

LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat gender bias at work

TO GET STARTED:

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

ABOUT THE 50 WAYS PRESENTATION:

- The 50 Ways to Fight Bias activity is divided into 4 different presentations.
- Each presentation takes roughly 1–2 hours to complete and includes 12–13 different examples of gender bias in the workplace.
- You can repeat this activity up to 4 times without repeating the same content.
- This is **PRESENTATION 1** of 4. See the [Moderator Guide & Speaker Notes](#) for additional presentations.

PRESENTATION STARTS
ON THE NEXT SLIDE

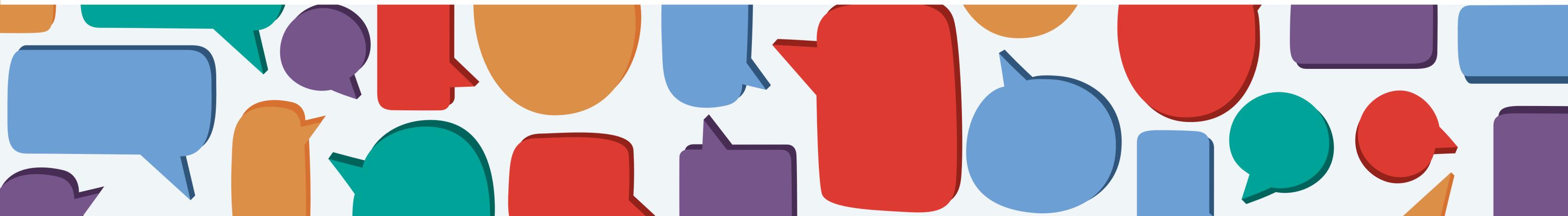


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50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat gender bias 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:

Stanford

VMware Women's Leadership
Innovation Lab



paradigm

- ▶ Gender 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 makes it hard for companies to level the playing field.
- ▶ Today, we'll learn concrete steps to address gender bias head-on.

TODAY'S AGENDA

- 1 Set the tone**
- 2 Learn about gender bias**
- 3 Dive into specific situations and solutions**
- 4 Finish with a closing activity**

Setting the tone

- 1 Bias isn't limited to gender.**
- 2 We all fall into bias traps.**
- 3 Knowing that bias exists isn't enough—
commit to take action.**
- 4 Stories should be anonymous.**
- 5 Give people the benefit of the doubt.**

Overview: common biases women experience at work

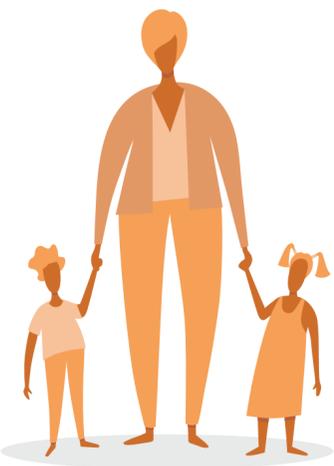
OVERVIEW: COMMON BIASES WOMEN EXPERIENCE AT WORK



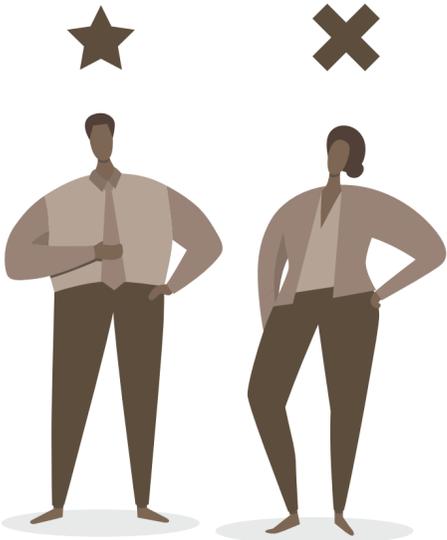
Likeability bias



Performance bias



Maternal bias



Attribution bias



Affinity bias



Double discrimination & intersectionality



Watch the video:
"Introduction to the Common Biases Women Experience"

Icebreakers

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

ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

ANSWER

Almost 3 times more often.¹²⁷

In a study of performance reviews, men who stayed late to help prepare for a meeting got a 14% increase in their rating.

What increase did the women get when they stayed late to help?

ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

In a study of performance reviews, men who stayed late to help prepare for a meeting got a 14% increase in their rating.

What increase did the women get when they stayed late to help?

ANSWER

No increase at all. Research shows that when men help out with office tasks they are rewarded, while women are not. Conversely, women are penalized if they refuse.¹³³

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?

