The Internet has become an increasingly important part of modern life. The Internet can have a number of positive attributes, such as maintaining contact with friends, as well as access to educational, financial, health, religious, and other information. Along with the Internet’s positive attributes, it can also increase the severity and frequency of many current psychosocial problems, including sexually compulsive behavior that may be expressed by viewing Internet pornography (Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelley, & Mathy, 2004). This easy access to Internet pornography can put the user at risk of sex addiction with all of its associated problems (Cooper, 2002).

Researchers have studied the Internet pornography (also known as cyberporn) phenomenon in different ways, including its relationship with religiosity. Findings have focused on the extent of use and whether religiosity is a protective factor concerning the use of Internet pornography. Findings have been mixed, with some Christian and popular media sources indicating Christians have high use rates of Internet pornography (Statistics and information on pornography, 2007; Evangelicals are addicted to porn, 2007), with the research literature also mixed as to the role of religiosity as a protective factor against Internet pornography use (Abell, Steenbergh, & Boivin, 2006). What has not been studied is whether dimensions of individual religion (external, internal, and quest) have a relationship to the use of Internet pornography.

This study explored the extent of Internet pornography use among men and women attending a conservative Christian university, the perceived benefits and consequences of viewing, and the relationship between internal, external and quest religiosity and Internet pornography use. Findings suggest that the majority of males had some involvement in Internet pornography, but regular viewing was significantly lower than has been found in the general population. Internal and external religiosity showed only a weak, though statistically significant, inverse relationship with regular Internet pornography use.

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This study explored the extent of Internet pornography use among men and women attending a conservative Christian university, the perceived benefits and consequences of viewing Internet pornography, the motivation for viewing and the relationship between internal, external, and quest measures of religiosity with Internet pornography viewing. A major goal of this study was to investigate if one or more of various dimensions of individual religiosity (external, internal, and quest) have a relationship to the use of Internet pornography.

While the Internet is used to peruse a wide variety of subjects, the most viewed topic on the Internet is sexually explicit material (Cooper, 2004). Researchers have found that there are over 100,000 websites featuring several different kinds of sexual content (Carnes, 2001; Cooper, Bories, Maheu, & Greenfield, 2001). Visits to Internet pornography sites have been increasing over the years with the most popular sites reporting 50 million hits (Worden,
The majority of Internet pornography users appear to do so on a more recreational basis with 43% spending less than one hour per week and 6-10% using more compulsively, spending six hours or more per week engaged in Internet pornography (Cooper, Putnam, Plancho, & Boies, 1999; Cooper, Morahan-Martin, Mathy, & Maheu, 2002; Weisskirch & Murphy, 2004). Cooper, Delmonico, and Burg (2000) have proposed that the anonymity, accessibility, and affordability (also known as the Triple-A Engine) of online pornography makes it very enticing to many people that would not attend public sexually explicit programs or purchase such material in a public place. In addition, the Internet may have a disinhibiting affect in which people engage in activities they would not normally have done (Cooper, 2004).

Clinicians are increasingly encountering patients whose presenting problems stem from or are manifesting themselves in online sexual compulsivity where patients feel a compulsive urge to participate and increase their time pursuing Internet pornography (Abell, Steenbergh, & Boivin, 2006). Internet pornography addiction/compulsion has been defined as, “a pathological preoccupation with online sexual behaviors in an effort to create a mood-altering experience” (Levert, 2007, p. 147). Cooper and his colleagues have generally found about 9 – 15% of Internet pornography users who participate in their studies experience various indices of distress – about the same percentage of people who are using 11 or more hours per week who are probably also addicted (Cooper, Delmonico, Griffin-Shelley, & Mathy, 2004). Those involved in relationships with a partner who views Internet pornography often feel it was an act of betrayal similar to an affair (Whitty, 2003; Bridges, Bergner, & Hesson-McInnis, 2003; Schneider, 2000; Parker & Wampler, 2003). Internet pornography use also affects spiritual connections with many Christians saying it makes them feel disconnected from God (Arterburn & Luck, 2003). Generally, males far outnumber females in Internet pornography usage (about 85% to 15%) (Cooper et al., 2004). Women generally use cyberporn differently, being more interested in cyber chat rooms instead of just viewing pictures, which is what males prefer to do online (Cooper, et al. 2004). This should not be misinterpreted to mean that women are not at risk for developing difficulties with their online sexual behavior. Based on the estimate in 2000 of 18 million Internet pornography users, there are possibly 2 million users, including an estimate of 300,000 women, who are addicted and experiencing negative consequences as a result (Cooper, 2002). This definitely warrants something that needs to be studied in depth.

