

WOMEN IN TECH
Breaking the Glass Ceiling.
Women in Tech.

A Wenham Carter Career Perspective

LORDS SELECT COMMITTEE

A report from the Lords Select Committee in the UK estimates that increasing the number of women in tech could generate an extra £2.6 billion each year for the UK economy, and McKinsey's Global Institute report found that \$12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women's equality.



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WOMEN IN TECH LEADERSHIP PRACTICE

Identifying the future female leaders in tech



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INTRODUCTION

Women in technology are under-represented according to any study you can consult on the issue. This matters, not only for the millions of individual women and girls who find themselves at a disadvantage compared to their male peers, but for the technology sector as a whole, who are missing out on talented leaders and experts to drive innovation and progress.

The good news is that more conversations are being had about diversity, and getting more talented women on board and retaining them has become a key HR strategy for many corporate players.

However, latest figures show that not only does the technology industry lag behind other industries such as finance, legal or education; but there's little

evidence of much progression, with Gartner finding that the proportion of female CIOs has remained static at 14% for a decade, and the percentage of females within US computer science degree courses actually falling from 37% in 1984 to just 19% in 2012.

Despite the sobering statistics, aspiring women in tech can take inspiration from some strong female leaders, with corporate titans like Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, Marissa Mayer, CEO of Yahoo and Ginni Rometty, CEO of IBM among some of the most famous. But how can we create an environment where a female CEO is normal rather than newsworthy?

In the following sections, we'll look a little deeper into gender equality in the tech industry, and then talk more about practical initiatives and strategies that aim to address the issue.

WOMAN-SIZED

Women actually make up the majority of technology users and purchasers – it makes sense for firms to design products with them in mind. Any woman who has bought a ‘universal’ smart watch better worn on a manly wrist, or a tried to take a photo on an oversized smartphone designed for man-sized hands will testify there’s some way to go.

WHAT IS GENDER EQUALITY IN TECH, AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

What are we talking about when we talk about equality? The gender pay gap is a hot topic, (rightly so considering studies indicate women in technology a year into their careers earn 82% of their male peers, despite having a higher GPA on average, and the figures look even worse for black or minority women) but the gender pay gap is a symptom rather than a cause of the often unconscious bias against women in technology. Other metrics we can measure (most of which come out disastrously low) include analysing the male/female split in technical degrees, employees of technology firms, leadership positions, CXO or venture capital. However, altering these numbers requires the pursuit of more fundamental and less tangible goals. These include encouraging more girls to take up academic subjects required for a career in tech (maths, science, IT) creating an inclusive and supportive working environment where talented women can reach their potential and ensuring women and men are considered equally for promotion. If we get this right, the numbers will surely follow.

There is a business case (as well a moral one) for encouraging women leaders. Recent research by Catalyst showed that companies with top quartile gender diversity in the top management outperformed those companies in the bottom quartile with 17.7% and 13% ROE (Return on equity) respectively. A report from the Lords Select Committee in the UK estimates that increasing the number of women in tech could generate an extra £2.6 billion each year for the UK economy, and McKinsey’s Global Institute report found that \$12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 by advancing women’s equality. It was also found that having at least one woman on the board gave companies a greater chance of success.

Diversity in product teams is also important, since the better the team can represent their users (the general adult population, in much of

consumer tech), the better designed products will be. There has been worrying evidence of a ‘male product bias’ in technology: Apple’s Siri can direct users to places to purchase Viagra and prostitutes, but not abortion services and Carmat’s pioneering artificial heart was designed to fit 86% of men but 20% of women. A 2010 paper prepared for the UN concluded that the basic premise of developing advanced electronic products seemed to be dominated by male thinking. Women actually make up the majority of technology users and purchasers – it makes sense for firms to design products with them in mind. Any woman who has bought a ‘universal’ smart watch better worn on a manly wrist, or a tried to take a photo on an oversized smartphone designed for man-sized hands will testify there’s some way to go.

