



The American Institute of Architects

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Before I applied to the architecture school at the University of Michigan, I lived in Japan for a school year and studied the language. It was a wonderful experience in many ways, but the most unique was one I hadn't expected. I lived in a small town where I was one of perhaps 70 Americans. At the beginning of the year, I had a hard time understanding the local dialect and felt hopelessly out of place. People stared at me wherever I went, even leaving rooms when I entered. Have you ever spent time in a place where you were in the minority? It is uncomfortable, and eye-opening.

A white male coworker (and future Young Architects Forum chair) Ryan McEnroe attended the National Organization of Minority Architects conference in Brooklyn NY in September. Out of the 1,200+ attendees only a handful looked like him, and he summarized the experience beautifully: "That feeling of being 'other' is a similar feeling to what our minority colleagues (and women in general) feel every day when they go to work in the A/E/C field. They have to be extra careful when they speak, what they say, how they say it – as to not come across as unintelligent, out of place, or making unnecessary comments simply feeling like they need to say something or they won't be invited back to the table."

Architecture is still a white man's profession, despite a 50/50 gender split in architecture students today. The higher one looks in the leadership at our firms, the fewer women there are, with just 18% of AIA members being licensed women. This leads to the idea of 'the missing 32%' as a way of describing the women who drop out of architecture before achieving licensure or leadership. The numbers are worse for people of color, with just 3% of Latinx licensed architects (compared to 16% of the population) and 2% of African American licensed architects (compared to 12% of the population). The number of African American licensed female architects is appalling low, measured in the mere hundreds.

This year I have focused the board on discussing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) issues in part driven by my experience in Japan and the profession, as well as the focus on EDI at the AIA National level. One of the tasks the board supported was re-activating the Women in Architecture committee at AIA Michigan. While AIA Detroit has an EDI committee and Women in Design events, no other chapter does. I ask anyone interested in volunteering on this committee to fill out the volunteer form [here](#) and send it to Cathy Mosley at cathy@aiami.com.

We have a lot of work to do yet to create awareness and make serious progress in these issues. It can't be up to one person or group, however; we all must do the hard work of leaning in, facing our own prejudices, and supporting our friends, coworkers, and architects in training.

Onward and upward,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristen Nyht".

Kristen Nyht, AIA, AICP, LEED AP

Read more:

<http://eqxdesign.com/missing32>

<https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/more-equity-in-architecture-equals-more-equitable-development>