



LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

A program that equips all employees to identify and challenge the biases women face at work

Company cultures



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TO GET STARTED:

Download our [Moderator Guide & Speaker Notes](#) to prepare for your session, find links to necessary handouts, and learn what to say.

Use "Slide Show" mode to click on links in this presentation or right click to access the hyperlink when not in "Slide Show" mode.

Presentation starts
on the next slide

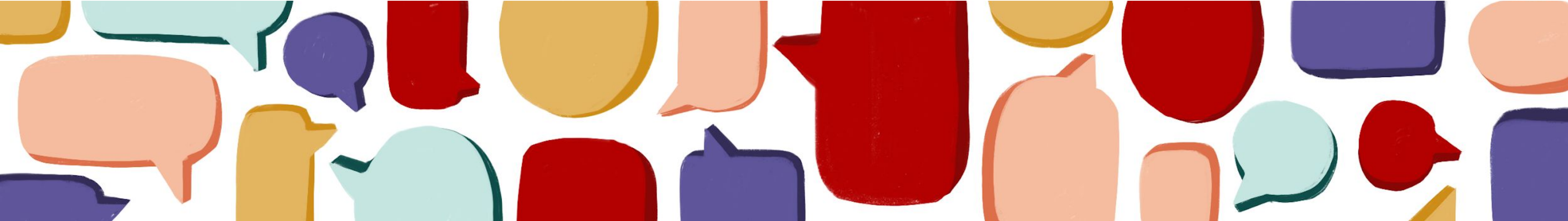


LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

A program that equips all employees to identify and challenge the biases women face at work

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Welcome

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

LEAN IN

LeanIn.Org helps women achieve their ambitions and works to create an equal world.

LeanIn.Org thanks our partners for their valuable contributions to this program:



WHY WE ARE HERE

- ▶ Bias—whether deliberate or unconscious—is holding women back in the workplace.
- ▶ It makes it harder for women to get hired and promoted and negatively impacts their day-to-day work experiences.
- ▶ This hurts women and prevents companies from fully leveraging their talents.
- ▶ Today, we'll learn concrete steps to address the biases women face head-on.

TODAY'S AGENDA

1

Set the tone

2

Learn about
biases women
face at work

3

Dive into specific
situations and
solutions

4

Finish with a
closing activity

1

Setting the tone

SETTING THE TONE

- 1** Women can experience a broad range of biases that can undermine their capabilities or leave them feeling disrespected at work.
- 2** Multiple kinds of bias can be at play in any situation.
- 3** We all fall into bias traps.
- 4** Knowing that bias exists isn't enough — commit to take action.

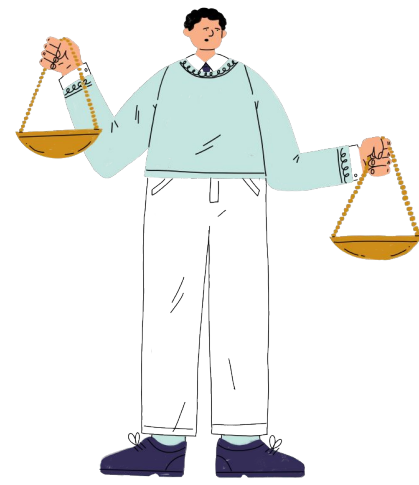
GROUND RULES FOR TODAY

- 1 Some situations may be difficult to hear.
- 2 Stories should be anonymous.
- 3 Give people the benefit of the doubt.

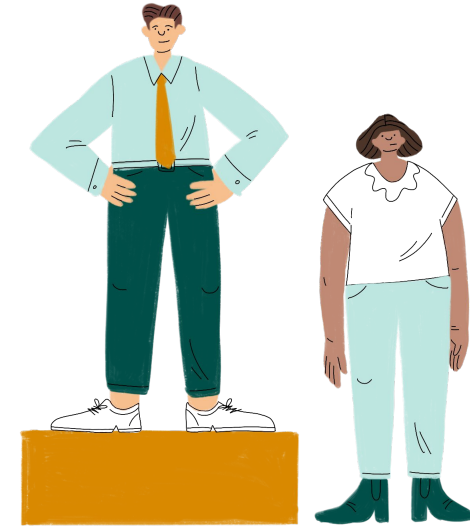
2

Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Unconscious bias



Performance bias



Attribution bias



WATCH THE VIDEO:

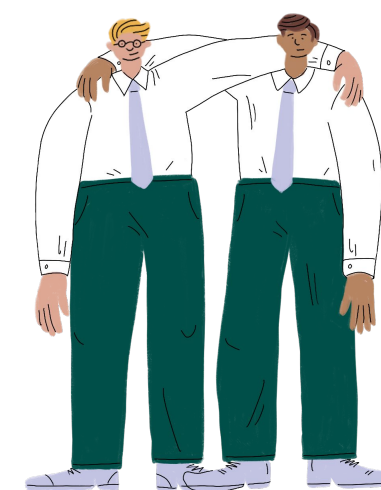
“Introduction to the Common Biases Women Experience”



Likeability bias



Maternal bias



Affinity Bias

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



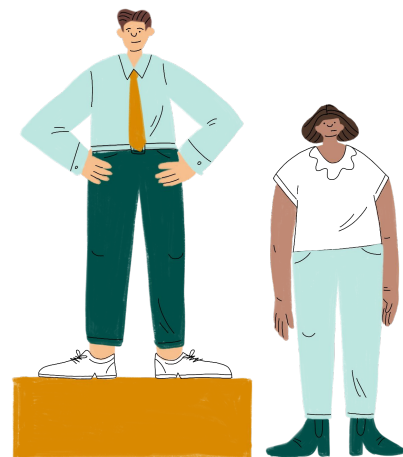
Likeability bias

Likeability bias is rooted in age-old expectations. We expect men to be assertive, so when they lead, it feels natural. We expect women to be kind and communal, so when they assert themselves, we like them less.¹¹



