



LEAN IN

# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat bias against women at work

# For managers



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# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat the biases women face 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.

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

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PRESENTATION STARTS  
ON THE NEXT SLIDE

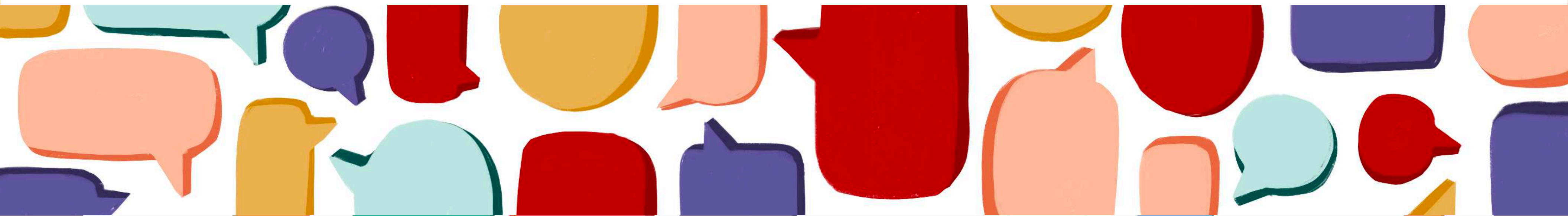


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# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat the biases women face at work

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# Welcome



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# LEAN IN

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

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



## WHY WE ARE HERE

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- ▶ Bias—whether deliberate or unconscious—is holding women back in the workplace.
- ▶ It makes it harder for women to get hired and promoted and negatively impacts their day-to-day work experiences.
- ▶ This hurts women and makes it hard for companies to level the playing field.
- ▶ 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



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# Setting the tone

- 1 Women face biases due to their race, sexuality, and other aspects of their identity.
- 2 Intersectionality 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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- ➊ Some situations may be difficult to hear.
- ➋ Stories should be anonymous.
- ➌ Give people the benefit of the doubt.

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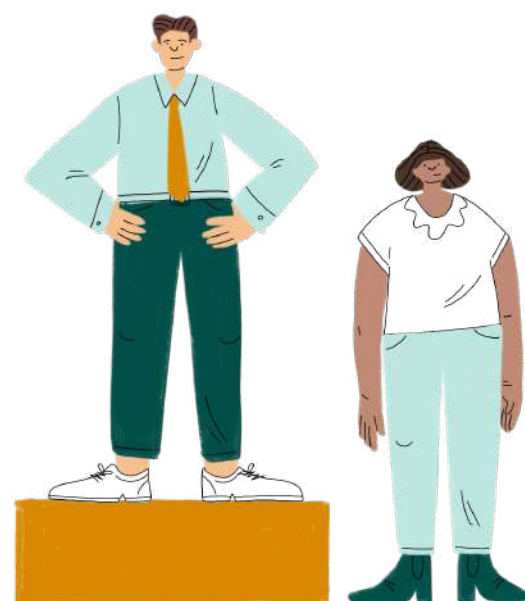
# Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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Likeability bias



