



# Escaping Feelings: Investigating Why University Students Gamble



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## BACKGROUND

University students often take part in a diversity of risky activities, making them significantly at risk for developing problematic behaviors (e.g., substance and alcohol use and gambling problems).<sup>1</sup>

Disordered gambling is associated with many deleterious consequences including mood disorders,<sup>2</sup> and escaping negative emotions is a common motivation for problem gamblers.<sup>3</sup> However, the relationship between gambling participation and emotions is still not entirely clear.

Mindfulness emphasizes observing, attending to and accepting experienced emotions,<sup>4</sup> and as such is expected to be a protective factor against problematic behaviors.

This study will investigate this relationship among a group of 205 undergraduate students by exploring the connection that mindfulness and emotion regulation strategies (suppression and reappraisal) have with gambling participation.

## RESULTS

Reappraisal moderated the effect of suppression on gambling frequency,  $b = .003$ ,  $SE = .0013$ ,  $t = 2.44$ ,  $p = .01$ . Mindfulness did not significantly moderate the effect of suppression on gambling frequency ( $b = -.006$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $t = -.566$ ,  $p = .57$ ). All correlations for variables are reported in table 1.

Table 1. Gambling Frequency, Mindfulness, Suppression and Reappraisal variables: Correlations (N = 205)

Variables	Gambling	Mindfulness	Suppression	Reappraisal
<b>Gambling</b>	---			
<b>Mindfulness</b>	-.121	---		
<b>Suppression</b>	.160*	.208**	---	
<b>Reappraisal</b>	-.067	.284**	.003	---
<b>Alcohol</b>	.098	-.120	-.055	-.50

Note: \* Correlation is significant at  $p < .05$  level;  
\*\* Correlation is significant at  $p < .01$  level (2-tailed)

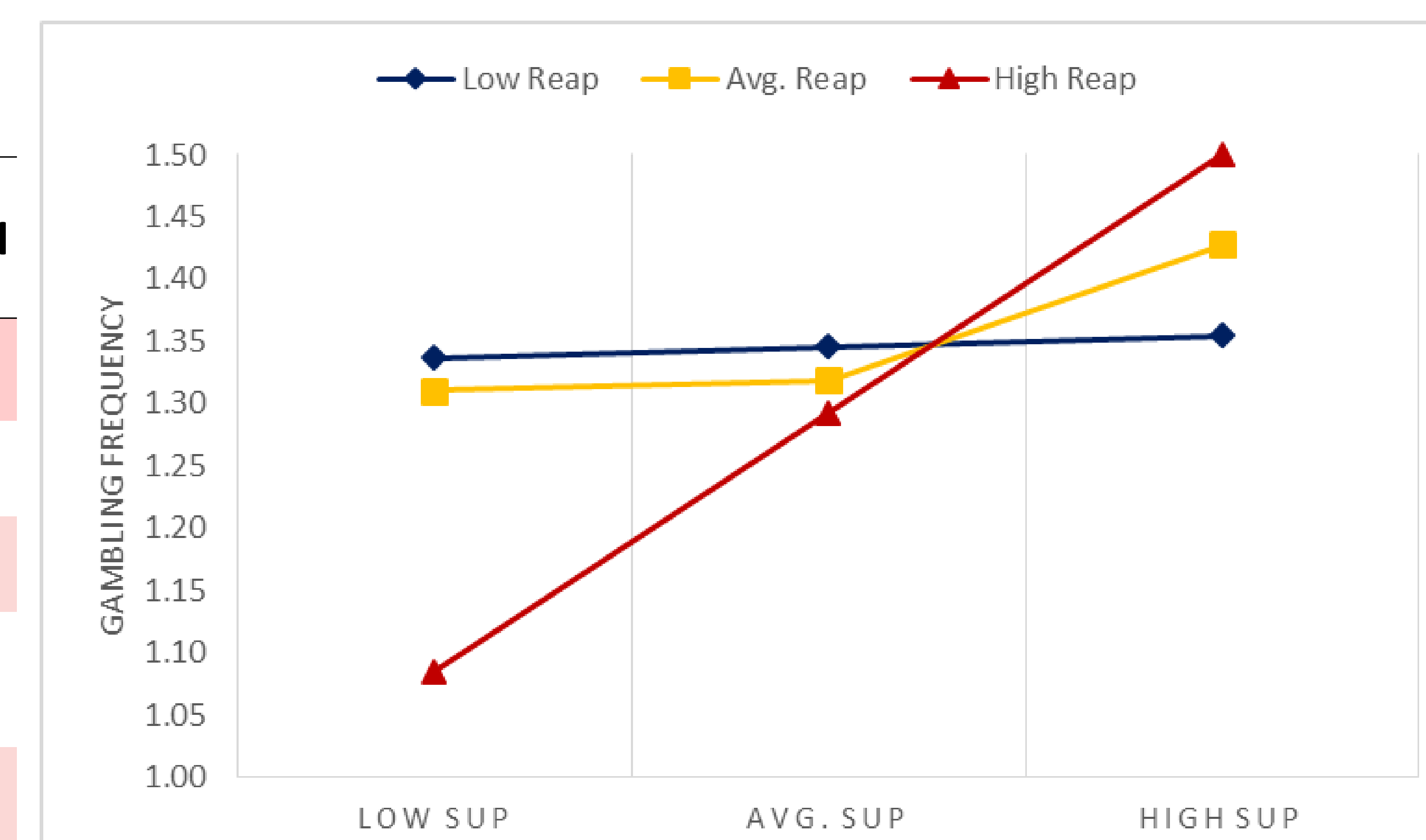


Figure 1. Interaction of Reappraisal on Suppression and Gambling Frequency

## Methods

### Measures

#### Online Survey

- Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (ERQ; Gross & John, 2003); Mindful Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS; Brown & Ryan, 2003); Frequency questions on gambling (5-point Likert scale; Daily to Never)

#### Participants

- 205 University students 18-34 years old (89% 18-24 years; 11% 25-34 years); 85% Female
- 61% White, 31% Asian, 2% African America and 6% Other
- 59% Bachelors Degree; 18% Master's Degree
- 20% reported gambling once a month; 2% reported gambling weekly

## DISCUSSION

Within a highly female sample, reappraisal only moderated the effect of gambling participation when suppression was low, but had no effect on gambling frequency when suppression levels were either average or high. This suggests that reappraisal and suppression emotion regulation strategies are independent of each other, and individuals who use suppression often are at increased risk of greater gambling participation. This study also illustrates the importance of not only focusing on one type of emotion regulation strategy (i.e., reappraisal) during gambling interventions. Specifically, this data points to the importance of suppression within gambling frequency, and as such future studies need to focus on how to increase protective factors against suppression, such as the understanding and acceptance of emotions.

### Selected References

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