

# BIAS INTERRUPTERS

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## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR MANAGERS

### *Tools for Assignments*

#### THE CHALLENGE

Every workplace has high-profile assignments that are career-enhancing (“glamour work”) and low-profile assignments that are beneficial to the organization but not the individual’s career, in some organizations diversity committee work may fall into this category. Research shows that women do more “office housework”<sup>1</sup> than men.<sup>2</sup> This includes literal housework (ordering lunch), administrative work (scheduling a time to meet), and emotion work (“she’s upset; comfort her”). Professionals of color (both men and women) also report less access to desirable assignments than white men do.<sup>3</sup>

- **Glamour work.** More than 80% of white men, but only 53% of women of color, 59% of white women, and 63% of men of color, reported the same access to desirable assignments as their colleagues.<sup>4</sup>
- **Office housework.** Almost 50% of white women and 43% of women of color reported that at work they more often play administrative roles such as taking notes for a meeting compared to their colleagues. Only 26% of white men and 20% of men of color reported this.<sup>5</sup>

Diversity at the top can only occur when diverse employees at all levels of the organization have access to assignments that let them take risks and develop new skills. If the glamour work and the office housework aren’t distributed evenly, you won’t be tapping into the full potential of your workforce. Most workplaces that use an informal “hey, you!” assignment system end up distributing assignments based on factors other than experience and talent. If women and people of color keep getting stuck with the same low-profile assignments, they will be more likely to be dissatisfied and search for opportunities elsewhere.<sup>6</sup>

#### THE SOLUTION

Fair allocation of the glamour work and the office housework are two separate problems. Some organizations will want to solve the office housework problem before tackling the glamour work; others will want to address both problems simultaneously.

##### 1. **Identify and Track**

The first step is to find out if, and where, you have a problem. Find out:

- Distribute the **Office Housework Survey** to your team to find out who is doing the office housework and how much of their time it takes up.
- Use our **Assignment Typology Guide** to gather further metrics on what assignments fall into your department’s office housework and glamour work.

##### 2. **Implement Bias Interrupters for Office Housework**

- **Establish a rotation.** A rotation is also helpful for many administrative tasks (e.g. taking notes, scheduling meetings). Rotating housework tasks like ordering lunch and planning parties is also an option if admins are unavailable. **Don’t ask for volunteers.** Women are more likely to volunteer because they are under subtle but powerful pressures to do so.<sup>7</sup>

- **Hold everyone equally accountable.** “I give it to women because they do it well and the men don’t,” is a common sentiment. This dynamic reflects an environment in which men suffer few consequences for doing a poor job on office housework, but women who do a poor job are seen as “prima donnas” or “not team players.” Hold men and women equally accountable for carrying out all assignments properly.

### 3. Implement Bias Interrupters for Glamour Work

- **Avoid mixed messages.** If your organization values such things as mentoring and committee work (like serving on the Diversity Initiative), make sure these things are valued when the time comes for promotions and raises. Sometimes organizations say they highly value this kind of work—but they don’t. Mixed messages of this kind will negatively affect women and people of color.
- **Provide a bounceback.** If you have individual assigners whose glamour work allocations is lopsided, hold a meeting to bring the problem to their attention. Work with them to figure out if either, 1) the available pool for glamour work assignments is diverse but is not being tapped fully or whether 2) only a few people have the requisite skills for glamour work assignments. Read our **Responses to Common Pushback** and **Identifying Bias in Assignments Guide** before the bounceback meeting to prepare.

#### *If a diverse pool has the requisite skills...*

- **Implement a rotation.** Have the supervisor set up a rotation to ensure fair access to plum assignments.
- **Formalize the pool and institute accountability.** Write down the list of people with the requisite skills and make it visible to the supervisor. Sometimes just being reminded of the pool can help. Have the supervisor track their allocation of glamour work going forward to measure progress. Research shows that accountability matters.<sup>8</sup>

#### *If the pool is not diverse...*

- **Re-visit your assumption** that only one (or very few) employees can handle this assignment: is that true or is the supervisor in question just more comfortable working with those few people?
- **Analyze how the pool was assembled.** Does the supervisor allocate the glamour work by relying on self-promotion or volunteers? If so, that will often disadvantage women and people of color. Shift to more objective measures to create the pool based on skills and qualifications.

#### *If the above aren’t relevant or don’t solve your problem, then it’s time to **expand the pool!***

- **Development plan.** Identify what skills or competencies an employee needs to be eligible for the high-profile assignments work and develop a plan to help the employee develop the requisite skills.
- **Leverage existing HR policies.** If your organization uses a competency-based system, or has a Talent Development Committee or equivalent, that’s a resource to help develop competencies so that career-enhancing assignments can be allocated fairly more fairly.
- **Shadowing and mentoring.** Have a more-junior person shadow a more-experienced person during the high-profile assignment. Establish a mentoring program to help a broader range of junior people gain access to valued skills.