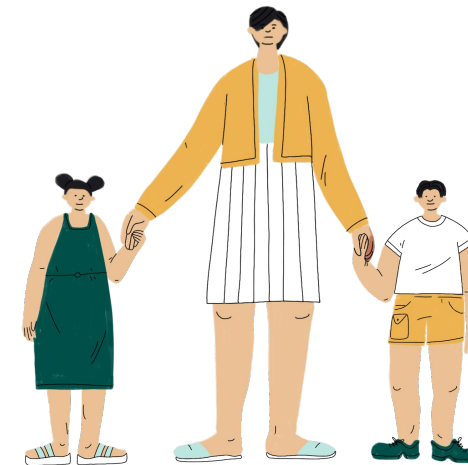
Attribution bias

Attribution bias is closely linked to performance bias. Because we see women as less competent than men, we tend to give them less credit for accomplishments and blame them more for mistakes.¹⁰



Performance bias

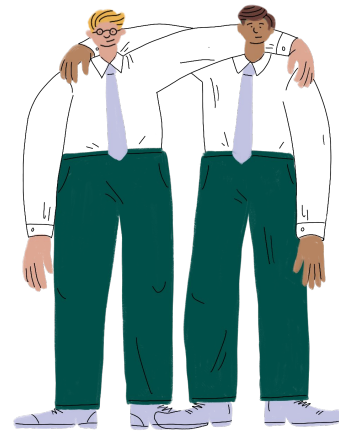
Performance bias is based on deep-rooted — and incorrect — assumptions about women's and men's abilities. We tend to underestimate women's performance and overestimate men's.⁹



Maternal bias

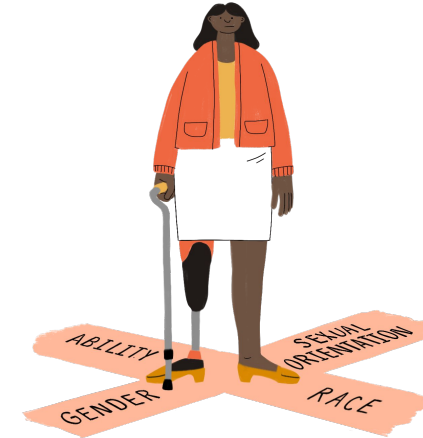
Motherhood triggers false assumptions that women are less committed to their careers — and even less competent.¹²

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Affinity bias

Affinity bias is what it sounds like: we gravitate toward people like ourselves in appearance, beliefs, and background. And we may avoid or even dislike people who are different from us.¹³



Compounding bias

Bias isn't limited to gender. Women can also experience biases due to their race, a disability, or other aspects of their identity.



Unconscious bias

Unconscious biases are mental "shortcuts" that our brains use to make sense of the world around us. We all have unconscious biases, but by slowing down and becoming aware of them, we can reduce their impact on our decisions.

Icebreakers

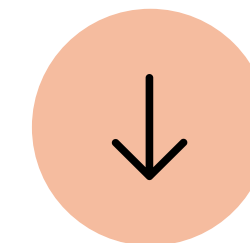
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

What % of women have experienced everyday disrespect like being mistaken for someone more junior or having their competence questioned at work?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

What % of women have experienced everyday disrespect like being mistaken for someone more junior or having their competence questioned at work?

ANSWER:
73%.⁸

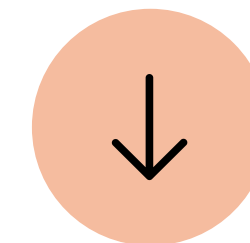
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

In one study, how much more likely was a woman to get an interview if her resume pictured her without a hijab, compared to picturing her with a hijab?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

In one study, how much more likely was a woman to get an interview if her resume pictured her without a hijab, compared to picturing her with a hijab?

ANSWER:

Three times more likely.²³³

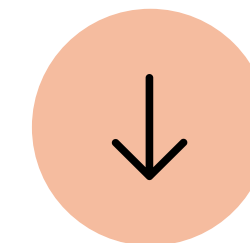
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

Compared to men without disabilities, how much more likely are women with disabilities to hear disrespectful remarks at work about themselves or others like them?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

Compared to men without disabilities, how much more likely are women with disabilities to hear disrespectful remarks at work about themselves or others like them?

ANSWER:

Nearly three times more likely.⁸

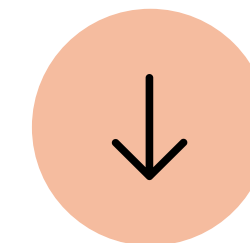
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

Compared to straight men, how much more likely are lesbian and bisexual women to feel like they can't talk to colleagues about their lives outside of work?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

Compared to straight men, how much more likely are lesbian and bisexual women to feel like they can't talk to colleagues about their lives outside of work?

ANSWER:

Around four times more likely.⁸

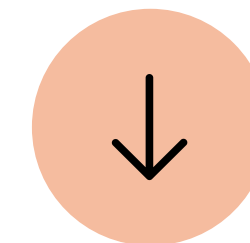
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

How many times more often do men interrupt women than other men?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

How many times more often do men interrupt women than other men?

ANSWER:

Almost 3 times more often.²³

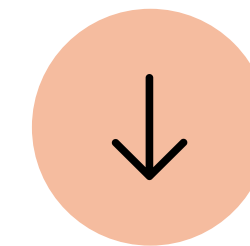
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

What % of Black women have *never* had an informal interaction with a senior leader at their company?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

What % of Black women have *never* had an informal interaction with a senior leader at their company?

