



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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For senior leaders



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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

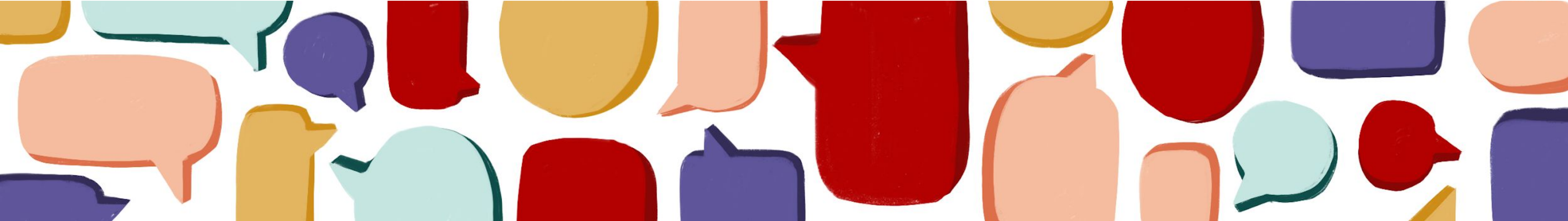


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# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

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

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- ▶ 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

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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

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- 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

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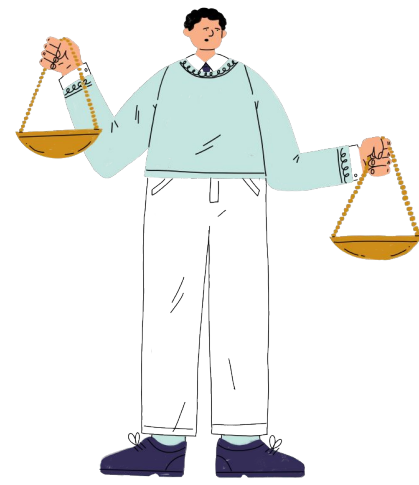
- 1 Some situations may be difficult to hear.
- 2 Stories should be anonymous.
- 3 Give people the benefit of the doubt.

2

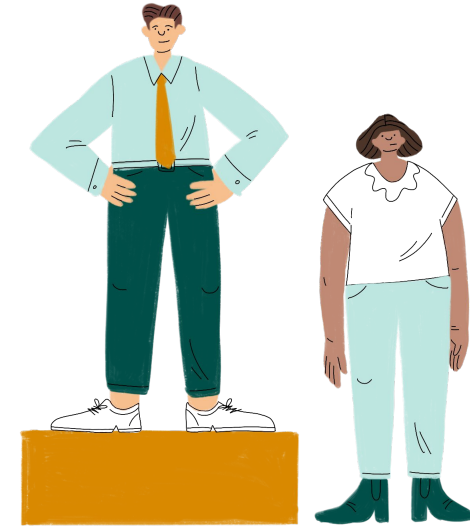
# Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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Unconscious bias



