

Spring 5-8-2023

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<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.PSY.RP.01>

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Recommended Citation

Lea, Nicole, "Feathered Friends: The Positive Effects of Owning A Companion Bird" (2023).
Psychology | Student Research Posters. 4.
<https://doi.org/10.33015/dominican.edu/2023.PSY.RP.01>

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Feathered Friends: The Positive Effects of Owning A Companion Bird

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Introduction

- The full social impact of the hidden epidemic of loneliness is only recently receiving the attention it urgently demands. While many solutions are suggested, a time-tested remedy is a companion bird (Zasloff, 1996).
- People report as deep a connection with a pet as with the humans in their lives due to the pet’s unconditional love and consistency alleviating the emotional isolation suffered by so many. The study focuses on the benefits of a companion bird (Brooks et al. (2018).
- The study of human-parrot bond shows great opportunity for future research that will demonstrate the positive effects of healthy attachments for both people and companion birds. It is hoped that such research will impact bias against birds as pets, through more education about avian species, adoptions of neglected birds living in rescues, and other positive outcomes for the animals themselves (Anderson, 2014).

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Quality of relationship to a companion bird is positively related to closeness with family: the higher quality of relationship, the closer people feel to family.

Hypothesis 2: Quality of relationship to a companion bird is negatively related to depressive symptoms: the higher quality of relationship, the less depressive symptoms people will report.

Hypothesis 3: Quality of relationship to a companion bird negatively relates to loneliness: the higher quality of relationship, the less the feeling of loneliness people will report.

Hypothesis 4: Quality of relationship to a companion bird is positively related to an improved quality of life: the higher quality of relationship, people will report feeling healthier both emotionally and physically.

Methods

Participants
This study utilized a sample of 203 who have owned or currently own companion birds. The sample included 170 were women, 20 men, 9 nonbinary, and four prefer not to say. All participants were over the age of 18 from multiple countries.

Materials/Measures/Procedure
Distribution was via social media: Instagram and TikTok, with a link of the anonymous survey posted using the five scales listed below for the participants to complete.

Family Bonding Scale Lu, Yu, Ren, & Marshall, (2013) measuring family bonds using a six-point Likert scale

Short Depression Scale Andresen, Malmgren, Carter, & Patrick (1994) measuring symptoms of depression in the last two weeks using a three-point Likert scale

