

Crafting as a Means of Emotion Regulation

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Emotions and emotion regulation skills are part of everyone's life. From the perspective of psychological well-being and the smooth functioning of everyday life, individuals are required to possess the ability to recognise, process, and regulate different emotions. Creative activities, included in fields such as visual arts, music, and crafts, have been shown to evoke a wide range of emotional reactions and to provide opportunities for emotion regulation through various strategies. This article examines crafting as a means of emotion regulation from the perspective of hobbyists' experiences. The data consist of responses from 56 craft hobbyists to an online questionnaire with open-ended questions, which were analysed using data-driven and theory-guided content analysis, drawing on Gross's process model as well as Fancourt's classification of approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies. The results indicate that crafting offers adults diverse, flexibly applicable ways to regulate their emotions. Hobbyists described crafting particularly as an approach strategy for encountering, structuring, and calming emotions, but also as a means of temporarily setting aside burdensome emotions in accordance with an avoidance strategy. In addition, crafting strengthened identity, self-efficacy, and self-compassion, reflecting its significance as a self-development strategy. The findings contribute to existing understanding of emotion regulation by demonstrating how multiple regulation strategies are intertwined within a single creative everyday practice and support adults' emotional learning and self-regulation.



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Introduction

A diverse range of emotions permeates human everyday life, and the ability to regulate emotions is an essential part of everyday functioning. Emotions are part of being human and influence how individuals perceive themselves, others, and the surrounding world (Gross & Muñoz, 1995; Varila, 2004). Different environments of everyday life — such as social relationships, studying, working life, and leisure activities — require emotion regulation skills that support psychological well-being and functional capacity (Gross & Muñoz, 1995; Varila, 2004).

Studies (Aldao et al., 2010; Gross & Jazaieri, 2014) show that insufficient emotion regulation skills are associated with several mental health challenges, such as depression, anxiety disorders, eating disorders, and substance abuse problems. The significance of emotion regulation skills has been widely discussed, especially in the upbringing of children and adolescents (Daniel et al., 2020). Emotional skills have been highlighted as a central part of the Vision for Basic Education 2045, which emphasises the role of school in supporting well-being and a meaningful life (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2026). Our view is that different mechanisms of emotion regulation are also significant in adult education.

The growing interest in emotions and emotion regulation in educational contexts has also generated critical discussion. Brunila (2012) argues that the emphasis on emotional self-management may foster

a therapeutic ethos that encourages continuous self-development and emotional work. This highlights the need to view emotion regulation not only as an individual competence but also as a socially and culturally situated practice. Accordingly, this study approaches crafting as an everyday, self-directed activity through which adults may engage with emotions beyond formal educational or therapeutic settings.

Alongside these critical discussions, research on emotions and emotion regulation has expanded rapidly across disciplines (see, e.g., Lönngren et al., 2024; Meadows et al., 2020; Rawlings et al., 2023; Simonton & Layne, 2023), and a wide range of strategies for emotion regulation has been identified. However, there is no consensus on which strategies are most effective in different situations or for different individuals (Aldao et al., 2015; Trautmann et al., 2024). Therefore, further research is needed on the forms and practices of emotion regulation in everyday life.

Creative activities, such as listening to and playing music, activities connected to visual arts, and crafts, have been shown to provide a fruitful context for the processing of emotions. Studies (Barnett & Vasiliu, 2024; McRae & Gross, 2020; Huotilainen et al., 2018) indicate that emotion regulation associated with creative activity is, at the neurological level, connected to the brain's emotion regulation systems. In addition, creative activity offers diverse pathways for emotion regulation through different strategies (Chaze et al., 2022; Fancourt et al., 2019, 2025; Mak et al., 2021).

Crafting is a form of creative activity in which emotions and making are particularly closely intertwined. During the crafting process, a range of emotions are experienced, which the individual can recognise, regulate, and structure as the activity progresses (Brooks et al., 2019; Groth, 2017; Ojala et al., 2018). The concentration and immersion inherent in crafting can support calming down, clarification of thoughts, and experiences of flow (Huotilainen et al., 2018). At the same time, crafting can provide a safe space for encountering both burdensome and positive emotional experiences (Kokko et al., 2026; Nordstrand et al., 2024; Pöllänen, 2015).

Although the well-being effects of crafting have been extensively studied (Kokko et al., 2026), craft hobbyists' own descriptions of emotion regulation have been examined only to a limited extent so far. This study explores the experiences of craft hobbyists living in Finland regarding crafting as a means of emotion regulation and analyses the kinds of emotion regulation strategies that craft activities enable for adults. The study approaches crafting as an everyday practice and an informal learning environment in which emotion regulation, embodied activity, and reflection are closely intertwined.

