measure subjective career success, the qualitative articles in our review highlighted authenticity, survival, collective good, and adjustability as manifestations of subjective career success. While authenticity has been acknowledged in previous studies on subjective career success (e.g., Shockley, Ureksoy, Rodopman, Poteat, & Dullaghan, 2016), the other three were not widely discussed in mainstream career success literature. These manifestations are not exclusive to minority groups and can hold true for nonminority groups, but within the boundaries of this review, we focus on how they are experienced by minority groups.

Authenticity refers to perceiving success as living a professional life true to one's identity and one's authentic self's goals (e.g., Ballakrishnen, Fielding-Singh, & Magliozzi, 2019; Shockley et al., 2016). Some minority groups felt successful when they accommodated goals aligned with their identity by juggling multiple responsibilities at a healthy pace and maintaining work-life balance (e.g., Shanmugam, 2017), even if it meant delayed or dismissed promotion (e.g., Tlaiss, 2019). Some women started their own businesses to challenge the traditional roles of wife and mother, while others left jobs due to inequality and the glass ceiling, choosing entrepreneurship to pursue greater status, autonomy, and control over their professional decisions and responsibilities (Constantinidis, Lebegue, El Abboubi, & Salman, 2019). In other instances, authenticity was discussed in association with identity and intersectionality as minority groups endeavored to remain true to themselves in workplace settings (e.g., Smith et al., 2019). Therefore, being comfortable with who they were within their workplace and not being pressured to abide by ideal worker expectations not aligned with their identity (Bhide & Tootell, 2018; Gunasekara, Bertone, Almeida, & Crowley-Henry, 2021) were perceived as subjective career success. When the authentic self's goal was to pursue personal and professional growth and development, it was also perceived as success by minority groups (Bhide & Tootell, 2018; Fielden & Jepson, 2016), even if it did not match the objective measures prescribed by their workplace (e.g., McBride, 2011).

Survival was defined as viewing the ability to endure challenging situations as a form of success, including persevering professionally despite systemic barriers and contextual challenges. As stated by Yassour-Borochowitz and Wasserman (2020), for those from a disadvantaged group, career success is negotiated in constant dialogue with systemic barriers and environmental demands. In the case of minority groups, subjective career success can manifest itself as professional survival in the face of adversity and in spite of others discounting one's capabilities (e.g., Tlaiss, 2019). For example, for employees with hearing loss, career success was about continued economic independence, feeling proud to still be a productive workforce member and seeking out occupations where disability would not be a disadvantage (Baldridge & Kulkarni, 2017).

The collective good frames success as a shared and community-based phenomenon (e.g., Einarsdottir, Christiansen, & Kristjansdottir, 2018; Woodhams, Xian, & Lupton, 2015) that includes others, the wider society, and goodwill and is not individualistic, self-centered, or self-promotional (e.g., Ballakrishnen et al., 2019). Helping others grow (e.g., students and children; Afiouni & Karam, 2014), making a positive difference in their professional community (e.g., Sparkman, 2021), and advocating for the marginalized and giving them a voice through or as an outcome of their work (e.g., Gabriel, Ladge, Little, MacGowan, & Stillwell, 2023) were examples of the collective good perceived as success. Other manifestations of the collective good included "one's ability to contribute to the well-being of others," including family and community members (Juntunen et al., 2001: 278), effective performance in relationship with communities across diverse boundaries (Charles & Arndt, 2013), acting as a mentor, and "feelings of social betterment rather than a formal title" (Hallward & Bekdash-Muellers, 2019: 612). Many minority members who were successful in their careers embraced representing their minority group and made a conscious effort to support relevant initiatives (e.g., Higgins, Friedman, & Reeves, 2024).

Adjustability refers to the experiences of navigating nonlinear trajectories, voluntary or involuntary career transitions and breaks, lateral moves, and downward shifts. It suggests

that success is adjustable, nonlinear, and evolving and counters the dominant static discourse, which presents individual careers as a ladder to climb, with a more personal and protean-shaped journey (Hall, 1996). Instead, adjustability can kaleidoscopically take various forms (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), depending on the particular dynamics of an individual's work and life. Recognizing that careers are not always upward trajectories, this dynamic view of success accounts for setbacks, lateral moves, and even downward shifts that can ultimately lead to greater long-term success (Gersick & Kram, 2002). Career breaks necessitated by parenthood, health issues, displacement, rehabilitation, sexual transition, or the like made career success extremely challenging for minority groups and came at the cost of leading a chaotic life not aligned with their authentic self (e.g., Shaw, Taylor, & Harris, 1999). Adjustability captures success as the sense of retaking control of professional life following a career break, voluntary or involuntary career transitions, moves, and shifts as careers unfold (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011).

Career Advancement Resources

Our review found networking, mentoring, role models, training and development, and workplace support as career advancement resources playing a key role in minority groups' career success. While we acknowledge that these resources can overlap or be closely linked to one another, we present them separately to accommodate a clear account of our findings.

Networking. Networking refers to "the practice of building and maintaining professional relationships" (Porter & Woo, 2015: 1478). A substantial number of the reviewed studies evidenced the significance of networking, formally and informally, in career advancement and promotion among minority groups (e.g., Avolio, Pretell, & Valcazar, 2023; Baranik, Gorman, & Wales, 2018; Brewster, Duncan, Emira, & Clifford, 2017; San Miguel & Kim, 2015). External and internal networks gave minority groups more exposure inside and outside their organizations (e.g., Tomlinson, Muzio, Sommerlad, Webley, & Duff, 2013), enabled them to challenge their underrepresentation on the executive level (e.g., Fernando & Cohen, 2013), and helped them perform better and stand out among their colleagues (e.g., Athanasopoulou, Moss-Cowan, Smets, & Morris, 2018). In addition, they offered avenues to share strategies and resources to overcome unique career barriers (e.g., Tatli, Ozturk, & Woo, 2017). For example, a network of influential colleagues helped women executives to make themselves visible throughout their organization and increase their chances of career advancement (e.g., de Klerk & Verreynne, 2017). Another study showed that the external support network of persons with hearing loss provided them with solutions to better understand the content of work meetings (Baldridge & Kulkarni, 2017).