Performance bias



Attribution bias

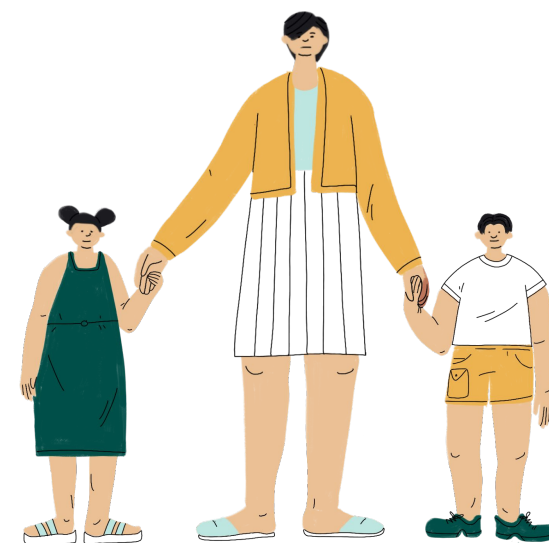


**WATCH THE VIDEO:**

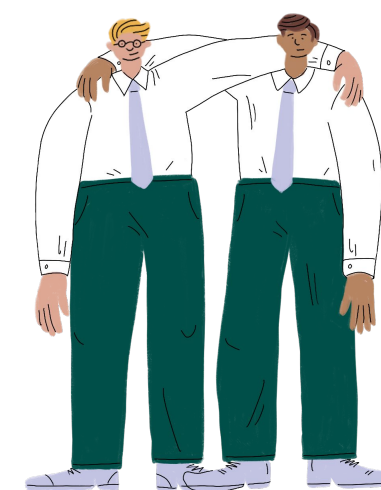
“Introduction to the Common Biases Women Experience”



Likeability bias



Maternal bias



Affinity Bias

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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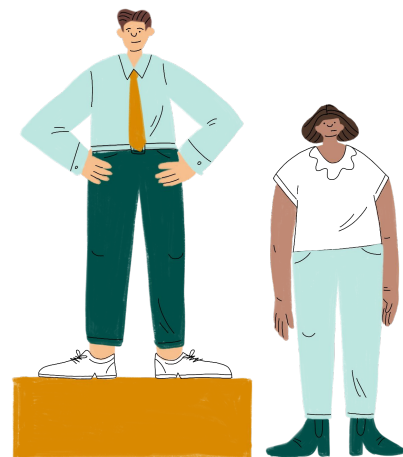
## Likeability bias

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.<sup>11</sup>



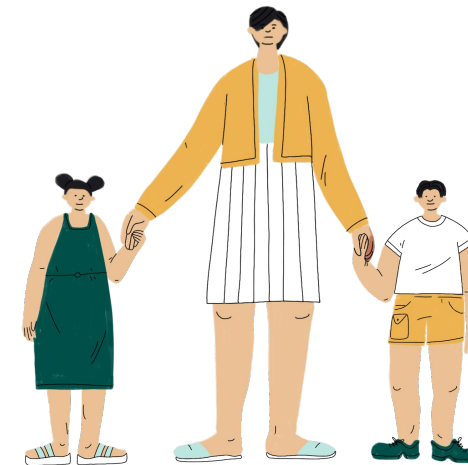
## Attribution bias

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.<sup>10</sup>



## 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.<sup>9</sup>

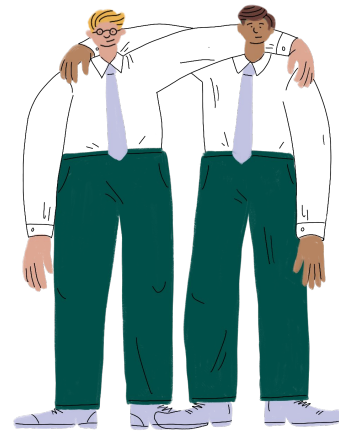


## Maternal bias

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

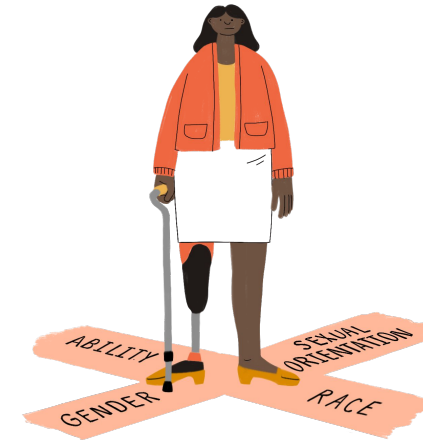
## COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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### 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.<sup>13</sup>



### 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?

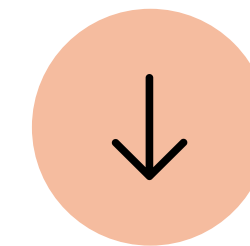
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When 1 in 10 senior leaders at their company is a woman, what % of men and what % of women think women are well represented in leadership?

## Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

**SEE THE ANSWER**



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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When 1 in 10 senior leaders at their company is a woman, what % of men and what % of women think women are well represented in leadership?

### **ANSWER:**

44% of men and 22% of women.<sup>201</sup>

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

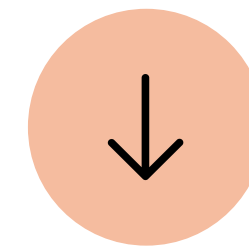
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For every 100 men promoted to manager, how many Black women are promoted?

## Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

**SEE THE ANSWER**



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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For every 100 men promoted to manager, how many Black women are promoted?

### ANSWER:

Only 54 Black women.<sup>403</sup>

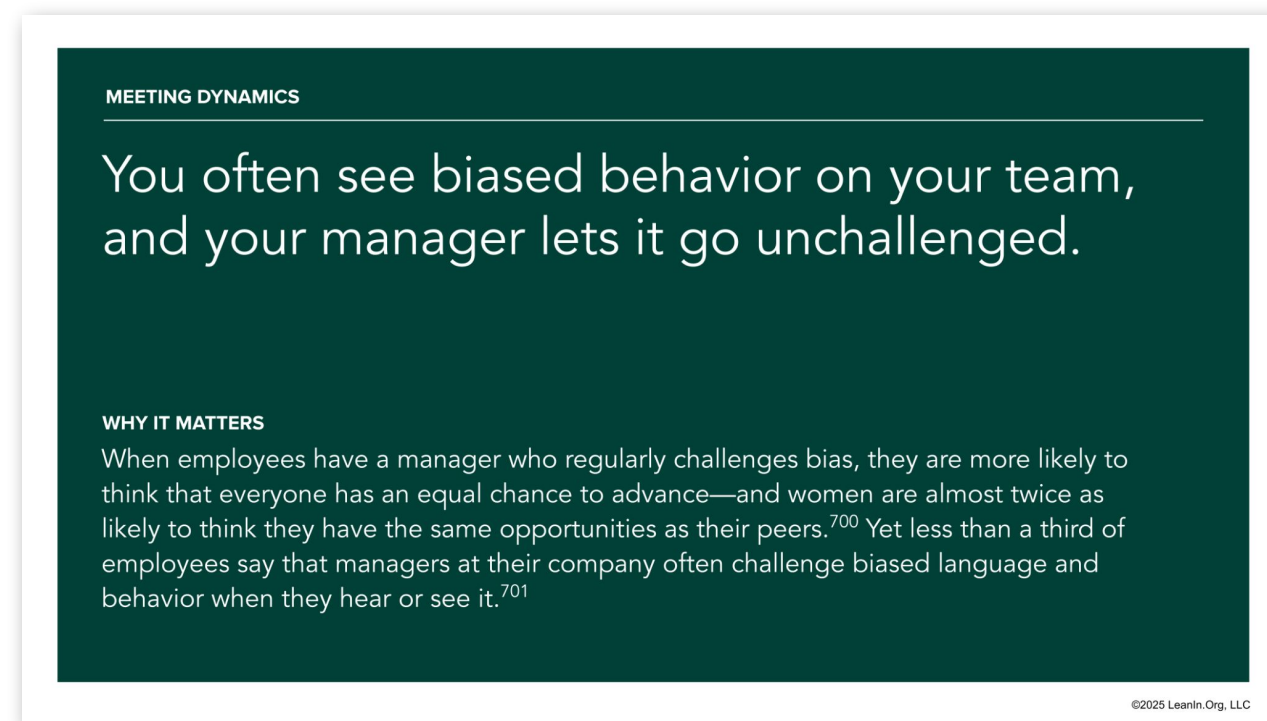
3

# Workplace situations

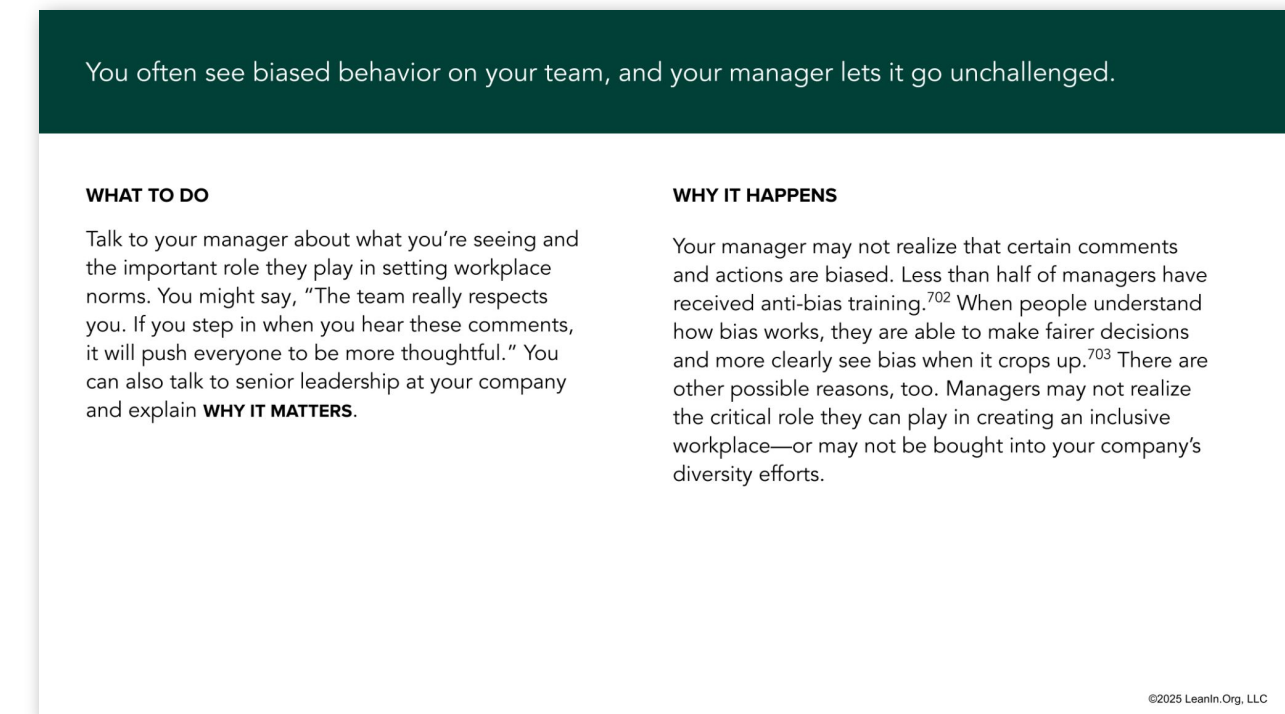
## INSTRUCTIONS

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- 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.

## HIRING

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You realize that your company gets most of its new employees through referrals by current employees.

### WHY IT MATTERS

If you're not careful, you may end up with a lot of employees of the same race or gender, or from similar educational or economic backgrounds. This could mean that your company is failing to get the benefits of diversity—and isn't necessarily getting the best talent.

You realize that your company gets most of its new employees through referrals by current employees.

## WHAT TO DO

If the new hires lack diversity, talk to HR or someone senior. Say that you've noticed that your company tends to hire people who are referred by other employees and explain the shortcomings of this strategy. Another issue could be that your process for evaluating new hires is too subjective, so someone saying, "He's my friend" ends up carrying a lot of weight. To counter that, suggest using a list of standardized criteria, so all candidates are judged by the same standard.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Affinity bias makes us more comfortable with others like ourselves.<sup>374</sup> This can make it feel safer and more comfortable to hire people who are already known and liked by existing employees.<sup>177</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

Your company announces its latest round of promotions. Nearly everyone moving up is a man.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This imbalance may signal bias in how your company evaluates employees for promotion—which means women may be missing out on valuable career opportunities and your company may be failing to get the strongest candidates into leadership positions. This is a widespread problem in corporate America: on average, women are promoted at lower rates than men, while Black women and Latinas are promoted at even lower rates than women overall.<sup>161</sup>

Your company announces its latest round of promotions. Nearly everyone moving up is a man.

