



LEAN IN

# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat bias against women at work

## Experiences of women of color



LEAN IN

# 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

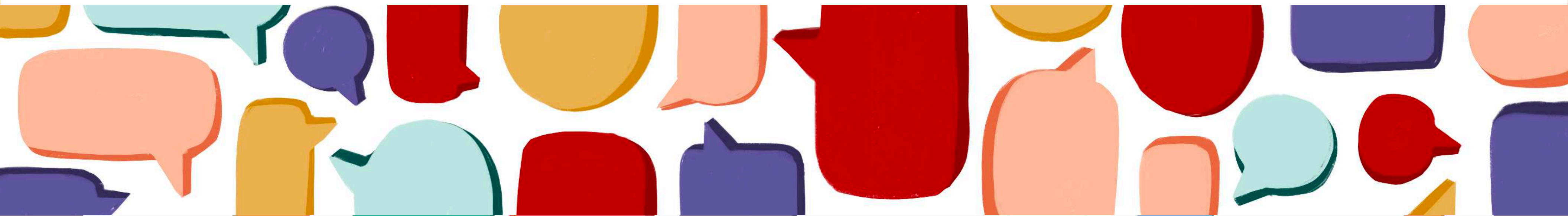


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# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

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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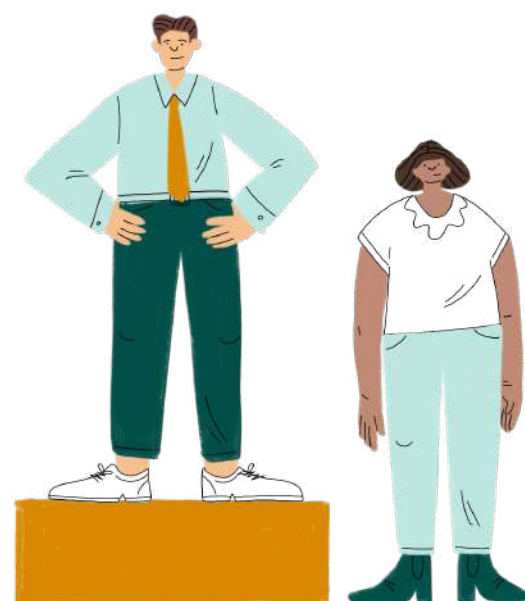
# Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK

