

Hannah Gendusa, Jose Martinez, M.S. & Jon Maner, PhD.

Department of Psychology, Florida State University, Tallahassee, FL

## Introduction

From a **life history perspective**, high levels of **unpredictability** – random changes in one’s environment – experienced in **early development** can teach people that **long-term pursuits** are **unlikely** to come to fruition because the chaotic nature of their environments cannot be counted on to pay long-term dividends. Consequently, people may adopt a **shorter-term** time horizon and invest their energy in more **immediate** goals.



**Shorter Psychological Time Horizon**

## Method: Studies 1 and 2

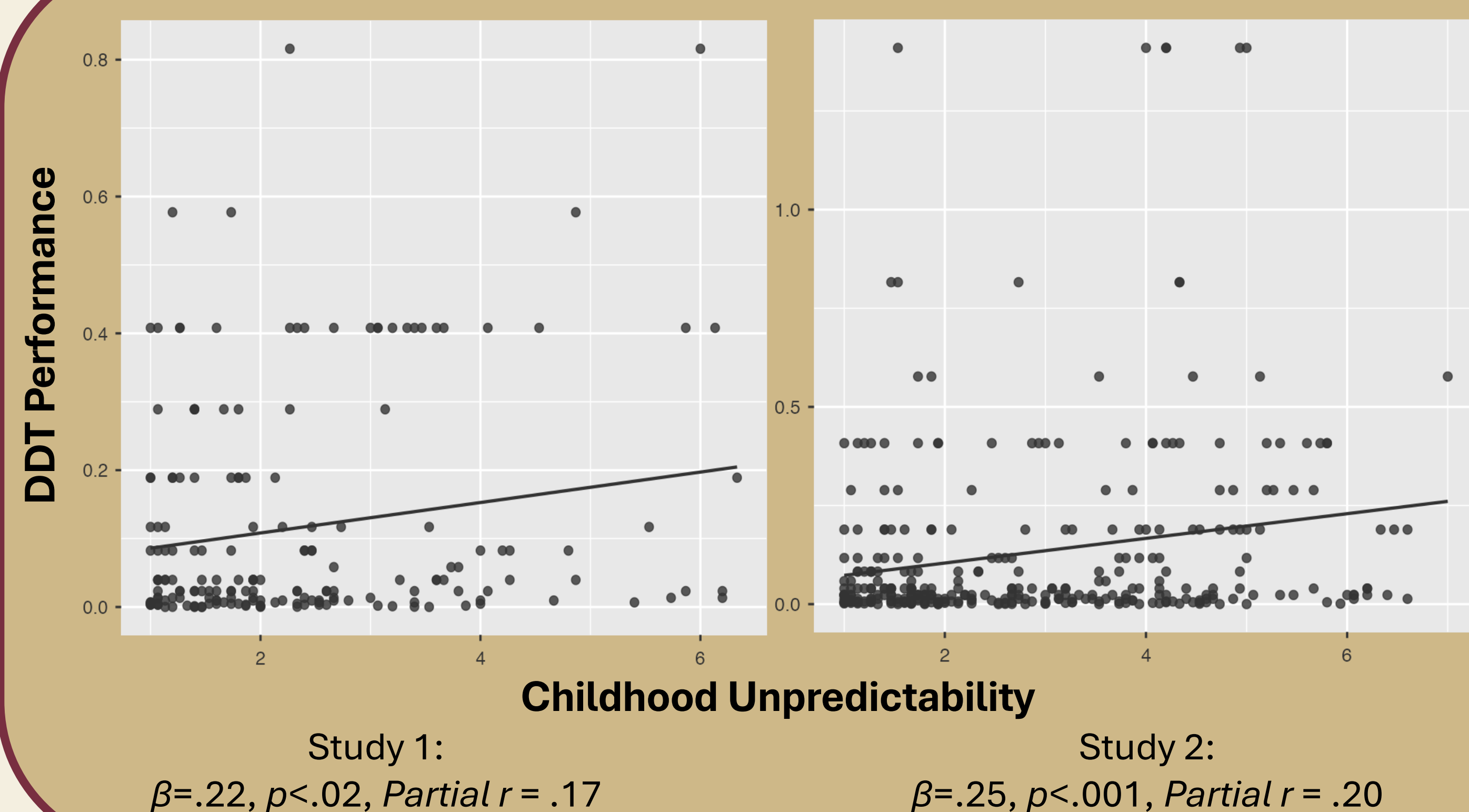
- Participants (Combined N=522) completed measures assessing **perceptions of environmental unpredictability** in family, school, and neighborhood contexts up to the age of 10
- Participants completed **5** trials of a DDT in which they chose between **immediate (but smaller)** versus **delayed (but larger)** rewards

