



LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

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

Reviews and promotions



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TO GET STARTED:

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

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

Presentation starts
on the next slide

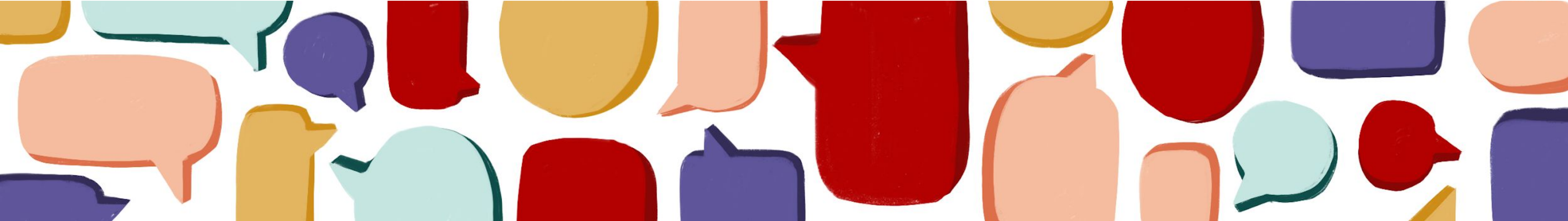


LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

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

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Welcome

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

LEAN IN

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

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



WHY WE ARE HERE

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

TODAY'S AGENDA

1

Set the tone

2

Learn about
biases women
face at work

3

Dive into specific
situations and
solutions

4

Finish with a
closing activity

1

Setting the tone

SETTING THE TONE

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

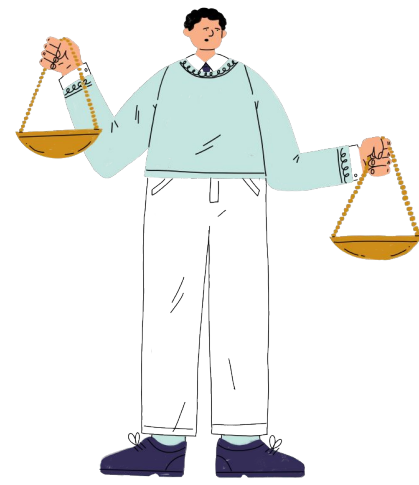
GROUND RULES FOR TODAY

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

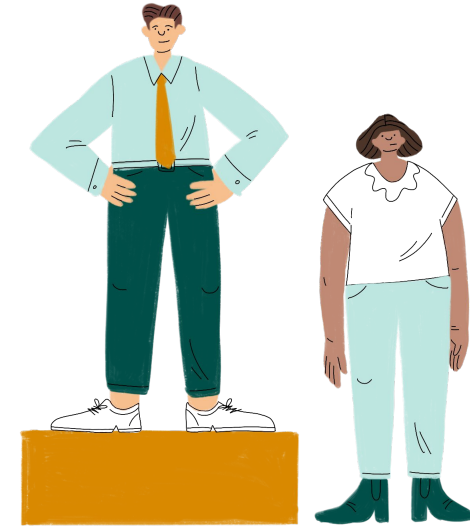
2

Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Unconscious bias



Performance bias



Attribution bias



WATCH THE VIDEO:

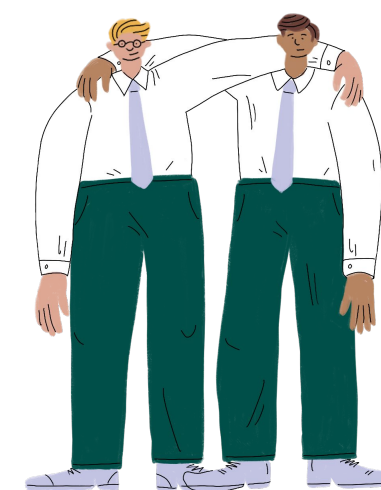
“Introduction to the Common Biases Women Experience”



Likeability bias



Maternal bias



Affinity Bias

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



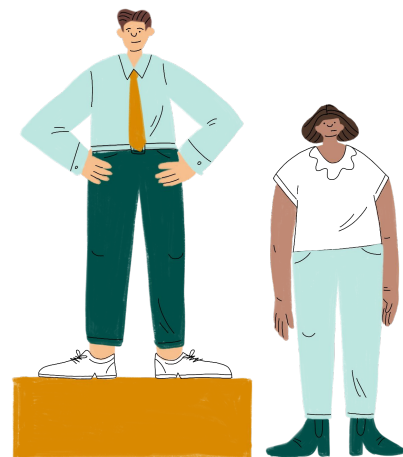
Likeability bias

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



Attribution bias

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



Performance bias

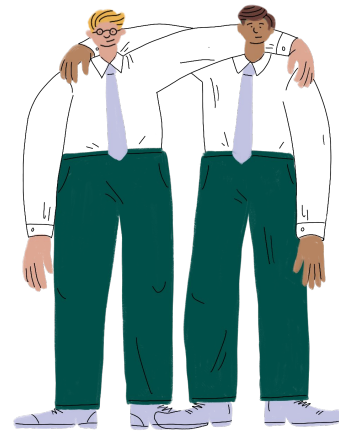
Performance bias is based on deep-rooted — and incorrect — assumptions about women's and men's abilities. We tend to underestimate women's performance and overestimate men's.⁹



