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WILL WE EVER ACHIEVE TRUE GENDER EQUALITY IN ASTRONAUTICS?

Abstract

We are now at a total of 579 different humans sent into space, and among them there are only 68 women, mostly Americans. One might object that the low numerical representation of women in the astronaut profession is directly related to the delay in their entry into the profession. This claim is both true and false. Indeed, after the soviet media coup with Valentina Tereshkova's very first female flight, we must not forget that the profession remained forbidden to women until 1978, both in the East and in the West. However, since then, and very officially, the profession has been opened up to women, but it is clear that their representativeness in the various promotions of astronauts (all nations combined) remains low, far from the strict equality so often advocated and claimed, especially in recent years. Astronauts are recruited from a population that has validated a military and/or scientific curriculum. By definition, this criterion alone drastically reduces the potential female pool and thus makes it impossible to achieve a goal of equality between men and women that could possibly be set by the various space agencies for reasons of image. With the number of employees not rising (or with difficulty) to 30% of applications during the most recent astronaut recruitment campaigns, equality in number between men and women in future promotions could only be achieved if female candidates were preferentially selected, resulting in fact, and as a backlash, the exclusion of male talents. The list of 18 astronauts (9 men and 9 women) selected for the Artemis program made public by NASA in December 2020, alone represents a big step in history. There is little or no doubt that the next human to set foot on the Moon will be a woman. This is probably what weighed in the constitution of this pool from which will be chosen the lucky ones of the return to the Moon. Will women, in the medium term, have to continue to adapt to flight conditions in space structures created by men, for men, as was the case with the American space shuttle program? What facilities will space architects have to imagine so that the future lunar bases, or even Martian, allow the reception of all, without distinction of gender? Wouldn't it be time to ask women about this, in order to avoid, as an adaptation of their equipment, providing them with a makeup bag?