

Exploring the Social Capital Accounts for a Variation in Desistance and Its Relative Impact on Desistance at the Louisiana State Penitentiary

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Abstract

This study explores the social capital accounts for a variation in desistance and its relative impact on desistance at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. The study adopted a survey research design, binary logistic regression, and a primary data source with a sample of 144 respondents to explore the study. The primary data source comes from the Louisiana State Penitentiary based on self-reported face-to-face survey interviews initially taken May 2007 and followed by face-to-face interviews officially obtained data over the period of a year and eight months regarding the same sample population. Results suggested that in the *Before* study, using self-reported data, there were only two social capital variables that were statistically reliable in distinguishing desistance among inmates. These variables were *relationship with mother*, which had the most predictive power regarding desistance process, followed by the *who raised the inmate variable*. The strongest of all variables in this study was the punishment adjustment, in particularly the psychological coping one.

Keywords: Offenders, Age, Demographics, Desistance, Delinquents, Crime, Juvenile, Punishment, Incarceration, Offenders, and Justice system.

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INTRODUCTION

Social capital accounts for variation in desistance among juveniles in the state of Louisiana is perceived to be the alarming causes of juveniles' crimes. In fact, the practice of transferring juvenile offenders to adult criminal court and sentencing them to life in adult prisons grew during the latest juvenile crime wave of the late 1980s and early 1990s (Feld, 1987; Torbet, Gable, Hurst, Montgomery, Szymanski & Thomas, 1996). Particularly alarming were the homicide arrest rates for 10-17-year-olds and 18-24-year-olds that rose sharply from the mid-1980s, peaked in 1993, and then began to decline steeply thereafter (Blumstein & Cork, 1996; Cook & Laub, 1998). Violent arrest rates for young adults (18-24-year-olds) were higher than rates for adolescents, 13-17-year-olds, who are referred to as juvenile lifers in this study (Commission on Behavior and Social Sciences & Education, 2001; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999). These events led states throughout the United States to significantly expand legislation allowing for the prosecution of juveniles in adult criminal courts (Griffin, Torbet & Szymanski, 1998) as well as sentencing juveniles to life terms in prison (Amnesty International, 2005).

The violent crime rate between 1987 and 1994 resulted in a 73 percent increase in the number of cases transferred annually to criminal court from 6,800 to 11,700 (Stahl, Sickmund, Finnegan, Snyder & Sickmund, 1999; Hart, 1998). The number of waived cases declined by 17 percent in 1995 and then increased by 2 percent in 1996. In 1997, the number of cases transferred directly to criminal court increased by 7 percent, the highest in the last two decades (Juvenile Court Statistics, 1996; Stahl, et al., 1999; Jackson & Pabon, 2000). It has been reported that the transfer movement peaked at a time when the juvenile violent crime arrest rates had declined (Snyder, 1998; Singer & McDowall, 1988; Bishop, Frazier, Lanza-Kaduce & White, 1996; McNulty, 1996; Snyder, Sickmund, & Poe-Yamagata, 2000).

Research findings illustrated that there are significant differences in the characteristics of juveniles sentenced in adult criminal court (Bishop, 2000). As a group they have been described by the types of crime committed (Cesaroni & Peterson-Badali, 2005; Snyder & Sickmund, 1999), length of sentence (Rudman, Harstone, Fagan & Moore, 1986; Podkopacz & Feld, 1996; Myers, 2003; Kurlychek & Johnson, 2004), socioeconomic status (Cullen, 1994; Kerbo, 1996; Wilson, 1996; Krivo & Peterson, 1996; Currie, Shields, & Wheatley, 2007), and psychosocial and family dysfunctions (Maitland & Sluder, 1996, 1998; Bortner & Williams, 1997; Cowan, Cowan, & Schultz, 1996; Hentelef, 1999; Beam, Gil-Rivas, Greenberger, & Chen, 2002). Although the risk of being sentenced in criminal court varies by geographical jurisdiction, nationally the minimum transfer age is 14 (Feld, 1999).

