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A Metaphorical Exploration of Work, Life and Community On-Board Cruise Ships: A Hospitality Perspective

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This research provides a sociological understanding of front line hospitality staff, focusing particularly on waiters and pursers employed on cruise ships. Its purpose is to evaluate the complexities and richness of their work and social experiences as they negotiate, create and justify their identities and community formations in the unique and under-researched environment of a cruise ship. Conceptually, the research investigates the inevitable and inextricable links between identity, work and community to explore their perceptions of themselves, others and their world. Being part of a wider research project, this paper metaphorically explores twenty semi-structured interviews to creatively gather an "insider's" view of the participants' work, community and cruise ship environment. Ultimately, a metaphor can be used as a porthole into self image, guided by the framework of the cruise ship to help construct meaning. Therefore, the metaphors used by participants were not a method to explain the organisation, but rather how the members come to understand themselves within the organisation. What is clear from this study is that all participants created a ship-based identity, which was different from how they perceived themselves on land. Being an environment that is unique, workers have to adapt, adopt and sacrifice - their previous identity has to be reshaped to meet the criteria of the place and system of the ship. Waiters were significantly more likely to define themselves and their world based upon their occupational perceptions and relationship with management, while pursers reflected upon their social and personal opportunities as a tool for self-definition. The outcomes of the research present an exploratory, in-depth account of the working lives of hospitality workers on cruise ships. The findings will be of value and relevance to cruise ship operators when tackling social issues relating to the employment of cruise ship workers.

Keywords: Cruise ships, Metaphors, Community, Hospitality

Introduction

The purpose of this research is to explore and evaluate the transient and temporary working lives of front line hospitality workers on-board cruise ships. This is a field of research which is relatively unknown, particularly from a sociological and behavioural perspective (e.g., Gibson, 2008; Papathanassis and Beckmann, 2011). In particular, an important and under-researched issue is that of cruise ship employees and how they make sense of their work and life on-board. It is this area which constitutes the focus of this study. When most people go to work, they are in the knowledge that they can go home at the end of the day or the end of their shift, insomuch that they have a life outside of work, including friends and family. The cruise ship industry is in contrast to this. The organisation not only invades one's working life, but also one's social life. Ultimately, to be employed on cruise ships, is in a sense to dedicate one's life, albeit temporarily, to an occupation or line of work and the people attached to that work.

From an operational standpoint, hierarchy, efficiency and bureaucracy are prominent, a diluted form of its naval cousin. To work on a cruise ship is to be arguably more tied to an occupation than one would be on land. The occupational position which an individual is employed on-board has an overarching determinant on the type of life one can expect. One's occupation will not only determine aspects such as the level of pay, status and number of hours worked, but also where one lives on the ship, where one can eat and socialise, and it also influences the people one socialises with. Essentially, an occupation can be the forefront of how an individual comes to define oneself and others while on the cruise ship, thus creating a ship-based identity. This noted, to capitalise upon a fuller understanding of the sociological and behavioural nature of cruise ship work, efforts should be made to explore the totality of work and life, encapsulating not only the work one does, but also the surrounding community and social activities which are inextricably linked.

This exploratory paper, which is part of a wider study that explores the work and life of hospitality employees on-board cruise ships, presents a discussion and findings of a metaphorical analysis of twenty semi-structured interviews held with individuals in the occupations of waiter and purser. A waiter has similar occupational demands to those on land, while a purser is similar to that of a front desk / guest services personnel in a hotel.

A brief overview of the cruise ship industry

The cruise industry finds itself straddling a unique segment of the hospitality and tourism sector, entangled within a production and service environment, and underlined by maritime and international law. In its entirety a cruise ship is a floating hospitality, leisure, and tourism hub, demonstrating a multitude of industries intertwined within one entity. The ship itself is a social container, encroaching physical and symbolic boundaries, a controller of social action and interaction. In this sense, cruise ships have often been regarded as floating 'cities' or 'hotels', and could arguably be further categorised as their own floating society. Research on cruise ships has

gathered pace over the past 30 years, with increased intensity in the last decade or so. The lack of social and cultural knowledge and rising media attention surrounding the industry are calls which have challenged researchers alike to focus on this successful fragment of the tourism and hospitality sector.

