



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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Experiences of women of color



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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

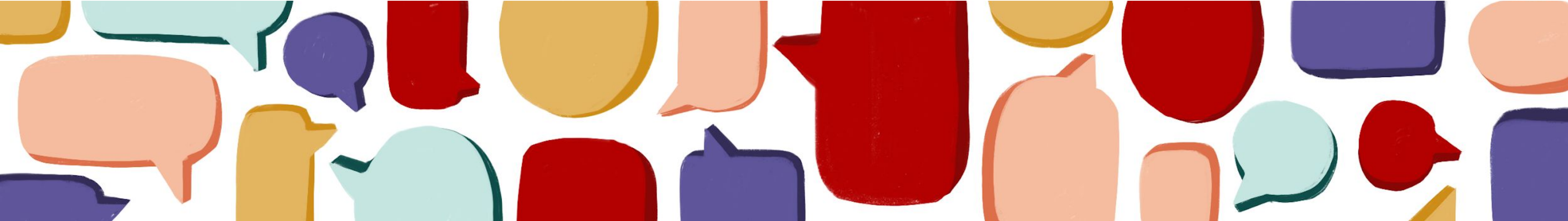


LEAN IN

# 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

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# LEAN IN

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THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL  
*The Power of Inclusive Leadership*



## 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.

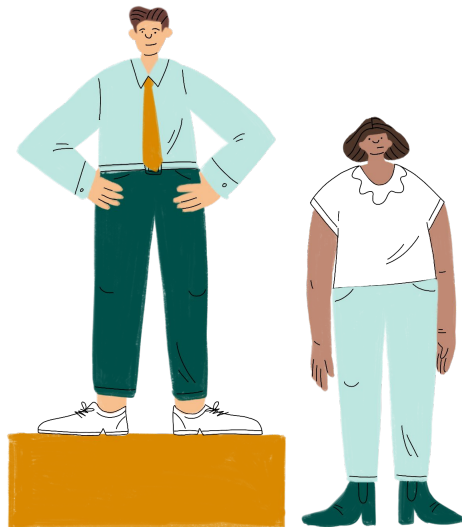
2

# Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Unconscious bias



Performance bias



Attribution bias

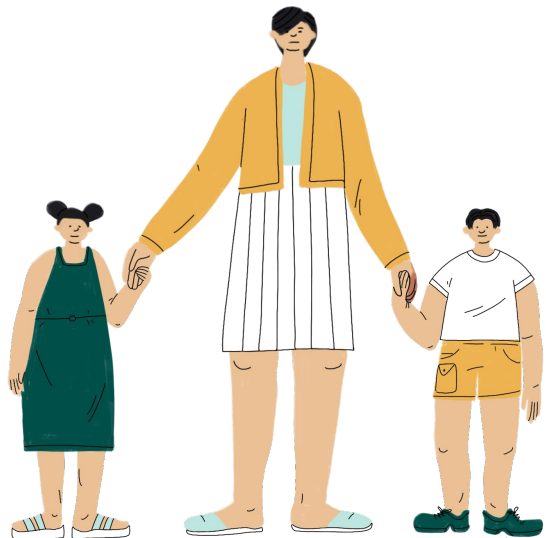


**WATCH THE VIDEO:**

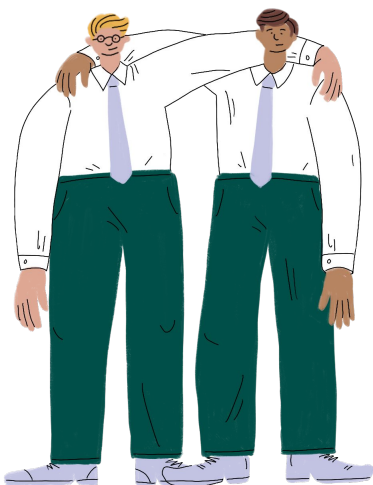
“Introduction to the Common Biases Women Experience”



