

Working in a Man's World: The Challenges Women Face Working in Construction

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On the roof of P.S. 107, a school construction site in the bustling Bronx, Jennifer Ponce, 36, in a neon safety vest, stands tall among the buzzing machinery and rhythmic beats of hammers that fill the work site. The air is laced with the scent of fresh paint and the promise of new beginnings. Sidewalk bridges encircle the school, providing protection, while sturdy scaffolding reaches towards the future. Construction workers move with purpose and precision.



Jennifer Ponce, Safety Inspector: NYC School Construction Authority

In this organized chaos Ponce, a seasoned safety inspector for the NYC School Construction Authority, moves with purpose and precision; as Ponce navigates the roof, her keen eyes scan for potential hazards. Meticulously, she ensures that safety precautions are followed, orchestrating a harmonious balance between the well-being of the workers and the public. Ponce, who has been working in construction for seven years, knows firsthand the challenges face as one of the few women in her position, and it hasn't always been easy for her.

“In a male dominant there's a lot of [sexism],” says Ponce. “Even though I'm a safety [inspector], just the fact that I'm a female, they still don't take it well.”

For decades, gender inequality has been a problem in society, putting strict expectations and obligations on both men and women. Many industries still have a strong gender bias, despite efforts to challenge these practices having some success. Construction is one such sector that has historically been controlled by males. According to data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, women made up 1.25% of the construction workforce in the United States as of 2023, even though they made up 47% of all working people.

The dynamics at play are marked by a delicate balance between low and high expectations. Conversely, the industry itself demands that women rise to every task effortlessly, without voicing any grievances. “All the females that come in ... we always have to show and prove that we can do this,” Ponce said.

Minority Based Discrimination

Giselle Peña, 25, an assistant project manager for Gannet Fleming Inc. a multistate construction company, with an engineering degree from Columbia, constantly finds herself confronting the system, particularly due to her young age of 25 and racial background.



Giselle Peña Assistant Project Manager Gannet Fleming
<https://www.theodysseyonline.com/columbia-university-student>

“I’m experiencing it (discrimination) because I’ve been asked to do everything above my pay grade ever since I started and at first, I took it like a champ but yeah, I’m going to work hard,” continued Peña.

Growing up with immigrant parents, Peña was taught to accept things as they are and to always express gratitude for what she had. This upbringing initially left her with uncertain perspectives on the workplace.

“It’s like you’re [told to] put your head down, work hard to get it done right, and don’t complain. If you complain, you’re going to lose your job,” says Peña.

Proving one’s worth comes with its own set of pros and cons. Some may see it as a rewarding achievement, like winning a personal battle, when women earn respect and trust from their peers through sheer determination. Yet, for those constantly having to battle against deeply rooted biases and stereotypes, it can also lead to feelings of frustration and discontent.

The study "Women's Work Pathways Across the Life Course" by Sarah Damaske and Adrienne Frech suggests that a woman's ability to secure full-time employment and overall well-being can be significantly influenced by her socioeconomic background during her formative years. However, there's a notable gap in research exploring the connections between women's career paths and factors such as early socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, and family dynamics.

"There was this one job where I was already there for a few months [as] an apprentice but [they] were always switching workers, foremen's, and supers," Ponce continued. "As soon as the [new] super noticed that I was a female coming in, he automatically sent me home. I [got sent] home for a whole week because I was a [woman] because I wasn't able to produce as much as a man."

"We're able and capable of doing the job, we always carry three or four blocks when other men were carrying one block or two blocks."

These encounters significantly affect women, making it tough for them to tackle doubts about their abilities and worthiness. Insight from an article titled "Equal Employment Opportunity is Essential: Women Face Distinct Challenges in Male-Dominated Fields due to Gender Perceptions" by Bishu, Sebawit G., and Andrea M. Headley lends support to this.

Reflecting on her upbringing as a child of immigrants, Peña says "Both my parents immigrated to this country... It's like you're told to put your head down, work hard to get it done right, and just don't complain."

"Being eager to learn could be the immigrant mentality where you put your head down, get the work done, don't say anything," Peña explained.

Andrea M Giron, 31, a mechanical engineer at Neenah Enterprises, Inc. in Fort Worth, Texas, knows firsthand the discrimination women endure, with three years under her belt at the company it hasn't been the smoothest ride. She grew up in Honduras, where her passion for engineering was sparked at a young age.