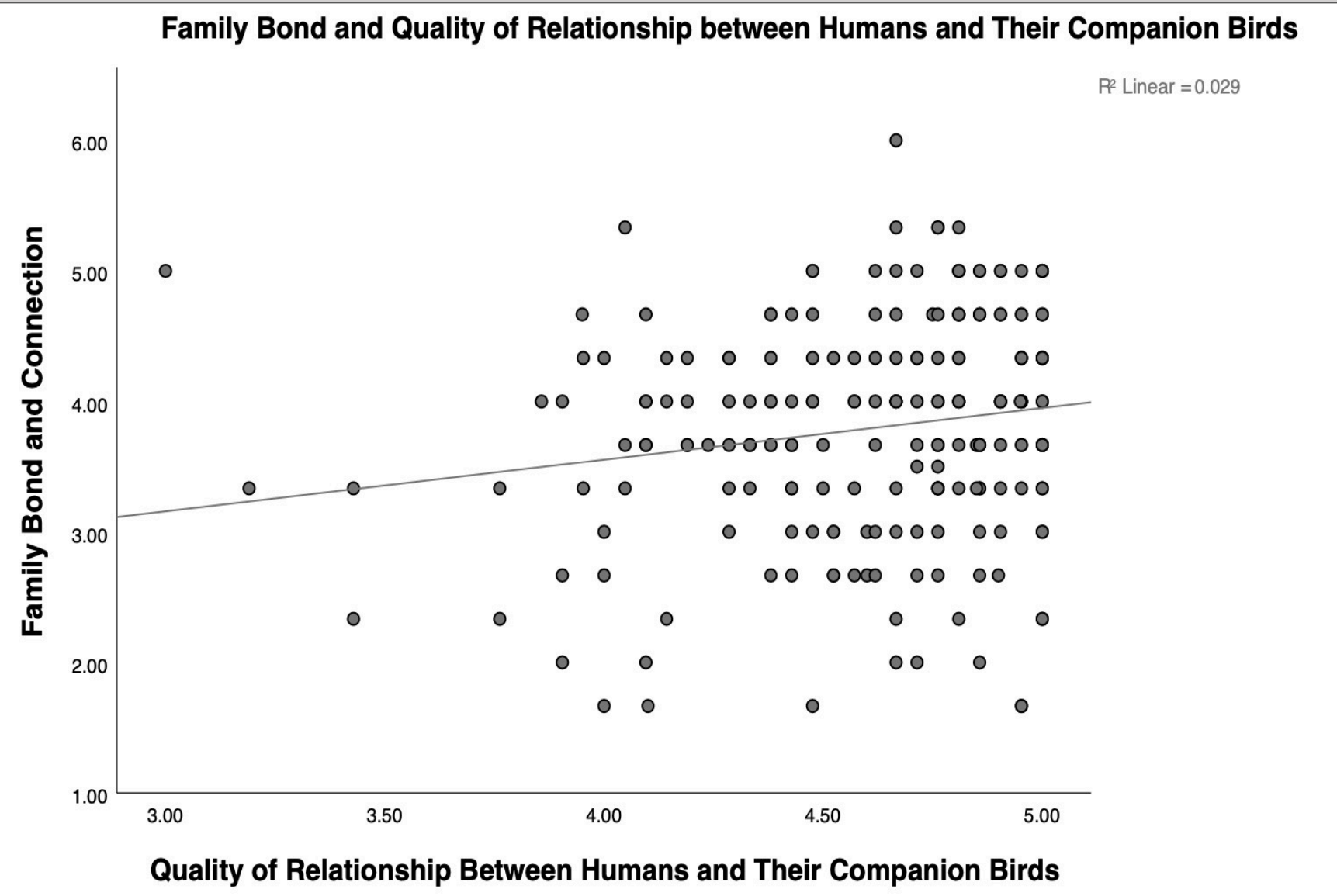
Social and Emotional Loneliness Scale DiTommaso, & Spinner (1993) measuring loneliness in adults using a seven-point Likert scale

Positive Mental Health Lukat., Margraf, Lutz, Van der Veld, & Becker (2016) measuring positive mental health using a five-point Likert scale

