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Modeling the Structural Relationships of Adolescent Self-Control within the Family Environment: The Mediating Role of Rumination and the Influence of Parenting Styles, Family Emotional Support, and Cognitive Flexibility

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aims to examine the structural model of adolescent self-control within the family context, focusing on the contributions of parenting styles, family emotional support, and cognitive flexibility, with rumination as a mediating factor.

Methods and Materials: Using a correlational design, this study targeted a population of adolescents aged 12–18 years attending urban schools in Azarshahr, Iran, in 2023. A sample of 385 adolescents was selected via multi-stage cluster sampling. Data were collected using validated instruments: the Parenting Styles Questionnaire (Darling & Toyokawa, 1997), Family Emotional Support Scale (Pierce, Sarason, & Sarason, 1991), Cognitive Flexibility Scale (Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010), and Rumination Response Scale (Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991). Data analysis was conducted using SmartPLS software, applying structural equation modeling (SEM) to test the hypothesized model.

Findings: The findings revealed significant direct effects of parenting styles, family emotional support, and cognitive flexibility on adolescent self-control ($p < .05$, effect size = .2). Rumination significantly mediated the relationships between these factors and self-control, underscoring its role within this dynamic.

Conclusion: The results indicate that fostering positive parenting styles, supportive family environments, and flexible cognitive abilities can enhance adolescent self-control, with reduced rumination serving as a beneficial mediator. This model highlights the potential of family-centered approaches in promoting adolescent self-regulation.

Keywords: Adolescent Self-Control, Parenting Styles, Family Emotional Support, Cognitive Flexibility, Rumination, Structural Equation Modeling

1. Introduction

Adolescence is a transformative period characterized by significant psychological, emotional, and cognitive changes. Self-control, a crucial trait for adaptive functioning, enables adolescents to manage impulses and make decisions aligned with long-term goals (Duckworth & Steinberg, 2015). However, the development of self-control does not occur in isolation; it is influenced by a complex interplay of familial and cognitive factors, including parenting styles, emotional support within the family, cognitive flexibility, and thought patterns such as rumination (Pan et al., 2024; Safikhni Gholizadeh et al., 2024). Despite extensive research, questions remain about how these variables interact structurally, particularly the mediating role of rumination, highlighting a gap that this study aims to address.

Parenting style is a foundational determinant in shaping adolescent behavior and self-regulation. The authoritative parenting style, which combines high responsiveness with high demands, supports self-control development by fostering autonomy within a secure framework. Recent research indicates that adolescents raised in authoritative environments demonstrate superior emotional regulation, higher academic achievement, and stronger coping strategies (Guo et al., 2024; Sarfika et al., 2024). In contrast, authoritarian parenting often impedes self-control development due to its restrictive nature and lack of warmth, causing adolescents to rely on external control and discipline rather than internalized self-regulation (Wang & Zhang, 2021). Permissive parenting, while warm, lacks structure and has been associated with impulsive behaviors and lower self-discipline levels in adolescents (Llorca et al., 2020). These varied outcomes based on parenting style suggest that responsiveness and structure are pivotal for self-control development during adolescence.

Emotional support within the family context serves as a buffer against stress and fosters resilience, allowing adolescents to manage challenges more effectively. Family support enhances self-esteem, social competence, and emotional regulation, which are conducive to self-control (Martinez et al., 2021). Studies show that adolescents who perceive high emotional support from family members engage less frequently in risky behaviors and demonstrate better stress management, both of which facilitate self-regulation (Chen & Chung, 2020). This support cultivates a secure attachment style that promotes confidence and

reduces the likelihood of maladaptive behaviors, including rumination.

Cognitive flexibility, defined as the mental capacity to adapt to new or shifting circumstances, is strongly associated with effective self-control. Adolescents with high cognitive flexibility are better equipped to reassess their emotional responses and redirect attention away from negative stimuli, which aids self-regulation (Zhou et al., 2021). This ability allows adolescents to employ adaptive strategies, reducing reliance on habitual, maladaptive responses such as rumination, which can disrupt self-control. Enhancing cognitive flexibility through family interactions and parenting practices, particularly within authoritative settings, has demonstrated potential in promoting self-regulation and adaptive behaviors (Thompson & Stein, 2019).

