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Cultural Dimensions of Emotion Regulation

Duygu Düzenlemenin Kültürel Boyutları

Başak Türküler Aka[1]

[1]Bahçeşehir University, İstanbul

ABSTRACT

This review aims to evaluate the connections between emotion regulation and cultural elements via different theoretical frameworks. For this purpose, one of the most used emotion regulation models in the literature, Gross's model, is briefly explained. Also, cultural elements are discussed by focusing on socialization practices, social rules, cultural scenarios, cultural values, and cultural differences highlighted in these concepts. Besides, the cultural differences in emotional expression and regulation through cultural values are presented by using two different theories and related research. The results of these research show that suppression can be adaptive and functional in different cultural contexts, and different levels of analysis can be combined to explain the processes of emotional behavior.
Keywords: Emotional regulation, culture, socialization, cultural values

ÖZ

Bu derlemenin amacı, duygu düzenleme ve kültürel öğeler arasındaki bağlantıları farklı teorik çerçevelerle değerlendirmektir. Bu amaçla, alanyazında en çok kullanılan duygu düzenleme modellerinden olan Gross'un modeli kısaca açıklanmış, kültürle ilgili öğeler sosyalleşme uygulamaları, sosyal kurallar, kültürel senaryolar ve kültürel değerler olmak üzere farklı alt başlıklarda ele alınmış ve bu süreçlerdeki kültürel farklılıklar vurgulanmıştır. Ayrıca, kültürel değerler açısından duyguları ifade etme ve düzenleme konusundaki kültürel farklılıklar, iki farklı teoriye dayalı çalışmalar aracılığıyla sunulmaktadır. Bu çalışmaların sonuçları, bir duygu düzenleme yöntemi olarak bastırmanın farklı kültürel bağlamlarda uyumlu ve işlevsel olabileceğini ve duygusal davranış süreçlerini açıklamak için farklı analiz düzeylerinin birleştirilebileceğini göstermektedir.
Anahtar sözcükler: Duygu düzenleme, kültür, sosyalleşme, kültürel değerler

Introduction

Emotions are an indispensable part of existence and are essential in our daily lives. They direct and regulate physiological, experiential and cognitive responses, and are a source of motivation to take action (Keltner & Kring 1998, Izard 2002). In addition, regulating emotions is essential for maintaining social harmony and well-being (e.g. Eisenberg et al. 1996, Eisenberg 2000). Individuals have to manage different emotional processes throughout life to achieve desired goals and meet environmental demands. Failure to use appropriate emotion regulation strategies in this process may lead to complex and permanent emotional problems. Studies showed that there is an association between maladaptive emotion regulation use and anxiety disorders (e.g. Mullin and Hinshaw 2007), social difficulties (Wranik et al. 2007), and physical disorders (Sapolsky 2007).

Emotion regulation includes multiple processes and concepts in which internal and external processes play a role, including observing, evaluating, and changing emotional responses (Thompson 1994). In this context, emotion regulation influences the intensity, timing, and frequency of emotional experience and the reduction or continuity of the emotions. How an individual regulates his emotions is determined by the interaction of personal characteristics and environmental conditions. While individuals can regulate their emotions by using their resources, they can also regulate their emotions by using environmental resources like getting the help of others and can act according to the needs of that specific situation. The recognition, interpretation, and expression of emotions leading to emotion regulation are intertwined with learning, experience, and context (e.g. Markus and Kitayama 1991). Therefore, in addition to individual characteristics, interpersonal, social, and cultural context constitute an essential framework in emotion regulation. Considering this fact in clinical applications is necessary for the efficient and functional use of emotion regulation. From this point of view, this study aimed to summarize the relationship between emotion regulation and culture within the framework of literature research and theoretical infrastructure to provide a starting point for readers who want to widen their perspective in this field. For this purpose, the emotion regulation model of Gross et al. (Gross and Levenson 1997, Ochsner et al. 2002, Gross and John 2003), which is one of the most used emotion regulation models in

Address for Correspondence: B. Türküler Aka, Bahçeşehir University, Department of Psychology, İstanbul, Türkiye
E-mail: turkuleraka@gmail.com
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studies on emotion regulation and cultural differences, will be briefly introduced. Then, socialization practices, social rules and cultural values, and their relations with emotion regulation will be discussed via relevant research.

