

# GENDER DYNAMICS IN PLANNING WORKPLACES

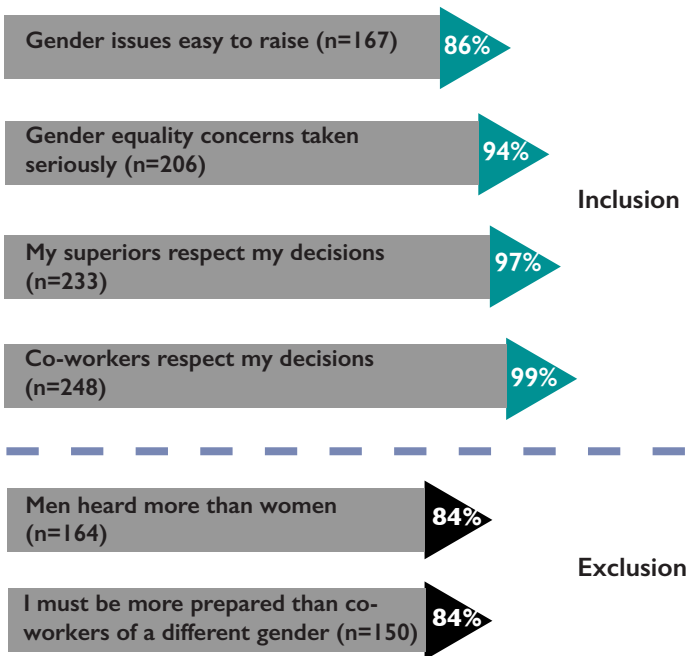
Marisa Turesky | Mildred Warner, PhD  
Gender Lens Issue Brief, March 2018  
Department of City and Regional Planning | Cornell University

## GENDER ISSUES ARE HEARD, BUT WOMEN ARE NOT

Planning workplaces are diversifying with respect to gender, but office culture and communication do not always reflect this change. This paper presents the results of a 2015 survey on Planning Workplace Dynamics, conducted in partnership with the Women and Planning Division of the American Planning Association (APA). The survey studied planners' workplace benefits (e.g. flexible time and parental leave policies) and communication practices (e.g. opportunities to voice gender concerns). According to the American Planning Association's website, planning is a career "that makes better places for everyone," (APA, 2017) but what about for planners themselves?

Ironically, a profession seeking to improve the lives of the public can neglect the equitable treatment of those within the profession, particularly for female planners. The results of the survey show where challenges exist for female planners, and workplace dynamics that could be improved to help mitigate such obstacles. **Although the mostly female respondents to the survey feel respected, with equal opportunities for pay and advancement, few feel equally heard and evaluated in their professional roles** (Figure 1). Changing such workplace dynamics is a challenge planners must address.

**FIGURE 1: WORK ENVIRONMENT**  
(% AGREE/STRONGLY AGREE)



Source: Women in Planning Workplace Dynamics Survey, 2015

## METHODOLOGY

The project, led by Professor Mildred Warner and A.C. Micklow, brought students from Cornell's Department of City and Regional Planning, Women's Planning Forum together with leaders of the Women and Planning Division of the APA (Jennie Gordon, Anna Kitces, and Fiona Atkins). The APA Divisions Council grant proposal, written collaboratively in Fall 2013, led to a semester-long workshop course on Gender and Aging in Spring 2014. Together, APA Women and Planning Division leaders and the Cornell students reviewed the gendered history of planning and new directions in planning for aging, and used their findings to design focus groups for the 2014 APA national conference in Atlanta. The focus group discussions were guided by three questions:

1. What is a gender lens in planning?
2. How do we apply a gender lens in practice?
3. What are the challenges of applying a gender lens?

Over forty focus group participants discussed how planning addresses the needs of women in planning practice and in workplace dynamics. The research team decided to separate the issues of planning for women, and women's experiences within the professional planning field into two separate surveys: one on planning practice relating to women and aging, and the other on workplace dynamics in the planning profession. For a summary of the survey on planning practice see Micklow et. al. (2015).



