



LEAN IN

50 WAYS TO FIGHT BIAS

An activity that helps you combat bias against women at work

Experiences of mothers



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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.

PRESENTATION STARTS
ON THE NEXT SLIDE

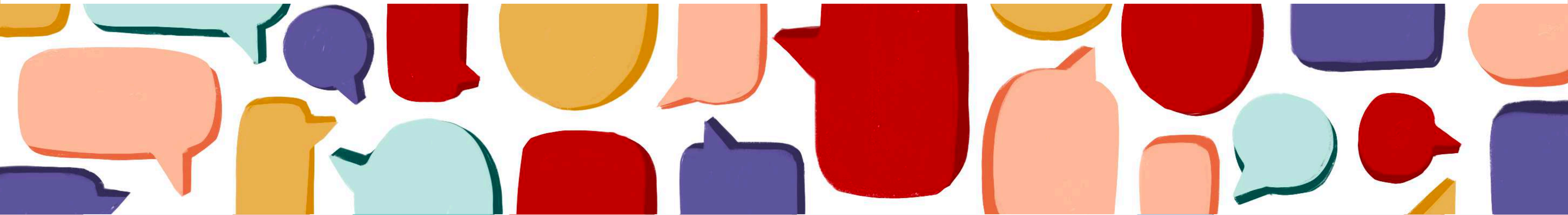


LEAN IN

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

- ▶ 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

- 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

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

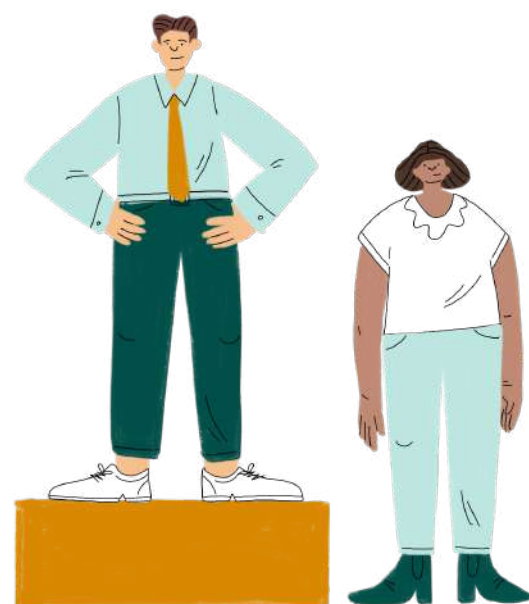
- ➊ Some situations may be difficult to hear.
- ➋ Stories should be anonymous.
- ➌ Give people the benefit of the doubt.

Overview: Common types of biases women face at work

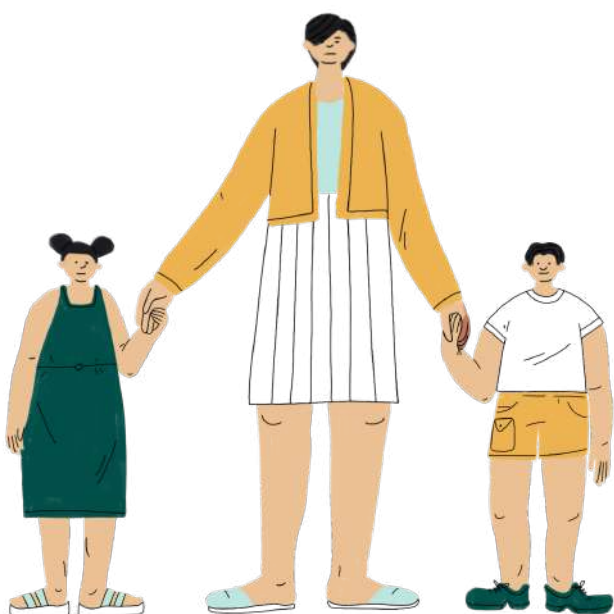
COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



