

BIAS INTERRUPTERS

*meritocracy
now!*

BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR HIRING & RECRUITING *Identifying Bias in Hiring Guide*

The five patterns below describe *tendencies not absolutes*. Here's what to watch out for:

Prove-It-Again! ("PIA") — Groups stereotyped as less competent often have to prove themselves over and over. "PIA groups" include women, people of color, individuals with disabilities,¹ members of the LGBTQIA+ community,² older employees,³ and first-generation professionals.⁴

1. **Higher standards.** Despite identical resumes, a candidate who listed elite interests like tennis received 12 times more callbacks than one who signaled he was a first-gen professional⁵; "Jamal" needed eight additional years of experience to be considered as qualified as "Greg",⁶ and "Jennifer" was offered \$4,000 less in starting salary than "John."⁷ A queer woman received 30% fewer callbacks than a straight woman⁸ and a gay men had to apply to 5 more jobs than a straight man to receive a positive response.⁹
2. **"He'll go far;" "She's not ready."** The dominant group* tends to be judged on their potential, whereas PIA groups tend to be judged on what they have already accomplished.¹⁰
3. **Casualty: education vs. experience.** When hiring for a job that required both education and experience, participants justified selecting the man over the woman by weighing the man's qualifications more. When the man had more experience, participants ranked experience as essential. When the woman had more experience, participants still chose the man — saying that education was key.¹¹
4. **Elite school bias.** Over-reliance on elite educational credentials hurts first-generation professionals and candidates of color, who are more likely to attend schools close to home with more modest reputations.¹² Education shouldn't be used as a proxy for intelligence: top students from lower ranked schools are often as successful as students from elite schools.¹³
5. **PIA groups get horns; others a halo.** Horns=one weakness generalized into an overall negative rating. Halo=one strength generalized into a global positive rating.¹⁴
6. **"We applied the rule—until we didn't."** Objective requirements often are applied rigorously to PIA groups—but leniently (or waived entirely) for the dominant group.¹⁵ This means that some groups are left out: for example, desk jobs that require applicants to be able to lift 25 pounds may weed out employees with disabilities.¹⁶
7. **Can only superstars survive?** Superstars often escape PIA problems that affect others of their group.¹⁷

Tightrope ("TR") — A narrower range of workplace behavior is considered socially acceptable from women¹⁸, people of color¹⁹, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community²⁰ ("TR groups"). First-generation professionals and modest or introverted men can face Tightrope problems, too.

1. **Leader or worker bee?** TR groups face pressure to be "worker bees" who work hard and are undemanding...but if they comply, they lack "leadership potential."²¹
2. **Modest, likeable, not ambitious.** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be mild-mannered team players. "Ambitious" is not a compliment for women and "niceness" may be optional for men but required of women.²²
3. **Direct and assertive—or angry and abrasive?** Behavior seen as admirably direct, competitive, and assertive in the dominant group may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups — "tactless," "selfish," "difficult." Anger that's accepted in the dominant group may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups.²³
4. **"She's a prima donna"; "He knows his own worth."** Self-promotion may be seen as off-putting in TR groups. Modest men may encounter bias that reflects assumptions about how "real men" should

* Who is the dominant group in your workplace? Look at which group predominates in the company's top positions.

behave. Also, strong modesty norms can make first-generation professionals, people of Asian descent, and women uncomfortable with self-promotion.²⁴

5. **LGBTQIA+ employees** may be stereotyped as “too feminine,” “too masculine,” or just “too gay.”²⁵ These kinds of judgement signal illegal discrimination under federal and state law.

The Parental Wall can affect parents regardless of gender—as well as employees without children.

1. **“He has a family to support.”** Fathers face expectations that they will not—or should not—take time off for caregiving, or that they are—or should be—sole breadwinners.²⁶
2. **“Gaps in her resume.”** People take time off for many reasons. Be consistent. If you don’t penalize for military service, don’t do so for taking time off for children either.²⁷
3. **“Her priorities lie elsewhere” (or should!).** Mothers are stereotyped as less competent and committed. In one matched-resume study, a mother was 79% less likely to be hired than an identical candidate without children.²⁸
4. **“I worry about her children.”** Mothers who work long hours tend to be disliked and held to higher performance standards. Taxing jobs may be withheld on the assumption that mothers will not—or should not—want them.²⁹
5. **“No life.”** Employees without children may face the assumption that they can always pick up the slack because they have “no life.”

Tug of War — Bias against non-dominant groups can create conflict within that group.³⁰

1. **Tokenism.** It’s important to make sure there is more than just one “token” historically excluded group member in the applicant pool.
2. **Strategic distancing and the loyalty tax.** People from historically excluded groups on a hiring committee may feel they need to distance themselves from applicants of their group, or align with the majority against their own group, in order to get ahead or avoid being accused of favoritism.
3. **Passthroughs. PIA:** People from historically excluded groups may hold members of their own groups to higher standards because, “That’s what it takes to succeed here.” **Tightrope:** Women or LGBTQIA+ employees may fault each other for being too masculine—or too feminine. People of color may fault each other for being “too white”—or not “white” enough.³¹ **Parental wall:** Parents may fault each other for handling parenthood wrong—taking too much time off or too little.³²

Racial Stereotypes — People of Asian descent are often stereotyped as passive and lacking in social skills; Black people as angry or too aggressive; Latino/a people as hotheaded or emotional.³³

Ten Powerful Bias Interrupters

1. Decide in advance what factors are important for the job.
2. Give each candidate a separate rating for each factor, then average the ratings to identify the highest ranked candidates.
3. Keep track of referrals; if one group predominates, reach out proactively to other groups.
4. Hire candidates from multiple tiers of schools, not just elite institutions.
5. Make sure to give everyone—or no one—the benefit of the doubt.
6. If you waive job requirements, do so consistently and require an explanation.
7. Don’t insist on likeability, modesty, or deference from some but not others.
8. Don’t make assumptions about what mothers—or fathers—want or are able to do, and don’t count “gaps in a resume” against someone without a good reason for doing so.
9. Don’t use “culture fit” without a clear definition of specific work-relevant qualities—and keep track to ensure such concepts aren’t artificially advantaging one group.
10. Hand out this guide so people know what bias looks like.

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