

# Interview with Alexandra Maurer

«I turn my bias into interest.»

Alexandra Maurer is the host of our social experiment «First Impressions.» Together with 16 Johnson & Johnson employees, she explored the question: What lies beyond the first look? In the aftermath of the experiment, Alexandra, who has Swiss and Jamaican roots, tells us all about her personal experiences with biases and how we can practice self-empowerment in everyday life.



**In what kind of situations do you experience unconscious biases?**

It happens as soon as I leave the house. When I'm on the train with my daughter, who is quite fair, people give us looks trying to figure out how we go together. It happens at work. I hear people telling me that I would be busier if I were white and blonde. Or hair stylists complaining about how much hair I have, which makes me feel like something is wrong with that. As Swapna from our experiment said, you start looking for faults in yourself. It is important to remember that no one is born with these biases. They are taught by society.

I did have a moment during the experiment where I caught my internalized biases. When Florian revealed that he was the semipro gamer, I was pretty surprised. I thought I knew what a gamer looks and acts like. Guess I did not!

**Did you catch yourself having a biased thought during the experiment?**

## How do you «unfeed» that thought for the next time?

I turn my bias into interest very quickly. And actively listen to stories from different people. Heike, one of our four protagonists, knows that by being a good listener she gives her team the feeling of being heard. Openness leads to acceptance.

Yes, because curiosity is so important. Like Salim said, if you have a question, ask! There is nothing wrong with not knowing everything there is. Quite the opposite. Florian told us during the experiment that he had to come out as part of the LGBT+ community over and over again. But for him, it's not tiring, because it allows him to tell his story on his terms. If someone is interested in my story, it empowers me.

## Being curious rather than judgmental. Something that was also brought up a lot by our protagonists.

## Speaking of empowerment, how do you empower yourself?

I felt alone with my experiences until a lot of societal issues and mistreatment were being captured on camera and spread around the world. It made me, and a lot of people like me, feel empowered by our own stories and backgrounds. If you want to become an ally to the people around you, regardless of where they come from, who they love, and what they do, don't look away. Ask questions, listen, and spread your knowledge. And embrace change every day.

Together with a film crew and 16 Johnson & Johnson employees, we spent a day exploring our unconscious biases in a raw and real experiment. A special thank you to the 12 audience members who were willing to show their decision-making. And thank you to Florian Kress, Swapna Pillai-Amarnath, Heike Sieber, and Salim Kusadasi, who shared their inspiring stories so openly with their fellow Johnson & Johnson employees and the world.



Dive into our social experiment  
«First Impressions»