



LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

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

For managers



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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

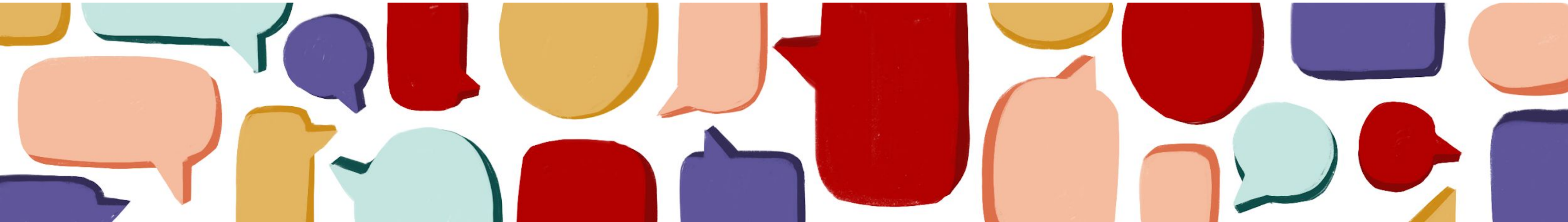


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50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

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:



THE EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP COUNCIL
The Power of Inclusive Leadership



WHY WE ARE HERE

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

TODAY'S AGENDA

1

Set the tone

2

Learn about
biases women
face at work

3

Dive into specific
situations and
solutions

4

Finish with a
closing activity

1

Setting the tone

SETTING THE TONE

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

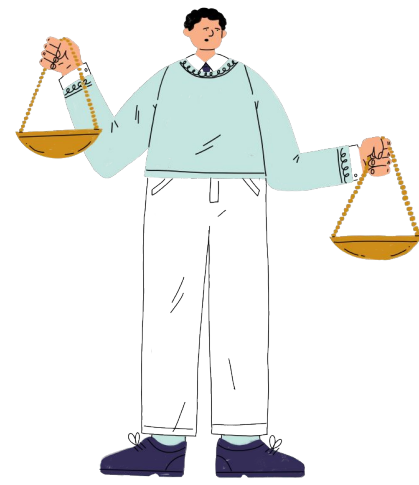
GROUND RULES FOR TODAY

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

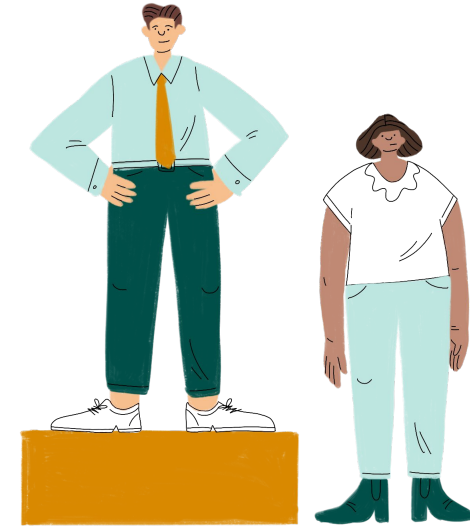
2

Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Unconscious bias



Performance bias



Attribution bias

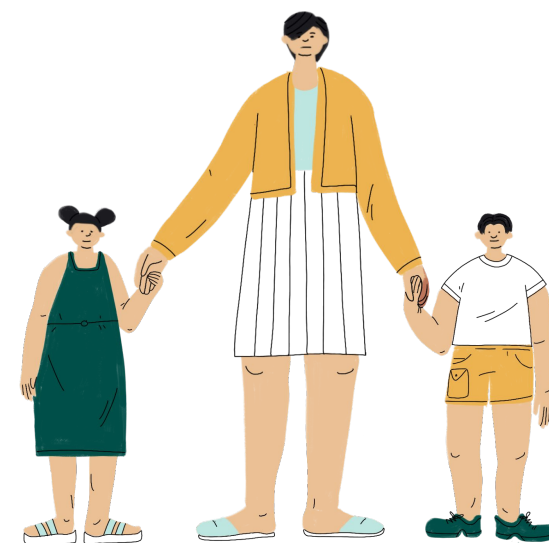


WATCH THE VIDEO:

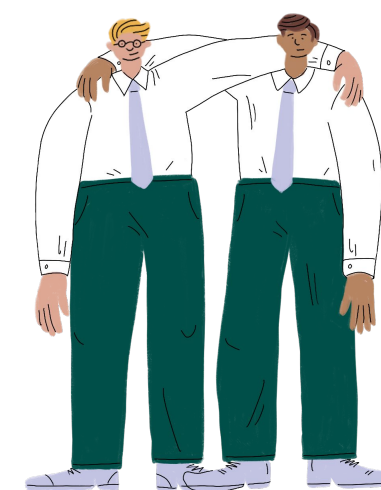
“Introduction to the Common Biases Women Experience”



Likeability bias



Maternal bias



Affinity Bias

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



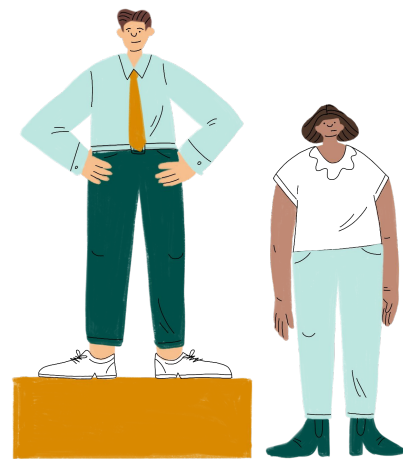
Likeability bias

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



Attribution bias

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



Performance bias

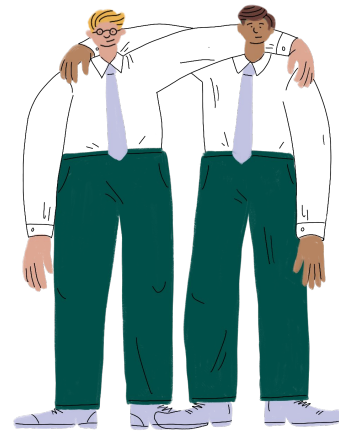
Performance bias is based on deep-rooted — and incorrect — assumptions about women's and men's abilities. We tend to underestimate women's performance and overestimate men's.⁹



Maternal bias

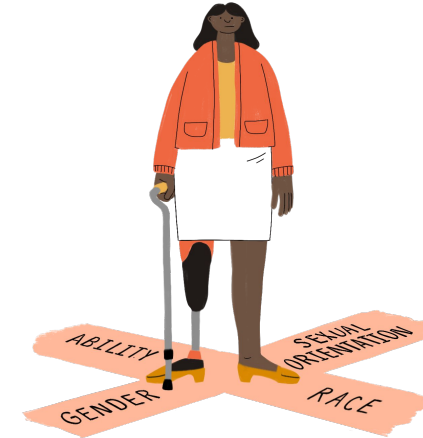
Motherhood triggers false assumptions that women are less committed to their careers — and even less competent.¹²

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Affinity bias

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



Compounding bias

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



Unconscious bias

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

Icebreakers

ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

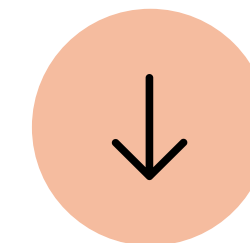
In a study of performance reviews, what % of women received negative feedback on their personal style such as “You can sometimes be abrasive”?

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?

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.⁵⁰

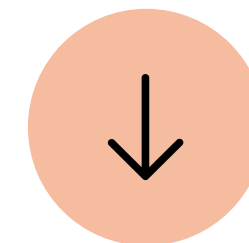
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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?