As noted earlier, religious involvement is generally found to be a protective factor for problem behaviors such as crime, illegal drug use, alcoholism, or other problem behaviors (Bachman, O’Malley, Schultenberg, Johnston, Bryant, & Merline, 2002; Geppert, Bogenschutz, & Miller, 2007; McBride, Mutch, & Chitwood, 1996), as well as related to better mental and physical health (Abdel-Khalek & Lester, 2007). Research has been mixed as to whether religiosity is a protective factor in Internet pornography usage. At a policy level, religious belief was found to be related to supporting more restrictions on access to Internet pornography (Lo & Wei, 2002). At an individual level, Stack, Wasserman, and Kern (2004) found that the strongest predictors of cyberporn use were weak ties to religion and a lack of a happy marriage. However, Goodson, McCormick, and Evans (2000) found that religiosity was not significantly associated with negative emotions related to sex on the Internet or in predicting negative emotional reactions to viewing Internet pornography among a population of college students. Abell, Steenbergh, and Boivin (2006) found that there was an inverse relationship between religiosity and sexual addiction, but no significant relationship between religiosity and cyberporn involvement. There was actually a positive relationship between higher spiritual belief scores and cyberporn involvement. Abell et al. (2006) theorizes that males who have stronger spiritual beliefs may be more likely to engage in solitary cyberporn because it is perceived as more permissible than premarital sex or extramarital sexual relationships. Since Internet pornography is conducted in the privacy of one’s own home, away from prying eyes, Levert (2007) proposes Christians can maintain rigid doctrinal attitudes, public religious fervor and outward appearances while ignoring private practice. These results suggest that, though religiosity is normally a protective factor for most social problems, it may not be for the private accessing of cyber pornography and it may actually be a risk factor (Abell et al., 2006).

Abell, Steenbergh, and Boivin (2006) have called for an exploration to begin to understand why religiosity apparently does not relate to lower rates of viewing Internet pornography. Abell et al. (2006) also asked how internal and external religious
motivations might relate to such activities as access to and extent of viewing Internet pornography among men and women, the idea being that those who have internalized spiritual values should have more of a buffer against the use of Internet pornography. Therefore, this research studied the relationship between dimensions of individual religion (internal, external, and quest) and use of Internet pornography. Also of interest were a number of descriptions concerning Internet pornography use, such as intentionality, amount of use, as well as elements which increased use, and perceived problems and benefits of viewing Internet pornography. Finally, it was of interest to see whether there were differences between males and females, as it may be naïve to think that only men are adversely affected by Internet pornography.

**Method**

**Participants**

Data were collected from a convenience sample of undergraduate and graduate students at a small, conservative, Christian university in the Midwest. A total of 751 completed surveys were collected and utilized. In this data set, women comprised 54.5% and men 44.6%. The mean age of respondents was 22.3 (SD = 5.6). The class distribution included 23.3% freshmen, 22.8% sophomores, 23.6% juniors, 16.5% seniors, and 11.9% were graduate/professional students. Ethnic origins were 20.9% African-American, 11.9% Asian-Pacific Islander, 47.9% White (non-Hispanic), 9.5% Latino, and 7.5% other ethnic origin. The vast majority of participants (97.4%) identified themselves as having the same religious affiliation as that of the Church the university was affiliated with.

**Instruments**

A questionnaire was developed that had 144 questions that assessed a broad range of risk and protective behaviors. Various sections concentrated on areas such as drug use, sexual activity, gambling, Internet pornography, relationships, religion, and depression. A pencil-and-paper, closed-answer format was used, and participants were to choose the best answer available. For this article, the items used were from the Internet pornography section. For this section, a number of items were created to assess use on the Internet. Items included issues such as whether subjects had ever purposely viewed Internet pornography, the number of hours in the past week they had viewed Internet pornography, and the location and the time of day of use. They were also asked to choose from a list of potential benefits, problems, and elements that increase Internet pornography usage.

