The Absence of Parents and Psychopathic Disorder in *Dismissed* Movie

Hana Kapila Natania

1Faculty of Adab and Humanity, Universitas Islam Negeri Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta

I. INTRODUCTION

The role of parents is one of the most fundamental aspects required in the formation of a child’s personality and psychological well-being. Parents have an essential role in the development of early childhood psychological (Ardiati, 2018). Parents’ role is also needed by a child, especially in providing nourishment, affection, guidance, feelings of security, prevention of disease, etc. However, not all children have a perfect family with a complete father and mother. Some of them are growing up with parents who are both physically and emotionally nonexistent. The absence of parents can significantly influence the child’s psychological development.

The role of parents in the process of a child’s psychological development also got special attention from several psychoanalysts. It was started by Sigmund Freud as a pioneer of psychoanalysis theory, and his theory was developed by his other followers. Freud emphasizes that the presence of parents is significant for children through every stage of development, especially in early childhood. According to Freudian psychoanalysis, personal and social development takes shape in the first six years of human life. This period is the basis of personality development in the next period (Ayun, 2016). The role of parents can help children complete the stages of psychosexual development.

If a child loses the parents figure, the child will experience an impact on his development and every stage of psychosexual development. When
the psychosexual stages are correctly resolved, the result is a healthy personality. If certain problems are not resolved at the proper stage, fixation can occur (Habibie, 2017). Fixation has a long-lasting effect on every problem at every stage of our personality or character (Boeree, 2006).

Furthermore, if the parents are absence, it can cause the child to have a weak superego. Anna Freud as cited in Holder argue that if as externally the level of rapport with parent increases, so does the internal state of the superego and the energy with which it enforces its claim. If the former is lowered, the superego will also decrease (Holder, 2005). Anna Freud provides a detailed explanation that a child’s superego has a continuous dependence on the people with whom they have a primary relationship, particularly their parents, as the giver of the rule regarding something good or bad. Likewise, Donald Winnicott asserts that if the parents or primary caregiver of the infants is absent, consequently the task of infant development will be infinitely complicated (Winnicott & Rodman, 2010). If the parents fail or not present in that period to raise awareness healthy self, the child will become a False Self. The False Self is organized to hide the True Self which it does by meeting the demands of the environment (Winnicott, 1990). The False Self is not the Real Self or real behavior, but rather the behavior that is used to fulfill the expectations of the people around. Individual who has False Self mostly refer to a variety of personality disorders.

Evidently, the absence of parents in child’s psychological development also creates the problem on the mental condition of children. In the form of losing the role of parents, children who grow up in imperfect family conditions will be prone to mental illness or psychological disorder. Children raised without complete families are less developed in their psychological, intellectual, and social development than children raised in normal families and are more susceptible to physical and mental illness (Stevens, 1983). One psychological disorder caused by parental absence in a child is Psychopathic Personality Disorder. According to Hare (1999) in Nekrassovski, psychopathic is a personality disorder characterized by a specific group of behaviors and inferred personality traits, most of which society views negatively (Nekrassovski, 2016). Psychopathic personality disorder is a dangerous psychological condition. This personality disorder is frequently linked to violent tendencies and criminal behavior. Nevertheless, not everyone who engages in violent or criminal behavior is a psychopath. Psychopathic personality disorder is characterized by emotional behavior that interferes with interpersonal relationships. A psychopath is prone to violence and is unable to maintain harmonious relationships with others. A psychopath cannot be identified based on their outward appearance. In general, a psychopath looks normal, but unlike normal people, psychopaths lack morals and conscience. They have no ethics or respect for the rights of others. Psychopathic personality disorder can be caused by bad experiences that occurred in the past, which can be in the form of sadness, loss, trauma, etc. Furthermore, psychopathic personality disorder is also as the result of not fulfilling children’s crucial physical needs, such as nourishment, sleep comfort, and emotional needs such as parental love and empathy as a continuation of healthy psychological development in children. These needs can be met by parents. Parents help children to identify themselves and instill a sense of empathy in them. Without a sense of empathy, children will grow up with destructive effects. The lack sense of empathy is one of the manifestations of psychopathic personality disorder. Besides, psychopaths often use the image of charm, manipulation, and even violence to get what they want. They often have no feelings of guilt or remorse when breaking social norms or hurting others. Zeier & Newman (2013) stated that all of this stems from the fact that psychopaths are completely devoid of conscience and incapable of empathizing, and have low emotional reactivity and lack of underlying anxiety (Nekrassovski, 2016). These behaviors are manifestations of a psychopathic personality disorder.