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

ANSWER:

Only 54 Black women.⁴⁰³

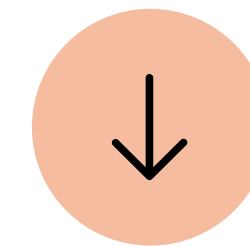
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

When hiring managers believed a woman had children because “Parent-Teacher Association coordinator” appeared on her résumé, how much less likely was she to be hired?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

When hiring managers believed a woman had children because “Parent-Teacher Association coordinator” appeared on her résumé, how much less likely was she to be hired?

ANSWER:

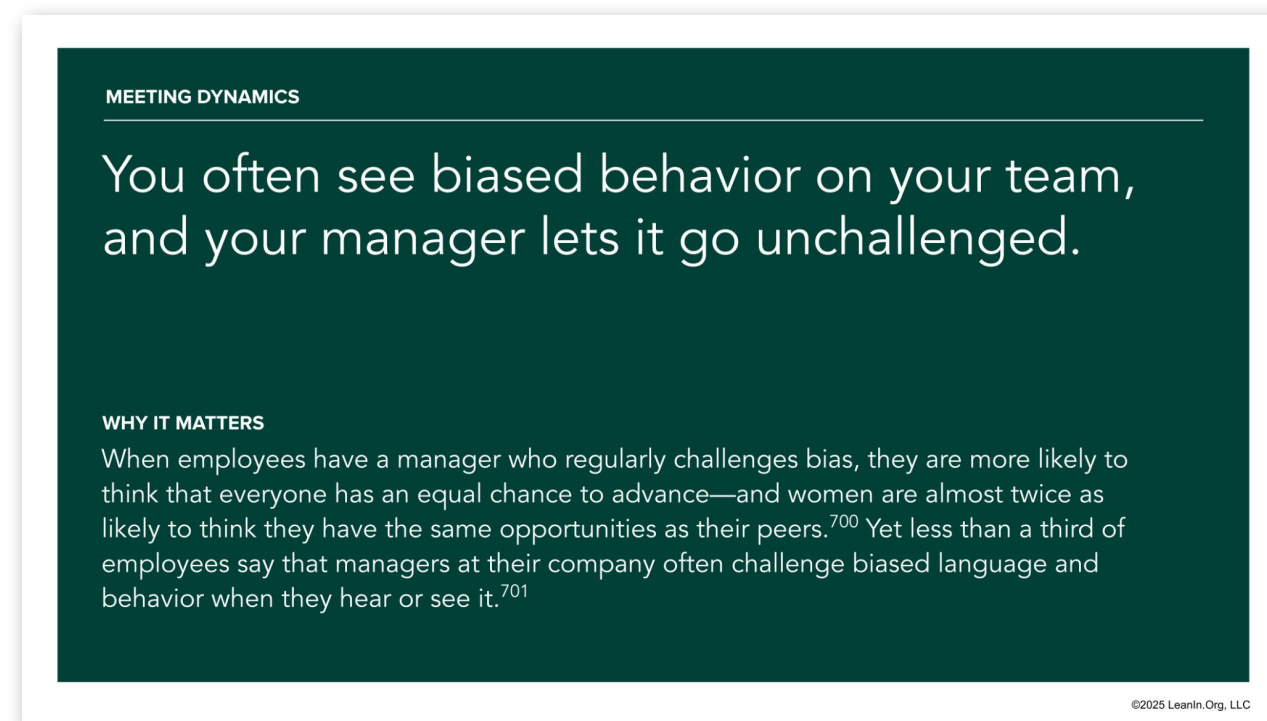
79% less likely to be hired.
(And if she was hired, she would be offered an average of \$11,000 less in salary.)¹²¹

