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Gender Issues in Architecture

Kathryn H. Anthony

Introduction

Why do we need more women in architecture, and greater diversity among designers? Why has this been, and will it continue to be, such a paramount concern? As I argued in Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession, "The built environment reflects our culture, and vice-versa. If our buildings, spaces, and places continue to be designed by a relatively homogeneous group of people, what message does that send about our culture?" (Anthony, 2001). The built environment is one of culture's most lasting legacies, and women must be included.

This chapter reflects on the current state of women in the architectural profession, how far women in architecture have come and how far they still have to go. We begin by introducing Architect Barbie. Why did she come into being, what did she symbolize, and what issues did she raise? Next is an analysis of some major challenges that women architects in the US and abroad have faced in recent history, including how they have been impacted by the economic recession. We examine some strategies currently in place to promote greater gender diversity in architecture, with a special emphasis on the recognition of women in architecture through awards, prizes, and leadership positions that have met with mixed success.

Space here does not permit an overview of accomplished women architects and their designs, nor does it permit a discussion of issues of sexual orientation in architecture, topics that merit attention elsewhere. Instead our focus is on key controversies related to gender that are still shaping the profession today.

Introducing Young Girls To Architecture: Architect Barbie

The Barbie doll made her debut in 1959, with Ponytail Barbie and a black and white striped swimsuit. Her full name is Barbie Millicent Roberts and she is from Willows, Wisconsin. Since then the toy manufacturer, Mattel, has created over 100 versions of Barbie, from the first teenage fashion model to four runs as a presidential candidate, and almost everything in between.
In 2010 Mattel invited the public to vote on the 125th career of their ever-popular Barbie doll. The vote focused on professions where women were underrepresented, including Architect Barbie, Surgeon Barbie, and Computer Engineer Barbie. Computer Engineer Barbie won.

In an effort to save Architect Barbie, feminist scholar, historian, and professor at the State University of New York (SUNY) at Buffalo, Despina Stratigakos intervened, along with architect, SUNY Buffalo colleague, and 2012 President of American Institute of Architects (AIA) New York State, Kelly Haynes McAlonie. Together they approached Mattel to advocate for an architect’s version of the iconic doll. Eventually both were asked to advise on its design. While in real life, architects have a preference for wearing black, young girls would view black in a negative way, more as “villain,” “mortician,” rather than architect. So instead of providing authentic all-black attire, the designers chose basic colors, clean lines, and simple volumes, along with black ankle boots. Her accessories were a pink drawing tube, a white hard hat, and black glasses.

The doll was launched at the 2011 AIA convention in New Orleans where 400 girls recruited from nearby schools and girls’ clubs participated in workshops led by women architects. The architects presented an overview of what architects do, discussed work of past and present women architects, and oversaw an exercise for girls to redesign Barbie’s Dream House, a type of first design studio assignment. When the workshop was over, each participant was handed a gift bag with a set of drawing tools and her own Architect Barbie to take home. This workshop served as a prototype for other subsequent workshops held in Boston and Chicago and elsewhere.

As Stratigakos put it, “If Architect Barbie gets us talking, then more power to her. But ultimately she is for kids, not adults, and it is the politics of the sandbox that I hope to influence. I look forward to the day when little girls claim hard hats and construction sites as just another part of their everyday world” (Stratigakos, 2011).

Even the Mattel spokesperson recognized that “The field of architecture is an area where women are underrepresented” (Wischhoyer, 2011). While women account for about 40 percent of students in architecture schools, the percentage of practicing women architects is less than half that amount. And while the percentage of women in architecture schools has been increasing, according to Stratigakos, “the number of women actually entering the profession and remaining there remains pretty flat” (Wischhoyer, 2011).

Architect Barbie raised eyebrows in the profession. As John Cary put it in his provocative piece,

Yet while the AIA and others might hope to inspire a generation of girls and young women to become architects, the systemic problems facing the profession will not be fixed with a doll and a dream. Career pipeline issues must be remedied. Cultural and institutional sexism must be faced. These are matters of retention, not recruitment.