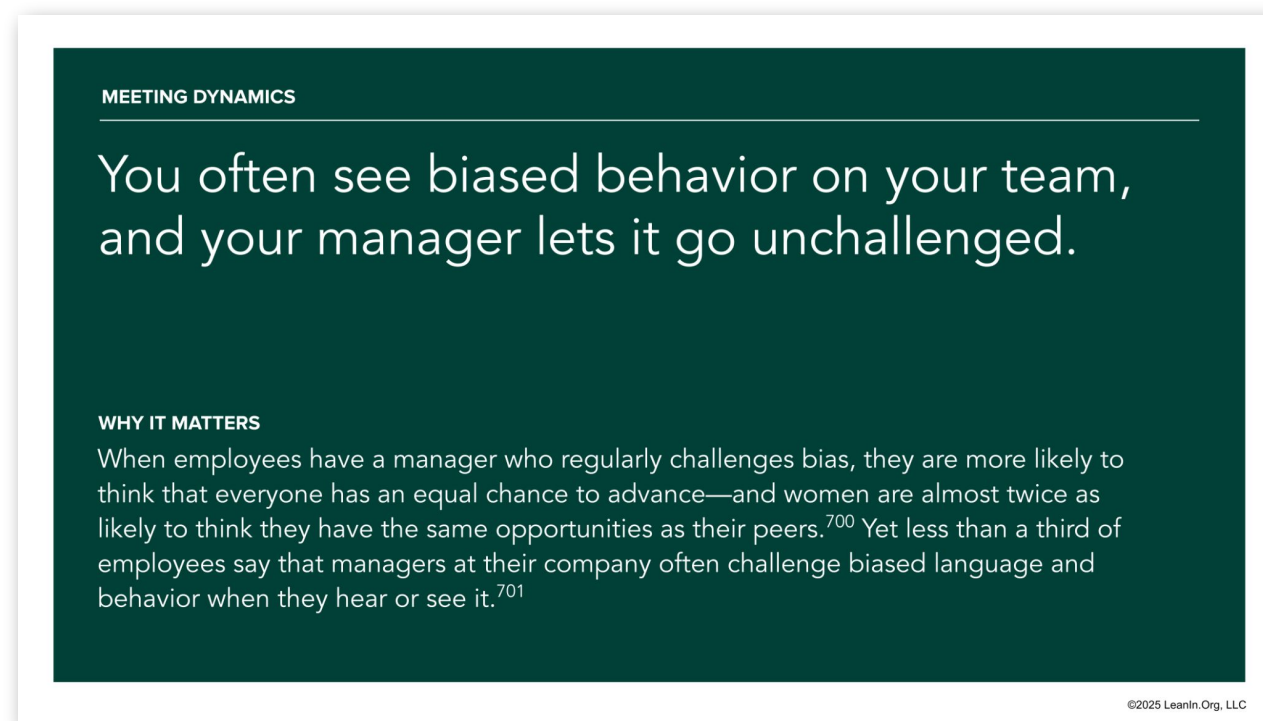
ANSWER:
59%.⁵¹

3

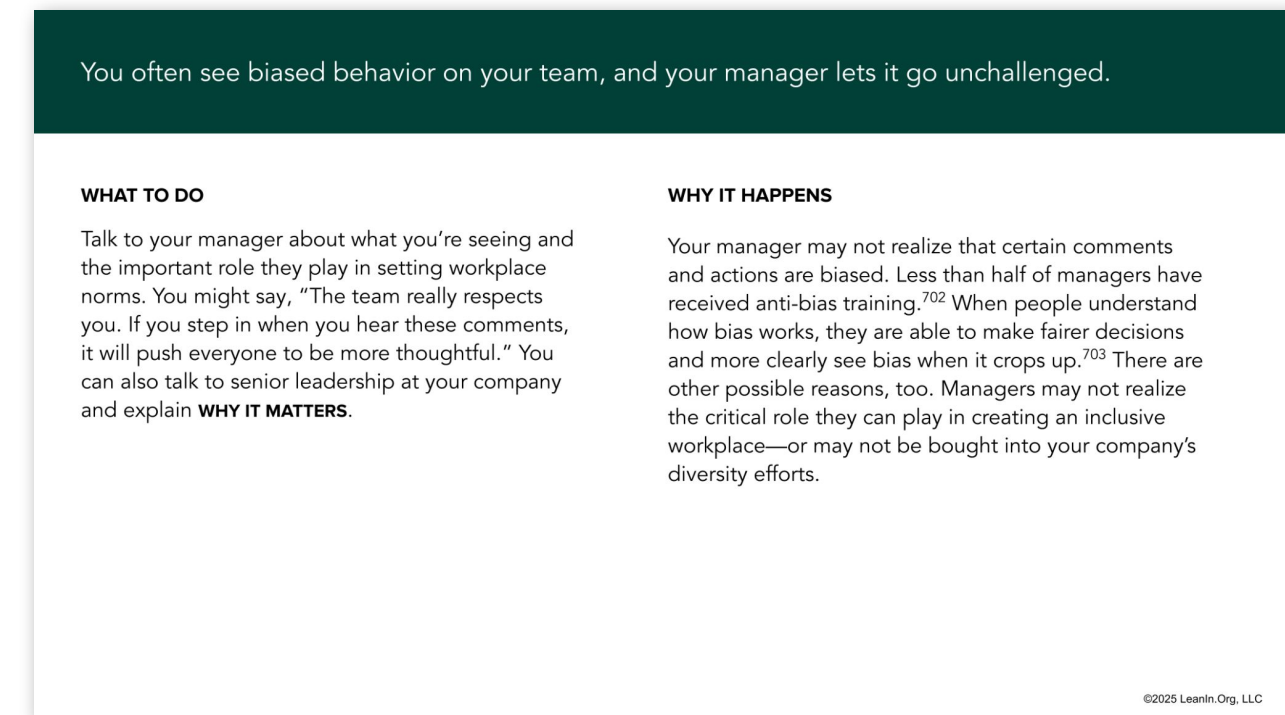
Workplace situations

INSTRUCTIONS

- 1 Move into your small group or breakout room. Everyone should have a copy of the presentation you will use for discussion.
- 2 Select one person to read the situation and **WHY IT MATTERS**.



- 3 As a group, discuss what you would do in this situation.
- 4 After 3–5 minutes of discussion, read **WHAT TO DO** and **WHY IT HAPPENS**.



- 5 Continue through as many situations as you can in the time allotted.

Your manager, who is a man, often meets the men on his team for dinner or drinks—but rarely meets with the women outside of work.

WHY IT MATTERS

Friendships at work are valuable. Important relationship building and information sharing can happen over coffee or pizza. When people are routinely excluded from outings like these, they can miss out. If it's a manager making arrangements, it's especially problematic—part of their responsibility is to make sure the whole team has equal access to networking opportunities.

You realize that a colleague who is a man only mentors other men.

WHAT TO DO

This is your manager, so you have standing to raise this with him. Say that you've noticed he goes for drinks with men on the team more than women. Explain **WHY IT MATTERS**. You can also offer solutions: if he's uncomfortable going to dinner with women, suggest that he meet everyone for breakfast or lunch.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your manager may feel more comfortable with men because of affinity bias, which draws us toward people like ourselves.⁵⁵⁴ Or he may be nervous for other reasons: some men are wary of spending time with women colleagues outside of work for fear of seeming inappropriate.