These manifestations of psychopathic personality disorder are destructive psychological effects related to parental absence in one’s early developmental stage. These destructive psychological effects portrayed in Lucas Ward, the Dismissed movie’s main character, a movie by Benjamin Arfmann, which was published in 2017. This movie tells the story of Lucas Ward, a 17-year-old boy who lives motherless. His father is a criminal defense attorney who has a drinking hobby, and his mother has long passed away. He lost his mother since he was a baby. He lives his life with his father, and has no siblings. Apart from that, Lucas has an aggressive behavior and an obsession with always getting an
“A” in school. He is easily mad when his teacher does not give him an “A”. He does not even hesitate to kill two women who are not directly involved in the conflict. In performing his aggressive behavior, he is often inspired by the fictions he read such as the Othello play and Crime and Punishment novel. He has a different understanding from other people in reading these fictions and he considers these fiction characters as the model for his actions when threatening his teacher to give him an “A.”

There have been many researchers who have conducted research related to the issue of this research which investigates the effect of parental absence on the main character’s behavior. The first research is conducted by Febe Olivia Yowandra Dita Sutanto (Sutanto) entitled “The Influence of the Absence of Father Figure on Ronnie’s Behavior as Seen in Nicholas Sparks’s the Last Song” in 2015. The second research is conducted by Arief Rahman Fajar (Fajar) with his research titled as “The Impact Of Father Figure Absence Towards Illya’s Behavior In Guy Ritchie’s The Man From UNCLE (2015) Movies”. The third research is taken by Andi Bagus Prakoso (Prakoso) titled as “The Absence of Father Figure On Sutter’s Adolescence in James Ponsoldt’s The Spectacular Now (2013) Film: A Psychoanalysis Criticism” in 2017. All the aforementioned previous research has not yet analyzed the parental absence, both mother and father, and its correlation to the psychopathic problem. Therefore, the writer conducts this research considering that no other researchers have done this research, especially using Dismissed movie as the corpus.

The writer argues that there is a correlation between Lucas’ psychopathic obsession with the traumatic experience of the parental absence started when Lucas’ early developmental stage until teenager. Therewith, his psychopathic behavior reflects his way that trying to substitute the absence of parents to the characters of fiction that he admired. Therefore, in analyzing the character and psychological disorder of Lucas, the writer uses Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalysis theory and the Psychopathic Checklist Revised (PCL-R) by Robert D. Hare. Psychoanalysis can be used as an approach to literary study which focuses on the explanation of growth, development, and structure of human personality (Christine, 2017). The purpose of this research is to explore (1) How is the psychopath character portrayed through the main character in the Dismissed movie?, and (2) How is the main character’s psychopathic problem related to the absence of his parents?

II. METHOD

The qualitative method and descriptive analysis approach are used in this paper to carry out the purpose of this study. Qualitative method focuses on the process of investigating comprehension that explores social or human problems (Creswell, 1998). The qualitative method enables the writer as the subject of research to explore and investigate accurately the phenomena in accordance with the issue of research to be studied that reveals in the research questions through dialogues, narrations and the behavior of the main character, Lucas. The primary data used in this research is taken from the Dismissed movie by Benjamin Arfmann. Meanwhile, the secondary data is collected from books, journals, and websites related to this research. According to Darlington and Scott, in qualitative research, the data collected from three techniques, for instance, in-depth interviewing of individuals and groups, systematic observation of behavior, and analyzing documentary data in books, journals, and the like (Darlington & Scott, 2002).

