

Feeling Like an “Odd Duck”: The Experiences of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x Planning Practitioners

ABSTRACT

Problem, research strategy, and findings: African Americans/Blacks and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x practitioners are underrepresented in the planning profession. This article examines these practitioners’ experience with the climate for diversity in their workplaces. Drawing from a survey of 3,005 APA members, we show that African Americans/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x practitioners experience significantly higher rates of bias and discrimination than other groups. Interviews with 24 African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners across the U.S. reinforce the narrative that these racial and ethnic groups working in the field of planning continue to face racism, discrimination, and microaggressions in the workplace, and this affects the impact of their work in planning practice.

Takeaway for practice: Given the potential negative consequences of the lack of diversity and inclusion at work along with the presence of discrimination/microaggressions, this study shows that it is necessary not only to increase diversity in the workplace, but also to make create inclusive work environments. Practicing planners concluded that cross-cultural communication and anti-racist training can help planners plan with ethnically and racially diverse communities and practice inclusivity, both in the workplace among their colleagues and in communities of difference. But trainings will not be enough, for substantial change to occur, major shifts are needed in the profession as a whole—including APA and ACSP.

KEYWORDS:

Diversity, microaggressions, race, ethnicity, inclusion, equity, racism

INTRODUCTION

The killing of George Floyd in police custody reignited nationwide demonstrations calling to end systemic racism. Tens-of-thousands of organizations made statements committing to anti-racist practices. In its statement, the American Planning Association (APA) reaffirmed its commitment to create “great communities for all” (APA 2020, 1). With the goal of recognizing and eradicating “the bad policy decisions of the past,” the APA statement also spoke about its diversity and inclusion efforts such as its Planning for Equity Policy Guide, and the AICP Code of Ethics (APA 2020, 1).

Here, we discuss findings from a joint APA and the Association of Collegiate Schools of Planning (ACSP) initiative focused on assessing the climate for diversity within planning workplaces. “Climate for diversity,” throughout this article, refers to the degree of openness or closedness that any given organization has towards diverse individuals along the dimensions of race and ethnicity (García et al. 2020). This study was initiated in 2017 when members from ACSP’s Planners of Color Interest Group (POCIG) approached APA’s and ACSP’s Diversity Committees to propose a survey and interviews to understand the perceptions of practicing planners around issues of diversity and inclusion in their workplaces. As a planner put it, she felt like an “odd duck” in her work environment. This article focuses specifically on the ways in which African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x¹ planners experience the climate for diversity in their respective planning organizations.

We begin by reviewing literature on how planning organizations engage with and address issues of race and ethnicity. After, we argue that embracing racial and ethnic diversity is a necessary component to realize equity planning and discuss how interpersonal discrimination and microaggressions manifest in the workplace, including tokenism and stereotyping. We also

outline implications for planning practitioners and strategies that could be implemented (e.g. cross-cultural communication and anti-racism training) not only to create an inclusive climate in the workplace but to also further racial and ethnic equity in planning practice.

In the methods we detail our analysis of a nationwide survey of 3,005 APA members and 24 in-depth interviews with African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x practitioners. Seven themes emerged from the interviews: (1) tokenism and isolation, (2) mistreatment, (3) disrespect/mockery, (4) questioning qualifications, (5) stereotyping and profiling as aggressive, (6) bias in hiring and promotion and, (7) strategies to address bias and discrimination. The conclusion presents recommendations such as cross-cultural communication and anti-racist training that planning organizations can offer to improve the climate for racial and ethnic diversity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Efforts Toward Racial and Ethnic Inclusion within ACSP and APA

ACSP members have long recognized that the planning profession and academy have failed to create an inclusive climate that is conducive to attracting and retaining African Americans/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x individuals, which hurts planning education and practice. Since the Civil Rights Movement, Black planners have been: “[A]n essential aspect of a larger strategy for rapidly increasing the supply of effective black planning professionals, while at the same time creating an American planning education process that is relevant to the ideal of a multiracial, urban, post-industrial society” (Mitchell et al.1970, 2). Similarly, in the late 1970s Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners started to offer a framework for how a younger generation of educated planners was “willing to endorse changes oriented towards redressing the ravages of racism on urban society” (Diaz 2005, 109).

To further inclusion efforts in the planning academy, POCIG started to organize informal meetings at ACSP's 2006 annual meeting and was formally recognized as an ACSP interest group in April 2007. The mission of POCIG is to "advance the interests and concerns of people and communities of color within planning academia and the profession" (POCIG 2020, 1). In 2013, ACSP created a Committee on Diversity to implement the goals of a Diversity Task Force. The Committee's main aims include reporting to the ACSP's Governing Board on evaluations, strategic planning implementation, and program assistance to planning faculty and students for assessing diversity and developing inclusive curricula (Committee on Diversity 2020).²

For the planning profession, APA's Ethical Principles in Planning outline several important values that planners should have that relate to diversity and equity in planning, including to: "treat fairly and comment responsibly on the professional views of colleagues and members of other professions," "contribute time and effort to groups lacking adequate planning resources," and "plan for the needs of disadvantaged groups and persons" (APA 2016). Supporting these principles, APA has created several divisions, such as Latinos in Planning (LAP) and Planning and the Black Community Division (PBCD). LAP has worked to unite Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners in the profession and to identify the unique issues that affect Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x communities (LAP 2020). LAP sponsored an initiative that resulted in a book *Diálogos: Placemaking in Latino Communities* (2012), the Diálogo on the Border Conference (2013), and a conference final report (2014). Likewise, PBCD has been fulfilling its mission to provide "a forum for discussion, research, and action by African-American planners, citizens, and students" for the past 40 years (PBCD 2020, 1). PBCD also created the Hindsight Conference in 2017, 2018, and 2019 spearheaded by the APA-NYC Diversity Committee.

