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Gender Equity Commission Priorities: An Archival Study and Prospects for the Future

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Gender Equity Commission Priorities: An Archival Study and Prospects for the Future

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Abstract

This research explores the priorities of the gender equity commission in New York City over forty-five years. Archival commission data was organized thematically to understand the history of gender equity and suggest future possibilities for gender equity beyond New York City. In our historical analysis, we see an expansion of the definition of gender and an adoption of an intersectional approach to gender. We identify four historical gender priorities: *sexual harassment and violence*, *pay equity and economic advancement*, *health and safety*, and *gender recognition and celebration*. To address systemic issues of gender inequity, we recommend local level administrators embed an intersectional approach in their policies and programming and move away from the commission model to one of a permanent office or agency. These recommendations will better equip municipalities with the resources to increase gender equity, particularly during COVID-19 recovery.

Keywords

gender, gender equity, municipal government, archival research

Introduction

Gender¹ equity has become a central, and contentious, agenda item in jurisdictions across the United States. Since the onset of COVID-19, major U.S. cities have grappled with how to address pressing gender equity topics ranging from retaining women in the paid labor force and childcare policy to domestic violence interventions. These gender equity concerns amplified by COVID-19 provide municipalities opportunities to be at the forefront of creating more gender equitable structures for disproportionately impacted populations. As “laboratories of democracy,” (Tafoya 2018) municipalities have a significant role in shaping public opinion about gender equity, and in influencing how gender equity is addressed. Most municipalities do not have

permanent agencies dedicated to gender equity; rather, municipalities making a concerted effort to address gender issues often use the commission model, where a body is created to perform a specific administrative, legislative, or judicial function (Britannica 2018). Oftentimes, commissions serve to study, advise, and make recommendations to the mayor for the purpose of addressing inequities. Some key examples of notable commissions across the U.S. include

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New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Pittsburgh.

As the largest and one of the most progressive municipalities in advancing gender equity in the current U.S. context, the New York City gender equity commission provides rich insight into a significantly under-examined area of study in public administration, serving as an example for other jurisdictions. New York City led on issues ranging from Title IX protections to salary history bans, and making feminine hygiene products accessible to all. In 1975, New York City was the first municipality to establish a commission devoted to gender equity (CSW 1976). Then, in 2016, the City Council and de Blasio Administration solidified the status of the commission as a permanent entity. Along with the commission's solidified status, we see the de Blasio administration expanding the commission's scope with a broader definition of gender and a more nuanced treatment of identity by accounting for intersectional identities.

The theory of intersectionality is relatively new in public administration and policy scholarship (Bearfield 2009; Breslin, Pandey and Riccucci 2017; Gaynor 2018; Nelson and Piatak 2021), primarily making its way into the mainstream literature in the 2010's. In practice, there is a growing recognition of the value and need to take an intersectional approach to solving public challenges; yet, public administrators are grappling with what an intersectional approach looks like in practice (Hamidullah and Riccucci 2017). Crenshaw (1989) coined the term "intersectionality" to address the "problematic consequence of the tendency to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (p. 139). Crenshaw (1989) contrasts the multidimensionality of Black women's experience against previous analyses that focus on only single identity categories (p. 139). Women of color are often the product of intersecting patterns of racism and sexism, where unlike white women or black men, their experiences are unique in that they neither share the *privileging* associated with being white or male. Instead, women of color are marginalized within both (Crenshaw

1991). This growing recognition of equity challenges related to overlapping, historically-marginalized identities is a significant administrative puzzle for administrators charged with devising solutions (Diggs 2022). COVID-19 makes this need to adopt an intersectional lens in gender-commission work even more critical, given the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on underrepresented populations.

This research contributes to the extant literature on local level gender equity efforts in the current U.S. context by tracing the historical priorities of the gender equity commission's work in a large, diverse municipality. The value of this work lies in both theory building around local-level equity initiatives and providing practitioners a starting point for gender equity efforts in other municipalities. Further, this historical analysis can serve as a model for future historical studies in public administration and policy, where archival data is underutilized as a qualitative source.

In this study, we perform a historical analysis of archival data from the commission. We identify four historical gender priorities: *sexual harassment and violence, pay equity and economic advancement, health and safety, and gender recognition and celebration*. We see an expansion of the definition of gender and an adoption of an intersectional approach to gender, particularly in recent years. To address systemic issues of gender inequity, we recommend municipalities embed an intersectional approach in their policies and programming and move away from the commission model to one of a permanent office or agency. These recommendations will better equip municipalities with the resources to increase gender equity, particularly during COVID-19 recovery.

Historical Context of the Gender Equity Commission in New York City

The history of efforts to address gender equity in New York City through the establishment of a commission dates back to 1975 (see

Table 1). Mayor Beame issued Executive Order No. 28 establishing the Committee on the Status of Women (CSW), which provided the foundation for New York City's cutting-edge approach and commitment to gender equity (NYC Exec. Ord. 28 1975). The CSW predominantly focused on assuring that women and girls in the city were free from discrimination on the basis of sex, enjoyed the benefits of equal opportunity, and the talents of women and girls were fully utilized to promote economic and social well-being (NYC Exec. Ord. 28 1975).

