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.


2 Ibid