Diversity and Equity in Planning

Diversity can be defined by various identities including race and ethnicity (Agyeman and Erickson 2012; Sweet and Etienne 2011), class and gender (Lipsitz 1995; Conley 2009), sexual orientation (Forsyth 1995), national origin and religion (Sandercock 1997), age, dis/ability, and more (Tiarachristie 2016). Leonie Sandercock's writings in the 1990s advanced scholarship on diversity by counteracting ethnocentrism in the planning profession (Sandercock 1995; 1997; 1996). Ethno-racial groups, particularly in Canada, Australia, and the U.S., are persistently disadvantaged compared to white groups in terms of opportunities, wealth, power, and representation (Burayidi 2000; Qadeer 1997; Watson and McGillivray 1995). Researchers note that diverse societies have specific demands that planners need to respond to, such as the pursuit of spatial and distributive justice (Umemoto 2001; Thomas 1996; Laquian 1996; Agyeman and Erickson 2012; Fainstein 2016; Heikkila 2001).

Early U.S. planning research documented institutional racism in both planning practice and in the profession (Stafford and Ladner 1969; Hoch 1993; Checkoway 1986; Mier 1994; Grigsby 1994). Several studies have documented the intersections between race/ethnicity and class disadvantage among African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x communities (Hartman 1994; Córdova 1994). Others have documented how racial and ethnic bias in zoning has resulted in urban renewal, redlining, disinvestment, segregation, gentrification (García 2019), food insecurity (Raja, Ma, and Yadav 2008), and environmental injustice (Forckenbrock and Schweitzer 1999). Scholars have pointed out that living in a racially and ethnically segregated and low-income neighborhood limits one's educational opportunities (Frankenberg 2013; García 2018). Planners and others have also addressed the issue of mass incarceration of African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x but, in particular, among young males with low-

educational attainment and living in households experiencing high levels of poverty (Garcia-Hallett et al. 2019; Simpson 2015).

Moreover, groups based on their race, ethnicity, and cultural identity have advocated for equal opportunity, affirmative action, reparations, cultural inclusion, and governmental intervention such as exceptions, accommodations or arrangements in planning—e.g., regional development, enterprise zones, public service delivery, affordable housing, the elimination of housing occupancy restrictions, and the acknowledgment of ethnic-racial enclaves (Qadeer 1997; Heikkila 2001; Moreno-Leguizamon et al. 2015; García et al. 2019). The pursuit of racial and ethnic equity in planning practice challenges the status quo so that race no longer determines a resident's socioeconomic outcomes; where everyone can thrive regardless of where they live (APA 2020). This type of planning practice must address socio-geographic inequities and ensure marginalized racial and ethnic groups have decision-making roles (Fainstein 2016; Reece 2018) and “clearly define policy work toward addressing specific underserved communities, and that discuss strategies for implementation” (Zapata and Bates 2017, 423). Demands for the inclusion of racial and ethnic diversity in planning practice have also become demands for planning equity in education and the workplace (Sen et al. 2017; Solis 2020; Tiarachristie 2016; Sweet and Etienne 2011; Zapata and Bates 2017; Krumholz 1990).

Discrimination and Microaggressions in the Planning Workplace

Planners, like other professionals, experience everyday workplace discrimination based on race, color, national origin, and other federally protected classes (Kennedy 2015; Gibson and Fernandez 2018; Deitch et al. 2003). Many of these experiences mirror those they experienced during their planning education (Greenlee et al. 2018; Jackson et al. 2018; García et al. 2020; Lee et al. 2020). Coworkers make racially or ethnically charged comments or actions short of

violent harassment or discrimination—that is, they perpetuate microaggressions.

Microaggressions are subtle expressions of bias towards a person from a marginalized group where the microaggressor—colleague, supervisor or community member—is often unaware of the harm they cause (Harwood et al. 2012; Sue et al. 2007). These actions and beliefs show up as part of everyday interactions or as disrespectful or mocking situations (Tiarachristie 2016).

These exchanges can take place within the office or in the field and generate discomfort between coworkers, are harmful to the work environment, and add to the daily psychological burden of employees from marginalized groups (Almond 2019; Sue et al. 2007; Harwood et al. 2012).

African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners might also experience tokenism—that is, their workplaces may not take diversity seriously, but instead feel they have to fulfill quotas or other societal expectations (Olivas-Lujan 2008; Yoder, Schleicher, and McDonald 1998; Kelly 2007). Consequences of tokenism range from feelings of isolation to stereotyping, all of which impact an individual’s performance (Flabbi et al. 2019; Wingfield and Wingfield 2014). Tokenism often morphs into depersonalization where a single individual is assumed to represent all people of color; meanwhile, people of color tend to resist being the spokesperson for their entire group (García et al. 2020).

Furthermore, stereotyping in the planning workplace happens when planners of color are assumed to share traits or behaviors with simplified and standardized images based on the individual’s race or ethnicity (Tiarachristie 2016). While African American/Black women are stereotyped as “angry,” males are profiled as “criminal predators” (Childs 2005; Welch 2007). Profiling is often confused with stereotyping, but they are not the same: “A profile is based on observable behavior while a stereotype is based on the internal perceptions of behavior” (Lee et al. 2007, 1). The additional stereotype of Black/African American and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x

workers being incompetent, also plagues the planning workplace (Tiarachristie 2016; Wu 2003). Furthermore, there is a strong stereotype of people of color having their position only because of affirmative action (Leslie et al. 2013).

Studies in the workplace have shown that many employees think that benefits are granted to certain groups, regardless of their work ethic, or that hiring and promotions are made to meet a certain quota (Oh et al. 2010; Malos 2000; Kennedy 2015; Jackson 1990). Prejudiced assumptions result in the planner of color constantly having to prove their abilities (Tiarachristie 2016; Wu 2003). Knowing that one's coworkers believe that African American/Black or Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x colleagues are less deserving of their current positions leads to feelings of insecurity and a need to defend one's qualifications (Berry and Bonilla-Silva 2008).