While forming their own network to support one another was found helpful in career advancement (e.g., Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014), it was not always perceived as facilitating career progression: first, minorities were not well represented in high-level leadership positions (e.g., Abalkhail, 2017); second, the potential for career advancement was linked to networking with powerful individuals at higher organizational levels (e.g., Aaltio & Huang, 2018). Also, some studies found minority-only networks to be divisive (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2010) and suggested challenging traditional dominant networks to make them more inclusive (e.g., Fritsch, 2015; Seierstad, Tatli, Aldossari, & Huse, 2021).

Mentoring. Mentoring is defined as an "interdependent and generative developmental relationship that can promote mutual learning, growth, and development within the careers context" (Chandler, Kram, & Yip, 2011: 537), and extant literature has evidenced its significance for career success (e.g., Janssen, Van Vuuren, & De Jong, 2016). Several studies highlighted the importance of mentoring for objective and subjective career success among minority groups, especially for early-career individuals (Anthony & Soontiens, 2022; Chawla & Sharma, 2016; Crabtree & Shiel, 2019). Having a mentor helped minority groups advance and get promoted in the organization (Barkhuizen, Masakane, & van der Sluis, 2022; Calinaud, Kokkranikal, & Gebbels, 2021; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Holton & Dent, 2016; McGee, 2018) and become satisfied with their job (Hebl, Tonidandel, & Ruggs, 2012) and their career progress (Blake-Beard, 1999; Wallace, 2001). Mentors helped minority groups learn the nuances of "the system" (Bagilhole & Goode, 2001) and navigate the complexities within prevailing power structures (Jayashree, Lindsay, & McCarthy, 2021) and organizational politics (Barkhuizen et al., 2022), which enabled them to gain insight about which battles were worth fighting (Yu, 2020). This supported minority groups in building intraorganizational relationships (Gorska, Dobija, Staniszewska, & Prystupa-Rzadca, 2022) and social capital (Jayashree et al., 2021).

Mentors provided career and decision-making advice (Avery, McKay, Roberson, & Thomas, 2023; Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014; Gorska et al., 2022; McGee, 2018; San Miguel & Kim, 2015; Traves, Brockbank, & Tomlinson, 1997; Wyatt & Silvester, 2015; Zhang, Holdsworth, Turner, & Andamon, 2021) and exposed minority groups to strategic (Barkhuizen et al., 2022) and high-profile projects (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014) and development opportunities (Hancock & Hums, 2016; Holton & Dent, 2016; Kumra & Vinnicombe, 2010; Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Chybicka, 2022; Yu, 2020). In many cases, this type of support boosted minority groups' confidence and encouraged them (Hancock & Hums, 2016) to step out of their comfort zones, pursue their professional goals (Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Chybicka, 2022), apply for leadership positions, and assume more responsibility (Mate, McDonald, & Do, 2019; M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2019; San Miguel & Kim, 2015; Steele, Moake, & Medina-Craven, 2024). In cases of minority groups encountering discriminatory behavior within organizations, mentors stepped in to provide guidance and to help minority group members advocate for themselves (e.g., Fielden & Jepson, 2016; Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Chybicka, 2022).

Role models. Role models are "individuals whose behaviors, personal styles and specific attributes are emulated by others" (Shapiro, Haseltine, & Rowe, 1978: 52). Many studies discussed the importance of role models for minority groups' career success (e.g., Doubell & Struwig, 2014; Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014; Fielden & Jepson, 2016; Holton & Dent, 2016). Role models were significant for minority groups as a means to envisage what they could achieve in their careers. They inspired, acted as sources of career advice and support (Durbin & Tomlinson, 2014), encouraged a can-do attitude (Ladge, Clair, & Greenberg, 2012), and facilitated access to a network of supportive colleagues (Fielden & Jepson, 2016).

In most cases, the reviewed studies referred to role models in association with representation (e.g., Fagan & Teasdale, 2021), indicating that inspirational role models who help make accurate career assessments often share similarities with career actors (Sealy & Singh, 2010).

While employees can have role models from any groups within or outside organizations, it has been evidenced that minority groups often seek role models from a similar background and in their immediate organization (Cross, Linehan, & Murphy, 2017).

Training and development. Training and development programs, especially leadership training, were mentioned in several studies as a key leveraging factor for minority groups' career success. This was particularly the case for early career individuals (Holton & Dent, 2016). Such developmental initiatives could be offered in different shapes and forms, ranging from formal executive education focused on improving leadership qualities (Fazal, Naz, Khan, & Pedder, 2019) and delivered by organizations or local federations (M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2019) to one-on-one programs, such as career counselling (Fazal et al., 2019), or informal learning (M'mbaha & Chepyator-Thomson, 2019). Training and development interventions affect minority groups' career success indirectly or directly by developing participants' awareness of (Fazal et al., 2019) and confidence in (Ali, Grabarski, & Konrad, 2021; Ali & Rasheed, 2021; McBride, 2011) their leadership skills (Rath, Mohanty, & Pradhan, 2019), encouraging them to put themselves up for senior roles (Chi-Ching, 1992; Holton & Dent, 2016), and enabling them to overcome existing barriers (Clarke, 2011).