Process Model of Emotion Regulation

After Thompson's (1994) definition of emotion regulation, different models emphasizing different aspects of emotion regulation had emerged (e.g. Campos et al. 2004, Gross 2007, Koole 2009). Among these models, one of the most widely used is the Gross et al.'s model (Gross and Levenson 1997, Ochsner et al. 2002, Gross and John 2003). This model is based on the emotion-generating process model (e.g. Izard 1977, Frijda 1986) and distinguishes two main strategies: antecedent-focused emotion regulation and response-focused emotion regulation. Antecedent-focused regulation strategies are used before an emotion is fully formed, and it includes four strategies as situation selection, situation modification, attention deployment, and cognitive change (Gross 2001). Response-focused strategies are used to control emotional aspects after specific physiological or behavioral responses occur after emotion-generation process (Gross 2001). These strategies may include experiential and behavioral interventions and suppression of emotion.

In literature, studies evaluating emotion regulation strategies show that response-focused strategies were related to an increase in physiological arousal (Cioffi and Holloway 1993, Wegner and Zanakos 1994, Gross and Levenson 1997, Gross 1998, Campbell-Sills et al. 2006) whereas antecedent-focused emotion regulation strategies were related to reduced subjective stress, lower physiological arousal (Gross and Levenson 1997, Gross 1998) and increased tolerance to emotional events (Gross 1998, Richards and Gross 2000).

Most of these studies have been conducted by using cognitive reappraisal as an antecedent-focused regulation strategy and suppression as a response-focused regulation strategy. However, it is not very appropriate to evaluate any emotion regulation strategy as adaptive or maladaptive. As a matter of fact, some studies showed that suppression has an adaptive role in traumatic situations and grieving process (e.g. Bonanno et al. 1995, Bonanno et al. 2003, Seery et al. 2008). Therefore, when evaluating emotion regulation processes on the axis of adaptiveness, it is crucial to consider the biological, developmental, and individual characteristics as well as the cultural processes which have been emphasized in this article.

Culture

Culture can be defined as the patterns of ideas, knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors historically derived in communal living and continued selectively in the next generations and their reflections in institutions and other communal settings (Kroeber and Kluckholm 1952). Socialization practices in the family play an essential role in the continuation and spread of culture. Social rules, cultural scenarios and cultural values constitute a framework for sharing and maintaining the culture. This framework reinforces culturally supported values and behaviors, so behaviors compatible with culture are practiced more, and they are socially rewarded (Mesquita et al. 2014). Similarly, culture also affects the choice of which emotions to regulate and how to regulate them (Butler 2012). Emotion regulation can be more adaptive if it is in line with the current cultural context, resulting in greater well-being (Ford and Mauss 2015). In the following sections, the concept of emotion regulation is evaluated according to the studies in the literature by using the elements of the above-mentioned cultural framework.

Emotion Regulation and Cultural Elements

Socialization Practices

Socialization practices are an important part of the culture. The most significant source of socialization during childhood is the family environment. In every cultural community, parents want to pass on methods that will work in that community and facilitate their children's survival and adaptation (Keller 2003). Thus, parent-child interactions, the social environment, social norms, parents' beliefs about emotions, and concepts of culture are closely related to emotions and emotion regulation (Super and Harkness 1986, Halberstadt and Lozada 2011).

Since parents are mostly the primary caregivers, they control the existing resources and prepare the emotional nurturing environment for their children (Grusec 2011). Therefore, parents also play a significant role in shaping children's emotional development (e.g. Campos et al. 2003, Greenspan and Shanker 2004). In particular, how parents handle and respond to their children's negative emotions and distress shapes how children form their emotional repertoire. When children see that their parents are available to soothe, comfort, and alleviate

