Gender microaggressions in higher education: Proposed taxonomy and change through cognitive-behavioral strategies

Karen B. Schmaling, College of Health and Human Services, University of North Carolina at Charlotte

Abstract

The underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in higher education is well documented. There are a number of potential reasons for this gender disparity, but gender discrimination appears to be an important maintenance factor. The paper proposes a taxonomy of gender microaggressions, which are forms of gender discrimination, to help identify and validate common discriminatory experiences of women in the academy. Potential change strategies are suggested to address gender microaggressions that are informed by methods familiar to clinical psychology. Examples are presented of the gender microaggression taxonomy and change strategies. A number of opportunities for further research are identified.

The representation of women in higher education

Every year, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* devotes an issue to facts about higher education across the United States. The most recent issue (August 31, 2007, Volume 54, Number 1) characterized women in higher education as follows: Women comprise 57.4% of enrolled students[1], 57.4% of bachelor's degree recipients, and 48.8% of doctorate degree recipients. Women comprise 38.1% of all full-time faculty; the proportion of women decreases from a high of 48.7% in public 2-year colleges to a low of 31.1% in private doctoral universities.[2] Presidents are 23% female. Data on gender representation in non-presidential leadership positions in the academy are more difficult to find. However, using somewhat dated information, women held 27% of dean and 15% of provost positions (Berryman-Fink, et al. 2003). The majority of women presidents and provosts serve at lower status (e.g., community college) and/or small institutions; women leaders are present in small numbers at doctoral/research universities. The diminishing proportion of women who advance from undergraduate to doctoral education; earn doctorates; enter the academy; advance in the academy; and lead the academy as shown in Figure 1 has been referred to the 'leaky pipeline' (Mason and Goulden 2002), 'off-ramps' (Hewlett 2007), and other structural metaphors; that is, women are represented in decreasing proportions as one ascends up the academic hierarchy. The

---

[1] Universities' attempts to keep equal proportions of male and female students by offering admission to male applicants with lesser qualifications than female applicants was described in an article entitled, 'The Latest Way to Discriminate Against Women' (Whitmire 2007).

[2] A recent paper modeled the number of years to achieve gender equity in faculty composition under different assumptions, including a "radical" solution of hiring only women (11 years to gender equity), and assuming equal proportions at hire, promotion, attrition, and retirement (asymptotic to 57 years to gender equity), which shows that even a radical solution would take a long time to achieve gender equity (Marschke, et al. 2007).

proportion of women who are qualified to hold leadership positions is much larger than the proportion of women who hold leadership positions (Committee on the Guide to Recruiting and Advancing Women Scientists and Engineers in Academia and Committee on Women in Science and Engineering 2006).

A plethora of evidence points to factors other than – or at least in addition to -- a lack of women in the pipeline (Carli and Eagly 2001) (or work-family conflict, or other explanations that have been put forth, see summary by Settles, et al. 2006) to explain the lack of representation of women in leadership positions in the academy. The 'glass ceiling' (Carli and Eagly 2001; Ridgeway 2001) is a more appropriate metaphor for limitations in higher education secondary to gender discrimination. Gender discrimination against women is alive and well in many forms in the academy: it hinders advancement, and accounts for some of the gender disparity in leadership positions (Heilman 2001).

Gender discrimination in the academy

The nature of modern gender discrimination and other forms of contemporary discrimination and prejudice (Dovidio 2001) has been described as covert, subtle, automatic, unintentional, unconscious, and pervasive (Heilman 2001; Sue, et al. 2007). A number of other terms have been used to describe subtle gender discriminatory events or their collective effect: chilly climate (Hall and Sandler 1982); microaggressions (Solorzano, et al. 2000; Sue, et al. 2007); microinequities (Benokraitis 1998); and selective incivility (Cortina in press).