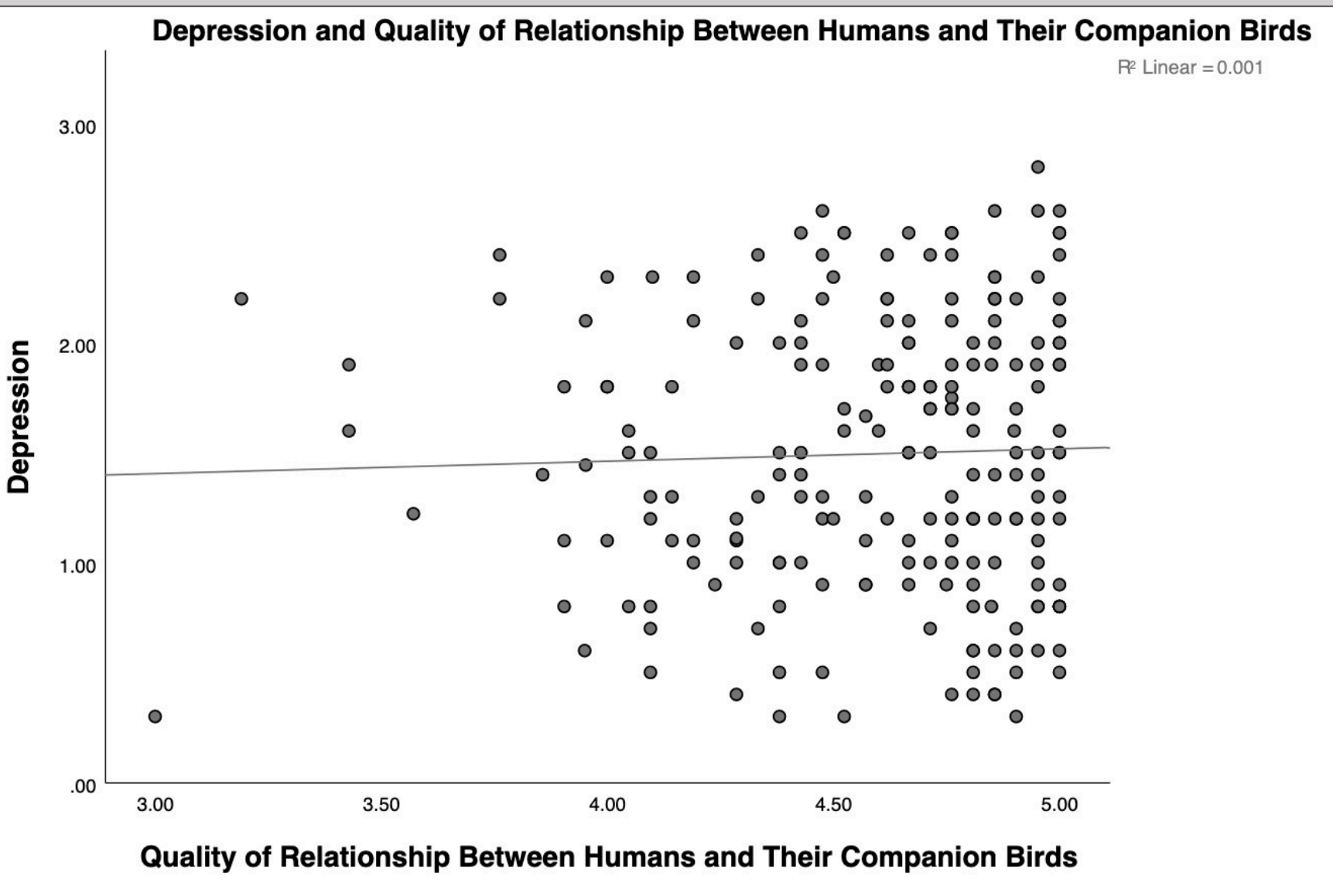
OBRS Burmeister, Drasch, Rinder, Prechsl, Peschel, Korbel, and Saam (2020) measuring the relationship between humans and their birds using a five-point Likert scale.

