

# Effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences On Adult Desire to Parent

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## Background

Factors Influencing Decision to have Children:

- Childhood events have direct effect on personal outlook on life. (Korkeil et al, 1992)
- Personal outlook (optimistic vs. pessimistic attitudes) are two ends of bipolar axis. (Marshall, Wortman, Kusulas, Hervig, & Vickers, 1992)
- Socio-economic status significantly impacts levels of optimism/pessimism. (Heinonen et al, 2006)
- Optimistic/Pessimistic views, often associated with happy/unhappy childhood experiences, influence choices about having children. (Park, 2005)

Childhood experiences strongly influence expectations for parenting. For some potential parents, it is:

- A desire to “reproduce positive family experiences.”
- An opportunity to fix mistakes of an adversity-filled childhood by creating a good future for own children.
- Too frightening, wanting to avoid putting a child through what was experienced during their own childhood. (McDonnell, 2012)

## Hypotheses

Experiences from adult’s childhood color decisions about having children, but this is connected to individual differences in Optimistic vs. Pessimistic attitudes toward life in general. It is predicted that:

1. Participants with significant adverse childhood experience and a high level of pessimism will decline to have children (presumably out of fear of repeating their own problematic youth). *Hypothesis supported by positive relationship.*
2. Participants with little/no childhood adversity will want children independent of their levels of optimism/pessimism (presumably to repeat those positive experiences). *Hypothesis supported if no relationship between variables.*