distress, they view stressful situations as less threatening and tend to be less physiologically aroused (Cassidy 2000). Conversely, if parents ignore their children's needs or are inconsistent in meeting them, children may have to learn to underestimate or exaggerate the cues of their distress (Kuczynski 2003, Cassidy and Shaver 2008). In fact, these parental emotional repertoire contents, which are manifested as behavioral interactions, are also a reflection of the socialization goals created through culture (Keller and Otto 2009). Since the purpose of socialization will also vary from culture to culture, societies also differ in what is acceptable regarding the social norms they have and the expression of emotions. For example, while American parents encourage their children to share their feelings, Chinese and Japanese parents socialize their children to care about the feelings of others and limit the expression of their feelings in order not to disturb group harmony (Rothbaum et al. 2000). Similarly, Chinese and Indian children have been shown to emphasize relationships and display less self-interest when discussing problems compared to Western children (Keller et al. 1998, Doan and Wang 2010). Apart from these, it has been shown that Indian girls are able to distinguish the nuances between felt and expressed emotions earlier, even before preschool age, compared to Indian boys and British boys and girls. This finding highlights the cultural difference in socialization practices (Joshi and MacLean 1994). Also, American and Chinese mothers use different approaches for soothing their children in the face of stressful events; American mothers regulate their children's emotions by explaining possible reasons why they might feel that way, thus adopting a 'cognitive approach'. On the other hand, Chinese mothers adopt a leading role and a "behavioral approach" and focus on social interaction, discipline, and appropriate behavior (Wang and Fivush 2005).

It is also possible to mention a hierarchical structure in socialization practices. At the top level of this structure, there are primary developmental objectives (Keller and Otto 2009). These objectives can be divided into two groups, which will be discussed in detail in the cultural values section; raising a more independent and self-sufficient individual or an individual who is more socially related and has a complementary role in society. Children learn to regulate their emotions according to these primary objectives. For example, the expression of emotion in negative situations is associated more with the aim of autonomy, while suppression of negative emotions may be associated with adaptation to the group. As the harmony between emotion regulation strategies and objectives increases, the probability of internalization of these strategies increases (Higgins 2008).

As a result, the repertoire related to emotion regulation is first shaped with socialization practices within the family, and these practices reflect the cultural elements that the parents have internalized.

Social Rules and Cultural Scenarios

One of the main dimensions in that cultures differ is the social rules that explicitly or implicitly guide and regulate the complex relationships among the members of society. Individuals have multiple social roles in society, and each individual may belong to different cultural subgroups with different beliefs and norms. Therefore, culture creates a common ground of values, norms, and beliefs for its members to maintain order. This common factor also promotes the continuity of life, well-being, and happiness by providing meaning and knowledge to its members to meet their basic needs (Matsumoto 2007a). In addition, socialization and developmental processes ensure the continuity of this system for generations.

Cultural scenarios determine the meaning, organization, and expression of emotions through the lens of the culture (e.g. Miyamoto and Ma 2011, Miyamoto and Ryff 2011). For example, positive emotions are more desirable in Western cultures than Eastern cultures, and negative emotions are less desirable in Western cultures than Eastern cultures (Eid and Diener 2001). Similarly, it was observed that the definition of happiness differed between American and Japanese individuals. Accordingly, while Americans tend to notice the positive characteristics of happiness, such as the hedonic experience, Japanese refer to the negative characteristics of happiness, such as its transient nature and negative social consequences (Uchida and Kitayama 2009).

In another study, African-American mothers were found to accept and support their children's negative emotions less and use socialization practices that encourage their children to express their negative emotions less than European-American mothers (Nelson et al. 2012). It has been stated that this may occur to adapt to a culture composed mostly of European-Americans and stand strong. Similarly, in a study in which European-American and Chinese participants rated emotional expressions, Chinese participants rated emotional expression more negatively and emotional control more positively than European-Americans. Thus, it was revealed that Chinese participants preferred and applied both implicit and explicit emotion control strategies in emotion regulation. This situation might be related to attempts to hide the pride to prevent the deterioration of interpersonal harmony in Chinese culture (Deng et al. 2019). This study is in line with other studies showing that Asians regulate their emotions to match the expectations of others (e.g. Boiger et al. 2012).

Furthermore, it was found that suppressing emotions while exhibiting behaviors that were considered to be self-sacrifice in romantic relationships were related to high well-being and relationship satisfaction for participants who are high in commitment, whereas suppressing emotions in a similar situation were related to low well-being and relationship satisfaction for participants who are low in commitment (Le Bonnie and Impett 2013). In addition, it has been shown that self-esteem is associated with life satisfaction at a higher rate in individualistic cultures compared to collectivistic cultures (Diener and Diener 1995). Individuals in collectivistic cultures also rely more on social norms to decide whether they will be satisfied, and while evaluating their lives, they care about the social evaluations of their family and friends (Suh et al. 1998).

