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### The community feeling versus anxiety, self-esteem and well-being – introductory research

**Abstract:** In accordance with the concept of A. Adler (1933/1986) – the community feeling is an individual characteristic which is relatively stable throughout life. It refers to an inner relationship of one person with other people: a feeling of unity with others or separation from others. People with high community feeling are motivated in their actions by striving towards the common good, whereas people with low community feeling intend to exhibit their superiority over others in their actions, which would allow them to compensate for their inner feeling of inferiority. On the basis of the Adler concept the following hypotheses were formulated: There is a negative connection between the community feeling and anxiety. The community feeling is positively connected with self-esteem and psychological well-being. A slight increase in the community feeling can be observed with age. The community feeling increases in the age of middle adulthood. 585 people between 20 to 65 years of age were examined. Methods: Community Feeling Questionnaire, State-Trait Anxiety Inventory, Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale, Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being. The hypotheses assumed were verified.

**Key words:** Alfred Adler, community feeling, anxiety, self-esteem, well-being

#### Introduction

Over 80 years ago Alfred Adler (1933/1986, 1935 a, b, c, 2005) described a community feeling dimension between one person and other people as significant for psychological health and quality of life. The community feeling refers to an inner relationship one person with other people, with humanity, their feeling of unity with others or (in case of its lack) separation from others, which is frequently accompanied by anxiety and hostility. It is an individual characteristic relatively stable throughout life, shaped in the first years of life, under the influence of the relationship with the main caretaker (most frequently the mother). People with high community feeling are motivated in their actions by striving towards the common good. On the other hand, people with low community feeling intend to exhibit their superiority over others in their actions, re-affirming their value by proving they are better than others, winning a dominant position, which would allow them to compensate for their inner feeling of inferiority. People with high community feeling can also achieve individual objectives (i.e. achievements, career), but they do not aim to other people, proving their superiority over them in order to compensate for their inner feeling

of inferiority. People with high community feeling are focused on work for the common good. People with low community feeling care mostly about their own business, not taking others into account. Low community feeling is frequently caused by an inferiority complex which the person is trying to overcome by striving to achieve success which will show their superiority over others. People with high community feeling, in turn, have high, adequate and stable feeling of their own value and adequate self-esteem, coming from the consciousness of what they have to offer others, how needed they are for the community. People with high community feeling have a high trust level towards other people, themselves and the world in a way close to the basic trust meaning of E. Erikson (1982/2002, 1968/2004, 1950/1997). People with low community feeling, in turn, have the tendency to ascribe hostile tendencies to others and treat them as rivals. Perception of people in low community feeling people is dominated by categories 'better-worse', which categories do not dominate the perception of others in pro-community people. Low community feeling people feel a strong urge to have an advantage over others in all actions and frequently quit trying to take actions which, in their belief, will bring them no success or victory.

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Adler (1933/1986, 1935 a, b, c, 2005) believes that successful completion of life tasks and solving life problems depends on community feeling. A person with the correct community feeling makes friends easily, is interested in matters important for humanity, works for others, is interested in being useful for others. The correct community feeling is the sense of feeling the life source. Lack of correct community feeling may, according to Adler (1933/1986, 1935 a, b, c, 2005), result in perceiving a threat, social anxiety, difficulties in cooperation, excessive shyness, a demanding attitude towards others and feeling hurt, lust for power, a tendency to find joy in others' failures, hate, vanity, distrust and pessimism. According to Adler the correct community feeling leads to being valuable and gives meaning to life while lack of it undermines many human problems and psychological disorders. "Everything that we define as failure shows lack of community feeling" (Adler, 1933/1986, p. 256).

