

BIAS INTERRUPTERS

*small steps
big change*

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.¹
- **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.²
- **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."³
- **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.⁴ 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.⁵

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.

¹ 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

² Ibid

³ 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

⁴ 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>

⁵ 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>