Workplace support. Workplace support refers to positive relationships at work promoting employees flourishing (Colbert, Bono, & Purvanova, 2016) and comprising manager and peer support. In several studies, manager support was shown to be positively linked to objective and subjective career success among minority groups, especially during early career stages (e.g., McGee, 2018). Line managers were perceived as gatekeepers who had power over many career advancement facilitators and opportunities (Wyatt & Silvester, 2015). They could leverage career success by acknowledging minority groups' work (Koekemoer et al., 2019) and providing fair performance evaluations (Cho, Park, Han, & Ho, 2019; Rath et al., 2019). By trusting employees (McGee, 2018), standing in their corner (Richie, Fassinger, Linn, Johnson, Prosser, & Robinson, 1997), believing in their abilities, and increasing their self-confidence (Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Hancock & Hums, 2016), managers could empower minorities (Abalkhail, 2020) to try new things, maximize existing opportunities (Chawla & Sharma, 2016), and apply for promotion (Bhattacharya, Mohapatra, & Bhattacharya, 2018; Hancock & Hums, 2016; Holton & Dent, 2016). When workplace safety and harassment preoccupied minority groups (e.g., for trans employees; Thoroughgood, Sawyer, & Webster, 2021), managers could provide some peace of mind by defending and advocating for their employees' rights.

Some studies highlighted the role of peers in career advancement (Holton & Dent, 2016; Richie et al., 1997). Reaching out to supportive and trustful colleagues provided psychosocial comfort when facing obstacles, especially for individuals with invisible disabilities (e.g., Baldridge & Kulkarni, 2017) and for LGBTQ+ employees in conservative and restrictive cultures (Ulaş-Kılıç, Bayar, & Koç, 2021) where visibility was more risky. For example, coworker support reduced fear and increased the likelihood of disclosing one's sexual orientation, salary increases, opportunities for promotion, and career commitment (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Ragins, Singh, & Cornwell, 2007).

Individual Resources

Individual resources, comprising human and psychological capital, were also shown to be positively associated with minority groups' career success.

Human capital, manifested as education, continuous learning and advanced degrees (Bhattacharya et al., 2018; Cullen & Christopher, 2012), work and international experience (Fritsch, 2015), and hard and soft skills (e.g., communication and social skills; Metz & Tharenou, 2001), made a positive contribution to minority groups' career success (e.g., Johnson & Eby, 2011). For instance, higher education degrees from prestigious universities and broad work experience have been shown to provide minority workers with legitimacy and opportunity (e.g., Johnson & Eby, 2011; McGee, 2018).

Psychological capital, an individual's positive psychological resources of hope, optimism, self-efficacy, and resilience (Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, & Hirst, 2014), was mentioned in many studies (e.g., Avolio et al., 2023; Kauffeld & Spurk, 2022; Smith, Caputi, & Crittenden, 2012). The psychological capital categories that emerged in our review comprised self-efficacy and confidence, resilience, and career advancement optimism, which were shown to be linked to progression in one's career (e.g., Cho et al., 2019; Peus, Braun, & Knipfer, 2015).

Access to and Use of Resources

Many of the studies emphasizing the positive role of career advancement and individual resources in minority groups' career success evidenced that their access to and use of such resources were limited (e.g., Mehra, Kilduff, & Brass, 1998). A *lack of access* is defined as systemic limitations and barriers preventing members of minority groups from fully benefiting from resources necessary for career advancement, while *lack of use* refers to the underutilization or limited application of available resources.

While many workplaces attempt to grant equal resources to their employees and in certain countries they are legally mandated to do so (Bonaccio, Connelly, Gellatly, Jetha, & Martin Ginis, 2020; Ezerins, Simon, Vogus, Gabriel, Calderwood, & Rosen, 2024; Ng & Rumens, 2017), minority groups still faced constraints in benefiting from those resources. Therefore, although career advancement resources were theoretically equally available to all employees, minority groups were constrained in their access to and use of such resources. Our review showed that men were shown to have more access than women to networking (e.g., Biggerstaff, Campbell, & Goldie, 2024), mentoring (e.g., McDonald & Westphal, 2013), training and development (e.g., Cohen, Dalton, Holder-Webb, & McMillan, 2020), role models (e.g., Sealy & Singh, 2010), and workplace support (e.g., Glass & Cook, 2016). This lack of access was more pronounced for racial and ethnic minorities (e.g., Kameny, DeRosier, Taylor, McMillen, Knowles, & Pifer, 2014), individuals with disabilities (e.g., Boeltzig, Sullivan Sulewski, & Hasnain, 2009), and the LGBTQ+ community (e.g., Federo, 2024) and was justified because the needed accommodations would not be cost-effective (e.g., Bhaskar, Baruch, & Gupta, 2023; Kwon & An, 2022). There were cases where minority groups had access to career advancement resources, but they did not feel comfortable using them. For instance, although many ethnic minorities had access to formal mentoring and networking at their workplace, some were not at ease benefiting from these initiatives, as they constantly

felt treated differently on the basis of stereotypes associated with their race or ethnicity (e.g., Sisco, 2020).

Regarding individual resources, minority groups repeatedly claimed that having the same credentials, education, degrees, and other types of human capital as the majority was not sufficient for them to advance their careers and they had to work harder than others to be seen (D'Agostino, Levine, Sabharwal, & Johnson-Manning, 2022; Jayashree et al., 2021). While they wanted to remain resilient and positive, their energy and psychological capacity were diminished because of the issues that they faced due to their minority status. This was particularly more taxing on minority groups if they had no support from their peers and were the targets of microaggressions, hatred, and discrimination (e.g., Pitcan, Park-Taylor, & Hayslett, 2018; Thoroughgood et al., 2021).

Barriers to Access to and Use of Resources

In synthesizing the lived experiences of minority groups to explain why they could not equally access or use career advancement resources or benefit from individual resources, we found commonalities among the factors leading to their lack of access and use. Informed by the "bodies out of place" perspective (Puwar, 2004), we framed these factors as complex visibility, encompassing hypervisibility, invisibility, managed visibility, and organizational inclusivity. In what follows, we describe complex visibility and its three types supported by findings from the reviewed studies.