**If you can’t expand your pool, re-frame the assignment** so that more people could participate in it. Could you break up the assignment into discrete pieces so more people get the experiences they need?

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- <sup>1</sup> Williams, J. C., & Dempsey, R. W. (2014). What works for women at work: Four patterns working women should know. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- <sup>2</sup> Misra, J., Lundquist, J. H., & Templer, A. (2012, June). Gender, Work Time, and Care Responsibilities Among Faculty 1. In *Sociological Forum* (Vol. 27, No. 2, pp. 300-323). Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd. doi: 10.1111/j.1573-7861.2012.01319.x; Mitchell, S. M., & Hesli, V. L. (2013). Women don't ask? Women don't say no? Bargaining and service in the political science profession. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 46(2), 355-369. doi: 10.1017/S1049096513000073; Porter, S. R. (2007). A closer look at faculty service: What affects participation on committees?. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 78(5), 523-541. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2007.0027>; Benschop, Y., & Doorewaard, H. (1998). Six of one and half a dozen of the other: the gender subtext of Taylorism and team-based work. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 5(1), 5-18. doi: 10.1111/1468-0432.00042; Ohlott, P. J., Ruderman, M. N., & McCauley, C. D. (1994). Gender differences in managers' developmental job experiences. *Academy of management Journal*, 37(1), 46-67. doi: 10.5465/256769; De Pater, I. E., Van Vianen, A. E., & Bechtoldt, M. N. (2010). Gender differences in job challenge: A matter of task allocation. *Gender, Work & Organization*, 17(4), 433-453. doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0432.2009.00477.x
- <sup>3</sup> Williams, J. C., Multhaup, M., Li, S., Korn, R. M. (2018). You Can't Change What You Can't See: Interrupting Racial & Gender Bias in the Legal Profession. American Bar Association & Minority Corporate Counsel Association.
- <sup>4</sup> Ibid
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid
- <sup>6</sup> Babcock, L., Recalde, M. P., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2017). Gender differences in accepting and receiving requests for tasks with low promotability. *American Economic Review*, 107(3), 714-47. doi: 10.1257/aer.20141734
- <sup>7</sup> Heilman M. E., & Chen J. J. (2005). Same behavior, different consequences: Reactions to men's and women's altruistic citizenship. *Behavior Journal of Applied Psychology*, 90(3), 431- 441 doi: 10.1037/0021-9010.90.3.431; Allen, T. D. (2006). Rewarding good citizens: The relationship between citizenship behavior, gender, and organizational rewards. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(1), 120-143. doi: 10.1111/j.0021-9029.2006.00006.x; Babcock, L., Recalde, M. P., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2017). Gender differences in accepting and receiving requests for tasks with low promotability. *American Economic Review*, 107(3), 714-47. doi: 10.1257/aer.20141734; Williams, J. C., & Dempsey, R. W. (2014). What works for women at work: Four patterns working women should know. New York, NY: New York University Press.
- <sup>8</sup> Tetlock, P. E. (1983). Accountability and complexity of thought. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 45(1), 74. doi: 10.1037/0022-3514.45.1.74; Tetlock, P. E., & Mitchell, G. (2009). Implicit bias and accountability systems: What must organizations do to prevent discrimination?. *Research in organizational behavior*, 29, 3-38. doi: 10.1016/j.riob.2009.10.002

# BIAS INTERRUPTERS

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## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS *Identifying Bias in Assignments Guide*

### What's the difference between assignments?

- **Glamour Work:** high-profile assignments that are career-enhancing and can set someone up for promotion.
- **Low-Profile Work:** assignments that are necessary and beneficial to the organization but don't highlight the individual's career.
- **Office Housework:** literal housework (ordering lunch, cleaning up after a meeting), administrative work (scheduling a time to meet, making sure everyone is on the conference line), and emotional work ("he's upset—can you fix it?").