In order to ameliorate some of the issues described above, several planning studies have discussed how cross-cultural communication and anti-racist training in planning education and the workplace can be an effective strategy (Agyeman and Erickson 2012; Jackson et al. 2018; Sweet 2018; Angotti et al. 2011). It can be carried out by a diverse scholar from a local planning school or a colleague practitioner who teaches in the planning office (García et al. 2019). Furthermore, as García et al. (2019) propose, planning departments and the cities they serve could create an equity plan to address issues of race and ethnicity in the office and the community.³

Solis proposes institutionalizing racial equity in planning organizations as an analytical framework and calls for a thorough review of the "internal rules and norms" that reproduce racial inequity (Solis 2020, 1). These options allow employees to practice equity in the workplace and non-work environments (Krumholz 1990; Zapata and Bates 2017; Pfeiffer 2016). This cross-

cultural and anti-racist training to address multiple publics should start in planning school and be reinforced in the workplace (García et al. 2020; Umemoto 2001).

METHODS

The research question of this article is: How do African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners experience the cultural climate in their respective planning organizations? Our study summarizes responses from a cross-sectional online survey conducted from January to March 2019. The survey was distributed via email to all active APA members and took about 20 minutes to complete. A total of 3,005 APA members out of 46,398 participated (a 6.4% response rate). Most participants were from the South (n=487) and West (n=475) US Census regions, with roughly half those numbers from the Northeast (n=211) and Midwest (n=249) regions. Table 1 summarizes respondents employment sector, education, nativity, race/ethnicity, gender identity, and sexual orientation compared to the overall planner population. More details about who participated in the research can be found in our technical report (Jackson, Garcia, et al. 2018). Table 1 shows that 70.6% of our sample identified as White, 4.8% identified as Asian, 7.8% identified as Black or African American, 7.3% identified as Hispanic or Latino, 2% identified as American Indian or Alaskan Native, 3.7% identified with another race or ethnicity, and 3.2% indicated that they preferred not to share their racial or ethnic unique identifiers.

[Table 1]

Respondents were asked in the survey if they would like to participate in a follow-up Zoom⁴ interview to share in-depth experiences with diversity and climate. Potential interviewees shared their emails on the survey—308 volunteered and 104 interviews were conducted. A total 12

African American/Black and 12 Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planning professionals volunteered to be interviewed. A total of 12 African Americans/Blacks participated in the study. One born in Somalia and the rest were born in the United States. One was Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x and born in South America. The other 12 interviewees were Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x, including one who identified as bi-racial (white and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x). Of the Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners, five were foreign-born in Peru, Venezuela, and Panama (one each) and two from Puerto Rico (a territory of the U.S.), the rest were born in the United States.

Most of the interviewees (17) identified as male, and the rest (7) as female.⁵ We did not link individual survey responses to interview responses, which is a limitation of our study approach. Pseudonyms were assigned to participants to allow for easier comparison and reporting.

Interviews were conducted between March and December 2019 and took between 20 and 60 minutes. Audio recordings were transcribed using Sonix⁶ then edited for accuracy by interviewers. The interview transcripts were qualitatively analyzed using Dedoose⁷ by four investigators utilizing both inductive and deductive coding strategies (Strauss and Corbin 1998; Strauss 1987). A total of 60 selective codes were derived from previous team findings on planning educational environments as well as additional codes that came from the literature, team conversations, and an initial codebook development geared towards practicing planners specifically.⁸ To ensure intercoder reliability throughout the initial data analysis we had pairs of coders analyze the same interview (Campbell et al. 2013).⁹ The inter-rater reliability was 90%.

We also analyzed closed-ended survey responses that focused on differences between responses for African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x individuals versus other individuals who provided racial and ethnic identifiers by summarizing descriptive statistics for each response, visualization of response distribution data, and data disaggregation and

description. Likert scale responses were disaggregated and analyzed by race/ethnicity. Kruskal-Wallis tests¹⁰ were run to determine whether statistically significant differences existed in the distribution of responses.

SURVEY FINDINGS

We first asked respondents about their workplace environment and overall support for diversity within their organization (Table 2). Compared to other groups, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x were less likely to agree or strongly agree that they could share ideas openly, or that their workplace has a commitment to diversity in the broader community. Those same respondents were more likely to agree or strongly agree that their workplace was composed of staff who reflect the diversity of the community they serve and were split on whether their workplace takes steps to address issues important to creating a diverse workforce.

[Table 2]

Satisfaction with diversity in their current workplace was also explored by various aspects of diversity (Table 3). The most notable differences were found in terms of ability and disability status, citizenship or nationality status, and racial and ethnic diversity. With regards to ability or disability status, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x were more likely to be dissatisfied with levels of diversity. Likewise, these same respondents were more likely to be dissatisfied with levels of diversity around citizenship or nationality status. Satisfaction around racial and ethnic diversity was split between being very satisfied or very dissatisfied.

[Table 3]

Respondents also reported personal experiences of bias or discrimination in their current workplace (Table 4). Most respondents report that they personally experienced bias or

discrimination very rarely, of those that personally experienced bias or discrimination, it was more frequently related to aspects of age, citizenship or nationality, racial and ethnic identity, and sexual orientation. Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x respondents were more likely to experience age discrimination very often when compared to African American/Black respondents. Both African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x respondents were more likely to report frequent incidences of bias or discrimination on the basis of their citizenship or nationality and their race/ethnicity. African American/Black respondents were more likely to report frequent incidences of bias/discrimination on the basis of their sexual orientation while for most other groups, the vast majority of respondents felt this seldom or never happened.

