

# Undercurrent of Bias

NOTED AUTHOR URGES HOPKINS FEMALE FACULTY TO PUSH ASIDE SUBTLE GENDER OBSTACLES.

The undisputed fact is that more women are entering academia in nearly all fields and beginning their careers on equal footing with their male counterparts. It's just as conclusive that as they inch their way up the promotions ladder, they have to work harder than men, yet lose ground when it comes to salary, length of time in rank and promotion (see sidebar).

The reasons for this overall inequality are both subtle and obvious, noted Hunter College professor of psychiatry and linguistics and author Virginia Valian. Speaking on advancing women in medicine at the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine Women's Leadership Council annual lecture, she pointed out that while some obstacles to academic advancement are apparent—women's careers are delayed because they take the major role in child rearing—it's the more indirect (and unconscious), harder-to-document forms of discrimination that are more difficult to overcome.

Valian cited a typical case she'd heard about involving a male department head who had received two requests: one to send a faculty member to address the board of trustees, another asking for a speaker at a local elementary school. He

chose a male faculty member to address the board and a female to talk to the schoolchildren.

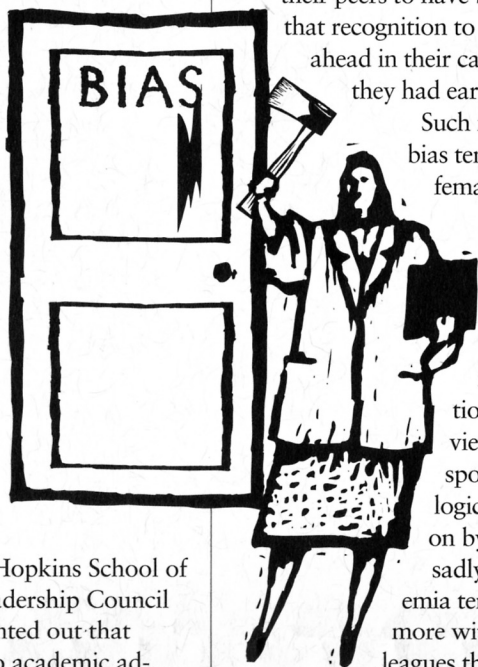
In another example of bias, Valian mentioned a study showing that female faculty listed as senior authors in research publications were generally assumed by their peers to have been accorded that recognition to help them get ahead in their career, not because they had earned the honor.

Such forms of gender bias tend to work on a female faculty member's psyche, Valian said. Women, she asserted, are less likely to re-submit grant applications and peer review articles as a response to the psychological insult brought on by rejection. "And sadly, women in academia tend to identify more with their male colleagues than with their own gender, because men are perceived as 'winners.'"

To eliminate subtle discrimination, Valian urged female faculty members to band together to point out acts of gender bias. She also emphasized the need to expand successful programs like the mentoring one instituted in the Department of Medicine. In a period of four years, the number of women achieving full professorship in that department increased from four to 22.

Janice Clements, vice dean for faculty, feels that conditions for female faculty have improved greatly from 10 or 15 years ago. But there are still issues like subtle gender bias that need exploring. Her thinking converged with that of University Provost Steve Knapp, who mandated recently that each school set up a

committee on the status of women. That committee, Clements notes, will build on the work done by her predecessor, Catherine DeAngelis. "We're going to drill down a little deeper, analyze more extensive data, talk with women faculty to identify issues still out there that need addressing," she says. ■



## Professor, Interrupted

The proportion of women in academic medicine who climb beyond the rank of junior faculty has stalled, according to a study from the Association of American Medical Colleges. Despite the increasing number of women entering medical school and joining medical school faculties, between 1979 and 1997 the proportion of male and female professors held at 34 percent and 12 percent, respectively. Looking at data from all U.S. medical schools, author Lynn Nonnemaker found that 634 more women became faculty members than men, or about 10 percent more than would be expected with proportional representation. Yet 334 fewer women than expected advanced to associate professor, and 44 fewer than expected moved up to full professor.

The report, published in the Feb. 10 issue of the *New England Journal of Medicine*, is accompanied by an editorial from Catherine DeAngelis, Hopkins' former vice dean for academic affairs and faculty, who said women with child care responsibilities are at a competitive disadvantage when it comes to academic work and professional advancement.