3

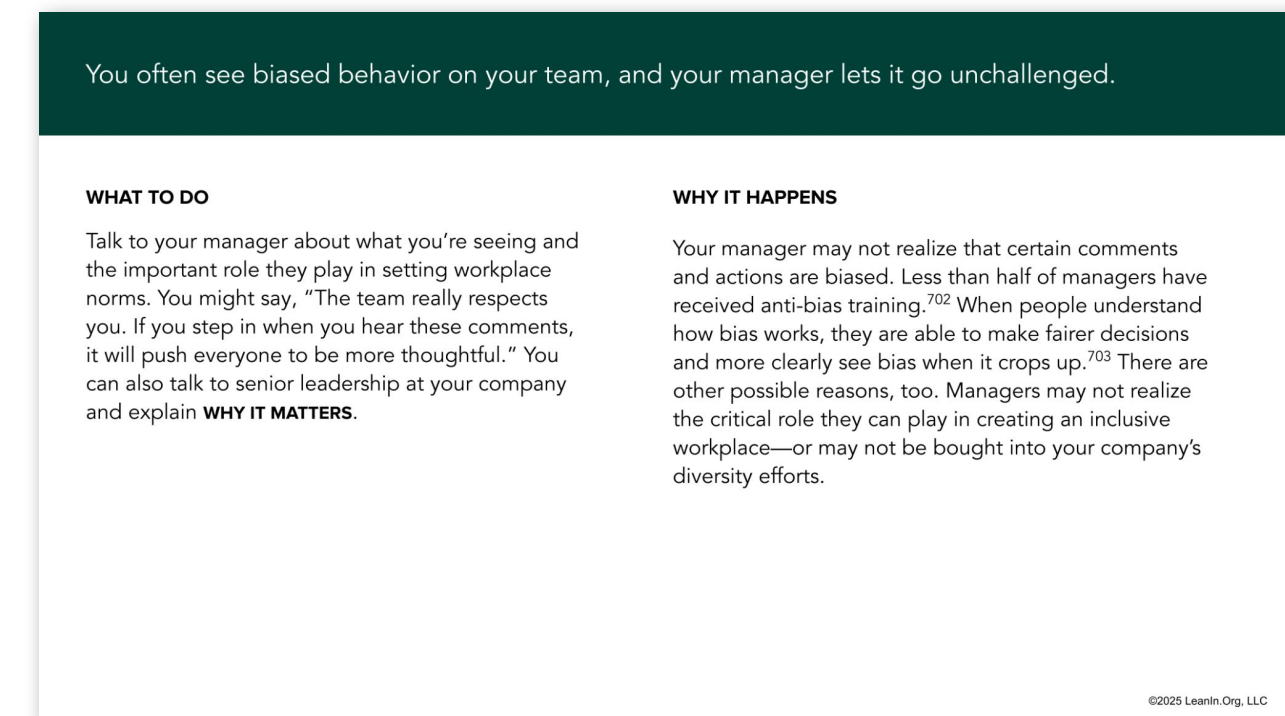
Workplace situations

INSTRUCTIONS

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



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



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

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.⁷⁴ 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.⁷⁵

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.⁷⁶ When people understand how bias works, they are able to make fairer decisions and more clearly see bias when it crops up.⁷⁷ There are other possible reasons, too. Managers may not realize the critical role they can play in creating a positive work culture—or may not be bought into your company's efforts to do so.

REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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.⁷² By contrast, we expect men to be driven and ambitious, and we tend to think well of them when they show those qualities.⁷³

Rooted in likeability 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.¹²⁸

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.¹²⁹ 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.¹³⁰

Rooted in attribution bias

HIRING

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.⁸²

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.⁸³

Rooted in affinity bias

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.⁷⁰⁶ If most networking events are held in bars, it means they miss out on the team bonding that can lead to career opportunities.⁷⁰⁷ 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.⁷⁰⁸

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.⁷⁰⁹

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 AND PROMOTIONS

A colleague recommends a man for promotion over a woman, saying, “I’m not sure about her long-term commitment. She just got engaged, and I think she wants to have kids soon.”

