

# The Grim Reality of Being a Female Job Seeker:

*If You're Overweight, Not 'Nice'-Looking, Older,  
or a Minority, You Won't Be Hired*



**FAIRYGODBOSS**

## Contents

Introduction .....	2
Weight .....	3
Demeanor .....	4
Demeanor and gender .....	5
Age .....	6
Generational differences .....	6
Race .....	7
Race and leadership ability .....	8
Conclusion .....	8

In a perfect world, hiring managers would only consider a woman’s professional skills and job-related accomplishments during a job interview. Unfortunately, that simply isn’t the case.

Many women tell us it’s not uncommon to leave a job interview and think to themselves: Should I have worn a different blouse? Did I smile enough? Was my race the only thing they saw?

Some might infer that these job candidates are over-analyzing their interview experience because they’re feeling anxious about their job prospects. However, Fairygodboss’ latest research shows that these women’s thoughts are actually quite rational.

In October 2017, Fairygodboss surveyed 500 hiring professionals, showing them photos of different female job candidates. These women, of varied ages and races, had distinctly different body shapes, hairstyles, clothing, and demeanor.

We asked respondents to choose the top three out of 11 adjectives they felt described each woman. Those adjectives included professional, unprofessional, confident, leadership material, intelligent, friendly, reliable, cold, superficial, insecure, and lazy. The top three adjectives chosen by respondents were professionalism, reliability, and leadership material. After describing each job candidate, we then asked respondents to choose the five women they would be most likely to hire.

Their answers revealed that specific aspects of a woman’s appearance may keep her from getting hired. For example, the candidate most frequently selected by hiring managers was a young, thin, Caucasian brunette. Women of different races, sizes, or with less traditional appearances, were less likely to be hired.

How can women combat these biases? While many of our physical traits are obviously out of our control, there are a few specific factors women can be wary of – and perhaps manipulate – to decrease their chances of being superficially judged during the hiring process.

### Female Job Seekers Are Judged Every Day

<p>Age ↓ Race ↓ Body Shape ↓ Hairstyle ↓ Clothing ↓ Demeanor</p>					
					
					



