

# **BIAS INTERRUPTERS** *small steps big change*

## **Identifying & Interrupting Bias in Hiring**

The four 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, older employees, LGBT+, and class migrants (professionals from blue-collar backgrounds.)

1. **Higher standards.** When evaluating identical resumes "Jamal" needed eight additional years of experience to be judged as qualified as "Greg," and "Jennifer" was offered \$4,000 less in salary than "John."
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.
3. **Casistry: education vs. experience.** When a man had more experience, people tended to choose to hire the man because he had more experience. But when the man had more education, people again chose the man because he had more education. Both education and experience counted less when women had them.
4. **Elite school bias.** Over-reliance on elite educational credentials hurts class migrants and candidates of color. Almost half of Harvard students are from families in the top 4% of household incomes. Top students from lower ranked schools are often as successful as students from elite schools
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.
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.
7. **Do only the superstars survive?** Superstars may escape PIA problems that affect others.

**Tightrope** A narrower range of workplace behavior often is accepted from women and people of color ("TR groups"). Class migrants 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."
2. **Modest, helpful, nice; dutiful daughter, office mom?** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be mild-mannered team players—so "ambitious" is not a compliment for women and niceness may be optional for men but required of women.
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" Anger that's accepted in majority men may be seen as inappropriate in TR groups.
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 class migrants, Asian-Americans, and women uncomfortable with self-promotion.

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5. **Racial stereotypes.** Asian-Americans are stereotyped as passive and lacking in social skills; African-Americans as angry or too aggressive; Latinos as hotheaded or emotional.

The **Parental Wall** can affect both fathers and mothers—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.
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.
3. **“Her priorities lie elsewhere” (or should!).** Mothers are stereotyped as less competent and committed and are 79% less likely to be hired than identical candidates without children.
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.

**Tug of War** Sometimes bias creates conflict within underrepresented groups.

1. **Tokenism.** If people feel there’s only one slot per group for a prized position, group members may be pitted against each other to get it.
2. **Strategic distancing and the loyalty tax.** People from underrepresented groups may feel they need to distance themselves from others of their group, or align with the majority against their own group, in order to get ahead.
3. **Passthroughs. PIA:** People from underrepresented groups may hold members of their own groups to higher standards because “That’s what it takes to succeed here.” **Tightrope:** Women 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. **Parental wall:** Parents may fault each other for handling parenthood wrong—taking too much time off or too little.

## 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, and don’t count “gaps in a resume” against someone without a good reason for doing so.
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.