

# Affinity Bias



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**AFFINITY BIAS** - Because of affinity bias, we often gravitate toward people like ourselves

# Affinity Bias

**Because of affinity bias, we often gravitate toward people like ourselves—and may avoid or even dislike people who are different. Affinity bias plays out in several ways in the workplace. Mentors say they're attracted to mentees who remind them of themselves. And hiring managers are more likely to spend time interviewing people who are like them and less time getting to know people who are different. They are also more likely to give people like them a favourable evaluation.** Because men hold more positions of power in the media—and are more likely to gravitate toward other men—affinity bias has a particularly negative effect on women. They can end up being overlooked or left out.



# Attribution Bias



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# ATTRIBUTION BIAS

Because we see women as less competent than men, we don't always recognize the work they do. Even when women and men work on tasks together, women often get less credit for success and more blame for failure.

We also fall into the trap of thinking women's contributions are less valuable. This often plays out in meetings, where women are more likely to be talked over and interrupted. Given that women are often blamed more for failure and tend to wield less influence, they are prone to greater self-doubt. The bias women experience can be so prevalent that they underestimate their own performance. Women often predict that they'll do worse than they actually do, while men predict that they'll do better. In some cases, men apply for jobs when they meet 60% of hiring criteria, while women wait until they meet 100%.



# Maternal Bias

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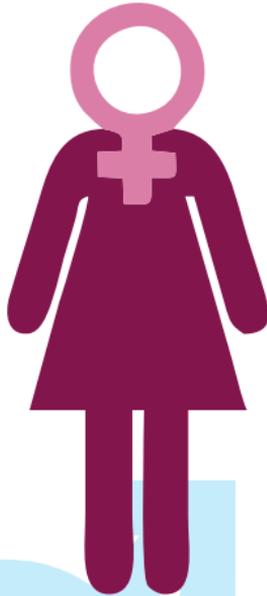
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# Maternal Bias

We incorrectly assume that mothers are less committed and less competent. As a result, mothers are often given fewer opportunities and held to higher standards than fathers even in the **workplace**. We fall into the trap of thinking mothers are not as interested in their jobs, so we assume they don't want that challenging assignment or beat or to go on a big work trip. And because we think they're less committed, we're more likely to penalize them for small mistakes or oversights.

Research shows that maternal bias is the strongest type of gender bias. When hiring managers know a woman has children\_she is less likely to be hired. And if is was hired, she will be offered a less than average salary for her job grade. Men can also face push backs for having kids, too. Fathers who take time off for family reasons receive lower performance ratings and experience steeper reductions in future earnings than mothers who do.



# Performance Bias



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# PERFORMANCE BIAS

We tend to underestimate women's performance and overestimate men's. As a result, women have to accomplish more to prove that they're as **competent as men.** This is why women are

often hired based on past accomplishments (they need to prove that they have the right skills), while men are often hired based on future potential (we assume they have the skills they need).

To understand the impact of this bias, consider what happens when you remove gender from decision-making. Performance bias often leads to missed opportunities and lower performance ratings for women—and both can have a huge impact on career progression. This bias is even more pronounced when review criteria aren't clearly specified, leaving room for managers and others to rely more on gut feelings and personal inferences.



# Did you know?

The logo for Gender & Media Connect, featuring a stylized male symbol (♂) in purple above the word "gender" in a lowercase, sans-serif font. Below "gender" is a horizontal dashed line, followed by the text "& MEDIA CONNECT" in a smaller, uppercase, sans-serif font.

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**In a study of governance and management bodies of mainstream media organisations in Zimbabwe, what is the percentage of males to females of all the governance members?**

Answer: As of 2017, males dominate more than 65% and Women less than 35%



# Did you know?



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**Research has shown that  
Zimbabwe Media  
organisations' gender  
representation is more  
biased towards men than  
women**

Answer: Human Resources Departments from most of the media organisations maintain that the gender representation of employees is at times a direct reflection of (1) available human resources in the market, and (2) of applicants for the available posts



# Did you know?



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## ICEBREAKER

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In a survey conducted around gender discrimination in media organisations in Zimbabwe most respondents referred to media houses as “testosterone-filled newsrooms which allocate women to cover so called “soft” issues and are widespread with requests for sexual favours”

Answer: It is clear that gender discrimination is a huge problem in Zimbabwean newsrooms, with gender stereotypes and sexual harassment as its face.

## **SITUATION 1: NEWSROOM DIARY MEETING DYNAMICS**

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A woman suggests an idea for a story she wants to cover in a diary meeting and it falls flat. A few minutes later, a man suggests the same idea and gets an enthusiastic reaction.

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

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

### **START THE CONVERSATION**

As a group, discuss your reaction to the situation. Have you heard or seen something like this before? What can you do in these types of situations?

After the discussion, read what to do and why it happens.

## WHAT TO DO

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

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## WHY IT HAPPENS

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



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**Keep in mind:** Bias isn't limited to gender. People can also experience biases due to their race, sexual orientation, disability or other aspects of their identity.

