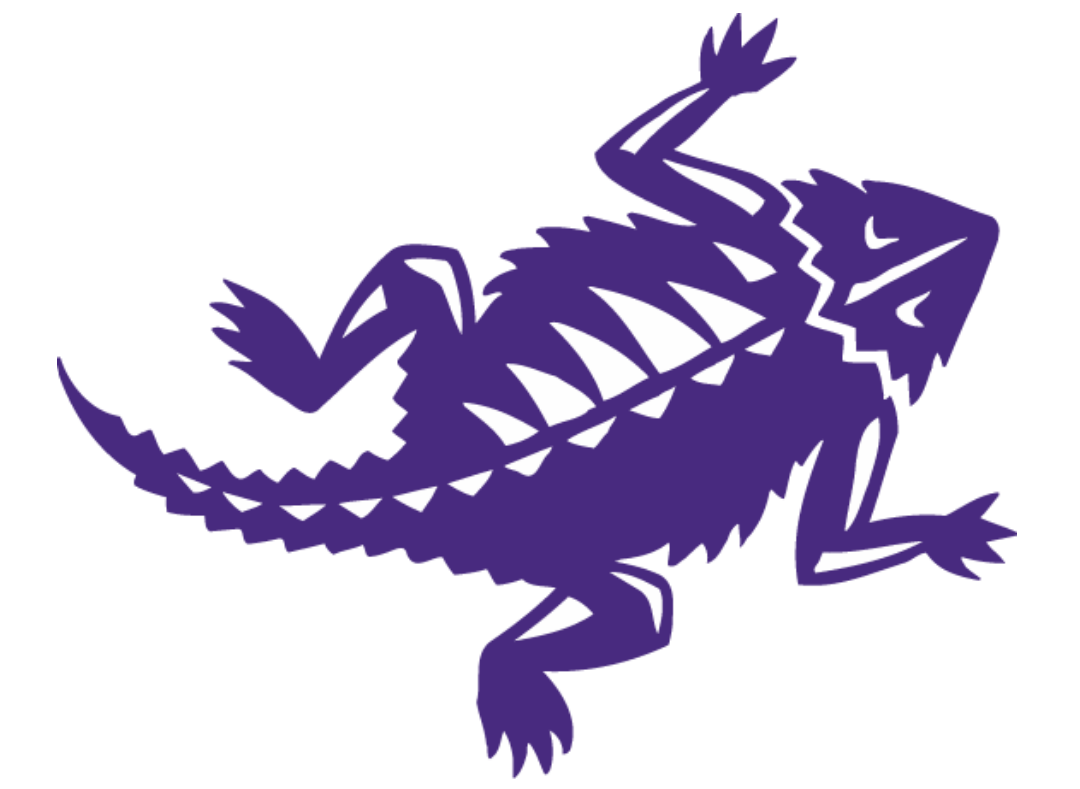




The Effects of Induced Gratitude and Pride on Children's Ability to Delay Gratification



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Introduction

Delay of gratification refers to the ability to wait for a preferred reward over an immediate reward. For children, this ability serves as an important predictor of future outcomes including better health outcomes, school achievement, and other social and cognitive outcomes (e.g., Mischel et al., 1989). The ability to delay gratification has also been associated with better health outcomes, as one study found that children who were able to delay gratification for longer had lower body mass index (BMI) thirty years later (Schlam et al., 2013). Additionally, Watts and colleagues (2018) demonstrated that, although there are a magnitude of factors that can affect a mother's ability to help delay a child's gratification, there was a correlation with early delay of gratification and later achievements in the child's life.

Previous studies have identified several strategies that children utilize in order to delay gratification and most research points to cognitive processes as the key strategy for aiding in children's ability to delay gratification. Mauro and colleagues (2000) explored some potential strategies to help a child delay gratification, including the use of making faces in a mirror or singing a song. Both of these strategies have been shown to delay gratification as they provide a distraction for the child. However, a newer body of research with adults suggests that emotions, such as gratitude, might be manipulated, and thus might serve as a constructive strategy for delaying gratification (DeSteno et al., 2011). This study is the first to examine whether positive emotions influence a child's ability to delay gratification.

Method

- Four and five-year-old children ($n = 74$) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions - pride, gratitude, and control - and completed a drawing task prior to the delay of gratification task.
 - **Pride:** Children completed a drawing and then were given praise.
 - **Gratitude:** Children were instructed to draw something they were thankful for and then describe it when they finished.
 - **Control:** Children were given a single black crayon and asked to draw 5 lines and given no feedback.