The modern cruise ship industry is a strategic key player in the hospitality and leisure industries, and has changed markedly in recent years. It is 'expanding rapidly' (Millar, 2010: p.17), predominantly influenced by technological advances in vessel and operational design and changes in social perceptions, making cruising more accessible to individuals from wider socio-economic backgrounds. Such changes have evidently impacted on demand and according to the Cruise Lines International Association (CLIA), the industry has experienced a continuing upward trend with average annual growth figures of 7.4% since 1980 (CLIA, 2010). Cruise Market Watch (2013) reported that there were 20.3 million passengers in 2012, which is forecast to grow to 20.9 million passengers in 2013. Although cruise tourism, in terms of figures, registers less passengers than in other tourism sectors, the growth rate of cruise tourism far outreaches tourism rates overall, and the industry holds a significant economic portion of the world tourism business (Swain, 2006).

The nature of a cruise ship, being physically isolated and encapsulated, is what sets it apart from many other industries, organisations and places of work for an employee. The cruise ship is a place of work, a temporary home, and offers a base for leisure pursuits, which are 'locked into patterns of interaction with whoever is on-board' (Sampson, 2003: p.266), forming a contained floating society. Working seven days a week, up to 16 hours a day, for months at a time can severely strain employees, especially in occupations with direct customer contact such as those in hospitality positions. This on-board life offers little opportunity for socialising and activities outside of the occupation (Lukas, 2009; Sehkaran and Sevcikova, 2011), thus developing a sense of community revolving around a specific line of work.

Due to the self-sufficient nature of operations and a focus on customer satisfaction, there is often one employee per two/three customers, highlighting the centrality of labour operations on-board (Raub and Streit, 2006). The labour structure of a cruise ship can be divided into hotel and marine operations represented by a three class social structure of officers, staff and crew (e.g. Lee-Ross, 2004). Occupations categorised as 'crew' are at the bottom of the hierarchy and are typically positions in the dining room, custodial operatives and cabin stewards. 'Staff' occupy positions such as shop assistants, gym instructors, and entertainment. Most front line service staff are recognised as crew, although the position of purser for example, is categorised as officer. Authority on-board can be compared to 'paramilitary' (Nolan, 1973: p.88) or 'quasi-military' (Wood, 2000: p.365) in which social relations are much more hierarchical than in most workplaces and power structures are closely linked to the specific division of labour (McKay, 2007; Nolan, 1973). The social structure is in principle restricted to one's position held on-board the ship. In this sense, a worker could be straggled to their occupation as an important dimension that expresses their identity.

A metaphorical exploration

In its simplest of forms, a metaphor creates a distinctive understanding of an object/experience through the connection of something that is relatable and familiar. For example, "Michael has the heart of a lion", does not literally mean that "Michael" has a lion's heart, but may have a shared understanding of being brave, strong, and courageous. Therefore, through the vehicle of discourse an individual can communicate effectively, maintaining a shared meaning which may or may not be difficult to express otherwise. Metaphorical language means not taking language literally but rather deciphers the underlying meaning. In this sense, a metaphor can reveal an insight into how individuals make sense of events, which can be attributed in a collective and individual way (Cazal and Inns, 1998), reflecting an intersection of context specific social meanings and experience. In short, a metaphor can be considered a form of discourse that transfers an experience or process (e.g., emotion, ideas, relationship) that is tied contextually and often tacitly, and expressed so that it becomes clearer and relatable. Due to the presentational value that metaphors offer individuals, it can be a useful tool to express ideas or thoughts which are sensitive, complex or intangible, or furthermore in areas which are poorly understood, such as cruise ship work.

Much contemporary research on the subject of metaphor draws upon the work of Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) *'Metaphors We Live By'*. They asserted that metaphors structure conceptual understanding and regard metaphors as 'pervasive', not only in the thinking of language use, but also ingrained into thought and action. In this sense, a metaphor can be a representative link between language and thought, and furthermore can be fundamental to the signification of reality to understand and interpret the world (Lehtonen, 2000). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, p.3) state, 'the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor'.