**Delay Discounting Task (DDT):**

**\$1 Today**

OR

**\$10 Next Week**

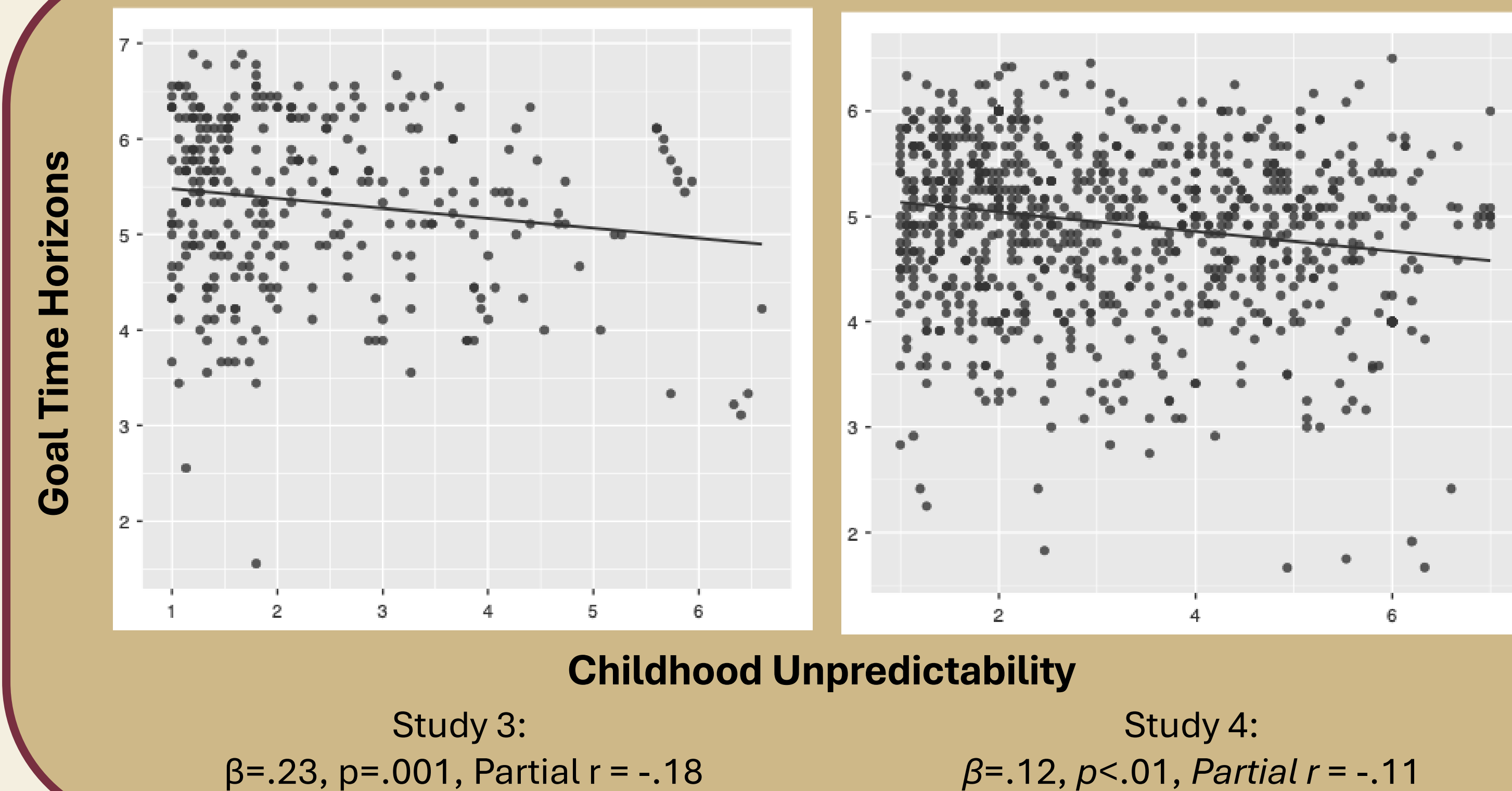


## Results

**Greater** levels of childhood unpredictability associated with preferences for **immediate** (but smaller) rewards at expense of delayed but larger rewards

## Method: Studies 3 and 4

- Participants (Combined N=1,164) completed same measure of **environmental unpredictability**
- Participants listed their three most important goals
- Trained research assistants read each goal and used a **1** (near future) to **7** (very far future) Likert scale to code participant goals



## Results

**Greater** levels of childhood unpredictability associated with **shorter** goal time horizons

## Discussion

- Findings suggest a **significant correlation** between perceptions of childhood unpredictability and both **delay discounting** and the motivational **time horizons**.
- **Higher** levels of unpredictability were associated with preferences for **immediate**, smaller rewards rather than delayed, but larger rewards and **shorter** (rather than longer) goal time horizons.
- These associations held over and above perceptions of childhood harshness and demographic characteristics.
- People may calibrate their psychological time horizons to the levels of unpredictability they experienced in early childhood.

## References

Martínez, J. L., Hasty, C., Morabito, D., Maranges, H. M., Schmidt, N. B., & Maner, J. K. (2022). Perceptions of childhood unpredictability, delay discounting, risk-taking, and adult externalizing behaviors: A life-history approach. *Development and Psychopathology*, 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0954579421001607>

Martínez, J. L., & Maner, J. K. (2023). Shorter Goals for the Faster Life: Childhood Unpredictability Is Associated With Shorter Motivational Time Horizons. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461672231216821>