## Weight

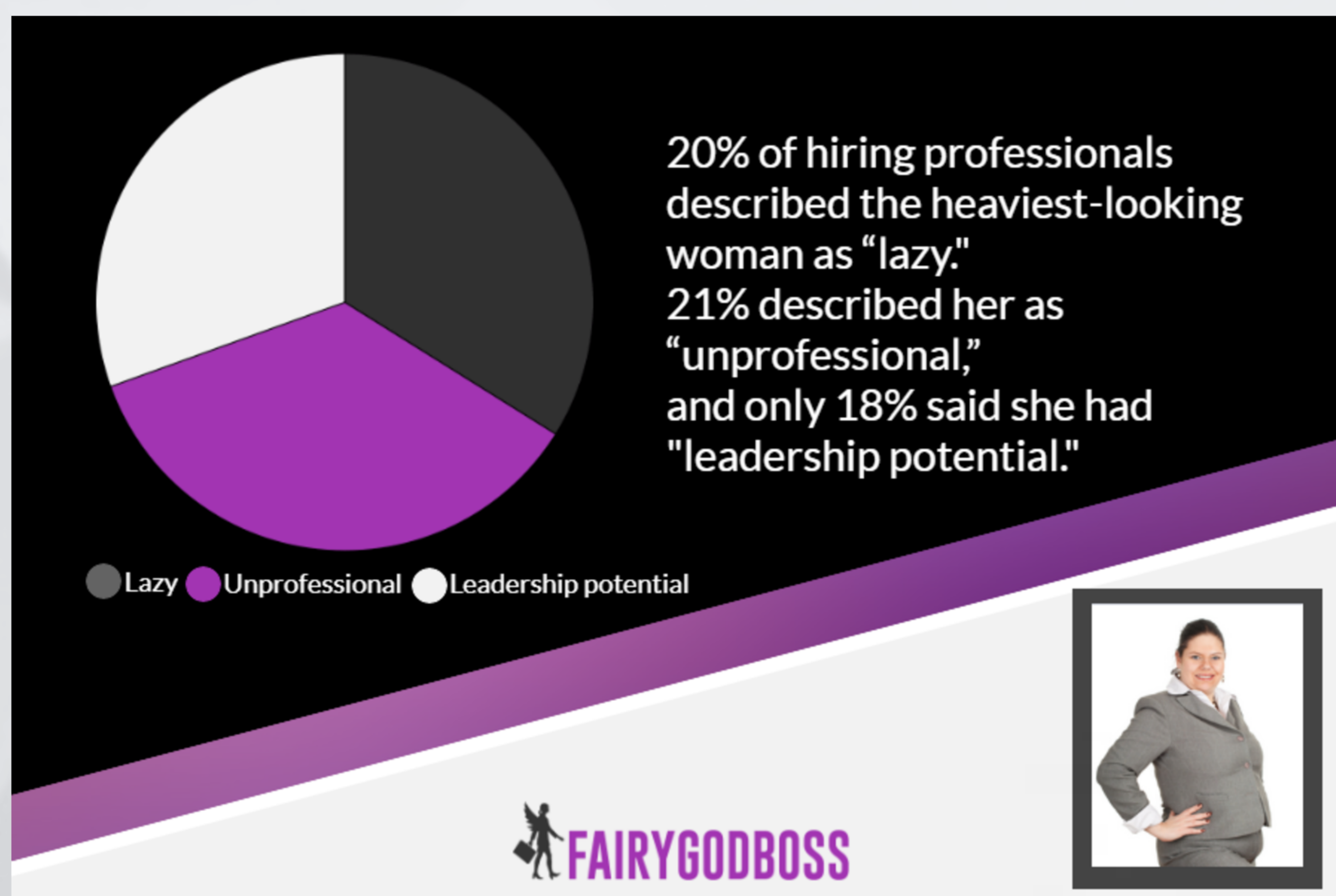
It's no secret that many women struggle with their weight. In fact, recent [research](#) published in the New England Journal of Medicine found that more than 35 percent of American women are obese. Not only is weight an extensive public health problem, it's also an issue of potential discrimination and bias.

In fact, 20 percent of the hiring professionals we surveyed chose to describe the photo of the heaviest-looking woman as "lazy," while this adjective was selected less frequently for every other woman pictured. Additionally, 21 percent described her as "unprofessional," and only 18 percent said she had leadership potential.

Only 15.6 percent of respondents said they would consider hiring her.

### *How to counter the bias*

It's important to acknowledge that people may make unfair assumptions about women who are overweight. The sad reality is that women who are overweight may need to emphasize their work ethic, professionalism, and leadership skills more so than other candidates in order to simply level the playing field.



## Demeanor

“Put a smile on your face, honey.” If you’ve been told this way too many times, you’re in the majority. It’s condescending, but the fact is, women are still judged for not smiling, even during a job interview.

Our research found that only 15 percent of hiring professionals would consider hiring a frowning woman, making her the least likely of the women shown to respondents to be hired.