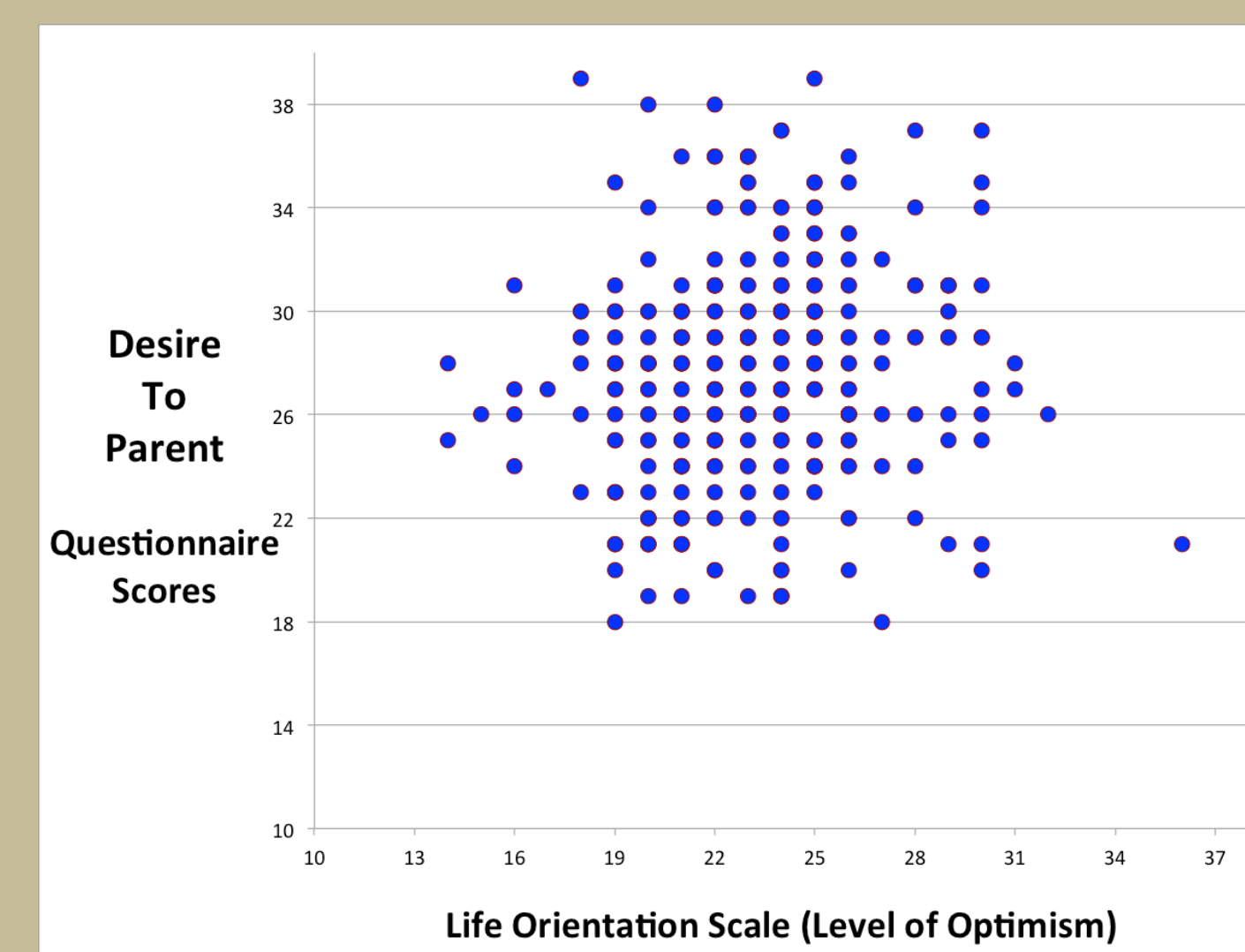
## Results

### OVERALL VARIABLE RELATIONSHIPS (Entire Sample, n = 594)

(All Correlation Significant at  $p < 5\%$ )

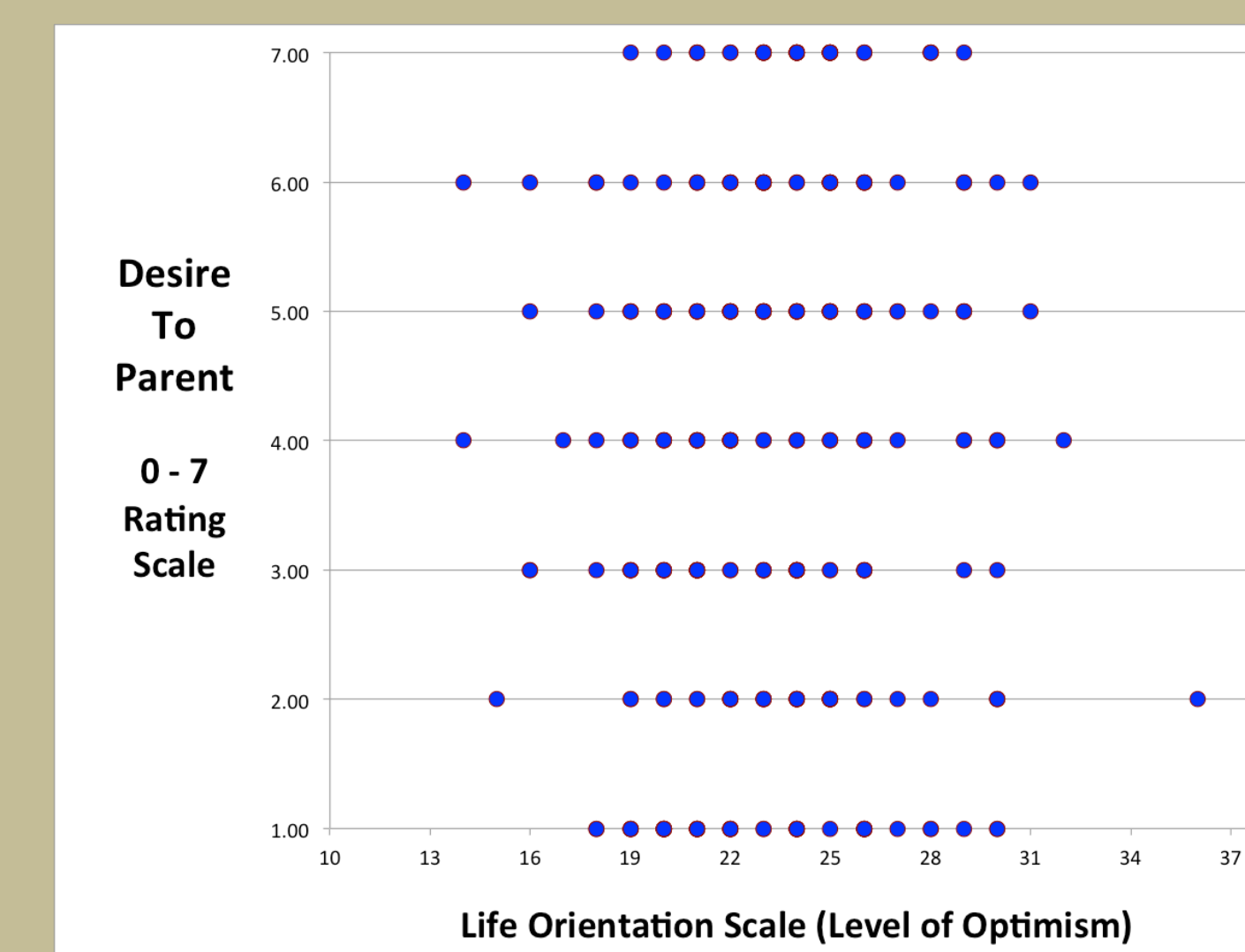
	Level of Optimism	Severity of Childhood Adversity
Desire to Parent Questionnaire	$r = + 0.08$	$r = - 0.08$
Desire to Parent 0-7 Rating Scale	$r = + 0.05$	$r = - 0.05$