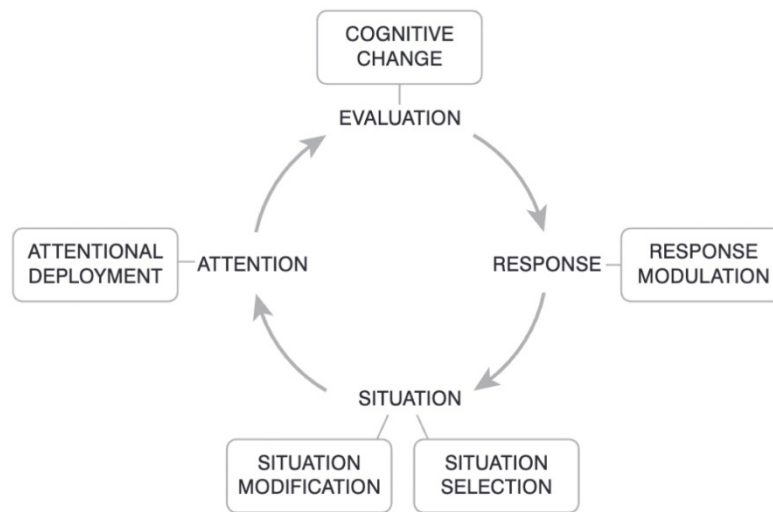
Emotion regulation and emotion regulation strategies

The central concept of this study, emotion regulation, refers to the processes and mechanisms by which an individual influences the emotions associated with their experiences, as well as when and how those emotions are experienced and expressed (Gross, 2023; Koole, 2009). According to Naragon-Gainey et al. (2017), emotion regulation is not limited to the stage of emotional expression but can be applied across different phases of emotion formation and development.

Among the theoretical models structuring emotion regulation, one of the most central is the five-category process model developed by Gross (2023) (Figure 1). In this model, emotion regulation strategies are divided into five successive and partly overlapping categories: situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation. The process model provides a framework for examining how individuals can influence emotional processes, either before an emotional experience arises or during it.

Figure 1.

Gross's (2023, p. 8) five-category process model.



In Gross's (2023) process model, emotion regulation strategies progress from situation-related choices towards the individual's internal responses. **Situation selection** refers to the individual approaching certain situations or avoiding them depending on the emotions they evoke and the type of emotion regulation they require. In this way, the individual influences in advance the kinds of emotional demands to which they are exposed.

Situation modification, in turn, refers to altering the external or social situation, for example, changing the topic of conversation in a conflict situation to reduce the emotional load of the situation. Gross (2023) describes these two strategies as situation-based forms of emotion regulation.

Gross (2023) refers to situations in which an individual seeks to regulate their emotions by redirecting their attention or restricting awareness of certain information as **attentional deployment**. This may involve, for example, distancing oneself from a distressing situation or shifting attention from an unpleasant experience to a pleasant memory. Conscious focus on an emotional experience, such as dwelling on an emotion or using mindfulness practices, can also be regarded as part of this strategy category. Gross (2023) characterises cases in which emotions are regulated by altering the aspect of the situation or experience to which attention is directed as strategies requiring attention and cognitive control.

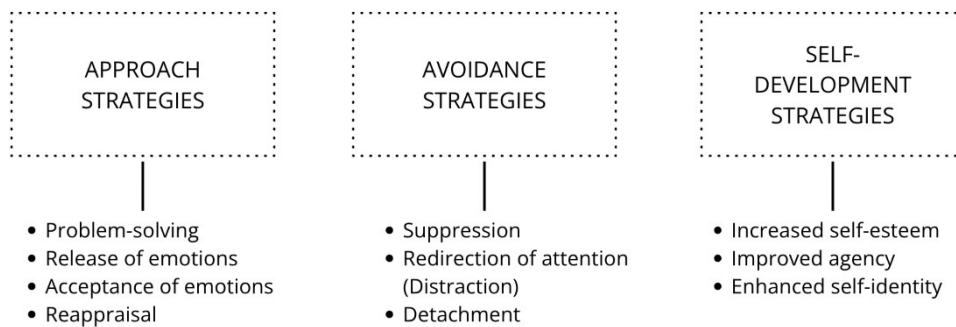
In Gross's (2023) model, **cognitive change**, the modification of cognition or appraisal, refers to emotion regulation at the level of thinking and interpretation. For example, an individual may relate their own situation to those of others or view an encountered adversity as an opportunity for learning and growth. In this way, the emotional experience may shift, for instance, from envy to gratitude or from hopelessness to acceptance. In these cognitive strategies, emotions are regulated by modifying one's own meaning-making and orientation towards the situation.

The strategy of response modulation targets the expression of emotional experience and the associated physiological, bodily, and behavioural reactions. The individual may, for example, attempt to restrain the expression of anger or disappointment by concealing facial expressions, controlling gestures, or releasing tension through physical exercise or other activities (Gross, 2023). Thus, emotion regulation occurs by directly influencing the responses produced by the emotion system and their observable outcomes.

Fancourt and colleagues (2019) have examined emotion regulation in the context of creative activity and have structured it into three complementary strategic categories: approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies (Figure 2). This classification provides a useful framework for examining emotion regulation associated with creative practice.

Figure 2.

Classification of emotion regulation in creative activity, adapted from the framework of Fancourt and colleagues (2019).



