

Portrayal of a Closeted Gay in Love, Simon Movie

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ABSTRACT

The study applied Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory to analyze the experiences of Simon Spier, the closeted gay protagonist of the 2018 film "Love, Simon." Using the concepts of the id, ego, and superego, Simon's internal struggles and external challenges related to his sexual identity, highlighting his fear of being outed, internal conflicts about coming out, and journey towards self-acceptance were examined. The research found that Simon's portrayal can positively influence viewers' attitudes towards LGBTQIAP+ individuals by showcasing the complexities of a closeted gay teenager's life. The study underscored the importance of media in shaping societal perceptions and promoting tolerance, suggesting future research could examine other characters and sexual identities in the novel to understand their impact on readers' views.

INTRODUCTION

The 2018 film, *Love, Simon*, based on the teen gay romance novel *Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda* by Becky Albertalli, made headlines for being the first mainstream, commercially successful teen romance film starring a gay character (Lodge, 2018). The film is especially notable for being a queer youth film with an emphasis on liberal ideas of inclusion and tolerance, arguably meant to normalize queerness instead of disrupting heteronormativity and cisnormativity (Greensmith and King, 2022). Both the film and book focus on a closeted high school student, Simon Spier, played by Nick Robinson. The main storyline explores Simon's coming out and romantic feelings for a gay peer at his high school named Blue who he exchanges anonymous emails with. The film explores how modern societal constructions of gay adolescence intersect with themes of self-understanding, authenticity, and coming of age.

Using the concepts formulated by Sigmund Freud, the researchers aim to find the portrayal of a closeted gay present in "Love, Simon" (2018). Simon Spier, protagonist in *Love, Simon*, struggles to express his true sexual identity, as he knows to himself that he is gay.

In this study "Portrayal of a Closeted Gay in Love, Simon Movie," the researchers examine the depiction of a closeted gay in "Love, Simon" (2018) through a psychoanalytical lens, focusing on how the protagonist, Simon Spier, navigates internal and external conflicts related to coming out. By applying Freud's concepts of the id, ego, and superego, this analysis explores the psychological mechanisms at play and evaluates the media's influence in shaping perceptions of LGBTQIAP+ individuals, ultimately highlighting the power of storytelling in fostering understanding and acceptance of diverse identities. The researchers aim to analyze the depiction of Simon's experience as a closeted gay teenager in the movie "Love, Simon," exploring how this portrayal influences viewers' perspectives and attitudes towards LGBTQIAP+ individuals and their representation in media. Additionally, the research seeks to examine how the concepts of the id, ego, and superego are represented through Simon Spier's character development, providing a deeper understanding of his internal conflicts and psychological growth within the narrative.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Closeted Gay

In the jargon of contemporary homosexual culture, those who hide their sexual identities are referred to as either closeted or said to be in the closet. Revealing one's homosexuality is referred to as coming out. (Drescher, 2004) Many people hesitate to come out because of the risks of meeting prejudice and discrimination. Some choose to keep their identity a secret, some choose to come out in limited circumstances, some decide to come out in very public ways, American Psychological Association (2008). Furthermore, Jaspal (2021) states that in order to cope with the resulting dangers to identity, some people suppressed their sexual identity. Many people won't get or even understand their identity at first, as we individually navigate through our own feelings and try to comprehend the reason why we behave the way we do and like the people we end up liking; we experience changes towards our sexual attractions over time, reflecting the nonlinear nature of sexual development.

LGBTIAP+ in Media

Despite advancements in the 21st century with regard to portrayals and representations of LGBT youth, “the vast majority of queer youth films remained relatively marginalized within the independent market.”. Johnson (2022) examined how gay characters were depicted on television between 2010 and 2019. She claims that lesbian characters are excluded from the show's primary narratives, and these portrayals might follow both old and new patterns. Furthermore, her data suggest that coming-out narratives have shifted away from the difficulties of being a lesbian and towards topics such as acceptance and love for a gay child. Furthermore, in Drid and Sehailia's (2023) study, they found that Netflix's way of enforcing homosexuality is by portraying their homosexual characters as positive individuals who live a happy natural life and engage in long-term passionate romantic partnerships and presenting them as tough, dedicated persons who battle adversity and repressive conventions, and who hope to encourage others and assist them in accepting who they truly are while remaining proud of themselves.

