



THE IMPACT OF UNIONS ON JOB SATISFACTION: A REVIEW

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Abstract

In the last 40 years, the effect of unions on job satisfaction has attracted the attention of those working in the fields of economics, industrial relations, and industrial psychology. It is known that in most of the studies in the literature, this effect results in negative and 'out of the reasonable framework'. In studies published in recent years, it has been found that the direction of this effect has changed. This shows that the relationship between the union and job satisfaction is more complex than it seems. Thirty-five studies published in English included in the analysis section of this review by searching the Web of Science® database are included in the SSCI, SCI-Expanded, ESCI, CPCI-SSH indexes. Research articles, conference proceedings, and early access articles are included in the database search. In the literature, it is seen that the union membership status of the employee, the rate of unionization, the employee's being within the scope of the collective labor agreement and the existence of a union in the workplace are determined as the 'union variable'. In the 'exit-voice' hypotheses, the concurrent relationship between 'union variables' and job satisfaction is often not taken into account. In the 'reverse causality' hypotheses, it is seen that 'instrument variable' and 'fixed-effect' models have been developed to solve the endogeneity problem caused by the concurrent relationship. In the 'discussion and suggestions' section of this review; It is discussed how the effects of unions on job satisfaction can be tested in labor relations systems where the benefits obtained from the union gains do not depend on the membership status and the employees do not have the opportunity of collective labor agreement through the unions. In this framework, it is suggested that the employee's perception of union effectiveness scales, which are created in Likert type, should be determined as the

predictor variable and the effect on job satisfaction should be tested instead of the predictive variables measured at the dichotomous level.

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Introduction

Union leaders claimed that the power of labor is being tried to be reduced because the 'new public management' model has started to take root in the public sector and the human resources management approach has been adopted in the private sector (Eren, 2017). Nonetheless, in the context of their organizational goals, unions are still able to maintain their existence in workplaces, different labor relations systems that vary at the national and international levels.

According to Budd (2004), who discusses the purposes of labor relations in a conceptual triad as 'efficiency', 'equity' and 'voice', positive externalities can be expected if a balance is established between these three elements. While economic 'efficiency' is the primary objective of the employer; 'equity' in procedural and distributional dimensions, and 'voice' with dimensions such as work-related autonomy and industrial democracy are among the objectives of the employee. The realization of this common goal between the actors of labor relations (employer, employee, and public authority) also depends on the balancing power of unions, which are important factors in the labor market, against employers.

The most important role and priority of the unions in the labor relations systems are to improve the working conditions of the employees and to increase their welfare. Therefore, it would not be a surprise if employees vote pro-union in their workplaces to find solutions to the factors that cause job dissatisfaction (Hammer and Avgar, 2005).

According to some studies in the literature, unions traditionally focus on improving the bread and butter conditions of their employees (Dawkins, 2016; Hipp and Givan, 2015). In collective bargaining with the employer, issues such as salary, job security, and fringe benefit are mainly discussed. Therefore, it is seen that union membership has a positive effect on the job satisfaction of the employees regarding the minimum living conditions. However, this effect can turn negative when other elements of job satisfaction such as the promotion opportunity of the employee, the scope of the job, and resource adequacy are concerned (Kochan and Helfman, 1981).

According to Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1990), unions can have a positive effect on job satisfaction by eliminating work-related conflicts in the workplace. However, in terms of externalities, it is known that unions have different effects such as having a negative effect on job satisfaction of non-union employees (Haile et al., 2015) and improving occupational health conditions (Addison and Belfield, 2004).

As a result of the expected performance of the unions, how to analyze the effect of the employee on job satisfaction, especially in terms of ‘equity’ and ‘voice’, is discussed in the light of the findings of this review.

1. Background

The dominant evidence in the literature points to the paradox of the negative impact of unions on job satisfaction. This paradox was tried to be explained with the ‘exit-voice’ and ‘reverse causality’ hypotheses (Freeman and Medoff, 1984; Borjas, 1979).

The debates on the effect of unions on job satisfaction, which have passed their 40th year, gained a different momentum with the book called ‘What Do Unions Do’ (Freeman and Medoff, 1984), and Hirschman's (1970) typology of Exit, Voice, and Loyalty has become functional in shedding light on the solution of this problem.