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Likeability bias



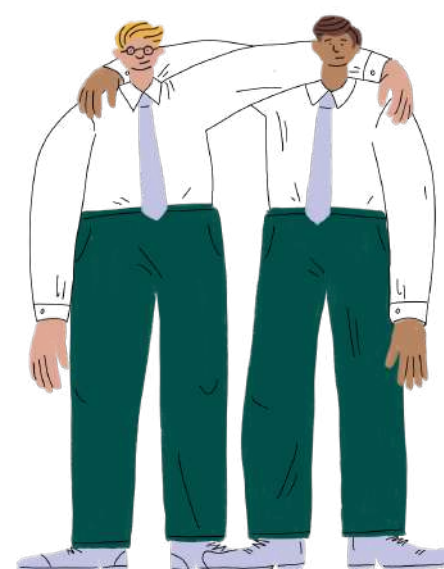
Performance bias



Maternal bias



Attribution bias



Affinity bias



Intersectionality



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

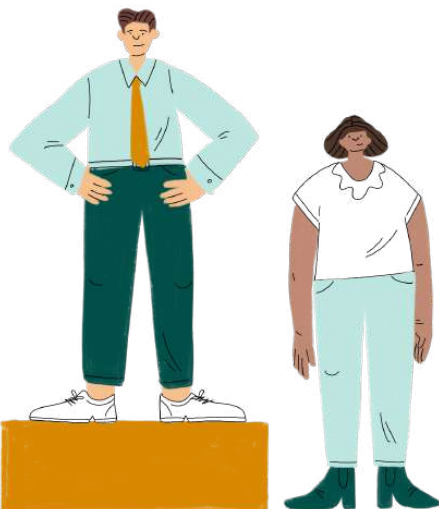


# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



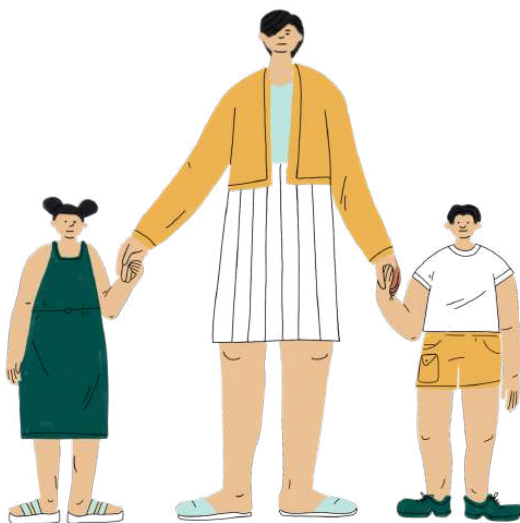
## Likeability bias

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>



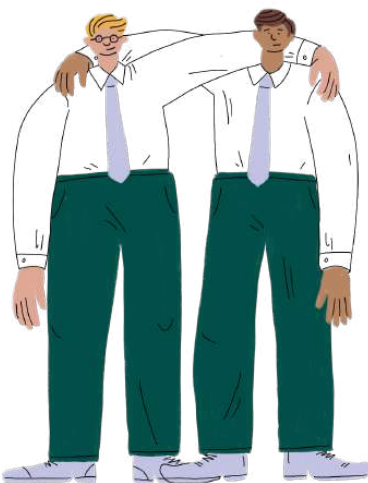
## Maternal bias

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



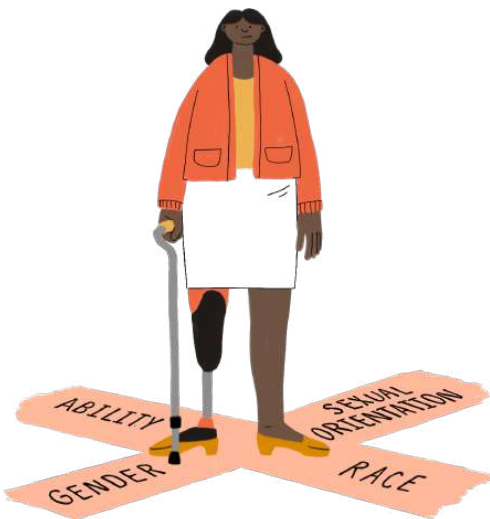
## Attribution bias

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.