Metaphors, as a niche form of discourse analysis, have been applied to a wide range of research areas, specifically, and more relatable to this study, to the area of work, identity and community. In particular, metaphors have been used to explore the identity of teachers (e.g., Cameron, 2003; Hunt, 2006; Leavy *et al.* 2007), the relationship between work and life (Cowan and Bochantin, 2011), the emotional work of being a nurse (Froggatt, 1998), hospitality organisations (Palmer and Lundberg, 1995), and also the 'performative' metaphors in the interactive service work of cruise ship workers (Weaver, 2005). Understanding how metaphors are used can assist in the understanding of how people think, make sense of the world, and how individuals communicate (Cameron, 2003). Furthermore, the analysis of metaphors is concerned with how metaphors are structured, used and understood (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). In other words, to what meaning is the metaphor being expressed, what information is being transferred, and what kind of relationship does this have with the experience/process. Thus bridging perceptive thought processes with shared understanding. In this sense, metaphors can provide insights into hidden emotions or experiences, particularly with regards to belonging to a group, transferring to such concepts as identity, or how individuals construct meaning of themselves.

Methodology

This study gathered data via semi-structured telephone interviews from past and present cruise ship employees in the positions of waiter and purser. Due to the notorious difficulties of collecting data on cruise ship employees (e.g. Larsen *et al* 2012), the sample of participants was achieved through three strategies: (1) an advertisement on cruise ship based online social networks, (2) a poster / advertisement in two internet cafes and one seafarer hub around the port of Southampton, UK., and (3) the opportunity of snowball sampling. The sampling criteria were based on individuals employed in the position of waiter or purser, had completed at least one full contract on a cruise ship, and lastly that individuals were employed on a cruise ship, or employed recently. In total, twenty interviews were undertaken. The length of the interviews was between seventeen minutes and just over two hours, with an average of over forty minutes. The interview questions were generally derived from the literature and also a preliminary study, but questioning was open and remained general to seek the motivations and expectations of working on-board cruise ships, insights of their work and life, and their perceptions of work and themselves.

The sample included nine males and eleven females originating from 15 different countries. There was one participant who had worked in both positions and so was included in the data of waiting staff and pursers. This included eight waiting staff and thirteen pursers. The waiting staff participants were typical of cruise ship employees in that it is a male dominated position (six males and two females), and they also primarily originated from Eastern Europe or Asia (five). Participants in the position of purser were also typical in that it is a female dominated position (three males and ten females), and also mainly from Western Europe/North America/Australia (nine). All participants had worked at least one full contract on-board a cruise ship, with the longest being ten years, and with an average of just over three years. Because of the difficulties of contacting cruise employees directly, there was a total of just five individuals who were still working in the cruise ship industry. Of the 15 participants not currently working on cruise ships, seven months was the longest time out of cruise ship employment. The shortest was two months, and the average was just over four months.

Metaphor analysis

Generally, metaphor analysis, as a research tool, begins with the collection of linguistic metaphors from participants, which are sorted into groups or clusters by lexical connections, and subsequently given labels from which meaning is transferred (Cameron, 2003: p.240). This can be typically applied in two ways: through the use of pre-determined metaphors which have been recognised in previous research, or through the development of metaphors based upon what is discovered in the data. Each approach has its appropriateness and usefulness. The extraction of metaphors in this study was unprompted (Weaver, 2005). This meant that the interview schedule did not directly seek to ask participants to think metaphorically, allowing participants to naturally and organically use, and more importantly be given the choice of metaphorical use. In other words, individuals chose to use metaphors as a way of reflecting their understanding as a semi-conscious discourse.

The current analytical procedure of metaphors was primarily influenced by the work of Steger (2007), but also takes note of Cameron (2003), and was undertaken in three steps. Basically, these steps involve (1) the identification of metaphors in the discourse, (2) evaluating the general meaning of the metaphor, and (3) investigating the connotations relevant to the context (i.e. cruise ship). The analysis of metaphor is not to seek an all-encompassing metaphor that are used by cruise ship employees, but to locate multiple metaphors, which may contrast, to fully explore their understandings or realities of working and living on-board a cruise ship. This analytical process involved the reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts, highlighting the metaphors used. Metaphors were chosen that were 'strong' and 'comparative'. In other words, the metaphors that were more obvious and arguably less creative, yet were the dominant images of the organisation, work and life, that participants chose to express as one way of understanding their world. Once the metaphors were highlighted, these were listed and grouped by each participant.

