



LEAN IN

# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat bias against women at work

## Addressing the “broken rung”



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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

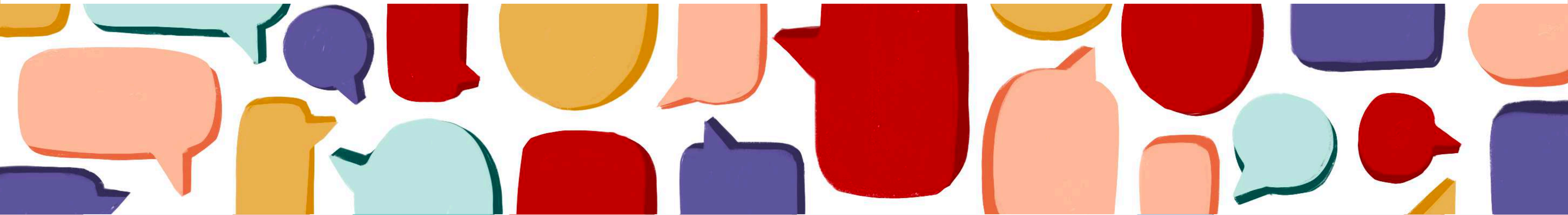


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# 50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

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

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# Welcome



BROUGHT TO YOU BY

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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

- ➊ Women face biases due to their race, sexuality, and other aspects of their identity.
- ➋ Intersectionality can be at play in any situation.
- ➌ We all fall into bias traps.
- ➍ 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.

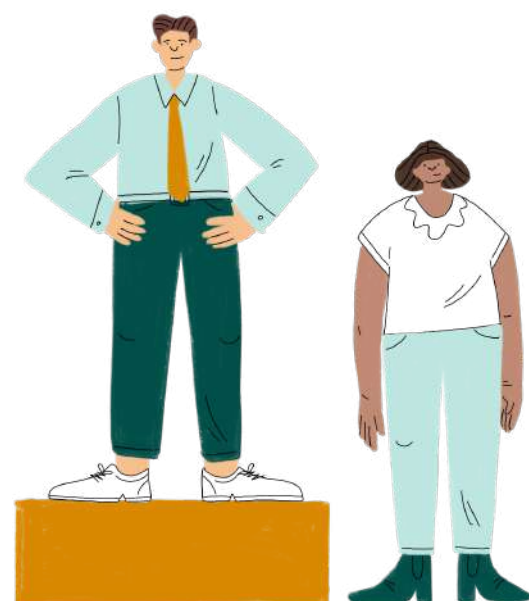
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# Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

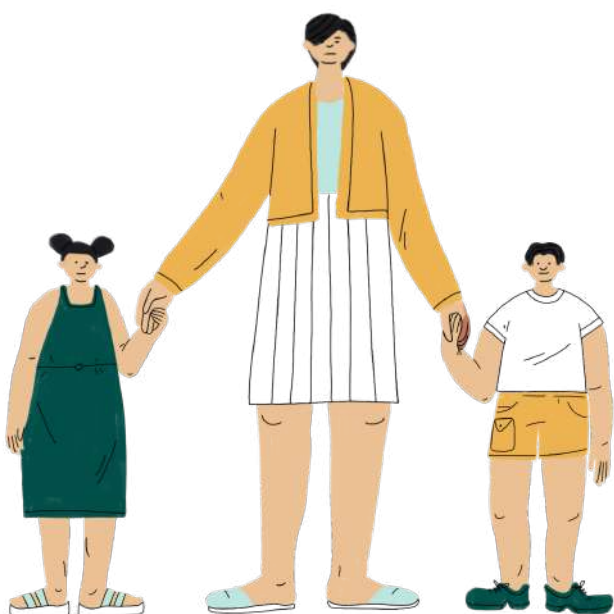
# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Likeability bias



