

DESIGNING A CAREER: MEN AND ARCHITECTURE

Valerie Caven

Division of HRM, Nottingham Business School, Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, NG1 4BU, UK

Much attention has been paid to the careers of women in the construction and architecture in particular. Difficulties faced by women working in the architecture profession have been identified as long working hours, poor pay, paternalistic culture, sexism and task restriction. These are all 'measured' against an assumed masculine norm, however, there is little or no work on what constitutes this norm or how it came to be established, other than an idea that it is due to the critical mass of men involved in the industry and related cultural assumptions. It has been argued that what it means to be an architect has been determined and tightly controlled by male architects and women are thereby excluded from these 'masculine' norms. However, this is a paucity of work examining how working within these 'masculine' norms affects male architects. Drawing on semi-structured, in-depth interviews with male architects examining their careers in detail from what made them choose the profession initially to the issues which confront them on a day to day basis, the author uses the same research tools as previous research into the careers of women architects in order to provide a direct comparison. Findings indicate that the male architects have very similar concerns about their work, career and work-life balance as the women. The conclusion is that the norm of masculinity in the construction industry must be questioned.

Keywords: architecture, career, men, profession, work-life balance.

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The construction industry is indisputably male-dominated employing 2.16 million men compared to 218,000 women (Source: ONS 2009). However, the majority of literature relating to careers and employment is on the subject of women and their experiences. Much of this reflects on the difficulties experienced by operating in such a masculine environment and presents a negative view of the industry and the associated professions. The difficulties faced by women in the construction industry are well-documented, it is perceived as being sexist, physically demanding, combative and male-dominated (Watts, 2007; Greed, 2000; Agapiou, 2002; Fielden *et al.*, 2000; Ellison, 2001). The architecture profession too has come attracted academic attention with the research focussing on occupational stress (Sang, *et al.* 2007), reasons for women leaving (De Graft-Johnson, *et al.* 2003; Adams and Tancred, 2000) and other professional difficulties (Fowler and Wilson, 2004). However, despite all these studies referring to the overwhelming masculinity of the profession and industry, there is distinct lack of literature relating to the male perspective both in the meaning of their work (Nolan, 2009) as well as in their experiences in the construction industry (Sang *et al.*, 2007) or as architects (Cohen, *et al.* 2005). Indeed, as De Graft-Johnson *et al.* referring to the need for diversity within architecture/construction state:

“... as people think carefully about the implications of low pay, unfriendly family policies and work environments, fear of litigation, poor work/life balance and other issues, it is possible that this workforce crisis could deepen and affect men as well as women” (2005:1036).

It is precisely this point that this paper seeks to investigate. Aside from an Australian study which reveals strong parallels between men and women's career expectations (RAIA 2007), the literature referred to above focuses on the existence of powerful masculine norms. However, the question is, if there is little or no research about men's careers, then where have these norms come from? The aim of this research is to investigate the male perspective and to provide an insight into the architectural profession as a career for men.

The basis for the research is provided by previous research carried out by the author into the careers of women architects (Caven, forthcoming; 2008; 2006a; 2006b) in which the attractions of entering the profession are examined along with the 'lived experiences' of the architectural career are scrutinised. The key points which arose - and on which the interviews with the men are based - are that women do not (on the whole) make a reasoned choice to become architects based on research; instead, it is more of an inherent reaction from childhood. Secondly, the intrinsic rewards are considered more important and valued more highly than the monetary ones. Thirdly, the women sole practitioners and principals of practices reported a greater amount of job satisfaction than their salaried peers. It is these points which form the starting point for the investigation into the men's careers.

Whilst, without doubt the profession is male dominated - 86% of corporate members are male (RIBA 2008) - but as Watts (2007:300) emphasises, the literature referring to women's positions in the construction industry is based on "the continuing dominance of masculine stereotypes ... that are based on the masculine career model that exhorts the strict separation of work and private/family non-work responsibilities and interests". Furthermore, Dainty *et al.* (1999:356) argue that historically "work practices [have been] geared towards men's needs. These include long working hours, geographical instability and hence, an expectation that they would subordinate their personal lives". The underlying assumption which dominates any discussion of career is that the 'desirable' outcome is a continuous, linear path with upward progression and is said to reflect the masculine model of employment.