Findings and discussion

In total there were two clusters of metaphorical illustration that related to the environment of the ship. One cluster explored how participants understood the ship's space or work setting, and the second cluster identified the strategies used as participants negotiated their way through their working and social lives. The metaphor clusters are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 Metaphorical findings
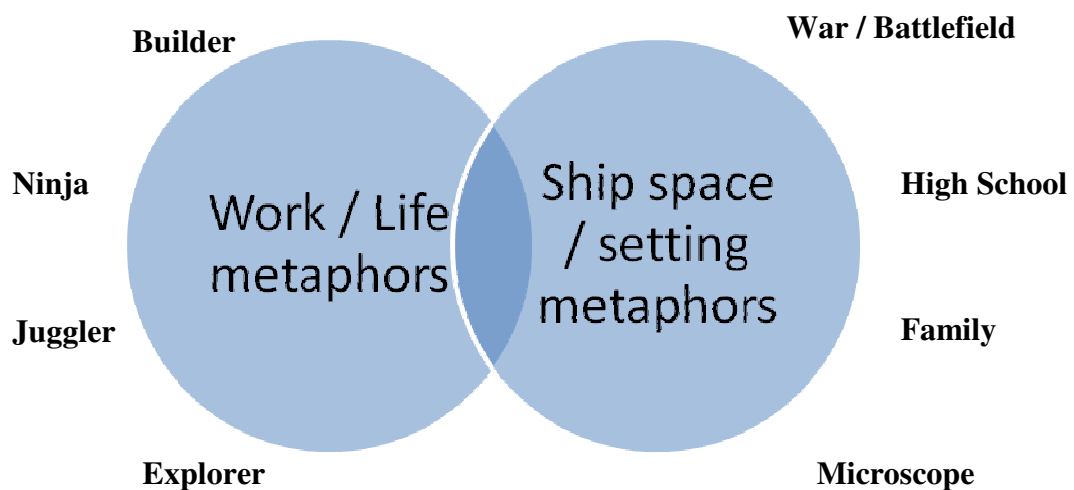
Metaphors of the environment: ship space / work setting

This metaphorical content reflected upon the participants' views about their working and social environment. In other words, how the cruise ship environment had implications upon one's work

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and also social activities. The metaphorical content here was predominantly associated with conflict, intensity and struggle, and how individuals were able to fit in the ship's environment. Moreover, the metaphors were of a community focus, in that the focus was not solely upon the individual. Being able to understand the cruise ship environment could not be fully made without reference to others. To make sense of oneself (self definition) within a given context can only be realised from the comparison, relationships, and judgement of others (e.g. Tajfel, 1978). Therefore to understand oneself in the cruise ship environment, the perception of others and their perceived perceptions need to be taken into consideration.

On cruise ships there is a strong emphasis on family. When talking of family about other cruise ship members it clearly had meaning to the participants, particularly since they were isolated from their "real" family. This disconnection from their biological family provides a need for belonging and it became "a family away from your own family" (Joanne, purser). It was clear that cruise ship companies would foster and place value upon a family environment; it not only supports a strong and harmonious community atmosphere, but it also implements control, trust, and an element of obligation. The obligation refers to the feeling of having to do a good job or a reluctance to leave one's role, because to do so would be letting their family down (Furunes and Mykletun, 2007). In some ways, a family and the organisation are similar. As a social system, both have a recognised leadership/hierarchy, which can be collectively and individually supportive and controlling, and furthermore have the capacity to entrench belonging and a base of conflict (Brotheridge and Lee, 2006). It was clear that organisational members "really became family" (Sam, purser), and although there was some references to the role of a parent/manager role, the most identified role was that of their "brothers and sisters", or their work group members. In this study, waiters formed a family which was centred around their occupation, while pursers, having more freedom in their role, encapsulated different occupations, albeit typically on the same hierarchical level.