Another area in which intercultural emotion regulation differences can be observed is the behaviors of seeking help and giving social support. For example, compared to European Americans, East Asian individuals expressed less distress and sought less help; they stated that openly asking for help may also create an additional source of stress due to the risk of negative effects on their relationships (Taylor et al. 2007, Kim et al. 2008). This result indicates that expressing or suppressing emotions is evaluated in terms of social rules, and the cost of profit/loss is made according to this evaluation (Sherman et al. 2009).

As is seen, the culture in which they live provides individuals with a structure about which emotions are desirable and how they should be regulated in this direction. This structure creates a model that individuals can follow through communication, acceptance or rejection, or transmitted rules in daily life.

Cultural Values

In previous chapters, studies showing the relationship between emotion regulation and socialization practices, social rules, and cultural scenarios have been presented. Cultural values can be considered as the highest points of the cultural framework. The following sections explain the relationship between these values and emotion regulation through two models presented in the literature.

Values Model and Emotion Regulation

Within the rapidly growing literature (e.g. Matsumoto et al. 2005, Butler et al. 2007, Haga et al. 2009) about cultural differences in emotion expression and regulation, Matsumoto et al. (2008) offered a functional perspective to understand these factors. This perspective is based on the idea that two types of cultural values are essential for understanding emotion regulation. The first type of values is about interpersonal relationships, and the second type of values is about the emotions themselves.

The values of interpersonal relationships determine the desired relationship styles and the ways of managing conflicts (Matsumoto et al. 2008). These values include the content of the relations in the existing community, the themes to be prioritized, social rules, areas where problems may arise, the strategies to solve problems, and how these values will be transferred to the individuals. These concepts constitute the dynamic between individuals and ingroups within the community.

These dynamics vary in different cultures. In particular, these differences, known as individualism and collectivism (Hofstede 1980) or autonomy versus embeddedness (Schwartz 2004), are explained by four attributes: self, goals, relationship, and determinants of behavior (Triandis 1995).

In cultures where individualism or autonomy is dominant, people tend to have autonomous and independent self-construals. Personal goals have a priority over in-group goals (Yamaguchi 1994). Other individuals are essential for social comparison, and the ability to express oneself and validate internal qualities are essential characteristics of individualistic cultures. Emotions are also evaluated according to internal and subjective experiences (Markus and Kitayama 1991).

On the other hand, in cultures that are collectivistic, or embeddedness is dominant, people tend to have interdependent self-construals and prioritize in-group goals (Yamaguchi 1994). In collectivistic cultures, relationships and harmony with social norms are important for self-definition (Markus and Kitayama 1991). Emotions are evaluated based on self-control and group cohesion, focusing on the emotions of other people (Mesquita and Frijda 1992).

The focus on hierarchy in interpersonal relations is also important for a society. This cultural value orientation is known as power distance (Hofstede 1980, Hofstede and Hofstede 2005) or hierarchy versus egalitarianism (Schwartz 2004). Power distance refers to the degree of acceptance and expectation of unequally distributed power in a society.

Cultures that are high in power distance or hierarchy levels tend to provide more power to higher status individuals and to accept disproportional power variance in society (Hofstede 1980, Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). They also have a negative view of assertiveness and promote self-control when they are with high-status people (Matsumoto 2007b). These cultures emphasize values such as obedience, respect for authority and following rules (Hofstede 2001).

On the other hand, cultures with low power distance or hierarchy tend to reduce status and power differences in society and make power distribution more equal (Matsumoto et al. 2008). Democratic values and discussion are encouraged in these cultures (Hofstede 2001, Matsumoto et al. 2008). In addition, these cultures tend to encourage individuals to be more assertive and not demand self-control when communicating with higher status people (Matsumoto 2007b).