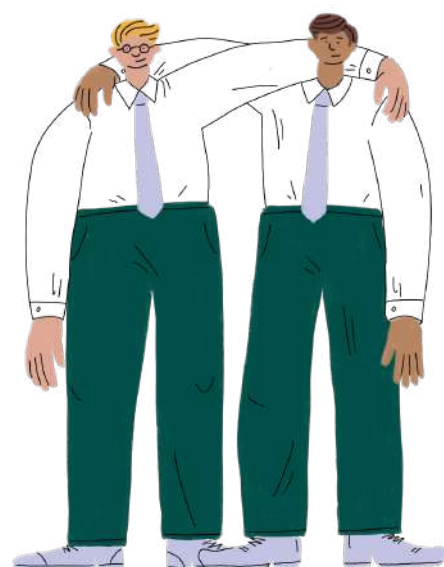
Performance bias



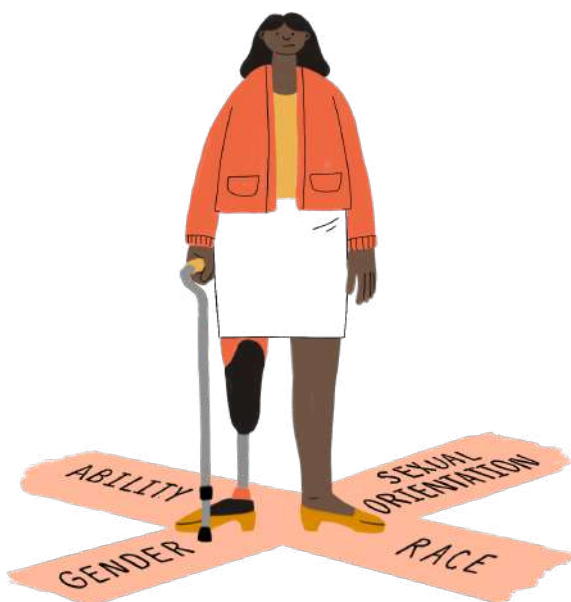
Maternal bias



Attribution bias



Affinity bias



Intersectionality



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

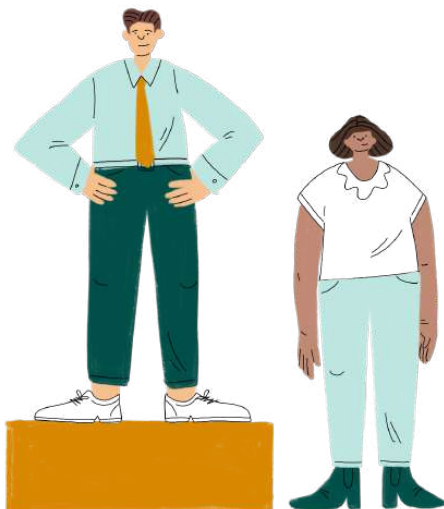


# COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



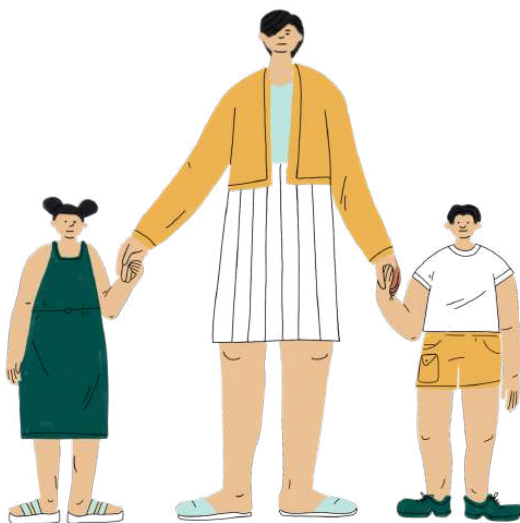
## Likeability bias

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>



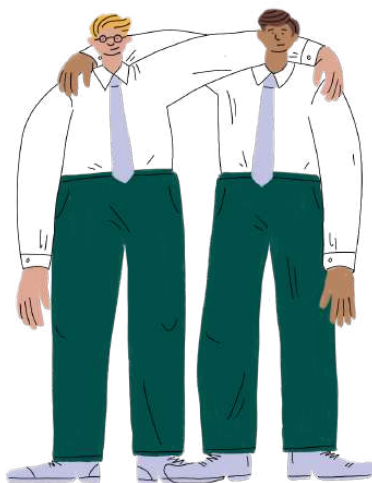
## Maternal bias

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



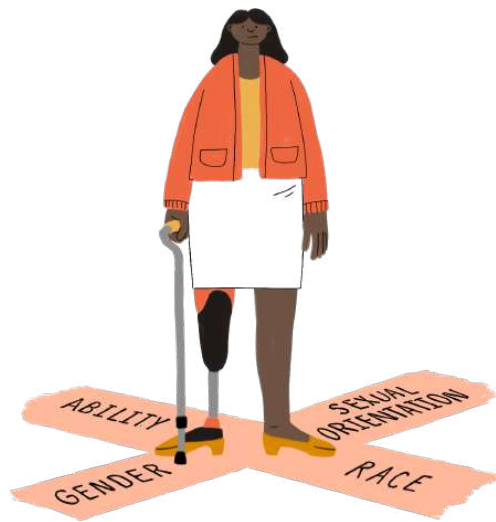
## Attribution bias

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

When a woman's name was replaced with a man's name on a résumé, how much more likely were evaluators to say they would hire the applicant?

## ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

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When a woman's name was replaced with a man's name on a résumé, how much more likely were evaluators to say they would hire the applicant?

## ANSWER

Over 60% more likely.<sup>271</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>272</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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## 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>273</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>274</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>275</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>276</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>277</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

## 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>278</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>279</sup>

*Rooted in maternal bias*



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>280</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>281</sup>

*Rooted in likeability 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>282</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>283</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>284</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>285</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>286</sup> Because of this, women are less likely to get credit for successes and more likely to be blamed for failures.<sup>287</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*

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>288</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>289</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>290</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>291</sup>

*Rooted in performance 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>292</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>293</sup>

*Rooted in affinity bias*

## HIRING

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You're asked to interview candidates for a role on your team and notice none are women.