This project was conducted in collaboration with the Cornell Women's Planning Forum and the Women and Planning Division of the American Planning Association. Work was supported in part by an APA Divisions Council Grant. For more information see [www.mildredwarner.org/planning/genderlens](http://www.mildredwarner.org/planning/genderlens) and [www.planning.org/divisions/women](http://www.planning.org/divisions/women)



This issue brief describes the results of the 2015 national survey on workplace dynamics in the planning profession. We integrated the focus group feedback into an online survey, Planning Workforce Dynamics, which was launched in Spring 2015. The survey was advertised through multiple divisions of the APA (Small Town and Rural, Housing and Community Development, and Private Practice), and the APA's national monthly e-newsletter, Interact. The survey asked questions about workplace characteristics, work environment, work-life balance, salary, benefits, planner attitudes and actions, and respondent characteristics. 327 planners responded to our survey and 75 responded to open ended questions with additional information regarding gender in the planning workplace. Each survey question was analyzed based on its full response rate. We categorized these questions by position, gender, and benefits.

## RESPONDENT, WORKPLACE, AND COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

Of the 327 planners who responded to our 2015 survey, 160 answered all survey questions. The respondents who provided demographic information were 87% white, 83% female, and more than half were under 39 years old (59%). Most respondents worked in the public sector (79%), and at the local level (53%). Over one third were in management positions (37%). Most respondents were from the Northeast (30%) or the West (43%), and were from a principal city (63%) where the population size is greater than 250,000 people (45%). While management was mostly male (50%), non-management staff was balanced (45%) or mostly female (33%) (Figure 2).

## WORK ENVIRONMENT

The first section of the survey asked about communication of gender issues in planners' work environments. The majority of respondents indicated that gender issues were easy to raise (86%) and taken seriously when such issues were expressed (94%). Nevertheless, respondents overwhelmingly reported gender challenges in office communication. They reported men being heard in professional meetings more than women (84%), and needing to be more prepared than co-workers of a different gender (84%). When we separate the data based on respondents' gender, 90% of women agree that they must be more prepared, compared to 36% of male respondents. Despite such discrimination, respondents still felt that superiors (97%) and coworkers (99%) respect their decisions (Figure 1).

## FINDING GENDER BIAS

Despite general feelings of respect and acceptance, female planners still face barriers in daily professional interactions. One possible explanation may be that

**FIGURE 2: RESPONDENT CHARACTERISTICS**

<b>Race (n=256)</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
White	223	87
Black	12	5
Asian or Pacific Islander	15	6
Not listed	6	2
<b>Gender (n=259)</b>		
Man	39	15
Woman	216	83
Prefer not to answer	4	2
<b>Position in Workplace (n=257)</b>		
Management	95	37
Non-Management	162	63

## WORKPLACE CHARACTERISTICS

<b>Scope of Planning Practice (n=289)</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Local	154	53
Regional	98	34
State	22	8
National	15	5
<b>Gender of Management (n=287)</b>		
Mostly or all male	144	50
Balanced	69	24
Mostly or all female	74	26
<b>Gender of Non-Management (n=275)</b>		
Mostly or all male	61	22
Balanced	123	45
Mostly or all female	91	33

## COMMUNITY CHARACTERISTICS

<b>Population Size (n=249)</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
Less than 10,000	20	8
10,000-49,999	37	15
50,000-99,999	36	14
100,000-249,999	44	18
250,000-999,999	48	19
≤ 1 million	64	26
<b>Metropolitan Status (n=252)</b>		
Principal city/county	160	63
Other city/county within Metro Stat Area	66	26
Non-metropolitan	26	10
<b>Region (n=254)</b>		
Northeast	77	30
Midwest	32	13
South	37	15
West	108	43

Source: Women in Planning Workplace Dynamics Survey, 2015

planning for gender is less personal, while professional interactions show the prejudice women face in daily workplace behavior. **Unconscious bias** can lead to a lack of recognition and value of women's voices. Women must over-prepare in order to achieve such acknowledgement. This is true despite the fact that over 97% of respondents report their decisions are respected. Why the disconnect? **Gender issues can be raised, women are respected, but men are still more likely to be heard.** Is it the case that planning places are still masculine in terms of behaviors and communication? Respondents elaborated on gendered communication in the open-ended section of the survey. In the comments section, a number of female respondents said that **men interrupt women** during professional conversations and meetings, or **disrespect women's professional knowledge.** One planner explains:

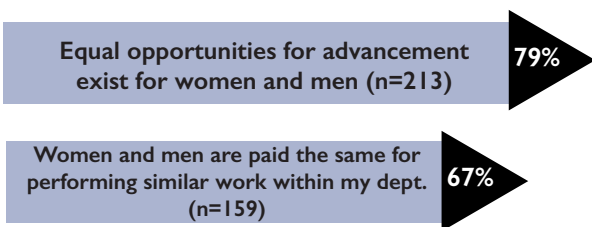
My other female co-worker...and I have gotten used to not asking work related questions of certain male co-workers because of the same patronizing responses we get. "Did you look in the zoning code?" was a common response to a typical question. Gosh, it never occurred to me as a professional planner, to look - \*gasp\* in the zoning code! Or cutting us off before we finish our question, by answering what they assume to be our question. Which it never is. ...Because I'm not at all inclined to want to casually ask them about their thoughts or experiences, for fear of being patronized or belittled, it can be a breeding ground for inconsistency. It is really frustrating.

Gender bias in workplace interactions is just one example of the barriers women face in communicating and engaging as professionals.

## GENDER EQUITY

The survey also asked respondents about salary and benefits in their workplaces. **Sixty-seven percent of respondents indicated that they believe women and men have equal pay for equal work in their department and 79% experienced equal opportunities for advancement, regardless of gender** (Figure 3).

**FIGURE 3: GENDER EQUITY (% AGREE)**



Source: Women in Planning Workplace Dynamics Survey, 2015

## Strategies for Equal Pay & Advancement

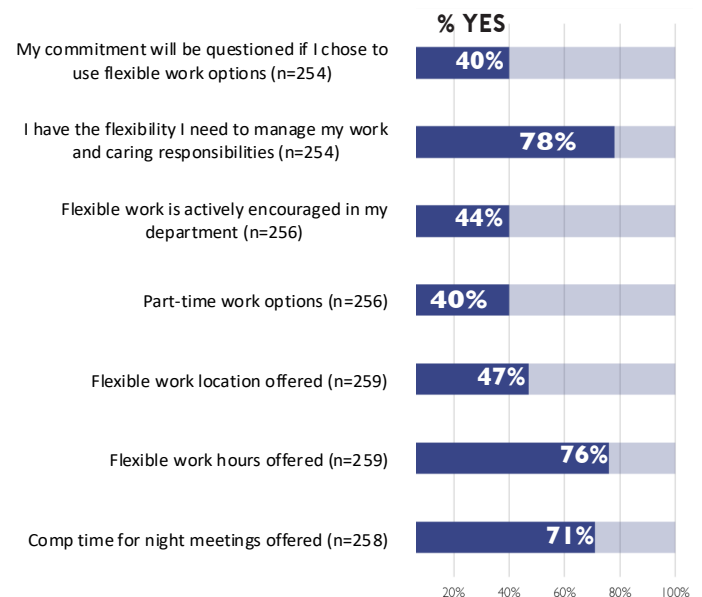
The comments section explored women's disadvantage in professional opportunities: "I am considering leaving this position because there is no career progression track. ...There are no real mentoring opportunities, they only exist on paper."

The equality that some planners experience in daily interactions does not necessarily translate to structural gender equity, such as leadership opportunities. Equal access to professional social networks, mentorship, and work-life balance are key factors that can improve women's promotional opportunities (Eagly & Chin, 2010; Eagly & Carli, 2007).

