

# Women in Architecture

## Same Cannot Mean Equal



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### Challenges

What can it be like for women in architecture? Architecture, similar to other male-dominated professions, presents a number of challenges to women. Challenges which are different than and often in addition to those faced by our male colleagues. The architecture profession—at least in America—has not figured out how to address these issues properly. Some of the issues are systemic, meaning that they exist in the long-standing culture of the architecture profession; some are structural, meaning that the operation of the professional system itself has caused some of the problems. The structural issues are more recent, and are compounded by the profession's culture. I continue to see this happen through actions of my colleagues, students, employers, academia, the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards (NCARB), the American Institute of Architects (AIA), and National Architectural Accrediting Board (NAAB).

### Early Experiences

In 2001, I was a graduate architecture student at Yale University School of Architecture (YSoA). Denise Scott Brown and Robert Venturi had come to offer final remarks at a symposium titled Architecture or Revolution, that focused on the YSoA while Charles Moore was Dean.<sup>(1)</sup> During that time, Scott Brown and Venturi taught three studios from 1967-1969, including "Learning from Las Vegas"; it was the work from that studio that eventually

led to their quintessential post-modern treatise Learning from Las Vegas: The Forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form (1972). Although Scott Brown and Venturi jointly taught the three studios as Yale, only Venturi was given the title "Davenport Visiting Professor".<sup>(2)</sup> At the 2001 symposium, I do not remember Venturi speaking, instead it was Scott Brown that took command of the podium. She displayed the rawness and bitterness that one often does for being overlooked for her contribution. She used the opportunity of the 2001 symposium as a public forum, at the place where she taught, to discuss how disappointed she was to not get the recognition that she deserved for her contribution to Yale, the book, and to architecture. While she talked powerfully about her convictions, I saw my male Yale professors, sitting directly in front of me, shifting uncomfortably in their seats. As Scott Brown ended her talk, and apprehensive applause broke out, the three professors conferred: "How embarrassing for Bob?" "How inappropriate that is..." "I cannot believe she brought that up..." "Why did she even speak?" Meanwhile, I thought, good for her!

This was not the first time that I realized that architecture is not the same for women as it is for men. From 1998-2001, I worked for Robert A.M Stern, Architects in New York. When I was there and initiated by Stern himself, most project assignments and impromptu discussions about the office, architecture, and ones' professional futures were held in the men's bathroom at

the urinal. Not being a man, that insight and informal mentoring was not available to me in the same way it was to my male colleagues. Meanwhile, in the women's bathroom, a firm Associate would pump breast-milk during breaks, because there was not a private location that she could use. How is it possible for a woman to participate fully in that environment?

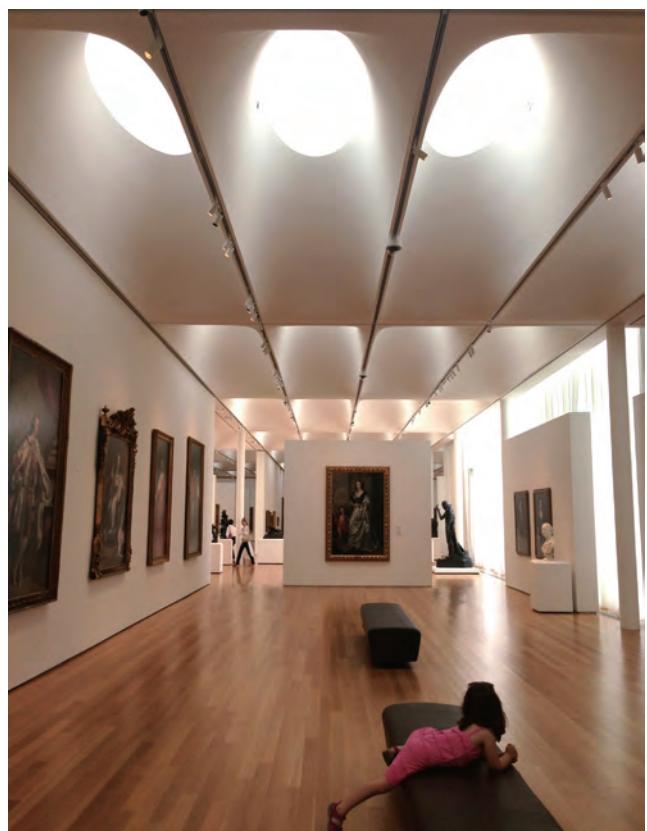
Led by then Dean Bob Stern, YSoA held Women, Family and the Practice of Architecture Symposium in the afternoon of January 25, 2002. Unlike the two-day symposium exploring Charles Moore's tenure as Dean, with formal presentations, panel discussions, and receptions, this symposium included a panel that introduced the participants and answered audience questions with Bob Stern moderating.<sup>(3)</sup> I asked the panel for their advice for seeking maternity-level policies of potential employers during the interview process. My concern was how could you ask about their policies without the potential employer fearing that you would leave the job to have a baby? I thought why would a firm ever hire you? All panel members and Stern stated that for the sake of all women, one needed to ask. I was not (and am still not) convinced. I do not think that Stern's office would have ever offered me my first job if I had asked that question. Would I really do women as service by asking and then by not joining the workforce? Again, these are not challenges that men often face.