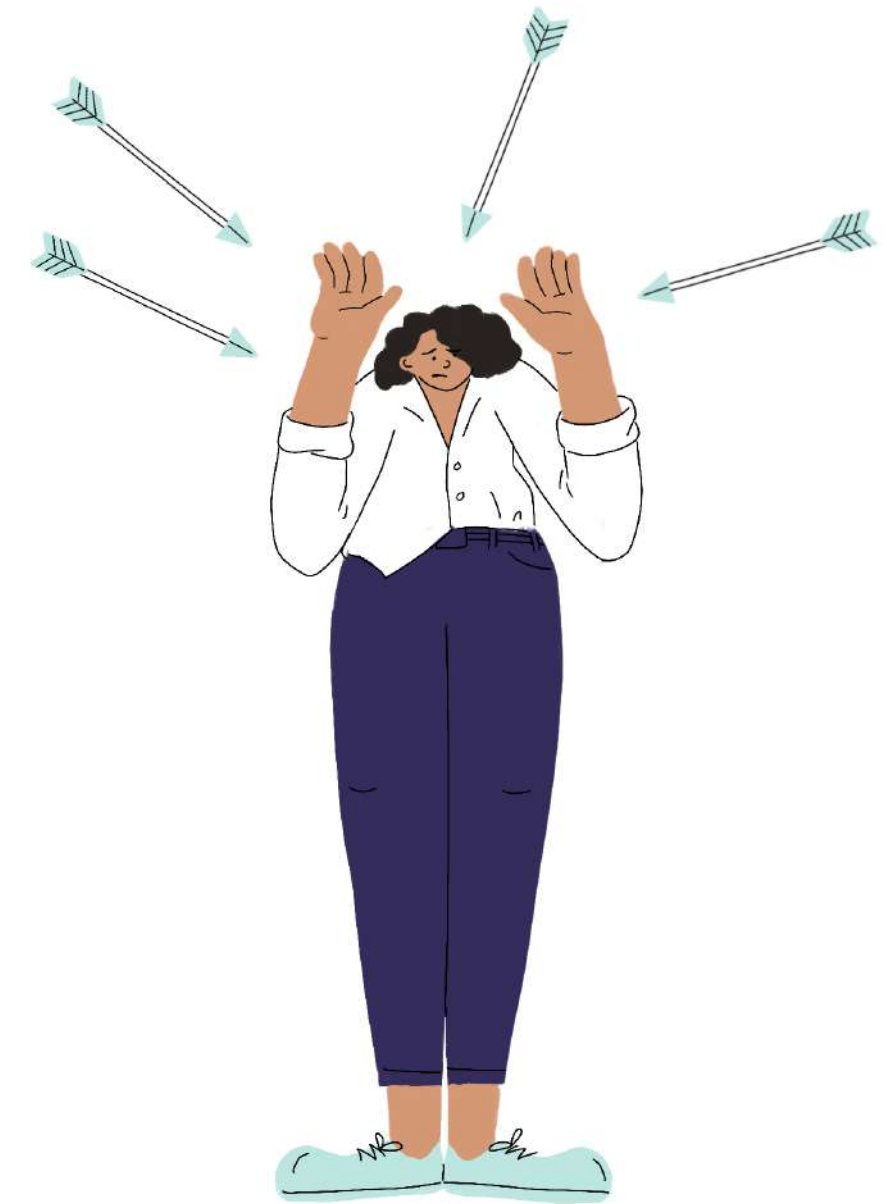
## OVERVIEW: MICROAGGRESSIONS

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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

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>478</sup>



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

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

## ANSWER

It led to 50% more callbacks—the equivalent of adding eight years of work experience.<sup>479</sup>

For every 100 men hired as managers,  
how many Latinas are hired?

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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For every 100 men hired as managers, how many Latinas are hired?

**ANSWER**

57.<sup>480</sup>

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



## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

## ANSWER

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

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

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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

**ANSWER**

59%.<sup>481</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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# A coworker says, “I don't see color.”

## WHY IT MATTERS

This comment denies a fundamental part of people’s identities. It also suggests that if we choose to ignore racism, it will go away on its own. In fact, many studies show that when people or institutions claim to be “color-blind,” they often perpetuate racism by failing to take action against it.<sup>482</sup> To combat racism, you first have to face it head-on, then actively work to challenge racist stereotypes and behavior—both your own and those of others.<sup>483</sup>

A coworker says, "I don't see color."

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

You could ask a question to make your coworker reflect: "What's wrong with acknowledging someone's race? Everyone's identity is unique and should be appreciated."<sup>484</sup> Explain that while you understand they think they're being fair and objective, "not seeing color" can make racism worse. Point out that this way of thinking signals that someone's not interested in challenging racist behavior, whether or not that was the intention.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Your coworker may wish to deny that racism still exists.<sup>485</sup> Or they may be falling into the trap of thinking that "not seeing color" is a way of avoiding racism, when in fact it perpetuates racism.<sup>486</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>487</sup> Left unaddressed, these perceptions—accurate or not—can contribute to a workplace where Black employees feel like they don't belong.<sup>488</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>489</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>490</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>491</sup> They also may not realize how traumatic these events are to the entire Black community,<sup>492</sup> perhaps seeing them as isolated one-offs instead of ongoing systemic abuse.

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>493</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>494</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

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

**WHY IT MATTERS**

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



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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Women tend to be interrupted more often than men due to false beliefs that their contributions are of less value and that they should be more accommodating than men.<sup>495</sup> This is compounded for women with nonnative accents because of “accent bias,” the belief that those with “foreign” accents are less intelligent than others.<sup>496</sup> This bias can be even more extreme if the speaker makes errors in grammar or word choice.<sup>497</sup> All this sets the stage for women who speak English as a second language to be spoken over, interrupted, or simply not listened to.

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

At an all-staff meeting, your company's leaders share concrete goals for hiring, promoting, and retaining women, but it's clear they haven't set goals for women of color specifically.

### WHY IT MATTERS

If companies don't set goals by gender and race combined, they are not explicitly prioritizing the advancement of women of color. That means women of color, who face a uniquely challenging combination of sexism and racism, are more likely to be overlooked.<sup>498</sup> It can also send the message that the company hasn't made the advancement of women of color a priority.

At an all-staff meeting, your company's leaders share concrete goals for hiring, promoting, and retaining women, but it's clear they haven't set goals for women of color specifically.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

If you feel comfortable, you could raise the question directly in the meeting: "Do we set these goals for women of color?" You could also speak to your manager or HR team afterward about the importance of setting goals that combine gender and race.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Many corporate diversity efforts focus on either gender or race, but very few focus on the two together. In fact, only 7 percent of companies set representation targets for gender and race combined. This may happen because company leaders aren't aware of the importance of an intersectional approach to diversity efforts.