The exit-voice hypotheses emphasize the ‘*actually insincere*’ dissatisfaction of union members as they have the opportunity and ability to use the ‘voice’ instrument during negotiation with the workplace management, as an alternative to the ‘exit’ instrument. Although union members use the ‘voice’ instrument, which is a reflection of their dissatisfaction, the fact that they do not tend to ‘exit’ compared to non-union members is cited as evidence. However, the instrument of ‘voice’ depends on the presence of a union in the workplace as a means for employees to reflect their dissatisfaction, especially for workplaces (*closed-shop*) where the condition of employment in the workplace depends on the status of membership in the union (Freeman and Medoff, 1984). The reverse causality hypotheses are based on the assumptions that unions exist in workplaces with poor working conditions or that employees with low job satisfaction levels may show a tendency to unionize (Borjas, 1979). Therefore, the concurrent relationship between union variables and job satisfaction variables points to the problem of endogeneity under these assumptions.

It is known that in a few studies in the literature, this problem has been tried to be solved with the 'instrumental variable' and the 'fixed effect' approach in panel data analysis (Laroche, 2016).

As seen in Table-1, most of the research studies in the literature were conducted in countries such as Great Britain and the USA. Especially in the states of the USA where there is no 'right-to-work law', it is known that unions achieve gains only for their members through collective bargaining. For the employee to benefit from these gains without being a member of the union, he/she must pay the union membership fee. At the same time, if employees in the states covered by the 'right-to-work law' in the USA work in a unionized workplace, they can benefit from the collective bargaining agreements made by the unions with the employer without paying any membership fee (Gius, 2012). Therefore, considering the unique characteristics of the countries' labor relations systems (such as the fact that the collective bargaining rights of civil servants in the public sector in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) are limited by law), the predictive variables to be included in the research will need to be determined with a different approach.

In this review, it is aimed to discuss the suitability of the predictor variables used in the literature in terms of labor relations systems with different characteristics. The results obtained in the context of the two main hypotheses summarized above on the subject are classified in the 'analysis' section of this review.

In addition, it is argued that in labor relations systems where union gains are public goods, and employees do not have collective bargaining rights, union variables commonly used in the literature (such as union membership, unionization rate, presence of a union in the workplace, employee's being within the scope of the collective labor agreement) may be insufficient to determine the effect on the job satisfaction of the employee. Predictive variables that could be alternatives are presented in the 'discussion and suggestions' section of this review, with reference to some sources in the literature.

2. Research Methodology

The literature search was conducted on November 26, 2021, using the Web of Science® database. Research articles, conference proceedings, and early access articles in the SSCI, SCI-Expanded, ESCI, and CPCI-SSH indexes published in English were included in the search.

The following keywords were used in the database search: (trade union (All Fields) OR labor union (All Fields) OR labour union (All Fields) OR unions (All Fields)). To improve the search results, the following keywords were searched in all areas of the full text: job satisfaction OR work satisfaction OR employee satisfaction OR quality of work-life OR job dissatisfaction.

By reading the abstracts and then the full texts of all 195 studies obtained as a result of the steps listed above, it was checked whether the conditions were met at the same time; (a) overall job satisfaction and/or certain aspects of job satisfaction (such as wage satisfaction) to be determined as the dependent variable (b) at least one of the union variables (such as membership status, the employee and/or workplace within the scope of collective labor agreement) is included as the predictor variable.

Studies in which unions were considered as a mediator or moderator variables were not included in the review. In addition, no publication date restrictions were imposed at any stage of the scanning procedure. Thirty-five studies published between 1983-2021 and whose findings were shared in the analysis section are marked with an (*) in the references. The selection of publications according to the literature search strategy is summarized in Figure-1.