Likeability bias



Maternal bias



Affinity Bias

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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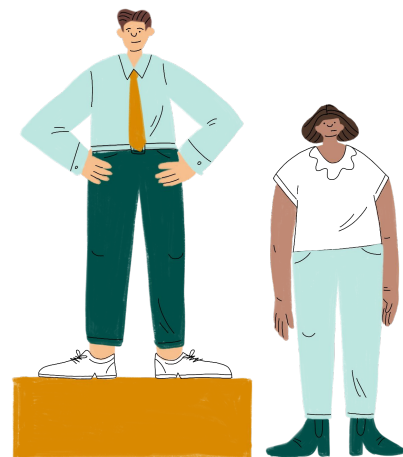
## Likeability bias

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>

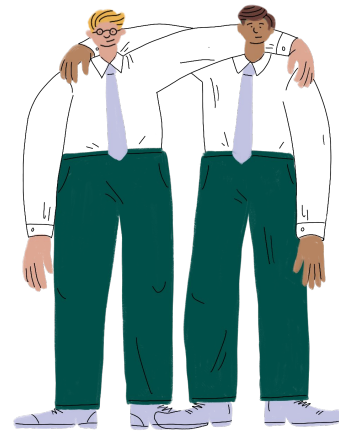


## Maternal bias

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

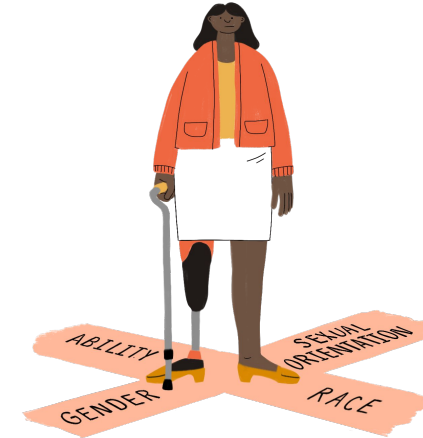
## COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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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?

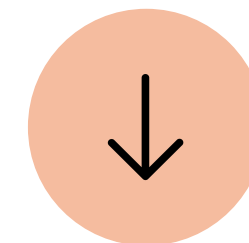
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For every 100 men promoted to manager, how many Black women are promoted?

## 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>8</sup>

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

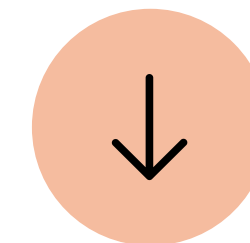
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In one study, job applicants with white-sounding names got what percentage more callbacks than identical job applicants with Black-sounding names?

## Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

**SEE THE ANSWER**



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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In one study, job applicants with white-sounding names got what percentage more callbacks than identical job applicants with Black-sounding names?

### ANSWER:

It led to 50% more callbacks—the equivalent of adding eight years of work experience.<sup>234</sup>

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

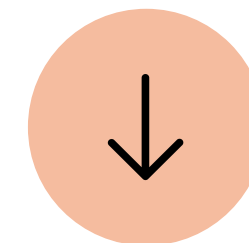
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As of September 2020, how many Black women have led Fortune 500 companies?

## Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

**SEE THE ANSWER**



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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As of September 2020, how many Black women have led Fortune 500 companies?

### ANSWER:

Only two—Ursula Burns at Xerox and Mary Winston at Bed Bath & Beyond.

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

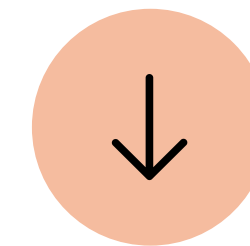
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What % of Black women have *never* had an informal interaction with a senior leader at their company?

## 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>392</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**.

MEETING DYNAMICS

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.<sup>700</sup> 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.<sup>701</sup>

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- 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**.

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.<sup>702</sup> When people understand how bias works, they are able to make fairer decisions and more clearly see bias when it crops up.<sup>703</sup> 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.