Likeability bias



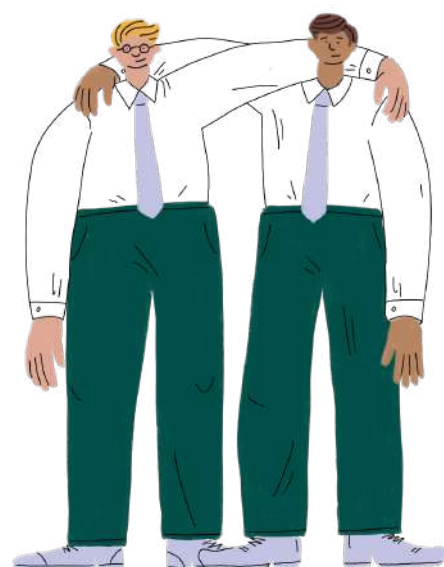
Performance bias



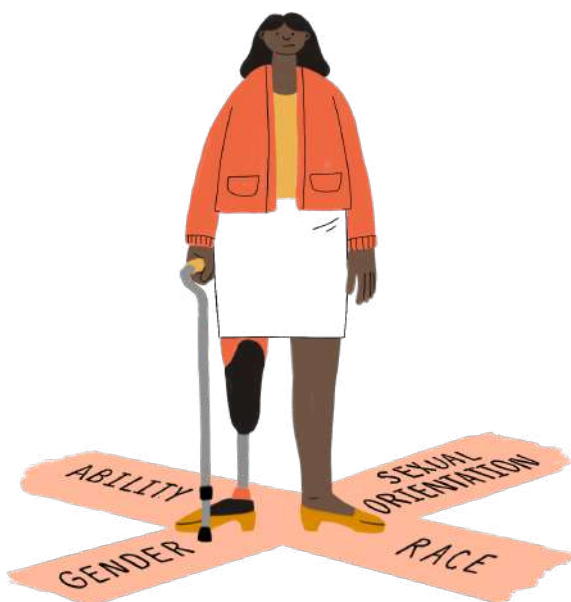
Maternal bias



Attribution bias



Affinity bias



Intersectionality



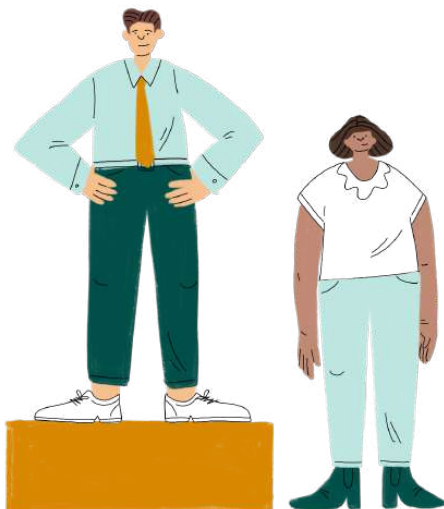
Watch the video:
"Introduction to the Common
Biases Women Experience"

