

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

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SEXUAL WELLBEING & SEXUAL SECURITY IN ISOLATION & CONFINEMENT
ENVIRONMENTS (SWICE)

Abstract

As humanity treads further and further into increasingly extreme environments and for increasingly longer periods of time, questions concerning social, psychological, and physiological factors will become increasingly complex and pressing. Societal and political developments have seen women join astronaut corps and Antarctic teams since the 1960s. Since then, researchers have been keen to study gender-specific traits on both individual levels and in terms of group dynamics. Psychosocial research has taken a more prominent stance as scientists realize that these factors play a decisive role in mission success and safety.

Nevertheless, what is missing in this body of research is an examination of human sexuality in these kinds of extreme environments – a topic that has been avoided by many of the key organizations in the field despite sexuality being a driving component of the human condition and vital for the existence of humankind. There have been several incidences of sexual misconduct in extreme environments and in the age of metoo, it is important that space agencies are armed with tools and knowledge to protect the sexual security and secure the sexual wellbeing of astronauts.

We developed a preliminary research project focusing on sexual wellbeing and sexual security which now currently ongoing on the Antarctic station Concordia. The research is currently very exploratory and introductory in nature and aims to achieve an overview of the sexual issues that occupy humans isolated for 1-year missions on antarctic stations which serve as analogues for space habitats. By means of questionnaires, implicit association tests, and interviews, we hope to establish a foundation for further research into this neglected field of space psychology. With our presentation we aim to present our methodology, underline the importance of sexuality in behavioural space research, and discuss possible routes for future investigation.

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