However, in line with growing interest in work-life balance issues (Ackers and El-Sawad, 2006; Walsh, 2005), a survey carried out by the RAIA (2007) shows that 61% of male architects were prepared to forgo career advancement if it posed a threat to personal happiness and that 46% of men had taken a career break. In addition, 23% of men had declined a promotion. These figures show strong comparisons with those for women included in the same survey (69%, 63% and 26% respectively) which provides further rationale for this research. The question that can be asked here is whether men really are happy to accept these conditions or do they feel powerless? Thus the aim of this study is to provide an insight into the reality of architecture as a career for men.

Method

The Participants:

The sample was selected from the East Midlands region (in the UK) of the RIBA, as it comprises a variety of different contexts for employment within the profession with large urban practices (national and international) as well as small local practices numbering 180 in total and employing almost 1000 members (Source: RIBA 2008). Sixteen men were chosen at random from the Register of Members representing a

range of practices including sole practitioners, large and small practices; only one declined to take part.

Their ages ranged from 29 to 65 and all except one had embarked on an architectural career on leaving school. In a profession such as architecture, there is a notion that the commitment of the individual to his/her work is greater than someone who has not invested in his or her training and qualifications to such an extent. This is also implicit with work orientations. It takes a seven-year period of both study and practical experience in order to qualify as an architect in the UK – a length of time that would be likely to deter anyone who was not fully committed to entering the profession. Table 1 shows biographic details and work arrangements:

Table 1: Biographic details and working arrangements

Name	Age group	No of dependents / children	Work arrangement
JB	20-29	0	Employed in practice
ME	50-59	0	Recently made redundant (had formerly worked in industry)
DD	30-39	1	Sole practitioner
JE	50-59	0	Sole practitioner/Expert witness
GB	30-39	0	Employed in practice
JF	30-39	0	Employed in practice
MA	40-49	2	Partner in practice
RC	30-39	1	Associate in practice
PB	50-59	0	Sole practitioner
PJB	50-59	2	Sole practitioner
CB	50-59	1	Sole practitioner
BC	30-39	3	Partner in practice
WE	60-69	0	Sole practitioner
AMS	40-49	3	Partnership with wife
GR	50-59	3	Partnership with wife

There are four architects employed in a practice who are salaried and represent the ‘historical’ model of career within an organisation. The six sole practitioners and four principals represent an alternative career path in that “people will identify themselves more with their work than any particular organisation” (Mirvis and Hall 1996:250). A sole practitioner owns his/her own practice bearing the associated risk and responsibility and works alone although s/he may have secretarial/administrative support. Principals/partners have architectural employees and also are subject to a high degree of risk with their income dependent on the profit made by the practice after their employees have been paid. However, it is the highest level on the architectural career ladder. Two of the principals were in partnership with their wives.

The research instrument and procedure:

In-depth biographical interviews were carried out by the researcher with each of the men in a variety of locations including homes, offices, and cafes. The intention was to explore their career stories and to draw out the ways in which their careers had

evolved. The interviews explored why the respondents chose architecture; where they studied and length of time taken to qualify; how their career had developed since qualification; the highlights and low points of their career; the pressures and satisfactions; the rewards both intrinsic and extrinsic; and, the factors which may have helped or hindered the career. The subject areas were not designed to be specifically question and answer type topics but areas for discussion. The lives and careers of the men interviewed showed so much diversity that it was not possible to construct an inflexible series of questions that all would be asked. The semi-structured nature of the interviews provided a means for probing further depending upon the individual circumstances of the interviewee. This flexibility proved invaluable in establishing a rapport between interviewer and interviewee and as a result considerably enriched the data collected. Analysis was on the basis of themes arising from the interviews which are now considered below.