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

A coworker asks a Black woman on your team if they can touch her hair.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Asking to touch a Black woman's hair is "othering"—that is, it treats her as different or as an outsider.<sup>499</sup> It can make the woman feel objectified and disempowered, as well as on guard and self-conscious.<sup>500</sup> And depending on the context, this request for unwanted physical interaction could also feel like sexual harassment.

A coworker asks a Black woman on your team if they can touch her hair.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

You can jump in and say something like, “Hey, asking to touch a Black woman's hair is not OK!” or “Why do you need to touch it? It looks great from here!” To make sure it doesn’t keep happening, consider mentioning it to your manager as an example of why the company needs regular anti-racism training and a robust allyship program.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

The request may be motivated by “hair bias”—the idea that there’s something exotic, wrong, or unprofessional about a Black woman’s natural hair.<sup>501</sup> This bias began in the slavery era and has been reinforced by the beauty industry.<sup>502</sup> It is also all too common: in fact, some U.S. companies still prohibit natural Black hairstyles.<sup>503</sup> Plus, asking to touch a Black woman’s hair reveals a troubling power dynamic in which white people can cross the personal boundaries of Black people without facing any penalty.<sup>504</sup>

# 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>505</sup>



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

### WHY IT MATTERS

Statements like these can quickly shut someone down. It's not fair to your coworker, who is trying to present her ideas. It's not fair to everyone in the meeting who could benefit from her insights. And it reinforces harmful stereotypes that Latinas are overly emotional compared to other groups and that women who assert themselves are angry or combative.<sup>506</sup>

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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that Latinas tend to be labeled as heated or emotional when they are merely speaking without being deferential.<sup>507</sup> This is rooted in the pervasive stereotype that Latinas are too intense, feisty, and emotional.<sup>508</sup>

After interviewing a Black woman, a coworker expresses surprise over “how articulate she sounded.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like these may sound like compliments, but they definitely are not. They are microaggressions that perpetuate a stereotype that Black people aren't articulate or educated, which is not only insulting but can also lead to fewer career opportunities.<sup>509</sup>

After interviewing a Black woman, a coworker expresses surprise over “how articulate she sounded.”

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Asking a probing question can prompt your coworker to examine their assumptions. You might ask, “Why wouldn’t you expect her to be articulate?” You can also talk to the hiring manager responsible for making sure job candidates are evaluated fairly and explain that comments like these undermine that process.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This type of statement is fueled by a centuries-old racist belief that Black people have worse language skills than whites.<sup>510</sup> It also reflects a narrow view of what “articulate speech” sounds like by reinforcing the idea that to be considered smart or have your words valued, your speech must sound “white.”<sup>508</sup> This assumption is all too common: compared to any other racial or ethnic group, Black women are the most likely to have others express surprise over their language skills or other abilities.<sup>511</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

# You hear a white coworker say they aren't privileged because they grew up poor.

## WHY IT MATTERS

This kind of thinking is fairly common, as 63 percent of white Americans say they don't benefit much or at all from being white.<sup>513</sup> When white people don't accept that there are benefits to being white, they cast doubt on the idea that racial inequality exists at all.<sup>514</sup> The comment also invalidates the lived experiences of nonwhite coworkers, who deal with racial inequality as a part of their daily lives.<sup>515</sup>

You hear a white coworker say they aren't privileged because they grew up poor.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

You can tell your coworker you know they've worked hard to get where they are.<sup>516</sup> Then explain that benefiting from white privilege doesn't mean they haven't struggled. Their challenges may be economic, health related, or derive from another source, but racism has not been one of their burdens. Put another way, they haven't struggled because they are white.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Even though it hugely benefits them, white privilege can be invisible to those who have it.<sup>517</sup> It's the privilege of not being treated with suspicion by store clerks or regularly pulled over by police. It can mean being hired over a Black candidate with similar experience<sup>518</sup> or getting a mortgage when a Latino in the same financial situation is denied one.<sup>519</sup> Even when people know white privilege exists, they can be reluctant to admit it applies to them.<sup>520</sup> It can make them feel defensive and as if their own hard work is invalidated.<sup>521</sup>

You overhear a coworker confuse the names of the only two Black women in your company.<sup>522</sup>

### WHY IT MATTERS

This mistake could diminish the women's value in the eyes of those who hear it. It can also signal disrespect for Black women at the company more broadly because, consciously or unconsciously, it is a form of stereotyping. And it can make the women feel that their names are not considered worth learning or that they are viewed as interchangeable.



