

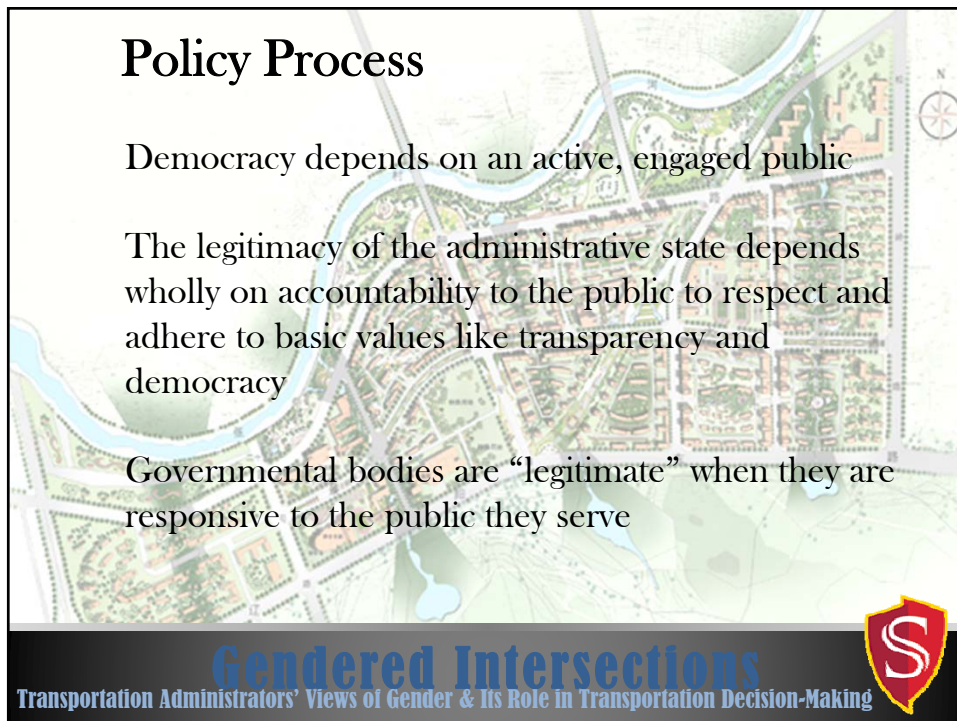



# Gendered Intersections

Transportation Administrators' Views of Gender & Its Role in Transportation Decision-Making



Josephine K. Hazelton & Gerard C. Wellman, Ph.D.  
California State University, Stanislaus



## Policy Process


Democracy depends on an active, engaged public

The legitimacy of the administrative state depends wholly on accountability to the public to respect and adhere to basic values like transparency and democracy

Governmental bodies are “legitimate” when they are responsive to the public they serve

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## Policy Process

Transportation is a policy problem:

“it is an absolute necessary means to an end; it allows people to carry out the diverse range of activities that make up daily life” (Hanson, 1995, p. 3)

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## Public Participation

Agencies seeking public input must allow that input to guide decision-making:

“A history of participation with no visible impact on agency decisions can be worse than no participation at all” (Halvorsen, 2003, p. 540)

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## Public Participation

When the public is left out, they can either disengage or become reactive and judgmental, sometimes sabotaging the process

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## Transportation & Gender


Gender equity is the state of equal access to opportunities and resources regardless of gender while maintaining fair protections, representation, and outcomes for all genders

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## Transportation & Gender

Achieving gender equity requires challenging social structures of male domination and dissolving public policies that allow for female disadvantage