WHY IT MATTERS

When coworkers make assumptions about a woman’s commitment to work based on what’s happening in her personal life, it unfairly limits her opportunities—and could cause your company to miss out on a highly committed candidate. It’s also illegal in many states to consider a person’s marital or parental status as a factor in promotions.

A colleague recommends a man for promotion over a woman, saying, “I’m not sure about her long-term commitment. She just got engaged, and I think she wants to have kids soon.”

WHAT TO DO

Suggest to your colleague that women should decide for themselves whether or not they want to take on new challenges at work. If you’re feeling bold, you can also point out the double standard: “It’s hard to imagine that we’d say that about a man who recently got engaged.”

WHY IT HAPPENS

When women get engaged or married, studies show that they start to experience maternal bias.¹³⁸ People—consciously or unconsciously—start to question their competence and commitment, based on the mistaken belief that women can’t be fully present at work if they have family responsibilities at home.¹³⁹

Rooted in maternal bias

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

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.⁶⁵

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

HIRING

A colleague advocates for a man with strong potential over a woman with proven experience.

WHY IT MATTERS

When a more experienced candidate is passed up in favor of someone with less experience, your company can miss out on valuable wisdom, talent, and skill. And in this case, the woman loses out on an opportunity that she's well suited for.

A colleague advocates for a man with strong potential over a woman with proven experience.

WHAT TO DO

Point out how experienced the woman is for the role and note the value of proven experience over potential. You might also take a moment to explain **WHY IT HAPPENS** and **WHY IT MATTERS**.

Longer term, it's worth recommending that everyone on your team aligns ahead of time on clear, objective criteria for open roles, then uses them to evaluate all job candidates. This minimizes bias by making sure that every candidate is held to the same standard.¹⁵²

WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that people often hire or promote men based on their potential, but for women, potential isn't enough. Women are often held to a higher standard and need to show more evidence of their competence to get hired or promoted.¹⁵³

Rooted in performance bias

You notice that the same woman is always asked to take notes at your weekly meeting.

WHY IT MATTERS

When people take notes, they're effectively taken out of the conversation. They aren't able to contribute meaningfully, and the group misses out on their insights. Teams with members from a wide range of backgrounds are often more innovative and productive,¹⁰⁶ but you can't reap the full benefits of a diverse team if you don't hear from all its members.

You notice that the same woman is always asked to take notes at your weekly meeting.

WHAT TO DO

At the start of the next meeting, suggest that everyone take turns taking notes each week. If you notice a colleague regularly asking only women to take meeting notes, pull them aside to let them know you've noticed this trend and suggest they mix it up.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Due to age-old stereotypes, people expect women to be more giving than men and to accept lower-level tasks. Secretarial tasks also tend to be seen as women's work. As a result, women are asked to do more "office housework" like taking notes.¹⁰⁷ And women of color—who are often unfairly assumed to be in lower-status roles—are asked to do this office housework even more often.¹⁰⁸

HIRING

After interviewing an out lesbian woman, a manager at your company says he didn't click with her.

WHY IT MATTERS

Comments about "clicking" or "culture fit" in a hiring process are vague and subjective, and this opens the door to bias.⁷⁴¹ As a result, good candidates might get dismissed without a detailed look at their qualifications. This could mean that your company ends up with less diverse, less qualified teams.

After interviewing an out lesbian woman, a manager at your company says he didn't click with her.

WHAT TO DO

Ask the manager if the candidate met the criteria for the role. The best way to reduce bias in hiring is to evaluate all candidates for a role based on the same predefined set of criteria. And you could also explain to him **WHY IT MATTERS**.

WHY IT HAPPENS

This manager may be influenced by homophobia, a conscious or unconscious dislike for lesbian and gay people. His comment may also be fueled by affinity bias, which leads us to gravitate toward people like ourselves and to avoid or even dislike those who are different.⁷⁴³ As a result, gay and lesbian people tend to face unfair barriers to getting hired. For example, one study found that straight hiring managers spend 50% longer interviewing straight candidates than gay candidates.⁷⁴⁴

Rooted in performance bias

REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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.¹⁶¹

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.¹¹⁵ 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

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

Your boss questions your colleague's knowledge of something firmly in her area of expertise.