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Psychopathic Characteristics of the Main Character Analysis

Psychopathy is known as “a severe personality syndrome that causes abnormalities in affective and interpersonal functioning accompanied by significant behavioral aberrations (Patrick, 2007). According to Perri and Lichtenwald, the psychopaths expect to violate social norms and expect something without any sense of regret or guilt (Perri & Lichtenwald, 2010) . However, a specific list of traits for psychopathic personality disorder has been published by one of the experts in psychopathy, Robert Hare, in his PCL-R, which describes some traits for psychopath personality disorder. If a person owns these traits, then that person can be diagnosed as having a psychopathic problem and can be considered a psychopath. Thoroughly, these traits are seen in Lucas Ward, the main character of Dismissed movie, and will be analyzed in more detail as follow.
1. Glib and Superficial Charm

The first impression of Lucas is a teenage boy who is superficially charming. Not only being charming in appearance, but he also shows a friendly and polite attitude. It can be seen when Lucas first attended the English Literature class as a new transfer student and met his teacher, Mr. Butler. Lucas looks very friendly and polite to Mr. Butler. According to Hare, a psychopath can be very effective in presenting themselves well and are often very likable and charming (Hare, 1999). Lucas praises the essay assignment made by Mr. Butler. Lucas said, “I found your essay prompts to be utterly stirring. Like the double in Moby Dick. I never knew that it could have so many meanings until you encouraged me to dig deeper into the subtext” (Arfmann, 2017). He said that in order to make a good start to get closer to Mr. Butler and make a good first impression of himself on Mr. Butler. Lucas knows very well that first impressions were very important. That is the reason why Lucas builds a fake character or persona when interacting with other people. However, in fact, Lucas is rude to Mr. Butler later. He threatens Mr. Butler when he does not get an A from Mr. Butler on his paper.

2. Grandiosity of self-worth

Not only has a charming character, Lucas also has good self-confidence, but at the same time it makes him arrogant. He has a grandiose sense of self-worth that leads to his belief that he is the most special, unique, and right. It makes him think that he has the right to do whatever he wants. A sense of grandiose self-worth is a central hallmark in psychopathic personality disorder. As claimed by Hare, psychopaths often come across as arrogant, shameless braggarts-self-assured, opinionated, domineering, and cocky (Hare, 1999). Whereas in this case, Lucas thinks that he is the most special person compared to others, so he can dominate all positions wherever he is. It can be seen in the scene when Lucas feels that he deserves an “A” on his Iago paper, and then he refuses Mr. Butler’s opinion on Iago. He always felt that he was always smarter than anyone, so he could not accept that other people had the right to interfere with his opinion. Lucas’s inflated self-image or inflated grandiosity leads him to have not only a sense of being special, arrogant, and entitled but also a dream world of exceptional power and success. It can be seen from the following dialogue.

Lucas : Mr. Butler, where did you get your degree?
Mr. Butler : I’m sorry?
Lucas : Your degree. Your degree. Where did you go to college?
Mr. Butler : I went to Iowa State. I don’t think that has anything to do with...
Lucas : Yeah. Perhaps My interpretation of the text befits an Ivy League mindset. And that’s why we’re having this pesky medication.

Lucas has a big fantasy to continue his education at Harvard University. Therefore, he always tries to maintain his academic record by getting the grade “A”. There is nothing wrong with having the obsession at such young age. However, it becomes a problem when Lucas justifies any means to reach his obsession. Lucas has the audacity to do anything to get an A, even by committing a crime.

3. Pathological Lying and Manipulative

Besides his sense of grandiosity of self-worth, he is also very skilled in lying and manipulating. Lucas’ skill in lying and manipulating shows when Lucas avenges Mr. Butler with some strategies he made. At first, he wanted to make Mr. Butler lost his family. The first strategy he made was to create a scandal between Mr. Butler and his friend Rebecca in a manipulating way. Lucas lies to Becca about things that are not true. He did it to manipulate Becca to ensure that Becca complied with his instructions and she was used as a means to avenge Mr. Butler and makes him give Lucas the grade A. Lucas manipulates Becca’s mind with the false information about Mr. Butler condition at home with his wife. He also convinces Becca that Mr. Butler has a crush on her and gives the pointers which Becca must do to be with Mr. Butler. A psychopath often uses other people to achieve his goals. Psychopaths can be very astute at determining people’s weaknesses and using them for their benefit (Hare, 1999). It is clear that Lucas really understands someone he considers weak. As a psychopath, it would be very foolish not to exploit the weaknesses of others (Hare, 1999). In the early scenes of the movie, it is clear that Lucas has a tendency to manipulate people close to him. At the beginning of the movie, Lucas is very friendly and kind to Becca. However, when Lucas gets to know Becca, Lucas begins to manipulate and exploits her to gain his goal.