Rooted in affinity bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker asks a woman of color where she is “really from.”

WHY IT MATTERS

Many people of color hear this often, and the net effect is to make them feel that they are foreigners who don't belong. Research shows that when heard repeatedly, this question can be mentally taxing and can even contribute to depression and anxiety.³⁴²

A coworker asks a woman of color where she is “really from.”

WHAT TO DO

You could address this comment in the moment: “You probably don’t realize this, but people of color get this question all the time, and it can make them feel like outsiders.” Or you could take your coworker aside privately to explain why the question might make the woman feel marginalized, even if their intention is to try to get to know them.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your colleague may be genuinely interested in where the person is from and may not realize that the question can be hurtful. They may also have lack awareness of the diversity of Americans.³⁴³ The underlying assumption is known as “the perpetual foreigner stereotype.”³¹

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

Your team holds regular happy hours after work for networking and bonding at a local bar. You realize that one colleague, a Muslim woman, has never come.

WHY IT MATTERS

Some Muslims avoid alcohol and may therefore feel uncomfortable in a bar.⁶⁸ If most networking events are held in bars, it means they miss out on the team bonding that can lead to career opportunities.⁶⁹ It can also send a message that employees who don't drink—and other groups like caregivers who need to be home soon after work—are not considered when social events are planned.⁷¹

Your team holds regular happy hours after work for networking and bonding at a local bar. You realize that one colleague, a Muslim woman, has never come.

WHAT TO DO

Talk to your team leader and explain **WHY IT MATTERS**. Encourage them to plan a wide range of events that leave out as few people as possible. For example, if your team goes out every week to a bar, consider moving it to a restaurant sometimes. Move a few evening events to lunchtime so working parents can join. And make the changes with sensitivity, so no one gets blamed. If happy hours are simply canceled, it may create bad feelings among some employees.⁷¹

WHY IT HAPPENS

Many teams—and companies—don't realize how much thoughtfulness is needed to ensure that work events are welcoming to as many employees as possible. This might happen because teams fall into the habit of replicating bonding events that have been offered for decades—many of which were designed for less diverse workplaces.

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

In a private conversation, a coworker expresses resentment about “special treatment” for a woman with a disability who is allowed to work flexible hours.

WHY IT MATTERS

People with disabilities may need flexibility for many reasons—for example, to manage pain or for medical treatment. When those needs are questioned, they may feel undermined, stigmatized, and unhappy at work.⁵⁷⁰ But when employees with disabilities are fully supported, they’re usually just as happy as their colleagues.⁵⁷¹ This has a big impact, since 1 in 6 working-age Americans has a visible or invisible disability.⁵⁷²

In a private conversation, a coworker expresses resentment about “special treatment” for a woman with a disability who is allowed to work flexible hours.

WHAT TO DO

Tell your coworker **WHY IT MATTERS**. You can also talk to HR and ask them to clarify your company’s general policies on flexible work, so that people are less likely to view specific situations as unfair.⁵⁷³

WHY IT HAPPENS

This can happen when people don’t understand that accommodations like flexibility aren’t “nice to have” for employees with disabilities—they’re essential. Additionally, because people with disabilities tend to be seen as less valuable and competent, coworkers may question whether they really need or deserve extra support.⁵⁷⁴ This is especially true for women with disabilities, who face more bias and disrespect at work than almost any other group.⁵⁷⁵

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker asks a Black woman on your team if they can touch her hair.

WHY IT MATTERS

Asking to touch a Black woman's hair treats her as different or as an outsider.¹¹⁹
It can make her feel disempowered, on guard and self-conscious.¹¹⁹

A coworker asks a Black woman on your team if they can touch her hair.

WHAT TO DO

You can jump in and say something like, “Hey, asking to touch a Black woman's hair is not OK!” or “Why do you need to touch it? It looks great from here!” To make sure it doesn’t keep happening, consider mentioning it to your manager as an example of why the company may need more frequent or robust anti-bias training.

WHY IT HAPPENS

The request may be motivated by “hair bias”—the idea that there’s something exotic, wrong, or unprofessional about a Black woman’s natural hair.³²⁶ This bias has been around for over a century and has been reinforced by the beauty industry.⁵⁰² It is also all too common: in fact, some U.S. companies still prohibit natural Black hairstyles.⁵⁰³

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

Before an event, your manager says to a Latina, "Don't forget there's a dress code." He does not give this reminder to others on your team.

WHY IT MATTERS

This comment could adversely impact how others view your Latina colleague, especially as it comes from her manager. It could also add to the pressure felt by many Latinas to present themselves with extreme care to fit a narrow definition of professional attire.³⁰⁴ Most Latinas in corporate America say that they style their hair and makeup conservatively (87%) and dress conservatively (84%) to fit in at work.³⁰⁵

Before an event, your manager says to a Latina, "Don't forget there's a dress code." He does not give this reminder to others on your team.

WHAT TO DO

Push back on the comment. You can do it lightly: "I think [Name] always looks well put together." Or privately ask your manager to explain why they directed that comment at her, rather than everyone. You can also explain **WHY IT MATTERS**.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your manager may believe common stereotypes about what Latinas like to wear, such as large earrings, bright colors, or tight clothes.³⁰⁶ They may be unaware that Latinas are a diverse group with a wide range of style preferences. Your manager is also probably influenced by corporate norms for dress in the U.S., which encourage us to think that certain styles typical of white businessmen, such as dark colors and button-down shirts, are the most tasteful and appropriate, even though they have no impact on the way someone does their job.³⁰⁷

MEETING DYNAMICS

A meeting is starting soon and you notice that it's mostly men seated front and center and women seated to the side.

WHY IT MATTERS

If women are sidelined in meetings, it's less likely that they'll speak up, which means the group won't benefit from everyone's best thinking. Plus, it's not beneficial to sit in the low-status seats in the room—and women have to fight for status as it is.⁵⁸⁵

A meeting is starting soon and you notice that it's mostly men seated front and center and women seated to the side.

WHAT TO DO

If there are empty chairs at the table, urge women sitting to the side to fill them. If there's no room, acknowledge the problem—for example, ask if anyone else sees that it's mostly men at the table. If it happens often, consider saying to the person who runs the meeting, "I've noticed that it's mostly men at the table and women on the sidelines. Maybe you can encourage a better mix."