## WHAT TO DO

If you're involved with reviews, seize the opportunity to make the process more fair. Suggest that your company set detailed review criteria up front and then stick to them. Consider using a rating scale (say, from 1 to 5) and ask reviewers to provide specific examples of what the employee did to earn each score.<sup>115</sup> If you're not part of reviews, you can still make these suggestions to your manager.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Multiple forms of bias may contribute to a workplace in which fewer women are promoted. People tend to see women as less talented and competent than men, even when they're equally capable. Because of this, women are less likely to get credit for successes and more likely to be blamed for failures.

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

Someone complains to you that a new dad on the team is taking too much of his allotted family leave.

### WHY IT MATTERS

All workers—men too!—should be able to spend time with their families, whether that's to bond with new babies, care for sick kids, or be there for aging parents. When workplaces have generous family leave policies, employees are happier, more productive, and more likely to stay on staff.<sup>224</sup> Plus, when men don't use their leave, it makes it harder for women to use theirs without judgment.

Someone complains to you that a new dad on the team is taking too much of his allotted family leave.

## WHAT TO DO

Stand up for your colleague on leave. Point out **WHY IT MATTERS**—how family leave is good for workers, families, and companies.<sup>225</sup> More importantly, remind them that no one should be forced to choose between being a good employee and a good parent.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Working fathers can face pushback for spending time with their kids. They tend to receive lower performance ratings and experience steeper reductions in future earnings than mothers who take the same amount of leave.<sup>226</sup> Much like maternal bias, this pushback is rooted in gender stereotypes. Moms are expected to be more committed to family and less to their careers.<sup>227</sup> But the reverse is true for fathers, and when they go against that expectation by prioritizing family, they are penalized.<sup>228</sup>

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.<sup>706</sup> If most networking events are held in bars, it means they miss out on the team bonding that can lead to career opportunities.<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>70</sup>

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.<sup>66</sup>

## 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.

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.<sup>185</sup> 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.<sup>186</sup> They may also experience extra pressure and scrutiny, and they can feel that their actions reflect on others like them.<sup>187</sup> 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.<sup>188</sup>

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.<sup>189</sup> 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.<sup>190</sup>

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

### WHY IT MATTERS

Mentorship can be critical to success.<sup>239</sup> We all benefit when a colleague shows us the ropes or sponsors us for new opportunities—particularly when that colleague is more senior.<sup>240</sup> If your coworker only mentors men, the women he works with are missing out on his advice and, potentially, on opportunities to advance. He is also missing out on their best thinking.

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

## WHAT TO DO

Talk to your colleague. Explain why mentoring is so valuable and share your observation that he only mentors men. Recommend he mentor at least one woman, and offer to help him identify a few promising candidates. If he confides he's uncomfortable being alone with women, point out that there are plenty of public places to meet—and remind him that mentorship really matters.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

We're often drawn to people from similar backgrounds. The problem is that this can disadvantage people who aren't like us—and this is especially true when we're in positions of power.<sup>241</sup> Additionally, some men are anxious about mentoring women for fear of seeming inappropriate. Almost half of men in management are uncomfortable participating in a common work activity with a woman, such as mentoring or working alone together.<sup>242</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

## REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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When reviewing candidates for promotion to a senior role, a member of the committee comments that an Asian woman “doesn't seem like a leader.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

If this statement isn't supported by any evidence, it's unfair to the woman and reinforces a common bias against Asian women as leaders. It could cause your colleague to miss out on a job opportunity and your company to miss out on a talented leader.