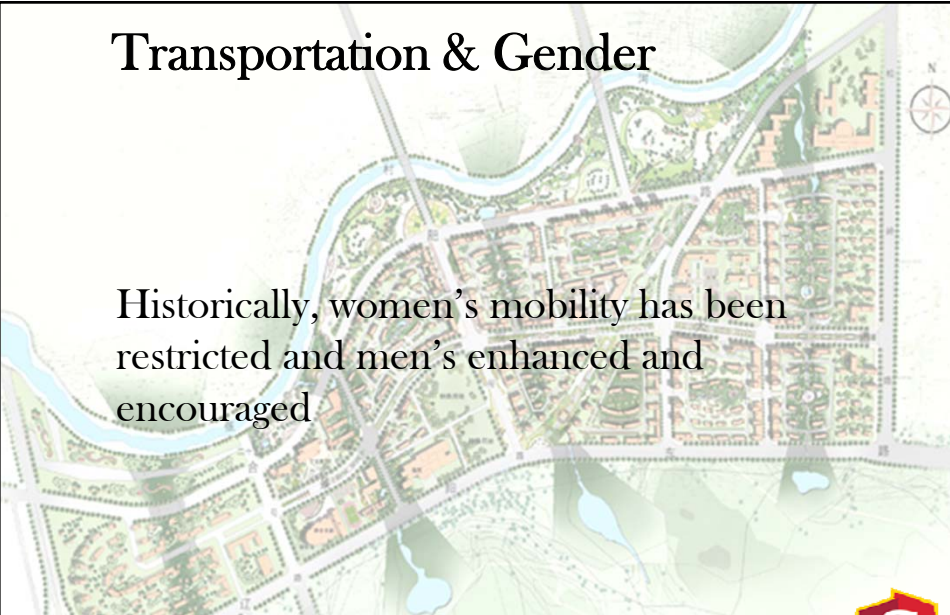


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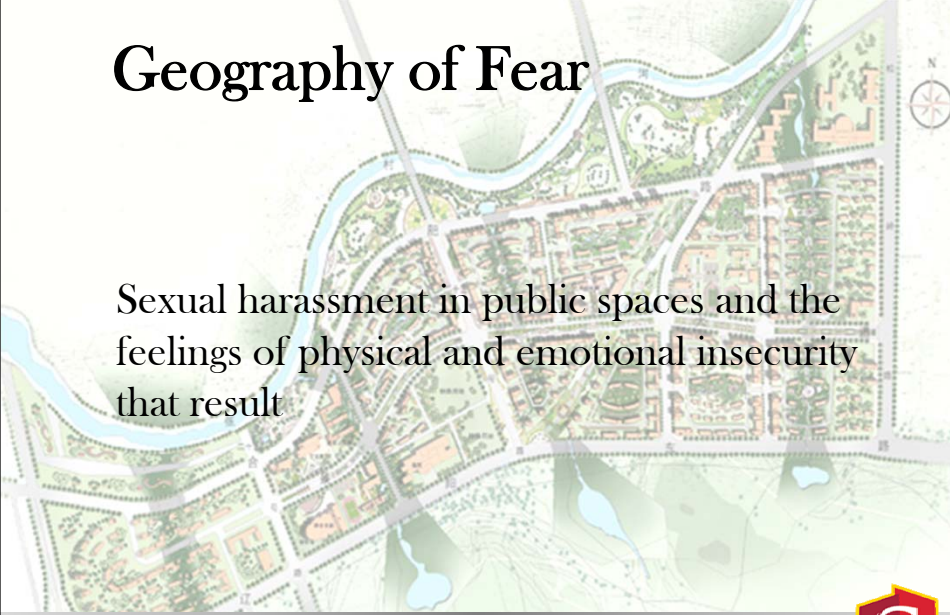
## Transportation & Gender

Historically, women's mobility has been restricted and men's enhanced and encouraged



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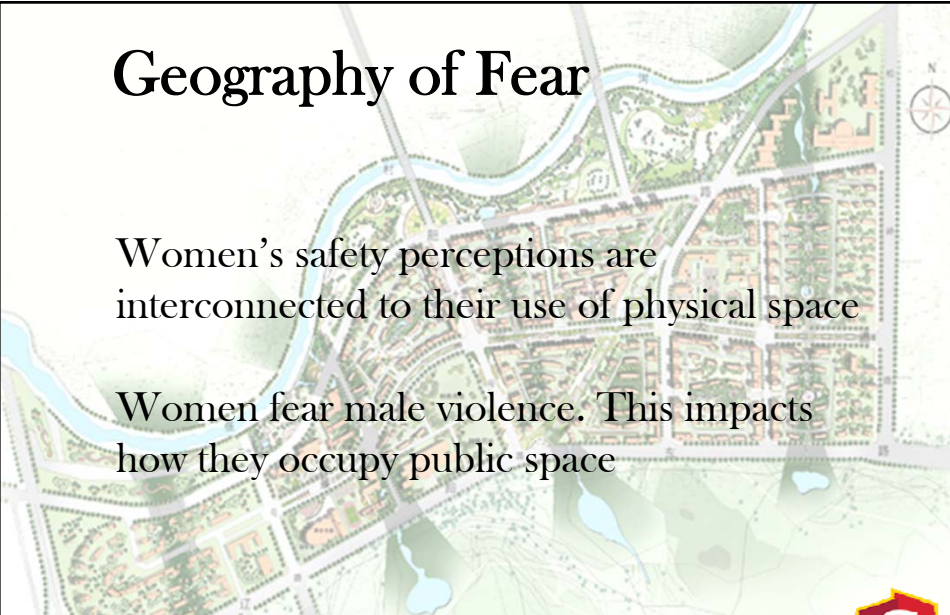





# Geography of Fear

Sexual harassment in public spaces and the feelings of physical and emotional insecurity that result

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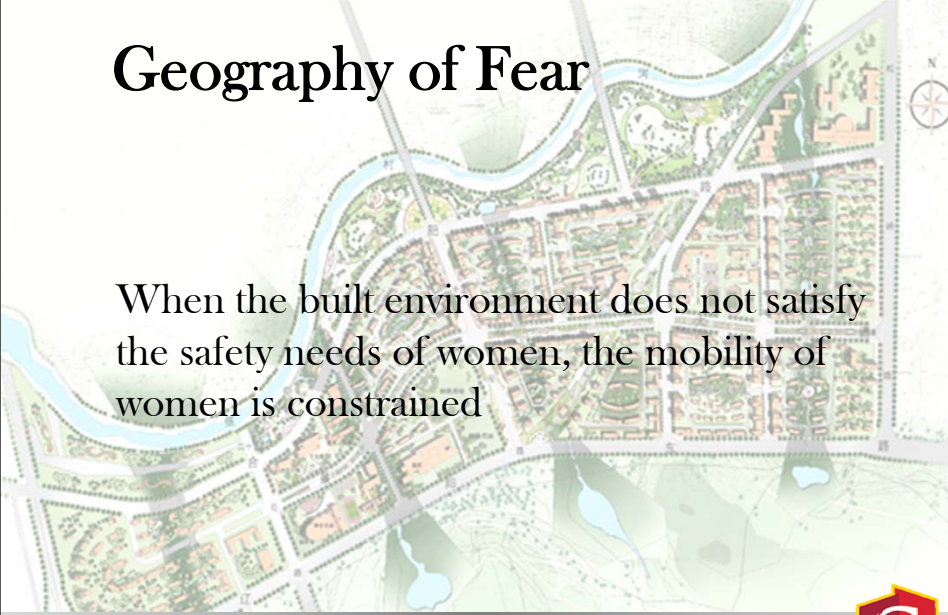
# Geography of Fear

