

[people talking in a museum]

I was in the National Air and Space Museum last week, walking amongst the uniforms that represented the history of flight throughout the years. The woman next to me sighed and gazed wistfully at an outfit from the 70s and said aloud,

Deleted: many pilot and flight attendant

Deleted: a stewardess

"I always wanted to be a flight attendant."

I was struck by the response. Why is it that when women think about jobs that take them to the skies, they think of flight attendants?

It might be because until 1973, when Emily Howell Warner was hired by Frontier Airlines, there were only men in the cockpit.

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[news clip if possible]

You can move through the decades walking up and down these rows of uniforms, but until the 70s, you won't find any options for women other than the slim fitting skirts and blouses meant for flight attendants.

Deleted: Emily Howell Warner was the very first woman to be hired as a commercial airline pilot. So

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Deleted: these rows of uniforms didn't include

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[Sound of flight attendants taking orders.]

The 70s weren't exactly a boom for women in aviation, either. Five years Howell Warner broke the glass cockpit door, the number of women pilots had grown to a measly three-hundred in the entire United States.

Deleted: devastating minority

[sound of women pilots communicating with ATC]

And now, in the year 2018, that number has risen to 6,267. Women make up a grand total of about six percent of commercial pilots in the United States. That's a staggering level of inequality. And if that's not bad enough, the first female and African-American commercial airline captain was hired just last year, in 2017.

[interview of Melissa Ward]

First. First is not a word we associate with this millennium. "First" is a word saved for the industrial revolution, the space race, Brown vs. the Board of Education...you get the idea. And yet in the world of aviation, women are still making "firsts." In a world where electric, self-driving cars hit the roads on a daily basis, there's still an enormous uphill climb for women if they want to be behind the yoke of Boeing 737.

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Deleted: A large part of this is rooted in the conflict between

Deleted: and job expectations

Deleted: The mother is still the primary caretaker in a large majority of families in the US, but airline

Deleted: for women

No doubt, cultural and familial expectations still play a role in limiting these opportunities. Commercial pilots are often gone for days at a time. That leaves little room to raise families. Perhaps it makes sense for women to stay at home. But then why do so many female flight

attendants pursue careers with the same schedules? And why do we naturally assume the familial responsibilities still fall primarily on women?

Deleted: This is a problem many job-seeking mothers face, but the responsibility of an airline captain to be gone for three to five days at a time is an extra roadblock.

Then there is the circular problem of having very few women in aviation to serve as role models. With only six percent of airline pilots being female, it's much less likely a young girl will see a female airline pilot and be inspired to ward a career in flight. And many people who do see female airline pilots wrongly assume that they are military veterans. Side note: most airline pilots are not veterans at all -- it's a common misconception.

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Deleted: woman

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Deleted: look into that as a career goal

[Top Gun memorable quote clip.]

Many female pilots have fathers who were pilots. Very few had mothers who were pilots. And the cost of getting into a flight school program is so astronomically high that those without family members often push it off as a far-off dream, or simply fly a few hours here and there as they can afford to.

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Perhaps a key factor in opening (or closing) the skies is economic. Becoming even a Private Pilot costs around \$10,000. And it requires a time commitment of at least four hours a week, with another eight to ten hours of studying and prepwork. The costs and demands of obtaining a commercial license only amplify the problem. Spending upwards of \$30k and devoting the intense hours needed for training translates into more opportunity for those with support and resources, and continued disparities in who gets behind the yoke.

Deleted: Let's talk briefly about the costs of flight training. For the first level,

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Deleted: And with your private pilot rating, you can't get a job. You have to go on to spend (X amount of money) on your instrument rating, then your commercial license. With

Deleted: , you can get your CFI rating (Certified Flight Instructor), but that job often pays between \$15-\$25 an hour...not enough to live on for most people

Deleted: So that 30k you put towards your flight training finally got you a job, but where does the 30k come from without a job?

So, in many ways the 6% of women pilots is less surprising than we might think at first and calls for us to look for "all of the above" solutions. We need more firsts. We need more role models. And we need to make sure that the support and opportunities required to take to the skies are equally available to all.

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Deleted: to the difficulty of getting a license

[Rewrite the close out statement to circle back to the anecdote at the beginning. Respond to the woman with I want to be a pilot or something like that]

Deleted: . It's certainly no surprise that it's hard to burst through the -- glass ceiling? I feel like there's a better, aviation-related pun that could be used here.

Deleted: How do we get girls interested in becoming women who fly the planes that take us safely to 30,000 feet and back?