

# How Can You Gain Better Emotional Control?

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper, I looked at methods to improve emotional control in order to maximize happiness. Previous studies have shown that reappraisal, reward, and exercise can help us gain more emotional control, which may lead to greater happiness. In my correlational study, I tested the strength of these relationships by examining naturalistic daily changes in their variables longitudinally over a two-week period. I estimated reappraisal use by rating how often I reframed negative thoughts, measured retail therapy by recording the number of items I purchased, measured exercise as the total number of minutes spent exercising, and finally measured emotional control by rating my mood on scale each day. The data collected in my research show that emotional control is significantly correlated with reassessment and exercise, but not with retail shopping.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Problem

Not having control over your emotions can lead to outbursts, high-stress, and anger. In contrast, good emotional control can make our bodies healthier. Also, when people have poor emotional control it may cause problems in their relationships with other people. Therefore, understanding how to improve emotional control may help people have better interpersonal relationships. Since having a wide range of emotions makes it difficult to know how to manage them, I wish to learn how to improve emotional control so that I can maximize happiness.

### 1.2 Literature Review

One of the factors previously found to predict emotional control is cognitive emotion regulation, specifically reappraisal. Davis et al. (2015) studied a sample of 5- and 6-year-old children in a rural area of the northeast of the United States. The children were randomly assigned to three groups, each group watching two edited movies (film order: sadness-fear or fear-sadness). Before watching the film, the children were each given one of three training sessions. In the first training session, the children were asked to carefully watch what happened in the film and were told that they would have questions to answer when it was over (control condition). In the second training session, children were told that if they feel sad while watching a movie, they can think

about things that make them happy, such as eating ice cream (distraction condition). In the third training session, children were asked to tell themselves that the movie didn't really happen and that it's no big deal when they were afraid or sad (reappraisal condition). The results showed that children who watched sad or horror movies before any training experienced more negative feelings than after the reappraisal training. This means that reappraisal may be an effective way to adjust one's emotional control in terms of cognitive direction of views or attitudes towards things.

Another way to improve mood is for people to engage in specific tasks to cheer themselves up. Ataley et al. (2011) specifically looked at retail therapy as a method to improve emotional control. Atalay et al. (2011) conducted a random sample survey at a shopping mall in the Northeast. Respondents were asked to fill in a short survey report before shopping that asked them to describe their mood at that time, such as "at present, I am in a good mood" and "at this moment, I feel irritable". Comparing the pre-purchase and post purchase lists, 63% of customers bought unplanned items, which they thought made them feel better. According to their analysis, the emotional value of consumers after retail treatment increased by a significant amount. As a result, people in a bad mood are more likely to engage in retail therapy, which involves buying small gifts to reward themselves. Therefore, current research shows that retail therapy may be a good way to improve people's mood.

Also, exercise is a good way to control your mood. Zhang et al. (2019) conducted a sample survey of sixty female graduate students from a university in Beijing, China. The subjects were those who had no or less exercise experience. They were divided into two groups: one group was given an aerobic

intervention while the other was given a mindfulness (yoga, meditation) intervention. They offered forty minutes of aerobic exercise three times a week for eight weeks, alternating with sixty minutes of yoga. After eight weeks of the experiment, the implicit emotion regulation ability of the subjects was significantly improved. There was no significant change in mindfulness intervention group. This study confirmed the effect of exercise intervention on the regulation of endogenous emotion. Eight weeks of physical and mental exercise intervention did improve positive emotions. Therefore, exercise is one of the ways to improve mood.

### *1.3 Hypotheses*

Based on the above literature review, I predicted the following hypotheses:

1. If reappraisal increases then emotional control will improve.
2. If retail shopping increases then emotional control will improve.
3. If exercise increases then emotional control will improve.

## **2. Methods**

### *2.1 Participants*

The author of this paper served as the sole participant in this study. The participant was a 30 years old woman and undergraduate student at Camosun College who completed the current study as an assignment for Psyc 110 ("Experimental Psychology"). The participant did not suffer from any disorders of emotional control and experienced normal levels of emotional control during this study.

### *2.2 Materials and Procedure*

I performed a correlational study to test concurrently all of my hypotheses by examining naturalistic daily changes in their variables longitudinally. I kept a study journal with me at all times over this study's two-week period in order to record self-observations of the following four variables: (1) reappraisal, (2) retail shopping, (3) exercise, and (4) degree of emotional control.

In order to measure reappraisal in the current study, the participant was asked to rate the number of times they reframed a problem or situation that bothered them each day on a scale of 1-7. Reframing was defined as thinking about a problem or situation in a way that minimizes the stress or negative thinking associated with the problem or situation. For example, the initial thought of "I'm not going to pass my test" could be reframed as "I passed my last test, so I'll probably pass this test." The following response anchors were used for this scale: 0 = did not reframe any of my negative thoughts, 3 = occasionally reframed my negative thoughts, 5 = often reframed my negative thoughts, and 7 = reframed all my negative thoughts. Using the scale, the participant recorded a score for each day in their research journal before going to bed.