### The Policy to Women

I have moved from architectural profession into academia. At my past three academic appointments, I have been aware my institution's maternity leave policies. While a Professor at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD), faculty believed—based on conversations with administrators—if a mother gave birth over winter or summer breaks, she would not qualify for the Family and Medical Leave Acts (FMLA) and would not be eligible to take unpaid leave. In 2008, as tenure-track faculty at University of New Mexico (UNM) School of Architecture and Planning, I was the first faculty member to be pregnant and request leave. At that time, UNM's

maternity leave policy for faculty has been last revised in 1973 and based earned leave on the number of days worked. When I requested clarification from UNM, asking how days would be counted, no one could give me an answer. Months later, I met a faculty member from another department and lamented my situation; there I learned a new maternity leave policy had been written by an ad hoc university women's task force and agreed upon by university administration. This policy had not been published. In order for me to qualify under the policy, I sent multiple emails, made multiple phone calls, met with my chair and dean, and then finally went to the university's provost office. All of this took a total of two to three months, and resulted with my earning a semester of paid leave. Despite leave, I still had duties that needed to be done. After my daughter was born, I planned an academic conference that I had committed to organizing prior to pregnancy. With a 6-month old baby, I co-hosted the conference, and wrote and presented two papers for the conference.

In 2011, when I interviewed for my position at North



Author with her daughter at the North Carolina Museum of Art

Carolina State University (NCSU), that I could ask about NCSU's maternity-leave policy before I took the job. I believed it was safe to do so because the head of NCSU School of Architecture was female, and I already had a tenure-track position and was comfortable with staying at UNM if needed. Although asking about maternity-leave policy may seem like a boon from my 2002 discussion at Yale, it was offset by my difficulty in getting pregnant. My pregnancy while at UNM (and a subsequent attempt while at NCSU) was done with assisted reproductive help. Time-wise, assisted reproduction required numerous doctor appointments, hormone injections, surgery and post-surgery recovery, outpatient procedures, and bed rest. Resource-wise, this drained my spouse and me financially and emotionally. Needless to say, I could not work as much as my colleagues in academia or even my husband, who is a practicing architect.

### Present-day Structural Challenges

According to a 2015 NCARB report, the average age for people to complete architectural registration is 33.3 years.<sup>(4)</sup> Generally, the United States' (US) architecture registration process is not the most efficient. In most US states, the process includes three parts that are completed sequentially. 1) graduate from a NAAB-accredited program 2) gain professional experience under an architect, and 3) pass all six divisions of the Architecture Registration Exam (ARE). Since 1970, the average number of years between graduation and initial licensure was 5 years; and has trended upward to its peak of just over 9 years in 2006.<sup>(5)</sup> As the years towards licensure are increasing, the licensing process has changed. When I completed the exam in 2003, there were 9 divisions to the exam, and I could take as long as needed to complete all divisions. In 2006, NCARB instituted the ARE Rolling Clock, which required the test-takers to complete all exam divisions in 5 years. If they did not, then any passed divisions that were scored more than five years ago would need to be retaken.

In 2011, the American Institute of Architects (AIA) San Francisco chapter started The Missing 32% Project, which highlighted that although 42% of architecture

graduates are female, the number of female licensed practitioners and senior leaders is only between 15-18%.

<sup>(6)</sup> I think that the licensing process and the missing of 32% of women in the profession may be linked. A NAAB-accredited degree (e.g. Bachelors of Architecture or a Masters of Architecture) takes a minimum of 5-6 years to complete. That puts graduates at 23-25 years of age upon graduating. Afterward, there are 2-3 years of working in an office to earn professional experience, putting pre-licensed architect at 25-28. In addition, women's professional experience hours may be lost due to reduced hours, family leave, or inability to participate in certain tasks such as site visits and other construction-related requirements. Finally, there is the ARE, which in 2014 took approximately 2.5 years to complete.<sup>(7)</sup> Women, taking their ARE divisions, may be having children or have small children, making it difficult to compete all divisions within the 5-year period. This investment of time puts most women in a difficult position. Do you choose your future family or your future profession?