Women's safety perceptions are interconnected to their use of physical space

Women fear male violence. This impacts how they occupy public space

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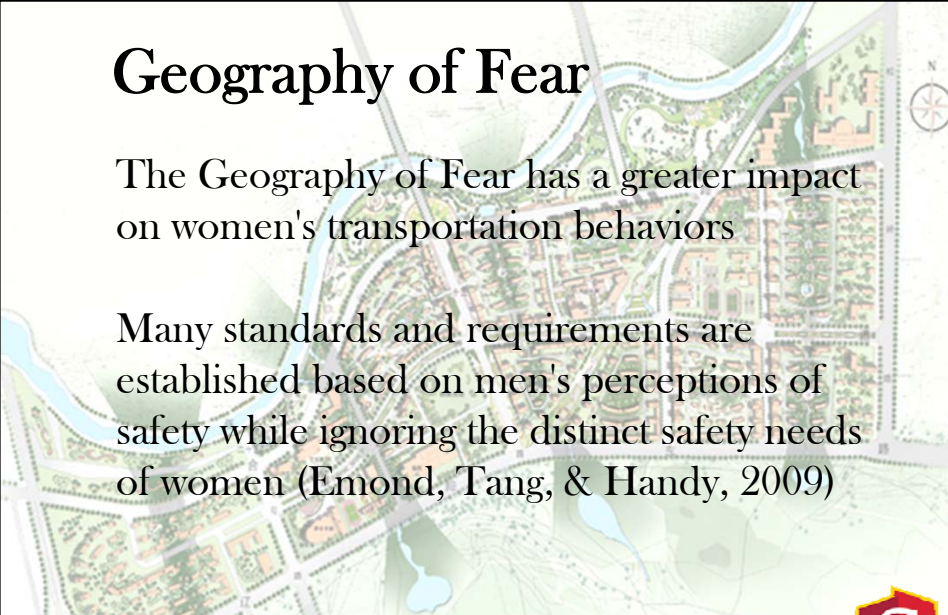





## Geography of Fear

When the built environment does not satisfy the safety needs of women, the mobility of women is constrained

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## Geography of Fear

The Geography of Fear has a greater impact on women's transportation behaviors

Many standards and requirements are established based on men's perceptions of safety while ignoring the distinct safety needs of women (Emond, Tang, & Handy, 2009)

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## Research Questions

We employed qualitative research methodology with semi-structured interviews to answer:

1. How do transportation administrators perceive gender equity in transportation?
2. To what extent is gender considered in transportation planning and policy decision-making?
3. Do transportation administrators reveal a concern for gender equity in their decision-making?

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## Methods

Cities between 50,000 and 1,000,000 in population sorted by Census Division

15 cities representing 14 states randomly selected

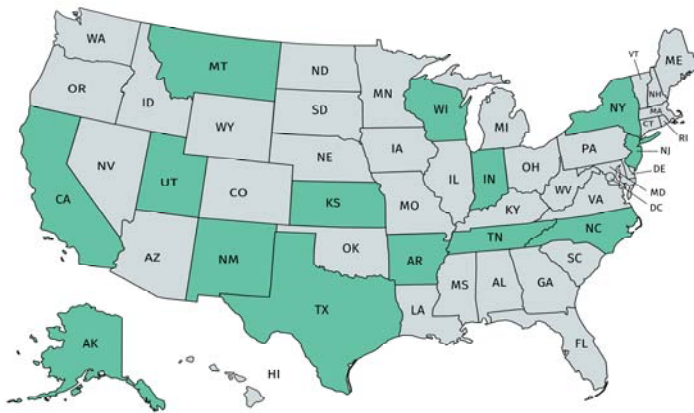
Interviewees' jobs included titles like Director of Public Works, Senior Traffic Engineer, and Transportation Planner

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## States Represented



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## Methods

Average city included in this study had 160,000 in population

Largest city was just under 700,000 in population; smallest was 60,000

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## Methods

Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and hermeneutically analyzed to identify trends and themes

Interviews were 27 minutes on average, ranging from 21 to 46 minutes

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## Findings

The patriarchy is alive and well.

Gender equity is not a consideration or goal of interviewees in this study

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## Findings

Three primary themes emerged:

1. The Geography of Fear is not understood
2. “Male” is default and privileged
3. Gender equity is someone else’s problem

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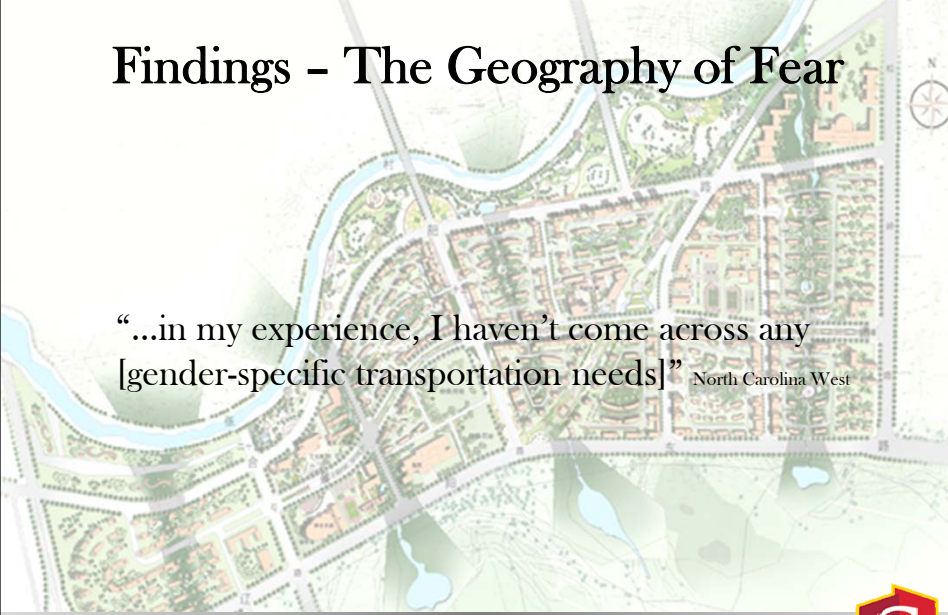
## Findings