To measure retail shopping, the participant was asked to record the number of items they bought in a physical store and the number of times they visited online shopping websites (e.g. Amazon) every day of the study. The participant added the total number of items purchased each day with the number of times they visited online shopping websites each day to calculate a single retail shopping score for each day and this score was recorded in their research journal. If the participant did not purchase anything on a certain day or visit any online

shopping websites, the participant recorded a zero for that day.

To measure aerobic exercise, the participant recorded the amount of time they spent doing aerobic exercise each day in their research journal. Total time the participant spent doing aerobic exercise (e.g., walking, running, swimming, etc.) each day was recorded in minutes.

To measure the degree of emotional control, the participant rated their general emotional state on a scale of 1 to 5 every day of the study before going to bed. The participant was asked to reflect on how they were feeling at bedtime and then record their emotion rating for that day in their research journals. The following values were used in this emotional scale: 1 = very unhappy, 2 = slightly unhappy, 3 = neutral, 4 = slightly happy, and 5 = very happy.

To assess the strength and statistical significance of associations between variables predicted by my three hypotheses, I performed Pearson product moment correlations of my predictor variables (reappraisal, retail shopping, and exercise) with my outcome variable (degree of emotional control). For testing hypothesis #1, reappraisal ratings were correlated with emotional control ratings. For testing hypothesis #2, I correlated the number of purchases made per day and the number of times shopping websites were visited with emotional control ratings. For testing hypothesis #3, the amount of aerobic exercise was correlated with emotional control ratings. A correlation coefficient was considered statistically significant if the probability of its random occurrence ( $p$ ) was  $< .05$  (i.e., less than 5% of the time expected by chance alone).

### **3. Results**

As shown in Table 1, emotional control was significantly correlated with only exercise and not with reappraisal or retail shopping. There was no significant correlation between participants' reappraisal and emotional control ( $r = .15, p = .06$ ; see Figure 1). Similarly, there was no significant correlation between retail shopping and emotional control ( $r = -.35, p = .22$ ; see Figure 2). In contrast, exercise was significantly associated with emotional control ( $r = 0.71, p = 0.002$ ; see Figure 3).

## 4. Discussion

### 4.1 Summary of Results

Based on previous research, I hypothesized that the increase of three variables would lead to better emotional control: reappraisal (Hypothesis #1), retail shopping (Hypothesis #2), and exercise (Hypothesis #3). The data collected in my research supported the relationship between emotional control and exercise (Hypothesis #3), but did not between emotional control and support reassessment or retail shopping (Hypotheses #1 and #2).

### 4.2 Relation of Results to Past Research

My research failed to confirm the relationship between reappraisal and emotion control. Davis et al. (2015) found that after reappraisal training, participants' emotion control ability was significantly improved. Davis et al. (2015) compared children's perceptions of sad events with their perceptions of problems. In contrast, I evaluated the use of reappraisal by assessing how often I reflect on negative thoughts every day. This difference in methodology could possibly account for the discrepancy in results between the two studies.

My research also failed to confirm the relationship between retail shopping and emotional control. Ataley et al. (2011) conducted a survey of randomly sampled respondents to fill in a survey report before and after shopping to evaluate whether the respondents improved their emotional control through retail purchase. In contrast, as a participant, I don't always find that retail shopping has an impact on improving emotional control. In fact, I can improve emotional control in a short time through retail shopping several times, but the process is short and unstable. The other several retail shopping did not bring too much fluctuation to my mood, that is to say, the retail purchase did not improve my emotional control value. Future research should examine whether retail shopping can predict the degree of certain emotional control.

The relationship I found between exercise and emotional control is consistent with previous studies. Zhang et al. (2019) found that regular aerobic exercise can help improve one's mood. Although Zhang et al. (2019) manipulated exercise through running and yoga exercise, my research included other forms of exercise (rope skipping and some stretching exercises) and achieved the same results. This similarity in findings about the relationship between regular exercise and emotional control shows the universality of this relationship.

## References

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<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01888>