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SILICON VALLEY: THE ELEPHANT IN THE VALLEY?

Silicon Valley in particular – where just 11% of executives are women - has repeatedly been accused of being a boys club, and a toxic one at that. It's an environment where tech blogger Adria Richards was fired and received rape threats for publicly objecting to a sexist joke made at a conference, but entrepreneur Gurbaksh Chahar, convicted of domestic violence, was appointed as an advisor at VC firm NIN Ventures while awaiting his sentence.

The high profile Ellen Pao case uncomfortably thrust sexism and discrimination in California's technology heartland into the limelight. For those who missed it, Ellen Pao sued her former employer Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers for an eye-watering 8 figure sum of lost earnings, claiming that she was discriminated against because of her gender. Although Pao lost her case, evidence given during the trial sparked conversations about how inhospitable Silicon Valley can be for women both in the corporate as well as the start-up space.

Trae Vassallo, who testified in the Ellen Pao case, along with angel investor Ellen Levy and consultant Michele Madansky, co-authored a study titled "Elephant in the Valley" which painted an alarming picture of life at the top for women in tech. The study surveyed 220 high achieving women, all with 10+ years' experience in technology and 91% residing in the Silicon Valley/Bay area, many from top positions as CXOs, co-founders or in VC. The results were shocking – 60% had reported unwanted sexual advances, with 50% reporting this happening on multiple occasions. 88% had experienced clients or colleagues addressing questions to male peers that were less qualified or appropriate to deal with the matter in hand. And 75% had been questioned about marriage or children in interviews.

To quote from an anonymous respondent; "In one review session, one male partner said of a female employee 'we don't need to worry about her bonus of promotion because she just got married. So she'll probably have a baby and quit soon". Exclusion was rife too, with team building activities geared towards male bonding, and reports of women being excluded from conferences and networking events because they 'killed the buzz'.

A look at the data: Still some way to go

In the US in 2015, women made up just 25% of the workforce in technology companies, and for non-white woman, the numbers are even lower, with Asian, African American, and Hispanic women encompassing five, three, and one percent (respectively) of tech jobs.

Despite some improvements in recent years, the bigger players are still male dominated when it comes to leadership positions; even companies like Intel and Facebook, who have publicly spoken out for the greater need for more women leaders and engineers, are for the most part led by white men.

Venture capital firms have a striking lack of diversity – a survey by Fortune found that out of 542 VC partners, a paltry 4.2% were female. This figure is even less than the widely lamented number of female CEO's at Fortune 500 companies (4.6%) and has fallen since the 1990s too. A lack of female presence in VC firms is almost certainly holding back women entrepreneurs, since 97% of venture-funded businesses have male CEOs and research from MIT showed that investors were twice as likely to invest in a venture pitched by an attractive man than a woman, regardless of how attractive she was.

"we don't need to worry about her bonus of promotion because she just got married. So she'll probably have a baby and quite soon"

If you delve deeper into the numbers, as this University of Berkeley report [here](#) did, the lack of women leaders in technology seems not to be a result of fewer female graduates qualified to work in tech but because fewer women choose to work in technology than men, with those that do leaving the industry at a higher rate ("[It's the culture, bro](#)").

Additionally; fewer women are promoted into top leadership roles. Statistics worsen the higher up the career ladder; with only 3.9% of CEO positions in technology being held by women, and 7% of board level positions.

Worryingly, it seemed that external factors such as sexism and harassment in the workplace were far more significant in explaining the barriers to leadership than internalised factors such as a lack of belief in their skills.

NAME OF COMPANY	NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES	% WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP
Apple	92,600	28%
LinkedIn	6,442	25%
Google	51,564	21%
Microsoft	128,000	23%
Facebook	8,348	23%
Intel	107,600	16%
Twitter	3,600	21%

Only 3.9% of CEO positions in technology are held by women, and 7% of board level positions.