### WHY IT MATTERS

Your company is likely missing out on talented candidates—and women are missing out on a chance to advance their careers. This is a widespread problem: fewer women than men are hired at the entry level, and at every subsequent step, the representation of women further declines.<sup>294</sup>

You're asked to interview candidates for a role on your team and notice none are women.

## WHAT TO DO

Talk to the hiring manager. Point out that there aren't any women being interviewed. Suggest an additional push to identify two or more viable women candidates.<sup>295</sup>

Longer term, recommend that your company start using diverse slates—that is, include at least two women and underrepresented minorities in each candidate pool. This has been shown to reduce bias in hiring.<sup>296</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

This may be happening because fewer women work in your field. But it may also reflect bias in your company's hiring process, an area where all types of bias can come into play, from favoring people like yourself (affinity bias) to holding women to higher standards (performance bias).<sup>297</sup>

After an interview, a coworker gives a low rating to an appropriately dressed Black woman because “she did not look professional.”<sup>298</sup>

#### WHY IT MATTERS

Black women can miss out on jobs, promotions, and other opportunities because of arbitrary judgments about their appearance.<sup>299</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>300</sup>

After an interview, a coworker gives a low rating to an appropriately dressed Black woman because “she did not look professional.”<sup>298</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>301</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

People often view white men as more competent and leader-like than women or Black people.<sup>302</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>303</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>304</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 on a review committee and several members argue against a woman's promotion because she is not "seen as a leader," even though her team delivers outstanding results.

### WHY IT MATTERS

The review committee may be making incorrect—and unfair—assumptions about the woman's abilities. Additionally, if the review committee uses a narrow definition of leadership, they may unfairly exclude a lot of people, like this woman.



You're on a review committee and several members argue against a woman's promotion because she is not "seen as a leader," even though her team delivers outstanding results.

## WHAT TO DO

Point out that the woman's team delivers superb results, and suggest that their performance speaks to her leadership. You can also ask them to explain the attributes she lacks. When people are asked to justify their thinking, it can help reduce bias in decision-making.<sup>305</sup>

As a longer-term solution, suggest creating detailed metrics for performance reviews, including clear expectations for leaders. This way, all employees will be evaluated based on a more complete definition of good leadership and using the same standards, which reduces bias in the review process.<sup>306</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Both women and men more readily associate men with leadership.<sup>307</sup> This bias is so strong that when women work on teams, their contributions are often attributed to the team as a whole. In contrast, when men work on teams, they are more likely to be seen as taking a leadership role.<sup>308</sup> The bias affects different groups of women in different ways: Asian women often aren't seen as assertive enough to be leaders, while Black women and Latinas can be stereotyped as not talented enough for leadership roles, and Native American women contend with both these stereotypes.<sup>309</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias & attribution bias*



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

### WHY IT MATTERS

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

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

## WHAT TO DO

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

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

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Studies show that women often get negative feedback on their speaking style, while men do not.<sup>310</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>311</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>312</sup>

*Rooted in likeability bias*

## HIRING

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

### WHY IT MATTERS

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

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

## WHAT TO DO

Mention to the hiring committee that you've noticed they tend to select men over women with similar abilities. You can also explain **WHY IT HAPPENS**. Then suggest a solution. Research shows that when teams agree on a set of clear criteria and use it consistently for all candidates, the hiring process is fairer and the most qualified women and men can rise to the top.<sup>313</sup>

## WHY IT HAPPENS

We tend to rate women lower than men, even if they have similar qualifications.<sup>314</sup> This can make a real difference in hiring. In one study, replacing a woman's name with a man's name on a résumé increased the likelihood of being hired by more than 60%.<sup>315</sup> The impact can be even worse for some groups—including Black women, Latinas, Native American women, and women with disabilities—whose competence is questioned both because they're women and because of stereotypes about their race or ability.<sup>316</sup>

*Rooted in performance bias*

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>317</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>318</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>319</sup>

## HIRING

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Over lunch, your colleague says, “It’d be great to hire more women, but I worry about lowering our bar.”

### WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like this promote the false idea that women are less competent and qualified than men. This comment is particularly concerning if it’s made by someone involved in hiring. If hiring teams unfairly overlook women, women miss out—and so does your company.



Over lunch, your colleague says, “It’d be great to hire more women, but I worry about lowering our bar.”

## WHAT TO DO

Try asking, “Why do you think hiring women would lower the bar?” Restating their words may prompt your colleague to rethink their assumption. You can also explain **WHY IT MATTERS**.

Longer term, push your company to use standardized hiring criteria.<sup>320</sup> That way, the bar will be set before the hiring process begins, so all candidates will be evaluated against it and the notion that “we lowered the bar” is likely to fade.

## WHY IT HAPPENS

Comments like this wrongly assume that the bar is set the same for everyone, so if women aren’t hired, it’s because there aren’t enough qualified women out there. In reality, the bar is set differently for women and men. We consciously or unconsciously expect women to meet a higher standard.<sup>321</sup> The false belief that everyone is evaluated fairly and objectively is known as the “myth of meritocracy.”<sup>322</sup>

*Rooted in performance 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...”