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.¹³⁶

Workplace situations

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

WHY IT MATTERS

If people think that women are well represented in leadership when in reality they're not, they're less likely to do anything to fix the problem—they simply don't see it. That's a loss for your company: when companies have more women in leadership, they tend to have more employee-friendly policies and produce better business results.¹¹³

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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

WHAT TO DO

Point out the numbers, which speak for themselves. You can say, "It's great that we have those two women on the leadership team, but they're only two out of fifteen. Women are half the population, so women are still really underrepresented." You can also share that having more women in leadership can be good for a company's bottom line.¹¹⁴

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

When it comes to women in leadership, people tend to be too satisfied with the status quo: 45% of men and 28% of women think women are well represented when only 1 in 10 senior leaders at their company is a woman.¹¹⁵ These low expectations are the result of generations of inequality. When there used to be no women senior leaders, seeing just one or two can feel like a huge step forward. It's hard to imagine a groundswell for change when we don't have higher expectations for what equality looks like.

After an interview, a colleague says they didn't like how a woman candidate bragged about her strengths and accomplishments.

WHY IT MATTERS

In general, candidates who are well liked are more likely to be hired—so when women are seen as less likeable, they're often less likely to get the job.⁸ And companies that fail to hire talented women miss out on their contributions and leadership.

HIRING

After an interview, a colleague says they didn't like how a woman candidate bragged about her strengths and accomplishments.

WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague to explore their thinking: "That's interesting. Do you think you'd have that reaction if a man did the same thing?" You can also reframe what happened: "I noticed that too, but I don't see it as bragging. I just thought she was talking confidently about her talents." It's also worth pointing out that a job interview is exactly the place to talk about your strengths.

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

HIRING

After an interview, a colleague says they didn't like how a woman candidate bragged about her strengths and accomplishments.

WHY IT HAPPENS

We expect men to assert themselves and promote their own accomplishments. But we often have a negative reaction when women do the same thing.⁹ This puts women candidates in a difficult spot. If they tout their achievements, it can hurt their chances of being hired. If they don't, their achievements might be overlooked.

Rooted in likeability bias

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

WHY IT MATTERS

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

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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

WHAT TO DO

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

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

Motherhood triggers assumptions that women are less competent and less committed to their careers. As a result, they are held to higher standards and presented with fewer opportunities. Studies show that the “maternal wall” women face when they have kids is the strongest gender bias.³²

Rooted in maternal bias

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

WHY IT MATTERS

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

MEETING DYNAMICS

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

WHAT TO DO

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

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

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

MEETING DYNAMICS

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

Women tend to be stereotyped as overly emotional, while men tend to be viewed as rational—and therefore more professional and better suited to lead.¹¹⁸ This dynamic can lead people to see a woman with an opinion—especially if she expresses it with conviction—as being overly emotional, while the same view voiced by a man is considered reasonable.¹¹⁹

A coworker confides in you, “I honestly just find it easier to work with men.”

WHY IT MATTERS

Your colleague’s preference for working with men could lead them—consciously or unconsciously—to overlook talented women. When this happens, women can miss career opportunities, and your coworker can miss the chance to work with women from whom they might learn something.

A coworker confides in you, “I honestly just find it easier to work with men.”

WHAT TO DO

A comment like this may signal that your coworker thinks women are less talented or less likeable than men. You can ask, “What makes you say that?” When people are asked to explain themselves, it sometimes leads them to rethink their position. You can also explain **WHY IT HAPPENS**—it can be eye-opening to understand how bias works—or share your own perspective: “I’ve had great experiences working with women.” Even if you can’t convince them to think differently, you can push back on their point of view.

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker confides in you, “I honestly just find it easier to work with men.”

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your colleague may say this because of performance bias, which can lead them to incorrectly assume that men are more competent than women.¹⁰⁴ Likeability bias can lead them to feel that competent women are less likeable and therefore harder to work with.¹⁰⁵ And if your colleague is a man, his comment may be rooted in affinity bias—he may prefer to work with people like himself.¹⁰⁶

Rooted in performance bias, likeability bias, affinity bias

A woman suggests an idea in a meeting and it falls flat. A few minutes later, a man suggests the same idea and gets an enthusiastic reaction.

WHY IT MATTERS

Getting credit for ideas is important—it's often how employees get noticed. When people don't feel heard, they may also stop speaking up and sharing their views. Over time, if their contributions go unseen, it can slow their advancement.⁶¹ In both cases, companies end up missing out.

MEETING DYNAMICS

A woman suggests an idea in a meeting and it falls flat. A few minutes later, a man suggests the same idea and gets an enthusiastic reaction.