WOMEN IN TECH BREAKING THE GLASS CEILING

What can be done?

If the evidence shows that the lack of women is damaging the technology industry, what can be done to rectify it? The problem is that a large proportion of discrimination is unconscious or culturally ingrained, and thus harder to identify and solve. For example, a male employee might be perceived as more eligible for promotion since he shares characteristics with other, male executives who have previously been successful – a classic “status quo” bias. Discrimination is a subjective and controversial area; as was demonstrated in the Ellen Pao case, it’s difficult to determine the precise factors that affected a management decision such as who to hire and promote, and very easy to cite reasons other than gender for these decisions. Most executives (male or female) would feel uneasy with the idea that they deemed a candidate less qualified simply because she is a woman. And many team leaders may be unaware that a seemingly innocuous macho culture may be creating an environment where some staff feel excluded.

However, change is possible. Building STEM and graduate recruitment from the bottom up is a good place to start. Not for profit organisations such as “Black Girls Code” or “Girls Who Code” are emerging, with free programmes encouraging girls, especially those from underrepresented backgrounds, to aim for bright futures in the tech industry. Within organisations, HR teams should be actively promoting diversity initiatives such as encouraging female applications, mentor / mentee schemes (these happen less formally too – see GeekGirlMeetup, or DevelopHer in London), talks or seminars by inspirational female leaders, as well as internal management programmes aimed at future women leaders.

The “Elephant in the Valley” survey also highlighted how far HR teams have to come in acting on harassment in the workplace: 60% of those who reported harassment were dissatisfied with the course of action.

Progress is happening though. We are seeing promising action from organisations on pay, for example. Intel in 2015, and Facebook, Apple and Microsoft in 2016 all publicly announced in they had achieved gender pay parity, defined as no significant difference in the pay between men and women at the company with similar experience and skills. It’s hoped that these kind of public declarations will encourage other firms to publish these figures and review pay more stringently to ensure discrimination (gender or otherwise) is eliminated.

We can also take hope from start-ups and collaborations in Silicon Valley aimed at increasing participation of women in tech and busting the ‘brogrammer’ culture. Eileen Carey and Lauren Mosenthal made headlines last year with their new software “Glassbreakers, now targeted at helping large enterprises with a mission to increase diversity. Sukhinder Singh Cassidy, a successful entrepreneur founded Boardlist, a platform which helps start-ups and private companies find women to serve as independent directors on their board. Latina Laura Gomez recently raised \$2 million for her recruiting software start-up Atipica, which amongst other things, helps organisations eliminate bias from the recruitment process. Project Include, a new project led by a group of high profile women tech activists including Gomez, aims to give chief executives practical recommendations to change the male-dominated working environment in Silicon Valley.

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WOMEN IN TECH WENHAM CARTER'S CONCLUSIONS

While it continues to be the case that senior leadership, CXO and board positions are dominated by men, the tide of opinion is gradually shifting, with more firms and organisations recognising the importance of encouraging diversity. However there is more to be done, both in encouraging female participation, entrepreneurship as well as nurturing progression for female talent.

At Wenham Carter we believe that simply being a woman shouldn't hold you back in an organisation or in your career and currently run specific programs for high potential female leaders under 35 and aiding women who are already in senior management positions to identify the right board level appointment. Over the years these specific programs have built an impressive network of talented female leaders in technology and telecoms - not just in Silicon Valley, but on a truly global scale. We are proud to help our female candidates secure exciting new positions - and help our clients

benefit from diversity at the top in hiring from our network of talented women.