According to Rudy (2016), discrimination against gay people can be seen in homosexual films since American culture did not fully accept gay people until the 2000s, and as a result, prejudice was commonly voiced against gay males throughout that time. He also noted that LGBT films were successful as a form of entertainment, having distinguishing characteristics that attracted people. That's why many gay-themed films are enjoyable.

Furthermore, Li et al. (2023) add that homosexuals are not portrayed in the same way as heterosexuals, with gays frequently depicted as feminine and lesbians as masculine, obscuring the true characteristics of homosexuals; misconceptions about homosexuality are conveyed through one-dimensional portrayals and socially generated stereotypes. However, examining the topic from a different perspective reveals that, despite its faults, social media has had a positive impact on the identities of homosexual young adults. For example, it has provided them with an open communication platform, allowing them to be more honest about their sexuality while also giving heterosexuals a positive picture of homosexuality.

De Leon and Jintalan (2018) claim that the acceptance of homosexuality in the Philippine context is superficial, with homosexuality tolerated in the media but not accepted in a broader sense of society due to social constructs brought by religion, colonial, and postcolonial mindsets that widely affect how society views homosexuality, affecting its acceptance. Furthermore, they stated that Filipinos find it difficult to accept homosexuality due to colonial and postcolonial ideas associated with religion.

Id, Ego, and Superego

In Jamal and Jaf's (2023) study, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory asserts that the behavior of human beings lies in the unconscious part of the human brain. Freud's theory of the unconscious divides them into three: the id, ego, and superego. The id is where the most assertive part of the human lies, whereas in the superego, there lie the normative moral aspects of humans and society; nonetheless, the ego serves as a middle ground between the id and ego

that balances the two. Similarly, Freud (2006), cited in Tarigan et al. (2022), states that Freud's personality structure consists of three aspects: Id, Ego, and Superego. The id is the biological reservoir, seeking pleasure and avoiding discomfort. The ego balances these demands, controlling mental functions and decision-making. The superego, both conscious and unconscious, is a moral compass, distinguishing between good and bad.

According to Casan (2023), the character development of a homosexual person revolves around three major issues: concealment, disclosure, and acceptance of queerness, emphasizing that coming out as gay is the only appropriate way to embrace queerness, whereas remaining discreet is unsatisfactory and unsettling. Wright (2017) discovered that Filipino homosexual characters had a variety of queer character features, which could be classified as: (a) emotional and sexual involvements; (b) personal preferences; and (c) psychological and behavioral displays. They were seen to have no sexual, emotional, or romantic relationships with the opposite sex, despite their greater commitment to the same sex. Furthermore, they enjoy doing domestic tasks and have no interest in macho activities. They are either secretive and ashamed or loud and proud. In addition, Cuadra's (2023) study states that heteronormative attitudes and assumptions influence Philippine cinema's portrayal of homosexuality, whether it is through individual qualities, interpersonal connections, or sociopolitical settings. Philippine cinema has made significant progress in terms of diversifying gay and lesbian characters and deconstructing gendered tropes in relationships. However, these films continue to highlight the social realities faced by Filipino homosexuals which include discrimination and unequal rights.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study employed a qualitative research approach, specifically focusing on descriptive analysis and drawing from Freud's psychoanalytic theory. The purpose of the descriptive studies is to describe individuals' events, or conditions by studying them as they are in nature. The researcher does not manipulate any of the variables but rather only describes the variables. Descriptive studies look at the characteristics of a population, identify problems that exist within the unit, an organization, or a population or look at variations in characteristics or practices between institutions or even countries. (Siedlecki, 2020) Its primary aim is to explore the depiction of Simon Spier as a closeted gay in the 2018 movie "Love, Simon." The research objectives include understanding characters' conscious and unconscious motivations regarding sexual identity and examining societal implications. The researchers gather interpretations and analyze the film and secondary sources to identify themes and apply Freudian concepts. Ultimately, our study aims to deepen our understanding of LGBTQIAP+ representation in media and its societal impact.

Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is the film "Love, Simon," released in 2018. Directed by Greg Berlanti and based on the novel "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda" by Becky Albertalli, the movie narrates themes of sexual

identity and coming-of-age. Written by Elizabeth Berger and Isaac Aptaker, the film presents a compelling story that lends itself well to psychoanalytical analysis, particularly through Freudian theory. Premiering at the Mardi Gras Film Festival on February 27, 2018, and later distributed by 20th Century Fox in the United States on March 16, 2018, "Love, Simon " movie provides a convenient and accessible source of data for examining the depiction of sexual identity. Its popularity and cultural significance make it an ideal subject for in-depth exploration, offering valuable insights into societal attitudes and perceptions surrounding LGBTQIAP+ representation in media.

Data Collection

The researchers primarily utilize the 2018 movie "Love, Simon," directed by Greg Berlanti. This film, originally adapted from a novel "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda " by Becky Albertalli, provides a rich and accessible source of data for the study. Given the researchers' focus on psychoanalysis, the aim will be to identify and analyze the id, ego, and superego of each character portrayed in the film. The researchers chose to examine this film due to its groundbreaking role as one of the first mainstream Hollywood films to focus on a gay teenage protagonist. Its cultural impact reflects and contributes to changing societal attitudes towards LGBTQIAP+ issues, making it a key subject for examining media influence on public perception and acceptance. Through careful viewing and analysis, the researchers will dissect the personas of the characters, exploring their conscious and unconscious motivations, conflicts, and behaviors. By closely examining the interactions and inner workings of each character, the study seeks to uncover the portrayal of sexual identities in the 2018 movie "Love, Simon."

RESEARCH RESULT

This table presents evidence of Simon’s id which influenced his reactions as depicted in the movie.

Table 1. Manifestation of the Id of Simon Spier

Id
<p>Leah: Have you seen the new post? Simon: No. What? Oh, my God. You know, I'm never getting back in that pool again. Leah: Wait, no. About the closeted gay kid at school. Simon: What?</p>
<p>Simon: Dear Blue, I'm just like you. For the most part, my life is totally normal. My dad was the annoyingly handsome quarterback who married the hot valedictorian. And no, they didn't peak in high school. I have a sister I actually like, not that I'd ever tell her that. Last year and two-hundred episodes of Chopped ago she decided she wanted to be a chef, which means we're all pretty much her test subjects now. And then, there's my friends... Two of them I've known since</p>

<p>pretty much the beginning of time. Or at least kindergarten. One of them I just met a few months ago. But it feels like I've known her forever. We do everything friends do: drink way too much iced coffee, watch bad nineties movies, and hang out at Waffle House dreaming of graduating and moving to a city that doesn't have a Waffle House. And we have each other's backs. Always.</p> <p>So like I said, I'm just like you. I have a totally perfectly normal life. Except I have one huge ass secret.</p>
<p>Simon: Did you print my emails or something?</p>

In the early scene of the movie *Love, Simon*, Leah tells Simon about one of the posts in *Creek Secrets* about the closeted gay in their school. At first, Simon is not interested in knowing it but then replies to Leah with “What” in a worrying tone after hearing that it is about the closeted gay in their school. This scene could be a manifestation of Simon’s id which refers to Simon's reaction which reveals his concern and fear about being outed. Id represents a human’s biological instinct. Freud described id as “pleasure principle” and “primary-process thought,” representing id fulfilling human need immediately in order to relieve the nervous feeling.

The second dialogue is an email that Simon will send to Blue, the email is all about Simon's life with his family and friends. In the email, Simon openly discusses his life, including his relationships with his family and friends, which appear normal and fulfilling on the surface. However, he also reveals his "one huge-ass secret" – his sexual orientation. This could be a manifestation of Simon's id as where it shows his true self and desires.

The third dialogue is about how Simon responds to Martin after knowing that Martin saw all his sent emails to Blue. This scene where Simon replies “Did you print my emails or something?” could be a manifestation of his id where Simon's immediate fear and worry about his private emails can be seen as a reflection of his deepest desires and fears. This reaction is driven by his need to protect his secret about his sexuality, which is a core aspect of his identity.

This table highlights textual evidence showing the portrayal of Simon’s ego which allows him to be conscious of his identity while balancing his id and superego as shown in the movie.