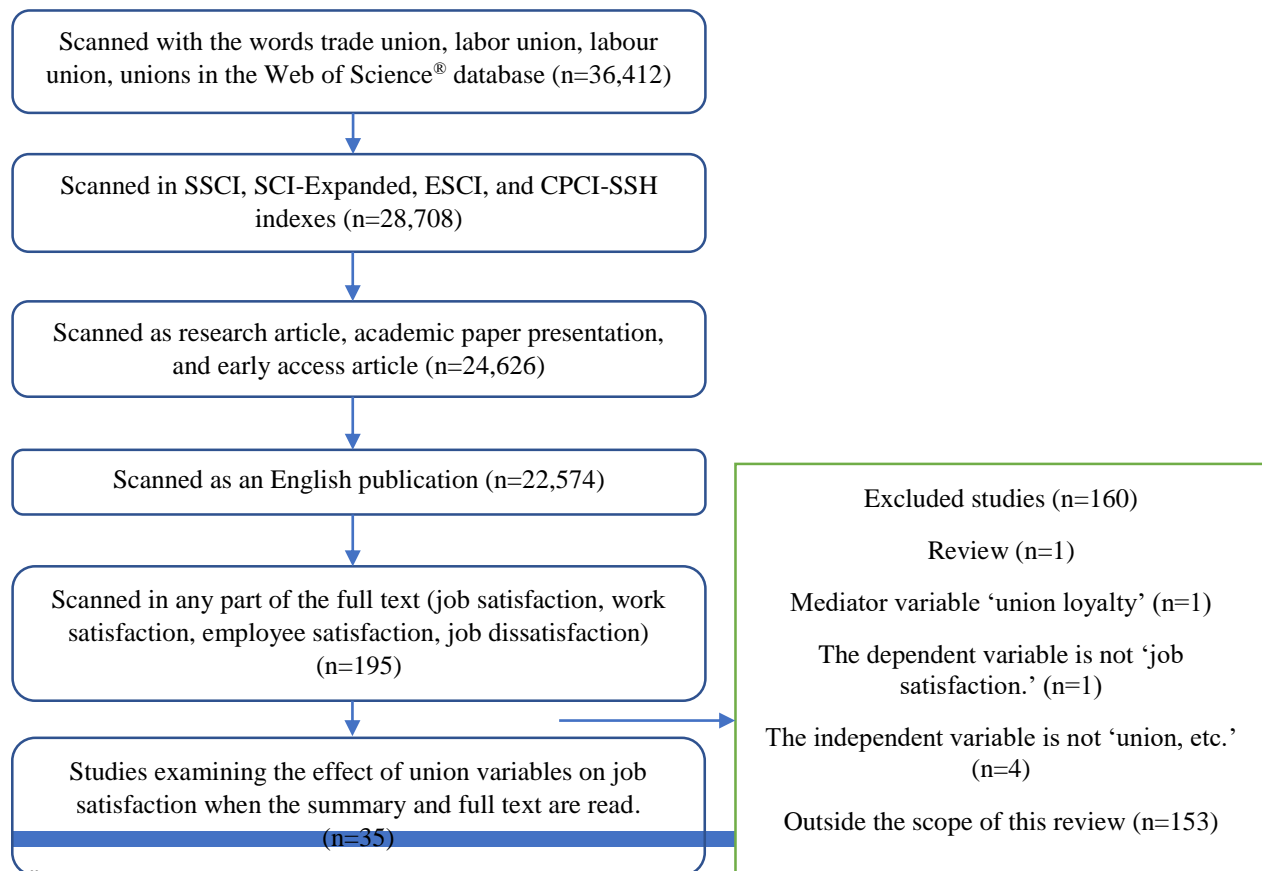


Figure-1: Literature search strategy diagram

3. FINDINGS

3.1. Findings specific to Turkey and TRNC

As seen in Table-1, there is no study specific to Turkey and the TRNC. Although OECD data are used in some studies, Turkey is not included (Clark, 2005; Hipp and Givan, 2015). Similarly, in some studies conducted in the EU region, data on Turkey are not included in the studies. (Bryson and White, 2016a; van der Meer, 2019; Humborstad, 2014). In the study of Blanchflower et al. (2021), Turkey is included in 38 European region countries, however, country-based results are not included in the study.

Although it is not clear whether it covers the data of the northern region of the island (TRNC), it seems that Cyprus is included in some studies (Blanchflower et al., 2021; Humborstad, 2014; Hipp and Givan, 2015). In two of these studies, results for Cyprus are not reported (Blanchflower et al., 2021; Humborstad, 2014). In another study, it is stated that there is a positive relationship between the density of unionization in Cyprus and the material aspects of job satisfaction (income, promotion opportunity, and job security). In the aforementioned study, although it was determined that the density of unionization had a positive effect on overall job satisfaction and also on the level of satisfaction with the context of the job, these findings were not statistically significant (Hipp and Givan, 2015).