(Cary, 2011)

In her essay “Girl Talk,” Alexandra Lange raised the key question: “The world’s most popular doll, dressed in architect’s garb: friend or foe to a profession already suffering from a pronounced gender gap?” She argued,

as a design critic and parent, Architect Barbie didn’t sit right with me, and I was not alone. Much disquiet on the architecture blogs and in the field focused on her stylized wardrobe: black-rimmed glasses, an outdated hot-pink blueprint tube, a skyline-print
Architect Barbie: Inspiring a generation
or just a dream?

As of 2013, the American Institute of Architects reports that
only 17% of architects and intern architects are women, and
less than 1% are African American. Mattel launches its Architect
Barbie doll in 2011 but it is not currently available in stores.

Figure 34.1 A version of the world-famous Barbie Doll, Architect Barbie, launched in 2011,
sought to inspire more young girls to pursue architecture as a career

dress, white hard hat, those oh-so-fashionable high-heel booties. But that was window
dressing for a deeper discontent: As the press release that accompanied her debut pointed
out, as of November 2010, just 17 percent of AIA members were women. Barbie seemed
like a distraction from, not an answer to, an ongoing problem.

(Lange, 2012)

Lange polled a sample of female architects and designers to ask what toys they had played
with as children: the computer game, the Sims, make-believe games, crayons, Spirographs,
Lincoln Logs, and art supplies. Others sabotaged Fisher Price toys. Those who played with
Barbies destroyed her with bleach, Sharpie makeup, and shorn hair. They created dream
houses out of shoeboxes, clothes out of fabric scraps, and played with Barbie in their Lincoln
Log constructions. Although Lange expressed her dislike for Architect Barbie and pink for
pink’s sake, she admitted “that Stratigakos is entirely justified in thinking that we have to
plant seeds wherever and however we can.”

Along with the production of Architect Barbie, in 2011 the AIA and Mattel challenged
AIA members to enter the Architect Barbie Dream House Design Competition, drawing 30
submissions from which a panel of jurors selected five finalists. Children and adults alike
cast a total of 8,470 votes for their favorite design. The winning design by Ting Li and Maja
Paklar was published on the AIA website but Mattel never put it into production (Frank &
The American Institute of Architects, 2011).
Why Do We Need More Women In Architecture And Design?

Gender Demographics in Architecture

Gender issues have long posed a tremendous challenge for both architectural education and practice. Compared to the numbers of women in medicine, law, and engineering, the number of women architects and women architecture faculty still remains low. As of 2012, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB) estimated the number of licensed architects in the US at 105,847 and the American Institute of Architects (AIA) included just over 83,000 members. Of all AIA members, including licensed architects as well as intern architects on the licensure path, 17 percent were female, compared to 9 percent in 2000. Underrepresented ethnic minorities such as African American, Asian American, and Latino American comprised 10 percent of AIA membership compared to 7 percent in 2000 (The American Institute of Architects, 2012). African-Americans comprised only 1 percent.

The number of women architects in underrepresented racial groups, such as African American, Latino American, or Asian American continues to remain low. The percent of African-American women architects is minuscule—far less than 1 percent. As Hannah McCann argued in her article, “0.2,” in Architect magazine: “The number of black women architects has quadrupled in 15 years. But four times a fraction of a percent doesn’t amount to much” (McCann, 2007). At that time (2007), the total number of licensed African-American women architects was just 0.2 percent, 196 out of a total of about 91,000 architects, while African-American women comprised almost 2 percent of the legal profession and 4 percent of the medical profession. By 2013, the total number of licensed African-American women architects had increased to 294, while their licensed African-American male counterparts totaled 1,589 (The Directory of African-American Architects, n.d.).

![Image](https://example.com/figure34.2.png)

Figure 34.2 Men still dominate architecture faculty in North America at all academic ranks. Women are the least represented at the full professor rank, where men outnumber them about 5 to 1.
Despite increasing numbers of African-American women students in architecture schools, many choose to forego licensure and choose alternate career paths. Among the reasons, according to McCann: the high cost of architectural education, lack of role models, and an inflexible model of success that rewards long hours and ignores community design (McCann, 2007).

How does that picture compare with the current status of women in architecture schools? According to the 2012 statistics available from the National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB), out of 26,850 students enrolled in accredited architecture programs across the US, women comprised 43 percent while men accounted for 57 percent (The National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc., 2013). Statistics for graduating students were similar. Of a total of 6,354 accredited degrees awarded during the 2011–12 academic year, women received 42 percent while men received 58 percent (The National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc., 2013).