A comprehensive review of the large experimental literature that supports the ubiquitous nature of gender-based discrimination in the academy (and elsewhere) is beyond the scope of this paper (see Valian 1998). Conclusions from this literature include: there are stereotypic characteristics and behaviors associated with gender; and women are not associated with 'leader,' 'scientist,' or other descriptors and their related behaviors that are relevant for advancement in the academy. These stereotypes exist in entrenched implicit (not consciously endorsed) forms (Nosek, et al. 2002), and include both descriptive (what women are like) and prescriptive (what women should do) characteristics (Heilman 2001). Descriptive gender stereotypes include less expectation for success, competence, leadership, result in biased evaluations, that in turn slow or halt advancement for women. For example, female postdoctoral applicants to Sweden's Medical Research Research Council (MRC) had to accrue an impact score (an objective measure based on the addition of all of each applicant's publication's impact

factors) 3-5 times higher than male postdoctoral applicants to achieve equivalent subjective competency ratings by the MRC reviewers (Wenneras and Wold 1997). Competent and other leader-like behaviors by women violate prescriptive stereotypes and result in personal derogation and dislike; as leadership positions include social interactions and socializing, a perceived inability to interact in socially appropriate ways inhibits advancement (Heilman 2001). Table 1 summarizes descriptive and prescription gender stereotypes and their consequences, which ultimately hamper advancement.

The subtle nature of modern gender discrimination leaves women wondering 'is it just me – did what I think happened really happen – did that mean what I think it means?' and how to respond – to not respond runs the risk of self-invalidation ("I'm being too sensitive"), lower self-esteem, depression, and other sequelae, and to respond risks charges of 'overreacting', denial, counteraccusations, and backlash by the perpetrator. The costs for women to persist and advance in the academy despite the frequent experience of discriminatory events may be large, although this area is relatively unstudied. Solorzano, et al. (2000) found that racial microaggressions left African American students feeling discouraged, fatigued, isolated, frustrated, and helpless; students left or transferred because of these events. Some authors (Cortina in press; Settles, et al. 2006) have likened the cumulative effect of these events to the well described effects of daily hassles and minor stressors on health, which can be better predictors of health problems than major life events (e.g., for headaches, Fernandez and Sheffield 1996).

Contributions of clinical psychology to address gender discrimination

Many of the studies and reviews in this area have been done by psychologists, particularly from the subdisciplines of social, developmental, cognitive, and industrial/organization psychology.[3] Other contributing disciplines include political science, law, sociology, psychology, women and gender studies, and education.

Clinical psychology has not devoted much attention to gender discrimination per se, although psychology as a field is resolute in its expectation for gender-neutral language in its

[3] There also are examples of psychology's failures to contribute to our understanding of this area. *American Psychologist* devoted a recent issue (January 2007, Volume 62, Number 1) to leadership. The author found only two references to gender in one of the six articles in the special issue (in Avolio 2007); gender was listed simply as one of a number of factors that may affect leadership, in the other, the author cited Carlyle's "great *man* theory" (author's emphasis) (Carlyle 1907, in Avolio 2007, 28) as an example of a model of individual differences in leadership. There are at least two very disparate interpretations of this issue: that the research on leadership in psychology is meant to apply inclusively and so there is no need to reference or discuss gender, or, that this special issue is an example of the lack of acknowledgement of gender biases that limit women's opportunities to advance.

publications (American Psychological Association 2001) and lack of bias in its ethics code (American Psychological Association 2002), including insistence on cultural competence in evaluation and treatment. The lack of attention to gender discrimination is not surprising given that the practice of clinical psychology focuses on the evaluation and treatment of psychological disorders in individuals, rather than broader social problems and interventions at societal levels. Theories and models of clinical psychology inform the approach to dysfunctional behavior and its treatment. It is proposed that the processes used in clinical psychology – evaluation (classification, measurement) and treatment (arming a 'client' with new skills and strategies) informed by a coherent theoretical model -- can help us with the entrenched and dysfunctional problem of gender bias in the academy.

Assessment: Construction and application of taxonomies, including gender microaggressions

The nature of human cognition and information processing is that we automatically type, categorize, and classify stimuli to reduce complex information into larger superordinant classes to make it more manageable to understand and process. Implicit gender biases are an example of this process, as has been demonstrated repeatedly by applications of the Implicit Association Test to disciplines in which women are associated more quickly with arts and languages and male are associated more quickly with math and science (Nosek, et al. 2002). (The author is not aware of research that has applied the methodology used in the assessment of implicit biases to gender and academic leadership positions.) Typologies also are created purposefully. The hierarchical taxonomy of organisms into genus and species, and of psychiatric diagnoses, are two examples of purposefully created taxonomies. One advantage of typologies is that they give us a common language to categorize and label (and as scientists, measure) new observations more easily.