Table 2. Manifestation of the Ego of Simon Spier

Ego
Simon: Anyway, I've been thinking about why I haven't come out yet.
Simon: Abby. Abby: Yeah? Simon: I’m gay.
Simon: But the truth is I was just scared.

Simon's ego manifests when he questions his reality and that he is grappling with the reasons behind his closeted status, indicating that he is having an internal conflict and a desire to understand himself better. This highlights that Simon is struggling with his sexual identity, both consciously and unconsciously. It shows that he is aware of his sexuality but hasn't fully accepted or embraced it publicly, reflecting the fear and uncertainty that often accompany the experience of being closeted.

The second exchange reveals Simon having a consensus with his id and superego, as this reveal sets a significant shift in Simon's ego from fear to bravery. By coming out to Abby, he is asserting his true identity and overcoming his fear of rejection or judgment. This is the moment where Simon acknowledges his true self, as coming out to someone close to him signifies a step towards self-acceptance, despite the potential risks.

The final textual evidence reveals that Simon's ego was in its most vulnerable state, admitting fear as the primary barrier to coming out. It is a moment of underlying fear that has influenced Simon's actions and decisions, where his ego is balancing the desire of the id with the pressure of the superego, admitting that fear has been a significant barrier to his coming out.

The third table presents textual evidence illustrating how Simon's superego influenced his thoughts and interactions.

Table 3. Manifestation of the Superego of Simon Spier

Superego
Simon: Maybe it's because it doesn't seem fair that only gay people have to come out. Why is straight the default?
Simon: Look, Martin, he was the one who wrote that CreekSecret's post about me. He screenshotted my emails and he's been using them to blackmail me for months. Nick: What does that have to do with us, Simon? Simon: He told me if I didn't help him get with Abby, he'd out me. And I... That's why I had to keep you guys apart.
Simon: Look, you don't get to decide that. I'm supposed to be the one that decides when, and where, and how and who knows and how I get to say it. That's supposed to be my thing. And you took that away from me.

In the first dialogue, Simon says the line in a way of feeling frustrated as he stated that announcing your identity should not be explicit, especially that heterosexuality is often assumed as default when it comes to coming out. As Simon being a closeted gay, a feeling of pressure in coming out is hard and it can create a conflict in announcing their true identity and may result in different treatments from other people. Despite the pressure and judgment from the society, coming out can be seen as a way of rebellion from superego in claiming one's actual identity. Simon's dialogue about the unfairness of only gay people

having to come out reflects the internalized societal values and norms that form his superego.

The second conversation with Nick shows Simon explaining that he was being manipulated by Martin and feeling fear if he didn't do the things that Martin wants. Simon resorts to doing something that is against his will to protect himself and needs to keep his friends apart. It illustrated that the pressure and a rollercoaster of emotions makes it accompanied by being a closeted gay. It shows that individuals can go under concealing their own identity due to the fact that they fear of discrimination and the judgment of society that could affect their mental health. Simon's decision to betray his friends is driven by his fear of being discriminated against, left out and judged by his loved ones. It highlights that societal pressure impact can lead the individuals to do actions that are against their own free will. In the second dialogue, Simon reveals his fear and the pressure he felt from Martin's blackmail.

The third textual evidence reflects the struggles of Simon after Martin leaked in Creeksecrets that he was gay. The decision to come out as who you are is deeply personal and represents the superego, especially announcing the true identity facing societal norms and expectations. As Martin leaked everything about Simon, the crucial aspect of self-expression is already taken by someone and creates resentment towards Martin. This line highlights that coming out is a decision you made by yourself that needs to undergo in the process to decide when, where and how to share the truth to your friends, family and society. From the third dialogue, Simon's frustration over losing control of his coming-out represents the superego's influence on his sense of self and autonomy.

The fourth dialogue reflects the fear of judgment and being rejected by the society as Simon questioned himself about announcing to the world and what if they don't like you. Simon expressed an internal conflict about the situation. This could arise from his superego as it conflicts with the social expectations and fear of not meeting it as he is already aware that the society he lives in is not open minded to those who are part of LGBTQIAP+. As Simon is hesitating to express and reveal himself is how the superego works as it leads to fear of society disapproval and may lead to emotional and behavior consequences.

