



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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Starter set



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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

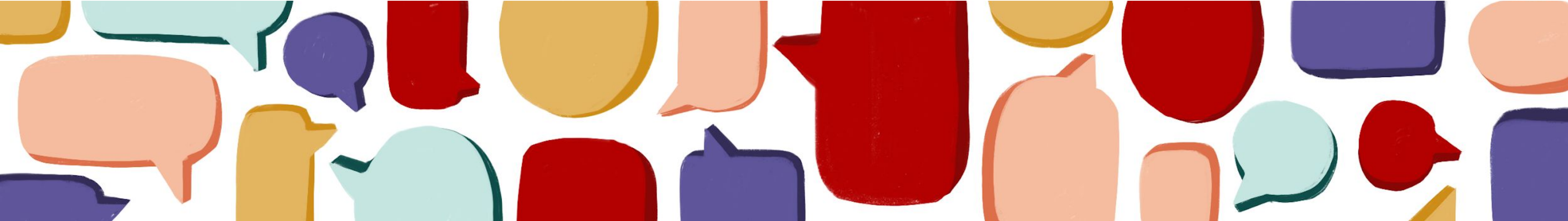


LEAN IN

# 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

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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.

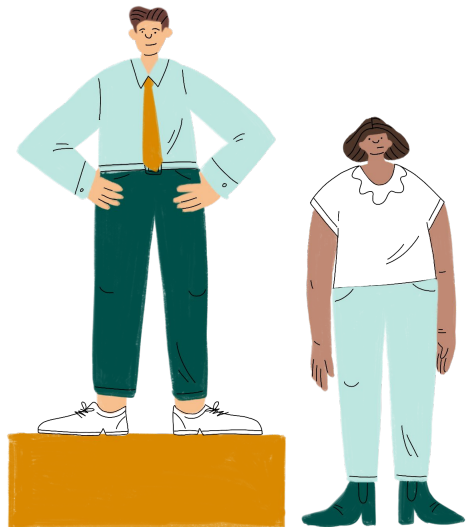
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# Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Unconscious bias



Performance bias



Attribution bias

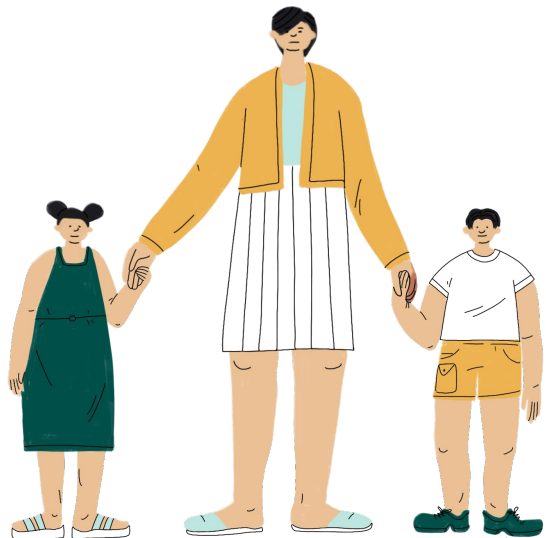


**WATCH THE VIDEO:**

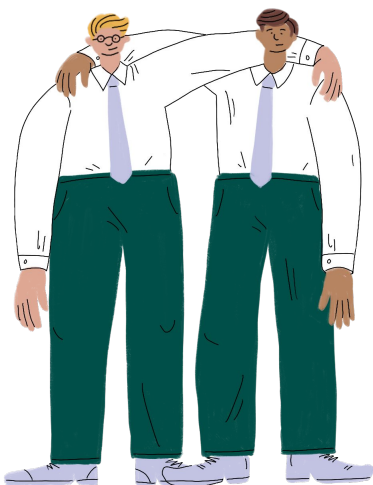
“Introduction to the Common Biases Women Experience”



Likeability bias



Maternal bias



Affinity Bias

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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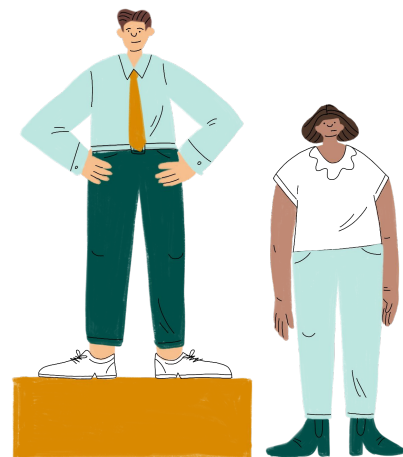
## Likeability bias