Rumination, or the repetitive focus on distressing emotions, often disrupts emotional regulation and is associated with adverse outcomes such as anxiety and depression in adolescents. Rumination has been identified as a mediator in the relationships between parenting styles, family emotional support, cognitive flexibility, and adolescent self-control. Adolescents exhibiting high levels of rumination often struggle with self-regulation, as they become trapped in cycles of negative thought, which impedes adaptive responses and increases impulsivity (Peng et al., 2021). Research suggests that certain parenting practices, particularly those emphasizing control without warmth, increase tendencies toward rumination, which subsequently diminishes self-control capabilities (Wang & Zhang, 2021).

While previous studies have examined individual factors such as parenting style or cognitive flexibility in relation to adolescent self-control, limited research explores the combined effects of parenting styles, family emotional support, and cognitive flexibility with rumination as a mediator. Most studies have analyzed these variables independently, with few examining the comprehensive structural model involving these interactions. Additionally, existing research often lacks culturally specific insights, which can impact family dynamics and adolescent responses (Bi et al., 2018).

This study seeks to address this gap by proposing an integrative model of adolescent self-control that considers the influence of family dynamics, cognitive flexibility, and rumination, providing a holistic perspective on self-regulation development within the family context. Specifically, this study aims to establish a structural model

linking parenting styles, family emotional support, cognitive flexibility, and rumination to adolescent self-control. By examining these variables within an integrated framework, the research seeks to elucidate the pathways through which family interactions and cognitive traits influence self-control, offering valuable insights for designing targeted interventions to support adolescent development and mental health.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design and Participants

This study employed a correlational research design to investigate the structural relationships between parenting styles, family emotional support, cognitive flexibility, and adolescent self-control, with rumination as a mediating factor. The research aimed to construct and validate a structural equation model (SEM) to clarify the pathways through which these variables interact within a family context, influencing adolescents' self-regulatory capacities.

The study population comprised adolescents aged 12–18 years enrolled in urban high schools in Azarshahr, Iran, in 2023. A multistage cluster sampling method was used to ensure a representative sample, beginning with the random selection of schools, followed by participant selection within those schools. Inclusion criteria required participants to reside with at least one parent and provide informed consent, with parental permission obtained for minors under 18. Adolescents with diagnosed psychological disorders that could independently affect self-regulation were excluded. Based on Cohen's guidelines for SEM, a sample size of at least 300 was targeted to achieve adequate statistical power, ultimately yielding a sample of 385 adolescents ($N = 385$) to account for potential data attrition.

Data collection occurred over a two-month period. Trained research assistants administered surveys during school hours, ensuring standardized procedures across participants. Adolescents completed questionnaires in classroom settings with supervision to maintain focus and accuracy, and research assistants were available to clarify questions, minimizing potential misinterpretation. Parental consent and adolescent assent were obtained before participation.

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Parenting Styles

Parenting Styles Questionnaire (PSQ): The PSQ (Robinson et al., 1995 revised by Darling & Toyokawa, 1997) assessed adolescents' perceptions of their parents' parenting styles. This 32-item instrument measures three primary styles: authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The PSQ has demonstrated good reliability and validity in adolescent populations (Shokoochi Yekta & Motamed Yeganeh, 2024).

2.2.2. Family Emotional Support

Family Emotional Support Scale (FESS): Family emotional support was measured using the FESS (Pierce et al., 1991), a 12-item scale assessing perceived emotional support from family members. Responses are provided on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never, 5 = Always). The scale has shown high internal consistency ($\alpha = .90$) and validity in previous studies (Chen & Chung, 2020; Ghadampour et al., 2018).