Complex Visibility

Complex visibility highlights identity-based experiences affecting individuals who hold different sets of underrepresented identities (Glass & Cook, 2020a) and explains that members of minority groups are subject to socially constructed narratives about those groups (Buchanan & Settles, 2019). It offers hypervisibility, invisibility, and managed visibility as theoretical anchors to explain the systemic barriers limiting minority groups' access to and use of resources necessary for career success.

Hypervisibility. Hypervisibility refers to being seen mainly in terms of one's underrepresented or marginalized group membership (Buchanan & Settles, 2019). It is characterized by heightened and often unwanted attention directed toward minority groups within an organization due to the underrepresentation of their identity status (e.g., Smith et al., 2019). Hypervisibility is manifested by (a) hyperscrutiny of minority groups' competence, abilities, worth, commitment, and contributions in the workplace and (b) being treated as a token, which involves stereotypical expectations and significant performance pressures (Settles, Buchanan, & Dotson, 2019).

Being hypervisible meant that minority groups were under surveillance and their real or perceived errors were used to reinforce negative stereotypes (Buchanan & Settles, 2019). Studies including senior leadership ranks showed that minority groups in high-level positions constantly faced doubts about their leadership and abilities (e.g., Glass & Cook, 2020b). This hyperscrutiny was one of the reasons why they accepted high-risk assignments: to stand out among their colleagues, gain others' trust, and be taken seriously (e.g., Smith et al., 2019;

Sparkman, 2021). Members of the LGBTQ+ community believed that they were accustomed to working harder than most colleagues to survive high levels of discrimination and bullying (Ulaş-Kılıç et al., 2021; Wicks, 2017) and to get the promotions that they desired (Parnell, Lease, & Green, 2012).

Minority groups' human capital, including education and past work experiences, were typically undervalued and limited their access to career advancement resources, including mentoring and training (e.g., Chen & Hong, 2016). Immigrants' qualification and degrees were not necessarily recognized postimmigration (Tharmaseelan, Inkson, & Carr, 2010). Some racial and ethnic minorities believed that they had to not only possess certain competencies to excel in their careers but also demonstrate them frequently to earn people's trust and battle negative stereotypes (e.g., Avery et al., 2023).

Because minorities seeking or holding high-status and leadership positions within organizations were underrepresented, they often became hypervisible symbols of diversity (e.g., Bagilhole & Goode, 2001; Smith et al., 2019; Wicks, 2017; Wilson-Kovacs, Ryan, Haslam, & Rabinovich, 2008). They faced intensified scrutiny regarding their competence and leadership potential and bore the burden of having their performance closely monitored—where any perceived misstep could reinforce negative stereotypes (e.g., Ali et al., 2021; Brewster et al., 2017; Goyal, Bhattacharya, & Gandhi, 2022). They were often expected to consider positions and tasks associated with promoting equality and diversity (e.g., Wyatt & Silvester, 2015) and representing their community (e.g., Wicks, 2017) or, in academic settings, to engage in research focused on their minority status (e.g., Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011). These stereotypical expectations served as a form of hypervisibility—positioning them as spokespeople for their groups and diverting attention from their broader competencies. Fulfilling such expectations made them feel overcommitted to diversity-related tasks and overburdened (Joseph & Hirshfield, 2011), and it limited their opportunities to focus on accumulating individual and career advancement resources (e.g., Johnson & Eby, 2011).

The lack of minority groups' representation in professional roles within organizations, coupled with their limited presence in leadership roles (e.g., Ali et al., 2021; Brewster et al., 2017; Goyal et al., 2022), also resulted in the inaccessibility of role models and mentors from such groups (e.g., Davis, Jones, Settles, & Russell, 2022; Sealy & Singh, 2010), further heightening pressures placed on the few who did rise to high-status positions.

Invisibility. Invisibility describes situations where minority groups felt that they were (a) not being seen or (b) not being heard, with their voices being discouraged, silenced, interrupted, or ignored. Many studies pointed to a nonwritten subculture (e.g., Anthony & Soontiens, 2022), which some referred to as an "old boys' club" (e.g., Opoku & Williams, 2019), which dismissed or did not consider minority groups' needs. Networking events were typically designed without considering accessibility features, which limited minority group participation (e.g., Randle & Hardy, 2017). Most formal networking opportunities arose from attending gatherings or events at a venue that required travel (Naraine & Lindsay, 2011); similarly, informal networking usually happened through after-work socializing (e.g., D'Agostino et al., 2022), including activities such as fishing or golf trips (e.g., Biggerstaff et al., 2024; Fotaki, 2013; Sheerin & Hughes, 2018). Women with caretaker responsibilities (e.g., Taser-Erdogan, 2022), part-time workers with personal or family circumstances (e.g., Durbin & Tomlinson, 2010), individuals whose cultural norms conflicted with intersex

after-work socialization (e.g., Afiouni & Karam, 2014) or drinking (e.g., Arifeen, 2020), and individuals with disabilities (e.g., Ely, Ibarra, & Kolb, 2011) all found it challenging to participate in such events.

Formal mentoring schemes within organizations typically matched employees from minority groups with mentors who did not understand their mentees' lived experiences (e.g., Tillman, 2001). Ignorant of the challenges of minority group status, some mentors assumed that what had worked for their career trajectory would work equally for minority groups (Thomas, 1993). Also, some mentees felt that their mentors did not treat them like their non-minority mentees for various reasons, including their hesitance to make mistakes or say something inappropriate (e.g., Daly, Vlach, Tily, Murdter-Atkinson, & Maloch, 2024). Minority groups felt unseen when it came to training and development programs as well. Learning disabilities (e.g., Ezerins et al., 2024), caretaker responsibilities (Manfredi & Clayton-Hathway, 2021), and family and parental obligations (Barkhuizen et al., 2022; Yu, 2020) were among the contingencies overlooked when designing such programs.