You overhear a coworker confuse the names of the only two Black women in your company.<sup>522</sup>

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

You can correct the mistake in the moment: “You’re confusing Maya with Alicia. They’re very different! You should get to know them.”<sup>523</sup> If that doesn’t work and your coworker continues to confuse them, you might need to talk to your manager. Explain **WHY IT MATTERS** and suggest that someone speak to them about trying harder to get this right.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Decades of research show that people often find it harder to differentiate between people of another race than people of their own race.<sup>524</sup> This is called “own-race bias.”<sup>525</sup> Research also suggests that people are less likely to remember employees with less power—and Black women (and people of color generally) are less likely to be viewed as powerful in their organizations.<sup>526</sup>

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



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

#### WHY IT MATTERS

This happens to women more than men—and to women of color most of all.<sup>527</sup> Being mistaken for a more junior employee can feel disrespectful, 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.<sup>528</sup>

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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

Longer term, consider recommending that the company implement bias training, which can help people avoid assumptions like this one.<sup>529</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Research shows that we strongly associate men with leadership—but not always women.<sup>530</sup> Women are twice as likely as men to be mistaken for someone much more junior—and women of color are often the most likely to experience this.<sup>531</sup>

*Rooted in performance 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 71 Latinas are.<sup>532</sup> This “broken rung” on the ladder to leadership means there are too few Latina managers to promote into senior roles.

In a meeting about promotions, someone questions whether a Latina candidate has the skills for a manager role.

Intersectional card

## 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 stereotyped as less intelligent than white people.<sup>533</sup> And as Latinas, they tend to be stereotyped as very family-oriented and more suited to supporting roles, even if they are qualified for more senior positions.<sup>534</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

When reviewing candidates for promotion to a senior role, a member of the committee comments that an Asian woman “doesn't seem like a leader.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

If this statement isn't supported by any evidence, it's unfair to the woman and reinforces a common bias against Asian women as leaders. It could cause your colleague to miss out on a job opportunity and your company to miss out on a talented leader.

When reviewing candidates for promotion to a senior role, a member of the committee comments that an Asian woman "doesn't seem like a leader."

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your colleague, "What leadership traits do you think she's missing?" Asking someone to give evidence for their thinking can prompt them to question any biased assumptions. If you know examples of her leadership, mention them. To help reduce bias in future promotions, talk to your HR team about the importance of consistently using a list of clear criteria to assess all candidates.<sup>535</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

When people make vague comments like "doesn't seem like a leader," they are often drawing on gut feelings rather than evidence from the person's experience or skill set. This vagueness opens the door to bias.<sup>536</sup> The comment may also be rooted in the false stereotype that Asian American women are submissive and lack the communication skills for leadership roles.<sup>537</sup>

A coworker asks a woman of color where she is “really from.”

#### WHY IT MATTERS

People of color hear this far more often than white people do, and the net effect is to make them feel that they are foreigners who don't belong. Research shows that when heard repeatedly, this question can contribute to depression and anxiety for American-born people of color.<sup>538</sup>



A coworker asks a woman of color where she is “really from.”

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

You could address this comment in the moment: “You probably don’t realize this, but people of color get this question all the time, and it can make them feel like outsiders.” Or you could take your coworker aside privately to explain why the question might make the woman feel marginalized, even if their intention is to try to get to know them.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Your colleague may be genuinely interested in where the person is from and may not realize that the question can be offensive. They may also have a lack of awareness of the diversity of Americans, since the question implies that nonwhite Americans are not American.<sup>539</sup> This assumption is known as “the perpetual foreigner stereotype.”<sup>540</sup>



In a lunchtime conversation about politics, a white coworker asks, “I know slavery was horrible, but what does it have to do with what’s happening today?”

#### WHY IT MATTERS

The impact of 400 years of slavery in the United States is still powerfully felt by many Black Americans, and non-Black people continue to benefit from its legacy. It is not a distant historical fact; it continues to shape Black people’s lives in tangible, painful ways.<sup>541</sup> Hearing someone dismiss that can be jarring, even traumatic, especially in a work setting.

In a lunchtime conversation about politics, a white coworker asks, “I know slavery was horrible, but what does it have to do with what’s happening today?”