According to the NAAB’s 2012 report on accreditation, of 6,064 faculty members teaching in NAAB-accredited degree programs, 40 percent were full-time, 15 percent were part-time, and 45 percent were adjunct (The National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc. 2013). Two-thirds (68 percent) were male faculty while one-third (32 percent) were female, an increase of female faculty from the 2010–11 academic year when males comprised 72 percent and women 28 percent. By 2012, women faculty accounted for 21 percent of full professors, 29 percent of associate professors, 36 percent of assistant professors, and 35 percent of instructors (The National Architectural Accrediting Board, Inc., 2013). Women were less well represented at the higher faculty ranks.

**Gender Discrimination In Architecture: In The USA**

Many women architects continue to face discrimination on the job. My research that formed the basis of my book, *Designing for Diversity: Gender, Race and Ethnicity in the Architectural Profession*, drew upon surveys and interviews of over 400 members of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) nationwide collected during the 1990s. It was the first study of its kind to compare obstacles and opportunities faced by architects in four demographic groups: white women, women of color, white men, and men of color—under the cloak of anonymity (Anthony, 2001). Here are 12 key findings that emerged from my research:

1. Rites of passage that serve as gateways to the profession often serve as roadblocks to underrepresented architects. Interviewing, internship, registration, and the first job are major hurdles to all architects. But when these experiences go poorly, and if underrepresented architects perceive that they are treated unfairly, they can be driven right out of the profession.
2. The fact that the architectural profession depends so strongly on a changing economy makes it difficult for employees to escape from uncomfortable work situations. When times are tough and jobs are hard to come by, as they are today, architects—especially underrepresented architects—are trapped. When faced with unfair treatment or dead-end jobs that stifle their professional development, they may have nowhere else to turn.
3. Many underrepresented architects are pigeonholed: women as interior designers, African-Americans as government architects, and Asian-Americans as computer-aided designers, thus limiting job mobility and advancement opportunities.
4. The phenomenon of “leap-frogging” occurs all too often. Many women architects told troubling tales of training male underlings who, despite far fewer years of education or professional experience, rapidly surpassed them in rank and salary. These men quickly
climb their own career ladders, leaving the women behind. Subordinates become superiors. Such instances propel many diverse designers right out of the profession, never wanting to return. In fact, my survey revealed significant pay gaps between men and women architects. The gap widened the more experience architects had in the field.

5 Working conditions in many smaller architectural offices make it difficult for those treated unfairly to complain in a confidential manner, and they fear a backlash from engaging in whistle blowing. Large institutions like universities, corporations, and large architectural firms hire human resource personnel to address complex issues like sexual harassment and salary inequities. Small design offices lack such personnel.

6 The profession is not as family-friendly as it should be, a situation that affects both women and men. Long hours and relatively low pay take a toll on family life no matter what gender. But it is even worse for women who must announce pregnancies, request maternity leave, seek flextime or part-time work after childbirth, and find adequate lactation spaces in the workplace. Only about half the women survey respondents had children, and many admitted trading a family life for a career. Male architects, as main breadwinners of the family, did not face this tradeoff.

7 Many underrepresented architects are unprepared for what awaits them in the profession. In school, where both women and men work side by side in studios, lecture courses, seminars, and student organizations, gender issues may simply be off their radar screen. Yet when they transition into the working world where they may be the only woman architect in the office, or the only African-American, Asian-American, or Latina architect in the office, it is a different picture altogether. The phenomenon of standing out while serving as an ambassador for your gender or race presents a new dynamic for many young architects.

8 Gender and racial discrimination still ran rampant in the architectural profession. Over two-thirds of the women and men surveyed had witnessed or heard of gender
discrimination and four out of ten had witnessed or heard about racial discrimination in an architectural office.

9 Significant gender and racial differences were found in which the experiences of underrepresented architects were far more negative than those of their white male counterparts. Most disturbing were inequities in salaries and benefits, with the pay gap widening the longer they remain in the field. Women architects earned significantly less than their male counterparts with comparable levels of professional experience. And women of color, compared to white men, men of color, and white women, reported significantly lower levels of satisfaction with their future career prospects in the field.

10 Although many underrepresented architects have shattered the glass ceiling and achieved great success, they overcame many more obstacles placed in their way. Among the most successful were those who opened their own offices, but not everyone desires or can afford to do so.

