
Space and Gender Equality - A response to Take Up Space

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APA Reference

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I have been thinking about how to approach writing up my thoughts about [Celestial Citizen](#)'s short film entitled "[Take Up Space](#)" for several days. Which may sound odd for a documentary that is only about 20 minutes long, but as one of the anonymous women stated in the film, I'm "too exhausted, too diminished, and too traumatized" to just jump from watching to writing.

I come to the aerospace world from practicing law. The legal profession has made essentially no real improvements as to diversity, equity, or inclusion since I graduated from law school almost 16 years ago. It remains a deeply misogynistic profession. As an attorney, I have been sexually harassed and discriminated against because of my gender at nearly every place I have worked. At the last law firm I worked at one of my co-workers came into my office when I was out, opened up one of my desk drawers, and placed a sexually explicit t-shirt rolled up to vividly show an image of a woman's breasts in my desk drawer. This was not, by far, the worst harassment that I have experienced over the course of my career. And, unfortunately, the aerospace industry is much worse for women, people of color, and other marginalized groups than the legal profession. I did not recognize the voices of any of the women in "Take Up Space", but I have heard stories from so many other women who have experienced similar abuse.

As the film points out, the first woman in space was a Russian cosmonaut. America did not put a woman in space until twenty years later. It would take almost another decade for America to allow a woman of color to go to space. And even though gender parity was achieved for the first time in NASA's astronaut class in 2013, space missions remain heavily skewed towards male dominated crews. Of the over 560 humans that have traveled to space, only about 11% of them have been women.

And this is not just an astronaut problem. Once again, "Take Up Space" points out that women make up less than 20% of the space industry workforce. And this is painfully apparent for many of us women in the industry. We all see the announcements of new executives at various aerospace companies and the vast majority are all men. We see female leadership at NASA being replaced by men. We see overqualified female astronauts sitting in the 3rd or 4th seat on crews while a less experienced man is made mission commander. We see historic private space missions being crewed almost entirely, if not entirely, by men. We see manel, after manel, after manel at aerospace conferences and conventions. We see private companies with leadership that is openly hostile to women and members of the LGBTQ+ community being given massive government contracts. We see NASA and numerous private companies repeatedly commit to focusing their launch activities in states that have taken away a woman's right to control her own body and are threatening the ability of LGBTQ+ individuals to simply exist. As a bisexual woman, I ask myself, as many of the women in the film do: "How much more of this can we take?"

I fell in love with space, in part, because of popular science fiction. It was one of the few places where I could see strong women thrive, succeed, and kick ass. From Lieutenant Uhura of Star Trek to Samantha Carter of SG-1 to Ellen Ripley of Alien, these women were simply inspirational. I had never seen a place for me in missions modeled off of Apollo 11, but I saw a place for me in these imagined space futures. Sadly, many within the aerospace industry still see space exploration through the lens of the alpha man. They see women as solely there to fill quotas or check publicity boxes. They do not understand the benefits of diverse perspectives. They just want to repeat what worked 60 years ago. And they couch it in terms of well, we are picking the best people for the job, they just happen to be mainly straight white cis men, not realizing that by refusing to acknowledge the skills and talents of those who do not fit into that limited category that they are saying we, the others, are inherently less than. That we are less qualified. This is simply not true. How many times have women been told by companies that we cannot hire you for this position because you lack this very specific aerospace background and then see a man hired for that same position with no such background but transferable skills. How many times have women seen a man with no expertise been called an expert and given space on a stage when that woman has more expertise but cannot get recognized for it.

We just want to stop having to worry constantly about being underestimated, attacked, and pushed out. We want to stop having to work twice as hard for a quarter of the success. We want “to just exist freely”. And we cannot do that if allies in the aerospace industry refuse to acknowledge the harassment and discrimination we face on a daily basis, the doors that are closed to us, and the hostile work environments we are forced to endure.

One of the reasons I joined Jus Ad Astra was because the women before me and the women around me now have worked too hard to see what little progress we have made disappear as humanity moves off world. [Women’s rights are human rights](#). LGBTQ+ rights are human rights. And I want to see all of our rights protected and brought to the stars as we journey forth to new horizons. As one of these courageous women in “Take Up Space” tells those of us who are constantly made to feel like we do not belong: “There is a place for you among the stars.” And I dream every day of that future place, a place for all of us.