

SPACE LIFE SCIENCES SYMPOSIUM (A1)
Behaviour, Performance and Psychosocial Issues in Space (1)

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CONTENT ANALYSIS OF RUSSIAN SPACE VETERANS: TO THE EXISTENCE OF UNIQUE
ASTRONAUT CULTURE

Abstract

During the recent years American and Russian psychologists, working with space crews, underlined the importance of searching not only negative, but positive effects of participation in manned space flights. Kanas (2003) and Suedfeld (2006) wrote about the existence of a certain cosmonaut/astronaut positive psychological features and values, obtained as a result of working and living in space. The main objective of our study was definition of the professional culture of cosmonauts, supposed to appear during the long history the Soviet / Russian practice of space flights. By professional culture we mean a system of values, goals and style of their achievement, typical for specialists of a specific profession (White, 1959). Within the framework of the project of Canadian Space Agency (CSA) together with Dr. Suedfeld's group, the study was executed in the Institute for Biomedical Problems, Russia (IBMP) with participation of 20 veteran cosmonauts. One of the main methods used was a structured interview covering such topics as: critical experiences as a cosmonaut; effects of cosmonaut's career on the rest of their life; post-cosmonaut career and family life, etc. Each topic included multiple questions. The duration of each interview varied from 2.5 to 3.5 hours. To process the interviews transcript text data, we used the content analysis software for Russian language (Shalack, 2003). We found certain similarity of values, goals and styles in cosmonaut veterans' group. Their dominating motivations are goal achievement and success achievement, what corresponds with earlier results obtained on astronaut memoirs' content analysis (Suedfeld, 2006). Cosmonauts are mostly oriented to cognition of the outer world and practical goals that they choose rationally, not intuitively. Rationalization of the incoming data is regarded by the group as the most productive and reliable perceptive style. They demonstrate a tendency to care mostly not about the individual interests, but about the whole mankind, planet and the country. The future comparison of the obtained results with the other studies of cosmonaut/astronaut culture would advance us to a more detailed description of a portrait of a member of this distinctive profession.