A systematic study of the patterns of desistance among serious juvenile offenders would add valuable social scientific knowledge to the discipline of juvenile justice. While there is strong research evidence supporting the age-crime curve explanation (Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986; Piquero, Farrington, & Blumstein, 2003;

Laub, Nagin & Sampson, 1998; Laub & Sampson, 1993), it is not well understood how desistance occurs among serious juvenile offenders and what factors substantially contribute to this process. Currently there are few studies on the variables that promote desistance or cessation of anti-social activity among violent juvenile offenders.

The overriding purpose of this study, therefore, is to understand desistance among a sample of incarcerated aged-delinquent offenders housed at the Louisiana State Penitentiary. This study sought to understand whether social capital accounts for a variation in desistance (decrease in anti-social behavior) across time. The study explored how attitudes toward punishment sanctions, such as life sentences, impact desistance. For the purpose of this study, the sample represented aged-delinquent inmates who were classified as either juvenile lifers or young adults. Several research questions were addressed in this study. This study is structured in as a way to assist policymakers, and criminal justice officials to understand the role *social capital* variables of family, parenting marriages, and friends play in predicting the variation in desistance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Social Bonds or Social Capital Predictors of Desistance

There is substantial evidence suggesting that social ties or bonds, such as family influence, parenthood, marriage, employment, and religion, act as turning points in an individual's life that can produce a change in the criminal's life from offending to non-offending (Sampson & Laub, 1990; Laub & Sampson, 2003). According to numerous studies, individuals who persist in offending into adulthood may differ from those who desist in several ways, including attachment to school, military service (Elder, 1986; Sampson & Laub, 1996), gender, age of onset of offending, incarceration, and adult social bonds (e.g., marriage, quality of marriage, job stability) (Farrington & West, 1995; Quinton, Pickles, Maughan, & Rutter, 1993; Quinton & Rutter, 1988; Sampson & Laub, 1990).

Brannigan (1997) indicates that crime is highest when males have the fewer resources, and it lasts longest in those with fewest investments in society (jobs, wives, children). Social bond can influence behavior through the establishment of an individual's stake in conforming to the norms and values of society. Social bond develops between individuals and socializing units, such as family, (which includes parenting), marriage, employment, and other social networks. A few of the more dominant socializing units that affect desistance are discussed next.

Family

The family is often said to be the bedrock of American society (Travis, 2005; Travis & Visser, 2005). Family life influences the lives of children in a number of ways. For example, it has been found that children raised by affectionate, consistent parents are less likely to commit serious crimes either as juveniles or as adults (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). On the other hand, children brought up by parents who neglect or reject them are likely to be greatly influenced by their community environments (such as neighborhood of street friends, or gangs). According to a National Institute of Justice study, abused and neglected children were 11 times more likely to be arrested for criminal behavior as a juvenile, 2.7 times more likely to be arrested for violent and criminal behavior as an adult, and 3.1 times more likely to be arrested for one of many forms of violent crime (juvenile or adult) (English, Widom, & Brandford, 2004).

Children and adolescent interactions and relationships with family and peers influence the development of anti-social behavior and desistance. Family interactions are most important during early childhood and can have long-lasting effects. In early adolescence, relationships with peers take on greater importance. Families provide children with the supervision, training, and advocacy needed to ensure a positive developmental course. When families fail to provide supervision, discipline, care, love, and good parenting, avoiding anti-social behavior may be difficult. A number of studies (Capaldi & Patterson, 1996; Farrington, 1989) has found that poor parental management and disciplinary practices are associated with the development of delinquent behavior. Studies also have found children who are neglected and abused by their parents and are therefore devoid of good parental management, are 25 percent more likely to experience problems such as delinquency, teen pregnancy, low academic achievement, drug use, and mental health problems (Kelley, Thornberry, & Smith, 1997). Furthermore, studies found that failure to set clear expectations for children's behavior, inconsistent discipline, excessively severe or aggressive discipline, poor monitoring and supervision of children all led to later delinquency (Hawkins, Catalano, & Brewer, 1995; McCord, 1979).

