

EXPLORING RELAXATION

A Cultural Probe



Day 1: Nov 187 Thursday

What did you do to relax today? Tell us about it.

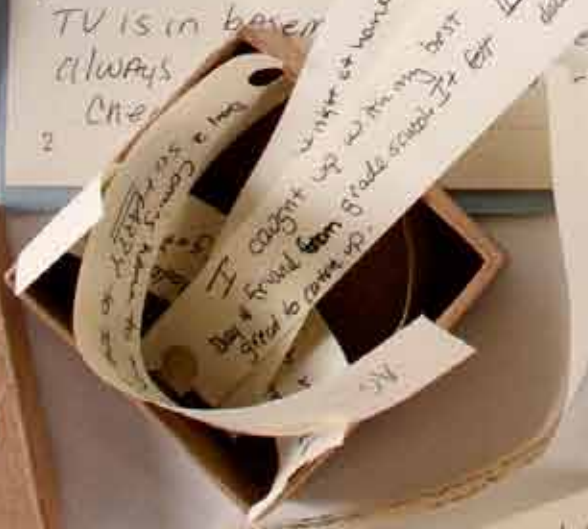
Today I did a couple of things to relax. The first was a tennis class in the morning after dropping off the kids to school. 1 hr of hitting balls with friends its fun and sets the mood of the day.

In the evening today - I finally was able to watch the next episode of 'Damages' (Netflix) I went to bed. Feels down and not 1 TV is in base always

Activity:

What would you do with an extra hour in your day? Tell us about it.

I would walk the dog or do more yard work and gardening. Something outside in the fresh air!



Day 1 My husband calling home from work to check on me while I'm sick.

Carefree Moment:

Camping trips in high school and college sleeping pig, lots of blankets and heading out for good fun.

Carefree Moment:

Sledding in the Arb in Ann Arbor, MI with my friend Caroline, her boyfriend & my fiancé; late into the evening after a big meal and a few drinks. Acting like children (though this was only a couple years ago) Laughing, Sledding, Falling down. Good memories!



RESEARCH INTENT

Knowing the connection between stress and chronic illness, we deployed a cultural probe to explore **how people incorporate relaxation into their lives.**

We imagined our client to be a healthcare services provider interested in understanding and encouraging relaxation as part of a healthy lifestyle.