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

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>429</sup> To combat any type of bias, you first have to recognize it exists and then work to challenge it.<sup>430</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>431</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>432</sup>

## 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>439</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>440</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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In an informal conversation with colleagues, someone interrupts and talks over a woman who speaks English as a second language.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This is disrespectful to your colleague and could negatively affect how others perceive her. It could also undermine her confidence and make her feel devalued. If your colleague is interrupted often, your team will miss out on hearing and benefiting from her ideas.

In an informal conversation with colleagues, someone interrupts and talks over a woman who speaks English as a second language.

### **WHAT TO DO**

If possible, interrupt the interrupter. You might say, “Hold on, I’d love to hear what [Name] was saying.” Or after the interrupter has finished speaking, invite the woman to speak again. Later, in private, you might want to mention to the interrupter that you felt they could have given the woman more space to contribute.

### **WHY IT HAPPENS**

Women tend to be interrupted more often than men due to false beliefs that their contributions are of less value and that they should be more accommodating than men.<sup>444</sup> This is compounded for women with nonnative accents because of “accent bias,” the belief that those with “foreign” accents are less intelligent than others.<sup>445</sup> This bias can be even more extreme if the speaker makes errors in grammar or word choice.<sup>446</sup> All this sets the stage for women who speak English as a second language to be spoken over, interrupted, or simply not listened to.

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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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.<sup>499</sup>  
It can make her feel disempowered, on guard and self-conscious.<sup>500</sup>

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.<sup>501</sup> This bias has been around for over a century and has been reinforced by the beauty industry.<sup>502</sup> It is also all too common: in fact, some U.S. companies still prohibit natural Black hairstyles.<sup>503</sup>

## MEETING DYNAMICS

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In a meeting, someone says to a Latina, "I can see you're getting fired up," when she has been speaking firmly but calmly.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Statements like these can quickly shut someone down. It's not fair to your coworker, who is trying to present her ideas. It's not fair to everyone in the meeting who could benefit from her insights. And it reinforces harmful stereotypes that Latinas are overly emotional compared to other groups and that women who assert themselves are angry or combative.<sup>449</sup>

In a meeting, someone says to a Latina, "I can see you're getting fired up," when she has been speaking firmly but calmly.

## WHAT TO DO

Speak up. Say you'd like to hear your coworker's point of view, and push back on the suggestion that she's too emotional or irrational. You could say, "[Name] doesn't seem heated to me. I think she's making some really great points. [Name], can you go on?"

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that Latinas tend to be labeled as heated or emotional when they are merely speaking without being deferential.<sup>450</sup> This is rooted in the pervasive stereotype that Latinas are too intense, feisty, and emotional.<sup>451</sup>

## HIRING

---

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*

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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You overhear a coworker confuse the names of the only two Black women in your company.<sup>330</sup>

### 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.<sup>330</sup>

## 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.”<sup>299</sup> 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.<sup>467</sup> This is called “own-race bias.”<sup>468</sup> 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.<sup>301</sup>

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

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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You're talking to a woman of color on your team. A coworker from another team joins you and assumes she is much more junior than she really is.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This happens to women more than men—and to women of color most of all.<sup>527</sup> Being mistaken for a more junior employee can feel disrespectful—and over time, slights like this can add up and leave employees feeling unhappy and more likely to leave their job.<sup>528</sup>

You're talking to a woman of color on your team. A coworker from another team joins you and assumes she is much more junior than she really is.

## WHAT TO DO

Correct the record by stating the woman's actual title. If it feels right, add some context that highlights her contributions to your company—for example, "She's running point on our largest initiative this quarter" or "She's our COO's right-hand person."

