

# Appraising Anxiety as Problematic Increases Odds of Misusing Meditation Strategies Above and Beyond Transdiagnostic Processes and Symptomatic Distress



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# The more problematic one considers their anxiety to be, the more likely they are to use meditation as an experiential control strategy.

## Background

- An intended function of meditation is to cultivate openness to, and acceptance of, private experiences.
- Yet, meditation can be used in ways known to paradoxically increase psychological distress (e.g., to avoid or suppress thoughts) which perhaps contributes to poor outcomes.
- Understanding how people use meditation in and outside of psychotherapy, as well as identifying predictors of differential use, are needed.
- We anticipated individuals who appraised anxiety as more “problematic” and reported greater levels of experiential avoidance (EA; Hayes et al., 1996), would be more likely to use meditation as a control strategy beyond the extent of anxiety symptoms.

## Methods

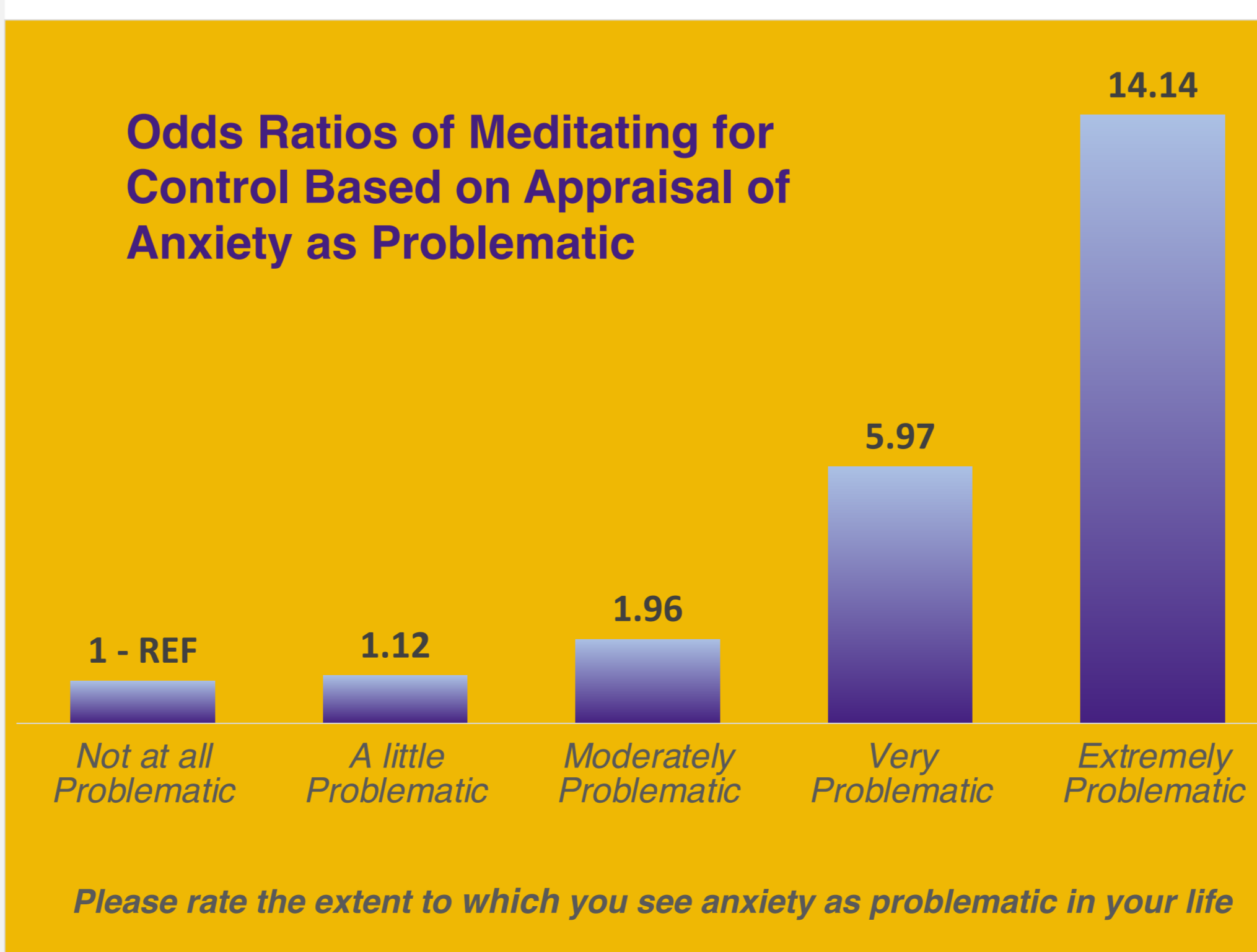
- Undergraduates from a larger study who endorsed having a meditation practice ( $N = 103$ ;  $M$  age = 20; 71% female; 46% White, 21% Black, 18% Asian, 15% Latino/a) were surveyed about their use of meditation.
  - $n = 43$  (41.7%) participants endorsed using meditation to increase acceptance of private events.
  - $n = 60$  (58.3%) participants endorsed using meditation to control/regulate unpleasant private events.
- Participants were also given a battery of measures assessing:
  - Anxiety: [BAI; Beck et al., 1988]
  - Negative Affect: [PANAS; Watson et al., 1988]
  - Cognitive Fusion: [CFQ; Gillanders et al., 2014]
  - Experiential Avoidance: [AAQ-II; Bond et al., 2011]
  - Perception of Anxiety as a Problem: [Single-Item Rating]
- Binary logistic regressions predicting control vs. acceptance were conducted, using the above-listed measures as predictor variables.