A. Adler's concept is based on insightful analyses and clinical case studies. It seems important and necessary to verify his concepts with methods that are in accordance with the modern paradigm. Much attention has been given in psychology to such dimensions as community vs agency (Helgeson, 1994; Conway, Pizzamiglio, Mount, 1996; Woike, Lavezzary, Barsky, 2001; Eagly, Karau, 2002; Wojciszke, Abele, Baryła, 2009; Wojciszke, 2010) and collectivism vs individualism (Triandis, 1995; Wojciszke, Abele, Baryła, 2009; Wojciszke, 2010). However, the operational aspect of Adler's community feeling idea is different from the above definitions in the following aspects:

- 1) According to Adler the lack of community feeling stems from an inferiority complex and is a source of many life difficulties. In its extreme form it can lead to loss of psychological balance.
- 2) The anti-community attitude described by Adler connected with motivation to achieve personal successes and gain a dominant position towards others is not synonymous with focus on achievement of personal objectives in the view of agency (Helgeson, 1994; Conway, Pizzamiglio, Mount, 1996; Woike, Lavezzary, Barsky, 2001; Eagly, Karau, 2002; Wojciszke, Abele, Baryła, 2009; Wojciszke, 2010) and individualism (Triandis, 1995; Wojciszke, Abele, Baryła, 2009; Wojciszke, 2010). As mentioned before, Adler stresses the negative consequences of an anti-community attitude, in which the drive to achieve personal successes is motivated by a willingness to prove that you are better than others, a wish to defeat others and prove your value at the same time. So not every person setting personal objectives has anti-community motivation.

The proposed post-Adler view of community feeling seems a good supplement to community knowledge present in modern psychological literature. The author of the article did not find publications that would present empirical verification of Adler's concept aspect. The experiences of the article's author in working practically with people (therapy, psychological counselling, development support

training) confirm the existence and significant meaning of a community feeling dimension (in the meaning described by Adler) for the individual's well-being. Empirical verification of A. Adler's concept seems important and necessary and the research presented is innovative. The results of the research may have a high application value, as they can be used to create postulates that will aid people with issues (i.e. people with high anxiety level or low self-appraisal).

This article presents pilot research results, aimed at making a preliminary verification of the existence of community feeling as a dimension of personality and its connections with anxiety, self-esteem and well-being.

## Methods

### Research questions and hypotheses

The research question if community feeling is a single-dimension creation or multidimension was formulated.

According to Adler people with low community feeling are characterised by higher anxiety levels than people with high community feeling. It is also confirmed by clinical work observations by the author. In connection to this, the first hypothesis has been formulated: There is a negative relationship between community feeling and anxiety as a trait.

Adler believes that the source of a lack of community feeling is an inferiority complex. On the basis of this assumption the second hypothesis has been formulated: There is a positive relationship between community feeling and self-esteem.

As presented in the introduction, Adler assumes that lack of community feeling is a source of many problems. This led to an assumption that: The community feeling is positively connected with psychological well-being.

According to E. Erikson (1982/2002, 1968/2004, 1950/1997) during mid-adulthood the task is development of generativity. Generativity is engagement in introducing the young generation to life, sharing your experience and/or creativity as a form of transferring some values to the next generations. It was assumed that in spite of the fact that the degree of community feeling is a permanent disposition (is like a characteristic), the generativity development may increase community feeling level. Therefore a hypothesis has been formulated that: A slight increase in community feeling can be observed with age. Community feeling increases in mid-adulthood.

### Respondents

The research was done on a group of 585 adults aged 20–65,  $M = 24.41$ ;  $SD = 8.44$ . Approximately 80% of them were women and 20% were men. 12 (2.1%) had basic or vocational education, 350 (59.8%) had secondary education (most of them are still students), 200 (34.2%) had a university education, there is no data on education of 23 (3.9%) people. Research participation was voluntary and participants were not paid.

### Community feeling structure analysis – preliminary version of Community Feeling Questionnaire

The Community Feeling Questionnaire was developed by the author of the article on the basis of Alfred Adler's concept. The questionnaire examines general levels of community and harmony with others' feelings, a kind of general attitude to people, characterised with motivation towards the good of others and the need of being useful. Life objectives of high community feeling people are aimed at the common good. The experimental test version is made up of 106 items in the form of statements, towards which the people being tested express their agreement or lack thereof on a 6-degree scale (from "I completely disagree" to "I strongly agree").