**Table 1**

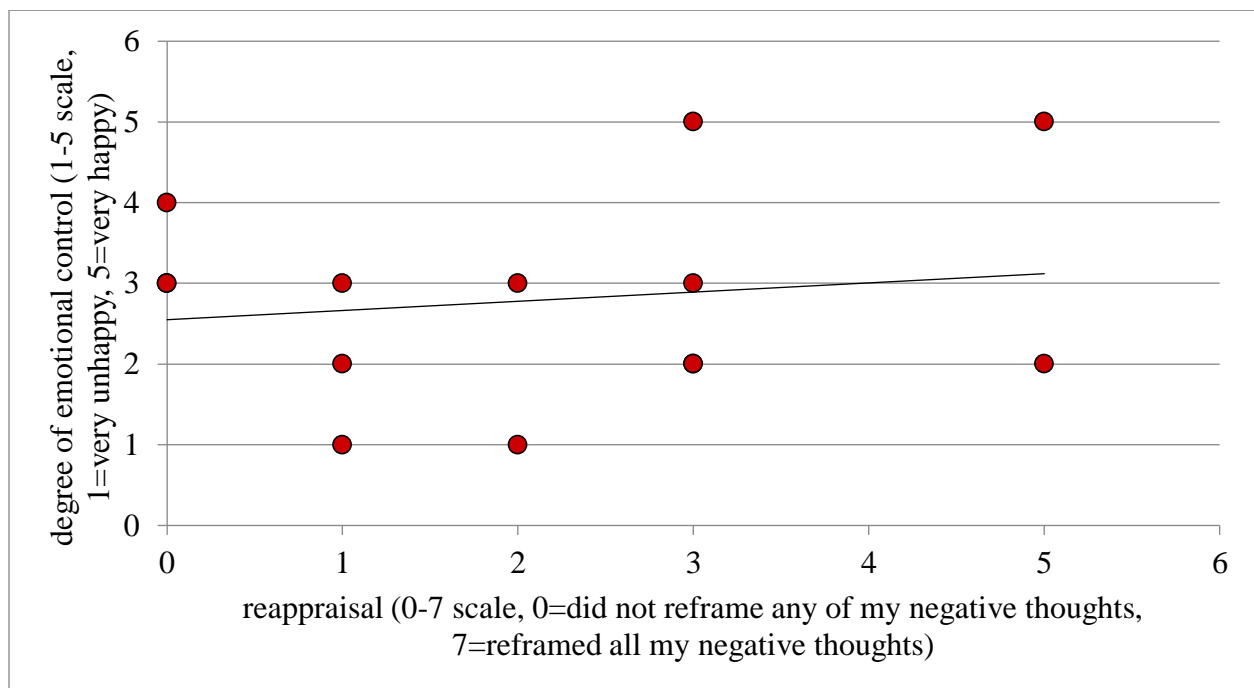
*Correlation coefficient (r) values, with number of daily trials (n) per correlation in brackets.*

Variables correlated	<i>r(n)</i>
Reappraisal & degree of emotional control	.15(14)
Retail shopping & degree of emotional control	-.35(14)
Exercise & degree of emotional control	.71(14)*

\*  $p < .05$ .

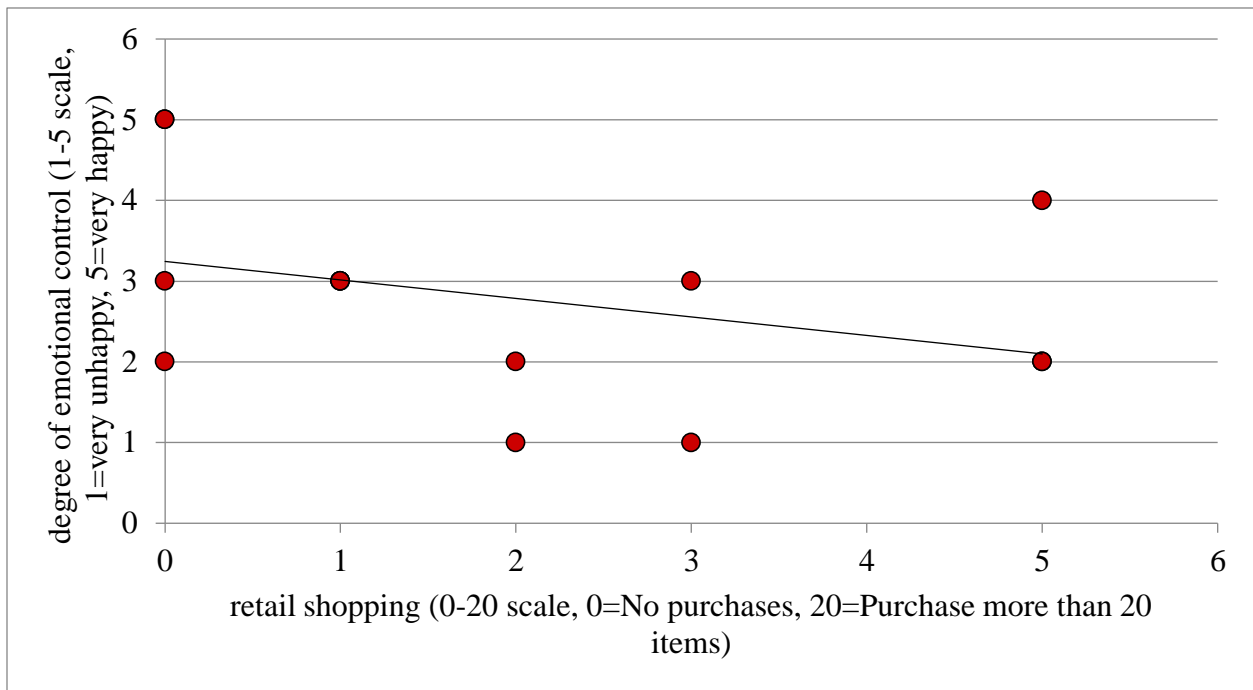
**Figure 1**

*Scatterplot of reappraisal and degree of emotional control.*



**Figure 2**

*Scatterplot of retail shopping and degree of emotional control.*



**Figure 3**

*Scatterplot of exercise and degree of emotional control.*