In **approach strategies**, creative activity serves as a means of confronting and processing emotions. According to Fancourt and colleagues (2019), these strategies include, for example, problem-solving, the acceptance and release of emotions, as well as the reappraisal of experiences. Creative activities can thus help to release negative emotions, such as anger or frustration, while also clarifying thinking and supporting problem-solving. Furthermore, creative engagement can provide an individual with a calm, safe space for emotional processing and self-reflection. According to Pöllänen (2015), the decision-making and problem-solving inherent in the craft process can help individuals to structure difficult experiences connected to their own lives and to develop ways of coping with adversity in other areas of life. She also emphasises that the social interaction associated with crafts enables the sharing of experiences and the joint processing of emotions with others. Both familiar and new, more challenging craft techniques can support a gradual and flexible way of confronting threatening or burdensome emotions.

In **avoidance strategies**, creative activity serves to shift attention away from burdensome emotions and thoughts. According to Fancourt and colleagues (2019), this category includes, for example, the suppression of emotions, the redirection of attention (distraction), and detachment from negative thought patterns. In this context, creative activity provides an opportunity to distract oneself, to gain distance from distressing experiences, and to temporarily alleviate psychological strain. In Pöllänen's (2015) study, crafts appeared for some participants as a way of escaping thoughts associated with depression or anxiety and of protecting oneself from self-destructive behaviour by offering a safe and concentration-demanding activity.

In this study, the classification of approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies proposed by Fancourt and colleagues (2019) is utilised as part of a theory-guided analysis in conjunction with Gross's (2023) process model.

Research design

This study examined the significance of crafting as a means of emotion regulation based on the experiences of craft hobbyists in Finland. The aim was to make visible the ways in which hobbyists describe emotion regulation as part of their craft activities by asking: What kinds of emotion regulation strategies do craft hobbyists bring forward when describing their craft activities?

The study was conducted as a qualitative survey. The data were collected from craft hobbyists through an online questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions. The questionnaire was developed based on

the five strategy categories of emotion regulation outlined in Gross's (2023) process model, as well as on Fancourt and colleagues' (2019) classification of approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies related to creative activity. The theoretical framework served as a basis for formulating the questions, but the responses were not constrained by predefined categories.

Examples of open-ended questions included: "Has crafting ever helped you process difficult emotions? If so, how?", "Do you engage in crafts in situations that require emotion regulation? If so, in what kinds of situations?", and "Do you experience crafting as strengthening your self-image or self-esteem? If yes, how?". The questionnaire concluded with an open-ended question inviting respondents to describe any other ways in which crafting helps them regulate their emotions.

The research invitation and the link to the questionnaire were published in the Facebook groups *Neulonta*, *Punomo – Käsityö verkossa [Knitting, Punomo – Crafts online]*, and *Tehdään puusta [Woodworking]* in January 2025. A total of 172 responses were collected within one week, of which 56 respondents were included in this study. The aim was to obtain a dataset that was as heterogeneous as possible. Since most of the respondents identified themselves as female, all male and non-binary respondents (altogether six) were included to broaden the gender perspectives. In addition to these six respondents, the first 50 female respondents were selected for the dataset, resulting in a final sample of 56 participants. The remaining responses were reviewed during the initial familiarisation phase. As they largely reflected themes and experiences similar to those identified within the analysed dataset, they were not expected to substantially expand the analytical categories. Nevertheless, it is possible that analysing the full dataset might have revealed additional nuances, which should be considered when interpreting the findings.

The study adhered to the guidelines of the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK), including ensuring voluntary and informed participation, safeguarding participants' anonymity, careful handling of the data, and reporting the results truthfully and transparently.

Gender and age were collected as background information to describe the participant group. Neither gender nor age were used as analytical categories in the coding or interpretation of the data. Rather than enabling comparisons between demographic groups, these characteristics provide contextual information about the sample. Six participants identified as male or non-binary. Given the small number of male and non-binary respondents, the data do not support interpretation of male and non-binary experiences as a distinct analytical category. These responses nevertheless contributed to the overall analysis and were included to broaden the diversity of perspectives represented in the dataset. The study included craft hobbyists of different ages (from 18 to over 65) and from diverse backgrounds. Most of the respondents were working-age adults who had engaged in crafting for over 10 years.

The data were analysed using theory-guided, or abductive, content analysis (Thompson, 2022; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018; Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). In theory-guided analysis, the data are examined on their own terms but structured around predefined concepts, where inductive and deductive reasoning are intertwined, and observations are interpreted in relation to existing theory.

In the initial phase of the analysis, the data were carefully familiarised, and key expressions relevant to the research question and the theoretical models were identified from the responses. These expressions were then reduced and grouped into subcategories and further into higher-level categories (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018; Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). Alongside the deductive examination, observations that deviated from the theoretical coding framework were also considered, such as expressions describing anticipatory emotion regulation. The aim was to generate a new understanding of the phenomenon by opening a dialogue between the data and the theory.