Andrea Giron Mechanical Engineer Neenah Enterprises, Inc.
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As a child, Giron would accompany her civil engineer father to construction sites. She vividly remembers being fascinated with the transformation of raw land into finished buildings.

She vividly remembers being fascinated with the transformation of raw land into finished buildings. "I was here when this was just dirt, and now there's this amazing, finished building and this grand opening my dad was part of and I thought that's so cool," she reminisces.

Giron ultimately pursued a career in mechanical engineering she got her degree at Midwestern State University in Wichita Falls, Texas. However, her journey has not been without its challenges. During a project kickoff, her manager made a disparaging comment in front of her subordinate.

"I was at the job site, my manager was there, I was the assistant project manager, he was the senior project manager and superintendent," Giron continues. "Once the project kickoff was over, my manager said in front of the superintendent and myself that I was in this country trying to have an 'Anchor Baby'."

The term, "anchor baby," is often used to describe a child born to foreign parents in a particular country, implying that the child's citizenship status is being exploited for immigration benefits.

"When I heard the term, I didn't know what it was, I kind of used context clues to put it together, and I didn't have anything to say back I was taken by surprise by the comment. It was a joke, but you don't say those kinds of things," says Giron.

Giron revealed that the shock of hearing the remark rendered her speechless at the time, and she felt that her only option was to leave. She does, however, express regret for being silent at the time.

Microaggressions are an issue that women of color face in the industry. These are small, subtle acts of discrimination that can add up over time and create a hostile work environment.

Gender Stereotypes and Bias

Since the 1990s, the number of women joining various construction sectors in the US has been slowly increasing. However, in 2001, women still accounted for only 9.75% of all workers in the construction business, up from 8.78% in 1992. This percentage remains significantly lower than in other economic sectors according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

"There's definitely a significant change from when I entered construction to where we are today, a lot of it has to do with the industry evolving as well, not just the perceptions," says Nicholas G. Dandolos; senior vice president area manager, NY construction services.



Nicholas G. Dandolos Gannett Fleming, Senior Vice President Area Manager, NY Construction Services.

<https://www.gannettfleming.com/blog/cmar-design-build-with-a-twist/>

Dandolos is a seasoned professional with 36 years of experience in the construction industry. He holds a degree in Aerospace Engineering from NYU, earned in 1987, and later pursued an MBA in Business Administration Policy from Baruch College. Although he sees several women thriving in the industry now Dandolos admits this wasn't always the case.

“Not so much today, but at that time, women were not thought of as the candidates for the lifting, the running, and the physical portion of the work, even today, some of the trades work now that that is being performed,” Continued Dandolos. “I would shy away from putting my daughter, my wife, and anybody who is related to me that will be in construction in that duty.

In the study conducted in 2019 "Women in Construction: Challenges, Obstacles, and Best Practices" by Marcela Ferreira Regis and Elaine Pinto Varela Alberte, it was revealed that over half (52%) of the women in trade roles reported facing rejection from their male colleagues at some point in their construction careers. This finding sheds light on a pervasive bias that undermines the skills and credentials of women in the industry.

“There are some limitations, physical limitations, but that's the only area that I could see women suffering. With the progression of robotics, and machines doing the work, now that's where the male-female [dynamic] gets a lot grayer,” says Dandolos

Despite their capability and commitment to their work, these women face skepticism and prejudice simply because of their gender. Studies from Chicago Women in Trades and the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health highlight the stereotypes women encounter

when searching for job opportunities confirming the frequency of gender-based discrimination they encounter.

“I don't see [women] physically meeting aspects of construction increasing in percentages. There are other areas that women are getting in are infiltrating the field and they're making substantial strides,” says Dandolos.

Sarah Pearlstein, 34, a senior vice president in the Washington, District of Columbia at Jadian IOS says, "Being young as well as female in a male-dominated industry it's like having two things working against me." Pearlstein started out as a project manager moving up to a general contractor to the position she is in now.



Sarah Pearlstein Senior Vice President - Construction, Jadian IOS Member of Women in Construction <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarahleahpearlstein/>

Pearlstein, a Bucknell University graduate in Civil Environmental Engineering with twins, embarked on a promising career trajectory after completing an abroad study program in England. Rising through the ranks, she found herself grappling with salary disparities.

“I figured out that I was being paid astronomically less than my peers... I don't necessarily think that it was only because I was female but I don't know,” says Pearlstein “That happens when you stay at a company for a long time coming in at a young and you get promoted quickly.”