Patterson (1976, 1995) found that parents who nag their children and use idle threats are likely to produce coercive systems of discipline, whereby the children gain control through misbehaving. Several longitudinal studies investigating the effects of punishment on aggressive behavior have shown that physical punishments are more likely to result in defiance than compliance (McCord, 1997; Power & Chapieski, 1986). Studies found that consistent discipline, supervision, and affection help create well-socialized adolescents (Austin, 1978; Bender, 1947; Bowlby, 1940; Glueck & Glueck, 1950). Well socialized adolescents are less likely to engage in delinquent or deviant behavior. On the other hand, adolescents who lack discipline and received poor or no

supervision are more prone to engage in delinquent or deviant behavior (Goldfarb, 1945; Hirschi, 1969; Laub & Sampson, 1988; McCord, 1991; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

Research literature in Criminology shows that reductions in delinquency between the ages of 15 and 17 appear to be related to friendly interactions between teenagers and their parents, which further provides the impetus to promote school attachment and stronger family ties (Liska & Reed, 1985). In contrast, children who have suffered parental neglect have an increased risk of delinquency (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). Both Widom (1989) and McCord (1983) found that children who had been neglected were as likely as those who had been physically abused to commit violent crimes later in life. After reviewing many studies, investigating relationships between socialization in families and juvenile delinquency, Loeber and Stouthamer-Loeber (1986) concluded that parental neglect had the largest impact. The family unit always in a human society has been the basis for marriage in a human society. Marriage is another good predictor of desistance, that is, a good, healthy marriage (Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998). In fact, marriage is central to the theoretical debates over stability and change in offending over the life span of a criminal. The next section discusses the significance of marriage in desistance.

Marriage

Farrington and West (1995) and Horney, Osgood, and Marshall, (1995). found that offenders were equally as likely to get married as non-offenders, but those who were married and lived with their spouses decreased their offending more than those who remained single or who did not live with their spouse. Sampson and Laub (1993) found that marital attachment and job stability significantly reduced deviant behavior in adulthood. Piquero, MacDonald, & Parker, (2002) found that a steady marriage is a strong antidote to a life of crime. In another study of paroled men, Piquero (2002) found that the most hardened ex-cons were far less likely to return to their criminal past if they settled down into the routines of a solid marriage. Several studies (Piquero, 2002; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Warr, 2002, 1998) showed that only healthy (solid or good) marriages affect desistance. Good marriages are healthy marriages, which entail commitment, communication, lack of domestic violence, have intimacy and emotional support, economic security; and couples are able to resolve conflicts through communicating and understanding (Moore, Jekielek, Bronte-Tinkew, Guzman, Ryan, & Redd, 2004; Moore, 2003; Doherty & Anderson, 2004). Laub and colleagues (1998) found that only good marriages proved to predict reduction in crime, and they had increasing effects over time. A study by Warr (1998) also found that offending decreased after marriage, but attributed the decline to less time being spent with peers and a reduction in the number of deviant peers following marriage, rather than to increased attachment to the conventional values of society through marriage (McCord, Wisdom, & Crowell, 2001).

In the previous two sections, family and marriage have been identified by a number of theories of crime desistance to be considered as positive and stabilizing social influences (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Warr, 1998; Sampson & Laub, 1993). Among other predictors of desistance from crime are steady employment, education, and the individual's, prosocial skills and capabilities. These predictors are discussed below, starting with employment and followed by **individual capabilities, competencies, and characteristics**.

The Role of Human and Social Capital in Desistance

Change in the individual's sense of personal agency (or human and social capital) will affect the process in making the commitment to refrain from anti-social activities. Several investigators contend that a variety of life events may initiate the desistance process, but that the ultimate outcome of these changes' rests on the person's cognitive shifts about who they are as the desistance process unfolds (Giordano, Cernkovich, & Rudolph, 2002). For example, in the case of serious juvenile offenders, this might mean the continued resolve to avoid certain peers, places, or activities or to attend vocational training classes, or become involved in prison approved inmate organizations. The factor that contributes to the newly developed discipline to carry out such commitment is the development of new and supportive social networks of family and friends, even during incarceration. The ongoing interaction between personal resolve and the restructuring of social ties could provide a richer view of personal agency carried out through conscious alterations of social context and daily activities, which prompts desistance (Mulvey, Steinberg, Cauffman, Piquero, Chassin, Brame, Schubert, Hecker, & Losoya, 2004).