DISCUSSION

Id is the most innate human quality, which represents their physiological desire (Zhang, 2020). In the first table, when Simon says "what" in a worrying tone upon hearing about the closeted gay student at his school, it can be seen as an expression of his identity. This is because the id is responsible for the impulsive aspects of our psyche that respond directly and immediately to basic urges, needs, and desires. In this context, Simon's id is reacting to the fear and anxiety associated with the possibility of his own secret being exposed. His immediate, instinctual response is a manifestation of the id's operation, reflecting an unconscious concern for self-preservation and the avoidance of pain or unpleasantness. The id is not concerned with reality or the consequences of actions; it is driven by the need to satisfy the urges of the moment. Simon's reaction is therefore a direct and visceral response to a perceived threat, aligning with the characteristics of the id as described by Freud's psychoanalytic theory.

From a psychoanalytical perspective, this email exchange represents the concept of the "id." The id, according to Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, is the primitive and instinctual part of the mind that operates based on pleasure-seeking and immediate gratification (Widayati, 2013). The id operates based on the pleasure principle, seeking immediate gratification of desires and wants. Simon's email to Blue reflects his inner struggle. Despite having a seemingly normal life, he harbors a significant secret: his homosexuality. By reaching out to Blue (an anonymous, closeted gay student), Simon seeks connection and understanding. His desire for acceptance and companionship drives him to communicate with Blue. The email exchange serves as an outlet for Simon's hidden desires and emotions, akin to the id seeking gratification. Simon's confession—revealing his "huge ass secret"—is a manifestation of his inner turmoil, which he can't openly express in his everyday life.

When Martin reveals that he has seen Simon's private emails to Blue, Simon's response is defensive and fearful: "Did you print my emails or something?" This reaction aligns with the id—the primal, instinctual part of our psyche. The id operates on pleasure principles, seeking immediate gratification and avoiding pain or exposure (Ramadhan, 2023). Simon's fear stems from the potential exposure of his secret (his sexuality), which is deeply tied to his core identity. The id represents our hidden desires and fears. Simon's fear of exposure reflects his need to protect his secret, which is a fundamental aspect of who he is. His immediate worry about the printed emails highlights the urgency of maintaining this secret. Psychoanalytically, the id drives self-preservation. Simon's fear of exposure triggers a defensive response to safeguard his identity. His reaction is instinctual, bypassing rational thought and emphasizing the primal nature of the id. Simon's dialogue in this scene exemplifies the id's influence—a raw, instinctive response rooted in protecting his core identity and desires.

From the second table, which presents the manifestation of Simon's ego, Surbakti et al. (2024) state that the ego serves as a rational force that negotiates the balance between the id and superego. In the context of the ego, Simon's struggle with his sexual identity shows that he knows that he is gay, albeit not fully accepted or embraced. The pleasure of wanting to come out as gay clashes with the consequences of said coming out, thus resulting in Simon's uncertainty about why he thinks he hasn't come out yet.

In Muhammad's (2024) study, he states that the ego deals with reality, trying to fulfill the id's desires in a socially acceptable manner, resulting in the delay of satisfaction and tension that the id feels about a desire not being fulfilled immediately. Although Simon hasn't publicly announced that he is gay, he started by admitting to Abby that he is gay. By starting to come out to someone he is comfortable with, the tension that the id feels is temporarily alleviated; he took one small step first before actually taking the next step in coming out.

Wardhani and Saptanto (2023) claim that the ego strives to maintain balance between individual desires and reality and to act rationally. Simon's fear got the better of him, causing it to influence his actions. His admission of fear of coming out as gay can reflect how he tries to balance his id's desire to come out with the consequences and expectations of the superego; admitting he was scared

is also acknowledging the fact that he wanted to come out; he just couldn't bring himself to speak up.

In the third table, Simon's dialogue about the unfairness of only gay people having to come out reflects the internalized societal values and norms that form his superego. According to Sahputro (2020), the superego develops from the values and morals learned from parents and society. Simon's frustration shows his struggle against these internalized norms that he sees as unjust. The superego here represents the societal rules and expectations he has learned and internalized, showing how deeply ingrained these norms are in his mind.

