

# Exploratory Research on Predictors of Conspiracy Theory Beliefs in College Students



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## Introduction

- Conspiracy theory beliefs revolve around false explanations of public and political events concerning a secret organization with malicious intent.
- Previous research shows that conspiracy theory beliefs can develop in lieu of healthy coping skills to reduce feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, and threat.
- As prior research has shown that individuals who experienced more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) growing up report greater emotion dysregulation, the present study aimed to investigate the relationship between ACEs and conspiracy beliefs through emotion dysregulation.

### Aims/Hypotheses:

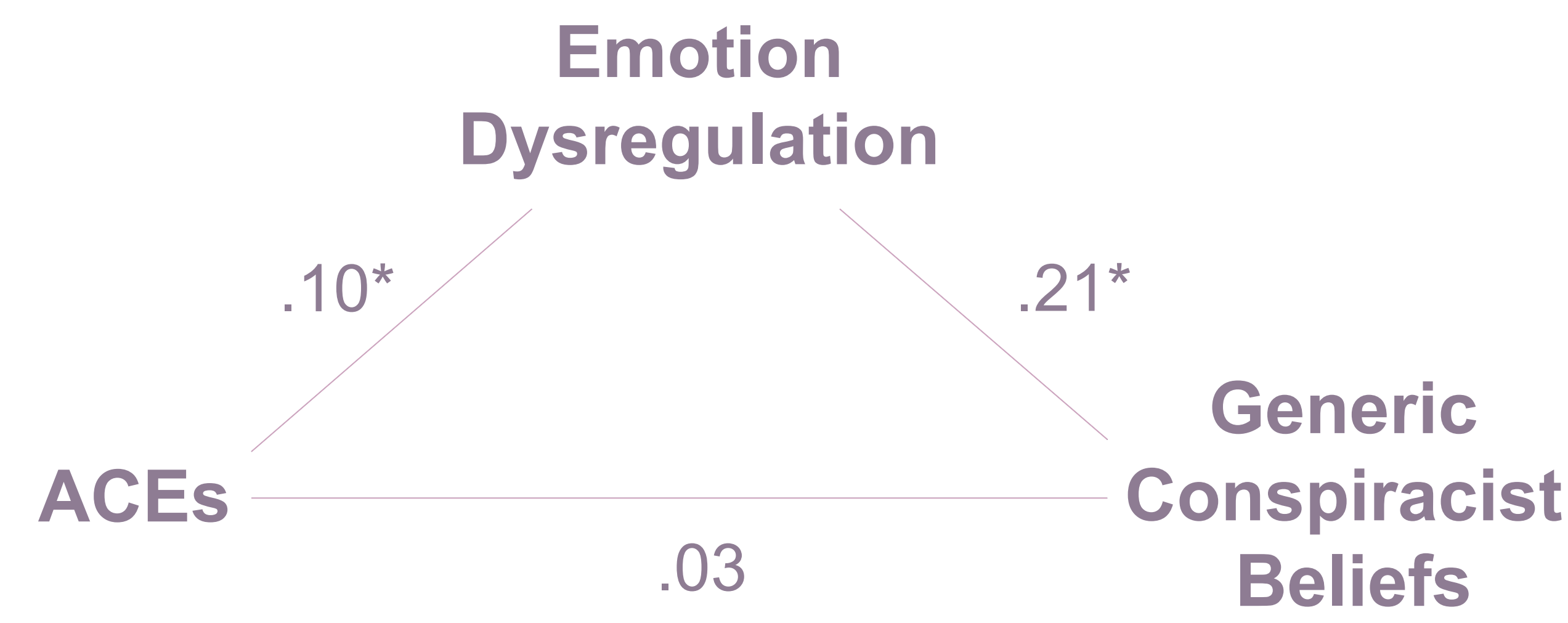
- Determine whether ACEs predict conspiracy theory beliefs explained through emotion dysregulation.
- Gain a greater understanding of who might be more susceptible to conspiracy theory beliefs.