The motivation to become an architect

The female architects from the earlier study cited ‘basic instinct’ as the key reason for choosing architecture as a career and this also was the case for many of the men interviewed. The most frequent response to the question “why did you become an architect?” was that it was something they had wanted to do right from being a child:

Sounds silly really ... being dragged around castles when I was a child, playing with Lego ... (JB)

I got into it at a very early age, probably four or five. The staircase fascinated me. That and what was known as the Queen Mary building in Hastings, which also fascinated me (ME)

The commitment required prior to qualification in terms of time spent studying would suggest that the choice of architecture as a career would be made following a thorough examination of individual self-concept and the environment in which that individual lives (Super *et al.* 1996) or by the ‘matching’ of the individual and occupation (Hall 1976). It would suggest that a certain amount of research would be carried out and careers advice sought although none of the interviewees reported doing this stating that their choice of career was more intuitive than as a result of rational planning. In addition, the more objective criteria for career choice, such as salary or considering various options before settling upon architecture, did not feature strongly, whilst possibilities of promotion and career structure were not mentioned at all. Others joined the profession because of subjects they were good at during their schooling and through ‘encouragement’ from their careers advisor:

The careers teacher ... said ‘okay, what are you good at?’ I said: ‘Art and Geography’. So he said, ‘hmm, not much use for Geography except for Geography teachers. Art – you can be a commercial artist, and art teacher or an architect.’ And he left me a little brochure on being an architect and one on being a commercial artist. And...I said, ‘not much choice really, I think I’ll be an architect!’ (ME)

[I was doing] A-levels, and I was a bit idle. It was clear I wasn’t going to do very well, so one of my teachers suggested...he’d seen a job advertised in an Architect’s practice for a junior technician. I didn’t know much about architecture at the time. But I knew the one thing I was good at was drawing, so I thought a job in drawing would be terrific. (DD)

This interviewee worked as a draughtsman for ten years before deciding to study for an architecture degree and finally qualified in his thirties.

These findings contradict Dainty and Bagihole (2006) who argue that men choose construction because they have a family member or some other contact working in the

sector. This may be the case for manual trades where personal contact is of greater value than for those in the professions.

Long working hours

Most architects (85%) are employed in the private practices (RIBA, 2008) and employees can be required to work whatever hours are deemed necessary. Because of the length of time required to achieve professional status, employment levels within professions can not respond quickly to a rise in demand for qualified practitioners. The result is, that in times of high workload, existing staff are required to work longer hours. The task-based nature of professional work combined with deadlines for completion of these tasks or where networking is a job requirement means that the length of working day becomes elongated. In many practices paid overtime does not exist and even working from 9 until 5 is considered less than full-time. However, long hours were cited as the chief reason why many women do not remain in the profession (De Graft-Johnson *et al.*, 2003). Certainly, for the interviewees long hours are cited as being one of the drawbacks of employment in a practice:

We've just had one guy at the office that has been stressed...to the point where he's divorced because of the workload, the strain. I mean, I've got a son and I've had to draw the line, so I can play and have the kids about... (RC)

I'm always in for 9. I never leave until 6 o'clock and very, very rarely take a lunch break ... so that's – what 9 to 6 – 9 hours. And I would guess 2 or 3 evenings a week I might do an hour, an hour and a half. (MA)

An easy week for me would be 40 hours (JB)

Compared to a sole practitioner:

A typical day – yesterday – I started probably before eight, and then took the dog for a walk around mid-morning, worked until midday, when I had to go into town for some prints ... if I'm going into town, I like to make use of the opportunity – I went for a swim on the way, and didn't finish work until eight that evening. It was over a twelve-hour day. So really you're merging work...with pleasure, basically. (PB)

Control over their career especially in terms of being able to organise their own time and work appeared to be an important feature for those working as sole practitioners and also featured strongly with women architects (Caven 2004, 2006b). The interview data indicates that working time and the freedom to control the level of engagement with work are the key differences between those who follow the traditional career path within a practice and those who have adopted an alternative architectural career.

