

## ATTITUDES VS. WORK-STYLES: THE ROLE PLAYED BY PERCEPTIONS OF PROFESSIONALISM ON FEMALE ARCHITECTS IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

The role of women in architecture has been viewed critically by modern researchers through different perspectives: historical accounts, the “feminist” space, gender discrimination, barriers to career progression, preferred roles for female architects and so many more. This has been instrumental to the formulation of several recent theories on gender involvement in the profession. The architectural profession boasts gender-neutrality yet continues to maintain practices that diminish the total involvement of women. This study examines the mind-set of female architects on the attitudes and culture of the architectural profession as it affects their contribution to the advancement of the profession. The study bases its analysis on theoretical and empirical sources of data that highlight areas of conflict for the full participation of female architects in the architectural practice and concludes with three recommendations for their increased input.

**Keywords:** Gender, Organizational Culture, Professionalism, Career Progression.

### INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Architecture has the enviable status of being called a “profession” because, like any other professions including medicine, law and engineering, it has clear distinctions from other occupations in the specialized expertise acquired through rigorous and long training that leads to certification and licensure. However, Architects typically maintain lesser social statuses among their professional equals with respect to educational requirements and percentage of practitioners who are licensed in various countries around the world. Architecture also lacks a monopoly in the building industry and a progressive architectural career incorporates the services of builders, contractors, developers and engineers though the Architect possesses an artistic and ideological foundation that leads to a claim of ecumenical proficiencies and knowledge (Blau, 1988). The Architect is, therefore, charged with the responsibility of creating the overall look of buildings and other structures which are not only aesthetically appealing: they must be functional, safe and economical and suit the needs of the people who use them. There are 3 main steps in becoming an Architect:

1. **Training:** In Nigeria, this is achieved by completing a professional degree in architecture of either a 4 or 5 years undergraduate/bachelors’ degree followed by a 2-3 years Master’s degree. Post-professional degrees may not be required for practicing architects but are beneficial for research, teaching and certain specialties.

2. **Gaining Work Experience:** In Nigeria, work experience commences during undergraduate training in the students industrial work experience scheme but only post-qualification work experience (a minimum of 2 years, including the year of National Youth Service) is required for an architecture graduate to sit for the licensing board exam. The period of internship is always taken under the supervision of a licensed architect.
3. **Licensure:** The federation requires individuals to be registered (licensed) before they can call themselves architects and contract to provide architectural services. The Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) certifies and registers architects who have reasonably satisfied the conditions of the exam conducted by the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA). It is mandatory to maintain an architectural license by completing a number of credits annually or biennially through workshops, formal university classes, conferences, self-study classes or other sources.

The professionalism movement in architecture has been centered largely on the principle that the architect is an inter-disciplinarian who desires to secure the exclusive mandate on the likely and dominant activity of the profession which is design. The architect must be an artist, an applied scientist or engineer, an educator, a lawyer, a psychologist, an author and a businessman: all of which are synonymous with strong occupational roles (or gender roles) carried out by men (MacKinnon, 1965 in Blau, 1988). Architecture is a very demanding profession, both in training and in practice, which does not always create a symbiotic relationship between the sex roles and gender roles (Becker *et al*, 1961 In Blau 1988).

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of this study is to highlight the factors that enhance or diminish the architectural workplace experience for female architects in Nigeria. In order to properly address the issues concerning architectural work-styles and career enrichment, as part of on-going research, this paper looks at the following questions:

1. To what extent is professionalism a part of the work-style of the practices of female architects in Nigeria?
2. What are the factors agitating against attaining optimal professionalism in the careers of female architects in Nigeria?
3. In what ways does the level of professionalism stem from the degree of career satisfaction for female architects?
4. What attitudes of architectural practice impinge on the development of professionalism among female architects?

### **METHODOLOGY**

The study was undertaken and presented as an objective assessment of related work that has been done on the topic of perceptions of professionalism in the architectural

workplace for female architects in Nigeria and seeks to address some misconceptions that would enable improved implementation of practices and attitudes that would develop the situation. The method adopted involves the empirical analysis of primary data from a field study on female architects in practice and a review and application of secondary sources of information interpreted after a careful observation of the challenges to indigenous architectural workplaces. The statistical tools of analysis include simple percentages, pictorial charts and the Severity Index (SI).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Women in Architecture

The paid work aspect of most careers takes place within an organizational context. As such, it is important to understand the processes that influence organizational behavior and the development of individuals within them (Hall and Seibert, 1992). Most organizations form a cultural system that simultaneously promotes competition and cooperation at the same time: members are expected to carry out tasks in groups or teams yet at the same time compete amongst themselves for limited career openings for advancement. Gender is an essential aspect of organizational culture because many studies allege that masculinity forms a key element of corporate culture. "Gender-culture" is known to be hierarchical, patriarchal, sex-segregated and sexually-divided, sex-stereotyped, sex-discriminatory, sexualized, sexist, misogynist and resistant to change to contain gender power struggles (Iztin, 1995).