[Table 4]

Respondents also reported the frequency that others in their workplace experienced bias/discrimination based on personal characteristics (Table 5). Respondents who were not African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x were more likely to indicate higher frequencies of others experiencing bias/discrimination on the basis of their age and gender. African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x respondents were more likely to indicate higher frequencies of others experiencing bias/discrimination on the basis of their ability status and citizenship status. These same respondents also perceived bias/discrimination happening “Very Often” or “Often” on the basis of race/ethnicity at more than double the rate reported by other respondents.

[Table 5]

INTERVIEW FINDINGS

The qualitative results from the 24 interviews provide more detailed information about how bias and discrimination are experienced in the workplace by African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners. We identified seven themes shared by African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x participants: (1) tokenism and isolation, (2) mistreatment, (3) disrespect and mockery, (4) questioning qualifications, (5) stereotypes of aggression, (6) bias in hiring and promotion and, (7) strategies to address bias and discrimination.¹¹ Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework developed through the qualitative analysis process.

[Figure 1]

Theme 1: Tokenism and Isolation

Tokenism is when a small number of people are used to give the appearance that a place is inclusive, which often results in feelings of isolation. Several African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x practitioners felt as “the only one” of their identified group and thus, threatened as tokens. Practitioners used phrases such as “I am the only person of color at work” and “It’s like I’ve always been the only Black planner,” “I’ve always been the only Black female in the room, in the department, and internships in my career,” “Numbers-wise, it’s kind of, we are minorities,” and “we are underrepresented.” Consequently, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planning practitioners reported being tokenized in the workplace. Trinity, an African American/Black female planner, felt tokenized while being mistreated in the office. Her department had won a diversity award, and her supervisor sent her to receive the award on behalf of the department. She believed that her supervisors did not genuinely care about racial and ethnic representation, but instead, were using her as a symbol or token of diversity. Trinity explains, “It’s also ironic because of the way I was treated in there, accepting that award was kind of, yeah, it like goes against each other. Like they have respect for diversity and inclusion in

the community, but not in the office.” Trinity felt that she was chosen for the role of accepting the award just to give the appearance that her department was diverse and that people of color were treated fairly when in reality, she felt tokenized.

Theme 2: Mistreatment

Mistreatment is based on a negative treatment difference based on race or ethnicity. Practitioners described how they had suffered mistreatment outside of the office from officials and community members. Rania, an African American/Black female planner, described a scenario where she set up a meeting with a mayor over the phone. “I show up at City Hall, and he looks at me. He goes, you sound different than you look on the phone.” Rania, said that the mayor meant that over the phone, she sounded white. Rania also noted that she was immediately treated very differently than on the phone. After that interaction, Rania felt she could not approach the mayor in the future because of this incident.

Similarly, Trinity explained how she was at a public event with her white colleagues, but City Council members did not shake her hand. As an African American/Black female planner, she attributed the differential treatment to the deep-seated racism that exists in the Midwest. She said: “I was discriminated against by the City Council members. And they wouldn’t shake my hand or take my business card. But they would take my coworkers’. We were standing in a line, shaking hands, and they’d just like, skip over me!” Trinity reported the matter to her supervisor, but no action was taken even though she brought it up to someone with authority to do something.

Pablo, a Latino planner, reported a similar offensive scenario in which a fellow code inspector with a Spanish surname went to investigate a zoning violation. When he arrived, the owner was not there, so he left his business card. When the property owner called back, the

inspector was out of the office, so his supervisor picked up. At this point, the property owner started yelling and making disparaging remarks to the supervisor, including asking, “Are you also a Mexican? Are you one of them, too?!” Zoning inspectors who work in the community enforcing laws are often not welcomed by property owners. In this case, the property owner, who was white, was annoyed due to his belief that the planning inspector was Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x.

Theme 3: Disrespect and Mockery

Discrimination could manifest itself in an attitude of disrespect, ridicule or mockery. This theme was mostly found in female planners of color interviewees, which speaks to intersectionality. Trinity felt disrespected when she made presentations at work. She described how one of her coworkers would start watching T.V. while she was presenting. She thought she was treated as a lesser colleague and less knowledgeable. Trinity said: “I’m consistently belittled and talked over just by one person. But it’s a group of six people. And yeah, in some meetings, he would just like turn on the T.V. So, yeah, it makes you feel like crap. And it’s just weird that nobody else responded to it.”

This practitioner dealt with an overtly offensive coworker, yet her colleagues were complicit because they did not denounce these situations or contribute to making the behavior stop.

Valentina, a Latina planner, related how communities of color were made fun of, “[t]he Mayor was making very inappropriate jokes at the City Council retreat. Very inappropriate, racially charged jokes about Mexican people that make me extremely uncomfortable.” This example shows how immigrant communities are often subjects of ridicule and contempt. Other African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners felt personally offended by these types of comments, and like they had little effective recourse.

Theme 4: Questioning Qualifications

There is a strong stereotype that people of color are less qualified. African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners described incidents where they had been treated as less qualified. They were asked with suspicion about their educational qualifications, and how they got hired into their current position. Rania said: “That question, which planning school did you go to? We’re starting already at this question of divisiveness and judgment about what school is better than other schools. But, some of them are valid, right? Like, show me your portfolio. What have you written before? Like, what’s your experience?”

African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners frequently experienced economic disadvantages that lead to barriers to access elite colleges or universities. Most reported coming from working-class families or low-income communities. Some prefer to discuss what they have done instead of where they graduated. They also worried about being questioned about their credentials and being perceived as having lower qualifications because of their racial and ethnic background. Meanwhile, interviewees explained how most of their colleagues did not understand their white privilege. Matthew, an African American/Black male planner, reported how he had been promoted to the position of the executive director, but a municipal official could not believe he held that title:

And I’ve had many [incidences of questioning my position], both at the academic level and the professional level. I remember when I first got this position that I’m in now as executive director, and I presented my [business] card to a municipal official that had just met me for the first time; that official’s response was “this couldn’t possibly be your title.”