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>



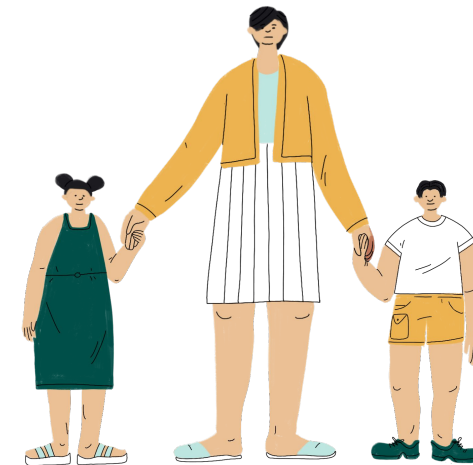
## Attribution bias

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>

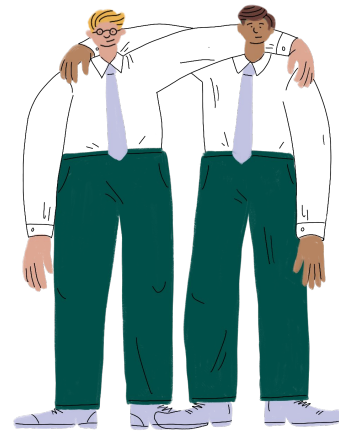


## Maternal bias

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

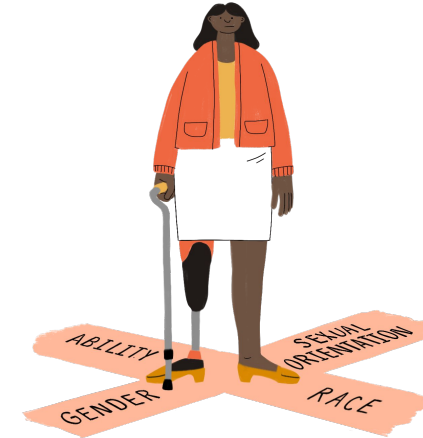
## COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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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?

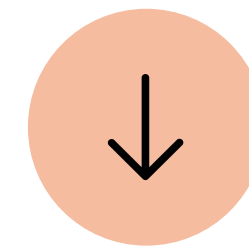
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How many times more often do men interrupt women than other men?

## Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

**SEE THE ANSWER**



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

### **ANSWER:**

Almost 3 times more often.<sup>49</sup>

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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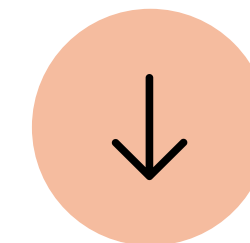
In a study of performance reviews, what % of women received negative feedback on their personal style such as “You can sometimes be abrasive”?

And what % of men received that same type of feedback?

## Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

**SEE THE ANSWER**



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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In a study of performance reviews, what % of women received negative feedback on their personal style such as “You can sometimes be abrasive”?

And what % of men received that same type of feedback?

### ANSWER:

66% of women and 1% of men.<sup>50</sup>

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

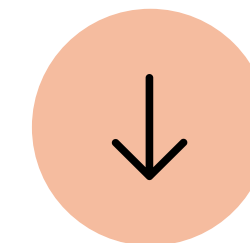
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What % of Black women have *never* had an informal interaction with a senior leader at their company?

## Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

**SEE THE ANSWER**



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

**ANSWER:**  
59%.<sup>51</sup>

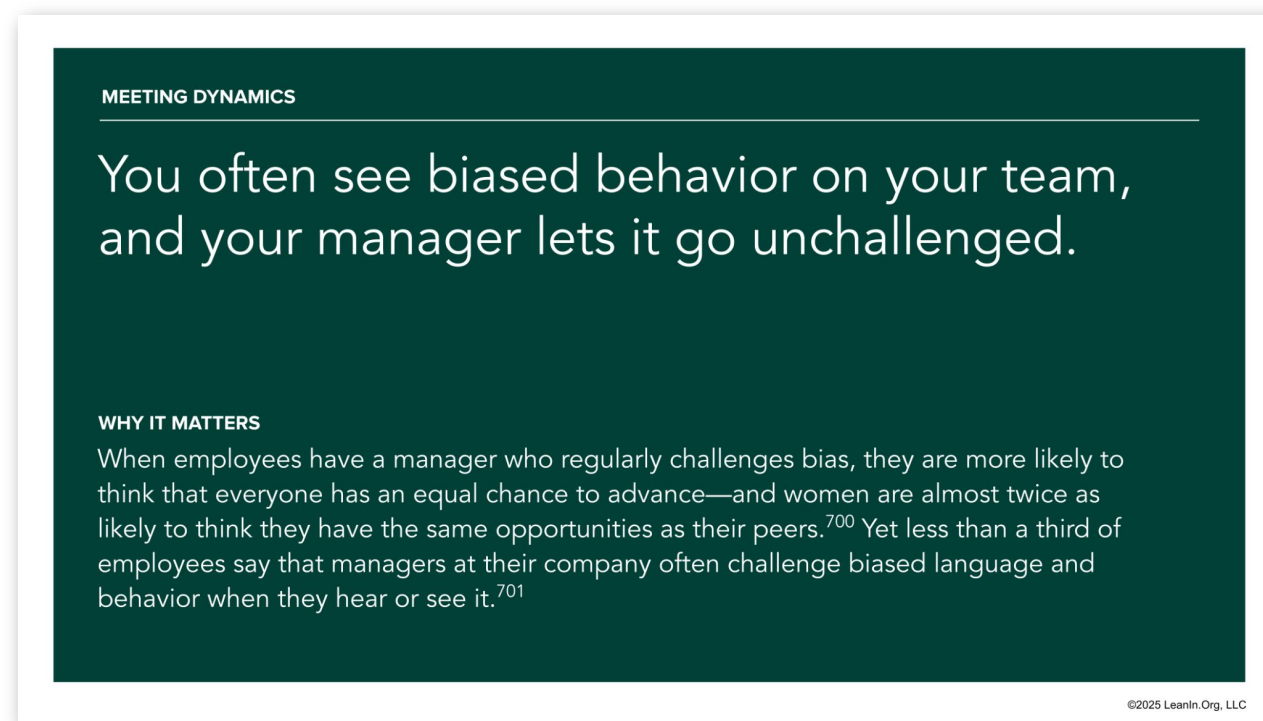
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# Workplace situations