### *How to counter the bias*

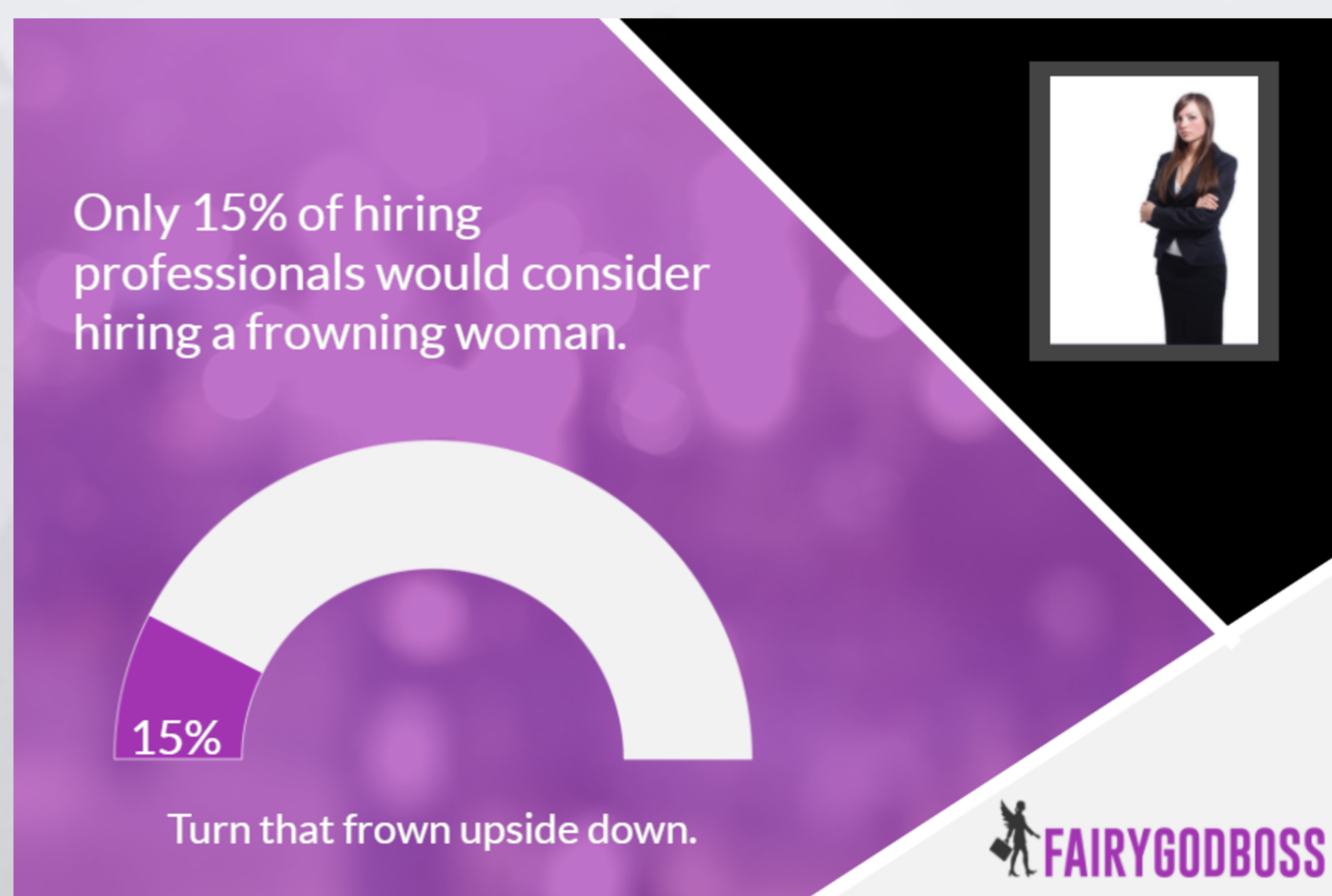
For women who aren’t naturally cheery, this can make job interviews awkward. Forcing smiles can cause people to come off as fake or insincere.

But understanding that you may be negatively judged for your demeanor doesn’t mean you have to be inauthentic. If you are very interested in a role, you can show your enthusiasm in other ways.

Do thorough research about the company and the position. Check out the employer’s social media pages to understand the company’s culture and how the team interacts. Find out what brings everyone together and demonstrate how you fit in.

Along the same lines, look online for [employer reviews](#). Find out what current and previous employees have to say about the company you’re considering. This will give you more insight into what it would be like to work for the organization, and what, in turn, they are looking for in prospective employees.

Then, incorporate what you find into your answers. This will show your interviewer that even if you don’t physically appear to be the most positive or cheerful person on the planet, you’re still very interested in the organization and are eager to join the team.



## Demeanor and gender

Our survey revealed that men and women tend to have different impressions of a woman's facial expressions. While 55.8 percent of the male hiring professionals we surveyed described a frowning woman as cold, a whopping 70.5 percent of female hiring professionals described her as such.

It's difficult to determine what causes this difference in perceptions. While it may be tempting to conclude that women judge female candidates more harshly on their apparent friendliness (or lack thereof), there may be other explanations.