Procedure

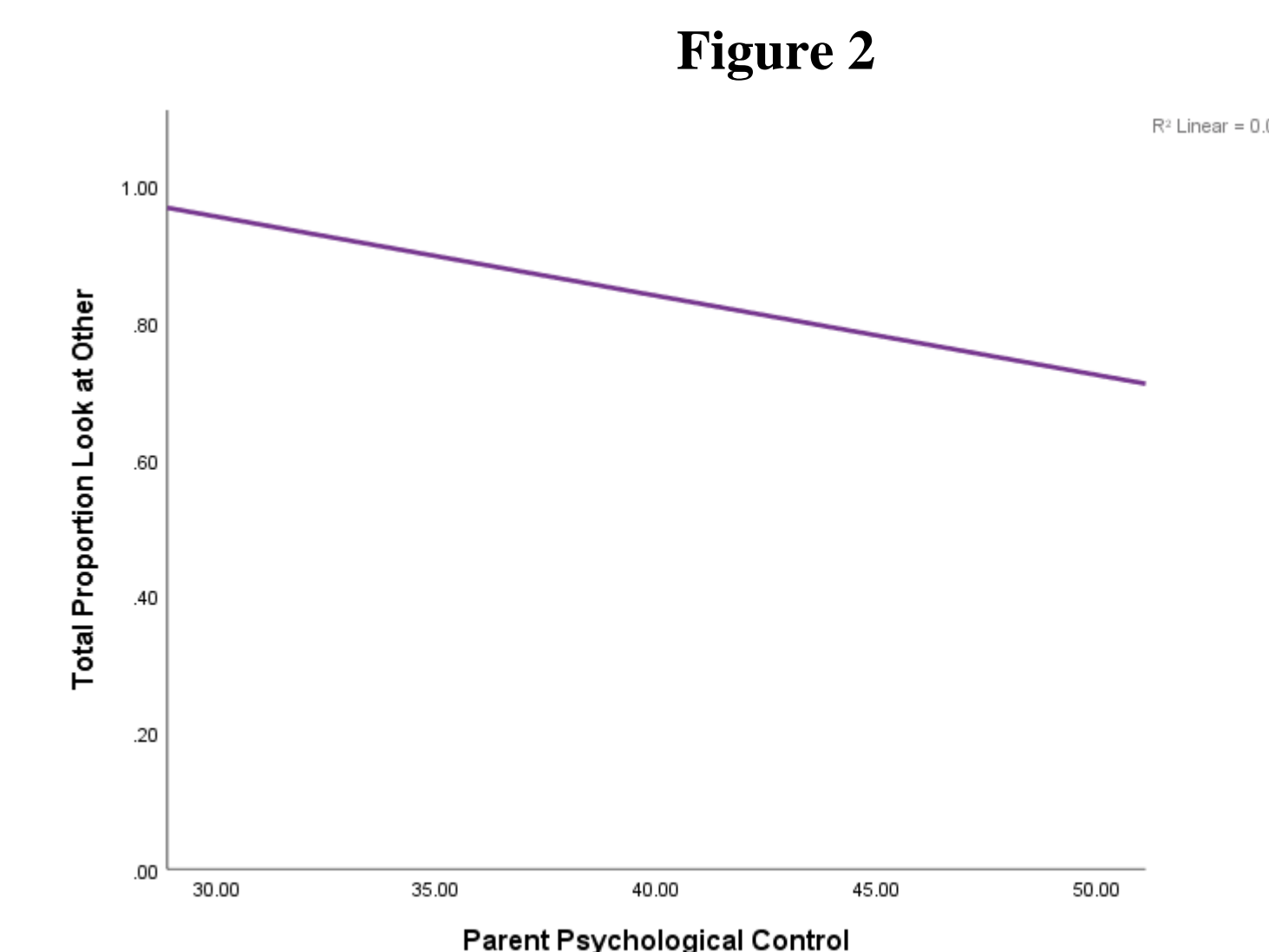
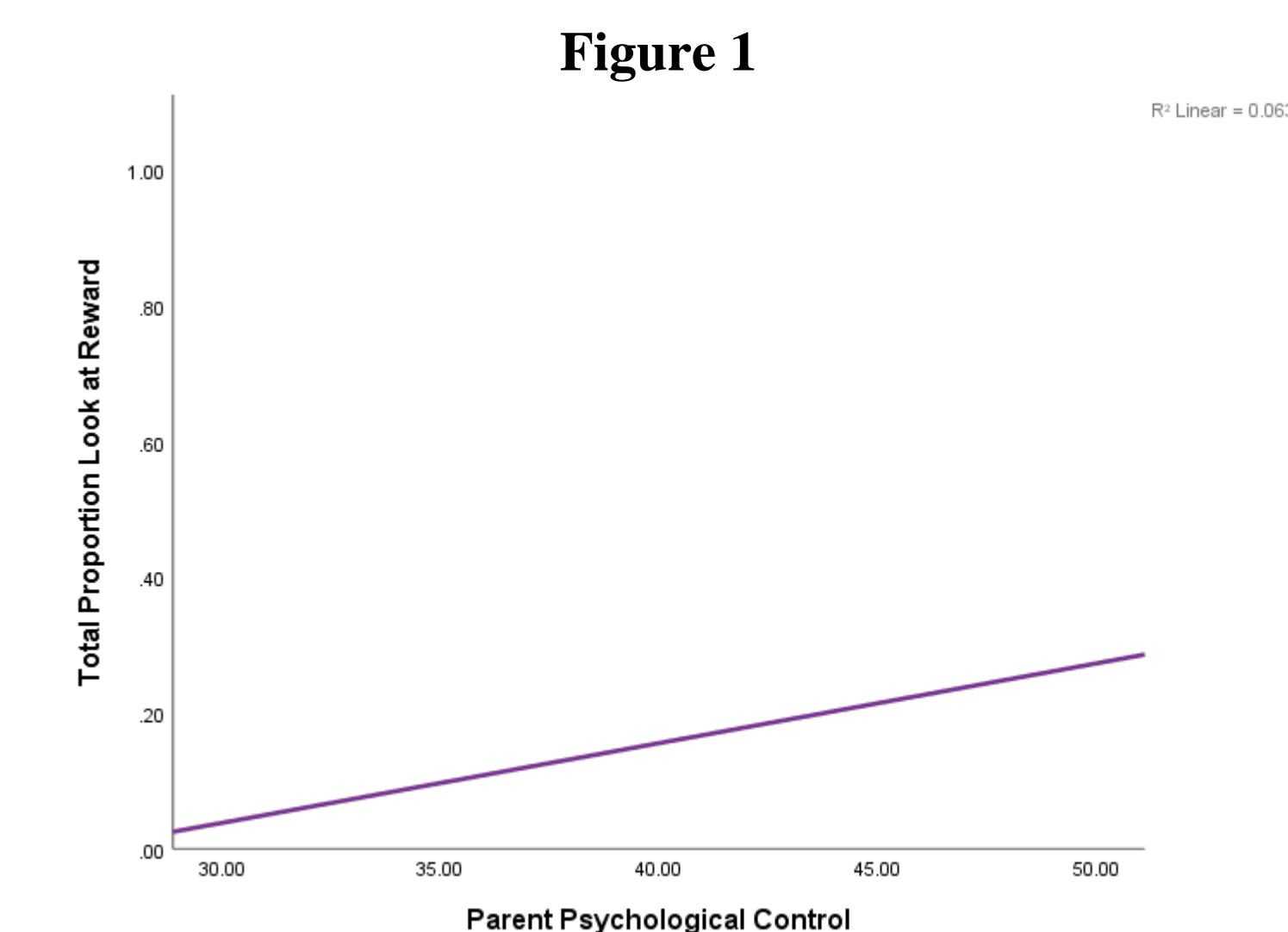
- Children were then told they could have more of a preferred reward if they waited for 15 minutes in their chair, but to ring the bell if they wanted to stop and have less of the reward (e.g., marshmallows, goldfish crackers, fruit snacks, etc.). The total amount of time they waited was recorded. In addition, the frequency of performing various behaviors was coded. These included distraction (looking away from the reward), verbal (talking about the reward v. talking about other things), and interacting with the reward (touching, smelling, tasting, eating).