11 Compared to those in private practice, underrepresented architects employed in government positions, corporate work, and real estate development, appeared to be significantly better off.

12 For those who triumphed in the profession, finding a supportive work environment—and knowing when to leave an unsupportive work setting—was the key. Management plays a critical role in influencing the success of underrepresented architects, and the “sink or swim” attitude is counterproductive.

Put in a broader perspective, my findings about the status of women architects in the US can be interpreted through the lens of feminist critic Susan Estrich and her broader explanation of why the status of American women is not what it should be: subtle, unconscious discrimination such as the allocation of resources and computer equipment in the workplace, which raises the question: who makes the rules, and how do these rules affect underrepresented groups; motherhood; the comfort factor whereby many middle-aged men are uncomfortable with women in social settings outside work, fearing lawsuits for sexual harassment; and what she calls “traitorism,” whereby women in positions of power often fail to help those in the lower and middle ranks (Estrich, 2000).

In her interview with Architect magazine, New York firm owner Deborah Berke explained her take on women’s absence in the field:

Family concerns are, of course, part of challenge, but it’s more like death by a thousand cuts, including low salaries or the experience of being a young woman architect who is ignored when she’s in a room that is 90 percent male...It’s the repeated occurrence of several dozen little things, rather than one fixed particular element... These recurring small blows help drive women and socioeconomic minorities out of the profession.

(Beck, 2012)

But, as Berke admits, as do so many others, “Ultimately, being an architect for me is so profoundly satisfying and fulfilling that it has been well worth the trudge.”

Gender Discrimination In Architecture: Across The Atlantic And Across The Pacific

In the early 2000s the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) appointed a research team at the University of the West of England to complete an investigative research report: Why
do women leave architecture? Research into the retention of women in architectural practice conducted by three faculty members, Ann de Graft-Johnson, Sandra Manley, and Clara Greed (De Graft-Johnson et al., 2003). The troubling situation in the UK, where women students in architecture increased from 27 percent to 38 percent between 1990 and 2002 and yet only 13 percent made it into the profession, whereas in law and medicine women comprised almost half their respective professions, prompted their research. The RIBA-sponsored study was primarily qualitative, eliciting opinions from women who have left the profession as well as those who remained within architecture. A web-based survey along with follow-up interviews formed the major basis of the study. A total of 174 women respondents participated, including 37 who had left architectural practice. Responses were received from around the world, from England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland as well as from Australia, Canada, Germany, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Singapore, and the USA.

According to findings from the British-based survey, here is why women leave architecture (De Graft-Johnson et al., 2003):

- Low pay
- Unequal pay
- Long working hours
- Inflexible/unfamily-friendly working hours
- Sidelining
- Limited areas of work
- Glass ceiling
- Stressful working conditions
- Protective paternalism preventing development of experience
- Macho culture
- Sexism
- Redundancy and or dismissal
- High litigation risk and high insurance costs
- Lack of returner training
- More job satisfaction elsewhere.

Women who had left architectural practice pursued a diverse set of alternate careers, such as teaching English in Japan, working in a hospital as a client’s representative, working in the property section of a bank, project management, running a home improvement agency, specialist roofing contractor, architectural publishing, landscape architect, maternity leave and childcare responsibilities.

Comments about women’s perceptions of their career prospects were disturbing. As one woman put it,

In my previous office, the nature of the work I got to do changed dramatically when I got married, going from competition and design work to suspended ceiling and raised floor layouts. I also believe that this was partially due to the fact that I preferred to get my work done during office hours rather than work evenings and weekends, unlike many people in the practice.

Another stated, “I was offered an associate position within a year, but when I fell pregnant this was forgotten” (De Graft-Johnson et al., 2003). And yet another admitted, “The system is set up for workaholic males. Only women that are prepared to be men have a slight chance of promotion” (De Graft-Johnson et al., 2003).