It can be quite demanding...you're getting calls all the time and it's difficult to switch off, but equally the flexibility – to do what you like when you like – is a key issue ... I play a lot of golf, and what I'll do is play golf in the afternoon and work in the evening (PB)

I'm not going to sack me if I start late. I take the kids down to nursery and put the answer phone on, and I'm back in the office by 20 past nine or something like that. It's got to the point now where I have an understanding with clients and builders and people like that, people just don't phone me between sort of five to nine and 9.20, I'm not going to be there or there's a low chance I'll be there (AMS)

In contrast to those who considered the benefits of quality of life and control over their career to be important, the salaried architects found that the organisational requirements regarding working time to be excessively demanding. Many employers now expect unpaid overtime to be carried out as a matter of course. Long hours have become an integral and accepted part of the culture of being employed as a salaried

architect as well as in many other professions in order to demonstrate greater commitment:

Working for [practices] – you’re fighting, and it’s like some kind of Formula One race! It’s difficult to maintain any individual autonomy in that situation, and your role as practitioner is less important...you have to move on all the time (GB)

The periods of economic and employment uncertainty, which have prevailed in the architecture profession and construction industry, have created a climate where it is necessary to demonstrate high commitment and, to some extent, ‘presenteeism’ for the salaried architects. These are termed by Peiperl and Jones as “overworkers ... who continue to exhibit excessive work behaviours at the same time they see the balance of rewards to themselves as negative” (Peiperl and Jones, 2001:389) due to the economic necessity to work or fear of job loss.

Rewards

The association of professional work with a stronger sense of personal identity and its central role in the life of the practitioner carries with it an inherent connection with implicit rewards (Kaufman 1982; Gerstl and Hutton 1966). To the extent that architecture as a profession is not well rewarded in a financial sense, the non-monetary rewards of following such a profession need to be explored in an attempt to provide an explanation for why the profession recruits and retains its practitioners.

Professionals are said to have a strong sense of vocation and monetary rewards are of reduced importance when compared to the non-monetary compensations. In fact, the use of the RIBA fee scales was intended to avoid the ‘distasteful’ aspect of having to discuss and negotiate financial matters. Non-monetary rewards associated with professions generally and architecture specifically are explained in terms of the sources of pleasure and displeasure invoked by the profession, the fusion between work and everyday life, and the meaning the practitioner gains from membership of the profession (Gerstl and Hutton 1966). The ethos of professionalism focuses on public service over private gain and the interests of the community over self-interest (Barber 1965).

The job satisfaction element and the satisfying of creative and esteem needs came across as a very important aspect and represent the source of pleasure mentioned by Gerstl and Hutton (1966). It is also linked to meeting social needs and the fact that something pleasant has been created for the client or the building users which then creates a feeling of being involved with something of value for the creator, which then provides public service over private gain (Barber 1965). Cohen *et al.* (2005) report their respondents referring to the creativity involved as being rewarding and the sense of achievement they obtained from designing a building of “‘beauty’, ‘high aesthetic value’, ‘lovely designs’ [and] ‘making something exciting’” (p782), this is echoed by the men interviewed in describing the very personal satisfaction gained by the interviewees in seeing their designs ‘translated’ in to buildings:

I'm on £Xk. I know the average is round about [more] for this area. But [I] definitely prefer the freedom of what I do here. The job satisfaction is more important to me. Over a year ago I looked at joining the council ... and the pay was a lot better, well with the benefits and pension, but in the long-term I don't think it would have been wise. I'm learning all the time here. It's still a curve. Whereas at the council I think I would have just been detailing. So in the long-term... (JB)

It's a satisfaction in being in charge of your own life. I'm getting a good amount. [of work] not pots of money, but enough to make sure I have money in the bank to do my taxes at the end of the year. I've got enough to go and buy a computer or whatever if I want to (DD)

I love my job very much. The rewards are... sitting down with people – they have a dream, they know what they want it to be...but they don't know how to interpret it...and you're the man with the brains (CB)

Financial rewards in a profession are reputed to be higher than in other occupations with shorter periods of training. This is effectively a form of deferred compensation to offset the time spent studying prior to qualification as well as to reflect the prestige of the professional and the value of their qualification (Barber 1965). Architects are deemed to be on a par with doctors, lawyers and accountants in terms of professional structure but there are significant differences in terms of salary between the professions. Architects earn on average £42,250 per annum (RIBA 2008) but the range for fully qualified staff is from £30,000 to £80,000 depending on age and sector of employment.