Exemplary items:

Reversed (lack of community feeling)

- The most important for me are individual achievements, which allow us to 'test ourselves' and reaffirm our values.
- It is important for me to turn out better than others.
- Being in various groups I frequently feel alienated.
- I sometimes disregard people who have achieved little.
- Many people are my enemies. I have many enemies.
- Frequently in different social situations, where I must be with or cooperate with other people, I feel alienated or disharmonious to others.
- I frequently see rivals and competitors in other people.
- I acknowledge my life is meaningful and successful when I achieve successes showing my superiority to others.

Direct (high community feeling)

- I consider cooperation to be the key to success, even if the input of individuals is not very stressed then.
- I gladly share my skills and knowledge with others, and if another person's skills or knowledge surpass mine, I would be happy about it.
- I frequently feel gratitude towards other people.
- I will consider my life meaningful if dying, I leave behind something that will be useful to others for a long time.

Test reliability for experimental version of 106 items – Cronbach alpha: .95. All questions turned out to be positively correlated with the whole questionnaire. Test item content accuracy was confirmed with the competent judge method (3 psychologists other than the author). The correlations in accordance with A. Adler's theory, discovered in the research presented, between community feeling and fear, self-appraisal and well-being also point to the exactness of the tool.

Next items correlated less than 0.40 with total scale (the sum of items) were removed. Therefore, using a method of competent judges, adequacy of individual items against the theory was analysed (a verification was performed to find if all items included in the test as a result of pre-selection are diagnostic towards the theory and if no key theory item was removed). Finally Item Cluster

Analysis (iclust) was performed on a reduced version of 65 items. "An alternative to factor or components analysis is cluster analysis. The goal of cluster analysis is the same as factor or components analysis (reduce the complexity of the data and attempt to identify homogeneous subgroupings)" (Revelle, 2016). As a consequence 3 clusters were identified (cluster fit = .72, pattern fit = .95, RMSR = .05). Correlations (r Pearson) between 3 subscales of Community Feeling Questionnaire: subscales 1 and 2:  $r = .395$ ,  $p < .001$ , subscales 1 and 3:  $r = .387$ ,  $p < .001$ , 2 and 3:  $r = .389$ ,  $p < .001$ . Subscale reliability 1: Cronbach alpha .880, subscale 2: .897, subscale 3: .914.

The clusters became a basis to identify 3 subscales of the community feeling questionnaire.

**Cluster one** is made up of 28 items. Item examples are:

- When I do something for others, I have a feeling I have done something purposeful.
- It is important for me that people who "come after me", the next generations, could use the effects of my work. I think the key to success is cooperation, even if individual contribution is not very stressed then.
- I frequently think about what I owe to other people.
- If my cooperation with a group is bad, I focus on improving my relations with people.

First cluster items create a **subscale about pro-community attitude** (high community feeling) characterised by:

- motivation for the common good, care for future generations,
- sense of life feeling coming from the actions toward the common good
- attitude towards work on people relations quality
- skill of harmonious cooperation in a group
- kindness towards other people
- a tendency towards experiencing gratitude connected with awareness of how much I received from others.

High results are high community feeling (pro-community attitude).

**The second cluster** is made up of 27 items. Item examples are:

- I only try to take actions where I can easily triumph and show I am better than others.
- I will believe my life was meaningful and successful when I achieve successes showing my superiority to others.
- I sometimes disregard people who have achieved little.
- If I fail to achieve my objectives, I frequently think that other people are to be blamed for it (who stood in my way or did not cooperate).
- I often see other people as rivals, competitors.

Description of a **subscale: low attitude towards dominance**, created by items from the second cluster:

Focus on domination, defeating others, gaining advantage over them, proving better than others (anti-community attitude).

- Motivation to overcome others, win competitively, turn out to be better than others, focus on rivalry – feeling of life sense is connected with proving to be better than others, winning a dominant position.
  - Perceiving people by categories “better-worse”, envy towards people with bigger achievements and disregarding people with smaller achievements.
  - Focus on own benefits without taking other people’s interests into account.
  - Being in a group is connected with fear for losing individuality, simultaneously there is fight for a dominant position in the group, unwillingness to cooperate in a group (unless this is a “star” position).
  - Animosity and tendency to ascribe this feature to others as well
  - A tendency to feel harmed / wronged.
- High results are pro-community attitude (low anti-community attitude: towards domination and defeating others).