PROBE CONTENTS

Instructions

Treat

Journal w/
Photo List

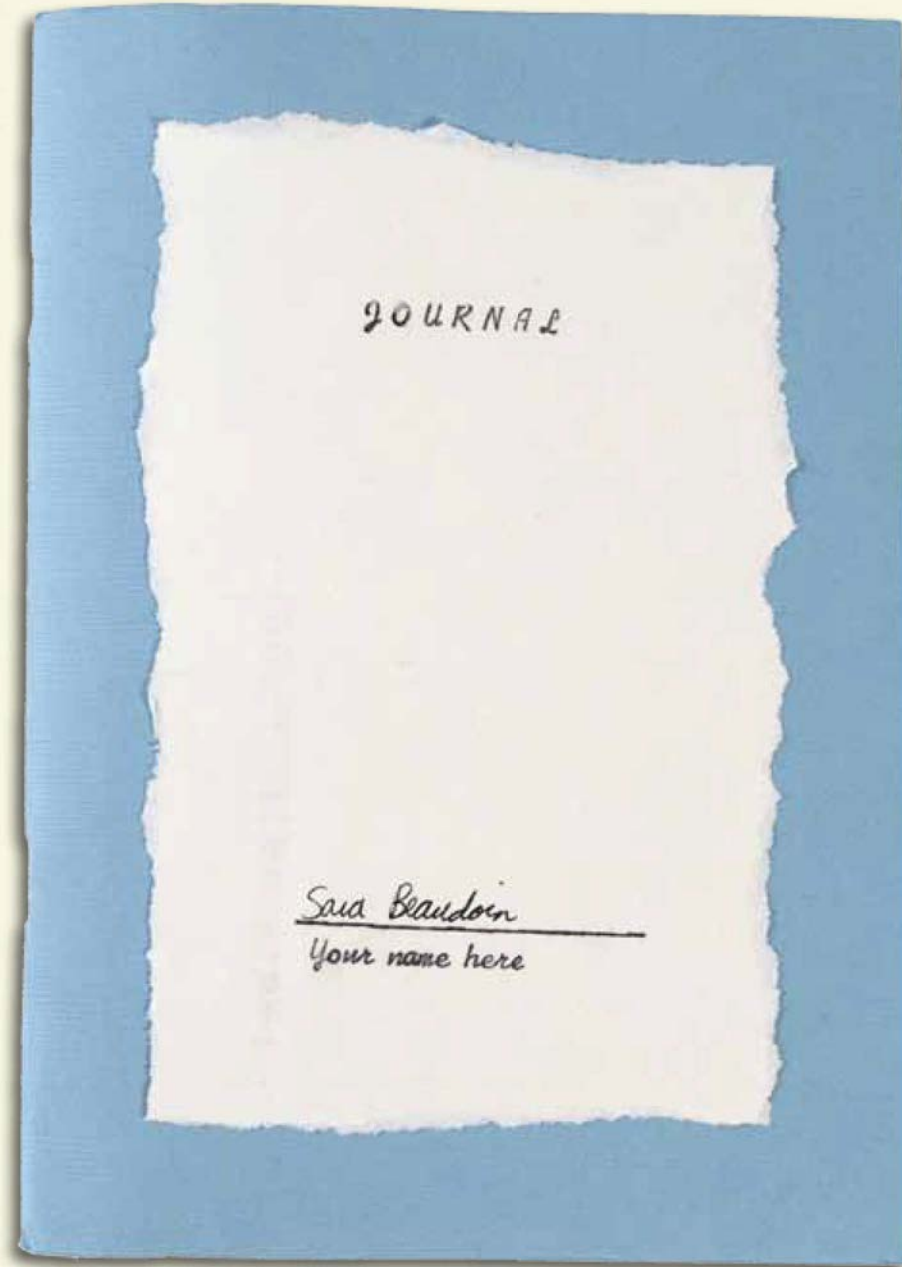
Treasured Moments Box

Pen for Journaling

Picture Cards

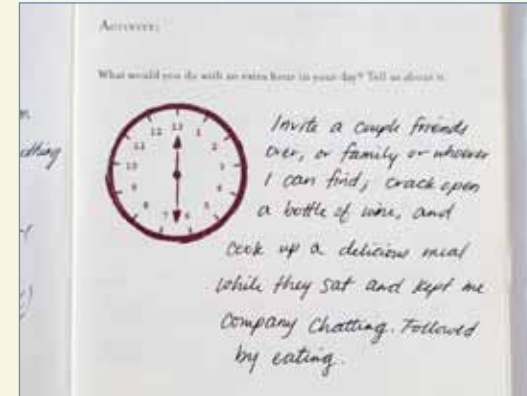


PROBE ACTIVITIES



Daily Journal

Participants were given a seven-day journal and asked to record what they did to relax every day.



25-Hours

Participants were asked, if you could extend your day by one hour, what would you do with that extra time?



Treat Yourself

Participants were given \$5 and asked to buy something just for them, take a photo of what it is, and then tell us about it in their journal.



Balancing Stones

Participants were given stickers depicting various concepts and asked to place which give their life “balance” on an image reminiscent of a Zen rock garden (blank stickers also provided).



“Me Time”

Participants were asked to take a 10-minute time-out from their day, rate the difficulty of the task (and why) and record how they spent the time.

PROBE ACTIVITIES

Photo List



We asked participants to **document aspects of their lives** using their own digital cameras. For example, something that calms them, a dreaded chore and a person they love.

Treasured Moments Box



We asked each person to write **their most treasured moment of their day** on a strip of paper and then enclose it (for safe keeping) in the treasure box.

Picture Cards



We gave participants a stack of evocative images and asked them to choose one (or more) that reminded them of a **“care-free” memory** and write it on the back of the card.

PARTICIPANTS

8 deployed, 7 received



Amanda

New homeowner



Shlomo

Busy grad student



Amy

Professional
working mom



Nicole

Newly engaged
young professional



Bridgette

Stay-at-home
supermom



Sara

20-something
in transition



Paula

New mother

ANALYSIS

Relaxation has many components:

Reflecting and being still

Being physically active

Using all of my senses

Having time to myself

Sharing the experience with others

Breaking from the ordinary

Having control

Being selfless and giving to others

Things that keep me from relaxation

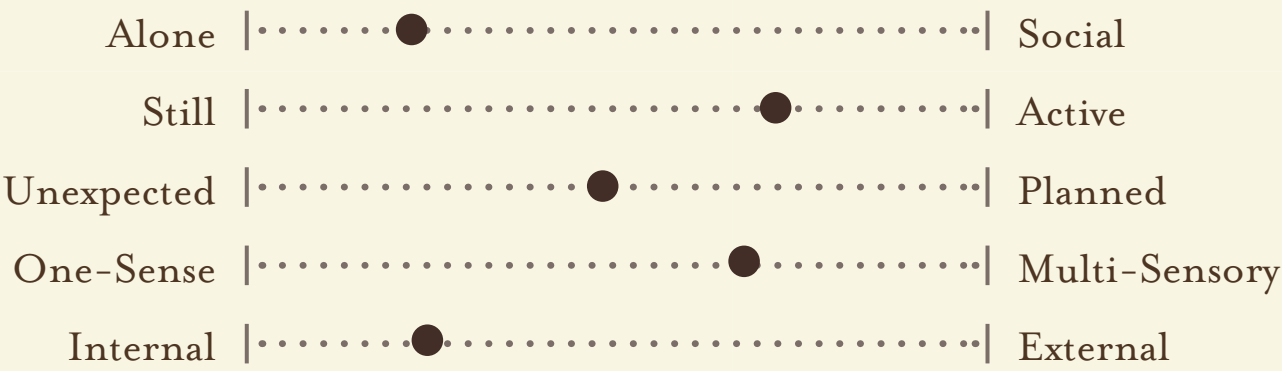
- Internal
- External



INSIGHTS

Don't stereotype relaxation

Relaxation means different things to different people depending on what's happening in their lives, as well as their personal preferences.



