

Invisible Women in Comprehensive Plans

May 2022

Supervisors: Mildred Warner, Xue Zhang; Authors: Chun Xu, Yu Wang, Jieyi Jin, Qianling Liu



Issues

- **Male bias exists in traditional planning paradigms.** Planning tries to be “neutral” but actually targets a small group of the population: 25-55 years old; androgenous workers. Even within this group, diversity exists and everyone has to adapt.
- **Women’s needs are often neglected.** An APA 2014 survey found 2% of plans address the needs of women, this jumped to 12% of plans in an ICMA survey in 2019, but still women account for a small portion compared to other groups.

Main Findings

A review of 80 comprehensive plans looking at word frequency on identities (i.e. women) and planning elements:

- **Neutral is not neutral.** Among all identities, women are mentioned the least and mostly in demographic information. Although planning language is gender-neutral, its outcomes are not.
- **Comprehensive plans need to be updated.** Some concepts, like trip chaining, accessibility, care work, complete streets and universal design, do not appear in many plans.
- **Does gender ride the family / child / aging train?** Women’s needs might be addressed via attention to children and aging, because of women's role as care providers. Gender sensitive planning can benefit women by giving their time back. But when "family" is mentioned in plans, it is usually single-family housing, which often does not address women’s needs.
- **When can women get their own car?** Women need to be more involved in the planning process. Physical design issues such as safety and trip chaining, are rarely mentioned. Economic development typically ignores care work. Inattention to women's needs leads to their marginalization.

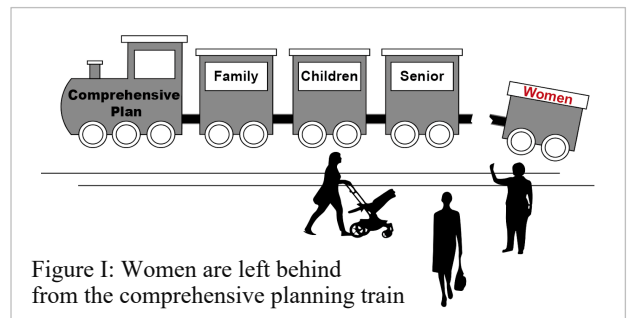


Figure I: Women are left behind from the comprehensive planning train

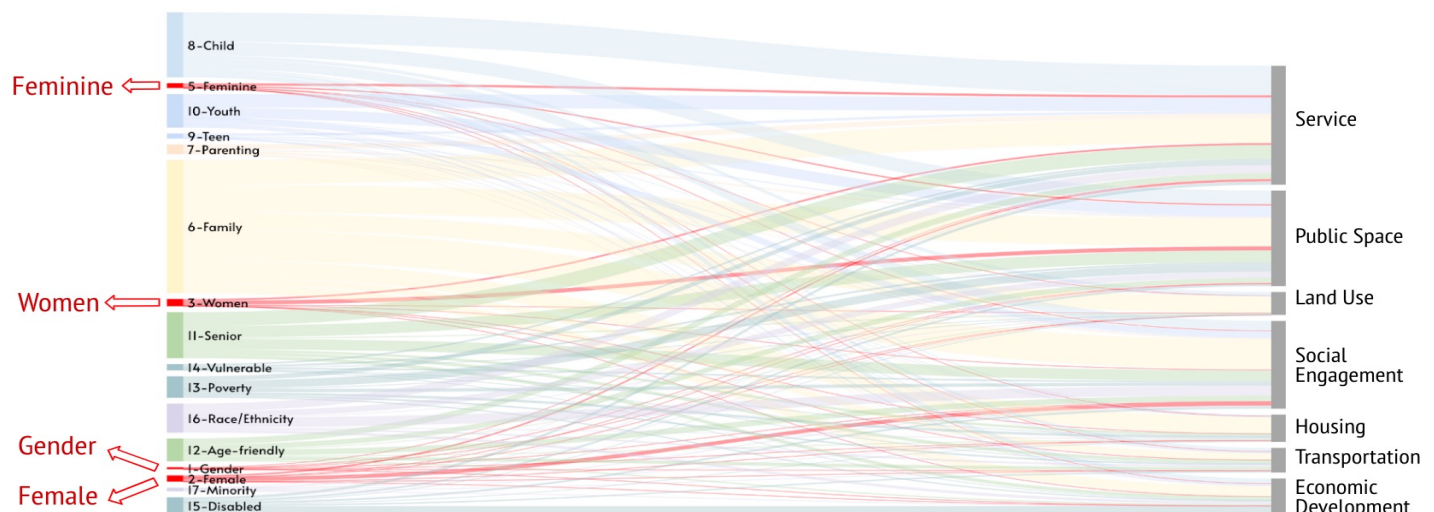
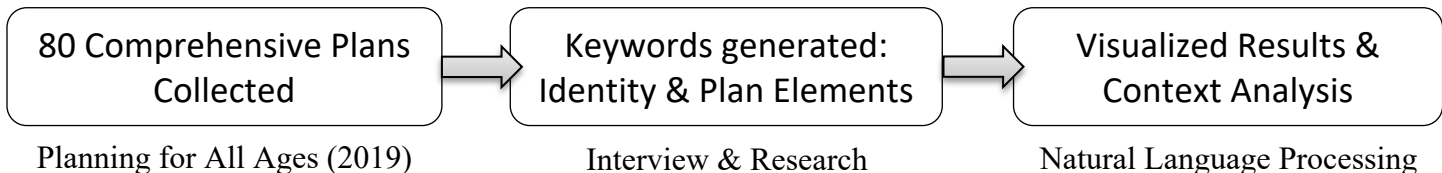