There were several examples in our review where minority groups' voices were dismissed, misunderstood, or even silenced. For instance, women who worked on teams consisting mostly of men often felt that their suggestions were not considered as much as the same or similar suggestions offered by men (e.g., Tokbaeva & Achtenhagen, 2023), or individuals with disabilities were shown to be excluded from some projects, being regarded as a liability and burden (e.g., Wilson-Kovacs et al., 2008).

Managing visibility. Managing visibility encompasses the social identity management and coping strategies used by minority groups to exert some control over how others perceive them, often to mitigate discrimination or bias (e.g., Buchanan & Settles, 2019; Roberts, 2005; Shih, Young, & Bucher, 2013), and it was manifested in (a) modifying behavior or (b) concealing, suppressing, and adapting identity. Examples of managing visibility included Black women toning down their hairstyle (Summers, Davis, & Kosovac, 2022); racial and ethnic minorities altering their accents, language, or dialects to fit in with the majority voices (e.g., Dickens & Chavez, 2018); disabled employees not asking for accommodations (e.g., Santuzzi & Waltz, 2016); women acting more masculine to appear fit for leadership roles (e.g., Treanor & Marlow, 2021); and LGBTQ+ employees often masking their authentic self, behaving or describing themselves in ways that did not come naturally to them, or living stressful dual lives (Collins & Callahan, 2012; Fielden & Jepson, 2016; Ulaş-Kılıç et al., 2021). While minority groups may engage in such strategies to reclaim control over their visibility and be perceived in ways consistent with their self-perceptions, the literature suggests that systemic barriers to access to and use of resources stemming from complex visibility cannot always be overcome by such efforts (e.g., Einarsdottir et al., 2018; Woodfield, 2016).

Hiding or suppressing one's invisible minority identity or passing as nonminority (e.g., Collins & Callahan, 2012; Goryunova, Schwartz, & Turesky, 2022) could also restrain minority groups' access to and use of resources (e.g., Bonaccio et al., 2020). For example, networking and mentoring opportunities were constrained when individuals who concealed invisible disabilities from their colleagues found it difficult to cope with the uncertainties of social activities (e.g., Baldridge & Kulkarni, 2017), or mentees could not be their authentic selves with their mentors (e.g., Croteau, Anderson, & VanderWal, 2008; Day & Schoenrade, 1997; Webster & Adams, 2023).

Individuals with invisible minority status were at times reluctant to seek workplace support, as their workplace culture did not make them feel safe to do so (Ezerins et al., 2024). Also, they felt that disclosing their minority status made them vulnerable to biases and discrimination and could result in their losing opportunities for skill development, leadership, and career advancement (e.g., Baldridge & Kulkarni, 2017; Kulkarni & Gopakumar, 2014; Parnell et al., 2012).

Managing visibility sometimes reduced participation in organizational schemes that leveraged developing human capital (e.g., Ross-Smith & Chesterman, 2009). This was mainly due to concerns about being put in situations (e.g., when traveling) that did not allow hiding their minority status and its contingencies (e.g., racial, ethnic or cultural rituals, and limited abilities; Tlaiss, 2015), especially if revealing their identity put their safety at risk (e.g., LGBTQ+ employees in specific international assignments; McPhail, McNulty, & Hutchings, 2016).

Organizational Inclusivity

Organizational inclusivity highlights the practices of creating a workplace context where all employees, including minority groups, feel valued and supported to pursue career advancement (e.g., Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Holcombe Ehrhart, & Singh, 2011). In our review, implementing equal opportunity (EO) policies, cultivating a sensitive workplace culture toward minority groups, and moving away from ideal worker expectations were highlighted as factors that could strengthen or weaken the link between minority status and complex visibility.

Equal opportunity. Studies showed that while EO policies were widely adopted by organizations, they primarily focused on recruitment, hiring, and selection rather than career progression (Brewster et al., 2017). As a result, those with a minority status were less likely to be promoted due to their identity, as these policies were not fully enforced (Abalkhail, 2017). These policies were also not reinforced in the distribution of advancement resources, such as training, mentoring, networking, and leadership development (Amis et al., 2020; Gabriel et al., 2023). Even when EO policies existed, managers demonstrated varying levels of awareness and readiness to enforce them (D'Agostino et al., 2022). When these policies were implemented primarily to increase minority representation, they often led to tokenism and heightened hypervisibility while reinforcing feelings of invisibility as minority individuals found their competencies overlooked or discounted (Primecz & Karjalainen, 2019).

Proactive enforcement of EO policies, however, had the potential to create career advancement pathways to leadership positions, ensuring proportional representation of minority and nonminority groups in leadership roles (McLaren, Patmisari, Hamiduzzaman, Star, & Widianingsih, 2023). However, some minority groups, such as women, expressed concerns that EO policies were not enough to mitigate complex visibility and that affirmative actions were needed, while some high-achieving women argued that they had navigated barriers regardless of such policies (Ng, Lim, Cheah, Ho, & Tee, 2022; Ng & McGowan, 2023). Minority groups advocated targeted outreach efforts, such as promoting job opportunities within minority communities, to improve equal access to opportunities (Bagilhole & Stephens, 1999). However, managerial resistance—often stemming from misconceptions

about positive action versus positive discrimination—has hindered the effectiveness of these initiatives (Kulkarni, 2016; Ryan & Haslam, 2007).