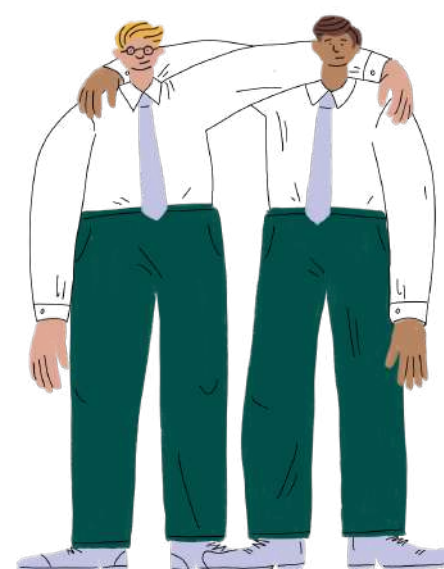
Performance bias



Maternal bias



Attribution bias



Affinity bias



Intersectionality



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

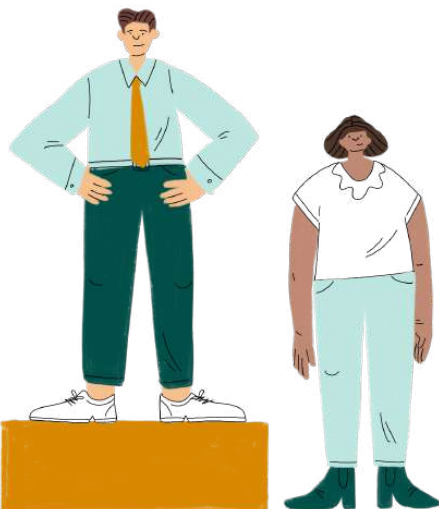


# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



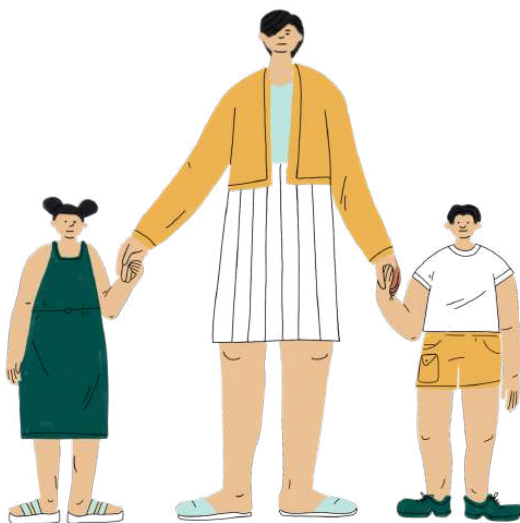
## Likeability bias

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.<sup>11</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>