COMMON TYPES OF BIASES WOMEN FACE AT WORK



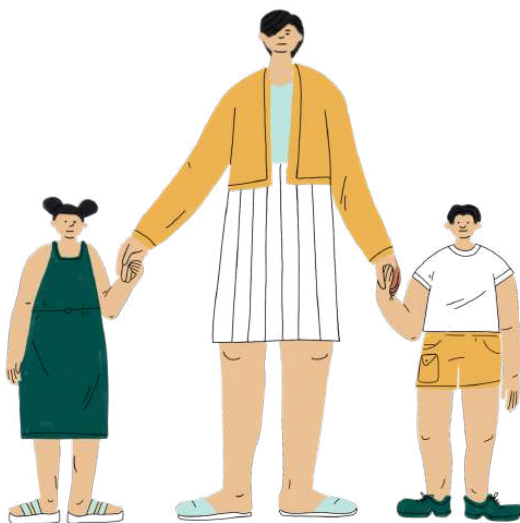
Likeability bias

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.¹¹



Performance bias

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



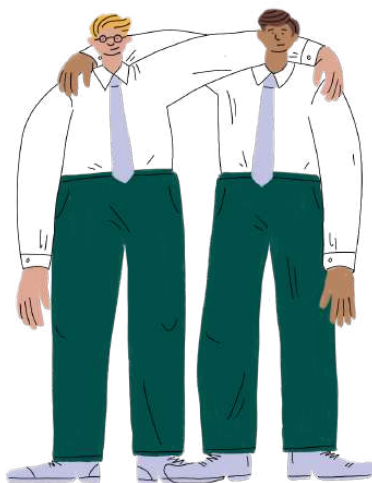
Maternal bias

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



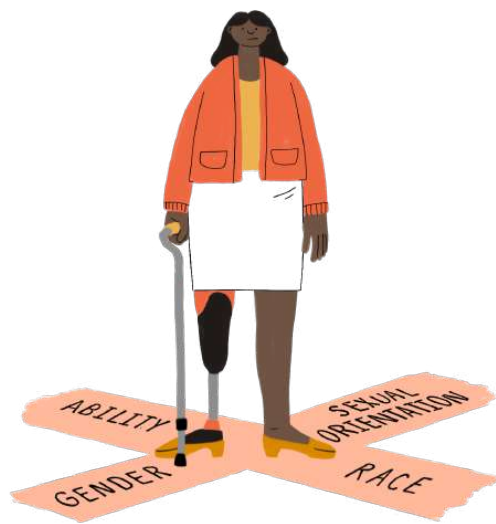
Attribution bias

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



Affinity bias

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



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

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



Icebreakers

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?

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.)⁴³⁵

When parents work from home, how many times more likely are mothers to be interrupted by their children, compared to fathers?

ICEBREAKER: DID YOU KNOW?

When parents work from home, how many times more likely are mothers to be interrupted by their children, compared to fathers?

ANSWER

More than 1.5 times more likely.⁴³⁶

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.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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.⁵⁴

Rooted in likeability bias

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REVIEWS & PROMOTIONS

A colleague recommends a man for promotion over a woman, saying, “I’m not sure about her long-term commitment. She just got engaged, and I think she wants to have kids soon.”

WHY IT MATTERS

When coworkers make assumptions about a woman’s commitment to work based on what’s happening in her personal life, it unfairly limits her opportunities—and could cause your company to miss out on a highly committed candidate. It’s also illegal in many states to consider a person’s marital or parental status as a factor in promotions.

A colleague recommends a man for promotion over a woman, saying, “I’m not sure about her long-term commitment. She just got engaged, and I think she wants to have kids soon.”

WHAT TO DO

Suggest to your colleague that women should decide for themselves whether or not they want to take on new challenges at work. If you’re feeling bold, you can also point out the double standard: “It’s hard to imagine that we’d say that about a man who recently got engaged.”

WHY IT HAPPENS

When women get engaged or married, studies show that they start to experience maternal bias.⁴³⁷ 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.⁴³⁸

Rooted in maternal bias

HIRING

Your colleague advocates for a job candidate with no gap in her résumé over another with a gap from when she was a full-time mom.

WHY IT MATTERS

Companies that look negatively on job applicants who take time off to raise kids risk missing out on qualified candidates—in particular, women. Mothers are more likely than fathers to take time off for childcare, and they face harsher career penalties when they do.⁴³⁹

Your colleague advocates for a job candidate with no gap in her résumé over another with a gap from when she was a full-time mom.

WHAT TO DO

Push for the candidates to be evaluated on their skills and experience, without taking into account the time taken off for caregiving.

