

[BIAS INTERRUPTERS] *small steps big change*

BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MANAGERS *Tools for Hiring & Recruiting*

THE CHALLENGE

Matched-resume studies, in which researchers send identical resumes except for one factor (such as the applicant's name or membership in an organization that signals something about their identity) provide objective evidence that bias drives decision making. Despite identical qualifications:

Race/ethnicity: "Jamal" needed eight additional years of experiences to be considered as qualified as "Greg."¹

Gender: "Jennifer" was offered \$4,000 less in starting salary than "John."²

Sexual orientation: Holding a leadership position in an LGBTQ organization made a queer woman receive 30% fewer callbacks³ and a gay man receive 40% fewer callbacks than their heterosexual peers.⁴

Parenthood status: Membership in the Parent-Teacher Association made a mother 79% less likely to be hired than a non-mother and offered \$11,000 less in starting salary.⁵

Social class: A candidate that listed elite hobbies: "polo, sailing, and classical music" was 12 times more likely to get a callback than a candidate that listed "pickup soccer, country music, and mentoring other first-gen students."⁶

You can't tap the full talent pool unless you control for bias in hiring. To truly see results, you will need to interrupt bias at every stage from the initial job posting to the final offer letter.

THE SOLUTION

1. *Consider the Metrics*

To the extent you can, keep metrics by: 1) individual supervisor; 2) a department; 3) location if relevant; and 4) the organization as a whole.

- Track the demography of the candidate pool through the entire hiring process, from initial contact, to resume review, to interviews, to hiring. Break down the demography by historically excluded groups: women, people of color, people with disabilities, veterans, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, etc.
- Track whether hiring qualifications are waived more often for people from certain groups than other groups.
- Track interviewers' reviews and/or recommendations to ensure they are not consistently rating majority candidates higher than others.

2. *Implement Bias Interrupters*

All bias interrupters should apply both to written materials and in meetings, where relevant. Because every organization is different, not all interrupters will be relevant. Consider this a menu.

Assembling a Diverse Pool

• **Insist on a diverse pool**

If the initial pool is largely homogenous, it is statistically unlikely that you will hire a candidate from a historically excluded group. In one study, the odds of hiring a woman were 79 times greater if there were at least two women in the finalist pool; the odds of hiring a person of color were 194 times greater.⁷

- **Limit referral hiring & tap diverse networks**

If your existing organization is not diverse, hiring from your current employees' social networks will replicate the lack of diversity. Instead, tap into diverse networks. Identify job fairs, affinity networks, conferences and training programs that are aimed at historically excluded communities in your field and send recruiters.

- **Change the wording of your job postings**

Take another look at your job ads to make sure you are asking for what you really want. Sometimes job ads include requirements that aren't really requirements at all – such as desk jobs that require applicants to be able to lift 25 pounds. This kind of language may weed out applicants with disabilities. Using masculine-coded words like "leader" and "competitive" will tend to reduce the number of women who apply;⁸ using words like "responsible" and "conscientious" will attract more women, and men too. Research shows that gender-neutral job postings result in more applications overall.⁹ Tech alternatives (see: Textio or the SAP Job Analyzer for Recruiting)¹⁰ can help you craft job postings that ensure you attract top talent without discouraging women. Also, keep in mind that explicitly stating that the salary is negotiable can reduce the gender gap in applicants.¹¹

- **Getting the word out**

Let people know that your company is a great place to work. One company offers public talks by women at their company and writes blog posts, and social media articles highlighting the women who work there. If you don't currently have the diversity to create that kind of content, face it head on with an article about your organization's interest in hiring more people of color, women, members of the LGBTQIA+ community, first-generation professionals — and your development plan to support new hires.

Resume Review

- **Distribute the Identifying Bias in Hiring Guide**

Before resumes are reviewed, have reviewers read our guide so that they are aware of the common forms of bias that can affect the hiring process.