Most African Americans/Blacks and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x expressed that people were either overtly surprised or suspicious when they learn about their positions which is a form of stereotyping. These behaviors make them feel unworthy and discouraged while at the same time, knowing they are being discriminated against.

Theme 5: Stereotyping and Profiling as Aggressive

Practitioners reported being stereotyped and profiled (a negative and often inaccurate stereotype) in the workplace as being aggressive. White colleagues express negative associations towards African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x counterparts based on racial and ethnic profiling. For some, this meant that their colleagues would assume that as an African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x male, they should know about and be prepared to deal with crime. Matthew, felt offended when he was given a security job to deal with gangs because he was African American/Black:

And my boss told me that she wanted me to be in charge of safety and security.

And I told her, I don't know anything about safety and security. And my boss simply told me "you are an African American male. Those drug dealers out there, African American males that relate to you better."

Javier, a Latino, said that he had gone to the office to pick up a map outside work hours, when a female who was also in the office at that time looked at him suspiciously, as if he had committed a crime. Javier said, "then that lady gave me really kind of a very judgmental look like I had done something offensive to her by just existing." Male planners in our interviews recalled several stories of racial and ethnic profiling. However, the majority of African Americans/Blacks and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x reported that racial and ethnic profiling often occurs in their everyday life and that they just wished they did not have the same experience at work.

Furthermore, African Americans/Blacks and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x felt seen as overly aggressive for expressing their views. Mariela, a Latina planner, said, “so I’ve had moments where people have told me that I’m maybe too aggressive.” She believed that her “directness,” which she learned growing up in a large city, was misinterpreted as “not polite” in a smaller city. Joseph, an African American/Black male planner, said that he failed to articulate his grievances out of fear of being punished professionally, “I personally never fully articulate my needs because I feel if I do, I’ll be punished for it. That’s the nature of being a Black male, I suppose.” Many participants explained that they could not express their concerns at their organization because either they would be perceived as angry or feared that their career would be harmed.

Theme 6: Bias in Hiring and Promotion

Biases can affect the hiring and promotion processes. African Americans/Blacks and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners reported leadership and compensation gaps as well as unfavorable treatment in contracts. Practitioner Rania said that there was a women leadership summit of about 60 leaders, but only two women were of color. Similarly, Yasmine, an African American/Black woman, said that she was the first person of color to be promoted to a leadership level in a department, “I might, at any given time, be the odd duck that walks into the room.”

In terms of compensation, some expressed that as African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners, they are paid less than their white counterparts. Mario, a Latino planner, expressed displeasure at how a colleague was promoted because “he was white.” Mario said, “He got away with making \$80,000 a year. I’m not going to make that in the next ten years. And I know that he only got that because he was white.” Leonardo, a Black Latino planner reported,

I was hired with another guy. He was coming from the same school too, a white male. We were hired at the same time, we were both hired full-time, but my hiring full-time was contingent for three months, and they would reevaluate me after three months, but the other guy, the white male, didn't have that contingency.

Workers from African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x backgrounds felt that they were less likely to be promoted to leadership positions while being more likely to be paid less or have inferior contracts.

Theme 7: Strategies to Address Bias and Discrimination

African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x practitioners talked about ways to improve the workplace climate which have important implications for practice. Daniel, an African American/Black planner, advocated for initiatives that allowed for conversations about race/ethnicity between employees in a more informal manner:

[We need opportunities for] conversation... I think if people can speak from their experience, that would be maybe better just to build that like empathy, so people understand what it's like. Just like for me, being the only Black person or the only person of color in the office. I don't think many people have experienced that. So, like what that feels like and like how you can't relate to certain people in different ways. Like that would be eye-opening.

Similarly, participants indicated that cross-cultural and anti-racist initiatives should be formalized and made widely available. As Cesar, a Latino planner shared, "I was feeling like I had the ability to make a deliberate effort to push the diversity agenda in a more formalized manner by providing cultural competency training, more of an effort to employ or engage, different groups of people, and that doesn't just go for racial diversity."

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the survey, African Americans/Blacks and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x reported higher rates of bias/discrimination than other planners. Discrimination and microaggressions in the workplace damage the confidence, self-worth, and sense of belonging of people of color. Reducing someone's self-worth can limit productivity and worsen their performance at work. Implicit biases can prevent capable and effective workers from accessing positions of greater responsibility and better remuneration. Moreover, there could be great consequences for planning organizations that fail to create inclusive environments like the inability to retain diverse staff and/or a decrease in the worker's commitment and loyalty to their workplace.

In interviews, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x participants stated that more people like them should be employed as planners to increase diversity in the workplace. A reason for increasing representation is to be able to practice planning with different cultural groups. Additionally, this would reduce feelings of isolation—that is, feelings of being “the only one.” Participants spoke about how it is more than just skin color or culture, but being the “only Black planner,” affects how you carry yourself and how you act regularly.

African Americans/Blacks and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x report that there is a long way to go in terms of not only thinking about representation, but inclusion. In other words, even when diversity is growing in numbers, African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x practicing planners still do not feel fully validated or included in their workplaces. Our participants shared experience of racial and ethnic tokenism when individuals perceive that their visible racial and ethnic distinctions are the focus of interactions with other members of a group. Some participants felt used for public relation purposes and making their department look good in front of the community.

Many felt that professional contacts believed that African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners are in their current positions only because of affirmative action. At the same time, participants argued that structural barriers such as coming from low-income families was the main disadvantage for them to have the best academic records in comparison to their white counterparts. Some saw being asked about academic credentials instead of professional qualifications (e.g., portfolios, which tend to be more practical), as an issue of color-evasiveness. Several African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x participants talked about disadvantageous treatment in promotion, pay, and contracts. Participants perceived being promoted at lower rates, receiving lower pay, and being offered inferior terms in their contracts.