**The Religious Life Inventory**

A number of instruments have attempted to measure dimensions of individual religiosity. The Religious Orientation scale by Allport and Ross measures two dimensions, an extrinsic and an intrinsic orientation. Allport and Ross (1967) originally differentiated between intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity by stating that extrinsically motivated individuals use their religion for their own instrumental and utilitarian means, while the intrinsically motivated individual lives their religion by embracing and following their creed. Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993) doubted that the Religious Orientation scale measured what it said it did. While the items measuring the extrinsic orientation seem consistent with that concept, the items measuring the intrinsic orientation seem less clear and perhaps measure rigid or intense personal devotion, religious practices, and beliefs. In order to measure their assumptions about a means (extrinsic) and end (intrinsic) dimension, Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis developed an instrument called the Religious Life Inventory and added another dimension called quest. In the Religious Life Inventory, the extrinsic dimension is called the External scale, and the intrinsic dimension is called the Internal scale. The Quest scale was designed as a questioning, searching, open-ended approach to religion. Here, the individual approaches religion in a way which recognizes that he or she does not know, and probably never will know, the final truth about existential matters, but is searching for spiritual and existential meaning. Because of an interest in these three dimensions, the Religious Life Inventory was chosen for this study. The questions in this inventory are based on a 9-point Likert scale.

**Procedure**

On a specified day, three class periods were chosen based on the large size of classes which occur during those periods. Prior to that day, professors teaching during those times were contacted for permission to survey their class. Trained proctors were sent to administer the survey. Participation during
the class time was voluntary and anonymous. Informed consent forms were read to and signed by students taking the survey. Only those 18 years or older were permitted to take the survey. The Institutional Review Board approved the study prior to implementation.

**Results**

In order to make comparisons between these data and that of Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis’ (1993) data, means, standard deviations, correlations, and Chronbach’s alpha were run on the data (the Batson et al., data will be in parenthesis). For the Internal scale, the mean was 7.35 (6.44) and standard deviation was 1.88 (1.35). For the External scale, the mean was 6.35 (5.80) and the standard deviation was 2.10 (1.59). For the Quest scale, the mean was 4.87 (4.99) and the standard deviation was 2.21 (1.17). The means and standard deviations have been adjusted for the number of items on each scale. Table 1 gives correlations and Chronbach’s alpha for both this data and that of Batson et al. (1993). As can be seen, there is a similarity between our data and that of Batson and his colleagues in that for both sets of data there is a strong positive relationship between the Internal and External scales, but little to no correlation between the Quest scale and the Internal and External scales.

**Extent of Viewing Internet Pornography**

Almost half (47.6%) of all the respondents had intentionally visited an Internet pornography site in their lifetime. However, the average amount of time respondents who had intentionally viewed Internet pornography spent per week viewing cyberporn was reported to be only 26 minutes. The data showed that 11% of the respondents reported being regular users; defined as 1 hour or more per week of Internet pornography viewing. Nine percent of the survey participants viewed 1-4 hours per week (defined as light users), 2% viewed 5-10 hours per week (defined as moderate users), and less than 1% viewed 18-49 hours per week (defined as heavy users). There were differences in the location and time of day Internet pornography was viewed. Sixty-seven percent of the respondents viewed it at home, 22% in the dorm, and 11% in other locations. The university has an Internet filtering policy which may explain why only 22% viewed Internet pornography in the dorm. The time of day a person felt the urge to view was mostly late night, 60%, with 17.6% in the evening, and 15% in the afternoon. Large gender differences were also found. For males, 68% had intentionally viewed Internet pornography and for women it was 19%. For males, about 22% reported viewing Internet pornography in the last week, compared to 2% of women.

**Perceived Problems and Benefits of Viewing Internet Pornography**

Those who had intentionally accessed Internet pornography were asked about the various perceived problems as well as benefits associated with viewing Internet pornography. Table 2 shows the types of problems that both genders reported experiencing as a result of viewing Internet pornography, while Table 3 looks at the types of reported benefits. The question which created the data for Table 2 focused on the types of problems experienced as a result of

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**Table 1**

*Correlations Among the Three Religious Orientation Scales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scales</th>
<th>Internal</th>
<th>External</th>
<th>Quest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>.85a</td>
<td>.64</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>.84</td>
<td>.62</td>
<td>-.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External</td>
<td>.69</td>
<td>.79</td>
<td>-.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quest</td>
<td>.72</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. Numbers in bold are from Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis (1993)*

a Entries on the diagonal are internal-consistency reliability coefficients (Chronbach’s alpha).
viewing Internet pornography and had 16 options to choose from (including “other” and “no problems”). The question which created the data for Table 3 focused on the types of benefits experienced as a result of viewing Internet pornography and had 12 options to choose from (including “other” and “no benefits”). As can be seen from Table 2, the top four reported problems were the same for males and females: worsened their relationship with God/Christ, led to an increase in sexual behavior, increased negative emotions (e.g.: guilt, shame, low self-esteem, etc), and led to more permissive attitudes concerning sexual behavior.