Relaxation takes practice

“Help me learn how!”

Benefits and burdens of to-do lists

To-do lists are a looming reminder of responsibility, but crossing things off to-do lists is gratifying and gives permission to “relax.”

Reframing relaxation

People tend to think of relaxation as the absence of tasks, rather than a task in and of itself.

External reminders

Conscience daily activities help people prioritize relaxation.



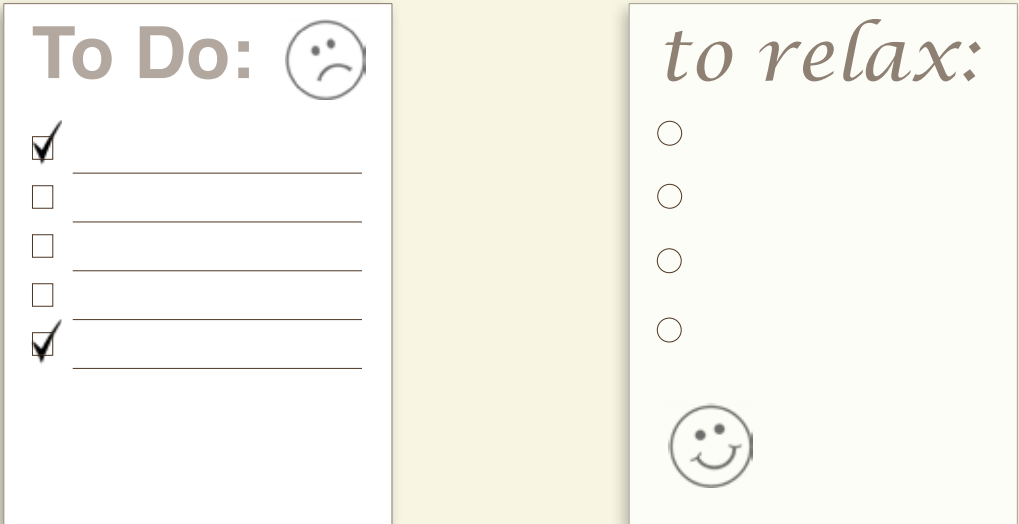
How MIGHT WE...

... *bridge the divide between to-do's and relaxation?* Relaxation isn't the absence of tasks, but can be an activity itself.

... *help employers offer different ways of relaxing,* rather than prescriptive activities (i.e., exercise or yoga classes)?

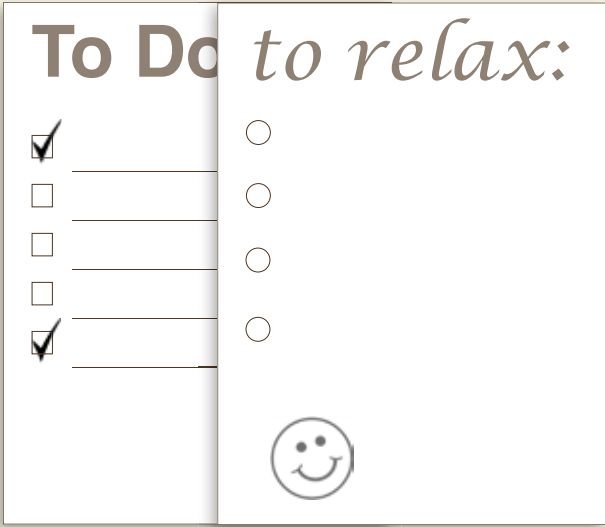
... *provide external reminders* to help people incorporate “me time” into their daily lives?

... *replicate the feeling of accomplishment and gratification* people get from checking things off their to-do lists?



Currently Separate

Should Combine



WHAT WORKED

Striking the right balance

There were enough activities to hold participants' interest, without overwhelming them.

Using visual prompts

Abstract icon stickers and evocative picture cards gave participants the freedom to interpret and project their own experiences.

Tapping into nostalgia

The picture cards transported our participants to a moment in their past, and gave them a chance to focus something pleasant and positive.

Creating empathy

Activities like “treasured moments” and stacking stones gave us a window into participants' personal lives and values.

Using technology

Having participants take photos with a cell phone and email them to us along the way allowed us to begin processing information much sooner.



WHAT WE WOULD CHANGE

Long-distance interviews

In in-person interviews, with the probe on hand, we able to build rapport faster by taking cues from body language and using eye-contact.

Participant diversity

Ideally, we'd have a broader range of ages, genders, cultural backgrounds, life stages and career stages.