Findings suggest the presence of depersonalization and stereotyping in the workplace. Planners were oftentimes taken to represent the experiences of all people of their race/ethnicity. African American/Black planning practitioners said that bosses gave them jobs that involved talking to “those drug dealers out there, African American males that relate to you better.” While Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x were referred to as overly aggressive by colleagues and clients. Furthermore, practitioners expressed being disrespected and mocked by their bosses, professional colleagues, city councilors, and mayors. African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x practitioners used phrases such as “I’m consistently belittled” to depict how they are treated in the workplace. Some stated that no action is taken even when they reported the issue. Nonetheless, most preferred to not call attention to any of these incidents because they did not want to be punished for it professionally.

Given the potential negative consequences of the lack of diversity and inclusion at work along with the presence of discrimination/microaggressions, this study shows that it is necessary not only to increase diversity in the workplace, but also to make work places more inclusive.

Various participants expressed that anti-racist and cross-cultural training are integral to generating racial, ethnic, and cultural awareness and an inclusive work environment. Notably, cross-cultural communication can act as a bridge to increase understanding, but most critically, embrace and value different ethnic and racial groups (Sweet 2018; García et al. 2019; Angotti et al. 2011). Similarly, anti-racist training could be pivotal to allow employees—as well as appointed and elected officials such as city council members and mayors—to build healthy working relationships, as well as reducing microaggressions and discrimination at work.

However, for substantial change to occur, major shifts are needed in planning, including within APA and ACSP. Within ACSP, changes can improve recruitment/retention, scholarship, curriculum, and classroom/campus climate. The Planning Accreditation Board (PAB) would also need to be part of making changes in planning schools' recruitment and retention practices of students and faculty of color, providing anti-racist and cross-cultural training to faculty, staff and administrators, changing the curriculum, classroom climate, etc. APA needs to improve their general communication and conference content to provide professional development to planners, administrators, mayors, and city council members on these issues. Also needed is accountability mechanisms and evaluations of diversity initiatives, hiring practices, racial impact studies, climate surveys, and consequences for inaction and discrimination. Furthermore, there is a need to deepen comparative studies evaluating cross-cultural, anti-racist trainings and other diversity efforts among organizations from different sectors and geographies where diversity initiatives have been implemented to understand what works and what the benefits might be not only to individuals but also to organizations, the profession as a whole, and even communities.

Overall, we show that even after decades of efforts by ACSP and APA to combat racial and ethnic discrimination, the field is still behind. As demonstrated by the Spring/Summer 2020

nationwide anti-racism protests, we are in a critical moment in history. We hope that there is momentum among planning organizations to transform their practices to further equity among African American/Black and Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x planners and communities. We urge all planners to listen to voices like Yasmine, telling us that they are tired of being tokenized, mocked, and feeling like the “odd duck.”

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TABLES AND FIGURES

Table 1. Respondent compared to the total planner population employment, education, racial/ethnic, nativity, gender, and sexual orientation characteristics¹²

Race/ethnicity	n	% R	% T	Nativity	n	% R	% T
Black	127	7.8	5.36	Native born	1,333	44.4	D/K
Latinx	119	7.3	D/K	Foreign born	97	3.2	D/K
White	1154	70.6	80	Other	60	2.0	
Asian	88	4.8	9.0	Prefer not to answer	30	1.0	
American Indian or Alaskan Native	33	2	D/K	No response	1,485	49.4	
Other	61	3.73	2.5				
Prefer not to answer	53	3.24					
No response	1370						
<i>Total</i>	<i>3005</i>	<i>100</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>3,005</i>	<i>100.0</i>	
Employment sector	n	% R	% T	Education	n	% R	% T
Local government	607	39.8	D/K	High School or GED	469	17.6	D/K
Private consulting firm	302	19.8	D/K	Associates Degree	66	2.5	D/K
County planning	207	13.6	D/K	Bachelors Degree	803	30	D/K
Regional planning agencies	125	8.2	D/K	Masters Degree	1251	46.9	D/K
Educational institution	70	4.6	D/K	Juris Doctor (JD)	14	0.52	D/K
State agency	69	4.5	D/K	Doctorate (Ph.D.)	65	2.4	D/K
Nonprofit organization	57	3.7	D/K	No response	337		D/K
Federal government	29	1.9	D/K	Total	<i>3005</i>	<i>100</i>	
Other	60	3.9	D/K				
No response	1479						
<i>Total</i>	<i>3005</i>	<i>100</i>					
Gender Identity	n	% R	% T	Sexual orientation	n	% R	% T
Male	726	47.7	52.9	Heterosexual	1199	78.8	D/K
Female	736	48.3	47.1	Gay or lesbian	143	9.4	D/K
Non-binary/third gender	8	0.53	D/K	Bisexual	49	3.2	D/K
Prefer to self-describe	10	0.66	D/K	Prefer to self-describe	31	2.04	D/K
Prefer not to answer	43	2.82	D/K	Prefer not to answer	100	6.6	
No response	1482			No response	1483		
<i>Total</i>	<i>3005</i>	<i>100</i>		<i>Total</i>	<i>3005</i>	<i>100</i>	

Table 2. Questions about their workplace environment and overall support for diversity within the workplace.