Figure II: Connections between **Identities** and **Planning Elements** (in total 86,000 matches)

Methodology



Analytical Results

- **“Women”** are mentioned at least once in only **40%** of the 80 comprehensive plans, while other identities appear in twice as many plans.
- **“Women”** only account for **4%** of all 9,000 records of identity words found in the comprehensive plans.
- **“Women”** are mentioned with respect to “public space”, “social engagement” and “service”. However, even in these elements, “women” is still the least mentioned identity, accounting for around **6%**.
- **“Women”** rarely appear in “Transportation”, “Housing” and “Land Use”.

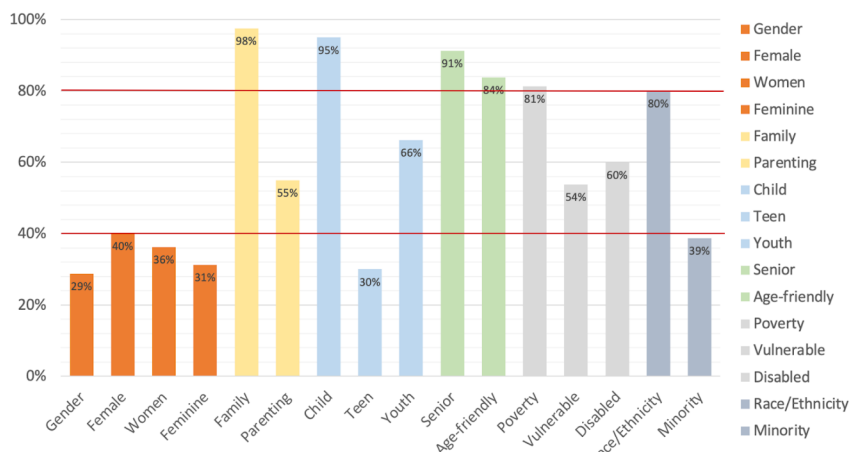


Figure III: How many plans mention these identities **at least once**? (in total 80 plans)

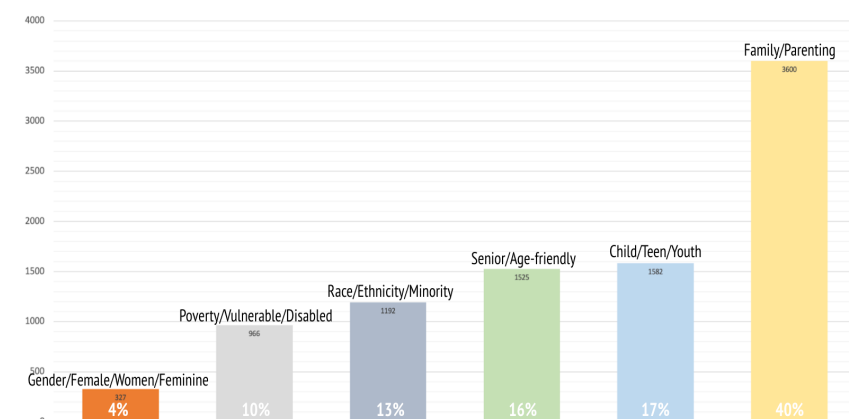


Figure IV: Identities' **frequency** in 80 comprehensive plans (in total 9,000 words)