In the later phase of the analysis, the data were further condensed by forming code equations, through which individual codes could be combined into broader meaning structures (Vila-Henninger et al., 2024). The purpose of these code equations was to enable the examination of phenomena that extended

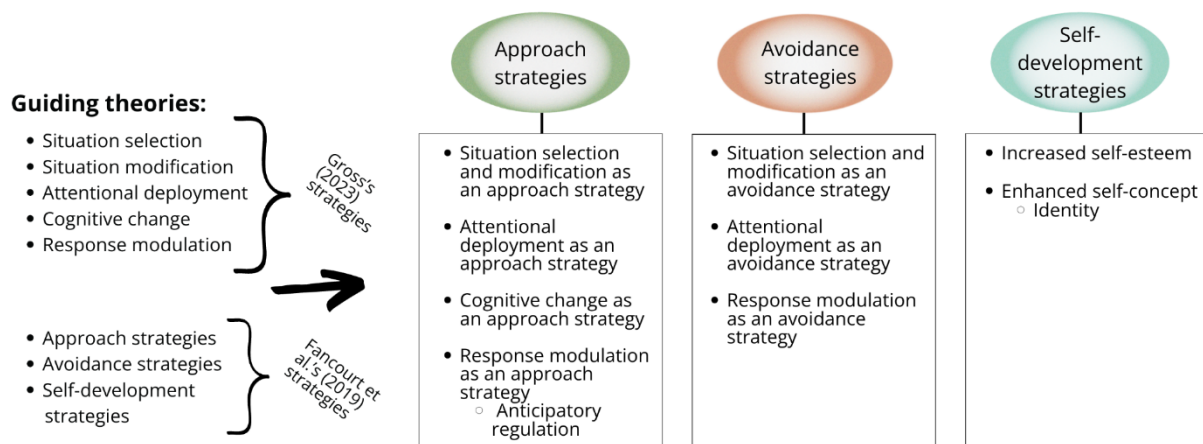
beyond individual emotion regulation strategies and corresponded to the multi-layered nature of the research question. In this context, the categories of Gross's (2023) process model—situation selection, situation modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and response modulation—were deconstructed and subsequently reassembled based on a data-driven interpretation. As a result of this analytical process, three broader themes were identified and linked to the approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies proposed by Fancourt and colleagues (2019) (Figure 3).

Results

Figure 3 presents the forms of emotion regulation described by craft hobbyists, organised into three main categories: approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies.

Figure 3.

Approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies used by craft hobbyists.



Through theory-driven, abductive interpretation (Thompson, 2022; Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2018; Vila-Henninger et al., 2024), the data were conceptualised and assembled into a coherent whole (Figure 3) to address the research question in a multi-layered manner.

The analysis is illustrated with data excerpts, in which each respondent was assigned an anonymous participant code (e.g., P1, P2, P3). The number refers to the respondent's sequential number in the analysed dataset.

Approach strategies in emotion regulation

Based on the analysis, the emotion regulation strategies used by craft hobbyists were manifested as solutions related to situation selection and modification, the deliberate direction of attention, the modification of thoughts and interpretations, as well as the regulation of emotional responses. These strategies will be elaborated on in the following section.

Situation selection and modification as an approach strategy refers to situations in which craft hobbyists use craft-making as a means of processing emotions. They described craft activities primarily as a way to calm down, relax, and regulate the burdens of everyday life. Engaging in crafts facilitated slowing down and recovery, particularly from work-related stress, time pressure, and fatigue; in some cases, it also served to prevent boredom. Crafting was perceived as a means of emotion regulation, especially when respondents needed to confront and process grief and loss. One respondent described their grieving process as follows: 'I worked through the shock grief caused by my father's death in a mourning shawl that I knitted for my mother' (P13). The data also revealed that crafting helped in processing emotions related to the death of a loved one or a pet, miscarriage, and infertility: 'After a miscarriage, I felt the need to knit socks for premature babies. And for other babies as well' (P27).

Crafting was also used to process illness and end-of-life situations, as reflected in emotionally charged accounts: ‘I knitted death socks for a dear friend of mine who was in palliative care. I cried and knitted, and when I sent the socks to my friend, we both cried alternately from joy and from sorrow. The socks were on her feet when she was placed in the coffin’ (P7).

In addition, some respondents highlighted that crafting provided a healthy and constructive alternative to maladaptive coping strategies, such as emotional eating or alcohol use: ‘When stressed (...) nowadays I would rather reach for crafting tools than for the bottle’ (P5), and ‘Crafting usually calms a restless state of mind. I have also replaced snacking and emotional eating with knitting’ (P22).

Attentional deployment was also a common approach strategy. Respondents associated emotional processing with repetitive movements and the flow of thoughts during crafting. They described craft activity as providing the body with meaningful engagement while allowing time and space for thinking. Embodied, repetitive activity enabled the processing of emotions and thoughts without the need to consciously direct attention to their processing. One respondent described this as follows: ‘When doing crafts, the mind relaxes as the hands are working and the thoughts can drift elsewhere. At times, the knots of emotional life seem to unravel when the body is doing something pleasant and meaningful to me’ (P44). Some respondents emphasised that engaging in crafting provides sufficient time for processing emotions. Woodworking was perceived as creating situations in which there was adequate time for difficult thoughts and emotions: ‘processing emotions and one’s own thoughts requires time... woodworking has, as if as a by-product, brought such moments into my life’ (P2).

Cognitive change as an approach strategy, in turn, referred to finding new perspectives on experiences through crafting. In the respondents’ descriptions, engaging in crafting appeared to be a means of distancing oneself from burdensome thoughts and examining one’s own experiences from a new perspective. Externalising negative thoughts into the craft object facilitated their processing: ‘When you manage to transfer a negative thought into an object, it becomes easier to observe it from the outside and to realise that it is insignificant’ (P5).