Microaggressions. Earlier the term 'microaggression' was included among a list of words used to describe discriminatory events. In a recent issue of *American Psychologist* (May-June, 2007), Derald Wing Sue and colleagues published what is likely to be a highly cited, seminal article entitled the "racial microaggressions in everyday life: implications for clinical practice." They attribute the term "microaggression" to Pierce, et al. (1978); this label is extremely helpful in itself.

A review of search engines in the sciences and humanities for the use of the term 'microaggression' with gender found one article (Rolin 2002), which in turn cited its use in a

book chapter (Benokraitis 1998, 10). Benokraitis (1998) used 'microaggressions' as a synonym for 'microinequities' in her discussion of professional diminution in the academy. 'Microaggression' is a more powerful – and therefore fitting -- term than 'microinequities'. The label puts a name to and validates the existence of (and experience of) these behaviors, the effect of which might otherwise be namelessly discomforting, and disturbing. Labeling also can increase the likelihood of noticing subsequent occurrences.

Sue, et al. (2007) presented a taxonomy of ten types of racial microaggressions that range on a continuum of decreasing obviousness from microassault (an explicitly racial, derogatory verbal or nonverbal attack), microinsult (rude, insensitive snubs or demeaning verbal or nonverbal behavior), and microinvalidation (verbal or nonverbal behavior that invalidates the experience of being a racial/ethnic minority). Most of the ten racial microaggressions in their taxonomy are easily applicable to gender issues as well. For example, there are microaggressive assumptions regarding intelligence or areas of intellectual interest by gender ("There are innate differences between males and females in terms of science aptitude." "*You* like statistics?!"); denial of individual sexism ("I have women colleagues; I am not sexist."); and pathologizing women's cultural styles/communication styles ("Why do you always get so emotional?" "Hey, it was just a joke -- why do you have to take it so seriously?").

A taxonomy of gender microaggressions. Inspired by Sue, et al. (2007), the following taxonomy of gender microaggressions is offered to add to the racial microaggressions in the Sue, et al. (2007) taxonomy that also are applicable to gender. Gender microaggressions may be in the form of omissions, or failures to act in a gender unbiased manner, and commissions, or gender biased actions – another way to look at these variants might be to ask both 'what is done?' and 'what is ignored or not responded to?' Table 2 describes four proposed categories of gender microaggressions: (1) "a woman's place is… not in the academy," related to acts that perpetuate stereotypic gender roles. Most of the examples listed in Table 2 are gender microaggressions of commission. An example of a this type of gender microaggression of omission might be a male faculty member asking his male colleagues to help him work out a glitch in a piece of equipment in his laboratory but not asking his female colleagues to do so (i.e., the notion that women's mechanical aptitude is inferior to men's). (2) Backlash, tokenism, and anti-affirmative action gender microaggressions include devaluing, minimizing, belittling, and demeaning comments about women and women-associated activities. (3) Gender

microaggressions that reflect 'the exclusive club' highlight gender separation and the isolation of women in the academy. As Valian (1998) said, "women cannot exploit opportunities that are not genuinely open to them" (p. 144). (4) Regarding passive-aggressive paternalism, the psychiatric diagnostic taxonomy, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fourth Edition* (DSM-IV) (American Psychiatric Association (APA) 1994), is helpful. The DSM-IV (APA 1994) describes passive-aggressive features to include resentment, opposition, and intentional inefficiency; other relevant features are the tendency to externalize blame and the target authority figures for passive-aggressive acts. The examples in Table 2 show nonadherence, somewhat obscured by externalization of blame, e.g., on supposed social conventions. An example by omission might be a male faculty member serving on a committee chaired by a woman -- if the committee's failure is likely to be attributable to its leader, the active non-participation of the male member would be a gender microaggression of this type.