Longer term, consider recommending that the company implement bias training, which can help people avoid assumptions like this one.<sup>472</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that we strongly associate men with leadership—but not always women.<sup>473</sup> Women are twice as likely as men to be mistaken for someone much more junior—and women of color are often the most likely to experience this.<sup>474</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

## REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

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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>472</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>473</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>474</sup>

*Rooted in performance 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>478</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>479</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>480</sup>

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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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.<sup>538</sup>

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.<sup>539</sup> The underlying assumption is known as “the perpetual foreigner stereotype.”<sup>540</sup>

A coworker says of a Black woman on another team, "Why does she always seem so angry?"

### WHY IT MATTERS

Labeling a Black woman angry can hurt her at work. In one study, when Black women were viewed as angry, they received lower ratings and raises than white women viewed the same way.<sup>489</sup> Comments like these can invalidate her point of view, which means the company loses out on her contributions.<sup>490</sup> And this stereotype can take a mental toll as Black women have to constantly monitor how they talk or act.<sup>491</sup>

A coworker says of a Black woman on another team, "Why does she always seem so angry?"

## WHAT TO DO

You can ask, "What makes you say that?" This can prompt your colleague to reflect on whether they are motivated by bias without putting them on the defensive. You could point out that the woman didn't seem particularly angry to you. And if you think your colleague is open to it, you can share **WHY IT HAPPENS**.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

The stereotype of the "angry Black woman" originated in the early 20th century, emerging at a time when Black women were expected to be more deferential than most other groups. The trope is still used to undermine Black women and discourage them from speaking up. Recent research shows that the myth is just that: a myth. While Black women are more likely to be labeled angry, they are no more likely to actually express anger than other groups of Americans<sup>495</sup>.

## MEETING DYNAMICS

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During a presentation, a Black woman is repeatedly interrupted by someone who has less expertise on the subject she's talking about.

### WHY IT MATTERS

In addition to being disruptive to the woman presenting and making it harder for everyone to follow her main points, behavior like this is disrespectful. If it goes unchallenged, it can signal that it's OK to treat women of color this way.<sup>496</sup>

During a presentation, a Black woman is repeatedly interrupted by someone who has less expertise on the subject she's talking about.

## WHAT TO DO

If you can, speak up in the moment. You could say, "I would really like to hear [Name]'s thinking—she's an expert in this area. Let's hold the questions until she gets to the end of her presentation." You can also ask an on-topic question that allows her to demonstrate her expertise.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Compared to people of other races and ethnicities, Black women are the most likely to have their judgment questioned in their area of expertise and to be asked to prove their competence.<sup>497</sup> Women of all races also tend to be interrupted far more often than men, and women of color even more so.<sup>498</sup> These dynamics are fueled by performance bias—the belief that women and people of color are less competent than white men.<sup>499</sup> Black women are particularly impacted by this bias because they are both women and Black.<sup>500</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

## REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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A colleague comments to you that another coworker “only got the promotion because she’s a Black woman.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

If this idea goes unchallenged, it reinforces an unfair stereotype about Black women’s talents. Comments like this are disrespectful and can therefore make the workplace feel unwelcoming—not only to Black women, but also to other employees.<sup>393</sup>

A colleague comments to you that another coworker “only got the promotion because she’s a Black woman.”

## WHAT TO DO

You can simply ask, “What makes you say that?” Sometimes that’s enough to make someone rethink their view. Or better yet, stand up for your coworker: “I think she got the promotion because she’s terrific.”

You might also take the opportunity to make a larger point about the value of diversity: “Plus, it’s good for the company to have more women of color in senior roles, because diverse teams tend to perform better.”<sup>129</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

People tend to underestimate women’s talents compared to men’s—and that bias can be even stronger when it comes to women of color.<sup>504</sup> That means that women often have to accomplish more to show that they’re as competent as men.<sup>505</sup> And when a woman of color succeeds, some people discount her accomplishments and assume that her success is due to external factors like affirmative action, rather than her own hard work and achievements.<sup>329</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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A coworker says to a newly hired woman of color, "Your name is really hard to pronounce. Do you go by something else?"<sup>507</sup>

### WHY IT MATTERS

This statement is disrespectful because it suggests that some names (and therefore people) are not worth taking the time to get to know. It can also make the new hire feel like an outsider, signaling that she has to change who she is in order to fit in at work.

