Work Climate, Gender, and the Status of Practicing Anthropologists

Report Commissioned by the Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology

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Executive Summary

Background: The Committee on the Status of Women in Anthropology (COSWA) is committed to equal opportunity for anthropologists in all work settings. Recognizing that a significant number of anthropology PhDs and nearly all alumni from master's programs are employed in positions other than as full-time university and college professors, in 2004 COSWA expanded its mission to become more inclusive of and to seek ways to connect to practicing anthropologists. To this end, COSWA designed and administered two work climate surveys to assess the gendered dimensions of anthropological work practice. This report contains the findings from COSWA's 2007 survey to assess the work climate of non-university and college-based practicing anthropologists. This document explores the gendered dimensions of the work environments of applied and practicing anthropologists, and provides the American Anthropological Association (AAA) with recommendations to make the AAA, in general, and COSWA, in particular, more inclusive of non-academically based anthropologists.

Methods: The survey instrument was developed by a nine person team that included a mix of full-time practitioners employed outside of academia and faculty members of applied anthropology departments. The survey was administered online through Zarca in the late fall and early winter of 2007. Because the AAA does not have a database of practicing anthropologists employed outside of academia, we needed to use a variety of resources to obtain the sample. Invitations were emailed to 6086 members of the American Anthropological Association's Applied Anthropology email proxy group, and the survey advertised to a snowball sample through list serve postings and personal contacts, and through applied anthropology departmental alumni networks. The survey consisted of 78 questions, 20 of which were open-ended. Content analysis was aided by Atlas-ti, a qualitative data management program, and quantitative analyses were conducted in SPSS 14.0.

The Sample: 437 respondents participated in the survey. Overall, the sample was predominantly characterized by white women holding the PhD between the ages of 30 and 69. These respondents most typically lived in domestic partnerships (without dependent children), were employed in private/for-profit organizations or in government, and earned $50,000-$79,000 a year. Many of them (49% of the sample) earned income through two or more sources over the previous two year period. While this demographic profile reflects the majority of respondents, the sample included a range of other individuals enabling some comparisons by gender, ethnicity, and work sector.

Work Climate: Signs of positive work climate include reported gender equality in hours worked and mentoring by survey respondents. Areas for improvement included the ratio of men to women employed in management and administration positions, and mentoring practices. Certain sectors of employment are particularly male top-heavy, including engineering, international development organizations, fisheries, military, national park services, and CRM. Being a young woman, in particular, remained challenging in work spheres where white, heterosexual, men continued to dominate. This observation is compounded by race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Minorities also tend to be underrepresented in top administrative and managerial positions, and are perceived to be more often relegated to field work, tech, or support roles. However, minority respondents reported very similar fields of employment as non-minority respondents. Mentoring relationships are less often developed for women practitioners than for men. Moreover, many practicing anthropologists work for organizations that do not offer formal mentoring programs, and therefore employees rely on informal networks to develop mentor-mentee relationships.

In addition to gender, a variety of factors influence perceptions of work climate for practicing anthropologists, including family status, race and ethnicity, age, and disciplinary background**.** Age is a factor that can cut both ways; at times and in certain fields of employment (e.g., international development, national park service, the military), older and more experienced employees are preferred, whereas in other fields (e.g., advertising), younger employees are preferred. Young women, however, are singled out more so than young men as faced with a "chilly climate" in a variety of employment fields.   Disciplinary background can also impact negatively one's work climate, especially in sectors dominated by hard sciences, economics, or business.

Work and Family: With respect to a "family-friendly" work environment, practicing anthropologists report this area to be weak both in policy and practice. Less than half of the practitioners in the sample were employed in organizations with formal leave policies, and therefore the majority of employees relied on informal practices to attend to familial responsibilities. Moreover, while managers are reported to schedule work activities at times that do not conflict with care giving, practicing anthropologists perceive animosity from co-workers without such responsibilities. Observations about the impact of family responsibilities on hours worked or perceptions of work climate were not gendered; both women and men are reported as facing the same issues in achieving a work-family balance.

Reflections on Practicing Anthropology: For practicing anthropologists, linear career trajectories are the exception rather than the norm. This aspect of career development distinguishes many practitioners from their colleagues who work in full-time academic positions, where career paths tend to be highly proscribed. In planning their careers, practicing anthropologists in the survey reported that obtaining job security, opportunities for professional advancement, searching for on-the-job satisfaction, and the pursuit of work-family balance are very important in making their professional decisions. In some circumstances, career options are limited by structural forces such as company reorganizations or budgetary cutbacks. Practitioner respondents reported that their initial entry into the world of anthropological practice (beyond the academy) was facilitated by networks that typically originated in their home anthropology departments when they were students.   It is of interest to note that "teaching" was reported by this many practitioners as a primary work activity. Thus, while many practitioners are not full time academically employed, they are contributing to the education of anthropology students. In essence, networking through faculty, previous employment, or internships was essential for most respondents as they searched for positions as practicing anthropologists. This pattern suggests that anthropology programs should emphasize networking skills with students and help facilitate their learning to expand their professional contacts during the time they are students.

Practicing anthropologists do not feel valued by the anthropology profession or discipline, both

of which are perceived as catering primarily to academic anthropologists. Negative experiences with the broader discipline are perpetuated through mentoring relationships between faculty and students. Reportedly, anthropology students are advised into academic careers as priority positions, with non-academic placements treated as second class, or not even acknowledged as a possibility. The devaluing of practicing anthropology is reflected in lack of training and preparation for applied research.

Reflections on the AAA: Practitioners report that they are largely dissatisfied with programs and services provided by the AAA, although there is some recognition of change. Principally, the organization is perceived as catering to academic anthropologists, and lacking relevance to the work experiences of practitioners. Continued efforts to expand sessions and workshops focused on the practical dimensions of anthropology were reported as very much needed to improve the divide. Despite the overwhelming sentiment that the AAA and anthropological profession do not value the work of practicing anthropologists, a vast majority of respondents write with great passion about the work they do, and report that they would not alter their career paths should they have an opportunity to start over.

Recommendations: Based on survey responses, we suggest that the AAA (1) increase sessions at the AAA meetings that address the career interests and research expertise of practicing anthropologist; (2) expand opportunities for students to build professional skill sets; (3) support career services and interviewing for nonacademic positions at the AAA meetings and online; and (4) increase the representation in articles and reviews of books by practitioners within the *American Anthropologist* and other AAA publications. Specific to COSWA, we recommend that COSWA (1) publicizes its mentorship program in the *Anthropology News* and online, and diversify mentors by sector of employment; (2) sponsor sessions (or webinars) for employers and coworkers on strategies to mitigate and improve perceptions of work climate, as related to gender, age, ethnicity, and familial status; (3) offer seminars in mobile work technology as a strategy to facilitate work-life balance or ease care giving responsibilities; and (4) sponsor networking hours at the AAA meetings for women practitioners.