**Table 2**

Problems Experienced as a Result of Viewing Internet Pornography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Worsened my relationship with God/Christ</td>
<td>43%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led to an increase in my own sexual behavior (from masturbation to intercourse)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased negative emotions (e.g.: guilt, shame, low self-esteem, etc)</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Led to more permissive attitudes concerning sexual behavior</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An increasing amount of time spent viewing Internet pornography</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lost interest in spiritual things</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damaged relationship with other people (from intimacy to withdrawal from others)</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attitudes about or toward the opposite sex deteriorated</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has affected the quality of school work</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has led to a decrease in family values (e.g.: less committed to marriage, etc.)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has led to a dissatisfaction with my partner (e.g.: their performance or looks, etc)</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased aggression (sexual or non-sexual) toward the opposite sex</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have spent too much money viewing Internet pornography</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has led to reprimands at school, job, or other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 3**

Benefits Experienced as a Result of Viewing Internet Pornography

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Benefit</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It produces sexual arousal for me</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gives me new ideas for my own (or partner’s) sexual behavior</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me feel more relaxed (less stress)</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is a sexual outlet where I do not have to deal with other people</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is risk free from elements like STDs</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me to sleep better</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It serves as an emotional outlet</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It helps me to better concentrate or focus in other areas of life</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to more permissive attitudes concerning sexual behavior</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leads to an increase in my own sexual behavior (from masturbation to intercourse)</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
increased negative emotions, and led to more permissive attitudes concerning their own sexual behavior. Table 3 shows that for males and females, the top five reported benefits were also the same (although not always in the same rank position): producing sexual arousal, giving new ideas for sexual behavior, helping them feel more relaxed, and providing a sexual outlet where they do not have to deal with others. In addition, cyberporn is risk free from sexually transmitted diseases. While the percents which indicate these as problems or benefits differ, it is interesting that the same elements are highest for both males and females.

**Reasons for Viewing Internet Pornography**

Also of interest were elements which increased respondents’ usage of Internet pornography (see Table 4). The question which created the data for Table 4 focused on reasons for viewing Internet pornography and had 9 options from which to choose (including “other”). Table 4 shows that for males and females, the top five reported elements which increased usage were the same (although not always in the same rank position): wanting sexual arousal, experiencing negative emotions, difficulty sleeping, out of habit, and low self-esteem.

**Religiosity and Viewing on Internet Pornography**

There was not a statistically significant correlation for either men or women on any religiosity measurement (quest, internal, and external) and ever intentionally visiting an Internet pornography site. There were slight positive correlations with quest for males and females and ever intentionally viewing Internet pornography and slight negative correlations with external religiosity for males and females, but these relationships were also not statistically significant.

An examination of the relationship between religiosity and regular viewing of Internet pornography showed statistical significance. Among males who had viewed Internet pornography for at least one hour in the previous week, there were small but significant inverse correlations between religiosity and the number of hours spent viewing Internet pornography. Among male Internet pornography regular users, the external dimension of the Religious Life Inventory showed a significant inverse correlation with hours spent on Internet pornography sites ($r = -.18$, $p < 0.01$) and the internal dimension also showed a significant inverse correlation with hours spent viewing Internet pornography ($r = -.13$, $p < 0.05$). There were no statistically significant correlations among regular users for males and the quest dimension or females on any religiosity dimension.

**DISCUSSION**

Among this population of university students, with the vast majority identifying religious affiliations with the church that sponsors the university (97%), heavy Internet pornography use rates are lower than surveys of the general Internet using population.
among the Christian males in this study were about half of the general male Internet using population (3.4% versus 6.5%) (Cooper, Morahan-Martin, Mathy, & Maheu, 2002). This could be the result of the protective effects of religiosity and the result of being at a conservative Christian university with pornography filters. Though this study did not gather information on Internet pornography addiction, others have found that heavy use is linked with Internet pornography addiction (Cooper, Morahan-Martin, Mathy, & Maheu, 2002). With an apparent 50% lower heavy use of Internet pornography among Christian male respondents in this study compared to the general population, this study indicates that religion may be a protective factor for heavy Internet pornography use and addiction. This study seems to support what Abbell, Steenbergh, and Boivin (2006) found, an inverse association between religiosity and sexual addiction. It is important to note that while Internet pornography use does exist in this population of Christian university students, the reported rates in this study are not nearly as high as what is being reported by Christian magazine articles and websites (Statistics and information on pornography, 2007; Evangelicals are addicted to porn, 2007). Another important statistic to note is the location of Internet pornography use among participants in this study. Respondents indicated 22% viewed in the dorm and 67% viewed in their home. This may indicate that the Internet filtering software that is used at the university may have a positive benefit in decreasing Internet pornography use.