WHAT TO DO

You can remind everyone that the idea originated with your woman colleague: “I think [Name] made that point a few moments ago. I like this direction.” Advocating for women coworkers in this way can help them get noticed for their contributions—and it can also position you as a leader.

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

MEETING DYNAMICS

A woman suggests an idea in a meeting and it falls flat. A few minutes later, a man suggests the same idea and gets an enthusiastic reaction.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Because we tend to underestimate women's performance and overestimate men's, we often don't give women as much credit for their ideas. This can play out in meetings. The team doesn't "hear" an idea when a woman raises it, but when a man says the same thing, they pay attention.⁶²

Rooted in attribution bias

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.

REVIEWS & 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.

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.¹⁷⁸

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.¹⁷⁹

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

REVIEWS & 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 HAPPENS

Both women and men more readily associate men with leadership.¹⁸⁰ 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.¹⁸¹

Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias

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.⁵⁰ Being mistaken for a more junior employee can feel disrespectful, even humiliating. Over time, the bad feelings from slights like this can add up and leave employees feeling unhappy and more likely to leave their job.⁵¹

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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.⁵²

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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 HAPPENS

Research shows that we strongly associate men with leadership—but not always women.⁵³ Women are twice as likely as men to be mistaken for someone much more junior—and women of color are the most likely to experience this.⁵⁴

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.⁷² But because managers and senior leaders are more likely to be white men, and because people tend to gravitate toward mentoring others like themselves, women and people of color often miss out on that support.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴ 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. In your case, mentoring people like yourself supports diversity and inclusion.

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of this bias, we tend to prefer the company of others who are like us.⁷⁵ This can lead us to invest more in people who remind us of ourselves, perhaps because we assume these relationships will feel more comfortable.⁷⁶

Rooted in affinity bias

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

WHY IT MATTERS

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

HIRING

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

WHAT TO DO

Mention to the hiring committee that you've noticed they tend to select men over women with similar abilities. You can also explain **WHY IT HAPPENS**. Then suggest a solution. Research shows that when teams agree on a set of clear criteria and use it consistently for all candidates, the hiring process is fairer and the most qualified women and men can rise to the top.¹⁷⁵

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

HIRING

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

We tend to rate women lower than men, even if they have similar qualifications.¹⁷⁶ This can make a real difference in hiring. In one study, replacing a woman's name with a man's name on a résumé increased the likelihood of being hired by more than 60%.¹⁷⁷

Rooted in performance bias

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

WHY IT MATTERS

All workers—men too!—should be able to spend time with their families, whether that's to bond with new babies, care for sick kids, or be there for aging parents.

When workplaces have generous family leave policies, employees are happier, more productive, and more likely to stay on staff.⁸² Plus, when men don't use their leave, it makes it harder for women to use theirs without judgment.

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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

WHAT TO DO

Stand up for your colleague on leave. Point out **WHY IT MATTERS**—how family leave is good for workers, families, *and* companies.⁸³ More importantly, remind them that no one should be forced to choose between being a good employee and a good parent.

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

Working fathers can face pushback for spending time with their kids. They tend to receive lower performance ratings and experience steeper reductions in future earnings than mothers who take the same amount of leave.⁸⁴ Much like maternal bias, this pushback is rooted in gender stereotypes. Moms are expected to be more committed to family and less to their careers.⁸⁵ But the reverse is true for fathers, and when they go against that expectation by prioritizing family, they are penalized.⁸⁶

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 unconscious 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.

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

Studies show that women often get negative feedback on their speaking style, while men do not.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

Rooted in likeability bias

A coworker asks,
“Who’s the new girl?”

WHY IT MATTERS

Calling an adult woman a girl in a professional context can make her seem junior and inexperienced—and implies that she doesn’t need to be taken seriously. Comments like this are disrespectful to women.

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker asks,
“Who’s the
new girl?”

WHAT TO DO

You can reply, “The new *woman* we’ve hired is ...”
That might be enough to make your colleague rethink their language. Or be more direct: “I’m sure it wasn’t your goal, but calling her a girl can undermine her standing here at work.”

NEXT: WHY IT HAPPENS

EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS

A coworker asks,
“Who’s the
new girl?”

WHY IT HAPPENS

People tend to think that women are less competent than men,¹¹⁶ which leads them to take women less seriously—and to assume they have lower status and less power.¹¹⁷ That can make it seem acceptable to refer to a woman as a girl, when they would not call a man a boy.

Rooted in performance bias

Closing activity

“My one action to address gender bias in the workplace is...”

LEAN IN

More ways to support gender equality



**Start Lean In Circles at
your organization**



**Participate in the Women
in the Workplace Study**

LEARN MORE AT
leanin.org