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Can your past predict your future behaviors? Investigating the Impact of Childhood Experiences.

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"Experiences shape the brain, but the brain shapes the way we view experiences (Fisher)." This quote accurately captures the impact of childhood past experiences where negative experiences have been shown to influence psychology, physiology and behavior (Boullier & Blair, 2018). The California Surgeon General's Clinical Advisory Committee defines experiences in childhood related to categories of abuse, neglect and household dysfunction as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). ACEs impact attentional bias as higher ACEs score is correlated with a more negative attentional bias (McElwain, 2008) and higher physiological activity (Deighton, 2018; Aimie-Salleh, 2019). Many studies assess ACEs impact on the child and adolescent population, yet there is a void in literature when examining the emerging adult population (age 18-29). The current study investigated differences in intentionality-based hostility biases between participants with high and low ACEs reports. The Ambiguous Intentions Hostility Questionnaire (Coombs, 2007) presented a set of scenarios with varying levels of fault clarity, requiring participants to attribute the level of fault. Participants completed this task while connected to psychophysiological sensors of pulse and skin conductance which were used as markers of stress reactivity. We hypothesize higher fault attribution with higher ACEs scores mirrored by concurrent higher pulse and skin conductance rates. A second task assessed attentional bias differences between high and low ACEs groups, using an emotional facial stimuli DotProbe task. We expect faster reaction times for angry faces for participants with high ACEs. Data is currently being collected and analyzed. Results will be presented and discussed in full during the oral presentation. This study seeks to modulate the effort to prevent ACEs as well as promote resiliency for those who have been affected.

Keywords: Adverse Childhood Experiences, attentional bias, emerging adult, intentionality-based hostility, psychophysiological sensors, stress reactivity, reaction times