4. Lack of Empathy

Lucas is the person who cannot feel the empathy
to other people. The feelings of other people are of no concern to psychopaths (Hare, 1999). As previously mentioned, that Lucas has the audacity to justify any means to obtain his obsession, so he tends to harm people with his lack of empathy character. Although he is only 17 years old, Lucas has the audacity to harm other people without pity or empathy. He cannot feel and express the emotions and feelings of others. His lack of empathy and conscience makes Lucas cannot distinguish between what is appropriate and what is not. There is a scene where he injures his friend Alex while conducting an experiment in chemistry class. His mind was only filled with hate and resentment. He also did not consider the consequences of his actions. Not only that, but he also committed the murder of his friend, Becca, and his teacher’s wife. Lucas’ emotions had died. His superego is too weak that makes he lacked empathy and conscience. His anxiety also makes him unable to think long and unable to control his emotions. He kills others quickly and without hesitation.

5. Lack of Guilt or Remorse.

Apart from having no empathy, he also never feels guilty for the crimes he committed. This Lucas trait manifests the psychopathic trait, which is a lack of remorse or guilt. Psychopaths have an extraordinary lack of concern about the consequences of their acts on others (Hare, 1999). Lucas never feels that these malevolent things he did were his fault. This is due to the fact that Lucas lacks a sense of guilt or remorse for the crimes he has committed. He will do anything to make his goal come true, and he will get rid of those who get in his way by hurting or being hurt by him. The following dialogue demonstrates Lucas’ lack of guilt or remorse.

Mr. Butler : Hey, Lucas. I heard you were with Alex when the accident happened.
Lucas : Oh. It was very unpleasant, Mr. Butler. It was very unpleasant, Mr. Butler. But sure Alex will bounce back. You know, Beethoven composed some of his best work after he went deaf.
Mr. Butler : Right. How are you doing? You okay?
Lucas : Well, I'll get over it. I'm just hoping that I can lead our team to victory now.

(00:21:48-00:22:12)

The dialogue above occurs after the explosion accident that happened to Alex in chemistry class. Lucas makes the explosion that blinds Alex’s eyes. Lucas harms Alex because Alex is preventing him from getting first place in a chess contest. That dialogue occurred when Lucas asked by Mr. Butler about the incident, then Lucas answers him with an answer that does not indicate feelings of guilt towards Alex. The dialogue also shows Lucas acting as if nothing happened. Lucas expresses no remorse for injuring his victim, instead stating that he will forget about the incident and keep concentrate on his main goal.

From the explanation above, Lucas shows many traits of psychopathy checklist revision by Hare. Those traits are glib and superficial charm, grandiose self-worth, pathological lying and manipulative, poor behavior control, lack of empathy, and remorse or guilt. These traits indicate that he has a strong tendency to commit a criminal act to gain his obsession. Therefore, Lucas certainly has the psychopathic problem.

The Connection between the Main Character’s Psychopathic Problem and His Parental Absence

This section addresses the second research question of this study regarding the consequences of the absence of Lucas’ parents on his personality. In this case, Lucas’ psychopath problem tends as a result of the absence of his parents. This section aims to describe the manifestations of Lucas’ parental absence related to his psychopathic problem using the psychoanalysis theory by Sigmund Freud. This section is not demonstrating the analysis based on the plot of the movie but based on the motive behind Lucas’ obsession to get the A and the absence of parents made Lucas suffer from a psychopathic personality disorder.

Lucas is obsessed with getting A’s in his academic transcripts at school. However, when he received a B+ from his teacher instead of an A, he shows uncontrollable and aggressive behaviors that contradicted his true personality. The purpose is to show how Lucas’ determination in gaining his obsession through violent behavior is actually all related to the trauma experienced by Lucas in his past. Lucas’ potential for violence to obtain his obsession with the A is known to seek the missing perfection in his life. The main goal he wants to do is to dominate and get rid of Mr. Butler, the person who prevented him from getting an A. Nevertheless, to achieve that, he killed other innocent women who hoped to reduce his anxiety of the trauma of the absence of parents in his life. For Lucas, the grade A is a symbol of perfection.
Through grade A, he can fulfill the imperfections of his life, a family. As previously mentioned, Lucas had not had an imperfect family since he lost his mother when he was an infant. He considers that perfection in the family is when the child lives with both parents who are complete. Since he cannot get the perfection from the family, it makes he seek the perfection in another way, the grade. He substitutes the meaning of perfection from family to the grade.