Results

A paired sample t-test was performed to examine differences in the type of behaviors (Look at Reward Interaction vs. Look at Other Distraction) children used to distract themselves during the task. Results of a paired samples t-test found that children were more likely to use distraction ($M = .81, SD = .16$) compared to interacting with the reward ($M = .19, SD = .16$), $t(74) = 16.63, p \leq .001$.

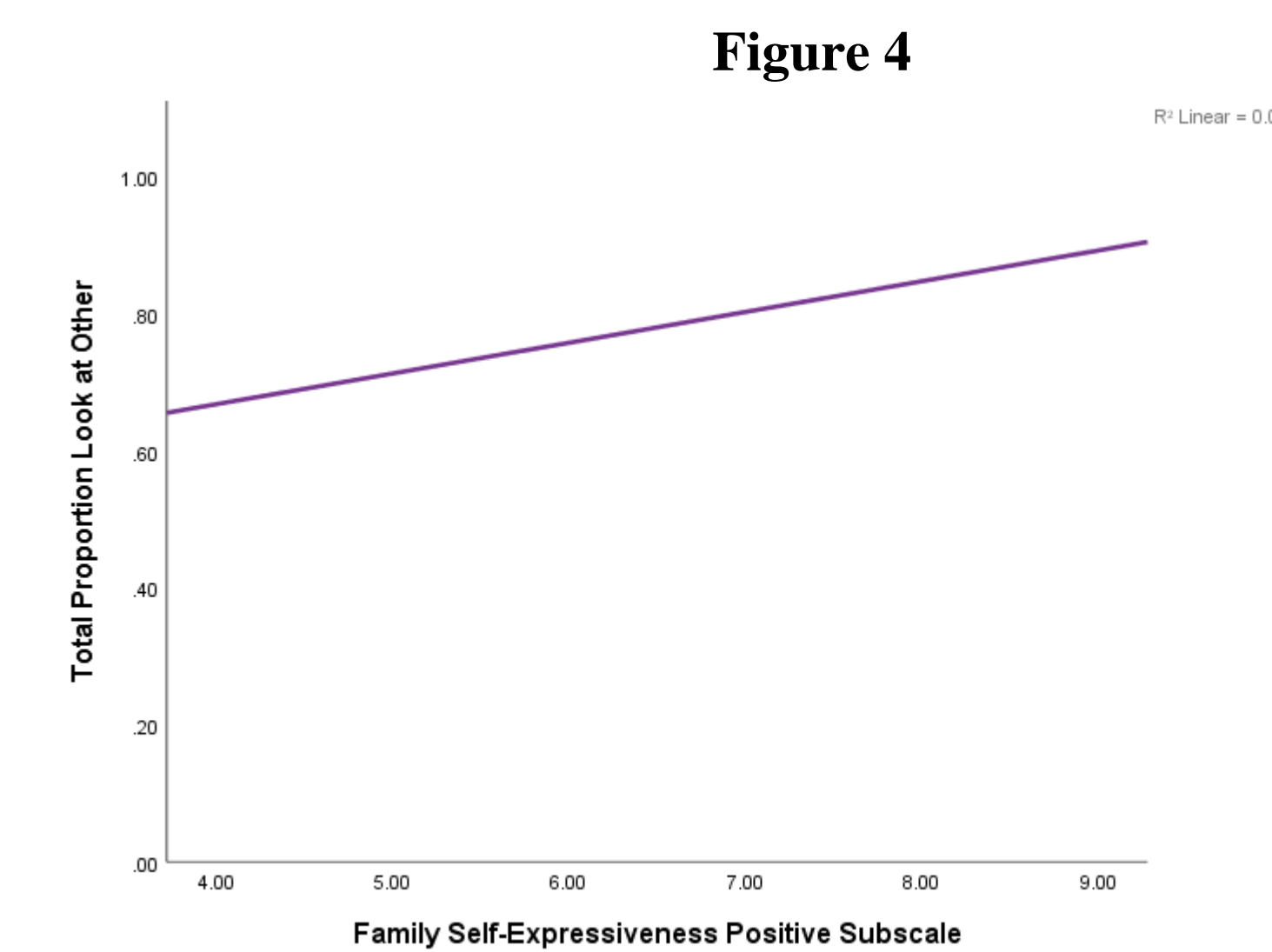
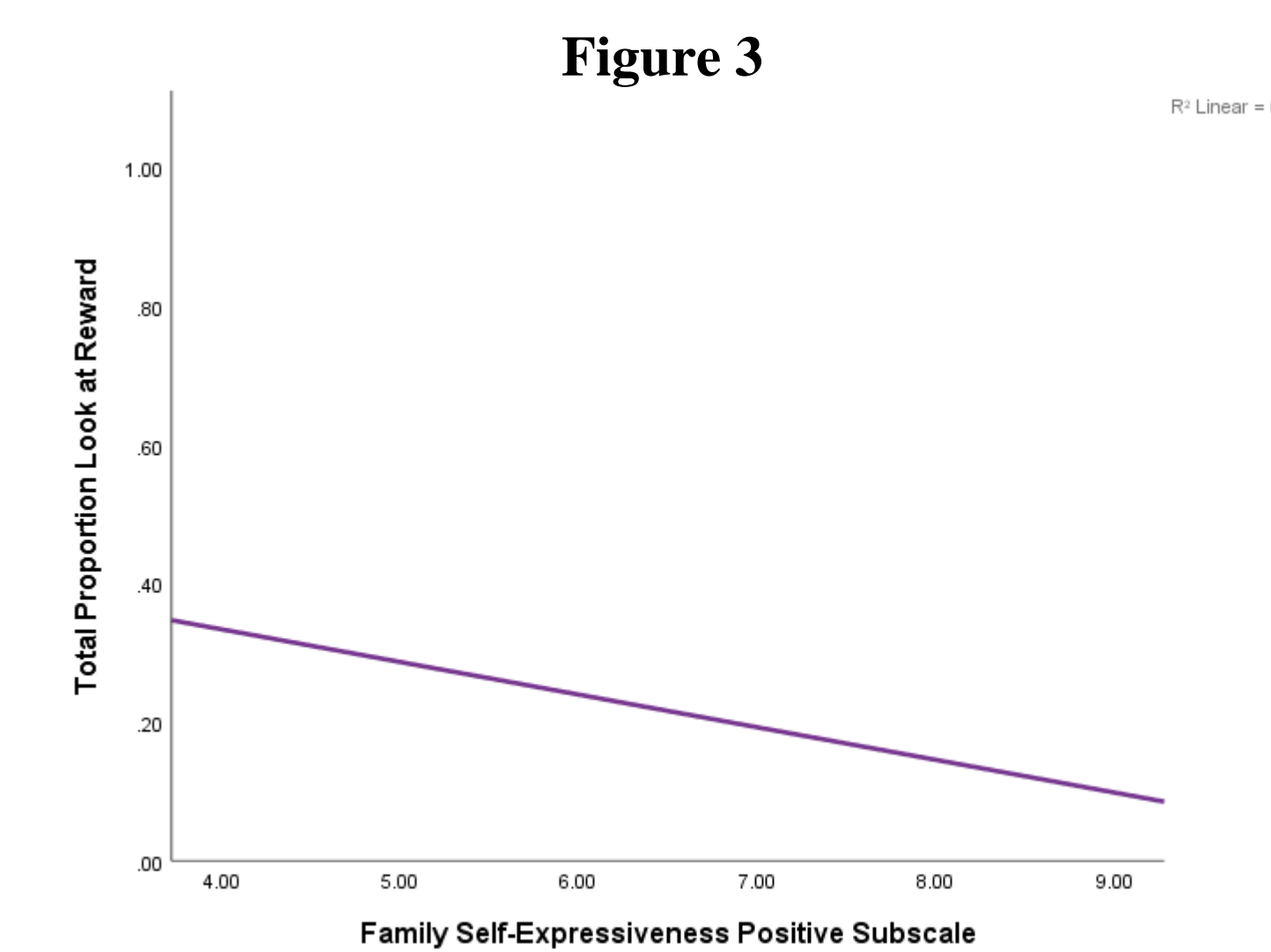
Psychological Control and Type of Distraction Use