Dealing with gender discrimination in the academy

Recommended strategies. Strategies to counter gender bias and sexism have focused on the individual, the individual in specific contexts, and institutional change. The following section summarizes the evidence-based recommendations of several authors (Heilman 2001; Valian 1998; Yoder 2001). General individual strategies include: be where women are well-represented or add women to the group or committee until ~35-40% representation is achieved; interact in a polite manner as women as to not do so risks sanctions for counter-stereotypic behavior; build power with pioneering, visible, and relevant activities; seek information; become an expert; be exceptionally competent; seek legitimization by neutral, credible leaders; learn about gender schemas; and challenge gender hypotheses. Additional individual strategies in male dominated contexts suggested by Yoder (2001) include: avoid dominant speech acts; focus on group outcomes; and bid time and conform to group norms to 'build credits' before attempting influence. At the institutional level, these authors suggest the following strategies: build resources and supports; develop and implement clear and objective performance expectations and evaluation criteria, and reduce the activity of automatic implicit biases by increasing accountability for conducting fair and impartial evaluations and crafting processes that demand evaluators devoting more time and attention to them.

Not recommended strategies. Importantly, there also are strategies that are not recommended. In male dominated cultures, Yoder (2001) does not recommend women

communicate with "competent assertiveness" (p. 817), self-promote, or employ symbolic leadership strategies such as sitting at the head of the table as they may prompt the negative reactions listed in Table 1. Although Valian (1998) recommends that people become cognizant that they and others are likely to have systematic gender biases, she does not recommend 'awareness training' in which people only identify personal examples because these can be explained away, which would be counterproductive (p. 315). She also does not endorse using the most highly accomplished and remarkable women as role models (e.g., in mentoring programs): junior women faculty may find too many differences between the accomplishments and qualities of a very successful woman role model in comparison to themselves, which can lead to demoralization. Relatedly, as seen in Table 1, the presence of a mentor can facilitate others to discredit a woman's accomplishments; mentors may need to proactively assign credit to their mentees to avert discrediting tendencies. These negative recommendations deserve note because all of the strategies mentioned in this section may seem like sensible components of individual or institutional change.

A cognitive-behavioral approach to gender discrimination

Most research in psychology uses large samples of participants in order to be able to make reliable and valid generalizations about the group being studied. While such approaches are instructive for some purposes, they also may serve to create or perpetuate unhelpful stereotypes (Madden 2005). Alternatively, the analysis of individual episodes (and contextual factors) may better serve to enhance our understanding of maintenance factors in the disparity in gender representation among higher education leaders. When clinical psychologists work clinically, they typically focus on small units of analysis: the individual and their immediate contexts.

Clinical psychologists utilize a predominant theory to approach clinical problems, such as cognitive-behavioral (CB), which focuses on how we think about – and process information about -- our experiences, which is the cognitive component, and our actions, which is the behavioral component. The CB orientation aligns well with the components of gender discrimination outlined by Heilman (2001) that should concern us: descriptive stereotypes are expressed cognitively as beliefs about women's characteristics, and prescriptive stereotypes are expressed in terms of expected behaviors.

The treatment process from a CB orientation includes, in effect, helping clients to act like

scientists by doing experiments that test alternative ways of thinking and acting, and then observing the effects of these actions. The premises of the theories that underlie behavior therapy, specifically operant conditioning (Skinner 1953), address both omitted and committed behaviors. As shown in Table 3, following a gender microaggression by either omitting a desired response (extinction) or committing an undesired response (punishment) theoretically will decrease subsequent gender microaggressions. The process of analyzing situations in order to respond in such a way to obtain the desired effects requires observation, knowledge of context, and especially knowledge of the effects of different responses on the perpetrator, which can be increased by accruing observations over a number of situations. Cognitive therapy (e.g., Beck, et al. 1979) proceeds from the notion that the meaning of an event is ambiguous and that our interpretation of the event determines our emotional reactions. Articulation of the thoughts, assumptions, and meaning of an event is the first step toward determining if events are being perceived objectively, and decreasing the effects of gender microaggressions. Examples are discussed in more detail below. CB methods are consistent with the recommendations from others listed above, including gaining information.