Over time, the commission broadened their focus from women and girls to gender, with greater emphasis on individuals from underrepresented sexual orientations and gender identities and expressions. (CSW 1984, 1992). For example, Mayor Koch and Mayor Dinkins began to recognize individuals from underrepresented sexual orientations and gender identities during their administrations. Mayor Koch established the Office of Gay and Lesbian Community in 1989, and Mayor Dinkins held the first reception for the Lesbian and Gay community at Gracie Mansion in 1990 (CSW 1984, 1992).

During the subsequent years, largely during Mayor Giuliani's administration, the commission's existence was primarily symbolic. In 2002, Mayor Bloomberg's Executive Order No. 29 restructured and refocused the commission in both name and practice, establishing the Commission on Women's Issues, and making public-private women's issues central to the commission's goals (NYC CGE, n.d.). It was not until Mayor de Blasio's Executive Order No. 10 in 2015, forty years after the first executive order establishing the CSW, that the language and title of the commission changed to the Commission on Gender Equity (CGE) and expanded its scope to include girls, women, and transgender and gender non-conforming persons regardless of ability, age, ethnicity/race, faith, gender expression, immigrant status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (NYC CGE, n.d.). This expansion with explicit language in the executive order was a bold break from the past that focused primarily on women and girls. Mayor de Blasio's long-

term commitment to prioritizing gender equity in New York City resulted in amending the New York City charter, to create a permanent commission on gender equity (NYC CGE, n.d.).

Literature Review: Efforts to Promote Gender Equity at the Local Level

Public administration and policy literature on gender equity efforts in the United States is limited and primarily focuses on national and state policy (Chappell 2002; Chappell and Curtin 2013; Gains and Lowndes 2018). Prominent national issues range from The Equal Pay Act of 1963, Title VII of The Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Crampton, Hodge and Mishra 1997), Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (England, Levine and Mishel 2020), and The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA) to state policies such as restrictive abortion legislation (Felkey and Lybecker 2018; Jones, Lindberg and Witwer 2020), and SOGIE (Sexual orientation, gender identity and expression) policies including employment protections (McCandless and Elias 2021; Smith et al. 2020), and gender I.D. markers on state-issued identity documents (Byrne and Open Society Foundations 2014; Elias and Colvin 2020; Westbrook and Schilt 2014). Because gender equity has historically been treated as a federal or state issue, few municipalities address gender directly. However, gender norms and dynamics are shifting, and in turn, now prompting local level policy makers to address gender policy.

Gender Equity at the Local Level

Gender equity policy at the local level is a relatively new development (Gains and Lowndes 2018; Van Donk 2000), as most scholarship at the local level targets gender differences in leadership (Bishu and Alkadry 2017; Dula et al. 2021) and representation (Holman 2017; Wasserman 2018). Municipalities across the U.S. often take overwhelmingly progressive or restrictive approaches to gender equity issues including women's advancement in the

Table I. New York City Gender Equity Commission 1974–2021.

Administration	Executive Order	Leadership	Commission Members
Mayor Beame 1974–1977 Commission on the Status of Women	E.O. 28. Establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women E.O. 86. Amendment Established structure of the Commission on the Status of Women	Ruth B. Cowan, Chairperson Amalia V. Betanzos, Vice Chairperson	Gillis MacGil Addison; Miriam Bockman Assemblywoman Elizabeth Connelly; Joan Ganz Cooney; Morris D. Crawford Jr.; Gregory Farrell; Burton M. Fine; Joseph H. Flom; Danielle I. Gardner; Councilwoman Carol Greitzer; Elizabeth Forsling Harris; Helen Caplin Heller; Velma Murphy Hill; Dr. Robert S. Hirschfield; Allan R. Johnson; Sandra C. Katz; Lawrence E. Levinson; Marilyn W. Levy; Peter A. Lewis; Dr. Marcella Maxwell; Bess Meyerson; Mary Burke Nicholas; Eleanor H. Norton; Lillian Roberts; Councilwoman-at-Large Aileen B. Ryan; Irma Vidal Santaella; Frank J. Schultz; Phyllis Cerf Wagner; Juanita E. Watkins; Shirley Weiner; Ruth Harnett
Mayor Koch 1978– 1989 Commission on the Status of Women	Governed by: E.O. 28. Establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women E.O. 86. Amendment Established structure of the Commission on the Status of Women	Marilyn J. Flood, Executive Director Marcella Maxwell, Chairperson 1978–1984 Kay J. Wight, Chairperson 1985–1989 Anne M. Briscoe, Vice Chairperson Lynn Hecht Schafan, Esq.: Vice Chairperson	Miriam Bockman; Brenda Brimmer; Anne M. Briscoe; Angela Cabrera; Barbara A. Clark; Ruth B. Cowan; Rita DiMartino; Jeannine M. Dowling; Edythe W. First; Estel Fonesca; Margot J. Fox; Ellis T. Gravette Jr.,; Councilwoman Carol Greitzer; Gloria W. Harvey; Judith Johnson; Michelle Jordan; Colette Mahoney RSHM; Jewell Jackson McCabe; Kay McGovern; Mary Burke Nicholas; Lenore Perry; Mary E. Powers; Maria Teresa Preite; Carolyn Reed; Joyce Richardson; Aileen B. Ryan; Carol A. Scafati; Laura Polla Scanlon; Sandra Schnur; Claire Shulman; Lowery Sims; Rose M. Singer; Linda Small, M.D. Taracido; Pat Koch Thaler; Jocelyn Vince Grace Lyu-Volckhausen; Brenda J. White Bonnie G. Wong; Barbara Reach
Mayor Dinkins 1990–1993 Commission on the Status of Women	Governed by: E.O. 28. Establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women E.O. 86. Amendment	Marcella Maxwell, Chairperson 1990–1992 Bella Abzu, Chairperson 1993	Judith I. Avner; Ruth A. Begun; Judith C. Bello; Edith K. Bergtraum; Charlotte Brunch; Jon M. Burnham; Patricia M. Carey; Connie S.P. Chen; Linda T. Chin; Ruth B. Cowan; Ana