WHY IT HAPPENS

Women typically get less time to speak in meetings. They're more likely than men to be spoken over and interrupted.⁵⁸⁶ As a result of signals like these, women sometimes feel less valued, so they sit off to the side.

Rooted in performance bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

You overhear a coworker confuse the names of the only two Black women in your company.³⁴⁵

WHY IT MATTERS

This mistake could diminish the women's value in the eyes of those who hear it. It can also signal disrespect for Black women at the company more broadly because, consciously or unconsciously, it is a form of stereotyping. And it can make the women feel that their names are not considered worth learning or that they are viewed as interchangeable.

You overhear a coworker confuse the names of the only two Black women in your company.³⁴⁵

WHAT TO DO

You can correct the mistake in the moment: “You’re confusing Maya with Alicia. They’re very different! You should get to know them.”²⁹⁹ If that doesn’t work and your coworker continues to confuse them, you might need to talk to your manager. Explain **WHY IT MATTERS** and suggest that someone speak to them about trying harder to get this right.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Decades of research show that people often find it harder to differentiate between people of another race than people of their own race.³⁰⁰ This is called “own-race bias.”⁵⁹⁰ Research also suggests that people are less likely to remember employees with less power—and Black women (and people of color generally) are less likely to be viewed as powerful in their organizations.³⁰⁰

Situation adapted from The Memo: What Women of Color Need to Know to Secure a Seat at the Table, by Minda Harts

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

You are in a staffing meeting, and a coworker recommends you put one woman on each team for better diversity.

WHY IT MATTERS

One in five women report they are often the only woman or one of the only women in the room at work.⁵⁹² These “Onlys” tend to have a worse experience than other women. They are more likely to have their abilities challenged and be subjected to unprofessional remarks.⁵⁹³ They may also experience extra pressure and scrutiny, and they can feel that their actions reflect on others like them.⁵⁹⁴ This takes a toll: women who are Onlys are 1.5 times more likely to think about leaving their jobs than women who aren’t.⁵⁹⁵

You are in a staffing meeting, and a coworker recommends you put one woman on each team for better diversity.

WHAT TO DO

Applaud the spirit of the idea, but explain the downside of inadvertently isolating women on separate teams. Instead of adding one woman to many teams, recommend putting groups of a few women on teams together. If you're in a position to do so, suggest that your company create opportunities for women Onlys to connect with other women, such as networking groups. Also, surface that this is a symptom of a larger problem: your company likely needs to hire more women.

WHY IT HAPPENS

When women are underrepresented in organizations—as they often are—they tend to be spread thinly across teams, which means they stand out. Women of color are even more likely to be “Onlys,” since there are fewer of them in corporate America.⁵⁹⁹ This underrepresentation can make the biases women face especially pronounced. With everyone's eyes on them, they can often be heavily scrutinized and held to higher standards. As a result, they feel pressure to perform, on guard, and left out—and may be less likely to speak up and contribute fully.⁶⁰⁰

MEETING DYNAMICS

In a meeting, a client only looks at and speaks to the men on your team.

WHY IT MATTERS

This slight might seem trivial, but it sends a signal about who matters—in this case, the men. It can also create a dynamic where women miss out on valuable chances to join the conversation and shape outcomes. When this happens, your team isn't able to put their best foot forward.

In a meeting, a client only looks at and speaks to the men on your team.

WHAT TO DO

Do your part to make eye contact with everyone and try to find ways to bring more women into the conversation. When possible, you can pass the baton to a woman in a way that highlights her expertise: “[Name] would be great to answer this. She’s actually our resident expert on the topic.”

WHY IT HAPPENS

This may happen because of performance bias: your client may assume—consciously or unconsciously—that the women at the meeting are less competent and lower in status than the men.⁶⁰⁷ If your client is a man, this behavior could also be the result of affinity bias: people often gravitate toward others like them.⁶⁰⁸

Rooted in performance bias & affinity bias

MEETING DYNAMICS

A woman suggests an idea in a meeting and it falls flat. A few minutes later, a man suggests the same idea and gets an enthusiastic reaction.

WHY IT MATTERS

Getting credit for ideas is important—it's often how employees get noticed. When people don't feel heard, they may also stop speaking up and sharing their views. Over time, if their contributions go unseen, it can slow their advancement.⁶¹⁴ In both cases, companies end up missing out.

A woman suggests an idea in a meeting and it falls flat. A few minutes later, a man suggests the same idea and gets an enthusiastic reaction.

WHAT TO DO

You can remind everyone that the idea originated with your woman colleague: “I think [Name] made that point a few moments ago. I like this direction.” Advocating for women coworkers in this way can help them get noticed for their contributions—and it can also position you as a leader.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Because we tend to underestimate women’s performance and overestimate men’s, we often don’t give women as much credit for their ideas. This can play out in meetings. The team doesn’t “hear” an idea when a woman raises it, but when a man says the same thing, they pay attention.⁶¹⁵

Rooted in attribution bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A colleague mentions her wife during lunch with coworkers. The group conversation, which had been flowing nicely, abruptly goes silent.

WHY IT MATTERS

Situations like this happen often to lesbian women, and they can create a barrier to connecting with coworkers.⁶¹⁶ Regardless of intent, these silences signal discomfort with the fact that she's married to a woman. Such moments can feel awkward and lonely, and if repeated could make your colleague feel unwelcome at work.

A colleague mentions her wife during lunch with coworkers. The group conversation, which had been flowing nicely, abruptly goes silent.

WHAT TO DO

The most important thing to do is revive the conversation and signal support. Express genuine interest in your colleague and her family. Ask her what her wife does for work, whether they have kids, how they met, what they like to do on weekends ... whatever you would ask a woman colleague married to a man.

WHY IT HAPPENS

There are several reasons why coworkers might fall silent at the news that a colleague is gay. Maybe they disapprove of marriage between two women. Or maybe their silence isn't ill intentioned. They may have been surprised or hesitated because they want to show support but worry about saying the wrong thing.

You impulsively reach out and touch a coworker's tattoo.

WHY IT MATTERS

For some people, being touched isn't a big deal. For others, it understandably is. Depending on the situation, it can feel anywhere from uncomfortable to invasive. In some cases, it can even constitute harassment.