A white coworker says to a newly hired woman of color, “Your name is really hard to pronounce. Do you go by something else?”<sup>507</sup>

## **WHAT TO DO**

You could repeat her name, demonstrating that it’s not hard to pronounce, and point out to your coworker that it’s a sign of respect to pronounce someone’s name correctly. You can also explain

### **WHY IT MATTERS.**

## **WHY IT HAPPENS**

Your colleague may be falling into the trap of considering white-sounding names the norm. If their own name has always been easy for classmates and colleagues to pronounce, they may never have had their name questioned like this and not understand how it feels.

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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When it's suggested that a Latina colleague present at a client meeting, someone says, "She has a strong accent."

### WHY IT MATTERS

This comment could torpedo your Latina coworker's chance to present at the meeting, which would be a major missed opportunity for her to prove her skills and show her value to the company. This is how bias against Latinx accents harms people: it can mean that Latinx Americans miss out on assignments, jobs, and promotions for which they are qualified.<sup>508</sup>

When it's suggested that a Latina colleague present at a client meeting, someone says, "She has a strong accent."

## **WHAT TO DO**

You could say that you don't have any trouble understanding her and that you think she'd do a great job at the meeting. You could also ask whether there's a problem with her expertise on the subject matter—if she knows the topic well, her accent shouldn't make a difference. You can also explain

## **WHY IT MATTERS.**

## **WHY IT HAPPENS**

Many people unconsciously assume a Latinx accent means a person has poor language skills, even if their grammar and word choice are perfectly correct. This bias particularly hurts Latinas: In the U.S., people tend to perceive women with Latinx accents as less intelligent and knowledgeable than other women or Latino men.<sup>509</sup> Your colleague may also be hearing an accent where there isn't one: Research shows that people can falsely perceive an accent when a person of color speaks completely unaccented American English.

*Rooted in performance bias*

## REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

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In a meeting about promotions, someone says an Asian coworker needs to work on her communication skills before she's ready for the next level.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This comment may unfairly rule her out for a promotion, which could mean that your company won't fully leverage her talents and will miss out on her unique perspective.

In a meeting about promotions, someone says an Asian coworker needs to work on her communication skills before she's ready for the next level.

## WHAT TO DO

If communication skills aren't key to this promotion—for example, it's a technical or internal-facing role—say so.<sup>510</sup> If communication skills are important, ask for examples of how she can improve and suggest sharing the feedback directly with her. If your colleague can't offer good examples, push back. You could explain that vague feedback can open the door to bias and say you're concerned that this woman is being unfairly judged for no good reason.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Women receive negative feedback on their communication style much more often than men do, no matter how they communicate: they're too quiet, too loud, too gentle, too assertive.<sup>511</sup> This dynamic can be exacerbated for Asian women because of stereotypes.<sup>512</sup> Research shows that Asian women tend to be typecast as too quiet and submissive, so people tend to assume they lack strong communication skills. And when they do assert themselves, this defies our expectations that Asian women will be quiet and gentle, and so they tend to be criticized as "abrasive."<sup>513</sup>

## HIRING

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During a hiring meeting, a coworker ranks a qualified applicant poorly because she graduated from an overseas school they don't know.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This judgment could mean this woman misses out on a job that she's qualified for. And your company could miss out on a strong candidate—one who would add a more global perspective.<sup>514</sup>

During a hiring meeting, a coworker ranks a qualified applicant poorly because she graduated from an overseas school they don't know.