Incarcerated aged-delinquents are still developing intellectually and psychosocially, in late adolescence, and the type of changes that occur during this period have considerable relevance for the process of desistance (Mulvey et al., 2004). As aged-delinquents acquire abilities to interpret and handle social situations, acquire skills, and experience personality changes; their goals and aspirations change. Psychosocial characteristics and technical skills are all important for decision making, which increases over the course of adolescence (Steinberg & Cauffman, 1996; Steinberg, Chung, & Little, 2004).

A juvenile offender's *attitudes, beliefs, and values* change considerably between the time of his admission to prison as an adolescent and years into adulthood. They develop a stronger sense of identity and increased psychosocial maturity, their attitude and personal responsibility, altruism, views of others, and the value of risk-

taking and sensation-seeking behavior may change (Steinberg & Cuffman, 2000). It is also important to recognize how adolescents' perceptions of, and attitudes toward the legal system change over this developmental period. Research on adults indicates that perceptions regarding procedural justice (Tyler & Huo, 2002) play an influential role in decisions to obey the law (Tyler, 1990; Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997). Such perceptions may redirect their views on the legal, social, moral, and personal benefit of crime or anti-social behavior (Grasmick & Bursik, 1990). It is important to measure the changes in how the juvenile offender now views the costs and benefits of crime. Presumably, as adolescents mature into adulthood, their appraisal of the relative costs and benefits of offending changes in ways that promote desistance (Mulvey, et al., 2004).

Changes in *social contexts* (an exogenous variable), which include social investments (whom they spend their time with or associate with) bring about many shifts in roles. The juvenile offenders may become involved in positive social relationships, as they mature and their abilities to relate to others in a more positive manner emerge. Late adolescence is usually marked by some basic, yet predictable, shifts in association and how adolescents spend their time. These changes in social contexts may alter opportunities and incentives to prosocial and anti-social activity. Some of these changes may be deliberate attempts to alter opportunities, whereas others may be related to changes in social roles that accompany late adolescence and young adulthood, such as enrollment in college, employment or marriage. Also, during late adolescence there is often a period of change in the family context, such as becoming autonomous by moving out of the parents' home. Though becoming autonomous is an important developmental phase in late adolescence, it is just as vital to maintain a healthy attachment with parents (Allen, Aber, & Leadbeater, 1990; Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Now, the youth is less subject to parental control, supervision, and mentoring (Gorman-Smith, Tolan, & Henry, 2000). This move becomes critical to watch because of the centrality of parental involvement in some of the more successful interventions for delinquency (Cunningham & Henggeler, 1990).

Shifts in social roles expand when one leaves high school or moves away from home and the neighborhood. New roles in the community also open up during late adolescence and early adulthood due to work, civic involvement, and church membership. Each shift in social contexts brings redefined or new social relationships and expectations regarding the acceptability of anti-social behavior. Successful adjustment to new demands in some of these contexts may promote desistance (i.e., marriage, parenthood, and employment), whereas changes in other social contexts (i.e., moving out of parents' home) may promote continued anti-social activities. These changes provide naturally occurring turning points for young adolescents, and failure to capitalize on them can limit future opportunities (Mulvey, et al., 2004).

Desistance from anti-social activity requires a supporting structure for positive activities, and this can exist only if the aged-delinquent offender has the necessary building blocks for its construction. These building blocks are the human and social capitals. More specifically, these are the individual and contextual changes outlined above that might promote desistance and thereby facilitate the successful transition to young adulthood and, eventually to a law-abiding citizen. It is the accumulation of human and social capital during late adolescence that makes the successful transition to young adulthood, and desistance from anti-social activities possible (Mulvey, et al., 2004). In sum, among some predictors of desistance found in the literature are: an intact marriage, healthy/strong parenthood, steady employment, education, age or maturity, community/organizational membership or involvement, a traumatic life experience (like the death of a loved one), involvement in treatment programs (multiple systemic therapy, family therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy) and sanction (incarceration).