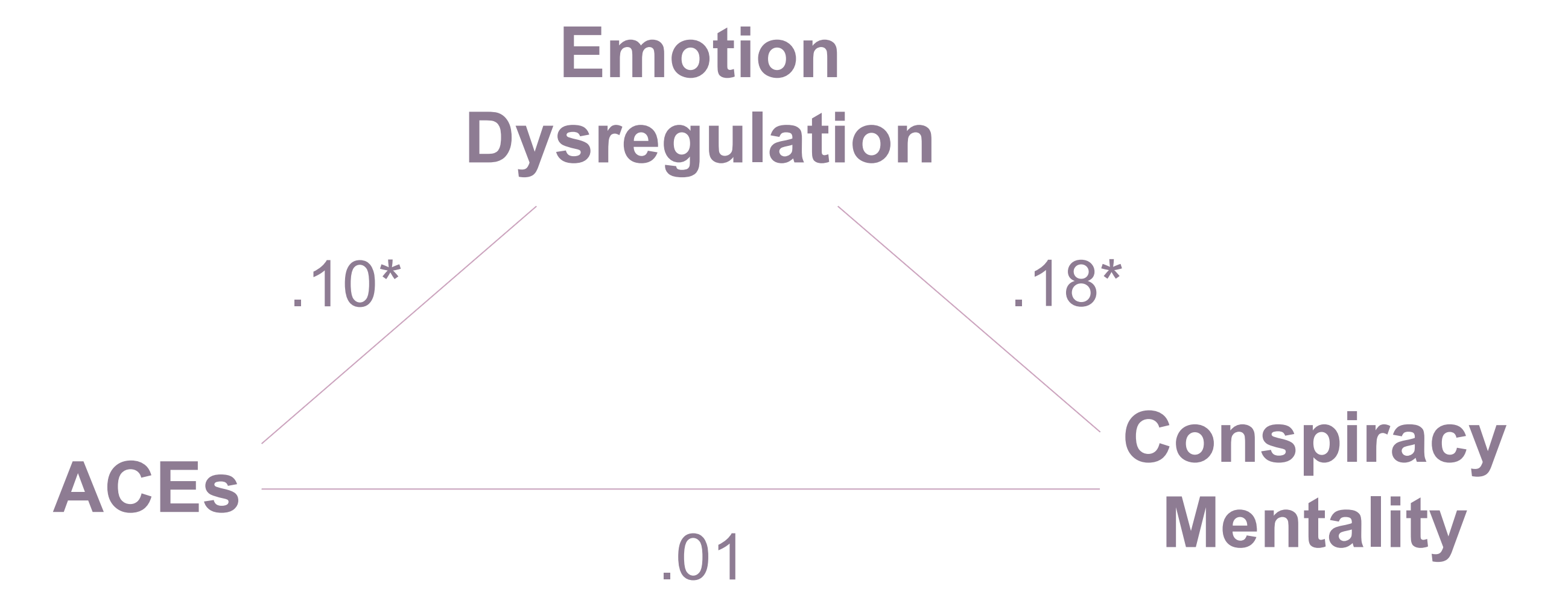
## Method

- 718 college students ( $M_{Age} = 19.99$ ,  $SD = 4.30$ ) completed the following measures online:
  - A measures of Adverse Childhood Experiences.
  - The Difficulty in Emotion Regulation Scale.
  - The Generic Conspiracist Beliefs Scale, a 15-items scale assessing generic conspiracist ideation.
  - The Conspiracy Mentality Questionnaire, a 5-item scale assessing the tendency to believe in conspiracy theories.

## Results



Direct effect:  $z = 2.59$   $p = .010$ , 95% CI = .004, .051  
 Indirect effect:  $z = 4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .012, .029  
 Total effect:  $z = 4.62$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .025, .070



Direct effect:  $z = 0.44$   $p = .44$ , 95% CI = -.014, .031  
 Indirect effect:  $z = 4.17$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI = .010, .027  
 Total effect:  $z = 2.47$ ,  $p = .013$ , 95% CI = .004, .047

\* $p < .001$

	1	2	3	4
1. ACEs	—			
2. Emotion Dysregulation	0.34*	—		
3. Generic Conspiracy Beliefs	0.17*	0.24*	—	
4. Conspiracy Mentality	0.09	0.19*	0.73*	—
Mean	4.22	41.63	47.81	34.07
SD	3.57	14.95	11.41	8.28
Cronbach's $\alpha$	0.81	0.93	0.90	0.78



## Discussion

### Implications:

- Results showed that ACE scores do not directly predict conspiracy theory beliefs but do indirectly predict these beliefs when emotional dysregulation was included as a mediator.
- These results indicate that those who have encountered more ACEs tend to experience greater emotion dysregulation, which further influences maladaptive emotion regulation coping strategies to regulate their mental states.

### Future research:

- Future research should confirm the findings with a more diverse sample in race, age, and educational background.
- A more diverse sample may be beneficial to examine other predictors of beliefs in conspiracy theories.