Longer term, recommend that your team use standardized hiring criteria and apply them consistently to all candidates. That can help ensure you judge everyone by the same yardstick.⁴⁴⁰

WHY IT HAPPENS

When a woman becomes a mother, it can make others think that she's less committed to her career—even less competent.⁴⁴¹ As a result, she is often held to higher standards and offered fewer opportunities.⁴⁴² Seeing a gap in a woman's résumé can trigger this maternal bias and hurt her chances of being hired.⁴⁴³

Rooted in maternal 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 2020.⁴⁴⁴ And if situations like this happen often, they can lead to stress or burnout.⁴⁴⁵

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.⁴⁴⁶

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.⁴⁴⁷ Decades of research on the ideal worker show that this norm can harm mothers more than fathers, since mothers often do more caregiving.⁴⁴⁸

A colleague doesn't invite a woman on your team to an evening work event, explaining that they assume the woman prefers to be home for dinner with her family.

WHY IT MATTERS

When women with kids are excluded from activities, it can limit their career growth. It can also make them feel isolated from the rest of their team. For companies that care about retaining women, that's a problem.

A colleague doesn't invite a woman on your team to an evening work event, explaining that they assume the woman prefers to be home for dinner with her family

WHAT TO DO

Say, "We don't actually know what [Name] wants. How about we offer her the opportunity and let her decide for herself?" Consider pointing out the difference in how mothers and fathers are often treated: "Do we assume fathers aren't interested in evening events?" You can also remind them of the bigger picture: "Let's make sure we give the moms on our team the same chances as everyone else—sometimes they get sidelined."

WHY IT HAPPENS

People often assume that once a woman starts a family, she stops being as committed to her job and career.⁴⁴⁹ This can lead to generalizations—for example, that moms will say no to stretch assignments, business travel, or invitations to work events after hours.

Rooted in maternal bias

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

WHY IT MATTERS

All workers—men too!—should be able to spend time with their families, whether that's to bond with new babies, care for sick kids, or be there for aging parents. When workplaces have generous family leave policies, employees are happier, more productive, and more likely to stay on staff.⁴⁵⁰ Plus, when men don't use their leave, it makes it harder for women to use theirs without judgment.

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

WHAT TO DO

Stand up for your colleague on leave. Point out **WHY IT MATTERS**—how family leave is good for workers, families, *and* companies.⁴⁵¹ More importantly, remind them that no one should be forced to choose between being a good employee and a good parent.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Working fathers can face pushback for spending time with their kids. They tend to receive lower performance ratings and experience steeper reductions in future earnings than mothers who take the same amount of leave.⁴⁵² Much like maternal bias, this pushback is rooted in gender stereotypes. Moms are expected to be more committed to family and less to their careers.⁴⁵³ But the reverse is true for fathers, and when they go against that expectation by prioritizing family, they are penalized.⁴⁵⁴

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.⁴⁵⁵ It could even make her feel that her job might be in jeopardy unless she returns early.⁴⁵⁶ This could in turn harm your company. Stress about maternity leave can make valuable employees less productive and less happy with their jobs.⁴⁵⁷

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.⁴⁵⁸

WHY IT HAPPENS

Asian women are more likely than other groups to be discouraged from taking family leave.⁴⁵⁹ This happens because they are often stereotyped as worker bees who are willing to prioritize work over family.⁴⁶⁰ 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.⁴⁶¹

Rooted in maternal bias

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

WHY IT MATTERS

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

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

WHAT TO DO

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

WHY IT HAPPENS

Motherhood triggers assumptions that women are less competent and less committed to their careers. As a result, they are held to higher standards and presented with fewer opportunities. Studies show that the “maternal wall” women face when they have kids is the strongest gender bias.⁴⁶²

Rooted in maternal 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.⁴⁶³ 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.⁴⁶⁴ All of these preconceptions can keep Latinas out of the senior roles they’re qualified for.

A colleague confides that they're frustrated that a woman on your team is taking her full maternity leave during such a busy time for the company.

WHY IT MATTERS

Comments like this can make it uncomfortable for employees to spend time at home with new children—and research shows this can lead to lower productivity and make employees more likely to leave.⁴⁶⁵

A colleague confides that they're frustrated that a woman on your team is taking her full maternity leave during such a busy time for the company.