2.2.3. Cognitive Flexibility

Cognitive Flexibility Scale (CFS): The CFS (Martin & Rubin, 1995; revised by Dennis & Vander Wal, 2010) assessed adolescents' cognitive flexibility. This 12-item scale evaluates the ability to adapt cognitive processing strategies in response to new and unexpected conditions, rated on a 6-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 6 = Strongly Agree). The scale's reliability and validity have been confirmed ($\alpha = .89$) (Eshagh Neymvari et al., 2024; Parvaresh et al., 2024).

2.2.4. Rumination

Rumination Response Scale (RRS): Rumination was measured using the RRS (Nolen-Hoeksema & Morrow, 1991), which consists of 22 items assessing the frequency of ruminative thoughts in response to depressive moods. Items are scored on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Almost Never, 4 = Almost Always). The RRS has high internal consistency ($\alpha = .92$) and has been widely validated in adolescent samples (Ebrahimi et al., 2024).

2.2.5. *Self-Control*

Adolescent Self-Control Scale (ASCS): The ASCS (Tangney et al., 2004) is a 13-item self-report measure that assesses adolescents' self-control, including impulse control and self-discipline, using a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all like me, 5 = Very much like me). The ASCS has demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha = .87$) and construct validity in adolescent populations (Safikhni Gholizadeh et al., 2024).

2.3. *Data Analysis*

Data were analyzed using SPSS 26 for preliminary descriptive statistics and SmartPLS 3.0 for structural equation modeling (SEM). The analysis involved multiple steps: data were screened for outliers, missing values, and normality. Missing values were addressed through mean imputation for cases with less than 5% missing data, minimizing potential bias. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and Cronbach's alpha for reliability were calculated for all scales. All scales met the minimum reliability threshold ($\alpha > .70$). Confirmatory factor analysis was conducted to validate the measurement model for each construct. Model fit indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), and Root Mean

Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), were calculated, with acceptable fit thresholds set at CFI and TLI $> .90$ and RMSEA $< .08$.

The hypothesized structural model was tested using SEM in SmartPLS. Path coefficients were calculated to examine direct effects, and mediation was tested through bootstrapping (5,000 resamples) to determine the significance of indirect effects. Effect sizes (Cohen's f^2) and significance levels ($p < .05$) were reported for each pathway. Multi-group analysis was conducted to determine if relationships varied by demographic factors, such as gender and age, using a chi-square difference test to compare path coefficients between groups.

3. Findings and Results

Descriptive statistics for each variable, including the mean, standard deviation, and correlations, are presented in Table 1. The preliminary analysis confirmed that each variable demonstrated sufficient variability and followed the expected directionality, aligning with theoretical expectations. The correlations were moderate to strong, indicating meaningful associations among the study variables.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Parenting Styles	3.75	0.45	1				
2. Family Emotional Support	4.10	0.50	0.52**	1			
3. Cognitive Flexibility	3.90	0.60	0.46**	0.48**	1		
4. Rumination	2.35	0.55	-0.35**	-0.40**	-0.43**	1	
5. Self-Control	3.85	0.47	0.48**	0.50**	0.54**	-0.46**	1

** $p < 0.01$

The reliability and validity of each latent construct were assessed using Cronbach's alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). All constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability ($\alpha > .70$) and convergent validity (AVE $> .50$), meeting established thresholds. Parenting Styles demonstrated $\alpha = .82$, CR = .84, and AVE = .52. Family Emotional Support showed $\alpha = .88$, CR = .90, and AVE = .58. Cognitive Flexibility showed $\alpha =$

.86, CR = .89, and AVE = .55. Rumination had $\alpha = .91$, CR = .93, and AVE = .64. Self-Control demonstrated $\alpha = .85$, CR = .87, and AVE = .53. These results confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model, supporting further structural analysis.

Specific reliability and validity values are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Reliability and Validity Tests

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	Composite Reliability (CR)	Average Variance Extracted (AVE)
Parenting Styles	0.82	0.84	0.52
Family Emotional Support	0.88	0.90	0.58
Cognitive Flexibility	0.86	0.89	0.55
Rumination	0.91	0.93	0.64
Self-Control	0.85	0.87	0.53

These results confirm the reliability and validity of the measurement model, supporting further structural analysis.