## WHAT TO DO

Point out that the requirements for the role don't include attending specific colleges or hailing from specific countries. Remind them that educational background is only one dimension of a candidate's experience, and it's typically not the most important one. And highlight the candidate's skills that do match up with the job description.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This type of pushback is common for immigrant women. On top of the gender bias women generally experience, immigrant women often face bias if their credentials come from overseas. In the U.S. and Britain, people tend to be biased against colleges in less wealthy countries and to believe that degrees from those countries are worth less.<sup>515</sup> As a result of this and other biases, immigrant women are hired at lower rates than women overall and earn less than any other group of women or men.<sup>516</sup>

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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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.<sup>304</sup>

Most Latinas in corporate America say that they style their hair and makeup conservatively (87%) and dress conservatively (84%) to fit in at work.<sup>305</sup>

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.<sup>306</sup> 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.<sup>307</sup>

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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In a meeting, a colleague tells an Asian woman they hope she won't be away on maternity leave for long, since the team "can't manage without her."

### WHY IT MATTERS

This comment may make your coworker feel pressure to cut her maternity leave short, which could negatively impact her health.<sup>152</sup> It could even make her feel that her job might be in jeopardy unless she returns early.<sup>153</sup> This could in turn harm your company. Stress about maternity leave can make valuable employees less productive and less happy with their jobs.<sup>154</sup>

In a meeting, a colleague tells an Asian woman they hope she won't be away on maternity leave for long, since the team "can't manage without her."

## WHAT TO DO

You should signal that you support your pregnant coworker taking her full leave. For example, you might say, "We'll really miss you, [Name,] but I hope you take all your leave! You deserve it." You could also offer to help her plan coverage for when she's gone. You may want to take a moment to explain **WHY IT MATTERS** to the colleague who made the comment. In addition, you could ask HR to reassure the woman that she has every right to take all her leave and that the company will keep her projects on track while she's out.<sup>153</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Asian women are more likely than other groups to be discouraged from taking family leave.<sup>156</sup> This happens because they are often stereotyped as worker bees who are willing to prioritize work over family.<sup>522</sup> But while this happens to Asian women more than women overall, it can happen to anyone (men too) because of beliefs that the "ideal worker" should be willing to sacrifice their personal life to advance their career.<sup>523</sup>

*Rooted in maternal bias*

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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A colleague complains about a Native American coworker taking two days off because she has a religious responsibility within her tribal nation.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This complaint may imply that your Native American coworker isn't committed to her job. It could also prompt others to view her as different or an outsider. And if comments like this are common, they could damage her reputation and hurt her chances for future opportunities. Plus, if she hears about the comment, it could make her feel undermined or stressed because of a sense of conflict between work and her tribal nation.

A colleague complains about a Native American coworker taking two days off because she has a religious responsibility within her tribal nation.

## WHAT TO DO

Stand up for your Native American coworker. Tell your colleague that missing a few days of work for religious reasons sounds reasonable to you. Remind them that it's a common practice for other religious groups like Jews and Christians. Reinforce how much she contributes to her job. You can also talk to your manager or HR about ensuring that learning about Native American culture is part of the company's inclusion training.<sup>333</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

In general, employees can be judged negatively when they take time for personal reasons.<sup>522</sup> This can impact people more when they are from non-majority groups. In this case, Native American customs and holidays—such as coming-of-age ceremonies and feast days—aren't widely known and understood. When Native Americans miss work for these events, they can face more judgment than other ethnic or religious groups do when they take off for celebrations or holidays.<sup>333</sup>

## HIRING

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After an interview, a coworker says that an appropriately-dressed Black woman “didn’t look very professional.”<sup>524</sup>

### WHY IT MATTERS

Black women can miss out on jobs, promotions, and other opportunities because of arbitrary judgments about their appearance.<sup>528</sup> To avoid this penalty, many Black women say they have to dress more formally than their colleagues and spend more money on hair and accessories.<sup>529</sup>

After an interview, a coworker says that an appropriately-dressed Black woman “didn’t look very professional.”<sup>524</sup>

