

New study examines why some people are afraid to relax

November 14 2012, by Dawn Fuller

(Medical Xpress)—Are you one of those people who can't sit still? A UC researcher develops a questionnaire to explore the physical, cognitive and social issues surrounding the anxiety related to kicking back a little.

Although many people look forward to getting away on vacation or just putting their feet up at home, there are others who can get as anxious about taking time to relax as they would if they were delivering a national address. Christina Luberto, a doctoral student in the University of Cincinnati's Department of Psychology, has now developed a questionnaire, the Relaxation Sensitivity Index (RSI), to examine the phenomenon.

Preliminary findings on the RSI will be presented on Nov.17, at the 46th annual convention of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) in National Harbor, Md.

"Relaxation-induced [anxiety](#), or the paradoxical increase in anxiety as a result of relaxation, is a relatively common occurrence," explains Luberto.

"We wanted to develop a test to examine why certain individuals fear relaxation events or [sensations](#) associated with taking a time-out just to relax."

The RSI is a 21-item questionnaire that explores fears related to

relaxation anxiety in three key categories:

Physical Issues – "It scares me when my breathing becomes deeper; I hate getting massages because of the feeling it creates when my muscles relax..."

Cognitive Issues – "I don't like to relax because I don't like it when my thoughts slow down; I don't like to relax because it makes me feel out of control..."

[Social Issues](#) – "I worry that when I let my body relax, I'll look unattractive; I worry that if I relax, other people will think I'm lazy..."

Participants rate how much each statement applies to them on a scale of 0 to 5. Three-hundred undergraduate college students participated in the study. They were, on average, 21 years old, female and [Caucasian](#).

Luberto says that exploring the idea of relaxation sensitivity was based on a related concept of anxiety sensitivity, which is the fear of arousal. Early results from the RSI study found that people who are high in relaxation sensitivity are also high in anxiety sensitivity. "This suggests that for some people, any deviation from normal functioning, whether it is arousal or relaxation, is stressful," says Luberto. Results also suggested that the RSI is a valid and reliable measure of relaxation-related fears and is able to identify which individuals have experienced increased anxiety when relaxing in the past.

Luberto states that additional research needs to be conducted to examine the effectiveness of the RSI in more diverse populations (including beyond college age), as well as among individuals with psychiatric disorders.

Ultimately, the RSI could be used to identify patients who would not

respond to being treated through [relaxation](#) therapies, which is a common component of treatment for anxiety disorders.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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