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

You might point out that the question minimizes the history of Black Americans. You can share concrete ways that slavery still shapes America today; we mention a few in **WHY IT HAPPENS**. If they want to know more, consider recommending some sources—for example, the documentary 13th and the essay “The Case for Reparations” by Ta-Nehisi Coates.<sup>542</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Slavery’s legacy is not widely taught in schools, which means that many white Americans never learn about it in depth.<sup>543</sup> In contrast, Black Americans live with the legacy of slavery every day. For example, voter suppression still limits Black political power. Rules that denied loans to Black Americans, known as “redlining,” still hurt Black homeowners.<sup>544</sup> And generations of unpaid labor fueled the wealth gap between Black and white Americans—even today, Black women own less than 1% of the wealth of white men.<sup>545</sup>

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

#### WHY IT MATTERS

Labeling a Black woman angry can hurt her at work. In one study, when Black women were viewed as angry, they received lower ratings and raises than white women viewed the same way.<sup>546</sup> Comments like these can invalidate her point of view, which means the company loses out on her contributions.<sup>547</sup> And this stereotype can take a mental toll as Black women have to constantly monitor how they talk or act.<sup>548</sup>

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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

The myth of the "angry Black woman" is a racist trope popularized in the media since the Jim Crow era. It began as a way of criticizing and dismissing women who didn't conform to slavery-era ideals of Black women as submissive.<sup>549</sup> The myth is just that: a myth. Research has shown that Black women are no more likely to experience or express anger than Americans as a whole.

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

### WHY IT MATTERS

In addition to being disruptive to the woman presenting and making it harder for everyone to follow her main points, behavior like this is disrespectful. If it goes unchallenged, it can signal that it's OK to treat women of color this way.<sup>550</sup>

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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Compared to people of other races and ethnicities, Black women are the most likely to have their judgment questioned in their area of expertise and to be asked to prove their competence.<sup>551</sup> Women of all races also tend to be interrupted far more often than men, and women of color even more so.<sup>552</sup> These dynamics are fueled by performance bias—the belief that women and people of color are less competent than white men.<sup>553</sup> Black women are particularly impacted by this bias because they are both women and Black.<sup>554</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*



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

### WHY IT MATTERS

If this idea goes unchallenged, it reinforces a damaging stereotype about the talent of people from underrepresented groups. Comments like this can foster sexism and racism and make the workplace feel hostile to some employees—and employees are generally less happy in hostile workplaces.<sup>555</sup>



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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

You might also take the opportunity to make a larger point about the value of diversity: “Plus, it’s good for the company to have more women of color in senior roles, because diverse teams tend to perform better.”<sup>556</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

People tend to underestimate women’s talents compared to men’s—and that bias can be even stronger when it comes to women of color.<sup>557</sup> That means that women often have to accomplish more to show that they’re as competent as men.<sup>558</sup> And when a woman of color succeeds, some people discount her accomplishments and assume that her success is due to external factors like affirmative action, rather than her own hard work and achievements.<sup>559</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

A white coworker says to a newly hired woman of color, "Your name is really hard to pronounce. Do you go by something else?"<sup>560</sup>

### WHY IT MATTERS

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

A white coworker says to a newly hired woman of color, "Your name is really hard to pronounce. Do you go by something else?"<sup>560</sup>

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT MATTERS.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

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

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

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

### WHY IT MATTERS

This comment could torpedo your Latina coworker's chance to present at the meeting, which would be a major missed opportunity for her to prove her skills and show her value to the company. This is how bias against Latinx accents harms people: it can mean that Latinx Americans miss out on assignments, jobs, and promotions for which they are qualified.<sup>561</sup>

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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Many people unconsciously assume a Latinx accent means a person has poor language skills, even if their grammar and word choice are perfectly correct. This bias particularly hurts Latinas: In the U.S., people tend to perceive women with Latinx accents as less intelligent and knowledgeable than other women or Latino men.<sup>562</sup> Your colleague may also be hearing an accent where there isn't one: Research shows that people can falsely perceive an accent when a person of color speaks completely unaccented American English.

