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Author: Dr. Jelena Brcic
University of British Columbia, Canada

Ms. Irina Della-Rosa
University of British Columbia, Canada

UNIVERSAL VALUES OF CANADIAN ASTRONAUTS

Abstract

Values are desirable, trans-situational goals, varying in importance, that guide behaviour (Schwartz, 1992). Research has demonstrated that universal values may alter in importance as a result of major life events. Anecdotal and scientific evidence of astronauts and cosmonauts suggests that spaceflight has a salutogenic effect; more specifically, it leads to a greater appreciation and understanding of the welfare of all people and nature.

The present study examines the effect of space flight on Canadian astronauts' values and the demands of astronauts' job position, as a life circumstance that affects value priorities. In addition, we are interested in comparing the values of Canadian astronauts to astronauts and cosmonauts of other nationalities.

We employed thematic content analysis for references to Schwartz's well-established value markers in narratives (media interviews, journals, and pre-flight interviews) of 7 Canadian astronauts for comparison to 59 NASA, 49 RKA, and 16 international astronauts.

Space flight, as a major event, did alter the importance of Canadian astronauts' values. We found a U-shaped pattern for the values of Achievement and Tradition before, during, and after flight, and a linear decrease in the value of Stimulation. The top value mentions were Achievement, Universalism, Security, and Self Direction. Achievement and Self Direction are also within the top 4 values of all other astronauts; however, Universalism is significantly higher among the Canadian astronauts. Within the value hierarchy of Canadian astronauts, Security is the third most mentioned value, while it is in seventh place for all other astronauts. Interestingly, the most mentioned value marker in this category is Patriotism. The findings have important implications in understanding multi-national crew relations during training, flight, and reintegration into society.