"I was always sort of frustrated by the fact that it felt I wasn't getting paid as much money as the people I was managing," she admits.

However, Pearlstein decided to turn her frustration into action. " I turned it into a positive where I [said] alright, I'm going to ask for more money and then they gave me more money," says Pearlstein. Her determination to confront the issue head-on showcases the resilience and drive of women in the construction industry.

Discrimination & Sexual Harassment



Lynn Maia; Project Manager DWATTS Construction
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Lynn Maia, a 41-year-old project manager at DWATTS Construction company in Alexandria, Virginia, with 7 years of experience in the construction industry, is well acquainted with these challenges. Despite her 20 years of experience as a project manager and commitment to her work, Maia still encounters resistance from men who struggle with women in positions of authority.

"I'm in the middle of this situation with my superintendent on my project," says Maia. "[There is] this power struggle with him being disrespectful, and trying to skirt around me, and just completely disregarding anything I say at any point," said Maia.

Women in construction often struggle to receive the same level of support as their male counterparts.

"[Because of this] the narrative around me has been that I'm bossy and controlling whereas we all know, that's the language that women are subjected to," says Maia.

"When I told them (upper management) that he was being disrespectful, they said, 'I've never heard anyone call him disrespectful.' It's straight-up disrespect to lie to me and tell me that things done to me were not done," says Maia.

Maia has called on higher-ups to intervene and take charge of the situation. She feels like she's not being heard by this person, who seems to only listen to the men above her. It's been

quite frustrating for her, and she also believes that those in authority over her haven't handled the matter well either.

“I'm going to them with my hands open saying the project is failing, I need your help,” says Maia as she struggles to compose her emotions, shaking in the frame of her computer camera. “[Instead] they're just perpetuating the situation.”

The macho culture often prevalent in construction can create a hostile work environment for women. Exclusion from informal networks can make it hard for women to feel like they belong in the industry. According to Cindy L. Menches and Dulcy M. Abraham's article “Women in Construction—Tapping the Untapped Resource to Meet Future Demands” the top five barriers to women's success in the industry include slow career progression, work-family balance, male dominance, inflexible work structure, and an overtly masculine culture.

“They need to not take my power away from me or diminish that power. [To] understand that it's different for women in this field in this situation,” Maia says. “I hate to throw that up in anybody's face, in this field because it's kind of like a cop-out in a way, but sometimes it is.”

Women are valued in the industry, and this is communicated strongly throughout the company when leaders actively recognize and address workplace cultures such as “the gentleman's club” and enforce policies that support gender equality and inclusivity. According to Andrews W. Gales, “Women in Non-traditional Occupations; The Construction Industry” the “gentleman's club” culture is courteous and civilized, and it is not antagonistic toward women as long as they fit into well-defined role stereotypes. This culture is prevalent in construction consultant organizations.

Sarah Forrest, 50, a seasoned professional in the industry, knows first-hand the subtle yet pervasive nature of the issues women face, with her 27 years of experience with Hensel Phelps Construction Company in Greeley, Colorado she has seen it all.



Sarah Forrest Chief Estimator at Hensel Phelps

Member of Women in Construction

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Forrest graduated from Kansas State University with a degree in Construction Science and Management. Interning with multiple construction companies, including Hensel Phelps, she climbed the ranks to become the Chief Estimator, a position she has held for over a decade. Forrest is no stranger to the insidious undercurrents of gender bias.

"I haven't seen a ton of like really in-your-face discrimination where people say, 'No I don't want you to do this because you're a woman', or they're blatant about the fact that they think less of you because you're a woman," says Forrest.

Forrest says "The way I describe it to the young people in our organization is a bunch of tiny paper cuts, just little things over and over again."

Forrest acknowledges that she is privileged and doesn't experience a lot of discrimination in her day-to-day life. However, she has noticed that there are things that hold her back.

"I don't know how many times have I been in a meeting and somebody's asked me to take notes and it's this idea of are you the secretary or the assistant," says Forrest laughing as she spoke.

"There is the occasional Creepy comment... the 'You look nice today?' or the occasional butt pinch, but that hasn't been truly an issue for me for years," says Forrest.