In many ways, the architectural profession as a whole can be seen as an organization and from the benchmark studies of any organization, there is a correlation between employees' perception of being able to progress towards career goals and overall engagement (Burns, 2012). In order to advance and succeed in careers in architectural practice, women have branched into the profession in 6 (six) key areas of interest:

1. **Women as Clients:** Some of the largest commissions in history were instigated by female clients who sought input from the most notable names in the architectural directories, both male and female.
2. **Women Preservationists:** Many female architects led movements that spearheaded protection and preservation of historic sites of national significance across most of the developed world.
3. **Women Designers:** Historically and in modern times, women such as Lene Tranberg, Zaha Hadid and Kazuyo Sejima have defied male-dominated spheres to change the landscape of design although till date their efforts have gone largely unnoticed by way of public commendation or international prizes.
4. **Husband-Wife Partnerships:** Collaborations between spouses or long-term partners increased the participation of women in architecture. As a reward, more female architects became more visible in the profession.

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5. **Women Critics:** Women like Catharine Beecher, Galen Cranz and Amita Sinha have broken through many of the barriers that shape the public perception of how society assesses architecture.
6. **Sexism and the Star System:** Due to the prestige attributed to design in architecture, many female architects are yet to break into the ranks of “gurus” in the profession (Berkeley and McQuaid, 1989, Anthony, 2008).

### **Nigerian Female Architects in the Workplace**

Career progression (or lack of) in architecture is one of the major reasons why retention figures for underrepresented groups tend to be lower overall than typical male models. It would be an arduous task to ascertain the figures of those who abandoned their architectural careers due to challenges of a discriminatory nature but undoubtedly those figures would run into their thousands worldwide (Burns, 2012). Women’s progress to proportional representations in the professions is slow everywhere not only in architecture. There is also a gendered difference in the extent of the labor market participation: women are over-represented in the part-time work force and this also further hinders earnings and career opportunities.

Organizational culture, which is a key component of professionalism, is hardest to change and also the hardest to measure or quantify. There are three things that act as gendered norms in professionalism: linear employment, long hours and the absolute prioritizing of work. With the focus of this research on women in architecture, it is important to emphasize that one of the reasons given in the 2003 Royal Institute for British Architects (RIBA) report for women’s exit from the profession was inflexible work places/family unfriendly work hours. The ability to do overtime is also seen as a key factor in getting ahead, according to 67% of the women in architecture surveyed in Whitman Report (Royal Australian Institute of Architects [RAIA], 2005, 2007). The report further suggested that women maintain a “good performance” on previous projects, compatibility with senior management and office culture, as well as the ability to lead and manage staff are also key factors in career progression (Burns, 2012). Women, whose checkered work patterns sometimes fluctuate between full-time and part-time, run the risk of having an accumulative disadvantage in their careers. Despite official policies, the established patterns that women do relatively unskilled jobs at the bottoms of organizations have not significantly changed. 90% of working women have low pay, low-skilled jobs (Senker, 1982).

Another gendered norm of the workplace that deters women in the architectural profession is the issue of “glass ceilings” (invisible barriers to career progression). The concept of the “glass ceiling” initially developed out of concerns for the dearth of female participation at the top of business corporations even though there were indications of female participation in commerce, both as a decision maker and as major consumers (Singh, 2013). Although the term “Glass Ceilings” only crept into the vernacular of career studies less than 30 years ago, researchers and writers had long since theorized about reasons why women seldom reached the highest ranks of their careers, especially in construction and other male-dominated professions. This

comes on the heels of a long history of discriminatory burdens placed on African women due to a range of cultural, religious, and legal constraints which have set the standard for underrepresentation of women in male-dominated occupations such as architecture and engineering (Okome, 2013).

In a smaller study conducted by Abu (2009), findings showed that glass-ceiling barriers are less evident in Nigerian architects, estate managers and quantity surveyors and more evident in civil engineers and builders. This, she surmised, is because the effects of these barriers are felt more in women professionals in the construction industry that are involved more with work on the construction site than those whose practice is equally linked to office work. With this is a cogent point since she associated factors such as sexual harassment and emotional stress as being responsible for poor performance by female professionals. Allu (2008) put forward a similar opinion; blaming cultural and sociological factors as reasons why men – who make up two-thirds of the construction team – do not favor taking instructions and orders from women, even those in leadership roles such as that of the architect.

## RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The data was sourced from responses to a questionnaire that was distributed randomly to a sample population of female architects at the 2013 edition of the Architects Colloquium held in Abuja, Nigeria (between April 22<sup>nd</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup>) and formed the basis of this empirical research. A 90% response rate was achieved when 27 (twenty seven) out of the 30 (thirty) questionnaires were correctly filled and returned. The data presentation and analysis are discussed below:

### Career Advancement towards Professionalism

Approximately 70% of the respondents are registered members with the professional body (Nigerian Institute of Architects, NIA) either as Graduate members, Associate members, Full members or Fellows of which 44% of the respondents had achieved a minimum of Full membership. This represented almost half of the responses to the survey. More than half of the respondents (52%) were employed in the private sector (parastatals and agencies made up 30% and the private sector made up 18%) of which almost a third of the respondents (30%) described their primary nature of their work as 'supervisory'. 26% of the respondents were primarily engaged in design while both teaching/research and management were the primary preoccupations of 22% of the respondents each. Two-thirds of the respondents (67%) maintained, then, that their job description was of a technical orientation while only 11% of the respondents were involved with mainly administrative work.

The results of the study observed a deliberate effort by Nigerian female architects to incorporate attitudes of career advancement into their practices with a bid to improving their levels of professionalism. Incentives for career progression among the respondents are illustrated in Fig. 1 below:

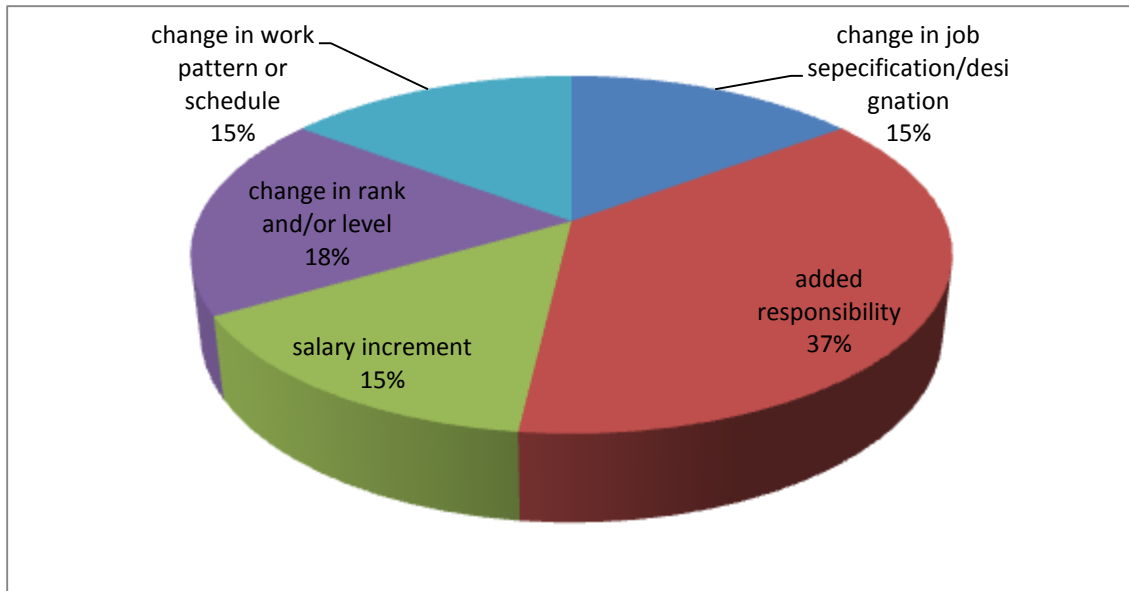


Fig 1: Incentives for Career Progression among Nigerian Female Architects (Source: Authors' Field Study)

The study highlighted the awareness of women architects on the issue of career progression of which routine and regular assessments and promotion give strong indication. 74% of the respondents maintained their organizations upheld on-going assessments and promotions and 78% of the respondents had seen upward advancement in their career in the last 3 years by way of a promotion. Similarly, 74% of the respondents felt that the duration was more as a result of standard industry-based practices and not due to other issues plaguing the industry such as intolerance, "existing male culture", and discrimination etc. which were more evident in earlier documented studies such as the RAIA and RIBA studies. Table 1 below shows 41% of the respondents felt that good performance on previous projects ranked as the strongest reason for progression although 70% of the respondents were of the opinion that the undue excuse from certain jobs or duties in the practice meant they were frequently assessed on the same low level assignments and not the prestigious, larger awards.