**Third cluster** is made up of 10 items. Item examples are:

- Being in different people groups I frequently feel alienated.
- I frequently feel worse than others.
- I find it difficult to fit in during different situations which require cooperation in a group, I frequently feel “out of place” in a group.
- Contacting people I do not know well I usually feel nervous and tense.
- I often react with withdrawal to social contacts.

Description of a **subscale: low attitude towards isolation** (third cluster): lack of the community feeling characterised by the feeling of isolation / separation from others, a tendency to experience anxiety and tension in a group of people, low feeling of self-esteem (inferiority complex). High results are pro-community attitude (low anti-community attitude – no sense of isolation and separation, no anxiety in social situations and no inferiority complex).

3 clusters received this way turned out to be very content coherent. The model is coherent both with Adler theory and with the article’s author therapeutic work observations. This three-factor approach with one pro-community factor and two types of anti-community factors identified seems also coherent with modern total personality theories such as Circumplex of

Personality Metatrials (Struś & Ciecuch, 2016). Placing the identified factors in the wheel model the first factor would be graphically represented on the other side of the wheel from the two anti-community factors.

To verify tool accuracy on an additional group (a different one than the group previously described and researched): among 102 students of regular and extramural university studies aged 20–43 correlations were measured between 3 dimensions of community feeling with basic hope (Trzebiński, Zięba, 2003) and with community and agency (Wojciszke, Szlendak, 2010). The results are presented in Table 1.

The tool’s accuracy has been confirmed. In accordance with expectations, positive correlations were found with basic hope (Trzebiński, Zięba, 2003). The correlations turned out to be strongest with the first factor, connected with pro-community attitude.

All 3 dimensions of community feeling turned out to be significantly correlated with communality from a questionnaire by Wojciszke and Szlendak (2010), the strongest correlations were also found with the first community feeling factor. Two first factors also turned out to be slightly correlated with unrestrained communality. A significant positive correlation was found between agency and third community feeling factor (low anti-community attitude – no feeling of isolation and separation, no anxiety in social situations and lack of inferiority complex). Second community feeling factor (low anti-community attitude – towards domination and overcoming others) turned out negatively correlated with unrestrained agency. This means that the stronger motivation an individual has to dominate others, strive to prove better than others, defeating others and reaffirming own value (low scores in second factor of community feeling), the stronger unrestrained agency is.

No correlation was found between second factor of community feeling (tendency to dominate others) and agency. The result is compatible with expectations based on Adler’s theory. Anti-community attitude described by A. Adler connected with motivation towards personal successes and gaining a dominant position towards other people is not synonymous with attitude oriented towards pursuing personal objectives from perspective of agency, because in anti-community attitude the drive towards own successes is motivated by will of turning out to be better than others, overcoming them and proving own value. The

**Table 1. Correlations between feeling of community with basic hope and community and agency**

Subscales of feeling of community	Agency	Community	Unrestrained agency	Unrestrained community	Basic hope
1	.295**	.621**	-.358**	.365**	.502**
2	-.002	.454**	-.498**	.278*	.406**
3	.528**	.362**	-.168	-.005	.284*

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Subscales of feeling of community: 1: pro-community attitude, 2: low attitude towards dominance, 3: low attitude towards isolation.

inferiority complex lies at its basis. Not every attitude to achieve personal objectives (characteristic for agency) is motivated by a will to overcome, subdue and dominate others in order to prove own value. Not everyone who sets personal objectives has an anti-community motivation.

The community feeling (defined in three factor form) in spite of valid correlations, differs from related constructs: community and agency (Wojciszke, 2010), complementing them at the same time.

### Hypothesis verification

#### Measures

- 1) The Community Feeling Questionnaire – described above
- 2) State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) (Spielberger, Gorsuch, Lushene, Vagg & Jacobs, 1983). Polish adaptation (Sosnowski, Wrześniewski, Jaworowska, Fecenec, 2006). A sub-scale researching anxiety as a state was used. The subscale was made up of 20 items. State anxiety items include: “I am tense; I am worried” and “I feel calm; I feel secure”. All items are rated on 4-point scale (from “almost never” to “almost always”). The internal consistency in the current study was 0.87.
- 3) Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (SES) (Rosenberg, 1989). Polish adaptation (Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, Łaguna, 2008). The scale measures global self-worth by measuring both positive and negative feelings about the self. Made up of 10 items. Answers are given in 4 degree scale (1 – “I strongly agree”, 4 – “I strongly disagree”).
- 4) Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-Being (PWB). Polish Adaptation (Cieciuch, 2010).

