

THESIS: Adverse Childhood Experiences and Anxiety: The Role of Emotion Regulation and EEG Asymmetry

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Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs; i.e., abuse, neglect, maltreatment) are a risk factor for developing anxiety in adulthood (Felitti et al., 1998), and have been linked to the use of maladaptive emotion regulation strategies (Curtis & Cicchetti, 2007; Diaz & Eisenberg, 2015). Furthermore, emotion dysregulation has been implicated in the development and maintenance of anxiety (Mennin et al., 2005). It has been suggested emotion dysregulation may explain the relationship between ACEs and anxiety (Poole et al., 2017; Soenke et al., 2010); however, previous research has only examined Generalized Anxiety Disorder using a categorical approach despite anxiety being a multidimensional construct characterized by anxious apprehension (worry) and anxious arousal (Sharp et al., 2015). This study added to the research by examining emotion dysregulation as a mediator of the relationships between ACEs and anxious apprehension and ACEs and anxious arousal. Furthermore, a multiple mediation model was used to compare six different emotion regulation strategies as mediators of these relationships. 443 participants were recruited from Ball State and social media and completed self-report measures of ACEs, emotion dysregulation, and anxious apprehension and arousal. The results indicated emotion dysregulation fully mediated the relationship between ACEs and anxious apprehension. Furthermore, non-acceptance of emotional responses, difficulty engaging in goal-directed behavior, and limited access to emotion regulation strategies all mediated the relationship between ACEs and anxious apprehension above and beyond the other strategies.

Emotion dysregulation only partially mediated the relationship between ACEs and anxious apprehension, and impulse control difficulties and limited access to emotion regulation strategies significantly mediated the relationship between ACEs and anxious arousal. The results are discussed in relation to theory regarding the etiology of anxiety following adversity, potential bidirectional relationships between emotion dysregulation and anxiety, and the implications for treatment.