Maternal bias

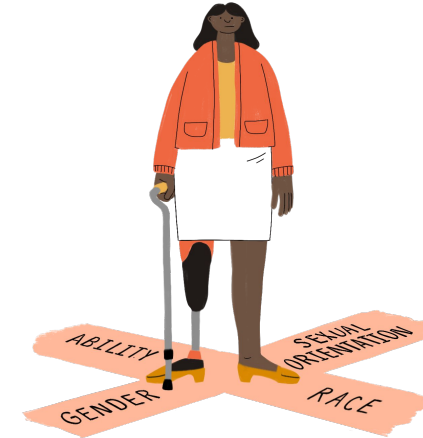
Motherhood triggers false assumptions that women are less committed to their careers — and even less competent.¹²

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Affinity bias

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



Compounding bias

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



Unconscious bias

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

Icebreakers

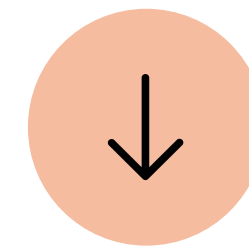
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

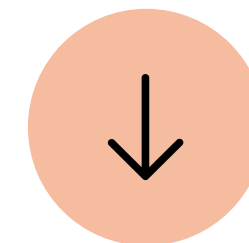
ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

How much more likely are men to ask for a raise than women?

Did you know?

Guess the answer as a group.

SEE THE ANSWER



ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

How much more likely are men to ask for a raise than women?

ANSWER:

This is a trick question. Women negotiate for raises and promotions as often as men do.³⁹³

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**.

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.⁷⁰⁰ 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.⁷⁰¹

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

REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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.³¹⁰ 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.³¹¹ 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.³¹²

Rooted in likeability bias

REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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

WHY IT MATTERS

How we describe people matters—and can unfairly influence performance reviews²⁰⁹
In this situation, it's not hard to imagine men getting the inside track on promotions and raises.

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

WHAT TO DO

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

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

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.⁴⁰⁴ Because of this, women are less likely to get credit for successes and more likely to be blamed for failures.⁴⁰⁵

Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias

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.⁴⁵ 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.⁴⁶ 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.⁴⁷

Rooted in performance bias

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.²⁷⁷ 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.²⁷²

Rooted in maternal bias

REVIEWS & 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

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

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

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.⁴¹⁵ 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.⁴¹⁶ This dynamic can be exacerbated for Asian women because of stereotypes.⁴¹⁷ 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."⁴¹⁸

REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS

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.²⁶³

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.²⁶⁴

WHY IT HAPPENS

Both women and men more readily associate men with leadership.²⁶⁵ 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.²⁶⁶ 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.²⁶⁷

Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias

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

WHY IT MATTERS

The comment is vague and lacks evidence, which means it’s more likely to be rooted in bias. If it sways the team, it could mean this woman misses out on a promotion she is well qualified for. That hurts everyone, since teams with more diversity—including employees with disabilities—tend to be more innovative and productive.²⁰⁴

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

WHAT TO DO

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

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

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

In a meeting reviewing annual performance, a coworker asks how a woman could have possibly brought in so much new business—but doesn't show the same skepticism about the men.

WHY IT MATTERS

Underestimating or over-scrutinizing women can diminish their standing at work and lead to them being overlooked for promotions and choice assignments. If it happens often, it may point to bias problems at your company.

In a meeting reviewing annual performance, a coworker asks how a woman could have possibly brought in so much new business—but doesn't show the same skepticism about the men.

WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague if they have a reason to question this woman's performance: "She's clearly getting great results. Why are you doubting her?" If their answer suggests that they are discounting the woman's performance unfairly, you can explain that women's accomplishments tend to be questioned more often than men's.

WHY IT HAPPENS

People often question the basis for women's achievements. They assume that women did well through luck or outside help, rather than with their own skills. As a result, women are often asked to prove themselves repeatedly, while men are not.

Rooted in attribution bias

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

You're on a review committee and a woman with an excellent track record is up for promotion. But the group is nervous about giving her the opportunity, since no one feels like they know her well personally.

WHY IT MATTERS

When you rely on personal relationships to decide who gets promoted, you may overlook the most qualified candidates.

You're on a review committee and a woman with an excellent track record is up for promotion. But the group is nervous about giving her the opportunity, since no one feels like they know her well personally.

WHAT TO DO

Encourage the group to consider the woman's full profile, such as her business results and her effectiveness as a manager. Ask why knowing someone personally is important for promotion. When people are asked to clarify the evaluation criteria they're using, they tend to make fairer decisions. If they push back, remind them that her personal relationships probably don't have anything to do with how well she does her job.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that we tend to gravitate toward others like us and may even avoid others who are different. Because most leaders are men, this dynamic can benefit men and disadvantage women, particularly women of color. In addition, social outings can sometimes exclude women, which makes it harder for them to network with colleagues and senior leaders. For example, evening events may be difficult for parents to attend. On other occasions, women might not be invited at all.

Rooted in affinity 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

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...”