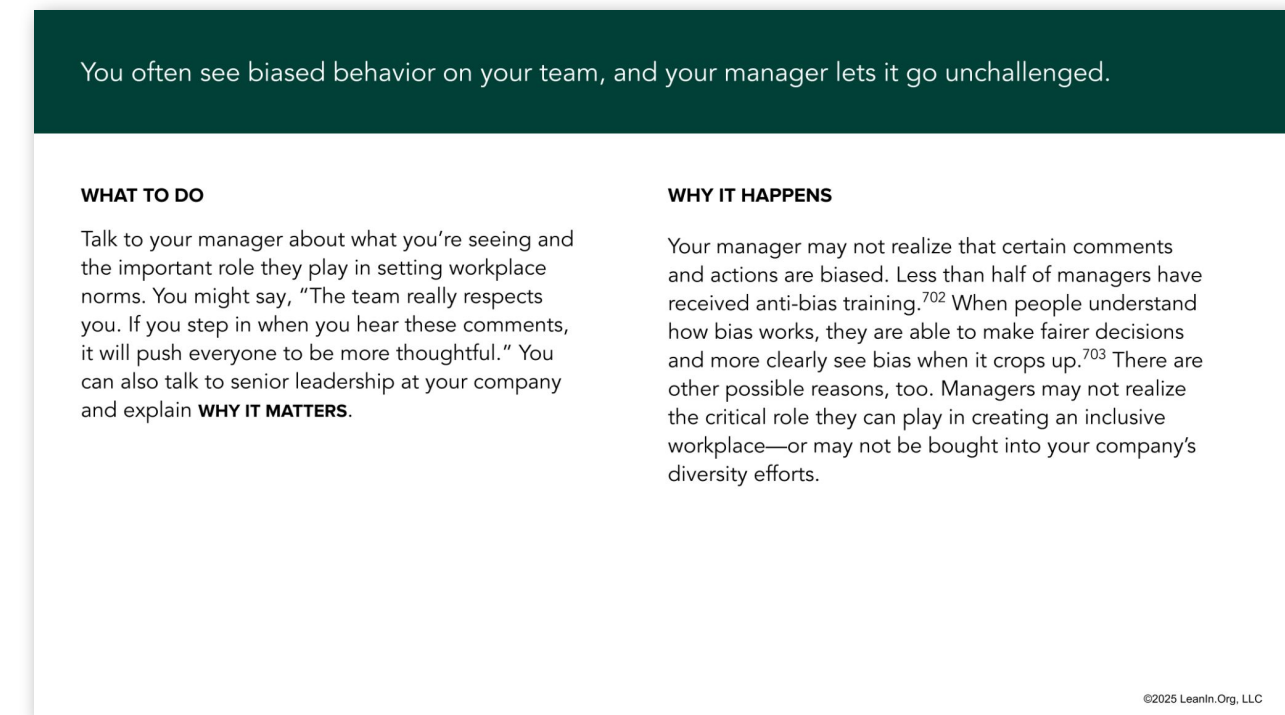
## INSTRUCTIONS

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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.

## REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

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You're on a team doing performance reviews and notice that a lot of women get feedback on their speaking style.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Criticisms like this can prevent qualified women from advancing, which hurts both them and your company.

You're on a team doing performance reviews and notice that a lot of women get feedback on their speaking style.

## WHAT TO DO

When you notice this pattern, point it out.

Explain this is a common bias against women and **WHY IT HAPPENS**. Suggest that the group focus on the substance of what people say, not their speaking style.

Longer term, recommend that your company use standardized criteria for performance reviews, which will reduce subjective opinions. Consider recommending anti-bias training for employees involved in the review process. When people understand how bias impacts their decision-making, they are able to make more objective decisions.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Studies show that women often get negative feedback on their speaking style, while men do not.<sup>52</sup> If women are confident and assertive, they can be criticized for speaking too loudly or often. But if they are quieter, they are more likely to be told that they need to speak more confidently and assertively.<sup>53</sup> For some groups of women, no matter how they speak, people project stereotypes onto them: Asian women are more likely to be criticized for being too quiet, while Black women and Latinas are more often labeled angry or loud.<sup>54</sup>

*Rooted in likeability bias*

## HIRING

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You're on a hiring committee and a colleague rules out a woman of color because she's "not a good cultural fit."

### WHY IT MATTERS

Evaluations of "culture fit" tend to be subjective. They can lead us to screen out people who aren't like us, which means we can miss qualified candidates and end up with more homogenous teams, which tend to be less creative. Plus, it can mean that talented job seekers lose out on opportunities.

You're on a hiring committee and a colleague rules out a woman of color because she's "not a good cultural fit."

## WHAT TO DO

When someone rules out a candidate because of fit, ask them to be more specific. If their thinking boils down to "she's different," point out that different can be good. Propose that you look for someone who adds to the team dynamic—a "culture add"—instead of someone who simply fits into it.

As a longer-term solution, ask that a set of standardized criteria be used for all hires. This reduces bias by minimizing subjective evaluations.<sup>7</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

We tend to gravitate toward—and hire—people who remind us of ourselves, which can impact our ability to objectively evaluate who would bring the most to the job.<sup>8</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

You're in a meeting and a woman colleague is spoken over or interrupted.

### WHY IT MATTERS

If women's ideas aren't heard, it can make it harder for them to be perceived as key contributors, which can harm their career progression. When teams miss out on women's insights, it can also mean your company is missing out. Teams that foster diverse points of view often have better ideas and get more done.<sup>57</sup>

# You're in a meeting and a woman colleague is spoken over or interrupted.

## WHAT TO DO

When a woman gets interrupted, speak up. You might say, "I'd like to hear the rest of [Name's] thoughts" or "[Name] raised an important point. I'd like to consider it further before we move on."