### Tendencies that lead to inequities in assignments:

- **Modest, helpful, nice; dutiful daughter, office mom?** Prescriptive stereotypes create pressures on women to be mild-mannered team players—so they are under social pressures to volunteer for office housework activities.<sup>1</sup>
- **Due to these stereotypes,** women are also more likely to be *assigned* office housework tasks because assigners tend to believe that women are more likely to accept the task.<sup>2</sup>
- **People of color** also face pressures to volunteer for and accept office housework, due to prescriptive stereotypes, notably that people of Asian descent are supposed to be "deferential worker bees."<sup>3</sup>
- **Not a "details guy."** Majority men are less likely to be asked to do the office housework, and they experience less backlash if they refuse to do it or do a bad job.
- **"Not a team player."** Women and people of color risk pushback if they don't gratefully accept and perform the office housework and low-profile work: "She's just not a team player," or "He thinks highly of himself, doesn't he?"
- **Maternal wall.** Women return from maternity leave to find that they are no longer able to get the quality of assignments that they could before having children.
- **"But she's good at planning parties."** Managers tend to assign office housework to women because "she's good at it," or "she likes it."
- **Golden boy.** Managers may consistently assign glamour work to the same person over and over again because the manager knows "he can get the job done." This can lead to a precarious position for a company where only one or two people are capable of doing the most important work.
- **Glamour work?** Women and people of color get less access to the glamour work in their organizations.<sup>4</sup> Sometimes this is due to the belief that women and people of color don't want the high-profile assignments. Data shows this isn't true.<sup>5</sup>

## Six Powerful Bias Interrupters:

1. **Don't ask for volunteers** when time comes for office housework.
2. **Establish a rotation** for office housework. This can be based on any factor—seniority, astrological sign, etc.
3. **Hold everyone accountable** for the tasks they are supposed to do. If someone does a bad job on a low-profile assignment, that's a performance problem. Treat it as such.
4. Before assigning a glamour work assignment, **consider all eligible employees**.
5. If only a few people are eligible to do the glamour work, find ways to **expand the pool**. One way is to have more junior people shadow more senior people.
6. **Ask people returning from parental leave** if they want the assignment before deciding they don't. You can say, "I have this assignment you would be great for, but I know you're getting back up to speed. Want to jump in? If not, there will be another opportunity in the future." – and make sure there is.

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<sup>1</sup> Allen, T. D. (2006). Rewarding good citizens: The relationship between citizenship behavior, gender, and organizational rewards. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 36(1), 120-143. doi: 10.1111/j.0021-9029.2006.00006.x

Babcock, L., Recalde, M. P., Vesterlund, L., & Weingart, L. (2017). Gender differences in accepting and receiving requests for tasks with low promotability. *American Economic Review*, 107(3), 714-47. doi: 10.1257/aer.20141734

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Berdahl, J. L., & Min, J. A. (2012). Prescriptive stereotypes and workplace consequences for East Asians in North America. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology*, 18(2), 141-152. doi: 10.1037/a0027692

<sup>4</sup> Williams, J.C., Li, S., Rincon, R., & Finn, P. (2016). Climate Control: Gender and Racial Bias in Engineering? Center for WorkLife Law. UC Hastings College of the Law. Available at: <https://worklifelaw.org/publications/Climate-Control-Gender-And-Racial-Bias-In-Engineering.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Williams, J. C., & Multhaup, M. (2018). For women and minorities to get ahead, managers must assign work fairly. *Harvard Business Review*, 2-9. Available at: <https://hbr.org/2018/03/for-women-and-minorities-to-get-ahead-managers-must-assign-work-fairly>

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## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS

### *Assignment Typology Guide*

The purpose of the assignment typology process is to figure out what the glamour and lower profile work are in your organization, and who is doing it. Because this will vary from organization to organization, we've created general tools that will help you figure this out. Walk through this activity yourself and ask anyone else who supervises employees to do the same.

1. Use the **Assignment Typology Worksheet** to help identify what's what on your team.
  - What is the glamour work? Make sure it passes this test: does it help the employee get promoted?
  - What is the lower profile work? Work that is necessary to the company and needs to be done well, but doesn't enhance an employee's prospects of promotion.
2. Fill out the left-hand side of the **Manager Assignment Worksheet** with the results of the **Assignment Typology Worksheet** and then fill out the remainder of the worksheet.
3. Analyze the worksheet information for demographic patterns, dividing employees into (i) gender and ethnic/racial groups, (ii) parents who have just returned from parental leave, (iii) professionals working part time or flexible schedules, and (iv) any other underrepresented group that your organization tracks (veterans, LGBTQ+ communities, individuals with disabilities, etc.). If you've distributed the **Office Housework Survey**, analyze the findings by the same demographic categories. Identify:
  - Who is doing the office housework?
  - Who is doing the glamour work?
  - Who is doing the lower profile work?
  - If you supervise anyone, create and analyze metrics by individual supervisor.
4. Use responses to anticipate potential challenges in giving assignments to a broader range of people.

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## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS *Assignment Typology Worksheet*

Fill out the worksheet below with specific projects/types of work/assignments that are high-profile and fall under the categories provided below:

**This process applies to: (circle one) Junior Senior Intermediate ( ) ( )**

**HIGHER-PROFILE WORK:**

<b>Roles that provide the opportunities to gain new knowledge or become a subject matter expert:</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
<b>Opportunities to display knowledge to important audiences:</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
<b>Opportunities to develop relationships inside the company that are important for promotion/compensation:</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
<b>Opportunities to develop relationships outside the company that are important for promotion/compensation:</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
<b>Opportunities that grant access to business development resources:</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
<b>Other high-profile assignments in your organization that lead to promotion:</b>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.