You impulsively reach out and touch a coworker's tattoo.

WHAT TO DO

Say, "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have touched you without asking" and commit to being more thoughtful moving forward. Never enter someone's personal space without knowing they're OK with it. Even if they say they are, be aware that they may feel pressure to agree, especially if you're in a position of power. Ideally, your company also has guidelines for respectful behavior that you can use to inform your thinking.⁶¹⁸ And when in doubt, keep your hands to yourself.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Sometimes, we touch people in celebration or friendship, like a high five or a quick hug. This can be perfectly fine, and even welcomed. But some touches suggest we see another person as a novelty—like when we touch a Black woman's hair, a pregnant woman's belly, or a disabled person's wheelchair—and this is demeaning and disrespectful. Some touches are also sexual in nature, and that is never OK at work.

You often see biased behavior on your team, and your manager lets it go unchallenged.

WHY IT MATTERS

When employees have a manager who regularly challenges bias, they are more likely to think that everyone has an equal chance to advance—and women are almost twice as likely to think they have the same opportunities as their peers.⁶²² Yet less than a third of employees say that managers at their company often challenge biased language and behavior when they hear or see it.⁶²³

You often see biased behavior on your team, and your manager lets it go unchallenged.

WHAT TO DO

Talk to your manager about what you're seeing and the important role they play in setting workplace norms. You might say, "The team really respects you. If you step in when you hear these comments, it will push everyone to be more thoughtful." You can also talk to senior leadership at your company and explain **WHY IT MATTERS**.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your manager may not realize that certain comments and actions are biased. Less than half of managers have received anti-bias training. When people understand how bias works, they are able to make fairer decisions and more clearly see bias when it crops up.⁶²² There are other possible reasons, too. Managers may not realize the critical role they can play in creating a positive work culture—or may not be bought into your company's efforts to do so.

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker complains that their team is switching their video call software to accommodate a visually impaired woman on the team.

WHY IT MATTERS

If employees with disabilities hear this comment, they may feel as though they aren't valued and don't belong.⁶²³ That could affect more people than you realize, since 1 in 6 working-age Americans has a visible or invisible disability.⁶²⁴ And it has a big impact—employees with disabilities are often less happy at work than their colleagues, but that gap goes away when workplaces are accommodating and welcoming to everyone.⁶²⁵

A coworker complains that their team is switching their video call software to accommodate a visually impaired woman on the team.

WHAT TO DO

Speak up on behalf of your visually impaired colleague. Say you think it's reasonable for all employees to have the software they need to do their job. Remind your coworkers that if this woman isn't able to fully participate in video calls, the team won't get the full benefit of her input. You could also ask your HR team to offer inclusion trainings that explicitly address disability, which can help employees build empathy.⁶²⁹

WHY IT HAPPENS

People with disabilities face particularly strong negative biases.⁶³⁰ Compared to most other groups, including men with disabilities, women with disabilities are more likely to be underestimated and devalued in the workplace—and this sets the stage for them to be denied the support they need to do their jobs effectively.⁶³¹

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A colleague doesn't invite a woman on your team to an evening work event, explaining that they assume the woman prefers to be home for dinner with her family.

WHY IT MATTERS

When women with kids are excluded from activities, it can limit their career growth. It can also make them feel isolated from the rest of their team. For companies that care about retaining women, that's a problem.

A colleague doesn't invite a woman on your team to an evening work event, explaining that they assume the woman prefers to be home for dinner with her family.

WHAT TO DO

Say, "We don't actually know what [Name] wants. How about we offer her the opportunity and let her decide for herself?" Consider pointing out the difference in how mothers and fathers are often treated: "Do we assume fathers aren't interested in evening events?" You can also remind them of the bigger picture: "Let's make sure we give the moms on our team the same chances as everyone else—sometimes they get sidelined."

WHY IT HAPPENS

People often assume that once a woman starts a family, she stops being as committed to her job and career.⁶³⁷ This can lead to generalizations—for example, that moms will say no to stretch assignments, business travel, or invitations to work events after hours.

Rooted in maternal bias

Your manager calls out a team member during a virtual meeting for not turning on her video when she seems reluctant to do so.

WHY IT MATTERS

Being put on the spot like this can trigger anxiety and stress. If the employee has her children with her, she may fear being judged as unprofessional—a bias that can affect all parents but impacts women more than men, as women are more likely to be interrupted by their children.⁶³⁸ Women are also penalized more than men for not looking well-groomed or put together.⁶³⁹ This creates a particular burden for Black women, who have to spend a lot more time than other women on their hair to avoid negative judgments. This is because of biased beliefs that their natural hair is "unprofessional."⁶⁴⁰

Your manager calls out a team member during a virtual meeting for not turning on her video when she seems reluctant to do so.

WHAT TO DO

In the moment, you can speak up and point out that she's present and participating, even if the team can't see her. If you, too, like to leave your video off from time to time, perhaps point this out. That sends the message that she isn't an outlier. Later, you could talk to your manager about it and explain **WHY IT HAPPENS**.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Managers may insist on video because they want their team members to feel connected, especially if they cannot be together in person. Or they may ask employees to turn on video to ensure that everyone is productive and engaged. But this doesn't take into account everything an employee may be balancing while working from home, including childcare and housework. And it doesn't make allowances for the anxiety employees may feel about how they look or their home looks on a busy or chaotic day.

Your manager calls out a team member during a virtual meeting for not turning on her video when she seems reluctant to do so.

WHAT TO DO

Talk to your manager about what you're seeing and the important role they play in setting workplace norms. You might say, "The team really respects you. If you step in when you hear these comments, it will push everyone to be more thoughtful." You can also talk to senior leadership at your company and explain **WHY IT MATTERS**.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your manager may not realize that certain comments and actions are biased. Less than half of managers have received anti-bias training.⁷⁶ When people understand how bias works, they are able to make fairer decisions and more clearly see bias when it crops up.⁷⁷ There are other possible reasons, too. Managers may not realize the critical role they can play in creating an inclusive workplace—or may not be bought into your company's diversity efforts.

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker asks a woman to pick up food for an office party, even though that's not her job.