### Evaluation of H1 (331 Participants - Childhood Adversity)



$r = - 0.06$  (  $p = 28\%$  )

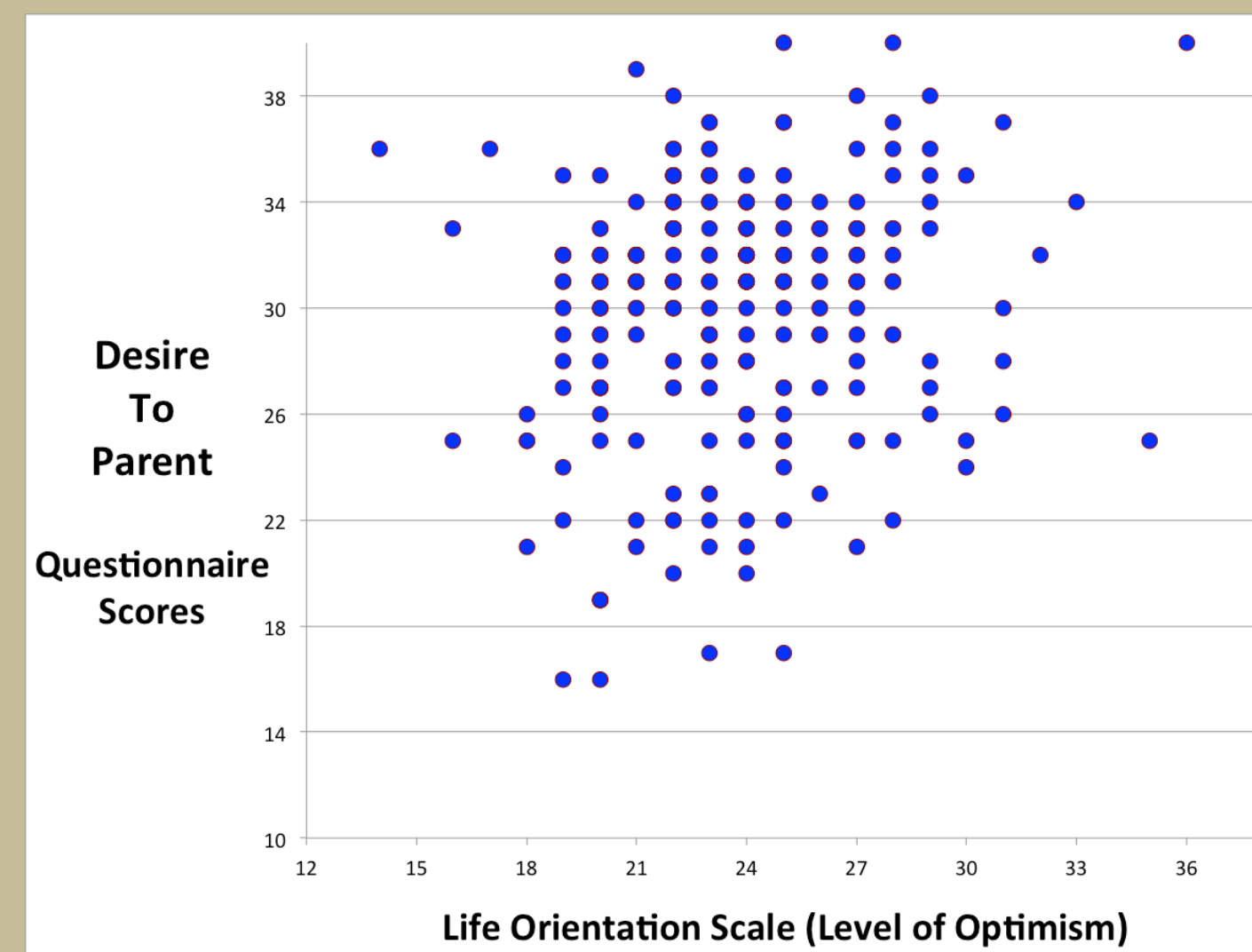
*Does Not Support Hypothesis*



$r = + 0.06$  (  $p = 27\%$  )