METHODOLOGY

This study follows a cross-sectional study. A sample size of 144 respondents were used in this study. A disproportionate-stratified probability sampling method utilizing a random number table will be applied. This study consists of two phases (the *Before* and the *After* study). The key variable used to predict desistance in this particular study is social capital and adjustment of punishment for the purpose of analysis. The key variable was measured in a *Before* self-reported study on May 2007 and an *After* official-report study on December 2008. The *Before* data were obtained from a self-reported survey given to inmates at LSP in May 2007. The *After* data were obtained from official reports provided by LSP's Classification Department. *Violent aged-delinquent male offenders* serving life sentences without the benefit of parole prior to age of 18 and up to age 21 were considered for this particular study. The survey instrument used for the data collection included the *LSP Aged-Delinquent Questionnaire*, which was modeled from a previous survey, *Old Prisoner Questionnaire*, designed by Dr. James Marquart, Corrections expert researcher. This survey as well as the previous survey was designed for the incarcerated inmate population to obtain a variety of questions related to their past and present lifestyle (family, beliefs/attitude, health behavior, prison adjustment, education, criminal history, etc...) prior to their incarceration and since their incarceration, and has passed the validity and reliability test in collecting crime related data for a very long time.

As part of the cross-sectional study design, a self-designed, detailed questionnaire (LSP Aged Delinquent Questionnaire) was used to conduct the face-to-face interviews. In administering the survey instrument, inmates

were gathered into classroom settings or meeting areas and were asked to complete the survey (using the special designed *LSP Aged Delinquent Questionnaire*). The survey required approximately 25 to 30 minutes for completion. The purpose and instructions for taking the survey were personally given by the author of this study with all inmates volunteering to participate in this project.

Statistical techniques utilized in this study were descriptive statistics, nonparametric chi-square, and logistic regression. Descriptive statistics were used to identify and describe the sample population and their self-reported responses. Chi-square statistics were performed to measure the significant difference between desisters and non-desisters among juvenile lifers and young adult lifers (in the sample aged delinquent population). Logistic regression is a statistical procedure used to examine the relationship and predictability of a criterion variable that is categorical from two or more predictor variables. The value that is being predicted in logistic regression is actually a probability, which ranges from 0 to 1. More precisely, logistic regression specifies the probabilities of the particular outcomes for each participant or case involved. In this study binary logistic regression was used to predict desistance or non-desistance among aged delinquents based on selective factors. Since desistance is a dichotomous criterion variable, logistic regression is appropriate in identifying the differences within the age-delinquent offenders who desist and those who do not desist. The predictor variables for analyses included punishment (or prison sanction), and social capital.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Binary logistic regression was utilized to determine which social capital variables, such as marriage status, religion as significant, parenting questions (are they living; relationship with mother/father), number of children, who raised respondent, and relationships with friends (same and opposite sex), were predictors of desistance. The marriage question asked them about their current marital status. The religion question addressed how often they attends religious services. Several questions address family, family relationships, and friends. For example, there was a question about how many children they have, whether their parents were still living, who raised them; two questions were regarding their relationships with their mothers and fathers, and two questions were about their friends (of the same sex and opposite sex).

Using the Hosmer and Lemeshow Goodness-of-Fit test [$\chi^2 (9, N = 144) = 21.157, p < .012$], suggested that a significant difference was found between the desistance rate of juvenile lifers offenders and young adult lifers with regard to social capital variables. Moreover, the social capital variables accounted for 14 percent of the variance (difference) in desistance. The aged delinquent offenders combined (juvenile lifers and young adult lifers) showed a 71 percent correct probability of desistance, with the young adult lifers have 97.9 percent correct probability of desistance.

Regression results indicated that the overall model for the nine predictors in the areas of marriage, religion, parenting, number of children, parent relationships, and friendship items were statistically reliable in distinguishing desistance among the aged delinquents with $-2 \text{ Log Likelihood} = 163.514$, $\text{Chi Square} = 21.157$, $df = 9, p < .05$ (See Table 1). Table 1 reveals in the analysis in relation to the Cox and Snell R Square value of 0.137 that about 13.7% variation in desistance could be explained by the variations in the social capital variables or accounts of personal agency—such as family, parenting, marriages, and friends/associates (church members).