*Rooted in performance bias*

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.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

If communication skills aren't key to this promotion—for example, it's a technical or internal-facing role—say so.<sup>563</sup> If communication skills are important, ask for examples of how she can improve and suggest sharing the feedback directly with her. If your colleague can't offer good examples, push back. You could explain that vague feedback can open the door to bias and say you're concerned that this woman is being unfairly judged for no good reason.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Women receive negative feedback on their communication style much more often than men do, no matter how they communicate: they're too quiet, too loud, too gentle, too assertive.<sup>564</sup> This dynamic can be exacerbated for Asian women because of stereotypes.<sup>565</sup> Research shows that Asian women tend to be typecast as too quiet and submissive, so people tend to assume they lack strong communication skills. And when they do assert themselves, this defies our expectations that Asian women will be quiet and gentle, and so they tend to be criticized as "abrasive."<sup>566</sup>



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

### WHY IT MATTERS

This judgment could mean this woman misses out on a job that she's qualified for. And your company could miss out on a strong candidate—one who would add a more global perspective.<sup>567</sup>

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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This type of pushback is common for immigrant women. On top of the gender bias women generally experience, immigrant women often face bias if their credentials come from overseas. In the U.S. and Britain, people tend to be biased against colleges in less wealthy countries and to believe that degrees from those countries are worth less.<sup>568</sup> As a result of this and other biases, immigrant women are hired at lower rates than women overall and earn less than any other group of women or men.<sup>569</sup>

Before an event, your manager says to a Latina, "Don't forget there's a dress code." He does not give this reminder to others on your team.

### WHY IT MATTERS

This comment could adversely impact how others view your Latina colleague, especially as it comes from her manager. It could also add to the pressure felt by many Latinas to present themselves with extreme care to fit a narrow definition of professional attire.<sup>570</sup> Most Latinas in corporate America say that they style their hair and makeup conservatively (87%) and dress conservatively (84%) to fit in at work.<sup>571</sup>

Before an event, your manager says to a Latina, "Don't forget there's a dress code." He does not give this reminder to others on your team.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Push back on the comment. You can do it lightly: "I think [Name] always looks well put together." Or privately ask your manager to explain why they directed that comment at her, rather than everyone. You can also explain **WHY IT MATTERS**.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Your manager may believe common stereotypes about what Latinas like to wear, such as large earrings, bright colors, or tight clothes.<sup>572</sup> They may be unaware that Latinas are a diverse group with a wide range of style preferences. Your manager is also probably influenced by corporate norms for dress in the U.S., which encourage us to think that certain styles typical of white businessmen, such as dark colors and button-down shirts, are the most tasteful and appropriate, even though they have no impact on the way someone does their job.<sup>573</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."

### WHY IT MATTERS

This comment may make your coworker feel pressure to cut her maternity leave short, which could negatively impact her health.<sup>574</sup> It could even make her feel that her job might be in jeopardy unless she returns early.<sup>575</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>576</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>577</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Asian women are more likely than other groups to be discouraged from taking family leave.<sup>578</sup> This happens because they are often stereotyped as worker bees who are willing to prioritize work over family.<sup>579</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>580</sup>

*Rooted in maternal bias*



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

### WHY IT MATTERS

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



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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Stand up for your Native American coworker. Tell your colleague that missing a few days of work for religious reasons sounds reasonable to you. Remind them that it's a common practice for other religious groups like Jews and Christians. Reinforce how much she contributes to her job. You can also talk to your manager or HR about ensuring that learning about Native American culture is part of the company's diversity and inclusion training.<sup>581</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

In general, employees can be judged negatively when they take time for personal reasons.<sup>582</sup> This can impact people more when they are from non-majority groups. In this case, Native American customs and holidays—such as coming-of-age ceremonies and feast days—aren't widely known and understood. When Native Americans miss work for these events, they can face more judgment than other ethnic or religious groups do when they take off for celebrations or holidays.<sup>583</sup>

After an interview, a coworker gives a low rating to an appropriately dressed Black woman because “she did not look professional.”<sup>584</sup>

#### WHY IT MATTERS

Black women can miss out on jobs, promotions, and other opportunities because of arbitrary judgments about their appearance.<sup>585</sup> To avoid this penalty, many Black women say they have to dress more formally than their colleagues and spend more money on hair and accessories.<sup>586</sup>

After an interview, a coworker gives a low rating to an appropriately dressed Black woman because “she did not look professional.”<sup>584</sup>

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your coworker to explain what they mean by “not professional.” Say that you think she looked appropriate, then refocus the discussion: “Let’s talk about her qualifications.” Consider speaking to your manager or HR team about making sure your company sets clear hiring criteria ahead of time, so subjective opinions like this don’t carry weight. It can also be helpful to appoint a “criteria monitor” in hiring meetings to make sure everyone evaluates candidates by the same standards.<sup>587</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

People often view white men as more competent and leader-like than women or Black people.<sup>588</sup> This can mean that Black women are automatically considered less hireable, regardless of what they wear. In addition, many people wrongly view Black women’s natural hair as unprofessional.<sup>589</sup> This bias is so strong that Black women who wear natural hairstyles are less likely to be hired or promoted than those who do not.<sup>590</sup>

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

A Native American colleague says in a team meeting that she didn't celebrate Thanksgiving. Another colleague replies, "That's not very American of you."