WHY IT MATTERS

Women are expected to do more “office housework” than men, or work that’s not part of their core job.⁶⁴¹ Doing office housework takes women away from their core responsibilities and suggests their time isn’t as valuable, which can be demeaning.⁶⁴²

A coworker asks a woman to pick up food for an office party, even though that's not her job.

WHAT TO DO

Say something like, "That's not really [Name's] job." Then suggest a solution that distributes the work more fairly: "Let's make this party a potluck" or "Let's switch things up and choose someone else this time." If your coworker pushes back, explain how women are more likely to be asked to do these tasks and why it's unfair.

As a longer-term solution, take note of who does the office housework on your team. If there are gender, racial, or other disparities, talk to your manager about rotating these tasks so they don't fall heavily on any one group.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Tasks like taking notes, planning events, and onboarding new hires tend to be seen as "women's work" due to stereotypes that women are more communal and giving than men.⁶⁴³ When women decline requests for help, they are often penalized for it, while men can say no with less pushback.⁶⁴⁴

Rooted in performance bias & likeability bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

You see a colleague introduce a senior woman as “the nicest person in the office” without mentioning her job title or accomplishments.

WHY IT MATTERS

When women are described only as “nice,” it can downplay their capabilities and reinforce the stereotype that women are nurturers—as opposed to leaders.⁶⁴⁵ This can be particularly undermining to senior-level women.

You see a colleague introduce a senior woman as “the nicest person in the office” without mentioning her job title or accomplishments.

WHAT TO DO

Try to round out the compliment with a reference to the woman’s overall performance. If she recently led a project or is known to be a strong manager, say so. If you believe the woman’s personality is an asset to the company, you can make that point, too. For example, you might say, “Because of her way with clients, we’ve really expanded our customer base.” Just make sure to link it to a positive business outcome.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of traditional stereotypes that women are nurturing and communal, colleagues often pay more attention to their personality traits. This means that women’s hard skills, accomplishments, and leadership capabilities often go overlooked, which can slow their advancement.⁶⁴⁶

Rooted in attribution bias & likeability bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker confides in you, “I honestly just find it easier to work with men.”

WHY IT MATTERS

Your colleague’s preference for working with men could lead them—consciously or unconsciously—to overlook talented women. When this happens, women can miss career opportunities, and your coworker can miss the chance to work with women from whom they might learn something.

A coworker confides in you, “I honestly just find it easier to work with men.”

WHAT TO DO

A comment like this may signal that your coworker thinks women are less talented or less likeable than men. You can ask, “What makes you say that?” When people are asked to explain themselves, it sometimes leads them to rethink their position. You can also explain

WHY IT HAPPENS—it can be eye-opening to understand how bias works—or share your own perspective: “I’ve had great experiences working with women.” Even if you can’t convince them to think differently, you can push back on their point of view.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your colleague may say this because of performance bias, which can lead them to incorrectly assume that men are more competent than women.⁶⁴⁷ Likeability bias can lead them to feel that competent women are less likeable and therefore harder to work with.⁶⁴⁸ And if your colleague is a man, his comment may be rooted in affinity bias—he may prefer to work with people like himself.⁶⁴⁹

Rooted in performance bias, likeability bias, affinity bias

A coworker asks, “Who’s the new girl?”

WHY IT MATTERS

Calling an adult woman a girl in a professional context can make her seem junior and inexperienced—and implies that she doesn’t need to be taken seriously. Comments like this are disrespectful to women.

A coworker asks, “Who’s the new girl?”

WHAT TO DO

You can reply, “The new woman we’ve hired is ...” That might be enough to make your colleague rethink their language. Or be more direct: “I’m sure it wasn’t your goal, but calling her a girl can undermine her standing here at work.”

WHY IT HAPPENS

People tend to think that women are less competent than men,⁶⁵⁰ which leads them to take women less seriously—and to assume they have lower status and less power.⁶⁵¹ That can make it seem acceptable to refer to a woman as a girl, when they would not call a man a boy.

Rooted in performance bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

Someone says of a coworker who is off work for a religious holiday, “Ugh, why is she out again?”

WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like this unfairly stigmatize coworkers for honoring their religious beliefs and practices.

Someone says of a coworker who is off work for a religious holiday, “Ugh, why is she out again?”

WHAT TO DO

If you know which holiday your coworker is off work for, explain its significance to your colleague. For example, “She’s off for Eid—it’s one of the biggest Muslim holidays of the year.” If you don’t know the holiday, saying something general is better than saying nothing: “She’s off for a religious holiday that I know is very important to her.” However you speak up, it conveys to your colleague that they said something off base, which can prompt them to reflect and hopefully avoid similar comments in the future.

WHY IT HAPPENS

We’re used to Christmas being a standard day off work for many U.S. employees. By contrast, non-Christian employees, including Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, and Hindus, often have to either use their personal time off or work through major holidays. Your colleague may not understand this, or may not know how significant these holidays are to their coworkers.

You hear a coworker ask another colleague whether it is her own choice to wear a hijab.

WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like these are based on false assumptions about Islam and signal that your coworker thinks of your Muslim colleague as fundamentally different. This can be problematic because people tend to avoid or even dislike people who they view as very different from themselves.⁴⁰⁸ It can also contribute to a culture where Muslim women feel less comfortable interacting with colleagues.⁴⁰⁹

You hear a coworker ask another colleague whether it is her own choice to wear a hijab.

WHAT TO DO

If you're comfortable using humor, you can ask, "Was it your own choice to wear those pants?" Otherwise simply ask, "What makes you say that?" Asking people to explain their thinking can push them to question their own assumptions. You can also follow up privately and share that research shows that almost 100 percent of Muslim women choose to wear a hijab themselves.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Americans tend to think of Muslim women as oppressed by their families and religious communities.⁴⁰⁶ As a result, non-Muslims often assume that Muslim women wear hijabs due to external pressure. In reality, most U.S. Muslim women say they choose to wear a hijab for religious or identity reasons, and only 1 percent say their family requires it.⁴⁰⁷

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

You hear someone tell a woman on the team that they “don’t look Jewish.”

WHY IT MATTERS

It’s disrespectful to your Jewish coworker because it implies that looking Jewish is not a good thing. For some Jewish people, the comment may be additionally upsetting because historically, “looking Jewish” and “not looking Jewish” were determinants of how Jewish people were treated, and even of their very survival.