(continued)

Table I. (continued).

Administration	Executive Order	Leadership	Commission Members
	Established structure of the Commission on the Status of Women	Dr. Anne Briscoe, Vice Chairperson Lynn Jackson Quinn, Director	R. Daniel; Elenor Rubin Denker; Jeannine M. Dowling; Suleika Cabrera Drinane; Councilwoman; June M. Eisland; Victoria Elliot; Karin Falencki; Edythe W. First; Peggy Graham; Winifred L. Grant; Meryl R. Grayer; Councilwoman Carol Greitzer; Elinor Guggenheimer; A. Lee Hatcher; Mary Holloway; In Sook Hong; Julie; Tarachow Hoover; Jean L. Janover; Michelle Jordan; Kate Rand Lloyd; Carlota M. Maduro; Colette Mahoney; Connie Mauro; Marcella Maxwell; Ann Merlino; Lenore Perry; Herminia; Ramos-Donovan; Howard J. Rubenstein; Rose M. Singer; Lucia Suarez; Pat Koch Thaler; Jocelyn Vince; Kay J. Wight
Mayor Giuliani 1994–2001 Commission on the Status of Women	Governed by: E.O. 28. Establishment of the Commission on the Status of Women E.O. 86. Amendment Established structure of the Commission on the Status of Women	Susan Molinari, Chairperson 1994 Amalia V. Betanzos, Chairperson 1995 Lynn Jackson Quinn, Director	Names of Commission members were unavailable via archival and internet searches
Mayor Bloomberg 2002–2013 Commission on Women's Issues	E.O. 29. Commission on Women's Issues	Amalia V. Betanzos, Chairperson 2002–2003 Anne Sutherland Fuchs, Chairperson 2004 Brianna Collins, Director	Lynn Jackson Quinn; Merly M. Jones; Rosemary Millus; Carmen Rita Torrent; Andrea Shapiro Davis
Mayor de Blasio 2014–2021 Commission on Gender Equity	E.O. 10. Established Commission on Gender Equity	Azadeh Kahlili, Executive Director 2016 Chirlane McCray and Silda Palerm, Co-chairs Jacqueline M. Ebanks, Executive Director 2016	Shara Ahmed; Chitre Aiyar; Diana Ayala Radhika Balakrishnan; Tania Bien; Jimmie Briggs; Laurie Cumbo; Cecelia Gaston; Laura Popa; Arva Rice; Beverly Tillery; Mayor de Blasio

workplace (Bernick and Heidbreder 2018; Feeney and Stritch 2019; Gooden 2017), SOGIE rights and protections (Burack 2018; Baumle, Lee Badgett and Boutcher 2020; Cravens 2015), or SOGIE restrictions such as “bathroom bills” (Murib 2020; Platt and Milam 2018; Wuest 2019). Given local government is closest to the population served, its impact is most immediately felt on citizens’ lives (Van Donk 2000), presenting a significant opportunity to shape public opinion about and policy for gender equity (Elias 2020; Tafoya 2018). Moreover, the role of local government is imperative to ensuring sustainability of gender rights and protections (Flores and O’Neil 2020; Karch 2020; Scala and Paterson 2017).

Understanding the historical work of the New York City Gender Equity Commission provides a starting point for local governments to learn from and adopt policy and practice within their jurisdictions. As COVID-19 continues to exacerbate gender disparities, local level approaches to gender equity become even more critical for underrepresented populations during COVID-19 recovery.