For instance, perhaps women simply place a higher value on smooth relationships in the workplace. Demeanor could be interpreted as a proxy for how supportive a future colleague may be, or whether she will be easy to work with.

### *How to counter the bias*

How to counter the bias If you're not naturally an emotionally effusive person, you can show a female hiring manager that you can form meaningful workplace relationships in other ways.

For example, if you receive their name beforehand, you can look them up on sites like LinkedIn to see whether there are any similarities you can bring up in the interview.

**Look for and ask about shared interests to connect on during an interview, such as:**

- Alma mater
- Professional connections or professional organizations
- Similar previous positions
- Current events (without veering into the political)
- Personal interests (e.g., sports, hobbies)

## Age

Many older women feel they're at a huge disadvantage when competing against younger talent for a job. Older job seekers may be concerned that hiring managers assume they don't have the latest tech skills or that they are set in their ways, even though they have years of valuable experience.

They're not wrong to worry about this. In fact, our research indicated that even when older women are perceived to have positive traits and characteristics, hiring managers may still choose not to hire them. Out of 15 job candidates, our survey respondents ranked the oldest-looking candidate sixth for professionalism, third for leadership material, and first for reliability.

These qualities also happened to be the top three traits that hiring professionals listed as the most important things they look for in a potential hire. When considering candidates, 70.4 percent said they valued professionalism, 60.6 percent said reliability, and 44.4 percent said leadership ability.

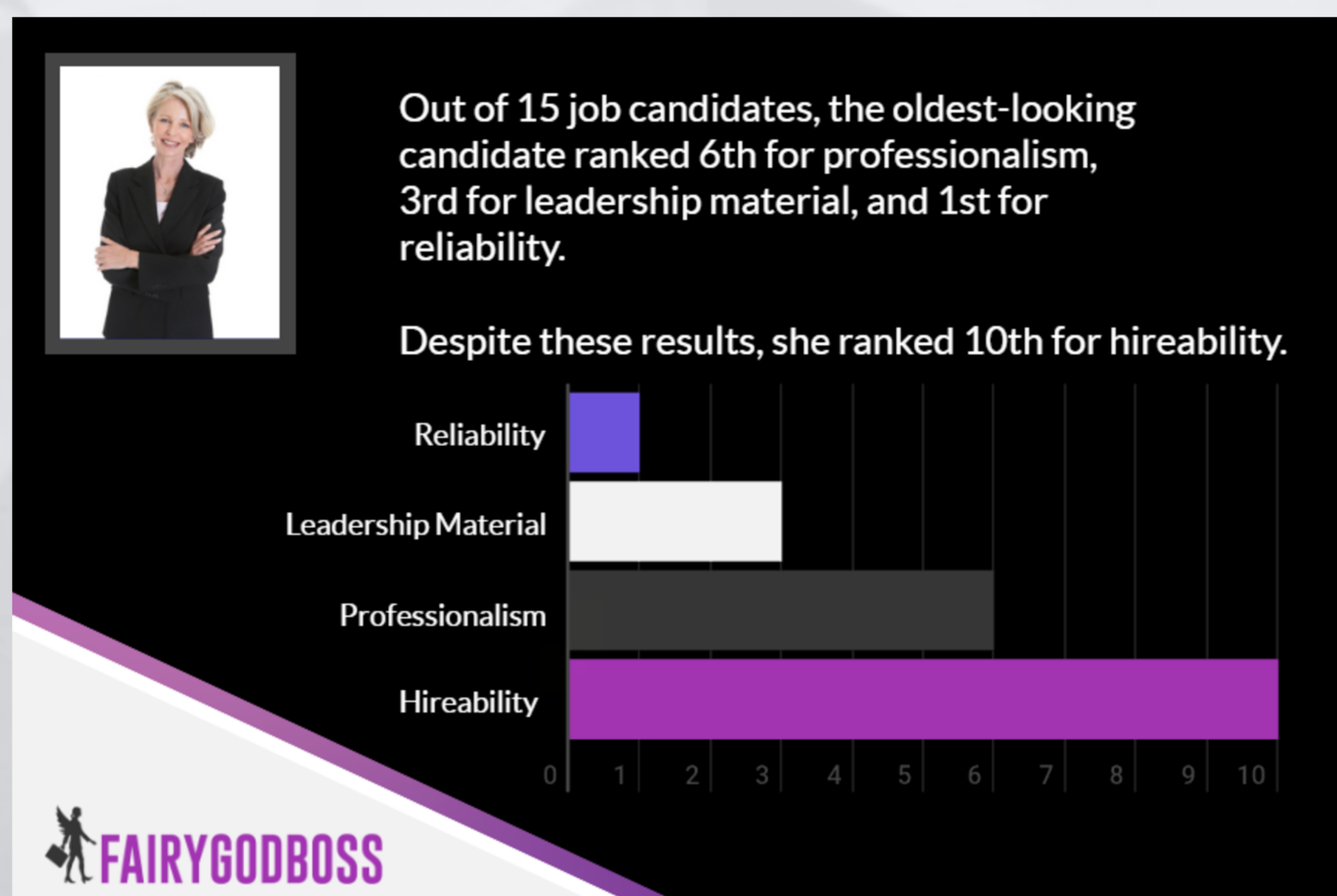
However, despite her high rankings in these qualities, only 29.2 percent of respondents said they would hire the older woman. Overall, she ranked 10th for hireability.