**LOWER-PROFILE WORK:**

<b>Routine Work: Work that must be done well but does not typically enhance promotion prospects:</b>
<i>Example: Often, but not always, serving on the Diversity Committee and/or mentoring junior employees falls into this category.</i>
1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.
11.
12.
13.
14.
15.



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## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS *Manager Assignment Worksheet*

**Instructions:** Input the specific projects/types of work/assignments that were identified in with the typology worksheet. Then fill out the right column to see how the work is distributed on your team.

**This process applies to: (circle one) Junior Senior Intermediate ( ) ( )**

Glamour Work	Employee Assigned
<b>Roles that provide the opportunities to gain new knowledge or become a subject matter expert:</b>	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
<b>Opportunities to display knowledge to important audiences:</b>	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
<b>Opportunities to develop relationships inside the company that are important for promotion/comp:</b>	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.

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## MANAGER ASSIGNMENT WORKSHEET *Tools for Organizations*

<b>Opportunities to develop relationships outside the company that are important for promotion/comp:</b>	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
<b>Opportunities that grant access to business development resources:</b>	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
<b>Other high-profile assignments in your organization that lead to promotion:</b>	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

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Lower-Profile Work	Employee Assigned
<b>Routine Work: Work that must be done well but does not typically enhance promotion prospects:</b>	
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.
11.	11.
12.	12.
13.	13.
14.	14.
15.	15.

**1. How do you decide who to assign work to?**

**2. What would be the challenges (if any) for you to give the glamour work assignments to a broader pool?**

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## BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS

### *Office Housework Survey*

**Please fill in the blanks below. Put in zero if no time was spent on certain tasks.**

			Tell us about the peers you have in mind when answering the previous question		
	On average, how much time did you spend per month on each task below?	Do you feel you spent more time on this task than your peers with similar seniority and experience (circle answer)	# of peers you have in mind	# of women in your peer group	# of people of color in your peer group
1. Cleaning up after meetings	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
2. Planning parties and other social events	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
3. Getting coffee/food for meetings	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
4. Taking notes at meetings	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
5. Fetching documents during meetings	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
6. Handling logistics and scheduling for meetings	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
9. Keeping track of paperwork	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
10. Keeping track of budgets	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
11. Managing documents and data	__hours__minutes	Yes/No			
12.					
13.					
14.					

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## **BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS**

### *Office Housework Survey*

## **How Do I Use This Survey?**

- 1. Circulate this short survey to your team.**
- 2. Look at the amount of time each team member is spending on different office housework tasks.**

Do certain groups of people spend more time in general? What about on specific types of work: literal housework, administrative work, undervalued work?

Do certain groups of people feel that they are spending more time, even if the amount of time recorded does not reflect a difference? Start there, then head to the **Bias Interrupters for Assignments: Tools for Managers** toolkit to learn how to level the playing field.

- 3. Help us improve this tool: e-mail us at [feedback@biasinterrupters.org](mailto:feedback@biasinterrupters.org)**

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## **BIAS INTERRUPTERS FOR ASSIGNMENTS**

### *Responses to Common Pushback*

Here are some of the most common justifications that supervisors/managers give for why plum assignments go to a non-diverse pool, and women end up with office housework—and some responses:

**“It needs to get done, and the women are the only ones who volunteer!”**

“Staffing office housework by asking for volunteers puts subtle pressures on women to volunteer, to show they’re good team players. It also put equal pressures on men *not* to volunteer, to show they’re go getters. Instead, allocate tasks like parties to admins; for the rest set up a rotation so that less valued work gets shared out equally.”

**“The women just do a better job at it. When I give it to the men, they blow it off, so I end up having to give it to a woman anyway.”**

“That’s because the women sense that there will be negative consequences if they blow it off—they’ll be dinged as prima donnas. And the men know that if they do a bad job, the only consequence is that they won’t be asked to do office housework again.”

**“He worked out successfully in the past,” “I trust him to do a good job.”**

“This is justifiable in a crisis. But operating always in crisis mode is not good for the organization in the long term. It means that the person who happens to get a career-enhancing assignment the first time around becomes the golden employee, excluding others who are equally talented from career opportunities. That means they will leave—and the golden employee may leave, too, because they’re asked to do the same thing over and over again.”

**“I’m too busy to train someone new.”**

“That may work well for you in the short term, but it will hurt the organization in the long term, as we lose valued people who are not given career-development opportunities. Having a deeper bench also gives you insurance: What if your go-to-guy gets hit by a bus or leaves the company? Taking a little time today could save you time and money in the future.”