

Title: Refusing to Disappear: Visibility as an Act of Resistance

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The word I choose to capture my vision for gender equity in medicine is visibility.

Visibility is a skill, and like beauty, it is often a tool for power. For me, visibility has never been a natural state. I am naturally cynical about the spotlight. In a world that equates competence with volume, I have often found comfort in the background. But in medicine, visibility—the ability to be seen and heard—is the currency of respect. For many women, and particularly for those of us who do not fit the mold of the loud, confident leader, visibility requires a deliberate, often uncomfortable, fracturing of the self.

During my preclinical training, I encountered this reality in small-group learning sessions. I came prepared. I had done the readings; I had the answers. Yet, my contributions were frequently met with a specific kind of non-response. I would speak, and there would be no reaction. No nods, no follow-up questions, not even a disagreement. Just a pause, and then the conversation would resume as if I hadn't spoken at all. It wasn't just silence; it was erasure. Even when I was the only one speaking, holding the floor, I felt entirely absent from the group, as if I were observing it from behind a glass wall.

The barrier wasn't just metaphorical; it was physical. I have a speech impediment that causes me to stutter, and as a result, I tend to mumble. It is a defense mechanism I developed young: if I speak quietly, the stutter is less obvious, less horrific to witness. I learned to minimize my presence to hide my insecurities, much like I used to use makeup solely to cover acne rather than for expression. But in medical school, this protective mechanism became a cage. My silence was being misread as passivity, my stutter as uncertainty.

As an Asian woman, this dynamic carried an additional, heavier layer. My quietness was too easily assimilated into the stereotype of the submissive, diligent worker who absorbs information but does not challenge it. I realized that my invisibility was a collaborative effort: I was hiding to protect myself from the embarrassment of my speech impediment, and the system was all too happy to overlook a quiet woman of color.

The turning point came when a facilitator pulled me aside. They had noticed the dynamic too. They acknowledged that I was contributing, but that the group wasn't receiving it. They offered to advocate for me—to amplify my points or call on me directly. While the offer was kind, it illuminated a pattern I had grown too comfortable with. I was used to being seen through the help of others—relying on intermediaries to clear a path for my voice. It was a dynamic I had

settled into because it was safer. But in that moment, I decided I wanted to fix it. I realized that if I relied on someone else to validate my presence, I would never truly own my place in that room.

In the next session, during a process observation discussion, I forced myself to speak. I didn't appeal to their emotions or ask for inclusion. I simply noted what I had been observing. I told them that often, even when I am speaking, I feel like I am not in the group at all. I pointed out that my words didn't seem to register. I acknowledged my stutter and my mumbling as variables in this dynamic, but I refused to let them remain the justification for it. It was visceral and uncomfortable. I stuttered through the explanation. I hated every second of it. It wasn't graceful, but it was honest.

Dr. Brodsky's mission to help women "get the jobs they want" rests on the premise that we must first refuse to be invisible. For me, that means refusing to hide my stutter. It means refusing to let my natural Koreanness or my resting face be interpreted as disengagement. It means accepting that visibility might always feel uncomfortable, like a dystopia I have to navigate to reach the equity I want.

I am learning to view visibility not as a personality trait I lack, but as an ethical commitment I must make. I am learning to project my voice—stutter and all—stating my ideas clearly and documenting my work. I am becoming attentive to others who are fading into the background, not to save them, but to ensure the environment doesn't erase them. Dr. Linda Brodsky showed us that visibility is an act of resistance. I intend to honor her by refusing to disappear, even when it is easier to stay quiet.