## WORK-LIFE BALANCE

The survey measured the kinds of benefits offered by planning organizations to balance work and care burdens. Of the 254 respondents, 40% said that their commitment would be questioned if they chose to use flexible work options. Still, 78% of respondents indicated that they had the flexibility to manage work and caring responsibilities. When asked whether such flexible work was actively encouraged, a majority said no (66%). Only 40% offered part-time work options and 47% indicated that their workplace offered flexible work location. Survey respondents indicated that 71% of their workplaces offer compensatory time for night meetings, and 76% offered flexible work hours (Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4: WORK-LIFE BALANCE**



Source: Women in Planning Workplace Dynamics Survey, 2015

A policy's existence does not necessarily mean a worker can take advantage of it without penalty. Some respondents explained that while **flexible schedules**

are offered, “they are **strongly discouraged in practical terms...**” Numerous female respondents wrote about experiences in which they were perceived as less diligent than their male counterparts when they used flexible work policies to care for children:

Working moms are also treated differently than working dads. It is viewed as a negative, or an unreliability for a mom to be working. I might need a day off or work from home or need an hour here or there to attend to my son. For men, it's treated as 'oh what a good dad to help out and be involved.'

This quote speaks to the **different expectations for women and men.**

### Flexible Work Options

While flexible work was tolerated, but not encouraged, the majority felt that they had the flexibility they needed. Planners often must attend meetings at night and on weekends to engage public participation. Such **nontraditional work hours help planners meet the needs of a diverse community, but they create challenges for planners' work-life balance.** Considering women still face a disproportionate care burden, such non-standard work hours may further disadvantage women (McKinsey 2017).

Although they make up almost half the workforce in the US, women are often forced out of the labor market in order to balance care responsibilities (Curran 2017). Workers with care burdens require more flexible workplace policies to meet their personal and professional needs (Slaughter 2015). However, taking advantage of flexibility policies can lead to wage penalties, lower evaluations, and fewer promotions (Williams et al. 2013). When providing flexibility policies we must also address the stigma associated with accessing such benefits (Hipp et al. 2016). Parental leave policies might exist, but the resulting stigma shows that **workplace expectations are still grounded in gender-conforming behavior.** Women, as well as men, need to be supported when they take advantage of flexible work hours.

### LEAVE POLICIES

The survey also asked about the different kinds of leave policies offered at respondents' workplaces. We found that 74% of respondents indicated that their workplace offered paid leave to care for an elderly family member or sick child, and 50% of respondents' workplaces allowed them to split a parental leave period with a partner. Even more respondents had access to parental leave (81%), with less than half reporting that such policies were paid (42%) or partial pay (37%). Respondents with access to parental leave could select multiple ways in which they were able to take advantage of such a policy (e.g. both paid and unpaid leave) (Figure 5).

**FIGURE 5: DOES YOUR WORKPLACE OFFER...**

Survey Item	Yes (%)
Paid leave to take care of an elderly family member or sick child (n=208)	74
Parental Leave (n=206)	81
Split parental leave with a partner (n=144)	50
<b>Is parental leave... (check all that apply)</b>	
Paid (n=64)	42
Partial pay (n=56)	37
Unpaid (n=69)	46

Source: Women in Planning Workplace Dynamics Survey, 2015

### Policy Versus Practice

Similar to respondents' reluctance to take advantage of flexible work options, planners also can be **uncomfortable using leave policies.** A respondent in a predominantly male-managed, small, non-profit on the West Coast said, “it's intimidating even asking for a sick day off for myself to take care of my own needs.” Although this planner found that her coworkers and supervisors respected her decisions as a planner, she was apprehensive about accessing the leave policy. One respondent, a manager in a large office managed and staffed primarily by women, expanded on flexible work options: “One of our firm's principals was the first person to have a baby while working at the company, and also needed to work remotely for three years while a spouse was in school in a different part of the country. I think these factors have significantly influenced our leave policy [and] flexible work schedule.”

### LEADERSHIP

**Management can lead the way to offer inclusive leave policies that create more work-life balance, particularly for female planners.** Of planners surveyed, 25% worked for predominantly female managers. Respondents in such **female managed workplaces perceived more equitable communication, benefits, wages, and opportunities for advancement** compared to respondents in male managed planning offices (Figure 6). We found that respondents with female management were less likely to report that men are more likely to be heard than women (80% versus 91%) but both numbers are quite high, suggesting more work needs to be done on office dynamics. However, respondents in female managed departments are more likely to report equal pay for equal work (87%) compared to male management (55%). In female managed offices, perceptions of equal professional growth were more prevalent (95%) compared to male managed offices (65%) (Figure 6).