None of the interviewees mentioned salary as being a motivating factor and as an indication of job satisfaction. In fact, the opposite was more frequently the case:

A gentleman was going on about how I got the look, I was trying to explain to him [and] he said 'I always wanted to be an architect when I was younger, but I just ended up being a millionaire!' Felt sad for him really, you know! But yeah, I do feel sad for him...but I do get tremendous pleasure. Money is not the issue (CB)

I could have made a lot more money doing something else and I think probably have had a lot less hassle doing anything else (MA)

Culture of industry

The construction industry is renowned for its macho culture so the following observations are interesting in that they provide the masculine perspective on this:

You need a hard edge to survive out there ... it's the pressure (ME)

As a young lad I was really under pressure and I had a nervous breakdown ... [the boss] was a total bully, sexist too ... I was reduced to tears by being shouted at and bullied (CB)

These men are reflecting on different areas of employment as ME was employed in industry prior to being made redundant and CB is a sole practitioner. What is important is that not only does it challenge the notion of there being a paternalistic culture within the profession and industry, it introduces the idea of heterogeneity amongst the men and highlights the need to examine the masculine 'norms'. While ME and CB refer to culture and how it affects them in a personal sense, others mention it in a business context:

There is a lot of competition which you have to manage your reputation against ... it can be a bit of a battle (GB)

I've got several problems with that competitive edge ... you end up making enemies (JE)

There are a lot of competitive things that hinder ... and each architect hinders each other as well ... we've got certain competitors that will do zero [cost jobs], they'll cut you in half for the fees and that makes life very difficult (JB)

Site visits were described as being daunting at the start of the career, much in the same way as the women in the previous research mentioned but it seems that the women are better prepared in that there was an expectation of displays of machismo, whereas the men found there was no male solidarity and, even as men, were still seen as 'other' and thus at a disadvantage.

You'd go on site, you'd meet this contractor and he said "we've got a bit of a problem ... can you have a quick look up on the roof?" and [you'] know what they were on about, all the lads stopped and were watching ... and if you didn't do it, you're at a disadvantage (CB)

CONCLUSIONS

The findings show that there are many similarities with the research into women architects and their careers. The attraction of the profession as being a 'basic instinct' is the same and none of the men reported researching the profession prior to making the decision to become an architect. Likewise, several only considered the profession after realising the subjects they had taken for A levels were of little use elsewhere.

Time pressures and poor work-life balance were mentioned by those employed in practice and the principals of practices as being an area of concern. Again, this follows the same pattern as the women, among whom the sole practitioners reported a much greater level of satisfaction with their working lives. The main reason for this was cited as having control over the projects as well as enjoying more flexibility in working time. Financially, this can be the most insecure form of employment but as financial rewards do not appear to be regarded as important (if a basic level of income is maintained), then it is the intrinsic rewards and job satisfaction which are the key motivators.

Professional employment is perceived as attracting higher financial rewards as an incentive for the investment in time spent obtaining qualifications and as compensation for the knowledge vested in a professional. Despite having a minimum 7-year period leading to qualification (comparable to medicine), architecture is not well rewarded financially in direct comparison with equivalent professions. The study of the female architects showed that they were not motivated by financial rewards and perhaps the most surprising finding from this research is that the men feel the same - the older men tended to be the sole breadwinner in their household and the younger men (apart from JB who is single) have a wife/partner working either part- or full-time.

Clearly, there are many more similarities between the men and women than were expected at the outset. However, although the sample size is relatively small, the findings provide a starting point to question the dominance of the acceptance of masculine 'norms' and justification for further research in order to challenge them further.