The Ryff inventory consists of either 84 questions. It consists of a series of statements reflecting the six areas of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations with others, purpose in life and self-acceptance. Respondents rate statements on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 indicating strong disagreement and 6 indicating strong agreement. Scales:

- 1) Self-acceptance. Has a positive attitude towards the self, acknowledges and accepts multiple aspects of self, including good and bad features, has positive feelings about past life.
- 2) Positive relations with others. Has warm, satisfying, trusting relationships with others, is concerned about the welfare of others. Is capable of strong feelings

of empathy, affection, and intimacy; understands the rule of “give and take” in human relationships.

- 3) Autonomy. Is self-determining and independent, able to resist social pressures to think and act in certain ways. Regulate their behavior from within; evaluate themselves by personal standards.
- 4) Environmental mastery. Possesses a sense of mastery and competence in managing the environment, controls complex array of external activities, makes effective use of current opportunities; is able to choose or create contexts suitable to personal needs and values.
- 5) Purpose in life. Has goals in life and a sense of directedness, feels there is a certain meaning to present and past life, holds beliefs that give life purpose, has aims and objectives for living.
- 6) Personal growth. Has a feeling of continued development, sees self as growing and expanding, presents an open attitude towards new experiences, possesses a sense of realizing his or her potential, notices improvement in self and behaviour over time, is changing in ways that reflect more self-knowledge and effectiveness (Ryff & Keyes, 1995, Schmutte & Ryff, 1997). General well-being consists of this 6 dimensions. In this study we used the Polish adaptation (Cieciuch, 2010). Reliability: Autonomy (Cronbach’s alpha 0.786), Environmental mastery (0.784), Personal growth (0.788), Positive relation with others (0.854), Purpose in life (0.841), Self-acceptance (0.863).

The research was performed on the same group as The Community Feeling Questionnaire verification (research group described above in the Respondents Chapter).

## Results

### Community feeling versus anxiety and self-esteem

To preliminarily verify hypotheses about connection between the community feeling, anxiety and self-esteem regression analysis method was used. Anxiety and self-esteem were treated as predictors and 3 dimensions of the community feeling as dependent variables. The results were presented in Tables 2 and 3.

All 3 dimensions of community feeling turned out to be negatively correlated with anxiety and positively with self-esteem. The strongest connection with anxiety was found for the third subscale of the community feeling. The third subscale also turned out to be most related with self-esteem. The second subscale of the community feeling was least related to self-esteem.

**Table 2. Feeling of community versus anxiety**

Subscales of feeling of community	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Beta
1	.240*	0.057	-0.277	-0.240
2	.258*	0.067	-0.365	-0.258
3	.609**	0.371	-1.336	-0.609

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Subscales of feeling of community: 1: pro-community attitude, 2: low attitude towards dominance, 3: low attitude towards isolation.

**Table 3. Feeling of community versus self-esteem**

Subscales of feeling of community	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Beta
1	.360**	0.130	0.450	0.360
2	.189*	0.036	0.259	0.189
3	.562**	0.316	1.189	0.562

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Subscales of feeling of community: 1: pro-community attitude, 2: low attitude towards dominance, 3: low attitude towards isolation.

### Community feeling versus well-being

To preliminarily verify hypotheses about connection between the community feeling and well-being regression analysis method was used. Community feeling was treated as predictor, and dimensions of well-being as a dependant variable.

The results were presented in Table 4.

It was confirmed that there is a positive connection between three dimensions of the community feeling and general well-being. The strongest ties with well-being was found in case of subscales 3 and 1, slightly weaker in case of subscale 2.