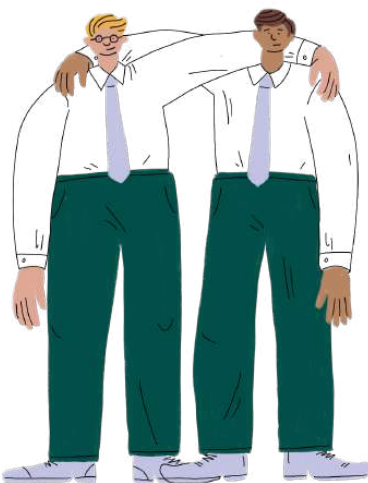
## Maternal bias

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



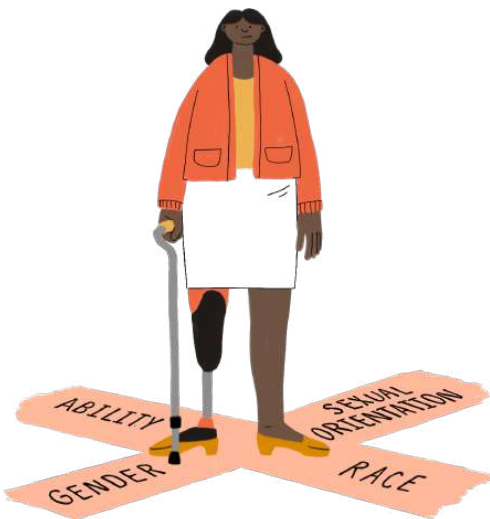
## Attribution bias

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>



## 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>



## Intersectionality

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

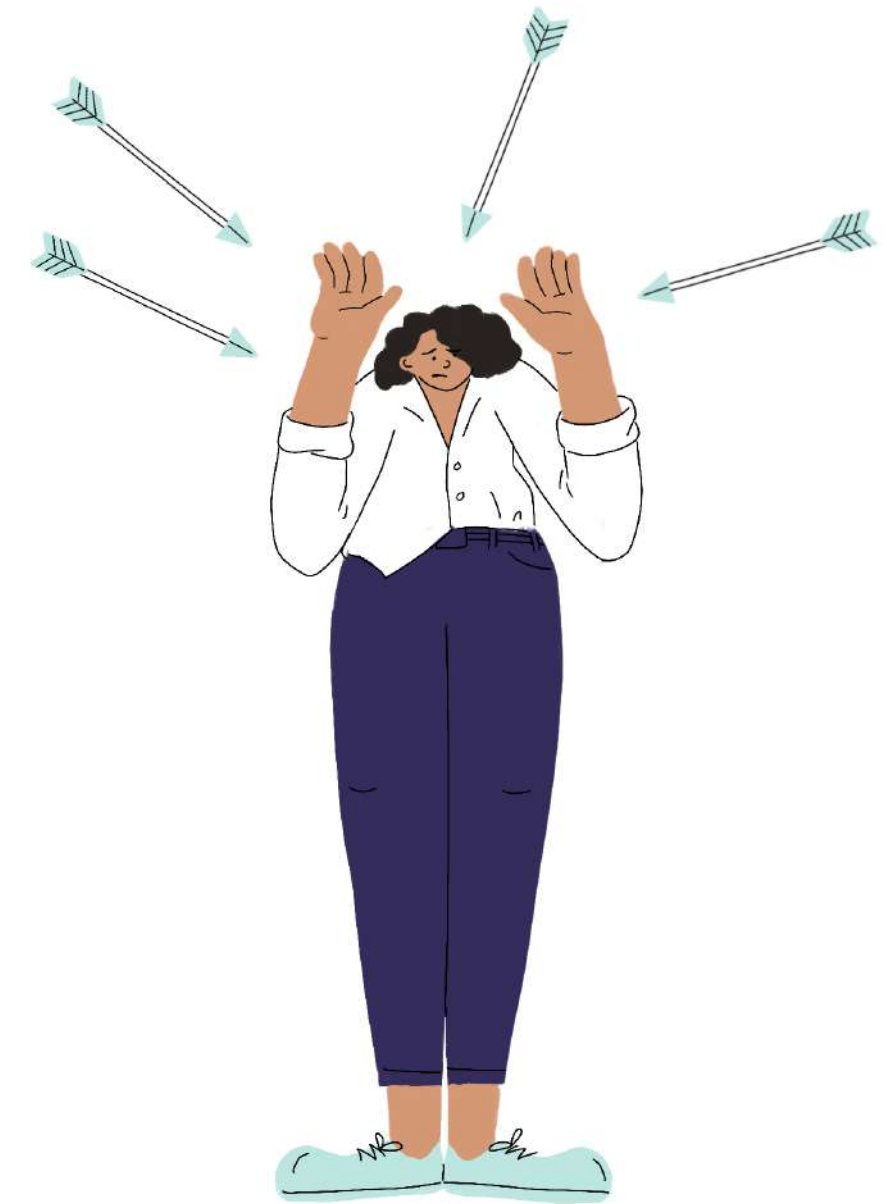
## OVERVIEW: MICROAGGRESSIONS

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Microaggressions are comments and actions that demean or dismiss someone based on their gender, race, or other aspects of their identity.

Some groups of women experience them even more often:

- ▶ Black women are nearly 2.5x more likely than white women to hear someone at work express surprise about their language skills or other abilities
- ▶ Lesbian and bisexual women and women with disabilities are far more likely than other women to hear demeaning remarks about themselves or others like them



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# Icebreakers

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?

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

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

## ANSWER

66% of women and 1% of men.<sup>119</sup>



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

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

## ANSWER

Only 58 Black women.<sup>120</sup>

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?

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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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.)<sup>121</sup>

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# 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.

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 MATTERS**

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

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

**WHAT TO DO**

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

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

**WHY IT HAPPENS**

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

*Rooted in likeability bias*

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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>122</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>123</sup>

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>124</sup> When people understand how bias works, they are able to make fairer decisions and more clearly see bias when it crops up.<sup>125</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.

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

### WHY IT MATTERS

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

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

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of stereotypical expectations that women should be selfless and giving, they can face criticism when they appear to be “out for themselves”—for example, when they compete for a bigger job.<sup>126</sup> By contrast, we expect men to be driven and ambitious, and we tend to think well of them when they show those qualities.<sup>127</sup>

*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.<sup>128</sup>

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

## WHAT TO DO

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

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

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

*Rooted in attribution bias*

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 less diverse teams. 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."

