New Book Revises the Feminist Narrative with Black Women’s Voices

Authors link different starting gates to unique challenges black and white professional women face in today’s workplace

NEW YORK, June 23, 2016 – Progress for all women depends on first recognizing their different histories and hurdles, affirms a new Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) book, Ambition in Black and White: The Feminist Narrative Revised. Drawing upon previous CTI studies, historical research, and interviews with women like Mellody Hobson, Joanna Coles, and Dr. Charlene Drew Jarvis, the authors apply a new lens to the feminist movement by showing how history accounts for the invisibility that keeps black women from attaining power and the ambivalence that constrains white women from pursuing it.

“Black women and white confront different challenges in today’s corporate offices because they entered the white-collar workforce from different gates,” says Tai Wingfield, co-author and senior vice president at CTI. “History plays a major role when looking into women’s different notions of liberation, appetite for power, and conceptions of workplace equality.”

Black women are more likely than white women to aspire to a powerful position with a prestigious title (22 percent vs. eight percent), according to a 2014 CTI study. Ambition in Black and White: The Feminist Narrative Revised reveals that such ambition comes from a long line of matriarchs—black women who prevailed as breadwinners despite a relentless undertow of discrimination and economic hardship. Yet, despite being hungry for leadership roles, black women are invisible to corporate management: only 11 percent have sponsors or senior advocates.

White women experience a different struggle, the book shows. They are highly ambitious but have misconceptions about power which divert them from pursuing a leadership position: 56 percent of white women believe the burdens of leadership outweigh the rewards. Their ambivalence is likewise a by-product of history, as for centuries white women have been confined to homemaker and helpmate roles—norms that have proven difficult to escape.

These different starting gates, challenges, and goals account for the divergent paths that black and white women have taken toward empowerment in the workplace and beyond.

“What’s keeping capable, ambitious women out of the C-suite today is what’s held them back since the dawn of the Women’s Movement: black women cannot shed their cloak of invisibility, and white women cannot put aside expectations that they be perfect mothers and wives,” says co-author and executive vice president and director of publications at CTI, Melinda Marshall. “To change the outcomes for women today, we wanted to capture the wisdom of women who paved the way—and they did not disappoint us in their guidance.”

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Ambition in Black and White: The Feminist Narrative Revised showcases the stories—and advice—of women who began their careers in the wake of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. It also profiles professional women today who have triumphed against considerable odds, enriching the trove of role models for women coming up the corporate ladder today.

For more information on Ambition in Black and White: The Feminist Narrative Revised, please visit here. The book is available for purchase on Amazon.com.

Research Authors:
Melinda Marshall is executive vice president and director of publications at CTI, where she drives the Center's research on innovation, sponsorship, and leadership. She has coauthored articles for the Harvard Business Review, including "How Diversity Can Drive Innovation" and "The Relationship You Need to Get Right" and CTI reports including Innovation, Diversity and Market Growth as well as Sponsor Effect 2.0. Her most recent blog, "Looking for Innovation in All the Wrong Places," appeared in the Stanford Social Innovation Review. Having completed Women Want Five Things, a study of women's ambition and relationship to power, she helped drive the Center's eleven-country study of leadership competencies (Growing Global Executives: The New Competencies) and Out in the World: Securing LGBT Rights in the Global Marketplace. A journalist, editor, and former national humor columnist, she has published eleven books in collaboration, and is the author of the award-winning Good Enough Mothers: Changing Expectations for Ourselves. Her articles have appeared in eighteen national magazines, including the Harvard Business Review, Parenting, and Ladies Home Journal. A magna cum laude graduate of Duke University, she earned her Master's in Human Rights Studies at Columbia University.

Tai Wingfield is senior vice president of communications for CTI and managing director at Hewlett Consulting Partners (HCP), where she drives corporate reputation efforts on behalf of each brand. She is an expert communicator and has effectively counseled public and private organizations on various issues including brand reputation management and awareness, minority outreach, and human rights. She is coauthor of the CTI report Black Women: Ready to Lead. Previously, she worked as a member of Edelman's Business + Social Purpose practice and served as the day-to-day client contact and lead on various accounts, driving strategy development and implementation for organizations including AMD, eBay, Xylem, and Microsoft Retail. Wingfield graduated from the University of Maryland with a BA in communication and an emphasis in public relations.

About the Research:
The research consists of a survey, Insights in-Depth® sessions (a proprietary web-based tool used to conduct voice-facilitated virtual focus groups) involving more than sixty-five people from our Task Force organizations, and one-on-one interviews with seventy-two men and women in the US.

The national survey was conducted online in June 2014 among 3,298 respondents (1,578 men and 1,720 women with 788 white women and 356 black women) between the ages of twenty-one and sixty-four currently employed in certain white-collar occupations, with at least a bachelor’s degree.
Data were weighted to be representative of the US population on key demographics (age, sex, race/ethnicity, region, education, and income). The base used for statistical testing was the effective base.

**About the Center for Talent Innovation:**
The Center for Talent Innovation (CTI) is an NYC-based think tank that focuses on global talent strategies and the retention and acceleration of well-qualified labor across the divides of demographic difference including gender, generation, geography, sexual orientation, and culture. CTI’s research partners now number more than 90 multinational corporations and organizations.

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