In the context of gender discrimination in the academy, the work needs to focus both on perpetrators and recipients – but the burden of the work is on women who are the most frequent recipients of gender discrimination and may be more likely to be motivated to change. (Both men and women can perpetrate gender microaggressions, and both men and women can observe or be recipients of gender microaggressions, therefore the use of role descriptors – perpetrator and recipient – is more inclusive than gendered terms.) As others have noted, expecting women to be primarily responsible for changing gender discrimination is inherently unfair (Yoder 2001); however, there is no obvious alternative.

Interventions for recipients of gender microaggressions. The first step would be to assess, be alert for, notice, and label gender microaggressions. The taxonomy in Table 2 is a starting point to help recognize their occurrences, offered with the hope that others will add to and refine this taxonomy further. As described above, the subtle nature of modern gender discrimination may lead to self-doubt, self-invalidation, lower self-esteem, depression, and other sequelae. The cognitive model may help address and ameliorate self-doubt and self-invalidation, which will in turn empower recipients to have grounded, considered, and strategic responses. Table 3 shows that the initial and re-examined thoughts and interpretations of a gender

microaggression: a lack of action and complacency may result from one set of thoughts, but action to correct inequities may occur after re-examining the situation and generating an alternative set of thoughts, stemming from the prompt, "how else might I look at this situation."

Interventions with perpetrators of gender microaggressions. Research shows that gender biased judgments are more likely under time pressure; thus, devoting more time to an evaluation process and using objective criteria are useful strategies to counter bias effects (Valian 1998). It follows that strategies to give the recipient time to thoughtfully analyze gender microaggressions, the potential responses that could be made, and their likely effects, also will help reduce subsequent occurrences of gender aggressions. However, consequences generally are most potent when they occur in close temporal proximity to the behavior of interest, so not too much time should pass. Table 4 shows a simple analysis of possible responses to gender microaggressions using an operant conditioning paradigm. In operant conditioning there are four types of responses based on combinations of response desirability (desirable or undesirable) and response presence (present or absent). Positive and negative reinforcement by the recipient will strengthen the likelihood of more gender microaggressions; punishment and extinction will decrease it. The most challenging concept in operant conditioning is probably negative reinforcement. The reinforcement of avoidance is one way to think about negative reinforcement; for example, if a person is phobic of heights and being in high places makes him nervous, then avoiding heights also precludes an undesired response (fear), thus, avoidance strengthens the phobia. Table 4 shows how following a gender microaggression with release from an undesirable task may negatively reinforce microaggressions.

Conclusions and future directions

There are more women available to advance into leadership positions in the academy than hold such positions. Gender microaggressions and gender-based discrimination limit women's advancement. A taxonomy of gender microaggressions is proposed to assist in their recognition and validate their occurrence. Strategies informed by cognitive-behavioral models may be used to decrease gender microaggressions and reinforce gender equitable behavior, and modify the cognitions of recipients of gender microaggressions that are associated with self-doubt and self-invalidation, leading to empowerment.

There are several areas of needed research, including further work to refine a taxonomy of gender microaggressions; to formulate reliable and valid measures of gender

microaggressions; and assess the association between gender microaggressions and outcomes -- both adverse events such as faculty attrition, negative promotion decisions, and health problems, and positive outcomes, such as advancement in the academy and positive perceptions of climate. This paper does not explore the impact – which may be additive or multiplicative -- of the interaction of gender microaggressions with microaggressions that address race, sexual orientation, age, religion, and other forms of discrimination (Madden 2005). It would be of interest to use the Implicit Association Test (e.g., Nosek, et al. 2002) to assess the association of gender with academic leader (e.g., 'professor' 'chair') versus academic service positions (e.g., 'librarian' 'department secretary') to quantify implicit gender biases regarding academic leadership positions. Finally, it is recommended that the cognitive-behavioral strategies suggested here by discussed in small groups committed to the supportive and collegial analysis of microaggressive episodes, and to assess the efficacy of cognitive and behavior change strategies over time on perpetrators, recipients, and the climate.

References

American Psychiatric Association. 1994. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (fourth edition)*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychiatric Association.

American Psychological Association. 2001. *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth Edition*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association Press.

American Psychological Association. 2002. *Ethical principles of psychologists and code of conduct 2002.* Downloaded from http://www.apa.org/ethics on July 26, 2007.