In the US, we are reluctant to recognize the differences between men and women. For example, the term 'parental leave' is used, rather than maternal or paternal leave. Each parent, regardless of gender, can take leave from one's job in care of a dependent. However, in most cases, men take far less leave and take leave far less often than women. Although gender equality and shared family responsibilities are important, we must acknowledge that bearing and birthing children only affects women. It is the woman that carries the baby in her body. It is the woman who must attend all of the prenatal appointments. It is the woman who breastfeeds the baby. It is the woman who is most often the primary caregivers. And in my case, it was the woman who prepared her body to get pregnant. With this difference, how is parental leave equal when the roles and responsibilities are not? How might we recognize the differences between women and men to make architecture more inclusive (and even promoting) of women?

In 2015, NCARB challenged US, NAAB-accredited schools to coordinate their professional experience

requirement within the NAAB-accredited schools' curriculum; and NCARB challenged US state jurisdiction to allow students to take all sections of the ARE before graduation. In less than 8 months, this program, called the Integrated Path toward Architecture Licensure (IPAL), was quickly implemented in more than 12 schools across the country. Barely in its second year, I am concerned with how IPAL will affect women differently than men. Instead of the three discrete steps to licensure (e.g. accredited degree, professional experience, and exam), IPAL conflates them into one long process. The three activities are no longer sequential but are now simultaneous, and the total amount of time is still the same. Now, with this program, a person's ability to earn an accredited architecture degree may be delayed by their ability to work or take the exam.

In 2016, NCARB issued a new ARE exam, ARE 5.0. The previous divisions of the ARE had been organized by architectural subjects (e.g. Structural Systems, Building Systems, Site Planning and Design, etc.), while the divisions of ARE 5.0 are organized by project phases (e.g. Project Planning & Design, Project Development & Documentation, Construction & Evaluation, etc.) With this new format, it stands to reason that ARE 5.0 benefits those who can see a project through all phases of design. Since architecture projects can take anywhere from 18 months to 4 years to complete, this means that those with steady and constant employment during those years most likely will do better on the exams, than those who may have had to take leave. This in turn could affect women who are more likely to take parental leave than men.

## Conclusion

I would like the AIA, NCARB, and NAAB consider what affect these recent changes would have on women? The architecture profession has always had difficulty retaining women, and the US workplace laws consider women the same as men. This coupled with recent NCARB initiative of IPAL and ARE 5.0 may further inhibit women's success in the profession. Women may have to choose between finishing IDP hours and expanding their family, earning their accredited degree

and family planning, and not taking maternity leave to see a project through all phases in order to be successful on the ARE. These are not traditionally the choices that men make. Instead I ask, how might the AIA, NCARB, and NAAB consider how to better address the challenges faced specifically by women to allow them to be more successful in architecture. ■

1. Architecture or Revolution: Charles Moore and Architecture at Yale in the 1960's November 2-3, 2001 Yale University School of Architecture New Haven, CT
2. Stern, Robert A.M., and Jimmy Stamp. Pedagogy and Place: 100 Years of Architecture Education at Yale. Yale University Press, 2016. Stern and Stamp acknowledge that only Venturi was given the title of Professor, even though "Scott Brown's participation was critical to the success of these studios." (292). The book then continues to refer to the three studios as "Venturi's Studio".
3. Participants included: Deborah Burke, Yale School of Architecture; Lise Anne Courturier, Bishop Visiting Professor, Yale School of Architecture; Peggy Deamer, Yale School of Architecture; Audrey Matlock, Yale School of Architecture; Alan Plattus, Yale School of Architecture; and Susan Rodrigues, James Polshek & Partners.
4. NCARB by the Numbers: Insights on NCARB Data and the Path to Licensure June 2015. National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. 2015. <<http://www.ncarb.org/Publications/-/media/Files/PDF/Special-Paper/2015NCARBbytheNumbers.pdf>> Accessed 9 February 2017. Website.
5. NCARB by the Numbers June 2012. National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. 2012. <<http://www.ncarb.org/About-NCARB/-/media/Files/PDF/Special-Paper/NCARB-by-the-Numbers.pdf>> Accessed 9 February 2017. Website.
6. Dickenson, Elizabeth Evitts. "The Missing 32% Project Survey Results Reveal Gender Inequity in Architecture. Now What?" Architect Magazine. 18 October 2014. [http://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/the-missing-32-project-survey-results-reveal-gender-inequity-in-architecture-now-what\\_o](http://www.architectmagazine.com/practice/the-missing-32-project-survey-results-reveal-gender-inequity-in-architecture-now-what_o) Accessed 9 February 2017. Website.
7. NCARB by the Numbers: Insights on NCARB Data and the Path to Licensure June 2015.