1. The Geography of Fear is not understood

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

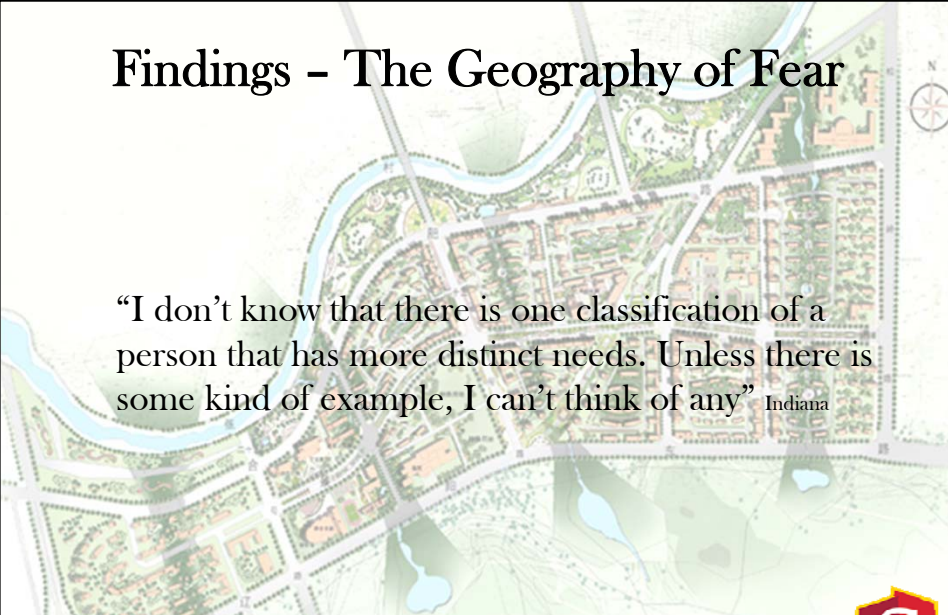


“...in my experience, I haven’t come across any [gender-specific transportation needs]” North Carolina West

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear



“I don’t know that there is one classification of a person that has more distinct needs. Unless there is some kind of example, I can’t think of any” Indiana

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

“I think that [gender] equity is pretty inherent in the way that transportation systems are currently.... I can’t think of any reason there wouldn’t be gender equity and that’s probably why it hasn’t come up”

Wisconsin

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

“There isn’t really anything you can do within the transportation infrastructure itself to make it any safer for one group or the other. I think that’s more of a societal issue, unfortunately”

California

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

With regard to lighting and personal safety:

“The only time that it ever came up - and I find it kind of **trivial** - is in our downtown parking garages and if women have to walk a block or two at night, street lighting is something that they mention once in a while. **Although we do have adequate street lighting, once in a while women will say it's not enough**” Wisconsin

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

“It's not something that's discussed, like, 'well here's the gender equity component of this, let's talk about it.' I guess we could do it that way, but it's more of a subconscious thing. During the general discussions of doing things, we don't talk about it, but we know it's there. **In our case, there's nothing that we can do that really would make a difference for one gender one way or the other**” Arkansas

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

“...about 15 years ago, we built a parking garage and obviously people, mostly ladies said, ‘Hey, you need to keep this well lit because we work the night shift downtown and we want to feel safe going to the parking garage,’ and so that was a part of the design. I don’t think that their input changed what we did much” Montana

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

“...one of the guys in the department said, ‘That’s really sad that our city has gotten to the point that you can’t be by yourself on the trail system anymore.’ And I said, ‘No, no, no, you misinterpreted that. It’s not that I won’t do that on the trail system anymore, I *never* would.... I think about those sorts of things when sometimes the men in the department don’t” Alaska

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## Findings - The Geography of Fear

“...we had a consultant who was a woman and she was very concerned about a shared use path going through a tunnel because of women’s safety while walking in the tunnel” North Carolina East

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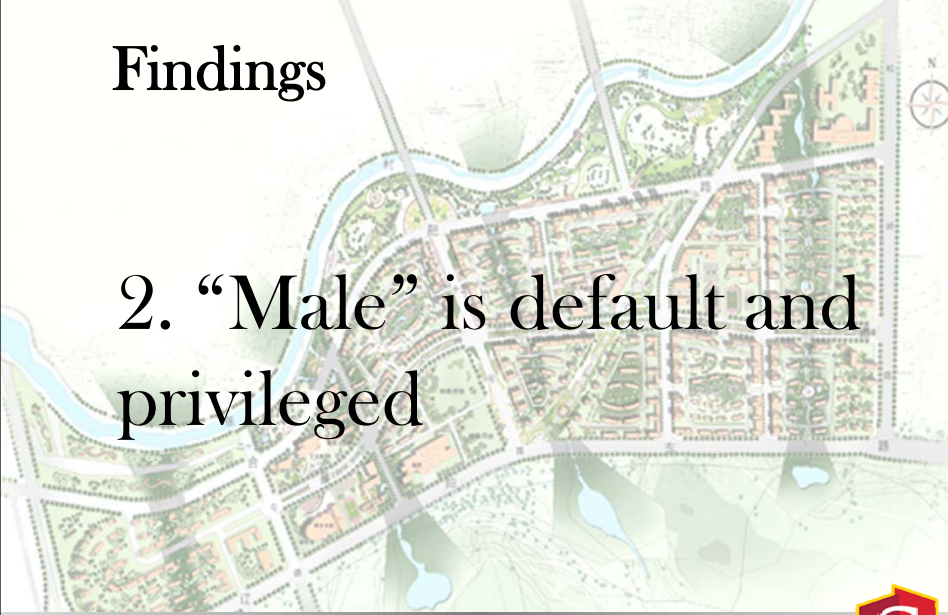
## Findings - The Geography of Fear