Avolio, B. J. 2007. Promoting more integrative strategies for leadership theory-building. *American Psychologist, 62 (1)*, 25-33.

Beck, A. T., A. J. Rush, and B.F. Shaw, et al. 1979. *Cognitive therapy of depression*. NY: Guilford.

Benokraitis, N. 1998. Working in the ivory basement: Subtle sex discrimination in higher education. In L. H. Collins, J. C. Chrisler, & K. Quina, eds., *Career strategies for women in academe: Arming Athena.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Berryman-Fink, C., B. J. LeMaster, and K. A. Nelson. 2003. The Women's Leadership Program: A case study. *Liberal Education, 89 (1)*, 59-63.

Carli, L. L. and A. H. Eagly. 2001. Gender, hierarchy, and leadership: An introduction. *Journal of Social Issues, 57 (4)*, 629-636.

Carlyle, T. 1907. *Heros and hero worship*. Boston: Adams.

Committee on the Guide to Recruiting and Advancing Women Scientists and Engineers in Academia and the Committee on Women in Science and Engineering. 2006. *To recruit and advance: Women students and faculty in science and engineering.* Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.

Cortina, L. M. in press. Unseen injustice: Incivility as modern discrimination in organizations. *Academy of Management Review*.

Dovidio, J. F. 2001. On the nature of contemporary prejudice: The third wave. *Journal of Social Issues, 57 (4)*, 829-849.

Fernandez, E. and J. Sheffield. 1996. Relative contributions of life events versus daily hassles to the frequency and intensity of headaches. *Headache, 36 (10)*, 595-602.

Hall, R. M. and B. R. Sandler. 1982. *The Classroom Climate: a Chilly One for Women?* Washington, DC: Project on the Status and Education of Women, Association of American Colleges and Universities.

Heilman, M. E. 2001. Description and prescription: How gender stereotypes prevent women's ascent up the organizational ladder. *Journal of Social Issues, 57 (4)*, 657-674.

Hewlett, S. A. 2007. *Off-ramps and on-ramps: Keeping talented women on the road to success*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Publishing.

Madden, M. E. 2005. 2004 division 35 presidential address: Gender and leadership in higher education. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 29*, 3-14.

Marschke, R., S. Laursen, and J. M. Nielsen, et al. 2007. Demographic inertia revisited: An immodest proposal to achieve equitable gender representation among faculty in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education, 78 (1)*, 1-26.

Mason, M. A. and M. Goulden. 2002. Do babies matter?: The effect of family formation on the lifelong careers of academic men and women. Academe, 88, 21-27.

Nosek, B. A., M. R. Banaji, and A. G. Greenwald. 2002. Math = male, me = female, therefore math ≠ me. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 83 (1)*, 44-59.

Pierce, C., J. Carew and D. Pierce-Gonzalez, et al. D. 1978. An experiment in racism: TV commercials. In C. Pierce (Ed.), *Television and education* (pp. 62-88). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Ridgeway, C. L. 2001. Gender, status, and leadership. *Journal of Social Issues, 57 (4)*, 637-655.

Rolin, K. 2002. Gender and trust in science. *Hypatia, 17 (4)*, 95-118.

Settles, I. H., L. M. Cortina, and J. Malley, et al.. 2006. The climate for women in academic science: The good, the bad, and the changeable. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 30*, 47-58.

Skinner, B. F. 1953. *Science and human behavior*. NY: Macmillan.

Solorzano, D., M. Ceja, and T. Yosso. 2000. Critical race theory, racial microaggressions, and campus racial climate: The experiences of African American college students. *The Journal of Negro Education, 69 (1/2)*, 60-73.

Sue, D. W., C. M. Capodilupo, and G. C. Torino, et al. 2007. Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist, 62 (4)*, 271-286.

Valian, V. 1998. *Why so slow?: The advancement of women*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press.

Wenneras, C. and A. Wold. 1997. Nepotism and sexism in peer review. *Nature, 387 (22 May)*, 341-343.

Whitmire, R. 2007, July 20. The latest way to discriminate against women. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, B16.

Yoder, J. D. 2001. Making leadership work more effectively for women. *Journal of Social Issues, 57 (4)*, 815-828.