Question	N	S. Agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis.	S. Dis.	K-W AA/B-H/L	K-W Other			
Q1.1: Encourages professionals to share ideas openly		27				27					
			p			p					
	Black	110	33	44	11	7	5	20.0	0.0 ***	30.7	0.0 ***
	Latino	85	29	46	9	12	4				
Q1.2: Has a commitment to diversity in the broader community	Other Group	1,275	41	40	9	7	3				
	Black	107	22	36	11	19	11	19.0	0.0 ***	29.0	0.0 ***

Q1.3: Is composed of staff who reflect the diversity of the communities we serve	Black							8			6		
	Latin	84	27	30	20	15	7						
	Other												
	Group	1,258	25	34	19	17	5						
Q1.4: Takes steps to address issues that are important	Black							20.6	0.0	***	29.9	0.0	***
	Latin	107	21	26	16	21	15						
	Other												
	Group	1,272	14	32	20	27	8						

ant to cre atin g a div erse wor kfo rce	Black	105	18	25	19	23	15	20.	8	0.0	***	30.	8	0.0	***
	Latin	84	20	21	20	26	12								
	Other														
	Group	1,2													
		28	16	25	22	27	10								

Notes: N= number, S. Agree= Strongly Agree, Neu= Neutral, Dis= Disagree, S. Dis.= Strongly Disagree, AA/B= African American/Black, H/L= Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x

Table 3. Respondents satisfaction with levels of diversity in planning positions in their current workplace with regards to a range of types of diversity.

Question	N	S. Agree	Agree	Neu.	Dis.	S. Dis.	K-W AA/B-H/L	AA/B-H/L	K-W Other	Other		
							20	0.0	31	0.0		
Q1.1: Encourages professionals to share ideas openly							p		p			
										*		
										*		
Black	110	33	44	11	7	5	20	0.0	***	31	0.0	*
Latinx	85	29	46	9	12	4						
Other Group	1,275	41	40	9	7	3						
Q1.2: Has a commitment to diversity in the broader community											*	
												*
												*
Black	107	22	36	11	19	11	20	0.0	***	30	0.0	*
Latinx	84	27	30	20	15	7						
Other Group	1,258	25	34	19	17	5						
Q1.3: Is composed of staff who reflect the diversity of the communities we serve											*	
												*
												*
Black	107	21	26	16	21	15	21	0.0	***	30	0.0	*
Latinx	84	24	25	14	21	15						
Other Group	1,272	14	32	20	27	8						
Q1.4: Takes steps to address issues that are important to creating a diverse workforce											*	
												*
												*
Black	105	18	25	19	23	15	21	0.0	***	31	0.0	*
Latinx	84	20	21	20	26	12						
Other Group	1,228	16	25	22	27	10						

Notes: N= number, S. Agree= Strongly Agree, Neu= Neutral, Dis= Disagree, S. Dis.= Strongly Disagree, AA/B= African American/Black, H/L= Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x

Table 4. Personal experiences of bias or discrimination in their current workplace.

Question	N	V. Sat.	Sat.	Dis.	V. Dis.	K-W	AA/B-H/L		K-W	Other	
Q3.1: Ability/Disability Status											
Black	85	15	49	25	11	16.8	0.0	***	25.1	0.0	***
Latinx	70	7	53	30	10						
Other Group	1043	14	58	22	7						
Q3.2: Age											
Black	105	25	60	11	4	15.7	0.0	***	24.2	0.0	***
Latinx	82	22	62	12	4						
Other Group	1244	25	62	9	4						
Q3.3: Citizenship or Nationality											
Black	99	21	55	18	6	15.8	0.0	*	24.2	0.0	***
Latinx	71	23	52	15	10						
Other Group	1136	19	59	17	5						
Q3.4: Gender											
Black	107	31	56	9	4	15.9	0.0	***	24.4	0.0	***
Latinx	83	30	55	12	2						
Other Group	1245	29	57	10	4						
Q3.5: Gender Identity											
Black	74	24	50	20	5	15.6	0.0	***	23.7	0.0	***
Latinx	66	17	59	17	8						
Other Group	885	18	59	17	6						
Q3.6: Racial or Ethnic											
Black	109	22	36	23	19	15.5	0.0	***	23.5	0.0	***
Latinx	85	15	42	26	16						
Other Group	1225	15	41	32	12						
Q3.7: Sexual Orientation											
Black	76	24	54	17	5	15.7	0.0	***	23.0	0.0	***

Latinx	64	19	56	19	6
Other Group	989	22	58	14	5

Notes: N= number, V. Sat.= Very Satisfied, Sat.= Satisfied, Dis= Dissatisfied, V. Dis.= Very Dissatisfied, AA/B= African American/Black, H/L= Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x

Table 5. Personal experiences of bias or discrimination in their current workplace.

Question	N	Very often	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never	K-W AA/B-H/L	AA/B-H/L	K-W Other	Other
							χ^2	χ^2		
Q3.1: Ability/Disability Status										
								p		p
									**	**
									#	#
Black	76	1	1	8	13	76	17.7	0.0	*	0.0
Latinx	62	2	0	3	13	82				
Other Group	985	1	2	5	8	84				
Q3.2: Age										
									**	**
									#	#
Black	105	3	4	21	15	57	19.7	0.0	*	0.0
Latinx	80	5	4	15	25	51				
Other Group	123	2	5	18	22	53				
Q3.3: Citizenship or Nationality										
									**	**
									#	#
Black	91	3	2	9	8	78	20.5	0.0	*	0.0
Latinx	78	4	3	9	18	67				
Other Group	110	1	1	2	6	90				
Q3.4: Gender										
									**	**
									#	#
Black	105	2	7	15	21	55	19.7	0.0	*	0.0
Latinx	84	4	5	14	13	64				
Other Group	123	1	3	6	20	54				
Q3.5: Gender Identity										
Black	75	1	0	1	8	89	15.6	0.0	**	0.0
									#	#

Latinx	65	0	3	5	2	91												*
Other Group	925	1	0	2	4	92												
Q3.6: Racial or Ethnic																		
Black	107	7	6	33	21	35	20.1	0.	**	##	0.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Latinx	84	6	5	20	21	48												
Other Group	115	2	1	2	6	11	80											
Q3.7: Sexual Orientation																		
Black	77	3	0	1	8	88	13.8	0.	**	##	0.	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Latinx	68	0	0	4	7	88												
Other Group	105	8	1	1	3	7	88											