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## Results

- Each variable alone (anxiety [BAI], negative affect [PANAS], cognitive fusion [CFQ], and a single item addressing the extent to which anxiety is viewed as a problem), except for EA [AAQ-II], significantly predicted group membership.
- Yet, when all variables were modeled together, only the 5-point Likert-style item emerged as a significant predictor ( $p$ -trend = 0.03).
- To further explore the association between this item and meditation intention, an additional logistic regression was conducted to evaluate odds ratios of meditating for control by endorsement of each of this item’s scale points:

Scale Response ( $N_{total} = 103$ )	$N_{control} = 60$	Odds of Meditating for Control		
		Odds Ratio	(95% C.I.)	$P_{trend}$
Not at all Problematic (18)	7	1	(reference)	
A Little Problematic (24)	10	1.12	(0.32-3.91)	
Moderately Problematic (27)	15	1.96	(0.58-6.62)	
Very Problematic (24)	19	5.97	(1.52-23.43)	
Extremely Problematic (10)	9	14.14	(1.46-137.30)	0.03



## Discussion

- A single item rating of how problematic individuals view anxiety to be, predicts how meditation is used above and beyond transdiagnostic and symptom-based variables.
- Individuals who consider anxiety to be very problematic in their lives are almost 6x as likely to use meditation for control as those who consider anxiety to be not at all problematic, and those who consider anxiety to be extremely problematic in their lives are an astounding 14x as likely to meditate for control.
- Results suggest that therapists ought to ask clients their views of anxiety using such a single-item scale, and regularly evaluate how clients are using the contemplative practices that are becoming increasingly popular in psychotherapies.
- Single-item measures such as this may be viable screening tools, and often demonstrate adequate psychometric properties for this purpose (Dollinger & Malmquist, 2009).
- Limitations include a small sample with relatively limited meditation experience ( $M = 19.7$  months practice), and an undergraduate sample from which to generalize findings.
- Additionally, unbalanced responses to the upper extreme points of the scale yielded large confidence intervals suggesting caution when interpreting these odds ratios.
- Future studies could aim to replicate these results with larger and more representative samples to increase precision and generalizability.

## References

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