The war/battlefield metaphor was more often referred to by waiters. This would suggest that waiters felt more threatened and were in a position of conflict. This is not suggested as a physical war/battle, but one that is verbal and symbolic in construction (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), whereby one's identity (personal and social) is attacked or criticised and strategies are devised to defend it. Waiters related to this metaphor on a more symbolic level which was integrated throughout multiple discourses in the interviews. For pursers, this metaphor was used as a mechanism to primarily describe their relationship with guests, which can be at a confrontational capacity, and also as an explanation as to how their personal space was "invaded" by the organisation (Kim, purser). For waiters, a war/battlefield metaphor was more akin to their identity and multiple aspects of their work and life. It primarily defined their role as one with connotations of conflict and struggle. The war for waiters was ultimately to gain a positive identity, yet they were confronted with being labelled as 'crew' by the organisation, having an autocratic relationship with management, and generally having an occupation that carries a 'stigma' (Wildes, 2007). This is underlined by the conflict with management, and also the artificial battle with guests to gain gratuities. It is clear that the relationship with management has a direct effect upon the way workers are able to make sense of their world. Pursers appear to have a clear and congruent working relationship, while the

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restaurant seems to be more of a battleground whereby the soldiers (waiters) are instructed/ordered by the general/guard (management). This type of bureaucratic style relationship in place for waiters/management can be a source of conflict and furthermore a practice that can stifle creativity (e.g. De Bono, 1985).

The next metaphor was a feeling of being under the microscope. This metaphor relates to how some participants felt they had no "escape" and that everything was "visible". This was more often used by pursers. Because pursers had that extra freedom with their role, being more socially available, it was a variable that was more salient. The final metaphor in this cluster was the high school metaphor. In particular, this was concerned with social standing (popularity) and community formation (segmentation) depending on one's occupation, thus highlighting inter-group rivalries. It was noticeable that an individual's social standing was generally attached to their occupation. Based upon school-type language, waiters were thought to be more like "geeks", while pursers more like "cheerleaders". In other words, it was a case whereby individuals "knew their place" in the society of the ship based upon their occupation. From this comparison, there was little support for waiters and pursers regularly socialising, either on a voluntary basis of choosing to socialise together, or not having that opportunity to do so because of the lack of support structure from the organisation. This is not to suggest that waiters and pursers never socialised, but because of the differing occupational demands and access to space and time; the system and structure in place created practical and social considerations.

Metaphors of the environment: work / life

This metaphorical content identified the individual strategies used by the participants to work and live on a cruise ship. Moreover, the strategies reflected how participants were able to cope with the conditions and hardships of working and living on the ship. Though not exclusive, these metaphors were a strategy linked to one's social activities. In this understanding, pursers were significantly more likely to use these metaphors than waiters, since a purser's role allowed more social freedom outside of their work demands. In essence, these were used by participants to gain some element of control through the management and implementation of their social activities, which was determined by and linked to their occupation. The metaphor that illustrated the biggest sense of control, which bordered on deviance, was the ninja metaphor. This was a strategy that was linked to being stealthy, trying to escape from the pressures of work, which could be at the cost of organisational compliance. Norris (waiter) talked about sneaking past security after drinking too much alcohol so as not to get into trouble. Being a ninja was to a certain extent to gain some control, which was more often an ambition for a waiter, as their work and life are more controlled than that of a purser. Being a ninja is not always easy, and it wasn't attainable for all, as Kim (purser) explains, "If you are on a regular job on the ship, you can just kind of slip away and no one really notices you". Kim had two positions, in one of them she was an officer. In the officer position she found it increasingly difficult to get away from work and the role that she had stepped into and so a ninja was not appropriate in her position.

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The explorer metaphor was a particular and temporary mindset that some participants described to achieve one's personal goals that offset the difficulties of ship life. To an extent, to work on a cruise ship is a journey, and to therefore be an explorer. The explorer outlook, although seeks guidance, moreover grasps independence, and other than the exploration of new countries, some participants talked about the exploration of the self. The prospect of being away from home, and in some instances escaping from home, gave the opportunity for participants to reflect upon themselves and their life. This metaphor was popularly used by pursers. The position of a purser gave the opportunity for individuals to explore, whilst the occupational demands and restrictions on being a waiter appeared to have dampened their appetite for being an explorer. An explorer was chiefly a strategy to capitalise upon one's personal ambitions; travel, experience new cultures and new lifestyles, and so on. This noted, an explorer's mindset was thought to be only temporary, either waning over time or fading after one's ambitions had been met. This would result in individuals developing new ambitions, which may lie outside of the industry, or altering their mindset which may be on a professional level.