#### WHY IT MATTERS

For many people, Thanksgiving represents joy, gratitude, and coming together as family. But for Native Americans, Thanksgiving can be a reminder that many of their ancestors were killed when Europeans arrived in North America.<sup>591</sup> In light of this, your colleague's response could feel hurtful or judgmental. It also puts the burden on your Native American coworker to defend herself.

A Native American colleague says in a team meeting that she didn't celebrate Thanksgiving. Another colleague replies, "That's not very American of you."

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

You could jump in on your coworker's behalf. Say, "For some people, holidays like Thanksgiving are reminders of some of the worst parts of our history, rather than the best." You might also explain **WHY IT MATTERS**.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

The comment may also reflect an assumption that Native Americans should try to fit in with mainstream U.S. culture.<sup>592</sup> It also likely reflects a lack of knowledge. Most Americans learn history from the viewpoint of Americans with European ancestry, not from a Native American perspective. For example, many learn in school that Plymouth settlers and Wampanoag Indians held the first Thanksgiving in 1621. But few learn that just 16 years later, Plymouth settlers massacred hundreds of Native Americans.<sup>593</sup>

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

### WHY IT MATTERS

Unless responding quickly to after-hours emails like this is an important part of your colleague's job, she's likely being judged unfairly. The comment implies that she's expected to work long hours and may be held to different standards than others.<sup>594</sup> And if she is expected to be available 24/7, it could cause stress or burnout.<sup>595</sup>



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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

If you feel comfortable, ask a few questions. Did they say that the message was urgent? Was the woman expected to be on call? If the answer is yes, then their complaint may be warranted and you don't need to push back any further.<sup>596</sup> But if there was no expectation that she would respond after working hours, it may be worth pointing that out. You could say something like, "I personally try to avoid answering work calls at night" or "You know, it can be good for everyone's long-term productivity when we can disconnect outside working hours."

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This comment could be caused by a number of factors, including tight timelines or heightened stress at work. But it may also reflect a common expectation that Asian women should work harder than other employees.<sup>597</sup> As a result, Asian women are often expected to conform to "ideal worker" norms, meaning that they are expected to be available 24/7 and take on extra work.<sup>598</sup>



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

### WHY IT MATTERS

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

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

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Because women are expected to be nice and accommodating, they are often penalized when they assert themselves. Compared to other groups of women, Asian women—who are often stereotyped as overly accommodating—can experience an even stronger backlash when they act assertively.<sup>599</sup>

*Rooted in likeability bias*

In a meeting about hiring for a senior role that requires travel, someone questions whether a Latina would want to be away from her family that much.

### WHY IT MATTERS

The question is based on biased assumptions about this employee's family commitments and ambition. It could mean she loses a major opportunity that she's qualified for and that your company misses out on her talents.

In a meeting about hiring for a senior role that requires travel, someone questions whether a Latina would want to be away from her family that much.

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

Ask your co-worker, “What makes you think that?” This may make them realize their comment isn’t based on hard evidence. Explain **WHY IT HAPPENS** Latinas are often stereotyped as having lots of kids or not being career-oriented.<sup>600</sup> You can also recommend asking all of the candidates how they feel about the travel requirements. Let them speak for themselves.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This comment may be influenced by several stereotypes about Latinas: that they aren’t ambitious in their careers, they usually have a lot of children, they prioritize family more than other groups do, and they’re more naturally suited to junior roles.<sup>601</sup> All of these preconceptions can keep Latinas out of the senior roles they’re qualified for.

A coworker asks you if a colleague, who is a woman of color, was hired to work with the “minority” clients.<sup>602</sup>

### WHY IT MATTERS

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

A coworker asks you if a colleague, who is a woman of color, was hired to work with the “minority” clients.<sup>599</sup>

Intersectional card

## WHAT TO DO

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

The question may be rooted in a biased belief that the woman of color is somehow less talented or capable than other account managers.<sup>603</sup> It also suggests that your coworker views clients of color as less important to the business. Taken together, these beliefs imply that a woman of color cannot be on the A team.

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

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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...”