Results

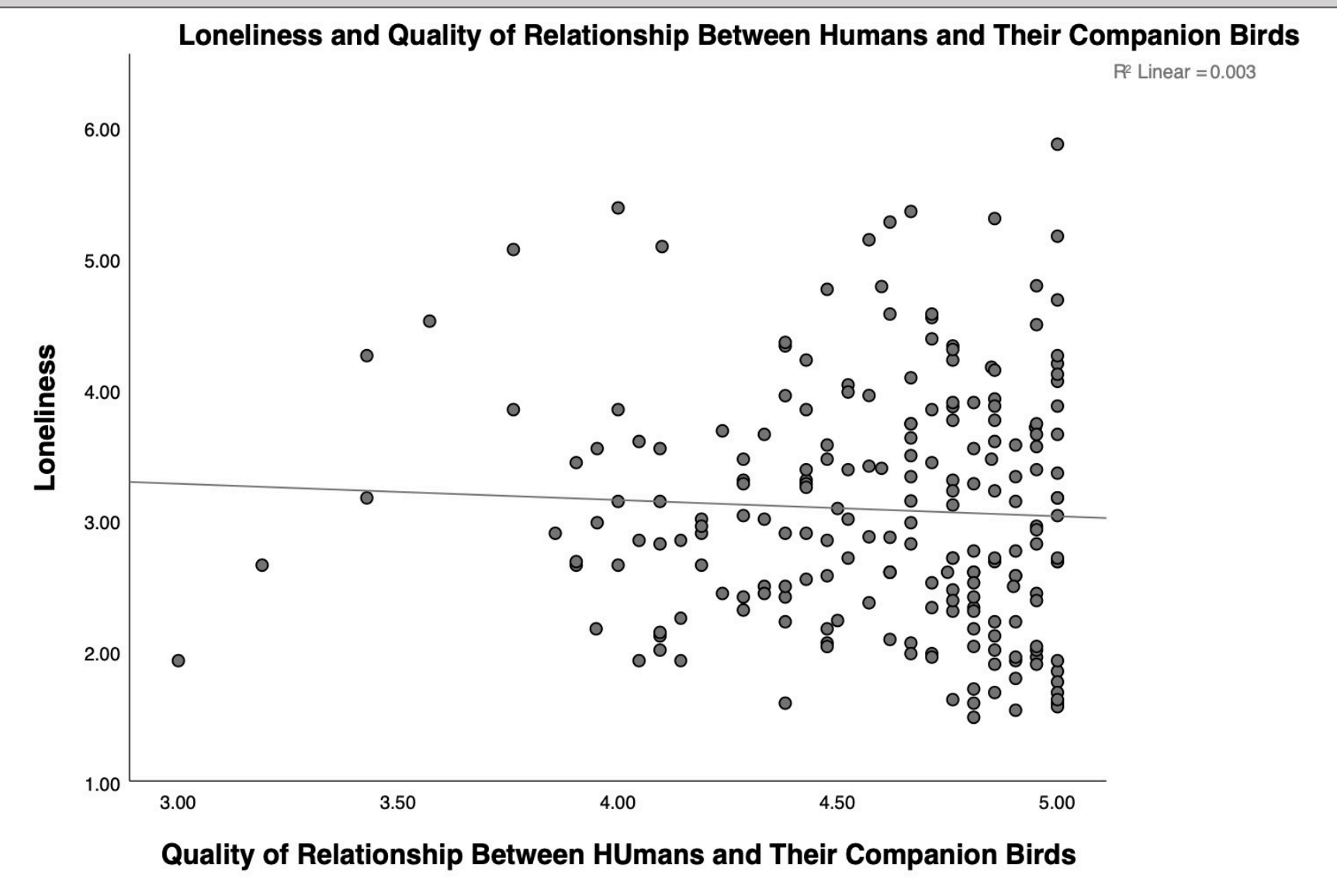
Hypothesis 1: There is a significant positive correlation ($r = .17, p = .01$): higher quality relationships were associated with greater family closeness and relationships.