Research Design

Method

We perform a historical analysis of archival gender equity commission data to understand how New York City gender equity priorities have changed over time and the implications for future efforts. The mayoral gender equity commission was selected for analysis, because it is an extension of executive leadership, charged with specific gender equity goals, and works with multiple federal, state, and local public agencies as well as private entities to serve jurisdictions. Archival data not only provides rich insight into historical interpretations of the administrative state, but also allows scholars to evaluate its evolution based on primary sources (Jaramillo 2020; Klareld 2017; Seawright, George and Bennett 2008; Ventresca and Mohr 2017). This research design involves the analysis of historical

documents² which provide information about organizations, individuals, and events of earlier times (Ventresca and Mohr 2017). Our study contributes to the limited work utilizing archival design in public administration and policy scholarship (Das, Jain and Mishra 2018; Gill and Meier 2000; Jaramillo 2020; Newbold 2010),³ while building on the substantive knowledge surrounding municipal commission priorities addressing gender equity.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data for this project was primarily collected on site from the New York City Department of Records and Information Services (DORIS), along with supplemental data from internet databases and website searches. Data sources include books, reports, meeting transcripts, executive orders, mayoral memorandums, press releases, news articles, and government web pages in the form of original hardcopy, microfiche, and internet-based documents⁴. The data was bound from the first mayoral commission to the de Blasio mayoral commission. Beginning in 1975, Mayor Beame issued Executive Order No. 28 establishing the first Committee on the Status of Women (CSW) to 2020 through the de Blasio administration with Executive Order No. 10 establishing the Commission on Gender Equity (CGE). Our archival data collection spanned a four-month period from October 2019 to January 2020 and was collected by five researchers. A total of 235 artifacts were included, with 17 books, 52 reports, 6 meeting transcripts, 24 executive orders, 98 mayoral memorandums, 9 press releases, 3 news articles, and 26 government web pages.

Data was coded in Atlas.Ti using a grounded theory approach to our inductive thematic analysis (Ventresca and Mohr 2017). First, the researchers took photos of original sources relevant to each mayoral gender equity commission and cataloged these documents in an excel to track the title of the document, type of document, date, key issue(s), focusing event(s), and key actor(s), mayoral administration, and legislation passed. Next, each of the

documents were uploaded to Atlas.ti. To create a coding scheme, 5 sample documents were analyzed independently by each researcher using an open coding approach⁵ to identify major commission priorities. Then, the researchers collaboratively compared commission priorities to develop a final coding scheme. Next, each researcher applied the coding scheme to 5 new sample documents to ensure intercoder reliability. After three iterations of checking intercoder reliability, coding was completed on all 235 documents. Then, data was interpreted and grouped into four main commission priorities as “a means of describing the phenomenon, to increase understanding and to generate knowledge” (Cavanagh 1997; Elo and Kyngas 2008). After all data was coded based on the four major commission priorities, we analyzed each administration for more nuanced sub-priorities following the same coding process described above.

Findings

Six administrations were analyzed to understand the gender equity priorities over the forty-five-year history of the gender equity commission in New York City. The four main commission priorities that emerged are: *sexual harassment and violence*, *pay equity and economic advancement*, *health and safety*, and *gender recognition and celebration*. Below is a summary table highlighting how the administrations contributed to each of the four major priorities, along with more nuanced sub-priorities that were consistent and dominant areas of focus for each administration. [See Table 2]

Sexual Harassment and Violence

The elimination of sexual discrimination and violence along gender lines was a focus of the commission in each mayoral administration beginning with Mayor Beame (NYC Exec. Ord. 28 1975). The commission under Mayor Beame actively advocated for legislation to combat sex discrimination and violence against women (CSW 1976). During Mayor Beame's administration, the commission

successfully amended a domestic relations law to remedy the inequities in the division of property in matrimonial actions in New York City (CSW 1976; NYC Exec. Ord. 28 1975). The commission continued to push for policy to end sexual discrimination and violence during the Koch and subsequent administrations (CSW 1976; NYC Exec. Ord. 28 1975). Mayor Koch's administration championed sexual harassment and victims rights by removing the requirement that a rape victim prove that they “earnestly resisted” rape (CSW 1984).

As part of Mayor Dinkins's administration, the commission sought public involvement by holding hearings to address sexual harassment policies and procedures in the New York City Municipal Workplace and adopted recommendations to facilitate an effective and productive workforce (CSW 1992). As a result of the commission's advocacy work on domestic violence, in November 1993, Mayor Dinkins established the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council, which was tasked to formulate policies and programs related to all aspects of services and protocols for victims of domestic violence, develop methods to improve the coordination of systems and service for victims of domestic violence.

In 1994, Mayor Giuliani addressed domestic violence as a public health epidemic and at the recommendation of the Commission on the Status of Women, the Mayor established the Commission to Combat Family Violence to develop a comprehensive strategy to fight domestic violence throughout the City. Mayor Bloomberg and the Commission on Women's Issues promoted resources for domestic violence by launching the *NYC Women's Resource Network* in 2009. This network is a free, online database with over 1,000 organizations and agencies representing a broad range of services offered throughout the City including support on domestic violence, education, housing, and other community services.⁶

During the Mayor de Blasio administration, the commission actively ensured legal protections for all genders remained in place. Mayor de Blasio's administration instituted legislative policy, Stop Sexual Harassment NYC (CGE

Table 2. Priorities of the New York City Gender Equity Commission: 1974–2021.