Workplace culture. In workplaces where sensitivity and awareness of minority groups' needs were prioritized, minority employees experienced a more inclusive culture that fostered openness, connection, and acceptance (e.g., Ezerins et al., 2024). In such supportive environments, minority groups were less likely to modify their behavior or feel the need to conceal their minority status to be considered for opportunities (e.g., Federo, 2024). In contrast, hostile work climates, such as highly masculine or homophobic ones, discouraged disclosure, fostered a sense of invisibility, and aggravated the need to conceal identity or pass as a member of nonminority groups (e.g., Essers, van der Heijden, Fletcher, & Pijpers, 2022). Workplace environments that required individuals with disabilities to justify the support that they needed emphasized their outsider-within status, reinforcing hypervisibility by treating accommodations as exceptions (e.g., Brewster et al., 2017). Sensitization programs were crucial in fostering a supportive workplace culture by educating staff to appreciate minority groups' contributions and reduce biases (e.g., Kulkarni, 2016). The active advocacy of managers and colleagues (e.g., Block, Cruz, Bairley, Harel-Marian, & Roberson, 2019) and transparent equity, diversity, and inclusion policies (e.g., Federo, 2024) played pivotal roles in creating a supportive workplace culture, where diversity was valued and minority groups could feel respected and visible (e.g., Thoroughgood et al., 2021).

Ideal worker expectations. Many of the reviewed studies highlighted that the ideal worker model—with its focus on 24/7 availability, extensive travel, physical presence, and a prioritization of work above all else (DeSimone, 2020; Pas, Peters, Doorewaard, Eisinga, & Lagro-Janssen, 2014)—reinforced invisibility and limited access to career advancement resources for minority groups who could not meet these rigid expectations (Niemisto, Hearn, Kehn, & Tuori, 2021; Yates & Skinner, 2021). Rooted in the majority group's work cultures and structures (Lupu & Empson, 2015), this model excluded those with caregiving responsibilities, health needs, or personal obligations, deeming them less committed and advancement ready (e.g., Ballakrishnen et al., 2019; Chikapa, Rubery, & Távora, 2023; Ford, Atkinson, Harding, & Collinson, 2021; Randle & Hardy, 2017). Accordingly, women (particularly mothers) and part-time employees faced disadvantages, as they were often viewed as being less dedicated to the organization (e.g., Fagan & Teasdale, 2021). Flexible roles, often pursued by minorities for work-life balance, were typically seen as secondary, further reducing visibility and limiting career progression (e.g., Ford et al., 2021).

An Inclusive Career Success Framework

Our conceptual framework, diagrammed in Figure 3, explains two pathways that lead to career success disparity among minority and nonminority groups (arrow *x*). The first pathway (arrows *a*, *b*, *c*) demonstrates that minority status leads to complex visibility (arrow *a*), which precedes and restrains minority groups' access to and use of career advancement resources (arrow *b*), subsequently affecting career success (arrow *c*). The link between minority status and complex visibility (arrow *a*) is moderated by organizational inclusivity (arrow *f*) such that the more inclusive the organization, the weaker link *a* is. The second

pathway (arrows *a*, *d*, *e*) shows the link between minority status and career success through complex visibility (arrow *a*), as well as human capital and psychological capital (arrow *d*). The link between human and psychological capital is moderated by complex visibility (arrow *g*) such that higher complex visibility can weaken the link between human and psychological capital and career success. While it is beyond the scope of our study, we acknowledge that our findings are embedded in and influenced by a larger context that includes wider systems of oppression (e.g., sexism, ableism, racism, and homophobia), which in many cases are outside of organizations' control.

Given that more than half of the studies included in our review ($n = 188$) were qualitative, our proposed model does not necessarily show tested statistical relationships. Rather, our model shows perceived associations between multiple factors and career success, which were highlighted by those whose voices were reflected in the reviewed studies. Our working definition of career success—which informed our database search, our subsequent synthesis of the reviewed studies, and our findings—corresponds to the existing definitions (e.g., the accumulated positive work and psychological outcomes resulting from work experiences; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001) and to the objective versus subjective categorization of career success (e.g., tangible or perceived indicators of work accomplishment; Judge, Higgins, Thoresen, & Barrick, 1999). However, not all of the qualitative studies in our review distinguished between objective and subjective career success or limited the perceptions of career success to the definitions established in the existing scholarship. To avoid confusion and to remain loyal to such studies, our model incorporates objective and subjective components of career success but abstains from drawing direct links to objective or subjective career success. Although the exact phrasing used in our figure may or may not have appeared in all the studies categorized under the same label, we are confident that the descriptions provided in the included articles align with our proposed labels. Our framework includes complementary categories of career success that emerged from synthesizing the qualitative studies that we reviewed.

Discussion

We extend career success literature through conducting a systematic review that focuses on career success among four historically marginalized minority groups: women, racial and ethnic minorities, individuals with disabilities, and the LGBTQ+ community. Our review extends career success literature methodologically and conceptually and equips future research to approach this topic more inclusively. We demonstrate that a systematic review has the capacity to explain well-documented disparities between the professional experiences of minority and nonminority employees—in our case, disparity in career success. We do so by acknowledging that the review and meta-analysis studies simultaneously including samples from all employees can only partially explain minority groups' career success. However, the common nuances and intricacies of minority groups' experiences might not be fully observed unless we intentionally bring together studies, including qualitative studies, that reflect these experiences.