Published by the Forum on Public Policy

Figure 1

Representation of women in higher education (Data from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, 8/31/07)

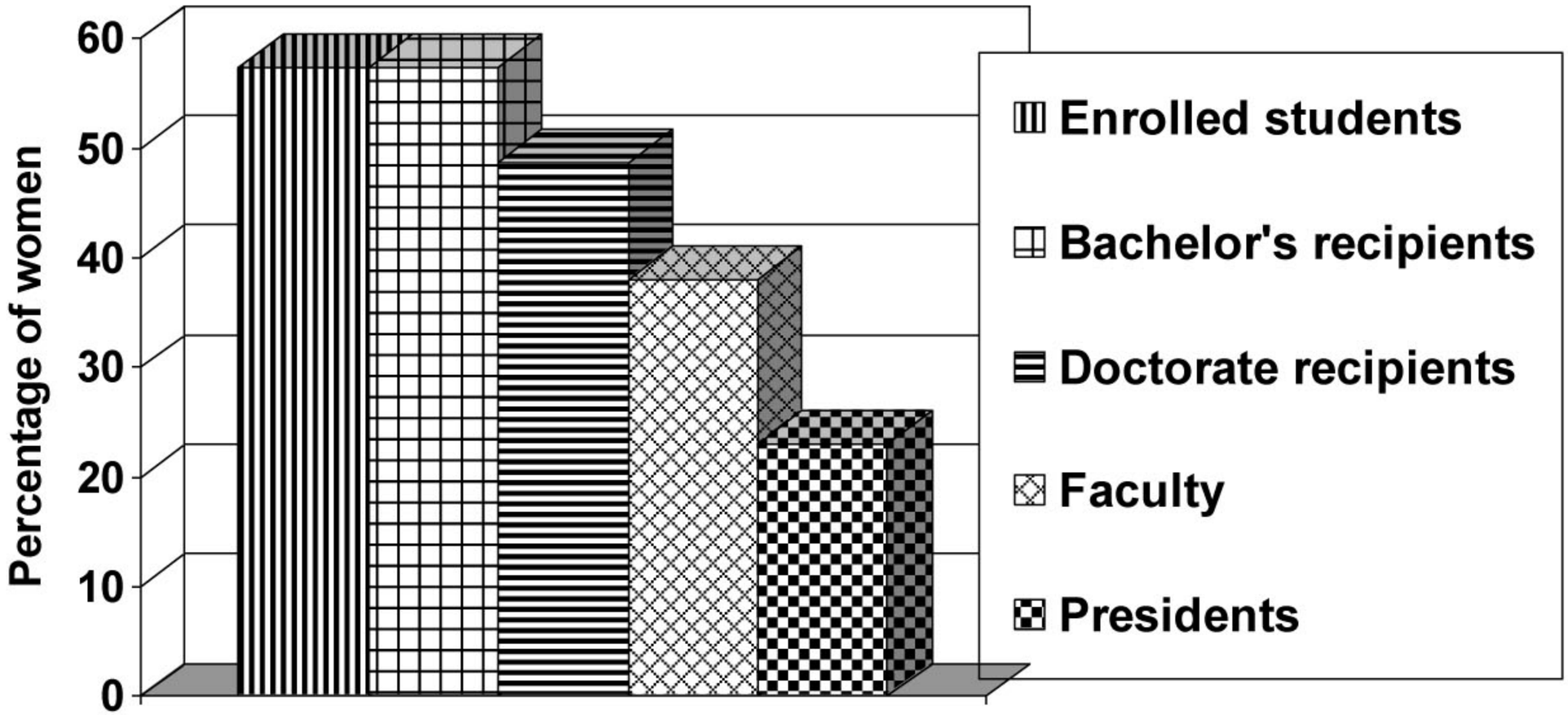

Table 1

Gender stereotypes: Types and consequences (based on the review by Heilman, 2001)