When reviewing candidates for promotion to a senior role, a member of the committee comments that an Asian woman "doesn't seem like a leader."

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague, "What leadership traits do you think she's missing?" Asking someone to give evidence for their thinking can prompt them to question any biased assumptions. If you know examples of her leadership, mention them. To help reduce bias in future promotions, talk to your HR team about the importance of consistently using a list of clear criteria to assess all candidates.<sup>243</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

When people make vague comments like "doesn't seem like a leader," they are often drawing on gut feelings rather than evidence from the person's experience or skill set. This vagueness opens the door to bias.<sup>244</sup> The comment may also be rooted in the false stereotype that Asian American women are submissive and lack the communication skills for leadership roles.<sup>245</sup>

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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You hear a woman being criticized for her leadership style—for example, being called “aggressive” or “out for herself.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

When women assert themselves—for example, by speaking in a direct style or promoting their ideas—they often get a negative reaction.<sup>246</sup> In contrast, men do not.<sup>247</sup> This discrepancy can have a big impact on women’s careers. Ask yourself who you’re more likely to support and promote, the man with high marks across the board or the woman who gets high marks for her performance but is not as well liked.

You hear a woman being criticized for her leadership style—for example, being called “aggressive” or “out for herself.”

## WHAT TO DO

When you hear someone criticize a woman for asserting herself, ask them about it: “That’s interesting. Would you have that reaction if a man did the same thing?” It may also be worth pointing out that being focused and decisive about moving the business forward is what’s expected of leaders.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of age-old stereotypes, we expect women to be nice and friendly.<sup>248</sup> When they assert themselves, they go against that expectation—and as a result, we tend to like them less.<sup>249</sup> This “likeability penalty” is often evident in the words we use to describe women, especially those who lead—such as “bitchy,” “demanding,” or “difficult.”<sup>250</sup>

*Rooted in likeability bias*

When discussing a potential promotion for a woman who uses a wheelchair, someone says, “I’m not sure she can handle a more senior role,” without offering further explanation.

### WHY IT MATTERS

The comment is vague and lacks evidence, which means it’s more likely to be rooted in bias. If it sways the team, it could mean this woman misses out on a promotion she is well qualified for. That hurts everyone, since teams with more diversity—including employees with disabilities—tend to be more innovative and productive.<sup>251</sup>

When discussing a potential promotion for a woman who uses a wheelchair, someone says, “I’m not sure she can handle a more senior role,” without offering further explanation.

## WHAT TO DO

Ask the person to explain what they mean: “What parts of her qualifications don’t meet the criteria<sup>201</sup>?” Basing evaluations on concrete criteria instead of gut feelings is fairer and can reduce the effects of bias. If you believe she merits a promotion, advocate for her. To help avoid bias in the future, you can talk to HR about using a set of clear and consistent criteria for promotions.<sup>202</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that people with disabilities face especially strong negative biases. In particular, women with disabilities are often incorrectly perceived as less competent than their coworkers, and their contributions may be valued less. They also get less support from managers than almost any other group of employees. This means they often face an uphill battle to advancement.

## HIRING

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In a meeting about hiring for a senior role that requires travel, someone questions whether a Latina would want to be away from her family that much.

### WHY IT MATTERS

The question is based on biased assumptions about this employee's family commitments and ambition. It could mean she loses a major opportunity that she's qualified for and that your company misses out on her talents.

In a meeting about hiring for a senior role that requires travel, someone questions whether a Latina would want to be away from her family that much.

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your co-worker, “What makes you think that?” This may make them realize their comment isn’t based on hard evidence. Explain **WHY IT HAPPENS** Latinas are often stereotyped as having lots of kids or not being career-oriented.<sup>258</sup> You can also recommend asking all of the candidates how they feel about the travel requirements. Let them speak for themselves.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This comment may be influenced by several stereotypes about Latinas: that they aren’t ambitious in their careers, they usually have a lot of children, they prioritize family more than other groups do, and they’re more naturally suited to junior roles.<sup>259</sup> All of these preconceptions can keep Latinas out of the senior roles they’re qualified for.

## REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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You're in a meeting to discuss performance reviews and notice that men are described as "strategic" and "visionary," while women are "hard workers" or "good team players."

### WHY IT MATTERS

How we describe people matters—and can unfairly influence performance reviews<sup>209</sup>  
In this situation, it's not hard to imagine men getting the inside track on promotions and raises.

You're in a meeting to discuss performance reviews and notice that men are described as "strategic" and "visionary," while women are "hard workers" or "good team players."

## WHAT TO DO

Point out the pattern and explain **WHY IT MATTERS**. You can also talk to HR about creating a broad checklist of leadership attributes with concrete examples of what they look like in practice. Expanding the definition of a good leader will help ensure your company doesn't miss out on excellent candidates for promotion while using a standardized checklist can help remove bias from the review process.<sup>210</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Gender stereotypes influence the words we use. Even when women and men produce similar results, we often talk about them differently. We tend to use words associated with leadership like "driven," "big thinker," and "visionary" to describe men. In contrast, we often describe women with communal language like "team player," "friendly," and "committed," not words that speak to skill or impact.<sup>211</sup>

## REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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You're on a review committee and several members argue against a woman's promotion because she is not "seen as a leader," even though her team delivers outstanding results.

### WHY IT MATTERS

The review committee may be making incorrect—and unfair—assumptions about the woman's abilities. Additionally, if the review committee uses a narrow definition of leadership, they may unfairly exclude a lot of people, like this woman.

You're on a review committee and several members argue against a woman's promotion because she is not "seen as a leader," even though her team delivers outstanding results.

## WHAT TO DO

Point out that the woman's team delivers superb results, and suggest that their performance speaks to her leadership. You can also ask them to explain the attributes she lacks. When people are asked to justify their thinking, it can help reduce bias in decision-making.<sup>263</sup>

As a longer-term solution, suggest creating detailed metrics for performance reviews, including clear expectations for leaders. This way, all employees will be evaluated based on a more complete definition of good leadership and using the same standards, which reduces bias in the review process.<sup>264</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Both women and men more readily associate men with leadership.<sup>265</sup> This bias is so strong that when women work on teams, their contributions are often attributed to the team as a whole. In contrast, when men work on teams, they are more likely to be seen as taking a leadership role.<sup>266</sup> The bias affects different groups of women in different ways: Asian women often aren't seen as assertive enough to be leaders, while Black women and Latinas can be stereotyped as not talented enough for leadership roles, and Native American women contend with both these stereotypes.<sup>267</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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A colleague says they're glad to see so many women in leadership at your company. In reality, only 2 out of 15 senior leaders are women.

### WHY IT MATTERS

If people think that women are well represented in leadership when in reality they're not, they're less likely to do anything to fix the problem—they simply don't see it. That's a loss for your company: when companies have more women in leadership, they tend to have more employee-friendly policies and produce better business results.<sup>268</sup>

A colleague says they're glad to see so many women in leadership at your company. In reality, only 2 out of 15 senior leaders are women.

## WHAT TO DO

Point out the numbers, which speak for themselves. You can say, "It's great that we have those two women on the leadership team, but they're only two out of fifteen. Women are half the population, so women are still really underrepresented." You can also share that having more women in leadership can be good for a company's bottom line.<sup>269</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

When it comes to women in leadership, people tend to be too satisfied with the status quo: 44% of men and 22% of women think women are well represented when only 1 in 10 senior leaders at their company is a woman.<sup>270</sup> These low expectations are the result of generations of inequality. When there used to be no women senior leaders, seeing just one or two can feel like a huge step forward. It's hard to imagine a groundswell for change when we don't have higher expectations for what equality looks like.

4

# Closing Activity

## SUMMARY: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT BIAS

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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...”