### Community feeling and age

To preliminarily verify the hypothesis that the community feeling increases in middle adulthood, a method of *t*-student was used to compare average results from Community Feeling Questionnaire for people aged 20–34 (early adulthood;  $M = 22.07$ ,  $SD = 3.13$ ) with people aged 35–65 (middle and early-late adulthood;  $M = 46.80$ ,

$SD = 10.30$ ). It turned out that middle-aged people have slightly higher community feeling (in all three subscales) than people in early adulthood. The differences, in spite of being slight, turns out to be statistically important. The strongest effect we find in case of the first subscale (Cohen's  $d = 0.576$ ). See Table 5.

### Discussion

The assumed hypotheses were confirmed. The results showed that the higher community feeling people are characterised by: lower anxiety level, higher self-esteem and higher level of psychological well-being than people with lower level community feeling. The results are coherent with A. Adler's (1933/1986, 1935 a, b, c, 2005) concept.

The greatest connection with all the above measures occurred in the third subscale: lack of community feeling characterised by the feeling of isolation from others. People with low community feeling, characterised by feeling of

**Table 4. Feeling of community versus well-being (PWB)**

Subscales of feeling of community	R	R <sup>2</sup>	B	Beta
1	.407**	0.166	0.364	0.407
2	.319**	0.102	0.258	0.319
3	.571**	0.326	0.318	0.571

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Subscales of feeling of community: 1: pro-community attitude, 2: low attitude towards dominance, 3: low attitude towards isolation.

**Table 5. Community feeling in different aged groups**

Subscales of feeling of community	Age: 20–34		Age: 35–65		t	Cohen's <i>d</i> effect size
	M	SD	M	SD		
1	4.14	0.55	4.46	0.58	4.099**	0.58
2	4.16	0.68	4.40	0.50	3.157**	0.35
3	3.91	1.04	4.21	0.88	2.074*	0.29

\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Subscales of feeling of community: 1: pro-community attitude, 2: low attitude towards dominance, 3: low attitude towards isolation.

isolation and separation from others, with a tendency to anxiety in social situations and an inferiority complex exhibit the highest level of fear, have lowest self-appraisal and experience the lowest well-being level. The results are coherent with other self-esteem research results, proving that people with high self-esteem are characterised with more resilience while executing a task and do not lose their motivation after failures (Shrauger and Sormann, 1977; Dzwonkowska, Lachowicz-Tabaczek, Łaguna, 2008). People with low self-esteem claim that they have more negative experiences in people contact and that they receive less social support (Lakey, Tardiff, Drew, 1994). The weakest (but still significant) connections were found in relation between self-esteem and well-being to the first subscale of community feeling. People with high pro-community attitude are characterised by high self-esteem and well-being. They are people characterised by high motivation for common good, care for next generations, focus on the work to improve people relations, skill of harmonious group cooperation, kindness towards others and a tendency to experience the feeling of gratitude.

The community feeling with people in middle adulthood turned out to be slightly higher than in people in early adulthood. The difference turned out to be the biggest in case of first community feeling dimension: pro community attitude characterised by common good motivation, care for other generations, feeling of sense of life from actions for common good, trying to improve people relations, skill of group work, kindness and gratitude connected with the consciousness of how much they receive from others. It may be connected with generativity development, which, according to E. Erikson (1982/2002, 1968/2004, 1950/1997) is a developmental task of middle adulthood.

Study limitations: The research is a pilot and introductory. Further community feeling research is necessary and further research on its personality and behavioural correlates.

The results received can have practical applications. They show the justification of work on developing the community feeling, which is connected with the level of anxiety, self-esteem and psychological well-being. The results may be used to prepare a prophylactic programme supporting community feeling development in youth and adults and for work with people with low intensity anxiety disorders. Adler's work may lead us to conclusions that community feeling is a relatively stable characteristic over the span of an individual's lifetime. Still, effective work on community feeling can be undertaken in later life periods. Clinical practice also confirms that. Increasing consciousness of one's own attitudes towards other people, ourselves and the world and negative consequences of anti-communal attitude for life quality may be an introduction to develop community feeling in people who have problems with it. Developing consciousness that a given way of perceiving people is only a subjective image, not objective reality, could also be helpful for that purpose. Community feeling is an issue valid not just for life quality of an individual, but also for society.

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