3.2. Findings on other countries and regions

Table-1 provides summary information about thirty-five studies evaluated within the scope of this review. When the findings on the effects of unions on job satisfaction are summarized in terms of their statistical significance and the direction of the effect, it is seen that no significant effect/difference was detected in fourteen of the fifty results obtained. However, fourteen positive effects/differences and twenty-two negative effects/differences were detected.

Table-1: Characteristics of publications in the literature

Characteristics	N	Characteristics	N
Years		Country / Region*	
1983-1992	4	EU	4
1993-2002	7	USA	12
2003-2012	9	Australia	1
2013-2021	15	Bangladesh	1
		Great Britain	10
Background			
Voice hypotheses	20	China	1
Reverse causality hypotheses	15	France	1
		Japan	1
Conclusion			
There is a positive effect/difference	14	Canada	4
There is a negative effect/difference	22	Korea	2
There is no significant effect/difference	14	OECD	2

* *Studies that were compared at the international level were scored together.*

When we look at the studies that found a positive relationship/difference between union variables and overall job satisfaction and/or certain aspects of job satisfaction, it is seen that the following three predictive variables were determined; a) 'union membership', b) 'union density' and c) 'whether a collective labor agreement has been made' (Blanchflower et al., 2021; Hipp and Givan, 2015; Humborstad, 2014; Pohler et al., 2014; Krieg et al., 2004; Addison and Belfield, 2004; Meng, 1990; Evans and Ondrack, 1990; Berger et al., 1983).

In other studies based on reverse causality assumptions, it is seen that the analyzes are deepened by the use of 'instrumental variable' and the consideration of 'fixed effect' elements in the panel data. In van der Meer's (2019) study, a positive effect was detected in the UK and Ireland, while no significant effect was detected in Continental Europe. According to Bryson and White (2016a), membership has a positive effect on wage satisfaction if the employee moves to a job within the scope of a union. In his research, which classified the employees as non-members under union guarantee and as 'free-rider' employees, Powdthavee (2011) found that membership had a positive effect on job satisfaction in the first years of unionization. This situation was defined by Powdthavee (2011) as the 'anticipation effect'. However, if the employee's union experience

increases, the statistically significant effect disappears. This situation was defined as the 'adaptation effect' by the same researcher. When Artz (2010) distinguished employees with and without union experience from all non-union employees, he found that union membership has a positive effect on satisfaction. However, as union membership experience increases, this effect turns negative. Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1990) used the industry factor as an instrument variable in their study and found that unionization had a positive effect on the satisfaction of those who were members of craft unions. Unionization does not have a significant effect on the job satisfaction of those who are members of industrial unions.

Considering the studies that found a negative relationship/difference between union variables and overall job satisfaction and/or certain aspects of job satisfaction, it is seen that the following four predictive variables were determined; a) 'union membership', b) 'union density', c) 'whether the union exists in the workplace' and d) 'whether a collective labor agreement has been made' (Blanchflower et al., 2021; Hipp and Givan, 2015; Haile et al., 2015; Krieg et al., 2013; Seago et al., 2011; Clark, 2005; Renaud, 2002; Kleiner and Lee, 1997; Hovekamp, 1995; Khaleque, 1993; Meng, 1990; Berger et al., 1983).

In other studies that found negative effects/differences under reverse causality assumptions, individual, profession, workplace, and country-specific characteristics (fixed effects) that are thought to have an impact on the decision to join a union were taken into account (Bryson and Davies, 2019; Laroche, 2017; Bryson and White, 2016b; Green and Heywood, 2015; Artz, 2012; Artz, 2010; Heywood et al., 2002). Among these studies, Bryson and White (2016b) found that leaving a job within the scope of a union has a negative relationship with satisfaction in terms of a wage increase. At the same time, researchers note that switching to a unionized job also lowers job security satisfaction because of the cost of re-employment.