Intersectional card

## 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>131</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>132</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

# Your manager suggests having a “powwow.”

## WHY IT MATTERS

This is a misuse of the word “powwow,” a social gathering that often holds spiritual significance for Native American people. Misusing words and phrases like “powwow,” “spirit animal,” and “low man on the totem pole” may feel harmless to non–Native Americans. But to Native Americans, it can seem mocking and derogatory.

Your manager suggests having a “powwow.”

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Speak up in the moment by saying, "I'm happy to have a meeting, but I want to mention one thing. You might not know this, but the word 'powwow' has real meaning to Native Americans. It doesn't simply mean a meeting." You can also explain **WHY IT MATTERS**. Or you could ask, "Are you trying to say you want to have a meeting?" This can prompt your manager to reflect on their language choice.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This type of cultural appropriation occurs when there is a power imbalance between cultures. People from a dominant culture feel able to use parts of a marginalized culture in any way they choose, including in ways that rob it of its original meaning.<sup>133</sup>

Your team holds regular happy hours after work for networking and bonding at a local bar. You realize that one colleague, a Muslim woman, has never come.

#### WHY IT MATTERS

Some Muslims avoid alcohol and may therefore feel uncomfortable in a bar.<sup>134</sup> If most networking events are held in bars, it means they miss out on the team bonding that can lead to career opportunities.<sup>135</sup> It can also send a message that employees who don't drink—and other groups like caregivers who need to be home soon after work—are not considered when social events are planned.<sup>136</sup>



Your team holds regular happy hours after work for networking and bonding at a local bar. You realize that one colleague, a Muslim woman, has never come.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Talk to your team leader and explain **WHY IT MATTERS**. Encourage them to plan a wide range of events that leave out as few people as possible. For example, if your team goes out every week to a bar, consider moving it to a restaurant sometimes. Move a few evening events to lunchtime so working parents can join. And make the changes with sensitivity, so no one gets blamed. If happy hours are simply canceled, it may create bad feelings among some employees.<sup>137</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Many teams—and companies—don't realize how much thoughtfulness is needed to ensure that work events are inclusive 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 and inclusive workplaces.

## REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

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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.<sup>138</sup> 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.<sup>139</sup>

*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.<sup>140</sup> But when employees with disabilities are fully supported, they’re usually just as happy as their colleagues.<sup>141</sup> This has a big impact, since 1 in 6 working-age Americans has a visible or invisible disability.<sup>142</sup>

In a private conversation, a coworker expresses resentment about “special treatment” for a woman with a disability who is allowed to work flexible hours.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Tell your coworker **WHY IT MATTERS**. You can also talk to HR and ask them to clarify your company’s general policies on flexible work, so that people are less likely to view specific situations as unfair.<sup>143</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This can happen when people don’t understand that accommodations like flexibility aren’t “nice to have” for employees with disabilities—they’re essential. Additionally, because people with disabilities tend to be seen as less valuable and competent, coworkers may question whether they really need or deserve extra support.<sup>144</sup> This is especially true for women with disabilities, who face more bias and disrespect at work than almost any other group.<sup>145</sup>

The day after a high-profile killing of a Black person by the police, coworkers are discussing the news but nobody brings up this story.

### WHY IT MATTERS

The silence suggests that non-Black colleagues are not outraged at the injustice or that they aren't aware of the Black community's grief and trauma.<sup>146</sup> Left unaddressed, these perceptions—accurate or not—can contribute to a workplace where Black employees feel like they don't belong.<sup>147</sup> When a Black person is killed by the police, it reminds all Black people of the violence that threatens their lives. It can make it hard to focus on work, and depression and anxiety can follow.<sup>148</sup>



The day after a high-profile killing of a Black person by the police, coworkers are discussing the news but nobody brings up this story.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