REFERENCES

- Ackers, P. and El-Sawad, A. (2006). Family friendly policies and work-life balance. In T. Redman and A. Wilkinson (eds.) *Contemporary Human Resource Management*. Harlow: FT Prentice Hall.
- Adams, A. and Tancred, P. (2000) *Designing Women: Gender and the Architectural Profession*. Toronto, University of Toronto Press.
- Agapiou, A. (2002) Perceptions of gender roles and attitudes toward work among male and female operatives in the Scottish construction industry. *Construction Management and Economics*, **20**, 697-705.
- Barber B. (1965) Some Problems in the Sociology of Professions. *Daedalus*. **92**(4).
- Caven, V (forthcoming) Women's Work Orientations: A Longitudinal Perspective. *Gender, Work and Organisation*.
- Caven V (2008) Work Orientations and Career Commitment presented at Workshop for Research Advances in Organisational Behaviour and Human Resource Management, University of Toulouse 1, May.
- Caven V. (2006a) Choice, diversity and false consciousness in women's careers. *International Journal of Training and Development*. **10**(1).
- Caven V (2006b) 'Career building: women and non-standard employment in architecture' *Construction Management and Economics*, **24**(5).
- Caven V. (2004) Constructing a Career: Women Architects at Work, *Career Development International*, **9**(5).
- Cohen, L., Wilkinson, A., Arnold, J. and Finn, R. (2005) Remember I'm the bloody architect: Architects, Organisations and discourses of profession. *Work, Employment and Society*, **19**(4), 775-796.
- Dainty and Bagihole (2006) Women and men's careers in the UK construction industry: a comparative analysis' in Gale A. W. and Davidson, M. J. (eds) *Managing Diversity and Equality in Construction*. London: Taylor and Francis.
- De Graft-Johnson, A., Manley, S. and Greed, C. (2003) *Why do women leave architecture?*. RIBA/University of West of England Research Project. London: RIBA.
- De Graft-Johnson, A., Manley, S. and Greed, C. (2005) Diversity or lack of it in the architecture profession, *Construction Management and Economics* **23**, 1035-1043.
- Ellison, L (2001) Senior management in chartered surveying: where are the women? *Women in Management Review*, **16**(6), 264-78.
- Fielden, S.L., Davidson, M.J., Gale, A.W. and Davey, C.L. (2000) Women in construction: the untapped resource. *Construction Management and Economics*, **18**, 113-21.
- Fowler, B. and Wilson, F. (2004) Women Architects and Their Discontents, *Sociology* **38**(1), 101-119.
- Gerstl J.E. and Hutton S.P. (1966) *Engineers: The Anatomy of a Profession*. London, Tavistock.
- Greed, C. (2000) Women in the construction industry professions: achieving a critical mass. *Gender, Work and Organisation* **7**(3), 181-196.
- Hall, D.T. (1976) *Careers in Organisations*. Santa Monica, California, Goodyear.
- Kaufman H.G. (1982) *Professionals in Search of Work: Coping with the Stress of Job Loss and Unemployment*. New York, John Wiley.

- Mirvis, P.H. and Hall, D.T. (1996) Psychological Success and the Boundaryless Career in Arthur, M.B. and Rousseau, D.M. (1996) *The Boundaryless Career: A New Employment Principle for a New Organisational Era*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Nolan, J (2008) Working to Live, Not Living to Work: An Exploratory Study of the Relationship between Men's Work Orientation and Job Insecurity in the UK. *Gender, Work and Organisation*, **16**(2), 179-197.
- ONS (Office of National Statistics) (2009). *Construction Statistics Annual 2008*, http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_commerce/CSA_2008_final.pdf accessed 11th May 2009.
- Peiperl, M. and Jones, B. (2001) Workaholics and Overworkers: Productivity or Pathology? *Group and Organisation Management*, **26**(3), 369-393.
- RIAI (2007) Men's survey prompts questions about women architects' careers on eve of World Architecture Day. Royal Institute of Australian Architects, www.architecture.com.au/i-cms?page=10130 Accessed 36/03/2009
- Royal Institute of British Architects, (2008) *Survey of Employment and Earnings*. London, RIBA.
- Sang, K.J.C., Dainty, A.R.J. and Ison, S.G. (2007) Gender: a risk factor for occupational stress in the architecture profession? *Construction Management and Economics* **25**(12), 1305-1317.
- Super, D.E., Savicklas, M.L. and Super, C.M. (1996) The Life-Span, Life-Space Approach to Careers' in Brown, D. and L. Brooks (eds) *Career Choice and Development*, 3rd edn. San Francisco, Jossey-Bass. Walsh, J. (2005). Work-life balance: challenging the overwork culture. In S. Bach (ed.), *Managing Human Resources*, 4th Edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Walsh, J. (2005). Work-life balance: challenging the overwork culture. In S. Bach (ed.), *Managing Human Resources*, 4th Edition. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Watts, J.H. (2007) Porn, pride and pessimism: experiences of women working in professional construction roles, *Work, Employment and Society* **21**(2), 299-316.