The remaining two metaphors were the juggler and builder. The juggler metaphor was an attempt to negotiate the major factors of cruise ship life: work, play and sleep. Moreover, it was a strategy for personal and work congruence, being able to meet personal goals but also the goals of the organisation. The builder metaphor was used to explain how individuals used the tools of the organisation to build relationships, a sense of self, and potentially a career. Working on cruise ships, for most individuals, is the beginning of something new; a new contract, meeting new people, and a new place of employment with different ways of working. So principally, working on a ship necessitates to some degree an element of building or planning, even if workers have worked on ships for several years. It was a means of using the tools provided by the organisation to develop social and professional bonds. Being organisationally dependent this could also be a cause of frustration. A worker may have career or professional aspirations, although the ability to reach these may not be facilitated by the organisation. This is arguably a case for waiters on-board. It is recognised that cruise ship organisations want the professional skill-sets and attributes for the role, but additionally forget or are inadequately prepared to meet these career aspirations or professional development. In short, frustration may occur if the tools do not match the requirements of the builder, or the builder does not understand the plans provided. Builders can only work if they have the right tools or plans in place.

Conclusion and limitations

The identification of metaphors is a technique that offers a different way of seeing data and moreover a route that can help explore cruise workers' understanding of the semi-closed world of the cruise ship industry and their position within it. To do this, it was not a case of identifying every metaphor used by participants, but rather, through metaphorical association, to identify the

metaphors that were central to their discourse in describing and evaluating their meaningful understandings. This study represents an exploratory and innovative contribution to the field of hospitality cruise ship work. The research also has value by being a medium that allows cruise ship workers to tell their story. This is something of a rarity in cruise ship research, to get a perceptive account of their world and what this line of work means for them. Furthermore, the research has been able to re-address and also re-affirm some of the negative depictions of cruise ship work. The stories collected from the workers in this study have been able to produce a very different but realistic perspective of the working lives of waiters and pursers. This paper also highlights the potential of metaphorical analysis in revealing a different view of reality. A metaphorical approach may be particularly useful in this instance where there is little research, but also as it may be particularly difficult for an "outsider" to grasp the realities of working on cruise ships. This noted, the analysis presented does not postulate that the views demonstrated here are definitive, but rather it has generated an interesting and creative way of discussing the way waiters and pursers view their working and social lives on-board cruise ships.

Despite the usefulness of metaphors to this particular paper, it is important to acknowledge the limitations. Firstly, the metaphors found here will be situation specific to the cruise ship environment. Although similar metaphors may be used in other research areas, the meanings could differ somewhat. Furthermore, the analysis of metaphors is concerned with a higher level of subjectivity. For instance, what one researcher deems as the underlying meaning could be totally different to what another researcher concludes, and moreover both could be different to how the participant makes sense of it. Second, as noted earlier, an analysis of metaphors, although it doesn't claim to be, cannot give an all encompassing view of a social phenomenon, only a partial view can be obtained. Third, metaphors can appear in conversation for several reasons, such as the 'nature of interact ional talk' or fashioned by a 'sub-conscious accommodation' (Cameron 2003: p.269). In this study some interviews had more metaphorical content than others, while one (Mandy, purser) was found to have no metaphorical content that was of particular interest. Finally, the implication of nationality should be acknowledged. Although from a nationality perspective the sample was seemingly representative of a twenty-first century cruise ship, a major consideration therefore (being that the interviews were conducted in English) was that for 50% of participants (ten), English was not their first language. While participants are required to have a good grasp of the English language to be employed on cruise ships it is important to recognise this limitation. It could be suggested that if participants were interviewed in their first language, different metaphors may have been used to describe their experiences and subsequently affected the findings related to the analysis of metaphors. This further highlights the issue of national differences, whereby metaphors used by participants may be understood differently than their intended purpose.

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