- **Pre-commit to what's important—and require accountability**

Pre-commit in writing to what qualifications are important, both in entry-level and in lateral hiring. When qualifications are waived for a specific candidate, require an explanation of why they are no longer important—and keep track to see if there's a pattern among waiver recipients.¹²

- **Ensure resumes are graded on the same scale**

Establish clear grading rubrics and ensure that everyone grades on the same scale. Consider having each resume reviewed by two different managers and averaging the score.

- **Redact extra-curricular activities from resumes**

Including extra-curricular activities on resumes can artificially disadvantage first-generation professionals. As mentioned above, one study found that law firms were less likely to hire a candidate whose interests included "country music" and "pick-up soccer" rather than "classical music" and "sailing"—even though the work and educational experience was exactly the same.¹³ Because most people aren't as aware of class-based bias, communicate why you are removing extracurricular activities from resumes.

- **Don't count resume gaps as an automatic negative**

Don't count "gaps in a resume" as an automatic negative. Instead, give the candidates an opportunity to explain gaps by asking about them directly during the interview stage.¹⁴ There are many, many reasons people may take time off from paid work (including to care for children or elderly parents or to take care of their own health). Don't infer that if someone has taken time off for family caregiving responsibilities that they will be less committed to the job they are applying for now.

- **Consider candidates from multi-tier schools**

Don't limit your search to candidates from Ivy League and other top-tier schools. This favors majority candidates from elite schools and hurts people of color and first-generation professionals.¹⁵ Studies show that top students from lower ranked schools are often just as successful.¹⁶ Whenever possible, use skills tests to gauge qualification and preparedness for the role.

- **Try using "blind auditions"** where the evaluators don't know who they are reviewing. If women and candidates of color are dropping out of the pool at the resume review stage, consider removing demographic info from resumes before review. This way, candidates can be evaluated based solely on their qualifications.

Interviews

- **Provide candidates and interviewers with a handout detailing expectations**

Develop an interview protocol sheet that explains to everyone what's expected from candidates in an interview. Distribute it to candidates and interviewers before interviews begin. This can level the playing field for first-generation professionals, Asian Americans, women, and introverts — groups that are more likely to feel pressure to be modest or self-effacing. Setting expectations clearly allows them to make the best case for themselves.

Here's a [sample memo](#) as well as a checklist of what to include:

- Outline the interview process with as many details as possible. If you're planning on giving them a skills assessment, say so. If it's not clear in the assessment instructions, let them know what you're looking to learn from the assessment – "We will be evaluating your ability to use Adobe Creative Suite by asking you to make social media graphic for a fictional event."
- Qualities your organization values because they better the work environment. Think: "culture fit."
- Skill sets required for the position.
Any additional qualifications your hiring team thinks are important, cross-check with your interview evaluation form.

- **Use structured interviews**

Ask the same list of questions to every person who is interviewed. Ask questions that are directly relevant to the job the candidate is applying for.¹⁷

- **If "culture fit" is a criterion for hiring, provide a specific definition**

Culture fit can be important but when it's misused, it can disadvantage people of color, first-generation professionals, and women.¹⁸ Culture fit should not mean the "lunch test" (who you would like to have lunch with.) Instead, make it clear what the hiring criteria is to evaluators and candidates.

- **Try behavioral interviewing**¹⁹

Ask questions that reveal how candidates have dealt with prior work experiences, as research shows that structured behavioral interviews can more accurately predict the future performance of a candidate than unstructured interviews.²⁰ Instead of asking, "How do you deal with problems with your manager?" ask, "Describe for me a conflict you had at work with your manager." When evaluating answers, a good model to follow is the STAR²¹ model: the candidate should describe the Situation they faced, the Task that they had to handle, the Action they took to deal with the situation, and the Result.

- **Ask performance-based questions & use skills-based assessments**

Performance-based questions (“tell me about a time you had too many things to do and had to prioritize”) provide concrete information about job-relevant skills.²² If applicable, ask candidates to take a skills-based assessment. For example, if part of the job is analyzing data sets and making recommendations, ask the candidate to do that.