Elements of religiosity could have protective factors that encourage staying away from Internet pornography, but also have risk factors as well. It has been suggested that Christians feel Internet pornography is seen as a more permissible sexual outlet than sexual intercourse with someone other than one’s spouse (Abell, Steenbergh, & Boivin, 2006). The most common benefit named and the element that increased desire to use among those who had intentionally viewed Internet pornography was sexual arousal, which seems to support this suggestion. The problems associated with viewing Internet pornography are also important to note. Over 40% of Internet pornography users reported that they felt Internet pornography use affected their relationship with God, with 20% reporting less interest in spiritual things. In addition, 40% reported an increase in their own sexual behavior. This suggests that Internet pornography viewing is not a harmless recreational activity, but relates to significant spiritual and behavioral consequences. Negative effects on relationships with others were reported as much less of a problem, which is different than what the research literature has indicated. This could be because most of the participants were not married, and therefore intimate relationships with a spouse would not be affected.

Consistent with what Abell, Steenbergh, and Boivin (2006) reported, in this study, religiosity does not have a significant inverse relationship with ever viewing Internet pornography, even when differentiating between Internal, External, and Quest scales. However, for males, external and internal religiosity did have a small but significant inverse relationship with how many hours per week Internet pornography was viewed for those who viewed at least one hour per week. Internal religiosity was found to have a slightly stronger inverse correlation with how many hours per week Internet pornography was viewed and thus may be more protective than external religiosity. While there is a significant inverse relationship between our measures of religiosity and hours of Internet pornography use, it is a much smaller relationship than is reported in the literature regarding the correlation between religiosity and substance use (Geppert, Bogenschutz, & Miller, 2007). As others have observed, the viewing of Internet pornography can be done in very private circumstances, without the obvious behavioral consequences that occur with alcoholism or drug addiction. External, even fervent religiosity and intense involvement in ones faith community is possible to combine with heavy Internet pornography use. However, as was also found in this study, there are significant perceived spiritual and behavioral consequences that are also reported by frequent viewers of Internet pornography.

Religiosity is not the only contributing factor to Internet pornography use. Catlin, McBride, Bailey, and Bailey (2008) using data from this same survey found that pornography use and frequency of pornography use significantly related to recency and frequency of alcohol and drug use and number of sex partners. This indicates that Internet pornography exists in a context of other risk behaviors.

This issue needs be addressed by Christian universities and churches. Regular Internet pornography use does occur among Christian men and, to a lesser extent, among women, and does have significant spiritual and behavioral consequences. Therefore, it is important for Christian universities to use filtering software. However, since most Internet
pornography viewing occurred at home, and those who are computer savvy can find ways to get around filters, there is a need to educate students on the potential dangers of Internet pornography use and other ways to cope with sexual arousal and negative feelings. Counselors and therapists can be instrumental in educating, diagnosing, and treating Internet pornography use problems and work on individualized plans to cope more positively.

**Limitations**

This study represents one of the few empirical investigations of the relationship between internal, external, and quest religiosity and Internet pornography involvement. It is important to note that our findings should be viewed in light of the limitations of this study. Since participants were a convenience sample of students enrolled in a conservative Christian university, we cannot generalize these findings to people of other ages or religious or educational backgrounds. Due to the sensitive nature of Internet pornography and sexual behavior questions, and particularly since it is a Christian university, it is possible that some of the students may have been hesitant to fully disclose these behaviors. If this is indeed the case, use rates would be even higher than what has been reported here. It should also be noted that the Religious Life Inventory’s External and Internal Scales are intercorrelated, and therefore, the Religious Life Inventory may not be the best measurement of external and internal religiosity according to Correderra and Helm (2008). They found that higher scores on external religiosity on Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis’ (1993) Religious Life Inventory were associated with higher scores on the intrinsic rather than the extrinsic scale from Allport and Ross’ (1967) Religious Orientation Scale.

**Future Research**

This study of Christian respondents indicated that heavy Internet pornography use is lower than the general population. Being a Christian could be somewhat of a protective factor against heavy use. Future research should focus on the rates of heavy use and consequences of use in a wide variety of Christian institutions and in general populations of Christians. Data suggest such use may have significant consequences for faith communities, as well as individuals involved and their spouses.

**References**


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