Conducting a review that adopted an inductive approach and was open to observing and conceptualizing factors shared among minority groups, we emphasize that the outsider-within status of minority groups and its role should be incorporated into the existing frameworks to

enable an inclusive understanding of career success. The unique experience of being an outsider within mirrors the distinct reality faced by most underrepresented groups aspiring to advance to senior positions (e.g., Smith et al., 2019). As outsiders in environments dominated by nonminority groups, minority groups may face disregard, undervaluation, and misinterpretation and, at the same time, be perceived as a distinctive exception, sometimes treated as a token. The resource management perspective has highlighted identity status as a predictor of career success from a predominantly insider position (Lapalme, Stamper, Simard, & Tremblay, 2009). Insiders benefit from being accepted as organizational members, enjoying positive attitudes and behaviors toward them from other in-group members, such as loyalty, cooperation, and trustworthiness, which enhance their access to resources for career advancement (Shore et al., 2011). Complementing this view, our review suggests that it is essential to consider the outsider-within experiences. Outsiders, such as women and racial minorities entering male- and White-dominated work groups or professions, face the challenge of being seen as disruptions to the status quo. Their journey requires strategic negotiation of their outsider-within membership status (Puwar, 2004). Approaching minority status as an outsider within enables understanding how this status is socially embedded, as well as how it affects minority groups' subsequent career experiences. For example, it helps to recognize that minority status can lead to identity-based systemic barriers to career success, drawing a more realistic picture of minority groups' lived experiences within organizations. This opens avenues for future theorization and research to operationalize and test its impact and increases the relevance of the resource management framework by including different categories of systemic barriers that limit access to and use of resources required for career success.

While systemic barriers to career success have been studied before, our theorization is unique. We utilize three distinct visibility mechanisms to explain why minority status affects career success. We extend the existing research on complex visibility, which has recognized the paradoxical states of being hypervisible and invisible (e.g., Wingfield, 2010). Our review, with its broader scope and focus on commonalities across minority groups, presents the simultaneous interplay of three types of visibility challenges. It provides a tangible way to understand them and enables future researchers to quantify and compare their impact on career advancement across minority groups. We acknowledge that complex visibility does not encapsulate all barriers to career success. Rather, it serves as a specific mechanism that mediates the impact of minority status—a socially constructed identity often accompanied by stigmas, biases, and discrimination—on career success. Our theoretical perspective, which conceptualizes minority status as an outsider within, allows us to explain how complex visibility shapes access to and use of career resources, thereby influencing career success outcomes. It is also important to recognize that, from other theoretical perspectives, barriers to career success could be categorized differently (e.g., institutional biases, workplace discrimination, or unequal accumulation of human and social capital). Rather than replacing these barriers, complex visibility should be understood as a mediating mechanism—one that connects the outsider-within positioning of minority groups to the systemic challenges that translate into career disadvantages.

Our review allows us to suggest pathways that explain the long-standing career success gaps between minority and nonminority employees. The two pathways demonstrate that minority status and complex visibility can limit minority employees' access to and use of multiple career advancement resources, as well as their human and psychological capital and

hence their lower levels of career success. Organizational inclusivity affects the two pathways and can intensify or weaken minority groups' inequitable resource access. These two pathways confirm what the resource management framework has so far found regarding the significance of career advancement and individual resources for all employees. However, each pathway shows that such resources might already be constrained by the complex visibility facing minority groups. Such visibility challenges can vary depending on the minority identity and the organizational inclusivity practiced by employers. Dismissing the causes and repercussions of complex visibility can lead to an incomplete understanding of minority groups' career experiences.

Our framework links multiple factors from the review to explain career success disparity among minority and nonminority groups. Specifically, minority status, which positions individuals as an outsider, makes them more susceptible to complex visibility, which in turn mediates their access to and use of career advancement resources. These disparities in access to and use of resources contribute to lower career success outcomes for minority groups. Our framework accounts for the role of human and psychological capital in career success while demonstrating how complex visibility can constrain the effectiveness of these resources. Organizational inclusivity moderates the impact of complex visibility by either amplifying or mitigating its negative effects on resource access and career success. By synthesizing these factors into a coherent framework, we move beyond fragmented discussions of barriers and instead offer a structured understanding of how career success disparity could be explained. Future research can empirically test the relationships and pathways outlined in the framework to assess the extent to which complex visibility operates as a key mechanism shaping disparities and how organizational inclusivity interventions can disrupt these negative cycles.

The inductive nature of our review allowed us to categorize additional manifestations of subjective career success. Previous research has expanded the literature on subjective career success (Shockley et al., 2016), framing it as a multidimensional construct distinct from career satisfaction and objective success (i.e., meaningful work, growth and development, influence, authenticity, personal life, quality work, and recognition). However, past efforts to extend career satisfaction research have acknowledged limitations, particularly in recruiting diverse samples that accurately represent variations in gender, race, and career stage (Shockley et al., 2016). As stated by past researchers, the predominance of Western participants in these studies raises questions about the generalizability of findings to more diverse populations. Our work complements these efforts by addressing gaps in the experiences of minority groups often overlooked in prior research. Specifically, our review highlights new manifestations of subjective career success, including survival, the collective good, and adjustability. These additions capture how the lived experiences of minority groups shape their perceptions of success, expanding the scope of career success measures to be more inclusive and contextually relevant.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While our review provides valuable insights into an inclusive career success perspective, we acknowledge that it is not without its limitations. To systematically review the literature on career success among minority groups, we included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method studies, which limited our ability to derive and quantify conclusions about the

strength of the relationships among categories and subcategories. Some of our reported relationships need further exploration, since they were based on a limited number of studies. Although our narrative describes the pathways to career success as direct links, it is essential to note that almost all the studies to date examined correlational relationships or qualitative associations; therefore, while causal effects of the factors that we have identified are implied, they have yet to be confirmed. While our article organizes the categories that emerged from our analysis and links them as dependent, independent, mediating, and moderating factors to explain disparities, it does not fully capture the temporal dynamics and change over time necessary for a process theory—a common challenge when working with nonempirical data (Cloutier & Langley, 2020). We encourage future empirical research to build on our framework and adopt process thinking to elaborate on how the categories and the links among them emerge and evolve over time.