The second type of value reveals guidelines for emotions and emotion regulation, especially in the community. Uncertainty avoidance refers to society's tolerance for uncertain or unknown situations and coping mechanisms (Hofstede 1980, Hofstede and Hofstede 2005). Cultures with high uncertainty avoidance tend to worry more about unknown situations and create more institutions or norms to deal with them. Long-term vs. short-term orientation refers to the society's tendency to delay gratification for social, and emotional needs or rewards (Hofstede 2001). Societies tend to be future-oriented for relationships when this value orientation is high, and they regulate their emotions to maintain the likelihood of good relationships. Finally, affective autonomy refers to the variability of culture in supporting and maintaining an individual's autonomous pursuit of positive experiences such as pleasure and excitement (Schwartz 2004).

Based on this framework of values, a theoretical model has been proposed by Matsumoto et al. (2008), which states that one of the culture's functions is to build and preserve social order by composing value systems that include emotion regulation norms. Accordingly, it is assumed that social complexity creates the need for social order. As a result of this need, culture is formed as a system of meaning and knowledge, including two different values; values related to emotions and values related to interpersonal relationships. These values, in addition to interacting with each other, also shape the norms regarding emotion regulation and contributing to the social order.

Matsumoto et al. (2008) conducted a study with participants from 23 different countries to evaluate this model. Results showed that cultures with a long-term orientation, embeddedness, and hierarchy, emphasizing maintaining social order, tended to have higher scores on suppression as an emotion regulation strategy. In addition, reappraisal and suppression tended to be positively related to these values. On the other hand, it was stated that cultures that attach less importance to maintaining social order and value the individual more tend to score lower on suppression. For these cultures, suppression and reappraisal tended to be negatively related. Also, it was found that emotion regulation at the country level was significantly associated with adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies.

Specifically, the finding that suppression is positively associated with a long-term orientation, embeddedness, and affective autonomy may indicate that in these cultures, suppression is used to gain time to assess the situation and decide on the appropriate response (Matsumoto et al. 2008). In addition, the fact that suppression is associated with higher rates of maladjustment and happiness should be thoroughly investigated, as it indicates that suppression may have a positive role at the cultural level. Also, it was seen that the hypotheses about reappraisal did not yield significant results.

In another study conducted with a similar perspective (Butler et al. 2007), it was seen that the social outcomes of suppression are culture-specific, based on the fact that Western European and Asian values may differ in terms of function, frequency, and negative affect related to suppression. The study showed that women with predominantly European values use emotion suppression less in daily life than women with bicultural Asian-European values. While women with European values associated self-preservation and suppression of negative emotional experiences, this relationship was reversed for women with bicultural values. It has also been shown that experimentally induced suppression leads to decreased sensitivity and negative social consequences for women with European values. In contrast, these effects are reduced for women with bicultural values. Finally, regardless of cultural values, it has been found that suppressing emotions leads to a decreased emotional expression, smiling, laughing, and the desire to make friends during face-to-face interactions (Butler et al. 2007).

In another study, Haga et al. (2009) compared participants from Norway, Australia, and the United States, assuming that American people would tend to suppress negative emotions and emphasize positive emotions as a cultural value. The results showed that suppression or cognitive reappraisal effects were similar across cultures, but Americans used suppression more than others as an emotion regulation strategy. On the other hand,

another study (Gross and John 2003) reported that European-American individuals use suppression less than ethnic minorities such as Asian-American, Latino, and African-American individuals.

In a study involving Indian and American university students (Sheerha and Kumbhare 2021), Indian students used suppression more, American students expressed negative emotions more, and the emotional clarity levels of Indian students were lower than American students. These results are in line with the differences between individualistic and collectivistic cultures.

Affect Valuation Theory and Emotion Regulation

In addition to the model presented by Matsumoto et al. (2008), another perspective that provides a way to examine the relationship between emotion regulation and culture is the affect valuation theory. This theory offers a model to understand the effect of cultural characteristics and temperament on the formation of emotions and behaviors (Tsai 2007, 2017). Accordingly, there are two types of affective states: ideal affect and actual affect.

1. Ideal affect refers to the affective states that individuals ideally want to feel or desire. Although ideal affect has similar characteristics to emotional norms and rules, it differs in some respects. First, ideal affect includes a ranking system for preferred affect states, instead of attitudes towards emotion. Through cultural practices and exposure to cultural elements, individuals learn to value some emotional states more than others and try to reach these states (Tsai et al. 2007). Second, ideal affect has a motivational component that makes a behavior more likely to occur than attitudes. Third, ideal affect is based on personal preferences, so it differs from norms or values that say what is suitable to be felt (Tsai et al. 2007).
2. Actual affect refers to individuals' emotional states regarding specific events, daily moods, or feelings. Actual affect includes a more comprehensive affect range than ideal affect (Tsai et al. 2006).