- **Address resume gaps head on**

Give candidates an opportunity to explain gaps by asking about them directly during the interview stage. Women fare better in interviews if they are able to provide information upfront, rather than having to avoid the issue.²³

- **Don’t ask candidates about prior salary**

Asking about prior salary when setting compensation for a new hire can perpetuate the gender pay gap.²⁴ (A growing legislative movement prohibits employers from asking prospective employees about their prior salaries.²⁵)

- **Develop a consistent rating scale and discount outliers**

Candidate’s answers (or skills-based assessments) should be rated on a consistent scale and backed up by evidence. Average the scores granted on each relevant criterion and discount outliers.²⁶

To understand the research and rationale behind the suggested bias interrupters, read our **Identifying Bias in Hiring Guide** which summarizes numerous studies.

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⁹ LinkedIn, “Language Matters: How Words Impact Men and Women in the Workplace,” 2019

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¹⁰ <https://textio.com/>; <https://help.sap.com/viewer/8477193265ea4172a1dda118505ca631/2105/en-US/ca7c906e150d451a942523d387063019.html>

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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 having identical resume qualifications, "Jamal" needed eight additional years of experience to be considered as qualified as "Greg",⁵ and "Jennifer" was offered \$4,000 less in starting salary than "John."⁶ A queer woman received 30% fewer callbacks than a straight woman⁷ and a gay man had to apply to 5 more jobs than a straight man in order to receive a positive response.⁸
2. **"He'll go far;" "She's not ready."** Majority men tend to be judged on their potential, whereas PIA groups tend to be judged on what they have already accomplished.⁹
3. **Casuistry: 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.¹⁰
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.¹¹ 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.¹²
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.¹³
6. **"We applied the rule—until we didn't."** Objective requirements often are applied rigorously to PIA groups—but leniently (or waived entirely) for majority men.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵
7. **Do only the superstars survive?** Superstars may escape PIA problems that affect others.¹⁶

Tightrope — A narrower range of workplace behavior often is accepted from women¹⁷, people of color¹⁸, and members of the LGBTQIA+ community¹⁹ ("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."²⁰
2. **Modest, helpful, nice; dutiful daughter, office mom?** 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.²¹
3. **Direct and assertive—or angry and abrasive?** Behavior seen as admirably direct, competitive, and assertive in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups — "tactless," "selfish," "difficult." Assertiveness that's accepted in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups.²²
4. **"She's a prima donna"; "He knows his own worth."** The kind of self-promotion that works for majority men may be seen as off-putting in TR groups. Modest men may encounter bias that reflects assumptions about how "real men" should behave. Also, strong modesty norms can make first-generation professionals, people of Asian descent, and women uncomfortable with self-promotion.²³

5. **LGBTQIA+ employees** may be stereotyped as “too feminine,” “too masculine,” or just “too gay.”²⁴ These kinds of judgement signal illegal discrimination under federal and state law.

The Parental Wall can affect parents of all genders—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 should get jobs because they are breadwinners.²⁵
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.²⁶
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.²⁷
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.²⁸

Tug of War — Sometimes bias creates conflict within historically excluded groups.²⁹

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.
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.³⁰ **Parental wall:** Parents may fault each other for handling parenthood wrong—taking too much time off or too little.³¹

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.³²

Eight 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. Don’t just hire friends of friends unless your networks, your org, or both, are diverse. Consider candidates from multi-tier schools, not just elite institutions.
4. Make sure to give everyone—or no one—the benefit of the doubt.
5. If you waive objective requirements, do so consistently and require an explanation.
6. Don’t insist on likeability, modesty, or deference from some but not others.
7. Don’t make assumptions about what mothers—or fathers—want or are able to do. Directly ask candidates about “gaps in their resume” during their interview.
8. If you comment on “culture fit,” “executive presence,” or other vague concepts, start with a clear definition and keep track to ensure such concepts are applied consistently.

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