## Generational differences

When we think about generational stereotypes, they often apply to millennials, who tend to be judged as being lazy or feeling entitled. However, we discovered that older hiring professionals may be just as biased against people closer to their own age.

Specifically, we found that 30 percent of hiring professionals between the ages of 25 and 34 said they would hire the older candidate, while just 26.5 percent of respondents older than 45 said they would.

For older female job seekers, this can be seen as good news; it suggests they shouldn't necessarily write off jobs at startups or cutting-edge companies populated by millennial employees. These organizations – and the younger interviewers who work at them – may actually be more likely to give older job candidates a fair chance than older interviewers might.



## Race

It's no secret that racial prejudice is alive and well across the country, and these biases most certainly permeate the job interview process. In our survey, the top three hiring choices of white respondents were all white candidates.

We also discovered that most hiring professionals' top choices of job candidates were women of their own race.

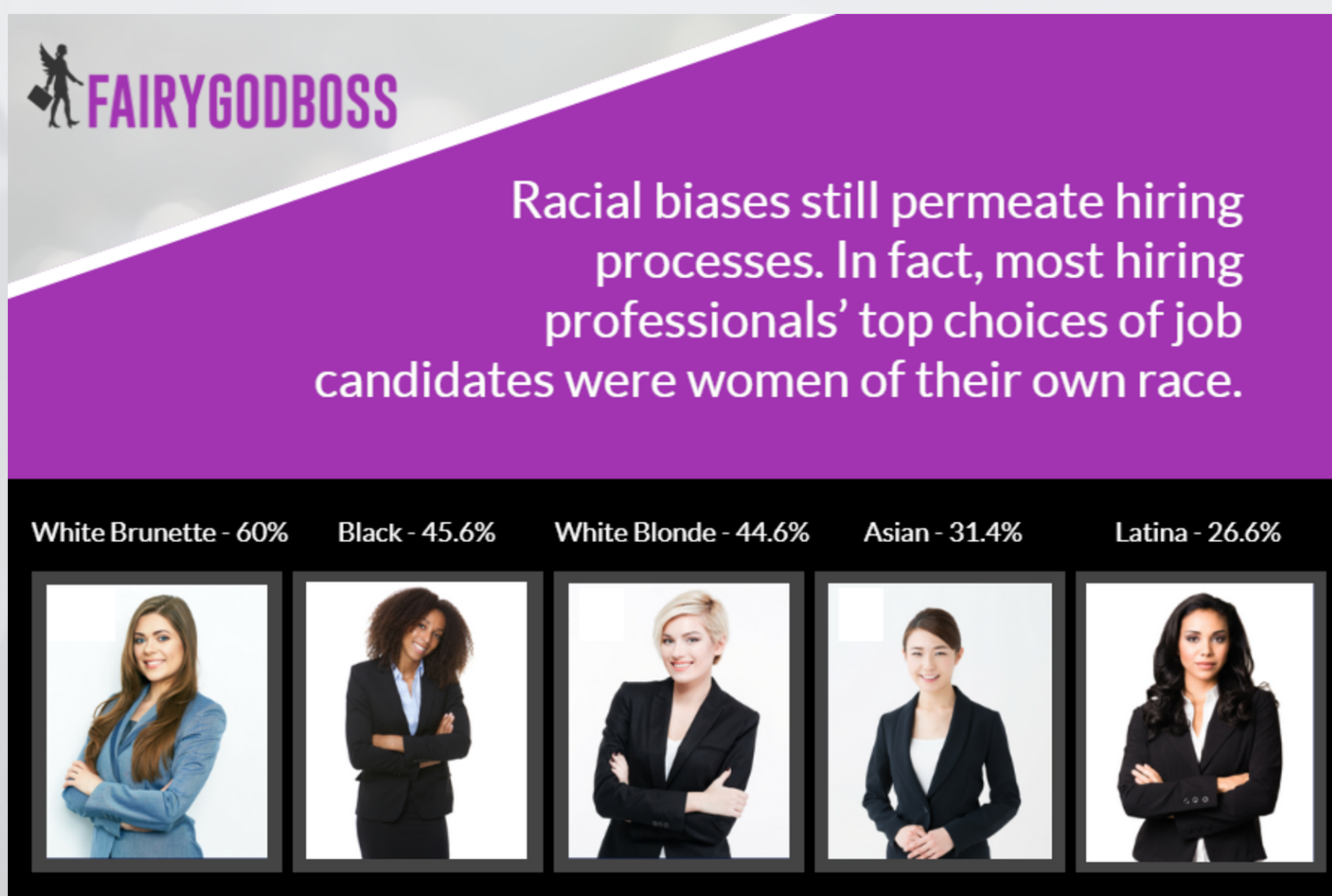
Among African American respondents, 67.7 percent listed the African American candidate as one of their top choices. Among Asians, 61.5 percent listed the Asian woman as the best candidate.

This suggests that women of color have a better chance of landing a job if they're interviewed by someone of their own race.

### *How to counter the bias*

While you certainly have no control over the ethnicity of the person who will be interviewing you for a job, it may be worthwhile to consider interviewing at companies that understand the value of a racially diverse workforce.

As a job seeker who is a woman of color, you may want to specifically target companies that have a proven track record of prioritizing diversity and inclusion. Check out organizations' websites to see how transparent they are about workforce diversity, whether they have existing diversity initiatives in place, or if they have senior leaders who are women of color.