In the moment, say something. Mention the incident and how awful it was. Depending on your relationships with Black coworkers, let them know you are there to talk if they need to.<sup>149</sup> Be understanding if Black coworkers seem distracted or not themselves. In the longer term, you can further educate yourself on the incident by reading about it in a Black news outlet, such as *Blavity* or *Essence*. If you're a manager, check in with Black members of your team to see how they're doing and if they need any additional support.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Non-Black coworkers may believe it's insensitive to mention incidents of police violence toward Black people. But in fact, doing so conveys that they care.<sup>150</sup> They also may not realize how traumatic these events are to the entire Black community,<sup>151</sup> perhaps seeing them as isolated one-offs instead of ongoing systemic abuse.



## HIRING

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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.<sup>152</sup>

## 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.<sup>153</sup>

*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. Diverse teams are often more innovative and productive,<sup>154</sup> 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.<sup>155</sup> 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.<sup>156</sup>

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.<sup>157</sup> 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.

Intersectional card

## 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.<sup>158</sup> 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.<sup>159</sup> 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.<sup>160</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

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.<sup>161</sup>



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.<sup>162</sup> 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.<sup>163</sup> You can also suggest that your company set diversity targets for promotions, then track outcomes and monitor progress, which can also help move the numbers.<sup>164</sup> 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.<sup>165</sup> Because of this, women are less likely to get credit for successes and more likely to be blamed for failures.<sup>166</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

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.<sup>167</sup> Over time, it can make them feel less happy in their jobs and more likely to consider leaving.<sup>168</sup>

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.<sup>169</sup> As a result, they are more likely to doubt women's competence and question their judgment.<sup>170</sup> Certain groups, including Black women, Latinas, and women with disabilities, tend to have their expertise questioned even more frequently than other women. They are often assumed to be less skilled because of racist or ableist stereotypes.<sup>171</sup>

*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.<sup>172</sup> 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.<sup>173</sup> 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.<sup>174</sup> 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, a person of color, or an LGBTQ person, 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.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because of this bias, we tend to prefer the company of others who are like us.<sup>175</sup> This can lead us to invest more in people who remind us of ourselves, perhaps because we assume these relationships will feel more comfortable.<sup>176</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

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>177</sup> It could even make her feel that her job might be in jeopardy unless she returns early.<sup>178</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>179</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."

Intersectional card

## 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>180</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

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

*Rooted in maternal bias*



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.<sup>184</sup>

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.<sup>185</sup> 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.<sup>186</sup> Or he may be nervous for other reasons: some men are wary of spending time with women colleagues outside of work for fear of seeming inappropriate.

*Rooted in affinity bias*

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.<sup>187</sup> And if situations like this happen often, they can lead to stress or burnout.<sup>188</sup>

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.<sup>189</sup>

## 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.<sup>190</sup> Decades of research on the ideal worker show that this norm can harm mothers more than fathers, since mothers often do more caregiving.<sup>191</sup>

In a meeting about hiring, colleagues agree the most qualified candidate is a trans woman but worry about how clients will respond.

### WHY IT MATTERS

It's inappropriate to speculate about how clients would respond to someone's gender identity, just as it would be about their religious faith or ethnicity.<sup>192</sup> The discussion also harms company culture, because it could make it feel acceptable to discriminate against trans people.<sup>193</sup>



In a meeting about hiring, colleagues agree the most qualified candidate is a trans woman but worry about how clients will respond.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Remind the group that they all agreed that she was the most qualified candidate and push back against the idea that you should give up on the strongest hire. You can also point to some of her specific qualifications and experience that fit the criteria for the role.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Transgender people often experience workplace mistreatment, including difficulties getting hired and promoted. This mistreatment is often due in part to concerns that clients and other employees have negative attitudes toward transgender people.<sup>194</sup> In this case, allowing such concerns to determine who gets hired results in discrimination against trans women.<sup>195</sup>

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.<sup>196</sup> 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.<sup>197</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

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.<sup>198</sup> 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.<sup>199</sup> 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.<sup>200</sup>

*Rooted in attribution bias*

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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...”