Among the more troublesome survey findings released in 2014: when asked “has the building industry fully accepted the authority of the female architect?” two-thirds (66 percent) of women and half (49 percent) of men answered “no.” Two-thirds of women suffered sexual discrimination—defined as anything from inappropriate comments to being treated differently because of their gender—a rise from prior surveys. Just under a third (31 percent) reported monthly or quarterly occurrences, and 11 percent reported once a week or more. Over half (54 percent) of women architecture students reported experiencing sexual discrimination in architecture school. Just over a quarter (27 percent) of women reported experiencing bullying while working in architecture; so did just under a quarter (23 percent) of men. Just over three-quarters (79 percent) of women—a significant rise from the first annual survey—and just under three-quarters (73 percent) of men believe the industry is too male-dominated. One woman explained that she has “been interviewed for positions and offered a 30 per cent lower salary than a man with less experience” (Mark, 2014).

Among discriminatory incidents women cited in the first annual survey published in 2012: “being given more secretarial work to do than my male Part 1 colleagues,” “difference in treatment on return from maternity leave on part-time basis,” and perhaps most shocking of all, “I have been asked if I’m menstruating, been told my salary will be reduced as a result of being pregnant, and have been taken off jobs on site when pregnant.” Others found the job site more problematic than the office, for example, “Even if the people in your practice and your client respect you, going on a site visit dressed appropriately and trying to appear professional is somewhat undermined when you are being wolf-whistled at by builders.” As another woman put it, “I experienced a lack of willingness to consider flexible or part-time working after I finished maternity leave, effectively forcing me to resign my post and set up as self-employed.” Over three-quarters (82 percent) believed that the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) should be doing more to tackle the gender imbalance and improve the retention of women within the profession (Waite & Corvin, 2012).

Even Zaha Hadid, one of the world’s leading female architects, admitted that she has faced “more misogynistic behavior” in London than anywhere else in Europe and that the situation is not improving for women in architecture (Thorpe, 2013). When interviewed by the Observer, Hadid, a British Iraqi and winner of the coveted International Pritzker Prize, stated, “I doubt anything has changed much over the last 30 years,” adding

It is a very tough industry and it is male-dominated, not just in architectural practices, but the developers and the builders too … I can’t blame the men, though. The problem is continuity. Society has not been set up in a way that allows women to go back to work after taking time off. Many women now have to work as well as do everything at home and no one can do everything. Society needs to find a way of relieving women.

Some women architects have different priorities from those of their male counterparts. Australia proves a fascinating case in point, where, in 2007, women comprised 43 percent of architecture students but less than 1 percent of firm directors. A 2005 survey of 550 female
members conducted by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects found that in measuring their personal success, women architects tended to reject the scale of a project, practice size, awards, and journal coverage in favor of client satisfaction and personal satisfaction—taking on new challenges and finding balance in their lives (McCann, 2007). Gender discrimination among architects is problematic there as well, as Harriet Alexander explained in *The Sydney Morning Herald* (Alexander, 2010):

Women and men have been graduating with architecture degrees at the same rate, and with the same grades, for at least 20 years but their paths fork from the moment they leave university. Male architecture graduates command an average starting salary nearly $7000 higher than their female counterparts and the profession continues to shed women to the point where it is rare to find a woman directing her own architecture firm … They are under-represented in major awards and speaking engagements. Those who have remained in the profession say the long hours and intense competition in the large firms are incompatible with the demands of children.

In 2013 the Australian Government’s Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) documented that architecture and building has the worst graduate pay gap of any industry. Median salary for male graduates was $52,000 vs. $43,000 for female graduates. Worse still, the gap increased in successive years, from 12 percent in 2010, to 14 percent in 2011, to 17 percent in 2012 (Clark, 2013). Data from the Australian Institute of Architects Graduate Salary Survey confirms that this pay gap persists over 12 years following graduation (Clark, 2013).

**Gender Differences While Riding Out The Recession**

Although most architects are more aware of the need to achieve diversity, and demographics are improving ever so slightly, the economic recession has placed a severe strain on all architects across the board. Most are lucky to just to find work. Finding a supportive work environment may be less of a priority than simply finding a job.

As of 2013, 11.7 million Americans were unemployed, and the unemployment rate fell to a four-year low of 7.5 percent. Over 4.4 million Americans had been unemployed for over six months (Rugaber, 2013). Riding out the recession has taken an especially hard toll on architects, whose unemployment rates have long been well above average. Among recent college graduates between the ages of 22 and 26, as of early 2012, the unemployment rate for architecture majors was 13.9 percent, the highest and worst rate of all compared with arts (11.1 percent), humanities and liberal arts (9.4 percent), engineering (7.5 percent), business (7.4 percent), psychology and social work (7.3 percent), education (5.4 percent) and health (5.4 percent) (Censky, 2012). These dire statistics were blamed on the collapse of the construction and home-building industries. Even those architecture graduates aged 30 and more with greater professional experience had an unemployment rate of 9.2 percent. During this same period, architecture majors with graduate degrees, who usually fare better in the employment market, had a jobless rate of 7.7 percent (Rampell, 2012).