According to the research in "Women in Construction: Challenges, Obstacles, and Best Practices" conducted by Marcela Ferreira Regis and Elaine Pinto Varela Alberte, it was found that an overwhelming 88% of the surveyed women reported instances of sexual harassment, with 41% also experiencing gender-based harassment. These concerning figures highlight a widespread issue within the industry that demands immediate attention.

"When I first started, there was this idea of 'no one says this out loud', and maybe I just internalized it," Forrest explains. "This is a man's space... this is a good old boys' network and this is how it is, yes, there are opportunities for women, but you're going to have to deal with some of this stuff."

Over the years, Forrest has witnessed a shift in attitudes within her organization, there's a growing awareness that such behavior is unacceptable. "That stuff doesn't happen, and when it does happen now, people complain, women complain because there's a culture that this is wrong," Forrest says.

Reflecting on generational differences, Forrest observes a shift in attitudes toward tolerating harassment. "I've talked to a lot of young women about this, and there are a lot of women my age and older who put up with things that we definitely should not have put up with, like the occasional rear-end pinching or the creepy comments," says Forrest.

Tonia Rivers, 41, founder and executive director of Mothers in Construction, knows firsthand about the sexual harassment and discrimination women face in the construction industry



Tonia Rivers Executive Director of Mothers in Construction
Member of Women in Construction
<https://www.linkedin.com/in/tonia-rivers/overlay/photo/>

"I have experienced sexual harassment and all the things that come with being a woman in construction," shares Tonia Rivers.

While Rivers, who is Black, chooses not to delve into specifics regarding the sexual harassment she endured, she opened up about her encounters with discrimination saying, "I remember the first time that I was exposed to someone saying the N-word in my presence, and you know, how you always think of what you're going to do and what you're going to say... And the only thing Tonia from Brooklyn could do was walk away and cry," she says, reflecting on a painful moment that highlights the hurdles she faced as an African American woman in the construction industry.

Navigating Obstacles

On top of everything else, women in the construction industry are facing difficulties when it comes to balancing their work and family life. Statistics show that many women in this field feel pressured to delay starting a family due to the demanding nature of their jobs and concerns about job security.

According to a recent study in the Journal of Construction Engineering and Management, the moving nature of work in construction also affects women because of their childcare and family responsibilities. Many women manage household responsibilities in addition to their

work, and thus, management and union support is essential to help them create a balance between the workplace and home.

As a project manager by trade and a mom in the construction industry Rivers understands how constantly having to battle these issues, it can also lead to feelings of frustration and discontent.

"What did make me at one time want to leave the career though was becoming a mom because that was something that I did not have a lot of people to look up to that had children," explained Rivers. "There were a lot of women that didn't really start having their children until like their 40s or late 30s, and I had my first child at 29, so I didn't know what to do. I didn't want to throw away my career," she explains.

Rivers founded Mothers in Construction, a nonprofit that provides resources to mothers in the construction industry, in 2022. The organization aims to help mothers balance their work and family life by providing them with the necessary resources. Rivers also provides construction management services for various construction projects.

She's not the only one who expressed her concerns. Peña says, "The worst part of it all? If I even dare to think about family planning, I can't disclose... I don't feel comfortable telling people." Unfortunately, many women in construction feel like they can't talk about their family plans because of the industry's demanding nature.

"I knew that I couldn't have a family with that work schedule in the way that I wanted to have a family," says Pearlstein. "I think that it works for some women and it works for some men, but it didn't work for me... I'd still be involved in construction projects, but not as a general contractor."

In a thorough investigation, Dabke, Salem, Genaidy, and Daraiseh (2008) looked at women's employment satisfaction in the building trades and it was published in the Journal of Building Engineering and Management. According to the study, satisfaction with management and/or union assistance in recognizing childcare and family obligations also earns a lower score.

"I started that organization to just give a voice to the voiceless," explains Rivers, reflecting on her motivation. "Trying to be a mother, navigating in this tough industry, and making sure that I can make it a little bit easier for those behind me."

The Rise of Women & Mentorship

When we think about working in the construction industry, certain roles may come to mind - engineers, architects, and project managers, to name a few. But behind the scenes, there are individuals like Masai Lawson, the Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition and Diversity & Inclusion Committee Chair at Gannett Fleming, who are making a significant impact in ensuring equal opportunities for all.



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Masai Lawson Gannett Fleming Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, Diversity & Inclusion Committee Chair

"I came from a long line of activists," Lawson says smiling proudly. "My mom is a Former Black Panther junior Black Panther, she called herself, and always advocated for women and children." Lawson highlighted her mother's diverse career, spanning from domestic violence advocacy to social services and hosting a talk show focused on current events and social issues.