Gender Stereotypes		*Consequences*		*Contextual factors that increase the likelihood of these consequences*		*Outcome*
<u>Descriptive</u>: what women are like	→	<u>Biased evaluations</u>: Women ≠ leaders → failure is expected a) work is *devalued* b) work is *discredited*	→	a) Lack of clarity and structure of performance expectations and evaluation criteria (less meritocracy) b) Ability to attribute to mentor or other person	→	Less likelihood of advancement via poor evaluations
<u>Prescriptive</u>: how women should behave	→	<u>Penalties</u> for competence and other counter-stereotypic behavior: a) *personal derogation* (b**ch) b) *dislike*	→	Competence violates prescriptive stereotypes with increasing physical attractiveness	→	Less likelihood of advancement via social sanctions & rejections

Table 2

Proposed taxonomy of gender microaggressions

Theme	*Microaggression*	*Message*
A woman's place is… not in the academy	(Male chair who is a parent to female dean who chose not to have children) "Will you talk to my female faculty about the best time to have a baby?" (Male faculty member to female associate dean at the end of a meeting – both were participants; neither 'called' the meeting) "So, you'll summarize the meeting and send us notes?" (Male administrator, a fund raiser, to female faculty member) "Let me show you how I'm going to get that money" (motions to come closer as if to say something in a low voice then drapes his arm across her shoulders) (Male student in interdisciplinary program to male and female deans in an email) "Dear Dean Smith and Mrs. Johnson"	Women should be confined to gender stereotypic roles including child rearing, performing housekeeping tasks (note-taking being an academic housekeeping task), and being sexual partners ("Mrs." is heterosexist as well as sexist)
Backlash, tokenism, and anti-affirmative action	(Male faculty member upon learning about the institution being awarded a NSF ADVANCE grant, sarcastically) "So when will the men get a special program?" (Male department chair) "Yeah, there are some women who applied but none of them are good fits."	Women are inferior

	(Male search committee chair) "We put a woman on the search committee."	
The exclusive club	Male vice-presidents and deans spend extensive time playing golf, poker, or attending a sports event together; similarly ranked women who play golf, poker, and attend sports events are not invited to do so with the men. Male faculty member, coming upon a group of 3 women faculty, 'I better move along so I won't hear the secret password."	Our clubs should be separate: you are not welcome to join my club and I have no interest in your club
Passive-aggressive paternalism	Male faculty member: "Hi, Dean." Female dean: "I'd prefer you call me Karen." Male faculty member: "Oh, I couldn't do that, I respect your position." Female walking with male is closest to the door and holds it open; he says "oh, no, please, you first," she says, "it's OK, go ahead," he more loudly says, "I was raised to never go through the door before a woman, you have to go first."	I will passively resist women leaders (sometimes under the guise of social convention)

Table 3

Example of a cognitive analysis of a gender microaggression

Situation	*Thoughts*	*Feelings*	*Alternative Thoughts: ("what's a different way of looking at the situation?)*	*Alternative Feelings*
I walk by the President and Engineering Dean (2 men) walking in the opposite direction talking about the round of golf they played on Wednesday with donors; they said hi to me as they passed	Wow – that's more time in one day then I have spent with the President in total. I don't play golf so I couldn't do that if I wanted to. I don't know of any interests I share with the President.	Remote, diminished	That's an opportunity to learn a lot of information and put the College of Engineering (and its dean) in an advantageous position. The President has a responsibility to allot his efforts in a balanced way. I need to plan an activity with him and my donors.	Active, resolved

Table 4

Example of operant conditioning analysis of a gender microaggression

Situation: Gender microaggression by male chair to female dean: “Will you talk to my female faculty about the best time to have a baby?” Context: Assuming that deans determine resources of chairs, other things being equal, praise and agreement by deans are desired responses and disapproval is an undesired response.

	Subsequent gender microaggressions *increase* *(NOT recommended)*	Subsequent gender microaggressions *decrease* *(recommended)*
A response *occurs*	A desired response occurs (positive reinforcement), e.g., “A good thing to address, I’d be pleased to.”	An undesired response occurs (punishment), e.g., “It’s an outdated notion that only women can understand and be responsible for childrearing.”
A response *does not occur*	An undesired response does not occur (negative reinforcement), e.g., “That reminds me, I found someone else to do the graduate student orientation so you can go out of town after all.”	A desired response does not occur (extinction), e.g., the dean pointedly ignores the suggestion.