WHY IT MATTERS

On its own, this incident may seem inconsequential. But moments like this add up: women are twice as likely as men to have their competence questioned at work.¹⁶⁷ Over time, it can make them feel less happy in their jobs and more likely to consider leaving.¹⁶⁸

Your boss questions your colleague's knowledge of something firmly in her area of expertise.

WHAT TO DO

Support the woman by highlighting her expertise. You can say something like, "You may not know this, but [Name] is our resident expert on the topic" or "[Name] actually wrote a report about this last year."

Longer term, consider making a more concerted effort to highlight the expertise of all the women on your team—not only in the moment, but regularly. Seek their insights in meetings and point people with relevant questions in their direction.

WHY IT HAPPENS

People tend to overestimate men's performance and underestimate women's.¹²¹ As a result, they are more likely to doubt women's competence and question their judgment.¹²² And certain groups, including Black women, Latinas, and women with disabilities, tend to have their expertise questioned even more frequently than other women.¹²³

Rooted in performance bias

You decide to mentor someone because they remind you of yourself.

WHY IT MATTERS

Good mentors can make a big difference. Employees with mentors are more likely to get raises and promotions.¹²⁴ But because managers and senior leaders are more likely to be straight white men, and because people tend to gravitate toward mentoring others like themselves, women, people of color, and LGBTQ people often miss out on that support.¹²⁵ That also means your company could miss out on fostering talented employees.

You decide to mentor someone because they remind you of yourself.

WHAT TO DO

Be aware of this dynamic and let it inform your choices. If you're a white man, you're more likely to be in a position of authority someday.¹²⁶ You can make the workplace fairer by being thoughtful about whom you mentor. Consider proactively reaching out to mentor someone from a different background. If you're a woman or a person of color, you might decide instead to mentor someone like yourself—especially if you remember struggling to find mentors when you were coming up through the ranks.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of this bias, we tend to prefer the company of others who are like us.¹²⁷ This can lead us to invest more in people who remind us of ourselves, perhaps because we assume these relationships will feel more comfortable.¹²⁸

Rooted in affinity bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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.¹⁷⁷ It could even make her feel that her job might be in jeopardy unless she returns early.¹⁷⁸ This could in turn harm your company. Stress about maternity leave can make valuable employees less productive and less happy with their jobs.¹⁷⁹

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.¹⁸⁰

WHY IT HAPPENS

Asian women are more likely than other groups to be discouraged from taking family leave.¹⁸¹ This happens because they are often stereotyped as worker bees who are willing to prioritize work over family.¹⁸² 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.¹⁸³

Rooted in maternal bias

MEETING DYNAMICS

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

WHY IT MATTERS

If women are sidelined in meetings, it's less likely that they'll speak up, which means the group won't benefit from everyone's best thinking. Plus, it's not beneficial to sit in the low-status seats in the room—and women have to fight for status as it is.¹⁸⁴

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

WHAT TO DO

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

Women typically get less time to speak in meetings. They're more likely than men to be spoken over and interrupted.¹⁸⁵ As a result of signals like these, women sometimes feel less valued, so they sit off to the side.

Rooted in performance 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.¹¹⁴ 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

Your manager schedules a virtual team meeting at an hour when your coworker has blocked off time on her calendar to care for her young children.

WHY IT MATTERS

This can seriously interfere with your coworker's ability to balance work and life. Many people plan ahead with partners or caregivers, and last-minute changes can be disruptive or impossible. It can also contribute to a feeling of being "always on"—which more than 30 percent of employees name as one of the biggest downsides to remote work in 2020.¹⁸⁷ And if situations like this happen often, they can lead to stress or burnout.¹⁸⁸

Your manager schedules a virtual team meeting at an hour when your coworker has blocked off time on her calendar to care for her young children.