Lawson's journey in the construction industry has been shaped by her personal experiences and familial influences. Lawson's role at Gannett Fleming goes beyond the traditional expectations of working in the construction industry. As the Senior Manager of Talent Acquisition, she ensures that everyone, regardless of their race, gender, or sexual orientation, has an equal opportunity to thrive within the company.

"There are still challenges and until we start to see more women in key decision-making roles, until we start to see more people of color in key decision-making roles, you're going to continue to see white [men] Still at a higher rate than people who are coming from underrepresented groups," says Lawson.

Seeking mentorship and cultivating strong support networks can significantly impact a woman's success. Seasoned professionals who have overcome similar challenges in the construction sector can offer invaluable guidance and insights. However, this can't happen if there are not more women pursuing the construction industry.

Aspiring civil engineer Shannuel Lamptey knows the importance of finding a mentor to succeed in a male-dominated field.



Shannuel Lamptey civil engineering student at Duke University

“Masai Lawson, she works at Gannett Fleming gave me great advice about how to handle the discrimination that does come,” says Lamptey. “She said that she had to check a lot of people because they would just say things that would normally get brushed under the rug but she nipped it in the bud and made sure that type of language wasn't acceptable.”

Although her summer internship with Gannett Fleming, facilitated by her father's connections, helped propel her career further in a positive environment, she understands how under different circumstances it could be more difficult.

“Having my dad on the construction site being a shadow under him, there was just absolutely no way [discrimination] was going happen. However, in another situation, that's it's possible,” says Lamptey.

Mentors can provide tailored advice on career advancement, help navigate workplace challenges, and offer vital encouragement during tough times. According to a study titled "Does Gender Matter? A Closer Look at Early Career Women in Construction," informal recruitment procedures and subjective selection criteria pose significant barriers to women's entry and progression in the construction industry. Operational line managers, often males, hold sway over recruitment and selection, resulting in fragmented systems and discriminatory practices.

Lamptey's time at Gannett Fleming led her to find invaluable support from mentors like Lawson and Peña assistant project manager.

“The most memorable advice I got was from Giselle [Peña]... the self-care stuff that we talked about and what being in this industry looks like in terms of taking care of yourself,” says Lamptey. “She [told me] the disrespect hits hard but you have to develop a very tough skin because it's inevitable, it's going to happen just make sure to know your worth in the industry,” says Lamptey.

Networking can also help women connect with experienced professionals who can guide them through the challenges of working in a male-dominated field.

"Networking for sure... I did a good job of doing that at Gannett Fleming because it was able to honestly help propel me further in civil engineering than I thought I would be if I hadn't networked a lot," says Lamptey.

Lawson has been able to form ties with well-known groups like NESB, Ace Mentor, and Engineers without Borders to increase connectedness in those areas.

"We've done it in New York, DC, and LA, where we have individuals from any walk of life, take an active role," says Lawson.

"The whole point here is we have to raise awareness among this community of women and young women of color," says Lawson.

Empowering Change: Moving Forward

Barbara Wagner, executive vice president at Clark Construction Group, LLC, in Irvine, California, knows the importance of women supporting each other in the industry. Reflecting on her own experiences saying, "When I got my graduate degree and was going through interviews, there was actually one company in DC," continued Wagner shrugging off the uncomfortable experience. "The recruiter, who was a senior vice president, said to me, 'You're too pretty to work in construction.' They didn't even look at my resume, that was the interview."



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Barbara Wagner Executive Vice President at Clark Construction Group, LLC
Founder of Women in Construction

At Clark Construction for nearly four decades, Wagner's journey is nothing short of impressive. Armed with a degree in architecture from The Catholic University of America and a master's in civil engineering from the University of Maryland, she embarked on her career. Starting from the ground up at Clark Construction, she steadily climbed the ladder to reach her current position.

As a veteran in the industry, Wagner's insights on the persistence of biases in the industry are invaluable. "There's biases still out there and there's not a lot you can do about it. You can just try to mitigate it in some form or fashion," continued Wagner. "There's still those types of biases out there, where they kind of look at you like, she won't be on the fast career track because she's going to have a family."