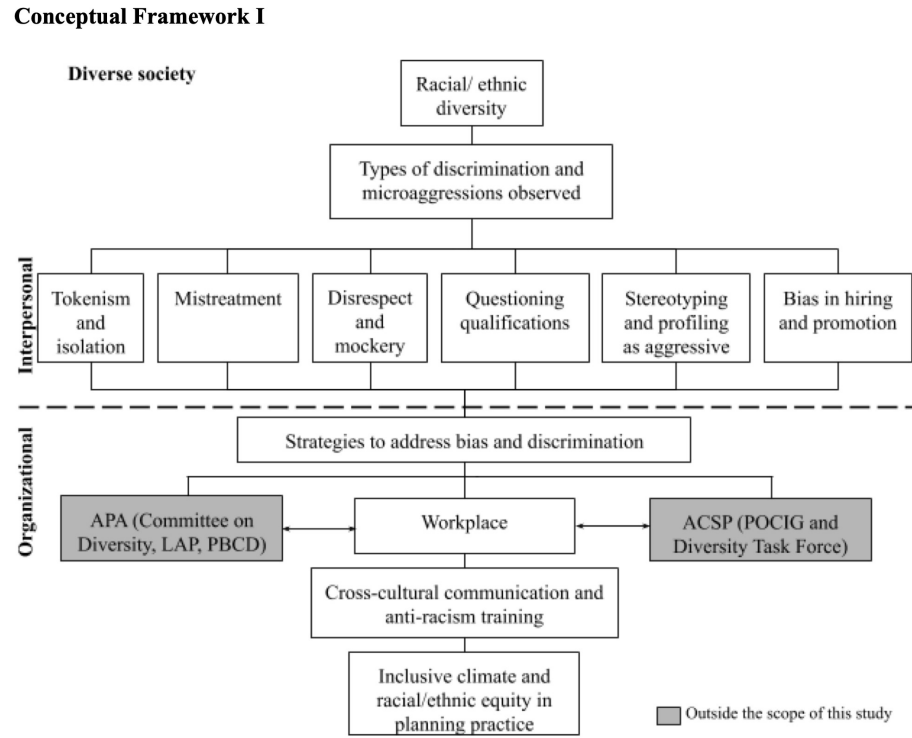
Table 6. Respondents perceptions regarding the frequency with which others in their workplace experienced bias or discrimination on the basis of their personal characteristics.

Question	N	V. Sat.	Sat. Dis.	V. Dis.	K-W	AA/B-H/L	K-W Other
Q3.1: Ability/Disability Status		22		22			
Black	85	15	49	25	11	16.8	0.0
Latinx	70	7	53	30	10		
Other Group	1043	14	58	22	7		
Q3.2: Age							
Black	105	25	60	11	4	15.7	0.0

	Lat inx Ot her Gr ou p	82 12 44	22 25	62 62	12 9	4 4						
Q3 .3: Cit ize ns hip or Na tio nal ist y												
	Bla ck Lat inx Ot her Gr ou p	99 71 11 36	21 23 19	55 52 59	18 15 17	6 10 5	15. 8	0.0	** **	24. 2	0.0	***
Q3 .4: Ge nd er												
	Bla ck Lat inx Ot her Gr ou p	10 7 83 12 45	31 30 29	56 55 57	9 12 10	4 2 4	15. 9	0.0	** *	24. 4	0.0	***
Q3 .5: Ge nd er Ide nti ty												
	Bla	74	24	50	20	5	15.	0.0	**	23.	0.0	***

	ck					6	*	7			
	Lat										
	inx	66	17	59	17	8					
	Ot										
	her										
	Gr										
	ou	88									
	p	5	18	59	17	6					
Q3											
.6:											
Ra											
cia											
l											
or											
Et											
hni											
c											
	Bla	10					15.	**	23.		
	ck	9	22	36	23	19	5	0.0	5	0.0	***
	Lat										
	inx	85	15	42	26	16					
	Ot										
	her										
	Gr										
	ou	12									
	p	25	15	41	32	12					
Q3											
.7:											
Se											
xu											
al											
Or											
ien											
tat											
ion											
	Bla						15.	**	23.		
	ck	76	24	54	17	5	7	0.0	9	0.0	***
	Lat										
	inx	64	19	56	19	6					
	Ot										
	her										
	Gr										
	ou	98									
	p	9	22	58	14	5					

Figure 1. Conceptual framework



1 To be more inclusive of people's identities we used the term Hispanic/Latin/o/a/x as described in ([García 2020](#))

2 At present, within ACSP, POCIG undertakes a role focused on advocacy, and the Committee on Diversity is focused on programming and implementation of ACSP goals and initiatives related to diversity.

3 Equity task forces/officers have been created in cities like Minneapolis, Seattle, Denver, NYC, and Chicago.

4 Online video conference software.

5 This gender imbalance comes up in the interviews in terms of the underrepresentation of females of color in the planning profession.

6 An automated transcription software.

7 An online qualitative data software.

8 Insert citations here if accepted for publication.

9 Each pair coded 10 interviews for a total of 20 interviews between four coders. After this initial coding we engaged in conversations to agree upon the codes that emerged from these 20 interviews, we coded the remaining interview on an individual basis.

10 One-way analysis of variance on ranks.

11 It is important to note that the themes discussed below are by no means discrete and bounded, meaning that many of the quotes relate to more than one theme. However, we have placed each quote within the thematic rubric that is most salient for the case.

12 Note: R=respondent, T= total planner population statistics from urban & regional planners, Data USA, 2018. Respondents that were White (R=70 vs. T=80) and Asian (R=4.8 vs. T=9) were underrepresented while African Americans (R=7.8 vs. T=5.36) and others (R=3.73 vs. T=2.5) are overrepresented. There were no statistics available for Latinos. Our sample was only slightly overrepresented by females (R=48.3 vs. T=47.1). All other statistics were not available for comparison, so we do not know how representative our sample was.