Table 1

Overall Model Fit Result

Model	-2 Log Likelihood	Chi Square	Df	P
Intercept	.662			
Final	163.514	21.157	9	.012*

$\chi^2 = 21.157, df = 9, p = .012^*$, Cox and Snell R Square = .137

Toward this end, the Wald Criterion Test (See Table 2) of all nine social capital variables, only two—*relationship with mother* had the most predictive power regarding the desistance process, and *who raised the inmates' variable* (which asked, '*During most of the time you were growing up, how would you describe your relationship with these people?*')—had the second most predictive power with respect to desistance process. Aged delinquents who had strong relationships with people who nurtured (mothers or care takers) them were 4.03 times as likely to decrease from anti-social behavior or desistance than those who did not have strong relationships with mothers of care-takers growing up. This shows the importance of social investments, particularly that of the nurturer (the maternal and intimate social relationships). The higher the response the more negative the maternal relationship and the greater their level of desistance. However, all the odd ratios except one for the independent variables indicated little change in the likelihood of desistance process.

Table 2
Social Capital Model of Logistic Regression for the Log Odds of Desistance

Variable	B	SE	Wald	Df	P	Exp(B)
Marriage	.335	1.213	.076	1	.782	1.398
Religion (attendance)	.011	.117	.008	1	.928	1.011
Children	.080	.216	.138	1	.711	1.083
Parents (living)	-1.239	.656	3.575	1	.059	.290
Who raised them (caretaker)	1.394	.598	5.437	1	.020*	4.030
Relationship (mother)	-1.989	.714	7.760	1	.005*	.137
Relationship (father)	-.451	.393	1.315	1	.251	.637
Friend (same sex)	-.043	.069	.385	1	.535	.958
Friend (opposite sex)	.042	.841	.402	1	.526	1.043

Model = X = 21.157. df = 9, p = .012; Cox and Snell R Square = .137, Overall Correct = 70.8

CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATION

The study revealed that social capital accounts or variables seems to have a greater a significant impact on the variations in desistance. The study further revealed that among the social capital variables two of the variables, the *primary relationship with the mother*, and *who raised the respondent*, were statistically significant. The relationship with the primary caregiver, which was usually the mother, was statistically significant with respect to inmates' desistance and non-desistance status. The second variable was *who raised them*. The aged delinquents with strong bond mother and or caretaker relationships had greater desistance form anti-social behavior that those with no intimate or close relationship with mother or caretaker (if different from mother).

With regards to intimate relationship, not all aged-delinquent offenders were able to get a chance to acquire wives or children before conviction and sentencing. The only intimate relationship that usually is established at birth is with the mother or care taker. Therefore, it is no surprise that these social capital variables were the strongest predictor of desistance. Moreover, these type of social bonds are acknowledged in the Criminology literature as contributing to desistance. The findings of social capital variables (with more intimate ties) were consistent with previous research studies (Sampson & Laub, 1990; 1993, 2003), except for the *After* official study, as shown in Tables 7 and 17.

The social capital variables were especially statistically reliable in the *Before* self-reported study, particularly with family relationship variables. The relationships with the primary care givers, which was usually the mothers, were statistically significant with respect to inmates' desistance and non-desistance status. Family interactions are most important during early childhood and can have long-lasting effects. There is a great deal of evidence ((Ensminger & Doherty, 2006; Sampson & Laub, 1990; 1993, 2003) suggesting that social ties or bonds, such as family influence, parenthood, marriage, and religion can serve as turning points in the lives of individuals and thereby produces change in criminal offending to non-criminal offending.

Much attention should be paid to the social capital accounts of personal agency to help minimize crime among juveniles. It has also been observed in the literature that little research has been conducted on the incarcerated juvenile offender population serving life sentences (Amnesty International, 2005) and their desistance from anti-social behavior. This study not only provides some insight to the desistance from anti-social behavior among aged-delinquents, but it also explores the effect of the "get tough" policy on juveniles incarcerated as adults. Whether getting away from the "get tough" policy is beginning to gain favor with politicians and the public, especially with the high economic costs of incarceration, and whether punitive policies toward juvenile offenders have been effective (The Future of Children, 2008), this will not likely affect the seriously violent offenders. Since the use of incarceration is unlikely to decrease for this population, research on effects of adult prison on juveniles is urgently needed (Bonta & Gendreau, 1990).

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