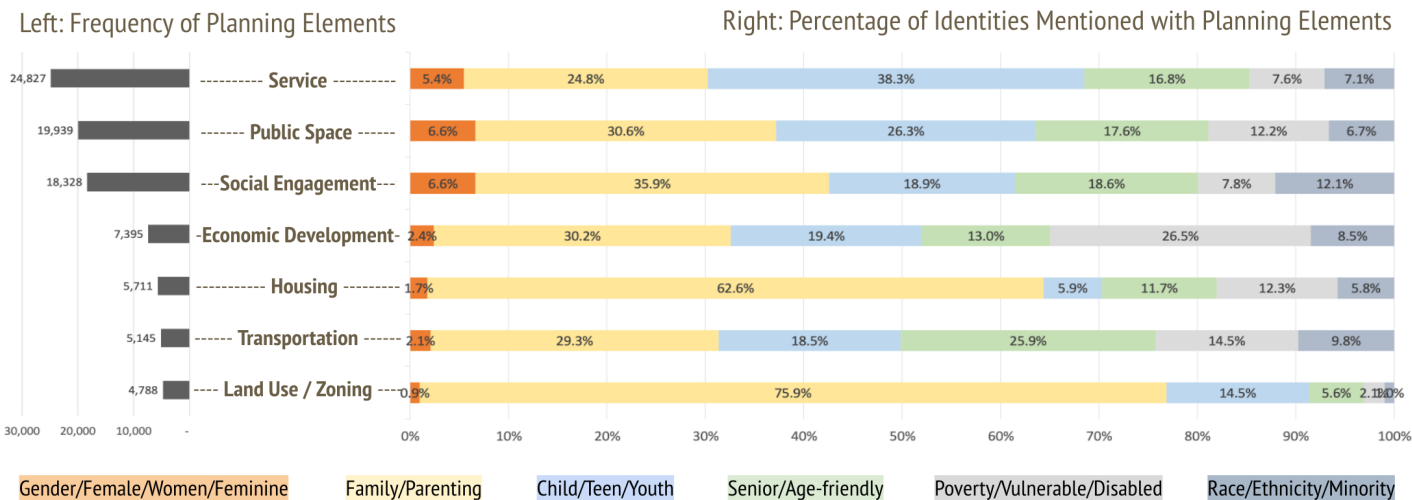


Figure V: Planning elements' **frequency & Identities distribution** by planning elements (in total 86,000 matches)

Scenarios

Women as Residents

- **Experience higher poverty** → Need affordable housing and public transit
- **Public engagement** → Need multiple channels for participation and diverse time options

Women today still face a substantial wage gap. The pandemic has even upended the labor market, which is especially harmful for working women.



I am much more engaged in community events than when I was younger, since being present in person is not always possible for a working mother.



Women as Workers

Labor force participation among women has increased sharply.

- **Economic development** → Women need employment, promotion and training opportunities
- **Physical environment** → Calls for attention to walkability of public transit, and safety

While my opinions are respected overall, men are more likely to be heard than women in professional meetings.



I usually take a bus home, but nighttime routes are so limited. Besides, safety is also a huge concern for the last half mile home.



Women as Care-providers

Women shoulder the brunt of unpaid labor and household chores.

- **Trip chaining** → Calls for attention to mobility for care responsibilities
- **Childcare** → Need care supports in economic development, and mixed land use and diverse housing options

After taking the kids to their schools and my mom to her medical appointment, now it's time for groceries. Worse, the provision of a bus home is far from satisfactory.



Footpaths are often not targeted for snow-removal and the pavements are so narrow and rough for the baby stroller! My mom offers help to care for kids but has nowhere to live.



Exemplary Plans

Austin, TX (2018)

- More **affordable housing** will be distributed throughout the city.
- The city will be **walkable** and **bikeable**, and be linked by **transit** to jobs and other centers.
- Implement policies that create, nurture, and retain **women-owned business**.
- **Connect** housing to jobs, child care, schools, retail, and other amenities and services needed on a daily basis.

Laguna Hills, CA (2017)

- Help “Special needs” groups find **decent and affordable housing**, including senior households, agricultural workers, **female-headed households**, disabled persons, large households, and the homeless.
- **Single-parent families with children** often require special attention due to their needs for **affordable childcare, health care, and housing assistance**.

Mobile County, AL (2015)

- Enhance the availability of **affordable housing**.
- Promote initiatives that strategically increase the growth and success of **women-owned businesses**.
- Implement a **Complete Streets approach** to roadway design.
- Prioritize **sidewalk and streetscaping improvements** that connect to schools.
- Invest in **multimodal transportation options**.