Lucas: So, class...why do we think that Lucas took Mr. Butler’s family from Him? Huh? Anyone? It's an easy one.
Well, oh...well, it's an incentive.

Mr. Butler: I didn't give you an A. I didn't give you an A.

Lucas: Mr. Butler didn't give Lucas the grade that he so rightly deserved. So, now, Mr. Butler, deserves to lose...

(01:20:09-01:20:58)

From the dialogue above, it can be inferred that Lucas views that grade A and family have the same meaning and equal position. In this case, Lucas takes Mr. Butler’s family to reduce his anxiety. The id in Lucas’ personality which is more dominating than the superego influences his obsession for grade A. So he justifies any means to reach his obsession by controlling other people without thinking about the consequences of his action. Lucas’ bad childhood memory also influences it because the loss of his parents makes him lose the perfection meaning in his life and suffers from the psychopathic problem.

Lucas’ psychopathic problem occurs not only because of the obsession he has to get the A but also because of his childhood experience. Lucas was traumatized by his mother’s death, which influenced his behavior in adulthood. Also, the absence of the role of his father who cannot replace the absence of his mother figure in Lucas has a big influence on Lucas’ behavior. Lucas’ father is physically present but not emotionally present in Lucas’s development. It makes Lucas a person who only thinks of himself and does whatever he wants, and the worst is killing other people for his personal goals. In gaining his obsession, Lucas takes the same action on two women that have not been directly involved in his conflict. Lucas is killing that two women.

The woman killed by Lucas to reduce his anxiety is Mr. Butler’s wife. This murder occurred after Lucas was identified as the primary suspect in the murder of Becca. Nevertheless, Lucas’ actions do not stop there. Lucas’ resentment of Mr. Butler is rising. Lucas goes to Mr. Butler’s house and sadistically murdered his wife, Mrs. Butler. Mrs. Butler was murdered by Lucas by strangled her to death. Lucas thinks that with murder, he can make Mr. Butler was scared of him and gave him the grade A. Lucas is dominated by his id to ruin Mr. Butler’s life by taking his family. The ego of Lucas also ignores the superego. Unconsciously, his psychopath action influenced by his trauma. The exposure to traumatic events during childhood increases callous-unemotional traits in youth, which then increases the likelihood of psychopathy later in life (Pierce, 2017). He chooses the women as his victim in order to reduce his trauma for losing the mother figure in his life.

The writer inferred that Lucas’ psychosexual development had a fixation in phallic stage. This stage is where children show more love or tendencies for their parents of different sexes. This stage is one of the important periods of psychological development (Janetius 4). It is because the success or failure of a child through this stage will impact the development of his character and personality later. Thus, the fixation in the psychosexual stages of Lucas makes Lucas have psychopathic behavior in his adulthood. Referring to Freud that fixation adversely affects personality development. It may be noted that the behavioral manifestations of fixation vary according to the stage of psychosexual development in which fixation takes place (Philip, 2010). In Lucas’ case, he experienced the fixation of his psychosexual development in the phallic stage. He cannot pass the phallic stage well because he lost the role of his mother and father. His mother had left him before the phallic stage. It traumatized Lucas in his later life.

Lucas projects his trauma to others. Freud explained that projection is a defense mechanism used to fight off disturbing impulse. That disturbing impulse can be in the form of aggressiveness, or other unacceptable feelings by oneself (Costa, 2017). He projects his mother figure to other women, one of them is Mrs. Butler. His action indicates Lucas’ process in releasing his trauma, although through physical violence.