Women’s mobility is self-limited and addressing this is not a priority for the city:

“Some of our greenways are not lit at all and so people have to bring their own light to walk at night, but some women said they just won’t walk at all because some areas can get very, very dark even though they are in an urban area” North Carolina East

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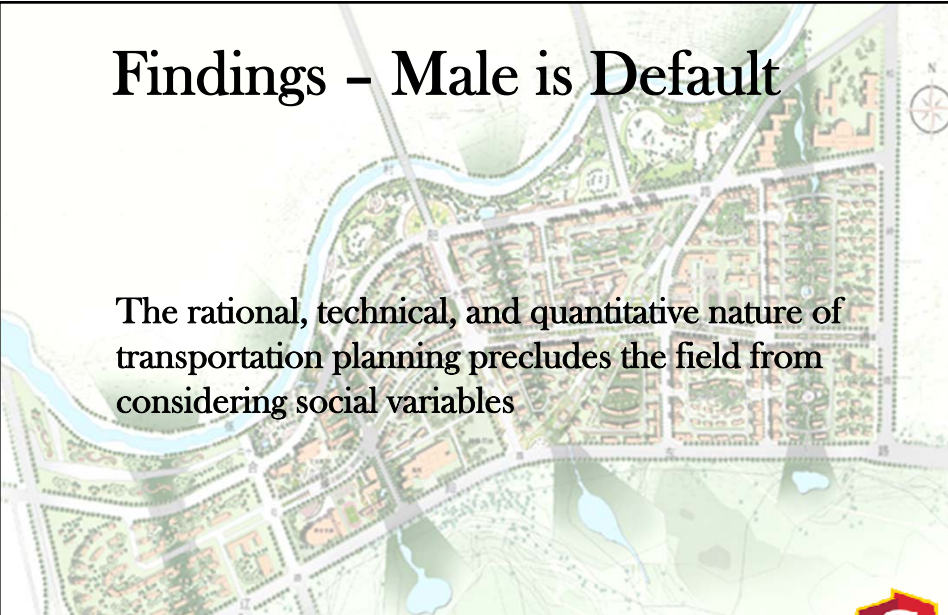





# Findings

## 2. “Male” is default and privileged


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# Findings - Male is Default

The rational, technical, and quantitative nature of transportation planning precludes the field from considering social variables

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## Findings - Male is Default

Minimum design standards do not accommodate women's transportation concerns

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## Findings - Male is Default

“If someone came to me and said, ‘I can’t walk around my community because I don’t feel safe,’ it would never dawn on me to say, ‘Are you gay, are you transgender, are you the only black guy in the neighborhood?’ I would just be like ‘okay’ and I would just do the analysis” New Jersey

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## Findings - Male is Default

Gender is not a variable in transportation metrics:

“I never break anything down by gender” New Jersey

“When we track traffic...gender is not something that we ever look at.... I've always kind of looked at it as being sexless”  
Alaska

“I really think that it speaks to equality in general, that when we do things...it has nothing to do with gender or race; a person is a person, regardless” New Mexico

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## Findings - Male is Default

“I can't think of a reason why [we don't collect any gender metrics] but I can safely say it hasn't hampered us” North Carolina West

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## Findings - Male is Default

“We don’t really look at ‘This neighborhood needs this,’ or ‘This community needs that.’ We just look at ‘Do we need a signal here because of the volumes?’” Kansas

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## Findings - Male is Default

Addressing women’s concerns are “extra” or “add-on”:

“I look at most of the transportation needs in terms of mobility and safety so if you’re making it safe for most people, I think it covers that. Lighting covers that. There may be people who feel less safe than others, but you have to meet the industry standards when it comes to safety” New York

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## Findings - Male is Default

“In the United States, we don’t have good street lighting, because we don’t have money for it. **We spend our money on other things**” Utah

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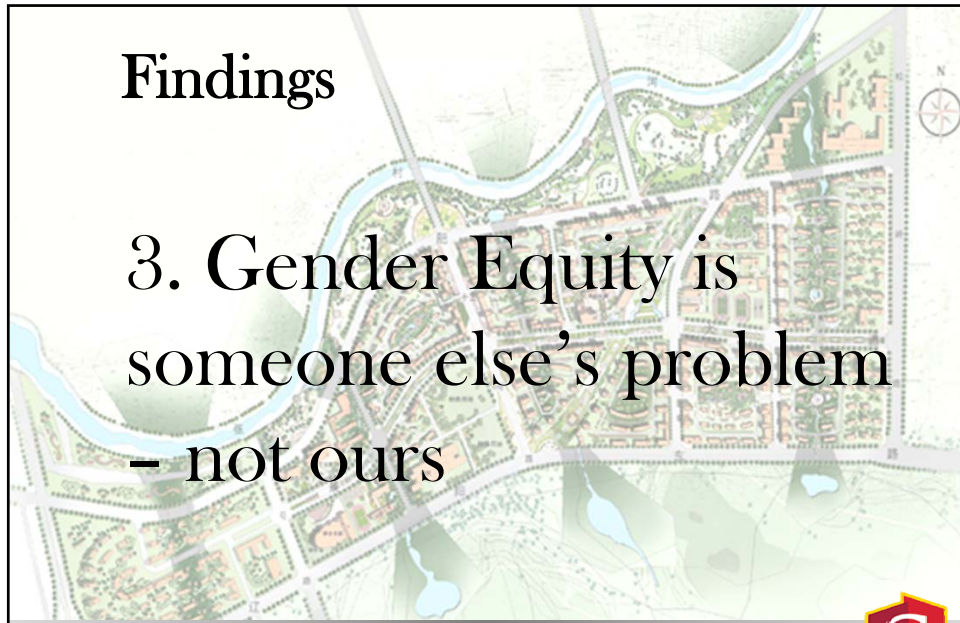