## Female Managers Matter

Women make up 42% of planners but are still underpaid and underrepresented as compared to men in planning management positions (American Planning Association Salary Survey, 2016; Johnson and Crum-Cano, 2011). According to the APA's salary survey (2016), the typical annual earnings of male planners is \$7,700 more than the typical female planner. A confounding factor of the wage gap, however, might be that women have, on average, 2.4 fewer years of experience than males, and experience positively correlates to higher wage earnings (<https://www.planning.org/salary/>).

Female managers can be more active in dismantling gender segregation than male managers (Stainback et al. 2016), as the following respondent's experience with issues of communication shows:

[Male coworkers] assume we're asking a ridiculously simple question, rather than the actual subjective or nuanced question that we were just looking for some professional input on. It's extremely detrimental to fostering a collaborative environment and forces us into silos... Luckily the other women planners in our department are VERY collaborative. I know it's a basic, basic premise, but I can't overstate how important it is to have women in leadership and men who recognize the importance and value of gender diversity.

Although every member of an organization can influence inclusivity and equity, **managers often hold the power to challenge or reinforce gendered biases.** Managers can hold biases that perpetuate gender segregation within a single office. Such segregation can lead to unequal opportunities for women, such as promotions:

The Director of my department instructs me to

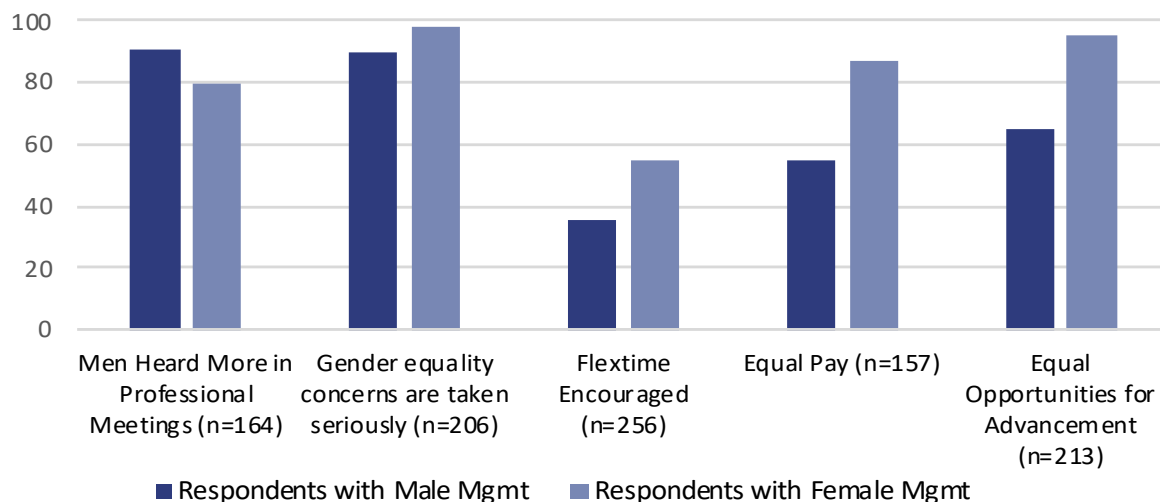
go through my supervisor (and not communicate with him directly), but I notice other colleagues are not restricted in this way. I am not invited to meetings as often as my male counterparts. Access to management appears easier to obtain for males than females for policy/planning matters. It seems females who are handling administrative functions, however, do have access to management. In this way, if this observation is true, I believe males could easily outcompete females due to access biases. In other words, it is still not an even playing field for women in my workplace, even if the rules in place are the same.

Accessing certain social networks is important to advancement opportunities, and **women often face greater challenges in accessing such networks** (Eagly & Chin, 2010). This means that fewer women will have support and mentorship, which can bolster opportunities for promotions. Exclusive communication, whether in professional meetings or social gatherings, can mean less institutional support for women in particular. A survey respondent with all male management and largely male staff explained her experience:

Gender discrimination in my rural-county workplace is not allowing women access to critical information: meetings, lunches, discussions, decisions, training, and networking. There is very much a "boys club" mentality among my department's managers; women are simply kept out of the room because they may bring up a perspective that differs from the male manager's. ...[W]omen in such workplaces simply choose not to "lean in" during the later career stage when the highest leadership positions become available.