Crafting supported shifts in perspective and the development of perseverance and patience. One respondent described crafts as a reminder of the continuity of life during difficult moments: ‘By taking up a craft, I remind myself in difficult times that life goes on, and that the fundamental things remain’ (P20). At the same time, the planning and problem-solving inherent in crafts appeared as skills that transferred to other areas of life: ‘The creative solution models I use in woodworking can sometimes be applied to other matters as well’ (P1).

According to the respondents, engaging in crafting also fostered a more flexible attitude towards setbacks and incompleteness. One respondent summarised this as follows: ‘In knitting, fortunately, there is always the possibility of undoing everything and starting over. Perhaps it teaches a different kind of attitude towards setbacks’ (P22). The responses emphasised the calming and patience-enhancing nature of crafting, in which embodied activity and repetitive movements clarified thinking: ‘A repetitive, simple movement [provides the opportunity and] opens the mind [to consider] things from different perspectives’ (P30).

Crafting functioned as a means of **modulating respondents’ emotional responses**. The respondents described crafting as providing a concrete avenue for approaching, processing, and modifying emotions. Craft activity facilitated the regulation of emotional responses, particularly when it was technically simple and did not require continuous concentration on execution. In such cases, attention could be directed simultaneously to the task at hand and to one’s own emotions. One respondent described this as follows: ‘[I use] simple [projects] for rage knitting’ (P13). Using simple techniques, crafting functioned as a means of calming down and relaxing, alleviating the most intense emotional reactions and supporting the acceptance of one’s own emotions.

For many respondents, crafting served as a means of releasing particularly negative emotions, such as anger, irritation, and the strain associated with working life. The release of emotions was described as a practice that helps to balance everyday life: 'Engaging in crafting resets the emotions I have stored during the workday' (P23). Crafting provided a safe channel for processing and expressing emotions, for example through colours, textures, and the rhythm of making: 'It clarifies my thoughts and also provides a channel for releasing emotions' (P8). Several respondents described anger and other intense emotional loads as diminishing through engagement in crafting: 'When I am angry, doing crafts usually reduces the anger' (P46). Focusing on manual activity helped to prevent emotions from taking over: 'Emotions are easier to process when you focus on doing something, so they do not take over your thoughts' (P5).

Respondents described engaging in crafting as providing a space to approach difficult emotions gradually and at one's own pace. In some cases, crafting enabled the retrospective evaluation of one's own emotional responses, for example, after conflict situations: 'When I take the time to sit down with a craft, the sharpest edge perhaps softens a little. Or at least I don't end up saying something hurtful' (P46). For another respondent, crafting offered a way of processing emotions related to letting go: 'It is wonderful to support an adult child moving into their own home by sewing curtains for their windows, and through this work, I can also release my own feelings of letting go' (P20). Some respondents pointed out that crafting facilitated the acceptance of their own emotions. Engaging in crafting provided an opportunity to pause and reflect on the underlying causes of emotions: 'When doing crafts, it is at least a good opportunity to examine one's own thoughts and reflect on one's emotional states' (P13).

The data also revealed instances of **anticipatory emotion regulation**, in which crafting was used to alleviate tension or anxiety associated with upcoming situations. One respondent reported: 'I suffer from a fear of public places, in which case doing crafting and thinking about them can help to ease the fear and tension' (P26). Another reflected on the use of crafting as a way of getting prepared for forthcoming situations: 'I could consciously relax with knitting before a stressful situation, for example before a job interview' (P20). In such cases, crafting was perceived as an activity that elevates mood and promotes calmness, helping to redirect attention away from perceived threats. One respondent also mentioned the role of crafting in preventing boredom: 'Knitting helps if boredom threatens, for instance when travelling' (P40).

In summary, the descriptions provided by craft hobbyists show that approach strategies are intertwined with a wide range of emotional needs, from everyday strain to grief, loss, and intense emotional reactions. For the respondents, crafting served as a space where emotions could be encountered, structured, and transformed through embodied activity, repetitive movement, and a rhythm that supports concentration. Crafting thus appeared as a means of regulating emotions through situation selection, attentional deployment, cognitive change, as well as the regulation of emotional responses. Taken together, these experiences highlight that crafting offers hobbyists a holistic pathway to emotional self-regulation and the promotion of well-being.

Avoidance strategies in emotion regulation

In the respondents' accounts, craft activities also appeared as various forms of avoidance strategies. Crafting was used to avoid difficult emotions and situations. Craft activity enabled the bypassing of emotions by directing attention either to the activity itself or, through the activity, elsewhere. Some respondents described craft activity as functioning as a way of dampening or suppressing their own emotional responses and experiences.

Situation selection and situation modification functioned not only as approach strategies but also as forms of avoidance. Craft activities were particularly used in situations where the aim was to avoid or regulate emotions. Respondents described, for example, knitting or woodworking as offering a means of escaping from or alleviating stress, anxiety, worries, or other negative emotional states. 'I may

withdraw to do woodworking if, for example, there is a difficult situation in everyday life or if (negative) emotions are close to the surface' (P2).