## Findings - Male is Default

“I would say that the people who I see cycling in the city are mostly men, which really isn’t that surprising because **the conditions for cycling in the city really favors the cyclists who are strong and confident who tend to be male**” North Carolina East

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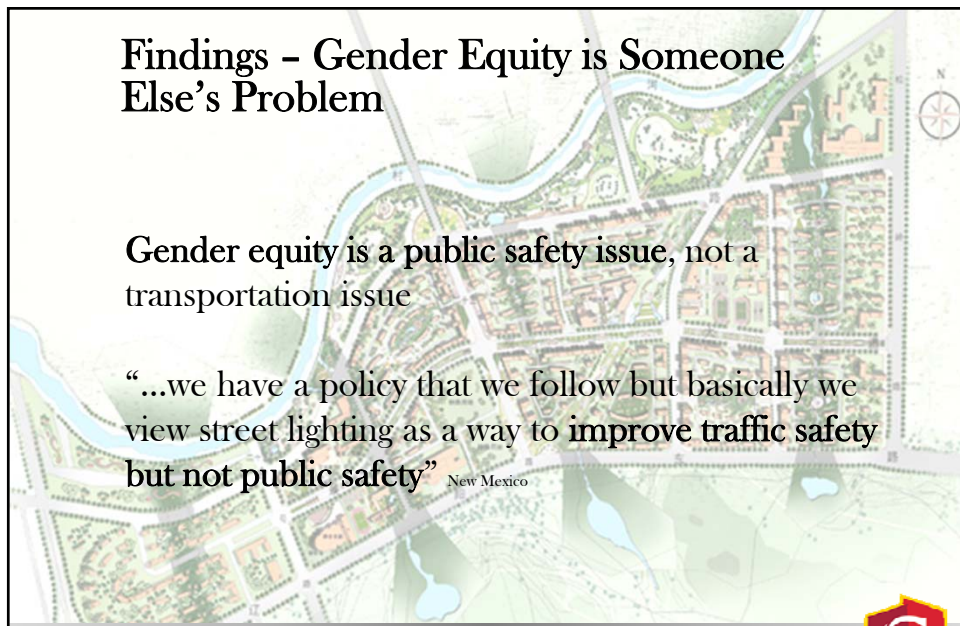





# Findings

## 3. Gender Equity is someone else's problem - not ours

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# Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

Gender equity is a **public safety issue**, not a transportation issue

“...we have a policy that we follow but basically we view street lighting as a way to **improve traffic safety** but not **public safety**” New Mexico

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## Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

Street harassment or street violence “would be a police matter, not a transportation matter. You’re thinking about two different forms of safety. You’ve got your highway safety and you’ve got your physical safety. And walking on a sidewalk being harassed would be the law enforcement’s jurisdiction” North Carolina West

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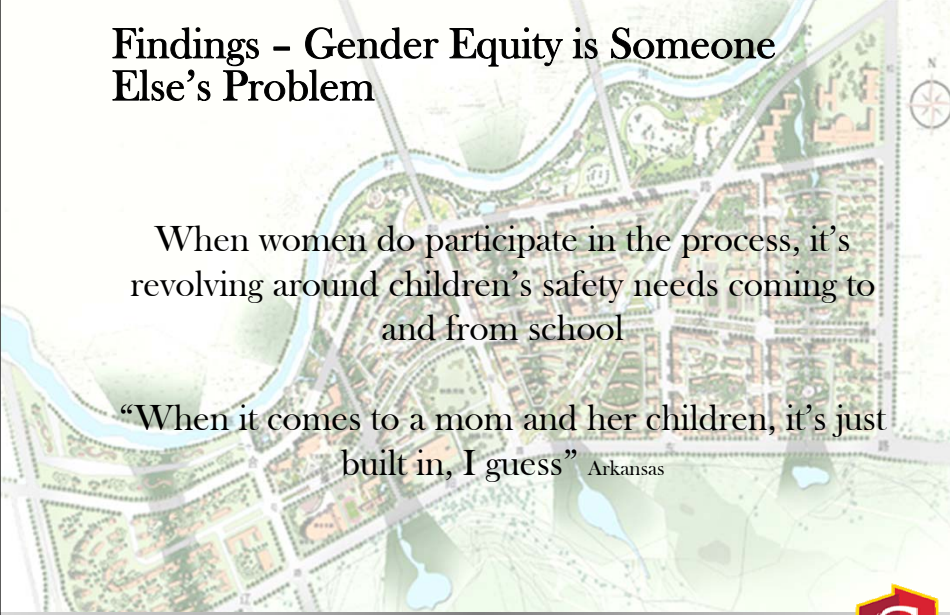
## Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

It's a public participation issue:

Interviewees state that women aren't showing up to public meetings. They rarely ask “why” they aren't showing up