The second woman killed by Lucas to help him reduce his anxiety is Rebecca, Lucas’ friend. He killed Becca, who was his close friend in class. At that moment, Lucas is filled with anger because
Becca failed to carry out his plan correctly. Lucas uses Becca to take revenge on Mr. Butler after he got the B+ from Mr. Butler. He feels disappointed with the failure of Becca to seduce Mr. Butler. Lucas’ id impulse takes control of the ego and ignores the superego. He kills Becca by pushing her off the roof of the school building. It suddenly causes Becca to die. Lucas kills Becca because he failed in his plan to ruin Mr. Butler and makes Mr. Butler lost his family. Besides, Lucas kills Becca also because he wanted to slander Mr. Butler as the prime suspect, so that Mr. Butler was expelled from school. It can be easy for Lucas to make Mr. Butler the main reason for Becca’s death. Before killing Becca, Lucas guides Becca to write a love letter and apologize to Mr. Butler, so it can be used as the primary evidence of the cause of Becca’s death. Every crime he did has been planned out. He is willing to sacrifice anyone and anything to exact his revenge and get what he wants.

In the murder of Becca, it can be seen that Lucas also makes a projection to Becca. It shows from the way Lucas killing Becca. Lucas pretended that he had sympathy for Becca, who feels sad because of the rejection that she got from Mr. Butler. Lucas pretends to give her support always to chase her love that makes Becca thinks that Lucas is such a good friend for her. He gives Becca a warm hug. At first, he hugs Becca very gently, but then he hugs Becca tightly, and he is immediately pushing Becca down. When hugging Becca, Lucas’s anxiety is increasing. His memory of the traumatic event in his past comes into his consciousness. Unconsciously, it reminds him of the longing of his lost love object by the physical touch from the woman figure. However, he denies that unacceptable feeling that and projects it to Becca since Becca is the only the female friend he has. Becca is also the only girl who gives the trust to Lucas. By pushing Becca down from the rooftop, it will help Lucas to overcome his anxiety, same as the way he kills Mrs. Butler.

His behavior in the murder of the two innocent women relates to the trauma he has in his past and the fixation on the phallic stage. His loss of the object of his first love, his mother, affects his behavior in his adulthood. It is also caused by the poor relationship with his father. His father cannot be adequately involved in the development of Lucas at this stage. It makes Lucas have a weak superego. The superego is formed at the end of the phallic stage. If a child experiences fixation in the phallic stage, that person will become immoral, inhuman, and not feel guilty after doing the bad thing (Lawrence et al., 2010). Lucas does not have the perfect superego because he failed in the phallic stage. It makes him have the audacity to kill Mrs. Butler and Becca without feeling guilty.

Lucas describes his father, Mr. Ward, as a diligent worker who is very busy with his job. It makes him learn everything in his life by himself. It is obvious that Lucas does not receive much attention from his father. Thus, he creates fictional characters as the role model that substitutes the role of his father. In fact, parents are the first role models for children, especially a father. Fathers can and do interact with their children in various ways, not only as playmates, but also as the role models for their children (Lamb, 2010). It can be seen from the way Lucas see the characteristic of the character in fictions he read. Thus, it is allowing a misleadingness in understanding a borderline between what is right and wrong.

Lucas : but I assure you, so long as I maintain a perfect academic record on my college transcript, moving forward, I believe everyone will be jubilant.

Mr. Butler : What if I don’t give you an A?

Lucas : You know my biggest criticism of Crime and Punishment? The stakes are too low. Raskolnikov, he’s a loner. He’s got nothing to lose. But I always find a book that much more compelling when the character stands to lose everything.

(00:37:14 - 00:37:56)

According to Feist & Feist, Freud believed that an infant boy forms identification with his father preceding the phallic stage; that is, he wants to be his father (Feist & Feist, 2009). Since Lucas cannot see his father as an object of identification he thinks is good, he looks for another object in his surroundings. The dialogue above occurs when Lucas threatens Mr. Butler to give him an A. Lucas threatens him using a fictional character he thinks deserves to be a role model in carrying out actions to gain his goal. He mentions Raskolnikov, the main character of the Crime and Punishment novel, who has the villainous characteristic. Through the way he acts, we can see that he tries to substitute the father’s role that is absent in his life into his favorite fictional character, especially as the former of his superego.
IV. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, based on Freud’s psychoanalytic theory focused on psychosexual development stages, this research reveals that fundamentally the origin of Lucas’ psychopathic problem has its root in his parental absence in his developmental stages. Bad experiences in the past and the absence of parental roles during a child’s development can contribute to the formation of personality problems of the child in the future. Lucas’ psychopathic behavior shows his endeavor to bring back the parental absence by substitute his father figure with a fictional character he admired, his mother figure with the female victim he killed, and his family’s imperfection with the grade A.

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