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your coworker to explain what they mean by “not professional.” Say that you think she looked appropriate, then refocus the discussion: “Let’s talk about her qualifications.” Consider speaking to your manager or HR team about making sure your company sets clear hiring criteria ahead of time, so subjective opinions like this don’t carry weight. It can also be helpful to appoint a “criteria monitor” in hiring meetings to make sure everyone evaluates candidates by the same standards.<sup>530</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

People often view white men as more competent and leader-like than women or Black people.<sup>528</sup> This can mean that Black women are automatically considered less hireable, regardless of what they wear. In addition, many people wrongly view Black women’s natural hair as unprofessional.<sup>529</sup> This bias can be so strong that Black women who wear natural hairstyles are less likely to be hired or promoted than those who do not.<sup>530</sup>

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

Your coworker complains that an Asian woman on your team didn't respond quickly to an email sent after working hours.

**WHY IT MATTERS**

Unless responding quickly to after-hours emails like this is an important part of your colleague's job, she's likely being judged unfairly. The comment implies that she's expected to work long hours and may be held to different standards than others.<sup>537</sup> And if she is expected to be available 24/7, it could cause stress or burnout.<sup>538</sup>

Your coworker complains that an Asian woman on your team didn't respond quickly to an email sent after working hours.

## WHAT TO DO

If you feel comfortable, ask a few questions. Did they say that the message was urgent? Was the woman expected to be on call? If the answer is yes, then their complaint may be warranted and you don't need to push back any further.<sup>539</sup> But if there was no expectation that she would respond after working hours, it may be worth pointing that out. You could say something like, "I personally try to avoid answering work calls at night" or "You know, it can be good for everyone's long-term productivity when we can disconnect outside working hours."

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This comment could be caused by a number of factors, including tight timelines or heightened stress at work. But it may also reflect a common expectation that Asian women should work harder than other employees.<sup>540</sup> As a result, Asian women are often expected to conform to "ideal worker" norms, meaning that they are expected to be available 24/7 and take on extra work.<sup>541</sup>

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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A coworker criticizes her manager, an Asian woman, for being “ruthless” and “abrasive.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

The comment may negatively—and unfairly—influence other people’s perceptions of the woman’s leadership ability and character. The language is subjective and vague, which makes it more likely to be influenced by bias.

A coworker criticizes her manager, an Asian woman, for being “ruthless” and “abrasive.”

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague to reexamine the basis for her criticism: “Could you give some examples?” Depending on her response, you can push back and reframe the criticism in a positive light. For example, if she says her manager is ruthless because she talks a lot about metrics, you can point out that that doesn’t seem particularly ruthless, just goal oriented. You could also explain **WHY IT HAPPENS**.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because women are expected to be nice and accommodating, they are often penalized when they assert themselves. Compared to other groups of women, Asian women—who are often stereotyped as overly accommodating—can experience an even stronger backlash when they act assertively.<sup>542</sup>

*Rooted in likeability bias*

## 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>543</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>544</sup> All of these preconceptions can keep Latinas out of the senior roles they’re qualified for.

## EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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A coworker asks you if a colleague, who is a woman of color, was hired to work with the “minority” clients.<sup>298</sup>

### WHY IT MATTERS

This question implies that people of color are different or outsiders. It may also suggest that your colleague was hired simply because she’s a woman of color, not because she’s qualified to do the job.

A coworker asks you if a colleague, who is a woman of color, was hired to work with the “minority” clients.<sup>298</sup>

## WHAT TO DO

You could ask your coworker what makes them think that, or counter their bias by mentioning some of the specific skills and experiences the woman brings to the team. You could also point out the problem with the underlying assumption—for example, by asking, “Do the men on the team only work with clients who are men?” Later, you could ask your manager to publicly reinforce her qualifications.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

The question may be rooted in a biased belief that the woman of color is somehow less talented or capable than other account managers.<sup>346</sup> It also suggests that your coworker views clients of color as less important to the business. Taken together, these beliefs imply that a woman of color cannot be on the A team.

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# 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...”