Administration	Priority 1: Sexual Harassment and Violence	Priority 2: Pay equity and economic advancement	Priority 3: Health and Safety	Priority 4: Gender Recognition and Celebration
Mayor Beame 1974–1977	Mayor Beame Actively Advocated for Sex Discrimination Legislation Amended a domestic relations law to remedy the inequities in the division of property in matrimonial actions in New York City (CSW 1976; NYC Exec. Ord. 28 1975).	Mayor Beame Worked with all Levels of Government for the Economic Advancement of Women Advocated and received federal funding through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA)	Mayor Beame Advocated for Measures Supporting Victims of Domestic Violence Provided shelter to abused parents and their children and protected battered wives who fled their households from being held at fault for desertion in a divorce action along with other measures.	Celebrating and Recognizing Progress in Equal Employment Opportunities Organized conferences to celebrate progress made in the labor force. along with highlighting persistent, such as the conference is the “Women, Work, and CETA” conference in 1977
Mayor Koch 1978–1989	Mayor Koch Championed Sexual Harassment & Violence Victims Rights Removed the requirement that a rape victim prove that they “earnestly resisted” rape (CSW 1984).	Mayor Koch Continued to Address Economic Advancement in Workplace Passed the 1984 Personnel Order for Alternative Work Schedules that established the use of part time work schedules for those in managerial positions.	Mayor Koch Protected Women’s Reproductive Rights. The Commission successfully advocated for the defeat of an abortion bill that would have required a court order verifying parental consent for abortions performed on females under 18.	Mayor Koch Celebrated Women’s Achievement Supported programs and contests in private and public schools, such as best poster, essay and performing arts, depicting the role of women in history.
Mayor Dinkins 1990–1993	Mayor Dinkins Prioritized Public Involvement in Sexual Discrimination,	Mayor Dinkins Included the Gay and Lesbian Communities in Economic Benefits	Mayor Dinkins Provided Resources to the Public on Health	Mayor Dinkins Included the Gay and Lesbian Community Mayor Dinkins and

(continued)

Table 2. (continued).

Administration	Priority 1: Sexual Harassment and Violence	Priority 2: Pay equity and economic advancement	Priority 3: Health and Safety	Priority 4: Gender Recognition and Celebration
	Harassment, and Violence Policy Sought public involvement by holding a public hearing to address sexual harassment policies and procedures in the New York City Municipal Workplace, which lead to the establishment of the Domestic Violence Coordinating Council.	Provided domestic partnership benefits for same-sex couples, making New York City one of the first cities in the nation to grant rights to such couples, helping to set in motion similar progress across the country	Concerns for Women Conducted a survey and published a booklet titled "Stress" to share information and strategies for women dealing with stress.	his wife hosted the first Lesbian/Gay Pride and History Month Reception at Gracie Mansion
Mayor Giuliani 1994–2001	Mayor Giuliani Developed a Comprehensive Sexual Discrimination, Harassment, and Violence Strategy Established the Commission to Combat Family Violence to develop a comprehensive strategy to fight domestic violence throughout the City.	Advancing Women's Economic Advancement by Providing Information to Women Entrepreneurs Commission provided information about the Small Business Administration's (SBAs) Office of Women's Business Ownership	Mayor Giuliani Focused on Increasing Awareness of Women's Health New York City agencies participated in the "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" walk sponsored by the American Cancer Society.	Mayor Giuliani Prepared Young Women for Future Success Created the Task Force on Girls and Young Women Girlspeak forum for girls and young women to share their hopes, dreams, needs, and suggestions.
Mayor Bloomberg 2002–2013	Mayor Bloomberg Promoted Resources for Domestic Violence and Other Women's Issues Launched the <i>NYC Women's Resource Network</i> to make services accessible to women.	Mayor Bloomberg Supported Minority and Women-Owned Businesses to Advance Women's Economic Success Signed Local Law 129 which prompted city agencies to buy	Mayor Bloomberg Provided Women with Resources to Lead Healthy and Productive Lives Launched the community health initiative, "Step Out	Mayor Bloomberg Connected New York City women with organizations, institutions, and monetary resources The recipients of the "New York City Small Business

(continued)

Table 2. (continued).

Administration	Priority 1: Sexual Harassment and Violence	Priority 2: Pay equity and economic advancement	Priority 3: Health and Safety	Priority 4: Gender Recognition and Celebration
		more goods and services from certified minority-owned and women-owned businesses.	New York City” in 2004.	Awards,” were required to be in business for a minimum of two years, have fewer than 100 employees, and demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit.
Mayor de Blasio 2014–2021	Mayor de Blasio Actively Ensured Legal Protections for All Genders. Upheld federal Title IX protections for all genders.	Mayor de Blasio Advocated for Gender Pay Equity and Economic Advancement Passed policy including banning City agencies from inquiring about a job applicant’s salary history	Mayor de Blasio Expanded Access to Sexual Health and Reproductive Justice Resources Passed legislation increasing access to feminine hygiene products for New York City’s shelter residents, students, and inmates.	Mayor de Blasio recognized more identities and intersectionalities of identities, CGE included: girls, women, transgender and gender non-conforming persons, regardless of ability, age, ethnicity/race, faith, gender expression, immigrant status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status

n.d.). The commission provided testimony during oversight hearings examining the City’s efforts to adhere to federal Title IX mandates, which protect against discrimination based on sex (CGE n.d.). At these hearings, the commission discussed how the City combatted the federal government’s efforts to dismantle aspects of Title IX for certain genders (CGE n.d.)