Lisa Fields, author of "Removing the Glass Ceiling: Practical Ways to Support Women in Male-Dominated Fields," emphasizes the importance of addressing outdated perceptions that hinder women's progress in trades. While gender equity might not be a top priority for hiring managers, Fields argues that failing to recognize the talent and potential contributions of women ultimately limits businesses' growth and success.

"It's an unintentional bias, I feel like sometimes, you'll get a project and you'll do it and know your male counterpart may do the same thing, but maybe it's not as good, but it's treated the same or better," says Wagner.

The predisposition that hinders women's progress in male-dominated fields is precisely why Wagner co-founded Women in Construction with her friend and construction lawyer Barbara G. Werther.

"When Barbara and I co-founded this 18 years ago, it really was an opportunity for women to be able to learn from each other, share experiences, give advice, and then also separate from gender," Wagner explains.

Barbara G. Werther, a member of Werther & Mills, LLC, and an influential figure in the construction industry, founded Women in Construction in 2006 with Barbara Wagner to support women in the field. The nonprofit organization is widespread, supporting women all over the U.S. Werther stresses the importance of helping others climb the ladder, and advocating for a supportive work environment.



Barbara G. Werther Member | Werther & Mills, LLC | Experience Matters | Litigation & Negotiation and Founder of Women in Construction
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"Women who do attain a higher position often don't help others climb up the ladder, and I don't like seeing that. I like for people to help, so that's sort of my personal mission to try to educate people that it benefits everybody to bring everybody up," Werther asserts.

Despite progress, Werther acknowledges challenges, noting, "I've observed sort of catty behavior even on the board at Women in Construction, and I have to say, I don't like it and I try to build consensus as opposed to having sort of outliers or people irritated. I know that it's human nature, but it's one thing I observe that I sort of don't love."

Research by Cheryl R. Kaiser and Kerry E. Spalding from the University of Washington reveals a troubling reality: despite the success of some women in breaking through barriers, there remains a pervasive lack of support for other women seeking to follow in their footsteps. The phenomenon of "climbing and kicking" is particularly alarming, as women in positions of power may exhibit bias against other women, perpetuating barriers to advancement.

Understanding gender identification is crucial in addressing this issue. Strongly identified women are more likely to support other women in the face of identity threats. Werther's work with Women in Construction serves as an example of how women can come together to support each other and promote inclusivity in the industry.



https://www.linkedin.com/search/results/people/?firstName=Jade&lastName=McNair&origin=SEO_PSERP

Jade McNair Lead Superintendent at Gilbane Building Company

Jade McNair, a young and dynamic professional, has been making significant strides in the construction industry for the past five years. Armed with a degree in building construction from Virginia Tech and a master's in construction management, McNair started her journey at Gilbane Building Company as a superintendent and has since climbed the ranks to become a lead superintendent.

McNair's success can be attributed to her hard work, determination, and her willingness to take on more responsibilities. "I think it was a lot of showing what I was capable of and I would ask for more work or more responsibility, and that was something that not many people, I think especially starting out, would think to do," McNair says reflecting on her trajectory within the company.

Despite being relatively new to the industry, McNair has had a positive experience, thanks to the support she receives from her colleagues and her employer. "Sometimes it's needed after a long day; you just want that understanding and just that 'I've been in that situation too'," says McNair.

However, as a member of the National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) McNair is quick to point out that support is not just important for women but for men in the industry as well. "I think men need to support women in the industry, and that's something I think that the National Association of Women in Construction really preaches," she states.

McNair's emphasis on the importance of male allies in promoting gender diversity and inclusion echoes the sentiments expressed in Laurie B. Fornataro's 2017 article, "Working in male-dominated fields, women can inspire each other." Fornataro's journey from accidental entry

into architecture to confident professionalism underscores the importance of mentorship, empowerment, and perseverance in overcoming challenges and inspiring future generations of women in architecture.

McNair believes that the construction industry can benefit from more women taking on leadership roles, as they bring a unique perspective and skill set to the table. "It's amazing when I get support from women, but for a man in construction who can truly see the impact that we as women are making, the changes we're trying to implement, the experience we're bringing in, the ideas that we're bringing, it's a different sense of gratitude because this is a male or industry," McNair explained.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the construction industry is projected to experience a growth rate of 10.1 percent through 2024, outpacing the average growth rate across all occupations. While this is promising news, women in construction still face significant barriers to entry and retention within the field.