**Table 1: Primary Incentive for Assessment and Promotion among Female Architects in Architectural Organizations**

Primary Criterion for Assessment and Promotion Within Organization	Percentage (%) of Female Respondents
Good performance on previous projects	41
Number of years spent on a rank/level	30
Publications/research	22
Age	0
Professional registration/CPDP points	4
Billable work hours	3

\*CPDP = Continuous Practice and Development Programs

Source: Authors' Field Work, 2013

### The Architectural Workplace Experience

In Table 2 below is the summary of the computed Severity Indexes (and subsequent ranking) of the industry-based factors that shape the structures and work-styles of the architectural profession:

**Table 2: Severity Index Ranking of Factors that Shape the Structures and Work-Styles of the Architectural Profession**

Indicators of Work-Place Discrimination	Strongly disagree	%	Disagree	%	Agree	%	Strongly Agree	%	Severity index	Rank
Intolerance/lack of acceptance	3	11	14	52	10	37	0	0	2.26	6
Relegation to desk-bound jobs	2	7	15	56	7	26	3	11	2.41	5
Sexual harassment	8	30	10	37	9	33	0	0	2.04	7
Undue excuse from certain jobs	0	0	4	15	19	70	4	15	3.00	1
Existing male culture	3	11	6	22	11	41	7	26	2.81	3
Conflict of interest in gender roles	3	11	7	26	14	52	3	11	2.63	4
Unequal opportunities	3	11	5	19	11	41	8	30	2.89	2

Source: Author' Field Work, 2013.

Table 3 below shows the Severity Index ranking of attitudes and cultures of the architectural workplace imposed by external influences on the female architects which in turn generate internal responses to their enhanced professionalism.

**Table 3: Severity Index Ranking of Attitudes and Cultures of the Architectural Workplace Which Generates Internal Responses to Enhanced Professionalism in Nigerian Female Architects**

Internal Responses to Factors Affecting Professionalism	Strongly Disagree	%	Disagree	%	Agree	%	Strongly Agree	%	Severity Index	Rank
Intimidation	2	7	11	41	12	44	2	7	2.52	3
Competence	5	19	10	37	10	37	2	7	2.33	5
Inter-staff relationships	4	15	12	44	11	41	0	0	2.26	6
Low self-esteem	2	7	13	48	11	41	1	4	2.41	4
Lack of exposure	2	7	9	33	14	52	2	7	2.59	1
Lack of mentors and role models	3	11	9	33	12	44	3	11	2.56	2

Source: Authors' Field Work, 2013.

The highlights of the severity index analysis are as follows:

1. The least weighted factors or variables in the study were ranked last (6) and the heaviest weighted factors were ranked first (1). This gives priority concern to the heaviest factors as a primary constraint or to enhanced professionalism among female architects in Nigeria.
2. The study highlighted the marginalization or barring of women from certain responsibilities in the profession as the primary workplace factors which is seen as stumbling blocks to optimum career development and professionalism.
3. Characteristically, the responses to the study indicated a lack of exposure and role models (mentors) as closely ranked internal factors that impede development of professionalism among women in Nigerian architecture. This study highlighted the least weighted factor as that of inter-staff relationships which as a parallel to the challenges of the profession is presumed to include a male dominated field.
4. The results of the study downplayed the role of sexual harassment in the profession as a factor affecting professionalism among female architects in Nigeria although it displayed a consistency in the assumption that conflicting interests in gender roles prevent women from being seen as leaders in the profession.

## CONCLUSION

The study highlighted key concepts in training, continued practice and licensure procedures by Nigerian architects with specific reference to the involvement of women in the profession. Emphasis was laid on existing workplace mentality and practices that may be detrimental to the development of professionalism among Nigerian female architects which includes, but is not limited to, engendered cultures and organizational attitudes. Nigerian society is engendered irrespective of career choices but female architects will succeed in enhancing their professionalism by overcoming the challenges identified in the field study.



## RECOMMENDATIONS

In order to enhance professionalism among female architects in Nigeria, the following suggestions arise from this study:

1. It is not enough to simply study and analyze the challenges to the development of professionalism among female architects. A deliberate effort is required from stakeholders in adopting implementable strategies that are based on workplace programs aimed at enhancing career progression among female architects.
2. Local and international policy formulation is required to keep the architectural workplace free from increased or additional gender cultures which are harmful to the actions that enhance professionalism. Where necessary, the adaptation of international laws which are relevant to the local context will set the stage for uniform practices in the architectural workplace.
3. It is the duty of the professional bodies such as the Nigerian Institute of Architects (NIA) and the Architects Registration Council of Nigeria (ARCON) to promote equality in the architectural workplace through seminars, workshops and continuous practice programs. It is strongly recommended that institutions of architectural practice are charged to embrace policies that foster professionalism in all contexts.

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**Reference** to this paper should be made as follows: Enwerekowe, E.O. and Prucnal Ogunsote, B. (2014), Attitudes vs. Work-Styles: The Role Played by Perceptions of Professionalism on Female Architects in Nigeria. *J. of Environmental Sciences and Resource Management*, Vol. 6, No. 2, Pp. 117 – 126.

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