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## **SITUATION 2: HIRING/ RECRUITMENT**

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You're on a hiring or recruitment committee in your media house 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 recruitment or hiring process—and may unfairly disadvantage women. When qualified women are overlooked, your media organisation misses out on their talents and on the chance to build more diverse teams.

### **START THE CONVERSATION**

As a group, discuss your reaction to the situation. Have you heard or seen something like this before? What can you do in these types of situations?

After the discussion, read what to do and why it happens.

## WHAT TO DO

Mention to the recruitment/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.

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## WHY IT HAPPENS

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

Rooted in: Performance bias



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## **SITUATION 3: REVIEWS AND PROMOTIONS**

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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 news desk delivers outstanding news stories.

### **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.

### **START THE CONVERSATION**

As a group, discuss your reaction to the situation. Have you heard or seen something like this before? What can you do in these types of situations?

After the discussion, read what to do and why it happens.

## 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.

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.

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## WHY IT HAPPENS

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

Rooted in: Attribution bias, Performance bias



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## **SITUATION 4: MENTORSHIP AND SPONSORSHIP**

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

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

Good mentors can make a big difference. Employees with mentors are more likely to get raises and promotions. But because managers and senior leaders are more likely to be men, and because people tend to gravitate toward mentoring others like themselves, women often miss out on that support. That also means your media organisation could miss out on fostering talented employees.

### **START THE CONVERSATION**

As a group, discuss your reaction to the situation. Have you heard or seen something like this before? What can you do in these types of situations?

After the discussion, read what to do and why it happens.

## WHAT TO DO

Be aware of this dynamic and let it inform your choices. If you're a man, you're more likely to be in a position of authority someday. You can make the workplace fairer by being thoughtful about whom you mentor. Consider proactively reaching out to mentor someone from a different background or gender. If you're a woman, you might decide instead to mentor someone like yourself—especially if you remember struggling to find mentors when you were coming up through the ranks. However also remember that in your case, mentoring people like yourself supports diversity and inclusion.

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## WHY IT HAPPENS

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

Rooted in: Affinity bias



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## **SITUATION 5: EVERYDAY INTERACTIONS**

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

### **WHY IT MATTERS**

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

### **START THE CONVERSATION**

As a group, discuss your reaction to the situation. Have you heard or seen something like this before? What can you do in these types of situations? After the discussion, read what to do and why it happens.

## WHAT TO DO

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

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## WHY IT HAPPENS

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

Rooted in: Performance bias



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## CLOSING ACTIVITY

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# One action

Suggested time: 5-10minutes

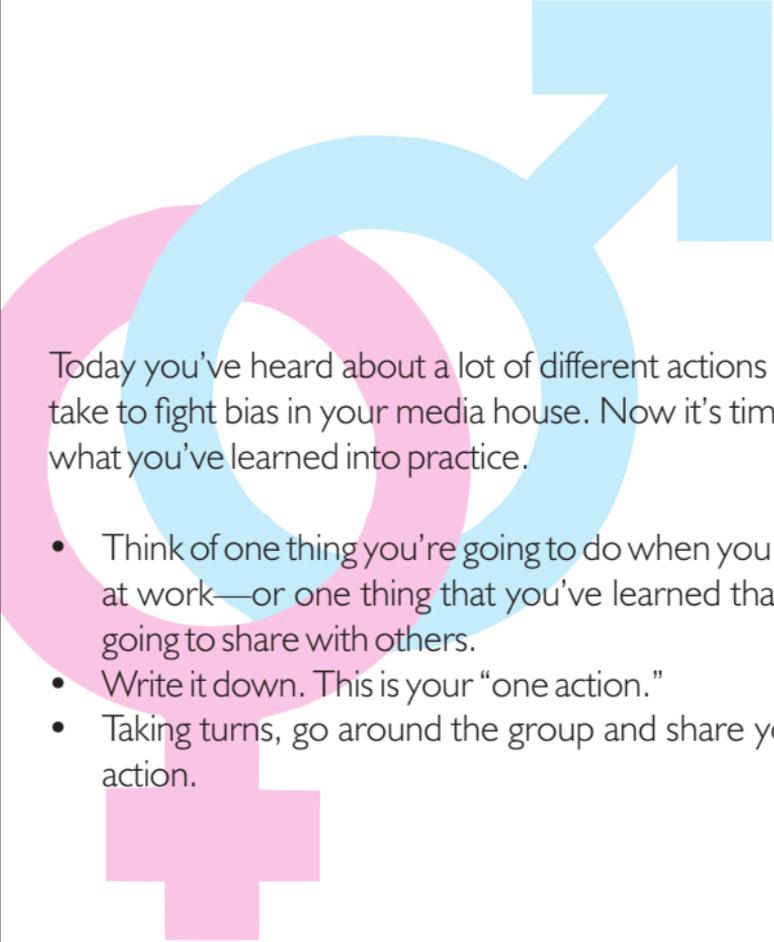
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## CLOSING ACTIVITY

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Today you've heard about a lot of different actions you can take to fight bias in your media house. Now it's time to put what you've learned into practice.

- Think of one thing you're going to do when you see bias at work—or one thing that you've learned that you're going to share with others.
- Write it down. This is your “one action.”
- Taking turns, go around the group and share your one action.