Pay Equity and Economic Advancement

Pay equity and economic advancement have consistently been a concern of each commission from Mayor Beame to Mayor de Blasio to

advance gender equity in New York City (CGE n.d.; CSW 1976). The commission under the Beame administration worked with all levels of government for the economic advancement of women, especially at the federal level, to make women’s wages equal to the wages paid to men performing similar work. More specifically, the Beame commission advocated and received federal funding through the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) to develop programs and initiatives to increase the number of women in the labor force. For example, Women and Work: The Labor Market Status of Women in New York

City and Women in Management was designed by CSW members, including their presence in more nontraditional jobs and employment roles dominated by men. The commission also offered programs and training designed to increase the number of women in the labor force, including their presence in more nontraditional jobs and employment roles dominated by men (CSW 1976).

Under Mayor Koch's administration, the commission addressed issues of economic advancement in the workplace with the 1984 Personnel Order for Alternative Work Schedules that established the use of part time work schedules for those in managerial positions (CSW 1984). The Mayor Koch administration also testified in support of the Gay Rights Bill to protect the City's lesbian and gay residents from discrimination in employment, housing, and other public accommodations (CSW 1984). Mayor Dinkins included the Gay and Lesbian communities in economic benefits that were in place for heterosexual partners. Mayor Dinkins believed in the value of all people's contributions to government work and society at large, regardless of their sexual orientation. Under Mayor Dinkins, CSW member, Dr. Majorie Hill, was a key figure working on LGBT equity in New York City. In addition to her role with CSW, Mayor Dinkins appointed Dr. Majorie Hill as the director of the Mayor's Office for the Lesbian and Gay Community in 1990. While in this position, Dr. Hill shepherded in domestic partnership benefits for same-sex couples, making New York City one of the first cities in the nation to grant rights to such couples, helping to set in motion similar progress across the country (Gay City News 2013).

During Mayor Giuliani's administration, the commission focused on advancing women's economic advancement by providing information to women entrepreneurs. The commission provided information about the Small Business Administration's (SBAs) Office of Women's Business Ownership, an independent agency of the federal government, that offered aid, counsel, to fund varied long-term needs of small businesses. The commission's

emphasis on women's economic advancement continued under the Mayor Bloomberg administration with programming supporting minority and women owned- business. In 2005, to increase direct economic benefits and to minority and women-owned businesses, Mayor Bloomberg signed Local Law 129 which prompted city agencies to buy more goods and services from certified minority-owned and women-owned businesses. During Mayor de Blasio's administration, the commission's robust advocacy for gender pay equity and economic advancement resulted in numerous policy changes including banning City agencies from inquiring about a job applicant's salary history, expanding paid sick and full-day pre-K for all New Yorkers, which constitutes the largest expansion of pre-K in history (CGE n.d.).

Health and Safety

Beginning with the early administrations, the commission addressed numerous health and safety issues to promote gender equity in New York City (CSW 1976). Under the Beame administration, CSW advocated for legislation to eliminate sex discrimination and amend domestic relations law to remedy the inequities in the division of property in matrimonial actions in New York City. On the state level, CSW advocated for measures supporting victims of domestic violence, such as permitting facilities to provide shelter to abused parents and their children and protecting those who flee their households from being held at fault for desertion in a divorce action. Mayor Koch protected women's reproductive rights by successfully advocating for the defeat of an abortion bill that would have required a court order verifying parental consent for abortions performed on females under 18.

During Mayor Dinkins's administration, CSW provided resources to the public on health concerns for women. To do this, the commission distributed an Interest Survey in November 1991 to gather insights into women's needs and interests in public programs and services. The survey identified "dealing with stress" as a special health

concern for women and in response, the New York City Commission on the Status of Women published a booklet titled "Stress" to share information and strategies for women dealing with stress. CSW and Mayor Giuliani sought to increase awareness of women's health issues, including breast cancer and osteoporosis. In 1995, the Giuliani commission in collaboration with the Women's Advisors Group and New York City agencies, participated in the "Making Strides Against Breast Cancer" walk sponsored by the American Cancer Society. Making Strides is a fundraising event in which individuals and teams raise money for the American Cancer Society's breast cancer programs in research, education, patient services and advocacy.

Mayor Bloomberg's commission believed that greater attention needed to be paid to women's health issues and providing women with the knowledge and resources to lead healthy, productive lives. CWI and Mayor Bloomberg launched the community health initiative, "Step Out New York City" in 2004. Then, under the leadership of Mayor de Blasio, the City has expanded access to sexual health and reproductive justice resources, including the global 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence campaign along with legislation increasing access to feminine hygiene products for New York City's shelter residents, students, and inmates.

Recognition and Celebration of Gender

Bringing gender to the forefront of public policy and administration involved recognizing the value and celebrating the successes that individuals from diverse gender backgrounds contribute to the City. All administrations celebrated women's history annually throughout the month of March with a number of public events and awards that honored women and gender equity in unique ways. Over time, however, administrations recognized and celebrated gender differently. Mayor Beame and the commission organized conferences to celebrate progress made in the labor force along with highlighting persistent barriers to be addressed

(CSW 1996-97). An example of such a conference is the "Women, Work, and CETA" conference in 1977 celebrating and recognizing progress in equal employment opportunities (CSW 1977).