We recommend that future researchers examine the distinct aspects of the framework derived from our synthesis. As current career success frameworks are largely based on the experiences of dominant groups with privileged access to resources, advancing future research requires a focus on barriers to resource access and use. Specifically, we emphasize the importance of examining complex visibility as a mechanism that can explain the impact of resource access and use on minority groups' career success. It is essential to consider complex visibility when assessing resource management in quantitative and qualitative studies. As the three visibility forms in our analysis largely stem from qualitative research, we encourage future quantitative studies to measure and integrate these visibility dimensions when analyzing minority groups or comparing their experiences with nonminority groups. Similarly, to capture the nuances of minority groups' experiences when positioned as an outsider within in organizational settings, future research should develop and incorporate measures that reflect the distinct dimensions of this status. Such research could explore the sense of being perceived as different or othered or as deviating from the normative group identity.

We do not argue for the generalizability of our findings; however, our review design can be applied to synthesize extant research on other organizational outcomes of interest to more deeply explain the challenges in access to and use of resources facing underrepresented minority groups. We also believe that our theorization of complex visibility can be linked to many organizational and individual outcomes and that future researchers can incorporate it into their research questions and study designs. Complex visibility has the potential to draw attention to the relative power of dominant group members to marginalized group members, and its focus on the influence of unstated organizational norms makes it well suited to thinking about the negative workplace experiences of minority groups. Our framework shows that, in an ideal world, without negative social stereotypes, biases, stigmas, and complex visibility, singling out studies conducted among a specific minority group for a review would not be required. However, we are far from such an ideal world now, and this review can be a stepping stone to extend career success scholarship to be more inclusive.

Future studies could explore the impact of structural changes, such as equitable promotion criteria, antibias policies, and accountability mechanisms, on career success disparity. This research would provide insights into which organizational policies are most effective in ensuring sustained equity in career success. Also, future research could examine

the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve minority access to critical career advancement resources, such as mentorship, networking opportunities, and training and development programs. Although initial evidence suggests that such interventions can positively affect minority career advancement (e.g., Davis et al., 2022; Steele et al., 2024), the limited number of studies in this area indicates a significant need for further research to validate and expand these findings. Evaluating whether these interventions mitigate barriers highlighted by complex visibility could help determine the most effective approaches for supporting minority groups' career success.

Our synthesis reflects the challenging aspects of complex visibility and systemic barriers; yet, given the emphasis in the literature that we reviewed, it is noteworthy that diversity scholars have called for more research examining when and how invisibility might confer benefits to marginalized group members on their path to career success. For example, Rabelo and Mahalingam (2019) distinguish between harmful alienating invisibility and self-protective invisibility. The varied positive and negative experiences associated with visibility underscore how the intersection of one's social identities influences these dynamics. According to intersectionality theory (Crenshaw, 1991), each identity's significance depends on the interplay with other identities and the power structures associated with them. Individuals may face marginalization in certain aspects of their identities while benefiting from privilege in others. Such individuals may experience hypervisibility, invisibility, or managed visibility, depending on which identity is most prominent in a specific context.

Implications for Practice

To facilitate career success equality in workplaces, we advocate for a multipronged approach that raises awareness and addresses the aspects identified in our review. To begin, organizational decision makers should develop a comprehensive understanding of the complex visibility influencing access to career advancement resources in their context and intentionally facilitate access to networks, mentors, role models, training, development, and workplace support for minority groups through planned interventions. Equal access to career advancement resources is necessary to implement unbiased HR practices, including recruitment, promotion, and performance evaluation. Diversity and equity practices should be informed by detailed reports of the levels of access to organizational resources among a diverse range of employees and should not be based on a one-size-fits-all approach. Such awareness of the contingencies of different minority groups can accommodate creating inclusive cultures and can mitigate ideal worker expectations to pave the way for minority groups' career success. For example, companies might arrange accessible networking gatherings during standard working hours to foster connections among all staff members, ensuring the inclusion of those who might be left out if events were scheduled after hours.

Organizations may offer benefits that support employees' personal responsibilities (e.g., childcare support), enabling them to commit more time and effort to career-building activities, such as mentorship or educational degrees that may contribute to their career success. Also, workplaces should make continuous efforts to establish psychologically safe spaces, such as career forums, where employees can openly discuss barriers to success and access to opportunities. This could prompt discussions to identify solutions for specific professional contexts, encourage informal social interactions among peers and colleagues, foster workplace support, and increase awareness across the organization of the lived experiences and visibility challenges of minorities who pursue career advancement. Making a case for

accommodating minority groups' needs, identifying required adjustments, and normalizing them within a workplace should be at the forefront of advocacy for an inclusive career success process. In many cases, it is ideal for minority groups to feel included and looked after without their asking for or justifying their needs. Including a diverse range of individuals and facilitating career success is not a box to be ticked but a mindset to inform organizational decisions and cascade through organizational layers.

Conclusion

Our systematic review contributes to the career success scholarship by integrating insights from diversity research and career resource management to develop a more inclusive framework for understanding career success among historically marginalized minority groups. By highlighting the systemic barriers that limit access to and use of career advancement resources, we emphasize the role of complex visibility—hypervisibility, invisibility, and managed visibility—as a critical mechanism shaping career outcomes for minority employees. Our framework underscores the importance of organizational inclusivity in mitigating disparities by moderating the impacts of complex visibility and facilitating equitable access to career advancement resources. Our findings broaden the conceptualization of career success by incorporating subjective manifestations, such as survival, the collective good, and adjustability, emphasizing how minority status shapes career success perceptions and outcomes. This review advances theory by extending the resource management framework to account for the outsider-within experience of minority groups and offers practical implications for organizations aiming to foster more equitable career advancement opportunities. Future research should continue to explore the nuanced interactions between minority status, visibility, and career success to refine theoretical and empirical understanding in this area.

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Notes

1.   The theoretical lenses informing our review were not selected up-front. While coding and categorizing the findings of the reviewed studies, we consulted the literature and found the combination of the two theoretical anchors helpful in explaining our findings.

2.   It is important to note that a quantitative meta-analysis or qualitative meta-synthesis was not feasible, as the included studies were not sufficiently similar (Grant & Booth, 2009).

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