Similarly, in some of the studies in which negative effect was detected, it is seen that the 'instrumental variable' was used. In the study of Gius (2012), it was found that the general level of job satisfaction in states subject to 'right-to-work law' in the USA is higher than in unionized regions. In another study in which the industrial relations climate, the attitude of the employee and the employer towards the union were determined as the instrumental variable, it was found that although union membership had a negative effect on job satisfaction, this effect disappeared when the perception of industrial relations climate was controlled (Bender and Sloane, 1998).

As indicated in Table-1, there are also studies indicating that union variables do not have any significant effect on general job satisfaction and/or certain aspects of job satisfaction (Nawakitphaitoon and Zhang, 2020; Holland et al., 2011; Kim and Kim, 2004; Renaud, 2002; Lincoln and Boothe, 1993; Evans and Ondrack, 1990; Brajcich et al., 2021; Bessa et al., 2021; van der Meer, 2019; Laroche, 2017; Green and Heywood, 2015; Powdthavee, 2011; Bender and Sloane, 1998; Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990). Renaud (2002) was found that union membership has a positive effect on wage satisfaction. Renaud (2002) also highlighted that this significant effect is lost in Canada when working conditions at the workplace are taken into account. In their study in which the data of the USA and Japan were compared, Lincoln and Boothe (1993) found that union membership did not have a significant effect in the case of Japan. Evans and Ondrack (1990) determined that union membership had a positive effect on wage satisfaction. However, they stated that this effect disappeared statistically when the complexity of the job was controlled. In their study, Brajcich et al. (2021) determined the rate of unionization in the public sector as an instrumental variable and found that the presence of the union in the workplace had no effect on job satisfaction. Bessa et al. (2021) found that working conditions have an impact on job satisfaction rather than the intensified union campaign during the negotiation process. Laroche (2017) found that in labor relations systems where collective labor agreements are made at the national level, job satisfaction differences between union members and non-union members disappear. In their study, Green and Heywood (2015) found that the negative effect of the union disappeared when ‘free-rider’ employees and non-union employees under union guarantee (provided that they paid union dues) were excluded from the equation.

4. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The literature on the persistence of the paradox of the effects of unions on job satisfaction is in line with the findings of the study. In some analyses deepened by the ‘fixed effect’ and ‘instrumental variable’ approaches in the literature, it is seen that the negative effects of unions on job satisfaction are not statistically significant. In some studies, significant findings were found for both positive and negative effects. This makes it necessary to address the predictive variable with measurement tools that better comprehend the labor relations system to be observed.

So, how else can one test whether unions have an impact on job satisfaction in a structurally unique labor relations system?

Considering the organizational objectives of the unions, it is more reasonable to expect that they will have a positive effect on the job satisfaction of the employees (Bryson and Davies, 2019; Powdthavee, 2011; Hipp and Givan, 2015; Seago et al., 2011). However, according to the statements of Freeman and Medoff (1984), union members try to turn the process in their favor by expressing their '*actually insincere*' dissatisfaction with the employer during the negotiation process. and/or unions can strategically fuel these attitudes of the employees with the same motive. On the other hand, unions can strategically fuel these attitudes of employees with the same motivation. It is known that these statements of Freeman and Medoff are specific to 'closed-shops', where benefiting from union gains depends on membership status.

In a labor relations system in which the benefit from union gains is 'public goods' regardless of the employee's membership status, the membership status, or the density of unionization would not be expected to affect job satisfaction (Laroche, 2016). However, according to the statements of Bryson and Davies (2019), the unionization rate is an important factor that determines the bargaining power of unions, and the possibilities and abilities of unions in voicing employees' work-related concerns. As a matter of fact, can the unionization rate, which has been considered as a predictive variable in some studies in the literature, be a criterion that can be accepted alone as the determinant of the effectiveness-performance of the unions in the system in which they exist? To answer this question, it is necessary to consider other features of the labor relations system to be researched.

As an example, in TRNC, it is known that without compromising their rights (such as union representation and collective talks), there are limitations in the local legislation on the basic rights (such as collective bargaining and strikes) of civil servants in the public sector. At the same time, in the TRNC example, union gains are common benefits provided to all civil servants in the public sector, regardless of membership status. However, this situation may not be unique to the TRNC in some aspects. As Laroche (2016) stated, although France has the relatively lowest unionization rate (less than 8%) among industrialized countries since the 1970s, it is an extreme example with the rate of employees (more than 95%) covered by collective agreement.