You hear someone tell a woman on the team that they “don’t look Jewish.”

WHAT TO DO

You can say something like, “There is no one way to look anything!” to disrupt the moment and redirect the conversation. If you feel comfortable doing so, you can also take your coworker aside and explain why comments like theirs can be harmful.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Comments about Jewish people’s appearance are based on anti-Semitic stereotypes, dating back centuries, about what Jewish people look like and how to identify them. It also reflects a lack of knowledge of the diversity of the Jewish community, since it implies that all Jewish people look one particular way. And because women are more likely to hear comments about their appearance at work, Jewish women likely end up hearing more belittling comments like this than Jewish men.⁴¹³

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A colleague questions whether an Orthodox Jewish woman will want to travel for work.

WHY IT MATTERS

Incorrect assumptions like this may lead Orthodox Jewish women to miss out on opportunities that can lead to advancement. It is also “othering” because it implies they have fundamentally different ambitions from their coworkers.

A colleague questions whether an Orthodox Jewish woman will want to travel for work.

WHAT TO DO

Respond to your colleague, “I don’t think we should assume that X doesn’t want to travel without asking her.” You can also share that research shows that travel opportunities can lead to career advancement, so assuming she can’t travel may hold her back at work.⁴¹⁵

WHY IT HAPPENS

This question may be based on a stereotype that Orthodox Jewish women are very family oriented and therefore less committed to work. In addition, many Orthodox Jewish women cover their hair and wear modest clothing, which can trigger these kinds of harmful stereotypes at work.

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

You're talking to coworkers about the news, and someone jokes about Jewish influence over the media (or another industry).

WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like this imply that positions of power held by Jewish people are not fairly earned, which can undermine your Jewish colleagues' perceived competence. In addition, tropes about Jewish power can elicit stress and even fear among your Jewish colleagues—especially given that this stereotype is often cited as a motive for hate crimes against Jewish people.⁴¹⁶

You're talking to coworkers about the news, and someone jokes about Jewish influence over the media (or another industry).

WHAT TO DO

In the moment, say something like, "I know you're only joking, but the problem is many people seriously think Jewish people hold too much power." This signals that your coworker's comment and the assumption behind it are not okay. Then, ideally, you can find time to talk one-on-one with your coworker and explain that even if it's not intended, comments like theirs reinforce damaging—and untrue—stereotypes about Jewish people.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Tropes and conspiracy theories related to Jewish power have extraordinary persistence: in a 2024 poll, 25 percent of Americans said Jewish people had too much power in the business world and 39 percent said Jewish people always like to be at the head of things.⁴¹⁷

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker says, "I don't understand why we need a Jewish ERG."

WHY IT MATTERS

Statements like this minimize the concerns of Jewish colleagues and can discourage support for a Jewish ERG.

A coworker says, “I don’t understand why we need a Jewish ERG.”

WHAT TO DO

You can say something like, “There’s a lot of research showing that ERGs help people thrive at work, and our Jewish coworkers deserve that camaraderie and support.” You can also point out that anti-Semitism is still widespread, making a Jewish ERG all the more needed.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Many people incorrectly believe that anti-Semitism is largely a thing of the past, so they don’t understand why Jewish employees might need an ERG. In reality, one in four Americans still holds a wide range of profoundly anti-Semitic beliefs, and for decades Jews have faced more hate crimes than any other religious group.⁴¹⁸

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

Someone says of a Jewish coworker,
“Let’s have her plan the conference,
as she’ll really watch the budget.”

WHY IT MATTERS

Unintentionally or not, the remark implies that your coworker should plan the conference because she's cheap—not because she has the right skill set—which undermines her standing at work. In addition, comments like this reinforce an anti-Semitic stereotype and are disrespectful to your Jewish coworkers.

Someone says of a Jewish coworker, “Let’s have her plan the conference, as she’ll really watch the budget.”

WHAT TO DO

In the moment you can say to your coworker, “I didn't know X had experience managing budgets. Can you share more details?” This pushes your coworker to reflect on why they made the remark. If the woman doesn't have budgeting experience, hopefully your question leads your coworker to recognize their bias. And if she does have the right background, you could follow up with something like, “It's great to hear you're recommending her because of her experience” to signal the comment is problematic, even if it wasn't intended that way.

WHY IT HAPPENS

The stereotypes that Jewish people are cheap or “good with money” go back to the Middle Ages, when they were barred from many professions but allowed to lend money and charge interest. This led to the biased thinking that managing money was somehow “natural” to Jews.⁴¹⁹

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

You hear a coworker say, “antisemitism just isn’t a problem anymore since Jews have so much wealth and power.”

WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like this can harm Jewish colleagues by reinforcing stereotypes that have historically been used to attack and discredit them. Such remarks may also discourage coworkers from taking antisemitism seriously, which is especially concerning given the rise in anti-Jewish incidents over the last decade.⁴²⁰

You hear a coworker say, “antisemitism just isn’t a problem anymore since Jews have so much wealth and power.”

WHAT TO DO

You can say something like, “You may not know this, but antisemitism is on the rise. And the stereotype about Jewish wealth and power can be really harmful.” If you think statistics might be persuasive, you can also mention that in the last thirty years, Jewish Americans have faced more hate crimes than all other religious groups combined.⁴²¹

WHY IT HAPPENS

Comments suggesting that antisemitism is no longer a problem may stem from lack of awareness. But they can also arise from harmful stereotypes about Jewish Americans, or from conspiracy theories that Jewish people invent antisemitic incidents for political gain.

The tropes of Jewish wealth and power have a long history. Centuries ago, Jewish people were more likely to work as money-lenders because they were barred from other professions, giving rise to the stereotype that Jews are generally rich.⁴²² And conspiracy theories of Jewish power have been used for millennia to incite resentment and even violence against Jewish communities.⁴²³

4

Closing Activity

SUMMARY: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT BIAS

When bias occurs, there are a number of ways to respond, some of which you discussed today. Below is a summary of the strategies you can use to combat bias:

- ▶ Speak up for someone in the moment
- ▶ Ask a probing question
- ▶ Stick to the facts
- ▶ Explain how bias is in play
- ▶ Advocate for policy or process change

“My One Action to address bias against women in the workplace is...”