Are you an ambitious female executive in a high tech sector? We'd love to hear from you, whether it's to get your perspective on diversity in your current workplace, or for career advice specific to your sector. Claire Palafox run's Wenham Carter's "Women Leaders in Technology" initiative and can be reached at:

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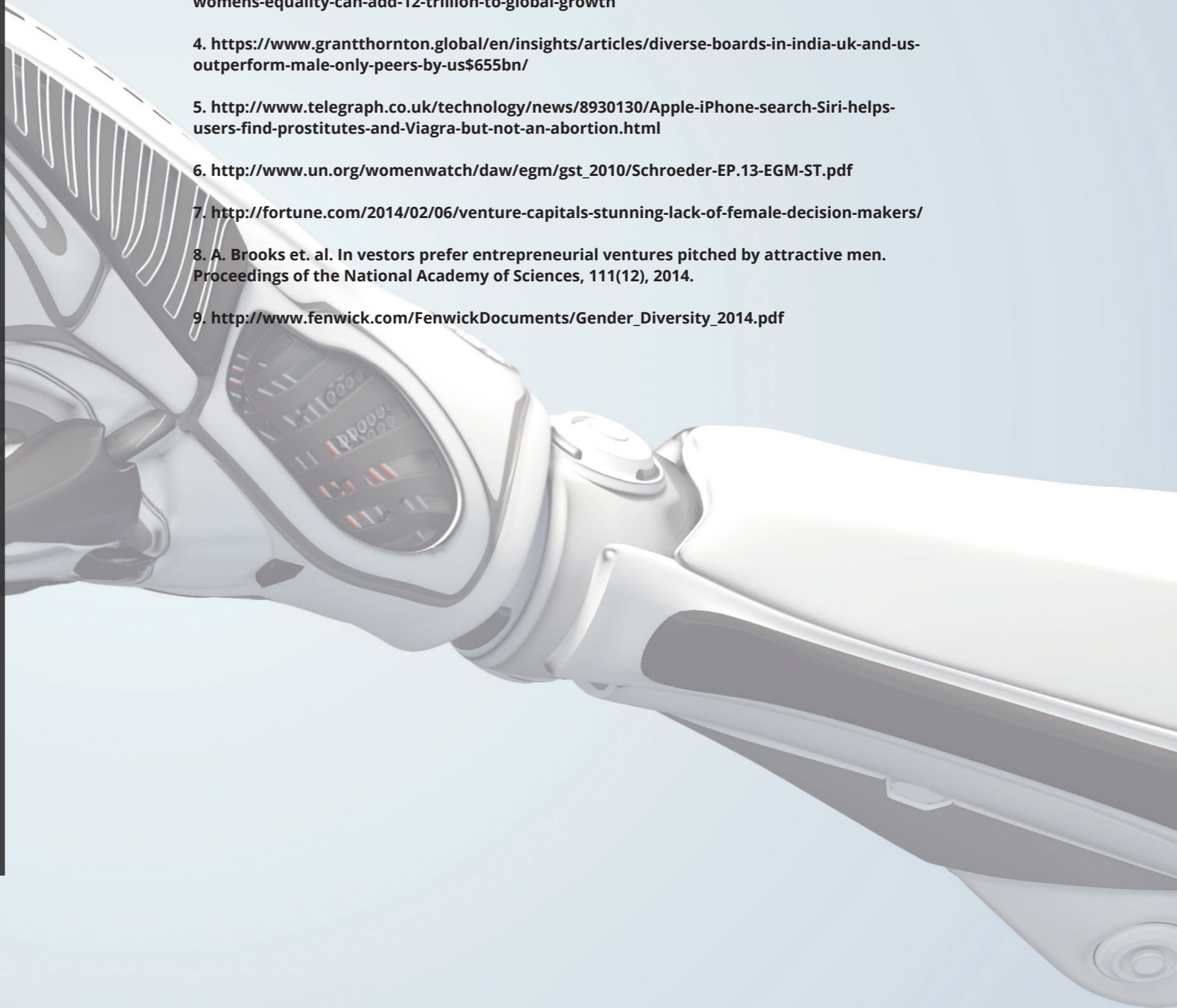
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