CSW and the Koch Administration held celebratory events and gave awards to recognize women's milestones and efforts to promote future progress of women. Mayor Koch's administration celebrated women's contributions in government. On March 29, 1982, Mayor Koch presented a proclamation to Dr. Marcella Maxwell, Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women, that expanded Women's History Week into Women's History Month. This expansion included the support of programs and contests in private and public schools, such as best poster, essay and performing arts, depicting the role of women in history.⁷ Like Mayor Koch before him, Mayor Dinkins believed in the value of women's contributions to government work and society at large, and as a result, honored women in celebratory events and receptions. Mayor Dinkins expanded from solely "women" to a broader gender equity recognition, including sexual orientation, gender identity, and expression (SOGIE). For example, on June 28, 1990, Mayor Dinkins and his wife hosted the first Lesbian/Gay Pride and History Month Reception at Gracie Mansion. This was the first reception of its kind held specially for the Lesbian and Gay community at Gracie Mansion.

CSW under Mayor Giuliani started laying the groundwork to prepare young women for future success. Such initiatives included the 1994 commission's Task Force on Girls and Young Women Girlspeak forum for girls and young women to share their hopes, dreams, needs, and suggestions. Additionally, the commission established the Junior High School Leadership Award to be presented annually to outstanding girls in the June graduating class. This award honored girls who demonstrated leadership in school and community activities while maintaining a good academic record.

Mayor Bloomberg's commission focused on connecting New York City women with

organizations, institutions, and monetary resources. In recognition that women in New York meet the biggest challenges and hardships in their efforts to succeed, Mayor Bloomberg granted 16 city small businesses that shape, serve, and improve the lives of women \$140,000 dollars funded NYC small business award grants. The recipients of the "New York City Small Business Awards," were required to be in business for a minimum of two years, have fewer than 100 employees, demonstrate an entrepreneurial spirit, have annual revenue not exceeding \$2.5 million, and provide measurable benefits to the women of New York City.

Under the Mayor de Blasio administration, the focus of the commission expanded to recognize and celebrate more gender identities and sexual orientations. This expansion was embedded in the commission's work, and it included: girls, women, transgender and gender non-conforming persons, regardless of ability, age, ethnicity/race, faith, gender expression, immigrant status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. This was a significant shift from past administrations that focused more narrowly on heteronormative conceptions of gender or singular, targeted events.

The rich history of the gender commission in New York City provides a lasting framework that can serve as an example and point of comparison for municipalities across the U.S. This historical analysis affords us the opportunity to examine what is missing from the past to better address gender inequities in the future in different contexts. Based on the four commission priorities of *sexual harassment and violence, pay equity and economic advancement, health and safety, and gender recognition and celebration* that run throughout the forty-five year history, we conclude by positing how this history serves as a basis for future administrations to address gender equity in a post-COVID-19 context beyond New York City.

Discussion and Conclusion

From this historical analysis, we suggest two major avenues to build on this history and to meet the needs of historically-marginalized

populations in a post-COVID context. First, municipalities should specifically focus on intersectional identities, especially those communities with the greatest needs. Second, municipalities should move away from the commission model to one of a permanent office or agency. COVID-19 underscores the centrality of gender equity and importance of ensuring intersectional approaches that focus on structural inequities. More concerted approaches are needed to address the most pressing gender equity concerns in the present post-COVID context. This entails going beyond the priorities the commission has previously addressed, especially their target populations of heteronormative, privileged gender populations. For example, rather than celebrating the most successful women, who are traditionally white, middle-class, and heterosexual, commission work should focus on underrepresented populations most in need, using an intersectional approach. COVID-19 makes this need to refocus gender-commission work even more critical, given the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 on underrepresented populations.

First, an intersectional approach to gender in municipalities promotes a more inclusive, and in turn, equitable approach to commission work. In New York City, most gender commission work over its forty-five-year history was related to the recognition and celebration of gender, with a focus on privileged women. Or, what the policy literature would deem "deserving targets" (Schneider and Ingram 1993). For example, Mayor Koch's administration celebrated women's achievements and Mayor Giuliani's administration prepared young women for future success. These women recognized and celebrated throughout the forty-five-year history of the gender commission in New York City were often white, straight, and economically stable. In 2022, the need to move beyond "deserving" population and focus on intersectional identities, especially those communities with the greatest needs that have been impacted severely by COVID-19 is imperative.

To better-equip New York City and municipalities across the country in addressing today's

most pressing gender equity concerns like childcare and domestic violence, a nuanced understanding of how public administration and policy impact different identities differently, is necessary. For example, even under the identity category “mothers in New York City,” there is vast differentiation-- including race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, employment status, marital status, sexual orientation, and others that can shape the lived experience of individuals. For public administrators to account for the lived experiences of individuals within a given jurisdiction, understanding of intersectional disparities is crucial.