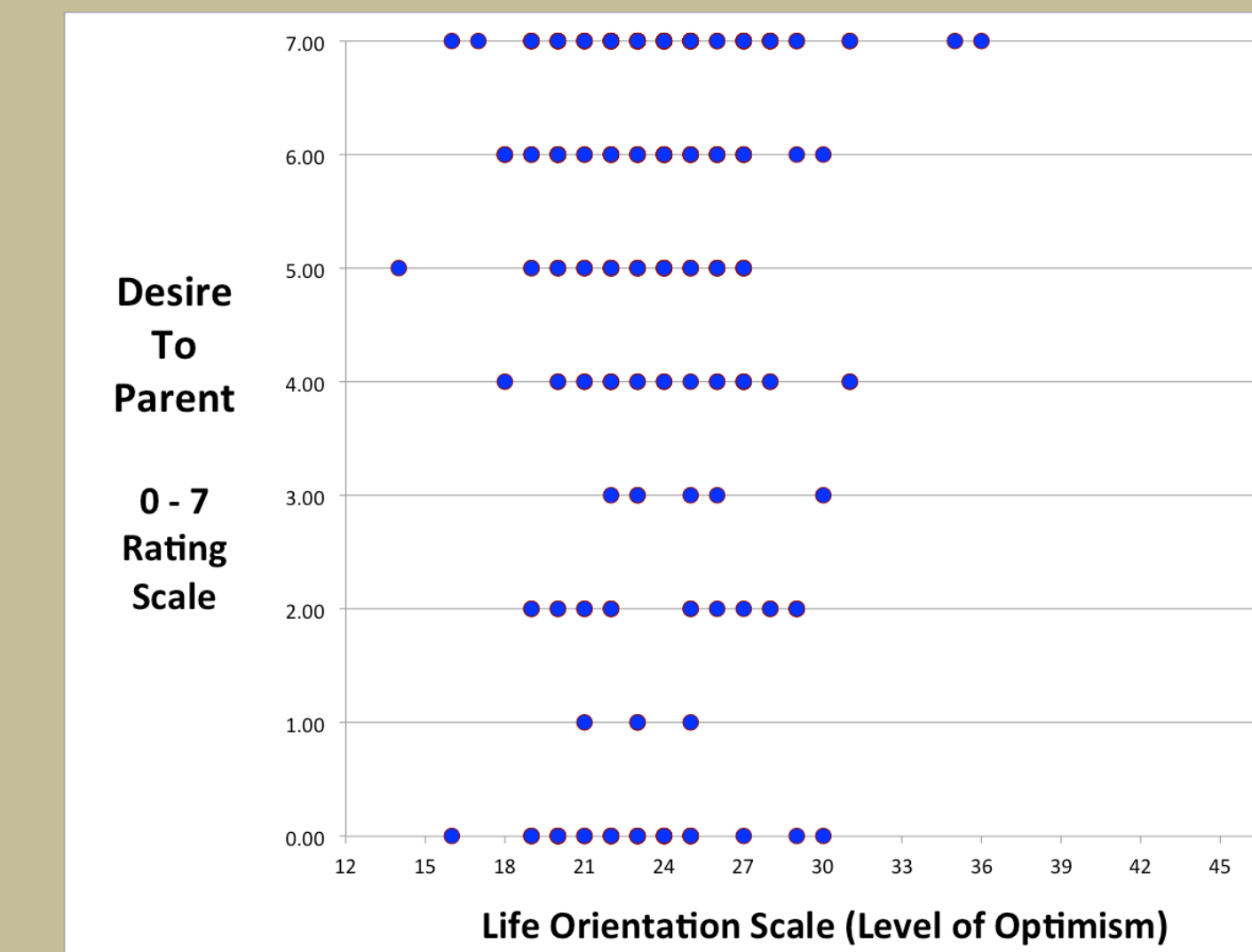
*Does Not Support Hypothesis*

### Evaluation of H2 (263 Participants - No Childhood Adversity)



$r = + 0.14$  (  $p = 2\%$  )

*Does Not Support Hypothesis*



$r = + 0.01$  (  $p = 87\%$  )

*Supports Hypothesis*

## Method

### Participants

- 594 adults ( 67 men, 511 women, & 16 other)
- Recruited through posts on Facebook, Tumblr, and emails to personal contacts.

### Measures

- **Demographics and Parenting History**
- **Desire to Parent Questionnaire**  
*Used to evaluate past or future plans for children*
- **The Life Orientation Scale**  
*Measure of optimism/pessimism*
- **Childhood Family Environment Scale**  
*Provided information on participants’ childhood environments and possible adverse experiences*
- **The Childhood Rating Scale**  
*Measure of severity of childhood adversity*

Procedure: Data collected anonymously at Internet survey site.

## Conclusions

- Optimism is a factor for those without a traumatic childhood, but is not a factor for those who had adverse experiences.
- There exists a weak, overall positive relationship between higher levels of optimism and desire to parent.
- Childhood adversity seems to have a small influence on diminishing desire to parent.
- As adversity and optimism-pessimism are only very weakly related to desire to parent, future research should consider other factors such as certain types of adversities, other personality traits, and parents’ environmental circumstances.



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