If you're leading a meeting, reduce interruptions by following an agenda and asking people to contribute in a structured way. You might say, "Let's go around the room and get everyone's ideas." You can also invite individual women in the room to contribute their opinions.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

People tend to value women's contributions less than men's.<sup>129</sup> One way this plays out is in meetings, where women—and in particular, women of color—are interrupted more and get less time to speak than men do.<sup>130</sup>

*Rooted in attribution bias*

Someone suggests that a woman on your team be given a big, high-profile project, and a colleague says, “I don’t think this is a good time for her since she just had a baby.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

Your company likely wants to retain and promote talented women. Sidelining them—even with good intentions—works against that goal by denying them opportunities that can lead to advancement.

Someone suggests that a woman on your team be given a big, high-profile project, and a colleague says, "I don't think this is a good time for her since she just had a baby."

## WHAT TO DO

Remind your colleague that this could be a career-changing project for whoever gets it, so it's better to let the new mom decide for herself whether or not she wants to take it on.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Motherhood triggers assumptions that women are less competent and less committed to their careers. As a result, they are held to higher standards and presented with fewer opportunities. Studies show that the "maternal wall" women face when they have kids is the strongest gender bias.<sup>61</sup>

*Rooted in maternal bias*

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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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.<sup>62</sup> But when employees with disabilities are fully supported, they’re usually just as happy as their colleagues.<sup>63</sup> This has a big impact, since 1 in 6 working-age Americans has a visible or invisible disability.<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup>

## 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.<sup>66</sup> This is especially true for women with disabilities, who face more bias and disrespect at work than almost any other group.<sup>67</sup>

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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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>68</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>69</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>71</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.

## REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

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A manager describes a woman who reports to her as “overly ambitious” when she asks for a promotion.

### WHY IT MATTERS

When a woman is criticized for competing for a promotion, it can have a negative impact on her and on the company as a whole. She may miss out on the chance to grow at work. Other women may hear the message that they shouldn't ask for promotions. And the company may miss an opportunity to advance a talented team member and make her feel valued.

A manager describes a woman who reports to her as “overly ambitious” when she asks for a promotion.

## WHAT TO DO

Prompt your colleague to explain her thinking. For example, you can say, “Generally, I think we like ambition as a company. Why does it bother you in this case?” You can also suggest that there may be a double standard at work by saying something like, “How do you feel when a man on your team asks for a promotion?” And if you think that women at your workplace are often criticized when they seek promotions, this would be a good opportunity to say so.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of stereotypical expectations that women should be selfless and giving, they can face criticism when they appear to be “out for themselves”—for example, when they compete for a bigger job.<sup>72</sup> By contrast, we expect men to be driven and ambitious, and we tend to think well of them when they show those qualities.<sup>73</sup>

*Rooted in likeability bias*

A coworker says, "I don't see color."

**WHY IT MATTERS**

This comment suggests that it's beneficial to ignore people's race or ethnicity. But in fact, studies show that when people try to be "color-blind," they often end up perpetuating racial bias because they don't acknowledge or take action against it.<sup>32</sup> To combat any type of bias, you first have to recognize it exists and then work to challenge it.<sup>33</sup>

A coworker says, “I don't see color.”

## WHAT TO DO

You could ask a question to make your coworker reflect: “What’s wrong with acknowledging someone's race?.”<sup>34</sup> You can also explain that while you understand they’re trying to be fair and objective, research shows that “not seeing color” can actually make racial bias more harmful or challenging for people of color.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Your coworker may be falling into the common trap of thinking that “not seeing color” is a way of supporting people of color.<sup>35</sup>

## HIRING

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After interviewing a Black woman, a coworker expresses surprise over “how articulate she sounded.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like these may sound like compliments, but they definitely are not. They perpetuate a stereotype that Black people aren't articulate or educated, which is not only insulting but can also lead to fewer career opportunities.<sup>449</sup>

After interviewing a Black woman, a coworker expresses surprise over “how articulate she sounded.”