Some respondents also used crafting to postpone demanding tasks: 'When I was studying, I often found myself knitting socks instead of doing schoolwork. Particularly, a difficult essay might be left waiting for [so to speak] a better moment. At times, I did engage in some mental work on it while crafting and managed to structure the matter slightly' (P27). In situations involving the avoidance of difficult emotions, respondents reported favouring tasks that require concentration and are technically demanding: 'If I don't want to think, I knit colourwork or a complex textured pattern' (P16).

Some respondents described situations in which engaging in craft activities was not possible due to intense grief or overwhelming emotional states, for example, after the death of a loved one or a pet. In such cases, crafting was avoided because it evoked emotions or required a level of emotion regulation for which the respondents lacked sufficient resources. One respondent described their experience as follows: 'Sometimes the feeling of grief has been so overwhelming, such as when a beloved pet died, that I simply cannot bring myself to pick up my knitting needles' (P26). Another respondent similarly reported: 'When [a total of five of my close ones passed away a year ago], I did not engage in crafting for a couple of months because I felt so physically terrible' (P36). In these situations, it was not possible to bypass emotions through crafting; rather, engaging in crafting might have forced respondents to confront or process those emotions. However, the same respondents described returning to craft activities as the grief gradually eased. Some respondents also pointed out that during intense emotional states, engaging in crafting did not feel meaningful or possible, and instead they turned to other activities, such as physical exercise: 'I might rather put crafts aside if it feels that my emotional state does not allow for engaging in them at that moment' (P20).

Attentional deployment appeared not only as an approach strategy but also as an avoidance strategy. It served as a means of avoidance, allowing craft activity to shift attention away from negative emotions. Respondents focused their attention on the activity to avoid negative emotions. One respondent described this as follows: 'When knitting, I don't think about anything other than the task at hand; I don't end up ruminating on anything else' (P4). Another respondent noted that crafting '... helps one to relax and focus on things other than unpleasant ones' (P21). Both demanding and routine tasks enabled detachment from thoughts and emotions. In such cases, craft activity shifted attention away from the burdens of everyday life and from matters weighing on the mind. Thus, craft activity was deliberately used to set emotions aside and redirect attention elsewhere.

Demanding craft techniques helped respondents disengage from negative thoughts by requiring full concentration, as illustrated in the following: 'I use colourwork knitting or other projects that require concentration or careful following of instructions when I want to calm down, take a break from unpleasant things for a while, or get rid of a bad mood' (P46). Continuous adherence to instructions, as well as learning a new technique or pattern, compelled respondents to concentrate on the activity, leaving no room for negative thoughts: 'During a challenging project, there is no space in my mind for other thoughts, not even for negative, circular ones' (P26).

Response modulation functioned not only as an approach strategy but also as an avoidance strategy among the respondents. Some participants reported that crafting could at times serve as a means of suppressing emotions, particularly in situations where they felt that they could no longer cope with additional negative emotions. One respondent reflected on this as follows: 'Perhaps I learned from both of my grandmothers that you can drown your emotions in crafts' (P47). The previously mentioned demanding and concentration-requiring craft techniques also occasionally enabled the suppression of emotions, as illustrated by the following respondent: 'If I feel myself becoming irritated about something, I take out a knitting project that requires full concentration. That way I get rid of distressing emotions' (P7).

In addition, a few respondents reported using crafting as a way of escaping their own emotions: ‘At times, I try to escape reality into some craft activity. Especially into knitting, I have knitted a lot of sorrow into the stitches’ (P47). However, most respondents felt that suppressing emotions was neither an effective nor a desirable means of emotion regulation.

In summary, avoidance strategies primarily involved attempts to direct attention away from burdensome emotions, either by engaging in technically demanding tasks or by turning to routine activities that helped temporarily set emotions aside. For many craft hobbyists, crafting functioned as a means of escaping stress, anxiety, or everyday responsibilities. However, intense emotions could inhibit engagement in crafting if it required confronting difficult emotions. Overall, Crafting appeared to function as an avoidance strategy that may enable the temporary management of emotional load, but not always as a sustainable or desirable way of dealing with challenging emotional experiences.

Self-development strategies in emotion regulation

In the descriptions provided by craft hobbyists, craft activity also functioned as a strategy supporting self-development. Self-esteem refers to an individual’s evaluation of their own worth and competence, self-efficacy to the belief in one’s ability to perform specific tasks and achieve goals, whereas self-concept refers to the individual’s overall perception of themselves, their attributes, and their roles (Leonard, n.d.). Crafting strengthened participants’ self-esteem and self-concept by providing experiences of success, competence, and efficacy, as well as by enabling social acceptance and offering a safe space for failure. In addition, craft activity contributed to structuring participants’ identities and connected them to various communities and intergenerational continuities. According to the respondents, self-esteem strengthened through crafting and experiences of self-efficacy were also reflected in other areas of life.

Most respondents described craft activity as strengthening their self-concept and supporting their self-esteem. The accumulation of skills related to crafting, problem-solving, personal achievements, and the completion of demanding projects were experienced as rewarding and meaningful. These experiences were described as generating a sense of efficacy and reinforcing perceptions of one’s own competence, as illustrated by the following respondent: ‘It is empowering to achieve something that one has wanted and planned. One’s sense of efficacy enhances self-esteem. Also, taking on challenges and overcoming them strengthens one’s self-image’ (P17).