These two types of affect, actual and ideal, are thought to interact in a way that creates different moods, expressive behavior, and physiological arousal. According to affect valuation theory (AVT), ideal affect is shaped by cultural factors, while temperament factors shape actual affect. The differences between them enhance the formation of different mood processes (Tsai 2007).

In support of this theory, Tsai et al. (2006) observed that when actual affect was controlled, Euro-American and Asian-American individuals cared more about high-arousal positive affect (e.g. excitement) than Hong Kong-Chinese individuals. It was also found that Hong Kong-Chinese and Asian-American individuals placed more emphasis on the low arousal affect (e.g. calmness) compared to European-American individuals. The difference between ideal and actual affect was related to the measure of depression for all groups. In addition, two different studies observed that the ratings of emotional experience and the degree of desirability of these states differed significantly from each other (Rusting ve Larsen 1995, Barrett 1996). This result was evaluated as a support for actual and ideal affect.

AVT theory also offers an explanation for the mixed findings in the emotion literature. Accordingly, it was stated that non-significant findings in emotional reactions across cultures (e.g. Scherer 1997, Tsai et al. 2000, Oishi 2002) may be due to measuring temperamental factors that reflect actual affect. On the other hand, it was stated that significant findings in ethnographic expressions that show differences in values and beliefs (e.g. Ots 1990, Heider 1991, Wierzbicka 1994) reflect ideal affect. In this respect, it has been stated that AVT theory can provide a way to combine cultural differences related to emotional experiences by combining two levels of analysis (Tsai et al. 2006).

Conclusion

Studies focusing on emotional socialization differences and cultural scenarios point to a circular relationship between these concepts. In this cycle, cultural norms and beliefs are transmitted through socialization practices, and culture influences socialization practices. This relationship can be evaluated in terms of cultural determinism, which emphasizes cultural differences (e.g. Miller 1999) or biological explanations that emphasize personality differences (e.g. McCrae and Costa 1999). Although this perspective is not new, it highlights that different levels of analysis and similar findings from different fields are required to identify specific emotion regulation mechanisms. New data from these sources may help to update the theory and practice. For example, similar to intracultural studies, it has been observed that using suppression as an emotion regulation strategy may not be as maladaptive as previous research has shown (e.g. Butler et al. 2007). This result may have significant effects both in research and therapeutic applications. First, by considering similar evidence from both intracultural and intercultural fields into account, suppression can be conceptually and functionally reevaluated.

It should also be noted that suppression and cognitive reappraisal may vary depending on the cultural context when adapting new therapeutic techniques and addressing emotion regulation issues in different cultures. What is considered 'useful' for one group of individuals may be ineffective for other group members. For example, when children in Iran and Germany were compared, more externalization and internalization symptoms were observed in Iranian children. It was suggested that children in Iran might avoid expressing themselves to maintain harmony in the family (Tahmouresi et al. 2014).

In addition, addressing the possible differences between ideal and actual affect for intracultural and intercultural levels will help to reveal the functionality of emotion regulation strategies, develop more accurate assessment tools, and adapt therapeutic interventions within this framework. Evaluating the emotional dimensions by being aware of the distinction between ideal affect and actual affect may be critical for both the therapist and the client. For example, an individual who regulates his emotions according to ideal affect for social acceptance may experience a conflict in his inner world regarding the actual affect dimension. The increase in the gap between ideal and actual affect may change the preferred emotion regulation strategies, and it might be necessary to evaluate the compatibility of these strategies within this notion. Finally, given the diversity of emotional repertoires of different cultures, not only suppression and reappraisal but also other regulation strategies should be investigated in future research.

In summary, this review aims to provide a brief perspective on the relationship between culture and emotion regulation by emphasizing the theoretical background and highlighting the points that need attention in clinical practice. Due to the limited scope of the subject, studies covering personality traits, genetic processes, or physiological outcomes were not included in the review. Future research may help to understand different outcomes related to the interaction among emotional regulation, experience, culture, physiology, and psychopathology.

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