The experiences expressed by these planners show the importance of **equitable communication** for

**FIGURE 6: RESPONDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF WORKPLACE GENDER EQUITY BASED ON THEIR MANAGERS' GENDER (% AGREE)**



Source: Women in Planning Workplace Dynamics Survey, 2015

all genders for both daily experiences of inclusion and for long-term career advancement opportunities. Although women might be bound to workplace rules, men may break them because they have significant relationships with those in power. Such relationships can allow certain staff to access essential information. Managers' biases can ensure that minority perspectives, such as those of women, remain on the fringe.

Another respondent expressed her perspective that it "shouldn't be the job of the non-management to figure out how to have a voice in the organization. [It is] the **responsibility of management to create a more inclusive office culture** so staff is treated equitably."

Management's responsibility is not only to set the standard but also model the way forward for workplace justice. **Survey results show female managers tend to pay more attention to issues of equality (for pay and advancement) than their male counterparts.** Female managers may be disproportionately practicing a transformational leadership style, which allows for discussion of gender issues and gendered behaviors (Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, and Engen, 2003). Stainback et al. (2016) find that women in top management roles tend to serve as "agents of change" within their organizations. They develop the leadership potential among other women, dismantling organizational gender segregation. When managers practice transformational leadership, they make space for a greater diversity of voices, improving the organizational trajectory (Bass and Avolio: 1993).

## CONCLUSION

Planning is a **feminizing field**. A majority of planning workplaces in our survey employ an equal or higher proportion of women in non-management positions (77%), and planning students are predominantly female (PAB 2016). **The 2015 Women and Planning Divisions' Workplace Dynamics survey shows that while planning organizations are gender-inclusive spaces in terms of respect, they lag in communication and benefits. Women's leadership tends to mitigate some workplace disparities.** As planners seek to reach out to a more diverse community (Micklow & Warner, 2014), we must also look inward on how we can accommodate a changing workforce. Much progress has been made, but much work needs to be done.

## SOURCES

American Planning Association Salary Survey (2016).

Bass, B. and Avolio, B. (1993). Transformational Leadership and Organizational Culture. *Public Administration Quarterly*, 112-121.

Curran, W. (2017). *Gender and Gentrification*. New York, NY: Routledge

Eagly, A., and Carli, L. (2007). *Through the Labyrinth*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press

Eagly, A. and Chin, J.L. (2010). Diversity and Leadership in a Changing World. *American Psychologist*. 65(3), 216-224.

Eagly, A.; Johannesen-Schmidt, M.; and Engen, M. (2003). Transformational, Transactional, and Laissez-Faire Leadership Styles: a Meta-Analysis Comparing Women and Men, *Psychological Bulletin*. 129(4), 569-591.

Hipp, L; Morrissey, T; Warner, M.E., (2016). Who Participates and Who Benefits from Employer-Provided Child-Care Assistance? *Journal of Marriage and Family*. 79(3), 614-635.

Johnson, B. and Crum-Cano, B. (2011). Glass Walls in Urban Planning: An Examination of Policy Type and Gender Segregation Within a Profession, *Review of Public Personnel Administration*, 1-24.

McKinsey & Company. (2017). *Women Matter: Time to Accelerate Ten Years of Insights into Gender Diversity*. New York: McKinsey & Company.

Micklow, A.C. Kancilia, B. Warner, M.E. (2015). "The Need to Plan for Women," *Planning with a Gender Lens Issue Brief*, Cornell University, Ithaca, NY. <http://cms.mildredwarner.org/p/233>

Micklow, A.C., Warner, M.E.. (2014). Not Your Mother's Suburb: Remaking Communities for a More Diverse Population. *Urban Lawyer*. 46(4), 729-751.

Stainback, K., Kleiner, S., Skaggs, S. (2016). Women in Power: Undoing or Redoing the Gendered Organization. *Gender and Society*. 31(1), 109-135.

Williams, J., Blair-Loy, M., and Berdahl, J. (2013). Cultural Schemas, Social Class, and the Flexibility Stigma, *Journal of Social Issues*, 62(2), 209-234.