As seen in the studies of Green and Heywood (2015) and also Powdthavee (2011) if the problem of the 'free-rider' employee benefiting as a public goods is taken into account, it is known that the effect can turn positive, even in a certain conjuncture, when the statistical significance of

the dominant empirical evidence is lost or vice versa. This evidence shows that membership status is not the main determinant. Gius (2012), on the other hand, emphasized this situation as a problem by referring to the fact that most studies in the literature have determined membership status as a predictive variable. According to Gius (2012), the ‘right-to-work law’ valid in some states of the USA has a significant positive effect on teachers' job satisfaction. Therefore, the fact that the ‘state-level right-to-work law’, which was determined as the ‘instrumental variable’ in the research in question, was considered rather than the membership status, is an emphasis on better understanding the nature of the labor relations system in determining the predictive variable. As a matter of fact, this evidence in the literature requires a more cautious approach to the issue.

On the other hand, it is known that in the studies of researchers such as Kochan and Helfman (1981) and Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1990), the positive effects of these variables on job satisfaction have been proven by using measurement tools such as ‘Union Performance’ and ‘Union Effectiveness in Increasing Employee's Control Over the Work’. However, this evidence is only the result of observations involving union members.

In their study, Kochan and Helfman (1981) found a strong and positive relationship between union performance and job satisfaction of union members and stated that these findings overlap with some of the results in the literature (*cited in Gordon et al. (1980) on p.44*). Kochan and Helfman (1981) emphasized that rather than discussing the causality aspect of this relationship, it would be more beneficial to evaluate it in terms of finding that the union, together with the workplace management, affects the job satisfaction of the employees. In conclusion, Kochan and Helfman (1981) have argued that assuming an ‘average’ union effect on job outcomes can be highly misleading and understanding these effects may indicate a more important phenomenon than anticipated.

According to Pfeffer and Davis-Blake (1990), unions affect job satisfaction positively by being effective in increasing the control of the employee over the work. In the same study, consistent with the literature, it was determined that membership status did not have a significant effect on job satisfaction. The researchers stated that this finding was inconsistent with the positive effect of unionization (in terms of its effectiveness in increasing the employee's control over the job) on job satisfaction. Therefore, by emphasizing the ‘reverse causality’ assumptions that suggest

that unionization is not a random event, they emphasized that unions may have characteristics that can change their job characteristics and work environment.

In their study, in which they examined the effects of 'union voice' and 'direct voice' channels on overall job satisfaction, Holland et al. (2011) hypothesized that employees' having the opportunity to give feedback to workplace management through unions might have a negative effect on job satisfaction. However, they did not determine a statistically significant relationship. Holland et al. (2011) attributed this to the fact that they evaluated this situation through the variable of 'union voice' (in the context of the existence of a union in the workplace) and emphasized that it is possible to solve this '*measurement problem*' with the measurement of union effectiveness perceived by the employees. According to Holland et al. (2011), union effectiveness is likely to directly predict job satisfaction.

When the components of the 'Labor Union Social Responsibility' variable in the study of Dawkins (2016) are examined, it is seen that the unions have a very similar structure with their effectiveness functions. In summary, 'Labor Union Social Responsibility' is framed with functions such as improving the living standards and job security of employees in the 'economy' dimension, finding positive solutions to work-related problems, and ensuring the continuity of occupational health standards in the 'workplace' dimension, reducing discrimination in the workplace and being the spokesperson for disadvantaged people in the 'social' dimension. In addition, it is an important factor in the commitment of the employees to the union and has an effect on improving the extrinsic aspects of job satisfaction.

In conclusion; rather than determining the variables, which are frequently used as predictive variables in the literature in investigating the effect of unions on job satisfaction, and summarized as 'union variables' in this study from a narrow framework (usually at a dichotomous level, for example, in determining membership status, the existence of a union in the workplace, or the existence of a collective bargaining mechanism in the workplace), the adaptation of union effectiveness-performance scales to the culture to be researched or the development of a new union effectiveness-performance scale specific to the work culture in question are suggested by emulating some studies in the literature (Kochan and Helfman, 1981; Pfeffer and Davis-Blake, 1990; Holland et al., 2011; Dawkins, 2016).

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