A series of multiple linear regressions examined the relationship between parenting behaviors and type of distraction use. Results indicated that as parenting psychological control behaviors increased, child use of Look at Reward Interactions increased, $b = .012, p = .030, R^2 = .06$, (Figure 1) and Look at Other Distraction decreased, $b = -.012, p = .031, R^2 = .06$ (Figure 2).



Positive Family Emotions and Type of Distraction Use

A series of multiple linear regressions examined the relationship between family positive self-expressiveness and type of distraction use. Results indicated that as positive family emotions increased, child use of Look at Reward Interactions decreased, $b = -.05, p = .017, R^2 = .08$, (Figure 3) and Look at Other Distraction increased, $b = .05, p = .022, R^2 = .07$ (Figure 4).



Discussion

Research with adults has shown that positive emotions play an important role in delaying gratification. Parents express more emotions that are positive towards the children are correlated with the child's ability to resist the focal object and delay this gratification. The children with parents with these more positive family emotions were able to decide on better strategies for distracting themselves in order to delay this gratification while children with parent who displayed more negative emotions choose poorer distraction strategies. The current study provides evidence that this is also true for younger children. Although all groups of children performed equally well with respect to the time they waited, there were important differences in the types of strategies they used. Focusing attention away from the source of temptation is generally found to be an effective strategy and one that translates across situations. The task of effortful control we understand can be very challenging for children, however using a strategy where the focus is not upon, the object, they need to resist makes the possibility of delaying gratification higher. An article by Eisenberg & Sulik(2012) describes that when the focus is on self-distracting activity inside of the item there is a decrease in the child's want for the item which is associated with lower levels of distress and other negative emotions. For example, distracting oneself during an anger-eliciting situation is also effective in reducing negative emotions. Therefore, teachers and parents should consider implementing interventions that focus on teaching children to generate positive emotions when encountering potentially challenging situations.

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