Another respondent highlighted the significance of crafting as a counterbalance to experiences of failure: ‘Even if I fail in other areas or think poorly of myself, with knitting I can always think that “well, at least this is something I can do”. And how uplifting for one’s self-esteem it is to look at a finished, successful piece’ (P9).

Crafting was perceived both as a means of self-expression and as a way of producing something concrete, useful, and aesthetically pleasing. Several respondents described feelings of skilfulness and competence associated with crafting. ‘... I feel that I am good at [knitting socks], and that feels good’ (P15), as one respondent explained. Experiences of success were seen as strengthening, among other things, a sense of autonomy, competence, and efficacy. Some respondents emphasised continuous learning as part of their craft practice: ‘When engaging in crafting, I feel that I am capable, that I am learning something new, and that I am skilled’ (P13). For some, it was meaningful to master skills that not everyone possessed: ‘... I can feel proud that I know how to do something that perhaps not everyone else can do’ (P11).

In the respondents’ descriptions, the tangible outcomes of craft were closely linked to self-esteem and positive emotional experiences. The works themselves, along with the materials, techniques, and colour choices, generated feelings of pleasure and reinforced a positive self-concept, as illustrated in the following: ‘I also enjoy working with colours—I am very satisfied with my “works of art” and, through them, with myself’ (P43).

The concreteness of crafts was particularly emphasised in situations where paid employment did not provide visible or tangible results: 'I experience a sense of achievement when I complete a knitted garment. I feel that I am really skilled at it. Being able to produce something visible is important when work rarely results in anything concrete or tangible' (P12).

On the other hand, incompleteness and failures were viewed positively. They were described as fostering patience, increasing an accepting attitude towards one's own mistakes, and strengthening self-compassion, as illustrated by the following examples: 'In a way, it teaches me patience and gentleness towards myself' (P45). Attitudes towards failure were reported to have changed: 'Nowadays, I allow myself to fail as well' (P5). Failures were also learned to be seen as an integral part of the craft process: 'It has also been good to realise that, in the end, you don't actually die from mistakes, and small imperfections in the work are almost part of the whole' (P22).

According to the respondents, the strengthening of self-esteem and self-efficacy was closely linked to the social dimension. Feedback, acceptance, and recognition received from others played a central role in reinforcing experiences of efficacy, as illustrated in the following: 'While making a Korsnäs sweater, I [felt] pride in my own skills when outsiders came to admire my work (in the public areas of a hotel)' (P18). Feedback was received both in face-to-face interactions and through social media: '... a social media post by an artist about a handmade gift I had given [was a moment of great joy]' (P24).

The significance of social media in strengthening self-esteem also emerged in the following account: 'Although I have always engaged in crafts, this social media world has, in my case, raised my self-esteem. It is wonderful to receive feedback, for example, in [Facebook] groups, on my craft work. Before social media, one did not receive feedback in the same way' (P47). Particularly meaningful was the experience that one's own work was used and appreciated: 'It makes me feel really good when I see that the crafts I have made are being used, appreciated, and liked' (P40).

Some respondents described crafts as a central part of their identity, in some cases from childhood through to adulthood. Crafts connected individuals to traditions, social communities, and intergenerational continuities, both concretely and online, as illustrated by the following respondent: 'Yes, it creates a sense of self-efficacy. It also connects me to a chain of generations as a woman engaged in crafts, and likewise to a circle of like-minded people interested in crafts, even those who live far away (including complete strangers with whom I interact, for example, in [Facebook] groups)' (P20).

For some, crafts appeared clearly as an intergenerational experience that connected them to close relationships and earlier generations: 'My grandmother was dear and close to me, and she taught me many things related to crafts. At the same time, I also admired my late aunt, who was skilled in handicrafts. My mother also engages in crafts, and it feels as if it continues along with us and binds us together in some way ...' (P27).

In summary, self-development strategies highlighted the role of crafting in strengthening hobbyists' self-esteem, self-efficacy, self-compassion, and sense of identity. Through experiences of competence, learning, achievement, and social recognition, crafting provided opportunities to build positive self-perceptions and confidence in one's abilities. Moreover, crafting connected individuals to meaningful communities, traditions, and intergenerational relationships, underscoring its significance not only as a means of emotion regulation but also as a resource for personal growth and self-understanding.

Discussion

This study examined crafting as a means of emotion regulation for craft hobbyists. The results suggest that craft activity enables the use of a range of emotion regulation strategies. The approach strategies described by hobbyists were linked to situation selection and modification, attentional deployment, cognitive change, and the regulation of emotional responses. In contrast, avoidance strategies emphasised the shifting of attention and the modification of situations, and in some cases, also response modulation. Regarding self-development strategies, craft activity served to strengthen self-esteem and self-efficacy, as well as to construct and structure one's identity. Crafting thus appears to function as a flexible everyday practice in which different emotion regulation strategies are utilised according to the situation and the individual's needs.

When interpreting the research results, it needs to be acknowledged that most respondents were women in Finland who knit and engage in other textile crafts; therefore, the findings primarily reflect the experiences of this group. The respondents were also craft hobbyists who use social media and were somehow involved in the three Facebook groups through which the survey was distributed. Those who responded to the survey were individuals willing, able, and ready to express their experiences in writing.