## Race and leadership ability

Race and leadership ability Our survey respondents cited leadership ability as a top consideration during the hiring process. Unfortunately, race can also play a factor in how women are evaluated for leadership potential.

For instance, hiring managers were more inclined to believe job candidates of their own race possessed leadership potential. Among respondents of all races, 29.2 percent described the African American candidate as having leadership ability. However, of the African American respondents, 38.7 percent said she had leadership potential.

We noticed the same pattern for the Asian and the Latina candidates. Overall, 27.6 percent said the Asian woman had leadership ability. For Asian respondents, that number jumped to 38.7 percent. And while 33.2 percent of all respondents said the Latina candidate had leadership potential, that number rose to 40.9 percent among only Latino/Hispanic respondents.

This data suggests that if women of color are interviewing with someone of a different race, they may want to consider the fact that their leadership potential might be underestimated and seek to combat this bias by placing additional emphasis on their leadership track record and abilities.



## Conclusion

Women today are still judged on their appearance, no matter the context. And when it comes to the job interview process, many of the factors that hiring professionals look at — and make unfair judgments upon — are completely out of your control.

Wearing a different suit jacket won't make hiring managers overlook your age or your race. But being informed about people's biases can help you try to counteract a few things that may be within your control.

After all, women of all shapes, sizes, and races deserve a fair shot at being evaluated on relevant job criteria — not appearance-related items that have nothing to do with how well they can perform.

Looking for more information on how women can succeed in the workplace?

**FAIRYGODBOSS**

Check out our website for career advice content!