In the second dialogue from the manifestation of Simon's superego, Simon reveals his fear and the pressure he felt from Martin's blackmail. According to Nurhidayata (2010), a personality composed solely of the ego and id would act selfishly, disregarding others' well-being. Simon's struggle indicates the presence of his superego, which introduces moral considerations and guilt, preventing him from acting solely out of self-interest. Simon's decision to protect his secret at the expense of his friends' trust showcases the tension between his id which is the desire to avoid being outed, and his superego which is the guilt and moral responsibility towards his friends.

According to Khoirunisa et al. (2022), the superego is responsible for aligning an individual's behavior with societal expectations. Simon's insistence on having the right to decide when and how to come out reflects his internalized societal, which dictate that such a personal revelation should be controlled and respectful of societal norms. His anger at losing control illustrates the superego's role in managing the conflict between his internal desires and external expectations.

This dialogue explicitly addresses Simon's fear of societal rejection, which directly ties into the Superego's influence as described by Liang (2011). The Superego, according to Liang, represents the moral branch of human behavior and causes feelings of guilt and shame when social norms are violated. Simon's fear of the world not liking him aligns well with the concept of the Superego creating a fear of societal disapproval and the internal conflict that arises from trying to meet these societal expectations. Simon's fear of announcing his true identity to the world because of potential rejection directly aligns with the Superego's influence as described by Liang. The Superego creates a fear of not meeting societal ideals and expectations, leading to feelings of guilt and anxiety about social disapproval. Simon's hesitation and fear of not being liked by the world illustrate the internal conflict created by the Superego's moral demands versus the Id's desire for self-expression.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the researchers concluded the following:

1. Simon's experience as a closeted gay man in the movie depicts Simon as fearful because he is fearing that he will be revealed in society, has inner conflicts that resonate with why he should not come out, and has a desire for self-control to navigate himself. On the other hand, he is also ready for change and is brave to come out, be accepted, and have self-acceptance.

2. The portrayal of Simon as a closeted gay teenager in the movie may influence the viewers perspective and attitudes towards LGBTQIAP+ to be tolerable. They've seen the example of how a closeted gay man lives in the movie. Inner and outer conflicts are just on the surface, making him worry every day if he'll be exposed, if he'll confess himself, what his family will say, what his friends will say, or how he will explain himself if he'll ever come out. As individuals who are part of society, it is within their capability to show tolerance and humility and provide a safe place for these closeted individuals.

3. As the story and the character of Simon develop in the movie, Simon's usage of his id, ego, and superego are presented. From the early minutes to the middle of the movie, it is shown that Simon uses his id and ego often. Most of his lines that manifest his usage of Id are all about trying to hide his sexuality from society, unconsciously. While his lines that were manifested by his ego show that he is conscious of his sexuality, that he desires to come out and be accepted, and that he is just scared against discrimination and not being accepted, Lastly, his lines that were manifested through the use of his superego were dominant in the last minutes of the film, where he encountered growth, self-acceptance, and confession. He realized that the tolerance within the heterosexual community and the homosexual community has a big difference, and it is up to him to make their perspectives change.

The researchers had already investigated the Love, Simon movie, but further exploration using a different approach is also recommended. To further strengthen the findings in this study, the future researchers may investigate the portrayal of other characters and sexual identities in Love, Simon novel. The future researchers may analyze the internal and external issues mentioned in the novel such as the characters' portrayal, motivation and interaction, the conflicts faced by the LGBTQIAP+ members, and the portrayals and explorations of sexual identities which influences how readers may view different gender orientations.

ADVANCED RESEARCH

The researchers exclusively examine the film adaptation and do not delve into the novel "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda" by Becky Albertalli, upon which the film is based. The analysis centers on the narrative, character development, and thematic elements within the film, using a psychoanalytic approach. Other psychological or sociological theories are not explored in depth. The primary focus is on Simon Spier, the protagonist, with detailed examination limited to aspects that directly relate to his journey as a closeted gay teenager. Consequently, detailed analyses of other characters or broader plot elements not directly connected to Simon's experiences are excluded. To address the limitations of this approach, future studies could expand the scope to include a comparative analysis with the novel, incorporate additional psychological and sociological theories, and examine the development and impact of other key characters.

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