According to Carolyn Arcand's study "Women in Construction and the Workforce Investment Act: Evidence from Boston and the Big Dig," published in the *Labor Studies Journal*, women in construction face significant barriers in the industry. Despite the favorable growth prospects, women still struggle to gain acceptance and respect in what is traditionally a male-dominated field. These challenges underscore the need for further examination and targeted interventions to promote gender diversity and inclusivity in the construction workforce.

In the face of these challenges, women in the construction industry find strength in mentorship and resilience. Lynn Maia, who has been in the industry for seven years, credits her mentor, Jill Sorensen, for guiding her through the industry. "She was really helpful in guiding me, helping me, and listening to me, and she still does," says Maia.

Shannuel Lamptey emphasizes the power of women's nurturing and caring spirit. "The important thing that I've learned about being a woman is learning how to use our power as women by being women instead of trying to use it by being men," she asserts.

Masai Lawson offers sage advice for women navigating the construction industry. "Recognize your worth, recognize your value because if you don't, nobody else will," Lawson advises. "And if you see something that you're not comfortable with before you go crazy, take a minute and pause and think about it. Not every battle is worth fighting, but always stand up for yourself and don't allow yourself to be disrespected."

Barbara Wagner echoes the sentiment of self-confidence and self-worth. "Be confident, don't underestimate your abilities," Wagner urges. "You need to believe in your ability. You need to take more risks in your career; women sometimes are afraid to take that next jump or take that next promotion, so just go for it. Believe in yourself."

The construction industry is evolving towards a more diverse and equitable environment for all professionals, regardless of gender. While there are still setbacks that women encounter in the industry, they can work towards greater inclusivity.

Conclusion

Women have consistently fought for their place in the workforce, one such woman is Sherraine Wingate, my mother a New York State Construction Superintendent at Gannett Fleming. Inspiring me to delve into this important topic her 32-year and counting journey in a male-dominated field has not only been remarkable but also eye-opening.



Sherraine Wingate NYS Construction General Superintendent at Gannett Fleming

As an African American woman, she has faced various forms of discrimination, including being the only woman in her training classes and college. Even now, as she inspects construction sites, she is often the only woman in the department.

"In terms of discrimination, there are just many different elements to discrimination when it comes to being a woman," says Wingate. "One could be male to female, where you have men that don't want to take direction from a woman, then you can have discrimination in terms of being a woman of color, and you also have age discrimination."

"I've experienced it all while working in the male-dominated field and also working in a supervisory position," says Wingate.

Wingate's story serves as an example of the strength and resilience of women in the construction industry. Despite the obstacles she faced, starting from the ground up as a maintenance worker in the New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA). She broke barriers and reached supervisory positions. She became the first advanced heat implant technician as a woman.

To other women considering a career in the construction industry, Wingate says "Being in a male-dominated field whether it's construction, plumbing, electrical, heating... It takes a lot of determination, a lot of perseverance, a lot of heartache and a lot of stress," she says.



Wingate now holds a license in construction management. Through it all, Wingate urges women not to let others weaponize their womanhood. "Overall, it's pretty hard being in a male-dominated field that I'm in... but I really like it and I don't think that I would change it," Wingate says, her voice tinged with determination.

Wingate's coping mechanisms, both good and bad, offer glimpses into the resilience required to thrive in such an environment.

"One of my coping mechanisms is having a very tough exterior, that it seems that I'm very rough around the edges and a no-nonsense person because I've had to be this way since I was very young," says Wingate.



<https://nychanow.nyc/a-win-for-former-chair-olatoye/>

Although under the tough exterior, there's also a warmth that emerges when she speaks of the camaraderie among like-minded women who understand the struggle firsthand.

"I felt like I wanted to be able to give some of that knowledge to other women, help them cope with the situations that they were in," says Wingate.

Wingate has encountered many roadblocks in her career journey, but instead of letting them hold her back, she founded an organization in 2015 to help other women overcome these challenges. Women in Nontraditional Careers (WIN) is an organization that provides resources and support for women pursuing careers in fields that are traditionally dominated by men.

Often, women in these industries feel isolated and unsupported, leading to discouragement and a lack of motivation to advance in their careers. WIN addresses this issue by providing a platform for women to connect with others who understand their struggles and can offer guidance and support.

Wingate vision for the future is one where women no longer have to endure the same uphill battle she's faced throughout her career. "I want to see that change. I want to see people give women a chance, whereas you don't have to fight so hard to prove yourself in any male-dominated field," Wingate says.

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