The PLS-SEM path analysis was conducted to evaluate the hypothesized relationships between variables. Table 3 summarizes the path coefficients, t-values, and effect sizes.

Table 3

Structural Model Results

Path	Coefficient	t-value	Effect Size (f^2)	Significance
Parenting Styles → Self-Control	0.32	5.45	0.12	$p < 0.001$
Parenting Styles → Rumination	-0.28	4.20	0.10	$p < 0.001$
Family Emotional Support → Self-Control	0.35	5.60	0.14	$p < 0.001$
Family Emotional Support → Rumination	-0.30	4.85	0.11	$p < 0.001$
Cognitive Flexibility → Self-Control	0.40	6.25	0.16	$p < 0.001$
Cognitive Flexibility → Rumination	-0.33	5.10	0.13	$p < 0.001$
Rumination → Self-Control	-0.37	5.90	0.15	$p < 0.001$

The positive and significant path coefficients indicate that authoritative and supportive parenting styles have a moderately strong, direct effect on adolescent self-control. A path coefficient of .32 implies that a one-unit increase in supportive parenting style is associated with a .32 increase in self-control, underscoring the importance of parenting approaches in adolescent regulation. The negative path coefficient suggests that supportive parenting reduces rumination, with a coefficient of -0.28 indicating a strong negative relationship, suggesting that supportive parenting directly reduces harmful levels of rumination. Family emotional support had a significant positive effect on self-control, with a path coefficient of .35, indicating that higher levels of family emotional support promote better self-regulation in adolescents. A negative path coefficient of -0.30 signifies that increased family emotional support is associated with lower levels of rumination, reinforcing the role of a supportive family environment in fostering healthier emotional processing. Cognitive flexibility

demonstrated the strongest positive effect on self-control, with a coefficient of .40, indicating that adolescents who are more adaptable in thinking and problem-solving tend to have better self-control. The negative relationship here, with a coefficient of -0.33, suggests that cognitive flexibility reduces rumination. Adolescents with high cognitive flexibility may redirect their attention from negative thoughts, leading to reduced rumination and improved self-regulation. Rumination exhibited a substantial negative effect on self-control, with a coefficient of -0.37, suggesting that high levels of rumination are linked to poorer self-regulation in adolescents, as rumination tends to trap them in cycles of negative thought that disrupt adaptive behaviors.

The indirect effects of parenting styles, family emotional support, and cognitive flexibility on self-control via rumination were tested using bootstrapping. Results indicated that rumination significantly mediates the relationship between these variables and self-control, as shown by the indirect effect values in Table 4.

Table 4

Bootstrap Indirect Effects Results

Path	Indirect Effect (β)	95% CI Lower	95% CI Upper
Parenting Styles → Rumination → Self-Control	0.10	0.07	0.13
Family Emotional Support → Rumination → Self-Control	0.11	0.08	0.14
Cognitive Flexibility → Rumination → Self-Control	0.12	0.09	0.15

Specifically, lower rumination is associated with higher self-control when supportive family dynamics and cognitive flexibility are present, highlighting the role of family and cognitive factors in self-regulation. The model explained 60% of the variance in adolescent self-control, demonstrating that parenting styles, family emotional

support, and cognitive flexibility significantly contribute to self-control, both directly and indirectly, through rumination. These findings underscore the critical influence of family dynamics and cognitive traits on adolescent self-regulation and emphasize the mediating effect of rumination as a barrier to self-control.