A survey of 448 AIA members, published in 2012, revealed that 15 percent of respondents were laid off during the recession and its aftermath. Of this group, 15 percent have moved on to other lines of work. Some optimistic experts predicted a shortage of architects by the time the economy recovers, as many will have left for greener pastures (Hanley, 2012).

High rates of unemployed architects are not just in the US. In the UK, for example, a recent survey revealed that 22 percent of qualified British architects are currently unemployed.
Among those architecture graduates currently in training, 44 percent are unemployed. British architects still employed faced an average 30 percent wage reduction (Stott, 2013).

How do the unemployment rates of male and female architects compare? Depending upon the data sources examined, it is somewhat difficult to tell. To date one of the only available data sources from which to draw this comparison is the U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (Hughes, 2010). As of April 2013, these statistics showed that 113,000 of those in architecture and engineering occupations are unemployed, a rate of 3.8 percent overall, with a rate of 3.2 percent for men and 7.3 percent for women. Just a year before that, in April 2012, statistics were even worse, with a total of 120,000 unemployed, a rate of 4 percent, with 3.4 percent for men and 7.7 percent for women. Compared to men, women were over twice as likely to be unemployed (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013).

Those who are underemployed as opposed to unemployed also face special challenges. These include architects who faced sharp salary cuts just to stay on the payroll, who have had to take unpaid furloughs of two weeks or more, or who have been laid off and rehired as short-term contractors for lower pay. Others have taken part-time jobs in unrelated fields just to pay their bills.

The good news, however, is that as campus buildings age, as school districts renovate and replace existing facilities, and as demand for more healthcare facilities continues to increase, the US Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that employment of architects will grow 17 percent from 2012 to 2022, faster than the average for all occupations (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014).

Promoting Greater Gender Diversity In Architecture Through Awards, Prizes and Leadership Positions

Although the AIA has been existence since 1857, it took 135 years for women to achieve significant leadership positions (see Figure 34.4). Susan Maxman was elected as its first female

1857: AIA is founded

1992:
Susan Maxman is the first female President of AIA

L. Jane Hastings is the first woman to serve as Chancellor of AIA College of Fellows

Figure 34.4  It took 135 years before the American Institute of Architects (AIA) elected its first woman President.
President (1992–1993) followed a decade later by Kate Schwennsen (2006–2007). Soon to follow are AIA 2014 President Helene Dreiling and AIA 2015 President-elect Elizabeth Chu Richter, the first time in the organization’s history that two women in a row served as AIA President. It took 40 years since the establishment of the AIA College of Fellows in 1952 for L. Jane Hastings to become the first woman to serve as Chancellor of the AIA College of Fellows (1992–1993). Denice Johnson Hunt served as the first woman of color to hold the highest elected office in an AIA local component as AIA Seattle President (1995–1996) (The American Institute of Architects, n.d.b).

Since its founding in 1912, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, the primary organization for architectural educators, took 74 years to elect its first female President: Blanche van Ginkel from the University of Toronto (1986–1987), soon followed by Diane Ghirardo from the University of Southern California (1988–1989), and Geraldine Forbes-Isais from the University of New Mexico (2007–2008).


Since it was first awarded in 1976, there have only been two female winners of the organization’s highest joint award, the ACSA/AIA Topaz Laureate for Excellence in Architectural Education, Denise Scott Brown (1996) and Adele Naude Santos (2009) (Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, n.d.b).

The prestigious Pritzker Architecture Prize, founded by Jay and Cindy Pritzker, and modeled after the Nobel Prize, awards laureates a $100,000 grant, a formal citation certificate, and a bronze medallion. Since the prize was first awarded in 1979, as of this writing there have been only two women laureates (2 out of 36 prizes): Zaha Hadid (2004) and Kazuyo Sejima (2010) along with her male partner Ryue Nishizawa.

