



ELSEVIER

Sleep Medicine 4 (2003) 253

**SLEEP
MEDICINE**

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Letter to the Editor

Flow into sleep

'Insomnia sensitivity' [1] is an excessive focus and concern over the quality and quantity of sleep. Nighttime has become aversive as the individual ruminates about their somnolent injustice.

'Flow' is both a commonplace experience and pragmatic psychological construct [2]. Flow is associated with life-satisfaction; a person in flow is thoroughly engaged with an activity that is absorbing and intrinsically rewarding [3]. Despite awareness of the activity, there is little meta-awareness. Consciousness of the moment-to-moment occupies cognition, to the exclusion of other cares.

Insomnia sensitivity is just the opposite of flow. In flow there is little self-consciousness. Those with insomnia sensitivity, by contrast, are only too conscious of the self. In flow, time is not a conscious consideration. With insomnia sensitivity, time crawls; there is an excruciating awareness of its passage.

A cognitive-behavioral approach to insomnia is enriched by the recognition of the reciprocal nature of insomnia sensitivity and flow. It can adumbrate behavioral modalities of treatment to supplement the mainstream options of stabilizing routines, restricting time-in-bed, improving sleep hygiene and correcting misconceptions about sleep [4].

One potential modality is as follows. Time liberated from unproductive time in bed is re-allotted for the cultivation of flow. This requires the identification of, and the encouragement to engage in, pleasurable, interesting and useful activities – redirecting the client's excessive focus on sleeping without arousing performance anxiety. Akin to Pierre Janet's 'Moral therapy' for Obsessive Compulsive

Disorder [5], the treatment of insomnia becomes increasingly an exercise in positive psychology [6]. In the spirit of the proverb 'one nail drives out another', energy and agency are reactivated as the client reclaims or acquires a life. Further research along these lines is encouraged.

References

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