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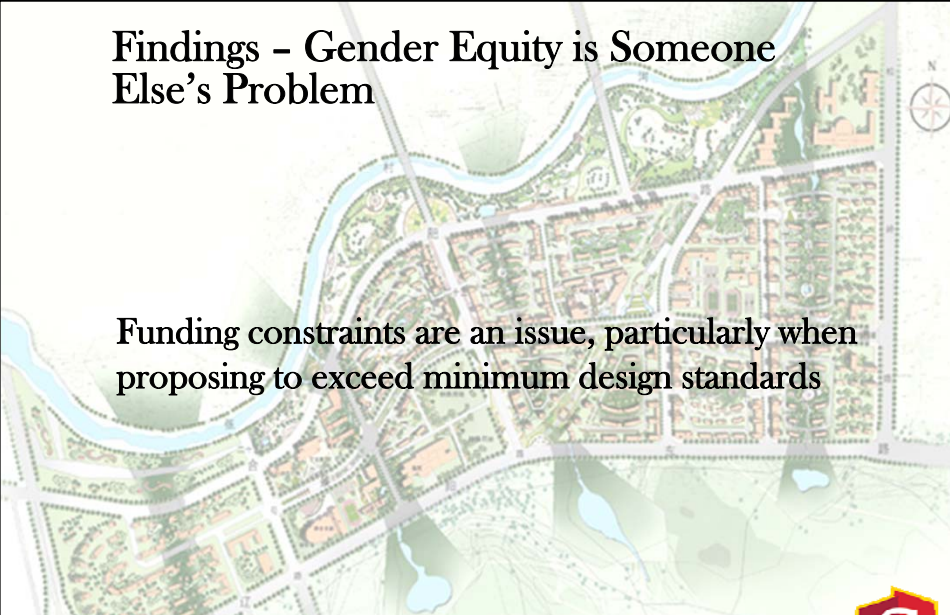



### Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

When women do participate in the process, it's revolving around children's safety needs coming to and from school

"When it comes to a mom and her children, it's just built in, I guess" Arkansas


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### Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

Funding constraints are an issue, particularly when proposing to exceed minimum design standards

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## Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

### Pursuing gender equity is elected officials' responsibility

On gender disparities among transportation planners: "The mayor really is in charge of making a lot of these appointments, so if you have a mayor really interested in putting the best person for the job, then he'll find the best person for the job and it may be a woman or it may be a man. And I think if you have a mayor that has a lot of political favors to return, it tends to be mostly men" New Jersey

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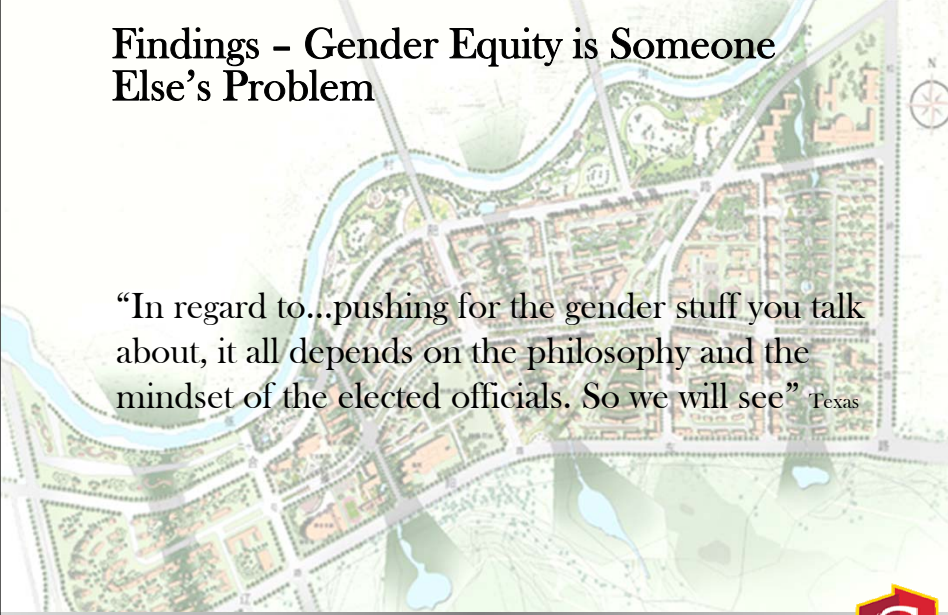
## Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

"I tell people that my role is the engineer. I'm not the mayor, I'm not running for office.... I don't have to agree with the mayor every day...I just need to adapt to his plans" New Jersey

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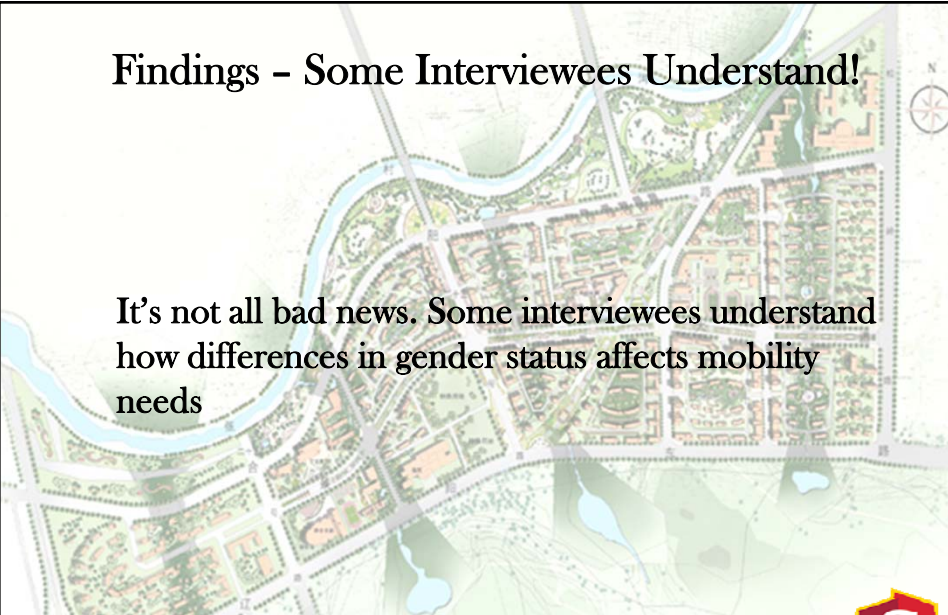





### Findings - Gender Equity is Someone Else's Problem

“In regard to...pushing for the gender stuff you talk about, it all depends on the philosophy and the mindset of the elected officials. So we will see” <sup>Texas</sup>


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### Findings - Some Interviewees Understand!