WHAT TO DO

Explain that family leave is good for workers, families, *and* companies.⁴⁶⁶ When workplaces have good family leave policies, employees are happier, more productive, and more likely to stay.⁴⁶⁷ Plus, remind them that no one should have to choose between being a good employee and a good family member.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Maternity leave is often viewed as an unnecessary cost, even though studies show that business outcomes can improve when companies offer leave.⁴⁶⁸ In addition, people sometimes assume that women who take time off for their children are no longer as committed to their jobs.⁴⁶⁹

Rooted in maternal bias

Your manager complains to you after a woman on your team was interrupted by her children during a client call, saying, “That was really unprofessional.”

WHY IT MATTERS

Being labeled unprofessional can hurt the woman’s reputation and chances of advancement. And it’s likely unwarranted in situations like this one, when the interruption is irrelevant to her performance and outside of her control. Situations like this are far more likely to happen to mothers: when mothers and fathers work from home, women are interrupted over 50 percent more often by their children.⁴⁷⁰

Your manager complains to you after a woman on your team was interrupted by her children during a client call, saying, “That was really unprofessional.”

WHAT TO DO

Remind your manager that your colleague is talented, accomplished, and doing her job well. You could also explain that children are far more likely to interrupt mothers than fathers. Knowing this can help your manager effectively support the mothers on their team.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Your manager’s judgment is likely based on norms of what it means to be an “ideal worker.” In the United States, the ideal worker is expected to keep work and family separate and prevent their family from interfering with work.⁴⁷¹ The comment may also be fueled by maternal bias, the false belief that mothers are less committed and competent than fathers and non-mothers.⁴⁷² Virtual work can make a woman more likely to be affected by maternal bias because her children may be more visible to her employer.

Rooted in maternal bias

You're in a conversation with coworkers and someone without children asks a woman with children, "How do you manage work and raising your kids? You must be overwhelmed."

WHY IT MATTERS

This question reinforces an often unconscious belief that dedicated mothers can't also be dedicated employees.⁴⁷³ It also assumes that the woman is overwhelmed, which can feel like a judgment on her ability to handle her workload and may lead to her getting passed over for opportunities. If this happens a lot, it can make women feel unsupported as working parents, which can make them more likely to leave the company.⁴⁷⁴

You're in a conversation with coworkers and someone without children asks a woman with children, "How do you manage work and raising your kids? You must be overwhelmed."

WHAT TO DO

There are a few ways you can respond, based on what feels right. You can point out that feeling overwhelmed is something everyone experiences from time to time, whether or not they have kids. You can make the point that it's not just working moms who have a lot to manage: "I imagine all working parents feel overwhelmed sometimes." And if your colleague doesn't seem overwhelmed to you at all, you can say that too.

WHY IT HAPPENS

Many people fall into the trap of believing that women can't be fully committed to both work and family. That can fuel skepticism about women's abilities. Fathers are often exempt from these assumptions.⁴⁷⁵

Rooted in maternal bias

A colleague comments that a mom on your team is working late at the office when she should be home with her family.

WHY IT MATTERS

All parents, regardless of their gender, should be able to manage their work and family responsibilities without judgment.

A colleague comments that a mom on your team is working late at the office when she should be home with her family.

WHAT TO DO

You might push back on your colleague's comment by saying something like, "I think it shows commitment to her job, just like when a father stays late."

WHY IT HAPPENS

When women become mothers, we often assume they can't be highly committed to both work and family.⁴⁷⁶ And when mothers do show that they're highly committed at work, they're often judged negatively for it, because of the strong cultural belief that moms should be home with their kids.⁴⁷⁷

Rooted in maternal bias

Closing activity

SUMMARY: STRATEGIES TO COMBAT BIAS

When bias occurs, there are a number of ways to respond, some of which you discussed today. Below is a summary of the strategies you can use to combat bias.

- ▶ Speak up for someone in the moment
- ▶ Ask a probing question
- ▶ Stick to the facts
- ▶ Explain how bias is in play
- ▶ Advocate for policy or process change

“My One Action to address bias against women in the workplace is...”