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## Introduction to the Special Issue on “Anxiety Sensitivity and Addictive Behaviors”

Sherry H. Stewart<sup>a,\*</sup>, Matt G. Kushner<sup>b,1</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Departments of Psychology and Psychiatry, Dalhousie University, Life Sciences Centre,  
1355 Oxford Street, Halifax, NS, Canada B3H 4J1*

<sup>b</sup>*Department of Psychiatry, University of Minnesota, Fairview Hospital, F-282-2A West,  
2450 Riverside Ave., Minneapolis, MN 55454, USA*

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### Abstract

Anxiety sensitivity (AS) is a cognitive, individual difference variable characterized by a fear of arousal-related bodily sensations due to beliefs that such sensations are signs of impending catastrophic physical, psychological, or social outcomes. AS has been linked to increased risk for the development and maintenance of panic attacks and anxiety disorders, and more recently has been related to risk for other psychopathological conditions including those related to substance misuse. This article introduces a special issue of *Addictive Behaviors* focusing on cutting edge findings on the relations of AS to substance use and abuse. We set the stage for the following series of eight novel empirical papers by providing a review of background on the ways in which AS has been hypothetically linked to increased risk for the development of substance abuse and addiction. We also consider whether AS might be differentially related to risk for abuse of specific classes of drugs with different pharmacological effects (e.g., depressants vs. stimulants). Finally, we consider how AS might be related to substance use disorder maintenance or relapse risk through its putative effects in increasing drug withdrawal severity and in lowering tolerance for withdrawal symptoms. Our overriding goal in writing this Introduction was to provide an organizational template for integrating the featured studies and to recommend promising directions for future work into the association of AS and substance use-related problems. © 2001 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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\* Corresponding author. Fax: +1-902-494-6585.

E-mail addresses: sstewart@is.dal.ca (S.H. Stewart), kushn001@umn.edu (M.G. Kushner).

<sup>1</sup> Also corresponding author. Fax: +1-612-273-9779.

## 1. Introduction

Anxiety sensitivity (AS) is a cognitive, individual difference variable characterized by a fear of arousal-related bodily sensations such as dizziness, trembling, and racing heartbeat. Individuals with high AS fear these sensations due to beliefs that they are signs of impending catastrophic physical, psychological, or social events such as life-threatening illness, loss of control, or extreme embarrassment. Although correlated with trait anxiety, AS and trait anxiety are conceptually distinct (see McNally, 1996). While trait anxiety involves an increased tendency to display fear in response to a wide variety of potentially anxiety provoking situations, AS denotes a more specific tendency to experience fear in response to arousal-related bodily sensations. The AS construct was first described by Reiss and McNally (1985) in their expectancy theory of anxiety. In this theory, AS was proposed as an anxiety-accelerating factor, which would increase risk for the development of fear, anxiety, and panic. It was further proposed that AS should also prove a strong motivator of avoidance behavior (Reiss, 1991).

Over the last decade, AS has attracted a great deal of attention from the clinical and research communities, with over 100 peer-reviewed articles being published and numerous conference presentations appearing on the topic (see Taylor, 1999). Much evidence now supports the role of high AS as a risk factor for panic attacks and anxiety disorder development (e.g., Schmidt, Lerew, & Jackson, 1997). Consistent with expectancy theory, AS also appears predictive of degree of avoidance behavior in anxious samples (e.g., Schmidt & Koselka, 2000).

Reiss (1991) was the first to suggest that AS might not only be important in the development and maintenance of anxiety-related forms of psychopathology, but also in the area of substance use and addictions. Interest in the notion that AS might be a useful construct in explaining addictive behaviors has grown in recent years, as is evidenced through the large number of recently published articles on this topic in peer-reviewed journals (see review by Stewart, Samoluk, & MacDonald, 1999), including this special issue. Moreover, conferences in the anxiety disorders and addictive behavior areas quite consistently have symposia, talks, and posters devoted to research on this theme. In fact, the articles contained in this special issue represent papers presented at two recent conference symposia: the 34th Annual Meeting of the Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy (AABT) in New Orleans (Stewart, 2000) and the 3rd World Congress of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (WCBCT) in Vancouver (Stewart, 2001).

The purpose of this introductory paper is to identify and describe articulated theoretical models relating AS to substance use/abuse. This theoretical review is intended to set the background for the empirical studies that follow in the rest of this special issue and to provide an organizing template for this area of inquiry in general. We believe the time is ripe for research linking AS to substance use to move beyond the now well-established correlation between AS and substance use to examine more sophisticated models. We begin by describing two general classes of models linking AS to drinking/drug use: moderator models and mediator models (cf. Baron & Kenny, 1986). Moderator models are relevant to specifying when the association between anxiety and substance use will be influenced by AS

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