The de Blasio commission began continued this trajectory by expanding the scope of the commission to reach more identities, including girls, women, transgender and gender non-conforming persons, regardless of ability, age, ethnicity/race, faith, gender expression, immigrant status, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status (CGE n.d.; CSW 1976). Previously, Mayor Koch established the Office of Gay and Lesbian Community in 1989, and Mayor Dinkins hosted a reception for the Lesbian and Gay community at Gracie Mansion in 1990 (CSW 1984, 1992). To work toward gender equity in this way, the structure and discretion of gender commission should be assessed.

Second, to achieve greater gender equity post-COVID we suggest public administrators move away from the commission model to one of a permanent office or agency. An agency or office with greater discretion and resources would have the ability to create and assess gender equity programming in a much more systematic way. These capabilities and resources are important for cross-agency approaches to addressing pervasive challenges within municipalities, healthcare, workforce retention, and childcare, being key examples.

This model is utilized in the Mayor’s Office of Women’s Advancement (MOWA) in Boston, Massachusetts. The former Mayor of Boston, Martin Walsh, created the office in June 2014 to prioritize advocating for equal opportunity for women and girls across the city. MOWA creates specific programming and opportunities that support three priority

areas: economic equity, health and safety, representation, and childcare. Since 2016, MOWA invested in research designed to learn about Boston’s childcare sector challenges and in programs to address these needs in impactful ways. Given MOWA’s structure and decision-making discretion, they were able to conduct a survey to assess child care needs of families and provide concrete next steps to key actors in an effort to mitigate impacts during COVID-19 and beyond. If a model similar to MOWA were adopted in New York City or other municipalities across the U.S., this agency would serve not only to elevate the importance of gender issues in the jurisdiction and advocate for gender equitable policy, but also establish an entity that has the discretion to embed intersectionality into its work in order to respond to changing population needs.

This work highlights the value of the gender equity commission and its role in shaping gender equity across the U.S., a topic that deserves greater scholarly attention. This historical analysis can also serve as a model for future studies in our field to include historical data. More historical analyses in our applied field will enrich our knowledge of the past to better inform our future policy and administrative directions. This study is a first step in what we hope to be a fuller stream of scholarship on the way municipalities promote gender equity. Although focusing only on New York City is a limitation, this study is not intended to be generalizable. Future work should expand beyond New York City. Furthermore, this work does not address the impacts of commission efforts on populations. Understanding the effectiveness of gender equity commission efforts is critical and future studies should target the lived experiences of different populations using an intersectional approach.

Beyond the scope of this manuscript, there are many unexplored questions surrounding gender equity at the local level for both scholarship and practice. For example, little is known about the needs of different gendered populations, especially underrepresented and intersectional identities. In order for the gender equity commission to more fully understand and

address the critical and emerging equity issues, comprehensive survey work targeting gender equity concerns in the areas of education, work, and childcare, should be undertaken. Furthermore, the efforts of existing gender equity commissions are not well known, especially in terms of power structures, priorities, and population impacts. As in the cases of New York City and Boston, these two municipalities have different structures for addressing gender equity. Understanding these structural nuances can be instructive for both academic and practitioner communities. A database or systemic analysis of the existing gender-focused commissions and work that they do should be compiled to compare these priorities and assess outcomes for different populations. Sharing resources and best practices is particularly timely post-COVID, as commissions are restructuring and refocusing their work to address emerging gender needs. Ultimately, this line of research will better equip municipalities to address long standing gender inequities, including childcare during COVID-19 recovery.

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Notes

1. "Gender" is defined and used differently in various contexts. For the purposes of this manuscript, we use the term "gender" to represent SOGIE (sexual orientation, gender identity and expression).
2. Historical documents are treated as data which are gathered and stored for analysis. For example, archival data include both physical and electronic sources: agency documents such as annual

reports, meeting minutes, emails, communications, memos, personnel files, survey responses, and webpages (Das et al. 2018; Ventresca and Mohr 2017).

3. A few seminal works rely on this methodology. For example, Stivers (1995) in *Bureau Men, Settlement Women: Constructing Public Administration in the Progressive Era* stresses the importance of historical consciousness in public administration. In addition, Patricia Shields (2017) in *Jane Addams: Progressive Pioneer of Peace, Philosophy, Sociology, Social Work and Public Administration*, highlights the work of Jane Addams to demonstrate the value of tracing foundational concepts, such as pragmatism.
4. Supplemental Databases: NYC Government Publications Portal, https://a860-gpp.nyc.gov/collections/zw12z528p?locale=en_2 and the NYC Municipal Library, <https://nycrecords.bywatersolutions.com> Websites included: NYC Commission on Gender Equity, <https://www1.nyc.gov/site/genderequity/index.page> and the NYC Office of the Mayor <https://www1.nyc.gov/office-of-the-mayor/index.page>
5. Open coding provides a process for researchers to identify commission priorities through constant analyzing, comparing, and data categorization. (Moghaddam 2006)
6. City of New York. (2020). *NYC Women's Resource Network database*. <https://catalog.data.gov/dataset/nyc-womens-resource-network-database-b167e>
7. Office of the Mayor. (1982). Proclamation of Women's History Month.

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