It's not all bad news. Some interviewees understand how differences in gender status affects mobility needs

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## Findings - Some Interviewees Understand!

With regard to tunnels that were perceived as unsafe: “We’re going to try to address things like taking away areas where people can hide, we’re going to try to keep them open and lit as much as possible” <sup>Tennessee</sup>

“We have a lot of college students. We have a lot of young women who are out walking and we try to look at that in terms of street lighting” <sup>Wisconsin</sup>

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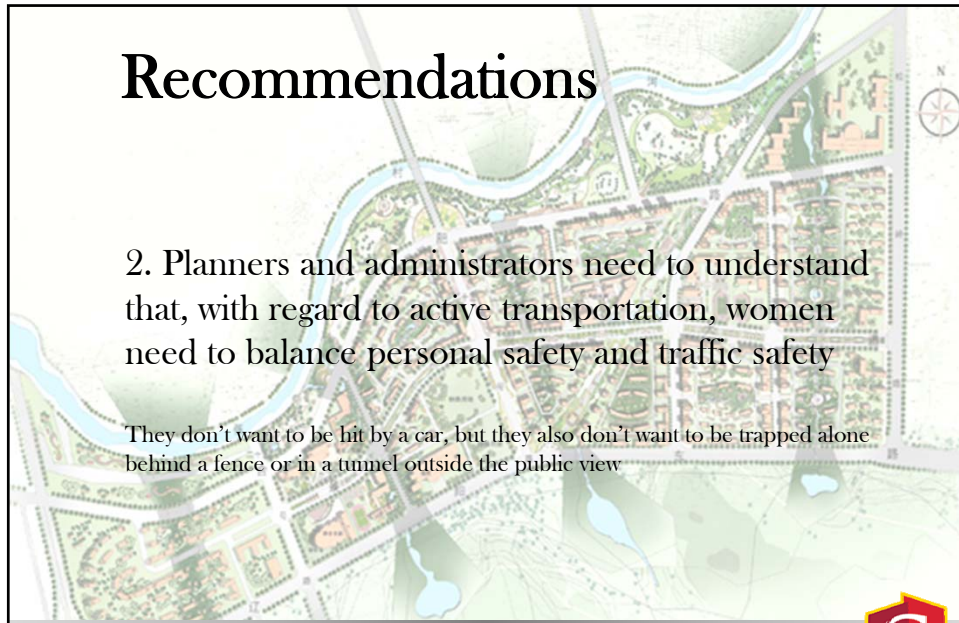
## Recommendations

1. Planning, policy, and administration programs should be teaching the Geography of Fear

**There is a social aspect to planning that should not be minimized or ignored:**  
“If someone came to me and said, ‘I can’t walk around my community because I don’t feel safe,’ it would never dawn on me to say, ‘Are you gay, are you transgender, are you the only black guy in the neighborhood?’ I would just be like ‘okay’ and I would just do the analysis”

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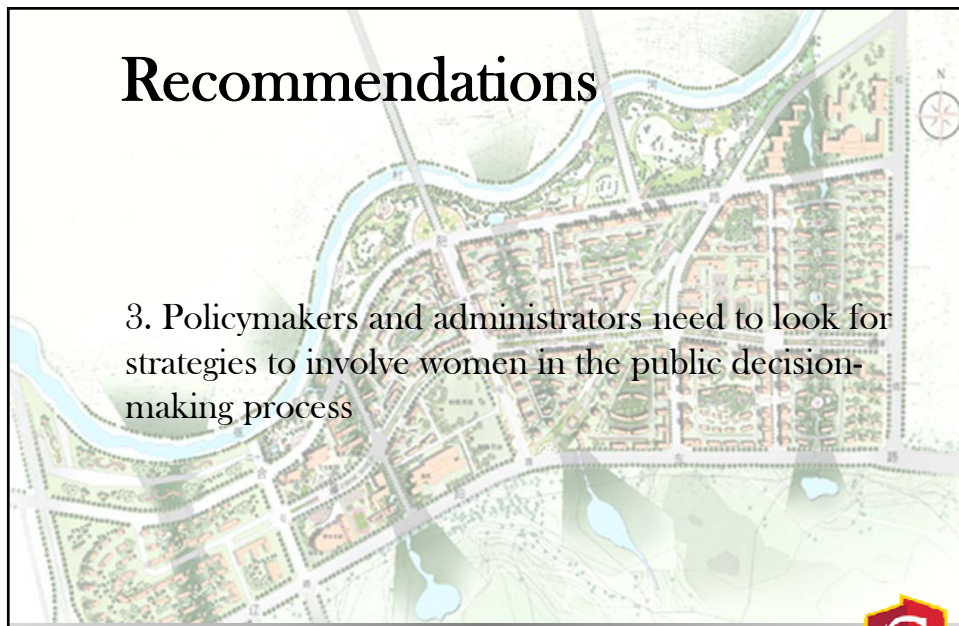



## Recommendations

2. Planners and administrators need to understand that, with regard to active transportation, women need to balance personal safety and traffic safety

They don't want to be hit by a car, but they also don't want to be trapped alone behind a fence or in a tunnel outside the public view


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## Recommendations

3. Policymakers and administrators need to look for strategies to involve women in the public decision-making process

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# Recommendations

4. Examine metrics for gender-based disparities. Seek ways to understand and recognize the unique transportation needs of women and gender-nonconforming individuals

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