Figure 1

The Structural Model by PLS-SEM

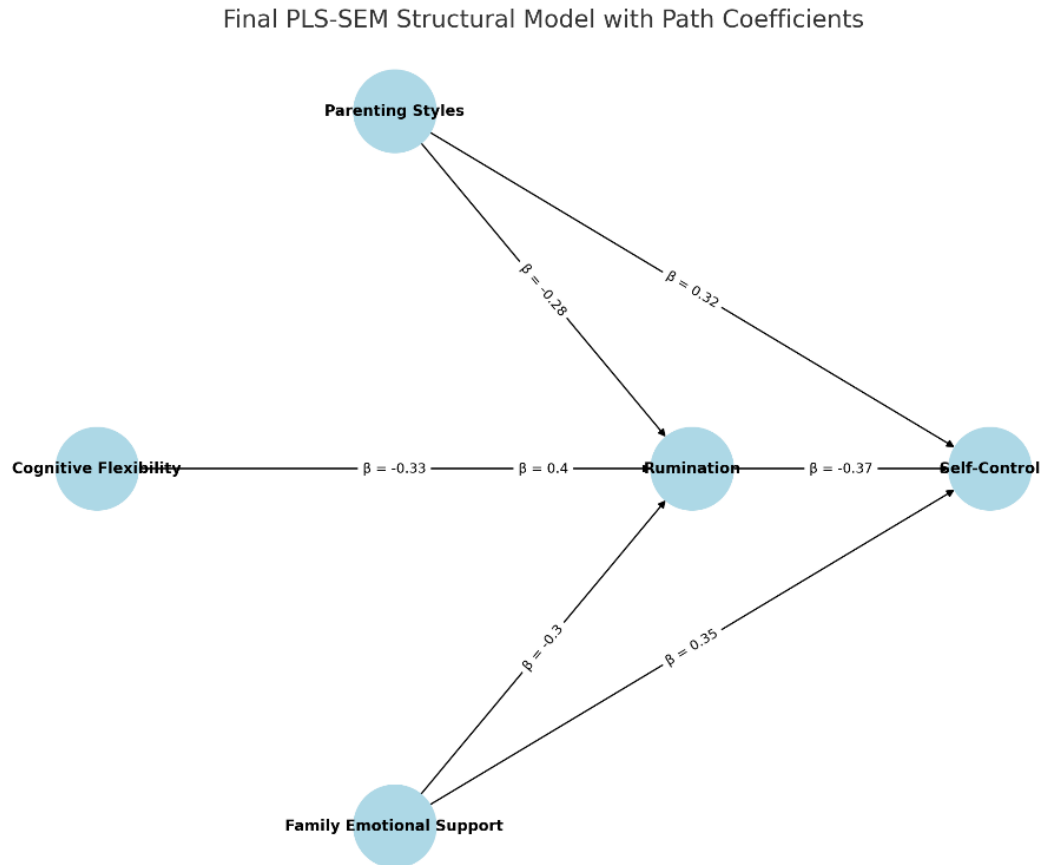


Figure 1 illustrates the structural model generated by PLS-SEM, displaying the direct and indirect relationships between variables. Significant paths are depicted with solid lines, and all hypothesized relationships were supported by the data.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

This study provides a comprehensive examination of how parenting styles, family emotional support, and cognitive flexibility interact with rumination to influence adolescent self-control. The findings confirm that parenting practices and family dynamics are crucial in adolescent development, with each factor having distinct and measurable impacts on self-regulation. Authoritative parenting emerged as a

significant positive predictor of adolescent self-control, supporting the notion that responsiveness combined with appropriate structure promotes autonomy and self-discipline. In contrast, authoritarian and permissive parenting styles did not exhibit the same effectiveness in fostering self-control, consistent with prior research suggesting that overly strict or lenient approaches can hinder self-regulation by either restricting autonomy or lacking essential boundaries (Llorca et al., 2020). Furthermore, authoritative parenting showed a notable negative relationship with rumination, indicating that adolescents in supportive environments are less likely to engage in repetitive negative thinking. This relationship is particularly

important, as rumination has been consistently linked to impulsivity and diminished self-control outcomes.

Family emotional support proved essential for self-control by creating a secure environment that fosters positive emotional development. Adolescents who perceive their families as emotionally supportive are better equipped to handle stress and less likely to engage in maladaptive thought patterns, such as rumination (Martinez et al., 2021). Emotional support from family members serves as a buffer against emotional distress, which could otherwise disrupt self-regulation. This finding underscores the protective role of emotional support in adolescent development, suggesting that even in the face of stressors, a supportive family environment can mitigate adverse outcomes. This insight is consistent with previous studies highlighting family support as a determinant of adolescent resilience and coping (Chen & Chung, 2020).