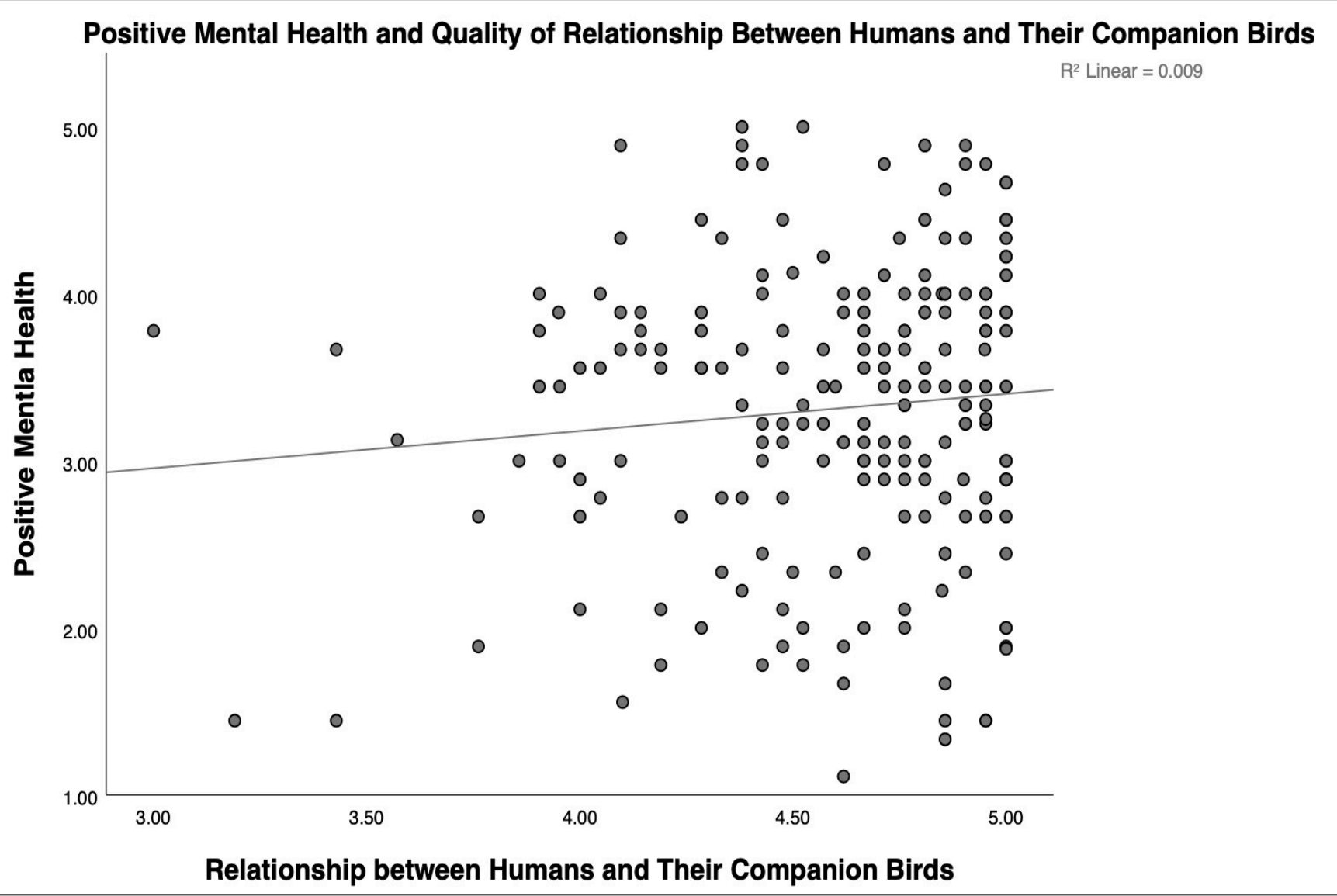
Hypothesis 2: The results showed there is no significant correlation ($r = .34, p = .625$): Higher quality relationships were not associated with less depressive symptoms.



Hypothesis 3: The results showed there is no significant correlation ($r = -.05, p = .470$): higher quality of relationship was not associated with less the feeling of loneliness.



Hypothesis 4: The results showed that there is no significant correlation ($r = .096, p = .168$): the higher quality of relationship was not associated with overall positive health.



Discussion

- While only one of the four hypotheses, family bonding, showed a significant positive correlation, it is hoped that further research will provide similar results for the other hypotheses.
- The positive correlation for family bonding can be attributed to the influence of “flocking”, a major characteristic of parrots. A flock birds striving to be with their flock or family demands a significant amount of work from the bird's owner. Besides on-going attention, mental stimulation, daily preparation of fresh vegetables, mixed with grains, seeds, and fruit, and training, spending time with a companion bird creates connection, trust, and other healthy attachments.
- Although this study does not show a significant positive correlation for either, it is reasonable to assume an inconsistency in the research, whether it be the set up of the scales, or their relation to birds, apart from one scale regarding relationship between human and birds.



- Limitations
- social media recruitment- Instagram and TikTok
 - Lack of time
 - Sample size
 - scales

Future Directions


Future studies could:

- Use more bird specific scales.
- Link scales about companion birds with questions regarding mental health, relationships, and loneliness and compare with people who live alone and who do not have a companion animal, specifically birds.
- Use the survey to compare specific demographics from specific countries for example women between the ages of 25-65 from the United States to women 25-65 from Israel.

Conclusion

- This time spent between birds and owners creates reciprocal health attachments and bonds, building trust and companionship. This then transmits to the human owner's own lives, causing them to form healthy relationships with family members and others.
- Healthy relationships and companionship can increase mood, reduce feelings of loneliness, and over all quality of life, thus counteracting the profoundly negative effects of loneliness.

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