

Effects of emotion regulation on risk aversion

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



This paper is on “ Emotion Regulation and Decision Making Under Risk and Uncertainty” by Mircea Miclea, Andrei C. Miu, Renata M. Heilman, Liviu G. Crisan from Babes-Bolyai University, in Cluj-Napoca, Romania and Daniel Houser from George Mason University in Virginia, USA. The study was published in the American Psychological Association, 2010, Vol. 10, No. 2. It deals with emotion regulation (ER) tactics such as cognitive reappraisal and expression suppression and their effects on risk aversion and decision making. Reappraisal involves reformulating the meaning of the situation.

Suppression involves inhibiting the responses and behaviours associated with emotions, such as facial expressions, vocal tonality or body language. The researchers hypothesized that participants using reappraisal would portray lower risk aversion (increased risk taking) than subjects using suppression. They induced negative emotions of fear and disgust on their participants through short movie clips and then rated how they did on tests that measure risk-taking based on the ER tactic that they were previously instructed to use. (Heilman, Crisan, Houser, Miclea & Miu, 2010, p. 58). Our textbook defines an experiment as a scientific method of research in which several factors called independent variables are modified to determine their effects on the dependant variable. This enables researchers to find cause and effect between different variables because they will observe if changes in one variable causes changes in the other (Baron, Byrne, Branscombe, & Fritzley, 2010, p. 19). For the purposes of this paper, focus will be on study 1 which looked at the effects of negative emotions such as fear or disgust.

The sample was of sixty participants (56 women; mean age 21. 45 years) from the Babes-Bolyai University campus. They were randomly distributed in

<https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-emotion-regulation-on-risk-aversion/>

6 groups based on the emotion experienced (either fear or disgust) and the ER strategy employed (cognitive reappraisal, expressive suppression, or control/no ER instructions). The independent variables in this experiment were the ER strategy induced and the emotion experienced by the subjects. The emotion was measured using PANAS-X (posttest).

The participants then completed the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ) to confirm that they employed the instructed ER strategy. The dependant variable was the risk taking behaviour of the subjects, measured with BART and IGT tests. Results showed that reappraisers, but not suppressors, showed significantly decreased fear and disgust. Findings reveal that cognitive reappraisal increases risk taking by reducing the experience of negative emotions, while expressive suppression does not because it is ineffective in reducing negative emotions (Heilman et al. , 2010, p. 258-61).

The textbook deals with the topic of emotion and cognitive regulation by addressing the topics of thought suppression, affect and cognition and emotion regulation. First, thought suppression is the effort we take to prevent certain thoughts from entering our consciousness. It is involved in two steps: the first is an automatic process which detects unwanted thoughts, and the second is a conscious process by which we decide to not think about the unpleasant thoughts and concentrate on something else. When we are too tired, the conscious process cannot operate and the unwanted thoughts become stronger.

We engage in though suppression to control our feelings and behaviour (Baron et al. , 2010, p. 47-48). Second, the textbook looks at the influence of <https://assignbuster.com/effects-of-emotion-regulation-on-risk-aversion/>

affect on cognition. Research indicates that our mood influences the way we see the world and our interactions with it. The textbook states that information of affective nature is processed differently than standard information, and as such it is almost impossible to ignore it once it has been introduced into a situation. People in a good mood are encouraged in heuristic thinking, and more likely to accept facts. Baron et al. , 2010, p. 50-53). Lastly, the textbook defines emotion regulation as a cognitive mechanism by which we use our thoughts to regulate and control our feelings. A study by Tykocinski lists two ER techniques: counterfactual thinking, when people adjust their thoughts about negative events to make them seem unavoidable and less distressing, which reduces negative affect, and giving in to temptation, which involves doing things that are potentially bad for us but pleasant in order to improve our mood (Baron et al. 2010, p. 54-55). Some similarities can be traced between the experiment and the textbook. They both agree that our mood has an influence on our cognition. In particular, the textbook tells us that people in a good mood engage in heuristic thinking, that is employing mental shortcuts, and that they are more likely to accept fewer arguments as demonstrated in the study by Ruder and Bless (2003). The experiment by Heilman et al. (2010) shows us that the ER technique one uses can decrease our risk aversion.

The textbook does discuss forms of ER techniques that are similar as the one present in Heilman's study. Thought suppression, as discussed in the textbook, has a few similarities with expressive suppression, in that they both attempt to inhibit something. Cognitive reappraisal is very similar to

Tykcinski's counterfactual thinking. In terms of the research done for the experiment and the textbook, no similarities could be found.

This translates in the different names given to the emotion regulation techniques (i. e. reappraisal vs. counterfactual thinking) in between the two. The study certainly has a lot more detailed information on the topic of emotion regulation than the textbook. The latter approaches the topic in a more general way, not surprisingly so since it is a college level manual. A critical look at the journal article reveals that, overall; they did a good job, however there are a few things that are not good.

The independent and dependant variables were chosen properly and they took great care to measure the effects using a variety of tests and statistical analyses. They made sure that fear and disgust was felt and that ER strategies were employed. However, further specification on the way they instructed their participants over which ER strategy to use would be welcome. The study does not list any further information on that topic, other than the participants were given the Emotion Regulation Questionnaire at the end to determine if they followed the assigned instructions.

The conclusions seem to follow the results in a coherent and logical fashion. The main problem with this study is their sampling. First of all, it is not very large, and second, it is not representative, as it consists almost exclusively of young women (56) from the campus. This does not allow for generalization. Further experiments with a larger, more representative sample would shed more light on the exact effects of emotion regulation on decision making under risk.