## WHAT TO DO

Asking a probing question can prompt your coworker to examine their assumptions. You might ask, “Why wouldn’t you expect her to be articulate?” You can also talk to the hiring manager responsible for making sure job candidates are evaluated fairly and explain that comments like these undermine that process.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This type of statement is fueled by a centuries-old racist belief that Black people have worse language skills than other groups.<sup>450</sup> This assumption is all too common: compared to any other racial or ethnic group, Black women are the most likely to have others express surprise over their language skills or other abilities.<sup>452</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

## MEETING DYNAMICS

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In a meeting, a woman strongly disagrees with a man about how to approach a problem. He says, “We can’t talk about this anymore. She’s getting too emotional.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

In a healthy workplace, debates happen all the time—and often result in better ideas, clearer strategies, and stronger teams. Shutting down debate can be counterproductive to your company’s goals. Plus, being tagged as overly emotional can diminish a woman’s standing at work—and send a message to other women that they shouldn’t speak freely.

In a meeting, a woman strongly disagrees with a man about how to approach a problem. He says, "We can't talk about this anymore. She's getting too emotional."

## WHAT TO DO

Speak up. You can say something to support the woman's point of view: "I think [Name] is making a good point. We should consider it." You can also push back on the "too emotional" comment directly: "She doesn't seem too emotional to me. Let's keep talking."

Or you can help your team get back to basics: "We're all just trying to come up with the best approach. Let's continue this conversation so we can land on the right solution together."

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Women tend to be stereotyped as overly emotional, while men tend to be viewed as rational—and therefore more professional and better suited to lead.<sup>91</sup> This dynamic can cause people to see a woman with an opinion—especially if she expresses it with conviction—as being overly emotional, while the same view voiced by a man is considered reasonable.<sup>92</sup> Women of color can face different and more acute variations of this bias, with Black women often labeled as "angry" and Latinas as "fiery."<sup>93</sup>

In a meeting about promotions, someone questions whether a Latina candidate has the skills for a manager role.

### WHY IT MATTERS

If your Latina colleague is in fact qualified for the promotion, this comment is a problem. It could lead to her being ruled out unfairly, which would be a loss for her and the company. Moments like this contribute to a bigger problem: For every 100 men promoted into manager roles, only 65 Latinas are.<sup>45</sup> This “broken rung” on the ladder to leadership means there are too few Latina managers to promote into senior roles.

In a meeting about promotions, someone questions whether a Latina candidate has the skills for a manager role.

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague for concrete examples of why they think she lacks the required skills. If he doesn't offer much evidence, say so: "I don't see a problem with her skills." You can also check her skill set against the list of criteria for the role. If she meets all or most of the criteria, that can help settle the matter. Establishing clear criteria for performance reviews and promotions can help minimize biased decision making.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Latinas face several layers of bias regarding their skills. As women, they are often stereotyped as less competent than men. As Latinx Americans, they tend to be unfairly viewed as less educated than other groups.<sup>46</sup> And as Latinas, they tend to be typecast as very family-oriented and more suited to supporting roles, even if they are qualified for more senior positions.<sup>47</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

## REVIEWS & 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>100</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>101</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Both women and men more readily associate men with leadership.<sup>102</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>103</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>104</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

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.

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.

## 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.<sup>114</sup> 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*

## HIRING

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You're on a hiring committee and you notice that your colleagues prefer candidates who are men over women with very similar experience.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This could be a sign of bias in your hiring process—and may unfairly disadvantage women. When qualified women are overlooked, your company misses out on their talents and on the chance to build more diverse teams.

You're on a hiring committee and you notice that your colleagues prefer candidates who are men over women with very similar experience.

## WHAT TO DO

Mention to the hiring committee that you've noticed they tend to select men over women with similar abilities. You can also explain **WHY IT HAPPENS**. Then suggest a solution. Research shows that when teams agree on a set of clear criteria and use it consistently for all candidates, the hiring process is fairer and the most qualified women and men can rise to the top.<sup>66</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

We tend to rate women lower than men, even if they have similar qualifications.<sup>67</sup> This can make a real difference in hiring. In one study, replacing a woman's name with a man's name on a résumé increased the likelihood of being hired by more than 60%.<sup>68</sup> The impact can be even greater for some groups—including Black women, Latinas, Native American women, and women with disabilities—whose competence is questioned both because they're women and because of stereotypes about their race or ability.<sup>69</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

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...”