Despite these limitations, the study demonstrated that engagement in crafts provides a meaningful context for practising emotion regulation strategies and opens possibilities for examining crafting as an informal learning environment in which adults can develop their self-regulation skills, reflect on their experiences, and support their well-being. Identifying emotion regulation strategies may also inform guidance and educational practices. The findings highlight how emotion regulation may develop and be exercised through self-directed, meaningful leisure activities. This perspective may help educators recognise the educational value of everyday practices such as crafting and support learners in identifying personal resources for well-being, reflection, and coping with emotional challenges.

In research on adult education, emotions have been recognised as a central starting point for learning. Emotional work forms an essential part of professional competence and workplace learning, while emotions guide learning processes and make them meaningful. At the same time, learning is understood to require an emotional connection to knowledge, highlighting the importance of attending to emotions as an integral part of teaching and learning (Tikkamäki, 2007; Varila, 2004; Isokorpi, 2007).

The findings of this study regarding the calming, concentration-supporting, and efficacy-enhancing effects of crafting support the view of emotions as a central starting point for learning. The flow associated with crafting—meaning an intensive immersion in the activity—together with perseverance and concrete making, provides such a point of connection (Huotilainen et al., 2018). These findings align with perspectives that emphasise the cognitive and reflective dimensions of emotions in learning (e.g. Puolimatka, 2004; Luukka, 2004), as well as with research highlighting the role of art and making in supporting emotional engagement (Häkämies, 2004).

The significance of affective practices is particularly evident in relation to difficult emotions. Research suggests that working with such emotions requires a space in which they are not rushed towards resolution but can be safely dwelt with. In this regard, craft activity can be understood as an informal, embodied practice in which emotions are processed through everyday activity, without the need for formal guidance or explicit emotional discourse. The rhythmic and material nature of crafting enables individuals to engage with emotions in a self-directed and experiential manner (Holmberg & Niemi, 2024; Keisala, 2017).

The significance of crafting is not limited to individual learning or emotion regulation but is more broadly connected to work and everyday life. Crafting may function as a counterbalance to the fragmentation of modern work and the strain of digital everyday life by offering a slower rhythm and an embodied alternative to a culture in which productivity and performance often displace the needs of emotional life. Similar to Kokko et al. (2026), the accounts of craft hobbyists in this study—calming

down, meaningfulness, and strengthened identity—suggest that crafting can serve as a form of cultural well-being practice that supports mental health and social connectedness. Craft activity may also have broader significance within services promoting well-being, community-based activities, and structures for lifelong learning. Low-threshold craft activities provide adults with opportunities for emotional release, interaction, and experiences of participation, for example, in craft groups and online communities.

At the same time, it is important to critically examine the emphasis placed on emotions and well-being in adult education. Brunila (2012) critiques the therapeutic turn in adult education, in which the processing of emotions becomes a normative requirement, and the individual is positioned as a continuous object of self-development. In the data of this study, craft activity appears as a different kind of space for relating to emotions: it is not based on guided emotional discourse, goal-oriented self-improvement, or psychological expertise, but rather enables the processing of emotions in a self-directed, embodied manner, often without the pressure for verbalisation. In this sense, crafts do not appear as an intervention, but as an everyday practice in which living with and learning from emotions are intertwined.

The findings also highlight differences in the intentionality of emotion regulation. While some hobbyists engaged in crafting specifically to process emotions or manage stress, others described it primarily as a meaningful leisure activity, with emotional benefits emerging incidentally. Crafting should therefore not be viewed as inherently therapeutic, but rather as an everyday practice that may create opportunities for emotion regulation, whether intentionally sought or experienced as a by-product of participation. This interpretation also resonates with Brunila's (2012) critique of viewing self-directed activities primarily through a therapeutic lens.

Based on the data, most respondents were working age adults with extensive experience with craft activities, which may have shaped both the emotional experiences reported, and the emotion regulation strategies described. The prominence of work-related stress, everyday demands, and recovery in the findings may partly reflect the life situations of this participant group. Previous research suggests that the level of experience influences the emotion regulation strategies employed through creative activities. For example, Fancourt and colleagues (2025) found that novice and experienced hobbyists tend to rely on different emotion regulation strategies. For this reason, it is important to examine the experiences of beginners and younger hobbyists more broadly to better understand the variation across different stages of craft engagement. In addition, future research should consider the diversity of craft methods and hobbyist profiles. In this study, most respondents were women engaged in knitting or textile-based crafts, which limits the generalisability of the findings to different gender groups and technique-specific contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined crafting as a means of emotion regulation from the perspective of craft hobbyists' experiences. The findings suggest that crafting provides adults with diverse opportunities to regulate emotions through approach, avoidance, and self-development strategies. Through crafting, participants described processing and reframing emotions, temporarily distancing themselves from emotional strain, and strengthening their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and sense of identity.

The findings contribute to understanding emotion regulation as an everyday, embodied practice by showing how multiple regulation strategies may be intertwined within a single creative activity. Crafting emerged as an informal learning environment in which emotional experiences, reflection, and personal growth are closely connected through material engagement and making.

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