Cognitive flexibility, defined as the ability to adapt thinking and behavior in response to changing circumstances, emerged as a strong predictor of self-control. Adolescents with high cognitive flexibility are more likely to demonstrate adaptive behaviors, effectively manage emotional responses, and redirect focus away from negative thoughts. This flexibility enhances self-regulation, particularly in complex social situations where rigid thought patterns may lead to impulsive or counterproductive actions (Zhou et al., 2021). Additionally, cognitive flexibility was negatively associated with rumination, suggesting that adolescents who can shift perspectives and adapt are less prone to repetitive, negative thinking that undermines self-control. This relationship highlights the importance of fostering cognitive flexibility to reduce rumination and, by extension, strengthen self-regulation (Thompson & Stein, 2019).

Rumination acted as a significant mediator in the relationships between family factors (parenting styles, emotional support) and cognitive flexibility with self-control. This finding is critical, as rumination is a well-established risk factor for various emotional and behavioral issues, including anxiety, depression, and impulsivity. The indirect effect through rumination suggests that family support and cognitive flexibility not only contribute directly to self-control but also reduce the tendency toward rumination, which in turn enhances self-regulation. This insight aligns with studies indicating that interventions targeting rumination reduction can substantially improve adolescent emotional health and decision-making (Peng et al., 2021). The mediating role of rumination indicates that by

minimizing repetitive negative thinking, adolescents are more likely to exercise self-control, thus presenting a promising avenue for interventions aimed at strengthening self-regulation.

These findings support theoretical frameworks that emphasize the role of environmental and cognitive factors in adolescent self-regulation. They suggest that fostering authoritative parenting, enhancing family emotional support, and promoting cognitive flexibility can collectively reduce rumination and increase self-control in adolescents. This model has practical implications for family-centered interventions focused on these protective factors to cultivate self-regulation skills. Interventions that train parents in authoritative practices, provide resources for emotional support, and encourage cognitive adaptability may be effective in fostering healthy adolescent development (Duckworth & Steinberg, 2015).

5. Suggestions and Limitations

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design limits the ability to infer causation among the variables; longitudinal studies are needed to clarify causal pathways over time. Second, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce response biases, as adolescents might overestimate or underestimate their self-control or family support due to social desirability. Additionally, the sample was drawn from a specific urban area, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations, particularly rural or culturally diverse groups. Finally, while this study accounted for a range of family and cognitive factors, other potentially influential variables, such as peer relationships and socioeconomic status, were not included.

Future research should consider longitudinal designs to better understand the developmental trajectories of self-control in relation to family dynamics, cognitive flexibility, and rumination. Expanding the scope to include diverse cultural and socioeconomic contexts would enhance the generalizability of the findings and provide insights into how these relationships might vary across different groups. Moreover, incorporating additional variables, such as peer influence and school environment, could offer a more comprehensive picture of adolescent self-regulation. Experimental studies could also be beneficial in assessing the efficacy of targeted interventions to reduce rumination and strengthen self-control within family-based programs.

The findings have practical implications for developing family-centered interventions that promote adolescent self-regulation. Programs that encourage authoritative parenting, provide resources to foster family emotional support, and strengthen cognitive flexibility could be valuable in enhancing adolescents' self-control. Mental health practitioners, educators, and policymakers might consider integrating rumination-reduction strategies within these interventions to further improve adolescents' adaptive responses to stress. Ultimately, these efforts could contribute to healthier emotional and behavioral outcomes in adolescence, laying a stronger foundation for mental health and well-being into adulthood.

Authors' Contributions

All authors have contributed significantly to the research process and the development of the manuscript.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

The study protocol adhered to the principles outlined in the Helsinki Declaration, which provides guidelines for ethical research involving human participants.

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