WHAT TO DO

Remind your manager of your coworker's schedule constraint and suggest an alternate time. You could also mention how blocking time like this is vital for maintaining work-life balance and explain that practices like these can help employees be more productive and feel more committed to the company.¹⁸⁹

WHY IT HAPPENS

This reflects the norm that the "ideal worker" is always available and doesn't need to take time away from work to care for family, pursue personal interests, or simply recharge.¹⁹⁰ Decades of research on the ideal worker show that this norm can harm mothers more than fathers, since mothers often do more caregiving.¹⁹¹

You offer the rising star on your team a stretch assignment, and she says she doesn't feel qualified to take it on.

WHY IT MATTERS

When women turn down opportunities they're qualified for because of self-doubt, they miss out—and your company isn't able to fully leverage their talents.

You offer the rising star on your team a stretch assignment, and she says she doesn't feel qualified to take it on.

WHAT TO DO

Let her know that you believe in her. Remind her she is being offered the opportunity because of her strong performance, not as a favor. You can also reassure her that how she's feeling is perfectly understandable: "It's normal for anyone to be nervous about taking on a bigger role. And women get sent signals that they're not good enough. It's hard not to internalize them."

WHY IT HAPPENS

Women can be prone to more self-doubt than men, and it's not because they're missing a special confidence gene.¹⁹⁶ Because we tend to underestimate women's performance, women often need to work harder to prove they're capable. And they are more likely to be passed over for promotions and stretch assignments. This bias is so pervasive that women often underestimate their own performance and are more likely than men to attribute their failures to lack of ability.¹⁹⁷

Rooted in performance bias

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A colleague is talking about a woman who landed a big project. They say, "Wow, she got really lucky."

WHY IT MATTERS

Getting recognized for accomplishments can make a difference, especially when it comes to performance reviews and promotions.¹⁹⁸ When achievements are attributed to luck rather than hard work or skill, it minimizes them.

A colleague is talking about a woman who landed a big project. They say, “Wow, she got really lucky.”

WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague, “I’m curious—what makes you think it was luck?” This may prompt them to slow down and rethink their assumption. If your colleague responds in a way that suggests they doubt the woman’s abilities, you might want to press more and ask why they think she’s less competent. Is there a reason? Can they give an example? If not, that speaks for itself.

WHY IT HAPPENS

We tend to overestimate men’s performance and underestimate women’s.¹⁹⁹ Because of this, we often attribute women’s successes to “getting lucky,” “having a good team,” or other explanations that diminish their achievements, while we accept men’s accomplishments as proof of their abilities.²⁰⁰

Rooted in attribution bias

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

In a meeting about performance reviews, a colleague says a Muslim woman might “not be allowed” to accept a promotion.

WHY IT MATTERS

This type of thinking causes two kinds of harm. First, it can lead to Muslim women being offered fewer opportunities. And second, it can prevent Muslim coworkers from feeling truly respected and included at work.

In a meeting about performance reviews, a colleague says a Muslim woman might “not be allowed” to accept a promotion.

WHAT TO DO

Interject with a quick question like, “Shouldn’t we ask her what she thinks?” Or you can also ask, “Why do you think she wouldn’t be allowed to take the promotion?” These types of probing questions push people to rethink their unconscious biases.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Many Americans wrongly think that Muslim women face extreme sexism within their communities that prevents them from pursuing a career.⁴⁰⁴ But this is not accurate: in fact, American Muslims support rights for women at similar rates to Americans overall, and 9 in ten Muslim Americans support women joining the workforce.⁴⁰⁵

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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

WHY IT MATTERS

Incorrect assumptions like this may lead Orthodox Jewish women to miss out on opportunities that can lead to advancement⁴¹⁴. It is also “othering” because it implies they have fundamentally different ambitions from their coworkers.

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

WHAT TO DO

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

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

4

Closing Activity

SUMMARY: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT BIAS

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

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

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