The Pritzker Architecture Prize caught the design community by storm when Robert Venturi was awarded the Pritzker prize in 1991, while his longtime design collaborator and wife, Denise Scott Brown, was excluded. Although Venturi implored the Hyatt Foundation, who administers the award, to include Scott Brown, his efforts were unsuccessful. The exclusion of Scott Brown sparked a highly publicized controversy culminating by her failing to attend her husband’s awards ceremony, a powerful protest.

Over two decades later, at an Architects’ Journal lunch event in London in March 2013, Scott Brown stated publicly that the Pritzker Foundation still owed her the prize and that it should correct its wrong. Her videotaped comments were posted online and picked up by two Harvard architecture students, Arielle Assouline-Lichten and Caroline James, who launched a Change.Org online petition demanding that Scott Brown retroactively be awarded the prize. The petition created a fury, receiving over 12,000 signatures, including Venturi and nine subsequent Pritzker prize winners. As architecture critic Sarah Williams Goldhagen argued in the New Republic, an analysis of their collaboration shows that Scott Brown brought to Venturi a greater capacity for conceptual clarity and precision, interdisciplinarity, ethics, and an urbanist perspective evident in their architectural designs and scholarly publications (Goldhagen, 2013).
Yet in June 2013, Lord Palumbo, Chair of the 2013 Jury of the Pritzker Architecture Prize, responded to the two Harvard students stating that “A later jury cannot re-open, or second guess the work of an earlier jury, and none has ever done so” (Quirk, 2013).

Since it was first awarded in 1907 during the 50th anniversary of the AIA, it took another 107 years for the AIA to bestow its highest honor, the Gold Medal, to a woman. The AIA’s 2014 Gold Medal was awarded posthumously to Julia Morgan (1872–1957), designer of California’s famous Hearst Castle and over 700 buildings including houses, churches, hotels, commercial buildings, and museums, most which are still standing due to her pioneering use of reinforced concrete, a material that proved resilient in earthquakes (Jacobs, 2013).

My book, Designing for Diversity advocated numerous strategies for architectural educators, practitioners, firms, and the profession to promote and achieve diversity. Some of these strategies have since been implemented, including the development of new diversity awards programs.

According to the American Institute of Architects,

The AIA is committed to increasing diversity and inclusion within the organization and the profession. To that end, the AIA Diversity Council, a presidential-appointed committee, has been established to push diversity and inclusion initiatives forward ... Areas of focus for the Council will continue to include women within the profession, multiculturalism, and pathways to the profession.

(The American Institute of Architects, n.d.a)

Starting in 2009, the AIA Diversity Recognition Program has celebrated the contributions of architects, AIA chapters, educational institutions, and individuals with up to 12 annual awards for Diversity Best Practices (The American Institute of Architects, n.d.a). Such positive recognition can go a long way to inspire others to promote diversity in the field. Similarly,
It took the AIA 107 years to award its first Gold Medal to a prolific woman architect, Julia Morgan, who had died decades ago.

The AIA’s recent publication of its Diversity Timeline, chronicling landmark events, awards, publications, and organizational policies from 1968 to the present, provides an important encapsulated history of diversity in the architectural profession (Hancock, n.d.).

Each year the AIA Diversity Council offers numerous events during the annual AIA convention. On the program for the 2013 convention, for example, was a session on “Equal Roles, Equal Voices,” discussing how to transform the profession and increase its value through the full contributions of women at all levels. The annual Women in Architecture Dinner has featured prominent architects Karen Braitmayer, Kim Day, and Billie Tsien. A Multicultural Fellows Diversity Award Honorees’ Reception honors those underrepresented architects recently inducted into the AIA College of Fellows.

The Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture offered its first set of Robert R. Taylor Diversity Awards awarded to seven faculty recipients from 1999–2003. The awards program experienced a hiatus for several years and was reinstated in 2010 as the Diversity Achievement Award. As of 2013 four such awards have been bestowed (Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, n.d.a).

Conclusions

In sum, gender issues have continued to play a perplexing role in architectural practice as well as in architectural education. Even though substantial progress has been made along many fronts, and the numbers of women architecture students continue to rise, the profession is still glaringly deficient in others.

For women in architecture in the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, it has definitely been a rocky road. One can only hope that those who have only recently risen to the pinnacles of their careers, achieving the recognition that they and so many others have long deserved, will pave a smoother path for future women in architecture to follow.
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References


